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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAESCHANAN - 5768

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Rav Mayer Twersky - Do Not Despair

### **Rabbi Mayer Twersky**

#### **Do Not Despair**

A life of avodas Hashem abounds with challenges. One especially important and trying challenge is to avoid despair. Virtually everyone, at some point in his life, stumbles and suffers spiritual setbacks. It is not uncommon for a person to experience a period of yeridah (decline) in his life. At such times, negativity develops momentum and a person can encounter the challenge of not despairing. What perspectives / kocho's hanefesh help us to successfully navigate this crucial challenge?

Ramban (in his introduction to sefer Devarim) directly addresses our question. In the opening segment of his speech Moshe Rabbeinu, explains the Ramban, set out "to strengthen their (i.e. Bnei Yisroel's) heart, by informing them that Hashem will always relate to them with the attribute of mercy – so that a person should not say that we will be unable to take possession of Eretz Yisroel because there is no one who does not sin and immediately the attribute of justice will be applied to us and we shall perish. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu informed them that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is merciful, abounding with mercy, because [the prospect of] forgiveness and pardon from Him aides and assists people in His service, as Scripture states 'forgiveness is with you in order that you be feared'". In a word, the omnipresent possibility of teshuva[1] and the concomitant prospect of forgiveness dispel despair. Forgiveness and the promise of a new beginning allow hope to dispel despair.

A second vital perspective emerges from various pesukim in sefer Devarim. Amongst them is the passuk, "ubacharta bachaim lemaan tichye atta vzarecha – you shall choose [the path of] life, so that you and your descendants may live". In other words, Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants us to succeed. Accordingly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives us the resources and resourcefulness to succeed.

Thus, belief in Hakadosh Baruch Hu breeds self-confidence. If one reflects upon his belief in Hashem he will be buoyed by self-confidence, and the prospect of despair will fade.

A final perspective may be gleaned from a comment of Rashi in this week's parsha. Rashi comments that the Torah charges us to love Hashem (and not merely fear Him) because "One who serves at his master's side out

of love can not be compared to one who serves out of fear. One who serves at his master's side out of fear once the master overburdens him he leaves [the master] and goes off" (Artscroll, Saperstein edition translation). One who is motivated by love is also energized by love and never relents, regardless of how daunting the challenge may be. We have opportunity to see the truth and astuteness of Rashi's comment (from the Sifrei) by observing the heroic, steadfast devotion of parents for a sick, troubled, or handicapped child. The challenge of coping with such a child can be very formidable, and yet parents persevere. The reason is simple: in the presence of love despair is unimaginable. If one is able to cultivate a feeling of love for Hakadosh Baruch Hu – because of who He is, what He does for us at all times, etc. – we will always persevere in His service. Despair / yei'ush, as the Rebbe of Kotzk taught, is shelo midaas – an uninformed reaction due to lack of reflection.

[1]The Yerushalmi in Masseches Peah teaches that one can always do teshuva. Rambam's comments in Hilchos Teshuva regarding Sichon, Pharoh, et. al. lie beyond the purview of the present dvar Torah. Copyright © 2008 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

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### **Taking a Risk**

**by Daniel Eisenberg, M.D.**

Have you ever seen someone painting a tall bridge, walking a tightrope high above a crowd, or engaging in any other dangerous pursuit and wondered: Are they crazy?

Jews ask a second, but no less important question: Does the Torah have anything to say about this? As usual, the answer is "yes" (at least to the second question). Risk is everywhere – an unavoidable part of daily life. What are the parameters of our obligation to protect ourselves from everyday dangers?

White marble campanile in Pisa, Italy, famous for the uneven settling of its foundation, which causes it to lean 17 ft (5.2 m) from the perpendicular. Begun in 1174 as the third and final structure of the city's cathedral complex, it was designed to stand 185 ft (56 m) high. Work was suspended several times as engineers sought solutions; the tower, still leaning, was completed in the 14th century. At present it is in danger of collapse despite efforts to strengthen it. (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia)

Imagine that you were the custodian of a delicate building, such as the recently re-opened leaning Tower of Pisa. You are asked to guard it from decay, destruction, and all other imminent threats to its future. Yet you know that the building will not last much longer without constant monitoring and upkeep. You could surround it with concrete barriers and steel girders, but that would hide the beauty of the building, making it virtually unusable. And even this could not prevent the eventual loss of the building. How do you balance the need to use the building with the need to protect it?

This presents an interesting metaphor. Judaism teaches G-d gave each person a body to use, but we are required to protect it. This is a difficult balancing act. If we are overly cautious, we miss out on much in life. Yet if we are reckless, we risk destroying the very body we were given to protect. What is the prudent course and what are the limitations?

### **FALLING IN THE BATHTUB**

The Torah has several mitzvot regarding personal safety. For instance, we are instructed to build a parapet/fence around any flat roof, to prevent anyone from falling. Maimonides explains this to include any dangerous situation, such as an unguarded swimming pool. We must be proactive in eliminating all preventable risks.

In addition to removing hazards, the Torah twice commands us to protect our health, safety and well being. For example, the Talmud forbids walking near a shaky wall, lest it fall and injure the passerby. Similarly, all dangerous pursuits (bungy-jumping is an example) are proscribed.

But are we commanded to be agoraphobic, never leaving the safety of our homes? Even if we did stay home, we could fall in the bathtub! Maybe showers should also be forbidden. Obviously, there is latitude in evaluating how much risk is acceptable. The Talmud asks in several places why certain potentially dangerous actions are permitted. It answers that a person need not avoid small risks that are accepted by the rest of normal society without undue concern.

For instance, since automobile travel presents an element of danger, we might think that it should be forbidden. Nevertheless, it is a risk accepted by society and most people do not give much thought to the danger. Therefore, driving with normal caution (such as wearing a seatbelt and using the turn signal) is permitted by Jewish law, despite the inherent small risk.

The rationale for this ruling is that while we may not take indiscriminate risks, we may go about normal activities of daily living with the guarantee of heavenly protection. This is derived from the book of Psalms that states: "God watches over the simple." That is, I do not have to worry when I go outside that I may be the one in a million to be struck by lightning. Because I can rely on the promise that G-d watches over me -- as I do the simple activities of daily living.

#### CHAIN-SMOKING

With respect to risk, factual information is required to make halachic decisions. Several hundred years ago, smoking was permitted in Jewish law, because it was considered an aid to digestion and therefore healthful. Today, smoking is considered the leading preventable cause of death in the West. As a result of our clear knowledge of the dangers of smoking, most contemporary rabbis now forbid cigarette smoking.

Interestingly, it is likely that the severe health risks were not present to the same degree several hundred years ago. Only in the 20th century did chain-smoking become possible with the advent of prepackaged cigarettes, and with it the skyrocketing incidence of lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases.

But if millions of people still smoke, why can't we apply the concept of "God watches over the simple"? To apply this concept, the risk must be very small and it must be accepted by society. Scientific data suggests that smoking poses a significant health risk. Additionally, the number of smokers has declined as they appreciate the true risks involved, suggesting that society does not accept the risks. Even many smokers would like to quit, but it is difficult due to the addictive nature of nicotine.

#### PAINTING THE BRIDGE

But what of our original reaction to the bridge painter and tightrope walker? Surely most people would not accept such risks. However, Judaism recognizes the need to earn a livelihood as a second mitigating factor in allowing risky behavior. The Talmud asks: "Why does the worker climb the tree and risk his life? Is it not to earn his wages?" Therefore, the least we can do is pay him on time!

Intrinsic in the Talmud's argument is the assumption that one may take risks to earn a living that would not otherwise be permitted. Someone has to paint the bridge, build the skyscraper, and dive for pearls. So long as the risk stays within "reasonable" parameters, such activities are permitted as professions.

The exact degree of risk in any endeavor always remains hazy. And the overarching rule is the obligation to protect one's health. Judaism considers these and other factors, employing a systematic approach to assessing danger and the circumstances of the individual who wishes to take the risk.

#### Author Biography:

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more about Jewish medical ethics by visiting Dr. Eisenberg at [www.daneisenberg.com](http://www.daneisenberg.com)

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From: **Daniel M. Hartstein** <daniel@bettertel.com> Subject **Points to Ponder- Tzitz Eliezer ZT'L Nov 29 2006**

We had the great Zechus this week of learning the Torah of the great Goan and Posek HaDor HaRav Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg ZT"L who passed away last week.

We started with the words of the Rav ZT'L who refused to write an article in memory of the Rambam as the Rav said the Rambam is still alive everyday in my shiur. Soto B'H throughout the World the words of the Tzitz Eliezer continue to be quoted by hundreds on a daily basis. The Torah of Tzitz Eliezer is indeed alive and well!

We focused the shiur on a fascinating Teshuva of about the Issur of smoking found in Shut Tzitz Eliezer (Chelek-Tes Vav: Siman Lamed Tes ) written in 1982. .

Rav Waldenberg read over a long article on the matter smoking and the harms it has found to cause. .

In light of this new information it was clear with out a shadow of doubt that we can not apply the principle that many do a harmful act and therefore Hashem, will protect them. This view point based on the words to Chazal (See Gemarah Yevomos 12-b and 30-b) in certain areas was applied by some Achronim when it came to smoking but can no longer be applied with the current information we have. The large countries in the World have already published their finding as a law that smoking is hazardous to your health. In fact, a new letter just published (1982) by the surgeon General of the US says that over 100,00 people in the US will die from cancer caused by smoking. Therefore it is very clear on can not dismiss smoking as something that Hashem will protect those who are foolish and do it.

We see the Rambam (Daod 4:1) that paskened that the body in it entirety was created by Hashem and therefore we must distance ourselves from items that will harm the body.

A other Rambam (Roseach V'Shmeras Hanefesh 12:5) says there are many things the Rabbis deemed not allowed because they are dangerous to the body. All those who don't follow the words of the Rabbis and tell others they will harm their bodies, regardless of the Rabbinic edict, can be sentence to lashes by the Bais Din. This seems to be a warning not only to the one who causes harm to himself but to others who do not warn their fellow Jews who the he is causing harm to their body.

This Ramabam is quoted as Halacha by the Shulchan Aruch (Chosen Mishpat Tuf Cuf Zayin) In fact the Bear HaGolah questions if this halacha is Min HaTorah or MiDirabanan but the Levush felt it is obvious this is a Torah prohibition.

We find that many years ago there was a great Tzadik who did not allow smoking. The Kohen Gadol, The Chofetz Chaim writes about this as an aside in his Lekutai Amorim (Perek Yud Gimel). The Chofetz Chaim writes that there are a number of Doctors that advise that if a person has trouble breathing he should not smoke. This will cause him to become weak and have shortness of breath. The Chofetz Chaim told these people 'who allowed you to smoke in this case'? We can not say like the Gemarah in Bava Kama (Tzedek Biez) that one who causes harm to himself is patur. This is a monetary issue for who will pay for his damages if not himself. One can not harm his on body, as this violates V'Neshmartem L'Nofshosaychem. Furthermore add the Chofetz Chaim who gives the slave the right to harm what belongs to the Master? The Master gave us a specific amount of strength to serve him, who are we to diminish this strength? In another place the Chofetz Chaim says beside for all above, all smoking is a violation of Bitul Torah.

The Tzitz Eliezer says it is clear from the words of the World's Posek that the violation of smoking is severe because today in all cases it is a harmful to your health. Clearly the Chofetz Chaim did not entertain the idea that 'Hashem will guard the foolish ones' (despite their harmful acts). Today,

with the new research that show great harm to all forms of smoking the Chofetz Chaim would say all types of smoking are not allowed.

The words of the Chofetz Chaim are not new to us. The Rambam (Sanhedrin Yud Ches: Vav) as explained by the Radvaz, the body is owned not by man but by Hashem How can one harm something that is not his? The Bear Hagolah shares this view as well as the Rambam in Hilchos Dayos. We see the words of the Chofetz Chaim are not a chiddush but well documented from the time of the Rambam and Bear Hagolah.

It is clear to the Tzitz Eliezer that smoking is not allowed based on Halacha (and not merely a hashkofa view). For sure this applies to one who has not started and to those who already smoke. they must do whatever they can to stop.

Another interesting point the Tzitz Eliezer found in this secular article was the great danger of second-hand smoke. In today's society people are smoking in so many public places like offices, trains and meeting areas this is also a big issue. Even worse parents and others are smoking in front of children and babies. There is a further prohibition in Halacha to smoke in front of others for this will cause harm to those around you! The idea of harm in Halacha is well documented. For example the Rambam Shecanim (12:7) and Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat Siman Kuf Nun Hay speak specifically about harming a person via the smell or ingestion of smoke. There is a dispute between the Shulchan Aruch and the Ramah as to if we consider a non-regular disturbance a violation of this issue. However based on the Sefer Choshen Aharon in a case where the smoke is known to harm others there is no dispute it is a violation of Halacha. Therefore, today smoking has an additional halachik problem of causing harm to ones fellow neighbor.

This idea of harm to neighbors is further documented by others like the Talmedai HaRosh, Shut Rashba and Nesevous Mishpat who all give cases where there is a halachik issue with causing harm to others even when that harm is indirect. The Bottom line is one should stay away from even a safek of causing harm to his friends as he might violate a Halachik precept!

In Summary the Tzitz Eliezer is certain like Torah HaOlah that there is Halachik problem with smoking. Further more there is a problem smoking in public as it will harm others.

For more research on this topic see a great article by Rav M. Halperin <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/assia/haishun1-2.htm>

This teshuva truly demonstrates the Emes Shel Torah of Hagoan Rav Waldenberg. In a time where many did not come out with such a controversial pasak the Tzitz Eliezer in his search for truth went out on a limb with no care of reaction of the pesak and came out to say smoking is Assur L'Halacha. We also see Rav Waldenberg's great Bekius to find obscure Rambam's and a mere note in the Chofetz Chaim that sheds light on this issue. We demonstrated via so many other Teshuvous how the Tzitz Eliezer Paskened based on what was felt as the Emes and not necessarily the social norm. We gave the example of the in Chalek Yuf Tes Siman Nun Biez where Rav Waldenberg was asked by the Nishmas Avraham if it was permitted for doctors to report R'L a child abuser to the authorities. The Tzitz Eliezer paskined with out a shadow of doubt it is a case of Pekauch Nefesh and allowed. Certainly, even in a case where pekuch Nefesh is not an issue, like Hashem forbid sexual misconduct with a child it is a cheyuv- obligation to tell the authorities as this is spiritual Pikuach Nefesh of the highest order. The Tzitz Eliezer proves that the laws of telling the non-Jewish authorities (ie meseria) has changed because most societies have just laws. We also pointed to the Teshuva about lighting extra Shabbos candles on Friday night. Despite the beauty of the custom the Tzitz Eliezer did not like the idea based on strict Halacha. The original mitzvah was based on 2 candles, one for Zachor and Shomer and extra candles should only be allowed if they are placed in separate area.

The Tzitz Eliezer writes in one of his hakdamas how fortunate he is that his seforim are leaned and accepted by so many. For his lips are moving evne when he is not awake from those learning his seforim. May we be zozech to continue to move the lip of the great Tzitz Eliezer and may his

Neshoma be an advocate on behalf of Klal Yisrael to bring Masiach in our day!

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[http://www.ou.org/shabbat\\_shalom/article/brander\\_vaetchanan\\_comfort\\_at\\_last/](http://www.ou.org/shabbat_shalom/article/brander_vaetchanan_comfort_at_last/) August 13, 2008

### **Vaetchanan: Comfort at Last By Rabbi Asher Brander**

Jews tend to be peddlers, even when we have no things to sell.

Yesterday, I met a young man who was trying to make a deal, a shidduch. He was sufficiently confused by my hashkofic world that he figured I can connect him with equally confused or confusing personalities. On that score, we'll have to see - for that story has just begun.

We forged an immediate bond (even though he was British). I was moved by his sincerity and warmth (even though he was British). We began to schmooze over pitas and techina. In the context of a larger conversation, he mentioned to me that he was married a second time - as his first wife passed away (her illness lasted but forty days), leaving him with two children. The first yahrtzeit was coming up. I was actually stunned. A few moments ago he seemed innocent, a young man unmarred by the vicissitudes of life, possessing a bren in learning and a joie de vivre. Now, this 30 year old young man seemed experienced, weighty, and yet remarkably possessed of that same joyous demeanor.

I probed a bit. "How do you feel? Is it still difficult?" My first wife was very special (as is my second). It happened so quickly. She never complained about her situation and had tremendous faith. What she wanted was for me to move on. After she passed away, I found out that she phoned up our Rav and gave specific instructions for each child; I was to get remarried as soon as possible. Her special character has allowed me to get on.

Nechama. The art of finding and giving comfort is one that Jews have had time to perfect the last 1939 years. It is the operative word this Shabbos. Comfort and joy is in the air. The music begins again. New couples and their homes within the People of Israel, built. Somewhere between the ashes of tisha b'av and the joy of Shabbos Nachamu, we pick ourselves up off the floor.

Nechama the word is fascinating. We are wont to translate it as comfort. This is an appropriate translation - but a brief tour of the Bible reveals a more primary meaning of the word. Witness the first word of the following verse(1):

Vayinachem Hashem ki asah es ha'adam... And Hashem regretted that he made Man ...

Rashi, in his first approach indeed interprets the word to mean comfort. Take a look if you have a chance. In his second and more textual approach, he offers a different notion:

G-d's thought turned from [applying] Divine Mercy to [applying] Divine Justice. He reconsidered what to do with man that He made upon the earth. Similarly wherever the term appears in Scripture it means he reconsidered as to what to do. [For example:] "No man that He should reconsider." --- "I regret that I have made him King." All these refer to second thoughts.

Here, Rashi teaches us that the more primary meaning of the word means regret or reconsideration. At first blush, it does not seem like there is much of a relationship between regret and comfort. Let's dig deeper.

A mourner who is in the throes of loss is simply trying to cope. The future is clouded by the black present. The job of the mourner is to survive while the halachic task of the community is to be Menachem, to provide comfort. What is the secret of this process? How can a community make up for an irretrievable loss without retrieving? Nechama surely can neither reside in a magic wand, nor for that matter in trite formulas.

Rav Soloveitchik pointed out the paradox that we lighten our mourning post midday on Tisha B'av. Most famously, we get up off the ground. Yet,

the actual Beis HaMikdash was set ablaze on late Tisha B'av afternoon. Indeed some Tannaim wanted to establish the fast on the Tenth of Av. Why do we let up now?

The Rav points out, based on the midrash(2), that even as the Temple went up in flames and the edifice of intimacy was shattered, the deep observer recognized that the link between Hashem and His people emerged as unbreakable. (God was kila chamaso al eitzim v'avanim). That eternal bond, or rather that realization of the eternal bond created the moed aspect of Tisha B'av and forged the comforting message necessary to survive Tisha B'av. Post destruction Judaism needed to understand that Hashem can be found anywhere and that Shechina resides in the Diaspora as well(3).

Comfort then resides with a new orientation. The same data set and the same reality, yet it is the ability to see the beauty of a new (and true) insight that provides the comfort. More precisely, there can only be Nechama with Nechama, (the former being comfort and the latter being reconsideration). Understanding the reality and being able to peer through the veil is the critical process of nechama. It is one thing for us to be menachem; it is quite the task for the mourner to be comforted (mitnacheim).

Once the mourner comes to grips with the reality that there will be no more hugs and kisses, then true nechama, comfort, can begin. My close friend who suffered a great loss taught the phrase of "joy amidst the sorrow". That happens when the mourner refocuses and begins to contemplate the eternity of the neshama and its implication in terms of relationship; when the mourner begins to think of what was achieved in this world, thus allowing for gratification; when the mourner considers how one can elevate a soul that waxeth eternal and what that means in terms of one's own spiritual life.

Life is full of dreams. I have met many whose dreams were dashed but emerged stronger and others who still suffer from what they could not achieve or from what did not happen to them. Our parsha, Vaeschanan begins with Moshe's dashed dream, his unbelievable desire to go to the Holy Land. I often think how fortunate we are to be living other people's dreams. Moshe Rabbeinu serves not only as a paradigm of piety but also as a model of one whose great dream was never realized and yet never stopped growing.

After comfort comes building, as we say in the once-yearly bracha of Tisha B'av: menachem tziyon u'bonei yerushalayim.

May Zion be comforted and Jerusalem be rebuilt! - Soon in our personal and national lives

Good Shabbos Asher Brander

FOOTNOTES:

1. Bereishis, 6:6

2. Cf Kiddushin 31b, Tosafos ibid.

3. This of course is the depth of the Haftorah of Shabbos Nachamu where Hashem personally comforts us. Nachamu, Nachamu Ami yomar elokeichem

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Covenant & Conversation

**Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from**

**Sir Jonathan Sacks**

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - 5766]

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/tt-index.html>

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.

G-d 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. G-d 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 G-d 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 G-d called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; G-d 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 G-d 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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<http://www.anshe.org/parsha.htm#parsha> Parsha Page  
by **Fred Toczek** - A Service of Anshe Emes Synagogue (Los Angeles)  
Vo'eschanan 5757 & 5762

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E. LilMode U'ilamed (Rabbi Mordechai Katz)

1. Going beyond the letter of the law. The Parsha contains an apparent redundancy -- it contains several admonitions to observe the laws taught by Moshe, but later states "and you shall do that which is right and good in the eyes of the L-rd". What new instruction does the latter verse add? Rashi and Rambam explain that this verse contains the additional command to do "right and good" -- i.e., to go above and beyond the letter of the law in serving Hashem and aiding one's fellow man. One who does so shows that he acts not only out of a sense of duty, or to gain rewards, but also out of a sincere desire to do Hashem's bidding for its own sake. This ideal is illustrated by the following story: A man came to the Brisker Rav before Pesach and asked "Can I use milk instead of wine for the Four Cups?" The Brisker Rav didn't reply; instead, he removed five rubles from his pocket and gave them to the man. The Rav's wife asked "Would not one ruble have been more than enough money for him to buy wine?" "Perhaps," responded the Rav, "but from his question, it was clear that he didn't have money for meat either, for one can't eat meat and use milk for the Four Cups. Therefore, I gave him enough money for both meat and wine for his Pesach Seder."

2. Mezuzah and Tefillin. Mezuzah and Tefillin each contain a portion of Hashem's teaching to Israel. As a result, they serve as a link to Hashem, a constant reminder that we are guarded by His presence and that it is our task to perform His mitzvos (Rambam), as illustrated by the following story: Onkelos ben Kalonymos was a close friend of the Emperor and a convert to Judaism. The Emperor didn't take kindly to Onkelos' conversion and sent several groups of soldiers to pick him up and return him to Rome. As he was being dragged out of his house by the soldiers, Onkelos reached over and kissed his Mezuzah. As the soldiers gazed in astonishment, he told them "Do you see the difference between your human ruler and my G-d? A human emperor stays inside while his guards stand outside to guard him; but my G-d stays at the door and guards all of the common people inside. (Onkelos's words had such an impact on the soldiers that they also converted.)

F. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

1. Bring sanctity into all aspects of human behavior. "See that I have taught you statutes and laws as the L-rd, my G-d, commanded me, to do so in the midst of the land." Some philosophers advocate that if a person wants to live a life of sanctity and purity, he must flee from inhabited places and live alone in the wilderness. This is not, however, the path of the Torah. We are told to live an elevated life among other people. True sanctity and perfection is to live among other people and behave towards G-d and your fellow man in a manner consistent with Torah values (Arvai Nachal). The ideal of Torah is to bring sanctity and idealism into all aspects of human endeavor. If you live alone, you will be free from anger, envy, causing

others pain, etc.; but, you will also be missing opportunities for kindness, compassion, charity, etc. Only when you are in the company of others can you fulfill all aspects of the Torah.

2. View anew each day all that you have. "If you beget children and grandchildren and become old in the land, and become corrupt and make an idol, the image of anything, and you do what is evil in the eyes of the Almighty, your G-d, to anger him". Why does a person meriting children and grandchildren lead to his becoming corrupt and doing evil? To the contrary, shouldn't it make him more grateful to Hashem? The answer lies in the word "Venoshantem", becoming old -- that is, you become so accustomed to what you have that you no longer appreciate it. Taking for granted what you already have prevents you from being grateful to Hashem for all the good that He has given you. There are many things that you have that you appreciated when you first got them. If order to develop a deeper gratitude for Hashem's kindness, we should try to view all that we have as though it was just received that very day.

3. Internalize the awareness that all that occurs to you if from the Almighty. "And you shall know this day, and you shall take this to your heart, that the Almighty is G-d in the heavens above and upon the earth below, there is no other." The Chofetz Chaim taught that this verse tells us that all that happens in our lives -- profits/losses, pain/suffering, joy, etc. -- is from Hashem.

4. Continue to reflect upon Hashem's love and eventually you will experience it. "And these things which I command you this day shall be on your heart". Rabbi Shalom Schwadron interpreted this mean that we must remove any obstructions (i.e., faulty character traits and emotions) from our heart before we can experience love for Hashem. The Kotzker Rebbe commented that "at times your heart might be closed and the concepts and ideas you accept intellectually don't penetrate and become part of you. Still keep them on your heart even if they don't enter your heart, for as soon as your heart opens up they will immediately fall right in."

G. In the Garden of the Torah (the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, z'tl)

What is Prayer? The fundamental dimension of prayer is to ask G-d for our needs; the praise and thanksgiving which precede and follow our requests is merely a supplementary element of the mitzvah (Rambam; Cf. Shulchan Aruch Harav, which refers to the recitation of G-d's praise as the "fundamental element of prayer"). This week's Parsha -- in which Moshe pleaded to Hashem for permission to enter Israel -- gives us insight in the way we should approach G-d in prayer. As the Sifri notes "[Moshe] could have depended upon his good deeds. Instead, [he] asked G-d for a gift . . . How much more so should we make requests [of G-d in this manner]." When asking for Hashem's goodness, one should plead with humility; even when a person is deserving, he should not rely on his merits, but should ask G-d for unearned kindness.

H. Reflections on the Sedra (Rabbi Zalmen Posner)

Face-to-face. In recalling the forty years in the wilderness, Moshe repeats the Ten Commandments, which he prefaces with the introduction that, "face to face G-d spoke to you from the mountain," and "not with our fathers but with us here today alive." There is a personal element in Torah, a challenge made to man by G-d face to face. We are placed on earth to live as we will and make of it what we please. We are given Torah to teach us how to live and what we can accomplish. We can approach Torah affirmatively, seeking meaning for our lives, finding where and how G-d speaks to each of us face to face. Torah is meant for the living; it is not to be consigned to our ancestors as a revered relic of an almost forgotten past. Torah is to be used, employed in all situations and problems, for it has an immediate relevance to all who are alive.

I. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski)

An active Shabbos. "And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and G-d delivered you from there . . . therefore he is commanding you to make the day of Shabbos." Several times, the Torah refers to Shabbos with the word "to make," as though there were something active

about Shabbos, although it would seem that the salient feature of Shabbos is complete rest or lack of activity. In the repetition of the Ten Commandments, there is a marked change from the original recitation. There it says that we must observe Shabbos because G-d created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh." Yet, here it says that we should observe in remembrance of our enslavement in Egypt, Hashem is commanding us to make the day of Shabbos. Why does the Torah give a different reason for Shabbos here? Perhaps it is because that here the Torah is not telling us why to observe Shabbos, but how not to observe it. The idea of a "day of rest" is essentially a secular concept. One rests so that he/she can "recharge" the batteries in order to increase one's work efficiency for the following week. The day of rest is a means rather than an end. The Torah concept of Shabbos is just the reverse. One works six days in order to be able to have a Shabbos. Exhaustion is not the reason for Shabbos any more than it was for G-d's resting on the seventh day. Shabbos is a day of spiritual growth and development. It is a day when through prayer and the study of Torah, one should be able to create a new self, a person more refined than one had been heretofore. Shabbos is passive only in the sense of abstinence from work, but that abstinence is not sufficient. It must be used to enable oneself to make oneself into something finer and more spiritual person. This is what the Torah means by repeatedly using the expression "to make" the Shabbos. Make the Shabbos an active day of spiritual achievement and creation.

J. Artsroll Chumash: A Few Thoughts On The Shema.

1. Hashem is "One and Only". There is an inner harmony in all that He does, though human intelligence cannot comprehend it. (R' Gedaliah Schorr likened the concept to a ray of light seen through a prism. Though the viewer sees a myriad of different colors, it is a single ray of light. So, too, G-d's many manifestations are truly one.). On another note, the first and last letters of the first verse of the Shema are written large in the Torah. These two letters spell the Hebrew word for "witness", symbolizing that by reciting the Shema, the Jew bears witness to G-d's Oneness.

2. "You shall love . . ." How can one be commanded to love? The Torah answers this in the next few verses by saying that Jews should think about the Torah, study it and teach it. When one meditates on G-d's great and wondrous deeds and creations, he will come to love and praise Him (Rambam).

3. "With all of your heart . . ." Rashi notes that this is really referring to hearts; that is, we must love G-d with both our good and evil inclinations. Talmidei R' Yonah interprets this to mean that we should follow our good inclination to perform commandments and reject our bad inclination to sin. Rambam notes that the "evil inclination" refers to our earthly cravings (e.g., for food, drink, physical gratification, etc.); by channeling these desires to the service of Hashem, we serve Him with both inclinations.

4. "With all of your soul . . ." -- i.e., even if your devotion to G-d costs you your life (Rashi); this refers to the rare situations -- idolatry, adultery and murder -- in which halachah requires one to die rather than sin. According to Ramban, your "soul" refers to the seat of the intellect, meaning that one should devote one's entire intellectual capacity to the love of G-d.

5. "Today . . ." You should always look to these matters as if they are new, fresh and exciting -- as if the Torah was given today. If one makes that effort, one can always find stimulation and challenge in the Torah and mitzvos

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from PROFFOX@aol.com to PROFFOX@aol.com date  
Thu, Aug 14, 2008 at 12:51 AM subject A thought on Parshas V

'eschanan  
"...Shema Yisroel..." "...Hear, Israel..." (6:4) Our tradition relates that far before Moshe wrote this verse in the Torah, the words were declared by the twelve sons of our Patriarch Yaakov as they assembled before him. The Talmud records that he echoed their words with the response, "Boruch Shem Kavod Malchuso L'Olam Va'ed" : Blessed is the

Name of His glorious kingdom forever. Moshe did not write those words here, yet Yaakov asserted them. Our practice is to recite them silently after the opening line of Shema. That way, we preserve the words of Yaakov yet do not veer from the instruction of Moshe. Of course, on Yom Kippur we say them loudly. The Recanati excavates the depths of this practice. If these words were introduced and valued by Yaakov Avinu, why did Moshe omit them? If they are not intended as a facet of the Torah commandment here, why would we include them?

The Recanati contrasts the missions represented by each of these two great leaders. Yaakov was the father of a family who would one day evolve into the Kingdom of HaShem. Moshe was the shepherd of a nation who had become the prototype of that Kingdom. The descendants of those twelve brothers became a great nation, and forever would serve the role of being HaShem's Kingdom on earth. We received the Torah and by living by it, and living up to its standards, we serve as the vanguard of all that is sacred and heavenly. HaShem is One and His Name is One (Zecharia 14:9). Every, and any, of those qualities which we attribute to G-d, even when they appear mutually exclusive (such as the middos of rachamim and din) are not a contradiction to His Oneness. This is why, the Recanati says, our very declaration of that Oneness in the Shema refers to Him as HaShem Elokeinu, HaShem Echad - that which we associate with His Compassion (HaShem) and that which we associate with His Justice (Elokeinu) are One G-d - HaShem Echad. In the fading light of exile, when Jews enter or exist in galus, we do not apprehend HaShem with the clarity and the awe which is possible during times of revelation and the sanctity which can be part of ge'ula. Yaakov was poised, near death, on the frontier of exile and his twelve sons had begun that descent. When they declared HaShem's Oneness, he made known that the Presence of HaShem during exile is a different Presence, while nonetheless a facet of Oneness. Yaakov proclaimed that in exile, HaShem is known only through the efforts of His people, when they live by His laws. This is the meaning of the Boruch Shem ---Blessed is that Name of HaShem which is made glorious through His Kingdom, the Jewish nation. However, Moshe Rabbeinu knew HaShem in a fuller and intimate manifestation. For Moshe, there was only that sense of Oneness. The words of Shema declare that He is One. That is the ideal and loftiest apprehending of the Divine. After the giving of the Torah, there was no exile, hence no diminished consciousness of the Presence. This is why Moshe did not reference the golus-linked Name of HaShem. He does not mention that Boruch Shem. We recite Shema, and express that ideal. We then acknowledge quietly that His Name in exile is a "different" one, a manifestation made known only when we function as His glorious kingdom on Earth. We whisper the Boruch Shem. Those words are relevant to us in exile and were not a part of the broader consciousness known to Moshe and to our nation in those earlier, better times. Sometimes, I have ended these parsha thoughts with a question to ponder, and this week I pose, based on the Recanati's analysis, why then do we proclaim the Boruch Shem on Yom Kippur? Eager to hear your ideas. Good Shabbos. D Fox

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From Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> Peninim  
<peninim@shemayisrael.com> date Wed, Aug 13, 2008 at 4:35 PM  
subject **Peninim on the Torah**  
by **Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum** -  
Parshas Va'eschanan Aug 13 (1 day ago) PARSHAS VA'ESCHANAN

Beware for yourselves lest you forget the covenant of Hashem, your G-d,...and you make yourselves a carved image, a likeness of anything, as Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you. (4:23) This statement is puzzling. Not to make an idol of "anything that G-d has commanded you" seems a bit contrary to our understanding of the prohibition against idol worship. People create idols specifically in order to venerate the antithesis of Hashem's command. What does the pasuk mean? Rashi explains that the Torah actually abbreviates its enjoinder and should be read: "...anything that G-d has commanded you (not to make)." This sounds correct, but why would such an important prohibition be transmitted by inference, rather than directly?

The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, explains the pasuk's message pragmatically. We are admonished not to distort Divine commandments to suit our own purposes and whims. We are to observe them exactly as Hashem has given them to us in accordance with the interpretation which Chazal have rendered. People think that they can be selective in mitzvah observance, picking and choosing those mitzvos which fit into their comfort zone and ignoring those which they determine are not relevant. When we do this, we are essentially creating a Torah of our own. Any Torah which is man's creation, rather than that which Hashem has given to us, is nothing short of idolatry. By creating his own version of Torah he ends up worshipping his own will, rather than that of G-d. The Torah is warning us not to make an idol of the mitzvos that Hashem has commanded to us. We should worship Hashem - not ourselves. Every mitzvah has its own designated time and place, as prescribed by Hashem and transmitted through the generations by those Torah scholars that have remained faithful to Him - not to the idols which some have created.

Face to face did Hashem speak with you on the mountain, from amid the fire. (5:4) Moshe Rabbeinu recounts the awesome experience of the Revelation. As Sforno explains, Moshe was emphasizing that the Revelation was not a dream or a prophetic vision. It was a direct revelation, during which Klal Yisrael were in full possession of their faculties. Other than an unprecedented spiritual experience that has become part of the mindset of the observant Jew's psyche, what is the depth of the experience we call the Revelation? I think the answer lies in the Maharal m'Prague's explanation of the concept we refer to as the "truth." At Revelation, we experienced the essential meaning of truth, the ultimate truth.

Maharal defines truth as the entire picture. It is an image that includes everything: past, present, future; including the internal reality of something, together with its external counterpart. It is a synthesis of the entirety of reality, a total harmony, in which every aspect of a given subject interplays in absolute harmony. For an idea to be true, it must be so on all levels: spiritual, physical, mathematical and philosophical. In order for an idea to be true, it must be so in all areas, under all circumstances.

Thus, as human beings, it is difficult for us to perceive truth in its purest sense. We are unable to see the future, and we view the past through our colored interpretation. When we add our own subjectivity and vested interests to the equation, our view of the past is "clearly" not objective and, hence, not accurate. If so, what is real truth?

Maharal explains that the only real truth is transcendent truth, which by definition means a truth that either emanates from-- or is above-- time and place. Only once in our history did we have access to this transcendental truth: Kabbolas haTorah. When Hashem gave us the Torah amid a revelation unparalleled and unprecedented in history; when He opened up the Heavens and we saw and beheld a revelation of His glory never before and never after seen by mortal man - we experienced transcendental truth. We experienced the essence, the reality, of truth.

Finding truth is a quest in which we, as mortals, engage throughout our lives. In his sefer, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Horav Eliyahu E. Dessler, zl, asks: What is the essential characteristic which enables one to withstand all of the tests and trials throughout life successfully? Our forefathers did. With what ammunition can we do the same? He explains that we utilize our developed ability to bring our baser nature under the control of our higher yearnings. It is the power to confront the truth in the innermost depths of our hearts; to refuse to be swayed by falsehood which masquerades as the truth. This attachment to the truth in truth is the secret of success in the spiritual life. We inherited this ability from the Patriarchs.

Accepting the truth in the recesses of one's heart is not a simple endeavor. The yetzer hora works overtime to convince us that what is patently false is somehow true - and we all fall for it - because we want to believe it! It is so much easier to convince ourselves that something false is true, than to continue our quest for the truth. It is a quest that never really ends, if we search for the truth - in truth.

I close with a profound thought from Horav Nachman, zl, m'Breslov in his Likutei Moharan:

"Truth is one. One is always one. Before one, what do you count? If there are two, they are not one. It is the same with truth. It is only one. When you speak the truth, you can say only one thing. What you say is the truth, and that is the way it is. Falsehood, on the other hand, can be expressed in many ways. For instance, if you have a silver bowl, you can only say one true thing about it. You can say it is a silver bowl, but if you wish to speak falsely, you can say many things. You can say that it is made of gold, copper or any other material - each one deviating from the truth. Hashem, the Torah, and Klal Yisrael are, therefore, all one. Hashem is truth, the Torah is truth, and Klal Yisrael is truth. Since they are all truth, they are all one."

Who can assure that this heart should remain theirs, to fear Me, forever? (5:26)

When Klal Yisrael accepted the Torah, they reached a summit of spirituality never before achieved, a closeness with Hashem that has never been paralleled. Hashem declared His wish that this moment continue forever. "Who can assure that this heart

should remain theirs, to fear Me... forever?" Regrettably, Klal Yisrael did not respond correctly to Hashem's request. Forty years later, as they stood on the verge of entering Eretz Yisrael, Moshe Rabbeinu took them to task for not responding properly. The Talmud in Avodah Zarah 5a explains that they should have replied affirmatively: "Yes. Please Hashem grant us the purity of heart to serve You in this manner forever!" However, they did not. Why? Chazal explain that on some imperceptible level, Klal Yisrael were reluctant to feel gratitude to Hashem for bringing them to this point, to enable them to achieve such a spiritual plateau. They were not the only ones who did not acknowledge their error. Moshe himself was also unaware of their mistake. He only realized it forty years later! This initiates an insightful comment from the Talmud that a student/person does not attain a full understanding of his rebbe/mentor until after forty years. It took Moshe, the quintessential leader of the Jewish nation and Hashem Yisborach's stellar talmid, disciple, to develop a clear insight of what it was that his Rebbe, Hashem, expects of the Jewish People.

The question which Tosfos asks is quite understandable. If Moshe, the greatest prophet who ever lived, failed to detect any failing on the part of the Jews for forty years, how could he criticize his flock for not realizing that they should have responded affirmatively to Hashem's request? Were they greater than Moshe? He had not realized it either!

Tosfos' answer gives us something to think about. They say that Klal Yisrael should possess a deeper awareness of what is expected of them - even more than Moshe. Klal Yisrael needed the prayer because they had sinned. They should have understood that they needed help from Hashem. Thus, their lack of response was an error. Moshe had not sinned. Therefore, he did not need a prayer for his spiritual welfare. Simply, someone who has once been ill should have the common sense to ask the doctor for help. One who has never been ill does not understand this need.

Horav A. Henoch Leibowitz, zl, derives from here that one who has sinned quite possibly may feel a greater need for closeness with Hashem - even more than a much saintlier or holier person. He explains that the neshamah, soul, of the sinner cries out from the abyss of filth created by his sin, as it grasps for the holiness and purity of which it has been deprived. The sinner has a stronger impetus for crying out to Hashem than the individual who has maintained a righteous and pious lifestyle. Sin has a powerful impact upon a person and, if he is cognizant, it can stimulate exceptional growth. It is very much like the survivor of a sudden illness. He realizes that if he is to continue living, he must make some drastic lifestyle changes. These alterations can spell the difference between life and a painful death. Klal Yisrael should have realized the spiritual trauma their infractions created for their neshamah. The impact of sin is powerful and stimulating, because, on some inner level, the sinner realizes his true greatness and his awesome potential for attaining sanctity. It is all in his hands. Falling down makes a person realize where he could and should be. Moshe did not share their sinful experience. Thus, he had to wait forty years to realize the error of their ways, and only then did he criticize Klal Yisrael.

Every Jew has a thirst for holiness. Every Jew wants to be close to Hashem. In some, the thirst is embedded beneath layers and layers of secular and physical habits. What matters most is one's awareness of the distance between him and Hashem. Once Hashem has been "invited" into the equation, He provides the opportunity and impetus for the sinner's return. Teshuvah is a spiritual reawakening, a desire to strengthen one's connection between himself and the sacred. Thus, the efficacy of teshuvah is often derived from one's sense of distance from the sacred. The greater the distance, the greater the potential movement toward renewed interrelation. I once heard that this distance might be compared to a rope that is cut and retied. It is now doubly strong at the point where it has been retied.

What drives a person to return, to awaken from his spiritual slumber? What motivates that thirst for holiness? It is his neshamah, soul. Each and every one of us has a neshamah which is a chelek Eloka miMaal, a part of the Divine in Heaven. Yes, we have a part of Hashem within us. He deposits it with us, and we have to return it in good condition. It is that spark that drives the thirst which stimulates our return. We all have it; some have buried it deep beneath years of misuse, but it is present.

I conclude with a powerful thought from the Chofetz Chaim. The sage once announced that he wanted everyone in his yeshivah to assemble at a certain time. He had an important secret to reveal. Obviously, the excitement ran high as everyone was trying to guess what it was that their revered rebbe was going to tell them. This was unusual. Perhaps the Chafetz Chaim was about to reveal to them information concerning the arrival of Moshiach Tzidkeinu. Clearly, that is what it had to be. After all, what could be more important? At the appointed time, everyone assembled in the bais medrash, waiting eagerly to hear what their rebbe was about to reveal to them.

The Chafetz Chaim entered the room, took out a siddur and proceeded to read the berachah of Elokaei neshamah she nasata bi tehora hi, "My G-d, the soul You placed within me is pure." We recite this prayer daily at the beginning of our morning prayers. It is an expression of gratitude to Hashem for restoring our vitality in the

morning with a soul of pure, celestial origin, and for sustaining us in life and health. As the Chafetz Chaim read, he came to the part where one says, "Someday You will return it me." This same neshamah which you have within you will be returned to you. You will receive the neshamah which you possessed in this world. What you do with your neshamah does not affect you only for the duration of your life, for the fifty, seventy, even one hundred twenty years. It affects you forever, for eternity. Remember that!" Now we can understand what drives us - or, at least, what should drive us to greater spiritual heights.

You shall teach them thoroughly to your children. (6:7)

The Torah uses the word "children," but, as Rashi comments, it does not mean children exclusively. It refers to one's students as well, since the Torah considers an individual's students to be like his children. In other words, the Torah writes children, because it means children, but students are also considered children. Rashi cites a pasuk in Devarim 14:1, "You are children to Hashem, your G-d." Certainly, we are not Hashem's children simply because of His partnership with our parents. If so, members of the gentile nations would also be considered His children. The pasuk is clearly speaking only to members of Klal Yisrael. Apparently, we are Hashem's children because He is the Source of our influence. He is our inspiration, the Source of our perspective on life and living. This teaches us, explains Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, that the title av, father, is not linked to the physical form of the child, but rather, with the essence of the child. This title can equally apply to the talmid, student, who receives a similar influence from the rebbe as the child receives from his father.

The Mashgiach emphasizes the significance of Klal Yisrael as Hashem's banim. He cites the tefillah which we recite on Rosh Hashanah, Hayom haras olam, "Today is the birth(day) of the world. Today all creatures of the world stand in judgment - whether as children (of G-d) or as servants. If as children, be merciful to us as the mercy of a father for children." Rabbeinu Bachya in his Kad Hakemach comments, "We do not know if You will judge us because we are Your children, as it is written, 'You are children to Hashem, your G-d, or You will judge us because we are Your servants, as it is written (Vayikra 25:55), For Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me.'" Apparently, Rabbeinu Bachya understands this tefillah to convey two perspectives concerning Hashem's outlook during judgment. He can view us as children: Did we act as good and proper children? Did Hashem derive pleasure from us, as a father derives pleasure from his son? Did we give nachas to Hashem? He can also view us as servants and determine if we have fulfilled our role as such.

We now have to ask ourselves: What is considered nachas for a father? How do we determine a father's nachas? When a father perceives that his influence has inspired his child's positive development, he derives pleasure. When a father sees that his positive character traits, outlook, ethical and moral standards have been transmitted to his child, he has nachas. When a father sees himself in his child, he has pleasure. Are we giving Hashem the nachas that a father deserves? Do we act towards Him as a son should act towards his father?

While children are aware of a natural sense of love, students have to be made to feel loved. A student should feel that his rebbe cares about him as a person, as well as a student. He should sense that his rebbe views him as a father views a son. Then, a reciprocity in which the student feels like a son to his father follows.

Horav Mordechai Weinberg, zl, was such a rebbe. A rosh yeshivah who was known for his brilliance and erudition, his uncompromising position to preserve the sanctity and purity of Torah, he was an individual who would tolerate no infraction or corruption. Yet, he was the gentlest of souls with regard to his talmidim. Known affectionately in the Torah world as Reb Mottel, he represented the middos, character traits, of emes and rachamim, truth and compassion, kanaus, zealotness, and sensitivity, all developed into a harmonious blend, a phenomenon of Torah leadership at its zenith. He took leave of this world in the prime of his life, leaving talmidim bereft of a rebbe, orphaned of a father. In an appreciation of the Rosh Yeshivah's life, Rabbi Yaakov Feitman cites vignettes from his life, emotions that poured from students who felt that they had lost more than a rebbe; they had lost a father, a moreh derech, a guide on the path of life.

One mother wrote: "I am so and so's mother. My son was known as a trouble maker and non-accomplisher. The Rosh Yeshivah singled him out, infused him with self-worth and peeled away his rough exterior. No one else saw what was beneath the surface, but Reb Mottel did. He saved my son."

He would take students who had previously been labeled, boys to whose names epithets had been attached, and lead them personally to the bais hamedrash. He took his love for Torah and breathed it into them until he altered their consciousness.

A young man came to his yeshivah after a number of dismal failures in other yeshivos. Actually, he was about to give up on ever becoming a Torah scholar. The Rosh Yeshivah devoted a portion of his daily study time to learning with this young man for two years until he was confident enough to go on his own. Today, he is a respected talmid chacham who credits his success and that of his family to Reb Mottel.

Once someone learned Torah from Reb Mottel, it was the beginning of a lifelong bond - a relationship that was unbroken by time or distance. He would travel to their simchos, refusing to accept payment for his time and effort, declaring, "This is my nachas as well." Indeed, he participated in the simchah like a parent.

I conclude with a story which Rabbi Yisrael Besser relates in his, "Warmed By His Fire," which I feel defines the relationship between a talmid and his rebbe. A talmid recently called Reb Mottel's son-in-law, Horav Shlomo Altusky, Shlita, for advice regarding a yeshivah for his highly motivated son. When Rav Altusky commented on the young boy's exceptional attitude towards learning, the father said, "It is not our z'chus, merit. It is because of the Rosh Yeshivah."

He explained his comment with the following story. Apparently, a number of years had gone by since this young man's wedding, and the couple had not yet been blessed with children. When the talmid visited with Reb Mottel and lamented the couple's predicament, the Rosh Yeshivah told him not to worry. This was atypical of a man who was unusually warm and compassionate. The talmid alluded to this. Reb Mottel's response tells it all.

"Do you think that when I am mesader kiddushin, officiate at a wedding ceremony, it is a simple ceremonial honor which has no meaning? The reason that I always ask to be provided with hotel accommodations is simply because I want to be more comfortable? Absolutely not! It is because whenever I am mesader kiddushin, I sit and recite Tehillim for many hours, entreating Hashem that this marriage be successful in all ways. I pray that my students build homes that are filled with joy, harmony and siyata dishmaya, Divine assistance. I was your mesader kiddushin. I prayed for you. Thus, you have nothing to worry about."

Hashem blessed the talmid and his wife with a child shortly thereafter. When the student called Reb Mottel to share the news with him, the Rosh Yeshivah commented, "You know, I am envious of you. Every parent must undergo tzaar gidul bonim, the various trials and tribulations that are so much a part of child rearing. You, however, have suffered enough prior to your son's birth. Thus, you will be spared any further pain."

The father concluded the story and said, "You see; the Rosh Yeshivah blessed me. My son's success is in the z'chus of the Rosh Yeshivah."

When a rebbe loves like a father, his students value him as a son.

Va'ani Tefillah Hadar kavod hodecha v'divrei niflocheha asicha.

I shall speak the splendid glory of Your Majesty, and of Your wondrous deeds.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, distinguishes between the praise offered by the gentile nations and that of Klal Yisrael. The nations of the world relate all of the details of the mighty upheavals in nature and history and the destruction of the wicked - all events which are the precursors of the advent of Moshiach and the establishment of Malchus Shomayim, Heavenly Kingdom, on earth. The Jewish People, however, view these occurrences as manifestations of the splendor and glory of Hashem. We perceive world events as fitting perfectly into what seems to be a puzzle. Everything has its proper and correct place. It all fits into a Divine plan.

Furthermore, as Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, notes, asicha, with the suffix "ah," denotes urging. David Hamelech is urging himself to be dedicated to this function. Sichah is different than the other terms which denote speaking, such as, sippur, haggadah, dibur, amirah, all functions which indicate speaking in a limited measure in accordance with the nature of the subject. If it is lengthy, the speech will coincide. If it is short, the story will be brief. Sichah denotes constant talk, without limits, or specific purpose - just plain talk - and more talk. Thus, David declares: I choose to talk without limit always about Your splendor and glory. This is my pleasure and my heart's desire. It is focused speech for a specific purpose: for personal appreciation of Hashem's greatness and to share this awareness with everyone. That is my pleasure! In loving memory of our dear Mother & Bubby Mrs. Chana Silberberg Chana bas Moshe Zev a"n nifter 20 Av 5760 t.n.tz.v.h. Zev & Miriam Solomon & Family

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**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

Weekly Parsha

VAETCHANAN

Friday, August 15, 2008 Printer Friendly

This week's parsha begins the seven week period of consolation and condolence that bridges the time space between Tisha b'Av and Rosh Hashana. In order to properly prepare for the oncoming year and its challenges one must first be comforted by the vision of better times ahead and the belief in one's ability to somehow overcome those omnipresent challenges. Healing occurs when one believes that there is yet a future ahead.

All medical doctors agree that hope and optimism on the part of the patient are great aids in the process of recovering from illness or injury. If we would not have time and vision to recover from the sadness before the advent of the High Holy Days then

those most meaningful days of our year would clearly be diminished measurably in our minds and hearts.

Throughout the book of Dvarim, Moshe's pain at not being allowed to enter the Land of Israel is manifestly present. But Moshe is strengthened and even somewhat consoled by his vision of his student and loyal disciple, Yehoushua, succeeding him in the leadership of Israel, and in his firm conviction that the people of Israel will successfully conquer and settle the Land of Israel.

Comfort and consolation come in varying forms. What comforts one individual may not be effective for another individual. But again, all agree that such consolation is a necessary ingredient in the restoration and rehabilitation of those who were so depressed and saddened. There is no substitute for consolation and healing. Otherwise it is impossible to continue in life.

The parsha also deals with the Ten Commandments of Sinai. I have often thought that the repetition of this subject, which seemed to be adequately covered once in the Book of Shemot, teaches us an important lesson, which again may serve to be a source of consolation to us.

The "first" Ten Commandments was given at the beginning of the Jewish sojourn in the desert of Sinai. There was no Golden calf, no complaints about the manna, no spies, no Korach, no plagues of snakes – nothing had yet occurred to diminish the light and aura of Sinai. Well, in such a perfect society there is no reason not to recognize the values and laws of the Ten Commandments as being valid and even necessary in practice.

But now Moshe stands forty years later, after all of the disappointments and rebellions, the backsliding and the pettiness, the death of an entire generation, and reassures us in the "second" Ten Commandments that all of those values and rules have not changed at all. The lesson of the immutability of Torah and Halacha is thereby engraved upon the Jewish heart and mind.

Many things have happened to the Jewish people since Moshe's speech before his death. Many have mistakenly thought that all of the changes in technology, economies, world orders, etc. have made the Ten Commandments, Torah and Halacha somehow less relevant.

Moshe stands and speaks to us to remind us that the basic anchor of Jewish life and in fact of all world civilization lies in those words of Sinai. Everything has changed but human beings have not changed. And neither then has God's instructions for us.

Shabat shalom.  
Rabbi Berel Wein