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[Parshapotpourri] Parsha Potpourri by Oizer Alport - Parshas Va'eschanan
Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Parshas Vaeschanan - Vol. 10, Issue 41

Compiled by **Oizer Alport**

Nachamu nachamu ami (Yeshaya 40:1 - Haftorah) The well-known Haftorah which is read on Parshas Vaeschanan begins Nachamu nachamu ami - Comfort, comfort My people. Why is the word "nachamu" repeated? The Medrash explains (Eichah Rabbah 1:57) that because the Jewish people sinned doubly, as indicated by the double expression (Eichah 1:8) "Cheit chat'ah Yerushalayim" - Jerusalem has greatly sinned - they were doubly punished, as Yeshaya continues to say (40:2) "Ki lakcha miyad Hashem kiflayim b'chol chatoseha" - the Jews received double from Hashem's hand (as punishment) for all of their sins. As a result, when they repent their sins, they will be doubly comforted, as indicated by the double expression "Nachamu nachamu ami" in our verse.

What is difficult to understand is the Medrash's statement that the Jews doubly sinned. How is this to be understood? It can't mean that they did a lot of sins, because then the verse would simply say that they did many sins. What does it mean that each of their sins was doubled, and what is the connection between this and a double consolation?

The Darkei Mussar explains that Hashem gave us the Torah to be a light unto the nations, meaning that the Torah is not only for us, but for all of the nations of the world. If we behave the way that Hashem commanded us, the non-Jews will see our conduct and be so impressed by it that they will want to imitate us and they will become elevated as well. For this reason, the Torah was given in 70 languages, corresponding to the 70 nations of the world. Unfortunately, when we don't behave properly, not only do we go down spiritually, but the non-Jews for whom we're supposed to be role models go down as well. He writes that in his times, people complained that the non-Jews around them acted like lowly animals. He suggests that instead of focusing on them and blaming them for acting so inappropriately and immodestly, we should focus on ourselves and realize that if we behave in the way that we are supposed to, we will elevate not only ourselves but them as well, so the fact that they are acting in this manner is on some level our fault and responsibility. In light of this, he explains that the Medrash says that the Jews sinned doubly because not only did they sin, but their actions had a negative impact on everybody around them, and they were held

accountable for this as well. As a result, we were doubly punished, not only for our sins but also for theirs. However, the Medrash adds that the time will ultimately come when we will properly fulfill our mission and purpose, and not only will we be elevated, but the entire world will be elevated with us, and we will be doubly comforted for all of our pain and suffering, may it be speedily in our days.

Tu B'Av The 15th day of the month of Av is commonly referred to as Tu B'Av, and it traditionally falls close to Shabbos Parshas Vaeschanan, as it does this year on Friday. Our Sages teach (Taanis 4:8) that it is one of the two most festive days in the Jewish calendar (the other being Yom Kippur). The Gemora (Taanis 30b) questions what is so unique about this date, and proceeds to enumerate six different joyous episodes in Jewish history which all occurred on this day.

First, although women who inherited land in Israel from their fathers because they had no brothers were initially forbidden to marry men from other tribes (see Bamidbar 36:8-9) in order to prevent their tribal land from being transferred to another tribe, after a period of time, the Sages derived on Tu B'Av that the prohibition was no longer in effect, and they were once again permitted to intermarry with other tribes. Second, as a result of a tragic episode involving a concubine from the town of Givah, all of the other tribes swore that they would not allow their daughters to marry men from the tribe of Binyomin (See Shoftim 19-21). On Tu B'Av, the Sages ruled that the prohibition was only applicable to those living in the generation when it was made, but not to future generations, who were once again permitted to intermarry with the tribe of Binyomin.

Third, after the Jewish people were sentenced to wander in the wilderness for forty years as result of the sin of the spies, each year on Tisha B'Av they would dig graves and sleep in them. Every year, more than 15,000 Jews would die on that night. In the final year, all of those who went to sleep in their graves were shocked to discover in the morning that not one of them had died. They assumed that they had been in error about the date, so each successive night they again slept in their graves. On the 15th day of the month, when they saw the full moon, they understood that Tisha B'Av had clearly passed, and the fact that they were all still alive was a sign that they had been forgiven for the sin of the spies, which was a cause for celebration.

Fourth, the wicked king Yeravam ben Navat placed sentries along the road to prevent people from ascending to the Temple and to encourage them to instead worship his idols (See Melochim 1:12). On Tu B'Av, these sentries were removed by king Hoshea ben Elah. Fifth, many years after the horrific destruction of the city of Beitar, the Romans finally permitted those who had been slaughtered there to be buried, and miraculously, despite the passage of time, none of the bodies had decomposed. Finally, the wood for the Altar in the Temple was collected during the summer when the sun was strong enough to dry it out and prevent it from becoming infested with worms. As the sun's strength begins to wane on Tu B'Av, this was the last day to perform this mitzvah, and its completion was a cause for rejoicing.

Rav Yitzchok Breitowitz points out that when counting from Tisha B'Av, the 15th day of Av is the seventh day, which symbolically represents the fact that we have now completed the traditional 7-day mourning period, and we are now picking ourselves up and moving on with life. In this light, he brilliantly suggests that the aforementioned six causes of joy on Tu B'Av parallel the five tragedies that our Sages teach (Taanis 4:6) occurred on Tisha B'Av. The first calamity was the decree that those who accepted the negative report of the spies about the land of Israel would die in the wilderness. This decree was overturned in the final year when all of the Jews who dug graves and slept in them were spared and emerged alive. The second tragedy was the destruction of the first Temple, which was destroyed for the sins of idolatry, murder, and forbidden relationships (Yoma 9b). Their rejection of Hashem and pursuit of foreign gods was rectified by the removal of Yeravam's idol-associated sentries by Hoshea ben Elah.

The third tragedy that took place on Tisha B'Av was the destruction of the second Temple due to the sin of baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). The

interpersonal conflicts were rectified on Tu B'Av, when permission was given for women who had inherited land to marry whomever they wanted, even men from other tribes, and for all of the tribes to once again intermarry with the tribe of Binyomin. The fourth calamity that occurred on Tisha B'Av was the horrific massacre of the Jews in Beitar, which was nullified when they were able to be buried on Tu B'Av, and it was discovered that none of their bodies had rotted. The fifth and final tragedy that occurred on Tisha B'Av was the fact that Yerushalayim was plowed over after the destruction of the Temple, which left it completely barren and infertile. The fact that they were able to obtain wood for the offerings that were burned on the Altar demonstrated that Hashem had not forsaken them and was providing them with their needs.

Tisha B'Av is the emotional climax of a 3-week period during which we mourn devastation and destruction. On Tu B'Av, we figuratively "get up" from shiva, as we focus on moving on and rebuilding, just as our Gedolim taught us by example after the Holocaust. In fact, our Sages teach that prior to creating the world in which we live, Hashem first created many other worlds and destroyed them all, which teaches that the proper response to destruction - even the destruction of an entire world - is to channel our energy and efforts into rebuilding anew. As we now begin the seven-week period of comfort, we should strengthen ourselves through the recognition that no matter what challenges and tragedies we may be dealt in life, Hashem will never forsake us, and we always have the opportunity to follow in His footsteps by continuing to grow and rebuild.

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

Answering Unanswered Prayers

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Did you ever really pray for something you wanted? I mean, really fervently, desperately, pray hard for something that was vitally important to you?

If you did, and I think we all pray this way at moments of urgency, you violated an anonymous piece of wisdom:

"Be careful what you pray for, because you just might get it."

I have not been able to determine who said that. But I know clearly what he meant. In my own life, I have had more than one occasion to look back at answered prayers, which achieved what turned out to be very trivial objectives. And I have certainly been disappointed in prayer, only to learn that in the long run, I was much better off without the benefits of whatever I prayed for so earnestly.

We think we know what is good for us, we think we know what we need, but we really don't. Often, we are much the better for having certain prayers rebuffed, and we frequently discover that the things we thought were important are not important at all.

In the Torah portion that we read in the synagogue this week, Parshat Va'etchanan, Moses confides to us how he powerfully beseeched the Almighty, begging Him to reverse His decision to frustrate Moses' greatest dream, that he be permitted to enter the Promised Land. Moses uses a synonym for prayer, *chanan*, which connotes imploring, pleading for the undeserved favor, *matnat chinam*.

But Moses is denied his dream. His petition is torn up in his face. His is the archetypal unanswered prayer.

Joel Cohen, in his book *Moses, a Memoir*, puts these poignant words in the mouth of Moses:

"I lowered my knees and begged Him once again. I could muster no tears this time... I needed badly to reach and walk about the land He promised to Abraham for us, so long ago... My work is incomplete. My prophecy has achieved no reality for me in my lifetime... There will be no future for me. My staff, the instrumentality of miracles against His enemies, is powerless against His will."

Beautifully put, by this author of a book I recommend to you all.

What are we to learn from the story of the unanswered prayer of the humblest, but greatest, of men? Many things, in my opinion.

We learn that the gates of prayer are not always open. In the words of the Midrash, they are sometimes open but sometimes closed. And we are not to rely upon them exclusively. Rather, we are to do our own part to achieve our objectives in mundane ways.

Judaism insists upon a balance between faith in the divine and the exercise of practical human effort. It acknowledges that while there must be *bitachon*, trust in the Lord, there must also be *hishtadlut*, old-fashioned hard work on our part. As the rabbis have it, never rely upon miracles.

We can never allow prayer to become a substitute for our doing all we can do. We must not simply expect the Almighty to achieve Jewish sovereignty for us, but must do our parts politically and militarily. We cannot expect manna from heaven, but must earn our livelihoods by dint of the sweat of our brow. And when we are ill, yes, we must pray, but we must also diligently seek out competent medical assistance.

There are other lessons, to be sure, to be learned from the unanswered prayer of Moses. His grave remains a secret, so that it not become a shrine and that he not be idolized or heaven forbid, deified. For another important lesson about prayer from the Jewish perspective, is that we pray to the One Above only, and not to saints and holy men, be they alive or be they dead. Cemeteries are not synagogues.

By not granting Moses his request, the Master of the Universe was in effect telling him that he did all that he could, and that no more is expected of him. Humans are expected to do all they can, and not necessarily to accomplish everything.

"It is not necessary for you to complete the task, but neither are you exempt from doing all that you can."

Moses is being told, "You did all you could, even if you did not achieve all of your personal ambitions." No human is complete, no man is perfect.

And then there is a final lesson, one that we learn from the very fact that Moses persisted in his prayer, although he knew well that his request would be spurned. He modeled the importance of hope, even in the face of impossible odds.

Jewish history contains a long list of Moses-like figures, whose vision it was to enter the Holy Land. They include men like the Gaon Elijah of Vilna, who longed to spend the last years of his life in Eretz Yisrael. And closer to our time, the great sage Yisrael Meir Kagan, the Chofetz Chaim, prayed and carefully planned to live out his life in Israel.

Ironically, they, like Moses, had their dreams frustrated by the Hand of Providence. Like Moses, they were ready to try almost anything to realize their ambitions. And like Moses, who was told that he would not enter the land but his disciple Joshua would, various leaders of Jewish history, however reluctantly, took comfort in the fact that their disciples realized their dream in their stead.

This is possibly the most important lesson of all. When our prayers go unanswered for ourselves, they may yet be answered for our children and grandchildren.

Unanswered prayers are mysteriously answered, in inscrutable and unpredictable ways.

From TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

Rabbi Yakov Haber

Tu B'Av and Nachamu: The Roots of the Redemption

On Friday we celebrate Tu B'Av. Some explain that the joy of Shabbos Nachamu is really rooted in the joy of Tu B'Av since when the ninth of Av occurs on Sunday, Shabbos Nachamu and Tu B'Av coincide. Even when they do not, their proximity warrants a festive mood similar to Tu B'Av.

In the Talmud (Ta'anis 26b), R. Shimon ben Gamliel famously declares: "there were no holidays in Israel as great as Tu B'Av and Yom HaKippurim." The Gemara (ibid. 30b-31a) states that Yom Kippur understandably is a

holiday as it is the day of forgiveness and atonement, but why is Tu b'Av such a happy occasion? The Talmud gives six reasons:

B'nei Yisrael became aware on that day that the decree that all males of the generation of the exodus would die as a result of the sin of the spies had come to an end. The dead of Beitar were buried. The temporary prohibition forbidding a woman inheriting land in Israel from marrying anyone outside of her tribe was lifted. In the aftermath of the civil war following the tragedy of pilegish b'giva, the other tribes had vowed that the tribe of Binyamin, which had been practically wiped out, would not be able to marry any woman from the other tribes. This would have led to Binyamin's total extinction. On Tu b'Av, this vow was lifted and Binyamin's continuity as a tribe was assured. The roadblocks set up by Yarov'am to prevent aliya l'regel were removed by Hoshei'a ben Eila. Chopping wood for the mizbeach ended as a result of the coming of the end of the drying effect of the summer season, and the siyum hamitzva was celebrated. From now on, the Gemara concludes, all who increase their Torah study will benefit, and chas v'shalom the opposite. Several of these events are really just slight respites from tragedies of massive proportions. Are these really cause to celebrate?

Furthermore, is there a common theme linking all six events?

In answer to these questions, it would appear that Tu B'Av, coming as it does so soon after Tish'a B'Av and with its above-mentioned link to Shabbos Nachamu, is the "headquarters" of that which will undo the damage which brought about the exile. This perhaps is the root cause of the celebration.

The process of teshuva, which is a crucial component for quickening the redemption, requires undoing the causes of the exile. In addition, once the teshuva process has begun, and, to a large extent, even before, Divine mercy advances the redemption and reverses its evils. As Yeshayahu states: "For a short moment I left you, and with great mercy I will gather you" (Isaiah 54:7). Each one of the events we commemorate and celebrate on Tu B'Av falls into one of these two categories, repentance and Divine mercy.

The first two events demonstrate Divine rachamim even in times of Divine wrath. Part of the generation which rejected the gift of Eretz Yisrael was spared. The bodies of the many Jewish casualties of the utter Roman destruction of Beitar did not decay and were eventually allowed to be buried. Even within the period of enormous sorrow, Hashem demonstrated His love for us and indicated that even if we are undeserving, He will still advance our redemption - "and He brings a redeemer to their descendants for the sake of His name, with love."

The next three events demonstrate the Jewish people's movement toward undoing the causes of destruction and the exile. The destruction of the first Temple was caused primarily by violations of the three cardinal sins, chief in the list being avoda zara (Yoma 9b). Part of this campaign of widespread avoda zara was Yarov'am's banning of aliya to Jerusalem to worship Hashem there. Hoshei'a's removal of his roadblocks represented an opportunity to change.[1] The destruction of the second Temple was caused primarily by baseless hatred tearing the unity of the Jewish people apart (ibid.). Regarding the various decrees forbidding marriage of one tribe and another - ordained in order to preserve the integrity of the inheritance of each tribe or to punish the reprehensible actions of one of the tribes - even though each was made for an important reason, they still were detrimental to the unified fabric of Klal Yisrael. Their repeal represented a step toward achieving that elusive unity. Of course, these events occurred long before the destruction of the Batei Mikdash and accompanying exiles. But perhaps these events injected into the fabric of B'nei Yisrael an extra boost toward the ability to be unified.[2]

How does the celebration of the siyum k'risas ha'eitzim fit into the pattern? The Torah warns us that one of the causes of exile is doing mitzvos by rote, as a burden or chore to be dispensed with quickly, moving on to our "real" pursuits. The tochacha in parashas Ki Savo threatens exile as a consequence of "your not serving Hashem, your G-d, with joy and happiness of heart" (28:47). Megillas Eichah (1:3) states "Judah was exiled out of pain and great servitude". Among the other interpretations of this verse, some suggest that

Yirmiyahu is indicating one of the reasons for the exile. We served G-d, not out of joy with a sense of gratitude for the immense opportunity, but with an attitude of viewing that service as painful and even a burden. The immense joy accompanying the siyum hamitzva of cutting the wood for the altar - which actually serves as one of the sources for the concept of celebration at a siyum maseches (see Yam shel Shlomo, Bava Kamma 7:37) - is the exact opposite of that attitude. Mitzvos are our mission in life to be relished, performed with zest and happiness, and celebrated upon their completion. The next step is to immediately seek other mitzva opportunities. This is noted as well by the Gemara as it ends its discussion of this celebration by emphasizing the need to increase one's Torah learning at that precise time. Several of these themes are found in parashas VaEschanan, the parasha always read on Shabbos Nachamu, as well. Moshe's living example of passion for mitzvos is manifest throughout the parasha. His pleading with Hashem to enter the holy land was, as the Gemara in Sota (14a) teaches us, not to enjoy of its beautiful physical bounty but to pursue its unique mitzvos not relevant outside of Eretz Yisroel. Moshe's seizing the opportunity to designate the three arei miklat in the East bank of the Jordan river (4:41 ff.) - even though he knew they would not be effective until the days of his student, Yehoshua - also serves as an appropriate model for us to run after mitzvos even if we are not able to complete them. The portion "ki tolid banim", read on Tisha B'Av, adjures us to use the opportunities that the exile presents us to return to G-d and wholeheartedly serve Him (see 4:29 ff., see also 6:5).

May our return to Hakadosh Baruch Hu inspired by the tragedies of the exile and renewed enthusiasm for Divine service as well as a realization of G-d's infinite mercy serve as merits to rush the final redemption!

[1] Commentaries note the Gemara in Gittin (88a) that his actions actually indirectly caused the exile of the Ten Tribes, since the Jews in the kingdom of Yisrael did not take advantage of this opportunity. Why then is this cause to celebrate? Perhaps the simplest answer is that we celebrate the opportunity, which itself is significant.

[2] See Gemara Sanhedrin (19b) concerning Yosef, Boaz, and Palti ben Laish for an example of this concept. Copyright © 2015 by TorahWeb.org. All rights reserved.

Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Vaeschanan 5774

1. I would like to share with you two thoughts on the Parsha and then a thought that is not Dafka on the Parsha. Let's start with two thoughts on the Parsha. One is one of the most incredible thoughts in a beautiful Sefer of incredible thoughts from Morainu HoRav Shimon Schwab (Sefer Mayan Bais Hashoeva - Parshas Korach 16:7 page # 334). We know that when Moshe Rabbeinu begs to go into Eretz Yisrael HKB"H says to him as it says in 3:26 (רב-לך--אל-תוסף דבר אלי עוד, בדבר הזה) it is plenty. You have spoken to me enough. The language of (רב-לך) itself is a little hard to understand. It doesn't sound like the words of Chiba you would expect from the Ribbono Shel Olam to Moshe Rabbeinu who is Davening to go into Eretz Yisrael, it should have been words of Pi'us in some type of a way. But it doesn't seem that way. HKB"H says Genukt, it is enough. Furthermore, there is a Gemara in Maseches Sotah 13b (21 lines from the top) (א"ר לוי ברב בישר) with the language of "Rav" Moshe spoke and (ברב בישרוהו) with the language of "Rav" he was spoken to. How so? The Gemara explains. (ברב בישר) Moshe Rabbeinu spoke using the word Rav when he said (רב-לכם, בני לוי) in Parshas Korach 16:7. He said (בני לוי) it is enough for you sons of Levi. Therefore, (ברב בישרוהו). Therefore, the same language of Rav, HKB"H spoke to him. (רב-לך--אל-תוסף דבר אלי עוד, בדבר הזה). This Gemara is a Pliya. First of all, was it an Aveira that Moshe Rabbeinu said to the Bnei Korach "Rav Lachem", is there something wrong that he should be punished because he said it? Secondly, the language of (ברב בישר), a Bisurah is usually a Bisura Tovah, usually something positive. (ברב בישרוהו) That language in Lashon Kodosh is a very difficult one. For this, Rav Schwab says an incredible Yesod that is really important to any Jewish who is Osek B'tzorchai Tzibbur, who is involved in anything for the Tzibbur of Klal Yisrael. Rav Schwab gives us insight into the complaints of the Adas Korach, into the family of Levi when they came to Moshe Rabbeinu.

What was the job of the Leviim? When it was time for the whole Klal Yisrael to move, all 3 Million Jews had to now gather up their possessions on short notice and travel to another one of the 42 different Masaos, that they moved to in the Midbar. Leviim had to run to the Bais Hamikdash (Mishkan) and it was hard work, they had to take apart the different parts of the Bais Hamikdash (Mishkan), disassemble them, cover them properly, in some cases carry them by hand and in other cases put them in wagons and travel. Their wives undoubtedly were collecting the children's slippers, pajamas, and different things, getting ready to move. But the father was a Levi, he had to run and there he was taking care of the Mishkan. He gets to his new destination, the family has to settle in, but no he is a Levi, he is busy setting up the Mishkan. That the Leviim did, they set up the Mishkan. As soon as the Mishkan is set up and ready for Avodah, ready for the Shechina, we tell the Leviim ok your job is done, back off. Only Kohanim have the right to do Avodah, only Kohanim put on special Begadim (לְכַבֹּד, וּלְתַפְאֶרֶת), only Kohanim get to eat from the different Korbanos that are brought. Back off, you are like a Yisrael. To most people that would be very upsetting. Here I am doing all the hard work, all the labor, and when it comes time to get a little bit of the glory, of the joy, of the people coming to see the Mishkan, I am told to back off I am like one of them. It is very much that way when you are Osek B'tzorchei Tzibbur, when you get involved in public things. It is very much that way. There are a lot of people who do a lot of work behind the scenes and really don't get proper credit for it, don't get proper credit at all. That is why the Leviim had complaints, look at what we are doing and look at what we are getting. It is not fair. Moshe Rabbeinu said to them (רַב־לֵקֶם, בְּנֵי לֵוִי) – you should know that it is an extraordinary thing. When you get to serve HKB"Y behind the scenes, you are more Lishma, more L'sheim Shamayim than those who don't. Here you are, able to do all the work and back off with humility and let the Kohanim do the Avodah. Moshe Rabbeinu told them Rav Lachem it is no small thing this what I am telling you to do.

Fast forward to Parshas Vaeschanan. In Parshas Vaeschanan Moshe Raabbeinu says I want to go into Eretz Yisrael. For 40 years I nurtured these people, for 40 years I went from one challenge to another, one difficulty to another. Now is the time to see the Nachas, the Sipuk. To see them enter Eretz Yisrael, to see them enjoy. In the whole Sefer Yehoshua the people don't rebel once and Moshe Rabbeinu has a complaint on Yosher, a complaint of how can it be that I come until here and now I am not allowed to go further? The Ribono Shel Olam says to him (רַב־לֵקֶד), it is plenty. What you have done is a Besura to you, it is good news to you. What you have done is extraordinary. When someone does things for the Tzibbur to set things up, that is an extraordinary level of Avodah. Therefore says HKB"Y to Moshe Rabbeinu (בָּרַךְ בִּישְׂרָר בִּישְׂרָוּהוּ) remember you said (רַב־לֵקֶם) to the people of Korach, I am telling you the same thing. What a beautiful thought for anybody who is Osek in Tzorchei Tzibbur behind the scenes.

from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com> date: Thu, Jul 30, 2015 at 9:06 AM

**The Meaning of Tu B'Av
by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau**

Six events occurred on Tu B'Av, the 15th of Av, making it a festive day in the Jewish calendar.

The Mishnah tells us that: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur." (Tractate Ta'anit) What is Tu B'Av, the 15th of the Hebrew month of Av? In which way is it equivalent to Yom Kippur?

Our Sages explain: Yom Kippur symbolizes God's forgiving Israel for the sin of the Golden Calf in the desert, for it was on that day that He finally accepted Moses' plea for forgiveness of the nation, and on that same day Moses came down from the mountain with the new set of tablets.

Just as Yom Kippur symbolizes the atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, Tu B'Av signifies the atonement for the sin of the Spies, where ten came bearing such negative reports which reduced the entire nation to panic. As a result of that sin, it was decreed by God that the nation would remain in the desert for 40 years, and that no person 20 or older would be allowed to enter Israel. On each Tisha B'Av of those 40 years, those who had reached the age of 60 that year died – 15,000 each Tisha B'Av.

This plague finally ended on Tu B'Av.

Six positive events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Event #1 - As noted above, the plague that had accompanied the Jews in the desert for 40 years ended. That last year, the last 15,000 people got ready to die. God, in His mercy, decided not to have that last group die, considering all the troubles they had gone through. Now, when the ninth of Av approached, all the members of the group got ready to die, but nothing happened. They then decided that they might have been wrong about the date, so they waited another day, and another...

Finally on the 15th of Av, when the full moon appeared, they realized definitely that the ninth of Av had come and gone, and that they were still alive. Then it was clear to them that God's decree was over, and that He had finally forgiven the people for the sin of the Spies.

This is what was meant by our Sages when they said: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur," for there is no greater joy than having one's sins forgiven – on Yom Kippur for the sin of the Golden Calf and on Tu B'Av for the sin of the spies. In the Book of Judges, Tu B'Av is referred to as a holiday (Judges 21:19).

In addition to this noteworthy event, five other events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Events #2 and 3 - Following the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (see Numbers, chapter 36), daughters who inherited from their father when there were no sons were forbidden to marry someone from a different tribe, so that land would not pass from one tribe to another. Generations later, after the story of the "Concubine of Giv'ah" (see Judges, chapters 19-21), the Children of Israel swore not to allow their daughters to marry anyone from the tribe of Benjamin. This posed a threat of annihilation to the tribe of Benjamin.

Each of these prohibitions were lifted on Tu B'Av. The people realized that if they kept to their prohibition, one of the 12 tribes might totally disappear. As to the oath that had been sworn, they pointed out that it only affected the generation that had taken the oath, and not subsequent generations. The same was applied to the prohibition of heiresses marrying outside their own tribe: this rule was applied only to the generation that had conquered and divided up the land under Joshua, but not future generations. This was the first expression of the merging of all the tribes, and was a cause for rejoicing. In the Book of Judges it is referred to as "a festival to the Lord."

Over the generations, this day was described in Tractate Ta'anit as a day devoted to betrothals, so that new Jewish families would emerge.

Event #4 - After Jeroboam split off the kingdom of Israel with its ten tribes from the kingdom of Judea, he posted guards along all the roads leading to Jerusalem, to prevent his people from going up to the Holy City for the pilgrimage festivals, for he feared that such pilgrimages might undermine his authority. As a "substitute," he set up places of worship which were purely idolatrous, in Dan and Beth-el. Thus the division between the two kingdoms became a fait accompli and lasted for generations.

The last king of the kingdom of Israel, Hosea ben Elah, wished to heal the breach, and removed all the guards from the roads leading to Jerusalem, thus allowing his people to make the pilgrimage again. This act took place on Tu B'Av.

Event #5 - At the beginning of the Second Temple period, the Land of Israel lay almost totally waste, and the wood needed to burn the sacrifices and for the eternal flame that had to burn on the altar was almost impossible to obtain. Each year a number of brave people volunteered to bring the wood needed from afar – a trip which was dangerous in the extreme.

Now, not just every wood could be brought. Wood which was wormy was not permitted. And dampness and cold are ideal conditions for the breeding of worms in wood. As a result, all the wood that would be needed until the following summer had to be collected before the cold set in. The last day that wood was brought in for storage over the winter months was Tu B'Av, and it was a festive occasion each year when the quota needed was filled by that day.

Event #6 - Long after the event, the Romans finally permitted the bodies of those who had been killed in the defense of Betar (in the Bar Kochba revolt) to be buried. This was a double miracle, in that, first, the Romans finally gave permission for the burial, and, second, in spite of the long period of time that had elapsed, the bodies had not decomposed. The permission was granted on Tu B'Av.

In gratitude for this double miracle, the fourth and last blessing of the Grace After Meals was added, which thanks God as "He Who is good and does good." "He is good" – in that the bodies had not decomposed, "and does good" – in that permission was given for the burial.

To this day, we celebrate Tu B'Av as a minor festival. We do not say Tahanun on that day, nor are eulogies rendered. By the same token, if a couple are getting married on that day (and, as we will see below, it is the custom for the bride and groom to fast on their wedding day), neither fasts.

Beginning with Tu B'Av, we start preparing ourselves spiritually for the month of Elul, the prologue to the coming Days of Awe. The days begin to get shorter, the nights get

longer. The weather, too, helps us to take spiritual stock: the hectic days of the harvest are over for the farmer, and the pace has slowed down considerably. Even on a physical level, the heat of the summer makes it hard to sit down and think things out, and now that the days and nights are cooler, it is easier to examine one's actions.

In earlier times, it was the custom already from Tu B'Av to use as one's greeting "May your inscription and seal be for good" (ketiva vahatima tova), the same blessing that we today use on Rosh Hashana. Those who work out the gematria values of different expressions found that phrase adds up to 928 – and so does the words for "15th of Av." From "Practical Judaism" by Rabbi Israel Meir Lau published by Feldheim Publishers. Published: August 13, 2005

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The Right and the Good **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Buried among the epic passages in Va-etchanan – among them the Shema and the Ten Commandments – is a brief passage with large implications for the moral life in Judaism. Here it is together with the preceding verse:

You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His testimonies and His statutes, which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. (Deut. 6: 17-18)

The difficulty is obvious. The preceding verse makes reference to commandments, testimonies and statutes. This, on the face of it, is the whole of Judaism as far as conduct is concerned. What then is meant by the phrase "the right and the good" that is not already included within the previous verse?

Rashi says, it refers to "compromise (that is, not strictly insisting on your rights) and action within or beyond the letter of the law (lifnim mi-shurat hadin)." The law, as it were, lays down a minimum threshold: this we must do. But the moral life aspires to more than simply doing what we must.[1] The people who most impress us with their goodness and rightness are not merely people who keep the law. The saints and heroes of the moral life go beyond. They do more than they are commanded. They go the extra mile. That according to Rashi is what the Torah means by "the right and the good."

Ramban, while citing Rashi and agreeing with him, goes on to say something slightly different:

At first Moses said that you are to keep His statutes and his testimonies which He commanded you, and now he is stating that even where He has not commanded you, give thought as well to do what is good and right in his eyes, for He loves the good and the right.

Now this is a great principle, for it is impossible to mention in the Torah all aspects of man's conduct with his neighbours and friends, all his various transactions and the ordinances of all societies and countries. But since He mentioned many of them, such as, "You shall not go around as a talebearer," "You shall not take vengeance nor bear a grudge," "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor," "You shall not curse the deaf," "You shall rise before the hoary head," and the like, He went on to state in a general way that in all matters one should do what is good and right, including even compromise and going beyond the strict requirement of the law ... Thus one should behave in every sphere of activity, until he is worthy of being called "good and upright."

Ramban is going beyond Rashi's point, that the right and the good refer to a higher standard than the law strictly requires. It seems as if Ramban is telling us that there are aspects of the moral life that are not caught by the concept of law at all. That is what he means by saying "It is impossible to mention in the Torah all aspects of man's conduct with his neighbours and friends."

Law is about universals, principles that apply in all places and times. Don't murder. Don't rob. Don't steal. Don't lie. Yet there are important features of the moral life that are not universal at all. They have to do with specific

circumstances and the way we respond to them. What is it to be a good husband or wife, a good parent, a good teacher, a good friend? What is it to be a great leader, or follower, or member of a team? When is it right to praise, and when is it appropriate to say, "You could have done better"? There are aspects of the moral life that cannot be reduced to rules of conduct, because what matters is not only what we do, but the way in which we do it: with humility or gentleness or sensitivity or tact.

Morality is about persons, and no two persons are alike. When Moses asked God to appoint a successor, he began his request with the words, "Lord, God of the spirits of all flesh." [2] On this the rabbis commented: what Moses was saying was that because each person is different, he asked God to appoint a leader who would relate to each individual as an individual, knowing that what is helpful to one person may be harmful to another. [3] This ability to judge the right response to the right person at the right time is a feature not only of leadership, but of human goodness in general.

Rashi begins his commentary to Bereishit with the question: If the Torah is a book of law, why does it not start with the first law given to the people of Israel as a whole, which does not appear until Exodus 12? Why does it include the narratives about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the patriarchs and matriarchs and their children? Rashi gives an answer that has nothing to do with morality – he says it has to do with the Jewish people's right to their land. But the Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin) writes that the stories of Genesis are there to teach us how the patriarchs were upright in their dealings, even with people who were strangers and idolaters. That, he says, is why Genesis is called by the sages "the book of the upright." [4]

Morality is not just a set of rules, even a code as elaborate as the 613 commands and their rabbinic extensions. It is also about the way we respond to people as individuals. The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is at least in part about what went wrong in their relationship when the man referred to his wife as Ishah, 'woman,' a generic description, a type. Only when he gave her a proper name, Chavah, Eve, did he relate to her as an individual in her individuality, and only then did God "make them garments of skin and clothed them."

This too is the difference between the God of Aristotle and the God of Abraham. Aristotle thought that God knew only universals not particulars. This is the God of science, of the Enlightenment, of Spinoza. The God of Abraham is the God who relates to us in our singularity, in what makes us different from others as well as what makes us the same.

This ultimately is the difference between the two great principles of Judaic ethics: justice and love. Justice is universal. It treats all people alike, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, making no distinctions on the basis of colour or class. But love is particular. A parent loves his or her children for what makes them each unique. The moral life is a combination of both. That is why it cannot be reduced solely to universal laws. That is what the Torah means when it speaks of "the right and the good" over and above the commandments, statutes and testimonies.

A good teacher knows what to say to a weak student who, through great effort, has done better than expected, and to a gifted student who has come top of the class but is still performing below his or her potential. A good employer knows when to praise and when to challenge. We all need to know when to insist on justice and when to exercise forgiveness. The people who have had a decisive influence on our lives are almost always those we feel understood us in our singularity. We were not, for them, a mere face in the crowd. That is why, though morality involves universal rules and cannot exist without them, it also involves interactions that cannot be reduced to rules. Rabbi Israel of Rizhin once asked a student how many sections there were in the Shulchan Arukh. The student replied, "Four." "What," asked the Rizhiner, "do you know about the fifth section?" "But there is no fifth section," said the student. "There is," said the Rizhiner. "It says: always treat a person like a mensch." The fifth section of the code of law is the conduct that cannot be reduced to law. That is what it takes to do the right and the good.

[1] See Lon Fuller, *The Morality of Law*, Yale University Press, 1969, and R. Aharon Lichtenstein's much reprinted article, 'Is there an ethic independent of the halakah?' [2] Numbers 27: 16. [3] Sife Zuta, *Midrash Tanhuma* and *Rashi to Numbers ad loc.* [4] *Ha-amek Davar to Genesis, Introduction.*

Peninim On the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Va'eschanan

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

PARASHAS VA'ESCHANAN

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor shall you subtract from it. (4:2) The Torah is Divinely authored and, as such, it is perfect. To add or subtract from the written word of G-d is to imply that it lacks perfection and is somehow not applicable in all venues or under all circumstances. When Hashem commands that Tefillin have four parshios, He does not mean that four is a minimum, allowing for us to add a fifth parsha at will. Every number that Hashem gives us is the requisite for this mitzvah. To add or subtract is to distort and demean the pristine nature of the Torah. To do so is to deny its Divine authorship. This idea would seem valid if one were attempting to subtract from the Torah. Why should the devout, observant Jew who wants to add to the mitzvah be held in contempt?

Simply, one who adds suggests that the original mitzvah is imperfect. We can look at it in another way. Horav Lazar Brody, Shlita, suggests an often-used parable which lends practicality to this prohibition. It also explains why those individuals who attempt to impugn the Torah with their own perverted ideas of religious observance not only lack clear perception in their understanding of Torah, but are also deficient in their religious observance.

A man visited his doctor complaining of chest pains and trouble breathing. The doctor put him through a battery of tests to confirm that nothing was seriously wrong with the man. The diagnosis came back as pneumonia, a lung infection that was treatable with antibiotics. The doctor was well aware that in order to rid the system of infection effectively, the patient would require 20,000 units of antibiotics. To swallow the entire dosage all at once would kill the patient. On the other hand, to spread the dose over a period of thirty days would not provide enough fighting power to eradicate the bacteria. Thus, the doctor wrote a ten day prescription, dividing the dosage over four times a day, providing the patient daily with 2,000 units of bacteria-fighting antibiotics. In ten days, the patient should be cured of his pneumonia.

The doctor took all of this into consideration when he wrote the prescription. He was not going to hold the patient's hand to make sure that he took the correct amount four times daily for the allotted time period. A patient who does not follow the doctor's instructions and misses a dose or doubles up on his dose either will not recuperate or will become sicker. Anyone with a modicum of common sense understands that the doctor knows what he is doing, so that to undermine his authority would be foolhardy. Is it any different with the Torah's mitzvos? Hashem is the Rofeh kol basar, Healer of all flesh, the Supreme Physician, Who knows what is best for us, because He is our Creator. Hashem has determined that the Jewish neshamah, soul, requires four species for seven days - no more, no less. Those who are clueless concerning the spiritual anatomy of the Jewish soul should not attempt to change the age-old, hallowed traditions of our people. Egalitarian worship is just another ruse for "do not add." Changes in halachah to conform with contemporary society were attempted by the secular streams of Judaism two centuries ago. We all know how successful they were. Now we have those who call themselves Orthodox, attempting to do the same, all under the veneer of progress. They will meet with the same success as their secular mentors. The issue is only how many unsuspecting, misguided Jews will be misled because of their folly.

I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery. (5:6)

A well-known question was posed by Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi (Kuzari 1:25): Since the first mitzvah of the Aseres HaDibros, Ten Commandments, is the enjoyment to believe in Hashem, why not mention that Hashem created Heaven and earth? Why does our liberation from Egypt play such a critical role in our hashkafah, philosophy/outlook. He explains that, while the creation of the world is the penultimate experience, no one was around to see it. Yetzias Mitzrayim, the Exodus, was witnessed by millions. There is no question that something witnessed is something remembered. Yetzias Mitzrayim left a lasting influence on the psyche of the nation that experienced this seminal event.

Ibn Ezra (Shemos 20:1) quotes the Kuzari's question and replies in a diametrically opposite manner. He explains that, on the contrary, a logical deduction reached through analysis and profound dialectic is the most concrete proof that Hashem is the Master and Ruler of the world. Any intelligent person whose mind is engaged understands that Hashem created the world and that He continues to guide it every moment of its existence. The problem is that, sadly, a large segment of people exists who find reaching a cogent conclusion established on logic and reason quite challenging. They

just cannot seem to pick it up and understand. It is for them that Hashem must employ the proof of yetzias Mitzrayim, to support the building blocks of faith.

Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl, supplements these expositions with a powerful thought. Aside from the mitzvah of emunah, faith in Hashem, implied by the first commandment, it is upon this mitzvah that we must build our obligation to observe Hashem's Torah and observe His mitzvos. This mitzvah teaches us why a Jew must be observant: Hashem took us out of Egypt. Had He not taken us out, we would still be slaves to the Egyptian Pharaohs.

Our obligation to serve Hashem originates from our obligation to show hakoras hatov, appreciate and show gratitude, to Hashem for everything that He has done for us. We must acknowledge that, without Hashem, we are nothing. We cannot function. The event that serves as the watershed for Jewish existence is the liberation from Egypt. This is why we constantly reiterate this fact.

In his sefer, *Orchos Chaim*, the Rosh writes that the first commandment encapsulates the essential foundation of the Torah: to trust Hashem with all your heart; and to maintain perfect faith in His Hashgachah Pratis, Divine Providence. It implores us to believe that each and every one of us is under Hashem's individual supervision. The Alter, zl, m'Kelm explains that, in this way, one is fulfilling the dual beliefs in his heart: the perfect unity of emunah, faith; and bitachon, trust, in Hashem.

Included in this belief, writes the Rosh, is the knowledge that Hashem sees everything that occurs anywhere in the world at all times. This includes the deepest recesses of one's heart. One must sincerely believe that Hashem is his G-d. Without faith in Hashem, one's faith remains incomplete. There is no such thing as partial belief.

The Mashgiach of Mir and Ponevez, Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl, adds that the purpose of Hashem's actions with regard to yetzias Mitzrayim is for us to learn His ways. By mentioning yetzias Mitzrayim during Krias Shema, we remind ourselves that everything and everyone - regardless of his significance - is subject to Hashem's close, undivided scrutiny and supervision. One who is deficient in this belief, even in the least degree, lives with incomplete faith in Hashem, because he believes in an extraneous power other than Hashem.

By affirming that Hashem freed us from the Egyptian bondage, we assert that we have since become Hashem's servants. Furthermore, having descended to the forty-ninth level of tumah, spiritual defilement, our moral degeneration had descended to the point that we stood at the precipice of extinction. Indeed, our very survival, our lives, were at stake. Hashem rescued us from that moral abyss, from that state of near obsolescence. This was the segulah, treasure, that distinguished the Jewish nation from all other people. We were almost gone. Hashem spiritually resuscitated us. This created a unique bond. While the Hashgachah Pratis manifest by yetzias Mitzrayim applies to all people, it is on a special level with regard to the Jewish People. It guards each person's spiritual condition, and, through this vehicle, the Jewish People have the merit of achieving eternal life. Hashem will not allow us to descend to the point of no return.

This follows in the teachings of the Ramban who explains (Shemos 13:16) that when a Jew attaches a single mezuzah to his doorway and takes a moment to contemplate its significance, its meaning and underlying message, he has already acknowledged the fundamentals of faith. The mezuzah on the doorpost is witness to the person's belief that Hashem took us out of Egypt. It acknowledges the events of yetzias Mitzrayim which are an affirmation of Hashgachah Pratis. The pasuk, Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad, which is contained within the mezuzah, is testimony to Hashem Echad, the Oneness of Hashem, which is the foundation of the entire Torah.

In his last mussar shmues, ethical discourse, on Parshas Vayishlach, the Mashgiach spoke of Hashgachah Pratis as the key to menuchas ha'nefesh, peace of mind. Simply, a person who lives with the belief that Hashem is One, and that everything in life is Divinely Providential, lives with menuchas ha'nefesh. It is only through one's confidence that Hashem deals with every person individually that he can achieve true peace of mind. One who believes in Hashgachah Pratis knows that he will be rewarded for the mitzvos that he performs and punished for the aveiros, sins, that he perpetrates. He relies on Hashem's justice, because he knows that it is just.

A person can advance in Torah and mitzvos only when he experiences true menuchas ha'nefesh. In turn, one's emunah in Hashgachah pratis, which facilitates his menuchas ha'nefesh, is the result of his belief in yetzias Mitzrayim. Therefore, the first commandment sets the foundation for the others that follow.

You shall teach them thoroughly to your children and you shall speak of them. (6:7) Rashi teaches that banecha, your sons, eilu ha'talmidim, applies equally to one's talmidim, students. In Nitzotzos, Rav Yitzchak Herskowitz, Shlita, relates a story he heard from a Rosh Yeshivah, who is one of today's more successful marbitzei Torah, disseminators of Torah, in Eretz Yisrael. Apparently, Torah was not always this individual's primary interest. As a young, teenage student attending Yeshivas Ohr Yisrael in Petach Tikvah, he was involved in a lot of things, most of which were not Torah-related. Running with a group of like-minded students, he presented a constant

challenge for the patience of the yeshivah's Mashgiach, ethical supervisor. Every opportunity to sneak out of the daily instruction in Talmud was an opportunity to catch up on his sleep. In short, he was walking the fine line between remaining in the yeshivah and being asked to leave to join the ranks of those who had sadly relegated themselves and their future to a life devoid of Torah erudition. The alternatives to a proper Torah education were dismal.

At this point of our story, we see a teenage yeshivah student floundering within the system. One cannot really refer to him as a student, because he was at risk, at best a non-student, who happened to be on the yeshivah's student roster. He was at the point that, after considerable warnings, the next infraction would gain him entrance to the street with the others who had failed in the yeshivah. Drifting through the day as usual, with no interest in learning, sitting in the back of the bais hamedrash trying to catch up on some needed sleep, the Mashgiach came over to his seat, and pointed to him and three other students, "Out of the bais hamedrash! Pack your bags and leave. You no longer have a place in the yeshivah. How dare you go to such and such a place!"

Apparently, someone had reported to the Mashgiach that a group of students, "one" student included, had left the yeshivah without permission and visited a place that was off limits to yeshivah students. (This writer does not know the identity of the place that these students had visited, nor am I aware of the prevailing mindset in those days, to be able to determine what was considered off limits.)

Our "hero's" immediate response was, "It is a mistake. It was not me. (For once) I was not here yesterday." The boy pleaded with the Mashgiach to listen to him. It was a case of mistaken identity. He simply was not there. The Mashgiach was intractable, "Take your belongings and leave immediately! You are no longer wanted in this yeshivah."

The boy was upset for two reasons. First, he did not want to be asked to leave the yeshivah. The image of his devastated parents stood before him. His parents were not giving up without a fight. They took their son the next day to the office of the Rosh Yeshivah, the venerable Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl. The boy began his plea, saying, "Kavod Horav, I know that, in the past, I have proven time and again that I make poor choices, spending time with the students who are not into learning, sneaking out to places that are inappropriate for an observant Jew - let alone a yeshivah student. This time, however, I am innocent! I did not go."

The boy did not know if Rav Neiman considered his plea to repent the paragon of integrity, but, regardless, he was willing to give him another chance. Rav Neiman looked straight into the tear-filled eyes of the student and said, "My child, do not weep. Do not be pained - especially if you are not guilty. Tomorrow, you are to attend class as if nothing had happened. I will speak with the Mashgiach. You have nothing to worry about."

The next morning, the boy entered the bais hamedrash as usual. As the Mashgiach was about to come over to him, Rav Neiman appeared at the entrance to the bais hamedrash. This was unusual, since the Rosh Yeshivah was already advanced in age, frail and in ill-health. A conversation ensued between the two. While the student did not hear the whole conversation, it was the last sentence that changed his life - forever. "Please accept him as if he were my own son!" was Rav Neiman's request of the Mashgiach.

Lightning had struck! Hearing these words spoken about him, he knew that the Rosh Yeshivah cared about him! He was like his own son! From that day on, the boy's life changed. He threw himself into his learning with such incredible diligence that it astounded everyone. After all, the Rosh Yeshivah loved him; he was like his own son.

A mother once came to a prominent Rav, seeking his advice concerning her son who was drifting off the derech, path, of Torah and observance. His response was classic: "Show him greater love!"

What is the meaning of showing greater love? Do we not all show all of our love to our children/students? Rav Herszkowitz quotes the well-known question and answer given in educational circles concerning Yaakov Avinu's reaction to his son, Reuven's, relationship with Leah, Reuven's mother. While Chazal teach that Reuven did not sin (in our terms), his act of impetuosity was severely criticized by his father, when he lay on his deathbed. Why did Yaakov wait so long to have his "talk" with his eldest son?

The explanation which the commentators give is that our Patriarch feared a negative reaction on the part of Reuven. Had Yaakov rebuked Reuven at the time of the incident, Reuven might have changed his familial allegiances and followed his uncle Eisav on his journey to infamy. Frightening - but quite possibly true - especially in today's society - when our children are sadly accorded many negative examples to follow. Today, a parent must think hard and long concerning for what incursion he will rebuke, and how he will administer his carefully selected words of reproach. We do not want to "offend" the children whom we have carefully and meticulously "spoiled" throughout their formative years. "They" were never wrong. It was always the "friends," the rebbe or the school. To lose it now and tell it like it is might upset the careful balance that we have established with our children.

On the other hand, ubiquitous criticism, pervasive disparagement, casting aspersions on everything that does not meet with the standards with which we were raised will only

distance today's youth. There must be a balance which is regulated by common sense. While this quality is often at a premium, one who does not possess it should seek the help of someone who does. Someone who does not recognize or respect common sense has a much more serious problem.

During the period of Czarist Russia, the Jewish youth were in danger of being kidnapped by the evil authorities and drafted into the Czar's army for a minimum of twenty-five years. Those few who survived physically no longer had any relationship with Judaism as a religion. These young men were called the Cantonists. Jews would do anything to avoid the accursed Russian draft. One young teenager received the dreaded letter to report to the draft for an "interview." Deathly scared, he went to the Rav of his village and asked for his blessing. "Please, Rebbe, I do not want to go to the army!" the boy cried.

The Rav looked at the boy and asked, "My son, are you Shabbos observant?" The boy was embarrassed when he answered, "No." "Do you observe the laws of kashrus?" the Rav asked. "Sometimes," the boy replied. "Do you daven? Do you recite blessings?" was the next focus of the Rav. Sadly, the answers were, once again, in the negative.

The Rav thought for a few minutes, as the boy stood there humiliated, thinking to himself that the Rav would never give his blessing to a Jewish boy who did not practice even the basic tenets of his religion. After what appeared to be careful rumination of the boy's responses, the Rav looked at the boy and said, "I hope the authorities will be as disappointed with your answers as I am!"

The boy stood there for a few moments, contemplating the Rav's blessing, and then suddenly a smile came across his face. The Rav did not say that he was disappointed with him. He indicated that it was his answers that distressed him - not the boy - just the answers. As a result of the Rav's common sense and deep-rooted compassion for a Jewish child, he saved the boy.

The blessing was effective, and, as a result of the Rav's thoughtfulness, the boy became an observant Jew and went on to study Torah and raise a Torah-observant family that was a source of nachas, spiritual satisfaction, to Hashem.

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

In his Taam V'Daas, Horav Moshe Shternbach, Shlita, quotes a powerful observation from Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl. Chazal teach that anyone who recites Krias Shema while not wearing Tefillin is considered as if he is offering false testimony. The parsha of Krias Shema includes the pasuk U'keshartem l'os al yadecha v'hayu l'tofos bein einecha, "Bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be as ornaments between your eyes" (Devarim 6:8). How can one recite the mitzvah of wearing Tefillin when he himself is not wearing them?

Accordingly, one who does not educate his children in the derech Yisrael sabba, approved traditional manner, which has been integral to the Jewish people since time immemorial, is, likewise, testifying falsely. How can he say the phrase, "You shall teach them thoroughly to your children," when, in fact, he does not?

It is a compelling observation, but one which apparently does not seem to shake anybody up. We live in a society in which parents believe they know what's best for their children. The education which they choose for them does not have to conform to tradition. It must conform to the parents' comfort zone. If the parent feels the education their child receives might cramp their own style of religious observance, they will nix that school. If it is not sufficiently progressive for their line of thinking, they will seek one that is. I really wonder if such parents bother to concentrate on the words of Krias Shema - unless they feel that it, too, is outdated.

But He repays each of His enemies to his face to make him perish; He will not delay for His enemy to his face He will repay him. (7:10)

Rashi explains that even the wicked who act appropriately and carry out good deeds will be rewarded. Hashem does not deprive anyone of his rightful reward. There is one difference, however; the wicked will be rewarded in this world. Olam Habba, the World To Come, is not their domain. They will not access their reward in the Eternal World. Their reward will be received in the here and now. The righteous, however, will enjoy the deep-rooted spiritual pleasure that is Olam Habba. Why should the rasha, wicked person, not receive his reward in Olam Habba? Is it reserved only for the righteous? Also, why does the tzaddik, righteous person, not receive his reward in this world? Is there some taboo concerning a righteous person receiving his reward in this world?

The Maharam, zl, m'Lublin, explains this pragmatically. The rasha, who for once acts properly, who performs a kindness, carries out a good deed, does so for ulterior reasons. His motives are suspect. He does not live a life reflecting belief in - and devotion to - Hashem. His positive activities are performed for attention, for public acclaim. Simply, his motives are false; his acts of kindness are nothing more than a sham to garner accolades for himself. An action that from its very onset is false should be rewarded in a world that is false. Thus, the rasha receives his reward in the world that is appropriately suited for his less than genuine act - Olam Hazeh, this world.

When the rasha commits a sin, it is with resolute passion and with his fullest fervor. There is no holding back. He sins with emes, with heartfelt, genuine rebellion against Hashem. He has no regrets. Thus, his punishment is administered in the World of Truth, where he will feel the pain for his actions in all of its truthful splendor.

The tzaddik performs mitzvos with sincerity, with genuine emotion, with the spiritual integrity required to serve Hashem, Whose seal is emes, truth. He, therefore, receives his reward in the world most suitable for such integrity - Olam Habba. When the tzaddik errs, his infraction is a temporary lapse in judgment, a momentary laxity in his battle with the yetzer hora, evil inclination. It is not purposeful and clearly not a sin committed with sincerity and malice aforethought. Thus, his punishment takes place in the world where falsity reigns, a world where eminence is often spurious and inauthenticity is held in esteem - this alma d'shikra, world of untruth.

In loving memory of our dear Mother & Bubby, Mrs. Chana Silberberg Chana bas Moshe Zev a'h nifter 20 Av 5760 t.n.tz.v.h. Miriam Solomon & Family
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Parashat Va'ethanan- It's All Good - Weekly Parasha Insights by Rabbi Eli Mansour Inbox x

Daily Halacha <return@email.dailyhalacha.com> 3:32 AM (19 hours ago)

Weekly Parasha Insights by Rabbi Eli Mansour

Description: **Parashat Va'ethanan- It's All Good**

Parashat Va'ethanan contains the first paragraph of the Shema, which we recite each day, and this paragraph includes the command, "You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." The Mishna in Masechet Berachot (54) understands this command to mean that one is obligated to bless Hashem for bad fortune just as one is obligated to thank Him for good fortune. We must love Hashem and feel grateful to Him under all circumstances, even when our situation seems bad.

Why must we thank Hashem for misfortune?

Rabbenu Yona, in his commentary to Masechet Berachot, writes that misfortune brings us atonement for our misdeeds. Nobody is perfect, and even the most righteous among us make mistakes for which we need to atone. Achieving atonement through misfortune here in this world is far preferable to having to earn atonement through suffering in the next world. A flat tire, a stock that nosedives, the flu, and even, Heaven forbid, more serious misfortunes are "pennies on the dollar" with which we pay the "debt" we owe for our wrongdoing.

The Rambam, in his commentary to the Mishna, gives another reason for why we need to be thankful for misfortune, citing the famous Rabbinic adage, "Kol Ma D'abid Rahamana Le'tab Abid" – "Everything Hashem does is done for the best." Very often, we experience events which seem disastrous, but later turn out to have been great blessings in disguise. I know personally of several individuals who lost their jobs and were heartbroken and devastated, but then landed other positions which were far more profitable.

The Shema begins with the famous Pasuk, "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeni Hashem Ehad" – "Hear, O Israel, Hashem our G-d – Hashem is one." This verse makes mention of both Names of G-d – "Hashem" (the Name of "Havaya"), and "Elokim." The Name of "Havaya" signifies G-d's kindness and compassion, whereas "Elokim" represents the aspect of strict justice, Hashem's punishing us and bringing upon us hardship. In this Pasuk we declare that "Hashem" and "Elokeni" are actually one and the same – "Hashem Ehad." Even "Elokeni" is really "Hashem." The difference is only in our perception; we perceive some things as good and others as bad, but the truth is that "Hashem Ehad" – there is only one G-d, who does only goodness.

This is why it is customary to close our eyes when we recite this verse. The world is very misleading. When we look around us, we see a great deal of misfortune and suffering. In order to truly believe that "Hashem Ehad," we need to "close our eyes," to remind ourselves that the misfortune we see is only a mirage, and one day it will become clear that everything Hashem does is for the best.

There is a well-known story of a Hasid who asked his Rabbi to help him build this belief, that everything Hashem does is good. It is so difficult to live with this faith, that even the seemingly unfortunate events that we experience are actually for our benefit, and so this Hasid turned to his Rabbi for help. The Rabbi told the Hasid that there is only one man who can teach him how to reach this level of faith, and that is the famous Reb Zushe of Anapoli.

And so, the Hasid embarked on a trip to visit Reb Zushe. When he arrived at Reb Zushe's home, he was startled to see that the great Sadik lived in a dilapidated residence, in a state of abject poverty. He knocked on the door, and explained to Reb Zushe that his Rabbi sent him there to learn how to develop the belief that everything Hashem does is good, even when one endures hardship and suffering.

"I'm afraid I cannot help you with that," Reb Zushe apologetically replied. "I've never experienced any misfortune in my life. Everything in my life is wonderful."

Of course, this is a very high level which takes many, many years of hard work to achieve. But this is something that we must all work on, each on his or her level. It starts with appreciating everything we have, by focusing on all that is good rather than on what is not, and by recognizing that even that which seems bad will, one day, turn out to have been for the best.

This is the message of the daily Shema – the daily proclamation we make affirming that ultimately there is no distinction between "Hashem" and "Elokeni," because it is all one, and it is all good.

from: **Rabbi Kaganoff** <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date: Mon, Jul 27, 2015 at 9:04 AM subject: Where does my Shemoneh Esrei end?

Where Does My Shemoneh Esrei End?

Question #1: Slow on the draw

"The other day, I was finishing Shemoneh Esrei as the chazzan began Kedushah, but I had not yet recited the sentence beginning with the words Yi'he'yu Leratzon when the tzibur was already reciting Kodosh, kodosh, kodosh. Should I have answered Kedushah without having first said Yi'he'yu Leratzon?"

Question #2: A proper ending

"Someone told me that I am not required to say the prayer Elokei Netzor at the end of Shemoneh Esrei. Is this a legitimate practice? Why don't the siddurim say this?"

Question #3: Responding in kind

"If I am reciting the Elokei Netzor at the end of Shemoneh Esrei while the chazzan is already beginning the repetition, should I be reciting 'Amen' to his brachos?"

Question #4: What do I Say?

"I finished Shemoneh Esrei, said the pasuk Yi'he'yu Leratzon, but am still standing in the place and position I assumed for Shemoneh Esrei. What may I answer at this point?"

Question #5: Do I Repeat the Whole Thing?

"I just finished Shemoneh Esrei but did not yet back up the three steps, and I realized that I forgot to say Yaaleh Veyavo. What do I do?"

Answer: Historical introduction

The Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, called in English The Men of the Great Assembly, were 120 great leaders of the Jewish people at the beginning of the Second Beis Hamikdash period and included such luminaries as Ezra, Mordechai, Daniel, and the last of the prophets, Chaggai, Zecharya and Malachi. To help us fulfill our daily obligation of praying, they authored the "amidah," our main prayer. Since this prayer consisted, originally, of eighteen blessings we call it the "Shemoneh Esrei," a name which we also use when referring to the prayers of Shabbos, Yom Tov, and Rosh Chodesh Musaf, even though those tefillos are always only seven brachos (with the exception of Musaf of Rosh Hashanah, which is nine.) A nineteenth brocha, that begins with the word Velamalshinim (or, in the Edot Hamizrah version, Velaminim), was added later when the main Torah center was located in Yavneh after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, about 400 years after the original Shemoneh Esrei had been written (Brachos 28b).

Standardized versus subjective prayer

Tefillah includes both standardized and individualized prayers. This article will discuss both types of prayer.

People often ask why our prayers are so highly structured, rather than having each individual create his own prayer. This question is raised already by the early commentators, and there are a variety of excellent answers. One of the answers is that it is far more meaningful to pray using a text that was written by prophets and great Torah

scholars. The Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, who authored the Shemoneh Esrei, included among its membership some of the greatest spiritual leaders of all history and also the last prophets of the Jewish people. An additional reason is that many, if not most, individuals have difficulty in structuring prayer properly, and therefore the Shemoneh Esrei facilitates the individual's fulfilling the Torah's mitzvah of prayer by providing him with a beautifully structured prayer (Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 1:4).

Furthermore, our prayers are structured because of concern that when someone creates his own prayer he may request something that is harmful to a different individual or community, something that we do not want in our prayer (Kuzari 3:19). For example, someone might request that he receive a particular employment opportunity, but that prayer is harmful to another person. The Shemoneh Esrei is written in a way that it protects and beseeches on behalf of the entire Jewish community. We thereby link ourselves to the Jewish past, present and future each time we pray.

In addition, the halachos and etiquette of prayer require that one not supplicate without first praising Hashem, and that the prayer conclude with acknowledgement and thanks. When Moshe Rabbeinu begged Hashem to allow him to enter the Chosen Land, he introduced his entreaty with praise of Hashem. From this we derive that all prayer must be introduced with praise. We also learn that, after one makes his requests, he should close his prayer with thanks to Hashem. All these aspects of prayer are incorporated into the Shemoneh Esrei and may be forgotten by someone composing his own prayer.

When may I entreat?

There are several places in the organized prayer where one may include personal entreaties, such as during the brocha that begins with the words Shema koleinu (Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 1:9). In addition to these different places in the Shemoneh Esrei, after one has completed Hamevarech es amo Yisroel bashalom, which is basically the end of Shemoneh Esrei, is an ideal place to add one's own personal prayer requests. The Gemara (Brachos 16b-17a) lists many tefillos that different tanna'im and amoraim added in this place on a regular basis. Several of these prayers have been incorporated into different places in our davening – for example, the yehei ratzon prayer recited by Ashkenazim as the beginning of Rosh Chodesh benschung was originally the prayer that the amora Rav recited at the conclusion of his daily prayer.

Two of the prayers quoted in the Gemara Brachos form the basis of the prayer that begins with the words Elokai, netzor leshoni meira, "My G-d, protect my tongue from evil," which has now become a standard part of our daily prayer. This prayer, customarily recited after Hamevarech es amo Yisrael bashalom and before taking three steps back to end the prayer, was not introduced by the Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, and, indeed, is not even halachically required. This prayer contains voluntary, personal entreaties that became standard practice. One is free to add to them, delete them, or recite other supplications instead.

The questions quoted as the introduction to our article relate to the laws that apply to the end of our daily prayer, the Shemoneh Esrei. Chazal established rules governing when we are permitted to interrupt different parts of our davening and for what purposes. Thus, there is discussion in the Mishnah and the Gemara concerning what comprises a legitimate reason to interrupt while reciting the blessings that surround the Shema or during Hallel. However, the status and laws germane to interrupting the supplications one recites at the end of the Shemoneh Esrei are not mentioned explicitly in the Mishnah or the Gemara. Rather, there is ample discussion germane to this issue among the rishonim and the later authorities. This article will provide background information that explains which rules are applied here, when they are applied and why.

Introducing and concluding our prayer

The Gemara (Brachos 4b and 9b) teaches that the Shemoneh Esrei must be introduced by quoting the following verse, Hashem, sefasei tiftach ufi yagid tehilasecha, "G-d, open my lips so that my mouth can recite Your praise" (Tehillim 51:17). The Shemoneh Esrei should be concluded with the verse Yi'he'yu leratzon imfrei fi vehegyon libi lifanecha, Hashem tzuri vego'ali, "The words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart should be acceptable before You, G-d, Who is my Rock and my Redeemer" (Tehillim 19:15). These two verses are considered an extension of the Shemoneh Esrei (tefillah arichta), a status that affects several halachos, some of which we will soon see.

Before or after Yi'he'yu Leratzon?

The first question we need to discuss is whether personal supplications recited after the completion of the Shemoneh Esrei should be included before one recites Yi'he'yu Leratzon or afterwards. When the Gemara rules that one should recite Yi'he'yu Leratzon after completing the Shemoneh Esrei, does this mean that one should recite this sentence before one recites personal requests?

This matter is debated by the rishonim. The Raavad prohibits uttering anything between the closing of the brocha, Hamevarech es amo Yisroel bashalom, and the recital of the verse Yi'he'yu Leratzon. In his opinion, reciting any supplication or praise at this point is a violation of the Gemara's ruling, which implies that one must recite Yi'he'yu Leratzon immediately after completing the 19 brachos of the Shemoneh Esrei. This approach is quoted and accepted by the Rashba (Brachos 17a).

On the other hand, Rabbeinu Yonah (page 20a of the Rif, Brachos) notes that even in the middle of the Shemoneh Esrei one may insert personal supplications – therefore, inserting personal requests before Yi'he'yu Leratzon is also not a hefsek, an unacceptable interruption.

Yet a third opinion, that of the Vilna Gaon, is that it is preferable to recite supplications before reciting Yi'he'yu Leratzon.

What about Kedushah?

The later authorities discuss the following issue: According to the conclusion of Rabbeinu Yonah, who permits reciting personal supplications before one has recited Yi'he'yu Leratzon, may one also answer the responses to Kedushah, Kaddish, and Borchu before one has said this verse?

The Rama (Orach Chayim 122:1) rules that since one may insert personal requests before Yi'he'yu Leratzon, one may also answer Kedushah or Kaddish. Many disagree with the Rama concerning this point, contending that although inserting a prayer prior to reciting Yi'he'yu Leratzon does not constitute a hefsek, one may not insert praise at this point (Divrei Chamudos, Brachos 1:54; Pri Chodosh, Orach Chayim 122:1). Their position is that one may insert entreaties at many places in the Shemoneh Esrei, but adding anything else that is unauthorized, even praise, constitutes a hefsek. It is for this reason that someone in the middle of the Shemoneh Esrei may not answer Kedushah or the other important congregational responses.

The straightforward reading of the Tur agrees with the Rama's understanding of the topic (Maamar Mordechai; Aruch Hashulchan 122:6; although we should note that the Bach did not understand the Tur this way.)

To sum up

Thus far, I have mentioned three approaches regarding what one may recite after having completed Hamevarech es amo Yisrael bashalom, but before one has said Yi'he'yu Leratzon.

(1) One may not insert anything (Raavad and Rashba).

(2) One may insert a personal supplication, but one may not answer Kaddish or Kedushah (Rabbeinu Yonah, as understood by Divrei Chamudos and Pri Chodosh).

(3) One may even answer Kaddish or Kedushah (Rabbeinu Yonah, as understood by Rama).

How do we rule?

Among the early codifiers we find all three approaches quoted:

(1) The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 122:1, 2) and the Bach conclude, like the Rashba and Raavad, that one may not insert or recite anything prior to saying Yi'he'yu Leratzon.

(2) The Divrei Chamudos rules that one may recite personal supplications before one says Yi'he'yu Leratzon, but one may not answer Kedushah or Kaddish.

(3) The Rama permits even answering Kedushah or Kaddish before saying Yi'he'yu Leratzon. This is the approach that the Mishnah Berurah (122:2) considers to be the primary one and it is also the way the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (18:15) rules.

The Rama mentions that some communities had the custom of not reciting Yi'he'yu Leratzon until after they completed saying Elokai Netzor and whatever other personal supplications the individual chose to recite. Notwithstanding this custom, many authorities suggest reciting Yi'he'yu Leratzon immediately after completing the words Hamevarech es amo Yisrael bashalom, since this procedure allows someone to answer Kedushah according to all opinions and avoids any halachic controversy (Divrei Chamudos; Magen Avraham). However, according to the opinion of the Gra, mentioned above, this is not the preferable way to add one's personal supplications to the tefillah.

At this point, we can address the first question asked above:

"The other day, I was finishing Shemoneh Esrei as the chazzan began Kedushah, but I had not yet recited the sentence beginning the words Yi'he'yu Leratzon when the tzibur was already reciting Kodosh, kodosh, kodosh. Should I have answered Kedushah without having first said Yi'he'yu Leratzon?"

Most Ashkenazic authorities conclude that one who has not yet recited Yi'he'yu Leratzon may answer the first two responses of Kedushah, that is, Kodosh, kodosh, kodosh and Baruch kevod Hashem mimkomo. Sefardic authorities, who follow the ruling of the Rashba and the Shulchan Aruch, prohibit responding before saying Yi'he'yu Leratzon.

Notwithstanding that most Ashkenazic authorities conclude that one may answer the first two responses of Kedushah before one has said Yi'he'yu Leratzon, they still prefer that one recite Yi'he'yu Leratzon immediately after closing the brocha Hamevarech es amo Yisrael bashalom. Nevertheless, this last issue is still disputed, since the Gra rules that one should delay reciting Yi'he'yu Leratzon until one finishes one's supplications. In other words, whatever one chooses to do, he will be right with the Jews.

We will continue this discussion in next week's article.