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Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg
The Dance of Tu B'Av

In the haftarah of Shabbos Nachamu, the navi Yeshaya is commanded to offer words of comfort to Klal Yisroel on the loss of the Beis HaMikdash and the suffering they have endured in exile. But the message he gives them does not seem to be one of consolation. First, he is asked to proclaim, "All flesh is like grass...Grass withers and blossoms fade, but the word of G-d stands forever" (40:6-8). Then the pesukim describe Hashem's greatness. "Who measured the waters in His palm; who arranged the heavens?... From whom did He seek counsel; who gave Him insight?... It is He who sits on top of the earth, with its inhabitants like grasshoppers... It is He who turns leaders into nothingness... If He were just to blow on them, they would wither (40:12-24)." And then the haftarah concludes, "Lift your eyes and see Who created these things (the heavenly bodies); He calls to each of them by name; by the abundance of His power and by the vigor of His strength, not one is missing. (40:26)" What is the navi's message? And how is it a source of comfort?

The Mishna (Ta'anis 4:8) quotes the statement of R' Shimon ben Gamliel, "The Jewish people never had such joyful days as Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av (the fifteenth of Av); on these days, the girls of Yerushalayim would go out with beautiful borrowed linen garments so as not to embarrass those who did not have (and young suitors would come to make matches with them)." The Gemara (30a) asks: what is so special about Tu B'Av? It is understandable why Yom Kippur should be singled out as an exceptionally joyous day of the year because it is the day that we are cleansed from our sins and we get to start fresh with a clean slate. But what is so special about Tu B'Av? And what is its connection to Yom Kippur?

The Gemara gives several answers to explain what exactly happened on Tu B'Av. The first answer is that Tu B'Av is the day that the different shevatim were allowed to intermarry with each other. The Torah at the end of Parshas Masei (36:6-9) describes how the daughters of Tzafchad, who received their father's portion in Eretz Yisrael, were told they could marry only men from their own shevet Menashe so that their land would not pass to a different shevet. This caused a certain sense of estrangement in Klal Yisrael.

On Tu B'Av, a source was found which indicated that after the generation of the midbar, the intermarriage of the different shevatim should be permitted. This brought great joy to Klal Yisrael because now even a girl who inherited land from her father could marry a man from a different shevet. But it also took sacrifice on the part of the shevatim, because with this change, they were opening themselves up to the possibility that they might lose some of the land that had previously belonged to their shevet. That is why Tu B'Av is such a special yom tov, because it commemorates not only the reunification of Klal Yisrael, but the ability of the shevatim to sacrifice their own interests for the benefit a young girl's shidduch prospects.

What is the connection of Tu B'Av to Yom Kippur? The answer is that what makes Yom Kippur such a joyous day on the Jewish calendar is not simply the fact that we are forgiven on that day, but rather, that by neglecting our physical needs and our own self-importance on Yom Kippur, we are able to more fully appreciate the value of the people around us. As we say in the piyut after the avodah, Yom Kippur is "a day for increasing love and friendship, a day for abandoning jealousy and competition." It is a day to reorder our sense of priorities, to think less of our own interests and more of the interests of our fellow Jews. By fasting, we separate from physicality, and that allows us to acquire a more appropriate perspective on life.

This idea can give new meaning to the rest of the Mishna as well. The tanna describes how the young Jewish girls would go out on their shidduch quest wearing borrowed fancy clothing so as not to embarrass those who could not afford their own. Why mention this point? It certainly adds a sweet dimension to the story. But is there some deeper message? The tanna might be alluding to the fact that this kind of behavior - showing sensitivity for others - is especially appropriate on Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av because these are days when we remember how important it is to be caring of others even when that caring comes with sacrifice. And that is precisely what the wealthy girls were doing, because by sharing their garments, they were leveling the playing field for everyone and seemingly putting themselves at a disadvantage.

This might be the deeper meaning behind the statement of the Mishna that there was no greater yom tov for Klal Yisrael than Tu B'Av. Chazal tell us that the second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of sinas chinam - baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). A person acts with hatred when he is self-centered, when he is not willing to put himself in someone else's shoes and see things from the other person's perspective. The young girls who lent their clothes to their poor friends demonstrated that they understood the importance of thinking about someone else. Perhaps this is what the tanna meant to say, that what made Tu B'Av such a special yom tov is the very fact that the young girls cared so much about each other. What a fitting response to the sinas chinam which brought us the mourning of Tisha B'Av in the first place!

How does a person learn to think and care about others? One way is by developing a sense of humility. When a person appreciates that every individual is special because each one of us has a unique role to play in the world, there is no room for arrogance or competition. If we are all equal in Hashem's eyes, reaching out to others will not put us at a disadvantage because Hashem will ensure that we receive exactly what we deserve.

This is the message of consolation the navi shares with Klal Yisrael: the way to reconnect with the Ribbono Shel Olam is by developing a proper sense of self-worth. On the one hand, man is like withering grass compared to Hashem's omnipotence and grandeur. But at the same time, Hashem cares about each and every individual creation - "He calls to each of them by name." Since life is fleeting, we should not get involved in petty arguments and momentary pleasures. Each one of us has a mission to fulfill and we should not be distracted with trivial pursuits. Instead, we should try to serve Hakadosh Boruch Hu in everything we do and strengthen our relationship with Him. Moreover, we should never belittle someone else because in Hashem's eyes each one of us is special. By appreciating the value of each and every Jew, and living constantly with an awareness of the Ribbono Shel Olam, we draw closer to Him, and we can feel comforted by the knowledge that Hashem is as close to us as we allow Him to be.

More divrei Torah from Rabbi Koenigsberg
More divrei Torah on Tisha B'av and Nachamu
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Rav Shlomo Aviner on Tu B'Av

June 30, 2006

Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel stated, "Israel had no holidays as joyous as Tu B'Av and Yom Kippur, when the young women of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards" (Mishna Ta'anit 4:8).

3672857_thumbnailOur sages compared Tu B'Av to Yom Kippur, no less.

What is so special about this day – the fifteenth day of the month of Av – which makes it deserving of such a noble comparison? We know that on Yom Kippur the second set of Tablets were given to Moshe Rabeinu, and Gd forgave the Jewish People the sin of the Golden Calf. Therefore this day, the day we received the Ten Commandments for the second time, has always been a day of forgiveness and rejoicing for us (see Rashi on Ta'anit 28:2).

The Talmud (in Baba Bathra 121a) gives six reasons for us to rejoice on Tu B'Av:

1. On this day, the tribes were granted permission to intermarry:

In the first generation to enter the Land of Israel and to receive their portion of land, women who inherited their fathers were not allowed to marry out of their tribe, so as not to allow land belonging to one tribe to pass over to another.

On Tu B'Av, the next generation of women were granted permission to marry whomever they desired, as the limitation on the first generation had expired. Unfortunately, today we still suffer from ethnic jealousy, and there are still Jews who consider it a tragedy if their offspring marries a Jew of another ethnic group.

2. The tribe of Benjamin was allowed to marry other tribes:

In the civil war following the incident of "Pilegish Bagiv'a," the tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out, except for six hundred young men who managed to escape.

But the People of Israel took an oath at Mizpeh that they would not allow their daughters to marry anyone from the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21). Later, when they realized that the tribe was in danger of extinction, they regretted the oath and looked for a way to allow the Benjaminites to marry and maintain themselves as a tribe. It was decided that no one would willingly give his daughter to a Benjaminite, but neither would he prevent him from "running off" with her. The men found out where the girls of Shiloh went to dance, and "carried them off," with the tacit agreement of the girls and their parents. Thus the tribe of Benjamin was saved from extinction.

3. The "Desert Generation" ended:

Following the Sin of the Spies, when the people of Israel cried that they would not go to the Land of Israel, the whole generation of Israelites who had left Egypt was sentenced to die in the Desert.

Every year until the fortieth year, on the eve of the Ninth of Av, Moshe Rabeinu would command them, "Go out and dig!" They would go out of their desert camp, dig themselves graves, and sleep in them overnight. The next morning, a messenger would proclaim, "Let the living separate from the dead!" About fifteen thousand men would have died that night; the others would return to the camp for another year.

In the last, fortieth year, no one died. At first they thought that they might have counted the days wrong, and so they slept in their graves the next night, too.

This went on until the fifteenth of Av, when they finally realized that no more people would die, and they declared that day a day of celebration (Talmud Yerushalmi, Ta'anit 4:6). (The reason they had not realized that the forty years were up was that they mistakenly counted forty years from the Sin of the Spies but, actually, the year they left Egypt was counted as the first year of the decree.)

In addition, all those years, Gd did not appear to Moshe Rabeinu in a prophecy, but rather communicated with him through the Urim and Tumim (Ta'anit 30:2).

This is like a couple who are angry with each other and write notes because they are not on speaking terms. On Tu B'Av of the fortieth year, Gd again began to speak to Moshe Rabeinu directly.

4. Hoshea ben Elah Permitted Pilgrimage to Jerusalem:

Yerovam Ben Nevat, the first king of the break-away Kingdom of Israel, feared that if Jerusalem, political capital of the Kingdom of Judah, continued also to serve as the spiritual capital of all Israel, it would weaken his sovereignty and eventually cause his downfall.

Therefore, he set up 'border policemen' to prevent anyone from the Kingdom of Israel from crossing over into the Kingdom of Judah and going to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 12). One of the last kings, Hoshea Ben Ela, annulled this decree on Tu B'Av, and allowed the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Although he was not known as one of the most righteous kings, this act of Hoshea was a noteworthy one (see Rashi on Ta'anit 31:1). In quantity, the number of mitzvot he did may not have been great, but in quality, this act of his was quite remarkable (see Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 3:2).

5. Those who were killed at Beitar were buried:

At the end of the Bar Kochba revolt, the Romans conquered the city of Beitar and murdered thousands of Jews, leaving their corpses strewn all over. The Romans, who were bent on breaking the Jews' spirit, would not even allow them to bury their dead (Gittin 57-58; Ta'anit 31:1). Nothing could take the spirit out of the remaining Jewish soldiers more than the sight of their friends lying dead on the ground beside them. (This is something like what we experienced during the Yom Kippur War.)

In Beitar, miraculously, the bodies did not rot or smell during the prolonged period before Tu B'Av, when they were permitted to be buried.

On that day, our sages added another blessing to the Grace after Meals, "HaTov V'HaMeitiv": "HaTov – for the miracle of the bodies not emitting bad odors, and HaMeitiv – for they were permitted to be buried" (Brachot 48b). This blessing was added to honor the memory of Bar Kochba's fighters.

Whenever we eat bread, we recite this blessing, honoring the fighters despite the fact that the revolt itself was unsuccessful and we suffered great losses.

What connection is there between the tragedy of Beitar and the Grace after Meals? This same question may be asked about other blessings of the prayer. The first blessing, "Who sustains all life" is indeed a fitting blessing. But in the second paragraph, we thank Gd for giving us the Land of Israel, Brit Milah, and the Torah. What do these have to do with food? And in the third section, we pray, "Please have mercy on Israel, and on Jerusalem, and on the Kingdom of David, and on the Holy Temple."

The fourth section begins with thanksgiving for the burial of the corpses of Beitar. All of the above are important, but what connection do they have with the Grace after Meals?

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk explains that they remind us why we eat. We need strength so that we may strive on behalf of the common good, the Nation of Israel. By reciting the Grace after Meals, we attempt to sanctify the act of eating and to channel the strength it gives us into uplifting activity. Mentioning Torah, Eretz Israel, Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of David help us to utilize our strength to rebuild the Land and Jerusalem.

For that reason, our leaders composed these blessings. Moshe Rabeinu, who led us in the desert for forty years, composed the first blessing. Joshua, who brought us into the Land of Israel, composed the second. David and Solomon composed the blessing, "Who builds Jerusalem." Each one is a step above the other (see Meshech Chochma to Deut. 8:10; Rav Kook, Siddur Olat Re'eya I, p. 361-3).

The fourth blessing, composed by our sages in honor of the dead of the Bar Kochba Revolt, represents another stage: Despite the traumatic defeat, we were not totally annihilated.

Divine Providence is particularly evident in the miraculous preservation of the corpses of Beitar until the time when they were finally brought to burial. The Bar Kochba Revolt was but another phase in the battle over Eretz Israel and Jerusalem. Even though it ended in defeat, we will eventually triumph in our battle. As Rav Kook wrote to his beloved Bnei Akiva, "Rabbi Akiva was full of enthusiasm and dedicated to strengthening every vision of redemption and renewal of Jewish life in Eretz Israel."

He supported the Bar Kochba Revolt and treated it as if it might be the Redemption (see Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11:3). It is precisely because the revolt failed then, Bar Kochba was killed, and Jewish independence was lost, that we are certain that Rabbi Akiva's vision will one day come true. "Failure will not overtake us a second time. It was not for nothing that the Nation of Israel fought for its very existence. Eventually, we shall be victorious; the day is fast approaching" (Ma'amarei Re'eya, Letter to Bnei Akiva, p. 203). The process of Redemption and Renewal today is simply a modern version of the Bar Kochba Revolt. The nation is re-awakening, and this time we shall certainly succeed, with the help of Gd.

6. No more trees were cut down for use on the Holy Altar:

The wood used to fuel the Holy Altar was dried, since fresh logs might contain worms. After Tu B'Av, the days become shorter and the sun is no longer strong enough to dry out freshly cut logs. Therefore, no more trees were cut down after Tu B'Av, and the day was nicknamed, "Axe-breaking Day" (Ta'anit 31a; Rashi op. cit.).

This, too, reminds us of our dedication to the Holy Temple. The Talmud tells us of the family of Salmai of Netofa: Once, the wicked rulers (the Romans) passed a law forbidding Jews to bring logs for the Altar to the Holy Temple. They stationed guards at checkpoints along the main roads, just as (the Kingdom of Israel's) Yerov'am ben Nevat had done, to prevent Jews from coming to the Temple.

What did the Gd-fearing men of that generation do? They made ladders out of the logs, and carried them on their shoulders. When the guards asked them, "Where are you going?" they answered, "To bring doves from our dovecotes down the road, using the ladders on our shoulders." As soon as they passed the checkpoint, they dismantled the ladders and brought the logs up to Jerusalem. These people deserve to be remembered as "Tzaddikim (righteous men) of blessed memory" (Ta'anit 28a).

Even under duress and persecution, we remained faithful to Jerusalem and to the Holy Temple.

All of the six incidents which are commemorated on Tu B'Av have one thing in common: On this day, different segments of the Jewish Nation were united: Jews of different families and tribes were permitted to marry each other.

The tribe of Benjamin was once again allowed to marry women of other tribes, thus preventing them from extinction, despite the grave sin they had committed. The Nation of Israel showed its commitment to the Land of Israel and the Holy Temple.

The Generation of the Desert ceased to die, and the sin of the spies was forgiven.

The border policemen preventing Jews from the Kingdom of Israel from coming to Jerusalem were sent away. As a result, the ties between the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah and the Holy Temple were re-established.

The corpses of Beitar were brought to burial, honoring the memory of these freedom-fighters who gave their lives to regain a sovereign state and the freedom to worship Gd as they chose.

Trees were no longer cut down to be burnt on the Altar. This custom of donating logs affords another opportunity to illustrate the dedication shown by righteous Jews even when they were persecuted.

"Who can compare to Your People, Israel, a singular Nation in the Land" (II Samuel 7:23): Domestic harmony within the Nation, and harmony between the Nation and its Land are really one and the same. In the Land of Israel, they become one People (Zohar, Parshat VaYikra 93b; the Natziv, Shivat Zion, vol. II; Eim HaBanim S'meicha, p.321).

Tu B'Av is the opposite of Tisha B'Av. In contrast to the baseless hatred that brought about the destruction of the Holy Temple and the Exile, the events commemorated on Tu B'Av revolve around love and unity among different sectors of the nation, and our deep connection to Israel and the Holy Temple. Tu B'Av is a day of renewal of ties among the nation, and Yom Kippur is a day of renewal of our ties to the Holy One of Blessed Name. On this day, we turn over a new leaf.

There is a famous story about the Ba'al Shem Tov, who sent his disciples to learn how to repent by following the example of a very simple man. They saw him standing in prayer, holding two notebooks, and speaking to Gd, "Master of the Universe, in this notebook I have recorded the many sins which I committed

this past year. And in the other notebook I have recorded all the suffering and troubles you brought upon me. I will forgive You for all the troubles if You forgive me for all my sins!"

He then threw both notebooks into the fire. This should serve as a model for all our relationships – with our friends, our spouses, and so on. We must learn to throw all the notebooks into the fire, and begin anew.

This is also why it is fitting for Yom Kippur to be the "Wedding Day" of Israel to the Lrd, and Tu B'Av to be a day for Jewish weddings. Therefore, "Israel had no holidays as joyous as Tu B'Av and Yom Kippur."

<http://rabbisacks.org/why-is-the-jewish-people-so-small-vaetchanan-5779/>
COVENANT & CONVERSATION

12th August 2019

Why Is The Jewish People So Small? (Va'etchanan 5779)

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Near the end of Va'etchanan is a statement with such far-reaching implications that it challenges the impression that has prevailed thus far in the Torah. This remark gives an entirely new complexion to the biblical image of the people Israel: "The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7).

This is not what we have heard thus far. In Genesis, God promised the patriarchs that their descendants would be like the stars of the heaven, the sand on the seashore, the dust of the earth, uncountable. Abraham will be the father, not just of one nation but of many. At the beginning of Exodus we read of how the covenantal family, numbering a mere seventy when they went down to Egypt, were "fertile and prolific, and their population increased. They became so numerous that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1:7). Three times in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses describes the Israelites as being "as many as the stars of the sky" (1:10; 10:22; 28:62). King Solomon speaks of himself as being part of "the people You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number" (I Kings 3:8). The prophet Hosea says that "the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted" (Hos. 2:1). In all these texts and others it is the size, the numerical greatness, of the people that is emphasised. What then are we to make of Moses' words that speak of its smallness? Targum Yonatan interprets it not to be about numbers at all but about self-image. He translates it not as "the fewest of all peoples" but as "the most lowly and humble of peoples." Rashi gives a similar reading, citing Abraham's words, "I am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27), and Moses and Aaron's, "Who are we?" (Ex. 16:7).

Rashbam and Chizkuni[1] give the more straightforward explanation that Moses is contrasting the Israelites with the seven nations they would be fighting in the land of Canaan/Israel. God would lead the Israelites to victory despite the fact that they were outnumbered by the local inhabitants. Rabbeinu Bachya[2] quotes Maimonides, who says that we would have expected God, King of the universe, to have chosen the most numerous nation in the world as His people, since "the glory of the King is in the multitude of people" (Prov. 14:28). God did not do so. Thus Israel should count itself extraordinarily blessed that God chose it, despite its smallness, to be His am segula, His special treasure.

Rabbeinu Bachya finds himself forced to give a more complex reading to resolve the contradiction of Moses, in Deuteronomy, saying both that Israel is the smallest of peoples and "as many as the stars of the sky" (Gen. 22:17). He turns it into a hypothetical subjunctive, meaning: God would still have chosen you, even if you had been the smallest of the peoples.

Sforno[3] gives a simple and straightforward reading: God did not choose a nation for the sake of His honour. Had He done so He would undoubtedly have chosen a mighty and numerous people. His choice had nothing to do with honour and everything to do with love. He loved the patriarchs for their willingness to heed His voice; therefore He loves their children.

Yet there is something in this verse that resonates throughout much of Jewish history. Historically Jews were and are a small people – today, less than 0.2 per cent of the population of the world. There were two reasons for this. First is the heavy toll taken through the ages by exile and persecution, directly by Jews killed in massacres and pogroms, indirectly by those who converted – in

fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spain and nineteenth-century Europe – in order to avoid persecution (tragically, even conversion did not work; racial antisemitism persisted in both cases). The Jewish population is a mere fraction of what it might have been had there been no Hadrian, no Crusades, and no antisemitism.

The second reason is that Jews did not seek to convert others. Had they done so they would have been closer in numbers to Christianity (2.4 billion) or Islam (1.6 billion). In fact, Malbim[4] reads something like this into our verse. The previous verses have said that the Israelites were about to enter a land with seven nations, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Moses warns them against intermarriage with the other nations, not for racial but for religious reasons: “They will turn your children away from following Me to serve other gods” (Deut. 7:4). Malbim interprets our verse as Moses saying to the Israelites: Do not justify out-marriage on the grounds that it will increase the number of Jews. God is not interested in numbers.

Notwithstanding all these interpretations and explanations, Tanach itself offers one extraordinary episode that sheds a different light on the whole issue. It occurs in the seventh chapter of the book of Judges. God has told Gideon to assemble an army and do battle with the Midianites. He gathers a force of 32,000 men. God tells him, “You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against Me, ‘My own strength has saved me’” (Judges 7:2).

God tells Gideon to say to the men: Whoever is afraid and wishes to go home may do so. Twenty-two thousand men leave. Ten thousand remain. God tells Gideon, “There are still too many men.” He proposes a new test. Gideon is to take the men to a river and see how they drink the water. Ninety-seven hundred kneel down to drink, and are dismissed. Gideon is left with a mere three hundred men. “With the three hundred men that lapped [the water] I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands,” God tells him (Judges 7:1–8). By a brilliant and unexpected strategy, the three hundred put the entire Midianite army to flight.

The Jewish people are small but have achieved great things to testify in themselves to a force beyond themselves. It has achieved things no other nation its size could have achieved. Its history has been living testimony to the force of Divine Providence and the impact of high ideals. That is what Moses meant when he said: Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (Deut. 4:32–34)

Israel defies the laws of history because it serves the Author of history. Attached to greatness, it becomes great. Through the Jewish people, God is telling humankind that you do not need to be numerous to be great. Nations are judged not by their size but by their contribution to human heritage. Of this the most compelling proof is that a nation as small as the Jews could produce an ever-renewed flow of prophets, priests, poets, philosophers, sages, saints, halachists, aggadists, codifiers, commentators, rebbes, and rashei yeshivot. It has also yielded some of the world’s greatest writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, academics, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, and technological innovators. Out of all proportion to their numbers, Jews could and can be found working as lawyers fighting injustice, economists fighting poverty, doctors fighting disease, teachers fighting ignorance, and therapists fighting depression and despair.

You do not need numbers to enlarge the spiritual and moral horizons of humankind. You need other things altogether: a sense of the worth and dignity of the individual, of the power of human possibility to transform the world, of the importance of giving everyone the best education they can have, of making each feel part of a collective responsibility to ameliorate the human condition. Judaism asks of us the willingness to take high ideals and enact them in the real world, unswayed by disappointments and defeats.

This is still evident today, especially among the people of Israel in the State of Israel. Traduced in the media and pilloried by much of the world, Israel continues to produce human miracles in medicine, agriculture, technology, and the arts, as if the word “impossible” did not exist in the Hebrew language. Israel remains a small nation, surrounded, as in biblical times, by “nations larger and stronger than you” (Deut. 7:1). Yet the truth remains, as Moses said: “The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples.” This small people has outlived all the world’s great empires to deliver to humanity a message of hope: you need not be large to be great. What you need is to be open to a power greater than yourself. It is said that King Louis XIV of France once asked Blaise Pascal, the brilliant mathematician and theologian, to give him proof of the existence of God. Pascal is said to have replied, “Your Majesty, the Jews!”

[1] Rabbi Chezekiah ben Manoah; France, 1250-1310

[2] Bachya ben Asher ibn Halava, Spain, 1255–1340

[3] Ovadiah ben Yacov Sforino, Italy, 1475-1550

[4] Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, Ukraine, 1809-1879

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Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit" a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample: Hair-Covering

Q: Which is more important – a woman covering her hair or a man wearing a Kipa?

A: Certainly a woman covering her hair, since it is a Torah Mitzvah.

Food Which Arrived on Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible to eat food which arrived on Shabbat in a car?

A: No. Biur Halachah #318 d.h. Achat. Piskei Teshuvot 318:16.

Jonthan Pollard

Q: What is with Jonthan Pollard?

A: Continue to Daven for his and his wife's health and that they should be allowed by the United States to make Aliyah.

Sketch for Tattoo

Q: Is it permissible for me to make a sketch for a tattoo for a non-religious friend?

A: No. It is aiding one to perform a transgression.

Working Diligently

Q: I am paid by the hour. Is it permissible to work slower in order to earn more money or must I work as hard as possible?

A: You should work as hard as possible, as the Rambam writes at the end of Hilchot Sekirut regarding the words of Yaakov Avinu: "I worked for your father with all my might".

Kissing Mezuzah without Kipah

Q: Is it permissible to kiss a Mezuzah if I am not wearing a Kipah?

A: Yes. But you should know that wearing a Kipah is an obligation and kissing a Mezuzah isn't even a fixed custom.

Small Tefillin

Q: Is there a problem with having small Tefillin?

A: No. But one needs a Sofer who is a great expert knows how to write miniscule letters that are still Kosher.

Definition of Baseless Hatred

Q: What is the definition of baseless hatred?

A: Hating those who are different from you.

Bright Red Car

Q: Is it permissible to buy a car which is bright red?

A: Yes. But it is preferable to refrain from doing so, since one should be modest and not draw attention to oneself.

Gabbai and Rabbi

Q: I am the Gabbai of a Shul and the Rabbi gave a Pesak which is difficult to understand. Am I obligated to listen to him?

A: Yes. But it is permissible to ask him for the reason behind the ruling. Shaming Sages

Q: Is there a difference being one shaming Maran Ha-Rav Kook and shaming Chasidic Rebbes?

A: No. Any shaming of a Torah scholar is an extremely severe transgression. It is heresy (see introduction of our Sefer "Alo Naale" – Response to Va-Yoel Moshe of the Satmar Rebbe).

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Parshas Vaeschanan
The Process of Comfort and Moving On

The Torah reading of this week always coincides with the Shabbat that falls after the fast of the ninth day of Av. Because of the nature of the prophetic reading, it is seen as the Shabbat of comfort and consolation, which are difficult commodities to acquire. Tragedies are not easily erased from one's mind and affect one's permanent personality and view of life. Comfort and consolation rarely come from outside sources, that are almost completely dependent upon the personality and psychological makeup of the one who has suffered the tragedy.

The Torah is always realistic about human nature and never provides simplistic or instantaneously magical solutions to personal problems and difficulties. Rather, consolation is to be viewed as a process of maturity and development. Tragedies are never really forgotten but they can be sublimated by future events and experiences of life that follow.

The narrative of this week's reading has Moshe attempting to convince Heaven, so to speak, to reverse its decree and to allow him to enter and live in the land of Israel. His request is denied. The Torah never records for us whether Moshe is truly ever consoled over this event and his fate. Nevertheless, for the balance of this book of Dvarim, Moshe continues to fulfill his mission as the leader of the Jewish people and the greatest of all prophets. Even when one is not completely comforted, one must continue with a positive mission in life and not use the disappointments and tragedies that eventually beset all of us as an excuse for depression.

The Jewish people unfortunately have a long list of complaints, grievances and tragedies that litter our historical narrative. Though we have many great achievements to balance the ledger sheet of history, the ninth day of Av reminded us that we have never been completely comforted and consoled. Even in our day, the great accomplishment of the creation and success of the state of Israel and the miraculous in gathering of Jews from all over the world to populate our country, gives us hope and stamina to face the future and its challenges. But in no way, does it come to provide comfort and consolation for the destruction of European Jewry in the past century.

It is obvious that tragedy, resilience and accomplishment exist side-by-side within us individually and as a nation. Our great prophets assure us that we will be healed from our wounds and restored to greatness. But, just as one who undergoes surgery and is restored to full health, nevertheless he bears the scars of that surgery for the rest of his life. So too, comfort and consolation of the Jewish people is not meant to remove the scars of what has happened to us over our long and many times painful history. The task is to move on, and this attitude and behavior eventually brings about healing as part of the process of consolation.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha

By Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Parshas Vaeschanan

Mi Casa Es Su Casa

“And write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates” (6:9)

Generally, a mitzva is defined by the object used to perform the mitzva, such as shofar, lulav, and tefillin. However, the word “mezuzah” means “doorpost”; the object itself has no defining name other than the post upon which it is placed.

This would be comparable to referring to tefillin as “arm”. What is different about mezuzah?

The Talmud teaches that upon vacating a home, if a person knows that the next tenants will be Jewish, he is responsible to leave a mezuzah hanging on the door.

The Talmud relates a story concerning an individual who ignored this responsibility and was punished with the loss of his family. 1 What is the severity of the transgression which resulted in such a tragic punishment?

When leaving the land of Moav, Naomi attempts to dissuade her daughter-in-law Ruth from embracing Judaism and accompanying her to Eretz Yisroel.

Among the precepts she mentions that Ruth will be required to observe is the mitzva of mezuzah.2 Why is that an important mitzva to mention to a person who is interested in converting?

In the secular world, a person has a right to his privacy, and no authority can dictate to him what to do behind closed doors; man is king of his domain. The manner in which a person makes it be known that his house is under his control is by placing his name on either the door or doorpost. By placing a mezuzah on his doorpost, man is affixing Hashem's name upon his home, thereby submitting to Hashem that He is the authority of this abode. Naomi understands that Ruth, coming from a society which entitles a person to complete control over his actions within his own home, needs to be warned that as a Jew this will not be the case.

Leaving a mezuzah behind when vacating a premises is an affirmation that this is Hashem's home. A person who removes the mezuzah is denying Hashem's control over his home. Therefore, the quid pro quo for this is that he loses his own home, i.e. his family.

The mezuzah functions to make a home “Hashem's home”. Therefore, the object of the mitzva becomes the home, not the name affixed to it.

Consequently, the mitzva is defined by the doorpost of the house.

1. Bava Metzia 102a 2. Rus Rabbah 2:23

Marital Stress

“...Do not commit adultery...Do not desire your neighbor's wife...” (5:17,18)

The seventh commandment of the Decalogue, “lo sinaf” prohibits adultery.

Included in the tenth commandment, “lo sachmod” is the prohibition against coveting a friend's wife. It would appear that these two prohibitions duplicate one another. Why are they both included in the Ten Commandments? Although “lo sinaf” addresses the prohibition against adultery, the Torah does not explicitly state that it is referring to a married woman. Why, when discussing “lo sachmod” does the Torah emphasize the woman's marital status?

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos records that Avraham Avinu successfully endured ten trials.1 The Torah reports that Sarah, Avraham's wife was abducted on two occasions, the first time by Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and the second time by Avimelech the Philistine monarch.2 Rabbeinu Yonah registers both abductions separately in his enumeration of the ten trials. 3 The Ramban explains that the purpose of a trial is to afford a righteous individual the opportunity to actualize his potential.4 Once the individual successfully overcomes his trial, actualizing his potential, repetition of the trial is pointless. Why, then, is Sarah's second abduction included in Avraham's ten trials? The only possible solution is that the two different abductions served to develop different sensitivities. What is the difference between the two abductions?

As Avraham and Sarah approached the Egyptian border, Avraham told Sarah “Now I know that you are a beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will kill me in order to take you. Therefore, please tell them that you are my sister.”5 Rashi explains that the local populace was not graced with women of beauty, and Avraham was aware that the Egyptians' lust for her would lead to his demise.6 The Torah attests to the fact that Avraham's fears were not unfounded, as the verse records that upon their arrival in Egypt, the Egyptian officials saw Sarah's beauty and lauded her for Pharaoh, after which she was

abducted.⁷ In the verses which record Avimelech's abduction of Sarah, we find no mention of her beauty being a factor which motivated the act. The Ran explains that this abduction, which occurred twenty-four years after the first one, was motivated by Avimelech's desire to incorporate a member of Avraham's family into his household.⁸ The verses make it clear that the Egyptian abduction was motivated by lust; Egyptians were notorious for their immorality. Avimelech's abduction of Sarah was motivated by the need for domination and power. Avimelech was exercising his power as king to assert himself over Avraham by taking a member of his household for a wife. The intended victim of the first abduction was Sarah. Avraham's test was the manner in which he would react to losing the woman he loved. The intended victim of the second abduction was Avraham, over whom Avimelech was attempting to exert his power and control. This test presented Avraham with a completely different challenge than did the first abduction. The dynastic names of the monarchs reflect their motivations; the name "Pharaoh" is derived from "perah" or "paru'ah", which means "naked" or "immoral", while the name "Avimelech" means "father of power".

The act of adultery can be motivated by two very different feelings; its motivation can be either lust, or the desire to exercise control over the married woman's husband. The tenth commandment, "Do not covet" is emphasizing the prohibition against taking control of another person. Therefore, in this prohibition, the Torah lists those items to which a person senses the greatest connection: his wife, house, field and slave. The Torah emphasizes the coveted woman's marital status, for that serves as the motivating factor, the assertion of control over his friend. The seventh commandment addresses the act of adultery motivated by lust. Therefore, although it refers to consorting with a married woman, the relationship between husband and wife is downplayed.

1. Avos 5:3 2. Bereishis 12:14-17, 20:1-7 3. Avos ibid 4. Bereishis 22:1 5. Ibid 12:14,15 6. Ibid 7. Ibid 8. Drashos HaRan

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**Hamaayan
 By Shlomo Katz**

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
 Parshas Vaeschanan
 The Engine
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We read in this week's Parashah (4:9-10), "Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life; [rather,] make them known to your children and your children's children—the day that you stood before Hashem, your Elokim, at Chorev [Har Sinai]." In many Siddurim, the above passage is listed among the "Sheish Zechirot" / "Six Remembrances"—events and ideas that some Halachic authorities require a person to remember every day. (See the standard Hebrew/English Artscroll Siddur p.176.) R' David Bleicher z"l Hy"d (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Bet Yosef-Novardok in Kiev, Ukraine and Miedzzyrzec Podlaski, Poland; killed in the Holocaust in 1944) writes: The Zechirot are not incidental pieces of information to be remembered. They are the essence of what a Jew believes. He explains with a parable: Imagine a person about to take an urgent trip by airplane when an engine problem develops. No matter how big the rush, a wise person will stop to repair the engine. Only a fool would say, "I'm in a hurry now; fixing the engine can wait." Remembering the Giving of the Torah and the rest of these Remembrances is the engine that makes a Jew "run"; it is what causes a Jew to perform Mitzvot and study Torah, R' Bleicher writes. A defect in one's remembrance of these events is not an incidental problem, it is a critical issue.

What is the sign that one is "remembering" properly? Our verse answers: It is that he "make[s] them [i.e., these events] known to [his] children and [his] children's children." (Divrei Binah U'mussar p.154)

"From there you will seek Hashem, your Elokim, and you will find Him, if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul." (4:29)

R' Simcha Bunim of Pshischa z"l (1765-1827; Chassidic Rebbe in Poland) comments: Some people seek G-d "there," i.e., in philosophical inquiries. In reality, the place to find G-d is in your heart. Once someone purifies his Middot / character traits, he will find Hashem in his heart. (Torat Simcha No.133)

"Or has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation, with challenges, with signs, and with wonders, and with war, and with a Yad Chazakah / strong hand . . ." (4:34)

R' Yitzchak Maltzen z"l (1854-1916; Lithuania and Eretz Yisrael) writes: The Torah refers many times to Hashem's "Yad Chazakah," a term that includes several different ideas. These include:

(1) Hashem has the absolute ability to act contrary to the laws of nature, a fact which indicates that the world is a creation and He is its Creator. R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270; Spain and Eretz Yisrael) writes that this is why there are so many Mitzvot that are "Zecher L'yetziat Mitzrayim" / "A reminder of the Exodus from Egypt." The Yad Chazakah that Hashem demonstrated at the time of the Exodus demonstrates that He is the Creator and that He remains actively involved in the affairs of the world, facts that obligate us to serve Him.

(2) At the time of the Exodus, Bnei Yisrael were not worthy of being redeemed. Hashem, so-to-speak, used a Yad Chazakah to overpower his Attribute of Justice and take them out. This explains why, after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe prayed (Shmot 32:1), "Why, Hashem, should Your anger flare up against Your people, whom You have taken out of the land of Egypt, with great power and a Yad Chazakah?" At first glance, Moshe's argument was counter-intuitive: "Since You once did Bnei Yisrael a big favor (the Exodus) and they disobeyed You (the Golden Calf), do them another favor (forgive them)!" In fact, Moshe was saying, "Nothing is too difficult for You. You overcame the Attribute of Justice at the time of the Exodus, when Bnei Yisrael were not worthy, and You can do it again!"

(3) The Exodus was completely against Pharaoh's will; Hashem alone brought it about. This knowledge gives us faith and hope for the future redemption.

(4) The Exodus also was against the will of some of Bnei Yisrael, who would have preferred to stay in Egypt. So, too, in the future, those of the Jewish People who choose to remain assimilated amongst the gentiles will not have that option. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Siach Yitzchak p.9a-10a)

"These words Hashem spoke to your entire congregation on the mountain, from the midst of the fire . . . It happened that when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness and the mountain was burning in fire, that all the heads of your tribes and your elders approached me. They said, 'Behold! Hashem, our Elokim, has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire; this day we saw that Hashem will speak to a person and he can live.'" (5:19-21)

If Har Sinai was burning with fire, why does Moshe say that Bnei Yisrael heard the Commandments from "the midst of the darkness"? Indeed, Bnei Yisrael themselves say in the next verse that they heard "from the midst of the fire"! R' Hillel Schneider z"l (rabbi of Lapy, Poland; died 1898; father-in-law of the Chafetz Chaim z"l) explains: We prepare for weeks for Yom Kippur and, when the day finally comes, we are ready to be like angels. But, if Yom Kippur came more often, it would not have the same impact.

Similarly, Bnei Yisrael prepared for three days for Hashem to speak to them. But, once they had heard the first two of the Aseret Ha'dibrot from Hashem, they felt their preparations wearing off, as if they were in relative darkness. Therefore, they asked to hear the remaining Commandments from Moshe. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that a person on a high enough level could hear Hashem's voice from the midst of the fire and live. (Bet Hillel: Drush 19, p.79)

“You shall love Hashem, your Elokim, with all Le’vavcha / your heart, with all your life, and with all your resources.” (6:5)

The word “Le’vavcha” is spelled in Hebrew like the word “Le’va’vecha,” which would mean: “Your two hearts.” The Gemara (Berachot 54a) comments on the use of that word (rather than “Libcha”): Love Hashem “with both of your inclinations—the Yetzer Ha’tov and the Yetzer Ha’ra.”

The Gemara continues: Some people prefer their physical well-being to their money; therefore it says, “Love Hashem . . . with all your life.” Others prefer their money to their physical well-being; therefore it says, “Love Hashem . . . with all your resources.” [Until here from the Gemara]

R’ Yitzchak Parchi z”l (Yerushalayim; 1782-1853) explains: The phrases, “With all your life,” and “With all your resources” elaborate on “With both of your inclinations.” The nature of the wicked—represented by the Yetzer Ha’ra—is to love their bodies more than their money. Therefore, they spare no expense for delicacies, old wine, expensive clothes, etc. The nature of the righteous—represented by the Yetzer Ha’tov—is the opposite, as the Gemara (Chullin 91a) says: “Tzaddikim care more for their property than for their bodies, because they know that their property was earned honestly.” [The Gemara says this in reference to Yaakov Avinu, who endangered himself to retrieve some small jugs.]

He continues: What does it mean to serve Hashem will all one’s life (other than dying to sanctify G-d’s Name)? It means, for example, getting up early in the morning to go to Shul, no matter how unpleasant the weather. This is alluded to in the verse (Tehilim 55:15), “In the house of Elokim we would walk B’ragesh / in company.” “B’ragesh” may be read as the acronym of Barad / hail, Ruach / wind, Geshem / rain, and Sheleg / snow. (Marpeh La’etzem p.27)

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Va’etchanan: Loving God With All Your Might

Rav Kook Torah

“You shall love the Eternal your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” (Deut. 6:5)

What does it mean to love God וּבְכָל מְאֵדָה - “with all your might”? The Talmud offers two explanations for this phrase.

Thankfulness, Even in Misfortune

The first explanation is that, in every situation (מידה) that God places us, we should sincerely thank (מודה) Him. From here we learn that one should recite a blessing over bad news as well as good news. When hearing about death, financial loss, or other tragedies, we need to acknowledge that God is the true Judge.

How is it possible to thank God for tragedy? And why is this a form of loving God?

A self-centered individual will look at all circumstances only in the context of his own narrow interests. From this viewpoint, good and bad are measured purely by selfish criteria.

However, those who can internalize the dictates of their intellect, and who love that which their mind tells him to love, will have a drastically different outlook on good and bad. Happiness and pleasure are not limited to how events affect them or their immediate surroundings. As a result of their love of the Infinite, they judge every situation, every circumstance, in terms of the klal - the community, the nation, the universe, all of creation, and beyond.

In the overall picture, evil does not exist. What appears to be evil and bad in a narrow outlook, will ultimately result in greater good in the broader view. If we live our lives following this insight, we will understand that while a certain situation may be difficult on a personal level, our private suffering enables positive repercussions for the klal.

With All Our Possessions

The Sages gave a second explanation for “all your might”: to love God with all of your money. We should serve God with all of our possessions.

How does this relate to the first explanation, that we should express gratitude to God in all circumstances of life?

An individual who chooses to reject all material possessions, spurning all wealth and comfort in pursuit of an ascetic lifestyle, is living an extremely limited existence. He is incapable of truly appreciating the value of life. What is life worth when it is restricted to poverty and hardship? We can only attain a full measure of love - for life, for the universe, and for God - when we seek to live life to its fullest, albeit in accordance with God’s will.

Life is expanded and enriched through material possessions. Money and possessions are called meod (“very”), as they serve to intensify the living experience. Wise individuals, living a full, intense life, are deeply aware of the importance of life. They recognize the greatness of the klal and are willing to sacrifice their lives out of love for God. The richness of their life strengthens their dedication to truth and justice, according to what benefits the klal. Their souls are full of emotion and feeling, and they can truly feel gratitude for all circumstances of life, whether or not they are in their own personal best interest. (Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 301-302.

Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 328)

See also: Va’etchanan: In Mind and Heart

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/startupnationcentral/2019/08/12/what-jewish-tradition-teaches-us-about-data-privacy/#6338c92451bc>
Forbes Magazine Aug 12, 2019

What Jewish Tradition Teaches Us About Data Privacy GUEST POST WRITTEN BY

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman is the President of Yeshiva University.

Recently, I opened my phone and was surprised to discover a message from my 20-year-old son with a picture attached of him as a 75-year-old man. The app behind this latest social media craze, FaceApp, realistically depicts what you will look like in fifty years’ time. A day or two after receiving the picture, the entire incident took on a darker cast. Given that FaceApp was developed by Wireless Lab, based in St. Petersburg, Russia, lawmakers began to raise concerns that allowing the app access to personal data might represent a “national security and privacy risk to millions of U.S. citizens.”

And it was certainly little comfort when security experts responded that FaceApp probably represented no more severe a risk than most of the ways we surrender our data to major tech companies. In an era when social media and tech giants are expert in understanding and learning their users’ likes and dislikes, knowing where they are at all times and using our sensitive information to drive revenue and increase profits, these are the everyday realities in front of us. What do we do in this era of constant connection and perpetual tracking, where one’s thoughts, words and deeds can be instantaneously captured, broadcast around the world and preserved forever; where the lines between private and public are becoming increasingly blurred?

While we face a particularly modern iteration of the dilemma, ancient Jewish tradition provides us some direction through the interpretation of the story of the gentile prophet, Balaam, who was hired to curse the Israelite people, and ends up blessing them instead. Perhaps the most famous line that Balaam speaks is his praise of the Israelites, “How fair are your tents, O Jacob; your encampments, O Israel!”

Why did Balaam extol the Israelites’ tents, of all things? The rabbis of antiquity answered that Balaam admired a specific feature of the manner in which the Israelites had arranged their tents; namely, the tent openings did not face one another, thus preventing peering eyes from seeing into a neighbor’s home. In an essay outlining “A Sanctified Perspective on Dignity, Privacy, and Community,” leading contemporary Jewish thinker, Rabbi Dr. Michael Rosensweig of Yeshiva University, argues that this rabbinic teaching highlights the emphasis that Jewish thought places upon the primacy of privacy. In Jewish law, privacy is not simply a matter of personal preference. It is rather a formal legal category, such that peering into another’s private space is considered an act of damage. This reflects the Jewish tradition’s understanding that it is only away from the public eye - given space to make mistakes and take risks - where we can discover our unique personalities.

This defining feature of Jewish thought is being challenged by the ethos of our day. Our children are being reared in a culture in which everything they do is captured and preserved forever. Whereas George Orwell in “1984” imagined that people would need to be coerced into this sort of behavior, our children are engaging in it voluntarily, posting their thoughts and experiences, not to mention disclosing their personal information without any regard for the potentially permanent consequences that can result.

In this new world, the first clause of Balaam’s blessing - “How fair are your tents, O Jacob!” - is of greater importance than ever before. But at the same time, consider the verse’s second clause, in which Balaam praises the Israelites’ encampments. What is the difference between “tents” in the first half of the verse, and “encampments” in the second? The classical Jewish commentators from late antiquity down to the nineteenth century taught that whereas “tents” referred to the Israelites’ private dwellings, “encampments” referred to public spaces dedicated to collective, communal endeavors. Balaam offered praise for these places as well, for there are enormous advantages to cultivating an integrated, active public square.

We live in a time when there exists both the need and increasingly expansive means to cultivate virtuous public places, with boundless opportunity to affect positive change. It is only by engaging in public life head-on that we can achieve success that resonates far beyond our own families and social circles.

Taken as a whole, then, the rabbinic interpretation of Balaam’s ancient words highlights the importance of living in two domains, of cultivating both a virtuous private and public life. This is a crucial message as we think about educating the next generation.

We need spaces and moments for ourselves and our families; times when, and places into which the camera should not enter. Privacy is a value to be protected and treasured. And once these private moments have rooted us, we can then capitalize on the advances of today by participating head-on in the public square. Perhaps this is the reason why this verse has resonated so strongly throughout Jewish tradition. The imperative to create both sanctified, private “tents,” and virtuous, public “encampments,” captures the essential posture of Judaism’s approach to the productive human experience. And it is this set of values that we must bring to the rest of the world, so that when our children reach the age when they do not just look 75 because of an app, but are 75, they inhabit a culture and society that both prizes the value of private strivings, and celebrates the promise of collaborative effort.

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Excerpted from Rabbi Shmuel Goldin’s *Unlocking the Torah Text – Devarim*, co-published by OU Press and Gefen Publishers

Second Edition?

Context

Moshe’s recollections bring him back to the pivotal moment at Sinai, when, amidst thunder, lightning and the sounding of the shofar, God conveyed the Ten Declarations to the Israelites (see *Shmot*: Yitro 4).

As Moshe repeats these declarations in retrospect, a series of variations upon the original text recorded in the book of *Shmot* emerge. These textual discrepancies are inconsistent in nature. While the first and third declarations are repeated without any change at all, the other eight contain variations ranging from the nuanced to the substantial.

Questions

We have repeatedly noted (see *Bereishit*: Bereishit 3; Chayei Sara 3; Miketz 1) that whenever the Torah replicates a conversation or event, we are challenged to carefully compare the two versions presented. Invariably, the differences that emerge are important and instructive.

The passages before us, however, are uniquely problematic. With Moshe’s retrospective recording of the Ten Declarations, we are effectively confronted with a “second edition” of the divine communication that launched Revelation and changed the world.

How can we explain the textual discrepancies between the two versions of the Aseret Hadibrot? These declarations are, after all, God’s own words. A perfect God must have fashioned a perfect text through which to introduce His law to His people. Communication shared by such Deity should need neither further editing nor improvement.

Our questions are further complicated by the singular nature of the book of *Devarim* as a whole. We have previously noted (see *Devarim* 1) that a spectrum of rabbinic opinion exists concerning

the authorship of this volume. While all traditional scholars accept the divine nature of *Devarim*, they argue over Moshe’s role in the narrative. Does *Devarim*, they ask, uniquely consist of Moshe’s words, agreed to by God in retrospect; or does Moshe continue in the role that he has played until now, faithfully recording a text dictated by his Divine Master? Our position on these issues will

clearly affect our posture concerning the “dueling editions” of the Aseret Hadibrot. Numerous possibilities emerge. Did the textual emendations found in *Devarim* originate from God, from Moshe or from a partnership between the two? Is the source of all these variations consistent; or were some changes determined by God and others suggested by Moshe?

Approaches

A

Faced with these glaring issues, the rabbis accept as a given that the second version of the Aseret Hadibrot is neither an improvement upon nor a replacement for the first. Both versions are authentic. The changes that appear are, instead, designed to convey critical lessons and ideas that could not be derived from one consistent text.

Armed with this understanding, the scholars painstakingly study the differences between the two versions of the Aseret Hadibrot and offer explanations for each.

Our discussion must, of course, begin with a review of the textual discrepancies themselves.

The Ten Declarations:
Version 1 (*Shmot*)

The Ten Declarations:
Version 2 (*Devarim*)

1. I am the Lord your God,
Who has taken you out of the
land of Egypt, from the house of
slavery.

1. I am the Lord your God, Who
has taken you out of the land of
Egypt, from the house of slavery.

2. You shall have no other gods
in My presence. You shall not
make for yourself *a graven
image nor any likeness* of that
which is in the heavens above or
on the Earth below or in the
water beneath the Earth. You
shall not bow down to them nor
shall you serve them, for I am
the Lord your God, a jealous
God, Who visits the sin of
fathers upon
children to the third and to the
fourth generations of those who
hate Me; and Who shows
kindness to thousands of those
who
love Me and to those who keep
My commandments.

2. You shall have no other gods in
My presence. You shall not make
for yourself *a graven image of
any likeness* [the letter *vav* is
omitted] of that which is in the
heavens above or on the Earth
below or in the water beneath the
Earth. You shall not bow down to
them nor shall you serve them, for I
am
the Lord your God, a jealous God,
Who visits the sin of fathers upon
children *and* to the third and to the
fourth generations of those who
hate Me; and Who shows kindness
to thousands of those who love Me
and to those who keep My
commandments.

3. You shall not take the name
of the Lord, God, in vain, for the
Lord will not absolve anyone
who takes His name in vain

3. You shall not take the name of
the Lord, God, in vain, for the Lord
will not absolve anyone who takes
His name in vain.

4. *Remember* the Sabbath day
to sanctify it. Six days shall you
labor and perform all your work;
but the seventh day is Sabbath
to
the Lord your God; you shall not
do any work – you, and your
son, and your daughter, your

4. *Safeguard* the Sabbath day to
sanctify it, *as the Lord your God
has commanded you*. Six days
shall you labor and perform all
your work; but the seventh day is
Sabbath to the Lord your God; you
shall not do any work – you, and
your son, and your

slave, and your maidservant, *and your animal*, and your convert who is within your gates – *for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is within them, and He rested on the seventh day.* Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it.

daughter, *and your slave, and your maidservant, and your ox, and your donkey, and your every animal*, and your convert who is within your gates; *in order that your slave and your maidservant shall rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God took you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to make the Sabbath day.*

5. Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be lengthened upon the land that the Lord your God gives to you.

5. Honor your father and your mother, *as the Lord your God has commanded you*, so that your days may be lengthened *and so that it will be good for you*, upon the land that the Lord your God gives to you.

6. You shall not murder.

6. You shall not murder.

7. You shall not commit adultery.

7. *And you shall not commit adultery.*

8. You shall not steal.

8. *And you shall not steal.*

9. You shall not bear *false* witness against your fellow.

9. *And you shall not bear vain witness against your fellow.*

10. You shall not covet your fellow's wife, *nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that belongs to your fellow.*

10. *And you shall not covet your fellow's wife, and you shall not desire your fellow's house, his field, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that belongs to your fellow.*

The textual variations between the two versions of the Aseret Hadibrot can be summarized as follows:

1. On six occasions the conjunctive letter *vav* is added to the text (second, fourth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth declarations), while on two occasions that letter is omitted (second and fifth declarations).
2. On two occasions the Torah substitutes one word for another (fourth and ninth declarations).
3. On three occasions the Torah adds a totally new phrase to the text (fourth and fifth declarations).
4. On two occasions the Torah substantially changes a passage of existing text (fourth and tenth declarations).

5. On two occasions slight written variations appear in the text, but are not vocalized (second and fifth declarations). [Note: As these variations do not result in a change in meaning, they are not reflected in the above translation. One of the variations results in the omission of another letter *vav* from the Devarim text, in a variant spelling of the word *ya'arichun* (shall be long; see below).]

B

In predictable fashion, the rabbis approach these textual variations from all ends of the interpretive spectrum, offering explanations that range from the mystical and Midrashic to the pragmatic and halachic. Differing perspectives concerning the divine or human origin of the emendations found in the Devarim text can also be discerned.

At one end of the spectrum, a fascinating Midrashic source takes note of an easily missed transformation in the Aseret Hadibrot as a whole. The first "edition" of the declarations, the rabbis point out, contains the entire Hebrew alphabet with the exception of one letter, the letter *tet*. This omission is subsequently rectified in the second "edition" through the insertion of two phrases: *u'vizro'a netuya*, "and with an outstretched arm" (third declaration) and *u'lma'an yitav lach*, "and so that it will be good for you" (fifth declaration). The words *netuya* and *yitav*, each containing the letter *tet*, provide one such letter to compensate for the original omission and one to complete the alphabet in the second edition of the *dibrot*. These nuanced distinctions, the rabbis explain, hardly occur by chance.

God intentionally omits a letter of the alphabet when the Aseret Hadibrot are first given at Sinai in order to protect the Israelites from the full consequences of their impending sin – the sin of the golden calf. *By rendering His contract with the people incomplete and thereby technically "invalid," God deliberately minimizes the impact of their subsequent betrayal of that contract.*

A corrected version of the Sinaitic covenant, complete with all letters of the alphabet, is granted to the next generation of Israelites, as they stand poised to enter the land of Canaan and to succeed where their fathers failed.

A second Midrashic tradition attributes yet another omission in the initial version of the Aseret Hadibrot to potential consequences of the sin of the golden calf. The word *tov* (good), the rabbis note, is absent from the declarations inscribed on the tablets at Sinai. Had those tablets – ultimately smashed by Moshe in response to the sin of the golden calf – contained the word *tov* in any form, God would have been compelled to strip away all future "goodness" from the fledgling Jewish nation.

Any direct allusion to the concept of "goodness" must wait until a new, more deserving generation receives its version of the declarations. This condition is fulfilled when the phrase *l'ma'an yitav lach*, "so that it shall be good for you," is incorporated into the fifth declaration recorded in the book of Devarim.

Finally, a third Midrash focuses on the addition of a total of four conjunctive letters, *vavs*, in the Devarim text. The numerical value of the letter *vav* is six. The inclusion of these four *vavs*, therefore, carries the cumulative effect of symbolically adding the number twenty-four to the *dibrot*. Twenty-four is also the number of volumes contained in Tanach, the Jewish scriptural canon. The entire corpus of Torah She'bi'chtav, the Written Law, is thus alluded to within the text of the Ten Declarations.

It should be noted that, as is often the case with Midrashim, all these sources ignore the literal significance of the additions in question, choosing instead to see the inclusions as "carriers" of divine lessons that are external to the straightforward meaning of the text.

C

While the Midrash offers countless other observations concerning these textual variations, we now turn our attention to the opposite end of the interpretive spectrum. Here, numerous scholars struggle to discern logical explanations for the emendations to the *dibrot*. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the general approach of Rabbi Yehuda Loew, the Maharal of Prague.

As previously noted (Devarim 1, *Approaches A*), the Maharal maintains that Moshe's role is transformed with the advent of the book of Devarim. The first four books of the Torah, the Maharal explains, are designed to reflect God's perspective, as the transmitter of the law. The text of those volumes is therefore transmitted by God directly, literally speaking through Moshe. The book of Devarim, however, is different. This text is devised to more closely parallel the perception of man, the recipient of the law. Now Moshe serves as a prophetic messenger, receiving God's messages and recording them in his own words. Devarim presents God's truths – seen through Moshe's eyes.

The emendations found in the Devarim version of the Aseret Hadibrot thus reflect Moshe's desire to add "commentary" to the text. Upon receiving God's word and perceiving its thrust, Moshe sets out to shape the text as necessary, so that all of God's messages will be clear to the nation.

While the Maharal's overall approach to the variations in the *dibrot* is rooted in logic, however, this scholar's explanation of the individual emendations remains somewhat esoteric.

As a case in point, the Maharal notes that the phrase *l'ma'an yitav lach*, "so that it shall be good for you," is added to the fifth declaration in the Devarim edition of the *dibrot*. This phrase is omitted from the first edition, the Maharal explains, because of the unique nature of Revelation

at Sinai. In that setting, God speaks to the nation “face to face,” addressing the divine dimension of the Israelites’ souls. The heavenly *dimension* in mortal man, however, is by nature incomplete and cannot be referred to by the term *tov* (good), a term that uniformly connotes wholeness and completeness. The phrase *l’ma’an yitav lach*, therefore, with its reference to “goodness,” can only be included in the second edition of the *dibrot*, when Moshe addresses the Israelites as earthly equals, one mortal speaking to another.

The Maharal also observes that in contrast, the next phrase, *u’l’ma’an ya’arichun yamecha*, “so that your days will be long” is included in the fifth declaration of both editions of the *dibrot*. Strangely, however, the word, *ya’arichun* (shall be long) is written incompletely in the Devarim edition, with a *vav* omitted and a smaller letter, *yud*, added. This emendation, the Maharal explains, is created by Moshe to reassure the nation. Generally, when the Torah speaks of a lengthy period of time, the connotation is one of sorrow. The time period involved may actually be short, but it “feels endless,” due to the difficult nature of its passage. Conversely, when the text speaks of a short duration of time, the days spoken of are pleasurable. The Torah thus informs us that Yaakov toiled seven years in expectation of marrying Rachel, yet the time period “seemed to him a few days because of his love for her.”

Moshe, recognizing the negative connotation associated in the text with a lengthy period of time, deliberately shortens the word *ya’arichun*. The reward for performing the commandment of *kibbud av va’em*, he conveys, will be “long days” that don’t possess the usual character of “long days” in the Torah. An individual who honors his parents will be rewarded by God with a long yet gratifying life. He will be blessed with an abundance of pleasurable days that will not seem endless.

D Numerous other commentaries follow the Maharal’s general approach to the text in Devarim, yet offer specific explanations that cleave closer to the *pshat*.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, for example, maintains that Moshe tailors the *dibrot* in Devarim in order to address the unique challenges faced by a generation about to enter its Promised Land.

By adding the phrase *l’ma’an yitav lach...al ha’aretz*, “so that it shall be good for you...on the land,” to the declaration concerning obedience to parents, Moshe conveys that “every contemporary generation in Israel [will only achieve] happiness and prosperity if it takes over, with honoring obedience, the tradition of its history and laws from the hands of its parents, as a heritage to be carried on forever...”

Hirsch also offers a logical explanation for Moshe’s joining together of the last five *dibrot* – the prohibitions against murder, adultery, theft, false testimony and coveting another’s property – into *one long collective statement* in the Devarim text. He does so, Hirsch argues, in order to include and prohibit all crimes against the property of others “in one and the same utterance of God.” In addition, by connecting these transgressions, Moshe consciously roots all such crimes in the last declaration, the ban on “coveting” the property of another. Envy towards others, Moshe emphasizes to the people, inexorably leads to greater sin. Such emphasis, Hirsch explains, is particularly necessary at this juncture, as the people prepare to leave behind the controlled, centralized authority of the desert encampment in favor of a scattered existence over the whole of a country.

E Once we accept Hirsch’s suggestion that Moshe tailors the *dibrot* in Devarim to suit the needs and perceptions of a new generation, we can offer other explanations for some of the variations found in the declarations.

Moshe adds, for example, the phrase “as God commanded you” specifically to the fourth and fifth declarations dealing with the observance of Shabbat and *kibbud av va’em*, obedience to parents, respectively. Based on a Talmudic tradition, Rashi and others explain that this phrase references the fact that the mitzvot of Shabbat and *kibbud av va’em* were actually introduced to the nation shortly after the parting of the Reed Sea, *before the Revelation at Sinai*.

If these commandments preceded the Sinaitic Revelation, however, why is the phrase “as God commanded you” not included in the first edition of the *dibrot* communicated at Sinai, as well? By the time Revelation occurred, these imperatives had already been shared.

We might argue, perhaps, that, for the generation of the Exodus, Revelation at Sinai was a stand-alone event, designed to impress the people with its power and strength. As we have noted before, this generation, shaped in the cauldron of Egyptian slavery, relates to God through the primitive dimension of *yira*, fear (see *Bamidbar*: Korach 6, *Approaches B, Points to Ponder*; Chukat 2, *Approaches D*; Chukat 3, *Approaches H*). Immediacy and power, rather than slow, painstaking processes, speak to the erstwhile slaves. The Ten Declarations are therefore presented in isolation to the generation of the Exodus, as a powerful independent statement of binding law.

Their children, however, come to see God through the continuing prism of *ahava*, love. Raised for almost four decades under God’s watchful eye, surrounded by the Clouds of Glory, nurtured on the heaven-sent *manna*, patiently traveling towards a destiny and a destination, this generation now understands that a true relationship develops over time, in incremental fashion. Against this backdrop they are able to view the unfolding of the law itself as a process, with Sinai as a

dramatic but by no means isolated event. This generation has witnessed laws enacted following the Revelation at Sinai during their own wilderness travels. They can readily understand that the development of law could have preceded Sinai, as well.

The shift of generations potentially explains the greater emphasis on material possessions in the second edition of the *dibrot*, as well. In the fifth declaration, as recorded in Devarim, the commandment of Shabbat applies not only to “your animal,” but to “your ox, and your donkey, and your every animal.” In the tenth declaration the list of possessions that we are forbidden to covet expands to include “your fellow’s house” and “his field.” Additionally, while the Israelites are prohibited from “coveting” another’s possessions in the first *dibrot*, in the second version they are also warned not to “desire” those possessions. The generation of the wilderness has begun to comprehend the reality of personal ownership in a way that their parents, raised in slavery, could scarcely imagine. Moshe therefore specifies material possessions in greater detail, including “real estate” where applicable. He also warns this new generation not only against “coveting”

that which is clearly beyond their reach, but against “desiring” prohibited possessions that they believe they could potentially attain.

Finally, the shifting emphasis in the fourth declaration from creation to the Exodus as the philosophical foundation for Shabbat observance may also reflect generational change. Momentous events can only be fully appreciated and understood in retrospect. To the generation of the Exodus, therefore, Shabbat is presented as a remembrance of the creation of the world. To the wilderness generation, however, Shabbat also becomes a remembrance of the Exodus itself.

F No discussion concerning the variations between the two editions of the Aseret Hadibrot would be complete without mention of the most famous distinction: the transition from “*Zachor* (remember) the Sabbath day to keep it holy...” in the first edition to “*Shamor* (safeguard) the Sabbath day to keep it holy...” in the second. Rabbinic commentary on this glaring shift is extensive. One basic approach, however, stands out, weaving Midrashic and halachic analysis into a fascinating interpretive tapestry.

The rabbis begin with a foundational Midrashic suggestion: “‘Remember’ and ‘safeguard’ were delivered in one utterance.”

These two imperatives, the rabbis suggest, were miraculously communicated at Sinai simultaneously. Rashi and others explain this claim to mean that the two words were somehow pronounced by God as one, yet each word was separately and distinctly discerned by the assembled Israelites.

What, however, is the import of these two separate imperatives? What specific obligations do the commandments of “remembering” and “safeguarding” the Sabbath entail?

While various suggestions are offered within rabbinic literature, one basic approach is of particular significance. The commandment to “remember” the Shabbat obligates us to perform the positive acts that underscore the significance of the Sabbath day, such as the recitation of Kiddush (the blessing proclaiming the sanctity of Shabbat recited over a cup of wine). The commandment to “safeguard” the Shabbat, on the other hand, obligates us to observe the restrictions that define the day. By refraining from thirty-nine basic prohibited activities and their derivatives on Shabbat, we effectively “safeguard” the sanctity of the day.

Combining the legal distinction between these two imperatives with the Midrashic tradition that they were transmitted in “one utterance,” the rabbis arrive at a practical halachic conclusion. Although women are normally exempt from time-bound positive biblical commandments, they are nonetheless obligated in the biblical mitzva of Kiddush. This exception to the rule, the rabbis explain, emerges from the divinely ordained connection between *zachor* and *shamor*: “All those who are included in the commandment to ‘safeguard [the Shabbat]’ are also included in the commandment to ‘remember [the Shabbat].’”

Since women are obviously as responsible as men in maintaining the sanctity of the Sabbath through refraining from prohibited activity, they are also obligated in the positive acts, such as Kiddush, that underscore the holiness of the day.

Taken together, the rabbis maintain, the imperatives of *zachor* and *shamor* summarize each Jew’s relationship with Shabbat. *Shamor* directs our attention to the restrictions through which we create the behavioral boundaries that define the circumference of the Sabbath day. *Zachor* commands us towards the positive actions through which we fill the newly created circle with meaning.

G Our search for answers concerning the two editions of the Aseret Hadibrot has been extensive but hardly exhaustive. Numerous other sources comment on these textual emendations, and further insights remain to be revealed through continuing study and analysis.

Points to Ponder

How does a divinely ordained legal system transcend the ages? We examined this question in depth in our review of the structure and process of the Oral Law (see *Shmot*: Yitro 5). In short, however, the secret lies in the delicate balance between continuity and change – in immutable

foundational laws that remain open to constant interpretation and application across the generations.

Can it be that the Torah hints at this essential balance through the differing editions of the Aseret Hadibrot? No section of text would seem riper for rigidity than these declarations, pronounced at Sinai by a powerfully present God. Nonetheless, the Torah allows for controlled transformation even in this divinely transmitted code. While the laws remain unchanged in the second version, new ideas are added and the text is consciously shaped to better address a new generation. Apparently, the balance that preserves the law is embedded in the law from the outset.