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Parsha Page by **Fred Toczek** - A Service of Anshe Emes Synagogue (Los Angeles)

V'ZOS HABROCHOH 5757

D. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

Utilize all that you have to serve Hashem. The Rambam states that every person who wishes to be righteous has the ability to be as righteous as Moshe. Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman explained that this does not mean that others can reach the elevated spiritual level of Moshe. Rather, the intent of Rambam can be understood with the Radak's interpretation of the words, "servant of the Almighty." The Radak explains that just as all that servant does is for his master, so too Moshe utilized all that he had just for Hashem. All of his abilities and talents were devoted to serving Hashem. Similarly, everyone else is able to devote all he/she has to serve Hashem.

E. Peninim on the Torah (Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum)

An eternal legacy. "And so (Moshe), servant of Hashem, died there." The Torah's description of Moshe's death seems to be an innocuous event. Horav Dovid Feinstein, Shlita, takes notes of the word "there". He suggests that the Torah is implying that Moshe had only died "there," suggesting that he did not die in other places. Indeed, Moshe's soul lives on in all places where Torah is learned and lived, in order to inspire every Jew throughout history. We may apply this insight to the actual concept of life and death. One who lives his life in this world and leaves it a better place has not truly died; rather, his legacy remains for all future generations.

F. Divrei Torah (National Council of Young Israel)

Simchat Torah. Strangely, the holiday when Jews rejoice with the Torah, Simchat Torah, takes place not on Shavuot (when the giving of the Torah is observed), or on Yom Kippur (when the second Tablets were given)? Rather, at the end of the reading cycle, when the whole Torah has been read, we burst out in the holiday singularly devoted to rejoicing with the Torah -- and we celebrate Simchat Torah. Torah and its meaning are not limited to a particular aspect of our existence. Torah encompasses not only a segment of our life but the totality of our life. Torah addresses the Jew in the wholeness, fullness, richness and complexity of his existence. Hence, only when a Jew passes through the whole year of Torah reading, when the whole of life, its better moments and worse moments, its ups and downs, its joys and tragedies, when under all circumstances we retain loyalty and fidelity to Torah -- only then can we truly rejoice with the Torah.

Chazak, Chazak, Vinischazaik

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Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Vzos Habracha

He became King over Yeshurun when the numbers of the nations gathered - the tribes of Yisrael in unity. (32:5)

Hashem is Klal Yisrael's King in the fullest sense only when the nation acts like a klal, united in each individual's conviction and obedience to carry out His will. When we received the Torah at Har Sinai it was amidst ish echad b'lev echad, "One man with one heart." The nation was unified as one. We pray for that day to return. Unity among Jews is all-important. Without it, we cannot exist as a nation under G-d. Great tzaddikim have gone out of their way to promote achdus, unity. Horav Moshe Epstein, zl, the Admor of Ozrov, was a well-known Torah giant whose encyclopedic knowledge of all aspects of Torah was legendary. Yet, despite his distinguished status, he made time every day to study Daf Yomi, the folio-a-day program, initiated by Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, in which all Jews learn and participate together in experiencing unified Torah study. He was a scholar who did not need to set aside time for Torah-study. It was his life. Yet, he wanted to learn a topic that many Jews throughout the world were learning. He did the same concerning the Mishnah Yomis and Halachah Yomis, in which every day Jews throughout the world studied one Mishnah or one halachah. He wanted to be part of the klal, general community.

The inclusion of an individual in a group plays a dual role. On the one hand, he is relegated to suffering from the same negative decrees that affect the larger community - regardless of his own personal merit. On the other hand, by associating oneself with the larger group, he derives the benefits of the group - regardless of his personal merit. In the Talmud Berachos 30a, Chazal teach, "A person should always associate himself with the community." Rashi explains this as reference to one's prayers, maintaining that they be articulated in the plural form, rather than the singular. By praying for the public welfare, everyone is immediately included with them. Thus, no one individual needs personal merits in order to benefit from the prayers.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that the community is not viewed as merely a collection of individuals, but rather, as a new entity exceeding the combination of the merits and strengths of the individuals of which it is composed. He cites the Derashos HaRan who supports this idea from the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu was punished for referring to Klal Yisrael as "the rebellious people." While, as individuals, each one deserved this ignominious title, the nation, as a whole, did not deserve to

be described in this way. Moshe was unjustified in referring to them by this label.

While Chazal make their statement concerning being part of the community with regard to prayer, it applies to the entire gamut of human endeavor. Indeed, as Rav Chaim notes, isolating individuals from the umbrella of "community" is the ploy of the yetzer hora to make them easy prey to succumb to temptation. As soon as Yaakov Avinu was left alone, Va'yivasseir Yaakov levado - va'ye'aveik ish imo, "And a man came and fought with him" (Bereishis 32:25). This, as Chazal point out, was Eisav's guardian angel, who had previously been powerless to ensnare Yaakov in his web, since he was never alone. He was surrounded by family. With them, he was safe. Once he was isolated, he attracted the forces of evil.

The Rosh Yeshivah concludes with the famous Chazal in the Talmud Kiddushin 30b, "If this abominable one has begun bothering you, draw him into the bais ha'medrash." This is a reference to the yetzer hora, evil inclination, who is beginning to overpower an individual. His salvation is to draw the yetzer hora into the house of Torah-study. Why? The Rosh Yeshivah explains that the bais ha'medrash is a place of community, where everyone is involved in the support of the same goal and objective. The despicable yetzer hora is powerless when he confronts the community. His strength peaks when there is a dearth of numbers. The merit of the many Jews in the house of study, all focused on studying Hashem's Torah is so strong that it renders the yetzer hora helpless.

In his Michtav Mei'Eliyahu, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, explains that the role of community has great efficacy, especially in the area of prayer. In fact, it is desirable for one to pray for his friend in sickness or in trouble. He can even hope for a positive Heavenly response to his prayer. He does not have to be a tzaddik, righteous person, to entertain this hope His simple concern for his friend, coupled with his sincere prayers on his behalf, can create new merit and, ultimately, a new revelation of Hashem's glory in the world. It is this extra merit that might make the difference in tipping the scales in his friend's behalf.

Furthermore, any individual can pray for the whole community, thereby increasing the merits of the whole community. Most of our prayers are founded upon this principle, and, for this reason, Chazal formulated our prayers in the plural. Every individual prays for the whole community, and his prayers are, therefore, exponentially more valuable in this form than if every individual would have merely prayed for himself. In this form each prayer is purer, because it is devoid of selfish interests. Thus, communal spirit is fostered, adding to its merit and consequent efficacy.

And this to Yehudah, and he said, "Listen, O' Hashem to Yehudah's voice, and return him to his people; may his hands fight his grievance and may You be a helper against his enemies." (33:7)

The Talmud Sotah 7b, teaches that, during all of the years that the Jewish People sojourned in the wilderness, the bones of Yehudah were rolling around in his coffin. Moshe Rabbeinu then prayed on his soul's behalf. He entreated Hashem, saying, "Who caused Reuven to confess - if not Yehudah?" Immediately, Hashem listened. Yehudah's bones came to rest, but they were not permitted to enter into the Yeshivah Shel Maalah, Heavenly Academy. Moshe prayed again, requesting, "And return him to his people." Hashem listened, and Yehudah's neshamah entered the Yeshivah. He was unable, however, to establish a Torah dialogue with the souls of the other scholars who were there. Once again, Moshe prayed and beseeched Hashem, "May his honor fight his grievance." Hashem listened, but Yehudah's novellae were still not acceptable. Moshe offered one more prayer to Hashem: "May You be a Helper against his enemies." Yehudah was finally "in."

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, derives from Chazal that zikui ha'rabim, crediting/endowing the multitude with merit, catalyzing merit for others, is even greater than the actual activity. Moshe prayed for Yehudah for

one reason: Yehudah caused Reuven to confess his error. What about the fact that Yehudah had also confessed to his own error? Are we to disregard that? No. but it is not as great a meritorious factor as creating an opportunity for others to do good.

The members of a small village near Radin, Poland, approached the saintly Chafetz Chaim with what they thought was a simple request. Could the venerable sage dispatch one of his bachurim, students, to serve as their chazzan for the Yamim Noraaim, High Holy Days? The Chafetz Chaim immediately called over one of his students and asked him to lead the services in that shul. The student replied that he would much rather remain in the yeshivah for the holidays, so that he could daven in unison with the other students. In addition, he wanted to pray in the proximity of his revered Rebbe. The Chafetz Chaim told him that man was not created to serve only himself, but also to serve others. His purpose in life now was to lead the services in the small village.

In closing, the Chovas HaLevavos, Shaar Ahavas Hashem writes: "My brother, you should know that if a man has reached a sublime spiritual level with regard to the repair of his neshamah before Hashem - even if he becomes as great as a Navi, Prophet, and has gained their character traits and has devoted himself to Hashem, as they did - his merits will still not reach the merits of he who turns the multitude to righteousness. Reaching out to the wicked and bringing them 'home' is the most wonderful merit, for, in this way, his own personal merits increase with the mitzvah performance generated by those whom he has inspired."

Moshe Rabbeinu taught us Torah. Thus, thousands of years after he has departed from the face of the earth, the Torah is referred to as Toras Moshe. It is his Torah because he taught it to us. It is not what you do, but what you catalyze others to do.

The one who has said of his father and mother, "I have not favored him"; his brothers he did not give recognition, and his children he did not know." (33:9)

As Moshe Rabbeinu blesses Shevet Levi, he details their qualities and the perfection of their souls, which they exhibited while standing up for the Glory of Hashem and His Torah. They withstood enormous challenges to their spiritual persona and emerged better people, to the point that their individual personal lives had no meaning to them. They lived for Hashem. When Moshe stood in the midst of the Jewish camp following the tragic sin of the Golden Calf, he called out, Mi l'Hashem eilai! "Who is for Hashem should come forward and stand by me!" It was the tribe of Levi that surged forward. At Moshe's order, they raised their swords and slew the idolaters - even if they were close family. Their loved ones had become Hashem's enemies. Shevet Levi answered the call. They responded to Mi l'Hashem eilai. This tribe demonstrated unprecedented commitment.

It is, therefore, strange that when we read Bircas Moshe, our quintessential leader's blessing, we are surprised that, to the consummate appellations attributed to these spiritual giants, Moshe adds, Ki shamru imrasecha u'Brischa yivtzoru, "For they observed Your word and Your covenant they preserved." These words are anti-climactic. Every Jew is obligated to observe Hashem's word and preserve His covenant. What did Shevet Levi do that was so unusual? They acted in much the same manner that is expected of every ordinary Jew. It is like saying that the spiritual giant, the greatest, most eminent scholar of the generation, observes Shabbos. Is this all there is to say about him/them?

Horav Avraham Zelmans, zl, Rosh Yeshivah in Novarodok, derives an all-important lesson concerning avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. Regardless of one's spiritual stature, even if he is the gadol hador, preeminent leader of the generation, someone who has the ability to catalyze great and mighty achievements, who can - and does - withstand the greatest challenges - even he must concern himself with what may appear to be an insignificant mitzvah, a simple spiritual endeavor. He may not say, "I will do bigger and better things." He is obliged in the most menial, as well as the most sublime. One may not say, "I do not

have the time for davening in the morning. I am busy throughout the night with important communal activities. I am writing my shiurim, lectures, etc."

There are individuals whose lives are devoted to the basic mitzvos - shul, a little learning, tzedakah, Shabbos, etc. They do not get involved in the larger communal issues. They do not protest, give mussar, "stick out their necks" to take on those who would usurp the Torah-way. On the other hand, there are those gifted individuals whose innate talent and personality render them prime candidates for communal leadership. They are always in the thick of things, in middle of the fray of activity. They can be called upon 24/7 to answer the call of someone in distress. When it comes, however, to the basics - such as timely davening, attendance and participation, learning a daily minimum, helping someone who will not garner much attention, they are suddenly deficient.

The Torah is teaching us that an adam ha'shalem, complete man, does it all. Only one who has successfully adhered to the criteria of, "For they observed Your word and Your Covenant they preserved," can go on to be among those who are Mi l'Hashem eilai. One does not happen without the other.

Dear Readers: As I conclude yet another cycle of Peninim Al HaTorah, I reflect upon the overwhelming siyata diShmaya which I have enjoyed these twenty one years. It has been an inspiring journey which I hope shall continue far into the future. Why me? Why now? I recently read a compelling thought from the Michtav Mei'Eliyahu which seems to tell it all. He explains that people who work for the good of the community find that they are aided by the merit of the community. We often find an extraordinary thing taking place. A community may be in dire need of a person to come to its aid or help it in some other way, material or spiritual, but, regrettably, no one is available who is really suited to the task. We then find that Hashem will shower Heavenly aid in extraordinary measure upon anyone who volunteers for the task, even though, judged on his own merits, he is far from fitting the bill. Though he is not fitting for the job, he will be made suitable. What has brought about this incredible transformation? It is the merit of the community which needs him. Apparently, there was a need, and I was fortunate enough to be showered with Hashem's favor. I pray that I continue to be worthy of this blessing.

We often take the support we receive from friends and colleagues for granted. We become complacent, almost expecting their continued aid with the same congenial attitude, regardless of how much pressure they are under, or what their personal circumstances may presently be. To this end, I once again have the privilege of thanking: Mrs. Sharon Weimer and Mrs. Tova Scheinerman, who prepare the manuscript on a weekly basis; Mrs. Marilyn Berger, who continues to edit the copy, making it presentable and readable to the wider spectrum of the Jewish community; finally, Rabbi Malkiel Hefter, who sees to it that it all comes together, the final copy completed, printed and distributed in a timely and orderly manner.

Over the years, Peninim has developed its own network of distribution. While the constraints of space do not permit me to mention each and every person who sees to it that Peninim is distributed in his or her individual community, I will highlight a few. It started with Baruch Berger of Brooklyn, New York, who originally came to me, requesting that he be able to distribute Peninim in his community. At the time, Baruch had become ill and sought a z'chus. As his health regressed, Baruch was compelled to halt his activities, but the z'chus is all his. May Hashem grant him a refuah sheleimah b'soch shaar cholei Yisrael. Avi Hershkowitz of Queens, New York, and Asher Groundlin of Detroit, Michigan, distribute in their respective communities. For years, Meir Bedziner distributed Peninim throughout the Baltimore, Maryland, area. He was niftar seven years ago. His wife continues the labor of love of disseminating Torah in her community. Shema Yisrael network provides the electronic edition for worldwide distribution. A number of years ago,

Eliyahu Goldberg of London, England, began a "World" edition. Through his efforts, and those of Menachem Hommel of London and Pinchas Brandeis of Manchester, Peninim receives extensive coverage in England, France, Switzerland, South Africa, Hong Kong, South America, and Australia. Rabbi Moshe Peleg, Rav of Shaarei Zedek Medical Center, prints and distributes Peninim throughout the English-speaking community in Eretz Yisrael. Kudos to Meir Winter of Monsey, NY, and Moshe Davidovici of Antwerp, Belgium, for including Peninim in their electronic edition of Divrei Torah. May the mitzvah of harbotzas Torah serve as a z'chus for them to be blessed b'chol mili d'meitav.

My wife, Neny, has supported me in more ways than I can enumerate. Peninim is no different. She avails me the opportunity and peace of mind to write, regardless of the time and place, whether convenient or not; and her weekly "early morning" last word editing of the manuscript prior to its printing is the final word. She has been - and always is - there. For this reason - and for so many other favors too numerous to mention - I offer her my heartfelt gratitude. I pray that: we are both blessed with good health; we merit that Torah and chesed continue to be the hallmarks of our home; and we continue to derive much nachas from all of our children and grandchildren.

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Hebrew Academy of Cleveland
Sponsored l'os hakaros hatov u'lichvod mishpacha Harav
Avraham Leib Scheinbaum v'ra'eeso sheyichyu from Meir Tzvi and
Perel Braun

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Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein
V'zot HaBracha 5772

Jerusalem Post

Though the Torah apparently ends on a sad note in its description of the death of our greatest teacher, Moshe, it nevertheless somehow allows V'zot Habracha to be the happiest parsha of the Torah and the Jewish year. V'zot Habracha is read in the synagogue on the holiday of Simchat Torah, one of the two most joyous days (the other, most naturally, the day of Purim) on the Jewish calendar. The rejoicing on Simchat Torah is occasioned not only because we have lived out the year to successfully complete another cycle of Torah readings, important as that fact alone is. It also represents that in Judaism life is never done with and that the influence of a life and its achievements can continue to be effective for many generations and even millennia. Moshe's death, as is the mortality of all of us, is an unavoidable reality. But Moshe's influence has never waned or weakened, not only concerning his beloved people of Israel but concerning world civilization generally as well. And it is Moshe's continuing influence that is so joyously celebrated on Simchat Torah. The unavoidable mortality of Moshe only serves to further highlight his immortal greatness and influence. We are awestruck by the presence in our lives and thoughts of someone who is not physically here and who in fact passed away thousands of years ago. The lasting power of Moshe, which surmounts even his own mortality, is the living testimony to the power of one's soul to live eternally. And, it binds disparate generations and societies together - which is certainly something to rejoice about. Moshe distributes various diverse and different blessings to the tribes of Israel. He customizes, so to speak, the blessings to fit the talents and natural inclinations of each of the tribes. He eschews a one size fits all attitude - one that unfortunately is so prevalent in today's Jewish religious world. Not everyone can or should be Yissachar, the scholar of the Jewish people, nor need everyone need be Zevulun or Gad, the tribes that provide for the material welfare and security of the Land of Israel and the Jewish people. Just as our father Yaakov blessed each of his sons with the blessing that most fitted

the temperament and abilities of that particular child, so too does Moshe follow that example. Rashi mentions that the parsha begins with a connecting letter “vav” – meaning “and” – because Moshe stated that “I will begin my blessings from where our father Yaakov concluded his blessings.” Moshe does so not only in content and in style but in attitude and application as well. Just as Yaakov blessed his children individually and no two blessings were the same, because no two of his sons were exactly alike, so too does Moshe follow that example and blesses each of the diverse tribes individually and uniquely. This is the forerunner and inspiration of King Solomon’s adage to educate the young student according to the path and talents of that particular student. Then the blessing and education imparted will also contain that necessary whiff of Torah immortality that is the hallmark of Jewish life throughout the ages. Chag Sameach Rabbi Berel Wein

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Gilad Shalit and the Sea Turtle

The controversial exchange highlights one extreme difference: Israel values life.

by **Rabbi Ken Spiro**

A couple of years ago I remember seeing an incredible contrast on YouTube. A very large and very old leatherback sea turtle (which is on the endangered species list) had been caught in a fisherman’s net off the coast of Gaza. The beautiful creature was hauled ashore and surrounded by a large crowd of Gazans. One of the men in the crowd explained to the reporter how the meat of the turtle would feed Gazan children, who were suffering due to the Israeli occupation, and the blood would help cure various ailments. The turtle was dragged behind a truck, flipped on its back and then slaughtered.

Further up the Mediterranean coast in Israel, a much younger and smaller sea turtle had been injured by a boat and lost one of its limbs. The turtle was rescued by some Israelis and then taken to a special turtle sanctuary where it was operated on, nurtured back to health and then released back into the sea.

The contrast couldn’t have been more extreme.

When I heard about the impending exchange of Gilad Shalit for over a thousand Palestinians prisoners, many with “blood on their hands,” I was reminded of those two turtles.

To me those two turtles represented a microcosm of the values of Israel and the Jewish people versus the enemies that surround us.

In the summer of 2006, after Israel had withdrawn from Gaza, Gilad Shalit was kidnapped by Hamas terrorists from an Israeli tank guarding Israel’s border with Gaza. The terrorists had tunneled under the security fence and after killing the other members of the crew, dragged Shalit back to Gaza. In violation of international law no one was allowed to have contact with him, not even the Red Cross.

Israel has thousands of Palestinian security prisoners. All are treated humanely according to international law. They have the right to legal representation, visitation from family and the Red Cross and even educational opportunities while they are in prison.

The most striking contrast is the attitude of the two sides towards freeing these captives. The Israeli government has worked tirelessly for the release of Gilad. So important is the life of one soldier that the government of Israel is about to repeat what it has done numerous times before: embark on controversial, lopsided prisoner exchanges in order to free a few or even one Israeli prisoner. These exchanges have proven to be very problematic; hundreds of Israelis have been killed or wounded by terrorist who were released in one of these exchanges and then returned to terrorism. Controversy aside, the concern for the life of one soldier is a powerful testament to the humanity and moral strength of

Israel and the profound concern that Judaism has always held for the value of life, a value which the Jewish people taught the world.

The contrast with Israel’s adversaries in the Middle East couldn’t be more extreme. The first question the International community should really be asking is why does the Arab world have so little respect for its own people that it thinks the life of one Jew is worth a thousand plus Arabs? Aren’t these exchanges usually a one-for-one deal? Perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised. These are the people who brought to the world hijackings and suicide bombings, who raise their children to want to be martyrs and who fire rockets from schools and hospitals. They have demonstrated time and time again that human life, even the life of their own people, has very little value.

Former Prime Minister Golda Meir once said, “We will only have peace with the Arabs when they love their children more than they hate us.” Sadly the Arab world seems to moving further away from this goal and real peace still seems like a distant dream.

But let’s not end on a negative note. The Jewish people are about to celebrate the Holiday of Sukkot. A major theme of Sukkot is joy, to appreciate the beauty and wonder of God’s creation and focus on the specialness and the unique mission of the Jewish people.

As we celebrate Sukkot this year let us be aware that even though the Jewish people and Israel face many dangers and challenges, there is much to take pleasure in. Let us take particular pleasure in the values that we the Jewish people have not only taught the world but have lived by for centuries despite enduring great hardship at the hands of the nations of the world.

Despite living in the roughest “neighborhood” in the world-surround by hostility, war and terrorism, the Jews of Israel have not only maintained their dignity, but have a created a thriving, productive, free, democratic and technologically advanced country that is truly a testament to the power and humanity of the Jewish people, the Jewish spirit and the Jewish Faith.

For Shalit’s parents and others who have worked so tirelessly for these 1900-plus days to secure his release, the level of joy at this moment is unfathomable. Yes, the deal is controversial, reasonable people have reason to be opposed. Irrespective, let us all give thanks for the reunification of a Jewish boy with his family and his people.
