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subject: Urgent Tehillim Needed - IDF Begins Ground Invasion of Gaza  
As of 10pm tonight Israel time the Israeli army has begun a limited ground invasion in Gaza to wipe out the terrorist tunnels that Hamas uses to infiltrate Israel (just this morning, 13 terrorist were caught in such a tunnel). It goes without saying that this an extremely dangerous time for our brothers who are fighting a cruel and vicious enemy that respects no rules of decency and thus they are in urgent need of our Tefillos.

**Please take a few minute to say Tehillim 20, 83, 121, 130 and 142 to ask for Hashem's protection for them.**

May the Guardian of Israel Who Neither Sleeps Nor Slumbers continue to Stretch Forth His Protective Wings over all our brethren living in our Holy Land.

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### **Conflict Resolution**

#### **Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

One of the hardest tasks of a leader – from prime ministers to parents – is conflict resolution. Yet it is also the most vital. Where there is leadership, there is long-term cohesiveness within the group, whatever the short-term problems. Where there is a lack of leadership – where leaders lack authority, grace, generosity of spirit and the ability to respect positions other than their own – then there is divisiveness, rancour, back-biting, resentment, internal politics and a lack of trust. Leaders are people who put the interests of the group above those of any subsection of the group. They care for, and inspire others to care for, the common good.

That is why an episode in this week's parsha is of the highest consequence. It arose like this. The Israelites were on the last stage of their journey to the promised land. They were now situated on the east bank of the Jordan, within sight of their destination. Two of the tribes, Reuben and Gad, who had large herds and flocks of cattle, felt that the land they were currently on was ideal for their purposes. It was good grazing country. So they approached Moses and asked for permission to stay there rather than take up

their share in the land of Israel. They said: "If we have found favour in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as our possession. Do not make us cross the Jordan" (Num. 32: 5).

Moses was instantly alert to the danger. The two tribes were putting their own interests above those of the nation as a whole. They would be seen as abandoning the nation at the very time they were needed most. There was a war – in fact a series of wars – to be fought if the Israelites were to inherit the promised land. As Moses put it to the tribes: "Should your fellow Israelites go to war while you sit here? Why do you discourage the Israelites from crossing over into the land the Lord has given them?" (32: 6-7).

The proposal was potentially disastrous. Moses reminded the men of Reuben and Gad what had happened in the incident of the spies. The spies demoralised the people, ten of them saying that they could not conquer the land. The inhabitants were too strong. The cities were impregnable. The result of that one moment was to condemn an entire generation to die in the wilderness and to delay the eventual conquest by forty years. "And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making the Lord even more angry with Israel. If you turn away from following him, he will again leave all this people in the wilderness, and you will be the cause of their destruction" (Num. 32: 14-15). Moses was blunt, honest and confrontational.

What then followed is a role model in negotiation and conflict resolution. The Reubenites and Gadites recognised the claims of the people as a whole and the justice of Moses' concerns. They propose a compromise. Let us make provisions for our cattle and our families, they say, and the men will then accompany the other tribes across the Jordan. They will fight alongside them. They will even go ahead of them. they will not return to their cattle and families until all the battles have been fought, the land has been conquered, and the other tribes have received their inheritance. Essentially they invoke what would later become a principle of Jewish law: zeh neheneh ve-zeh lo chaser, meaning, an act is permissible if "one side gains and the other side does not lose." [1] We will gain, say the two tribes, by having land good for our cattle, but the nation as a whole will not lose because we will be in the army, we will be in the front line, and we will stay there until the war has been won.

Moses recognises the fact that they have met his objections. He restates their position to make sure he and they have understood the proposal and they are ready to stand by it. He extracts from them agreement to a tenai kaful, a double condition, both positive and negative: If we do this, these will be the consequences, but if we fail to do this, those will be the consequences. He leaves them no escape from their commitment. The two tribes agree. Conflict has been averted. The Reubenites and Gadites achieve what they want but the interests of the other tribes and of the nation as a whole have been secured. It was a model negotiation.

Quite how justified were Moses' concerns became apparent many years later. The Reubenites and Gadites did indeed fulfil their promise in the days of Joshua. The rest of the tribes conquered and settled Israel while they (together with half the tribe of Manasseh) established their presence in Trans-Jordan. Despite this, within a brief space of time there was almost civil war.

Joshua 22 describes how, returning to their families and settling their land, the Reubenites and Gadites built "an altar to the Lord" on the east side of the Jordan. Seeing this as an act of secession, the rest of the Israelites prepared to do battle against them. Joshua, in a striking act of diplomacy, sent Pinhas, the former zealot, now man of peace, to negotiate. He warned them of the terrible consequences of what they had done by, in effect, creating a religious centre outside the land of Israel. It would split the nation in two.

The Reubenites and Gadites made it clear that this was not their intention at all. To the contrary, they themselves were worried that in the future, the rest of the Israelites would see them living across the Jordan and conclude that they no longer wanted to be part of the nation. That is why they had built the altar, not to offer sacrifices, not as a rival to the nation's sanctuary, but

merely as a symbol and a sign to future generations that they too were Israelites. Pinhas and the rest of the delegation were satisfied with this answer, and once again civil war was averted.

The negotiation between Moses and the two tribes in our parsha follows closely the principles arrived at by the Harvard Negotiation Project, set out by Roger Fisher and William Ury in their classic text, *Getting to Yes*.<sup>[2]</sup> Essentially they came to the conclusion that a successful negotiation must involve four processes:

Separate the people from the problem. There are all sorts of personal tensions in any negotiation. It is essential that these be cleared away first so that the problem can be addressed objectively.

Focus on interests, not positions. It is easy for any conflict to turn into a zero-sum game: if I win, you lose. If you win, I lose. That is what happens when you focus on positions and the question becomes, “Who wins?” By focusing not on positions but on interests, the question becomes, “Is there a way of achieving what each of us wants?”

Invent options for mutual gain. This is the idea expressed halakhically as *zeh neheneh ve-zeh neheneh*, “Both sides benefit.” This comes about because the two sides usually have different objectives, neither of which excludes the other.

Insist on objective criteria. Make sure that both sides agree in advance to the use of objective, impartial criteria to judge whether what has been agreed has been achieved. Otherwise, despite all apparent agreement the dispute will continue, both sides insisting that the other has not done what was promised. Moses does all four. First he separates the people from the problem by making it clear to the Reubenites and Gadites that the issue has nothing to do with who they are, and everything to do with the Israelites’ experience in the past, specifically the episode of the spies. Regardless of who the ten negative spies were and which tribes they came from, everyone suffered. No one gained. The problem is not about this tribe or that but about the nation as a whole.

Second, he focused on interests not positions. The two tribes had an interest in the fate of the nation as a whole. If they put their personal interests first, God would become angry and the entire people would be punished, the Reubenites and Gadites among them. It is striking how different this negotiation was from that of Korach and his followers. There, the whole argument was about positions, not interests – about who was entitled to be a leader. The result was collective tragedy.

Third, the Reubenites and Gadites then invented an option for mutual gain. If you allow us to make temporary provisions for our cattle and children, they said, we will not only fight in the army. We will be its advance guard. We will benefit, knowing that our request has been granted. The nation will benefit by our willingness to take on the most demanding military task.

Fourth, there was an agreement on objective criteria. The Reubenites and Gadites would not return to the east bank of the Jordan until all the other tribes were safely settled in their territories. And so it happened, as narrated in the book of Joshua:

Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh and said to them, “You have done all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the Lord your God gave you. Now that the Lord your God has given them rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. (Joshua 22: 1-4)

This was, in short, a model negotiation, a sign of hope after the many destructive conflicts in the book of Bamidbar, as well as a standing alternative to the many later conflicts in Jewish history that had such appalling outcomes.

Note that Moses succeeds, not because he is weak, not because he is willing to compromise on the integrity of the nation as a whole, not because he uses honeyed words and diplomatic evasions, but because he is honest,

principled, and focused on the common good. We all face conflicts in our lives. This is how to resolve them.

[1] Baba Kama 20b.

[2] Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Random House Business, 2011.

Previous

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks  
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Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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**“Shall Your Brothers Go To War While You Sit Here?”**

**Rabbi Ari Kahn**

“Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here?” With these words Moshe hurls a devastating moral attack against the tribes of Reuven (Reuben) and Gad, an attack that reverberates until this very day, and is used as ammunition against those who live in the modern state of Israel yet choose to take advantage of the service deferments.

As the Jews drew nearer to the Promised Land, they came into possession of lush grazing land, and two tribes expressed a desire to make their homestead east of Israel. In short, they sought to trade their future portion in the land of their forefathers for the green pastures across the border. For them, the Promised Land would remain an unfulfilled promise – not because God did not want to keep His promise, but because they were less interested in what the Land of Israel had to offer than they were in the lucrative opportunity they saw on the outside.

Their request was met with a rhetorical question, a response so full of moral outrage that its critical tone was unmistakable: “Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here?” The historic moment in time should not be overlooked: the conquest of the Land of Israel and the very existence of a Jewish national entity in the Land of the Patriarchs hung in the balance.

Upon closer inspection, their wish not to be a part of the “Zionist” enterprise is not really analogous to those who live in Israel today and choose not to fight. We have become so accustomed to hearing these words used out of context that we fail to take note of the differences: Those who live in Israel, regardless of their political orientation or the degree to which they take part in national or military institutions, do not fit squarely into the moral attack hurled by Moshe against the two tribes who sought to remain outside the land. When considered in context, Moshe’s charge against those who would choose the lush fields over the Land of Israel would be more appropriately directed at modern-era Jews who choose to remain in the diaspora rather than taking part in the rebuilding of the Land.

Moshe’s response to the two tribes’ request goes one step further, lending context and depth to his critique: “And why do you discourage the heart of the people of Israel from going over to the land which God has given them? This is what your fathers did, when I sent them from Kadesh-Barnea to see the land.” (Bamidbar 32:7-8)

Moshe compares their request to the sin of the spies, perhaps the most nefarious episode endured during his tenure. He identifies the crux of the spies’ perfidy not simply in the rejection of the Land of Israel, but in the fear they instilled in the hearts of the nation. This fear escalated into panic and led to a massive breakdown of faith and purpose. The spies’ insidious report caused the nation to doubt their leaders, to lose sight of their goals. The entire community of Israel began to have second thoughts about the Land and their collective destiny. Can a similar charge be made against those who

live in Israel today, even if they do not share the burden of protecting the Land and the People of Israel? I think not.

With this in mind I wish to put forth a few suggestions:

First, to those living in Israel who do not serve: By any moral and religious logic, those who live in Israel must offer their full support to our soldiers and their sacred mission. Too often, demagogues get caught up in their self-serving ideology and attack the State, the government, and the I.D.F. as if they are all part of an elaborate plot designed to uproot Jewish values. The role of the army is far more prosaic; they are indeed involved in elaborate plot – to protect the lives and freedoms of as many Jews as possible. This is a responsibility that must be shared by each and every one of us. Often old skirmishes and battles are conjured up, and present day reality is ignored, rather than focusing on old internal battles, they should treat themselves to a healthy dose of present-day reality.

The same rabbis who attack the army and proscribe military service often hand down halakhic rulings that permit soldiers to break Shabbat laws when lives are in danger. It is a strange sort of cognitive dissonance that allows them to understand that our soldiers' efforts are sacred acts, while at the same time labeling those who perform this life-saving labor as impure. Is a soldier who risks his own life for the protection of his brethren no more than a "shabbos goy"? In point of fact, today's I.D.F. may have more religiously observant officers than secular ones. The iconic brave kibbutznik of the past has been eclipsed by the brave kippa-clad young man.

Among the rabbis who saw things differently, two come to mind: one was my revered teacher, Rabbi Yisrael Gustman, who, upon seeing the graves in the military cemetery on Mount Herzl, declared, "Kulam kedoshim", "They are all holy martyrs." Another is Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. When a student asked the Rabbi's permission to take a short leave from the yeshiva in Jerusalem to travel to pray at the "graves of the righteous," Rabbi Auerbach told him that he need go no further than Mount Herzl, to the military cemetery.

These great rabbis recognized that our brothers who went to war and did not return were holy. It behooves all those who remain in yeshiva and devote themselves to learning Torah, to bolster the spirit of those around them and aid in the national effort in any way they can. First and foremost, they must recognize the sanctity of the sacrifice others are making on their behalf, and the holiness of our brothers who have fought to secure their freedom to build and populate great centers of Torah learning in Israel – especially those who paid for these blessings with their lives.

As for those who have chosen the diaspora as home: Make sure that your choices do not instill fear in the hearts of those who dwell in Zion. Be active in your support: Send your children to Israel. Allow them to serve in the army if they express the desire to do so. Remember that this moral fortitude and bravery is the culmination of a proper education.

Consider the Israelis who give three years of their lives to military service, and then continue to disrupt their normal routine for a month or more each year for decades thereafter. Keeping that time-frame in mind, create a structure for donating resources or time to Jewish causes, and strengthen the spirit of those who live in Israel. Israel should be more than just a destination for vacations. It is the inheritance of all Jews, and a part of our personal and collective destiny.

For a more in-depth analysis see:

<http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2014/07/audio-and-essays-parashat-matot.html>

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**The TorahWeb Foundation**

**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**

***Wartime Obligations***

A thousand for a tribe, a thousand for a tribe, for all the tribes of Yisrael shall you send to the army. (Bamidbar 31:4). Some say that three thousand served from each tribe. One thousand fought at the front. One thousand guarded the gear behind the battle lines (See Rashi Breishis 14:24). One thousand engaged in tefilla (Bamidbar Rabba 22:3).

Forty years ago, at the frightening beginning of the Yom Kippur War, R. Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l cited this Medrash in his exhortation to his talmidim (Erev Sukkos 5734, Sichos Mussar, 2010 ed., p. 456,7). This week, with rockets landing throughout Eretz Yisrael, R. Chaim's message is timely and critical, particularly for American Jews.

At present, many heroic soldiers are risking their lives to defend Israel's citizens. Our obligation to pray for them is boundless. Those who gave their lives on behalf of Am Yisrael, or were killed only because of their being Jewish - no creature can reach their place of reward in the next world (Bava Basra 10b). The Talmud refers to R. Akiva, and the brothers who gave their lives to save the Jews of Lod. Today we refer to the kedoshim of Tzahal, the three talmidim murdered last month, and this week's victim of a rocket fired from Gaza. Today, all of Israel's citizens, behind the battle lines, are in danger.

In recent weeks, we have seen the hand of Hashem in sparing us from casualties despite thousands of potentially fatal rockets. This demands thanking Hashem for His protection, and beseeching Him for safety and ultimately for peace. Our embattled Israeli brothers and sisters are doing their part. American Jews, far from the murderous enemies, must share the pain of the Israelis, and intensify their tefillos for peace and serenity in the holy land.

R. Chaim cites the expression (Yeshaya 54:9) the waters of Noach, which refer to the mabul. The Zohar (parshas Noach) holds Noach partially responsible for the deluge, since he did not pray that the generation be saved. We dare not repeat this mistake. Our tefillos, especially communal ones, are our indispensable contribution to the war effort.

When you draw near to the war, the Kohen says to the people: Shema Yisrael, today you are coming near to the battle against your enemies (Devarim 20:2,3). Even if there is no merit in you except for Krias Shma, you are worthy that Hashem should save you (Rashi). We must say Shema, with intensity, and on time, to merit Hashem's salvation. Extra chizuk is needed during a crisis in a time of laxity, such as summer vacation.

The pesukim continue (20:3,4): Do not be afraid of them for Hashem fights for you against your enemies to save you. R. Chaim states that only the realization that Hashem alone can save us can prevent fear. Ashur (the USA) will not save us, we will not ride (rely) on horses (planes) and we will not call our handiwork (the army) "our god" (Hoshea 14:4). We must pray with all our might for the safety of our soldiers, but we must realize that only Hashem can save us.

As the war dragged on then, as now, R. Chaim's words (p. 460-61) continue to inspire. We dare not become accustomed to the dangerous situation and be lulled into a state of complacency. Moreover, the thousand who prayed did so near the front, so that their tefillos be more intense and effective. In America we must try to feel part of the dangerous matzav. If we daven for those in danger, Hashem will have mercy and help them and us.

From afar it is difficult to feel their pain. Moshe went out to his brothers and saw their burden (Shemos 2:11). He focused his eyes and his heart to be distressed over them. Only then could he feel their pain, and, by joining in their plight, pray intensely and effectively.

One who pains himself together with the community merits seeing their consolation. But one who separates himself from the community will not see their consolation (Ta'anis 11a). One who separates himself and does not pray together with the community is included in this category (Pri Megadim Orach Chaim 574:6).

Indeed, concludes R. Chaim (p. 463,4), our suffering is a means to the end, that we should daven to Hashem Who desires our tefillos. Why did Hashem

create the crisis at Yam Suf? Because he desired to hear their voices in prayer, as it says (Shir Hashirim 2:14) My dove [trapped at the sea as if] in the clefts of a rock, let Me hear your voice [in prayer]. (Sehmos Raba 21:5). Each day, near the end of 'Hodu', we say, Open your mouth wide- with intense tefilla- and I will fill it [Tehillim 81:1]. Once the purpose of your suffering, from Mitzrayim until today, is achieved by your tefillos, Hashem will answer them.

The previous pesukim in Hodu express our sentiments in this time of crisis. Hashem save, may the King answer us on the day we call. Save Your nation. Hashem is our help and our shield. Grant us our salvation. Redeem us for the sake of your kindness. And, as R. Chaim taught, may your kindness be upon us, as we prayed to You, thus achieving the purpose of the crisis.

>Klal Yisrael's response to the abduction which precipitated the present crisis was breathtaking. We witnessed unity among previously fragmented groups. We saw faith and prayer across an incredibly wide spectrum. We felt the everlasting truth of the subsequent pasuk in Hodu: Fortunate-and praiseworthy [See Metzudos and Rashi, Tehilim 1:1] - is the nation that Hashem is their G-d.

As Klal Yisrael suffers in Eretz Yisrael, Jews worldwide must join in the suffering and pray to Hashem for salvation. Our tefillos must include faith and trust in Hashem, even when He does not accede to our prayers. May we merit the conclusion of Hodu "My heart will rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to Hashem for He has saved me".

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## **Rabbi Mayer Twersky**

### ***Naftali, Gilad, Eyal Hy'd and the War on Hamas: Reflections on Kiddush and Chillul Hashem, Providence, and Prayer***

I.

#### Introduction

On 2 Tammuz, 5774 with the discovery of the bodies of three precious, beloved souls, Naftali Frenkel, Gilad Shaar, and Eyal Yifrach, Hy"d, the Jewish people collectively entered a period of mourning and reflection. This period was cruelly interrupted by two developments - the chillul Hashem of the barbaric slaying of the Arab youth Abu Khedir, and the war of rockets launched by Hamas. Both of these developments rightfully command our attention. Nevertheless, the reflection triggered by the martyrdom of Naftali, Gilad and Eyal Hy"d ought to continue.

Towards that end the following essay shares some thoughts on Providence, prayer and ahavas Yisrael. Sadly, the essay also contains a postscript briefly reflecting on the subsequent chillul Hashem and Hamas initiated war.

This essay is offered as a humble tribute to a dual kiddush Hashem - that of the three kedoshim Hy"d and, yibadlu l'chaim, the three families whose remarkable, steadfast emunah taught and inspired us all.

II.

קלי קלי למה עזבתני רחוק מישועתי דברי שאגתי. אלקי אקרא יומם ולא תענה ולילה ולא דומי לי.

My God, My God why have you forsaken me, why so far from saving me, from the words of my cry.

O my God, I call out by day, but you answer not

And by night, but there is no respite for me.[1]

Malbim explains: Dovid Hamelech, speaking either in his own voice or that of Klal Yisrael, cries out in anguish with two queries.

Number one: Ribono Shel Olam, where is Your hashgacha? I feel abandoned.

Number two: How could You not respond to my incessant tefillos?

Eemunah, even of the most profound sort embodied by Dovid Hamelech, does not forestall questions about hashgacha and tefillah. Nevertheless, for many people these questions lie dormant indefinitely. The intellectual awareness of tzaddik v'ra lo remains impersonal and thus innocuous. The philosophically inclined might tackle the issue as an abstract problem of philosophy. The non-philosophically inclined simply ignore it altogether. However, given the vicissitudes of life, at some point most people experience tzaddik v'ra lo. It invades their private domain. When this happens, questions about hashgacha and tefillah can trigger soul searching and an existentially driven quest for perspective.

The next sections of this essay seek be"H to contribute, however modestly, to that search and quest.

III.

#### Tzaddik V'Ra Lo

A parable of the Chafetz Chaim provides perspective on the inscrutability of Providence[2]. A visitor, passing through a town, davens in the local shtiebel. After davening, he questions and criticizes the gabbai's distribution of aliya's. Why did the gabbai give the first aliya to the kohen sitting in the back, bypassing all thekohanim sitting in the front? Why did the gabbai ignore the venerable, older leviim and give the second aliya to a teenager? Etc. One of the townspeople chides the visitor for his presumptuous foolishness. "Reb Yid, you are here for one day. You do not know who received aliya's previously or, due to chiyuvim, who is slated to receive aliya's in the coming days and weeks. How do you expect to understand or appreciate our gabbai's judicious distribution of aliya's?"

We too, are passing through this world for but a few fleeting moments as history unfolds, and yet we naively expect to understand.

IV.

#### Choshech Anan V'Arafel

But our inability to understand the ways of Providence is not only because Hashem knows the future, and we do not. In order to deepen our perspective on the inscrutability of Providence, let us begin by studying the Torah's description of maamad Har Sinai.

ויהי ביום השלישי בהיות הבקר וגו' וענן כבד על ההר

On the third day, when it was morning ... and a heavy cloud on the mountain[3].

וההר בער באש עד לב השמים חשך ענן וערפל

And the mountain was burning with fire up to the heart of the heaven, darkness cloud and thick cloud[4].

The greatest revelation of divine light, Matan Torah, was enveloped in darkness and thick cloud. What is represented by this meteorological-spiritual dialectic?

הרי נאמר בתורה 'ושמרתם את כל חקותי ואת כל משפטי ועשיתם אותם וכו' המשפטים הן המצוות שטעמן גלוי, וטובת עשייתן בעוה"ז ידועה וכו' והחקים הן המצוות שאין טעמן ידוע

It says in the Torah "You shall guard all my chukim and mishpatim and comply with them"...mishpatim are the commandments whose reason is obvious and which are clearly beneficial...chukim are those commandments whose reason is not known[5].

Revelation yields mishpatim but also chukim. We intuitively understand and appreciate some parts of the Torah while we are stymied and mystified by other parts. The ultimate chok is the seemingly self-contradictory mitzvah of parah adumah. Shlomo Hamelech's confession of defeat, "I thought I could become wise, but it is beyond me"[6], according to Chazal, relates to the inscrutability of parah adumah[7]. The brilliant, dazzling light of revelation does not altogether dispel or displace the thick cloud of divine inscrutability[8].

HKBH reveals Himself and His chochma in different ways and venues. Of course, Matan Torah was the primary venue of revelation. But He also reveals Himself through His governance of history, i.e., providence. Here too revelation yields both mishpatim and chukim. We intuitively understand and appreciate some elements of hashgacha, while we are stymied and mystified by other elements. Tzaddik v'ra lo is the analogue of parah adumah, the

ultimate providential chok. Here too even Solomonic wisdom comes up short.

How are we to understand the dichotomous reality of revelation? Why do we encounter within Torah the chok of parah adumah, and within hashgacha, its analogue tzaddik v'ra lo[9]?

The answer goes to the heart of correct belief in HKBH. We erroneously conceive of HKBH in human categories. According to our line of thought, He exists as we do, albeit He exists infinitely, eternally, and perfectly. Similarly, we project that He knows by the same process of cognition as we do, albeit He is omniscient, and so forth. In effect, we think of HKBH as a perfect superhuman.

Rambam, representing the consensus of traditional Jewish belief, emphatically rejects our anthropomorphic conception of HKBH. He begins with the most fundamental theological lesson.

אין אמיתתו כאמיתת אחד מהם

The reality of His existence is unlike that of any [other being][10].

HKBH is sui generis, altogether different and unique. Everything about Him is absolutely unique, incommensurate in every way with human existence and experience.

Rambam proceeds to develop this lesson with regard to HKBH's mode of knowing and knowledge.

כבר בארנו כי שהקב"ה אינו יודע בדעה שהיא חוץ ממנו כבני אדם שהן ודעתם שנים אלא הוא יתברך שמו ודעתו אחד, ואין דעתו של אדם יכולה להשיג דבר זה על בריו. וכשם שאין כח באדם להשיג ולמצוא אמיתת הבורא כי כך אין כח באדם להשיג ולמצוא דעתו של בורא. הוא שהנביא אומר: כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי נאם ה'.

We have already explained...that God does not know with a knowledge that is external to Him as do men, whose knowledge and selves are two [different entities.] Rather, He, may His name be praised, and His knowledge are one. Human knowledge cannot comprehend this concept in its entirety for just as it is beyond the capacity of man to comprehend and conceive the essential nature of the Creator...so too, it is beyond man's ability and knowledge to comprehend the Creator's mode of knowing and knowledge. This is what the prophet [Isaiah 55:8] says "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways, My ways"[11]

Because everything about HKBH is absolutely unique no analogy can really capture Rambam's point. Nevertheless, perhaps the following will help us somewhat relate to Rambam's theological lesson.

Two people, one capable of viewing the world in only two dimensions, the other views the world in three; one is color blind, the other sees the full range of colors; one is a priest of materialism, the other a priest of spiritualism. These two individuals, presented with the same scene, will see radically different realities because their modes of perception radically differ. Moreover, it is intuitive that differing perceptions of reality will at times yield opposing and confounding moral judgments. It is no breach of courtesy to ignore a picture, but decidedly discourteous to ignore a person. It is no issue to pave a highway through drab terrain, but unconscionable to sacrifice the dazzling beauty of the Versailles gardens. Animal experimentation is a moral outrage for the mechanist and a moral imperative for the vitalist.

The analogue: how/what HKBH thinks, perceives and knows is not how/what we think, perceive and know. The gap between the two modes of perception is infinite. And thus, His moral judgments are not ours. The Navi Yeshayahu compressed this profound lesson into a few, sparing words.

כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי

Since My thoughts are not your thoughts

Consequently your ways are not My ways.

Sefer Iyov is devoted to the question of tzaddik v'ra lo. Here is Rambam's summation.

This is the object of the Book of Job as a whole... so that you should not fall into error and seek to affirm in your imagination that His knowledge is like our knowledge or that His purpose and His providence and His governance

are like our purpose and our providence and our governance. If man knows this, every misfortune will be borne lightly by him[12].

The converse of Rambam's statement is also true. Faithful, albeit painful, silence in the face of tzaddik v'ra lo beautifully expresses faith. It reaffirms belief in an exalted, divine, not superhuman, God. His divinity implies inscrutability[13].

V.

May you hear from Heaven[14]

Let us turn to Dovid Hamelech's, and our, second question. What happened to our tefillos? What did they accomplish?

It is not my intention to discuss how unknowingly we were davening after the boys' murder. Nor do I wish to dwell upon the important distinction between tefillah not being answered and not being answered in ways that we can discern and appreciate.

Both these perspectives are crucial in the immediate context of our three boys Hy"d. Nevertheless, I think we are all aware of these important perspectives. Thus moving beyond the immediate context, I would, be"H, like to briefly offer three general perspectives on unanswered tefillah.

אבל הצבור כל זמן שעושים תשובה וצויעין בלב שלם הן נענין שנא' כה' אלקינו בכל קראנו אליו.

Whenever the community repents and wholeheartedly cries out they are answered, as stated "like our God [who answers us] whenever we call to Him"[15]

The guarantee that communal prayer is answered "whenever we call to Him" is quite extraordinary but there are conditions attached. Two conditions, in fact - we cry out wholeheartedly and repent. The first condition can be easier to fulfill. When we experience acute crisis and/or present danger, we instinctively, wholeheartedly call out to HKBH. There are no atheists in foxholes, or half-hearted supplicants.

The second condition is more demanding. Teshuva, when properly affected, is a personally transformative, life altering process. The Baal Teshuva needs to be able to proclaim "I am not the same person who performed those actions." [16]

Perhaps, when we reflect on unanswered tefillah, we err. Perhaps the question is not "did Hashem respond?" but "did we repent?"

VI.

Repentance that man according to his ways

כל־תפלה כלי־תחנה אשר תהיה לכל־האדם לכל עמך ישראל אשר ידעון איש נגע לבבו ופרש כפיו אליהבית הוה. ואתה תשמע השמים מכון שבתך וסלחת ועשית ונתת לאיש ככל־דרכיו אשר תדע את־לבבו כי־אתה ידעת לבדך את־לבב כל־בני האדם. וגו' וגם אליהנכרי אשר לא־מעמך ישראל הוא ובא מארץ רחוקה למען שמך. כי ישמעון את־שמך הגדול ואת־ידך החזקה וורעך הנטויה ובא והתפלל אליהבית הוה. אתה תשמע השמים מכון שבתך ועשית ככל אשר־יקרא אליך הנכרי וגו'

For any prayer and supplication that any individual or group of your entire people Israel may have - each man knowing the affliction of his heart - when he spreads out his hands [in prayer] toward this Temple, may You hear from Heaven, the foundation of Your abode, and forgive and act, and recompense that man according to his ways as You know his heart, for You alone know the hearts of all people... Also a gentile who is not of Your people Israel, but will come from a distant land, for Your Name's sake - for they will hear of Your great Name and Your Temple - may You hear from Heaven, the foundation of Your abode, and act according to all that the gentile calls out to You[17]

Shlomo Hamelech's prayer for his fellow Jews is conditional. HKBH should answer them only if they deserve and their requests are appropriate ("recompense that man according to his ways as You know his heart"). But his prayer concerning Gentiles is unconditional. HKBH should simply accede to their requests ("act according to all that the gentile calls out to You")[18]. Why?

Think of the following analogy. A couple enjoys a strong, healthy and abiding relationship based upon mutual affection, respect, devotion and commitment. Within such a relationship each spouse can, as warranted, say

no to the other without engendering a crisis of faith. A second couple enjoys, at best, a tenuous relationship; perhaps they have not even committed to each other. In this latter case, the [possible] relationship may not withstand a negative response.

Jews are maaminim bnei maaminim[19]; our relationship with HKBH is strong and eternally enduring. He can "afford" to say no without risking the relationship. This is not the case with unbelieving gentiles.

Shlomo HaMelech speaks of tefillah within the Beis Hamikdash. But the perspective he provides on tefillah is globally true. Unquestionably, a negative response can be deeply painful. But our equanimity in the wake of such a negative response attests to the special, eternal bond of faith between the Chosen People and the Creator.

#### VII.

As one person with one heart[20]

Rav Soloveitchik beautifully depicts the Jewish concept of tzibbur.

The community is not just an assembly of people who work together for their mutual benefit, but a metaphysical entity, an individuality, I might say, a living whole. In particular, Judaism has stressed the wholeness and the unity of Knesses Yisrael, the Jewish community. The latter is not a conglomerate. It is an autonomous entity, endowed with a life of its own[21].

De jure, the Rav's words are always true. Even when divisiveness chas v'shalom exists within our ranks we are one people. But, de facto, we do not always experience the metaphysical unity. When we come together to daven together for each other, we feel part of something larger than ourselves, something great and noble, far greater and nobler than our personal existence. The metaphysical truth becomes our experiential truth, as well.

We should never lose sight of this remarkable tefillah dividend.

#### VIII.

This is the fundamental rule of the Torah

ואהבת לרעך כמוך רבי עקיבה אומר זהו כלל גדול בתורה

"You shall love your fellow as yourself" Rabbi Akiva says, this is the fundamental rule of the Torah [22]

We might add it is a formidable challenge of the Torah, as well. Self-love is instinctive; love for others is decidedly not. And yet for every mitzvah HKBH commanded He implanted within us the necessary kochos hanefesh[23]. Hitherto our challenge has been to uncover and awaken the hidden, dormant kochos hanefesh forahavas yisrael.

The kidnapping and extended period of public uncertainty about the fate of the kedoshim had a transformative effect on our avodas Hashem. These dormant, latent kochos hanefesh were ignited. Our avodah has dramatically shifted away from uncovering and awakening to sustaining and deepening.

The Rebbe of Sochotchov (Shem M'Shmuel) offers a profound insight into this type of avoda. Chazal rhetorically ask why the parsha of nazir is juxtaposed to the parsha of sota. And they answer, to teach you that whoever sees the degradation of an adulteress should accept a vow of nezirus [and abstain from wine]. Asks the Rebbe, but this person has seen first hand the possible devastating effects of intoxication. That experience itself ought to insure his abstinence. Why does he need a vow of nezirus?

Answers the Rebbe, every experience, regardless of how powerful and gripping, gradually wanes and weakens, and ultimately entirely dissipates unless we take measures to consolidate it. Hence Chazal's counsel: while still feeling the full effects of having seen the demise of the sota, he should accept a vow of nezirus.

We find ourselves at such a moment, needing to consolidate and capitalize upon an extraordinary experience, the recrudescence of ahavas Yisrael.

#### VIII.

Three Suggestions

What measures ought we to take? Following are three suggestions- certainly not the only possible measures, perhaps not even the best, but hopefully worthwhile.

First suggestion: we did not identify Naftali, Gilad, and Eyal Hy"d by their choice of yarmulke, yeshiva affiliation or ethnicity. They were

neither Chareidi, Chardal, Dati Leumi, or Chiloni. They were neither Ashkenazim nor Sefardim. Without compromising our fealty to the general masora or our own personal masora, we viewed these three boys Hy"d simply as Jews, our brethren. We experienced for ourselves that one does not have to fully agree to feel familial concern, devotion and love.

The feelings we experienced for the three kedoshim are replicable. Thus the first suggestion is to make a sustained, concerted effort to view all Jews with the same unjaudiced eyes, with which we viewed Naftali, Gilad, and Eyal Hy"d, and thus to facilitate the same familial concern, devotion and love.

Second suggestion: Unconsciously we sometimes adopt a passive posture regarding chessed. When approached to perform chessed, we respond. But we do not initiate. Such passivity can easily result in irregular practice of chessed and is certainly less effective in molding our hearts to love all Jews. We ought to be more proactive in performing chessed. As per the suggestion of the Chafetz Chaim [24], we should b'n undertake that a day does not pass without engaging in chessed. Chessed opportunities vary depending upon a multitude of factors. But we all have such opportunities. This active posture can be"H help nurture and express ahavas Yisrael.

Third suggestion: As a ben chutz l'aretz, I feel a tremendous debt of gratitude to all bnei Eretz Yisrael, and especially the chayalim. Their ongoing self-sacrifice to live and serve in Eretz Yisrael secures the Holy Land for all of us. Perhaps we can channel our gratitude and concern into daily recitation of Tehillim on their behalf, even after, be"H, the current attacks in Eretz Yisrael cease. Even one (short) perek a day would be meaningful if that is all one's schedule allows. They need our prayers, and we need to acknowledge and support their ongoing mesirus nefesh.

#### IX.

Conclusion

רב יוסף כי הוה שמע קל כרעא דאמי' אמר איקום מקמי שכניה דאתא

When Rav Yosef would hear his mother's footsteps, he would say "let me rise in honor of the divine presence which approaches [25]"

A remarkable insight of Rabbeinu Bachya illuminates this remarkable Gemara.

Then think of the kindness shown by the Creator in the care which He provides for man... The infant's body grows stronger... God fills the hearts of the parents with kindness, love and compassion for the child, so that raising him is not a burden for them; [so that] they are more sensitive to the child's needs for food and drink than their own needs; and [so that] all the trouble and hard work that go into raising him-[they must] bathe and dress him, and the like; gently care for him; and protect him from all harm, even against his will - are made easier for them[26]

Parents serve as HKBH's emissaries. In nurturing and showering love upon their children, they are projecting HKBH's love. The parental capacity for love and self-sacrifice is a special divine gift to parents and children.

In his mother's love Rav Yosef detected HKBH's loving presence. Hence when he would rise for his mother, he was also rising for the divine presence.

Rabbeinu Bachya's insight is not limited to parental love. The phenomenal kochos hanefesh within the Jewish heart for ahavas Yisrael are also a special divine gift. Ahavas Yisrael is actually an expression of HKBH's intense, eternal love for us.

Times have been trying. The Jewish people have been moved to echo Dovid Hamelech and ask "why have you forsaken me?" and "how is it possible that I call out by day and You answer not?" The thick, dark cloud of inscrutability has very much been present. But simultaneously HKBH strengthens and reassures us. His loving presence in the form of ahavas Yisrael breaks through the cloud cover.

#### X.

Postscript

Our grief has intensified. We no longer grieve only for the three beloved kedoshim Hy"d, ruthlessly murdered. We grieve also for the chillul

Hashem caused by the heinous murder of the Arab teen. [As this postscript is being written, reports have surfaced that the primary suspect in the murder of the Arab boy is not mentally sound. Obviously, to whatever degree mental illness is responsible, to that same degree the chillul Hashem is mitigated.]

Besides grief, how else should we respond to chillul Hashem? Rabbeinu Yonah addresses our question.

But for this sickness too, [i.e. chillul Hashem] though it can not be cured in the same manner as other transgressions, a cure can be found if the Blessed One helps him to sanctify His Torah before others, and to make known the glory of His Kingdom... This corresponds to the pronouncement of physicians concerning bodily sickness, that it is cured by its opposite and healed by its converse. And Solomon, may Peace be upon him, said "By mercy and truth iniquity is expiated" (Proverbs 16:6) The idea of "truth" here is that the sinner set his heart towards strengthening the cause of truth [27]

In other words, the antidote to chillul Hashem is kiddush Hashem. Rabbeinu Yonah's prescription for kiddush Hashem essentially emphasizes outreach and advocacy for truth.

Rambam's prescription is more elaborate.

וכן אם דקדק החכם על עצמו והיה דבורו נבחת עם הבריות ודעתו מעורבת עמהם ומקבלם בסבר פנים יפות ונעלב מהם ואינו עולבם, מכבד להן ואפילו למקילין לו, ונושא ונותן באמונה, ולא ירבה באריחות עמי הארץ וישיבתן כלו ועושה בכל מעשיו לפנים משורת הדין, והוא שלא יתרחק הרבה ולא ישתומם, עד שימצאו הכל מקלסין אותו ואוהבים אותו ומתאוים למעשיו הרי זה קידש את ה' ועליו הכתוב אומר ויאמר לי עבדי אתה ישראל אשר בך אתפאר.

If the sage held himself to exacting standards: he speaks softly with people, is sociable and greets people amicably. He suffers insult without returning it. He respects all people, even those who disrespect him. He conducts business faithfully. He does not linger in the company of those who are contemptuous of Torah...In all his actions he goes beyond what is required without going to the extreme and isolating himself with the result that all praise and love him and aspire to his actions, he has sanctified Hashem's name. Of such a person Scripture says "and He said to me, you are My servant, Yisrael, in whom I will be glorified"[28]

A word of explanation is in order regarding this prescription. Rambam directed it to "one who is great in Torah and widely known for his devoutness"[29]. Such a person represents Torah. Consequently, everything he does, willy-nilly, reflects upon Torah. And thus what is acceptable behavior for others is unacceptable for him.

The Chofetz Chaim incisively opined that due to their paucity all religious Jews now represent Torah to the Jewish people and the world. We all live under a microscope. And thus the thrust of Rambam's prescription applies to us all. We must avoid even the appearance of impropriety[30], a fortiori actual impropriety. What is acceptable behavior for others is unacceptable for us. Our behavior and demeanor should inspire love and admiration.

In truth, as per the Chofetz Chaim's trenchant insight, we are always ambassadors of Torah. We should always be hypersensitive to our position of responsibility, recognizing the potential for kiddush and chillul Hashem in our words and actions. In the aftermath of a chillul Hashem, however, we should rededicate ourselves and redouble our efforts to use our ambassadorial position to be mekadash shem shamayim.

## XI.

### Revenge

What is the Torah's attitude towards revenge? Immediately two verses come to mind: לא תקום, the Torah's prohibition against exacting revenge, and קל קל רב, the Psalmist's laudatory description of HKBH as God of vengeance[31]. How are we to understand these seemingly contrary indications?

One approach suggests that vengeance is a divine, not human, virtue and prerogative. The mitzvah of imitatio dei notwithstanding, some descriptions of HKBH are becoming to Him, but not us. For instance, we attribute grandeur (גאווה/אווה) to HKBH, but excoriate a person who is a baal gaava. HKBH is infinitely exalted;for Him גאווה/אווה is becoming. We are

nothing;for us גאווה/אווה is hubris bordering on heresy[32]. This circumscription of imitatio dei is certainly correct. And perhaps it resolves our contrary indications regarding nekamah.

But, in truth, the entire question is based upon a misunderstanding. Onkelos in his Targum for the phrase לא תקום simply reproduces the Torah's phrase verbatim. By contrast, he renders the phrase נקמה לי נקמה as לפני נקמה, that is, punishment is before Me [to dispense]. This is true for other instances of נקמה (מנקמת נקמה) פרענותא, בריית, נקמת בני ישראל, לתת נקמת ד, דם עבדיו יקום) Onkelos translates נקמות ד' קל ד' אלקא מרי, פורענותא, God the master of punishment.

נקמה נקמה semantically denotes a quid pro quo response. Such a response can represent willful revenge (rendered verbatim by Onkelos) or, alternatively, divinely sanctioned commensurate punishment (rendered as פורענותא by Onkelos). The Torah prohibits the former and praises HKBH as a just and fair God for the latter. Indeed the quid pro quo of reward and punishment comprises the 11<sup>th</sup> of Rambam's 13 principles of faith.

Revenge is not a Jewish concept; justice is.

## XII.

### Missiles and Miracles

In recent days with murderous intent Hamas has launched thousands of deadly missiles against Israel. A small number of these missiles have been shot down by the Iron Dome. Despite Hamas' best and prodigious efforts many other missiles have inexplicably landed in unpopulated areas. Others have somehow missed their targets even within densely populated areas. The chances b'derech hateva of such overwhelming failure are negligible. We are, b'chasei Hashem, witnessing miracle upon miracle.

I would like be"H to share two important perspectives on miracles.

HKBH allows for free will in all areas, including belief. Haba l'taher misayin oso, haba l'tamei poschin lo. Accordingly, it is always possible to advance some atheistic, natural explanation for miracles. That far-fetched, convoluted alternative provides the opening for one who chooses not to believe. But in no way does that atheistic alternative detract from the miracle. One can argue that an especially virulent strain of virus randomly affected the Egyptian firstborn on the night of yetzias Mitzrayim. The resistance to acknowledging truth, however, in no way diminishes it. It only diminishes the person.

Like earthquakes, miracles are of varying magnitude. The fact that a miracle could be of even greater magnitude does not mean that it is not a miracle. HKBH could have killed the firstborn and the youngest in every Egyptian household. He did not. Makkas Bechoros is not therefore reduced to a natural phenomenon because the miracle could have been even greater.

In the same vein, today Klal Yisrael suffered its first fatality as a result of the Hamas missiles. There have been injuries and extensive property damage. Nonetheless, beyond any legitimate shadow of a doubt, we are witnessing, b'chasdei Hashem, miracle upon miracle (al nisecha sh'bechol yom imanu).

Miracles protect from missiles; they also inspire faith. As we pray for peace and security throughout Eretz Yisrael, we humbly thank HKBH for both the protection and inspiration. And we look forward to the day that we and all mankind will have genuine faith in Him." דעה אתיקוק כמים לים [33]"מכסים

[1] תהילים כ"ב:ג. Translations of pesukim from Tanach have been taken from Artscroll.

[2] הפנח חיים על התורה, פרשת כי תישא

[3] שמות י"ט:ט"ז

[4] דברים ד:י"א

[5] "מב"ם סוף הל' מעילה ע"פ יומא ט"ו:"

[6] קהלת ז:כ"ג

[7] מדרש תנחומא ריש פרשת חוקת פרשת א' וע"י גם במדבר רבה על אתר

[8] השוה מורה נבוכים ג:ט

[9] tzaddik v'ra lo and R' Meir, disagree as to whether HKBH explained the mystery of Our sages, R' Yosi [9] is a mystery that only tzaddik v'ra lo to R' Yosi or not. See Berachos 7a. But even according Rabbeinu Moshe could not fathom it on his own Rabbeinu Moshe HKBH can dispel. Even

[10] "מב"ם הל' יסודי התורה א:ג

[11] "מב"ם הל' תשובה תה:

[12] מורה נבוכים ג:כ"ג

[13] "ל' ליקוטי הגרי"ז ח"ב עמוד ג ד"ה בענין מהותה של אמונה ור"ל: שמעתי כשרבינו הקדוש ענה לא שאמר, בימות המשיח הרי ישנו הרבה, הרי ישנו ויבנו הכל, וע"ז ענה רבינו, אם אמונה הוא דין בתורה, הרי אמונה תהא גם את! והיינו דגם בימות המשיח יצטרפו לאמונה, שעדיין לא יבנו הכל ונה"ח מחויבים במצות אמונה.

[14] מלכים א', ח"ל"ט  
 [15] רמב"ם הל' תשובה ב'ו. אמנם בהל' תפילה ח'א כתב רבינו שתפילת הצבור נשמעת תמיד, ולא הזכיר התנאי שעושים תשובה. אכן בע"כ צ"ל או שמעך על מש"כ לעיל (והזכיר), או שיש חילוק בין "נשמעת" ל"נענין". ואבמ"ל אבל ב"ב בס"ד נעריך בזה במ"א.  
 [16] רמב"ם הל' תשובה ב'ד  
 [17] מלכים א', ח: ל"ח, ל"ט, מ"א-מ"ג  
 [18] במדבר רבה א:ג, והמפרשים (רש"י, רד"ק, רלב"ג, אברבנל, מלכים) של מלכים. ומש"כ דוק אם אהבקות ראיות להם, ע"י מלכי"ם.  
 [19] שבת צ"ג.  
 [20] רש"י שמות י"ט:ב ע"פ מלילתא שם  
 [21] "The Community", Tradition vol. XVII, no. 2, p. 9 [21] ע"י גם משך חכמה הפטרה לפרשת דברים, לפי שהצבור בכלליותו כמו יחיד שהוא איש אחד  
 [22] ויקרא י"ט:י"ח, ירושלמי נדרים פרק ט' הלכה ד'  
 [23] ע"י מהר"ל תפארת ישראל פרק ה'  
 [24] אהבת חסד חלק שני פרק י"ב ע"פ ספר שערי קדושה  
 [25] קדושים לא.  
 [26] תשובת הלבבות שער הבחינה פרק ה', Feldheim, 1996, translation  
 [27] שערי תשובה, שער ד', אות ה', Feldheim, 1967, translation  
 [28] רמב"ם הל' יסודי התורה ה"א  
 [29] שם  
 [30] ויש דברים אחרים שהם בכלל חילול השם וכו' דברים שהבחינה מרגנת אחריו בשבילן, ואע"פ שאינן עבירות, רמב"ם שם.  
 [31] כן פרשו המפרשים זולת המלבי"ם שהפסוק נאמר לשבחו של הקב"ה  
 [32] כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח כאילו בעיניו, סוטה ד.  
 [33] ישעיהו י"א:ט

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**Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:**

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>  
 reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com  
 subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein  
**Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
**The Terrible Truth**

In my many decades as a public speaker I have encountered many reactions to my words. Though most people love me and are enthralled by what I have to say, many times people have somehow vehemently disagreed and have informed me of their negative opinions. Sometimes people have even walked out while I was still speaking to express their displeasure. Once or twice I remember being heckled by members of the audience who somehow were unable to appreciate the greatness of my character and the wisdom of my words. But last Shabbat afternoon, while teaching my weekly class/lecture on Pirkei Avot, the air raid siren in Jerusalem sounded and all of us attending this class in our synagogue repaired to the bomb shelter and stairwell in the building.

Those rockets headed for Jerusalem were intercepted by the Iron Dome defensive system or fell in open fields outside of the city. This was the first time in my career that anyone shot at me while I was speaking. I imagine there is a first time for everything and I am somewhat flattered that Hamas somehow has taken notice of my oratorical skills and has attempted to silence them.

In all seriousness, the terrible truth of the ongoing conflict is that unreasoning and ideological hatred overrules all logic, strategy, human concerns and reasonable behavior. The terrible truth is that all of the casualties suffered by the civilian population living in Gaza are directly attributable to Hamas. It started the conflict, it kidnapped and killed innocent children, and it has fired over 700 rockets against purely civilian targets in Israel.

And, Hamas is frustrated beyond belief at its failure to obtain any tactical or strategic advantage with its violent and vicious behavior. It just continues to shoot rockets, knowing that it only guarantees that its own population in Gaza will pay the price for its doctrinal hatred of Israel and the Jewish people. That is the terrible truth that the world knows but will not accept and act upon.

Another aspect of the terrible truth was acted out on the streets of Tel Aviv on Saturday night. A small group of diehard Leftists and peace loving humanitarians attempted to conduct a rally – mostly for the benefit of the television and print media of the world – demanding that Israel end its Gaza campaign. Spontaneously, and in reaction, a small group of other Israeli citizens gathered and vociferously denounced and opposed those attempting to conduct that rally.

The police immediately came to interpose themselves between the two opposing groups, both of which were now vehemently shouting at each other and coming close to blows. Hamas intervened by shooting six rockets at Tel Aviv at that moment. Some were intercepted again by the Iron Dome system and the others fell harmlessly in open areas or in the sea.

Both groups of demonstrators ran to the same shelter when the air raid siren sounded. In the shelter their argument continued and the police, who also were in the shelter, had to maintain separation and order. The absurdity of the situation apparently did not register upon the peace loving humanitarians.

They somehow still failed to realize that Hamas and its rockets meant them as well and not just those “aggressive, war-mongering, right-wing extremists” who control the government and defense forces of Israel. Hamas rockets also fell in Arab Hebron and Bethlehem, cities controlled by and located in the areas of the Palestinian Authority.

But, since Hamas does not care about its own civilians in Gaza, why should it care about Arabs living on the West Bank? Hamas does not care about any human life and therefore it only keeps on firing rockets, to no avail or advantage except as a release point for its hatreds and perverted ideology. The media of the world – especially such biased anti-Israel organs as the New York Times, Haaretz and the Guardian, etc. – headline the destruction of mosques and the deaths of civilians in Gaza. Parenthetically they note that the mosques were used to store and shoot rockets aimed at Israeli citizens. The world looks for symmetry in human casualties in this conflict. The fact that symmetry is lacking in this area is used to condemn Israel instead of admiring it for its ability to defend itself and its citizens. The symmetry that is lacking is in the media coverage and reporting of events. There is no country in the world that would sit idly by while hundreds of rockets rained down on its civilian population and cities.

Israel has tried for many decades to reach a peaceful accommodation with its Arab neighbors. For religious, cynical, greedy and ideological reasons, it has been rebuffed time and again in these efforts. The terrible truth is that in spite of the clucking of the do-gooders, the formula of quiet will be met by quiet and force will be met by force. This is still the only reasonable option left to us in our most dangerous area of the world.

Shabat shalom

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**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
**Matot**

The subject matter that begins this week's parsha concerns itself with vows and commitments that one undertakes to perform or to abstain from. There is an entire tractate in the Talmud – Nedarim – that discusses this subject almost exclusively. In Jewish life, even an oral commitment in many cases can be considered to be binding. The Torah expressly teaches us that one should live up to and perform “everything that emanates from one's mouth.” As such, it is completely understandable why this matter of vows and commitments should merit the attention that it does receive in the Talmud and in Jewish law generally. Man is elevated from the animal kingdom by the gift and ability to speak and communicate to others, even to later generations.

Words, whether spoken or written, are almost sacred in the view of Jewish tradition and society. The great sage and saint of Eastern European Jewry of the last century, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hakohen Kagan – Chafetz Chaim - devoted much of his scholarly career to explaining and teaching the Torah laws regarding speech. We are taught that “life and death itself are dependent upon the utterances of our tongue.”

In a society such as ours, where instant communication is the expected norm and silence is treated as a social and political aberration and not as a virtue of



wisdom or patience, the sanctity of speech and its binding effect has unfortunately lost resonance amongst us. Nevertheless, it certainly would behoove us to study this parsha's message regarding our spoken words and the commitments that they carry with them.

The question arises and is discussed by many biblical commentators as to why this particular subject was initially taught by Moshe to the leaders of the tribes of Israel - and certainly why the Torah makes mention of this in the opening verse of the parsha itself. The question also subtly raises the issue of why the Torah allows, if not even demands, the continuation of the Jewish people as being divided into separate tribes and not treated as being one whole unit.

We see throughout the Bible that this division into tribes occasioned much social disunity and sometimes even civil war. I think that one insight into these matters is that people find it difficult to operate within a large and general group, with one perspective. Our nature is to remain familial and tribal.

Part of that nature unfortunately breeds a disdain for others not like us. This disdain is usually reflected in our speech and comments about others and also in the fact that somehow we feel that we are not really bound by our verbal and written commitments made to those 'others.'

My commitments to my family and my tribe are certainly sacred in my eyes and I will do all in my power to fulfill them. But my commitments to your family or your tribe have a certain unjustified mental flexibility attached to them that would allow me somehow to avoid my responsibilities.

Moshe expresses this lesson regarding the individual commitments of Jews to the heads of all of the different tribes to teach them that they are all equally bound to all commitments made, no matter to what tribe, family or individual. The nature of humans is to be tribal and the Torah allows for it. However, the Torah does not allow for slippery speech and broken vows and shattered commitments, simply because they were made to those of another tribe.

Shabat shalom

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>  
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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

### **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Matos**

#### **He shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do. (30:3)**

For the most part, the idea of "keeping one's word" is ethical in nature. I gave my word; someone relied on my word; it is only right that I keep my word. Our parsha teaches a new dimension in "word keeping": our words are sacred. If one breaks his word, as in a promise to pay back a debt, to perform a specific endeavor, etc., he is not just acting unethically, but he is actually desecrating his word. Words are holy.

We are used to thinking that kedushah, holiness, is relegated to space, time, objects. We view sanctity as innate. Something is either holy from the get-go - or it is not. The Torah teaches us that holiness can be created, manufactured at will. When one consecrates an object, animal, or even money, it becomes holy. The object that had once been mundane is now sacred. Why? It has been sanctified through the medium of someone's word.

The Torah goes even further. Not only does holiness attach itself to words which are designated for the purpose of sanctifying something, but even ordinary speech, whose goal is not to create holiness, is inviolate once it exits the mouth. When a person makes a vow and abrogates it, the Torah refers to it as an act of desecration. He has profaned his word. The act of breaking one's word is an act of desecration. Why should "mere" words be holy if their purpose is, in fact, mundane?

The Nesivos Shalom cites Rabbeinu Yonah's commentary to Pirkei Avos 1:17, in which he compares the Jew's mouth to a keli shareis, ministering vessel, used in the Bais HaMikdash. These vessels have a significant role in the Temple service. For example, a Korban Minchah, Meal-offering, achieves full korban status as soon as it is placed in a keli shareis. The vessel endows its contents with kedushah - just by being there.

Likewise, a Jew's mouth becomes a keli shareis, since it is used for so many functions of service to Hashem. If the mouth is holy, its contents - the words that exit from it - are, by extension, holy.

Why would the mouth more than any other organ of the body achieve keli shareis level? Do we not serve Hashem with every fiber of our being? True - but the mouth exemplifies service of Hashem more than any of the other organs of the body. It is with our mouths that we pray, which is a conversation with G-d. We study Torah, recite Kiddush, and articulate our remembrance of specific mitzvos, such as Shabbos, erasing the name of Amalek, and the exodus from Egypt. It is with our mouth that we chose to become Hashem's Nation with the seminal declaration, Naase v'Nishma, "We will do and we will listen."

Our power of speech is the ministering vessel which transforms our mouths into a keli kodesh, holy vessel. Thus, when a Jew does not keep his word, it is a much more egregious sin than simply an ethical character deficiency. It is a disgrace, for he has profaned the holy ministering vessel - his mouth.

#### ***Exact the revenge of Bnei Yisrael from the Midyanim... Moshe sent them... with Pinchas ben Elazar HaKohen. (31:6)***

Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to exact revenge against the Midyanim for their role in causing Klal Yisrael to sin with the Moavite girls and worship the Peor idol. Moshe himself did not lead the way; instead, he chose Pinchas. Rashi attributes Moshe's reasoning to the fact that Pinchas had begun the deed of reckoning, by slaying Kozbi, the Midyanite Princess, who had cohabited with Zimri, the renegade Prince of the Tribe of Shimon. Let the one who initiates the revenge carry on to the next phase.

Alternatively, Pinchas was a descendant of Yosef HaTzaddik who was sold by his brothers to the Midyanim, who, in turn, sold him to the Egyptians. Veritably, Yosef was actually sold three times: the brothers sold him to the Yishmaelim; who sold him to the Midyanim; who, in turn, sold him to the Egyptians.

The idea that Pinchas should exact revenge due to his ancestral connection to Yosef begs elucidation. The Midyanites referred to in the Yosef-sale were merchants, interested in purchase, sale and profit. To them, Yosef was nothing more than a piece of merchandise. Therefore, asks the Avnei Nezer, is this a reason for his descendant, hundreds of years later, to take revenge and decimate the Midyanim?

Understandably, this incident contains much more than meets the eye. Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, explains this based on an important lesson to be derived from the Manna, the Heavenly food which sustained our ancestors for forty years in the wilderness. After entering Eretz Yisrael, Klal Yisrael ate from the produce of the land. This began on the day after Pesach, after the Omer offering was waved and brought up to Hashem. In Yehoshua 5:11, 12, Rashi explains that the Manna actually stopped falling on the day Moshe died, the seventh of Adar. Nonetheless, the Manna which they gathered on that day sufficed to sustain them until the fifteenth of Nissan. This idea coincides with the posuk that says, "They ate Manna for forty years." A mathematical difficulty remains, since they began eating Manna on the sixteenth of Iyar - one month after Nissan. Thus, we actually ate Manna for forty years minus thirty days. The Torah does not make mistakes. How are we to understand this? Rashi explains that for the first thirty days after leaving Egypt, prior to receiving the Manna, the nation ate matzah, which had the taste of Manna!

Rav Miller posits that Rashi's commentary not only solves our technical difficulty, but it also provides us with a critical principle essential to our spiritual development. The shift from matzah to Manna was gradual; the transition was gentle. To shift from eating physical food to living off Heavenly sustenance must occur gradually. The people had to become accustomed to the taste of the Manna before being presented with it in its physical form. Spiritual growth requires gradual modification. One does not leap to the top. He scales the heights of spirituality step by step, rung by rung, at a steady pace, establishing his spiritual foundation solidly on each step before he ascends to the next level.

Likewise, when the nation entered Eretz Yisrael, a measured gradual alteration took place as they transitioned from eating Manna exclusively to eating the natural produce of Eretz Yisrael. This was not a culinary transfiguration, but rather, a preparation for an entire spiritual change in their manner of living. The wilderness was the backdrop for miracles on an almost steady basis. The nation understood that miracles were real and nature only a concealment of reality. Crossing the border into the Holy Land, they would be expected to live on a totally new spiritual plane. Their perspective would be altered as they confronted the world of nature, of cause and effect, a world in which the Divine Hand of G-d, which is always in control of the rudder, would be obscured. They would have to look with a profound and discerning eye to perceive the Divine maneuvering of life. Thus, the people were slowly weaned off the Manna, which last descended on the seventh of Adar. It continued to taste like Manna, but it did not arrive daily with the morning dew. Just as they ascended from Egypt on a gradual and gentle basis, likewise, they descended back into the world of obscure reality, where man must gaze through the maze of ambiguity resulting from the veil of nature to see the Divine truth.

There is, however, a negative side to gradual descent: one is very likely unaware of his decline. It is so gradual and gentle that what he perceives as nothing is actually another

nail in his spiritual coffin. Thus, one might commit a small sin, an activity that on its own is not significantly damaging, but when he overlooks a few of these insignificant sins, he is sadly laying the foundation for a major and cardinal transgression. In his Gur Aryeh commentary to Bereishis 25:28, Maharal advances this idea with regard to the sale of Yosef, a sale whereby he was thrice exchanged. Yosef was sold a number of times. The change was gradual, as he moved from one domain to another. He was first sold by his brothers to the Yishmaelim - who were also descendants of Avraham Avinu. While the Yishmaelim were not his brothers, since they shared in the Patriarchal lineage to Avraham, they maintained a certain element of kinship. Thus, the descent was gradual. The Yishmaelim brought Yosef to Egypt; Egypt was the home of their ancestress Hagar. In Egypt, Yosef was sold to peddlers who had Midyanite origins and were not considered Midyanim, but rather, businessmen who were going about their vocation. After this, Yosef was sold to Midyanim, who then sold him to the Egyptians. Hashem made Yosef's descent into Egypt as gradual as possible. This was a country in which hedonism had been elevated to a cultural status, where moral debauchery was a standard by which the people lived. Coming from Yaakov Avinu's spiritually sequestered home, this was a devastating transformation for Yosef. It had to be very gentle and gradual.

Having laid the foundation for understanding the Midyan factor in Yosef's life, Rav Miller returns to our original difficulty: Why Pinchas? Why was he the one chosen to exact revenge on Midyan? We mentioned that Rashi offers two reasons. First, Pinchas began the job by killing Kozbi; he might as well complete the work. Second, as a descendant of Yosef, he was taking revenge for what the Midyanim had done to his grandfather. On a cursory level, the two reasons appear disparate. In reality, they are related and even complement one another.

Midyanites were, sadly, very successful in their attempt to seduce Klal Yisrael, to pull the rug of morality from under our feet. Why? It was precisely due to their closeness to our people, their lineage descending from the union of Avraham and Keturah. It was uniquely as a result of our sense of kinship to these people that we were so susceptible to their contemptible influence. When one falls under the influence, especially an influence based upon the erroneous belief that the other person/nation, the aggressor, would never harm you because of their closeness - then one falls very hard. This is what happened to the Jews. They allowed themselves to be violated by the Midyanites guile-- to become compromised by them, because they believed in them. After all, we are kinsmen. They would never hurt us. (How many times throughout our tumultuous history have we repeatedly made this same mistake?)

The Midyanites personified a slow, insidious calculating lowering of personal values. The individual who could successfully battle against them would have to be an individual who represented unbending, untarnished truth. When Pinchas saw Zimri make a fool of himself by desecrating himself and profaning Hashem's Name in public, Pinchas acted decisively, with courage and resolution, to expunge this evil from the midst of our nation. Pinchas acted swiftly to eradicate the evil of a nation whose primary strategy was an agenda of gradual corruption. Pinchas unleashed his vengeance swiftly and with malice, avenging the injustice perpetrated against his ancestor. Rav Miller adds that Midyan had a great and wily mentor: the evil-inclination, whose primary technique for leading people to sin is gradual and gentle persuasion. First, it is a tiny compromise for the sake of a mitzvah, then it is a greater compromise, so that people will see that we are flexible. By then the protective armor has developed a crack, a chink which ultimately leads to the fatal flaw. Each and every Jew has as his life's mission the responsibility to remain steadfast and strong; to serve as a bulwark of truth and moral values, so that we withstand the strong winds that constantly seek to undermine us.

### **So Moshe gave to them - to Bnei Gad, and Bnei Reuven, and half the tribe of Menashe ben Yosef - the Kingdom of Sichon... And the Kingdom of Og. (32:33)**

The lands which were inhabited by the kingdoms of Sichon and Og were very fertile. Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven were two tribes which had large herds of sheep and cattle. The fertile grazing land would be a boon for them. They, therefore, approached Moshe Rabbeinu and requested to lay claim to the eastern portion of the Jordan, Eivar ha'Yardein, for themselves and their families. They were granted their wish, and the two tribes, with the added complement of half the tribe of Menashe, were allowed to remain on Eivar ha'Yardein. The question is obvious: Where did the tribe of Menashe enter into the picture? The discussion was about Reuven and Gad - not Menashe. The Netziv, zl, explains that Moshe was concerned for the spiritual health of the two tribes who remained separated from the rest of the nation. Their involvement in agricultural commerce would certainly occupy much of their time, hence not allow for the necessary exposure to spirituality which is required to maintain a spiritual status quo. The members of the tribe of Menashe, who were strongly committed bnei Torah, would inspire their brethren. This teaches us the significance of maintaining one's residence in

a Torah-friendly community, one which is replete with individuals who devote themselves-- and inspire others-- to maintain a strong relationship with the Torah. We wonder why Shevet Menashe, which had among its ranks some profound Torah scholars, was selected to be the tribe that remained on Eivar ha'Yardein-- and not Shevet Yissachar, whose vocation it was to study and disseminate Torah. Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, cites Chazal who teach that because the Shevatim, tribes/brothers, caused Yaakov Avinu to rend his garment in mourning over the news that Yosef had been killed, they, too, were compelled to tear their garments when they were accused of stealing Yosef's goblet. Two hundred and fifty years later, the tribes were separated and one tribe was "torn" in half - Shevet Menashe. Why? Chazal inform us that the messenger that Yosef sent to search for his goblet in the brothers' grain sacks was none other than Menashe. Thus, the one who indirectly caused the brothers to rend their garments was Menashe. Thus, two and a half centuries later, his tribe was split - half on the western bank of the Jordan and half on the eastern bank.

We have no understanding of G-d's ways, because we are limited by the temporal nature of time. Our tenure in this world is temporary and filled with questions - questions that are answered decades and even centuries later. Our inability to connect the dots, to put everything into perspective, hampers us from seeing life in its true perspective. No one is ignored. Everyone receives his due - both positive and negative. It might take time, but it will invariably occur -often when we least expect, or understand, it.

The Chafetz Chaim would cite two unrelated episodes which demonstrate this idea. There will always be a payback. It might take some time, and it might arrive when one least expects it, but it is guaranteed to come.

The first story concerns a poor widow who lived in Radin. It was winter, and she had run out of rent money. She begged the landlord not to evict her in the cold of winter. Could he please wait for the spring when the weather was not as harsh? The man was obstinate. She would have to go. He was embarrassed to leave her belongings in the street. Instead, he removed the windows from the apartment, exposing the woman to the elements, thereby forcing her to seek shelter elsewhere. The poor widow went into the street, shocked by the man's cruel insensitivity, broken and weeping bitterly over her own miserable plight.

When word concerning the incident reached the Chafetz Chaim, he commented, "Such an episode evokes Heavenly anger. It will not go by unrequited." Years passed, in fact sixty-seven years went by, during which the landlord lived a very good, peaceful life. He was healthy and prosperous, not a care in the world. Everyone had forgotten about that terrible incident - everyone but Hashem. One day, the landlord went for a walk and was bitten by a rabid dog. He became ill with rabies, and suffered greatly until his painful death. Everyone took pity on him; everyone felt his pain. The only one who remembered what had taken place sixty-seven years earlier was the Chafetz Chaim. He noted, "One must have a Torah perspective on life and view everything that occurs through the prism of Torah." Everything that takes place is part of one long continuum. What seems shocking to us today might not be so earth shattering if we would know the "rest of the story."

Another incident occurred in Aishishuk, during the Cantonist decree, when young Jewish youths were forcibly grabbed and conscripted for a minimum of twenty-five years into the Czar's army. Word reached the leaders of the Jewish community that they would have to supply a certain number of young men for the army. There was no room for negotiation. If the community did not supply them willingly, the boys would be taken by force, and everyone would pay. The soldiers went around indiscriminately picking up Jewish boys. Among those was the son of the town's butcher - a burly man who would stop at nothing to achieve his objectives.

When the butcher heard that his son had been taken, he went into a frenzy. He went to the barracks where the boys were being held captive. The wailing that he heard was heart rending. He proceeded to the commanding officer and asked, "How much do you want so that my son may leave? Name your price and you will have it." The officer looked at the hysterical father and said, "You do not seem to understand. There is a certain number of boys which I must provide for the army. If that number is missing - no amount of money can make up for the loss." The officer was intimating that he really did not care who took the butcher's son's place, but someone - not money - must replace the boy.

The butcher performed a dastardly sin. Late at night, he entered the bais hamedrash and found one boy who was a masmid, diligent student, studying alone in the back of the study hall. The butcher snuck up on him, grabbed him and brought him to the army barracks, together with a gift of one hundred rubles for the officer - all of this in lieu of the butcher's son. The son went free, replaced by the poor yeshivah student.

The Chafetz Chaim was studying in Aishishuk at the time and became aware of the tragic incident. The entire community was in an uproar. How could the butcher get away with committing such an outrageously cruel act? Time, however, was on the butcher's side, as people began to forget. Soon, he was "yesterday's" tragedy, yesterday's

news. The Chafetz Chaim, however, did not forget. He patiently waited to see how Hashem would deal with the butcher's requital. The butcher took his son into the business, and he soon became his father's right hand man. One day, the butcher gave his son a bag of money with which to purchase calves from a nearby town. The road to this town took the son through an area notorious for various insects - many of which carried dangerous germs. The son was bitten by a mosquito carrying the deadly black plague. As the trip went on, the son became more and more ill. He purchased the calves and proceeded to return home. By the time he entered the city limits of Aishishuk, his entire body was covered with painful black blisters which were already oozing blood. Finally, unable to continue on, the young man died a painful, gruesome death in the middle of the street. The Chevra Kaddisha, Burial Society, was summoned, but when they saw the condition of the deceased, they said, "We are unable to come in contact with the corpse. It would make us susceptible to the vicious infection which killed him. The butcher was called and told that his son was lying dead in the street, with no one even to move him. The father was relegated to performing the gruesome ritual all by himself, as he picked up the corpse, prepared the grave and personally buried his son. The entire town felt the pain of the father who so tragically lost his son. The Chafetz Chaim, however, remembered. Hashem had not forgotten what the butcher had done to the poor yeshivah bachur. It was payback time. In loving memory of our parents and brother Cy and Natalie Handler 3 Av 5772 - 24 Teves 5771 Jeremy Handler 19 Tamuz 5766 by the Handler Family

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/>

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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**Parshat Matot: Family supercedes property**

**By Shmuel Rabinowitz**

**July 17, 2014 Thursday 19 Tammuz 5774**

*We must always remember that material gains and making money are only a means to a greater end – family and values.*

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Matot, provides us with an important look at the different priorities that people have.

We encounter this subject as Am Yisrael is about to enter the Land of Israel after 40 years of wandering in the desert. Entering the Land is not going to be easy.

It will involve war and everyone understands this well.

And then, two tribes in the nation say that they are not interested in entering the Land of Israel. The tribes of Reuven and Gad see the vast areas northeast of Eretz Yisrael and like them. These two tribes "had an abundance of livestock very numerous" and these vast areas suited their pecuniary needs.

Representatives of these two tribes turn to Moshe Rabbeinu and present him with the possibility of settling in these areas. Moshe's response is unequivocal. He reacts sharply and utters the following famous sentence: "Shall your brethren go to war while you stay here?" (Numbers 32:6) Moshe's anger is due to his suspicion that these two tribes are trying to get out of the battle that the nation is facing due to strictly economic motives. This is an unacceptable reason for escaping battle, Moshe tells them.

After the two tribes heard Moshe's reaction, they declared the following: "We will then arm ourselves quickly [and go] before the children of Israel... We shall not return to our homes until each of the children of Israel has taken possession of his inheritance."

(Numbers 32:17-18) When Moshe Rabbeinu hears this explicit declaration, he makes a formal agreement with them and agrees to their settling in the areas that meet their economic needs.

However, when looking again at this Torah portion, we find another reason for Moshe's anger. And afterward, we understand the abatement of his anger and his agreement to give them what they requested.

When the representatives of the two tribes first appear before Moshe, they present their request with the following words: "[This] is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock... If it pleases you, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage..."

(Numbers 32:4-5) After Moshe's initial response, they present their plans to him again: "We will build sheepfolds for our livestock here and cities for our children." (Numbers 32:16) But Moshe still does not consent. When they summarize their request again, the wording changes: "Our children and our wives, our livestock and our cattle will remain there..." (Numbers 32:26) Only then does Moshe grant their request.

How is the wording different in these three requests? The first time, they presented their request as concern for the large number of cattle, for economic gain only ("an abundance of livestock"). The second time, they added their concern for their families ("and cities for our children"), but they still mention the abundant livestock and property before family. But only the third time do they present the correct order of priorities – family and only then property ("our children and our wives, our livestock and our cattle"), and then Moshe is willing to grant their request.

The Torah presents us with different models of priorities.

There is the person whose concern, emotions and thoughts are focused on his property, but he neglects the needs of his family. This is clearly a bad model; everyone knows that.

There is another person who invests energies and efforts also in his family, but his priorities are still defective because if he is ever faced with the decision of staying at work one more hour or spending that hour with his family, he will prefer to accumulate wealth and status rather than take care of his family. This is also not good.

The correct order of priorities is: Invest the best of our energies in our family, which is the most important thing. Our wives and children are our main goal and focus, and they are also the place that we can most influence and benefit. Investing in family is always a wise investment and no one can lose from it.

Only later, when we know that we provided our family with its emotional and spiritual needs, only when we are sure that our investment in educating our children and that the love among members of a couple is sufficient, only then can we turn to accumulating wealth, gaining social status and other areas that we enjoy investing in to reap benefits. We must always remember that material gains and making money are only a means to a greater end – family and values. We must never turn the means into an end because we would then lose those closest to us and our future.

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**Rav Kook List**

**Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

**Matot: Beauteous Evil**

The Offering of Midianite Jewelry

After the reprisal attack against Midian, the Israelite soldiers presented an unusual donation to the Tabernacle: gold jewelry seized from the Midianite women.

"We wish to bring an offering to God. Every man who found a gold article - an anklet, a bracelet, a ring, an earring, or a body ornament - to atone for our souls before God." (Num. 31:50)

Why did the soldiers bring this odd offering to the Tabernacle? The Talmud (Shabbat 64a) explains that they felt a need for atonement - not for improper actions - but for improper thoughts when they came in contact with the Midianite women.

Still, why not bring a more conventional offering? And why does the Torah list all of the various types of Midianite ornaments?

Some of the jewelry was of the normal variety, worn in full view, such as rings and bracelets. Other pieces, however, were of an intimate nature, worn underneath the clothes, like the kumaz, a suggestive body ornament. From the association that the Torah makes between ordinary jewelry and intimate ornaments, the Talmud derives the moral lesson that "to gaze at a woman's little finger [for enjoyment] is like staring at her undressed."

What is so terrible about enjoying a woman's natural aesthetic beauty?

The Snare of Superficial Beauty

On its own accord, beauty has intrinsic worth, and can make a positive impression on the soul. The soul gains a wonderful sense of expansiveness when it experiences aesthetic pleasures that are pure. However, if the beauty is covering up that which is ethically repulsive, this attractiveness becomes a spiritual hazard. The external charm is but a snare, entrapping in its inner ugliness those caught in its net. In general, we only succumb to that which is morally repugnant when it is cloaked in a veneer of superficial beauty.

This was precisely the casus belli for the war against Midian. The young women of Moab and Midian enticed the men with their outer beauty, leading them to perform the vile idolatrous practices of Pe'or. The Midrash describes their method:

"When [the Israelite man] was overcome by lust and asked her to submit to him, she pulled out a statue of Pe'or from her bosom and demanded: 'First, prostrate yourself before this!'" (Sifrei 25:1; Rashi on Num. 25:2)

This phenomenon encompasses an even greater pitfall. The simple act of staring at that which is prohibited undermines the soul's healthy sense of moral rectitude and purity. If we are attracted to that which is morally repugnant, we become desensitized to the ugliness of the sin. The superficial beauty not only conceals the inner sordidness, it diminishes our loathing for it.

Even if the soul has not been sufficiently corrupted to be actually ensnared in the net of immorality, its purity has nevertheless been tainted by an attraction to that which is forbidden. For this reason, the Israelite soldiers who fought against Midian required atonement. To make amends for their spiritual deterioration, they brought a particularly appropriate offering: gold jewelry, whose shiny and glittery exterior concealed its corrupt inner core. The officers donated jewelry that is worn openly, as well as ornaments worn intimately. They recognized that both types of jewelry share the potential to desensitize the soul and damage its integrity.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Ayah vol. IV, p. 116)  
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### **My Vows I Shall Fulfill**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

It is rather obvious why we are studying this topic this week – since the laws pertaining to vows are the first subject mentioned in Parshas Matos.

Question #1: Quiz question

Can performing a mitzvah become a liability?

Question #2: Is this a "klutz question?"

What does it mean that I am doing something "bli neder?"

Question #3: A sixty-thousand-dollar question

Yankel asks: "When I attended a Gemara shiur on Nedarim, I got the impression that performing hataras nedarim requires having a talmid chacham deliberate over the specific neder, until he concludes that there are grounds to release the neder. This seems to have no relationship to what we do on Erev Rosh Hashanah."

Question #4: A frum question

"My friend Billy Nader\* says bli neder on almost everything. Is this being too frum?"

Answer:

What is a neder?

Someone who recites a vow, an oath or a pledge is required to fulfill it (see Bamidbar 30:3). By virtue of the vow, oath or pledge, one creates a Torah obligation on oneself that one is, otherwise, not required to observe. For example, someone who declares that he will begin studying daf yomi every day is now obligated to do so, even on a day when it is inconvenient. Similarly, one who pledges tzedakah at yizkor or pledges a contribution to a shul upon receiving an aliyah becomes fully obligated min haTorah to pay the donation. In the case of a pledge to tzedakah, one must redeem it as soon as practical; otherwise, one risks violating an additional prohibition, bal te'acheir leshalmo, do not delay paying it (Devarim 23:22), as I will soon explain.

In general, one should be careful not to make vows or pledges. For one thing, he has now created a stumbling block for himself; since he runs the risk that he will not observe his commitment (see Nedarim 20a, 22a). Furthermore, one has created an accusation against himself, for by committing to observe something that the Torah did not require, he implies that he is so skilled at observing mitzvos that he can add a few of his own. The Satan can now level accusations against his occasional laxities in a much stronger fashion (see Nedarim 22a, based on Mishlei 20:25). (There are a few circumstances in which one is encouraged to make vows, but we will leave that topic for a different time.) For this reason, it is better not to pledge to contribute to tzedakah -- if you have the money available, donate it; if it is not currently available, don't pledge it! (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 203:4). It is very important that gabayim be in the habit of declaring that people's pledges are bli neder, and a similar wording should appear on pledge cards.

#### Different types of obligations

There are six main ways that one may create an obligation upon oneself either to fulfill something or to abstain from doing something.

##### (1) Nedarim, vows

A neder, a vow, in which one declares that something otherwise permitted is now prohibited -- such as, declaring that certain foods are prohibited.

Example:

In her desire to keep to her diet, Yaffah states: "I am going to prohibit all chocolate on myself." Yaffah has now created a neder, which prohibits her, min haTorah, from eating chocolate.

##### (2) Shavuos, oaths

A shavua, an oath, in which one swears to fulfill or refrain from some activity -- such as swearing that one will fast on a certain day, or that one will say Tehillim every day.

Example:

To repair his somewhat sloppy record at making it to minyan every morning, Shachar swears a shavua that he will be in shul for shacharis for the next three days. Should he fail to make it to shacharis any of those days, he will be breaking his shavua, which contravenes a Torah prohibition.

Whether a specific declaration constitutes a neder or a shavua depends on halachic technicalities, usually contingent on how one makes the declaration. Several halachic differences result from whether someone made a neder or a shavua, including that violating a shavua is a more serious infraction (Ran, Nedarim 20a). Later in this article I will mention another important difference between them.

##### (3) Kabbalos mitzvah, declaring that one will perform a good deed

Someone who declares: I will arise early and study this chapter or that mesechta has declared a great vow to the G-d of Israel (Nedarim 8a). Someone intending to perform an exemplary act who expresses these plans has now obligated himself, even though he did not use the terms "vow," "oath," or "pledge" (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 213:2).

Example:

Asking others to say certain chapters of Tehillim can create a stumbling block. One should be certain to specify that they are accepting bli neder.

##### (4) Kabbalos tzedakah, intending to donate charity

In the specific instance of contributing tzedakah funds, even deciding to give to tzedakah without verbalizing one's intention creates an obligation to donate tzedakah (Rama, Yoreh Deah 259:13; see also Choshen Mishpat 212:8; based on Shavuos 26b).

##### (5) Performing a stringency

Someone who is aware that performing a certain hiddur in halacha is not obligatory, and begins doing so, intending to observe it regularly, becomes required to continue the practice as a form of vow. It becomes a binding obligation, requiring hataras nedarim, annulling vows, even if the individual fulfilled the practice only one time, and even if he did not declare that he intends to continue the practice (Nedarim 15a; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 214:1).

Examples:

Someone who begins standing during keriyas haTorah, intending to continue the practice, becomes obligated to do so, unless he specified that he is doing so bli neder. He should perform hataras nedarim at the first opportunity, so as to avoid violating the prohibition of abrogating observance of a vow.

A woman began lighting a third Shabbos candle in her own home after her first child was born, and then did so the first time she visited her parents' house. This now became an obligation. She asked a shaylah what to do and was advised to make hataras nedarim on the practice of kindling a third light, and, certainly, when she is a guest in someone else's home.

##### (6) Three times

Someone who performs a stringent practice three times without saying bli neder must continue to fulfill the hiddur, even if he did not necessarily plan to always observe it (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 67:7).

Saying "bli neder"

Should I not observe hiddurim? I want to do these mitzvos, but I certainly do not want to be punished if I fail to continue performing them! How do I avoid becoming responsible?

To avoid creating this liability, someone expressing intent to perform a good deed should be careful to say that he/she is acting bli neder, without accepting it as a responsibility (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 67:4). Similarly, someone who begins practicing a halachic hiddur should say that he is not accepting it as a responsibility.

Example:

Hadassah decides that she will eat only glatt kosher meat or will use only cholov Yisroel products, both meritorious activities. She should state that she is doing it "bli neder." Similarly, when pledging money during Yizkor, while making a mishebeirach or making any other oral commitment to donate charity, one should be careful to say bli neder. When others are pledging to tzedakah and one feels pressured to participate, specify that the pledge is bli neder (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 257:4).

Saying "Bli neder" even for a non-mitzvah

Some authorities recommend saying bli neder on all one's activities, even those that do not fulfill a mitzvah, so that the habit helps prevent one from inadvertently creating nedarim (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 67:4).

Example:

Chavah tells her husband, "I am planning to go to exercise class this morning, bli neder." Although the statement that she plans to exercise does not create any obligation on her part, habituating herself to say bli neder is a good practice to develop.

We can now answer one of the questions asked above. "I have a friend who says bli neder on almost everything. Is this being too frum?" The answer is that your friend is being astutely cautious and following the advice of halachic authorities.

#### Don't delay in paying

In addition to the above-mentioned concerns involved in pledging tzedakah, the Gemara rules that the mitzvah of bal te'achar, not to delay the donation of a korban, applies also to tzedakah (Rosh Hashanah 6a). This means that someone who pledges money to a charitable cause is required to pay the pledge as soon as he can.

To quote the Rambam: Tzedakah is included in the laws of vows. Therefore, one who says "I am obligated to provide a sela coin to tzedakah" or "this sela shall go to tzedakah" must give it to poor people immediately. If he subsequently delays redeeming the pledge, he violates bal te'achar, since he could have given it immediately since there are poor people around. If there are no poor people, he should set aside the money until he finds poor people. However, if, at the time of his pledge, he specified

that he is not intending to redeem the pledge until he locates a poor person, he is not required to set aside the money (Hilchos Matanos Aniym 8:1). Someone who declares that he will give tzedakah to a certain poor person is not required to give the money, until he sees that person (Rama, Yoreh Deah 257:3). However, someone who pledged to contribute to deprived people, without qualifying which poor people he meant, is required to fulfill his pledge immediately (Mordechai, Bava Basra 491).

What is hataras nedarim?

Now that we realize that the obligations included in making vows is rather extensive, we want to find out, quickly, how to release ourselves from these vows.

Chazal derive from the Torah that there is a way one can be absolved from a vow, pledge or other such commitment, which is called hataras nedarim. Performing hataras nedarim does not in the slightest way diminish the reward that one receives for the good deeds one performed. It simply removes the continuing obligation to perform the vow from the individual who created it. Therefore, in the vast majority of circumstances, someone who made a neder should perform hataras nedarim, so that he does not violate the neder (see Nedarim 22a).

How does one perform hataras nedarim?

First, the person who made the vow or other commitment goes to three Jewish men who understand the logic of halacha and know the basics of how hataras nedarim operates (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 228:1 and commentaries). These three form a type of ad hoc beis din for the purpose of releasing vows. One of the three should be a talmid chacham proficient in the laws of hataras nedarim, including which vows one may not annul (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 228:14; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 67:8).

The nodeir, the person who made the vow, shares with the three (or, at least, the talmid chacham who is proficient in the laws of nedarim) the content of the vow, oath, or good practice from which he desires release and why he seeks relief. The talmid chacham will ask the nodeir several questions that must be answered truthfully. The talmid chacham thereby determines whether or not there are valid grounds to release the nodeir from the commitment (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 228:14). Only a talmid chacham who understands the very complicated laws of vows should undertake hataras nedarim, because there are many details that must be met for the hataras nedarim to be valid. (The details of what does and what does not constitute an adequate basis for hataras nedarim are beyond the scope of this article.)

Assuming that the talmid chacham feels that there are adequate grounds for hataras nedarim, the beis din declares the neder or other commitment annulled, by declaring mutar lach, mutar lach, mutar lach – the activities prohibited by the vow are now permitted. Of course, in the case of a vow to do something, the words mutar lach mean the reverse -- you are no longer obligated to carry out the vow.

Someone who violated his vow prior to performing hataras nedarim has indeed sinned, and is required to perform teshuvah for his or her infraction.

The difference between a neder and a shavua

There is a halachic difference between performing hataras nedarim to release someone from the obligation he created with a neder, and between performing hatarah after someone recited a shavua. Whereas in most instances one should arrange to release someone from a neder, one annuls a shavua only under extenuating circumstances (Rama, Yoreh Deah 203:3; Rambam end of Hilchos Shavuos). Explaining why this is so will need to wait for a future article.

May I appoint an agent to perform hataras nedarim for me?

No, one must ask directly to the beis din to release oneself from vows (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 228:16). If the members of the beis din do not understand the language that the nodeir speaks, they may use an interpreter to facilitate communication (Rama ad loc.).

There is one instance in which someone may make an agent to release nedarim. Sometimes, a husband may act as an agent for his wife to annul her nedarim. If a husband finds three people already gathered together -- for example, they were performing hataras nedarim for him or for someone else -- he may act as his wife's agent to ask them to release her from her neder at the same time, if she appointed him to do so on her behalf (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 234:56).

How does a woman perform hataras nedarim?

A woman who has a specific oath, vow, or practice from which she wishes release should arrange to perform hataras nedarim with a talmid chacham or beis din. As I mentioned above, if she is married, she may ask her husband to be her agent to perform hataras nedarim at a time when he is doing so for himself (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 234:56).

Hataras nedarim on erev Rosh Hashanah

At this point, we can address Yankel's question:

"When I attended a Gemara shiur on Nedarim, I got the impression that performing hataras nedarim requires having a talmid chacham deliberate over the specific neder, until he concludes that there are grounds to release the neder. This seems to have no relationship to what we do on Erev Rosh Hashanah."

Indeed, Yankel's question is extremely valid: hataras nedarim requires that one mention, specifically, the vow from which one seeks redress, and the beis din must deliberate whether this particular neder can be revoked. It is, therefore, unclear whether the generic hataras nedarim recited on Erev Rosh Hashanah, indeed, releases one from any commitments. The proper thing to do is to mention to an appropriate beis din every specific neder or practice that one wants annulled.

Mesiras modaah

The Gemara mentions that should one declare at the beginning of the year that all the vows one makes in the course of the year are invalid; this pronouncement has some value. This declaration is called a mesiras modaah. The Gemara concludes that this statement has only limited value, and one should not, intentionally, rely upon it. In point of fact, the standard hataras nedarim procedure performed on Erev Rosh Hashanah includes a mesiras modaah.

Kol Nidrei

The Rishonim dispute whether the purpose of Kol Nidrei that we recite at the beginning of our Yom Kippur service is also meant to be a form of hataras nedarim, performed at a time when virtually everyone is in shul to include the maximum number of people, or whether it is a mesiras modaah. It is for this reason that there are three different versions of the text: one that has kol nidrei refer to the past year's declarations, which means that it is hataras nedarim; one that refers to the coming year's declarations, which means that it is a mesiras modaah; and one that mentions both the past and the future years, which means that it is meant to accomplish both.

There is another interesting difference in halachic practice that results from this last dispute: Should the congregation recite Kol Nidrei together with the chazzan? If it is a mesiras modaah, then one must declare it oneself, and each individual should read the Kol Nidrei together with the chazzan. On the other hand, if it is a form of hataras nedarim, then it should be declared by the chazzan alone accompanied by the two honored men alongside him who hold the sifrei Torah, so that they form a beis din that is annulling everyone's nedarim. The Mishnah Berurah (619: 2) rules that we should consider it a mesiras modaah, and therefore concludes that each individual should recite Kol Nidrei softly along with the chazzan.

Conclusion

Now that we realize how serious our speech can be, we should reflect not only on the ideas of nedarim, but also on all the ramifications of our speech. As the pasuk (Mishlei 18:21) states, maves vechayim beyad lashon, Life and death are controlled by our tongues!

\*Obviously, this is not his real name, but a nickname.