

BS"D



To: parsha@parsha.net
From: cshulman@gmail.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON REEH - 5766

In our 11th cycle. To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to subscribe@parsha.net Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

This week's Internet Parsha Sheet is sponsored:

- 1) by the **Fiskus family** in memory of **R' Dovid ben Elimelech Zev z"l**, and
- 2) by Michael & Rachel Fiskus for a **Refuah Shleimah for Noach Mordechai Hacohen ben Kaila Chaya**.

To sponsor an issue (proceeds to Tzedaka) email cshulman@gmail.com

<http://www.anshe.org/parsha.htm#parsha> Parsha Page by **Fred Toczek** -
A Service of Anshe Emes Synagogue (Los Angeles)

REEH 5757

I. Summary

A. A blessing and a curse. Moshe told the Jews that they must choose between receiving Hashem's blessing for observing His commandments or suffering His curse for rejecting His laws. A ceremony would be held on the mountains of Gerizim and Eival immediately after entering Israel, during which the consequences of the blessing and curse would be pronounced.

B. Centralized Worship. Moshe set forth a number of religious, civil and social laws which were to regulate the Jews' life in Israel. He first dealt with the principle of centralized worship, which was directed against the idolatrous practice of individual worship at any site. Sacrifices were to be brought only to Hashem's chosen place, with those portions permitted to the lay worshiper to be eaten there. (However, an animal intended for ordinary consumption, rather than sacrifice, could be slaughtered and eaten anywhere provided its blood was not consumed.)

C. False Prophets/Idol Worship. The Israelites were warned not to imitate the Canaanites' rites, such as sacrificing living children to their gods. A false prophet who attempted to entice others to worship idols was to be put to death. All of the inhabitants of a city who, after having been investigated, were convicted of idol worship were to be put to death and the city was to be destroyed by fire. Self-infliction of wounds on the body or head as a sign of mourning is prohibited.

D. Kashrus. The Israelites were to refrain from eating anything abominable; Moshe therefore reviewed the Kashrus laws given at Mt. Sinai.

E. Ma'aser Sheini. A second Ma'aser (tithe) consisting of 10% of one's annual produce was to be brought by every Jew to the Sanctuary and consumed by him there. Any Jew who lived too far away from the Sanctuary to bring this tithe there could instead bring its monetary value with which he was to purchase food there and enjoy a festive meal with his family and the Levi'im. (The Ma'aser Sheni was taken after the Terumah [Kohen's portion] and Ma'aser Rishon [Levite's portion] had been removed. It was taken in the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th years of the Shemittah year; as noted above, during the 3rd and 6th years, this 10% was given to the poor

[a Ma'aser Oni] at home, rather than brought to the Sanctuary; during the 7th year, no tithe is taken.)

F. Shemittah Year. At the end of every Shemittah year (during which the land is to remain fallow), creditors are to release their fellow Jews from any loans which are due (this was, however, not to discourage loans to the poor, for such acts of kindness will be repaid by Hashem). A Hebrew slave who had been sold into bondage was to be freed at the beginning of the seventh year from the day he was sold and liberally assisted with means to enable him to make a fresh start on life; if, however, he chose to remain in his master's service, his ear was to be pierced as a sign that he selected slavery over freedom (contrary to Hashem's wishes).

G. The Festivals. In amplifying the laws of Pesach, Sukkot and Shavuot, Moshe emphasized that every Jew was to make a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary, bringing with him sacrifices, each according to his means.

II. Divrei Torah

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

A Blessing and a Curse. "Beyond I set before you a blessing and a curse." This verse is usually interpreted as "I [Hashem] put before you two things -- a blessing and a curse -- of which you must choose one". This translation emphasizes two distinct paths -- the path of good which leads to life and the path of evil which leads to the contrary. Horav M. Swift offers another interpretation: he renders blessing and curse as being one unit -- each blessing carries with the possibility that through misapplication it can be transformed into a curse. (For example, wealth may lead one to give charity and do other acts of lovingkindness or it may lead one to become more materialistic and self-centered.) The converse is also true with respect to a curse. HaRov Swift notes that this idea is expressed during the Rosh Chodesh (New Month) blessing, in which we ask for a "life in which the wishes of our heart will be fulfilled for the good". What is the meaning of the words "for the good"? Does anyone desire something that isn't for the good? Unfortunately, while things may seem to be good in our eyes, they may not be "viewed" by Hashem in the same light. Hashem knows what is truly good for us; we therefore entreat Him to grant us the good which only He knows is truly beneficial for us.

B. Kol Dodi on the Torah (**Rabbi David Feinstein**)

1. "Seeing" a blessing. "See! I place before you today a blessing and a curse". Why is the word "see" in the singular form when Moshe was speaking to the entire assembly (as evidenced by the use of the plural word for "you")? Also, why is the word "see" necessary at all? Each person has his own idea about what is a blessing or a curse. Some would say, for example, that mild illness is a curse, while others would view it as a blessing since it permits us to re-examine our lifestyle and make healthy changes before we suffer worse consequences. Others say the greatest blessing is children, whereas others say it is wealth, etc. When Moshe used the word "see", it meant that each individual would be given whatever he personally considered a blessing. However, sometimes the things we consider blessings (such as, as noted above, wealth) don't turn out to be good for us. Conversely, things that seem bad can turn out to be great blessing, such as when someone misses a travel connection and thereby avoids a fatal accident. Thus, Moshe used the word "see" -- not only will you be given blessings, but you will actually be able to see how they are blessings for you. (In this vein, someone once defined "Shana Tova Umescuah" [a "good and sweet year"] as a year so sweet that even a child understands that it is good.)

2. Rejoicing in the Festivals. "And you shall rejoice in your Festivals . . . and you shall be only joyous." Why does this verse, which refers to Sukkos, refer twice to rejoicing? The second reference is a promise that someone who rejoices during Sukkos will merit to be joyful all year long. Why does Sukkos have the power to spread its joyfulness during the entire year? On Sukkos, Hashem makes us leave our homes and their protection in order to

make us realize that everything in this world is transitory and that ultimately He protects us, not our material goods and fortresses.

<http://www.yu.edu/riets/torah/enayim/archives/issue1/articles1.htm#blau>

Vol. 13 No. 1

Shmor Veshamata

By Rabbi Yosef Blau

Each of the two words "shmor" and "veshamata" can assume a number of interpretations. "Shmor" can be translated as watch, observe, or keep, and "veshamata" as you will listen, hear, or accept. The combination of the two in Devarim 12:28 creates a particularly ambiguous phrase. The Talmud Bavli (Menachot 81b) applies this phrase to one who pledges a thanksgiving offering without the prescribed corresponding bread offering (see Vayikra 7:12). According to the Gemara, the term "shmor veshamata" obligates such a volunteer to bring the full sacrifice as defined by the Torah. Analogously, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Nazir 2:4) introduces this phrase as the reason that one who accepts the vow of a Nazir, but stipulates that he be permitted to violate one aspect of Nazirut, becomes an unconditional Nazir. One view in the Yerushalmi also uses this term to obligate in all restrictions of a Nazir one who formulates a vow of Nazirut in an inaccurate manner.

Apparently, the Talmudic understanding of "shmor veshamata" is that when fulfilling even a voluntary religious commitment, one must follow the Torah's precise formulation and may not shape the scope of his commitment in any way he desires. With this understanding we can interpret a cryptic comment of the Ramban on this Biblical verse. Looking at the latter part of the sentence, he notices that the pasuk does not mention the observance of laws or statutes, but rather stresses doing that which is "good and straight in the eyes of Hashem." The Ramban relates this to an earlier commandment (Devarim 6:18) to do that which is straight and good, the source for acting lifnim meshurat hadin and for peshara, legal compromise. What emerges is a delicate balance: on one hand, the Torah directs us to exceed the letter of the law and not hide behind legalisms; yet, at the same time, our sense of justice must be viewed through the prism of halacha. This, at first glance, is problematic. Either we are bound by the halacha even when the legal conclusion does not seem fair, or we should follow our sense of justice even against the strict application of the din. Nevertheless, the process of peshara is based on the assumption that the two can be balanced. When a rabbinical court decides a case on the basis of peshara, its judges must first determine the formal din, and only afterwards, guided by the codified halacha, may they introduce a practical compromise.

Strict adherence to technical legal requirements often falls short of the Torah's expectation that we ensure fair and ethical treatment of one another (see Ramban on Devarim 6:18 and Magid Mishneh on Yad Hachazaka, Hilchot Shechanim 14:5). Yet, in order that we maintain a proper sense of what is "good and straight," our concept of fairness must emerge from the halacha and not merely reflect our intuitive feelings. Last updated: 02/25/99 Comments: lehmann@ymail.yu.edu Disclaimer Webmaster Web Policy Copyright (c) 1999 Yeshiva University

From: Daf Yomi [dafyomi@yutorah.org] Sent: Friday, March 10, 2006 2:53 AM Subject: Daf Yomi for March 9-10 - Pesachim 51-52

By Rabbi Daniel Feldman - Lo Titgod'du [Reeh] Avoiding Conflict

The Talmud relates two prohibitions connected to the avoidance of disharmony: "Lo titgod'du (Devarim 14:1)" and the prohibition to deviate from the custom of the place one is in (minhag ha-makom) in the interest of avoiding "machloket" (Pesachim 51-52). While these comprise two distinct prohibitions (see, at length, Resp. Sridei Eish, II, Y.D. 11 in 5759 ed.), they share many overlapping themes.

The Talmud (Yevamot 14a) perceives a dual meaning in the phrase, lo titgod'du, ("you shall not cut yourselves [in anguish over a lost relative]") referring not only to physical cutting but condemning as well the creation of agudot agudot, separate and distinct groups within the community. (Whether the word "groups" is used precisely, or whether perhaps even one person with divergent practices presents a problem, is the subject of a question posed to R. Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld in Responsa Salmat Chaim 883. See also Turei Even, Megilah 2a, in Avnei Shoham (and note objection of R. Yehonatan Elishberg, printed in the journal Moriah, nos. 239/220:305); Resp. Tzofnat Paneach (Dvinsk 5700), Even HaEzer 61; and R. Shimon Gabel, Kli Golah to Yevamot. The possibility that the prohibition is directed only at those who instruct others in halachic practice is considered in R. Yisrael Yosef Bronstein, Avnei Gazit, p. 332-3.)

Whether this is to be taken as an actual interpretation of the text, or rather a rabbinically assigned allusion (asmachta), is a matter of some dispute. (On the former position, see Kessef Mishneh, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim 12:14; Responsa Me'il Tzedakah 49; Eishel Avraham (Pri Megadim) 493:6; Responsa Meishiv Davar 3:37:5; and Sdei Chemed, Klalim, Ma'arekhet Halamed, Klal 78; and Gur Aryeh to Devarim; on the latter, Sefer HaMitzvot L'HaRambam, prohibition 45; Mayim Chaim to Mishneh Torah; Sha'ar Yosef to Horayot 7b; R. Eliyahu Mizrahi to Devarim; and Torah Temimah to Devarim. On both, see Mitzvot HaShalom, pp. 129-131; She'erit Yosef 4:42; Avnei Gazit (p. 324-6). R. Moshe Feinstein, Responsa Iggerot Moshe, Orach Chaim, vol. 4, no. 34, assumes the prohibition is biblical.)

R. Tzvi Zeshersky, Minchat Tzvi 467, observes that there is a thematic connection between the two prohibitions derived from this verse, self-mutilation in mourning and communal fracture. The linkage is suggested by the beginning of the verse, "You are children to the Lord your God." The Jewish people realize that as children of God, all that occurs is ultimately for the best, thus, there is no reason to grieve in a drastic, inappropriate manner. So, too, the Father of the Jewish people would be anguished by unnecessary division among His children. The latter version of the prohibition is stated in relevance to halachic practice: "Abaye said... such as two rabbinical courts within one city, one ruling like Beit Shammai and one like Beit Hillel;... Rava said, like one rabbinical court in a city, half of the court ruling like Beit Shammai and half like Beit Hillel."

The rishonim present varying perspectives on the essence of this prohibition. Rashi, (Yevamot 14a, s.v. El Hatam) and many others, identify the problem as giving the appearance that the Jewish people are governed by two Torahs, that each group possesses its own body of halakhah not shared by the other. This is problematic for several reasons, one of which is that it presents an idolatrous image. Also, as R. Shmuel Landau (In his father's Resp. Noda B'Yehudah, II, Y.D. 29) observes, blatant divisions among Jews create a desecration of God's Name. The Rambam (Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim 12:14), however, seems to understand the motivation to be avoiding the conflicts that inevitably arise when separate groups are formed, at odds with each other. This is also the position of the Sefer HaChinnukh (Mitzvah 467). The Netziv (Resp. Meishiv Davar 1:17) observes that Rashi's understanding appears more consistent with the discussion in the Talmud, where this objection is raised in relation to the various dates established for the reading of Megillat Esther in different cities. Grounded in an inherent difference in the status of the cities, this variation is unlikely to evoke controversy; however, a case could be made that it does give the appearance of two Torahs.

The Ritva (13b, s.v. Vi'Akati) comments on the talmudic derivation in a manner amenable to both reasons. The interpretation is suggested by the beginning of the verse: "You are children to the Lord your God." All of Israel is children to one God, as opposed to that which may be indicated by multiple Torahs, or by a divided nation.

As the Netziv observes further, if the central concern is the appearance of two Torahs, then following the logic mentioned earlier,

divergences in matter of custom should not pose a problem, as it is accepted as a matter of course that different people have different customs (Note also the Netziv's comments in his *Ha'amek Davar* to Chumash.). However, if the fear is the risk of conflict, it is an unfortunate reality that issues of custom are not immune from this danger. (See Responsa Maharshdam, *Yoreh Deah* 356; R. Shlomo Wahrman, *She'erit Yosef* 4:42; and the journal *HaPardes*, vol. 7 no. 64:25-27; *Avodat Melekh*, to *Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim*; *Birkat Avraham*, *Pesachim*, p. 329; Responsa *Beit Av* 93; *Adnei Paz* 29; R. Yechezkel Sarna, in *Kovetz Nehorai L'Zekher Nishmat R. Meir Kotler*, p. 91-102; R. Yaakov Aharon Rothman, *Sefer Zikaron Beit Abba*, p. 255; *Be'er Avraham* pp. 104-106; R. Aharon Soloveichik, *Parach Mateh Aharon*, *Mada*, pp. 172-173; *Avnei Gazit* (p. 329-32); and R. Yosef Roth, *Siach Yosef* 22. For a wide-ranging discussion of this and all aspects of the prohibition, see R. Yaakov Zev Smith in the journal *HaMetivta* 5749:235-273.)

Accordingly, the Rambam and the *Sefer HaChinnukh*, mentioned previously as proponents of the latter rationale, do apply the prohibition to issues of custom, as does the *Smag* (Prohibition 62). The *Magen Avraham* (O.C. 493) also appears to agree with this position. The Netziv (*Meromei Sadeh*, *Yevamot* 14a) observes that despite the obligation to adhere to personal custom, derived from "Do not abandon the Torah of your mother," this prohibition overwhelms that imperative. This question bears great relevance to issues of communal prayer.

(Concerning prayer, see *Resp. HaRadbaz* 3:474 and 534; *Resp. Avkat Rokhel* 32; R. *Resp. U'Bacharta BaChaim* 24 and *Resp. HaElef Likha Shlomo* 45; *Resp. Meishiv Davar*; *Resp. Rivv'vot Ephraim* 2:44; *Resp. Avnei Yoshpe* 117; *Yashiv Moshe*, p. 10 (rulings of R. Yosef Shalom Eliashiv); *Resp. V'Darashta V'Chakarta* (vol. 1, *Orach Chaim*, 21); and R. Moshe Tzuriel, in the journal *Sha'alei Da'at* 7:101-106. In regards to wearing tefillin on Chol HaMoed, about which there are differing halakhic opinions, see *Shulchan Arukh*, O.C. 33:2 and *Rama*, *Eishel Avraham* (Buchatch) *ibid.*; *Resp. HaBach HaChadashot* 42, *Resp. Maharsham* 3:359; *Resp. HaAlshikh* 59; *Resp. Sha'arei Deah*, *Tinyana* 7; *Resp. Heishiv Moshe* 31; *Resp. Teshurat Shai* 486; *Resp. Beit Yitzchak*, *Yoreh Deah* 2:88; *Resp. Zikhron Yehudah* 115; *Resp. Beit Lechem Yehudah* 110; *Responsa Divrei Yissakhar* 4; *Sefer Ot Chaim V'Shalom* 31; *Resp. Menuchat Moshe* 90; *Artzot HaChaim* 31; *Magen Giborim* 31; *Resp. Chatan Sofer* 427; *Resp. Levushei Mordechai*, *Tinyana*, O.C. 423; *Resp. Hillel Omer*, O.C. 320; *Resp. D'var Shmuel* 322; *Resp. Da'at Sofer*, vol. 3, O.C. 2; *Resp. Shemesh Tzedakah* 90:15; *Resp. Ginzei Yosef* 32:2, *Ohr Avraham* 4; and *Resp. Iggerot Moshe*, O.C., vol. 4, no. 34 (see also no. 305:5, as well as his words in the memorial volume *Mevakshei Torah* for R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, vol. 2, pp. 461-5). Many of these forbid a situation in which, in one synagogue, some wear tefillin on Chol Hamoed and some do not; although some are lenient. R. Moshe Shternbuch (*Responsa Teshuvot V'Hanhagot* 2:31, and note also 2:80) tends toward leniency based on his suggestion that the responsibility of *lo titgod'du* is to bring the matter before a bet din for final decision; as no modern court is empowered to decisively rule on a question such as this, no prohibition pertains. For an interesting perspective on some of the basic positions see R. Ya'akov Davidson, *Hilkhot Derekh Eretz*, ch. 24. Note R. Chaim Leib of Krakow, *Chayyei Aryeh* 9, cited in *Sdei Chemed*, *Ma'arekhet Chol Hamoed*, #16, who does not apply the prohibition to issues of disputed halakhic ruling.

R. Yechezkel Yaakov Weinberg, in a lengthy responsum (*Resp. Sridei Eish*, *ibid.*) that includes a critique of the Netziv's position, concludes that while *lo titgod'du* is indeed limited to matters of actual law, there exists, as noted above, an additional prohibition, specifically addressed to customs, that prohibits differentiated behavior in situations of potential strife, thus mandating adherence to *minhag hamakom*. This prohibition is a formidable one that R. Weinberg gives much attention to.

Returning to *lo titgod'du*, some poskim have suggested that a distinction exists between long-standing, established customs and those more recent and less entrenched. Some authorities considered the variant customs of Ashkenazim and Sefardim to be so well-known and acknowledged as to be untouched by this prohibition. Those lenient on this point include R. Mordechai Benet, *Parashat Mordechai*, *Orach Chaim* 4, and *Em HaRo'im*, *Ma'arekhet Lamed*; see R. Moshe Halberstam, *Responsa Divrei Moshe* 35, and *Resp. Be'er Chaim Mordechai*, #4. (However, see also *Responsa Chatam Sofer* 6:1; *Pe'at HaShulchan*, *Hilkhot Eretz Yisrael* 3:32; R. Moshe Mintz, *Responsa Maharam Mintz* 15; and R. Moshe Shick, *Responsa Maharam Shick*, *Orach Chaim* 43. See, as well, R. Yitzchak Hershkowitz, *Responsa Divrei Ohr* 9.)

Along these lines, many rishonim suggest that a mitigating factor present in the multiple options for Megillah reading is the fact that no side believes the other is acting in an incorrect or prohibited manner, rather according to a prearranged and understood differentiation. It would appear that the primary concern is thus the fear of discord; if each side recognizes the other's right to act in a different manner, this consideration is nullified. This guideline is adopted by R. Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld in his *responsa* (*Salmat Chaim* 874-882.), as well as by others. Accordingly, R. Yehudah Leib Litwin (*Sha'arei Deah* 2:7, cited in R. Yitzchak Sternhill, *Kohvei Yitzchak* 3:7:2) and the *Arukh HaShulchan* (*Orach Chaim* 551:22) rule that for issues that are not halakhically indispensable, this prohibition is not a concern.

Similarly affected by this evaluation is a situation in which the entire population agrees to allow two modes of practice. The consensus would apparently obviate concerns of strife, but the appearance of two Torahs would still be a danger. The latter position is considered normative by some (see *Shulchan Arukh HaRav*, *Orach Chaim* 493:7, and *Resp. Zikhron Betzalel* 22), while others disagree.

Further, if the issue is disharmony, it may become less problematic if one or both of the parties is unaware of the divergency. So, too, if the variation is not obvious; thus, leniency is more easily conceivable for actions done in silence. (See *Resp. Meishiv Davar*; *Resp. Shoel U'Meishiv*, *Mahadurah Talitai* 1:247; *Yam Shel Shlomo*, *Yevamot* 3:10; *Resp. Avnei Nezer*, O. C. 29; and *Resp. Iggerot Moshe*, O.C. 2:94.) The *Resp. Me'il Tzedakah* (50), however, forbids multiple practices in the same area even when not simultaneous to each other, apparently, his concern is more with the appearance of two Torahs. A similar position is held by *Turei Even* to *Megilah* 19a (in *Avnei Shoham*).

Of course, as R. Moshe Halberstam (*Resp. Divrei Moshe* 35) observes, it is very possible that both proposed rationales for the prohibition are accepted as halakhah. If this is indeed the case, then the stringencies of both would be operative; effort must be taken to avoid any differentiation that risks either causing a conflict or giving the appearance of two Torahs (R. Halberstam uses this reasoning to reconcile a difficulty in the rulings of the *Rama*, O.C. 493:3).

R. Halberstam's son-in-law, R. Mattisyahu Deutsch, independently adopts a similar perspective in his response (*Resp. Netivot Adam*, 5), but suggests a distinction that affects the above mentioned discussion in reference to customs. Granted, adopting a dual stringency approach would forbid divergence in customs, as the risk of conflict is present, even if the "two Torahs" concern is not. However, in the case of long established customs that have become identified with a particular group, the entrenched nature of these customs will eliminate any basis for dispute. Thus, such divergence should be permitted, even within an enclosed area, as neither risk is present.

To support his point, R. Deutsch cites *Responsa Emek haTeshuvah* (#112), who posits that the prohibition of *lo titgod'du* is only binding on individuals who are empowered to act differently; in other words, are not bound by any preexisting and established practice. Such a distinction would thus exempt the situation discussed by R. Deutsch. (It should be noted,

hough, that this suggestion appears incompatible with the Netziv's words cited earlier.)

In any case, it appears that at least the Rambam, if not others, finds this prohibition to be the source for the Torah's opposition to conflict. R. Avraham Sherman (In the journal *Ohr HaMizrach*, nos. 130/131:272-280.) suggests that the Rambam prefers this as a source to the aforementioned possibilities because, as interpreted by the Talmud, it indicates that the prohibition is applicable even when the quarreling centers on matters of halakhah. R. Moshe Weinberger (In the journal *HaMetivta* 5756:181-185) proposes that inherent in this prohibition is an obligation to attempt, through dialogue, a consensus that will eliminate the need for any divisions.

The Daily Daf Email, by Rabbi Daniel Feldman, is a service of YUTORAH, the online source of the Torah of Yeshiva University. Get more daf yomi insights, and hear thousands of other shiurim, by visiting www.yutorah.org. To unsubscribe from this list, please click here.

<http://www.artscroll.com/Chapters/ptoh-002.html>

Parashas Re'eh from

Pirkei Torah Insights and discourses on the Chumash.

By Rabbi Mordechai Gifter

Parashas Re'eh

The blessing: that you hearken to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d... And the curse: if you do not hearken to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d...

When Moshe spoke about the berachah, he said, "that you hearken"; however, when he spoke about the curse, he said, "if you do not hearken". What was Moshe's intent in changing from "that" to "if"?

Rashi writes that the berachah will come in order "that you hearken to the commandments of Hashem." In other words, the purpose of the Torah's berachos is to further enable us to serve Hashem. Indeed, Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 9:1) writes: "We have been promised in the Torah that if we fulfill the mitzvos joyously and faithfully, and constantly exert ourselves over its [the Torah's] wisdom, then all those things that distract us from fulfilling the Torah – such as sickness, war, famine, and the like – will be removed from us. [We shall merit] all good things that strengthen and enable us to fulfill the Torah. We shall have adequate sustenance, peace, and considerable wealth – all so that we should not have to work for our physical needs, and thereby be free to learn Torah and perform mitzvos..." This concept, however, is not true of the kelalah, the curse, for the kelalah does not come in order to cause us to further sin, and therefore Moshe did not say "that you do not hearken."

Another explanation is that the entire creation is an act of chesed: Hashem desired to bestow chesed, and He therefore created the world as a means to do so. Ramchal (Mesillas Yesharim Chapter 1) explains that even though Hashem wishes to bestow only good, He has structured the creation in such a way that man must work to receive this good. The good is already in existence: it just lies waiting for man to perform the right deeds to gain access to it. Thus when we fulfill a mitzvah, we do not create the reward, but access the pre-existent good. Hence the Torah says: "The blessing: that you hearken to the commandments of Hashem," meaning that the blessing already exists, and we have only to "hearken to the commandments of Hashem" to attain it. This concept, however, does not apply to sin and its subsequent curse. Hashem does not desire to curse the sinner, and, therefore, the curse does not lie waiting for man to sin. Instead, the sin itself causes the kelalah, a situation which occurs only "if you do not hearken to the commandments of Hashem."

From: Halacha [halacha@yutorah.org] Sent: August 15, 2006 11:51 AM

Weekly Halacha Overview by

RABBI JOSH FLUG -

Recitation of Birkat HaMazon using a Cup of Wine

Last week's issue discussed the mitzvah of Birkat HaMazon and the differences between the biblical obligation and the rabbinic obligation. This week's issue will discuss the role of wine in Birkat HaMazon.

Is There a Requirement to Use Wine?

The Gemara, Pesachim 105b, and 117b, attempts to prove that one must recite Birkat HaMazon while holding a cup of wine. In one of the passages (105b), the proof is not countered and in the other the proof is countered. There are three opinions that emerge from the Rishonim based on the apparent discrepancy. First, Rashbam (cited in Tosafot, Pesachim 105b, s.v. Sh'ma Minah Beracha) is of the opinion that one must always recite Birkat HaMazon with a cup of wine, even if one is not reciting Birkat HaMazon with a zimun. Second, Tosafot note that common practice is that one only uses a cup of wine for Birkat HaMazon if there is a zimun. Third, Rambam, Hilchos Berachot 7:15, rules that there is no requirement to recite Birkat HaMazon using a cup of wine.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 182:1, cites all three opinions and does not rule conclusively on the matter. Mishna Berurah 182:4, notes that common practice is to follow the opinion of Rambam and forgo the requirement to recite Birkat HaMazon using a cup of wine. However, he adds that even Rambam agrees that it is preferable to use a cup of wine (see Hilchos Berachot 7:14). Nevertheless, Mishna Berurah notes that without a zimun, one can certainly recite Birkat HaMazon without a cup of wine. Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 182:1, also notes that common practice is to refrain from using a cup of wine for Birkat HaMazon. He adds that there are those who are meticulous to use a cup of wine for Birkat HaMazon on Shabbat and Yom Tov.

Perhaps a motivating factor in the practice to use a cup of wine on Shabbat and Yom Tov is the ability of the cup of wine after Birkat HaMazon to resolve a berachot related dilemma. According to Ramban, Milchamot HaShem, Pesachim 24a, s.v. U'Linyan, if one drinks wine before the meal (such as the wine for Kiddush), it is not covered by Birkat HaMazon and one is required to recite a separate beracha of "Al HaGefen" on the Kiddush wine. Mishna Berurah, Biur Halacha 274:4, s.v. Yayin, rules that although Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 174:4, states that one is not required to recite Al HaGefen on the Kiddush wine, one should try to show deference to the opinion of Ramban. However, Mishna Berurah concludes that there is no perfect solution to show deference to Ramban's opinion.

The practice of reciting Birkat HaMazon using a cup of wine on Shabbat and Yom Tov allows one to fulfill the opinion of Ramban. Ramban himself writes that if one drinks wine after Birkat HaMazon, the beracha of Al HaGefen recited on that wine will cover the wine from before the meal as well. By reciting Birkat HaMazon using a cup of wine, one can recite Al HaGefen and have in mind to cover the Kiddush wine as well.

Using a Cup of Wine at Seudah Shlishit

Rambam, Hilchos Shabbat 29:12, states that if one is eating a meal that continues until the conclusion of Shabbat, he may recite Birkat HaMazon using a cup of wine and then use that same cup of wine for Havdalah. Maggid Mishneh ad loc., adds that one should not use the same cup of wine for Birkat HaMazon and Havdalah unless one only has one cup of wine. Otherwise, one should use one cup for Birkat HaMazon and another for Havdalah. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 299:4, codifies Maggid Mishneh's ruling.

It is implicit from Shulchan Aruch's ruling that if one uses a separate cup of wine for Birkat HaMazon one should drink that cup of wine prior to Havdalah. Although one is not permitted to drink wine at this time, the cup of wine for Birkat HaMazon is considered part of the preceding meal and it is therefore permissible to drink the cup of wine. However, Magen Avraham 299:7, notes that the permissibility to drink the wine before

Havdalah only applies to those who are normally meticulous to use a cup of wine for Birkat HaMazon. Those who don't normally use a cup of wine for Birkat HaMazon should not drink the wine prior to reciting Havdalah. Mishna Berurah 299:14, codifies the ruling of Magen Avraham, but adds that one may drink the wine during the bein hashmashot period based on a combination of factors (see Sha'ar HaTziun 299:24). R. Yehoshua Y. Neuwirth, Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata 59:16, notes that even in a situation where one is not going to drink the wine of Birkat HaMazon, it should still be preferable to use two cups of wine. Nevertheless, he states that common practice is to use only one cup of wine. The cup used for Birkat HaMazon is used for Havdalah and then drunk.

The Role of the Wine at Sheva Berachot

Many are accustomed to witnessing a "ceremony" at the end of Sheva Berachot where different cups of wine are mixed together. As we shall see, this "ceremony" is not as complex as it seems. The starting point for this discussion is the Gemara, Pesachim 102b, which states that if one eats a meal late in the day on Friday afternoon, one should not recite Birkat HaMazon on the same cup that is used for Kiddush because of the principle of ain osin mitzvot chavilot chavilot (mitzvot should not be bundled together). Tosafot, ad loc., s.v. She'ain, note that for this reason, many people use two cups for the Sheva Berachot at the end of Birkat HaMazon. One cup is for Birkat HaMazon and one cup is for the Sheva Berachot. Tosafot then quote the opinion of Rabbeinu Meshulam who maintains that it is permissible to use the same cup for Birkat HaMazon and Sheva Berachot. It is not a violation of the principle of ain osin mitzvot chavilot chavilot because Birkat HaMazon and Sheva Berachot are inherently connected. Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer 62:9, rules in accordance with the opinion of Rabbeinu Meshulam. Rama, ad loc., notes that common practice is to use two cups for the Birkat HaMazon/Sheva Berachot proceedings.

Tosafot note that even if one assumes that two cups are necessary, it is sufficient to recite one Borei P'ri HaGafen on the cup used for Birkat HaMazon and those who are drinking from the Sheva Berachot cup can fulfill their beracha by listening. As such, all that is necessary is that the leader of Birkat HaMazon recites Borei P'ri HaGafen and then the bride and groom may drink from the cup used for Sheva Berachot. Nevertheless, R. Ya'akov Chaim Sofer, Kaf HaChaim 190:1, notes that the minhag in Yerushalayim is that the cups are mixed together after the recitation of Borei P'ri HaGafen (before anyone drinks) so that everyone who drinks can drink the wine of both cups. This minhag now seems to be ubiquitous.

Drinking the Wine from Sheva Berachot of Seudah Shlishit

Suppose there is a seudah shlishit meal in honor of a bride and groom and the Sheva Berachot do not take place until after Shabbat is over. Should the parties involved drink the wine before recitation of Havdalah and if so, should both cups be drunk or just one of them? There are three logical approaches to this issue. First, one can argue that it is prohibited to drink before Havdalah and therefore, neither cup should be drunk. Second, one can argue that the cup that is used for Birkat HaMazon should not be drunk as discussed previously. However, the cup for Sheva Berachot should be drunk by the bride and groom because wine is required for Sheva Berachot. Third, one can argue that both cups should be drunk. The Sheva Berachot cup should be drunk because there is a requirement to recite Sheva Berachot using a cup of wine. The cup for Birkat HaMazon should be drunk because wine is always used for Birkat HaMazon of a Sheva Berachot and it is tantamount to being obligatory. The first approach is taken by R. Yitzchak Z. Soloveitchik (cited in Mo'adim UZmanim 3:146). The second approach is taken by R. Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 4:69. The third approach is taken by R. Eliezer Waldenberg, Tzitz Eliezer 10:45.

The Weekly Halacha Overview, by Rabbi Josh Flug, is a service of YUTorah, the online source of the Torah of Yeshiva University. Get more

halacha shiurim and thousands of other shiurim, by visiting www.yutorah.org. To unsubscribe from this list, please click here.

From: owner-weeklydt@torahweb2.org on behalf of TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: Friday, August 11, 2006 [last week] To: weeklydt@torahweb2.org

Rabbi Yonason Sacks - Sheva d'Nechemta: The Haftoros of Consolation

Unlike the hatoros throughout the year which relate to the weekly parsha, the haftoros known as sheva d'nechemta reflect the character of this time of the year. The Gemara (Megillah 4a) explains, "Moshe tikein lohem l'Yisroel sheyehu sholaim v'dorshin b'inyano shel yom - Moshe enacted the practice of inquiring and elaborating on the theme of the day." The fact that the gemara applies this principle to Purim demonstrates that this institution is not limited to the yomim tovim, but extends to other significant periods of the year. Rav Soloveitchik suggests that it was this takonas Moshe which guided our sages to institute this special series of haftoros.

Although all seven of the haftoros are taken from sefer Yeshayahu, surprisingly their order does not follow the sequence of the navi. The haftorah of Parshas Shoftim for example, is found in perek 51, whereas the haftorah of Parshas Re'eh which is read a week earlier is taken from perek 54.

Tosafos (Megillah 31b s.v. Rosh Chodesh) explains "d'derech hanechamos l'hiyos holchos u'm'shubachos yoser" - the order of these haftoros reflect the unique progression of the quality of consolation. The Pesikta Rabbasi explains that although the first of the sheva d'nechemta assures Bnei Yisroel of true consolation, "nachamu nachamu ami - comfort, comfort, my people", it is not Hashem who consoles Bnei Yisroel directly, but rather the navi as an emissary of Hashem who promises consolation.

Then next hatorah which begins "vatomar Tzion azovani Hashem, v'Hashem shecheichani - and Tzion said Hashem has forsaken me, Hashem has forgotten me", underscores the refusal of Tzion to accept an indirect nechama. We yearn for Hakadosh Baruch Hu to console us directly. The haftorah of Parshas Re'eh reiterates this feeling of abandonment and despair - "aniyah so-ara lo nuchama - afflicted storm tossed, unconsolated one."

Ultimately, Hashem Himself consoles us. Hence the haftorah of Parshas Shoftim begins, "Anochi Anochi hu menachemchem - it is I, I am He who comforts you."

One of the many lessons of this medrash is the need for an avel to accept divrei nechama. Indeed, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik once wrote, "yavo'u divrei tanchumin ka'asher kein hu hamitzvah l'kabeil tanchumim - may words of consolation come, as it is a mitzvah to accept words of consolation", emphasizing the mitzvah incumbent upon the avel to accept the birchas aveilim.

In these extremely difficult and trying times, we yearn for the fulfillment of the majestic prophecy, "Anochi Anochi hu menachemchem."

Copyright © 2006 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved. Audio (MP3 and CD) - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/audio> Video - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/video> Divrei Torah - <http://www.torahweb.org/dvarTorahIndex.html> Shiurim of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l - <http://www.torahweb.org/ravSet.html> Palm Pilot TorahWeb Archive - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/palm> to unsubscribe, email "majordomo@torahweb2.org", with the following ONLY in the body of the email: unsubscribe weeklydt

From: owner-weeklydt@torahweb2.org on behalf of TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: August 17, 2006 10:00 AM To: weeklydt@torahweb2.org

Rabbi Yaakov Haber - True Prophecy, False Prophecy, Tests of Faith and Preserving Faith <http://www.torahweb.org/thisWeek.html>

Rabbi Yaakov Haber True Prophecy, False Prophecy, Tests of Faith and Preserving Faith

Dedicated to all of the 3,000 courageous Olim Chadashim who have recently moved to Eretz Yisrael under the auspices of Nefesh B'Nefesh including my father-in-law and mother-in-law Rabbi & Mrs. Yitzchak Handel shlita

I Among the many mitzvos and directives contained in Parshas Re'eh is a description of the navi sheker, the false prophet. After correctly predicting and producing a sign or miracle, the false prophet then demands that his listeners worship a foreign god. The Torah's response to such a person is swift and uncompromising: "You shall not listen to the words of that prophet ... And that prophet shall be put to death for he has spoken perversely about Hashem, your G-d, - who has taken you out of the land of Egypt and has redeemed you from the house of slavery - to cause you to go astray from the path Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you to follow and you shall eradicate the evil from your midst" (Re'eh 13:4,6).

A parallel section describing a true prophet appears in Parshas Shof'tim. There we are commanded "eilav tishma'oon" - "you shall listen to his commands" (18:15). From this passage Sifrei derives that even if a known true prophet (see Y'sodei HaTorah 9:3) commands you to violate one of the commandments of the Torah temporarily (hora'as sha'ah), such as Eliyahu HaNavi did at Har HaCarmel by offering korbanos outside of the Beis HaMikdash, you must obey. But how do we know who the true prophet is? To this the Torah responds: "That which the prophet says in the name of Hashem and it will not occur or transpire, that is the matter which was not spoken by Hashem, the prophet uttered it brazenly, do not fear him!" (Shof'tim 18:22). The simple reading of the text indicates that the prophet has to successfully predict the future to prove the truth of his prophecy. The previous text in Re'eh concerning the false prophet indicates that he performs a miracle. Of course, there he is not to be followed since he told his listeners to worship 'avodah zara, but the implication is that ordinarily performance of a miracle would be sufficient evidence of his prophecy. (See Ramban to Re'eh who explains that os (sign) refers to predicting the future and mofeis refers to a miracle. Hence, both are ordinarily acceptable validations of the prophet.) Moshe Rabbeinu, too, was told by Hashem to verify his prophetic status and his being sent by G-d to redeem the Jewish people through the means of miracles (Sh'mos 4:1-9). It would appear that the common denominator between the two is the ability to successfully predict the future as indicated in the text in Shof'tim. Performing a miracle only serves as a proof of prophecy when introduced by the prophet predicting that it would occur (see Ramban ibid). This two-step process: the prediction of the miracle and the performance of it is verified by a careful reading of Re'eh 13:1-2.

Rambam (Y'sodei HaTorah Chapter 8) presents a fundamental presentation as to why a prophet, even when producing the requisite proof of prophecy, must not be heeded with reference to any permanent change to Torah Law. The authentication of the revelation of Torah at Har Sinai was done via the entire Jewish nation rising for a moment in history to the level of prophecy and hearing G-d's voice. The content of this prophecy included a statement by G-d directing Moshe to climb the mountain and receive the Torah (see Yisro 19:9). Thus, the knowledge that Moshe was the appointed agent of prophetic reception of the Torah was a matter that was confirmed by each Jew present hearing this directly from G-d. If another prophet would arise with an alleged message from G-d concerning the changing of a part of the Torah and would verify his agency via predicting the future or performing a miracle, he cannot be followed. The degree of evidence confirming the original revelation - concerning which the Torah testifies that its commandments will not change (D'varim 29:28 and elsewhere) - which was based on individual knowledge is on a fundamentally different plane than the evidence produced by the false prophet, which is based on the performance of miracles. In a famous analogy, the Rambam compares this case to judges who know first-hand

the facts of a court case and then receive contradictory testimony from witnesses concerning the same case. Even though the Torah states that we should accept the testimony of two witnesses, this directive clearly does not apply when one has direct knowledge to the contrary. Similarly, although the Torah commands us to follow a prophet who produces the necessary evidence of his authenticity, this commandment clearly does not apply when one has personal knowledge that the prophet is lying such as where he attempts to change the Torah, concerning which the original, higher-level revelation included many statements that its commandments are binding forever. However, in light of the fact that no prophet may permanently override any commandment, the Rambam explains that concerning 'avoda zara which is singled out in our Parsha, the prophet may not even temporarily override Torah law. Here, though, Rambam does not give the logic for such a distinction even though it seems intuitive.

Rav Yosef Albo, in his Seifer Ikkarim (3:18), provides a fascinating approach to this very issue. The first two of the ten commandments were heard directly by K'lal Yisrael from Hashem and not through Moshe Rabbeinu as were the other commandments (Makkos 24a). (See Ikkarim who explains that this is the reason they are written in the first-person as opposed to the other eight of the 'Aseres HaDib'ros.) They consisted of a positive commandment of belief in the One and Only G-d and a negative commandment not to believe in or worship any other deities. Thus, knowledge of belief in One G-d alone and the prohibition to serve any false deity was based on direct, first-hand revelation. Knowledge of all of the other commandments, on the other hand, was based on first-hand knowledge that Moshe was chosen as the prophet and agent to teach them to B'nei Yisrael, not through direct individual prophecy. Therefore, even a temporary abrogation of the commandment against 'avoda zara, contradicting the individually received prophecy, would require direct revelation to every member of K'lal Yisrael which of course would never happen. For a temporary suspension of another commandment, merely establishing oneself as a navi muchzak, a tried and proven prophet, based on miracles or successful predictions is sufficient.

Interestingly, many new religions have been founded through exactly the route warned about in the Torah. A charismatic "miracle-worker" arose and stated that the previous divine laws or a portion of them had been abrogated and replaced. He then would proceed to "prove" his authenticity by performing miracles. The Torah clearly warns against exactly this phenomenon through the section dealing with the navi sheker. The core principle negating this supplanting of Torah is the nationwide revelation of Torah at Har Sinai. This is of course why this momentous event is such a fundamental part of Judaism - not just because through it we received the Divine Torah but because it established for all eternity a ready source of religious strength against all who would eventually try to convince the Jewish people of a change in the Divine plan (see Va'Etchanan 4:9-10 and Ramban Hashmatos l'Seifer HaMitzvot - Lo Ta'ase 2).

II

A final question addressed by the Torah remains. Why would Hashem allow a charlatan to possibly dupe his audience through the performance of sham "miracles"? To this, the Torah responds, "ki m'nase Hashem Elokeichem eschem loda'as hayishchem 'ohavim es Hashem Elokeichem b'chol l'avchem uv'chol nafsh'chem" - "for Hashem, your G-d, is testing you to see if you love Hashem, your G-d, with all of your heart and all of your soul." A fascinating conclusion emerges. Hashem expects of us and demands of us to remain loyal to Him and His Torah even when presented with enormous challenges to faith. A prophet ostensibly bringing with him the word of G-d performs miracles before our eyes and yet we are expected to remain loyal to the original word of Hashem! Apparently, the solid foundation of Ma'amad Har Sinai and its faithful transmission from father to son, from teacher to student is so powerful, so overwhelmingly convincing, that such faithfulness and loyalty becomes readily attainable

even to the average individual. Those who have fallen prey to such charlatans did not withstand this quite passable test.

Our individual lives and collective lives as a nation are constantly marked by moments of challenge to our faith in Hashem, His Torah, and our ultimate Destiny. Especially troubling to many is the question of "tzaddik v'ra lo, rasha v'tov lo" - the suffering of the righteous, and the prosperity of the wicked. Some are disturbed by how redemption and world peace can come about as promised by the prophets in a world filled with confusion, war, and a constant threat of terrorism. Although these are difficult challenges to overcome, here again, based on the overwhelming evidence of the Hashgacha Pratis, Divine Providence, of Hashem - "Who took you out of Egypt" and continues to guide history - assuring the preservation of Klal Yisrael and our heritage, the Torah, throughout our tumultuous history, we have a ready wellspring from which to draw spiritual fortitude to maintain our 'emuna and bitachon in HaKadosh Baruch Hu. In our own recent history, although so many of our people have suffered by the hands of our cruel enemies including during the most recent war in Lebanon, we should not ignore the fact that b'chasei Hashem alone, Klal Yisrael, M'dinas Yisrael and Toras Yisrael continue to exist and thrive. M'dinas Yisrael continues to be rejuvenated by new 'olim every year and continues to grow both spiritually and physically. Notwithstanding the fact that every Jewish life lost is an irretrievable loss, we should marvel at the Divine protection that caused relatively few civilian casualties after a barrage of almost 4,000 enemy missiles! Even during periods when Hashem's Attribute of Justice is stretched against His beloved people, we can observe how He remains constantly "meititz min hacharakim" - "peeking between the slats" - overseeing and protecting His nation. May we always merit strong faith and reliance on the Nosein HaTorah and the Eternal Protector of the Jewish people.

Copyright © 2006 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved. -- Audio (MP3 and CD) - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/audio> Video - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/video> Divrei Torah - <http://www.torahweb.org/dvarTorahIndex.html> Shiurim of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l - <http://www.torahweb.org/ravSet.html> Palm Pilot TorahWeb Archive - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/palm> to unsubscribe, email "majordomo@torahweb2.org", with the following ONLY in the body of the email: unsubscribe weeklydt

From: peninim-bounces@shemayisrael.com on behalf of Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: August 17, 2006 9:47 AM To: Peninim Parsha

Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum -
Parshas Re'eh

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26) Apparently, re'eh, see, is a reference to a certain level of comprehension. Sight, our most reliable and strongest sense, is a term used to describe a level of understanding. When a person is asked, "Do you see what I am saying?" the questioner really means, "Do you understand what I am saying?" In his book, "Forever His Students," Rabbi Boruch Leff cites Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl, who distinguishes between the senses of "hearing" and "seeing" and the level of comprehension to which each alludes.

We find the Torah employing both terms with regard to comprehension. The opening word of the pasuk which describes the stellar dialogue between man and the Almighty, "Shema Yisrael," "Hear O Yisrael," is the enjoinder to "hear." The tone for the entire relationship is "hear." This is, indeed, how a relationship begins and is sustained - by listening. One must want to hear. He must want to listen. On the other hand, if the purpose of the pasuk is to internalize the understanding that, "Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is "One," should it not have said, See O Yisrael"?

Rav Weinberg explains that shema, hear, implies that we are making a commitment which involves our intellect. To hear means to communicate; to listen is to interface with what one hears. Re'eh, see, is a term which applies to our emotions. To hear demands greater and more penetrating cognition. To see requires a stronger reaction to an idea or fact that one already understands.

The cognitive level of hearing entails a greater sense of understanding, because when we truly hear someone, we are able to communicate with him. It is a level of

communication in which every nuance and emotion in expressing oneself is a telling experience for the careful and astute listener. Sight is used to accumulate our emotions, so that they can better react to things that we already understand. Seeing is believing, because sight is a stronger sense. It has greater reliability and, once something is seen, it is undeniable. Thus, once someone "sees" something, he is more apt to believe in and commit to it than when he merely hears about it.

The opening pasuk in this parsha begins with re'eh, see. Based upon the subject matter of the request, "see" is a most appropriate term. Hashem is describing a ceremony that is about to take place. This ceremony, which involves blessings and curses, took place much later, after Klal Yisrael had crossed the Yarden into Eretz Yisrael. Why, then, does Hashem say "hayom," today? Indeed, the blessings and curses were not presented to them on that day.

While the actual ceremony did not take place "today," the announcement of its future advent was conveyed to them. This is an event that demands that one prepare properly for it, so that its impact be maximized. In order to ready themselves for this moment, the People had to be made aware "today," so that they could internalize and commit themselves emotionally in preparation for this event. Thus, the word "see" is used. See-prepare-commit, so that when the time comes you will learn what Hashem has to say.

With this idea in mind, I think we can now understand why some people refuse to listen, why they do not want to be bothered by what they hear. They prefer to live in a sort of twilight zone, in enchanted oblivion, because hearing might be too cumbersome and painful. Regrettably, there are many that refuse to be disturbed, who do not want their comfort level hampered in any way. They do not want to hear. Why is this?

It is because they have not "seen." They have not emotionally prepared themselves to listen. It is only when someone "feels" something for Yiddishkeit that he is willing to listen, to comprehend, to integrate what he hears into an observant lifestyle. One who is numb, who has not sensitized himself to listen, will not hear what is said.

Perhaps this is the lesson of the Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah 39:1, which describes how Avraham Avinu came to believe in Hashem. What made him take that first step? The Midrash cites the pasuk in Tehillim 45:11, "Listen, daughter and see, incline your ear." Avraham listened, a listening that led him to "incline his ear," to develop a penetrating cognitive appreciation of Hashem's existence and His constant guidance of this world. He "inclined his ear" - why? What prompted him to do this?

The pasuk says, "Listen, daughter, and see." It follows with, "Incline your ear." Avraham "listened" by "seeing." He saw a world filled with idolatry, immorality. He saw a world on fire! He saw a world of falsehood, people living a life filled with lies. He saw and understood that there must be more to life than what he had been seeing. This perception, this penetrating introspection, started him onto the road to belief in a Supreme Master Who guides the world. Once he "saw," he was able to internalize his observation and develop an emotional foundation for accepting what he would hear.

It is difficult to seek an understanding for what one does not feel in his heart. The Torah exhorts us to "see," to open our eyes and perceive the truth, to distinguish between what is bogus and what is genuine, so that we acknowledge the blessing that is a direct consequence of adhering to Hashem's commands. Hashem gave us our senses for a purpose: to use them to serve Him.

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26)

Sforno's commentary to this pasuk gives us a profound insight into the level of commitment that Hashem expects of us. He writes: "Look and perceive that your affairs (as a people) are not of an average nature, as is the case concerning other nations. For today I set before you a blessing and a curse: two extremes. The blessing implies success and good fortune beyond what is sufficient. Curse implies a state of deficiency, whereby attainments of bare necessities are out of reach. Both of these (blessing and curse) are before you to attain, according to your choice."

Klal Yisrael is faced with a pendulum that sways to extremes. It represents their future: one of extremes. Their fate is marked either by complete prosperity or total devastation. Our lot as Hashem's People is destined to be most uncommon, with no middle road. It is either blessing or curse. This is signified by the word re'eh, see - something new, something different. Moshe Rabbeinu cautions the nation that the choice that will catalyze these extremes is lifneichem, before you. They either choose blessings by observing Hashem's mitzvos, or they select curse by rejecting His mitzvos. It is that simple.

According to Sforno there can be no moderate stance for Klal Yisrael. The Torah brooks no compromise. Hashem demands total and unequivocal commitment. The consequences are equally extreme: absolute blessings or unmitigated curse. Our history has been characterized either by ceaseless blessing or by unbearable curse. Why? Should this be so? Why should our lot not mirror that of the other nations of the world, who live a more stable existence?

Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, suggests that indeed this question is not novel. It was first asked by Eisav when Yaakov Avinu sought to relieve him of the privileges of

the firstborn. Eisav said, "Behold, I am going to die (as a result of it), and so what is the birthright (worth) to me?" (Bereishis 25:32) Rashi explains that Eisav was concerned with the many warnings, punishments and death penalties associated with the position of the firstborn. Eisav felt that this esteemed position would be the cause of his premature demise. So, why should he bother?

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, derives a fundamental principle herein which illuminates our earlier query. The detriment of the loss corresponds to the greatness of the spiritual level. The more elevated and sublime the spiritual level, the greater is the void in its absence. An example is the Kohen, who is obligated to a greater level of Divine service than the common Jew. Consequently, he is subject to harsher punishment should he fail to carry out his mission.

So, the question glares at us: Is it worth it? Is it better to achieve the heights of spirituality with the incredible reward that it brings, or does the fear of reprisal and personal degradation that comes with failure outweigh the benefits? Should one eschew the benefits, so that he not suffer the penalties?

Rav Yeruchem posits that this question has been raised a number of times. When Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, they were overawed by the fantastic Revelation at the Giving of the Torah. They, thus, requested that Moshe convey the commandments to them, rather than their hearing them directly from Hashem. Why? Because the greater the clarity of truth experienced, the greater lies the responsibility incumbent upon the person. They feared their inability to live up to the overwhelming obligation of hearing the truth directly from Hashem. While their rejection of this opportunity disappointed Moshe, Hashem Himself assured him, saying, "They did well in what they spoke." (Devarim 5:25) Why did Hashem agree with their behavior? Were they not reacting in a manner similar to that of Eisav?

Rav Miller cites the Avnei Nezer, who distinguishes between two forms of fear. The first is fear of punishment, whereby man fears the suffering he will sustain if he does not accept his responsibilities and fulfill his task in the world. The second type of fear is one that stems from love. Man loves Hashem so much that he fears that something might interfere and cause a distance to come between them.

One whose service to Hashem is rooted in fear of punishment is counseled not to adopt extra obligations and practices. This individual, instead of having a sense of privilege and honor in being able to carry out even greater obligations and establish an even closer relationship with the Almighty, will instead constantly fret over the consequences of these added obligations. He will be so overwhelmed with the negative that he will be unable to enjoy and benefit from the positive.

When Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, they achieved an unparalleled spiritual plateau. Indeed, their entire spiritual persona became transformed. Their fear was not of punishment, but a trepidation borne of sublimity, of total holiness, to the point that they feared they could not endure such an unprecedented closeness to the Almighty. Their fear stemmed from love, from total devotion, from ultimate proximity to the Almighty.

Infinite blessings or torturous curse is the choice that is placed before Klal Yisrael. Mediocrity is not something that coincides with our spiritual DNA. We stood at Har Sinai and accepted the Torah through the medium of an experience that elevated us high above the rest of the world. This elevation makes us different, as it simultaneously brings with it greater responsibility which can also lead to our downfall. No one ever said that it was going to be easy.

Yet, there are those who prefer to live an unencumbered life, an existence oblivious to the beauty and richness of a pulsating Torah life, a life that accedes to being content with merely avoiding retribution. One who truly recognizes the inestimable value of Torah joyfully commits himself to it, regardless of the hardships that he may encounter along the way. The Eisavs who have refused to accept a life of spirituality are guided by their base nature and an attachment to materialism. Theirs is a life of fear. Regrettably, their fear is realistic, because that is the choice they have made for themselves.

There shall you bring everything that I command you ...and the choicest of your vow offerings that you will vow to Hashem. (12:11)

The Sifri says that the Torah is implying that when one chooses an animal for an offering, it should be a choice one. This is a new dimension in our avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. Although one may be virtuous, pious, very devoted to Hashem, he still must remember that whatever he offers, be it an animal or even himself or his time, he must give his all, the most that he has. All too often, we dedicate our efforts and talents to everything but avodas Hashem, relegating our service to a distant second place. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, shlita, notes that this was Kayin's sin. Both Kayin and Hevel sought to serve the Almighty, to find favor in His eyes. Hevel brought his choicest herd for a sacrifice. He gave Hashem his best. Kayin did not. He brought a sacrifice from the fruits of the land, which Rashi interprets to mean from the inferior portions of his crop.

Herein lies the difference between two people, two services, two offerings. Both served Hashem, but only one gave his best. Only one showed that he really cared. He

indicated his priorities. Hashem should be our priority, and the manner in which we serve Him should manifest our true commitment.

What happened to Kayin? Certainly he received the same educational experiences as Hevel did. Rav Zilberstein compares this to the two students who arrive together at yeshivah, both with a tremendous desire to study Torah and excel. They each have purchased new Gemaras, volumes of Talmud, they both have set up good chavrusos, study partners. Yet, one succeeds in excelling, while the other one just manages to keep his head above water. The reason: the one who excels never stops working, never refrains from fully exerting himself in every endeavor. The other one does exactly what he must - and no more. Every opportunity can become a wasted opportunity if one does not use it to its fullest potential. Kayin attempted to get by, but when he saw how far ahead of him Hevel was - he killed him. Instead of introspecting and realizing that he was at fault, he blamed Hevel for excelling.

When we compromise in our service to Hashem, our service becomes nothing more than a sterile, dispassionate experience, which will ultimately decrease in its feeling and frequency. This is especially true when we water down our service and commitment in order to favorably impress someone who has had very little to do with religious observance. Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, a legendary rosh yeshivah and rebbe of the previous generation, once had occasion to spend the summer at a camp which served young people from non-observant backgrounds. He was concerned that the camp directors spent too much time providing fun-filled activities for the campers. "Why must you provide them with so much fun?" he asked. "Why do you not get them to do something constructive like picking fruit? Why must it always be fun?"

When the camp was about to take their charges to a country fair, Rav Mendel questioned the necessity of such a trip. The camp director responded, "This is the only way to bring these children to Torah observance. If we do not give them this trip, we will lose them."

Rav Mendel replied, "So you will lose them."

It took some time before the camp director comprehended the depth of Rav Mendel's reply. On the one hand, the camp's message was: Torah study and mitzvah observance is supreme, but through its activities it was undermining its own primary message. They were, instead, indicating that fun and having a great time were to take precedence over Torah. Such a program would produce Jews who would pay lip service to Torah and mitzvos, while enthusiastically embracing any experience that promoted self-gratification. The Torah demands that our choicest offering be brought for Hashem - not for ourselves.

Hashem, your G-d, shall you follow and Him shall you fear; His commandments shall you observe and to His voice shall you hearken; Him shall you serve and to Him shall you cleave. (13:5)

We are enjoined to follow in Hashem's ways and to cleave to Him. Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, suggests that the focus must be on the "Him"/"Hashem" as the only One to follow. In other words, there is no room for any alliance or conglomeration of beliefs. One either believes in Hashem or he does not believe in Him. There is no option of including any other entity in this belief. It is only to Him that we seek to cleave. This is why the Rambam established the Thirteen Principles of our faith in which the first principle tells us that Hashem alone created and continues to guide and supervise the world. One who believes that Hashem is all of these, but does not accept the levado, that He is alone, is a kofer b'ikar, total apostate. He denies the very foundation of our faith.

The Brisker Rav, zl, related that his father, Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, said the following at a Rabbinic conference in St. Petersburg. "In Melachim I 18:4, it is recorded that Eliyahu HaNavi admonished the Jews who were following the Baal idol, 'How long will you dance between two opinions? If Hashem is the G-d, go after Him! And if the Baal, go after it!' What is Eliyahu saying? We can understand his encouraging the people to choose G-d and follow Him, but what is the meaning of, 'If the Baal, go after it!' Why? For what reason should they follow the Baal completely? Is it wrong for a believer in the Baal to share his god with another entity?"

Rav Chaim explained that it is not the Baal that would "mind," it is Yiddishkeit that has a problem with a believer in the Baal who decides he also wants to perform mitzvos! While it is true that a sinner is obligated to carry out the same mitzvos as any other Jew, this does not apply to an apostate. One who denies any of the Thirteen Principles of faith has no business doing mitzvos. One either believes in Hashem unequivocally or he does not believe in Him at all. There is no gray area with regard to emunah, belief in Hashem.

Sponsored by Etzmon & Abigail Rozen & Children in loving memory of their mother and bobbie Mrs. Faiga Rozen <> and In honor of the forthcoming marriage of our children Yaakov to Ana beshaa tova u'mutzlachas Etzmon and Abigail Rozen Peninim mailing list Peninim@shemayisrael.com <http://www.shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim>

From: rabiwein-owner@torah.org on behalf of **Rabbi Berel Wein** [rbwein@torah.org] Sent: August 17, 2006 12:07 PM To: rabiwein@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Wein - R'eih www.RabbiWein.com

Jerusalem Post 23 Av 5766 / 17 August 2006

TEHILLIM

PSALMS

<http://www.rabiwein.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2105>

Over the past month, all of the regular prayer sessions in our synagogue have been concluded with the recitation of three chapters of Tehillim – Psalms. The time honored Jewish custom has always been that at times of danger and duress, whether for an individual or for the Jewish people collectively, the recitation of Tehillim in order to ameliorate the situation is in order. The purpose, naturally, of this recitation of Tehillim, is to beseech G-d to intervene on behalf of the person endangered or the people of Israel when they are threatened.

The recitation of Tehillim was always seen as a major weapon of Israel in its struggle to survive in a very hostile world. Since G-d and His ways are inscrutable, we almost never have any accurate measure as to the effect that our recitation of Tehillim has in any one given situation. Jews nevertheless believe that the recitation of Tehillim in times of trouble is a necessary and effective means of reaching out to the Lord for help when apparently all else has failed to redress the situation.

However, the benefit of the recitation of Tehillim is not restricted to the improvement of the situation itself. It is also, and perhaps even primarily so, of benefit psychologically and spiritually to those that are reciting the Tehillim themselves. It gives the otherwise helpless bystander an opportunity to do something positive for the cause and to feel productive in the hour of need that one faces. One should never underestimate the need for such an outlet in times of stress and trouble.

Tehillim is not only comforting, it is prescient as well. In our synagogue, we recite the eighty-third psalm daily now. That psalm, written well over two millennia ago, details for us by name all of our current enemies. The Palestinians are mentioned, as are the dwellers of Tyre in Lebanon. Present day Syria also merits oblique reference in the psalm. Our ancient, seemingly indestructible, enemy Amalek is also included in this psalm. Amalek takes on different guises in the world and in Jewish history. In the story of Purim, Haman is portrayed as being a descendant of Amalek. That Amalek was a leader of Persia, the forerunner to present day Iran. Haman has worthy successors in the Iran of today.

Thus, the entire set of main characters in our current drama is described to us in the "playbill" of the eighty-third psalm. I find it to be oddly comforting that this psalm reads like current events and not like ancient history. It reinforces my belief as to the effectiveness and relevance of reciting Tehillim at a time such as this. It also buttresses my faith that just like the ancient enemies of Israel were defeated and relegated to the ash heap of history, so too will their current successors meet the same fate at the hands of the people and the G-d of Israel. Tehillim is most comforting in its sense of the reality of the situation and its optimism in seeing victory at the end of the day.

An old Jewish joke has a Jew running away in despair from a potentially disastrous occurrence shouting: "We can no longer rely on miracles. Therefore, let us now begin to recite Tehillim!" Jews see the recitation of Tehillim as a natural reaction to a troubled time and not necessarily as purely an appeal for miracles. No matter, how the situation unfolds there are appropriate psalms present in Tehillim to help us somehow cope with the events and trauma of the time. The rabbis of the Talmud elevated the recitation of Tehillim to the level of Torah study itself.

The recitation of Tehillim is a daily event for countless numbers of Jews the world over. The psalms of Tehillim are an important facet in the context of our daily prayer. Tehillim is recited at all occasions and at the life cycle events in Judaism's practice and ritual. Tehillim is joyous and song-filled; it

is also sober and realistic. It comes to comfort us in our hour of need and to console us in the midst of our sense of loss, pain and grief.

Tehillim is present with us under the wedding canopy and at the gravesite, in our homes and in our synagogue, in the hospital and in the doctor's waiting room. It is perhaps the most ubiquitous book in the Jewish library, for it accompanies us everywhere on our life's journey. In Temple times the words of Tehillim were the lyrics for the music of the Levites. In our times, the words of Tehillim are the balm for our souls and the comfort for our broken hearts.

Weekly Parsha 23 Av 5766 / 17 August 2006

R'EIH <http://rabiwein.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2106>

Seeing is believing and the first word in this week's parsha is r'eih – see. The Torah is evidently of the opinion that belief can be obtained by seeing life and events. There are things that are self-evident, and that by viewing those events one can make a correct and cogent choice between blessing and curses, between good and evil and between eternal life and mere human mortality.

The prophet Isaiah portrays the non-believers and doubters as being sightless people – blind to reality and history. Especially in our time when the ideologies of the past century that led so many millions astray and that also had a disastrous effect on the Jewish people as a whole have been proven worthless, it takes a particular form of sightlessness to continue to somehow believe in them. Even a cursory glance at Jewish history will reveal that the survival of the Jews as a people and as a force for civilization in the world is inextricably tied to its faith and observance of Torah values and lifestyle.

And if one only looks and correctly sees the situation of Israel and the Jews in the world today, one must be struck by the accuracy of the predictions for Israel as recorded in the book of Dvarim thirty-three hundred years ago. By seeing things clearly and correctly one can choose blessing and eternal life for one's self. And that is true for the totality of Israel and indeed for all of mankind as well.

At the conclusion of Moshe's life, the Torah informs us that he "saw" all of the Land of Israel and also foresaw all of the events that would befall the people of Israel there "even until the last day." It is interesting to note that the Lord saw fit, so to speak, to show him the future and let him see it with his own eyes rather than just tell or describe it to him. Seeing it impresses its reality to Moshe's human eyes. Moshe is the symbol of farsighted vision in Jewish history. Therefore, he is the greatest – the father, so to speak – of all prophets.

When Jeremiah is told of the coming destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, he is not informed of it by a declaration of God. Rather, the Lord, so to speak, asks him: "Jeremiah, what do you see?" It is by seeing the impending catastrophe with his own eyes that Jeremiah is able to give focus and passion to his message of warning to the people of Israel.

Seeing however requires more than good eyesight. It also implies an understanding of what is being seen, a backdrop to the actual item scene. And that is why the study of Torah, the understanding of the story of the Jewish people is so vital for our time and current circumstances. The Torah is essentially our spectacle to correct distorted vision and blind spots. It bids us to see clearly and correctly. We would be wise to don those spectacles and thereby choose blessing and eternal life for ourselves.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Take Advantage of a \$5.00 Gift Certificate at Rabbiwein.com Enter Code "TORGCERT" at Checkout. Not valid on sale items.

"WEIN" TO GO... MP3 DOWNLOADS NOW AVAILABLE AT RABBIWEIN.COM <http://rabiwein.com/catalog>

DON'T KNOW WHAT TO BUY??? CALL 800-499-WEIN to order your GIFT CERTIFICATES <http://www.jewishdestinystore.com/store/products.asp?dept=71>

Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> Project Genesis, Inc 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 Baltimore, MD 21208

From: ZeitlinShelley@aol.com Sent: August 17, 2006

The Elul Spirit

by Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss

It's hard to believe, but it's that time of the year again. The month of Elul. As we try to squeeze the last drops of juice from our vacations and prepare to return to the yearly grind, our minds already are filling with thoughts of school supply lists and new bus routes. As summer wanes, our thoughts start to focus on getting back into the yearly grind. Yet, to an observant Jew, the month or Elul means so much more. We are taught, "Hakol holeich achar hachasom – Everything is decided by the

conclusion." Thus, this month, the last month of the Jewish year, is the decisive one when it comes to determining how successful our year was. Just as one can correct an entire life in its last day, so too we can greatly improve the previous year in its final month. We are also taught that Moshe Rabbeinu went up Har Sinai to appeal for forgiveness over the sin of the Golden Calf on the first day of Elul and, after staying there for forty days and forty nights, he came down on Yom Kippur achieving atonement for Klal Yisroel. Moshe Rabbeinu thus injected into this time of year a powerful opportunity for one to repent and mend his ways. This is why this time of the year is known as the yimei rachamim v'selicha – days of mercy and forgiveness. In Chapter 138, the Chayei Adam tells us that it is incumbent upon a G-d fearing Jew to prepare at least thirty days before Rosh Hashanah to be ready for the Day of Judgment. Moreover, the Alter of Chelm further challenges us by relating that it is absurd to say the verses of Kingship, and to realistically accept Hashem as our King in the Rosh Hashanah davening, without ample preparation beforehand. He makes the scary statement that to say Malchios (Kingship) on Rosh Hashanah in an 'off the cuff' manner is even worse than saying vidui (confession) on Rosh Hashanah. (This is a practice from which we abstain since it would be wrong to confess openly during the moments when we are being judged.) So how do we prepare? Of course, the answer is to do teshuvah. But, what exactly is teshuvah. The meaning of this word is not as simple as it sounds. You see, teshuvah has two almost-contradictory meanings. This can be illustrated by the following two verses. In the verse, "Vayashov Avraham el na'arov," teshuvah means to return. In the verse, "Shuv meicharon apecha," teshuvah means to abandon or to forsake. The Rambam explains teshuvah in the latter sense, interpreting it as the pursuit of abandoning and forsaking our sins. However, both the Maharal of Prague and the Mabit explain it in the sense of return, understanding it to mean the attempt to return to Hashem. Let us focus on the Maharal's interpretation. Indeed, the job of returning to Hashem is the focus of the verse, "V'shavta el Hashem Elokecha – And you should return to Hashem your G-d." This is what is alluded to by the acronym which we so often associate with the word ELUL – Ani L'dodi V'dodi Li – I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me. It is our duty as we hear the shofar every morning in Elul to remember our great Patriarch Avraham, who was so attached to Hashem that he was ready even to give up his precious child for the love of his Creator. It is up to us to return our thoughts to Hashem during this critical month. We have a positive command – Es Hashem Elokecha tirah – to fear G-d. How, on a practical basis, do we fulfill this? Is it a precept to tremble at the thought of the Almighty-y? The Rishonim teach us that if we are tempted to speak some Loshon Hora, scream at our spouse, or gaze at improper things and we abstain because we realize that Hashem is watching us, this is the very essence of Es Hashem Elokecha Tirah. This is action that is consistent with the deeper focus of Elul – being more aware that Hashem is around. But Hashem is not only an inhibiting factor. He should also be our primary motivation for doing well. The posuk teaches us, "B'chol d'rachecha da'eihu – In all your ways you should acknowledge Him." Thus, when we are debating whether to get up early for selichos (or sleep another half-an-hour), or when we weigh whether we should travel an entire hour to visit a sick person (or browse the latest sports page), and we decide to do these mitzvahs because we want to please Hashem, this is an embodiment of the real meaning of Yiras Shamayim. In our Yomim Nora'im liturgy, we say, "Teshuvah, Tefilla, u'Tzedaka ma'avirin es ro'ah hazezirah – Repentance, Prayer and Charity abolish the evil decrees." Thus, we see that prayer is also a very important item on which to work at this time of year. Working on our davening is so consistent with the theme of returning to Hashem, for the great success of proper prayer lies in a correct realization that everything depends upon Hashem and that, when we are praying, we are really talking to Him, and believing with a certainty that davening can really help. So many people think that working on davening means to learn the meaning of the words and to concentrate on them. This, however, is not the first step. Rather, we must first learn to realize that when we pray, we are talking to G-d. Once we tailor our davening with this realization, everything else will just come naturally. Let us remember that, in direct proportion to how much we feel Ani l'dodi, I am to my beloved (Hashem), that is how much Dodi Li, my beloved will pay attention to me. So, let's make an effort to think, each of the countless times we pass mezuzahs everyday, just for a milli-second, that Hashem is in the room with us. Let us think "Thank you G-d" every time we say a blessing. And let us make it a firm practice to start off our day with a meaningful thank you in Mode Ani, and end our day with gracious gratitude as expressed in the brocha of Hamapil. As we pepper our day with constant acknowledgments of Hashem, we will then truly be ready, this Rosh Hashanah, to coronate Hashem as our King. In this merit, may Hashem show us, His loyal subjects, special favor, and bless us all with a year of good health, happiness and everything wonderful. To receive a weekly cassette tape or CD directly from Rabbi Weiss, please write to Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss, P.O. Box 140726, Staten Island, NY 10314 or contact him at RMMWSI@aol.com. Attend Rabbi Weiss's weekly shiur at the Landau Shul, Avenue L and East 9th in Flatbush, Tuesday nights at 9:30 p.m. Rabbi Weiss's Daf

Yomi shiurim can be heard LIVE on Kol Haloshon at (718) 906-6400. Write to KolHaloshon@gmail.com for details. (Sheldon Zeitlin transcribes Rabbi Weiss' articles. If you wish to receive Rabbi Weiss' articles by email, please send a note to ZeitlinShelley@aol.com.)

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - currently 5764]

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

Re'eh - Seeing and Hearing

TO APPRECIATE THE ORIGINALITY OF JUDAISM - I HAVE ARGUED MORE THAN ONCE IN THESE STUDIES - we must grasp one fundamental point. Unlike almost every other culture in ancient and modern times, Judaism is a religion of sound, not sight; of hearing rather than seeing; of the word as against the image.

The G-d encountered by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, by Moses in the burning bush, and by the Israelites as they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, came not as an appearance, a visible presence, but as a voice - commanding, promising, challenging, summoning. Listen to how insistent Moses is on this point:

Then G-d spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no image; there was only a voice . . . Be very careful, since you did not see any image on the day that G-d spoke to you out of the fire at Horeb. The G-d of Israel, G-d at the heart of reality, cannot be seen. Hence the severity of the prohibition against making images. Idolatry in the Torah is more than the absurdity of worshipping things we ourselves have made ("Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths but cannot speak; they have eyes but cannot see . . ."). It is the very idea that G-d is to be identified with anything visible. G-d is beyond what we can see - not simply because He is so much greater, vaster, than anything our eyes can encompass, but because He belongs to a different dimension of reality altogether.

Hence one of the key words of Devarim/Deuteronomy (which means "words") is Shema, "Hear" or "Listen":

Hear [shema] O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one. If you surely hear [shamao tishme'u] the commandments I give you this day, to love the Lord your G-d and serve him with all your heart and all your soul . . . Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all Israel saying: Pay attention and listen [u-shema], Israel . . . Listen O heavens and I will speak; earth, hear [ve-tishma] the words of my mouth. In one form or another, the verb shema appears no less than 92 times in the course of the book.

Our sedra, however, seems to represent a counter-example. Re'eh, its first word, means "See." On the face of it, Moses is making an appeal to the eye, not the ear. However, if we examine the role of sight in Judaism we discover something strange. Often, when the Torah seems to be using a verb or metaphor for sight it is actually referring to something not seen at all, but rather, heard.

One example can be found in the great opening of the book of Isaiah:

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah:

Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me . . . Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our G-d, you people of Gomorrah!" The initial verse speaks of a "vision" that Isaiah "saw." Yet it contains no visual imagery whatsoever. What Isaiah "sees" is a call, sounds, speech, a proclamation, not a sight or scene or symbol. Yet again, the key verbs are "hearing" and "listening."

More striking still is an episode in the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah:

The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?" "I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied. The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that My word is fulfilled." Jeremiah "sees" an almond tree. This really is a visual image. Yet immediately we discover that what is significant is not the appearance of the tree but the sound of its name. In Hebrew the word for almond tree, shaked, sounds like the verb meaning "to watch," shoked. The entire passage is a verbal pun. Jeremiah "sees" but G-d teaches him to listen. Indeed the text begins and ends with a reference to "word" - "The word of the Lord" and "My word is fulfilled."

Precisely the same thing occurs at the beginning of our sedra.

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse -- the blessing if you listen to [tishme'u] the commands of the LORD your G-d that I am giving you today; the curse if you do not listen [tishme'u] to the commands of the LORD your G-d and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not

known. The text seems to be about seeing. In fact, though, it is about listening to something heard, namely a blessing and a curse. The non sequitur is so marked that some English translations render the verb re'eh not as "see" but as "understand."

In one sense, however, Moses is referring to something visible, as the text goes on to make clear:

When the LORD your G-d has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses. Later in Devarim this ceremony is specified in greater detail:

When you have crossed the Jordan into the land the LORD your G-d is giving you, set up some large stones and coat them with plaster. Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over to enter the land the LORD your G-d is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the G-d of your fathers, promised you. And when you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I command you today, and coat them with plaster . . ." On the same day Moses commanded the people:

When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali. Both procedures - setting up the engraved stones, and the blessings and curses recited on the two mountains - are designed to give visual impact to an essentially auditory experience. Seeing, in Judaism, is ultimately about hearing. Israel is the people called on to reject images in favour of words; to discard appearances and follow, instead, the commanding voice.

No concept has proved more difficult to explain in modern times than the doctrine of Torah min hashamayim, "Torah from heaven." The reason is that it has not been understood in the depth it demands. It is not simply about (though it includes) the Divine authorship of the Pentateuch, nor is it merely (though it is also) a statement about its authority. First and foremost it is an answer to the ultimate human question: Where do we find G-d?

Judaism's answer is that G-d is found, first and foremost, not in the blinding light of the sun, nor in the majesty of mountains. He is not in the almost infinitely vast spaces of the universe, with its hundreds of billions of galaxies, each with hundreds of billions of stars. He is not even in the letters of the genetic code that give all life its structure and diversity. If this is where you seek G-d, says Judaism, you are looking in the wrong place. Indeed the mistake you are making consists in the very fact that you are looking at all.

G-d is to be found not by looking but by listening. He lives in words - the words He spoke to the patriarchs and matriarchs, prophets and priests; ultimately in the words of the Torah itself - the words though which we are to interpret all other words.

Why is G-d revealed in words? Because words are what makes us persons. Language makes homo sapiens unique. Because we have language, we can think. We can stand back, reflectively, from the data provided by our senses. We can ask questions. Human beings are the only species known to us in the universe capable of asking the question, Why?

Because we can speak as well as see, we can imagine a universe unlike the one we have seen every day until now. We can dream dreams, imagine alternatives, sketch utopias, formulate plans, construct intentions. Because of language - and only because of language - we are free and therefore morally responsible agents.

No doubt in some sense chimpanzees, flamingos, fruit bats and dolphins are free. They have nervous systems; they have eyes; they feel pain; they are capable of avoiding danger; within limits they know where to search for food. But they are not free in the sense in which human beings are free. We do not hold them to be responsible for their acts. We do not expect them to obey rules, nor do we hold them guilty when they kill. We do not judge them in courts of law.

The idea so popular among neo-Darwinians and socio-biologists that we are no more than "naked apes" is a fundamental error. To be sure, we share 98 per cent of our genes with the primates, but it is the other 2 per cent that counts. There are small differences that make all the difference - and it is language (the future tense, the question, the reflexive use of the words "I/me") that makes the difference. We are human because we can speak and can therefore be held accountable for keeping or failing to keep our word.

Language does more than allow us to make plans. It allows us to communicate. Words create and solve one problem in particular. They create the problem of loneliness (known in philosophy as solipsism). Animals are conscious, but only human beings are self-conscious. Animals may be alone; only human beings feel lonely ("It is not good for man to be alone"). That is because only human beings can articulate the difference between "I" and "you" and know the abyss that lies between us.

But language solves the problem it creates. Because we can speak, we can communicate. Only I can feel my pain. You cannot experience it nor can I experience yours. But we can speak, converse, convey what we feel to one another. We can ask for help; we can respond to other people's cry for help. We can share our hopes and

fears. We can form moral bonds by sharing promises. The bridge across the abyss between self and other is constructed out of language. Our loneliness is redeemed by words.

G-d reveals Himself in speech. That is the revolutionary doctrine known as Torah min hashamayim, "Torah from heaven." G-d is to be found in holiness, and the source, the template, the matrix of holiness is speech. All religions have holy places, holy objects, holy times, holy people. But in Judaism these are derivative not primary. Things are holy only because G-d has said so. Judaism is the religion of holy words.

Looking back on that long period of European history known as the Enlightenment, it is astonishing that serious thinkers could believe, yes, that G-d created the universe and endowed it with the form it has, but that is all (this is the view known as Deism: G-d created the world and then ceased to take any further part or interest in it). They found it possible to imagine G-d creating. They found it impossible to imagine G-d speaking. G-d, for them, was not personal. As with the Greeks, so with the Enlightenment philosophers: G-d was a force, a theoretical construct, the Being that brought being into being, the cause of causes, the metaphysical entity that gave rise to physical entities. G-d was an "It" not a "Thou." He could create but not communicate. He was the G-d of science but not of speech. It is this doctrine, essentially Hellenistic, to which Judaism is opposed.

Judaism is the single greatest statement in the history of civilization that personhood is at the heart of being - that it is not random, accidental, or peripheral that we are persons; that we can speak and listen; that we can communicate and be communicated with. Only human beings can grasp the concept of the holy, that which is defined in and through a relationship with G-d. Our relationship with G-d is personal, therefore verbal, a matter of speech. G-d as He is in Himself is beyond us; but G-d in relationship with humanity goes to the core of our humanity and is therefore expressed in words.

If you seek G-d, turn your attention to language - not to people, places or objects. The hidden presence of G-d is everywhere. But the revealed presence of G-d is in the words He gave to humanity on the basis of which He made a series of covenants, first with Noah, then with Abraham, then with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The Mosaic books constitute the covenant binding heaven and earth, G-d and mankind. Hence the philosophy of Israel - so different from that of ancient Greece, the European Enlightenment and contemporary science: To meet G-d is to listen to G-d.

The apparent counterexample of Re'eh, "See," turns out to be not a contradiction of this idea but a dramatic reiteration of it. "See, I am placing before you both a blessing and a curse." What the Israelites were asked to see was words.