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Rabbi Hershel Schachter Freedom of Choice

The opening section of Parshas Re'eh formulates the principle of bechira chofshis (freedom of will). Although the Rambam has not listed this among what he considered the thirteen principles of our faith (ikarei ha'emunah), he clearly considers it an ikar (Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 5:3). Perhaps he has subsumed it under the eleventh principle – reward and punishment – because if man had no freedom of will, he certainly would not be held accountable for anything he did (ibid 5:4). The navi Yirmiyahu (9:22) tells us that no one should be proud of his intelligence, his strength, or his wealth, since these are all determined before a baby is born (Talmud Nidda 16b), and don't necessarily indicate greatness of the individual. However, yiras shomayim is up to the individual and is not predetermined. Judaism absolutely rejects the position of some psychologists that all decisions that anyone will make throughout their lives are predetermined, as if all of our decisions and reactions conform to a computer program encoded within our minds. We were told by Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself that we were all created with the power of bechira – free will. This is the meaning of tzelem Elokim. Just as He created the entire world yesh me'ayin, so too he gave us the ability to make decisions yesh me'ayin. There are various considerations we keep in mind when making our decisions, all based on our psychological predisposition. But the final decision still remains up to us; our minds are not programmed in advance to make any specific decisions. All of our decisions are included within the statement of the rabbis (Berachos 33b) that all aspects of the human composition are predetermined (eye color, height, looks, etc.) except for yiras Shomayim. We are constantly bombarded by psychologists' theories that contradict this ikar of emunah, and we must realize that these theories are against a principle of our faith and are wrong.

It is interesting to note that when the Rambam formulated this most significant principle in Hilchos Teshuva (at the beginning of chapter 5) instead of referring to freedom of will as bechira chofshis, as it is commonly referred to, he calls it "reshus". In one of his drashas for aseres yemei teshuva, Rav Soloveitchk suggested that perhaps the Rambam meant to bring out the following idea: in modern Hebrew we refer to the elections as "bechiroth". At election time, we are presented with a fixed set of candidates (or parties) and we choose from among them. Man, however, not only has "bechira chofshis" to choose from among the various options which are presented to him, but he even has "reshus", i.e. the ability to choose a path

in life which was never even presented to him as an option. Therefore, even people brought up in a totally non-observant family and in an anti-Torah society also have the ability to choose – similar to yesh me'ayin – to be observant.

The Rambam writes (ibid.) that bechira chofshis is what distinguishes man from the rest of creation. Some people have the attitude that exercising their bechira to its maximum is the greatest demonstration of the uniqueness of man, so therefore the decision to sin and act against the Divine will constitutes the highest form of humanity. We sometimes enter an office and ask a secretary to take care of something for us. In order to show us "who is boss", the secretary will often give us a hard time. Similarly, people who serve in a supervisory capacity will sometimes refuse to grant requests to show us "who is boss". In both situations, control can equally be demonstrated in a positive and helpful way, i.e. by showing that it is within one's power to address the requester's needs, instead of a negative way. Unfortunately, many people have the flawed attitude that the stronger way to demonstrate one's power is by being negative.

The Talmud (Kiddushin 31a) tells us that one who does a mitzvah he is obligated to perform receives more reward than one who volunteers to do a mitzvah which is not required of him. Tosafos explains this based on a simple psychological principle, as follows: everyone likes to demonstrate his independence. As such, when one senses an obligation to do a mitzvah, a natural reaction is to refuse to comply to demonstrate his freedom and independence. Therefore it's more difficult (psychologically) for the one who is obligated to fulfill the mitzvah than it is for one who is not obligated, and the reward for mitzvos is given in accordance to how difficult it was to fulfill the mitzvos (Avos, end of chapter 5).

However, there is a positive way for an individual to demonstrate his freedom and independence with respect to mitzvos. Let him not simply follow the commands of Hashem, rather let him do "his own thing" by volunteering something which is above and beyond the call of duty – lifnim mishuras hadin. From the body of the mitzvos which Hashem has commanded us (i.e. from the letter of the law) we can deduce what is the spirit of the law. Having once understood the spirit of the law, we can then choose to voluntarily implement that spirit in a way that was never even presented to us in the letter of the law; we can thus demonstrate our uniqueness and our tzelem Elokim in this most positive, meaningful, and sensible way. Copyright © 2008 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

From: innernet-owner@innernet.org.il on behalf of Heritage House [innernet@gmail.com] Sent: Monday, June 05, 2006 10:40 AM To: innernet@innernet.org.il Subject: InnerNet - "The Millionaire Shochet" INNERNET MAGAZINE <http://innernet.org.il> June 2006

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"THE MILLIONAIRE SHOCHET"

by the Bostoner Rebbe

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In Judaism, the laws and requirements of animal slaughter are quite complex and becoming a certified shochet is quite difficult. First an applicant must study the staggering number of laws involved. Then he must practice under the guidance of experienced shochtim. Getting certification from a rabbi can take years. The slightest nick in the knife or tremor in the shochet's hands can render the animal unkosher, or result in exceedingly complicated legal issues. As in most areas of Jewish practice, shechitah is one area where good intentions, while laudable, just aren't enough. In fact, they can often do more harm than good. Doctors, lawyers and airplane pilots often say that the same applies to their expert professions...

Before slaughtering an animal for food, a shochet must first recite a blessing, thus reminding himself of the Ultimate Source of all life; and he must ensure that the animal is caused minimal pain or distress. After the shechitah of a bird, he must respectfully cover the blood, while reciting

another blessing. Compare that with the history of a non-kosher hamburger!

Back in the 1920s and '30s, shochtim were the very lowest rung on the American Jewish social ladder. Their work was exhausting and messy, their salary was minimal and their hours were impossible. Since there was no refrigeration, the trucks with the chickens often pulled into the slaughterhouse parking lot around midnight, and the poor shochet had to slaughter them all in time for delivery the next morning.

I remember Zundel Miller, who lived with us in Boston in the '30s. A chassid from Tiberias, Israel, he came to America and found a job as a shochet. For part of the day, he also served as my private tutor. Around 11 o'clock every Wednesday night, a fellow from the slaughterhouse would come by in his car and yell up the stairs, at the top of his lungs: "Shoche-e-et...!" You would think that it would have been the end of the world if Reb Zundel didn't jump out of bed and run down the stairs that split second. This was the unfortunate lot of many shochtim in those days.

* * *

This story, however, involves Reb Mendel, a chassid from Jerusalem, who came to America and worked as a shochet in New York. His job was particularly hard during the freezing winters, since the slaughterhouse where he worked was open and unheated. It did, however, have a small cubicle where one or two people could sit and warm themselves by a small stove. When the shochtim had to go out to work, they did so; but they hurried back as soon as they could to avoid frostbite.

One cold winter evening Reb Mendel dozed off while he was waiting in the cubicle for the truck to come in. When it finally arrived, the air was filled with his wake-up call: "Shoche-e-e-et...!" Up he jumped, and ran to his place. The boss and six or seven workers were already there and ready to start.

Reb Mendel quickly said the blessing and immediately started to shecht the chickens, one... two... three. Then he checked the knife to make sure that it was still perfectly sharp and free from nicks. As he was getting ready for the next batch of chickens, he happened to run his hand across his head and was stunned to discover that he was not wearing a yarmulke!

Apparently, while he was dozing in the cubicle, his yarmulke had fallen off his head. "Gevalt!" he thought to himself. "What did I do? I made a blessing without a yarmulke. I shechted without a yarmulke, and I didn't even know it!"

Now the hallmark of a professional shochet is that he has the exquisite sensitivity and focused attention that can detect the slightest jerk in the chicken's neck during shechitah. While not wearing a yarmulke might not invalidate the shechitah, the lack of proper sensitivity and an unnoticed jerk does -- the chicken is not kosher!

"If I couldn't feel whether I was wearing a yarmulke on or not, how could I tell if the chickens were doing anything or not?"

A lesser man might have hesitated, but Reb Mendel was a chassid through and through. He walked straight back to the cubicle, laid down his knife, and told his startled boss:

"I'm not shechting anymore."

"What! Why not?"

"If I can shecht without a yarmulke, I'm not a shochet anymore."

"Are you crazy?"

"No. I'm quitting."

"What will you do for a living?"

"I don't know, but I'm not going to be a shochet."

It was very hard to find work in those days, but eventually Reb Mendel found a low-paying job schlepping boxes in a dress shop. He worked very hard, his boss liked him, and he was eventually promoted to salesman and then to manager.

This went on until finally he became the boss of the dress shop. He bought a few more stores and continued to succeed until... he finally became a millionaire!

It's quite true. Reb Mendel, Jerusalem chassid and ex-shochet, became a multi-millionaire, all because he stuck to his guns religiously. Had he been willing to compromise just a little, he might still be dozing somewhere with one ear open for the inevitable battle cry:

"Shoche-e-e-et...!"

Excerpted with permission from "AND THE ANGELS LAUGHED."

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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 - 5766]

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

Re'eh

"You are children of the Lord your God. Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead, for you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be His treasured possession" (Deut. 14: 1-2).

These words have had a considerable history within Judaism. The first inspired the famous statement of Rabbi Akiva: "Beloved is man because he was created in the image [of God]. Beloved are Israel for they are called children of the All-present" (Avot 3: 14). The phrase, "Do not cut yourselves", was imaginatively applied by the sages to divisions within the community (Yevamot 14a). A single town should not have two or more religious courts giving different rulings.

The plain sense of these two verses, though, is about behaviour at a time of bereavement. We are commanded not to engage in excessive rituals of grief. To lose a close member of one's family is a shattering experience. It is as if something of ourselves had died too. Not to grieve is wrong, inhuman: Judaism does not command Stoic indifference in the face of death. But to give way to wild expressions of sorrow - lacerating one's flesh, tearing out one's hair - is also wrong. It is, the Torah suggests, not fitting to a holy people; it is the kind of behaviour associated with idolatrous cults. How so, and why so?

Elsewhere in Tanakh we are given a glimpse of the kind of behaviour the Torah has in mind. It occurs in the course of the encounter between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Elijah had challenged them to a test: Let us each make a sacrifice and see which of us can bring down fire from heaven. The Baal prophets accept the challenge:

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. (1 Kings 18:26-28)

This was, of course, not a mourning ritual, but it gives us a graphic sense of the rite of self-laceration. Emil Durkheim provides us with a description of mourning customs among the aborigines of Australia. When a death is

announced, men and women begin to run around wildly, howling and weeping, cutting themselves with knives and pointed sticks.

Despite the apparent frenzy, there is a precise set of rules governing this behaviour, depending on whether the mourner is a man or woman, and on his or her kinship relationship with the deceased. "Among the Warramunga, those who slashed their thighs were the maternal grandfather, maternal uncle and wife's brother of the deceased. Others are required to cut their whiskers and hair and then cover their scalps with pipe clay." Women lacerate their heads and then apply red-hot sticks to the wounds in order to aggravate them (Emil Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, translated by Karen Fields, Free Press, 1995, pp. 392-406).

(A similar ritual is performed by some Shia Muslims on Ashura, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the prophet's grandson, at Karbala. People flagellate themselves with chains or cut themselves with knives until the blood flows. Some Shia authorities strongly oppose this practice.)

The Torah sees such behaviour as incompatible with kedushah, holiness. What is particularly interesting is to note the two-stage process in which the law is set out. It appears first in Vayikra/Leviticus 21:

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: A priest may not defile himself for any of his people who die, except for a close relative . . . They may not shave their heads or shave the edges of their beards or cut their bodies. They must be holy to their G-d and must not profane the name of their God." (Lev. 21: 1-6)

There it applies specifically to cohanim, priests, on account of their holiness. In Deuteronomy the law is extended to all Israel (the difference between the two books lies in their original audiences: Leviticus is mainly a set of instructions to the priests, Deuteronomy is Moses' addresses to the whole people). The application to ordinary Israelites of laws of sanctity that apply to priests is part of the democratization of holiness that is central to the Torah idea of "a kingdom of priests".

The question remains, however: what has restraint in mourning to do with being "children of the Lord your God", a holy and chosen people?

[1] Ibn Ezra says that just as a father may cause a child pain for his or her long-term good, so G-d sometimes brings us pain - here, bereavement - which we must accept in trust without an excessive show of grief. [2] Ramban suggests that it is our belief in the immortality of the soul that is why we should not grieve overmuch. Even so, he adds, we are right to mourn within the parameters set by Jewish law since, even if death is only a parting, every parting is painful. [3] R. Ovadiah Sforno and Chizkuni say that because we are "children of G-d" we are never completely orphaned. We may lose our earthly parents but never our ultimate Father; hence there is a limit to grief. [4] Rabbenu Meyuchas suggests that royalty does not defile itself by undergoing disfiguring injuries (nivul). Thus Israel - children of the supreme King - may not do so either.

Whichever of these explanations speaks most strongly to us, the principle is clear. Here is how Maimonides sets out the law: "Whoever does not mourn the dead in the manner enjoined by the rabbis is cruel [achzari - perhaps a better translation would be, 'lacking in sensitivity']" (Hilkhos Avel 13: 12). At the same time, however, "One should not indulge in excessive grief over one's dead, for it is said, 'Weep not for the dead, nor bemoan him' [Jer. 22: 10], that is to say, weep not too much, for that is the way of the world, and he who frets over the way of the world is a fool" (ibid. 13: 11).

Halakhah, Jewish law, strives to create a balance between too much and too little grief. Hence the various stages of bereavement: aninut (the period between the death and burial), shiva (the week of mourning), sheloshim (thirty days in the case of other relatives) and shanah (a year in the case of parents). Judaism ordains a precisely calibrated sequence of grief, from the initial, numbing moment of loss itself, to the funeral and the return home, to the period of being comforted by friends and members of the community, to a more extended time during which one does not engage in activities associated with joy. The more we learn about the psychology of bereavement and the stages through which we must pass before loss is

healed, so the wisdom of Judaism's ancient laws and customs has become ever more clear.

As it is with individuals, so it is with the people as a whole. Jews have suffered more than most from persecution and tragedy. We have never forgotten these moments. We remember them on our fast days - especially on Tisha B'Av with its literature of lament, the kinot. Yet, with a power of recovery that at times has been almost miraculous, it has never allowed itself to be defeated by grief. One rabbinic passage (Tosefta Sotah 15: 10-15; see also Baba Batra 60b) epitomizes the dominant voice within Judaism:

After the Second Temple was destroyed, ascetics multiplied in Israel. They did not eat meat or drink wine . . . Rabbi Joshua told them: "Not to mourn at all is impossible, for it has been decreed. But to mourn too much is also impossible."

In this anti-traditional age, with its hostility to ritual and its preference for the public display of private emotion (what Philip Reiff, in the 1960s, called "the triumph of the therapeutic"), the idea that grief has its laws and limits sounds strange. Yet almost anyone who has had the misfortune to be bereaved can testify to the profound healing brought about by observance of the laws of avelut (mourning). Torah and tradition knew how to honour both the dead and the living, sustaining the delicate balance between grief and consolation, the loss of life that gives us pain, and the re-affirmation of life that gives us hope.

<http://www.anshe.org/parsha.htm#parsha>

Parsha Page

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

C. Growth Through Torah (**Rabbi Zelig Pliskin**)

1. Appreciate the joy inherent in Torah. "The blessing if you listen to the commandments of the Almighty". The Ohr Chaim writes that, aside any other blessing, listening to Hashem's Torah is itself a tremendous blessing and gives one the energy of life. When someone experiences the wonderful taste of Torah, he will feel as if he owes a debt of gratitude to the Giver of such present; rather than demanding a reward for what he does, he will realize that it is he who owes the Almighty.

2. No matter how far you away from Hashem, you can always come close if you make an effort. "After the Almighty your G-d shall you walk . . ." The Chofetz Chaim notes that the first word denotes a far distance; since this verse is telling us to follow Hashem, why doesn't the Torah use a word denoting closeness since we should be as close as possible to Him? This teaches us, says the Chofetz Chaim, that regardless of how far a person feels he is from Hashem, he should never give up hope. With all of his power, he should strive to get closer to Hashem. (Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once approached a wicked person who had done much wrong during his life and said "I am envious of you; if you will repent and return to Hashem with love and sincerity, all of your blemishes will be transformed into a great shining light. I envy the brilliance of that light.")

3. Give emotional support to those who need it. "If there be among you a needy man, one of your brethren within any of your gates in your land which the Almighty gave you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand against your needy brother." Ibn Ezra explains the underlined words to mean that you shall not refrain from speaking kind words to his heart. When a person is poor, he suffers more than just financial deprivation; he can easily suffer much emotional pain. Thus, we have an obligation to open our hearts to such person and to talk to him with compassion. Just giving money isn't enough. Once Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt'l and a student were rushing to an important meeting and were running quite late. A poor elderly Jew stopped them for a donation and then proceeded to tell Rav Feinstein about his problems. Rav Feinstein gave him a few dollars and stood listening to him as though he had all the time in the world. The student wondered if perhaps Rav Feinstein had concluded that they were too late

for the meeting. However, when the poor man finished, Rav Feinstein began to walk even more quickly than before. The student asked him "Why did you stand and listen? Couldn't you just have given him the money and moved on since we are in such a rush?" Rav Feinstein responded that listening to someone unburden his heart can be worth even more to the person than money.

D. The Chassidic Dimension (**the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, z'tl**)

The Month of Elul. In the Haftorah of Re'eh, wherein the Jews expressed their anguish at their tempestuous [spiritual] impoverishment that can find no solace merely from the words of the Prophets, for they desired to be united with and consoled by Hashem, Hashem acceded to their request and assured them that it is "I, and I alone, who will console you." Granting their request is G-d's response to the Jews' service -- an arousal from Above which follows an arousal from below. This explains why Eikev is always read during the month of Av, and Re'eh is always read on the Shabbos preceding Rosh Chodesh Elul or on Rosh Chodesh Elul itself. Av is the month during which G-d gave in to his Divine wrath, whereas Elul is the month during which G-d expresses his Divine mercy. During the former month, we feel mostly the doom, distance and concealment epitomized by Eikev, whereas during Elul (during which the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy are dominant) G-d is seen in all of His glory for "it is [He], and [He] alone, who consoles [us]."

E. Living Each Week (**Rabbi Abraham Twerski**)

1. No one is an island. "See! I set before you this day a blessing and a curse." The Hebrew in this verse mixes the singular and the plural -- i.e., the word "see" is singular, whereas the word "you" is plural. The Kli Yakar explains that each individual should feel a sense of responsibility for the multitude. The Talmud states that a person should always conceptualize the world as being composed of an equal number of righteous and sinful people, and should consider him/herself as having an equal number of mitzvos and sins. Since judgment is based upon the majority, if one's next act is a mitzvah, this will create a majority of mitzvos and if he/she acts righteously, this will create a majority of righteous people. Too often we view ourselves as islands, believing that whatever we do in our personal lives has no bearing on others. Moshe's message is that this is not so. What we do can either be a blessing or curse for the multitude.

2. To give is to receive. "You shall tithe all the produce of your fields." The Talmud interprets the words "you shall tithe" to mean "you may become wealthy," and according to this interpretation, the Torah promises material reward for tithing. One might think that giving charity is depleting his/her assets. Not so, says the Torah. Giving charity does not impoverish, but to the contrary, one receives more than he/she gives.

F. Reflections on the Sedra (**Rabbi Zalman Posner**)

1. Reward and punishment. Not too unreasonably many people expect that Heaven reward them immediately, or at least with all deliberate speed, for their good deeds. Why should anyone do good or forego illicit acts if not in anticipation of commensurate reward or in dread of punishment? "Behold I give you this day a blessing and a curse." Note that the blessing and curse are not defined here; reward and punishment are not apart from the good or evil people do. To paraphrase Pirkei Avos, "the reward of the mitzvah is the mitzvah, and the punishment for sin is sin." Man becomes a better person through good deeds and less worthy through bad deeds. The blessing of observing mitzvos lies in the observance proper, in man's striving and progressing toward a goal and ideal above himself. The curse of rejection of mitzvos is the debasement of man, his turning away from the path of righteousness.

2. A holy people. In this Parsha, Moshe cautions the Jewish people again about many observances commanded by Hashem, including the laws of Kashrus. Many popular explanations have emerged for Kashrus. A common explanation is that they are hygienic measures (and thus, some people assume, are now obsolete because of modern science and technology). In the Parsha, however, Moshe declares "for you are a holy

people upon the L-rd your G-d." Here there is no implication of health benefits. The Torah reason for Kashrus is clear, not a matter for guesswork. The Hebrew kodesh (holy) means dedication to a purpose. In all aspects of our lives -- not merely in synagogue or on holidays, but also in what we eat, say and in everything we do -- we must be dedicated to living a spiritual and "holy" life.

G. Divrei Torah (**National Council of Young Israel**)

The mitzvah of tzedakah (charity). In the latter portion of this Parsha we read of the mitzvah of tzedakah. Chazal tell us that nature calls for a world of haves and have-nots, as the pasuk says, "for the poor shall never cease out of the land." It is this very condition of inequity, perceived by humans as an imperfection in G-d's world, which creates the basis for the mitzvah of tzedakah. We ask, why did G-d create a cruel world where people must beg and scrounge for even the barest necessities of survival? G-d, in His infinite wisdom, gives mankind a hand in building and sustaining the world ("the world is built with kindness"). It is only through acts of kindness performed by humankind that the perceived imperfection is erased and the world becomes whole.

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INNERNET MAGAZINE August 2008

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"INSIGHTS INTO EDUCATION"

by Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg

* * *

Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg was an expert educator, whose Torah-based ideas were often at odds with contemporary society. Yet when implemented, his ideas proved to thousands of people the power and truth of the Torah approach to education. The following is best on a question-and-answer session with Rabbi Weinberg.

* * *

Question: Must a parent always be consistent with his reactions to his children's misbehavior?

Answer: Consistency is fundamental to raising healthy children. If you are not consistent, nothing you do is going to work. If today your child's behavior is met with disapproval but tomorrow it is not, then the child will know that your standards are meaningless; ingless; he will know they cannot be based on truth... If on one day it is serious and the next it is not, he will not get the right message.

On the other hand, if you are consistent, he will know that what you stand for is real. If he will get the same kind of reaction every time, he will know that he is going against truth. It matters less whether you go with rigidity or with softness than whether you are consistent or not.

This does not mean that you cannot warn him the first time and then punish him the second. Consistency does not mean that the reaction has to be the exact same each time, but that there is a pattern to your reaction by which he realizes that you are not wavering in your standards.

Another problem with inconsistency is that it confuses the child, and confusion cannot be absorbed. Even worse, when, in your inconsistency you react strongly, it can cause trauma and distance. Your whole relationship can be broken when your child doesn't know where he stands with you.

* * *

Question: What would you advise parents who find themselves constantly arguing with their children?

Answer: My general advice is never get into an argument with a child. Arguments with children are absolutely a waste of time and energy, and they also destroy relationships.

First of all, every time you argue with a child, you establish that unless you are able to convince him, he does not have to respond to your request. And he will require you to show him why you are correct, every time, and your statement that "this is right" will not mean anything anymore.

Besides, it's hard enough to persuade an adult -- do you really think you are ever going to win an argument with a child? In all likelihood, the argument will end when either the child gets his way, or the parents bribe him to follow theirs.

Therefore, at the time you make your request, do not justify yourself to your child. Do not explain to him why you are right. Save the explanations and insights for another time -- they are not to be shared at that point.

If you argue with your child, then I can guarantee that, unless by some strange coincidence you want him to do exactly what he wants to do, he will always argue. But if he knows that there are no arguments, no explanations, and no persuasion -- that this is just the way it is -- he will be far less likely to argue.

It is true that today it is not so easy to impose requests on a teenager and that you may have to get into a discussion. It's unhealthy for both sides, but sometimes you have no choice because they are not used to just listening anymore. But with a young child, you cannot discuss. He has to know that "this is what I said, and that is how it is."

So, for example, if you tell your child, "Put on your coat because it is cold outside," what do you think he will say? "It's not cold. I can stay warm." "No, go out and you will see that you will be cold." And he will go outside, in subfreezing weather, and say to you through his shivers, "See, I told you it is warm outside!" Is that not right? Do you think he is going to admit that he is cold? An adult might admit (once in four or five times!), but do you think a child would? Will he not grit his teeth and suffer and say that he is warm? And you will have lost the argument.

Instead, you insist he cannot go out without a coat. You simply say, "Put on a coat." And if he does not want to put it on, you insist that he stay home. If he runs outside, you pick him up, bring him in, and put him in his room. But you do not argue; you do not discuss it.

When I say that you should not explain yourself to your child, you must still make sure that you are not acting arbitrarily; you must only act when it is justified. The child cannot distinguish whether you are justified or arbitrary, so he has to accept what he thinks is your arbitrariness. But you yourself have to know the reason why you are doing things.

* * *

Question: What about making learning fun?

Answer: Teaching [children] using the Sesame Street-style destroys them, because Judaism says that unless you teach them right at the beginning to work hard, you will lose them. If you give them the impression that learning has to be fun, they will stop learning as soon as it is no longer fun. And you cannot make it all enjoyable...

When I heard about Sesame Street, I held very strongly that it destroys all possibilities of education. To make learning fun ensures that the children will not learn. I agree that there is a certain degree of fun in learning, but there comes a point when learning takes work, and if you are not ready to work, you are not going to learn. If you train children that learning has to be fun, then when you start making them work, they will ask, "What's happening here?"...

You can bribe a child who learns with fun, but do not bribe him with "fun learning." Of course, learning has to be exciting -- but as a result of its content, not because you have a big bird teaching it so that they are interested in the bird who is then able to slip in a letter A.

If he starts off being educated that learning has to be fun, then you are going to be imposing on him when you tell him to learn when it is not fun... You are not going to make solving a math problem or doing a chemical

formula fun either. It is intensive and mind-breaking, and you have to work at it.

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TORAH WEEKLY - For the week ending 30 August 2008 / 29 Av 5768 - from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu

Parshat Re'eh by **Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair** - www.seasonsofthemoon.com <http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/3631>

OVERVIEW

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from Hashem. When the nation enters Eretz Yisrael they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. Hashem will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there; not to a private altar. Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in Eretz Yisrael meat may be shechted anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of food that may only be eaten in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added or subtracted from it. If a "prophet" tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot. Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. Bnei Yisrael are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted -- Hashem will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee year. The Parsha ends with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

INSIGHTS

Look At Me!

"See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse...." (11:26)

When you hear a Rabbi exhorting his flock to lead more spiritual lives and spurn the "flesh-pots," you might think: "What does he know about flesh-pots! Maybe if he had a Rolls Royce, he wouldn't be so quick to reject materialism!"

If anyone knew the fleshpots, it was Moshe. Moshe grew up with an Egyptian 'gold spoon' in his mouth. Moshe was one of the richest men in the world; a prince of Egypt. He knew what materialism was. He knew what luxury was.

On the other hand, he didn't encourage the Jewish People to embrace the spiritual path just because he hated materialism. Moshe knew better than any man that ever lived what the spiritual world has to offer. He had been

up to heaven three times, a total of 120 days — 4 months amongst the angels! Moshe knew both sides of the coin as no one before or since.

In Hebrew you can read the first lines of this week's parsha two ways. "Look, I am placing before you..." or "Look at me — I am placing before you the blessing and the curse". In other words, Moshe when was saying "When you come to make your life-decisions, when you choose your path — Look at me! I've been in both places, and I can tell you. Choose the spiritual path!"

- Source: Kli Yakar

Knife Edge

"See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse..." (11:26)

Our Sages teach us that a person should constantly imagine that the whole world is in a state of precise balance — half meritorious and half culpable. He should consider that if he does just one mitzvah he will tip the world's scales of judgment to the side of credit, but if he does one aveirah (transgression) he will tip the scales to the negative side (Kiddushin 40).

Consequently, the Torah tells each individual here "See!" Every single action that you do "I am putting in front of you a blessing and a curse" that you have the power to tip the scales in either direction.

- Source: Toras Moshe

Rags and Riches

"See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse..." (11:26)

Wealth and poverty do not always have the same effect on a person.

There are those whose wealth influences them for the good and through the blessing of their wealth they come to a greater appreciation of G-d. However, had they been poor they would have been so occupied trying to find food that they would have forgotten their Creator. This was the case in Egypt where the Bnei Yisrael were so exhausted by the hard labor that they didn't listen to Moshe.

On the other hand, there are those whom wealth removes from the path of righteousness as we see so often in our history that the Jewish people become successful and self-satisfied and forget Who gave them what they have. However, when a person is poor and "broken," G-d never ignores his supplications.

That's what the verse is saying here: "See — I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse" — and don't think that the blessing is wealth and the curse is poverty; rather everything depends on how a person deals with his riches or poverty. And whether he be rich or poor, if he turns his focus to the Torah and mitzvot, then, whatever his status is in life, he receives the blessing.

- Source: Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in L'Torah U'Moadim

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PARSHAS RE'EH

If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream, and he will produce to you a sign or a wonder. (13:2) The Torah addresses us concerning the navi sheker, false prophet. Although the Torah refers to him as a prophet, he certainly is not one. As the Ramban explains, this is a term by which he refers to himself. He is a prophet in his own mind. The cholem chalom, the individual who presents a dream— through which he

seeks to incite the people against Hashem— is no different. Anything that serves as a vehicle for turning Jews away from the Almighty is absolutely false. Dreams do, however, have validity. We will see certain episodes whose halachic implications are based upon the support rendered by a dream.

In his Zos HaTorah, Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita cites the following incidents in which a dream played a crucial role. Horav Meir Simcha HaKohen, zl, m'Dvinsk, author of the Ohr Sameach and Meshech Chochmah, writes in his commentary to Parashas Kedoshim, Vayikra 19:9, "This (explanation) is from a dream." This is what gedolei Yisrael dreamed about: a question on Tosfos; a difficulty in the Yerushalmi; understanding a Rambam. Their lives were bound up in the Torah; their entire subconscious minds were suffused in Torah. Is it any wonder that when they "slept" their thoughts gravitated to what was important in their lives? Furthermore, their dreams served as a medium of communication with the Eternal World of Truth.

Horav Nachum Baruch Ginzberg, zl, author of the Mekor Baruch, writes in the preface to his magnum opus that once, upon visiting the Ohr Sameach, he encountered him extremely filled with joy. Since the Ohr Sameach was an individual who was usually serious, this display of joy was idiosyncratic. Noticing the look of surprise on Rav Nachum's face, the Ohr Sameach said, "I was just inspired with an insightful chidush, novel explanation, and shortly thereafter I dozed off. When I slept I noticed in the Heavenly Yeshivah that a group of the greatest Torah leaders of the past generations were sitting deep in discussion. They pointed out that, regrettably, in the contemporary physical world, no one is able to explain the Talmud in accordance with the truth of the matter. Current explanations lack accuracy. Suddenly, the Rashba arose and countered, "In Dvinsk, there is a rav who has been able to zero in on the truth even better than I." This is a reference to the statement made by the Rashba in one of his Responsa in which he is compelled to correct the text of the Talmud, because it otherwise does not make sense. The Ohr Sameach, however, had explained it perfectly!

The Techeles Mordechai, Horav Shalom Mordechai Schwadron, zl, fell asleep on Rosh Hashana night and dreamed that he had been awakened from his sleep by someone who asked him, "Do you want to see the Sifrei Chaim and Sifrei Meisim, the Books of Life and Death?" When he replied in the affirmative, he was told that he would be allowed to look for one minute. He saw the names of a number of Jews with whom he was acquainted that had not been entered in the Book of Life. He later remarked that, unfortunately, what he had seen in his dream had become reality.

Another time, he related that he dreamed on Shabbos night that the Heavenly Tribunal was judging a certain bachur, young man, a student in his yeshivah, concerning chillul Shabbos, desecrating the Shabbos. At first, this seemed ludicrous— until after Shabbos, the young man approached him that he needed advice concerning the process of teshuvah, penance and repentance. Apparently, he had been smoking his pipe while he was learning on Erev Shabbos, and he had not noticed that it was past shekiah, sunset. He immediately accepted upon himself his rebbe's advice for repentance.

Horav Moshe, zl, m'Kutzi, author of the S'MAG, an acronym for Sefer Mitzvos Gadol, writes in his preface that he was instructed in a dream to "make a Sefer Torah of two parts." Staring at the vision, he "understood" that it was expected of him to author a compendium of mitzvos: Aseih, positive commandments, and Lo Saaseh, prohibitive commandments, which he did. Furthermore, when he failed to include one Lo Saaseh, he once again was corrected in a vision with the words, "Guard yourself, lest you forget Hashem, your G-d." He had never before experienced this as a prohibitive commandment.

In the sefer, Ohr Zarua, Horav Yitzchak, zl, m'Vienna, writes that he was unsure if the name of the Tanna Rabbi Akiva should end with an alef or a hay. In a dream, he "saw" the pasuk, Ohr zarua la'tzadik u'yishrei lev simchah, "Light is sown for the righteous, and for the upright of heart,

gladness" (Tehillim 97:11). The last letters of the words of this pasuk spell out the name Akiva - with a hay. This prompted him to entitle his major work Ohr Zarua.

A number of such incidents have been recorded by Rishonim in their commentary or responsa. In fact, Horav Yaakov of the Baalei Tosfos authored an entire sefer entitled Sheilos U'Teshuvos Min HaShomayim, a compendium of eighty-nine questions, which he asked Heaven, receiving answers for all but one: When would Moshiach arrive?

The Chasam Sofer writes in his Derashos: "Surely, there are instances in which the righteous are foretold concerning events that will occur that can have a negative effect on Klal Yisrael. Hashem does this so that the righteous will prepare, remaining firm and resolute in order to prevent the decree from occurring." He adds that a number of times he had dreams that served as such a portent.

The Seder HaDoros writes that the mother of Rav Yechiel, father of the Rosh, was a young widow with three young sons. One Friday night, she dreamed that a woman came to her, instructing her to immediately leave the city. She woke up with a shudder, but soon went back to sleep. The dream repeated itself, as the woman appeared once again with the same warning. This time, the mother grabbed her three sons and fled to the outskirts of the city where she sought refuge in the home of the gentile laundress. At daybreak, a band of robbers attacked the sleeping village, plundering, killing and wreaking havoc. She returned home with her three sons. The entire Torah world are the fortunate beneficiaries of that dream.

You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting. (14:22)

Our parsha teaches us about the laws of tzedakah, charity, and maaser, tithing. The relationship between the two occurs in the third and sixth years when one is commanded to give Maaser Ani, tithe for the poor. Indeed, in the Talmud Shabbos 119A, Chazal teach that Aser bishvil shetisasheir, "Tithe so that you will become wealthy." They are indicating a corollary between opening up our hearts and wallets and the reward of increased wealth. In other words, one does not lose anything by giving charity. On the contrary, he gains.

Tzedakah is a powerful mitzvah, one that generates much merit for the benefactor. After all, it is included with teshuvah, repentance, and tefillah, prayer, as one of the three vehicles for abrogating a Heavenly decree. Hashem listens to the individual who is charitable. Charity plays a compelling role in catalyzing a positive response from Hashem. Why? What about charity -- more so than other mitzvos -- invokes Hashem's "cooperation"?

Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, cites the Talmud Shabbos 151b, where Chazal state: "Whoever has compassion on people, they will have mercy on him in Heaven." This means that by showing compassion for a fellow human being, one arouses the reservoirs of Heavenly Mercy, which catalyzes Hashem to "sit" on the Throne of Mercy, rather than on the Throne of Strict Justice. We pray for this during the closing Neilah prayer on Yom Kippur, when we ask Hashem: "O Attribute of Mercy, overflow upon us; and before Your Creator, cast our supplication, for the sake of Your people, request mercy; for every heart is pained and every head is ill." How do we generate that overflowing of mercy? Tzedakah accomplishes this in the same way that teshuvah and tefillah do.

We have to offer gratitude to those who share their wealth with others, because not only do they help the individual, but they also engender a flow of Heavenly mercy. This idea applies to acts of chesed, lovingkindness, as well. In the Talmud Bava Basra 10A, Chazal relate that Turnus Rufus Caesar asked Rabbi Akiva, "If your G-d loves the poor, why does He not sustain them?" Rabbi Akiva replied that it creates an opportunity for other Jews to be generous and to help their brethren, thereby mitigating their own punishment for the sins that they might have committed. Rabbi Akiva supplements this with an analogy. A king became angry at his son and disciplined him by incarcerating him in a dungeon without food or drink. A man went on his own initiative to bring food to the prince. Did the king appreciate the individual's gesture? Certainly! He could not feed his son,

because it would have undermined his own punishment, but he surely did not want his son to perish. Thus, anyone who went behind his back to reach out to his son, would be rewarded. Likewise, we Jews are considered Hashem's children. He will, therefore, compensate anyone who helps His children.

What greater merit can we seek for ourselves than "alleviating" Hashem's burden? He must support His children, but, sometimes, He cannot as part of the discipline He must enforce. He does appreciate, however, anyone who "helps" Him by sustaining His children.

Horav Nosson Wachfogel, zl, the venerable Mashgiach of Beth Medrash Gavohah was wont to relate an incident which he heard as a student in Kelm, Lithuania. One night, during the month of Elul, the month reserved for serious introspection and extreme exactitude in all mitzvos as preparation for the High Holy Days, the Alter of Kelm, Horav Simcha Zissel Braude, zl, had a dream. In the dream, he envisioned that Rabbeinu Yonah, the Rishon who authored the Shaarei Teshuvah, the handbook for repentance, was coming to Kelm to give a shmuess, ethical discourse. Imagine, Rabbeinu Yonah himself would speak in the city known for its singular devotion to spiritual integrity, meticulous observance of mitzvos, and character refinement during the month of Elul! This was the opportunity of a lifetime. The time was announced, and word was spread throughout the town.

At the appointed time, every Jew in Kelm had arrived and waited patiently, excitedly and with great trepidation to enter the bais hamedrash where the sage would hold forth. Understandably, the paragon of mussar, ethics, was waiting to enter. The guard at the entrance to the bais hamedrash asked the Alter to identify himself, which he did. One can only begin to imagine the surprise and eventual shock and dismay when the guard did not permit the Alter to enter. "How could this be?" the Alter asked. "I must enter." He began to beg, relating the many z'chusim, merits, he had. He called forth the multitudes of students he had directly or indirectly influenced, his meticulous observance of mitzvos, his illustrious lineage; none of this seemed to impress the guard. Nothing moved him. Rav Simchah Zissel was not going to gain entrance to the shmuess. Finally, the teacher exclaimed, "You should know that my son is Rav Nochum Velvel!" When the guard heard whose father he was, he immediately allowed him to enter the bais hamedrash. It was at this point that the Alter woke up. Disturbed, he immediately called for his saintly son and related the dream to him: "What merit did you have that superseded every argument that I presented? What did you do that was so unique that only because of your merit was I permitted to enter?" Clearly, the Alter had taken his dream quite seriously.

When Rav Nochum saw that his father was quite agitated, he related the following story. Apparently, for quite some time, Rav Nochum had been wearing a pair of thread bare, worn out and torn shoes. There was limited money, and whatever money they could scrounge, shoes were simply not a priority. Once, he had occasion to be at the shoemaker's shop and he saw an excellent, sturdy pair of shoes for sale. Realizing that the price of the shoes would put him back a bit, he decided to save for them. Every week, he would put away a few pennies which he was able to hoard. Finally, the day came, and with great excitement, Rav Nochum took his savings, proceeded to the shoe store and purchased the long awaited pair of shoes. He could now walk wearing sturdy shoes that would allow him to have the necessary support with a certain degree of comfort.

Shortly thereafter, on a freezing cold wintry night, he heard a feeble knock at his door. He rose from his studies to answer the door, to be greeted by a poor man who was going door to door begging for alms. The man was dressed in tattered clothing with not even a coat to protect him from the inclement weather. Rav Nochum motioned him to come into the house and gave him a warm drink. As the man stood up and was about to leave, Rav Nochum noticed that he was not wearing shoes.

Furthermore, his feet were bloodied and blistered, frostbitten from the cold and snow. "Where are your shoes?" Rav Nochum asked. "They are not my first priority. When one does not have what to eat, he first seeks to calm his

hunger pains, then he worries about shoes," the man replied. Rav Nochum did not flinch for a moment. He immediately removed his shoes and gave them to the poor man. "Here, you surely need them more than I," he said.

Rav Nochum turned to his father and said, "Probably it was that act of chesed that earned me the merit, so that you could enter the room to listen to Rabbeinu Yonah's shmuess."

When one performs acts of chesed with no ulterior motive other than to help his fellow Jew, it demonstrates his overwhelming love for Hashem and His children. Such a selfless act of kindness has the capability of catalyzing an incredible spiritual flow of Heavenly mercy for himself and for the world.

You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field, year by year. (14:22)

The Talmud in Shabbos 119A comments: Aseir bishvil shetisasheir, "Tithe, so that you will become wealthy." What is the reason that giving tzedakah increases one's material assets? Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, explains that all material and spiritual abundance that comes to us from on High is granted for one purpose: to benefit the collective Jewish nation. The individual Jew is nothing more than a caretaker of his personal portion, holding it in place for an opportunity when it can better serve the klal, Jewish community at large. As with any caretaker who shows promise when he performs well in supervising a small cache, he is likely to be rewarded with a larger treasury placed under his guardianship. Likewise, one who provides excellent care and return for the gifts granted him by Hashem will eventually receive greater opportunity to display his devotion and expertise. Of course, one who fails in his initial test will not be granted other opportunities for failure. Thus, one who tithes his money will receive greater material abundance - so that he can share even more with others.

Rav Shimon adds that this idea applies equally to one's talents and abilities. They are also G-d-given gifts, granted to us for a purpose: to serve the collective Jewish people. Thus, one who has been blessed with the ability to inspire, to influence others either by example or by teaching them, should do so. This is also a form of tzedakah. It is a common error to allege that charity is performed only with money. Time and skill, talent and expertise, are likewise valuable assets that one can - and should - share with others.

Horav David Lipshutz, zl, and Horav Leib Malin, zl, both students of Rav Shimon Shkop once stayed after a shiur, lecture, to further discuss the subject. After almost an hour of discussion, the two talmidim apologized to their rebbe for taking up so much of his precious time. It was at this point that he explained that aseir ta'aseir, aseir bishvil shetis'asheir, does not apply solely to money. It is relevant to every area of one's possessions: physical, material and spiritual. Therefore, a rosh yeshivah who disseminates Torah to many students, a function that requires much time on his part, whether it is in devoting time to prepare a shiur or spending time talking with a student, guiding and inspiring him, is performing a tithe. He is contributing his gifts, so that others may grow spiritually. He will be rewarded by having his "time" multiply, so that he will be able to be mechadesh, prepare novellae and penetrating shiurim, in much less time than he had previously.

In an addendum to the above, Horav Dov Eliach, master author and biographer, quotes Rav Shimon's grandson that in his later years when Rav Shimon's health was failing, his doctor suggested that he "cut back" and desist from saying his shiurim. Rav Shimon replied that the only reason Hashem grants life is for the purpose of acting on behalf of Torah and its related causes. Otherwise, why should he live? Therefore, on the contrary, the more he teaches, the more he will be blessed. The more time expended, the more time he will be granted. After all, aseir bishvil shetis'asheir.

In the event he will say to you, "I will not leave you"... then you shall take the awl and put it through his ear and the door, and he shall be for you an eternal slave. (15:16,17)

A Jewish bondsman is sold for a period of six years in lieu of his debt incurred by stealing. If he decides to continue his servitude beyond that period, his ear is drilled with an awl against the doorpost. Chazal explain

that the ear was selected, rather than any other organ because it "heard" at Har Sinai the admonition of Lo Signov, "Do not steal," yet this man ignored the prohibition and stole. Horav Arye Levine, zl, explains that his first act of stealing which catalyzed his avdus, servitude, is something that could be understood. Everyone errs in some manner. This fellow lapsed by stealing. It is a stumbling block. Therefore, when one steals, his ear is not drilled, because his indiscretion is a sign of a frailty within the individual - something which can be acknowledged and even, to some extent, understood, based upon the circumstances that led to his downfall.

His desire to remain a servant, to give up on life in society, to escape reality and responsibility, however, is an indication of a deeper problem. It demonstrates a lack of bitachon, trust, in the Almighty. He loves his master, and places his entire trust in a human, ignoring Hashem. For that, his ear is drilled. There is no place for yiush, hopelessness, among the Jewish people. It is more than a lapse in behavior - it is a sign of faithlessness, an indication that one has given up and broken with his faith. He exclaims, "I love my master," placing his hopes and aspirations in a human being of flesh and blood, while ignoring Hashem. One who rejects the Almighty and instead relies on human intervention deserves to have a reminder imprinted in his ear, so that the folly of his misplaced trust will be something that he never forgets.

Va'ani Tefillah Zeicher rav tuvecha yabiu The remembrance of Your abundant goodness they shall utter.

When Hashem shines His Countenance upon us; when we are the beneficiaries of His favor, we often do not realize how much we have actually gained as a result of His favor. Every favor symbolizes much more than we see and realize. It often, by extension, affects many people. Horav Pinchas Scheinberg, Shlita, quotes Horav Ben Tzion Baruk, zl, who compares this to a library catalog with its many index cards. On the cards are initials which reference the book to a variety of categories. Thus, a few letters on an index card can quite possibly serve as a guide for a variety of references. Likewise, when we articulate one of Hashem's favors, we should bear in mind the tremendous domino effect of that favor. Each gift is merely an "abbreviation" in the great index of favors which we derive from Hashem on a constant basis.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, comments that the word yabiu, which is translated as "express" or "utter," really means "to bubble over" with excited talk. When we speak of Hashem's goodness, we should effervesce with exuberance.

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Holiness In The Singular by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"See this day, I set before you a blessing and a curse: A blessing when you listen to the commandments ... and a curse if you do not listen to the commandments... You shall give the blessing on Mt. Gerizim and the curse on Mt. Eyal..." [Deut. 11:26-29].

This rather momentous exhortation contains a number of linguistic and conceptual problems: First, "see" (re'eh) is an imperative in the singular; the verse goes on, "when you listen" (tishme'u),

which is in second-person plural. Why the change? Second, why the mountains? And third, the content of the blessings and curses come later on in the Bible [Deut. 27:11], referring to the covenant at Mt. Sinai [Deut 28:69]. What is the significance of this added covenant, just prior to the entry into the Land of Israel? The two majestic mountains, Gerizim and Eyal, just outside of Shechem (Nablus) symbolize the difficult climb necessary for fulfilling the mandate of becoming a holy nation and a

Kingdom of priest-teachers to the world. Indeed, this is the third covenant just prior to our entry into the land.

At the place where the Israelites cross the river Jordan, first entering their land and the place at which representatives of the world would later enter and exit, the Israelites were commanded to set up large stones and write the laws of morality upon them “in a very clear manner of explanation” (be’er heitev). The midrashic explanation is that these laws be translated into the “seventy languages” of the world, graphically demonstrating our message to all of human civilization.

In order for us to carry out our mission to the world, we must first become a holy nation ourselves. The Bible tells us that blessing will come when we keep the commandments in an immediate fashion. After all, “the reward of a commandment is the commandment itself,” the satisfaction we receive from helping a person in distress, the familial cohesiveness and inner peace as we observe Shabbat. If, G-d forbid, we do not listen to the commandments, retribution may not come immediately, but eventually evil bears its own destructive fruits.

The great chasidic sage known as the Shpolle Zeide expressed this truth in a very memorable way. He tells how, as a child, he would go to a shvitz (steam bath, or a less sophisticated sauna) with his father, who would pour freezing cold water upon him just as he would begin to perspire profusely. “Ow,” he’d scream as the cold water touched his hot flesh, but — after cooling down a bit — he’d happily exclaim, “Ah!” “Remember, my child, the lesson of the ow and ah,” The Shpolle would hear from his father. “Before (and often even during) the commission of a transgression, you have physical enjoyment — ah! But afterwards, when you ponder your sin and suffer its consequences — ow! In the case of a mitzvah, however, you might cry ow, when you have to get up early for prayers or study, but in reflection of your religious accomplishment, you will always exclaim ah, afterwards. Make sure you conclude your life with an ah!”

Why is the first word re’eh, see, in the singular? Two summers ago, Hezbollah was shooting rockets into northern Israel, making the lives of the residents virtually impossible. Many inhabitants of southern Israel opened their hearts and homes to their embattled fellow citizens.

In Efrat, we welcomed refugees from Karmiel and Bar Yohai, Sefardi haredim together with Russian immigrants, some of whom came with their Christian spouses. Almost miraculously, the spirit of one nation conquered all differences, and everyone got along famously.

One of my neighbors, who hosted six individuals for six weeks, invited me to a special Friday evening meal at their home, supervised by the hostess but cooked by their guests. Before the hostess lit Shabbat candles, the three women (one of whom was wearing a cross) asked if they could join their hostess in the kindling of the Shabbat lights. I ruled that they could. That entire Shabbat I was certain that the Messiah would come; I know that he made significant headway in his journey. In order to truly climb the mountain to blessing, we must all take the upward trudge, collectively, as one. n Shlomo Riskin is chancellor of Ohr Torah Stone and chief rabbi of Efrat.