

[See end re eclipse]

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

PEOPLE

Standing on the corner of two major thoroughfares in midtown Manhattan recently I was struck by the number and variety of people walking past. There were hordes of them all purposefully heading towards some appointed place and event. They were a composite of all of humanity, representing every color of human skin, babel of languages, all social strata, faiths and ethnic origins.

When I was a blasé New Yorker twenty-three years ago I never noticed that all of these people existed and were parading before me. The anonymity of urban life allows one to ignore people as though they do not exist. We tend to see only what we wish to see, the people we can recognize and with whom we can identify, and we are oblivious to everyone else.

We see our world but avoid seeing God's world. And so the entire wonder of God's creation of humans escapes us. In so doing we fall victim to intolerance, hatred of others, war and violence. Abraham Lincoln once famously said that God must love the poor for He created so many of them. Well, God must love variety for He created such a variation in human appearance, culture and ethnicity.

So then why do humans decry such variety? Why do we crave conformity and governmental rule over individual freedom and self-assertiveness? Why do we long to restore civilization to the level of the generation of the Tower of Babel, of absolute unity of language and conformity of thought? Why, indeed?

The Lord apparently was displeased by the attitudes and behavior pattern of the generation that attempted to construct the Tower of Babel. He wished there to be a scattering of humans all over the globe with a wide variety of languages, cultures and folkways. This is the plain reading of the biblical narrative in the opening chapters of the Torah.

People were clearly meant to be different one from another. Only because of this can we justify and understand God's singling out of the Jewish people as being special and different than all other peoples, cultures and faiths. Jews represent the quality of difference that God planted within human society. It is the stubbornness of human beings to accept this idea of difference as being a Godly gift that has led to so many of the ills that have plagued human society over the ages. And, in the case of the Jews, it remains the root cause of anti-Semitism until this very day.

The slogan of the sinners of Israel over the millennia of our existence as a people has always been that we wish to be like everyone else, like all the other nations of the world. But that is contrary to the wishes and guidance of the Creator. Historical, racial and ethnical differences always arise to guarantee that the principle of human diversity always is present and active.

I know that this is an oversimplification of a very complex matter but I also hope that you will understand the basic point that I am trying to make. There is a reason that the rabbis instituted a blessing that states: "Blessed be God Who has made His creatures different one from another!"

We somehow fear people that are different than we are. They challenge our security and our very self-image. We see this in the cruelty of children to those that are physically different than they are. In the nineteenth century, Christian Europe was convinced that it was doing God's work in "civilizing" the human inhabitants of Asia and Africa.

The missionaries were convinced that they were teaching the true faith to the previously heathen masses. Current day historians and social scientists heatedly debate whether colonialism and imperialism were a boon or a curse to humankind then. But there is no question that hundreds of thousands and even millions of people were destroyed or enslaved, simply because they were different than those who were then temporarily more powerful militarily.

The inability to live and let live, which is the basic premise for allowing differences to exist and be tolerated in human society, lies at the root of the bloody conflicts that so bedevil us currently. How to retain our own self-esteem and strong identity without having to demonize those that are different than we are is a major spiritual, psychological and social challenge. Most of human history details for us the unfortunate results of humankind's inability to rise and overcome that challenge. But, we have to keep on trying.

Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

RE'EH

The American Declaration of Independence claimed that certain basic human rights were obvious. Yet what is obvious to some is in reality obscure and unknown to many others. Because of this, the Torah emphasizes the obvious in this week's Torah reading. The choice between death in this world and the next, and life – eternal life, no less, should be obvious. The Torah in fact states that seeing this will lead to a correct choice. But one needs to see them objectively and rationally.

People, who make poor choices, do so on the basis of emotion, desire, foolishness and illusory hopes and false ideas. These are the products of distorted vision - the inability to see things clearly. Only clear vision can lead to wise and correct choices. The commandments that the Torah enjoins us to observe are a form of corrective lenses to aid us in seeing things clearly and accurately.

People have to pass an eye and vision test in order to be able to legally operate an automobile. How much more so is an eye and vision test necessary when life and death itself is in question? The Torah advises us to always choose life. This is the basis for all Jewish society throughout our long and sometimes very painful history. It is obvious that one should always choose life. But we must always be reminded even of the obvious. We should never underestimate the power of distorted vision which causes untold damage to our own selves.

The final gift, so to speak, that the Lord granted to our teacher Moshe was that he was able to "see" the Land of Israel and the story of the Jewish people throughout history. The Torah teaches us that imagination is a form of "seeing." What we see from this is that seeing in the mind's eye is also a legitimate form of sight.

The Jewish people survived on the basis of imagination for all of the centuries of our exile and dispersion. We always imagined Jerusalem and the Temple, the Land of Israel and the ingathering of the exiles to their ancient homeland. When imagination wanes, so does our hope and creativity. Of course imagined reality may not completely coincide with the actuality of the human condition and circumstance. But without the original power of imagination – of seeing things in our mind and heart and not only with our actual physical eyes – one will never advance to actually seeing the desired goal.

That is why the Torah emphasizes time and again the importance of seeing things correctly, both in imaginary and in actual sight. The prophets of Israel fired our imagination with their visions of the future redemption of the Jewish people and humanity generally. We have seen some of these visions fulfilled in our times and in front of our very eyes, if we are but wise enough to see things accurately. The importance of this kind of sight is never to be minimized.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Limits of Grief (Re'eh 5777)

Categories

Covenant & Conversation

"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. (I 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.[1]

(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 Chapter 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 God 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 democratisation 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 God 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 God" 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 (nival). 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[2] epitomises 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 Rieff, 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.

Jonathan Sacks

Shabbat Shalom – Re'eh 5777

Parshat Re'eh (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "See, I am giving before you this day a blessing and a curse..." (Deut 11:26)

So opens our Biblical portion, which is making reference to the covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal which dramatically concludes the Book of Deuteronomy and precedes our entry into the land of Israel. What I would like to analyze in this commentary is a curious and seemingly pedantic detail, a strange grammatical formulation which, when properly understood, will shed light not only upon the nature of this third and final Pentateuchal covenant but also upon a fundamental philosophy of our religious nationality.

Our verse began with a singular verb which addresses an individual, re'eh – see, but then continues with a plural pronoun, lifnehem – (giving) before you, addressing a multitude. This grammatical switch in number – from singular to plural – is especially worthy of note, since when we do find such Biblical changes they take place in the opposite direction, from plural to singular. In the Biblical portion of the Decalogue, for example, G-d's introduction addresses in plural form the multitude of Israelites (Exodus 18: 4 ff: "You have seen – re'etem – what I have done to Egypt, and I lifted you – et'hem upon eagles' wings..."), but then switches to the singular form in the ten commandments themselves (Exodus 20:1 ff: "I am the Lord your G-d – E-lohekha, singular – whom I took you – hotzeitikha, singular – from the land of Egypt..., You shall not murder, lo tizrach, singular"). Nahmanides explains the switch from plural to singular, and catalogues many other instances when such a transition in number appears, as the desire of G-d to make certain that His words are being heard not only as a command to the general masses but also as a personal injunction to each and every individual! (Ramban, on Genesis 18:3 s.v. Al na).

In effect, G-d is thereby appearing as a Hassidic Rebbe rather than as a Congregational Rabbi, in accordance with the common folk understanding of the distinction between the two. When a

congregational Rabbi speaks, every individual believes that he is addressing the person next to him; when a Hassidic Rebbe speaks, every person listening knows and feels that he is addressing him personally.

But if this is the case, how can we understand our opening verse, in which G-d begins with the singular and continues with the plural? I believe that this unusual grammatical phenomenon speaks to the very definition of this third covenant, known as the covenant of arevut or mutual responsibility (B.T. Sotah 33 b). The Israelites, divided by the tribes in two groups of six stand together to receive G-d's blessings on Mt. Gerizim and G-d's curses on Mt. Eyval, poised before Shekhem and ready to enter the Promised Land. Our Biblical portion provides the exact location: "Are they not beyond the Jordan, ... in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the Aravah, over against Gilgal, beside the oak tree of Moreh?" (Deut 11:30). And the term aravah, or plains, is taken by the sages of the Talmud as a double entendre (play on words), the Hebrew arev also meaning co-singer, the individual who takes financial responsibility if a borrower reneges on the payment of his debt. This is the covenant which insists that every Israelite must see himself as part of a whole, as a member of a nation which sees itself as a united organism whose separate individuals feel inextricably and indelibly bound to each other in fate, destiny and responsibility. Hence G-d begins with the singular and continues into the plural in order to impress upon the individual Israelite that he must in some way merge with the multitude that he must assume responsibility for the entire Jewish people, that "every Israelite is a co-signer, responsible for every other Israelite."

This is what I believe to be the higher meaning of a shomer torah umitzvot, literally a guardian over the Torah and Tradition. It is not sufficient to merely study Torah and to perform the commandments; just as a guardian takes responsibility for the objects in his possession, so must each of us – everyone in his/her own way – take responsibility for the dissemination of Torah and the establishment of proper Torah institutions in his/ her community, in his/her generation.

It is recorded that the famed Rav Meir Shapiro of Lublin (early twentieth century) was forced into a dispute with a Cardinal concerning the quality of our Jewish tradition. "The Talmud is blatantly anti – Christian," argued the Cardinal. "Does it not state that 'only Israelites are called adam (Hebrew for human beings) whereas Gentiles are not called adam,' and therefore we Gentiles are not considered by you to be human beings?!" The Rabbi explained that there are four synonyms for human being in the Hebrew language: gever, ish, enosh and adam. The first three of these nouns have both a singular and a plural: gevarim, ishim, aneshim; only adam has only one form, both singular and plural, humanity – a compound noun, including every one together as a single organism. If a Jew is suffering in an Islamic – Fundamentalist country, or if Israel seems to be in danger, Jews world – wide demonstrate and flock to their homeland. This is a unique Jewish quality, built into our third covenant. In the case of the Jewish nation, the singular merges into the plural, the individual Jew is an inextricable part of his people.

Shabbat Shalom

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

In the News

Rabbi Shlomo Aviner Has Some Sound Advice

For Bayit Leumi MKs Regarding Halacha

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

Cell Phone on Shabbat

Q: I have a relative who is a Holocaust survivor and on Shabbat she was telling me what she went through. Suddenly, she pulled out a cell phone and showed me a picture. Did I commit a transgression?

A: No. This is considered a benefit that comes to a person against his will. Pesachim 25b.

Exercising on Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible for me to exercise on Shabbat if it saves me from depression and lying in bed the entire day?

A: Certainly.

Aliyah or More Religious

Q: Which is preferable - to make Aliyah or to be more religious outside of Israel?

A: Good question, but in the long run, the Exile is spiritually dangerous.

Comparing Jews to Nazis

Q: A high-ranking Tzahal officer compared Jews to Nazis. How should we relate to this?

A: This is what is called "Godwin's Law". If a discussion goes on long enough, sooner or later someone will compare someone else to Hitler. This obviously causes the entire value of the discussion to be lost (see "Godwin's Law" in Wikipedia).

Protection for a Mourner

Q: If a mourner needs to walk in the street, does he require an escort?

A: If there are other Jews in the street, he does not require an escort. A bride and groom require an escort since they are similar to a queen and king. A mourner, however, requires an escort so he will not be alone, and if others are in the street, he will not be alone. See Piskei Teshuvot 239:11 (When Rav Aviner was sitting Shiva for his mother z"l, he came to the Yeshiva one morning so that the students could pay a Shiva call without having to travel far and thus missing Torah learning. He told me that when he walked through the Kotel Plaza, he did not require an escort, but when he walked through the so-called Muslim Quarter he would need one).

Error in Number of Loops on Tzitzit

Q: Does an error in the number of loops on Tzitzit make them invalid?

A: No.

Babylonian Talmud

Q: Why do we learn the Babylonian Talmud which is from the Exile and not the Jerusalem Talmud, which is a product of Eretz Yisrael?

A: 1. The Babylonian Talmud is written extensively and there are many commentaries on it, while the Jerusalem Talmud is written briefly and has merited few commentaries. 2. The Babylonian Talmud is not exilic. It is an expansion of the Mishnah, which is a product of Eretz Yisrael.

Army in the Time of Mashiach

Q: Will there be an army during the time of the Mashiach?

A: Yes. The Mashiach will wage great wars. See Rambam, Hilchot Melachim Chapters 11-12.

Q: But it is written: "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears" (Yoel 3:10)?

A: That will occur much later. See Rambam, *ibid*.

Dulling of the Heart to Save One's Life

Q: If someone is obligated to eat non-Kosher food because he is in a life-threatening situation, does the food cause him "dulling of the heart" (dulling of one's spiritual sense, "Timtum Ha-Lev")?

A: No. Maran Ha-Rav Kook writes in his book "Musar Avicha" (p. 19) that the dulling of one's heart comes from violating a prohibition and not from the food itself (Yoma 39a. And see Meharsha on Shabbat 33a). Therefore, someone who eats non-Kosher food which is permitted to him, does not experience a "dulling of the heart" (Ha-Griz Soloveitchik, the Brisker Rav, also holds this way. Uvdot Ve-Hanhagot Mei-Beit Brisk Volume 2, p. 50. As well as Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski in his book "Orchot Yosher" #13).

Understanding the Prohibition of Avodah Zarah

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

There are several references to the prohibition of Avodah Zarah in this week's parsha...

Question #1: Defining Idols

Many people ask: "Are idol worship and Avodah Zarah the same thing?"

Question #2: The Only G-d

Rav Efrayim discusses: "May a gentile accept ideas that we consider Avodah Zarah, providing that he believes in G-d?"

Question #3: Nothing but G-d

Rav Moshe asks: "If all mankind is required to believe in one G-d, why do we say Shma Yisroel, that Hashem is One. Shouldn't we say Shma Bnei Odom...?"

Introduction:

The most basic belief underlying our observance of Torah is that Hashem is the Creator of the world and the ongoing Director of all

that transpires. He does not delegate authority to anyone or anything else, and we are to pray only to Him.

Idol worship vs. Avodah Zarah

Are idol worship and Avodah Zarah the same thing? The question, as phrased, is almost meaningless, since it does not define what is meant by idol worship. Truthfully, most people do not understand the extent of the prohibition of Avodah Zarah. They think that Avodah Zarah is limited to believing that some force other than Hashem decides our destiny. However, the prohibition of Avodah Zarah is far more encompassing. To quote the Rambam: "In the days of Enosh, mankind committed a major mistake.... This was their error: They said that, since G-d created the stars and the other cosmic forces with which to run the world, placed them in the heavens, gave them honor and they serve Him, it is appropriate to honor and praise them. They said that this is G-d's Will – to honor that which honors Him" (Rambam, Hilchos Avodah Zarah 1:1). The Rambam proceeds to describe that this was the primary form of Avodah Zarah -- not that any of those who worshipped the sun, moon or stars ascribed power to these celestial creations.

"With time, false prophets arose who claimed that G-d had commanded the people to worship specific stars or forces" (Rambam, Hilchos Avodah Zarah 1:2). The Rambam explains that this developed into extensive cults. "The primary commandment of Avodah Zarah is to not worship anything that was created, not an angel, not an extraterrestrial force and not a star... even when the worshipper knows that Hashem is the only G-d" (Rambam, Hilchos Avodah Zarah 2:1). We see that worshipping or performing any act of reverence to a force other than Hashem is included in Avodah Zarah, even when one accepts that all decisions are made by Him. To explain this further, let us discuss the term shituf.

Shituf

In most contexts, the word shituf is translated as "partnership." When applied to the prohibition of Avodah Zarah, the term is used to mean worshipping something other than Hashem, even though the individual believes in one G-d Who created the universe. As we just read, the Rambam describes this mode of worship as the primary violation of Avodah Zarah.

There are several ways that one could violate Avodah Zarah through shituf. Above, we described one way: there is nothing wrong with the belief system, but the object being worshipped makes it into an act of Avodah Zarah.

Another form of shituf is the mistaken belief that, although Hashem is indeed the Creator of all, He authorized some other force to make decisions. This constitutes Avodah Zarah. Many religions believe that Hashem created the world, but believe that He delegated authority on some matters to angels or others whom He created. Some religions even believe that He passed authority to humans or to former humans. Any belief that G-d allowed some other entity or force to have a decision in helping or saving mankind is pure Avodah Zarah. Practicing or believing in any of these religions is Avodah Zarah.

Praying

Another way of violating the prohibition of Avodah Zarah through shituf is by directing one's prayers to something other than Hashem. Even asking an angel to convey my prayers to Hashem qualifies as a very serious prohibition of Avodah Zarah. To quote the Rambam, "Only to G-d is it appropriate to serve, to praise, and to promulgate His greatness and His directives. One may not pray to anything beneath Him, not His angels, not the stars, not the celestial creations, not the elements of creation, nor anything developed from them. All of them are fixed in their deeds and have neither control nor independent free choice, with the exception of G-d. One may not make them intermediaries to use them to contact G-d. All our thoughts must be directed only to G-d, and one should ignore anything else. All this is included under the prohibition of Avodah Zarah. Most of the Torah's purpose is to command us concerning this" (Rambam, introduction to his commentary on the tenth chapter of Sanhedrin, fifth principle).

This belief comprises the fifth of the thirteen basic beliefs of Judaism, formulated by the Rambam, that Klal Yisroel has accepted as the core belief system of Torah. In the words of the unknown author of the 13 ani maamins, it is structured as: Ani maamin be'emunah sheleimah, shehaborei yisborach shemo lo levado ra'ui lehisparallel, ve'ein ra'ui

lehisparallel lezulaso, "I believe with complete faith that it is appropriate to pray only to the Creator, blessed is He, and that it is inappropriate to pray to anything else."

Some well-meaning people may be making a serious mistake when they daven at a graveside. To avoid the possibility of inadvertently transgressing the prohibition of Avodah Zarah when visiting a gravesite, one should be careful that all one's prayers are only to Hashem. (We will leave for a different time the discussion as to whether it is permitted to ask a deceased person to be a *guta betor*, to pray on our behalf. See, for example, *Gesher Hachayim*, Volume 1, Chapter 29, Section 9.)

One of the 613 mitzvos of the Torah is a prohibition against causing an oath to be expressed that includes the name of an idol. The Torah says, *Vesheim elohim acheirim lo sazkiru, lo yishama al picha*, "you may not mention the name of an idol, nor may your mouth allow it to be expressed" (Shemos 23:13).

Chazal understand that this includes a prohibition of swearing an oath mentioning the name of Avodah Zarah. They also understand that this prohibition includes causing an idol worshipper to take an oath, in which he uses the name of his idol. Again, to quote the Rambam, "It is prohibited to include something else together with Hashem's Name in an oath. Someone who includes something else with Hashem's Name in an oath is uprooted from the world. There is nothing else in the world that should be given honor" (Hilchos Shvuos 11:2).

Because of this mitzvah, until the modern era, Jews were excluded from holding office in most European countries, because assuming such a position required an oath of office that included a reference to what halacha recognizes as idolatry.

Gentiles

Although it may seem strange for a non-Jew to ask a *rav* a *shaylah*, it should actually be commonplace. After all, there are thousands of gentiles for every Jew in the world, and each one of them should be concerned about his or her halachic responsibility. Many non-Jews are indeed concerned about their future place in *Olam Haba* and, had the nations not been deceived by spurious religions, thousands and perhaps millions more would observe the mitzvos of Bnei Noach that they are commanded. It is tragic that they have been misled into false beliefs and practices.

The prohibition of Avodah Zarah applies not only to Jews, but to any human being walking the face of the earth. One of the mitzvos that bnei Noach are required to observe is a prohibition against worshipping Avodah Zarah. What is included in this prohibition?

On an obvious level, there should be no difference between the prohibition of Avodah Zarah as it applies to gentiles and as it applies to Jews, and this is the understanding of most halachic authorities. This approach is certainly implied by the Rambam, when he introduces the prohibition of Avodah Zarah by saying, "in the days of Enosh, mankind committed a major mistake," which happened over a thousand years before the Torah was given to Klal Yisroel.

Between Israel and the nations

If, indeed, the prohibition of Avodah Zarah is the same for Jew and gentile, are there any differences between a Jew's mitzvos regarding G-d's existence and a gentile's?

Yes, there are. A Jew has several positive mitzvos that a gentile does not, such as the mitzvah of *ahavas Hashem*, to love Hashem, and the mitzvah of *yiras Hashem*, to be in awe of Him. In general, the mitzvos of a ben Noach are prohibitions banning him from specific activities, but do not require him to perform any positive acts.

Other mitzvos

Several other laws that pertain to Jews germane to Avodah Zarah, such as the prohibition against entering a house of idol worship, or the prohibition of allowing an Avodah Zarah to be in one's house, do not apply to bnei Noach.

Similarly, the prohibition of *lo yishama al picha*, "your mouth shall not cause the name of an idol to be expressed" does not apply to bnei Noach. Thus, they would not be prohibited from taking an oath by the name of something in addition to or other than Hashem.

At this point, let us analyze one of our opening questions: "Rav Efrayim discusses: 'May a gentile accept ideas that we consider Avodah Zarah, providing that he believes in G-d?'"

The Rav Efrayim we mention was the author of the *Shaar Efrayim*, Rav Efrayim ben Yaakov Hakohen, one of the great Ashkenazic

halachic authorities of the 17th century. He was the grandfather of the Chacham Zvi and the great-grandfather of Rav Yaakov Emden. The Shaar Efrayim was born and raised in Vilna, and became one of the dayanim of the city at the age of 20 in a beis din that included the Chelkas Mechokeik, the Shach and the Birchas Hazevach, Rav Aharon Shemuel Kaidenover. During the upheavals of the period of the Gezerios Tach veTat that destroyed the Jewish communities of Poland and Lithuania, the kingdom of Sweden invaded Lithuania (then under the control of the king of Poland). During this era, the Shaar Efrayim fled southwestward, finding himself first in Moravia (now in the Czech Republic), then in Vienna and ultimately in Budapest, where he became the rav and opened a large yeshivah. He corresponded with the great poskim of his era, both those of the Ashkenazic world and those of the Sefardic world in Turkey and Eretz Yisroel. Eventually, he was offered and accepted the rabbonus of Yerushalayim, but, unfortunately, died in a plague before he could assume the position.

The question we are addressing, “May a gentile accept ideas that we consider Avodah Zarah, providing that he believes in G-d?” is published in Shaar Efrayim, in the context of the following halachic discussion.

Partnering with a gentile

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 63b; Bechoros 2b) prohibits creating a business partnership with an idol worshipper, because of concern that, should one need to have him make an oath, which was a common procedure in earlier generations, the gentile would swear in the name of his deity. This would cause the Jew to violate the prohibition of lo yishama al picha, “you may not cause the name of an idol to be expressed.” This ruling is codified in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 156).

Medieval gentiles

At the time that the Gemara prohibited creating a partnership with an idol worshipper, most gentiles were pagans. In the course of time, most European gentiles began to follow different religious beliefs and practices that accepted that there is one Creator, but included various other beliefs that qualify as Avodah Zarah. In the time of the rishonim, the following question was raised: Does the prohibition against forming a business partnership apply to a gentile who observes these practices?

Rabbeinu Tam, cited by Tosafos (Sanhedrin 63b s.v. Asur; Bechoros 2b s.v. Shema), ruled that it was permitted to have the gentiles of his day make an oath. The words Tosafos uses to express this idea is that a non-Jew is not commanded concerning shituf. This opinion is quoted authoritatively by the Rema (Orach Chayim 156). The question is, what did Tosafos mean?

Some authorities understood Tosafos to mean that shituf is not included in the ben Noach’s prohibition against worshipping idols (Olas Tamid, Orach Chayim 156). This interpretation understands that although the Torah is strongly opposed to any recognition or worship of any force other than Hashem, this aspect of Avodah Zarah was not included in the mitzvah that bnei Noach were commanded.

However, most authorities rule that this is a misunderstanding of Tosafos. In their opinion, there is no difference between Jews and non-Jews regarding the prohibition of idol worship. Any belief in another power that shares power or decision-making is a form of idolatry. It is also forbidden for a gentile to worship or pray to anything other than Hashem, even with the understanding that this object of worship is only an emissary of G-d.

According to the more accepted approach, Tosafos means the following: It is true that the gentiles in his day believed in ideas that qualify as Avodah Zarah. In addition, they prayed to their saints, whom they believed had a power to sway how G-d would treat them. When they swore oaths, they would include the name of the saint and the name of G-d. Tosafos rules that causing a gentile to swear an oath in which he mentions the name of a saint does not violate the Torah’s prohibition of lo yishama al picha, since the gentiles, themselves, view the saint only as a means to get Divine help, but not as a source of help himself. They did not consider their saints to be deities.

Furthermore, although the gentiles have strange idolatrous notions defining and understanding the nature of G-d, causing them to swear an oath in G-d’s Name does not violate lo yishama al picha, since the

name of the idol is not mentioned. Even though they think of their idol, they don’t mention his name in their oath. Therefore, the Jew does not violate any prohibition when the gentile takes an oath (Shu”t Shaar Efrayim #24; Shu”t Mahara Sasson #95; Shu”t Meil Tzedaka #22; Machatzis Hashekel 156:2).

Stumbling blocks

Thus far, we have explained why Tosafos holds that when a gentile swears, the Jew does not violate lo yishama al picha. However, there is another halachic question: If a gentile must observe Avodah Zarah exactly as does a Jew, are we not causing the gentile to violate his prohibition of Avodah Zarah? This is included under the Torah’s violation of lifnei iver lo sitein michshol, “Do not place a stumbling block before a blind person.” In this context, the verse means: Do not cause someone to sin if he is blind to – i.e., he is unaware of – the seriousness of his violation (Avodah Zarah 6b). This mitzvah applies also to a Jew who causes a gentile to transgress his mitzvos.

Lifnei iver and swearing

The Ran (end of the first chapter of Avodah Zarah) explains that there is no violation of lifnei iver, since the ben Noach’s prohibition not to worship idols does not include a prohibition of swearing in the name of an idol. Thus, although a gentile may not serve Avodah Zarah, he is permitted to take an oath of allegiance to an idol in which he does not believe. A result of the Ran’s ruling would be that, in a country in which swearing allegiance to the local religion is a requirement for holding public office, a ben Noach would be permitted to swear this oath.

Shma Yisroel

Having concluded that a non-Jew is required to believe that there is only one G-d, we are left with a question based on a posuk that we recite several times every day: Shma Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad. Why does the Torah say Shma Yisroel, when all non-Jews are prohibited from worshipping idols and from practicing shituf (see Maharam Shik’s commentary on Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah 418)? This is the third question we asked above. Rav Moshe asks: “If all mankind is required to believe in one G-d, why do we say Shma Yisroel, that Hashem is one. Shouldn’t we say Shma Bnei Odom...”

The Rav Moshe that I am quoting is Rav Moshe Shik, the Maharam Shik, who was the posek hador of the mid-nineteenth century in Hungary.

There are several answers one can give to explain this. I will share with you an answer that the Maharam Shik himself provides: The mitzvah of Shma Yisroel is that Jews are required to believe in one G-d because of the mesorah we have from our forefathers of the miracles that we saw at Har Sinai and in Egypt, and not because of logic. A gentile is permitted to believe in G-d even if his belief is only on the basis of his having been convinced through logic. Thus, Isaac Newton, who believed in G-d because His creation proves it, fulfilled the requirements of belief in G-d required of a gentile. However, Albert Einstein, who was Jewish and also believed in G-d because His creation proved it, but rejected the mesorah, did not fulfill the mitzvah of Shma Yisroel.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Re'eh

For the week ending 19 August 2017 / 27 Av 5777

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Insights

In G-d We Trust

“...You shall open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your destitute in your Land.” (15:11)

Sign seen hanging in a store:

“In G-d we trust, everyone else pays cash.”

A philosopher once asked Rabban Gamliel, “Your Torah commands you over and over again to give charity, and to not be afraid of it affecting your financial security. Isn’t such a fear natural? How can a person give away his money without worrying that perhaps he should have saved it for a rainy day?”

Rabban Gamliel asked him, “If someone asked you for a loan, would you agree?”

“Depends on who that someone is,” replied the philosopher. “If it’s someone I didn’t know, yes, I would be afraid of losing my money.”

“What if he had guarantors?” asked Rabban Gamliel.

“Well, if I knew I could rely on them, I would agree.”

“How about if the guarantor was the President, how would you feel about that?”

“Well, of course, in those circumstances I would have total confidence that I’d get my money back.”

“When someone gives charity,” said Rabban Gamliel, “he’s actually extending a loan to the ‘President of the Universe’. It says in the Book of Mishlei (Proverbs): One who gives graciously to the poor, extends, as it were, a loan to G-d, Who will pay back all that is due.”

G-d pays us back in this world by making sure we get back what we “loaned” Him. And, in the next world we get the full reward for our “loan”.

No one is as trustworthy as G-d. If He guarantees to return our money, why should anyone have the slightest hesitation in giving charity?”

Source: based on the Midrash

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OU Torah

Socialism: Is It Good for the Poor?

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

I must begin with a disclaimer. I am not an economist. Admittedly, there was a time early in my college days when I considered majoring in economics. My father, may he rest in peace, was a workingman and a member of a labor union (about which he had only good things to say). This led to my initial interest in labor economics, but the first psychology course I took quickly persuaded me that the depths of the human psyche were far more interesting than statistics about wages and unemployment.

Over time, however, it was precisely this fascination with the human psyche that motivated me to ask the following question: “Why are many Jews so convinced of the values of socialism, and why have they been so involved in the leadership of the Socialist movement?” I need not, in this essay, spell out details about the roles that Jews have played in the formation of the ideology of socialism and in its practice. Suffice it to say that the Jews are numbered among socialism’s most prominent theoreticians, and that the Communist Revolution was the favored cause of multitudes of young Jews in the early years of the 20th century.

Why? What did Jews find so attractive about these movements? Why do Jews to this very day lean leftwards in their politics and advocate economic policies consistent with socialism? Why, for example, were so many of the original pioneers of the settlement of the land of Israel socialist, or communist, in their orientation?

Some have seen in the affinity that many Jews had with socialism a reply to anti-Semitism. This point of view maintains that Jews believed that they could rid themselves of the hostility others bear toward them by adopting a cause that would solve the world’s economic suffering.

Others maintain that Jews are “revolutionary by nature,” and will participate in any revolutionary movement, particularly one which promises the establishment of a “just society”.

Still others maintain that for many young Jews in pre-Holocaust Eastern Europe, socialism was a “way of getting rid of their Jewish heritage, of leaving the ghetto behind them.”

I have found myself intrigued, over the years, by another perspective entirely. Jews find socialism attractive because they believe that it is rooted in Jewish tradition. In particular, they find that Judaism’s concern for the poor and its advocacy for the practice of charity are consistent with the values of socialism, if not identical to them.

I would like to examine this contention, if only superficially. I choose to do so with a humorous anecdote, which is often related during conversations about the efficacy of socialism. Here is the anecdote:

At the beginning of the 20th century, a famed socialist leader left a mass public meeting with a throng of admirers at his heels. On their way, they passed a beggar pleading for alms. The charismatic leader ignored the beggar, but one of his many followers threw the poor man a coin. The leader turned to his follower with a scornful gaze. He shouted, “Traitor!” The follower, stunned and confused, protested: “What did I do? After all, I just helped a poor man. Didn’t you teach us about the terrible suffering of the proletariat?” The leader responded, “We await the revolution, the comprehensive and absolute

solution to the problems of the poor. When you give alms to the poor person, you reduce his suffering. By doing so you are delaying the revolution. Instead of a total and final solution, you give him a momentary “fix.” Instead of giving him a new coat, you stitch another patch upon his rags. Therefore, you are a traitor to the cause!”

I am indebted to Rabbi Chaim Navon for this anecdote, with which he begins his essay on this week’s Torah portion in his excellent work, *Parashot*. Rabbi Navon offers a novel analysis of the entire topic, which I leave you, dear reader, to look up for yourself. I will, however, share with you the textual difficulty with which he begins his exposition.

There are two verses in this week’s Torah portion, *Re’eh* (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:21), which are difficult to reconcile.

The first, Deuteronomy 15:4, appears in the context of the command for creditors to remit debts during the sabbatical year. It reads, “There shall be no needy among you... If only you heed the Lord your God and take care to keep all this Instruction that I enjoined upon you this day.”

The second, a mere seven verses later (*ibid.* 15:11), reads, “For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.”

One verse assures us that there will be no poverty, while the other verse confronts us with the sad reality that there will never cease to be “needy ones in your land.”

There are many ways to address this apparent contradiction. One simple approach is that the first verse refers to the ideal society, one which has thoroughly addressed and resolved the problem of poverty. The second verse refers to the sad reality, knowing full well that the ideal is rarely achieved.

Let us return to the Socialist leader who was the subject in the anecdote quoted above. What exactly was his moral flaw? I found it expressed very articulately in an essay by a scholar whom I’ve quoted frequently, in the past.

His name was Rabbi Chaim Zeitchik and this is what he wrote in his comments on this week’s parsha:

“Let us not forget that charity is not just a matter of economic support. Charity demands heart. One must empathize with the poor man’s plight. One must feel his dilemma, his pain, his panic. If one sees only the poor man’s outstretched hand and does not hear the bitter cries of his heart, then he has not been charitable. How penetrating are the words of the Talmud (*Bava Batra* 9b): ‘He who gives a coin to the poor man deserves six blessings, but he who soothes him with words deserves eleven blessings.’”

The utopian dream of the socialist visionaries has never been realized. One reason is that they saw the outstretched hand of the beggar but did not hear the bitter cries of his pained heart.

The lesson for each of us is quite simple: True charity must go much further than writing a check or handing out ten dollar bills. It must also consist of kind gestures, gentle smiles, and sincere words of encouragement.

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Drasha Parshas Reeh

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Giving Personally

This week the Torah teaches us about charity. Not only does it tell us who to give, it tells us how to give. And it does so in an uncharacteristic and seemingly repetitive fashion.

“If there shall be an impoverished person from among you or any of your brethren in your cities... you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand against your destitute brother. Rather you should surely give him and you shall not harden your heart when you give him” (Deuteronomy 15:7-10).

The repetitive expression and emphasis on the word *him* is troubling. “You shall surely give him and not feel bad” would suffice. Why is the phrase “when you give him” necessary? The Torah is referring to the person to whom you have given. It tells us not to feel bad about giving charity. Why the extra phrase about the recipient?

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soleveitchik, the Rav (Rabbi) of Brisk, was revered throughout Europe as a foremost scholar and Talmudic sage. One

aspect of his character was known to shine even brighter than his scholarship – his humility.

Once, he stopped by an inn in the middle of a freezing night and asked for lodging. He had no entourage with him, and the innkeeper treated him with abuse. He did not disclose who he was, and after pleading with the innkeeper, he was allowed to sleep on the floor near a stove. The innkeeper, thinking that the man was a poor beggar, did not offer him any food and refused to give him more than a little bread and water for which Rabbi Soleveitchik was willing to pay.

The next morning Rabbi Soleveitchik did not see the shocked expression on the face of the innkeeper when a few of the town notables came to the inn. “We understand that the Brisker Rav was passing through this town. Is it possible that he came by your inn last night?”

At first, the innkeeper dismissed the question – until the Rav appeared and the group entered to greet him warmly. In a few minutes the town dignitaries converged on the inn with their students and children all in line to meet the great sage.

Terrribly embarrassed, the innkeeper, who realized that he had berated and humiliated a leading Torah figure, decided to beg forgiveness from the Rav.

“Rebbe,” he cried, “I am terribly sorry. I had no idea that you were the Brisker Rav. Please forgive me.”

The Rav replied. “I would love to, but you see that would be impossible.”

“But why?” asked the owner in shock.

“You see,” explained the sage. “You are coming to ask forgiveness from the Brisker Rav. That is not who you insulted. You debased a simple Jew who came for lodging – and he is no longer here to forgive you.”

The Torah explains that there are in essence two parts to tzedaka – the patron and the recipient. Often the giver becomes detached from the recipient; he wants to give but has no concern for the receiver. He may even have disdain for the person at the door, but the mitzvah of tzedaka overrides his pre-judgement and a contribution is given. Perhaps the Torah stresses the words “do not feel badly in your heart when you give to him,” to teach us an important lesson.

In addition to the mitzvah of giving, one should identify with the recipient too. Know the true situation of the person to whom you are giving. Understand what you are giving for. Be sure that when you are giving to him, your heart should not be in bad spirits. The Torah recognizes the simplest beggar as someone worthy enough to have his pronoun repeated. “Surely give him; do not feel bad in your heart when you give him.” If the Torah is careful enough to classify the beggar as an individual who transcends a generic recipient- and transform him into a personal beneficiary, then perhaps he is worthy of recognition by all of us.

*Dedicated by the Martz Family in memory of Nettie Martz & Florence Martz
Good Shabbos!*

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The author is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand Parshas Reeh

A Spoon and a Handle

“For you shall surely open your hand to him.” (Devarim 15:8)

First, the Torah tells us (15:7), “If there be a pauper among you, one of your brethren, in one of your gateways in your land that God your Lord has given you, do not harden your heart nor close your hand tight against your impoverished brother.” This is clearly telling us to give charity to the poor person. Then the Torah continues, “For you shall surely open your hand to him and provide him with the necessities he is missing.” This seems to call for a higher level of charity not covered by the first commandment.

There was once a Jew in Vilna who took a great interest in local history. In the course of his research, he would often go out to the old cemetery and read the inscriptions on the tombstones. He was able to gather a surprising amount of information in this fashion.

One day, he came across two adjacent graves. According to the inscriptions, the two men were brothers, both talmidei chachamim, both extraordinary baalei tzedakah, philanthropists. Strangely, the two tombstones shared an inscription from Eishes Chayil, the last chapter of Mishlei (31:20). The inscription began on one tombstone with “she extended her palm (kappah) to the poor” and was completed on the other with “and she stretched out her hand (yadeha) to the pauper.”

The man was puzzled. First of all, he had never seen an inscription shared by two tombstones. Second, inscriptions from Eishes Chayil were used almost exclusively for women. There was obviously a story behind all this, and by all appearances, an interesting story. The man sought out one of the oldest men in the Vilna community and asked him about the inscription. The old man indeed had a story to tell.

These two brothers were Torah scholars of the highest order, and they were also wealthy and extremely generous in their charities. They were much respected and admired in the community.

Suddenly, their fortunes took a turn for the worse. Some of their businesses failed. Their investments stagnated. People began to wonder and whisper. Why would such a thing happen to such sterling people?

The Rabbinical Court of Vilna also heard the stories and took the matter under advisement. “How can this be,” declared one of the judges, “that two such exemplary talmidei chachamim should be going bankrupt? It is a chillul Hashem! We have to do something about it.”

“But what can we do about it?” asked another judge. “Should we give them a loan?”

“No, of course not,” said the first judge. “We have to get to the bottom of this and correct it.”

“But how?” said the second judge.

“There is a simple way,” offered a third judge. “We have to summon the brothers to court and interrogate them about everything they’ve done for the past few years. I have no doubt they will answer our questions truthfully.”

The Rabbinical Court questioned the brothers for hours and discovered only one instance of wrongdoing. The Halachah demands (Kesubos 50a) that a person should not give away more than a fifth of his wealth to charity, but the brothers often exceeded this limit. Their only crime was that they gave too much charity!

What was to be done about this? The Rabbinical Court decided that the brothers could not be trusted to stay within the prescribed limits. Therefore, they themselves took control of the finances and decreed that anyone approaching the brothers for charitable donations should come to the Rabbinical Court’s appointed administrator of the brothers’ accounts.

The poor appeared on the doorstep of the brothers, and they duly directed them to the court-appointed administrator of their accounts.

“We’ve been to him already,” they protested, “and he is not nearly as generous as you’ve always been. We’ll never feed our children on what the administrator gives us.”

The brothers’ hearts melted, but what could they do? They didn’t have control of their money. So they began to give away the silver in their cabinets to the poor. Eventually, this trove was also depleted, and they were left with one silver spoon between them.

The next day, when a beggar approached each of the brothers, they broke the last spoon in half. One took the spoon part and gave it to a beggar, and the other took the handle and gave it to a beggar.

This wonderful act of charity was memorialized on their tombstones, relying on a wordplay. The beginning of the verse, “She extended her palm (kappah) to the poor” – kappah also meaning “her spoon” – appeared on the first tombstone. The completion of the verse, “And she stretched out her hand (yadeha) to the pauper” – yadeha also meaning “her handle” – appeared on the other.

This is an example of “opening the hand” of the highest order.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Yerushalayim.

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חדשות ערוץ 7

Israel National News

Re'eh: Why should we be like the sand of the sea?

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis,

'Who is Hashem speaking to? Is he speaking to me, to each single, individual Jewish person or is he speaking to the whole nation?'

Is the Torah speaking directly to me?

This week's Parasha commences with the words "Re'eh Anochi Noten Lifneichem Hayom Bracha U'klalah", "See, (written in the singular) I am giving you (written in the plural), today a blessing and a curse".

So, who is Hashem speaking to? Is he speaking to me, to each single, individual Jewish person or is he speaking to the whole nation?

Actually, the answer is both. And we have the very same phenomenon at the beginning of next week's Parasha of Shoftim: "Shoftim Veshotrim Titen Lecha Bechol She'arecha", "Judges and bailiffs, you shall place for you, (written in the singular), in all of your (written in the plural) gates..."

Actually, what we find here is a theme that runs right through the Book of Devarim. We all live with dual responsibility – I live by myself for myself and at the same time, I am an important cog within the wheel of Am Yisrael. When Hashem delivers his commandments, they are addressed to me personally, for my life, for the enhancement of my existence, and at the same time, what I do has a direct impact on the fate of the nation as a whole.

And we find this in Sefer Devarim, so beautifully put, through the two paragraphs of the Shema. They contain a lot of the same material. The Mitzvot, 'To Love Hashem', 'To Study the Torah', 'Tefillin' and 'Mezuzah', however there is a major difference: The first paragraph of the Shema is in the singular, addressed to the individual Jew, while the second paragraph of the Shema is in the plural, addressed to us all. So, therefore I have that dual responsibility. For example, when it comes to Talmud Torah, I must learn and I must teach, but I also have a communal responsibility – I must guarantee that there are schools in my district, I must support all teaching initiatives for the sake of the nation.

And so to, when it comes to 'Tefillin' and to 'Mezuzah'. I've come across some wonderful Gemachs, great charities which are there to provide Mezuzahs for people's homes. Mezuzot cost a lot of money – they're not cheap. And so, there are some wonderfully generous people who contribute towards Mezuzot for everybody's homes, recognising that we have a responsibility for ourselves but also for all of the homes in our area.

And this very message is presented to us so beautifully by the Prophet Hoshea, who declared: "Vehaya Mispar Bnei Yisrael K'Chol Hayam", "And the number of the Children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea". Of course, Hoshea was speaking about the remarkable fact that over the years, through the generations, against the odds, we will have great numbers. But why didn't he just talk about 'Chol', 'sand' – why 'K'Chol Hayam', 'the sand of the sea'?

And the reason I believe is, because 'the sand of the sea' is tightly packed together when it's wet, but at the same time, it's made up of single grains of sand. And so too, we, each one of us, is responsible to ourselves, and at the same time, we must never forget our connection to our people and the responsibility that we have towards our society.

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Seeing the Blessing

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

"See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing - if you listen to the mitzvot of Hashem...and the curse - if you do not listen" (Devarim 11:26-28.) Why does the possuk begin with the word "re'eh - see"? It should have simply said, "I present before you today a blessing and a curse."

The Ohr Hachayim explains that for a person to convince others to follow one path and to avoid another, he has to have tried both and seen the value of one over the other. Moshe Rabbeinu was trying to convince Klal Yisroel that only spiritual pursuits have real value. So he said to them, "Re'eh- look at me. I have achieved prominence in the physical world. I have power, wealth, and kingship. And I have also tasted spiritual ecstasy when I ascended to the heavens to receive the Torah. I have experienced the best of both the spiritual and the physical worlds, and I tell you there is nothing that compares to the spiritual blessing that one receives for observing the mitzvot of the

Torah." Moshe Rabbeinu was using himself as an example to convince the people to choose a life of Torah and mitzvot, and that is why he begins with the word re'eh.

Perhaps there is another reason that the possuk begins with re'eh. Sometimes a person can be blessed with physical well-being. He is healthy, financially successful and admired by others. And yet he is not happy with what he has. Shlomo Hamelech writes, "A lover of money will never be satisfied with money" (Koheles 5:9.) Chazal comment, "A person does not leave this world with even half of his material desires fulfilled; one who has one hundred wants two hundred" (Koheles Rabbah 1:32, 3:13.) All too frequently, physical blessing does not lead to happiness. That is why the Torah uses the word re'eh, to highlight the fact that feeling blessed is often a matter of perspective. When one focuses on Torah and mitzvot, on fulfilling the will of Hashem, and he accepts that whatever he has in life is a gift and he is sameach b'chelko (happy with his portion), that will bring him inner satisfaction and contentment.

This could be the deeper meaning behind the statement of Chazal, "And you will eat your bread with satisfaction - he eats a little and it becomes blessed inside him" (Torat Kohanim 1:7, cited by Rashi, Bechukosai 26:5.) Satisfaction is not always a function of the quantity a person eats. The Torah promises that if we follow the path of Torah and mitzvot, if we do not look for physical pleasures but rather we focus on what is truly important in life, then Hashem will make us feel satisfied no matter how much we have. Re'eh - see the blessings in your life with the proper perspective, and you will appreciate them.

There is yet a third lesson that the Torah might be hinting to with the word re'eh - that the way to acquire an appreciation for the beracha of Torah and mitzvot is by exposing oneself to kedusha, by seeing spirituality in action. Later in the parsha, the Torah introduces the mitzvah of ma'aser sheni, which requires a tenth of one's produce to be separated and eaten in Yerushalayim. The possuk explains that the purpose of this mitzvah is, "So that you will learn to fear Hashem, your G-d, all the days" (13:23.) How does eating ma'aser sheni lead a person to yiras shamayim? Tosafot (Bava Basra 21a) quotes the Sifrei which explains that when a person comes to Yerushalayim and sees the kohanim, leviim and talmidei chachamim around the Beis Hamikdash and the whole city involved in spiritual pursuits (kulam oskim b'meleches shamayim), it has an effect on him, so that even when he returns home, he is inspired to dedicate more time and energy to avodas Hashem.

This comment of Chazal teaches a critical lesson. When a person is exposed to kedusha, when he sees others involved in spiritual activities, it elevates him. And that perhaps is the idea the Torah is hinting to with the word re'eh. Even if intellectually a person appreciates the value of Torah and mitzvot, unless he actually exposes himself to experiences of kedusha, he will still find it challenging to remain focused on spiritual endeavors. The environment of a person can have a powerful influence on him. If we look for opportunities to connect to kedusha and we associate with people who are involved in avodas Hashem, that can inspire us to strengthen our commitment to Torah and mitzvot, which in turn will bring us true blessing.

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The Times of Israel

The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Reeh: Blessings and Curses come from within

Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude. -Thomas Jefferson

God prefaces many of His commandments with the line "when you enter the land," meaning, many of these commandments need to wait until we're in the Promised Land or are somehow dependent on the land itself. However, after one of these common introductions God goes on to give an unusually specific location and direction as to where the people of Israel should go and what they should do there.

He orders them to congregate at the twin mountains of Gerizim and Ebal next to the city of Shechem. There, in what turns out to be a massive natural amphitheatre, the assembled nation of Israel are to proclaim the blessings that will be accorded to themselves and their descendents should they listen to God's commandments, as well as the

curse that will befall them should they choose to ignore God's directives. What is physically unusual about the setting is that although the two mountains are almost identical in their shape, size, location and elevation, Mount Gerizim is verdant and alive; Mount Ebal is barren and desolate. Not surprisingly, the blessings were uttered upon Mount Gerizim, the curses on Mount Ebal.

Rabbi Hirsch on Deuteronomy 11:29 elaborates:

"Both of them rise from the same soil, both are watered by the same precipitation – rain and dew. The same air passes over them both; the same pollen is blown over them both. Yet Ebal remains starkly barren, while Gerizim is covered with lush vegetation to its very top."

"Thus we see that blessings and curses are not dependent on external circumstances. Hence, whether we are blessed or cursed is not dependent on the superficial conditions that are imposed upon us, but on how we deal with them – on our attitude..."

Whether we are blessed or cursed is not dependent on any outside force. Our fate doesn't rely on good or bad luck. Happenstance should not determine our inner reality. The opposite is true. Our attitude, how we see the world, how we perceive things, how we react, how we internalize the reality around us, that will determine whether we are blessed or cursed. It is completely in our hands.

May we be grateful for the blessings in our lives and see it as such.

Shabbat Shalom

Dedication - To the tail end of summer. It is beautiful and blessed.

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Shabbat and Water

The Sabbath Amidah Prayer

Unlike the weekday Amidah ('standing prayer') that contains nineteen blessings, the Sabbath Amidah only has seven blessings. Why seven? The Talmud (Berachot 29a) explains that these seven blessings correspond to the seven times the phrase "God's voice" appears in Psalm 29.

God's voice is upon the waters.

God's voice is in strength.

God's voice is in beauty.

God's voice shatters the cedars.

God's voice hews with flames of fire.

God's voice makes the desert tremble.

God's voice frightens the deer and strips the forest bare.

Why did the Sages associate this psalm, which contains not a single mention of Shabbat, to the Sabbath prayers? Also, why did they describe this psalm as the one that David composed "upon the waters"? Why the emphasis on water?

Waters of Destruction

The world appears most advanced and perfected when seen in its developed, built-up state. But upon deeper reflection, it is possible to recognize that there is also a need for destructive forces in the world. If we can perceive the benefits of destructive phenomena — like the positive role played by forest fires in the growth and regeneration of a forest — then we may grasp how also these forces indicate the underlying purpose and Divine wisdom governing the universe.

Water is a particularly apt metaphor for nature's destructive forces. Water, the seas and the oceans, are the antithesis of human progress and civilization. David composed Psalm 29 while reflecting "upon the water." He contemplated the great destructive forces in the world — leaving mighty cedars shattered, deserts shaking, and forests stripped bare — and in their deafening roar of upheaval he was able to hear the voice of God. Thus the phrase "God's voice" is the psalm's leitmotif, repeated seven times.

This insight is most clearly revealed in the spectacular devastation of cultivated land by floodwaters in the time of Noah. Thus the psalm concludes by recalling the tremendous destruction of the Flood — "God sat enthroned at the Flood" (29:10) — a destruction that cleansed the world of all that was irretrievably evil.

Sabbath Rest

What does all this have to do with the Sabbath? We mistakenly think that our greatest achievements are to be found in our actions and

practical accomplishments. Idleness and inactivity are assumed to be inconsequential, if not negative, aspects of life.

In truth, it is rest that perfects all actions. Rest is a contemplative process that gives meaning and purpose to our endeavors. This is the value of menuchah, the spiritual rest on the Sabbath day. It deepens our intellectual awareness and enhances our spiritual life. The Sabbath rest crowns our weekday activities, directing them toward their true purpose.

Seven Blessings

Now we may understand why the Sabbath Amidah prayer contains seven blessings. The number seven incorporates six — corresponding to the six days of creative activity — plus an additional seventh dimension of direction and purpose.¹ The seven blessings of the Sabbath Amidah teach that the menuchah of Shabbat is not just a negative quality, a cessation from productive work, but rather the development of our moral faculties and spiritual direction, cultivating our closeness to God and His ways.

(Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 31-33. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. II, pp. 19-20; Ein Eyah vol. I on Berachot 29a (4:43))

¹ Cf. Tiferet Yisrael ch. 40, where the Maharal (Rabbi Yehudah Loew of Prague, 1525-1609) explains the significance of the number seven as the physical universe — represented by the six sides of a three-dimensional box — plus one, its inner direction or content.

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Peninim on the Torah Hebrew Academy of Cleveland

Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Parashas Re'eh

ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה

Behold! I set before you today the blessing and the curse. (11:26)

"It is either/or," writes Targum Yonasan: Ana mesader kadameichou birkesa v'chilufta, "I arranged for you today a blessing and its opposite. Sforno writes, "Perceive that your affairs are not of an intermediate nature — as is the case concerning other nations. The fate of other nations is not marked by full prosperity or complete devastation — as is ours. Theirs is not a condition of extremes: of blessing and curse." The lot of Hashem's People, His children, is destined to be the most uncommon, in which there will be no middle course. We will either be blessed or cursed. Klal Yisrael does not have the luxury of a moderate stance. One is either good/blessed or bad/cursed. Torah brooks no compromise. Our commitment to Hashem must be total, unequivocal. Thus, our decision (which should be one of clarity) has two options: blessing or curse — one or the other. We cannot have both.

Centrism is a form of moderation and compromise. I once heard a powerful idea attributed to the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, who commented concerning those who choose the middle road, the road of compromise, the centrist road. He said, "There is no middle road when it comes to avodas Hashem, serving G-d. One is either a tzaddik or a rasha." The Rebbe peered out the window and said, "Men/human beings walk on the sidewalk — on the right or left side of the street. In the middle go the horses." Nothing can be added to his holy words. It may sound like I am preaching living to the extreme. For a Jew, life is to the extreme. One cannot relax his Torah observance, perform his mitzvos at a more convenient time. One either performs or he is a rasha. If one chooses a centrist approach based upon compromise, he risks walking together with the horses — or worse — being considered to be one of them.

Furthermore, the blessing and curse to which the Torah refers are not rewards; rather, they define the life one leads. One who listens to Hashem is blessed. One who refuses to listen is cursed. It is as simple as that. It is something that re'eh, one can see — if he is willing to open his eyes and look. This is not the place to dramatize and spell out the ill effects of a "non-listening" lifestyle. It is re'eh, plain for all to see.

Since we have no middle road -- and not listening is fraught with the danger of curse -- it is important, writes the Chazon Ish, zl, to inculcate into the hearts and minds of our youth that one must go to the extreme, not compromise, not accept any artificial form of observance. It is either the real thing or it is nothing. They must see the derech ha'emes, path of truth, without embellishment, without ambiguity. It is very much like a bird that flies in the sky. It must

constantly flap its wings or else it falls to the ground. It can glide only so far. So, too, must we always keep our wings flapping and stay the course.

Horav Lazar Brody, Shlita, offers an excellent analogy to illustrate how the closer one gravitates to a life of observance, of blessing, the further he removes himself from the source of curse. A king had an only son, who was very special to him. Enamored with his son, the king would do anything for the prince. One day, the prince began to complain of severe pain in his feet. A few days later, his feet began to swell; infection was beginning to set in. The king summoned medical specialists from all over the kingdom. The greatest medical minds of the land came and were confronted with a medical mystery which no one could solve. Finally, after great deliberation, they came to the overwhelming conclusion: the prince's legs must be amputated.

When the king heard the diagnosis and dreaded cure, he asked, "Are you absolutely certain that this is the only way to save my dear son's life?" The physicians shook their collective heads, nodding to the affirmative. The prince's legs must be amputated, or he would soon die. They scheduled the surgery, as the broken-hearted king prepared for the worst. Suddenly, the royal shoemaker ran into the palace and begged to be heard. What could a shoemaker have to add to the educated opinions of such distinguished physicians? "Please, my king, permit me to speak. I can cure the prince," the shoemaker declared, somewhat out of breath. The physicians were at first shocked with this man's insolence. What could he offer that they, the brilliant doctors, could not achieve? The shoemaker looked at the king with pleading eyes, "Please!" he asked. "Allow me one chance." The king listened. After all, the shoemaker was a trusted and devoted citizen, and he made fine shoes.

"My king, I am the heir to a distinguished lineage of master craftsmen. For generations, my family has provided the finest leather shoes for the royal family. As such, we understand the dynamics of the foot and the critical importance of wearing proper, well-fitting shoes. Ill-fitting shoes can cause many problems, even circulation issues." The shoemaker examined the prince's feet and prescribed a comfortable shoe in a larger size. Two days later, the prince's gray pallor began to subside, and his color began to return. The pain dissipated and the weakness improved, as the prince was able to get off the bed and walk with support. Within ten days the prince was completely cured, to the overwhelming joy of his parents and the rest of the kingdom.

The lesson is clear: Am Yisrael is compared to the ill crown prince, who is impeded by the severe, debilitating pain in his feet, which hinders his mobility and health. The infection in the prince's feet exemplifies our bitter exile, with the actual feet representing Jewish life. The king's physicians are the philosophers, maskillim, enlightened by the modernism preached by a society bent on secularism and the abolishment of religion. The shoes are the tarbus ha'goyim, gentile culture, with its liberal -- often hedonistic and usually immoral -- views. The new correct-fitting shoes signify a life of Torah adherence, ritual observance, and mitzvah performance. The shoemaker is none other than the tzaddik, holy, righteous leader of the generation -- whose job it is to save the prince from the faulty diagnosis of the secularists.

The secularists, reformers who seek to modernize Jewry, blame all of its supposed ills on tradition. They feel that the only solution to Jewish life in exile is amputation, severing our relationship with the past, with Sinai, with Hashem. The tzaddik teaches otherwise. Only by living a life of Torah does the Jewish soul achieve its proper "fit." It does not require a podiatrist to understand the message of this analogy.

**אבד תאבדון את כל המקומות אשר עבדו שם הגוים אשר אתם ירשים
אתם את אלהיהם על ההרים הרמים ועל הגבעות ותחת כל עץ רענן
You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations that you
are driving away worshipped their gods: on the high mountains and
on the hills, and under every leafy tree. (12:2)**

The Torah instructs us to destroy the idols and the places where they were worshipped. Actually, halachah dictates that only the idol itself is destroyed -- not the place upon which the idol was set. Furthermore, if a hill, mountain, or tree attached to the ground was designated as an idol, it did not have to be destroyed. What is the meaning of the Torah's exhortation to "destroy all the places"? Horav

Michel Feinstein, zl, explains that, obviously, idols have no power whatsoever. They consist of nothingness; they are simply a ruse to fool their worshippers. One of the methods employed by its priests to ensnare people was to set the idol upon a high place or beneath a verdant tree. Thus, they implied that the idol was of an elevated status, or that it provided comforting shade. In order to refute these false messages, the Torah enjoined us to remove the idol from the place, exposing its diminutive, powerless nature. It is nothing. Once its foundation is removed, its true insignificance is revealed. Everyone now sees that the idol is comprised of emptiness.

This idea applies equally to the idol's espousers and leadership. When they are revealed in their true colors, when the facade that they represent is exposed, when the people who have followed them see clearly that their leaders are a sham -- the hold these people have over them is broken.

It is related that Aristotle, the great philosopher, was caught in an inappropriate act, clearly not becoming an individual of his distinguished status. When asked how he allowed himself to act in this manner, his answer was classic and indicative of his true essence. "Now, I am not Aristotle," he responded. He was implying that, once the mask is removed, one sees the true essence of a person. Aristotle's eminence was based upon a sham. It was all fake. The real Aristotle was capable of acting in the most base and reprehensible manner. Everything else was a façade.

The secular leadership who advocate modernity, who shun tradition and view our way of life as archaic and senseless, are far from elevated people. They live a life of moral abandon, answering only to their whims and passions, while espousing a decadent philosophy and dogma to support their lifestyle. If one were to see them for what they really are, his attachment to them would quickly wane. By piercing through the façade, we pierce their bubble, exposing the bankruptcy of their cause.

כי עם קדוש אתה לד' אלקיך

For you are a holy people to Hashem, your G-d. (14:2)

Rashi explains that our personal kedushah, sanctity, is endowed to us by our forebears, our ancestors. In my opinion, herein lies one of the most inspiring principles of Judaism: we are descendants of a holy, illustrious lineage, and, as such, we have a responsibility to maintain this pedigree. This is perhaps one of the reasons that so many assimilated Jews have no impetus to return. They have no idea of their heritage, who they are, and from whom they have descended. The German reformers who initiated the break with traditional Judaism first erased Jewish history. They were acutely aware that, as long as we maintain a connection with the past, it would be difficult to sever one's relationship with Judaism. Torah became a legend. The Oral Law was the work of a group of overzealous, demanding rabbis; thus, it had no basis in Jewish law. Once that connection was broken, the rest was simple. Many of our ancestors were simple -- for the most part not erudite -- and economically-challenged people, who remained averse and diffident, living in the ghetto from birth to cradle. Without history, we can have no pride; without pride; we have no destiny.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our long history of forebears; as such, we have a responsibility to maintain their legacy. First and foremost, we owe it to ourselves and to them to study and research that legacy. Who were they? How did they live? How did they die? Why? Certainly, any serious-minded Jew or Jewess who possesses a modicum of intelligence will ask him or herself: So, why am I not following in their footsteps? Why am I not proud of my Jewish identity? After all, are not all of the preceding generations counting on me? Do I not owe them something?

These are timely questions which are sadly not asked much anymore. Today, the lines are drawn. One is either frum, observant, or not. Well, at least that is the way it used to be. Unfortunately, we are discovering more and more that some young people from observant homes have questions which they are not interested in sweeping under the rug. The outside world can today be accessed with the touch of a phone. They are regularly bombarded with enticing propaganda wherever they go. While the vast majority is sheltered from the various media -- there are always the innocent few, the troubled, the one child that got away. We are often too busy to notice the change until it is too late. It begins subtly and, with time, becomes more

dramatic. We wonder how it happened. Perhaps... just perhaps... maybe we never explained to them that they are part of something great, that they play a critical role in its continuity, and that they have in their hands the power to destroy the hopes and aspirations of thousands of their ancestors. Perhaps the following vignette might awaken someone. It is not new, but its timeless message is certainly worth repeating.

The story takes place in Kiev in 1960, but it must be a story that has often repeated itself, when elderly parents sit down with their children and share with them the regrets concerning the past and their hopes for the future – not their future, but that of their children. In this vignette, an elderly father took a quiet boat ride on the Dnieper River with his last surviving child – his daughter.

We have to remember that many of these parents, although not necessarily old, were nonetheless aged in the sense that they had survived World War II in Russia, and had lived through much persecution and suffering. Many were not physically well and they were emotionally overwhelmed with anxiety concerning the future of their children – not the physical future, but their spiritual/Jewish future.

The father began, “You know, my dear daughter, I had five sons who did not survive the difficult war years. Sadly, I do not have anyone to recite Kaddish for me when my time comes to leave this world. Therefore, I want you to be my Kaddish, to sanctify your life, so that you will be a living tribute to sanctifying Hashem, thus perpetuating my name. I want you to understand that your concern should not be only for your personal self, but also for the memory of all those in your family who preceded you in life and who are no longer here. You are their hope.

“Now, I know that Shabbos, kashrus, etc. are mitzvos upon which I am certain you would never renege. Our heritage is too much a part of you. It is the basics, such as behaving with a demeanor becoming a member of the *am ha’nivchar*, chosen people, acting and living out your life with kedushah, sanctity, *tznius*, moral modesty, both in attire and comportment, that reflect your noble calling. Your dealings with your fellowman should bespeak a status whereby people will comment: ‘There goes Chaim Kohen’s daughter.’

“Our sages teach us a frightening lesson: If children leave the path of Torah forged for them by their parents, then their father’s merit cannot save them – regardless of their father’s virtue and piety. On the other hand, a child who is a *tzaddik*, righteous, can save a father and cause his *neshamah*, soul, to be taken out of Gehinom, Purgatory, even if the father was a *rasha*, evil-doer. Therefore, I ask for myself – and all those who have preceded me - that you perform the mitzvos with proper care, giving attention to maintaining yourself on an elevated level of propriety and ethical character, so that the labor of a lifetime will not go down the proverbial drain.

“What do I mean with the words ‘labor of a lifetime?’” The father pointed to a bridge that spanned the river. It was a large, solidly constructed bridge which served as the means for connecting two parts of the city, allowing for thousands of vehicles to cross it daily. “Do you see that bridge?” he asked. “Hundreds of people worked to construct that bridge. It took a few years of great effort exerted by many in order to provide us with this wonderful bridge. At the end of the job, the contractor presented the government with his bill. Our government is very astute. It will not pay for a commissioned job until it has been tested out. They must confirm that everything was executed in accordance with the plan and blueprint. Is the bridge strong? Will it last for many years? They test the bridge to see if it is able to bear the enormous weight of all the traffic that will traverse it daily. To this end, they bring a train pulling forty cars loaded with coal and run them across the bridge. If it withstands the test and all forty cars are able to make it across, - it is a success. If not...

“This test is not only for money, for failure means there is no payment. It is also about pride and reputation. For some, failure can spell disaster. It took years developing their skill and reputation and, in the span of a few minutes, all could be all lost.

“And the test begins. One by one, the cars slowly make it onto the bridge. As each car rolls onto the bridge, the weight on it increases, and the suspense builds. Thirty cars have crossed – thirty one – two – three... finally the last car – number forty is slowly grinding its way up to the bridge. Knuckles are white, breathing is

slowed almost to a halt; this is the moment that matters most. Will they leave successful, or will they leave with their heads bowed in defeat? The car reaches the middle of the bridge, and the bridge begins to tremble. Suddenly, with a loud crashing noise, the bridge crumbles under the weight, causing all forty cars to plunge into the river below. All of the toil exerted by the engineers, the technicians, the various laborers – all for naught. Instead of being crowned with laurels, they return home in shame and dejection.

“It is very much the same with the bridge that spans the generations, the chain that stretches back to Sinai and reaches all the way back to Avraham Avinu. Every one of our fathers, our ancestors, traversed that bridge of life. They passed the ultimate test by clinging to their beliefs and maintaining their convictions. I, too, will not live forever, and one day I will go the way of all men. I will have lived my life with conviction and observed Hashem’s Torah and mitzvos, despite the many challenges which I confronted. We – they and I - look to you to remain strong, to overcome the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, that is constantly presenting obstacles in our way. Remember, an error on your part affects not only your life, but the legacies, hopes and aspirations of all of us who preceded you. You are that last car that can make the difference between success and eternal failure.”

The message is quite simple: It is not always about us. Each and every one of us carries an enormous responsibility upon his/her shoulders. The decisions and choices we make do not affect only our lives, but have ramifications throughout time. We owe it to the many generations of our forebears who rely upon us.

כִּי טוֹב לוֹ עִמָּךְ

For it is good for him with you. (15:16)

The Talmud Kiddushin 20a teaches that the *eved Ivri*, Jewish bondsman, enjoys the same standard of living as does his owner. *Imcha b’maachal u’b’mishteh*, “With you in food and drink. You should neither eat white bread while the *eved* eats black bread, nor should you sleep on cushions while he sleeps on straw.” This teaches us that one who purchases an *eved* is actually purchasing an *adon*, a master, for himself. *Tosfos* question why the bondsman becomes the master, on a higher level than the owner. Why does the owner not simply have equal status with the *eved*? Why would the *eved* be better? They explain that, as long as the master has two equal pillows, they both have equality. (If he only has one, if neither uses it, it is a *middas Sodom* (a designation used to describe a very evil, heartless person.) Therefore, the master gives the pillow to the *eved*. Now, the *eved* has a pillow and the master has nothing. This is why Chazal consider it as if the master now has a master over him. The *Maharit* wonders why Rabbi Akiva’s rule of *Chayecha kodmin*, “Your life precedes his.” *V’chai achicha imach*, “So that your brother can live with you” (*Vayikra* 25:36). Why should the master be relegated to giving up his pillow, if it means that he will not have a pillow upon which to sleep?

Horav Leib Lopian, *zl*, offers a powerful insight into the emotions of people and how the Torah is concerned and sensitive to each person’s individual feelings. When the owner, who always sleeps on a soft pillow, must give it up, so that his *eved* is comfortable, the owner will (as a result of sleeping on a pillow of straw) feel the pangs of poverty. He now knows what a poor man who cannot afford a soft pillow must endure in a night’s sleep. When the *eved* must sleep on a straw pillow, however, his pain goes deeper. He senses more than poverty. He realizes that he has the straw because he is the *eved*, and, since there is only one soft pillow, it goes to the master. Thus, the Torah demands that we delve into the mind of the *eved*, feel what he feels. It is one thing to be poor – and feel it; it is entirely another feeling to feel that one is a slave.

Horav Avraham Gurwitz, *Shlita*, relates that his father-in-law (Rav Leib Lopian) once traveled with an orphaned student to arrange for him (the student) to be able to continue learning in the *yeshivah*. They stopped for the night at a home which had only one bed and a couch for sleeping. Rav Leib insisted that the young man use the bed while he (the *Rosh Yeshivah* of Gateshead) slept on the couch. His son-in-law felt that his rationale was based on the above. If the young man would sleep on the couch, it would awaken within him a sense of sadness over being an orphan. To put it in contemporary vernacular, when someone has a problem, hang-ups, issues which

weigh heavily on his mind, if he feels stigmatized because he senses that he is different, any change in his life will exacerbate his feelings of dejection. An orphan carries considerable baggage on his shoulders. When a situation arises in which that weight increases (or, at least, he thinks it did), he will be aware of it.

רפאנו ד' – Heal us, Hashem. And we will be healed.

Sickness presents the Jew with conflicting emotions. On the one hand, he is religiously challenged. Who does not want to be healthy? Who feels that his actions warrant illness, pain and debilitation? Sickness is an overwhelming challenge for us to overcome. It takes a very special person to accept sickness with equanimity. On the other hand, once we realize that Hashem communicates with us through his agency of illness, we are able to advance on our relationship with Hashem by using illness as the vehicle for engendering prayer, faith and hope. Sickness brings with it loneliness, dejection, feelings of betrayal. Conversely, once we affirm our faith that sickness is Hashem's communication, we realize that we are really not alone, for Hashem is by our side. He employs sickness as a vehicle for spiritual healing. It is an unprecedented opportunity to reach out and strengthen our feelings about Hashem, increase our faith in Him. Thus, as we progress, our loneliness dissipates, as we begin to acknowledge that we are never really alone.

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חדשות ערוץ 7

Israel National News - Blogs

BDS Running Wild Until Stopped in Queens

Dr. Joseph Frager

After 200 Reform Rabbis had the gall to support BDS operatives, the Queens Museum decided to cancel a planned 70th Anniversary celebration on the very spot that the UN declared Israel a State on November 29th, 1947. The Queens Museum is a stone's throw from my house in Jamaica Estates. It is also a museum the President of the United States knows well.

The director of the Museum Laura Raicovich who called it a "political event" and "worried about Palestinian friends of the museum" canceled it after it was already set fully in motion. Israel's UN Ambassador Danny Danon said, "We will not accept this blatant discrimination against the State of Israel and we will not let this decision stand". Laurie Raicovich was the editor of a book

entitled "Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency, and Cultural Production". Articles in support of BDS were found in the book.

The publisher of the book said "that boycott and divestment are essential tools for activists around the globe". The Governor of New York who also knows the Queens Museum quite well having grown up in my neck of the woods, has admirably and courageously come out with legislation against BDS in New York State. My friends City Councilman Rory Lancman and Assemblyman Michael Simanowitz who both stood with me against BDS years ago when no one even knew what it stood for have both come out swinging. It appears that they were successful. At the moment of this writing, Rory tells me they got the Museum to reverse Laurie Raicovich's decision. It must be pointed out that Rory Lancman has been fighting Linda Sarsour in New York longer than anyone.

I believe Linda Sarsour is partially responsible for getting Laurie Raicovich to block the 70th Anniversary Celebration of Israel's Statehood. UN Ambassador Danon has called for the resignation of Laurie Raicovich. I second the motion. When Anti-Israel and Anti-Semitic actions rear their ugly head they must be squashed immediately. It is entirely unacceptable in a State that has declared BDS illegal that one person can wreak so much havoc. The outcry should be from every corner.

Israel remains and will always be America's staunchest ally in the Middle East. BDS weakens Israel and as a result weakens America. It is time to rise up and end the BDS scourge once and for all.

The writer is a leading American pro-Israel activist who sponsors and coordinates many Zionist events. He is clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine (Gastroenterology & Liver Diseases) at the Einstein School of Medicine as well as a practicing physician.

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שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה

Added:

<http://www.torahmusings.com/2017/08/solar-eclipses-in-judaism/>
by R. Gil Student

Solar Eclipses in Judaism

On August 21, 2017, parts of North America will experience a total solar eclipse for the first time in 26 years.1 New York and New Jersey will only see a partial eclipse but apparently there is more to this country than the Tri-State Area. Many enthusiasts are traveling to locations where they can experience the darkness that occurs when sunlight is not visible (don't ruin their fun by telling them about nighttime). In all seriousness, this is a rare natural phenomenon.

What does the Torah have to say about solar eclipses?

I. Blessing on Eclipse

The Mishnah (Berakchos 54a) lists phenomena on which someone who sees them recites a blessing. Among these are incredible sights such as mountains, seas and lightning. There is no mention of a solar eclipse. Should someone who sees a solar eclipse recite a blessing such as "Oseh ma'aseh bereishis, Who performs acts of Creation"? Dr. Jeremy Brown has an article on this subject in the next issue of the journal Hakirah (vol. 23). Because of its timeliness, the article is already online at Hakirah.org ("The Great American Eclipse of 2017: Halachic and Philosophical Aspects"). Dr. Brown quotes the Rav Menachem Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, as saying that you should not recite a blessing on a solar eclipse (Iggeros Kodesh vol. 15 p. 260). He offers two reasons. First, the Talmud does not mention a blessing on a solar eclipse and we must follow that precedent. Second, which is really an explanation of the Talmudic omission, is that a solar eclipse is a bad omen, as we will discuss shortly. We should pray for the bad omen to be annulled rather than bless the occurrence.

Dr. Brown also quotes Rav Chaim David Ha-Levi (Responsa Aseh Lecha Rav, 150) as ruling similarly based on the first reason. While he cannot approve a new blessing, he suggests saying the verses of "Vayevarech David" (1 Chron. 29:10) and adding to the end "Who performs acts of Creation." Dr. Brown quotes Rav David Lau, current Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel, who suggest reciting Tehillim 19 and 104 on seeing a solar eclipse (She'al Es Ha-Rav, 7 Nissan 5766).

II. Allegorical Meanings of Eclipse

The Gemara (Sukkah 29a) says two things about solar eclipses. The first is that solar eclipses are a bad omen for whole world. Another opinion is that they are a bad omen for gentiles while lunar eclipses are a bad omen for Jews (since the Jewish calendar is lunar while the Gentile calendar is solar). Additionally, the Gemara says that four things cause solar eclipses: 1) a deceased head judge who is eulogized insufficiently, 2) a betrothed woman who is attacked and not saved, 3) homosexual relations and 4) twin brothers killed at the same time.

The Rema (Toras Ha-Olah 1:8) asks how the Sages can attribute reasons to a solar eclipse, which is a natural occurrence. Whether or not people sin, the solar eclipse will happen. What are these reasons? He quotes the Akeidas Yitzchak (Vayechi, ch. 32) and Yesod Olam (3:17) who each interpret this passage allegorically. The Akeidas Yitzchak explains that solar eclipse really refers to the death of the righteous, the lights of our community who are extinguished. Yesod Olam goes in the other direction. He understands the four reasons for a solar eclipse as allegories for the movement of the moon. For example, the two brothers who die refer to the sun and the moon who both lose their light, so to speak, during a solar eclipse. Rema offers a different allegorical interpretation, connecting the four reasons to the movements of the astrological signs relating to a solar eclipse.

Centuries later, Rav Chaim Elazar Shapiro (Divrei Torah 6:93) offered an additional allegorical interpretation. He compares the moon's receipt of light from the sun to the Jewish people's receipt of divine attention or overflow. When that is blocked in any way, it signifies a distance from God.

Significantly, Rema explains that a solar eclipse can be a bad omen even though it is a natural phenomenon. The basic premise of astrology is that there are times of the year that are good for certain things and bad for other things, which can be understood by examining the stars. While great rabbis debated the legitimacy of astrology (e.g. Rambam was against, Ibn Ezra was in favor), Rema explains that a solar eclipse is no different. It is a natural phenomenon like the movement of the stars, which those who accept astrology recognize as meaningful to people. Centuries later, the Aruch La-Ner (Sukkah 29a) and Ben Yehoyada (Sukkah 29a) explained the bad omen similarly, as a time when bad things happen naturally.

III. Other Explanations

Maharal (Be'er Ha-Golah, ch. 6, p. 106) explains that the Gemara is offering reasons why God established nature in such a way that there would be solar eclipses. If people did not sin, we would merit eternal light. However, because God knew people would sin, He created the world in such a way that solar eclipses would happen. The Gemara is not offering the reason for a solar eclipse (which is nature) but the reason behind the reason (why nature is that way). The Shelah (Hagahos to Bereishis, quoted in Sedeih Tzofim, Sukkah 29a) explains similarly.

Some authorities believe that the Gemara is not talking about solar eclipses. Rav Yonasan Eybeschutz (Ye'aros Devash 2:10) suggests that the Gemara is referring to sunspots. While solar eclipses can be predicted, sunspots cannot and are caused by sin. Rav Yehosef Schwartz (Divrei Yosef 1:9) suggests that the Gemara is discussing unexpected atmospheric phenomena. He says that on 28 Iyar 1838 in Jerusalem at 4pm, the sun turned dark red for about an hour. Everyone was amazed by the sight. Over the next three months, Jerusalem experienced a terrible plague with many deaths. Rav Schwartz says that this was an example of the Talmudic phenomenon.

Dr. Brown quotes the Lubavitcher Rebbe (ibid.) as explaining that the Gemara refers to weather patterns. He also quotes Rav David Pardo (Chasdei David, Sukkah 2:6) who claims that while eclipses are natural in general, they can occur supernaturally, as well. Those eclipses are caused by sin.

According to NASA: A 1991 total solar eclipse could be seen in Hawaii and a 1979 total solar eclipse could be seen in the northwest. ←

<http://www.thelakewoodscoop.com/news/2017/08/star-ks-top-ten-2017-total-solar-eclipse-faqs-the-chofetz-chaim-message-prior-to-radin-eclipse-videos.html>

STAR-K's Top Ten 2017 Total Solar Eclipse FAQs & the Chofetz Chaim's Message Prior to Radin's Eclipse

AUG 16 2017 1:06 PM

By: Rabbi Dovid Heber. Q. What is a total solar eclipse?

A total solar eclipse is when the moon totally blocks the sun. It turns dark during the middle of the day and stars become visible. The corona (the sun's outer atmosphere that normally cannot be seen) is also visible and appears as a pearly glow around the dark side of the moon that covers the sun.

Q. When will it occur?

It will occur this Monday, Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul, August 21, 2017.

The exact time will depend on one's location. The maximum amount of totality in any one location will be 2 minutes and 40 seconds.

Q. From where can one view the total eclipse?

The total eclipse will be visible along a narrow band from Oregon to South Carolina. Major metropolitan areas in this path include parts of Kansas City, St. Louis, Nashville, and Charleston, SC.

Q. What if it's cloudy?

e zoche to greet Moshiach before these times.

If it is cloudy it will still get dark, however, most of the other fascinating aspects of this experience including watching the moon slowly cover the sun and viewing the sun's corona around the sun during totality will not be possible.

Q. What is a partial solar eclipse and from where will it be visible?

A partial solar eclipse is when the moon covers only part of the sun during which time there are darker conditions and a partially blocked sun is visible. This coming Monday, it will be visible from all regions of North America. For example, New York City will see a partial eclipse (about 70% of the sun will be blocked) that will peak at 2:44 pm.

Q. Is it dangerous to view a solar eclipse and if so how does one protect himself?

YES! IT IS ALWAYS DANGEROUS TO LOOK AT THE SUN. This is true even when it is partially covered. Looking at the sun without proper protection can G-d forbid cause permanent eye damage and even blindness r"l. This point cannot be stressed enough. The only time during an eclipse that it is safe to look at the event is during totality when the sun is totally covered and only the sun's corona is visible. One should use special "eclipse glasses" (not regular sunglasses) from a certified and reputable source. Inspect them to ensure they are not scratched or damaged. Use these filtered shades during the entire partial phase – both before and after totality. If one is in an area where only the partial eclipse is visible, these special glasses must be used the entire time while viewing the event.

Q. What is a lunar eclipse?

A lunar eclipse occurs when the earth is situated directly between the sun and moon and the earth blocks the sunlight from reaching the moon. The shadow of the earth covers the moon so that the full moon becomes darkened in the night sky.

Q. Is a bracha recited on an eclipse?

No. Although a bracha is recited on other niflaos haboray such as an earthquake, thunder and lightning, a bracha is not recited upon viewing a solar or lunar eclipse.

Q. What other inyanei halacha and hashkafa are discussed in relationship to an eclipse?

The Gemara (Sukka 29a) has various memrahs about eclipses. The Gemara states that a solar eclipse is a siman rah l'ovday kochavim and a lunar eclipse is a siman rah l'sonayhem shel Yisroel (a euphemism for Klal Yisroel). The Gemara continues and says that when Klal Yisroel does the Retzono Shel Makom (the will of Hashem) we have nothing to be afraid of. The Bais Yosef (Orach Chaim 426) addresses the impact of a lunar eclipse on the latest time to recite Kiddush Levana and how a solar eclipse does not have the same impact. The Chovos Halavavos (Cheshbon Hanefesh 3:23) mentions how a lunar and solar eclipse are great niflaos haboray (wonders of our Creator). Rabbi Shmuel Pliskin zt"l, a talmid of the Yeshiva in Radin, in an article published in the monthly Eretz Yisroel Torah Journal titled "Bais Yaakov" (Elul 5722/1962, Page 13 – see <http://hebrewbooks.org/27762>) indicates the following. The Chofetz Chaim instructed the residents of Radin to view a solar eclipse (that occurred in Radin) to see how the Ribono Shel Olam slowly ceases the koach of the mighty sun, which is worshipped by some nations as an Avoda Zarah, to show that the sun was nivra (created) and is not a borei (creator). The article goes on to describe how everyone gathered together with the Chofetz Chaim early in the morning to view this great event.

Q. When will the next total solar and lunar eclipses be visible in the Continental US?

The next total solar eclipse visible in the Continental United States will be April 8, 2024,

Erev Rosh Chodesh Nisan 5784. Totality will be visible from Dallas, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Buffalo, and parts of Montreal. The next two lunar two eclipses visible in the Continental US will be on Tu B'Shvat 5778, January 31, 2018 (only partial on the East Coast) and on Tu B'Shvat 5779, Jan. 20-21, 2019 (total throughout the Continental US). May we be zoche to greet Moshiach before these times.