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Talmud Torah and Kabalas Ol Malchus Shamayim

Partial transcript of an address of
Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchik zt"l to the
RCA Convention, 1975, on the topic of gerut.
This is a preamble to the shiur.
Transcribed by Eitan Fiorino.[1]

Before I start, I would like to discharge another duty; believe me I do it with sadness in my heart. You know me; I have never criticized anybody, never attacked anybody, and I have never set myself up as judge and arbiter, to approve or disapprove of statements made by others. However, today I feel it is my duty to make the following statement, and I am very sad that I have to do it. But somehow, I have no choice in the matter; there is no alternative. What I am going to say, I want you to understand, is my credo about Torah and about the way Torah should be taught and Torah should be studied.

I have been a Rosh Yeshiva and a teacher of Talmud all my life, at least the major part of my adult life. I have taught many, many people -- I don't know how many, but many people -- and when I do teach, time comes to a stop for me. I don't look at the timepiece, the clock, or at my wristwatch. I just teach.

Teaching has a tremendous and very strange impact on me. I simply feel that when I teach Torah, I feel the breath of eternity on my face. Even now that I am old, or certainly not young, teaching Torah and giving shiurim relieves me of the fear of death, and all the blues and depressive moments which other people go through. When I do teach, I feel rejuvenated, as if I were 25 or 30 years old. If not for the study and teaching of Torah, I would have lost my sanity in the year of triple aveilus in sixty-seven [2] -- I was on the verge of mental collapse and breakdown. I did not. I emerged victorious, and this is due to one thing only -- I would

say my mad dedication to Torah. I am not trying to brag or to boast; I am telling you the truth. I was [hit] that year and the following years; I felt somehow that I was not alone, that I had somebody; there was somebody invisible but whose presence I felt, to confide in; there was somebody on whose shoulder I could cry; there was somebody from whom I could almost demand words of solace and comfort. People don't know, and again, please take the proper spirit, I'm not bragging, they don't know how much my schedule is. They know I say shiurim here. Alright, fine, I say shiur three times a week in Yeshiva; even though the shiurim are an hour and a half, it never happens that I should get through in an hour and a half -- two hours, sometimes three hours, sometimes more than three hours. It is very strange -- the boys that sit in my class are very young, perhaps one quarter, one third of my age, but they come out exhausted, and I come out refreshed. That is shiur. Then I come to Boston, and every Friday morning from half past eight, for three hours until half past eleven, I study with my son-in-law. On Saturday, believe me that I cannot afford to take a nap on Saturday morning and I have not taken a nap on Saturday morning for the last, I would say twenty years perhaps, because I study with my grandchildren. I study with Moshe three hours at least, and I study with Meir two and a half hours. The same is Sunday, the same is Monday. I have no time sometimes, just to sit down and to relax.

The study of Torah has a great cathartic impact upon me. It is rooted in the wondrous experience I always have when I open up a gemara. Somehow, when I open a gemara, either alone or when I am in company, when I teach others, I have the impression -- don't call it hallucination -- I have the impression that I hear soft footsteps of somebody, invisible, who comes in and sits down with me, sometimes looking over my shoulder. The idea is not a mystical idea -- the mishna in avos, the gemara in Brachos says yachid sheyoshev v'osek batorah, shechina shruya [3]. We all believe that the nosein hatorah, the One who gave us the Torah, has never deserted the Torah. And He simply accompanies the Torah; wherever the Torah has a rendezvous, an appointment, a date with somebody, He is there.

Therefore, the study of Torah has never been for me dry formal intellectual performance, no matter how important a role the intellect plays in limud hatorah. You know very well that I place a great deal of emphasis upon the intellectual understanding and the analysis of the halachos; you know that this is actually what my grandfather zt"l introduced, and you know -- I have said it so many times, and I will say it again -- our methodology, our analysis, and our manner of conceptualizing, inferring, classifying, and defining halachic matters does not lag behind the most modern philosophical analyses I happen to know something about. We are far ahead of it; the tools, the logical tools, the epistemological instruments which we employ in order to analyze a sugya in shabbos or bava kama are the most modern -- they are very impressive, the creations of my grandfather. Anyway, we avail ourselves of the most modern methods of understanding, of constructing, of inferring, of classifying, of defining, and so forth and so on. So there is no doubt that the intellect plays a tremendous role in limud hatorah.

However, talmud torah is more than intellectual performance. It is a total, all-encompassing and all-embracing involvement -- mind and heart, will and feeling, the center of the human personality -- emotional man, logical man, volunteristic man -- all of them are involved in the study of Torah. Talmud torah is basically for me an ecstatic experience, in which one meets G-d. And again I want to say that whatever I told you now is not just mysticism or, due to my mystical inclinations; it isn't so. The gemara says so -- chazal have equated talmud torah with revelation, and the great event, the drama of Jewish [living] is reenacted, and restaged, and relived, every time a Jew opens up a gemara. The Talmud in Brachos, while discussing the problem of baal keri, the issur torah of baal keri [4], expressed itself as follows: d'sanya: v'hodotam l'vanecha v'livnei vanecha uch'siv basriha yom asher amadta lifnei hashem elokecha b'chorev, mah lehalen b'ima uv'yira uv'reses uv'ziya, af kan b'ima uv'yira uv'reses uv'ziya

[5] -- "make them known unto thy children and thy children's children, the day thou stoodest before the Lord thy G-d in Chorev." The Torah did not say "make known the halachos," more than that. Make known simply your rendezvous with G-d, which means they should experience exactly what you did experience, when you stood before thy G-d in Chorev. How did your people stand before G-d in Chorev? With fear, awe, and with a tremor of the heart, trembling. So must every Jew who engages in talmud torah stand before G-d with fear, awe, and tremor. That is why a baal keris assur b'divrei torah. It is not the tumah [6]; rather, he is not in the mood to experience the presence of the Almighty, to experience revelation every time he engages in study. If a Jew cannot experience revelation when he is busy studying, then he is assur b'talmud torah.

In other words, the study of the Torah is an ecstatic, metaphysical performance; the study of Torah is an act of surrender. That is why chazal stress so many times the importance of humility, and that the proud person can never be a great scholar, only the humble person. Why is humility necessary? Because the study of Torah means meeting the Almighty, and if a finite being meets the infinite, the Almighty, the Maker of the world, of course this meeting must precipitate a mood of humility, and humility results in surrender [7]. What do we surrender to the Almighty? We surrender two things: first, we surrender to the Almighty the every-day logic, or what I call the American Pie logic, the logic of the businessman or the utilitarian person, and we embrace another logic -- the logic m'sinai. Second, we surrender the everyday will, which is very utilitarian and superficial, and we embrace another will -- the will m'sinai. This is not, as I told you before, just drush, homiletics: when the Rambam explains kabalas ol malchus shamayim [8] in krias shma, and when he explains the gemara lama kadma parshas shma l'parshas v'haya im shama? sheyikabel alav ol malchus shamayim t'chila [9], he enumerates the elements of ol malchus shamayim: ahavaso v'yiraso v'talmudo, and talmud torah shehu ha-ikar hagadol shehakol taluy bo [10]. Talmud torah is an act; talmud torah means kabalas ol malchus shamayim. This is the reason that one must not study Torah unless one says birkas hatorah; this is the reason for kadish d'rabanan: because talmud torah constitutes an act of surrender, of kabalas ol malchus shamayim, of accepting the harness of mitzvos. It is interesting that chazal said ol malchus shamayim; why not kabalas malchus shamayim? Because kabalas malchus shamayim means when malchus shamayim is convenient, when man has the impression that malchus shamayim is out to promote his every day business, when malchus shamayim is good, is acceptable, from a purely pragmatic or purely utilitarian viewpoint. That is why chazal have always inserted the word ol - harness. Harness means regardless of the fact that kabalas malchus shamayim is sometimes very uncomfortable and requires of man sacrificial action, and that it is a heavy yoke. It is a yoke, but still the kabala must take place.

What does kabalas ol malchus shamayim require of the lomeid hatorah, person who studies Torah? First, we must pursue the truth, nothing else but the truth; however, the truth in talmud torah can only be achieved through singular halachic Torah thinking, and Torah understanding. The truth is attained from within, in accord with the methodology given to Moses and passed on from generation to generation. The truth can be discovered only by joining the ranks of the chachmei hamesorah [11]. It is ridiculous to say "I have discovered something of which the Rashba didn't know, the Ktzos didn't know, the Vilna Gaon had no knowledge, I have discovered an approach to the interpretation of Torah which is completely new." One must join the ranks of the chachmei hamesorah -- chazal, rishonim, gedolei achronim -- and must not try to rationalize from without the chukei hatorah [12] and must not judge the chukei mishpatim [13] in terms of the secular system of things. Such an attempt, be it historicism, be it psychologism, be it utilitarianism, undermines the very foundations of torah umesorah, and it leads eventually to the most tragic consequences of assimilationism and nihilism, no matter how good the original intentions. Second, we must not yield -- I mean emotionally, it is very important -- we

must not feel inferior, experience or develop an inferiority complex, and because of that complex yield to the charm -- usually it is a transient and passing charm -- of modern political and ideological sevoros (logic). I say not only not to compromise -- certainly not to compromise -- but even not to yield emotionally, not to feel inferior, not to experience an inferiority complex. The thought should never occur that it is important to cooperate just a little bit with the modern trend or with the secular, modern philosophy. In my opinion, yehadus (Judaism) does not have to apologize either to the modern woman or to the modern representatives of religious subjectivism. There is no need for apology -- we should have pride in our mesorah, in our heritage. And of course, certainly it goes without saying one must not try to compromise with these cultural trends, and one must not try to gear the halachic norm to the transient ways of a neurotic society, which is what our society is.

A thought. Kabalas ol malchus shamayim -- which is an identical act with talmud torah -- requires of us to revere and to love and to admire the words of the chachmei hamesorah, be they tannaim, be they amoraim, be they rishonim. This is our prime duty. They are the final authorities, and an irresponsible statement about chazal borders on, I don't like to use the word but according to Maimonides, the heretic. When the Rambam says about tzadukim [14], perek gimmel hilchos t'shuva halachah ches, v'chen hakofer b'perusha v'hu torah she- b'al peh v'hamach'chish magideha k'gon tzadok ubaitos [15] -- it's very strange, I wanted to discuss it with my father zt"l. Whoever denies the truthfulness or the authenticity of the torah she- b'al peh is a tzaduki. Why did he add v'hamach'chish magideha -- whoever denies the authority of the scholars, the chachmei hamesorah? Apparently the Rambam says that under the category of kofrim batorah [16] are classified not only those who deny for instance that nisuch hamayim [17] or avodas beis hamikdash [18] is required, or those who deny the torah she- b'al peh -- there is no doubt about it in those cases. But moreover, even those who admit the truthfulness of the torah she- b'al peh but who are critical of chachmei chazal as personalities, who find fault with chachmei chazal, fault in their character, their behavior, or their conduct, who say that chachmei chazal were prejudiced, which actually has no impact upon the halachah; nevertheless, he is to be considered as a kofer. V'chen hakofer b'perusha v'hu torah she- b'al peh v'hamach'chish magideha; he who denies the perfection and the truthfulness of chachmei chazal -- not of the Torah, but of the chachmei chazal as personalities, as real persona as far as their character, their philosophy, or their outlook on the world is concerned -- is a kofer. Let me add something that is very important: not only the halachos but also the chazakos [19] which chachmei chazal have introduced are indestructible. We must not tamper, not only with the halachos, but even with the chazakos, for the chazakos of which chazal spoke rest not upon transient psychological behavioral patterns, but upon permanent ontological principles rooted in the very depth of the human personality, in the metaphysical human personality, which is as changeless as the heavens above. Let us take for example the chazaka that I was told about: the chazaka tav l'meisiv tan du mil'meisiv armalo [20] has absolutely nothing to do with the social and political status of women in antiquity. This chazaka is based not upon sociological factors, but upon a verse in breishis -- harba arbeh itz'voneich v'heironeich b'etzev teildi vanim v'el isheich t'shukaseich v'hu yimshal bach -- "I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy travail; in pain thou shalt bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" [21]. It is a metaphysical curse rooted in the feminine personality -- she suffers incomparably more than the male who is in solitude. Solitude to the male is not as terrible an experience, as horrifying an experience, as is solitude to the woman. And this will never change, mayid shamayim vaaretz [22]. This is not a psychological fact; it is an existential fact, which is due not to the inferior status of the woman, but rather to the difference, the basic distinction, between the female personality and the male personality. Loneliness frightens the woman, and an old spinster's life is much more miserable and tragic than the life of an old bachelor. This was true in antiquity; it is still

true, and it will be true a thousand years from now. So, to say that tan du milmeisiv armalo was or is due to the inferior political or social status of the woman is simply misinterpreting the chazaka tan du milmeisiv armalo. No legislation can alleviate the pain of the single woman, and no legislation can change this role. She was burdened by the Almighty, after she violated the first [law]. Let me ask you a question -- ribono shel olam, G-d Almighty, if you should start modifying and reassessing the chazakos upon which a multitude of halachos rest, you will destroy yehadus. So instead of philosophizing, let us rather light a match and set fire to the beis yisrael, and get rid of our problems.

I also was told that it was recommended that the method afkinu rabanan l'kidushin minei [23] be reintroduced. If this recommendation is accepted, and I hope it will not be accepted, but if it is accepted, then there will be no need for a get. Ha-isha niknes b'shalosh d'rachim: b'kesef b'shtar ub'bia [24], the get of a gerushah (divorced woman) -- we will be able to cross out this mishna, this halachah; every rabbi will suspend the kidushin. Why should there be this halachah if such a privilege exists? Why should this privilege be monopolized by rabanus haroshis [25] in eretz yisrael? Why couldn't the Rabbinic Council do just as well as the rabanus haroshis, if the problem is afkinu rabanan l'kidushin minei? [ribono shel olam], what are you, out to destroy all of it? I will be relieved of two masechtos; I will not have to say shiurim on Gitin and Kidushin, and then Yevamos as well.

I want to be frank and open. Do you expect to survive as Orthodox rabbis? Do you expect to carry on the mesorah under such circumstances? I hope that those who are present will join me in simply objecting to such symposia and to such discussion and debate at the Rabbinical Convention.

When I was told about it, I thought, "would it be possible?" I can not imagine at the Republican or Democratic National Convention that they would introduce a symposium on communism and democracy, that perhaps communism should replace democracy in the United States. Could you imagine such a possibility? I could not. There is a certain system of postulates to which people are committed, and such a discussion, for instance at the National Convention of the Republican party, would be outside the system of postulates to which the American people are committed. And to speak about changing the halachos of chazal is, of course, at least as nonsensical as discussions about communism at the Republican National Convention. It is discussing self-destruction, a method of self-destruction and suicide. I know; you don't have to tell it to me -- b'sochacha ani yoshev [26] -- I don't live in an ivory tower or in a fool's paradise. I know that modern life is very complex. I know your problems; many of them are passed on to me. We are confronted with horrible problems -- social, political, cultural, and economic -- problems of the family, of the community, and of the society in general. We feel, and I sometimes feel like you, as if we are swimming against the tide; the tide is moving rapidly, with tremendous force, in the direction opposite of the way in which we are going. I feel it; I know it; you don't have to tell it to me. The crowd, the great majority, has deserted us, and cares for nothing. I know the danger of taruvos (mixtures) of weddings, of church weddings, in which a Jew or a Jewess is united in marriage by a priest and some Reform rabbi. We are facing an awesome challenge, and I am mindful of all that. However, if you think that the solution lies in the reformist philosophy, or in an extraneous interpretation of the halachah, you are badly mistaken. It is self-evident -- many problems are unsolvable, you can't help it. For instance, the problem of mamzerim in eretz yisrael [27] -- you can't help it. All we have it the Jewish nachalah (heritage) -- no one can abandon it -- neither me, nor the rav haroshis, nor the rosh hagula [28]. It cannot be abandoned. It is a pasuk in chumash: lo yavo mamzer bi k'hal hashem [29]. It is very tragic, the midrash already spoke about it, for instance [divros hashukim] [30], but it's a reality, a religious reality. If we say to our opponents, or to the dissident Jews, "that is our stand" -- they will dislike us, say that we are inflexible, we are ruthless, we are queer. But they will respect us. However, if you try to cooperate with them, or if halachic schemes are introduced from without, you will not command

love, and you will not get their love, and you will certainly lose their respect. That is exactly what happened in eretz yisrael. What can we do? This is toras moshe; this is surrender; this is kabalas ol malchus shamayim. We surrender. The Torah summons the Jew to live halachically. We cannot allow an eishes ish (married woman), no matter how tragic the case, to remarry without a get. We cannot permit a giores [31] to marry a kohein, and sometimes the cases are very tragic, as I know from my own experience. I had a case in Rochester: a gentile girl became a giores before she met the boy. She was a real giores hatzedek; she did not join our fold because she wanted to marry somebody. Then she met a Jewish boy, became . . . He had absolutely no knowledge of yehadus, she brought him close to yehadus. They got engaged, and he visited the cemetery. Since he had come closer to yehadus, he wanted to find out about his family, about his family tree, so he visited the cemetery in which his grandfather was buried, and he saw a strange symbol -- ten fingers [32]. So they began to ask -- they thought it was a mystical symbol, and then they discovered that he is a kohein. What can you do? This is the halachah -- the kohein is assur to the giores. We surrender to the will of the Almighty [33]. On the other hand, to say that the halachah is not sensitive to problems, not responsive to the needs of the people, is an outright falsehood. The halachah is responsive to the needs of both the community and the individual. But the halachah has its own orbit, moves at its own certain definite speed, has its own pattern of responding to a challenge, its own criteria and principles. I come from a rabbinic house; it is called beis harav, the house into which I was born, and believe me, Rav Chaim used to try his best to be a meikil (lenient). However, there were limits even to Rav Chaim's skills. When you reach the boundary line, it is all you can say -- "I surrender to the will of the Almighty." This is a sadness in my heart, and I share in the suffering of the poor woman, who was instrumental in bringing him back to the fold, and then she had to lose him; she lost him; she walked away.

This is why the Rambam says that talmud torah is identical to kabalas ol malchus shamayim, and to speak about halachah as a fossil, rachmana latzlom, is ridiculous. Because we know, those who study halachah know, it is a living, dynamic discipline which was given to man in order to redeem him and to save him. We are opposed to sh'nuim (changes) of course, but chidush [34] is certainly the very essence of halachah. There are no sh'nuim in halachah, but there are great chidushim. But the chidushim are within the system, not from the outside. You cannot psychologize halachah, historicize halachah, or rationalize halachah, because this is something foreign, something extraneous. As a matter of fact, not only halachah -- can you psychologize mathematics? I will ask you a question about mathematics -- let us take Euclidian geometry. I cannot give many psychological reasons why Euclid said two parallels do not cross, or why the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. If I were a psychologist I could not interpret it in psychological terms. Would it change the postulate, the mathematical postulate? And when it comes to Torah, which is hakadosh baruch hu, all the instruments of psychology and history, utilitarian morality, are being used to undermine the very authority of the halachah. The human being is invited to be creative, inventive, and engage in inspiring research from within, but not from without. Instead of complaining against the inflexibility of halachah, let us explore its endless spaces, and enjoy talmud torah, and find in talmud torah a redemptive, cathartic, and inspiring reality. That is all I wanted to say; now let us get to the shiur.

References:

1. Thanks to Hillel Becker, Caroline Peyser, and Larry Teitelman for help in deciphering the Rav's accent and/or for help with some of the references. A transcript of part of this talk appeared as "Surrendering to the Almighty" in the magazine Light, 17, Kislev 5736 (1976), p.13. Rather than a reconstruction or summarization of the talk, this is a nearly word-for-word transcript. In this way, there is no question of my interpretations of the Rav's words. However, the patterns of oral discourse are different than those of writing, and that must be kept in mind while reading.

Needless to say, all mistakes and errors are my fault. Ellipses (. . .) in the text indicate unclear portions of the tape, and brackets ([]) indicate unclear words.

2. Aveilus is mourning. In 1967, the Rav lost his mother, his wife, and his brother.

3. One who sits and involves himself with Torah, the Divine presence rests with him. I could not find this exact quote. Pirkei Avot 3:6 reads: . . . asara sheyoshvin v'oskin batorah sh'china shruyah . . . uminayin afilu echad? sheneemar b'chol hamakom asher azkir et sh'mi avo eilecha uveirachticha {when ten sit together and involve themselves with Torah, the Divine presence rests with them . . . how do we know it applies to one? For it is said "in every place that my name is remembered, I will come to you and bless you" (Exodus 20:21)}. Brachot 6a reads: uminayin sheafilu echad sheyoshev v'osek batorah shesh'china imo? sheneemar b'chol hamakom asher azkir et sh'mi avo eilecha uveirachticha {and how do you know that even if one sits and is involved in Torah the Divine presence is with him? For it is said "in every place that my name is remembered, I will come to you and bless you" (Exodus 20:21)}. See also Pirkei Avot 3:3.

4. A baal keris is a man who has had a seminal emission. A baal keris must immerse in a mikveh in order to study Torah. This is a takanat Ezra {a decree of Ezra}. The gemara in bava kama (82a) discusses the decrees of Ezra, and states regarding a baal keris (82b) v'tikan t'vilah l'baalei kerain. d'oraita hu d'chitiv v'ish ki titzei mimenu shichvat zara v'rachatz bamayim. d'oraita hu l'trumah ukadshim ata hu tikan afilu l'divrei torah. {And he [Ezra] decreed immersion for a baal keris. Is this not from the Torah? As it says, "and if a man has an emission of semen, he shall immerse in water" (Leviticus 15:16). That which is from the Torah applies to the priest's offering and to sacrifices; he [Ezra] came and decreed even for the words of Torah [immersion is needed]}. The gemara in Brachot (20b to 22b) discusses this further, concluding that a baal keris is assur b'divrei torah, forbidden in the words (and in the study) of Torah.

5. As we learned in a braita: "and you shall make them known to your children and your children's children (Deuteronomy 4:9)," and it is written afterwards, "the day that you stood before the Lord your G-d in Chorev (Deuteronomy 4:10)." Just as there it was in dread and fear and trembling and quaking, so too in this case it must be in dread and fear and trembling and quaking. Brachot 22a. See also Brachot 21b, Moed Katan 15a. The gemara is connecting the Jews who stood at Mount Sinai with a Jew engaging in talmud torah -- just as those Jews had to stand in dread and fear (thus they were prohibited from cohabitation -- Exodus 14:15), so too a person who studies Torah must be in the proper frame of mind. Thus, the baal keris is prohibited from studying Torah. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 61:1), quoting the Tur quoting Rav Amram gaon, states that such a frame of mind is necessary when fulfilling the mitzvah of kriat shma as well; thus, one must read b'ma b'yira b'retet v'ziya {with dread, with fear, with trembling and quaking}.

6. Ritual impurity. A man who experiences an emission becomes ritually impure and must immerse in a mikveh (see note 4); however, being ritually impure does not cause a prohibition of talmud torah. Brachot 22a states tanya: rav yehuda ben batira omer ein divrei torah m'kablin tumah {we learned in a braita: R. Yehuda ben Batira says the words of Torah do not accept ritual impurity}. See also Mishneh Torah Hilchot Kriat Shma 4:8, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 88.

7. See "Torah and Humility" in Shiurei haRav, A Conspectus of the Public Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (NY: Hamevaser-Yeshiva University/Tova Press, 1974) p.34-37. A summary of the Rav's yearzeit shiur delivered March 5, 1971.

8. Accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is fulfilled with the first verse of shma -- Hear Israel, the Lord is your G-d, the Lord is One (Deuteronomy 6:4) -- see Brachot 13a/b, Mishneh Torah Hilchot Kriat Shma 2:1, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 60:5 and the Mishnah Brura there. The Rav discusses this in Shiurim l'Zechar Avraham Mori zt"l volume 1, p.20-39.

9. Why was the section of "hear" (shma) placed before the section of "and it shall come to pass" (v'haya im shamo)? So that one should accept the yoke of the Kingdom of heaven first. Brachot 13a (mishna 2:1).

10. Love, fear, and study, and the study of Torah is the fundamental principle upon which everything is based. Based on Mishneh Torah Hilchot Kriat Shma 1:2, which reads umakdimin likrot parshat shma mipnei sheyeish bah yichud hasem, v'ahavato, v'talmudo, shehu ha-ikar hagadol shehakol taluy bo {we begin with the section "Hear" (shma) because it contains the unity of G-d, and love, and study, which is the fundamental principle upon which everything is based}. Possibly, the Rav quoted "ahavato v'yirato v'talmudo" from another source, but I was unable to locate it.

11. The Sages of the tradition. Included in this term, in chronological order, are: chazal, the Sages of the Talmud, divided into tanaim, the sages of the mishna (200 BCE to 200 CE) and amoraim, the sages of the gemara (200 CE to 500 CE); the geonim, the gifted ones (600 to 1000); the rishonim, the first or early ones (1000 to 1500); and the achronim, the later ones (1500 to the present).

12. The laws of the Torah for which no explanation is given.

13. The laws of judgments.

14. Sadducees. A priestly sect active during Second Temple times, which denied the validity of the Oral Law.

15. [Three are deniers of the Torah . . .] one who denies the explanations [of Torah] -- the Oral Torah, and one who denies the authority of the Sages, for example Tzadok and Baitos. Mishneh Torah hilchot t'shuvah 3:8. Tzadok was the founder of the Sadducees, and Baitos the founder of the Boethusians, a similar sect. See Avot d'Rabi Natan 5.

16. Deniers of the Torah, a class of heretic.

17. Pouring of the waters; part of the ceremony for the sacrifices in the Temple.

18. Service of the Temple; the sacrificial rites.

19. Statements about human nature which have halachic ramifications stated by the Sages and recorded in the Talmud.

20. It is better to live two together than to live alone (Rashi defines tan du as "two bodies"); or, It is better to live in trouble than to live alone (Jastrow defines tan du as "in trouble"). Yevamot 118b; Ketubot 75a; Kidushin 7a, 41a; Bava Kama 111a.

R. Emanuel Rackman had stated or written that this Talmudic dictum does not apply anymore.

21. Genesis 3:16.

22. Heaven and Earth are witnesses.

23. Afterwards the Rabbis can take the marriage away from him. Yevamot 90b, 110a; Ketubot 3a; Gitin 33a, 73a; Bava Batra 48b. This is the retroactive annulment of a marriage discussed in the gemara as applicable in the case that a man sends a get (religious divorce) by messenger, then cancels it while it is on route to his wife. Thus, the get is canceled, but the wife has no way of knowing, so she will think she is free to marry another person when in fact she is still married and thus may not remarry. In this circumstance, the Sages discussed the possibility of retroactively dissolving the marriage. The retroactive annulment of the marriage had been proposed as a possible solution to the problem of agunot, those women whose husbands refuse to grant them a get.

24. A woman may be acquired in three ways: through money, through a document, or through cohabitation. Based on the first mishna in Kidushin (2a), which reads ha-isha niknet b'shalosh d'rachim, v'kona et atzma bish'tei d'rachim. niknet b'kesef b'shtar uv'via {a woman may be acquired three ways, and she acquires herself [back] in two ways. She may be acquired through money, through a document, or through cohabitation}.

25. The Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel.

26. Amongst you I dwell.

27. A mamzer is the offspring of a forbidden union, loosely translated as bastard (the JPS Tanakh translates it as "misbegotten"). A mamzer may not marry a Jew, and mamzerut, the status of mamzer, is passed on to one's children for all generations. See Sefer haMitzvot, negative commandments 353 and 354. For contemporary halachic issues involving mamzerut, see R. J. D. Bleich, Contemporary Halachic Problems Vol. I, (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1977), p. 159-173.

28. The head (the leading rabbi) of the diaspora; this position existed in ancient times.

29. A mamzer shall not enter the congregation of the Lord. Deuteronomy 23:3.

30. The Rav quotes the first few words of a midrash, but the tape is unclear. He may have been referring Kohelet Rabah 4:10, which, in discussing mamzerim, asks zeh mah chatah v'zeh mah ichpat lei? {what sin has he done and what concern is it of his?} See also Vayikra Rabah (parshat emor) 32:8. The midrash is concerned with the understanding how the children seem to be held responsible for the acts of the parents. In Moreh Nevuchim 3:49, the Rambam answers this question: in order to create a horror of illicit marriages, the Torah taught that those involved in such unions will bring irreparable injury upon their offspring.

31. A female convert. A kohein {priest} is prohibited from marrying certain women, including a divorced woman and a convert. See Leviticus 21:7 and 26:7, and the Sefer haMitzvot, negative commandments 158 to 162.

32. Symbolic of the raised hands of the kohein when he is performing the Priestly Blessing. This indicates that his paternal grandfather was a kohein, therefore he is a kohein.

33. This idea is also explored in "Surrendering our Minds to G-d," in Reflections of the Rav by R. Abraham R. Besdin (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1979; now distributed by Ktav, Hoboken, NJ). p99-106.

34. Innovation. The gemara in Chagigah (3a) states i efshar l'beit hamidrash b'lo chidush {there is no house of study without innovation}. In Halachic Man (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), the Rav discusses the importance of chidush in the world view of halachah (see especially Part Two): "The power of creative interpretation (chiddush) is the very foundation of the received tradition." p.81. "Halachic man is a man who longs to create, to bring into being something new, something original. The study of Torah, by definition, means gleaming new, creative insights from the Torah (chidushei Torah)." p.99.

I. Summary

A. Moshe is denied permission to enter Israel. Moshe recalled how he entreated Hashem for permission for him to enter Israel. Hashem refused his request, instead telling him to view the Land from Mt. Pisgah and that Yehoshua had been appointed to lead the Jews into Israel and assume the role of leadership therein.

B. Moshe appeals to the Jews to keep the mitzvos. Moshe appealed to the people to adhere meticulously to Hashem's statutes and edicts, so that they would be recognized as a great nation and prevail despite their small numbers. They would be aided by the memory of hearing Hashem proclaim the Ten Commandments -- Hashem hadn't appeared to them in any form or shape, and this should remind them of the prohibition against forming graven images; should they disobey this injunction, they would be exiled and scattered among the nations (although, even if this occurs, their sincere repentance would bring about Divine mercy and forgiveness).

C. Moshe designates three Orei Miklot (Cities of Refuge). Moshe then designated three Orei Miklot in the east of Jordan.

D. The Ten Commandments. Moshe repeated the Ten Commandments, noting that the people assembled at Mt. Sinai were terrified by the wonders they witnessed and pleaded with Moshe to speak to them in place of Hashem.

E. The Shema. Moshe then expounded the Shema, affirming the unity of Hashem, Whom we should love and Whose commandments should be transmitted to the next generation. Hashem's laws are to be remembered by a "sign" upon one's hand and forehead (Tefillin) and doorposts (Mezuzah).

F. Remembering Hashem's Commandments. Moshe cautioned the people not to forget Hashem even after they settled in Israel and enjoyed prosperity. The Jews were warned to avoid all forms of idol worship (for this would lead to their destruction) and intermarriage. Future generations should be trained in Hashem's commandments and told of His wondrous acts in delivering the Jews from slavery in Egypt. Moshe reminded them that they are a holy people for whom Hashem showed His love by redeeming them from bondage, and it is their duty to reciprocate by observing His commandments.

II. Divrei Torah

A. Soul of the Torah (**Victor Cohen**)

1. Proper Kavanah. "I implored Hashem at that time, saying . . ." The Zanzer said that before he prays, he prays.

2. Caring For Our Health. "But you should take great care of your soul." The Baal Shem Tov commented that one should take care of his/her body, for when the body is sick the soul also becomes sick.

3. A Heartfelt Search. "From there you will see Hashem, your G-d, and you will find Him with all your heart and all your soul." The Chiddushei Harim commented that if we seek Hashem with our hearts, we will find Him there.

4. Deliverance From Affliction. "When you are in distress and all these things have befallen you, at the end of days, you will return unto Hashem your G-d, and listen to His voice." The Skoyler Rebbe noted that if we find ourselves in anguish, we should look at it through a window. We will then notice that the Jews are in the Diaspora and that the advice that is given to them is to "return unto Hashem" in true repentance. Therefore, we must return to Hashem and find personal deliverance from affliction. As the Talmud (Yoma 6b) teaches, great is repentance for it will bring the ultimate redemption.

5. Simple Faith. "You have been shown to know that Hashem He is your G-d. There is none besides Him." R' Yaakov Yisroel Cherkaser commented

that there are two ways to reach the level of knowing Hashem. The first is through knowledge and the second is through simple faith that Hashem "He is your G-d . . ."

6. Our Hidden Strength. "And you shall love Hashem your G-d with all of your heart, with all of your soul and will all of your possessions." The S'fas Emes asks why philosophers cannot comprehend how "to love" can be a command. They say that love is a natural phenomenon and cannot be commanded. He notes that it is probably in the nature of the Jew to love Hashem; however, it is necessary to awaken this natural love and cultivate it. That is the mitzvah of "you shall love" - we should act to awaken our hidden strength to love Hashem.

7. You Shall Teach ("Shinantam") Them. The Kotzker commented that the word "teach" ("shinantam") means "learn". If we wish our children to learn, we must study so that we are a role model to them.

B. Torah Gems (**Aharon Greenberg**)

1. Prayer. "And I pleaded to the L-rd at that time . . ." R' Yisroel said "nothing gives me greater pleasure in this world than a good prayer."

2. Self-Centeredness. "I stood between the L-rd and you at that time . . ." The "I" of man - his self-centeredness is what stands between him and His creator.

3. Inside Our Tents. "Get into your tents again." How we can act inside our homes is the main test of who we really are. R' Simcha Bunim.

4. Mercy and Justice. "And you shall love the L-rd your G-d will all your heart, will all your soul and will all your might." The word "L-rd" refers to G-d's mercy, whereas the word "G-d" refers to His strict justice. Whether G-d treats us with mercy or justice, we must always love Him. Alshekh.

C. Something To Say (**R' Dovid Goldwasser**)

Hishtadlus (Effort). "Six days a weeks shall you labor and accomplish all your work." R' Avigdor Miller notes that the work described in this verse refers to the concept of Hishtadlus, which declares the necessity for us to exert ourselves to achieve whatever is necessary. Although G-d is the Master Planner, He concealed His Presence by the means of these laws. It is His desire that we help ourselves with our efforts and not require miraculous help from him. The "six days of labor" refer to human striving. We do not know what result our efforts will bring about; it is simply our job to do it.

D. Pirkei Torah (**R' Gifter**)

1. Do Not Add or Subtract. "You shall not add to the words that I command you, nor shall you subtract from it to observe the commandments of Hashem your G-d that I command you." Man's natural tendency is to refrain from submitting himself to another's will and desire. We wish to govern ourselves. This tendency can greatly impede our service of G-d because true service of G-d demands complete submission to the Torah's governance. Adding or subtracting from the mitzvos - the manifestation of our service of G-d - would be fulfilling one's own will, not the will of our Creator.

2. Communal/Individual Search. "There you will seek Hashem your G-d and you will find Him if you will search for Him with all your heart and will all your soul." The word "you will seek" is in the plural, whereas the rest of the verse is in the singular. A desire to seek G-d is the result of our realization that the world does not run itself, but that there is a higher power which governs all. It is not too hard to reach this conclusion; however, each person needs to do so on his/her own level. Thus, the verse tells us to seek G-d in the plural, but recognizes our individual searches in doing so.



From: owner-weeklydt@torahweb2.org on behalf of TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: Wednesday, August 02, 2006 9:23 AM To: weeklydt@torahweb2.org Subject: Rabbi Hershel Schachter - Intermarriage

The HTML version of this dvar Torah can be found at: <http://www.torahweb.org/thisWeek.html>

Rabbi Hershel Schachter Intermarriage

In one posuk at the end of the parsha (7:3) the Torah prohibits both forms of intermarriage: a Jewish man may not take a non-Jewish woman, nor may a Jewish woman marry a non-Jewish man. In Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 157:61) the opinion of the Ramban (Milchamos, Sanhedrin 74) has been adopted, that there is a big difference between the two aforementioned cases. Because in the case of a Jewish man taking a non-Jewish wife the children will not be Jewish, this prohibition is considered more serious; it is considered as if the man had become a "mehuttan" with the avodah zarah. This is the end of the line! The tradition of Jewishness transmitted from Mt. Sinai from generation to generation will not be able to continue. But when a Jewish woman marries a non-Jewish man, the children will be Jewish; the transmission of Jewishness will continue. The woman has violated a serious aveira, but this is not a case of yehoreig ve'al ya'avor.

In Europe the common practice was that when a Jewish man would marry a non-Jewish woman, this was considered equivalent to his converting to another religion (shmad). However when a Jewish woman married a non-Jewish man, the custom was not necessarily so. This aveira was not considered the equivalent of shmad.

Whenever there is a "mixed" marriage between two Jews, for example when a Kohein or a Levi marries a girl who is not a Kohenes or a Leviah, the status of the children is determined by the father. The same is true when there is a "mixed" marriage between two non-Jews. Amaleki, Edomi, Mitzri, and Canaani each have a special status according to the halacha. When there is a mingling between two nationalities, the halacha declares that all the children follow the nationality of the father. This halacha is based on the posuk in Parshas Bamidbar (1:2)

"Imishpechosom l'beis avosom", which implies that in cases of a conflict, the mishpacha of the father is to be followed. The only exception is where there is a mixed marriage between Jew and non-Jew. In Talmudic times none of the rabbis felt that in these cases the status of the children should be determined solely by the father. One opinion felt that in order to be Jewish one must have both a father and a mother who are Jewish. A second opinion held that with either parent being Jewish, all the children would be considered Jewish. And the accepted opinion is that the issue is determined solely by the mother [1]. This position was arrived at based on the Rabbi's careful reading of the pesukim (7:3-4) at the end of our parsha. The Reform movement's renunciation of this position was a rejection of a tradition that has been accepted for over 1,500 years.

It is interesting to note that in a marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew none of the rabbis felt that the status of the children should be determined by the father. If in the other two types of mixed marriages (where both parents are Jewish or where the parents come from two different non-Jewish nations) the halacha established that everything is determined by the father, what motivated the rabbis to assume that the same should not be the case when a Jew and non-Jew marry?

The answer lies in the wording of the posuk in Bamidbar (ibid). The status of the children is determined solely by the father when we're dealing with an issue of "mishpacha". Being a Kohein or Levi is an issue of mishpachos kehuna or mishpachos leviah. The same is true regarding Amaleki, Edomi, etc. we colloquially refer to these groups as "nationalities", but strictly speaking (halachically) they are merely "mishpachos". In order to be a member of a certain mishpacha, you must have yichus (genealogical lineage) of ben ahcar ben through your father.

Being Jewish, however, is not a function of which mishpacha one belongs to. This is illustrated by the institution of geirus (conversion). After conversion, a ger belongs to no mishpacha, but nonetheless is just as Jewish as all the other Jews. Being Jewish is a function of belonging to the Jewish people (Am Yisroel). The Jewish people are the only ones called a nation as such! "Umi ke'amcha Yisroel goy echad ba'aretz" (Shmuel II 7:27) [2].

The rabbis apparently assumed that since "mishpacha" and "am" are fundamentally different, it must be that inclusion in each one will be determined by different factors in the case of a mixed marriage. A major difference between a mishpacha and a nation is that a mishpacha consists of a collection of individuals who relate to each other in a special way, while the term "goy" (nation) comes from the word "geviah" (body). Klal Yisroel is considered "one body". We must adopt this attitude and act accordingly.

1 Tosafos Yevamos 16b, s.v. oveid kochavim, and Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Gilyon Hashas ad loc.)

2 See "Chilul Hashem" - www.TorahWeb.org/torah/2001/parsha/rsch_emor.html - where we explained in a similar vein why the actions of one Jew are seen as a reflection on all Jews, as opposed to other nations where the actions of an individual are not understood as such.

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From: ravfrand-owner@torah.org on behalf of Rabbi Yissocher Frand [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Thursday, August 18, 2005 11:38 PM To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'eschanan

"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'eschanan

The Easy Commandment

Honor your father and mother, as the L-rd your G-d has commanded you, so that you may live long. (Devarim 5:16)

Why should we honor our fathers and mothers? The Torah gives us one reason in Parshas Shemos (20:12), "So that you may live long." In Parshas Vaes'chanan, however, the Torah gives an additional reason, "As the L-rd your G-d has commanded you." What is the significance of this additional phrase?

The Meshech Chachmah refers to the Talmud Yerushalmi that considers honoring parents an "easy commandment." Every person understands that debts have to be repaid. If someone lends you \$100,000 when you need it, you would be only too happy to repay the money once you have enough of your own. It would not be a hard thing to do.

By the same token, every person also understands that he has a moral obligation to repay his debt of gratitude to his parents. After all, the cost of raising a child must be at least between \$100,000 and \$200,000. Not to mention the time, effort and energy parents invest in their children. Therefore, the least people can do is honor their parents. It is not a hard thing to make such a small payment on such a large debt.

The Torah tells us here that this is not the proper motivation for honoring parents. It is not the self-evident obligation to make at least a small payment on a debt owed the parents. It is an obligation incumbent on us solely because "the L-rd your G-d has commanded you" to do so.

The Torah waited until Parshas Vaes'chanan to make this point, because it becomes most clear after forty years in the desert. During those years, raising children was easier than it ever was, before or since. They did not have to be fed. There was manna from heaven. They did not need to be

given to drink. There was water from Miriam's Well. They did not need new shoes and clothing all the time. Nothing ever wore out. Most likely they didn't need orthodontic braces either, because life in the desert was paradise. And still, the Torah demanded that parents be honored. Clearly, the obligation was to obey Hashem's commandment rather than repay a debt of gratitude. By the time the Jewish people had lived through the era of the desert, they could relate to the mitzvah of honoring parents as an independent obligation.

How far does this go? How much do you have to do for your parents? The Talmud responds (Kiddushin 31a) to this question with the famous story about a non-Jew from Ashkelon by the name of Dama bar Nesinah.

The Sages once needed a stone for the Urim v'Tumim, and they heard that Dama had exactly the stone they needed. A delegation came to see him and offer to pay him a princely sum for the stone. The stone was in a strongbox, with the key under his father's pillow. Dama did not disturb him.

"I cannot help you," he told the Sages. "My father is sleeping, and I wouldn't disturb his sleep."

The Sages left.

A year later, a perfect red heifer, suitable for a parah adumah, was born in Dama's herd. The Sages came to purchase it.

"How much do you want for it?"

"I know that you would give me any price I ask," he replied. "But I only want the amount of money I lost by not waking my father last year."

This story establishes the parameters of the mitzvah of honoring parents. The Talmud uses this story to establish the parameters of human nature.

As parents get older, they can become querulous and demanding. They can test the patience of their children. Sometimes, honoring parents under such circumstances can take a lot of patience and forbearance. Is there a limit to such patience? How much patience can be expected of a person? Is there a point where a person is allowed to run out of patience and be exempt from this mitzvah?

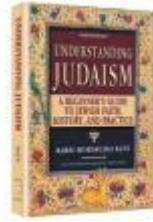
This is what the story about Dama bar Nesinah teaches us. The Sages were offering him a huge sum of money for the single stone they needed for the Urim v'Tumim. He knew that if he could only get the key, the money would be his. What thoughts must have gone through his mind? Maybe I'll make a little noise and he'll wake up. Maybe I'll slide my hand under the pillow very slowly so that I'll be able to get the key without waking him up. He must have been very tempted. But he didn't give in. He was able to honor his father even under such circumstances. This was the extent of what human nature is capable.

It follows, therefore, that if Dama bar Nesinah could have the forbearance to forgo such a huge sum of money and allow his father to sleep, certainly a descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov can find it in himself to honor his parents under any and all circumstances.

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Hear, O Israel... G-d Is One! from **Understanding Judaism A basic guide to Jewish faith, history, and practice**

By **Rabbi Mordechai Katz**

Hear, O Israel... G-d Is One!

THE FOUNDATION OF JUDAISM

What is G-d? Is G-d the clockmaker deity of 18th century philosophers – the deists who believed that G-d created the world, set it in motion, and then left it to run of its own accord? Is He the "ineffable" of certain Eastern philosophies, sometimes described as "allness" and sometimes as "nothingness"? Is He(or She) the mysterious "force" of contemporary science fiction?

It is difficult to find the right descriptions for G-d, so it may be easier to begin by saying something about what G-d is not. Our ancestor Abraham set the pattern nearly four thousand years ago when he rejected idol-worship. G-d, Whoever He was, could not be identified with the sun, moon, stars, or other natural phenomena. The Divine cannot, in fact, be represented in physical form. This accords with the second of the Ten Commandments which states, "You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image." G-d cannot be reduced to human form either, as some religions have held. As the Torah states, "Take good heed of yourselves, for you saw no manner of form on that day when G-d spoke to you at Horeb . . ." (Deuteronomy 4:15). [Deuteronomy is the last of the five books which comprise the Torah – G-d's words as dictated to Moses at Mt. Sinai.]

G-d has neither body, nor shape, nor form. Therefore He must be beyond space and time, which are the coordinates that define form. "He" must also be beyond gender. Use of the masculine pronoun is a convention with metaphorical meaning, but only a convention. Indeed, all the Bible's descriptions of G-d having physical form such as an "outstretched hand" are meant symbolically. G-d cannot be many Divine beings (not even trinity), since more-than-oneness is a feature of physicality. He must be only One. "The Lord, He is G-d – there is none else beside him" (Deuteronomy 4:35). The great medieval philosopher Maimonides (known to Jews as the Rambam) went so far as to state in his code of law, "Whoever conceives G-d to be a corporeal being is a heretic and an apostate."

To say that G-d is not anything in the world of space-time helps us expand our thinking. We can then say that G-d is both omnipresent and transcendental, two words that express the idea that G-d is not in space-time. Omnipresent means He fills all the universe, as Isaiah the prophet states in Prophets, "Holy, holy, holy is G-d of hosts – the whole world is filled with His Glory" (Prophets, Isaiah 6:3).

Further, since G-d has no physical properties and is beyond the laws of nature, He is transcendental, meaning that G-d must be prior to everything else, "outside" space-time, so to speak, such that G-d makes everything else possible. He has no beginning and no end. He always has been and always will be. This is difficult for our minds to comprehend, and is one among many wonders that we may never fully understand.

Since G-d is before and above all, we also affirm that He is Creator, and that His power in the universe is unlimited. We therefore speak of G-d as being omnipotent (all-powerful) and refer to Him in prayer as "King of the universe." He created space, time, and everything that is in it.

HOW IS G-D KNOWN?

The fact that G-d cannot be seen or pictured, touched or heard, is not proof that He does not exist. The human neurological system, however intricate it may be, operates within a limited pattern. In fact, the brain screens out many perceptions in order to give us a functional picture of reality, ensuring our ability to survive in the ordinary physical world.

In fact, we know from our everyday experience that there are nonphysical forces in the world. We cannot see love or touch hate, but they certainly exist. Even in what we call the physical world, there are some things that cannot be directly sensed with our physical form. We cannot, for example,

hold onto an isolated electrical current or put it into a dish with our bare hands. Yet we know this current produces light and heat, and we can observe its effects even though the wire through which it passes looks no different from any other wire.

Invisible physical forces and emotional vibrations are analogous to Divine power in that they are beyond the physical senses but have results we can feel and observe. Similarly, we can prove G-d's existence through His creations and perceive through our higher intelligence His guiding of history, without being able to perceive G-d directly. To look at what is around us and deduce that there must have been an intelligence behind it is a classic proof of G-d's existence called the "argument from design." Although philosophers have offered challenges to this proof, it is still the strongest rational argument for G-d's existence, beginning with the observable physical world and appealing to everyone's natural reasoning ability.

The emperor of Rome once chided Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya: "You call your G-d all-powerful? Why, I am much more of a god than He. Your G-d cannot be seen anywhere, and I am visible to all. If your G-d is so great, why can't I even see him?"

The rabbi did not try to argue. He simply smiled and asked the emperor to join him outside. The emperor was puzzled, but he complied. Once they were out in the street, the rabbi asked the emperor to look up at the sky. The emperor stared up toward the blazing noontime sun for but a brief moment, and then was forced to look away.

"Is something wrong?" asked Rabbi Yehoshua.

"How can I look up?" complained the emperor. "The sun is blinding me. I can't see!"

The rabbi nodded knowingly. "I regret your discomfort, Your Majesty. I just wanted to point out that even so great a man as you cannot look at the sun for more than a moment. Yet the sun is only a creation of G-d, Who is the real source of all light, power, and energy. If man can hardly gaze at G-d's creation, how can he hope to see G-d Himself in all His Glory?"

The emperor smiled. He knew that he had been bested.

Talmud Chullin, 59b

The argument from design states, in essence, that the complex laws of nature and living things are themselves proof that they could not have come about by sheer accident, but must have their source in an intelligent Creator. Indeed, they often seem to be deliberately planned. Even the simple structures of rocks and plants bear the signs of amazing symmetries and directionality. Cycles like the evaporation of water and the fall of rain, essential to life on earth, are extraordinarily complex. Scientists now know that if the historic temperature of earth varied only slightly, life would not have been possible.

If we look at the human being, it seems incredible that a person begins life as nothing more than a microscopic cell – a zygote formed by the union of two other minuscule cells, the sperm and the egg. From this tiny speck of matter emerges a being composed of billions upon billions of cells, diversified into many intricate organs.

Intricate chains of molecules structured in specific ways – deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA – provide the "instructions" for the tiny cell to grow into a diversified human body. Each cell and group of cells seems to know what job it must do to make the whole organism work. The nerve cells convey sensations and communicate the necessary response to the environment. Cardiac cells work together to keep the heart beating so that blood can be pumped throughout the body. Other cells fight germs, digest food, or aid in reproduction. Glands secrete tiny amounts of hormones that regulate growth, maintain chemical equilibrium, and respond to our very thoughts. With every breath, an enormously complex process allows oxygen to move to each cell and removes carbon dioxide. If that oxygenating process stopped for just four minutes, the brain would begin to die.

Think of just one organ: the eye. Most of us take sight for granted, but consider for a moment how the pupil must open like a shutter to allow light in, and the lens must focus the light properly on the retina, which then

relays the image via electrical sensations along the optic nerve. The rods and cones determine black-and-white and color vision. The brain receives the image upside down and must reverse it to orient us properly to the physical world. Meanwhile, the cornea protects the eye from damage and the tear ducts help remove foreign substances from the eye.

This color camera focuses automatically according to the object's distance, with the lens adjusting its degree of curvature as necessary. The iris controls the width of the entering light beam to admit the proper amount of light. The eye turns in the direction desired as the brain directs its musculature. The pressure of the fluid in the eye is calibrated to maintain the proper shape of the eyeball. The two eyes function as perfectly synchronized cameras to form one picture. In short, every component of the eye exhibits exquisite precision and is exactly suited for its specific function. Such a phenomenon points to an intelligent design behind it. Charles Darwin, the originator of evolutionary theory, admitted, "The belief that an organ as perfect as the eye could have been formed by natural selection is more than enough to stagger anyone."

The same is true, of course, of the processes of hearing, thinking, smelling, tasting, touching, eating, breathing, ingesting and digesting food, and all the amazing processes of every human being, every animal, and every plant. The complexities of nature are eloquent witnesses to the fact that they must have been designed by a Superior Being.

Indeed, it no longer seems possible to deny the argument from design. In the heyday of extreme rationalism (known as positivism) in the early 20th century, scientists still hoped to be able to describe nature as a machine – an extremely complicated one, to be sure, but ultimately reducible to clearly formulated scientific laws. A reasonable thinker could then argue that the universe evolved in a mechanical way, somewhat like the "growth" of a crystal. Now, as the 21st century has come upon us, scientists seem to be finding that the universe can only be understood if we factor in the idea of something like "intelligence" that operates continuously in the patterns of existence, even down to the behavior of subatomic particles.

If so, this means that it is no longer possible to say that the concept of G-d is being brought in to fill the gaps in areas that science does not yet understand, and that we will ultimately no longer need an idea of G-d. Rather, the concept of an Intelligence within and perhaps beyond the universe seems to be a necessary proposition.

THE CONCEPT OF CREATION AND SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING

The Torah, in the first chapter of the Bible, states that in the beginning of the creation of what we know as "heaven" and "earth," G-d created the universe from nothing. Beginning with the creation of light, G-d then made and shaped everything in its position, resulting in the world as we perceive it. The events of this creation are presented as follows:

First Day: Creation of light (and darkness).

Second Day: Separation of the "waters," thereby making the upper and lower waters.

Third Day: Accumulation of the lower waters, allowing dry land to emerge.

Fourth Day: Creation and placement of sun, moon, and stars in the sky.

Fifth Day: Creation of sea life and birds.

Sixth Day: Creation of reptiles, animals, and finally man.

Seventh Day: G-d "rested" from His work and sanctified the seventh day as the Shabbos, a day of rest.

Several things are notable here. Before G-d acted, nothing existed, not even the basic elements or their energy particles. At G-d's command, things sprang into existence. This was the most spectacular of miracles, one far removed from our experience or imagination. The simple words in which it is described are an enormous understatement.

Second, the concept behind this description is enormously sophisticated. In contrast to the creation stories of many other cultures, the description given in the first chapter of Genesis is very abstract. A formless G-d manifests through the energy of sound ("and G-d spoke"), and His first

creation is light. This is nothing like the humanoid deities of many other stories.

Third, the creation story moves forward in a precise order, from the energies of sound and light to the concept of atmospheres and fluids (upper and lower waters), then to the congealing of what we know as earth and into the regular motions of celestial bodies. Finally it moves to recognizable features of our planet's inhabitants – sea life, birds, reptiles, land animals, and human beings. While many questions can be raised about scientific theories of the origin of the universe and the evolution of life, what is remarkable here are not the differences, but the amazing similarities between the way the creation is portrayed in the Bible and the understandings of the most advanced branches of science – physics, quantum, physics, etc.

There are, of course, difficulties with most scientific hypotheses about the origin of life. Most problematic is the insistence of some scientific theorists that evolution occurred by chance. Many biologists have argued, on the contrary, that evolution by chance is mathematically impossible. Random mutation – the mechanism that supposedly resulted in billions of different species – could not produce the complexity of life on earth in the time span (four billion years of earth time) that science has allotted for it. J.W. Sullivan, one of the world's most brilliant physicists, has written that "the only possible conclusion so far as actual evidence goes is that the origin of life results from a supernatural, G-dly creative act."

Another frequently mentioned problem is that the Bible describes creation as occurring in a matter of days, while science holds that the universe is fifteen billion years old. Interestingly, long before current scientific methods were invented, some of our sages discussed whether the time frame of "seven days of creation" in Genesis actually corresponds to seven days as we know them. They noted that the sun and moon, which were created "for [measuring] times and seasons," did not appear until the fourth "day," so what was the "day" like before then? Moreover, if we have to understand every later description of G-d as metaphorical, certainly the acts of creation that occurred before a human being was present to witness them can only dimly be understood in human terms. To support this point, they bring a number of statements elsewhere in the Bible suggesting that G-d's measure of time is not like ours: "A thousand years is but a day . . ." and "G-d's thoughts are not our thoughts."

We need not debate the time frame of creation with today's scientists, whose own theories are very much in flux. The crucial point is that Judaism insists that G-d authored the universe, created its orderly systems, and continued to be involved in every aspect of creation, phase by phase. The clockmaker deity who wound up the machine and left it alone is not the G-d of Judaism, Who cares for every element of creation, Who directs each plant and animal in its growth and development, and Who planned the entire world as an arena in which human beings – the unique beings with free choice – could accomplish their destiny.

WHY DON'T WE HAVE CLEARER PROOFS OF G-D'S EXISTENCE?

The argument from design is very persuasive on a common-sense level. But we often wonder why G-d does not speak even more clearly about His existence, to reassure us at least that He is present. In ancient times, it seems, people saw miracles and heard G-d's voice, or at least knew people who were clearly connected to the Divine force, like prophets. Why don't we have a few miracles in our day?

Humanity is, in a sense, an experiment. When G-d created Adam, He made a being who could decide whether to be like the rest of creation, acting on an animal level, or to be like G-d Himself. The crux of the human experiment, the one independent variable, was that we should have free choice. If miracles were commonplace and the Divine Presence was indisputable, humans would have no choice but to acknowledge G-d. It would be as if we were compelled to believe in G-d.

Miracles did happen long ago, because they were needed to demonstrate G-d's existence to a world that had no concept of G-d at all. Once the Jews

were launched as a chosen nation – as we will see below – manifest miracles were less necessary. Human beings were then free to make their own decisions on the evidence available.

Still, open miracles do occur at times. Interestingly, many people who say "Why don't we have miracles?" refuse to believe in them when they do occur. It is tempting to pass off miracles as coincidences or as something that science will eventually explain. This is, again, part of the test of our free choice.

In fact, there is a completely different way to look at reality – namely, that everything is a miracle. If we accept the fact that G-d created the world and cares about it, then we can see G-d's contributions to the world as being continuous and ever flowing. We are surrounded by unrecognized miraculous events emanating from G-d. Indeed, we can see the continued existence of all things as dependent solely on G-d's will. We live from one miracle to the next.

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Pesachim 50

AGADAH: THE WAY HASHEM'S NAME IS WRITTEN AND THE WAY IT IS PRONOUNCED QUESTION: The Gemara teaches two differences between the world as it is now and the world as it will be in the future.

First, the Gemara cites the verse, "On that day, Hashem will be One and His name will be One" (Zecharyah 14:9), and asks is He not One even in this world? The Gemara answers that the World to Come is not like this world. In this world, the blessing "ha'Tov v'ha'Meitiv" is recited upon good tidings, and "Dayan ha'Emes" upon bad tidings. In the World to Come, only the blessing "ha'Tov v'ha'Meitiv" will be recited (because there will be no bad tidings, as Rashi explains).

Second, the Gemara continues and asks that the verse says, "And His name will be One" -- is His name not One even in this world? The Gemara answers that the World to Come is not like this world. In this world, Hashem's name is written one way but pronounced another. In the World to Come, His name will be pronounced the same way that it is written.

RASHI (Devarim 6:4) writes another difference between this world and the next world. Rashi quotes the Sifri on the verse "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad." He explains that "Hashem Elokeinu" means that the G-d Who is *presently* our G-d and not acknowledged as the G-d of the other nations will be *in the future* "Hashem Echad," one G-d over all of the nations, as the verse says, "At that time I shall cause all of the nations to call out in the name of Hashem" (Tzefanyah 3:9). Similarly, the verse states, "On that day Hashem will be One, and His name will be One" (Zecharyah 14:9).

The SHULCHAN ARUCH (OC 5) writes that when one utters the name of Hashem, both meanings – the meaning of the name as it is pronounced (that Hashem is the "Master of the world") and the meaning of the name as it is written (that He has always existed and is above time) – should be borne in mind.

However, the VILNA GA'ON (in BI'UR HA'GRA there) disagrees. He contends, based on numerous sources, that it is necessary to bear in mind only the meaning of the name as it is pronounced, "Master of the world." He adds, however, that the verse of Shema Yisrael is an exception, and when one utters the name in Shema Yisrael he should bear in mind *both* meanings.

Why is the verse of Shema Yisrael different from all prayers and blessings, according to the Vilna Ga'on?

ANSWER: RAV YITZCHAK HUTNER zt'l (in PACHAD YITZCHAK, Yom Kippur 5, Pesach 60 (and notes to Pesach 5:2), Shavuot 25:9) offers a penetrating insight based on the Gemara here.

Rav Hutner explains that the three differences between this world and the next as described by the Gemara here and by Rashi in Devarim are inherently related to each other. In this world, we do not perceive things the way they really are; reality is blurred, and Hashem's presence is not clearly recognized by all. If we would be able to see Hashem's good and perfection clearly, His true essence as One would be obvious. In the World to Come, reality will no longer be blurred, and it will be apparent to all that everything is good. At that time, the nations of the world will proclaim Hashem's Oneness together with us.

This is alluded to by the difference between the way Hashem's name is spelled and the way it is pronounced. The pronunciation that we use today connotes a Creator Who is partially hidden from the world. He is like a master who lets his slaves work while he supervises from a distance. In the World to Come, we will pronounce Hashem's name as it is written, because that name connotes His presence as evident to all and His essence as inseparable from all of existence. (See RAMBAN, beginning of Parshas Va'era, and MESHECH CHOCHMAH, beginning of Parshas Bechukosai.)

Accordingly, all manifestations of Hashem's attribute as "One" are based on the clarity of Hashem's presence that will be evident in the World to Come.

The truth is that even in this world it is possible, to a certain degree, to disperse the clouds that blur man's perception and understanding of reality and to feel the omnipresence of the Divine will. This is because even in this world, no true "bad" or "injustice" is ever wrought. Everything that transpires is the Divine design and is intended to be for our ultimate good (see Berachos 60b). Although the ultimate purpose behind what occurs in this world is often hidden from our perception, the reality is that it is the Divine plan. When we strive to recognize the Divine plan and to accept it, we gain a "glimpse" of the Creator.

The moment at which it is most imperative that we experience the clarity of the presence of Hashem is when we declare, "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad," and proclaim the Oneness of Hashem. As Rashi explains, this exclamation expresses our longing for the world in which Hashem's presence will be fully revealed and He will be recognized as One. When we recite this verse, we attempt to gain clarity of Hashem's Oneness in this world of confusion by finding the hidden, inherent good that exists in everything that happens and that exists in this world.

Accordingly, it is appropriate that we preserve in this verse the meaning of Hashem's name as it is written, and not only as it is pronounced. (See also Insights to Pesachim 56:2, Berachos 63:1, and Rosh Hashanah 32:3.)

Pesachim 56

SAYING "BARUCH SHEM KEVOD MALCHUSO" QUIETLY

QUESTION: The Gemara teaches that after one recites the verse, "Shema Yisrael," he should recite the verse, "Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso" quietly. Rabbi Yitzchak relates an allegory to clarify why this verse is said quietly. He says that it is comparable to a princess who smelled the aroma of delicious food. On one hand, she is embarrassed to ask for the food explicitly. On the other hand, if she does not partake of the food, she will suffer as a result of her urge. In order to resolve her dilemma, her servants bring the food to her quietly without announcement.

This analogy implies that there is some element of embarrassment in the recitation of the verse "Baruch Shem," and that is why it is recited quietly. Indeed, the NEFESH HACHAYIM (3:6) and other Kabbalistic sources explain that it is a lower level of declaration of the unity (Yichud) of the name of Hashem.

However, other sources indicate that "Baruch Shem" is a *higher* form of Yichud ha'Shem, and not a lower form as the Gemara here implies.

First, the TUR (OC 61) cites the Midrash that says that Moshe Rabeinu heard the angels declare, "Baruch Shem Kevod....," and he wanted to incorporate it into the prayers of the Jewish people. However, because it is an "otherworldly" praise and is too lofty to be recited in this world, he could institute only that it be said quietly. By saying "Baruch Shem" quietly, we show that we have no intention to encroach on the domain of the angels.

Second, we find that in the Beis ha'Mikdash, the Jewish people would respond with "Baruch Shem Kevod..." in place of "Amen" to every blessing they heard from the Kohen Gadol (Berachos 63a, Ta'anis 16b). Due to its lofty status, "Baruch Shem" may be said aloud only in the holiest place.

Third, the MAHARAL (Nesiv ha'Avodah 7) writes that the reason why we recite "Baruch Shem" aloud on Yom Kippur is because on that day we are elevated to a higher realm of existence. Similarly, Yakov Avinu recited this verse aloud because he was on a higher realm of existence.

These sources seem to contradict the implication of the Gemara here that "Baruch Shem" is embarrassing in some way.

ANSWER: RAV YITZCHAK HUTNER zt'l (Pachad Yitzchak, Yom Kippur 5:2:15) explains that both implications are true and do not conflict with each other. They reflect different aspects of "Baruch Shem." In one sense, "Baruch Shem" is a lower and embarrassing form of praise, while in other sense, it is a lofty and holy form of praise.

"Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso..." means that the name of Hashem is eternal and will remain forever. The name of Hashem, however, is comprised of two different elements (see Pesachim 50a and Insights there). There is the name as it is written, which emphasizes the eternalness of Hashem, and there is the name as it is pronounced (the name of "Adnus"), which emphasizes the sovereignty of Hashem in this world and expresses that Hashem is the Master of the world. The name of "Adnus" is used only in this world; it has no place in the World to Come, where Hashem's name will be pronounced the same way that it is written, as the Gemara earlier teaches (50a).

Accordingly, it is inappropriate to say "Baruch Shem Kevod... *l'Olam va'Ed*" in reference to the name of "Adnus." That name is used only in this world, while "Baruch Shem... l'Olam va'Ed" is a praise for the *eternal* use of the name of Hashem. The name of "Adnus" is a lower level of Yichud ha'Shem, a Yichud only for this world that expresses the limited extent to which we are able to perceive Hashem. It does not express the way that Hashem will be perceived in the next world.

In contrast, when "Baruch Shem" is used in reference to the name of "Yud-Heh," it is an appropriate and lofty praise, because it means that the name of "Yud-Heh" will be blessed in this world and in the next.

Praising the name of "Adnus" with the verse "Baruch Shem" is a lesser form of Yichud, because it applies only to this world. Praising the name of "Yud-Heh," the name of Hashem as it is written, with the verse "Baruch Shem" is a much higher form of Yichud. The angels experience Hashem's presence and perceive His reality in the ultimate way, the way expressed by the written form of His name. When they say "Baruch Shem," they praise that name, the name of "Yud-Heh." Similarly, in the Beis ha'Mikdash, the people declare "Baruch Shem" in response to the Kohen Gadol's elocution of Hashem's name as it is written. Since the lower level name of "Adnus" is not used, "Baruch Shem" may be said aloud. This is also why Yakov Avinu said "Baruch Shem" aloud; he perceived Hashem's presence the way the angels do.

When we say the name of Hashem in this world, however, we say only the name of "Adnus." We praise that name by quietly intoning, "Baruch Shem." The verse of "Baruch Shem" has two meanings. One is a lower form of praise of the name of "Adnus," and one is a lofty form of praise of the name of "Yud-Heh." Therefore, we say it quietly, like a person who has a message that can be understood in two ways, one that is lofty, and one that sounds incongruous. He whispers it so that the wise people who understand the lofty meaning will hear it and know that he is whispering it in order not to reveal the lofty wisdom behind it. The unlearned people will think that he is whispering it because it is a senseless statement and he is embarrassed to say it aloud. Accordingly, when the Gemara here implies that "Baruch Shem" is a lower form of praise, it does not contradict the other sources that imply that it is a higher form of praise. Both are correct, because both meanings are contained in "Baruch Shem."

From: **Meorot Hadaf Hayomi** [mailto:meorot@meorot.co.il] Sent: Thursday, March 16, 2006 12:15 PM To: members@meorot.co.il Subject: Meorot Vol. 355 Pesachim 56

Blessed is the Name of His Glorious Kingdom"

After we recite, "Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad," aloud, we recite, "Baruch Shem kavod malchuso" quietly. Why so? The Gemara explains that when Yaakov's sons gathered around him before his passing, they recited "Shema Yisrael," assuring their father that their faith in Hashem was firm. Yaakov then responded, "Baruch Shem." Therefore, when we recite Shema twice each day, we follow with "Baruch Shem," as did Yaakov Avinu. However, since Moshe did not write Baruch Shem in the parsha of Shema in the Torah, we recite it quietly, in deference to Moshe's omission.

The commentaries ask why need we be concerned that Moshe did not say Baruch Shem. There are many tefillos we say that Moshe Rabbeinu did not. Do we in any way show disrespect to Moshe, by saying a tefilla that he did not? Why then need we recite Baruch Shem quietly?

The Tzlach explains that since Moshe Rabbeinu did not include Baruch Shem in the parsha of Shema, it may be considered an interruption in the middle of Shema. Therefore we say it quietly (see Maharsha).

This explanation has interesting halachic relevance. Some communities have the custom of davening "Yom Kippur Katan," a lengthy addition to mincha on the day before Rosh Chodesh. As part of this tefilla, they recite the first posuk of Shema, followed by Baruch Shem. Some have the custom to recite Baruch Shem aloud, while others recite it quietly. According to the Tzlach's explanation, the whole reason Baruch Shem is recited quietly in Shema is in order that it not be so blatant an interruption. However, during Yom Kippur Katan one does not read the entire paragraph of Shema. Therefore there is no interruption and no reason to recite Baruch Shem quietly.

R' Shlomo Kluger (Chochmas Shlomo on Shulchan Aruch O.C. 61) argues against this ruling. He writes that our practice of reciting Baruch Shem quietly is based on a Midrash, not on our Gemara. The Midrash says that Moshe Rabbeinu learned the words of Baruch Shem from the angels. In order that they not be envious of us using their prayer, we whisper it. However, on Yom Kippur when we are elevated to become as pure as the angels, we have no fear to recite Baruch Shem aloud (Tur, O.C. 619).

This custom does not make any sense according to our Gemara. If Baruch Shem is recited quietly out of deference for Moshe Rabbeinu, then it should be recited quietly on Yom Kippur as well. We see from here, that the accepted practice follows the Midrash, and not the Gemara. Although the Tzalach's conclusion is correct according to the reasoning of our Gemara, it is incorrect according to the Midrash, which is accepted halachic practice. Therefore, even on Yom Kippur Katan, we should say Baruch Shem quietly, in order not to anger the angels.

Did Moshe say Baruch Shem: The Magen Avraham (ibid, s.k. 8) points out that not only do the Gemara and the Midrash differ, they seem to actually contradict one another. The Gemara states that Moshe did not say Baruch Shem, but the Midrash says that Moshe was the one who revealed to us this tefillah of the angels. The Magen Avraham explains that Moshe Rabbeinu did not include Baruch Shem in the parsha of Shema in the Torah, in order not to incite the anger of the angels. However, it is quite possible that he himself said it quietly, as we do today.

Shema without Baruch Shem: The Poskim debate whether one who omits Baruch Shem fulfills his obligation to recite Shema (see Magen Avraham 61, s.k. 11; Mishna Berura s.k. 29). The Biur Halacha (ibid, s.v. Acharei) rules that bedieved one does fulfill his obligation without Baruch Shem. He proves this from our Mishna, in which we find that the people of Yericho recited Shema without Baruch Shem, yet the Sages did not protest. This is because the people of Yericho still fulfilled their obligation without Baruch Shem.

Twelve words for twelve shevatim: The Midrash comments that Shema and Baruch Shem together are made up of twelve words, which correspond to the Twelve Shevatim. Saying Shema quietly: The Beis Yosef (O.C. 61:13) writes that people should not think that since Baruch Shem is recited quietly, it marks a break in the middle of Shema in which it is permitted to speak.

The Rashba (Teshuvos I, 452) writes that some have the custom to recite all of Shema quietly. Otherwise, some people may think that they can fulfill their obligation by simply hearing others say Shema. The Rema (ibid) writes that at very least, the first possuk should be read loudly.

We conclude with an interesting incite into the custom to whisper Baruch Shem. R' Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer I, O.C. 35) cites the Midrash that Baruch Shem is whispered in order not to incite the envy of the angels. However, the angels can certainly hear our whispers. We daven all of Shemoneh Esrei in a whisper, using specifically lashon hakodesh in order that the angels should understand our prayers and assists us by elevating them to their proper place Above. What good then does it do to whisper Baruch Shem?

The Klausenberger Rav zt"l (Divrei Yatziv, O.C. 83) answers that the angels say Baruch Shem in a thundering, loud voice of song. When we whisper Baruch Shem instead, we humbly show that we do not intend to compete with them. Therefore, they are not envious.

From: peninim-bounces@shemayisrael.com on behalf of Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: Thursday, August 03, 2006 5:59 PM To: Peninim Parsha

Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Va'eschanan

I implored Hashem. (3:23)

The Daas Zekeinim notes seven names given to tefillah, prayer. They are: tefillah, prayer; techinah, entreaty; tzaakah, shout; zaakah, cry out; nefillah, collapse; pegiah, encounter; rinah, joy. From among all of them, Moshe Rabbeinu selected techinah as the form of prayer of choice, because when he had previously asked Hashem, "Make Your way known to me," (Shemos 33:13) Hashem had replied, "V'chanosi eis asher achon," "I shall show favor when I choose to show favor." (Shemos 33:19) This indicated to Moshe that Hashem applies the attribute of chanun, pure favor, in directing the world. Everything that Hashem does for us is a form of matnas chinam, a gift asking nothing in return. Therefore, Moshe used the form of techinah to entreat Hashem to grant him a special favor, allowing him to enter Eretz Yisrael. In an alternative exposition, the Daas Zekeinim applies the gematria, numerical equivalent, of va'eschanan, 515, to emphasize how many times Moshe supplicated Hashem to be allowed entry into Eretz Yisrael. There is a powerful lesson to be derived from Moshe. He never gave up. Regardless of how often he was told no, he continued to pray as if it were the first time. He neither tired nor gave up hope. It was only after he was told to desist, that he stopped and accepted his fate. The mere fact that he was told to halt his prayers indicates that one more time would have rendered

success. Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, feels that Moshe is teaching us a lesson in emunah, faith, in the Almighty, a lesson that is substantiated by Chazal. "Even when a sharp knife is resting on one's neck, he should not despair from Heavenly mercy." It is forbidden to give up hope. It goes against the grain of faith. If there is life - there is hope.

The Brisker Rav, zl, explained Chazal's statement with the following incident that occurred in Brisk during his tenure as Rav. One year, shortly before Rosh Hashanah, the sexton of the large shul decided to change the location in which the choir would stand when they accompanied the chazzan during the service. They had always stood on his side. Now, consistent with so many of the progressive synagogues, the sexton had them placed in the gallery. The Brisker Rav was not made aware of this change until after the fact. Otherwise, he would have summoned the gabbaim, sextons, and vetoed their suggestion. While there was nothing forbidden about this change, the mere fact that they were emulating the temple of the free thinkers was sufficient reason to prohibit it.

The Rav entered the shul, went upstairs to the gallery and instructed the choir to return to their previous position in the shul. As soon as they had returned to their original place, the gabbaim instructed them to ascend to the gallery. The Brisker Rav once again went up the stairs and told them to return. After they had returned, the gabbaim insolently instructed them to go back to the gallery. This scene repeated itself a number of times. It became increasingly difficult for the Rav to ascend the stairs to the balcony. Yet, he continued. As he was about to go up one last time, the windows of the women's section were flung open, and the women, including the wives of the gabbaim, began to yell down to the choir, "How dare you not listen to the Rav! What chutzpah!"

The Brisker Rav added, "That which I could not personally accomplish, the righteous women of my shul achieved for me." Looking at his listeners, he said, "Now you certainly would have given up hope for success. After all, what more is there to do? The people were not listening. I went up to the gallery a number of times. What would one more time accomplish? I did it because Chazal teach us never to despair, never to give up hope - even when the sword is on one's neck. As long as the final decree has not been carried out, as long as the execution has not been performed, one can and should hope for mercy. Assur l'hisya'eish! It is forbidden to despair! Salvation can come supernaturally. Hashem is not bound by nature. What I continued to do was not destined to succeed, but since I sensed an obligation to fulfill Chazal's dictum, I merited Divine assistance. One must continue to believe and do. Hashem will do the rest. We are not permitted to give up for Him."

Rav Schlessinger cites another incident that occurred concerning the Brisker Rav which supports this idea. During the first World War, one of the members of the Jewish community of Brisk was accused of spying. The Rav did everything to save him, hiring the best lawyers and personally interceding on his behalf. It was all to no avail. The man was found guilty, and a date was set for his execution. According to Polish law, the accused was not executed unless his spiritual leader, be it a priest or a rabbi, confessed with him. It was only a formality, but one that was adhered to strongly. When the Brisker Rav was asked by one of his members if he would agree to confess with the condemned man, the Rav replied, "I will never do anything that will even indirectly cause the death of a Jew." Those who heard this statement were surprised. After all, what difference did it make what he was willing to do or not? The government would take him forcibly and compel him to listen to the confession.

The execution was to take place on Rosh Hashanah, and the guards came to the shul shortly before Mussaf to "accompany" the Rav to the execution place. The Rav motioned with his fingers that at present he was in the middle of prayer and could not speak. This went on for quite some time, and the guards began to lose patience with the Rav and his ruse. The members of the shul were concerned for the Rav's welfare as well as for their own. They brought over an elderly Jew to the guards, claiming that he was the assistant rabbi, who could perform the confession. This man accompanied the guards, listened to the confession, and the accused man was promptly executed. He returned to the shul just as a messenger from the governor arrived, absolving the accused of any wrongdoing. Apparently, he had been framed, and the guilty party had confessed.

When the Brisker Rav would relate this story, he would add, "One may never give up hope - even if a sharp sword is positioned on his neck. Why? What more can he do? He has prayed and prayed. It is over! Give up? No! That is not the Torah way." Chazal say, "Ein l'hisya'eish!" One may never despair. In the end, the least expected solution may surface, as apparently occurred with this man. Only, because man interfered, it was too late. If one truly believes, and he is worthy, he will merit siyata d'Shmaya, Divine assistance.

I implored Hashem. (3:23)

The Midrash focuses on the word Va'eschanan, "And I implored." They cite a pasuk in Daniel 2:21, "V'Hu mehashnei idanaya v'zimnaya," "and He (Hashem) alters times and seasons." This is an analogy to a king who had a close confidante to whom he gave extraordinary powers for delegating positions in the government. One day, this confidante was noticed standing by the gate to the palace begging the

gatekeeper to allow him to enter. People wondered at this sight, "Yesterday, he was appointing ministers. Today, he is begging by the gate. What happened?" They were told, "Yesterday, his window of opportunity was open. He was in power. Today, his reign is over."

Likewise with Moshe Rabbeinu. Earlier in the Chumash, we find him addressing Hashem authoritatively, using such phrases as "Arise, Hashem," "Return Hashem," and other terms that lend the impression that Moshe's power was permanent. Now, he was supplicating Hashem to enter Eretz Yisrael. What happened? His window of opportunity had closed. It does not remain open forever.

This Midrash teaches us a powerful lesson. One must seize the moment. When opportunity knocks - open the door and respond. Later might be too late. Life is filled with lost opportunities, marked by such phrases as, "I should have, would have, could have" - but, ultimately, "I did not respond" is the usual answer - always too late. Hashem sends us messages. Do we listen to them, or do we realize that they are messages after the fact? There are so many instances in each individual's life that even the slightest positive gesture would have made a world of difference. The individual, however, allowed the window of opportunity to close - and it did not reopen. The following story related by Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, was publicized over the years. For those who have not yet heard it, it is a classic that is worth repeating.

Rav Schwab once spent Shabbos with the saintly Chafetz Chaim, zl, in Radin. It was Friday morning, and, in the middle of a discussion concerning the function of Kohanim, the Chafetz Chaim turned to Rav Schwab and asked, "Are you a Kohen?" "No," replied Rav Schwab.

"Perhaps you have heard that I am a Kohen," the Chafetz Chaim said.

"Yes, I have heard," Rav Schwab quietly responded.

"Perhaps you are a Levi?" the Chafetz Chaim asked.

"No, I am not," was Rav Schwab's reply.

"What a shame! Moshiach is coming, and the Bais Hamikdash will be rebuilt. If you are not a Kohen, you will not be able to perform the avodah, service, in the Sanctuary. Do you know why? Because 3,000 years ago, at the incident of the Golden Calf, dein Zayda, your grandfather, is nisht gelafen, did not run forward, when Moshe Rabbeinu called out, "Mi l'Hashem eilai!" "Whoever is with Hashem should come to me!" Now take heart and listen. When you hear the call, "Mi l'Hashem eilai!" come running!

This was the Chafetz Chaim's message. When the call from Hashem comes, we must respond immediately, because that window of opportunity will not stay open forever. The Leviim responded 3,000 year ago, and it transformed their lineage forever.

Not because you were more numerous than any nation did Hashem desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all the nations. Rather, because of the love of G-d for you. (7:7,8)

Rashi explains the words, "Not because you were too numerous," to mean "Because you do not aggrandize yourselves when I supply you with goodness. Therefore, He desired you." "For you are the fewest of all the nations" means, "You minimize yourselves like Avraham and like Moshe and Aharon." Our ability to minimize our good fortune to walk humbly before G-d is what earns us His favor and love. When we think about it, the fact that our size does not go to our collective heads is not really a virtue. After all, we are the smallest nation in size and number. What is there about our census that would catalyze haughtiness? Furthermore, the fact that we act with humility is consistent with who we are. We have been persecuted and put down for so long, it has become natural to us. When we see an individual who is humble, we are impressed. The idea has limits. It is virtuous and commendable, but let us not get carried away. Yet, the Torah presents our collective humility as the primary reason for our being worthy of Hashem's love. Why?

Horav Gershon Liebman, zl, Rosh Hayeshivah of Bais Yosef/Novardhok in France, derives from here that one's primary virtue is his ability to minimize himself to the extent that when he deprecates his achievements and derogates his worthiness and positive features, he actually elevates his character and posture before Hashem. Hachnaah, downplaying oneself, is the key to distinction. Underrating oneself is a true indication of one's status as an oved Hashem, servant of Hashem. In other words, a person's stature is determined not by how much kavod, honor, he receives from others, but rather, how he handles this prestige. One whose head is turned by adulation demonstrates his true weakness. He shows that he has no clue, no concept of the truth. A great man is not one who tolerates abuse, but rather, one who accepts tribute and recognition and does not allow it to go to his head.

Members of Klal Yisrael distinguish themselves in their ability to accept who and what they are and, with great humility, minimize themselves before Hashem. While maintaining a low profile is important, a low self-image can be destructive. One should seek to establish a sense of balance between a positive attitude, in which one feels able to perform better and stronger, and avoiding arrogance. Chazal teach us that, as Jews, we are to maintain an almost paradoxical stance. They cite the pasuk in Shir HaShirim 2:14, "My dove in the cleft of the rock." Hashem said, "I call Yisrael

dove, as in the pasuk (Hoshea 7:11). 'Efraim is like a foolish dove without understanding.' To Me they are like a dove, but to the nations of the world they are like wild beasts." The Midrash in Shemos elaborates. Hashem said, "To Me they are a seduced dove, for everything which I decree upon them they accept and carry out. To the nations of the world, however, they are as tough as wild beasts... When the idolaters ask them why they observe Shabbos, why do you observe Bris Milah, they respond with resolution and conviction," thus reflecting a parallel to tough beasts.

The Shem MiShmuel derives from Chazal that every member of Klal Yisrael must possess two simultaneous self images, each dependent on circumstances. With regard to Hashem's infinite power and all encompassing wisdom, we are to be as doves- soft, gentle, bashful, aware of our very puny and limited capabilities. On the other hand, when we stand up for ourselves against the nations of the world, we must be resolute and outspoken. Veritably, there are forces out there in the world that would rather we did not exist. There are also those who maintain an implacable hatred for us and whose goal and purpose in life is our destruction. Our nationhood: our relationship with the Almighty-- our commitment to His mitzvos-- is a thorn in the eyes of many. We need great internal resolve to resist these forces, to focus on our mission-- regardless of the external and internal pressures. This is the meaning of being "tough as wild beasts." Successful Jewish life demands a synthesis of these two traits: pliability and bashfulness in our relationship with Hashem; and unswerving and uncompromising dedication to our stance within the outside world.

These two traits are characterized by the well known pasuk in Tehillim (34:15), "Sur meirah v'asei tov," "Turn from evil and do good." In turning away and shunning evil, one must display tremendous strength by being pugnacious and intractable. In one's quest to do good, however, a tender and humble heart will serve him well. The primary goal of a Torah lifestyle is, of course, the "do good" aspect, for it is that which enhances one's relationship with the Almighty. The Maharal teaches us that the mitzvos lo saasei, prohibitive mitzvos, are intended to ensure that we remain within the parameters of humanity - that we are mentchen. A breach in these mitzvos indicates that we have fallen below the standards of humanity. The positive mitzvos are intended to elevate us beyond this situation and guide us to develop into spiritually oriented and holy people. Thus, there is a reward for performing a positive mitzvah, while abstaining from the negative commands does not carry a reward. Hashem has chosen us for two reasons: first, because we abstain from evil; we are sur meirah; we preserve our essential dignity and human worth. This, however, does not establish a special relationship with Hashem. Second, in order to develop that relationship, we must perform positive mitzvos - we must be aseiv tov. Through the "do good" aspect of our service to the Almighty, by minimizing ourselves, we indicate that we appreciate everything that He grants us, despite the fact that we are unfit for, and undeserving of, His favor.

In loving memory of our dear Mother & Bubby Mrs. Chana Silberberg Zev & Miriam Solomon & Family

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