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Teaching Students, Not Subjects
Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

And when you throw them out, where do you think they will go? Walking into Bnos Yisroelin Baltimore, one sees a sign that reads, "Teaching Students, not Subjects." When the Baltimore Jewish Times reported on the school, they found that the school did much more than simply pay lip service to a sentiment many educators would be quick to say they support. Rabbi Amster noted that at Bnos, that sense "permeates everything that we do..."

There are those who might argue that such a "soft" sentiment is fine for a girls yeshiva, but for boys? For boys, one needs a stronger hand.

I would argue that in this regard there should be no difference between a girls and boys yeshiva. Caring for students is the only way to educate all our young people. Fortunately, despite the disturbing trend to hew an ever harder line with any student who does not strictly conform to a yeshiva's academic and behavior standards, I am not alone in my belief that we do greater harm by our harsh rigidity than by treating each of our students as a precious treasure.

Every Jewish educator knows, without question, what we teach is vital. Fewer seem to appreciate that who we teach is at least as much of a gift.

It would be understandable for the most preeminent Gadol to emphasize what we teach when he meets with mechanchim, rebbeim—educators—at the beginning of the new school year. He undoubtedly wants to emphasize the educational issues and concerns that will confront his teachers—the core curriculum that is to be taught, the pace at which classes must proceed, what is to be accomplished during a z'man—but that was not the focus of the Gaon Rav Aharon Yehuda Leib Shteinman's recent talk with educators of yeshivot ketanot as the school year began.

According to "Chadrei Chareidim" (www.bhol.co.il), the Rav pleaded with the educators to keep in mind two thoughts as the new school year begins. One, to continually relate to each and every student as a neshama, a pure and

precious soul. Two, to stop expelling students from yeshivas.

What kind of message is this to deliver to educators about to embark on a new school year?

Rav Shteinman continued in his talk by referring to Bava Kamma 62a, as he does in his recently published volume, "Leading with Love". The Talmudic passage is concerned with a man giving a woman a gold coin to hold but telling her, "Be careful with it for it is silver."

Rava rules that, should she damage the coin, she would have to reimburse the man the full worth of the gold because the owner will rightly claim that, regardless of the actual worth of the coin, she should not have damaged it. However, if the woman was merely negligent with the coin, she would be responsible only for the value of the silver, correctly claiming that she had only agreed to be responsible for a silver coin (netirusa d'dahava lo kabilsilalai) and not a gold one.

How are we to understand this passage? To put the passage in more contemporary terms, suppose a man gave his friend a locked box to safeguard, telling him that it contained \$10,000. Such a sum is not to be taken lightly. The friend would certainly guard it with great vigilance. But what if the locked box did not contain \$10,000 but rather \$100,000?

What if the friend negligently left the box on the back seat of a taxi? What would he say when he learned that he was responsible not for \$10,000 but for \$100,000? He would surely protest that he had never agreed to be responsible for such a princely sum. He would admit that \$10,000 is a sum worthy of vigilance. But \$100,000? That is another matter entirely.

"Had I known that there was \$100,000 in the box, I'd have been even more vigilant!"

The Rav would find his claim that he is not liable for the additional \$90,000 to be more than legitimate. But what does all this have to do with our discussion of teachers and students? Rav Shteinman suggests that, in a similar way, every single teacher, rebbi, principal of either boys or girls (equally so!) must fully understand exactly what is being entrusted to his safekeeping.

If a teacher thinks that his task is merely "to teach"—d'varim peshutim, a simple matter—that it is no great thing to teach, that "anybody can do that" he must immediately be set straight. Children are neshamos; they are netirusa d'dahava. They are more precious than gold. Do not for a minute think that they are merely silver. They are the most valuable possession of all klal Yisrael.

If a teacher is not able to take on the responsibility of safeguarding such treasure, he shouldn't! Before setting foot in a classroom, each and every teacher must be clear about the responsibility he are taking on, and the treasure that is being placed in his safekeeping. He must know that to treat any child with less than netirusa d'dahava is negligence.

If each and every teacher is to safeguard his students with such care, how much more negligent is it to expel a student from yeshiva? How much more negligent is it to treat such a soul in such a way that he or she will then "leave the fold", remove his or herself from our community?

That teacher should not think for a minute that he will not be asked in the world to come, "Why did this young man or young woman leave the community? Why is she no longer frum? Why is he on drugs?"

What will that teacher answer? What can he answer?

And in the gaping silence, he will be told, "if this was your own son, would you have thrown him out? For that is what you should have thought at the time. This is like your son, your son!"

"Responsibility for children is just as for gold, not silver. No! Even more than gold!"

It is not enough to presume that because a child is attending yeshiva that he or she is safeguarded, that his or her home is filled with yiddishkeit or that they are treated with love and respect. There is no guarantee. That is why each talmid must be watched closely and with care. The rebbi must be mindful of his charges; he must be mindful of everything. More importantly, he must teach with love and compassion, with a pleasant and joyous

countenance. The way to treat students is with compassion and mercy not rigidity and anger.

When I met with the faculties I had the privilege to lead, I always shared with them a simple truth: We all make mistakes. To err is human. And in almost every profession and circumstance, it is possible to make a mistake and then correct it. We almost always have the chance to begin anew. Except when it comes to a child or student we turned off by our negligence, inattention, or abuse!

It is on our heshbon to make the lessons sweet for our students; it is on our heshbon to safeguard our students. We are not, after all, teaching stuff. By transmitting the truths and jewels we teach, we are burnishing the links in a glorious chain. We are touching souls, precious Jewish souls.

Without those souls, for whom is the knowledge worthwhile?

When we extinguish the flame of learning in a young soul, it is not easily – if ever – relit. There very well may be no second chance.

There is no more important message a faculty can receive than to nurture that flame in every single student! And yet, even when Rav Shteinman addressed his audience of hundreds of mechanchim - educators I can imagine that there were those who listened impassively, all the while thinking to themselves, “Okay, we get it about all the love, compassion, sensitivity, personalization blah, blah, blah. It’s easy to talk about all that in the abstract. What about those of us in the classroom? What about us, the ones who have to deal with students who misbehave or act out?”

“What about the student who is immersed in the Internet?” a rebbi asked the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Shteinman.

Such musings have merit, but it is astonishing to me how much of the ills of society are now blamed on the Internet. Of course the Internet poses many dangers and challenges. But, were there no problems before the Internet?

So, how might Rav Shteinman have responded to any of the possible questions leading to the question of what to do with such students? Would he have quickly and resolutely determined, “Of course throw out the student immersed in Internet! Of course throw out the student who acts out!”

Would he have considered that student to be no more than garbage needing to be removed from the building as expeditiously as possible?

Or would he have asked, like the recently deceased Rav Ovadya Yosef, the highly respected Gaon and leader of Sefardic Jewry, “Whom are you throwing out? A rock? Some accumulated trash?”

Rav Ovadya Yosef ZT’L knew the challenge of teaching in a classroom. When he confronted a rowdy, disruptive or uncooperative student in a class, he did not view the student as “the enemy” but rather as the unique being God intended. He embraced the uniqueness of each of his students. What an upside-down world we have created when Rav Ovadya’s approach strikes us as refreshing and encouraging... instead of the norm!

Rav Yosef was passionate in his defense of such students. “Don’t throw them out. We are dealing with nefoshos! This is dinei nefoshos. Our Rabbonim only addressed dinei nefoshos when there was a Sanhedrin, 23 chachamim. This is dinei nefoshos. You throw him out and what will be with him then? You know what will be? Do you accept responsibility for what he will become?”

“Therefore, you must love him and smother him with love, bnei Yisrael whose future is to become gedolei Yisrael. To bring them closer with sweet words and this is how we bring them into the Torah fold.”

In truth, Rav Shteinman responded similarly to the Internet question. Each student is to be considered on an individual basis; for each student there is a need for a shailas chochom; each situation demands discussion and analysis with a Chochom.

The most important thing, he emphasized, was to not demean or demoralize (not to be me’zalzel) any talmid. Never to dismiss any talmid as hopeless, as “nu, meila.”

In his response, Rav Shteinman showed himself to be a true and absolute gadol – a visionary who could see clearly and respond to the demands of the times. He provided the wisdom of a zakein.

Anyone can treat a difficult or misbehaving student as garbage. Anyone can just throw him out. But it takes a teacher to transform him into the gedolim and nashim tzidkanios that Rav Shteinman envisions. “Who can know what great tzaddikim and tzidkaniyos and what great talmidei chachamim can emerge from the children sitting right in front of the mechanech!

If a mechanech does not realize what treasures sit directly before him, chas v’shalom, he may claim that he only agreed to watch “silver coins.” But, in fact, he has before him the purest gold. He has before him neshamos kedoshos!

Rav Shteinman was determined that his listeners would truly understand the importance of never dismissing, ignoring, or overlooking any student. “Let me give you another example,” he told them, “you know that Rav Chaim Volozhin established the yeshiva in Volozhin, which existed for exactly 70 years. The yeshiva had roshei yeshiva, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, and then his son Rav Yitzchok, and then a son in law of Rav Chaim, and another son in law, and then the Netziv.” He sighed. Of the seventy years, the Netziv led it for fifty. “In other words, Yeshivas Volozhin was all the Netziv.

“Yes, the Netziv who had not been particularly well thought of (mi’tchila chashvu alav sh’hu lo kol kach) turned out to be very special. Because of the Netziv, all of Volozhin, for 50 years existed and thrived.”

Give heed. Teach with your heart. Love your students. You never know, the next Netziv may very well be sitting before you in your classroom!

Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran serves as OU Kosher’s vice president communications and marketing.

December 26, 2013

<http://5tjt.com/respecting-teachers/>

Respecting Teachers

Student and Rebbe

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman

As Yeshivos start across the country, it is important to review the Torah’s value system in how we relate to our Rebbeim.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Torah places much emphasis and value upon respecting one’s teachers. This includes not just teachers, but also deans, menahelim, and Roshei Yeshiva. The Sifri in Parshas Voeschanan (34) writes, “HaTalmidim kruim banim.v’harav karui av – students are called children and the teacher is called a parent.” The relationship between the two should reflect this. There are numerous Halachos and sayings throughout Torah literature that demonstrate this.

- Rav Eliezer Ben Shamoah says (Pirkei Avos 4:12), “The honor of your student, should be as precious to you as your own honor. The honor of your friend..like the honor of your teacher, and the honor of your teacher like the honor of Heaven.” There is no greater honor than that which one must extend to teachers.

The Midrash (Midrash Saichel Tov Shmos 17:9) informs us as to where exactly each of these three concepts are derived.

Moshe told Yehoshua – his student, “Choose, for us, people” – he did not say, “Choose, for me, people.” He thus included his student with his own honor. Shaul did the same (Shmuel Aleph 9:5) where he told his servant, “my father will worry about us..” Because he used the inclusive term “us” he merited to become king.

The honor of one’s friend is derived from Aharon HaKohain when he referred to Moshe Rabbeinu, who was his equal (and 3 years younger too), with the words, “Bi Adoni -Please my master,” (Bamidbar 12:12).

The honor of one’s teacher is derived from Yehoshua (11:28), where he says to Moshe Rabbeinu, “My Master Moshe, shut them [referring those that have prophesied before Moshe, i.e. Eldad and Meydad] in!” Just as Hashem has done so with them – [shutting them in the camp], so too should you do with them.. Yehoshua thus compared Moshe Rabbeinu with Hashem.

• Just as a person is obligated in honoring and fearing one's parents, so too is there an obligation in honoring and fearing one's Torah teachers. [See Shulchan Aruch YD 242:1 AH].

• One who is meharher (thinks negative thoughts) after his teacher is like one who is meharher after the Shechina (statement of Rabbi Abahu, Sanhedrin 110a), as it states, "And they spoke about Hashem and of Moshe. (BaMidbar 21:5)." This refers to the time when Klal Yisroel complained as to why they were taken out of Egypt without bread and without water.

• One who disputes with his or her teacher, it is as if he or she has disputed with heaven (statement of Rav Chisda in Sanhedrin 110a). He brings his proof from the posuk in Bamidbar (26:9) concerning Dasan and Aviram who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korach, when they strove against Hashem. Here the Torah shows that disputing with Moshe and Aharon is, because they were their teachers, equal to disputing with Hashem.

• Indeed, if one comes across two lost items, one belonging to a parent and one belonging to a teacher, the halacha is that one must first return the item belonging to his or her teacher (Shulchan Aruch Hilchos Hashavas Aveida YD Vol. III). Even though, we rule that if the teacher is hired by the parent, the parent's lost item does come first, the fact that the teacher's item comes first in other scenarios is highly significant. The explanation for this halacha is based on the Mishna in Bava Metziah – that the teacher brings a person to the eternal world.

Respecting, or rather disrespecting one's teacher is even one of the Al Chait that is recited on Yom Kippur – "Al Chait shechatanu lefanecha b'zilzul horim vemorim – On the sin that we have sinned before You in disrespecting our parents and teachers."

SIX REASONS

1. The Imrei Yosher explains that without students demonstrating respect and honor toward their teachers, the very continuity of the Torah would be threatened.

2. An additional reason behind the obligation to demonstrate respect is out of the notion of Hakaras haTov – the feeling of gratitude. A teacher of Torah has the additional factor of bringing us to an eternal world (See Mishna Bava Metziah 33a). We must show eternal gratitude for this.

3. A third reason for the obligation to respect teachers is on account of Tikkun Olam – maintaining the structure of the world order. It is important to ensure the proper transfer of information from one generation to another. If an atmosphere of respect and discipline is not maintained, then the ability to transfer this information will become compromised. The world will suffer on account of this.

4. A fourth reason lies in the fact that all of us are created in the Divine Image and each person contains within his or her soul a "Chailek Elokah Mimaal – a Divine portion or spark from Above." Since all knowledge stems from the One Above – respecting those who provide us with knowledge is a means of showing reverence and awe toward Hashem. This reason applies, therefore, to all teachers, secular as well as Torah.

5. A fifth reason is that the success of a student is directly connected to his or her respect for the teacher (See Bais Av p. 160, Rav Grossbard, Mashgiach of Ponevech Yeshiva). Indeed, it can be said that Shmuel HaNavi was only able to receive Nevuah from Hashem because he thought he was being called by Eli (See Masais HaMelech, Kiddushin 57a).

6. It is also important to note that aside from the fact that showing disrespect in and of itself is wrong, it undermines the respect that other students should have for their teachers too. This is a violation of the severe prohibition of "veLifnei Iver Lo Sitain Michshol – do not place a stumbling block before the blind."

To Whom It Applies

There is such a concept as a Talmid/Chaver – a person who is both a teacher and a peer. If one's classmate, for example, constantly tutors and explains items to another classmate, the student classmate does not have to conduct oneself in the same manner of a student before a teacher, according to the

Rambam.

Other authorities, however, write that such a relationship does require respect. Certainly it applies to a teacher who has taught the student for a significant time. Chazal also discuss a teacher called a "Rebbe Muvhak", one who taught the student the overwhelming majority of the student's knowledge. Such a teacher must be treated with even more respect.

Women Teachers As Well

The Poskim (See Yechaveh Daas e.g.) have ruled that all the halachos that exist for teachers apply to a woman teacher as well. One must stand up for them when they enter the room and extend them the honors due a teacher just as a Yeshiva student must do so for his Rebbe.

Interesting Tidbits

• The Shla writes (Meseches Taanis, Perik Ner Mitzvah #24) that it is a proper minhag to fast on the day of the yartzeit of a Rebbe as well – because of the notion of Kavod and Yirah to a teacher.

• The Ramban's opinion (See Nimukei Yosef Bava Metziah 33a) is that even if a student has surpassed his or her teacher, one is still obligated in honoring them.

• The Responsa She'eris Yosef (#19) writes that one must give one's teacher's teacher more honor than one's teacher because both of you are bound to honor that teacher.

Action, Speech, and Thought

Some of these halachos apply to all teachers, while other halachos apply exclusively to teachers of Torah. We must demonstrate this respect, in our actions, our speech, and in our thoughts. There are actions that we must do, and there are actions that we must avoid. Chazal (see Mesilas Yesharim Chapter 7) tell us "Chitzonios meoreros es hapnimius – outer actions affect inner thoughts."

Active actions that we should do are:

• Letting the teacher go first (YD 251:9).

• If a teacher seems to be looking for a marker, it is a Mitzvah to volunteer to quickly get the marker (based upon above source).

• Standing up when the teacher enters within dalet amos or seven feet of the student in the room. [Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that 4 amos are approximately 7 feet, Rav Chaim No'eg rules that it is six feet.] The student must fully stand up and remain standing until the teacher reaches his or her spot. (Pri Magadim MZ 141:7). The custom, however, is that all students in the classroom stand up, even if they are not technically within the seven foot area.

• Holding the door for a teacher (YD 251:9)

• Visiting the teacher on Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and Yom Tov. The Mogain Avrohom (OC 301:7) writes that one should visit their Rebbe on Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh, but it is just a Mitzvah – not an obligation. On Yom Tov, however, it is an obligation. Where the custom is not to do this, one should first seek permission and perhaps do so in a group and for a limited time.

• It is a Mitzvah to serve one's teacher food and drink (YD 242).

Actions that we must avoid are:

• When one is sitting in front of a teacher one should sit straight and properly and not have one's feet on the desk in front (SA YD 242:16).

• Ruling issues of halacha in front of one's teacher

• Davening in front of a teacher (within seven feet unless there is some sort of mechitzah) is considered disrespectful (See OC 90:24)

• One should not sit in their teacher's seat or spot (See SA YD 242:16)

• One should not be Machmir (take on a stringency) in something that the teacher does not do in front of the teacher (See Mishna Brurah 63:6)

• Rolling one's eyes when a teacher says something.

• Studying another subject during that teacher's class. This is very disrespectful, as it implies that the material now taught is not as important to the student as is other material. This message is being told to oneself, to other students, and to the teacher. If one is doing so for a test, it is tantamount to saying, "My grades are more important to me than both this material, and the respect that teachers should be given."

• Chewing gum or eating when a menahel, teacher, dean or speaker addresses an audience.

• Engaging in serious doodling in a speech, Dvar Torah, or class is also disrespectful.

• Passing notes or photographs during a teacher's class or looking at pictures in a camera

• Texting during a teacher's class

• For girls, passing hand cream or lotion during a teacher's class

• For girls, doing another student's hair in class

• Looking at the clock in the back during class

• Getting up immediately as soon as the bell rings.

Speech that we should engage in includes:

• Although it is not obligatory, many students address their teachers in the third person. Some authorities write that based upon Bava Basra 158b – it is, in fact, obligatory to do so for one's primary Rebbe.

• We must always use respectful titles.

• If we are asked to speak at an affair, or event, one should obtain consent from one's teacher if they are present. One may simply say, "With the permission of my teachers," and then begin. This is considered sufficient, even though the speaker will continue. The consent obtained is thus an acknowledgement.

Speech that we should avoid:

• Referring to a teacher by his or her first name (See SA 242:15). Rav Moshe Feinstein zatzal (Igras Moshe YD Vol. I #133) writes that this also includes doing so in writing. The Yam Shel Shlomo Kiddushin (1:65) writes the same thing as well. Thus, we should not even refer to a teacher in writing without a proper title.

• Referring to a teacher just by his or her last name (pashut). A typical example is, "Parsha is going to be during Goldstein – good I did not study for his quiz."

• Remarking to a fellow classmate, "Boring."

• Insulting a Teacher. Example: Saying a statement such as, "Doesn't she (or he) know how to teach?" Another example, "I think Rabbi ___ forgot to shower this morning."

• Making fun of a teacher's clothing – either in front of them or to a friend.

• Speaking disrespectfully, as in, "You marked me wrong." – Even if one precedes the statement with respectful words.

• Disagreeing with a teacher in a disrespectful manner. Obviously, the learning process involves a certain give and take, but disagreeing should always be voiced respectfully.

• Sarcasm with a teacher. As an example, when a teacher makes a joke responding with a sarcastic, "Hilarious."

• Excessive friendliness can also, at times, be disrespectful. Such questions as, "Hey, what's up?" may, under some circumstances, be inappropriate to be used with a teacher. However, it depends upon the situation – certainly a relationship with a teacher should be cultivated and encouraged as much as possible.

Thoughts that we should engage in:

• When standing before a teacher one should view it as standing before the Shechina. (Rashi, Shmuel Aleph 3:1)

• When standing before a teacher one should contemplate that they are the next link in an unbroken chain that stretches back to Har Sinai itself – the first source. The teacher is thus providing us with a life-line and the opportunity to grasp hold of our birthright received at Sinai.

• One should be in a state of Simcha when standing before a teacher in class that one is meriting to study Torah (Ateres Paz 1:3)

• One should view oneself before a teacher as a droplet in front of the great sea. (Eitz Avos on Pirkei Avos)

• One should develop deep feelings of devotion and ahavah, love, toward one's teachers (Naizer HaTorah p.7)

Thoughts that we should avoid

• It is wrong to think and to express with our body language the notion that

the material the teacher is presenting is boring, superfluous, or off in some manner or form. Rolling one's eyes is quite often a physical expression of this thought process.

• One should not think that the teacher is ineffective without him or her personally being present as a sharp student (Sanhedrin 68).

When we merit to honor our parents and teachers in our actions, speech, and thought we will merit to achieve unbounded growth in ruchniyus – spirituality and closeness to Hashem. It also indicates that we are good people and not evil or rotten people (See Shaarei Teshuvah 3:148).

The Teacher's Obligation Too

It is important to emphasize that teachers must always keep the respect of the student in mind as well. It is the teacher who has the greatest opportunity in building up the confidence and self-esteem of a student. On the other hand as well, a teacher has the capability of utterly destroying the self-esteem of the student too, and must be very careful never to do so.

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Rabbi Yisroel Reisman - Parshas Vaeschanan 5775

Let's start with the Parsha. There is an incredible thought in the Sefer Kesav V'hakabala. On a part of the Parsha which is also part of the Siddur and that is Kriyas Shema. As you know, when we say Kriyas Shema every day we have the first Parsha which is Shema and V'ahava which is called Kabbolas Ol Malchus Shamayim. Then we have the second Parsha which is V'haya Im Shamo'a which we refer to as Kabbalas Ol Hamitzvos. Anybody who hears this automatically has a Kasha. The difficulty is that the same Mitzvos that are in the second Parsha are in the first Parsha as well. The Mitzva of Mezuzah, Tefillin, teaching Torah, they are in both Parshios. So what is going on? Why is one called Kabbalas Hamitzvos and one is called Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim?

The Kesav V'hakabala gives an insight into Pshat in 6:5 (אֶת יְרוּרָה, אֶת אֶלְרִיָּה, אֶת אֶלְרִיָּה), the entire Parsha. He says that really this Parsha has one Mitzva, the Mitzva of love of HKB"H. We are Mekabeil Ol Malchus Shamayim and we have the Mitzva to have a relationship of Ahava with the Ribbono Shel Olam. What follows 6:7 (וְשִׁנְתֶם לְבַבְיֶיךָ) is not an Az'hara to teach, it is telling you that the Middah of Ahavas Hashem is that it should be such a love that you want to teach it.

L'havdil if you would hear a great joke and you meet a friend you would want to share it with him. After all, you think that it is something worthwhile, something that will give him pleasure. That is for a joke which gives momentary pleasure and has no lasting meaning. How about Divrei Torah? If you have a true love and appreciation for Torah you will want to tell it to the person that you meet. A part of (בְּכֹל-לִבְבְּךָ, אֶת יְרוּרָה אֶלְרִיָּה, אֶת אֶלְרִיָּה) is to have such a love of (וְשִׁנְתֶם לְבַבְיֶיךָ) that you want to teach it. The same thing the Mezuzah on your doorway, the Tefillin on your body are expressions of Ahava. To tie a symbol of the Ahava to your body, to connect the symbol of your Ahava to your home. This is the explanation of the first Parsha of Kriyas Shema. The Sefer Kesav V'hakabala goes so far as to say that really this is simple Pshat in the Parsha. He writes I really wouldn't even bother saying this except that I see that people make a mistake and don't understand it.

I saw afterwards in the Hameik Davar that he has a similar explanation of this Parsha which we say every single day. A tremendous insight into the idea of the Ahavah.

I wonder if in the Beracha of (אֶהְבֶּה רַבִּי אֶהְבֶּהוּ) which precedes Kriyas Shema, where we talk about Hashem's love for us and we mention the ideas of (לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמְּדוֹ, לְשִׂמְרָה וּלְעֲשׂוֹת וּלְקַבֵּל) if there too it is meant as an expression of Ahavah.

It is a different Kavana. It is easy to Daven when there is one theme that goes through many of the words that you are saying as opposed to jumping from theme to theme. This gives us a Havana, an insight.

In previous years we asked a Kasha that (וְשִׁנְתָם לְבָנֶיךָ), that is explained as Eilu Hatalmidim. Shouldn't the first time that it mentions (בְּנֵיךָ) be a reference to your children? In the second Parsha by 11:19 (-אֵת אֲתֵם אֲתֵם אֲתֵם אֲתֵם) there it should mean the Banim that are Talmidim. Why in the first Parsha mentioned in the Torah do we translate (בְּנֵיךָ) as Talmidim? According to the Kesav V'hakabala it is very Geshmak. The whole idea here is to have a tremendous Ahava to HKB"H to teach who you can. It is not coming to tell you a Mitzvah of teaching Torah. It is an expression of Ahava. An Oheiv might want to spread the word of HKB"H as best as he can. And so, there is a thought on Parshas Vaeschanan.

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

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Weekly Parsha VAETCHANAN

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah reading of this week contains within it portions that we read in the synagogue on the morning of Tisha B'Av. With unerring accuracy the story of the Jewish people is predicted in full detail. The consequences of national sin and of an immoral society are outlined – the destruction of the Temples, the loss of national sovereignty, exile, persecution and a history of horror and unending dangers and sacrifice.

The history of the Jewish people, by its very nature, is peculiar and different than all others. There are no nations, races, religions or groupings of people who can be deemed guiltless. So then the question arises, why were and are we singled out for our particular fate and story? And the answer that the Torah itself grants us is that all of this is a result of the ancient and eternal covenant of the Lord made with our ancestors and renewed with us in every generation and every circumstance.

It is very difficult to deal with or explain the nature of a never-ending mutually binding commitment. Agreements are made on a daily basis with governments and individuals, companies and partnerships, with advance knowledge that these commitments are not permanent and are subject to change, as circumstances dictate. Conflicts of interest always arise and outside circumstances will always vary from what they were originally. But the nature of the relationship of the Jewish people to its Creator is such that the commitments never change and the obligations of the original covenant are always in force.

The return of the Jewish people to Zion and to the Land of Israel can only be seen and understood in light of the commitment described in the Torah reading of this week. Thousands of years ago Moshe foresaw that eventually Jews would leave the Exile, whether forcibly or voluntarily, and would return to their ancient homeland. Somehow, this is part of the covenant between Israel and God. And so, over the last two centuries Jews came home, first in a trickle and then in a steady stream and finally – regarding the Jews of Russia – in a mighty torrent. All sorts of Jews made this journey – socialists, communists, secular Zionists, religious Zionists, religious anti-Zionists, believers, and freethinkers all somehow made this passage of return.

The ostensible reasons for their so doing are varied in the extreme. But even to the most jaded of our observers, it should be clear that there is an underlying motive that drives this story. And that is the eternal bond of the original covenant made with our father Abraham and renewed through his generations and millennia of Jewish life by countless others.

The harrowing story of the Jewish exile, represented by the sad fast day of Tisha B'Av represents one extreme of the terms of the covenant. The dawning redemption of Israel, the people and the land, which we are witness to if we but remove the blinkers from our eyes, is the other part of the

covenant. In the words of the rabbis of the Talmud, Israel, Torah and God are one. We are all bound together in the great and holy covenant that guides our national existence.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In honor of the 15th of Av, I am presenting:

The Spurned Shadchan

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The phone rings. Mrs. Weinberg,* a Lakewood* shadchan who often calls to ask shaylos, is on the line.

"I suggested that a local girl meet a bachur who is currently learning in Eretz Yisroel," Mrs. Weinberg began. "Both families did their research and agreed that it sounded worth pursuing, but they decided to wait until the summer when the bachur would be visiting his family here."

"When the summer arrived," Mrs. Weinberg continued, "I called the families back to arrange for the young people to meet. However, they told me that someone else suggested the shidduch, and that they are following up through the other shadchan. Are they permitted to cut me out of the arrangements? After all, it was my idea first!"

Does Mrs. Weinberg have a claim? If she does, for how much money and against whom?

SHADCHANUS GELT

Before we discuss these issues, we need to establish whether paying a shadchan is indeed a halachic requirement.

I often find that people feel that one is not required to pay a shadchan. However, this is a misconception, since the Rama (Choshen Mishpat 264:7) requires paying a shadchan a fee, usually called by its Yiddish name, shadchanus gelt. Just as you expect to pay your real estate broker, so, too, you should assume you will pay the shadchan. (We should be aware that, according to the Rama, a shadchan's claim for services rendered has a stronger foundation than a doctor's fee for an office visit, see Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 336:2; but that is a topic for a different article.)

Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with a shadchan requesting payment for services rendered, just as an attorney or accountant has every right to demand payment for services.

BROKERAGE FEES

Although it sometimes sounds strange, shadchanus fees are halachically categorized as brokerage fees. Just as one pays a real estate agent for arranging a transaction, so, too, one pays a shadchan for making the arrangements necessary for the engagement and marriage to transpire. Therefore, we must first explain the halachic sources for brokerage fees.

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 63b) mentions the responsibility to pay a broker's fee to the person who arranges the sale of property or merchandise (Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 185:1; Rama 87:39). This is a standard business practice, similar to paying a commission to a stockbroker, real estate agent, or personnel recruiter (sometimes called a "headhunter").

BUT WHAT IF I DIDN'T ASK HIM?

People easily understand that if you approach a broker or agent, you thereby obligate yourself to pay him for his services. However, some people assume that if you did not solicit the service, you are not obligated to pay. Does this distinction have any basis?

According to halacha, you are required to pay for any unsolicited benefit that you would usually pay for. Providing unsolicited benefit is called yored lesoch sdei chavairo shelo birshus, entering someone else's field without authorization, and the provider of the benefit is referred to simply as the yored (Bava Metzia 101a).

The case where the Gemara demonstrates this halacha is very instructive: You own a field that you usually plant, but you have not yet planted it this

year. Someone else plants the field without asking the owner's permission and now asks the owner to pay him! Is the planter entitled to compensation for his efforts? The Gemara rules that he is entitled to compensation, since you benefit from his work.

HOW MUCH DO YOU OWE THE YORED?

You are required to pay the yored as much as you have benefited. If he performed work for you that would normally require you to hire someone, you must pay him the market rate for hiring someone for this work (Bava Metzia 76a; Sma, Choshen Mishpat 375:1).

WHY MUST ONE PAY THE SHADCHAN?

When a single person or the parent of a single person asks someone if they know of any marriageable prospects, they are asking them to perform a valuable service on their behalf. This service has a market value, just as any other brokerage or recruiting fee has a market value (Rama, Choshen Mishpat 264:7).

WHAT IF YOU DID NOT ASK THE SHADCHAN?

Although there are halachic differences whether you approach the shadchan or the shadchan offers his/her service, in either case you are required to pay the shadchan. The basis for this requirement is as follows:

Even if his service is unsolicited, the shadchan is considered a yored, since you received benefit from him for a service for which you would normally pay (Gra, Choshen Mishpat 87:117). As explained above, you must pay him whatever you would have otherwise paid for that service (Bava Metzia 76a, 101a).

AM I REQUIRED TO PAY SHADCHANUS TO A FAMILY MEMBER OR CLOSE FRIEND?

This shaylah was discussed hundreds of years ago. A professional shadchan contacted Mr. Reuven suggesting a gentleman he thought appropriate for Mr. Reuven's widowed sister-in-law. Mr. Reuven was involved in researching the shidduch and in arranging the couple's meeting. When the couple announced their engagement, Mr. Reuven informed the professional shadchan that he was expecting half the shadchanus gelt, claiming that he was the shadchan who convinced the woman to consider this shidduch. The professional shadchan contended that he was the only shadchan, and that Mr. Reuven was an interested party and not a shadchan. Mr. Reuven countered that the professional had never made direct contact with his sister-in-law but relied exclusively on him to encourage the shidduch. The matter was referred to Rav Yair Chayim Bachrach, known as the Chavos Yair (after one of the seforim he authored). The rav ruled that Mr. Reuven was indeed a shadchan, since he influenced his sister-in-law to pursue the shidduch. He was therefore entitled to half the shadchanus fee, even though he was related to one of the principals (Shu't Chut HaShani #3, quoted in Pischei Teshuvah, Even HaEzer 50:16).

WHO MUST PAY THE SHADCHANUS FEE, THE PARENTS OR THE COUPLE?

Usually, the parents of an engaged party pay the shadchanus gelt. Are they required to pay this fee, or is it really the responsibility of the young couple that the parents assume? As we will see, there are halachic ramifications to this question.

The poskim debate this question, making razor-thin distinctions that have major ramifications. Some contend that the responsibility falls upon the young couple, since they are the ones who benefit, even though the prevalent custom is that the parents pay (Shu't Avnei Nezer, Choshen Mishpat #36). Others contend that since the parents usually pay, the shadchan expects payment only from them, and, therefore, he has no claim against the young couple (Halichos Yisroel #3, quoting Eirech Shai, Choshen Mishpat Chapter 185).

There is a major dispute between these approaches. The first opinion holds that if the shadchan is unable to collect from the parents, he may collect from the couple. According to the second opinion, his only claim is against the parents, and if he cannot collect from the parents, he cannot claim his fee from the young couple.

WHO WENT TO WHOM?

Since we have learned that one must pay the shadchan whether or not one solicited him initially, does it make any difference whether I asked the shadchan or the shadchan approached me first?

There are several differences in halacha that pertain to whether you solicited the shadchan initially or vice versa, including when you are required to pay the shadchan and whether you violate the mitzvah of bal talin if you fail to pay the shadchan on time.

If you approached or telephoned the shadchan initially, then you have hired him or her to perform a job -- in this case, to find an appropriate shidduch. If he/she succeeds in his/her mission, then you are required to pay when the job is completed, and you must pay the shadchan as soon as the couple becomes engaged (Shu't Halichos Yisroel #1-2). Furthermore, if you do not pay him/her on time and the shadchan demands payment, you will violate a Torah prohibition called bal talin, not paying a worker on time, a mitzvah we will explain shortly.

However, if you did not hire the shadchan, then you do not violate bal talin if you do not pay him/her on time, since the shadchan is not your employee.

Another difference in halacha affected by whether the shadchan was solicited or not is whether you must pay him or her at the time the couple becomes engaged or at the wedding. If the shadchan solicited you, then the time you are required to pay the shadchan depends on minhag -- accepted local custom (Rama, Choshen Mishpat 185:10). If the local custom is that people do not pay the shadchan until the wedding, then the shadchanus gelt is considered a marriage expense to be paid then, not an engagement expense. However, if you solicited the shadchan then you are required to pay the shadchan when his/her job is completed, which is when the couple becomes engaged (Shu't Halichos Yisroel #4).

BAL TALIN – PAYING WORKERS ON TIME

As explained above, if one hired the shadchan, one must pay him/her on time, because of the mitzvah of bal talin.

WHAT IS ON TIME?

There are two deadlines, sunset and daybreak, and one is obligated to pay one's worker before the first deadline after the job is completed. Therefore, if the worker finished his job before the end of the day, I must pay him by sunset. If he completed the work at night, I must pay him before daybreak (Bava Metzia 111a). (As mentioned above, one violates this prohibition only if the worker demanded payment and the owner refused to pay and there was no understanding or prearrangement of late payment.) According to this approach, if you went to a shadchan who, Baruch Hashem, arranged a successful shidduch, you should make sure to pay him or her immediately after the couple becomes engaged, before the next deadline arrives (Shu't Halichos Yisroel #11). Others contend that one need not pay the shadchan until the wedding, unless the custom is otherwise (Rav Elyashiv, introduction to Shu't Halichos Yisroel).

Still other poskim contend that since the responsibility of paying the shadchan really lies with the marrying couple, there is no violation of bal talin if the shadchan is assuming that the parents are paying his fee, since they are technically not required to pay shadchanus gelt.

HOW MUCH MUST I PAY THE SHADCHAN?

One must pay the shadchan the accepted fee in your community for this service (Pischei Teshuvah, Even HaEzer Chapter 50:16).

DIVIDING THE FEE

What happens if two different shadchanim were involved at different stages of encouraging the shidduch? Are they both entitled to be paid? How does one divide the fee? As we can imagine, this is not a recent shaylah.

An early posek, the Shev Yaakov (Choshen Mishpat #13), discusses the following case: Levi recommended that Reuven's son meet Shimon's daughter. After the engagement of the young couple, Gad claimed that he had originally suggested the shidduch to the parties and thus he was entitled to part of the shadchanus.

The Shev Yaakov researched the claims. As it turned out, Gad had, indeed, originally suggested the shidduch to both parties, but Shimon and his family had no interest in pursuing it. Levi, however, was a more persistent shadchan and convinced Shimon to consider Reuven's son for his daughter.

The Shev Yaakov ruled that Gad was not entitled to any part of the shadchanus fee. He contends that a shadchan is entitled to a fee only when he was involved in the part of the discussion that reached fruition. However, in this case, Gad's proposal did not accomplish anything, and, therefore, he is not considered a shadchan.

By a similar reasoning, a real estate agent who showed prospective clients a house, but was unable to interest them in it, and then a different agent showed them the same house and succeeded in convincing them to purchase it, the second agent is entitled to the commission, according to halacha. (In these instances, if accepted business practice is different it might affect the halacha, which is a topic for a different time.)

Thus, it seems that Mrs. Weinberg is not entitled to any shadchanus fee in our situation, since she was not part of the actual introduction that took place.

Notwithstanding that the Shev Yaakov ruled that Gad was not entitled to a share of the fee, there are cases in which the shidduch involves several parties and each is entitled to a part of the fee. If Sarah suggested a shidduch, but then felt that Rivkah would be a better go-between, and eventually it was necessary to get Leah involved and she was instrumental in the couple subsequently becoming engaged, all three ladies are considered partial shadchanim, according to many poskim. The accepted practice in this case is to divide the accepted shadchanus fee and to award 1/3 to each of the ladies. Other poskim contend that only the person who suggested the shidduch and the one who finalized it are considered shadchanim and they split the fee – but that a go-between who neither suggested a shidduch nor finalized it is not viewed as a shadchan (Shu't Avnei Nezer, Choshen Mishpat #36).

SOME INTERESTING SHADCHANUS STORIES

A shadchan unsuccessfully attempted to arrange a shidduch between a daughter of the wealthy Weiss family and the son of the wealthy Schwartz family. Although the two families did meet and enjoyed one another, the shidduch did not materialize, and the Weiss girl subsequently married someone else. Later, other shadchanim suggested a match between a younger Weiss daughter and the Schwartz boy, and the couple became engaged. The original shadchan now claimed that he is entitled to a percentage of the shadchanus gelt, claiming that his involvement in the previous unsuccessful shidduch was instrumental in forging the close relationship between the two families that caused the latter shidduch to happen. Does the original shadchan have a claim?

The parties referred this shaylah to the Avnei Nezer (Choshen Mishpat #36). In a very complicated ruling he contends that the original shadchan might be entitled to a very small percentage of the shadchanus gelt for his role. He suggests a compromise on this basis, but rules that one could not be certain that he is entitled to any part of the fee.

IF A SHADCHAN ASKS FOR A HIGHER THAN TYPICAL FEE, AM I REQUIRED TO PAY IT?

If the shadchan did not provide any unusual shadchanus service, and the fee for a shadchan in your area is fairly standard, then the shadchan is not entitled to the extra fee. However, if there is no standard shadchanus fee in your area, or the shadchan performed a special service, then one must pay the shadchan's higher fee (see Rama, Choshen Mishpat 335:1 and 264:7; Shach 264:15). Shadchanus is like any other profession, where one may not charge significantly above the going rate. However, when there is no fixed accepted amount, then the shadchan is not overcharging, since there is no market amount. Similarly, if the shadchan extends him/herself more than is expected, he may command a higher fee, since one is paying for the extra service (see Rama 335:1).

According to the Midrash, Moshe Rabbeinu was the shadchan between Klal Yisroel and Hashem at the giving of the Torah. Furthermore, Hashem,

Himself, is indeed the ultimate Shadchan of every marriage. Thus, we should respect the wonderful role of the shadchanim in our midst, who are involved in a mitzvah that emulates both Hashem and Moshe.

* All names and places have been changed to protect privacy.

<http://www.aish.com/tp/ss/ssw/390192961.html>

Dvar Torah

from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D.

The Torah states:

"You shall love your God with all your heart" (Deut 6:5).

What lesson can we learn from this verse?

"Do His will out of love. One who serves out of love cannot be compared to one who serves out of fear. The one who serves his master out of fear, once (the master) overburdens him, will leave and go his own way" (Rashi).

These words are the single greatest method whereby parents can prevent their children from deviating. Children who obey their parents out of fear, whether it be fear of punishment or of incurring their disapproval, may well react as Rashi says. When they feel that the parental demands of them are excessive, they may rebel or go their own way. Not so if they obey their parents out of love.

Parents' love of their children is innate. Animals, too, care for and nurture their children. Children's love for parents must be earned. If parents act in a way that merits their children's admiration, they receive their love. Such children are likely to avoid doing anything that will distress their parents. Any parent who relies on authority to make his children do his wishes may find himself disillusioned and disappointed when the children do as Rashi says, "leave him and go his own way."

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Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' Covenant & Conversation

"The Power of Why", Rabbi Sacks' Covenant & Conversation 5776 on Spirituality for Va'etchanan

In a much watched TED talk Simon Sinek asked the question: how do great leaders inspire action? What made people like Martin Luther King and Steve Jobs stand out from their contemporaries who may have been no less gifted, no less qualified? His answer: Most people talk about what. Some people talk about how. Great leaders, though, start with why. This is what makes them transformative.2

Sinek's lecture was about business and political leadership. The most powerful examples, though, are directly or indirectly religious. Indeed I argued in The Great Partnership what makes Abrahamic monotheism different is that it believes there is an answer to the question, why. Neither the universe nor human life is meaningless, an accident, a mere happenstance. As Freud, Einstein and Wittgenstein all said, religious faith is faith in the meaningfulness of life.

Rarely is this shown in a more powerful light than in Va'etchanan. There is much in Judaism about what: what is permitted, what forbidden, what is sacred, what is secular. There is much, too, about how: how to learn, how to pray, how to grow in our relationship with God and with other people. There is relatively little about why.

In Va'etchanan Moses says some of the most inspiring words ever uttered about the why of Jewish existence. That is what made him the great transformational leader he was, and it has consequences for us, here, now.

To have a sense of how strange Moses' words were, we must recall several facts. The Israelites were still in the desert. They had not yet entered the land. They had no military advantages over the nations they would have to fight. Ten of the twelve spies had argued, almost forty years before, that the

mission was impossible. In a world of empires, nations and fortified cities, the Israelites must have seemed to the untutored eye defenceless, unproven, one more horde among the many who swept across Asia and Africa in ancient times. Other than their religious practices, few contemporary observers would have seen anything about them to set them apart from the Jebusites and Perizzites, Midianites and Moabites, and the other petty powers that populated that corner of the Middle East.

Yet in this week's parsha Moses communicated an unshakeable certainty that what had happened to them would eventually change and inspire the world. Listen to his language:

Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation by miracles, signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (Deut. 4:32-34)

Moses was convinced that Jewish history was, and would remain, unique. In an age of empires, a small, defenceless group had been liberated from the greatest empire of all by a power not their own, by God himself. That was Moses' first point: the singularity of Jewish history as a narrative of redemption.

His second was the uniqueness of revelation:

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? (Deut. 4:7-8)

Other nations had gods to whom they prayed and offered sacrifices. They too attributed their military successes to their deities. But no other nation saw God as their sovereign, legislator and law-giver. Elsewhere law represented the decree of the king or, in more recent centuries, the will of the people. In Israel, uniquely, even when there was a king, he had no legislative power. Only in Israel was God seen not just as a power but as the architect of society, the orchestrator of its music of justice and mercy, liberty and dignity.

The question is why. Toward the end of the chapter Moses gives one answer: "Because He loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them." (Deut. 4:37). God loved Abraham, not least because Abraham loved God. And God loved Abraham's children because they were his children and He had promised the patriarch that He would bless and protect them.

Earlier though Moses had given a different kind of answer, not incompatible with the second, but different:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me ... Observe them carefully, for this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." (Deut. 4:5-6)

Why did Moses, or God, care whether or not other nations saw Israel's laws as wise and understanding? Judaism was and is a love story between God and a particular people, often tempestuous, sometimes serene, frequently joyous, but close, intimate, even inward-looking. What has the rest of the world to do with it?

But the rest of the world does have something to do with it. Judaism was never meant for Jews alone. In his first words to Abraham, God already said, "I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you, I will curse; through you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Jews were to be a source of blessing to the world.

God is the God of all humanity. In Genesis He spoke to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, and made a covenant with all humankind before He made one with Abraham. In Egypt, whether in Potiphar's house, or prison, or Pharaoh's palace, Joseph continually talked about God. He wanted the Egyptians to know that nothing he did, he did himself. He was merely an agent of the God

of Israel. There is nothing here to suggest that God is indifferent to the nations of the world.

Later in the days of Moses, God said that He would perform signs and wonders so that "The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord" (Ex. 7:5). He called Jeremiah to be "a prophet to the nations." He sent Jonah to the Assyrians in Nineveh. He had Amos deliver oracles to the other nations before He sent him an oracle about Israel. In perhaps the most astonishing prophecy in Tanakh He sent Isaiah the message that a time will come when God will bless Israel's enemies: "The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria My handiwork, and Israel My inheritance'" (Is. 19:25).

God is concerned with all humanity. Therefore what we do as Jews makes a difference to humanity, not just in a mystical sense, but as exemplars of what it means to love and be loved by God. Other nations would look at Jews and sense that some larger power was at work in their history. As the late Milton Himmelfarb put it:

Each Jew knows how thoroughly ordinary he is; yet taken together, we seem caught up in things great and inexplicable . . . The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us.³

We were not called on to convert the world. We were called on to inspire the world. As the prophet Zechariah put it, a time will come when "Ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech. 8:23). Our vocation is to be God's ambassadors to the world, giving testimony through the way we live that it is possible for a small people to survive and thrive under the most adverse conditions, to construct a society of law-governed liberty for which we all bear collective responsibility, and to "act justly, love mercy and walk humbly"⁴ with our God. Va-etchanan is the mission statement of the Jewish people.

And others were and still are inspired by it. The conclusion I have drawn from a lifetime lived in the public square is that non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. They find it hard to understand why Jews, in countries where there is genuine religious liberty, abandon their faith or define their identity in purely ethnic terms.

Speaking personally, I believe that the world in its current state of turbulence needs the Jewish message, which is that God calls on us to be true to our faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith. Imagine a world in which everyone believed this. It would be a world transformed.

We are not just another ethnic minority. We are the people who predicated freedom on teaching our children to love, not hate. Ours is the faith that consecrated marriage and the family, and spoke of responsibilities long before it spoke of rights. Ours is the vision that sees alleviation of poverty as a religious task because, as Maimonides said, you cannot think exalted spiritual thoughts if you are starving or sick or homeless and alone.⁵ We do these things not because we are conservative or liberal, Republicans or Democrats, but because we believe that is what God wants of us.

Much is written these days about the what and how of Judaism, but all too little about the why. Moses, in the last month of his life, taught the why. That is how the greatest of leaders inspired action from his day to ours.

If you want to change the world, start with why.

<http://torah.org/torah-portion>

**Parshas Va'eschanan
Rav Yochanan Zweig**

ALL FOR ONE

Listen, Israel, HaShem is our Lord, HaShem is One (6:4).

Bal Haturim (ad loc) points out that in the cantillation of this famous possuk [cantillation marks provide a structure to sentences of the Torah similar to that provided by punctuation marks] there is a "psik" between the second

occurrence of "HaShem is" and the word "One." A psik essentially marks a pause. In other words, when reading the Shema the verse is broken up and read thusly: "HaShem is our Lord, HaShem is - One."

Bal Haturim explains that the use of the psik is to teach us a very specific lesson. In general, the description of HaShem as our "Lord" refers to His attribute of absolute justice, while the title "HaShem" refers to his attribute of absolute mercy. Bal Haturim therefore concludes that the pause in this verse is intended to teach us that both the attribute of justice and the attribute of mercy are a part of the unity of the Almighty - "One."

Bal Haturim's explanation of the purpose of the psik requires further clarification. Why would we need a specific lesson to teach us that both attributes of the Almighty are a part of the unity? After all, a person can be happy or sad, kind or harsh, and we innately understand that it all stems from one source. Why would we need a special verse in the Torah, particularly what is probably the most famous verse in the Torah, to teach us that both attributes of HaShem are part of the same unity?

In truth, Bal Haturim is alluding to one of the most fundamental principles of our philosophy, one that is rightly taught from this famous possuk. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, in his famous work on philosophy "Derech HaShem," points out (1:1:5) that HaShem, unlike a person, has no compartmentalization. That is, a person's psyche can be divided into many components - will, memory, imagination, desire, etc. - but HaShem is indivisible. Even though there are many attributes that we perceive, they are in truth all part of his perfect oneness: there are no separate components.

This difference is very important to internalize. A person can have varying reasons for his actions; therefore different feelings can be attached to each action. HaShem has a single purpose for everything and, as stated above, does not compartmentalize. The purpose of creation, according to "Derech Hashem" (1:2:1), is for HaShem to bestow good. Thus, every single act is part of the "goodness" that HaShem is providing. In other words, everything that HaShem does is part of the unity of purpose. Therefore, both mercy and justice are aspects of the same goodness, and a person receives what HaShem feels is the ultimate good in a given situation. The source of every act by HaShem is this unity. This is what we learn from the Shema.

Understanding this principle is the key to understanding Jewish philosophy. There is often a feeling of tension in the observance of the mitzvos; are we doing it for ourselves or for Him? In other words, why do we keep Shabbos or Kosher? Is it that we merely obey HaShem or is it because HaShem has determined that this system will deliver to our lives the highest level of "good"? Examining this carefully is the difference between pining every second for Shabbos to arrive and pining every moment for Shabbos to be over. Do we continuously regret the constrictions that keeping Kosher places upon us or are we thankful that HaShem has given us a system that He has determined is the best for us to follow? Do we perceive mitzvos as onerous obligations or a remarkable roadmap for successful living?

The Shema teaches us that everything is part of the unity of purpose and therefore for our good. We follow the Torah and mitzvos because it is in our best interest to do so. Even though we perceive different components of His actions, as viewed through the prism of our psyche, everything is in fact merely a reflection of the One and His desire to bestow good.

HOME IS WHERE YOU ARE

And write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates (6:9). This week's Parsha details the mitzvah of placing the ubiquitous mezuzah on the doorways of our homes. In fact, the word mezuzah itself means doorway. This seems a strange name for the piece of parchment that we affix to the doorway. Generally, names of mitzvos refer to the actual item utilized for the mitzvah, not how it is used or where it is placed; this would be like calling tefillin "forearm." Why is the name of this mitzvah different, what is so significant about where it is placed that it becomes the very definition of the mitzvah?

When Bnei Yisroel were about to leave Egypt, on the 15th of Nissan, HaShem commanded them to place the blood of the Korban Pesach on the

doorways of their homes. The reason given in the Torah is that on this night HaShem was going to visit all the Egyptian homes and kill all the first born. By placing the blood on the doorways it would be recognizable as a Jewish home and HaShem would "Pass-over" that home and not harm the inhabitants. In truth, this is a little odd. After all, HaShem Himself came to redeem the Jews that night and to smite the Egyptians; Why would He need the blood on the doorway to perceive the difference between the homes of the Jews and those of the Egyptians?

The answer, of course, is that the purpose of placing blood on the doorways was for our own sake. It was our declaration that we are Jews and not Egyptians. Physically putting the blood on the doorways of our homes was an articulation of our allegiance to HaShem. Chazal teach us that most of the Jews never left Egypt (see Rashi Shemos 13:17); they had seemingly fully integrated into Egyptian society. Placing the blood on the doorways was a way of showing who had chosen to be Jews and not Egyptians. Why was this sign also the doorways to their homes?

In American society "a person's home is their castle." That is, a person's home is considered their absolute space. This has many applicable ramifications in law. Basically all homeowners consider their home to be their kingdom, where their rule is absolute. Similar to having a family name on the door or a "Villa De ___" sign on the wall, when we put a mezuzah up at the entrance of our home we are declaring that this is God's space. By putting up a mezuzah we are proclaiming that even in our most private space we are still in His place. This is why the very essence of the mitzvah of mezuzah is its placement on the doorways of our homes - a declaration that our home is really His and that Hashem's rule is absolute, even in our personal space.

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OU Torah

Rav Shlomo Aviner on Tu B'Av

June 30, 2006

Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel stated, "Israel had no holidays as joyous as Tu B'Av and Yom Kippur, when the young women of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards" (Mishna Ta'anit 4:8).3672857_thumbnailOur sages compared Tu B'Av to Yom Kippur, no less. What is so special about this day – the fifteenth day of the month of Av – which makes it deserving of such a noble comparison? We know that on Yom Kippur the second set of Tablets were given to Moshe Rabeinu, and Gd forgave the Jewish People the sin of the Golden Calf. Therefore this day, the day we received the Ten Commandments for the second time, has always been a day of forgiveness and rejoicing for us (see Rashi on Ta'anit 28:2).

The Talmud (in Baba Bathra 121a) gives six reasons for us to rejoice on Tu B'Av:

1. On this day, the tribes were granted permission to intermarry:

In the first generation to enter the Land of Israel and to receive their portion of land, women who inherited their fathers were not allowed to marry out of their tribe, so as not to allow land belonging to one tribe to pass over to another.

On Tu B'Av, the next generation of women were granted permission to marry whomever they desired, as the limitation on the first generation had expired. Unfortunately, today we still suffer from ethnic jealousy, and there are still Jews who consider it a tragedy if their offspring marries a Jew of another ethnic group.

2. The tribe of Benjamin was allowed to marry other tribes:

In the civil war following the incident of "Pilegish Bagiv'a," the tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out, except for six hundred young men who managed to escape.

But the People of Israel took an oath at Mizpeh that they would not allow their daughters to marry anyone from the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21). Later, when they realized that the tribe was in danger of extinction, they regretted the oath and looked for a way to allow the Benjaminites to marry and maintain themselves as a tribe. It was decided that no one would willingly give his daughter to a Benjaminite, but neither would he prevent him from “running off” with her. The men found out where the girls of Shiloh went to dance, and “carried them off,” with the tacit agreement of the girls and their parents. Thus the tribe of Benjamin was saved from extinction.

3. The “Desert Generation” ended:

Following the Sin of the Spies, when the people of Israel cried that they would not go to the Land of Israel, the whole generation of Israelites who had left Egypt was sentenced to die in the Desert.

Every year until the fortieth year, on the eve of the Ninth of Av, Moshe Rabeinu would command them, “Go out and dig!” They would go out of their desert camp, dig themselves graves, and sleep in them overnight. The next morning, a messenger would proclaim, “Let the living separate from the dead!” About fifteen thousand men would have died that night; the others would return to the camp for another year.

In the last, fortieth year, no one died. At first they thought that they might have counted the days wrong, and so they slept in their graves the next night, too. This went on until the fifteenth of Av, when they finally realized that no more people would die, and they declared that day a day of celebration (Talmud Yerushalmi, Ta’anit 4:6). (The reason they had not realized that the forty years were up was that they mistakenly counted forty years from the Sin of the Spies but, actually, the year they left Egypt was counted as the first year of the decree.)

In addition, all those years, Gd did not appear to Moshe Rabeinu in a prophecy, but rather communicated with him through the Urim and Tumim (Ta’anit 30:2).

This is like a couple who are angry with each other and write notes because they are not on speaking terms. On Tu B’Av of the fortieth year, Gd again began to speak to Moshe Rabeinu directly.

4. Hoshea ben Elah Permitted Pilgrimage to Jerusalem:

Yeravam Ben Nevat, the first king of the break-away Kingdom of Israel, feared that if Jerusalem, political capital of the Kingdom of Judah, continued also to serve as the spiritual capital of all Israel, it would weaken his sovereignty and eventually cause his downfall.

Therefore, he set up ‘border policemen’ to prevent anyone from the Kingdom of Israel from crossing over into the Kingdom of Judah and going to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 12). One of the last kings, Hoshea Ben Ela, annulled this decree on Tu B’Av, and allowed the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Although he was not known as one of the most righteous kings, this act of Hoshea was a noteworthy one (see Rashi on Ta’anit 31:1). In quantity, the number of mitzvot he did may not have been great, but in quality, this act of his was quite remarkable (see Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 3:2).

5. Those who were killed at Beitar were buried:

At the end of the Bar Kochba revolt, the Romans conquered the city of Beitar and murdered thousands of Jews, leaving their corpses strewn all over. The Romans, who were bent on breaking the Jews’ spirit, would not even allow them to bury their dead (Gittin 57-58; Ta’anit 31:1). Nothing could take the spirit out of the remaining Jewish soldiers more than the sight of their friends lying dead on the ground beside them. (This is something like what we experienced during the Yom Kippur War.)

In Beitar, miraculously, the bodies did not rot or smell during the prolonged period before Tu B’Av, when they were permitted to be buried.

On that day, our sages added another blessing to the Grace after Meals, “HaTov V’HaMeitiv”: “HaTov – for the miracle of the bodies not emitting bad odors, and HaMeitiv – for they were permitted to be buried” (Brachot

48b). This blessing was added to honor the memory of Bar Kochba’s fighters.

Whenever we eat bread, we recite this blessing, honoring the fighters despite the fact that the revolt itself was unsuccessful and we suffered great losses.

What connection is there between the tragedy of Beitar and the Grace after Meals? This same question may be asked about other blessings of the prayer. The first blessing, “Who sustains all life” is indeed a fitting blessing. But in the second paragraph, we thank Gd for giving us the Land of Israel, Brit Milah, and the Torah. What do these have to do with food? And in the third section, we pray, “Please have mercy on Israel, and on Jerusalem, and on the Kingdom of David, and on the Holy Temple.”

The fourth section begins with thanksgiving for the burial of the corpses of Beitar. All of the above are important, but what connection do they have with the Grace after Meals?

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk explains that they remind us why we eat. We need strength so that we may strive on behalf of the common good, the Nation of Israel. By reciting the Grace after Meals, we attempt to sanctify the act of eating and to channel the strength it gives us into uplifting activity. Mentioning Torah, Eretz Israel, Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of David help us to utilize our strength to rebuild the Land and Jerusalem.

For that reason, our leaders composed these blessings. Moshe Rabeinu, who led us in the desert for forty years, composed the first blessing. Joshua, who brought us into the Land of Israel, composed the second. David and Solomon composed the blessing, “Who builds Jerusalem.” Each one is a step above the other (see Meshech Chochma to Deut. 8:10; Rav Kook, Siddur Olat Re’eya I, p. 361-3).

The fourth blessing, composed by our sages in honor of the dead of the Bar Kochba Revolt, represents another stage: Despite the traumatic defeat, we were not totally annihilated.

Divine Providence is particularly evident in the miraculous preservation of the corpses of Beitar until the time when they were finally brought to burial. The Bar Kochba Revolt was but another phase in the battle over Eretz Israel and Jerusalem. Even though it ended in defeat, we will eventually triumph in our battle. As Rav Kook wrote to his beloved Bnei Akiva, “Rabbi Akiva was full of enthusiasm and dedicated to strengthening every vision of redemption and renewal of Jewish life in Eretz Israel.

He supported the Bar Kochba Revolt and treated it as if it might be the Redemption (see Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11:3). It is precisely because the revolt failed then, Bar Kochba was killed, and Jewish independence was lost, that we are certain that Rabbi Akiva’s vision will one day come true. “Failure will not overtake us a second time. It was not for nothing that the Nation of Israel fought for its very existence. Eventually, we shall be victorious; the day is fast approaching.” (Ma’amarei Re’eya, Letter to Bnei Akiva, p. 203). The process of Redemption and Renewal today is simply a modern version of the Bar Kochba Revolt. The nation is re-awakening, and this time we shall certainly succeed, with the help of Gd.

6. No more trees were cut down for use on the Holy Altar:

The wood used to fuel the Holy Altar was dried, since fresh logs might contain worms. After Tu B’Av, the days become shorter and the sun is no longer strong enough to dry out freshly cut logs. Therefore, no more trees were cut down after Tu B’Av, and the day was nicknamed, “Axe-breaking Day” (Ta’anit 31a; Rashi op. cit.).

This, too, reminds us of our dedication to the Holy Temple. The Talmud tells us of the family of Salmai of Netofa: Once, the wicked rulers (the Romans) passed a law forbidding Jews to bring logs for the Altar to the Holy Temple. They stationed guards at checkpoints along the main roads, just as (the Kingdom of Israel’s) Yerov’am ben Nevat had done, to prevent Jews from coming to the Temple.

What did the Gd-fearing men of that generation do? They made ladders out of the logs, and carried them on their shoulders. When the guards asked them, “Where are you going?” they answered, “To bring doves from our

dovecotes down the road, using the ladders on our shoulders.” As soon as they passed the checkpoint, they dismantled the ladders and brought the logs up to Jerusalem. These people deserve to be remembered as “Tzaddikim (righteous men) of blessed memory” (Ta’anit 28a).

Even under duress and persecution, we remained faithful to Jerusalem and to the Holy Temple.

All of the six incidents which are commemorated on Tu B’Av have one thing in common: On this day, different segments of the Jewish Nation were united:

Jews of different families and tribes were permitted to marry each other.

The tribe of Benjamin was once again allowed to marry women of other tribes, thus preventing them from extinction, despite the grave sin they had committed.

The Nation of Israel showed its commitment to the Land of Israel and the Holy Temple.

The Generation of the Desert ceased to die, and the sin of the spies was forgiven.

The border policemen preventing Jews from the Kingdom of Israel from coming to Jerusalem were sent away. As a result, the ties between the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah and the Holy Temple were re-established.

The corpses of Beitar were brought to burial, honoring the memory of these freedom-fighters who gave their lives to regain a sovereign state and the freedom to worship Gd as they chose.

Trees were no longer cut down to be burnt on the Altar. This custom of donating logs affords another opportunity to illustrate the dedication shown by righteous Jews even when they were persecuted.

“Who can compare to Your People, Israel, a singular Nation in the Land” (II Samuel 7:23): Domestic harmony within the Nation, and harmony between the Nation and its Land are really one and the same. In the Land of Israel, they become one People (Zohar, Parshat VaYikra 93b; the Natziv, Shivat Zion, vol. II; Eim HaBanim S’meicha, p.321).

Tu B’Av is the opposite of Tisha B’Av. In contrast to the baseless hatred that brought about the destruction of the Holy Temple and the Exile, the events commemorated on Tu B’Av revolve around love and unity among different sectors of the nation, and our deep connection to Israel and the Holy Temple.

Tu B’Av is a day of renewal of ties among the nation, and Yom Kippur is a day of renewal of our ties to the Holy One of Blessed Name. On this day, we turn over a new leaf.

There is a famous story about the Ba’al Shem Tov, who sent his disciples to learn how to repent by following the example of a very simple man. They saw him standing in prayer, holding two notebooks, and speaking to Gd, “Master of the Universe, in this notebook I have recorded the many sins which I committed this past year. And in the other notebook I have recorded all the suffering and troubles you brought upon me. I will forgive You for all the troubles if You forgive me for all my sins!”

He then threw both notebooks into the fire. This should serve as a model for all our relationships – with our friends, our spouses, and so on. We must learn to throw all the notebooks into the fire, and begin anew.

This is also why it is fitting for Yom Kippur to be the “Wedding Day” of Israel to the Lrd, and Tu B’Av to be a day for Jewish weddings. Therefore, “Israel had no holidays as joyous as Tu B’Av and Yom Kippur.”

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

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Parshas Va'eschanan

Safeguard the day of Shabbos to sanctify it. (5:12)

The vernacular of this pasuk is ambiguous. If Shabbos is holy, why do we have to sanctify it? It is already holy. If it is a mitzvah like all mitzvos, one that imbues us with its kedushah, holiness, what role does remembering play in the scheme of shemiras Shabbos, Shabbos observance? Perhaps we may suggest the following: secular society recognizes that Shabbos is designated for the Jewish People as a day of rest. This does not necessarily mean that they view it as a day replete with unusual holiness. The kedushah is something that we infuse into the Shabbos. Otherwise, it is nothing more than an off-day, a day to rest from work, even attend services in the local synagogue; but that is the extent of it.

How does remembering fit into the equation? Well, there was a time when Shabbos was a critical mitzvah, just like all of the rest. Then along came the secularists who relegated Shabbos, together with most other mitzvos, to the dung heap of antiquity. Suddenly, we had no recollection of Shabbos. It is a new world, and, sadly, Shabbos does not play an active role in it.

Furthermore, even those who remember Shabbos - are they remembering to keep it holy? Are they sanctifying Shabbos, or is it simply a day off from work, a day to catch up on relationships and much needed rest?

Rabbi Zakai was a great Tanna who lived to be four hundred years old.

When he was queried by his students, Bameh he'erachta yamim, "In what merit were you blessed with such incredible longevity?" he replied, "You should know that I never missed having wine in honor of Shabbos kodesh.

One erev Shabbos, my mother noticed that the wine cellar was empty; she sold her head-covering and used the proceeds to purchase a large amount of wine. When she died, she bequeathed to me three hundred barrels of wine." Rabbi Zakai left three hundred barrels of wine for his children and grandchildren. He attributed his blessing to the pasuk, Likras Shabbos lechu v'nelcha ki hee mekor habrachah, "Let us go greet the Shabbos, for she is the source of all blessing."

Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, prepared his Shabbos table early on Friday. One of his talmidim, students, questioned him concerning this custom. His response was: "My father-in-law, the illustrious Ridvaz, was once very ill. At the lowest point of his illness, as he lay between life and death, he turned his head upward and whispered. He concluded his whispering, turned to his wife, and said, "Prepare the Shabbos table. You should know, my wife, that the only thing that can save me is that we prepare the Shabbos very early. I spoke to Hashem and pleaded, 'Hashem, I wrote a commentary on the entire Yerushalmi. If You will allow me to live, I promise to write a commentary on Talmud Bavli.' When I saw that this offer did not elicit a positive response, I realized that there was only one merit that would pull me through - Shabbos - hiddur Shabbos, beautifying the Shabbos, is my only chance."

It is the same old cliché?: man thinks that he observes Shabbos almost as if he is doing Hashem a favor by taking time off from his busy work week and dedicating one day to Hashem. He forgets that more than he (thinks he) does for Shabbos - Shabbos is doing for him.

The Rama, zl, Horav Moshe Isserlis, was an undisputed Gaon. Indeed, the Heavenly Angel that studied Torah with the Bais Yosef instructed him to write his Shulchan Aruch, Code of Jewish Law, because there was a great Gaon in Poland who was writing such a commentary on the Tur Shulchan Aruch. How did the Rama's father - who, for all intents and purposes, was a simple, G-d-fearing (although not so simple) Jew - merit to have such an illustrious son born to him? Apparently, the Rama's father owned a store which sold silk material. He had a weekly ritual such that, regardless of the workload, he closed his store every Friday afternoon at chatzos, midday, in order to prepare for Shabbos. One Friday, a wealthy customer visited the store fifteen minutes before closing time. He was prepared to purchase a large amount of silk, a purchase which would have rendered the Rama's father a substantial profit. At precisely twelve o'clock he told the customer that he must close the store. The man could not believe that this Jew was prepared to relinquish the deal of a lifetime due to some medieval religious observance. The customer warned him that, if he closed, he would not return and, thus, the storekeeper would forfeit an incredible profit. Naturally, the

Rama's father was in a quandary concerning what he should do. In the end, he told the customer that he answered to a Higher Power and must close the store. He lost the profit, but gained a son that illuminated the Torah world for generations to come.

One more story! Horav Chaim Pinto is a distinguished Torah scholar residing in Ashdod. His father, Rav Moshe Aharon, was a well-known tzaddik, holy and righteous man. Rav Chaim was born on a Friday, with the Bris set for the following Erev Shabbos. Sadly, tragedy struck the Friday of the Bris, when his mother entered the room and noticed that her infant had stopped breathing. She came running to her husband, who calmly instructed her that the Shabbos Queen would soon come to visit, and they were, therefore, forbidden, to weep or grieve. Furthermore, she was to tell no one that their child had died.

His wife was a righteous woman in her own right and agreed to remain stoic throughout the Shabbos. They covered the infant with a white sheet and kept the door closed. Shortly before Shabbos, a number of well-wishers visited to convey their blessing of mazel tov to the new parents. The rabbanis smiled and thanked them for their good wishes. When they asked to see the child, she replied that presently it was not a good time.

Wonder of wonders! Miracle of miracles! Motzoei Shabbos, Rav Aharon told his wife to enter the room where their newborn infant lay covered in a white sheet. "You have been given a gift," he said to her. "You guarded the Shabbos, making sure that its sanctity was not in any way impugned. Hashem has rewarded you in kind. Now, your simchah, joy, for which you were hoping, will not either be impugned." She entered the room to see that her child (the future Rav Chaim Pinto) was alive and well. Today, he is the Chief Rabbi of Kiryat Malachi. Once again, we note: when one guards over the Shabbos - the Shabbos watches over him.

Honor your father and mother. (5:16)

To render honor to one's parents is an awesome task. Honor means much more than respect. It means: to value; to cherish; to appreciate; to understand that one's presence in this world is attributed to his parents. The Sefer HaChinuch writes: Heim sibas heyoso b'olam, "They are the cause of his being in this world." When one realizes that his basic "being" is due to them, he should be filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. Honor should be the result of this emotion. Sadly, this emotion, or lack thereof, can backfire, when one has determined for himself that he owes his parents nothing. There are individuals raised in families that function only by some Divine miracle, who feel that whatever they have achieved in life is despite their parents. Thus, they have little to no respect for their parents, because, in their minds, they owe their parents absolutely nothing. Understandably, this is not a Torah-oriented perspective on the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim. Hashem commands us to respect parents, because they partner with Him in our creation. To honor parents is to honor Hashem. To disrespect parents is to dishonor Hashem.

For some, the respect they harbor for their parents is the last vestige of what is left of their relationship with Yiddishkeit. They have long reneged the yoke of mitzvos, turned their backs on Judaism in general, but, out of respect for their parents, they return home during the year for milestone celebrations and traditional festival family gatherings. There are those who wake up too late to accord their parents the respect they deserve. By the time they return to their senses, their parents are in the Olam HaEmes, World of Truth. So, they memorialize their parents in shul via the Yizkor service. This affords them the opportunity to visit the synagogue four times each year for the specific purpose of reciting a memorial prayer in honor of their parents. The following story underscores this idea.

Prior to World War II, Germany was a den of iniquity. The wave of assimilation had taken its toll on German Jewry. What the secular movements had initiated over a century past had long devastated the spiritual relationship the Jews had with Hashem. For the most part, traditional Judaism had become a relic of the past, mitzvah observance being adhered to

only by a small minority who still clung to the Torah as their anchor in a sea of confusion. The most illustrious families had been breached, especially in the larger cities, such as Berlin.

Nonetheless, there were still those who clung steadfastly to the Torah, guided by such illustrious leaders as Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl, author of the Seridei Eish, and rector, Rosh Yeshivah of the Hildsheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin. In Western Europe at that time, Rav Weinberg was the posek acharon, final adjudicator, of Torah law. A brilliant talmid chacham, Torah scholar, he held the respect of the entire frum, observant, world. In addition to his encyclopedic knowledge of the Torah, he was a symbol of middos tovos, positive character traits. His eidelkeit, pleasant disposition, and humanity were the products of the many years he had spent in Slabodka Yeshivah under the guidance of Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl, reverently known as the Alter of Slabodka. His distinguished disciple, Horav Avraham Abba Weingort, has spent years publishing his revered Rebbe's works and disseminating his chiddushim, innovative discourses.

One day, Rav Weingort was asked by a resident of Modiin to deliver a lecture in the community shul. Rav Weingort acceded to the request and delivered a shiur, lecture, on the topic of the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim. During the course of the lecture, Rav Weingort reminded himself of an incident that had occurred many years earlier in Berlin. Since there is nothing like a good story to concretize an idea, he related the story in middle of his shiur.

The central Orthodox synagogue in Berlin was filled to capacity during the Yamim Noraim, High Holy Days. For many members of Berlin's Jewish community, this was the one and only time that they entered the holy sanctuary of a shul to pray. While prayer was not part of their daily ritual, and public prayer was certainly not their norm, Rosh Hashanah, and especially Yom Kippur were special days. The spark of Judaism, the Pintele Yid, which is concealed within each and every one of us, begins to burn and glow brightly on these days. Indeed, the Jew to whom these holy days have no significance is truly distant from his source of life. On Yom Kippur, Rav Weinberg would walk the long distance from his home to the central synagogue, because he wanted to daven with the community. A special place in the front of the shul was reserved for the leader of Western European Jewry.

The davening was in accordance with tradition, adhering to all of the minhagim, customs, of the Berlin community. Each Jew prayed, conversing with Hashem, expressing his regrets over the past and articulating his aspirations for the future. It was a solemn worship service, since, after all, it was Yom Kippur. There was no looking back - only looking forward, praying, beseeching, begging Hashem to accept their sincere teshuvah, repentance, and grant them and their families another year of life. Finally came that solemn moment when the gabbai, sexton, called out, "Yizkor!" The time had come for the reciting of the prayer memorializing the dead. The young people, whose parents were still counted among the living, made their way to the exits. This was a time when the senior members of the shul, those who had sustained the loss of parents, were to be alone, to pray for the dead, and to be inspired by the temporal nature of life.

The doors to the sanctuary were closed, and the prayer of Yizkor was about to begin when suddenly a government limousine pulled up to shul. In front of the limousine rode two motorcycle police and two other motorcyclists brought up the rear of the motorcade. The doors to the limousine were opened and out stepped Walter Rathenau, the Foreign Minister of the Weimar Republic. He was one of the most powerful statesmen of the German government. (He was assassinated on June 24, 1922 an act of violent murder which many believe was the result of anti-Semitism due to his Jewish heritage.) The minister walked up the steps of the synagogue and entered the sanctuary. It was Yizkor. He was here to recite the prayer service for his Jewish parents.

A tumult broke out in the shul. This man was probably the most infamous assimilated Jew in Berlin. How dare he enter the sanctuary on this holiest day of the Jewish calendar year? This man had long ago turned his back on the religion of his ancestors. Yom Kippur certainly had no meaning to him. He did not acknowledge his Jewish heritage. Why would he be coming to shul? They were outraged.

Walter Rathenau did not care what people might have been whispering. He was the Foreign Minister - a Jew like everyone else in the synagogue. He wanted to recite the prayer for his parents. It was as simple as that. As soon as he concluded his prayer, he left the synagogue, went to the limousine and was driven off.

The worshippers were in a furor. The chutzpah, nerve, of this apostate Jew: To come by car and publicly desecrate the holiest day of the year was an outrage! He had profaned Yom Kippur and humiliated the Jewish community. The chazzan, cantor, ascended to the lectern and was about to begin Tefillas Mussaf, when suddenly Rav Weinberg left his seat and walked up to the lectern and asked everyone to be seated. A lull fell over the entire assemblage. Not a sound was heard, as everyone sat quietly to listen to the Rav.

"Rabbosai! My friends," the Rav began, "how does it enter your minds to shame a Jew who came to shul to honor his parents? The man had no ulterior motive, other than a sincere desire to pay his respects to his departed parents." The Rav was silent for a moment, and then he raised his voice, declaring, "Anyone who honors the memory of his parents is assured that one day his descendants will return to the embrace of the Jewish people!" With these words, Rav Weinberg returned to his seat, and the Mussaf service commenced. His words impacted the worshippers. No one would ever forget what the Rav had said.

Rav Weingort concluded the story and waited to see how it would impact the audience that had sat on edge to listen to him. Suddenly, one of the members of the audience stood up and asked to be recognized. The man seemed quite nervous, actually shaking, as he asked Rav Weingort, "Did the Rav say Rathenau? My name is Rathenau, and the Foreign Minister about whom the Rav is speaking was my great-grandfather! He was my father's grandfather!" When asked how it occurred that he, the great-grandson of Walter Rathenau was frum, he explained that his father was chozeir b'teshuvah, having become an observant Jew when he moved to Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Weinberg's words rang true. When one honors the memory of his parents, his descendants will ultimately become observant.

l'zechar nishmas Nosson Aryeh ben Zev niftar 18 Av t.v.tz.v.h.

u'l'zechar nishmas Yekusiel ben Yechiel Zeidel z"l niftar 20 Av t.n.tz.v.h.

By the Feigenbaum family

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date: Wed, Aug 17, 2016 at 9:14 AM

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The Meaning of Tu B'av

Six events occurred on Tu B'Av, the 15th of Av, making it a festive day in the Jewish calendar.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau

The Mishnah tells us that: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur." (Tractate Ta'anit) What is Tu B'Av, the 15th of the Hebrew month of Av? In which way is it equivalent to Yom Kippur? Our Sages explain: Yom Kippur symbolizes God's forgiving Israel for the sin of the Golden Calf in the desert, for it was on that day that He finally accepted Moses' plea for forgiveness of the nation, and on that same day Moses came down from the mountain with the new set of tablets.

Just as Yom Kippur symbolizes the atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, Tu B'Av signifies the atonement for the sin of the Spies, where ten came bearing such negative reports which reduced the entire nation to panic. As a result of that sin, it was decreed by God that the nation would remain in the desert for 40 years, and that no person 20 or older would be allowed to enter Israel. On each Tisha B'Av of those 40 years, those who had reached the age of 60 that year died – 15,000 each Tisha B'Av.

This plague finally ended on Tu B'Av.

Six positive events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Event #1 - As noted above, the plague that had accompanied the Jews in the desert for 40 years ended. That last year, the last 15,000 people got ready to die. God, in His mercy, decided not to have that last group die, considering all the troubles they had gone through. Now, when the ninth of Av approached, all the members of the group got ready to die, but nothing happened. They then decided that they might have been wrong about the date, so they waited another day, and another...

Finally on the 15th of Av, when the full moon appeared, they realized definitely that the ninth of Av had come and gone, and that they were still alive. Then it was clear to them that God's decree was over, and that He had finally forgiven the people for the sin of the Spies.

This is what was meant by our Sages when they said: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur," for there is no greater joy than having one's sins forgiven – on Yom Kippur for the sin of the Golden Calf and on Tu B'Av for the sin of the spies. In the Book of Judges, Tu B'Av is referred to as a holiday (Judges 21:19).

In addition to this noteworthy event, five other events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Events #2 and 3 - Following the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (see Numbers, chapter 36), daughters who inherited from their father when there were no sons were forbidden to marry someone from a different tribe, so that land would not pass from one tribe to another. Generations later, after the story of the "Concubine of Giv'ah" (see Judges, chapters 19-21), the Children of Israel swore not to allow their daughters to marry anyone from the tribe of Benjamin. This posed a threat of annihilation to the tribe of Benjamin.

Each of these prohibitions were lifted on Tu B'Av. The people realized that if they kept to their prohibition, one of the 12 tribes might totally disappear. As to the oath that had been sworn, they pointed out that it only affected the generation that had taken the oath, and not subsequent generations. The same was applied to the prohibition of heiresses marrying outside their own tribe: this rule was applied only to the generation that had conquered and divided up the land under Joshua, but not future generations. This was the first expression of the merging of all the tribes, and was a cause for rejoicing. In the Book of Judges it is referred to as "a festival to the Lord."

Over the generations, this day was described in Tractate Ta'anit as a day devoted to betrothals, so that new Jewish families would emerge.

Event #4 - After Jeroboam split off the kingdom of Israel with its ten tribes from the kingdom of Judea, he posted guards along all the roads leading to Jerusalem, to prevent his people from going up to the Holy City for the pilgrimage festivals, for he feared that such pilgrimages might undermine his authority. As a "substitute," he set up places of worship which were purely idolatrous, in Dan and Beth-el. Thus the division between the two kingdoms became a fait accompli and lasted for generations.

The last king of the kingdom of Israel, Hosea ben Elah, wished to heal the breach, and removed all the guards from the roads leading to Jerusalem, thus allowing his people to make the pilgrimage again. This act took place on Tu B'Av.

Event #5 - At the beginning of the Second Temple period, the Land of Israel lay almost totally waste, and the wood needed to burn the sacrifices and for the eternal flame that had to burn on the altar was almost impossible to obtain. Each year a number of brave people volunteered to bring the wood needed from afar – a trip which was dangerous in the extreme.

Now, not just every wood could be brought. Wood which was wormy was not permitted. And dampness and cold are ideal conditions for the breeding of worms in wood. As a result, all the wood that would be needed until the following summer had to be collected before the cold set in. The last day that wood was brought in for storage over the winter months was Tu B'Av, and it was a festive occasion each year when the quota needed was filled by that day.

Event #6 - Long after the event, the Romans finally permitted the bodies of those who had been killed in the defense of Betar (in the Bar Kochba revolt) to be buried. This was a double miracle, in that, first, the Romans finally gave permission for the burial, and, second, in spite of the long period of time that had elapsed, the bodies had not decomposed. The permission was granted on Tu B'Av.

In gratitude for this double miracle, the fourth and last blessing of the Grace After Meals was added, which thanks God as "He Who is good and does good." "He is good" – in that the bodies had not decomposed, "and does good" – in that permission was given for the burial.

To this day, we celebrate Tu B'Av as a minor festival. We do not say Tahanun on that day, nor are eulogies rendered. By the same token, if a couple are getting married on that day (and, as we will see below, it is the custom for the bride and groom to fast on their wedding day), neither fasts. Beginning with Tu B'Av, we start preparing ourselves spiritually for the month of Elul, the prologue to the coming Days of Awe. The days begin to get shorter, the nights get longer. The weather, too, helps us to take spiritual stock: the hectic days of the harvest are over for the farmer, and the pace has slowed down considerably. Even on a physical level, the heat of the summer makes it hard to sit down and think things out, and now that the days and nights are cooler, it is easier to examine one's actions.

In earlier times, it was the custom already from Tu B'Av to use as one's greeting "May your inscription and seal be for good" (*ketiva vahatima tova*), the same blessing that we today use on Rosh Hashana. Those who work out the gematria values of different expressions found that phrase adds up to 928 – and so does the words for "15th of Av."

From "Practical Judaism" published by Feldheim Publishers.

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