

Weekly Parsha VA-ETCHANAN 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Although our teacher Moshe figuratively tears down the gates of Heaven with his prayers and supplications to be allowed to enter the land of Israel, his wish is not granted. Over the centuries, the commentators have offered various explanations as to why Heaven, so to speak, remains so adamant in refusing his request and prayer.

Even though many great and noble insights have been advanced to rationalize and explain this refusal of the prayers by Moshe, the question itself remains a vexing one, even thousands of years later.

The simplest and, perhaps, least satisfying answer to the problem is simply that we can never understand or fathom the judgments and decisions of Heaven. The mortal mind can never cross the line of eternity and will always be left with questions and difficulties. All of this is encompassed in the words of God: "No human being while alive can fathom or see Me".

Naturally, we are greatly frustrated by our inability to deal with eternity on a rational basis. We are frustrated by the realization of our limitations, whether they be physical, mental, spiritual, or even mundane. The aptitude to live and function within the limitations of one's own shortcomings is a great talent, and, unfortunately, there are many who do not possess it, and are constantly unhappy, disappointed, frustrated, pessimistic and morose.

All the utopian ideas and legislation currently being promoted in much of the Western world is simply an outlet for the disappointment that is felt when one realizes that society is not perfect, and that life usually is messy.

Moshe is told by Heaven that he should no longer pursue this course of prayer. He is to give up on his lifelong dream and accept the will of Heaven, even though he may not understand or agree with the decision that is being rendered. This becomes part of the matrix of the greatness of Moshe, in that he does accept this judgment against him, and we do not find him pursuing the matter any longer.

In his closing words to the Jewish people, Moshe will refer again to the fact that he will not lead them into the land of Israel, and that he will die and be buried in the land of Moab. But these statements are not made in bitterness or in complaint, but simply in recognition of the truth of the situation that faces him and the Jewish people.

Judaism is a religion of optimism, opportunity, and multiple choices, but contains within it a certain degree of fatalism – an understanding that the will of Heaven will not be thwarted, no matter what, and no matter how mysterious it may appear to an ordinarily mortal.

In Yiddish, this streak of fatalism is expressed in the word 'bashert'. After all our attempts and actions have taken place, there still is this element that governs the outcome after all our efforts and seeming accomplishments. Such is the relationship of the created towards the Creator.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion COMFORT AND CONSOLATION Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Jewish people has searched for some sort of physical and psychological response to the destruction of the Temple, the millennia-long dispersion throughout the world, and the continuing enmity from much of the non-Jewish world and societies. Consolation is hard to come by, let alone comfort and some sense of serenity. The pain of centuries of humiliation, discrimination and violence cannot easily be replaced or erased even by the miraculous resurrection of the Jewish people and the state of Israel in our time.

We all experience loss and tragedy during our lifetimes. It is well-nigh impossible to escape this fate and its consequences. We are also aware that what we have lost is irreplaceable, and true comfort can never again be achieved. The Talmud teaches that one of the gifts that have been bestowed on human beings is that the memory and the loss of loved ones is somehow mitigated and softened by the passage of time and the events and circumstances of later life.

If it were not for this ability, not so much to console ourselves as to distract ourselves from the loss and tragedy that we have endured, it would be impossible to continue normal life after suffering from such a loss. This is certainly true on a personal level but is also true from a national perspective as well. Part of the restlessness and frustration that marks Jewish life all over the world stems from the fact that we have never been able to achieve any sense of comfort or consolation regarding the destruction of our Temple, and the length and intensity of the exile that followed its destruction.

After the day of mourning of the Ninth of Av, we read special Haftorot taken from the words of the prophet Isaiah, called seven chapters of consolation. The striking point about these

seven Haftorot is that the prophet concentrates upon the future and ignores the tragedies of the past. He does not dwell upon the cruelty and evil of the enemies of the Jewish people, and the many atrocities that were perpetrated upon the Jewish people in destroying the Temple and later generations as well. He does not attempt to erase the past or even to justify it, even though all the actions of Heaven are just and true.

In discussing the future and outlining for us the better times that will yet visit us, Isaiah's main points and themes of these seven Haftorot are the physical restoration of the Jewish people and the land of Israel and the ingathering of the exiles. It is as though we are being told that there is no use or benefit in reliving the past. Our hope and reason for continued life and success is based upon our future and its attendant blessings. The past will never bring us comfort or consolation. The paradox of life, and especially of Jewish life, is that at one and the same time, we are to remember the past and honor its memories and lessons, while at the same time looking forward to our future as the place where our energies should be focused and expended.

It is difficult for humans to look backwards and forwards at the same time. So much of the Jewish world still focuses its attention on the past, on memorials and museums. As noted above, the past never brings any sense of closure that can lead to a state of true consolation. The Talmud warns human beings not to grieve too long or too bitterly over the tragedies that have befallen us. Such is the way of the world, and it is beyond our abilities to change this seemingly natural course of events.

We are bidden to rise above our feelings and continue to be productive human beings. Our future, to a great extent, is dependent upon us and what we will make of it. Judaism searches for the path and the psychological necessity to be able to move forward in life, even when we are beset with dark memories and the sense of permanent loss.

I once heard from Rabbi Kahaneman a comment he made regarding a stone throwing incident that, unfortunately, happened in Israel. He said that stones are to be used for building and not for throwing. That pretty much sums up the Jewish attitude towards past tragedies and permanent loss. Throwing stones never leads to a better future. Building with stones always gives a sense of achievement and purpose for life, and it is that sense of achievement and purpose that holds within it the gift of comfort and consolation.
Shabbat shalom Berel Wein

The Fewest of All Peoples (Va'etchanan 5781)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Buried inconspicuously in this week's parsha is a short sentence with explosive potential, causing us to think again about both the nature of Jewish history and the Jewish task in the present.

Moses had been reminding the new generation, the children of those who left Egypt, of the extraordinary story of which they are the heirs:

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 testings, by 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 very eyes? (Deut. 4:32-34)

The Israelites have not yet crossed the Jordan. They have not yet begun their life as a sovereign nation in their own land. Yet Moses is sure, with a certainty that could only be prophetic, that they were a people like no other. What has happened to them is unique. They were and are a nation summoned to greatness.

Moses reminds them of the great Revelation at Mount Sinai. He recalls the Ten Commandments. He delivers the most famous of all summaries of Jewish faith: "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." (Deut. 6:4) He issues the most majestic of all commands: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deut. 6:5) Twice he tells the people to teach these things to their children. He gives them their eternal mission statement as a nation: "You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession." (Deut. 7:6)

Then he says this:

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples. (Deut. 7:7)

The fewest of all peoples? What has happened to all the promises of Bereishit, that Abraham's children would be numerous, uncountable, as many as the stars of the sky, the dust of the earth, and the grains of sand on a seashore? What of Moses' own statement at the beginning of Devarim?

"The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Deut. 1:10)

The simple answer is this. The Israelites were indeed numerous compared to what they once were. Moses himself puts it this way in next week's parsha: "Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Deut. 10:22). They were once a single family, Abraham, Sarah and their descendants, and now they have become a nation of twelve tribes.

But – and this is Moses' point here – compared to other nations, they were still small. "When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you ..." (Deut. 7:1). In other words, not only were the Israelites smaller than the great empires of the ancient world. They were smaller even than the other nations in the region. Compared to their origins they had grown exponentially but compared to their neighbours they remained tiny.

Moses then tells them what this means:

You may say to yourselves, "These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?" But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. (Deut. 7:17-18)

Israel would be the smallest of the nations for a reason that goes to the very heart of its existence as a nation. They will show the world that a people does not have to be large in order to be great. It does not have to be numerous to defeat its enemies. Israel's unique history will show that, in the words of the Prophet Zechariah (4:6), "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit," says the Lord Almighty."

In itself, Israel would be witness to something greater than itself. As former Marxist philosopher Nicolay Berdyaev put it:

I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint . . . Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history: all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny.[1]

Moses' statement has immense implications for Jewish identity. The proposition implicit throughout this year's Covenant & Conversation is that Jews have had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers because we are all called on to be leaders, to take responsibility, to contribute, to make a difference to the lives of others, to bring the Divine Presence into the world. Precisely because we are small, we are each summoned to greatness.

Y. Agnon, the great Hebrew writer, composed a prayer to accompany the Mourner's Kaddish. He noted that the children of Israel have always been few in number compared to other nations. He then said that when a monarch rules over a large population, they do not notice when an individual dies, for there are others to take their place. "But our King, the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He ... chose us, and not because we are a large nation, for we are one of the smallest of nations. We are few, and owing to the love with which He loves us, each one of us is, for Him, an entire legion. He does not have many replacements for us. If one of us is missing, Heaven forbend, then the King's forces are diminished, with the consequence that His kingdom is weakened, as it were. One of His legions is gone and His greatness is lessened. For this reason it is our custom to recite the Kaddish when a Jew dies." [2]

Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Gandhi said: "A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history." [3] That must be our faith as Jews.

We may be the fewest of all peoples but when we heed God's call, we have the ability, proven many times in our past, to mend and transform the world.

Parshat Vaetchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23 – 7:11)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "Comfort you comfort you my nation, says the Lord your God." (Isaiah 40: 1)

This Shabbat takes its name from our prophetic reading (Shabbat Nachamu, the Sabbath of comfort.) Indeed, the entire month is known as Menachem Av, the comforting month of Av. And in the prophetic reading of Isaiah, the prophet adjures us to speak to the heart of Jerusalem, to do penance for our sins, to make a pathway for our Lord, to straighten out our crooked roads. In his magnificent lyric style, he is telling us to repent, for in repentance, we will find our comfort and our redemption.

The list of curses and punishments which came in the wake of the destruction of our Second Temple is catalogued in chapter 28 of the Book of Deuteronomy, and followed by the call to repentance in chapter 30. But repentance and return to what? First of all, to the Land of Israel. The nation has done that of its own volition since the rise of the modern Zionist movement in the 19th century, when we stopped waiting for the Messiah and beat our own path to our historic homeland.

But this certainly also includes return to God's Torah. Which commandments should we concentrate on? Should it be the ritual, should it be the ethical, and if both, then with which must we begin our repentance? Furthermore, since we are hopeful that this time our redemption will be not only national, but universal, what is to be our message to the world?

If we could only isolate the reason why we lost our Temples, we would then understand how to become worthy of the third and final Temple (remember that the Bible only speaks of two destructions and of two exiles, the first in Leviticus 26 and the second in Deuteronomy 28). And if we could discover why God elected Abraham in the first place, it would certainly be salutary to check our actions against God's design; then at least we could ascertain where we stand in God's eyes.

At the dawn of our history, the Almighty explains that "Abraham will become a great and mighty nation, that through him shall be blessed all the families of the earth, and that God has chosen, loved, and elected him because he has commanded his children and his household after him to guard the way of the Lord, to do compassionate righteousness and moral justice (tzedakah u'mishpat) (Gen. 18:18-19) What does tzedakah mean? The Bible itself explains this when it commands us not to oppress the stranger, not to afflict the widow or the orphan, because God hears their cries and will punish us by making our wives widows and our children orphans. (Ex. 22:21-26) God in fact describes Himself as One who is gracious, who gives and loves even without cause and never expecting anything in return. (Ex. 34: 6-7)

Moreover, God repeats that when we make a loan to the poor and receive a pledge in return, we must return the pledge to the borrower if he needs it – even though the creditor actually owns the pledge until the borrower pays up his debt. The return of the pledge beyond the requirement of the law is called by the Bible an act of tzedakah: righteousness together with compassion. (Ex 22: 26)

In the first chapter of the Prophet Isaiah (the prophetic reading for the portion of Devarim, which always falls out towards the beginning of the Three Weeks of mourning), the prophet cries out that God is sated with our sacrificial animals, that He hates our monthly celebrations and festivals; it is God's will for us to rather judge the orphan and plead the cause of the widow. "Zion shall be redeemed through justice and we will return to her by means of our tzedakah, our acts of compassionate righteousness." (Isa. 1:27) Hence you see the straight line from Abraham's election to Isaiah's warning regarding the Temple: our worthiness depends not on our ritual piety, but rather upon our compassionate righteousness and moral justice.

After the destruction, the Prophet Jeremiah makes a ringing declaration which we read on Tisha B'Av itself: "So says God, let the wise not be

praised for their wisdom, let the strong not be praised for their strength, let the wealthy not be praised for their wealth. Only for this is one to be praised: understand and know Me because I am the Lord who does loving kindness, moral justice and compassionate righteousness on earth. It is these things that I wish". (Jer. 9:23-24)

How do we match up to these ideals? Let me tell you a true incident which for me is a metaphor of our times. A young man attended a yeshiva in Tzfat. The first morning he arrived a bit late for breakfast and there was no milk left for his coffee. He went to the grocery, purchased a container of milk and placed the container in the Yeshiva refrigerator with a sign "private property". The next morning, the container was gone. He bought another container, on which he added to the previous sign "do not steal". The next morning, that container too was missing. He purchased a new container, adding to the sign "questionable gentile milk" (halav akum). This time no one took his container; he left the Yeshiva.

Shabbat Shalom!

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? For example, 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.

Did You Know...

In this week's parsha, Moshe retells the events of Matan Torah, and repeats the Ten Commandments. There's a machlokes if this week's parsha talks about the second set of Luchos, to replace the first set that were broken because of the Eigel Hazav (Golden Calf), or if this is just Moshe paraphrasing them (Ramban to Shemos 20:8, and others). Either way, the act of breaking the Luchos had major repercussions for the Jewish people, as the Gemara (Eruvin 54a) says that had they not been broken, no nation would have been able to rule over Bnei Yisroel.

Interestingly, there were many differences between the two versions of the Luchos, and here are some of them:

1. Hashem wrote the first Luchos, while Moshe wrote the second ones (Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni #392).

2. The first set of Luchos were miraculously readable from both sides, while the second set were only readable from the front (Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni #392).

3. The first set of Luchos were made of sapphire, while the second ones were just plain rock (Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni #392).

4. The first set of Luchos had the entire Torah written on it, but the second pair only had the Aseres Hadibros (Beis Halevi, Derush #18). Not only were there differences in their physical aspects, but there were also differences in the very wording of the Aseres Hadibros including:

1. "Tov" is only mentioned in the second set of Luchos (in the commandment to honor one's parents). The Gemara (Bava Kama 55) answers that the reason is that the first Luchos were destined to be broken, and Hashem did not want the "tov," the good destined for the Jewish people, to be "broken" with the Luchos.

2. The Pesikta Rabasi (beginning of parsha 23) addresses the fact that in the first Luchos it says, "Remember the Shabbos day," while in the second account it says, "Keep the Shabbos day." The Pesikta Rabasi explains that the word "keep" is used to teach the Jewish people that only through "keeping" the Shabbos would they succeed in "keeping" the second Luchos from being lost like the first Luchos.

Dedicated LIN Binyomin Tzvi ben Shlomo Chaim. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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For the week ending 24 July 2021 / 15 Av 5781*

*Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parshat Va'etchanan*

Richard Branson and the Ultimate Joy-Ride

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

Billionaire Sir Richard Branson has successfully reached the edge of space on board his Virgin Galactic rocket plane. The UK entrepreneur flew high above New Mexico in the US in the vehicle that his company has been developing for 17 years. The trip was, he said, the "experience of a lifetime." He returned safely to Earth just over an hour after leaving the ground. "I have dreamed of this moment since I was a kid, but, honestly, nothing can prepare you for the view of Earth from space," he said in a press conference following the flight. "The whole thing was just magical."

I think Branson's expensive joy-ride has a deeper motivation though.

Judaism understands that all the pleasures, all the experiences of this world, are given to us for one reason only: that we might feel, that we might sense to the smallest degree... the taste of life itself.

But what is this "taste of life"? And what is "life itself" if not those experiences that it contains?

Imagine that you are standing in front of a firing squad, staring down the long black tunnel of the barrel of a rifle. "Squad! Take aim! And..." Just at that second, a messenger comes running into the square. "Stop the execution! The prisoner is free to go!"

Imagine how you would feel at that moment!

When our life hangs in the balance, when we are saved from a life-threatening experience, that euphoria is the perception of life itself, of existing. That moment of being rescued from death brings us face to face with our own existence. It is the sense of life itself.

There is, however, another less drastic and infinitely more spiritually uplifting way to experience the taste of life.

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 31a, Avodah Zarah 9a) teaches us that the world as we know it will last for six thousand years. In the seventh millennium, about 220 years from now, the world will undergo a fundamental change. At that time, all activity will cease. That world is known as Olam Haba, literally, "the World to Come." If we were to try to imagine that future world, it would be like one continuous Shabbat. Shabbat is really a hint of the future world, the faintest whisper of that reality. On Shabbat we are bidden to refrain from very specifically defined "creative" work, and, by doing this, we are able to make contact with something that is beyond this world.

The essence of the future world is that it is an existence devoid of activity. When all activity ceases, we will be able to perceive "being"

itself. In the world in which we live now, we cannot distinguish between life experiences and life itself. We understand reality as being identical with our experiences. This is not true. The activity of the world in which we live now masks the perception of life itself, but when all activity ceases — then we will experience the taste of life itself. And when we experience that, it will be the sweetest thing that can be. That is what is known as the World to Come — existence without activity.

Some 600 individuals have already paid deposits for tickets that will cost them up to \$250,000. These are all people who want to reach a height where they can see the sky turn black and marvel at the Earth's horizon as it curves away into the distance. Such a flight should also afford them about five minutes of weightlessness, during which they will be allowed to float around inside Unity's cabin.

Shabbat gives you 24 hours of "weightlessness" and can cost considerably less than a quarter of a million dollars.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Va'etchanan: Climate Change and Moshe Rabbeinu

Moshe seems to have done something which was totally unnecessary. In Parshat Va'etchanan we are told (Devarim 4:41), "Az yavdil moshe shalosh arim."

Just before he was to pass away, Moshe, who was on the eastern side of the river Jordan because he couldn't enter into the Holy Land, separated off three cities there.

Of course, two and a half tribes were to be dwelling there, and these three cities were separated to be 'arei miklat' — cities of refuge, in order that any person guilty of manslaughter could flee there for the sake of their protection.

Now Moshe knew that these cities would only become active once three additional cities were inaugurated for this purpose in the Holy Land itself, which would not happen until well after his death, so why did he do this? It seemed to be for no purpose whatsoever.

The Kli Yakar explains that the key to understanding this is the very first word 'az'. "Az yavdil moshe," — "Then Moshe separated."

He was inspired to do this because of something which had happened just before. So let's look at the previous verse. There Moshe reminds the people of how Hashem instructed them to keep the word of Hashem (Devarim 4:40),

"asher yitav lecha ulevanecha achereicha," — "in order that it should be good for you and for your children after you."

You see it was there that Hashem told him that we should do what is responsible in life not just for our own sake — it's also for the sake of our children and future generations who will come after us. That is what inspired Moshe to recognise that even though he personally, and those around him, were not going to benefit from the setting aside of the cities, it was his responsibility to start to do this for the sake of those who would be living thereafter.

We have here a powerful Torah message about our purpose in life. We're not just here for our own sakes and those around us. We are here to invest responsibly in the future of our earth. That is why, when placing man in this world, Hashem said to us, "I'ovda uleshomra," — 'I'ovda' — you must work in this world, you must be productive and creative, but at the same time, 'uleshomra' — you must guard and protect it.

This is so very relevant for us right now with regard to climate change. Until quite recently many people just weren't taking the whole issue of climate change seriously but now it is abundantly clear to us all that in just 50-100 years' time, the very lives of our grandchildren and great grandchildren could be endangered unless we act now for the sake of our environment.

Let us therefore take a leaf out of the book of Moshe to guarantee that what we do now will be the right thing not just for us but also for the generations to come.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Vaeschanan - Killer Torah

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

It is said with a combination of passionate joy and admiring wonder. As the Torah is raised for all to see, the congregants point to it as they recite a verse from this week's parsha. "V'zos hatorah asher sam Moshe..." This is the Torah that Moshe presented before the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 4:44). It would seem that this verse refers to the deep and beautiful laws that inspire the same awe as the sight of the Torah scroll unfurled in all its glory. It isn't. In fact, the words now used to announce the glory of the Torah in its entirety are placed directly after a part of the Torah we might rather have skipped. The words, "V'zos HaTorah – this is the Torah" are written following the laws of the cities of refuge. People convicted of negligent manslaughter or awaiting trial for that crime must stay in specially designated cities until the Kohein Gadol dies. The cities of refuge are strategically located and in this week's portion the Torah reviews both the entry qualifications and the terms of inhabitation. We Jews are not proud of killers, yet we obviously must deal with them. The question is, however, why are the words, "this is the Torah," which seem to personify the very essence of our code of life, placed within any proximity to laws that show our lowest point. Rashi, the classic medieval commentator, may be bothered by this juxtaposition. He comments that the words refer to an ensuing portion, which recounts the Sinai experience and the receiving of the Ten Commandments. Ramban explains that after Moshe's admonition of the people, he once again resumes discussing the laws with them. I would like to explain the location of the words with a homiletic approach.

In the early 1900s a Rabbi who lived in the tenements on the Manhattan's Lower East Side had to attend a City function at which a notoriously anti-Semitic Episcopalian Minister was also present.

The Minister turned to the Rabbi and with a sinister smile remarked, "What a coincidence! It was just last night that I dreamt I was in Jewish heaven."

"Jewish heaven?" inquired the Rabbi. "What is it like in Jewish heaven?"

"Oh!" replied the priest. "In Jewish heaven the streets were filled with Jews. Children, their faces dirty, shirts untucked, and clothes unpressed were playing in the dirt. Women were haggling with fish-vendors as Jewish beggars tried to interrupt, asking for handouts. The clotheslines stretched across the roads with the dripping wash mixing with the dust below to add more mud to the existing mess on the ground. And of course," he added with a sinister laugh, "rabbis were running back and forth with large Talmudic volumes tucked under their arms!"

The Rabbi pursed his lips and then replied, "that is truly amazing. You see I dreamt last night that I was in Episcopalian heaven."

"Really?" the Minister asked "And pray tell me what is it like in Episcopalian heaven?"

"It is magnificent. The streets shine as if they have recently been washed. The homes are exquisitely lined up in perfect symmetry, each with a small garden that has beautiful flowers and a perfectly manicured lawn. The homes were freshly painted and they sparkled in the sunlight!"

The Minister beamed. "And what about the people? Tell me about the people!"

The Rabbi smiled, looked the Minister right in the eye, and tersely stated, "There were no people."

By placing the words "this is the Torah that Moshe presented" directly after the laws of the cities of refuge, the Torah sends a message that it does not shirk or evade guiding us through every aspect of life. Whether the Torah is commanding the laws of priestly blessings or sharing the Passover story or rehabilitating a man who accidentally killed, it is an equal part of Torah and must be proudly proclaimed as such. We don't ignore our misfortunes nor hide them as if they do not exist. The laws of thieves and murderers are as part of the Torah as the perpetrators are part of society. We don't hide the unfortunate and wrongdoers from our existence. They exist in society and in the Torah that deals with their needs and laws. And when it deals with them the Torah proudly

proclaims that this, too, is the Torah that Moshe placed before the Children of Israel.

Dedicated in memory of David Atlas by his son Larry Atlas

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Longing for the Coveted Land - Past and Present

Rabbi Yakov Haber

Twenty years ago, I had the merit of writing a devar Torah on parshas Va'Eschanan portraying the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in facilitating complete fulfillment of the Torah, Hashem's masterplan for His beloved people.[1] This is highlighted beginning with Moshe Rabbeinu's fervent prayer for entry into the Holy Land at the very beginning of our parsha continuing throughout the parsha with its repeating refrain - anticipating the imminent entry of the Jewish people into the Land - of the performance of all the mitzvos, even those not dependent on the land, specifically in Eretz Yisrael. This clearly indicates that this land is the main epicenter of the performance of all of them. Since there are many additional ideas I believe worthy of developing, and, in my humble opinion, many international events have occurred recently highlighting the timeliness of these themes, I, with considerable trepidation, write the following thoughts in the hope of inspiring greater love for the Holy Land and fostering additional interest of more families in building their homes in Eretz Yisrael.

The Holy Land is endowed with a dual sanctity: a Divinely-bestowed one, and a humanly created one. The first is reflected in the Land being called "the land of Hashem"(Hoshei'a 9:3) Hashem Himself being referred to as the "G-d of the land" (Melachim II 17:26), in the increased Divine providence present in the Land, and in the Land being the focal point of the direction of prayers and the location from which prayers throughout the world soar heavenward (Berachos 30a). These themes and many other unique aspects to the Land have been presented majestically by many, among them the Ramban, in his commentary on Chumash.[2] The second, a more technical one, is affected by conquest or possession of the Land (see Rambam, Hilchos Beis Habechira 6:16). This generates the Torah obligations of most mitzvos hateluyos ba'aretz - agricultural commandments.[3] [4] This duality, reflecting an oft-occurring theme in Jewish life - a fixed Divine component and a human variable component, seems to indicate the Divine Will of maintaining an active partnership with mankind in bringing about a more perfect reality.[5]

The motivations for aliyah to Eretz Yisrael can be divided into several categories: 1) the pragmatic, 2) the mitzvah based, 3) the idealistic, and 4) the messianic. On the pragmatic level, many have immigrated to Eretz Yisrael as refugees - among them refugees from the periods before, during and after the Holocaust, those banished from multiple Arab lands after the foundation of the State of Israel, and many fleeing persecution or economic hardship in the former Soviet Union. The Land of Israel served as a place of refuge for all of them.[6] To be sure, many among this group - even if historical events had not forced them to flee - were still filled with love of the Land and viewed their immigration there as a great fulfillment of Torah concepts and even Biblical prophecies, but, nonetheless, the main motivation was escape. Some even find better employment opportunities for their particular field of work or cheaper housing and education as well in Israel. These motivations are primarily practical, not spiritual.

On the other hand, many have made aliyah convinced that living in the Land is a mitzvah, whether obligatory as indicated by the simple reading of Ramban and others or optional but still constituting the fulfillment of a Divine commandment (mitzvah kiyumis) as might be the view of the Rambam and was the view of Igros Moshe and Rav Y.D. Soloveitchik zt"l. Some maintain that even if living in the Land does not fulfill a specific Divine command but comprises the Will of Hashem.[7] This latter viewpoint was expressed poignantly by Rav Sholom Gold shlit"a:[8]

The story is told of a Diaspora Jew who studied in depth the whole range of opinions about yishuv haAretz and then called and made an appointment with R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. The appointed day came; he arrived at the airport, took a cab to Shaare Chesed, made his way up the steps and soon found himself in the Rosh Yeshiva's presence. He proceeded to begin to pour out all the knowledge he had committed to memory, when R. Auerbach said softly in Yiddish, "Es iz nisht vichtig" - "It is not important." Our Diaspora hero was devastated - but nevertheless pressed on until he heard again, "It's not important." In his desperation he asked, "What does the Rosh Yeshiva mean, it's not important?" To which R. Shlomo Zalman replied, "Just open up a Chumash and read and you will see that ratzon Hashem (G-d's will) is that Jews should live in Eretz Yisroel."

Many have been inspired or could be inspired based on idealism to build up the land agriculturally, economically, and spiritually. As one example, Rav Moshe Ze'ev Katz zt"l, a prominent, energetic Rabbinic personality, came to Beit Shemesh in the 1970s when it was a spiritual wasteland. Singlehandedly, he built up a network of Torah centers and inspired hundreds to return to Torah observance. It might be fair to say that the foundation of the entire Ramat Beit Shemesh (now, Baruch Hashem, comprising Aleph, Bet, Gimmel and Dalet and more!), with its thousands of families and growing each year, all rode on the coattails of this initial investment of mesirus nefesh, if not through direct cause and effect but at least on a spiritual level. Furthermore, on a klal Yisrael level, every religious family's aliyah increases the spiritual nature of the entire yishuv. In the powerful words of one of the great Torah giants of the last century, Rav Yechiel Michel Tikutchinsky zt"l, calling to us now (and perhaps even more so!) as when they were written over half a century ago:

What of today? How easy travel is to Eretz Yisrael! From America to [Israel] is only 36 hours (!)... All the roads are paved, water and other food staples are not lacking, electricity [and] fuel. Those who control the land is the government of Israel; the gates of the land are open wide. There is no remnant of the [certificate system]...

What is lacking today? That strong yearning which burned in the hearts of the faithful of Israel of previous generations in chutz la'aretz. Had travel and entry to Eretz Yisrael been so easy one hundred years ago or if all of the faithful of Israel in our era been drawn by the same soul-strings to our Holy City and Land, Eretz Yisrael would have been settled by a solid majority of shomrei Torah u'mitzvos. On the seats of the Knesset would be sitting authentic Jews who know and feel what Eretz Yisrael means and the intensity of the bonds which connect [the Land] and [the people]. Eretz Yisrael would then have an entirely different character. The Knesset laws would be based on the Torah of Israel; there would be no question in Israel about keeping Shabbos... and certainly there would no freedom for missionaries to proselytize Jews. No perikas 'ol, no desecration of Jewish values, no war of the mundane over the sanctified, no youth educated wantonly, degrading human life.

All this would occur if the faithful of Israel in chutz la'aretz were drawn to the land. They could save the Jewish religion and the sanctity of the Land from its desecrators and its enemies. True, even today, most of them feel a great connection to our holy Land; they pray toward it... raise its mention above all of their joy. Even today, they support the Jewish yishuv no less than in the past, but they still embrace dwelling in Exile. Many view their domicile there in the future [as well].

It is incumbent upon all shomrei Torah u'mitzva, especially all of our Rabbanim, to learn a lesson from the previous aliyot who entered Eretz Yisrael with great self-sacrifice and desired to take refuge in the chatzros Hashem and to release the land from its defilers. ברצות ד' דרכי איש גם, אייביו ישרימו אהו, and Israel will dwell securely from its external enemies, and the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael would shine in splendor as in days of old. We would then draw near, day by day, to our complete redemption and our hoped-for destiny. (Sefer Eretz Yisrael, end of Chapter 27)

Additionally, many have been inspired by messianic yearnings. In past centuries, it is a well-documented fact of history that many aliyot of hundreds of families were inspired by messianic hope.[9] Some were

anticipatory: based on passages in the Zohar, messianic speculation was rife in the years 1740 and 1840. Some were proactive. Many students of the Gaon of Vilna and many Chassidim made aliyah at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries to jumpstart the process of the spiritual awakening of the Land hopefully to be met with Divine favor; the Master of History would then hopefully take the redemptive process to the next step. Rav Tzvi Hirsh Kalischer zt"l (see his Derishas Tzion) even thought that, in addition to the founding of agricultural settlements, we must bring korbanos even before the Mikdash is built (following the pattern of the Shivas Tzion in the days of Zerubavel and later Ezra) in order to awaken Divine mercy to hasten the redemption. Many have seen or currently see within either the Balfour declaration, the San Remo conference, the 1947 United Nations vote, or, more recently, the explosion of the Jewish yishuv to over six million (kein yirbu!) a fulfillment of at least a pekida, the first step of the redemptive process to be followed by the zechira, the last step.[10] The pekida step of redemption during the Shivas Tzion leading up to the second Mikdash began with the call of Coresh, king of Persia, "Who among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him, and he may ascend!" (Divrei Hayamim II 36:23). Many believe our era is directly parallel to that one. Recently, inspired and perhaps frightened by the global pandemic of COVID-19 and now the more recent Delta variant, as well as the on-again, off-again closing of most air travel to Eretz Yisrael, rising anti-Semitism, and additional security concerns, some have been talking of mashiach's imminent arrival even pronouncing, "We better go now before the gates close totally!" Understandably, many Rabbinic personalities past and present have forcefully objected to some or all of these movements. One claim advanced is that such speculation, especially if advanced by Rabbinic scholars, if not met by fulfillment of the messianic expectation would be followed by lessening the stature of Rabbinic viewpoints in the eyes of the Jewish people. An additional concern is that the disillusionment of the final redemption not coming when expected would lead to spiritual malaise or even worse, as unfortunately has happened often in our tragic history in the aftermath of false or misguided messianic movements.

In my humble opinion, although the second motivation for aliyah based on ratzon Hashem seems to be the most basic, pure motive as well as the third motive of idealism both of which indeed have led to many thousands of current residents of the Promised Land uprooting from their former domiciles,[11] all the motivations have their proper place as well. Perhaps an analogy can be drawn to the various inspirations to teshuva. Rabbeinu Yona in his crucial work Sha'arei Teshuva (Sha'ar 2) outlines several motivations to repent, among them ideal and non-ideal ones. But as Chazal (Pesachim 50b) tell us and even recommend[12] "לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצוות אף על פי שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה, בא" - "a person should constantly engage in Torah [study] and [the performance of] the commandments even for ulterior motives, for from these ulterior motives will sprout pure ones." If even an ulterior motive inspires the person to act properly then it can be viewed positively. But one has to be certain that the person does not make the desirable activity dependent solely on the motivation. The motivation is exactly that - a motivation, not the essence of what is being done. I believe that the same can apply to messianic motivations. If the person is motivated to make aliyah based on his belief that mashiach's arrival is imminent, which can be premised not just on an emergency sense of leaving the Exile before it is too late but on heeding the Divine call of history, he must temper this vision with the fact that he does not dictate to G-d how He chooses to run Jewish and world history! Messianic expectation need not be an all or nothing proposal; it can provide inspiration and cause a pause from life's routine to explore fundamental values including yishuv ha'aretz, but cannot and should not be the overarching principle with the concomitant danger of leading to a "spiritual crash" if one's expectations are not fulfilled.

Although necessary caution in too much messianic speculation is certainly in order, I believe this does not exempt us from attempting, with proper humility and uncertainty, from trying to "read the map" of individual and national events in our lives. Elsewhere[13] I referenced

Rav Schwab's enlightening insight on the phrase in the last blessing of the morning Shema, "ashrei ha'am sheyishma l'mitzvosecha v'toras'cha ud'var'cha yasim 'al libo" - "praiseworthy is the nation who hearkens unto your commandments and places your Torah and your Word on its heart". "Your Torah" and "Your Word" seem to be redundantly synonymous. Rav Schwab explains that "Your Word" refers to the messages Hashem sends to us indirectly through intervention in our lives. In this vein, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt"l, at the beginning of the 20th century, concerning the Balfour Declaration exclaimed:

"Where are the Torah Jews from the lands of exile? Don't they see G-d's finger in all of this? Now I understand what it says in the musaf prayer for Yom Tov. 'And because of our sins we were exiled from our country and were distanced from our Land.' 'We were exiled from our country' by G-d, and then 'we were distanced from our Land' by ourselves! Have we ceased our anticipation? Imagine it hadn't rained for 2,000 years, and then suddenly one day a tiny cloud appeared. Wouldn't everyone become excited, and say, trembling, 'Perhaps this is it? Maybe, after all...?' Isn't the (British) Mandate at least comparable to this little cloud?"

We can only guess what Rav Sonnenfeld would have proclaimed in an era where over six million Jews live in Eretz Yisrael, the economy is flourishing and yeshivos and kollelim, attended by thousands of students, abound.

Mori v'Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter shlit"a has often described the dual mitzvos of yishuv ha'aretz, building up of the land, and yeshivas ha'aretz, actually dwelling in the land. One who financially supports the yishuv from chutz la'aretz fulfills the former but not the latter. One who lives in Eretz Yisrael but is supported from chutz la'aretz fulfills the latter but possibly not the former. The outlook some convey that living in Eretz Yisrael is the only important mitzvah in the Torah and especially the attitude of those not leading proper Torah lifestyles living in Israel who point an accusing finger at those who are more dedicated to Torah values than they are or even at those who are spiritually guiding hundreds if not thousands of Jews who live in chutz la'aretz - because the latter live in chutz la'aretz and the former live in Eretz Yisrael - are grossly misguided. But the dual truisms that leading meaningful Torah-filled lives in chutz la'aretz is also fundamental avodas Hashem and that supporting the yishuv also partakes of one part of the mitzvah should not, to my mind, serve as a sufficient reason to ignore the possibility of actual yeshivas ha'aretz. An analogy may be drawn to the relationship between supporters of Torah and learners of Torah. This partnership is a crucial one for the former sometimes even being awarded primacy due to the fact that without them the Torah would not be studied; but no one would claim that being a tomech Torah exempts one who can from learning Torah! Certainly, as Rav Y. D. Solovetichik zt"l, mori v'Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter shlit"a and mori v'Rabi Rav Mordechai Willig shlit"a (and earlier Maharam Schick) have often stated and advised, irreplaceable Rabbinic leadership and Torah teachers must fill the important role of serving klal Yisrael in chutz la'aretz, but this, to my humble mind, does not exempt those not filling this crucial role from seriously considering aliyah.

How does one who does not feel sufficient motivation to practically consider this central aspect of avodas Hashem become inspired? Telling is an insight of the Abarbanel (Rosh Amana) in his defense of the Rambam's view that there is a normative mitzvah to believe in Hashem - counted among the 613 mitzvos - against the critique of some thinkers that one cannot command belief.[14] He answers that belief is not a direct commandment, but rather an indirect one. The commandment is to act in a way that fosters that belief, primarily through study. He gives an analogy of falling in love. (Even the English phrase is very telling.) One cannot command or instantly feel love, but one can act in ways which will foster that strong emotional bond. In the beautiful phraseology of the Abarbanel, "It comes in an instant, seeming inexplicably, fostered by the person's initial activities." The same is true concerning inspiration toward aliyah - one has to foster an emotional and intellectual bond through study and experience. The footnote makes some recommendations of inspiring works.[15]

Many articles have been written and crucial, informative Rabbinic input has been presented about various difficulties new olim can encounter especially concerning education of children. These issues cannot be ignored in one's pursuit of this noble dream. But I firmly believe that the correct path is to seek out solutions to these issues, not just to dismiss aliyah as an option because of them. Indeed, much has been done in the past 20 years in Israel to address these issues. Job networks abound, many new schools have been created catering largely, if not exclusively, to the Anglo, Torah-observant crowd presenting all kinds of different combinations of Torah and general subjects and varied across the hashkafic spectrum. Additionally, professional support groups especially for tweens and teens have been formed and provide crucial assistance and safety nets. Living in Israel, although certainly having its unique challenges - as it simultaneously presents even greater, unique opportunities - has gotten more and more feasible for families of all types in just the past decade. Telecommuting, once the province of the few, has become much more of a norm in the "COVID-19 era" enabling additional employment opportunities once not feasible. A world-renowned Yeshiva has even founded a group to study the feasibility of the aliyah of tens, perhaps hundreds, of families to establish their own community. Families who have explored options some time ago should re-explore based on the current situation which keeps changing for the better. Whereas due research is certainly in order, too much hesitancy in this area to make sure every single detail is in place might be counterproductive. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l often would quote the popular saying that "before entering Eretz Yisrael one has to kill the king of Cheshbon (calculation)!" [A playful reference to Sichon, the king of Cheshbon.] (See Halichos Shlomo, Tefilah 23:fn 16.)

Every day, three times a day, we pray to Hashem: "Blow the great shofar for our freedom; lift up the banner to gather our exiles!" Perhaps it would not be too presumptuous to say that this banner has been lifted up by the Great Actor of History higher and higher especially with recent events.

The Rambam, in disagreement with others, states that the mashiach will prove his messianic mission not with miracles but by doing what the Messiah is supposed to do - bringing the Jewish people back to Torah, gathering the Exiles, fighting against the enemies of Israel and defeating them and building the Mikdash. Perhaps the best way we as a people can partner with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the great messianic drama - a drama to whose exact scenes and denouement we are not privy - but one whose initial steps certainly include kibbutz galuyos (see Megilla 17b) is by actively participating in this stage.[16] Even if the final redemption is chas v'shalom still far away, one who chooses to uproot and replant his family back in the primary place of the Jewish people, will be a beneficiary of the great spiritual value - and mitzvah according to many Rishonim - of living in the Land which is present even during the darkest period of exile.

How fortunate we are to live in an era where living in Eretz Yisrael is orders of magnitude easier than it had been for so many centuries! How fortunate we are to live in an era to be able to choose a career in Eretz Yisrael and an appropriate school for our children instead of dealing with practically no employment or schooling opportunities! How fortunate we are to live to see the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael blossom at such a rapid pace so that in a short period of time, even in the natural course of events, a majority of the Jewish people will be living in the Holy Land!

If we beseech HaKadosh Baruch Hu אלה תקום תרחם ציון כי עת להננה כי בא מועד - "May you arise, have mercy on Zion for the time has come to favor it, for the designated time as arrived", it certainly behooves us to seriously consider dwelling in the Eretz Hashem.

I heard an informative vignette from my father z"l concerning a Chassidic Rebbe who wished to embark on a massive spiritual project to benefit the Jewish people. His detractors chided him, "Rebbe, du bizt a chalomer!" ("Rebbe, you are a dreamer!"), to which he responded, "Ken zein az ich bin a chalomer, ubber ich shluft nisht!" ("It could be that I'm a dreamer, but I am not sleeping!") If we view aliyah as a desirable goal or even if we do not yet but we are convinced that it should be a goal of

ours, we must keep the dream alive by constantly learning, experiencing and inquiring so that the dream can become a reality for thousands, and hopefully even hundreds of thousands, of more Jews, faithful to Torah values, who have the ability to elevate themselves along with their families, greatly affect the yishuv in the Holy Land, and b'e'zras Hashem bring the day of our final redemption closer!

[1] *Mitzvot and Eretz Yisrael*

[2] Also see *Yadav Emunah* by Rav C. D. Sapirstein (*Sha'ar 7*) where these themes are presented in an organized, thought-provoking manner. See there also for an important treatment of the deeper meaning of the seemingly incomprehensible statement of Chazal, as popularized by Ramban, that mitzvot in Eretz Yisrael are fundamentally significant, whereas in chutz la'aretz they are performed in order that we "keep in practice" for when we return. Can it be that the mitzvot performed by klal Yisrael in exile together with its exalted leaders for almost 2000 years are just "practice"?! Whereas some might be satisfied with the simple reading of this statement of Chazal, one would be hard pressed to envision the water-carrier in Eretz Yisrael receiving a higher reward in Gan Eden than the Ba'al Shem Tov or the GR"A! Rav Sapirstein formulates the difficulty and presents a very cogent, profound answer to this conundrum.

[3] See *Encyclopedia Talmudit, Eretz Yisrael: 2: Kedushasa U'Mitzvoseha* for a thorough treatment of these two sanctities.

[4] It would appear that the debate between Tosfos and Ramban (beginning of Gittin) whether one fulfills the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael in land conquered by the olei Mitzrayim but not resettled by the olei Bavel revolves around the following point: Is the mitzvah of living in the Land based on the goal of living under direct Divine providence (dependent on the first, Divinely-bestowed sanctity) or is it based on enabling oneself to fulfill all of the mitzvot hateluyos ba'aretz (dependent on the second, humanly-endowed sanctity)? See also *Avnei Nezer* (Y. D. 454:14 ff.).

[5] See *Meshech Chachma* (on beginning of Behar, s.v. "ובת"ו") who compares Shabbos vs. Yom Tov and shemitta vs. yovel. Also see *Midrash Tanchuma* (Tazri'a 5) which records the famous conversation between R. Akiva and the Roman general, Turnus Rufus, concerning mila.

[6] Also see *Fleeing From; Running To*.

[7] See a thorough treatment of the various views in the *RJJ Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, Vol. 5, "The Mitzva of Yishuv Eretz Yisrael", by mori v'Rabi, Rav H. Schachter shlit"a and *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*, Vols. 1-11, by mori v'Rabi Rav J. D. Bleich shlit"a and *Encyclopedia Talmudit, Yeshivas Eretz Yisrael*.

[8] Available here

[9] See *Hastening Redemption: Messianism and the Resettlement of the Land of Israel* by Dr. Arie Morgenstern.

[10] See the eye-opening work, *Acharis K'Reishis* by Rav Aryeh Shapira shlit"a based on the teachings of Ramchal and GR"A that all redemptions have occurred and will occur with these two steps.

[11] When I recently asked a prominent doctor in Ramat Beit Shemesh what motivated him to make aliyah 20 years ago, he responded, somewhat surprised at my question, "Have you seen Tanach or the Kuzari?"

[12] Heard from Rav Noach Isaach Oelbaum shlit"a based on the language of "U'lan".

[13] *Divine Communication: Two Different Types*

[14] Even those Rishonim (see *Or Hashem*) who maintain that belief is not formally a mitzvah certainly agree that it is obligatory since it is a reasonable Divine expectation. They claim that for technical reasons it cannot be counted in the list of mitzvot since mitzvot are only relevant to those activities that are subject to free will.

[15] *To Dwell in the Palace: Perspectives on Eretz Yisrael* by Tzvia Ehrlich-Klein, *A Drop in the Ocean - A Daily Dose of Eretz Yisrael* by Rabbi Moshe Lichtman and Michael Freund, *Yadav Emunah* (Hebrew) (*Sha'ar 7*) by Rabbi C. D. Sapirstein, and *Sefer Eretz Yisrael* (Hebrew) by Rav Y. M. Tikatchinsky (chapters 25 & 27). The following websites also contain many inspiring and informative articles: www.nachliel.org and see there under "Resources" for additional websites and <http://www.qdushat-zion.022.co.il/>, a gateway to a relatively new Israeli organization and publication promoting aliyah and a Torah society in Eretz Yisrael, *Kedushas Tzion*.

[16] As mori v'Rabi Rav Dovid Miller shlit"a often states, "One living in Israel is living in the front seat of Jewish history, not the bleachers!"

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Written in stone (Vaetchanan)

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Constitutions should consist only of general provisions; the reason is that they must necessarily be permanent, and that they cannot calculate for the possible change of things. - Alexander Hamilton

In the Torah reading of Vaetchanan, Moses recalls the revelation of God to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments. He takes the opportunity to repeat the Ten Commandments (with some minor differences to the one stated in the Book of Exodus).

In retelling the story, Moses highlights that the Ten Commandments were written on two tablets of stones. The Bechor Shor on Deuteronomy 4:13 wonders as to the significance of repeating this detail.

He explains that there is particular importance to the Ten Commandments and that's why it was etched in stone, as opposed to on papyrus or parchment. The Ten Commandments needed to be written on a material that would never decompose. These verses needed to be written permanently, so that we would never forget them.

The Ten Commandments constitute the foundation of our faith:

The belief in God; not worshipping any other gods; not taking His name in vain; keeping the Sabbath; honoring our parents; no murder; no adultery; no stealing; no false witness; no coveting.

These are the building blocks of Jewish faith.

Remembering these principles is so foundational that based on this the Sages learn that whoever actively forgets them or any related teaching is worthy of the death punishment. "Actively forgets" is different than merely forgetting or even not having learned it in the first place; it

means someone who by deliberate thought decides to disassociate these commandments from his consciousness.

That's why they're written in stone. The commandments are immutable. They are eternal. They are a permanent guiding force for the Jewish people for millennia. If we don't currently have the carved tablets within reach, we should at least etch these commandments in our hearts.

May we merit to rediscover the Tablets of the Law in their housing in the Ark of the Covenant, together with the rebuilt Temple, speedily, in our days.

Dedication - To Ben & Jerry's Israel.

Shabbat Shalom Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Faith in One G-d – Faith in Goodness

Bs"d Va'etchanan 5781

The speeches convey the glory and beauty in the path G-d bequeathed to His nation, and the love and affection in this connection between the Jewish people and G-d. This week's Torah portion, Va'etchanan, continues the series of speeches from the previous parasha, Devarim, and focuses on faith in one G-d and the prohibition of creating anything in His image.

The significance of G-d's revelation at Mount Sinai, an event described in this parasha, far surpasses the creation of a new religion or the cohesiveness of a new nation around its G-d. The idea that appeared in the world was far-reaching; an idea that had been forgotten since G-d created His world. As people became further distanced from the concept around which the world was created, they created spiritual and historical significance through idol worship, believing that there were different gods in the world, each with its own power. The gods created humans and therefore they must be worshipped. They are the source of power and they determine fate. Idolatry typically did not view the gods as particularly good. With a few exceptions, the gods were not seen as having a specific stance on how reality should appear. On the contrary, the gods were often haphazard in their decisions. Despite this, having a close connection with them, through sacrifices and statues, brought them satisfaction and could lead to beneficial reciprocal treatment.

When G-d revealed Himself on Mount Sinai, a fundamentally different theological concept revealed itself as well:

"I am the Lord your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall not have the gods of others in My presence. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness which is in the heavens above, which is on the earth below, or which is in the water beneath the earth. You shall not prostrate yourself before them, nor worship them..." (Deuteronomy 5, 6-9)

And Moses warns again:

And you shall watch yourselves very well, for you did not see any image on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire. Lest you become corrupt and make for yourselves a graven image, the representation of any form... (Deuteronomy 4, 15-16)

There is only one G-d, and He does not want us to create images or likenesses of Him. So, the question is, what does He want? What is the significance of worshipping one G-d? If He does not want us to worship His image, what does He want from us?

We read this in the parasha repeatedly. The significance of worshipping G-d is embodied in the laws of justice given in the Torah. G-d's will is for us to worship Him through keeping these laws and regulations. These laws strive to bring the world and man toward absolute, divine justice, and make life better and more honest.

This idea, that appeared in G-d's revelation on Mount Sinai, carries within it tremendous meaning: G-d does not require anything of us on His own behalf, just for our own, since these laws do not cause Him any satisfaction or fulfill any of His needs. They were written for one purpose only:

"And the Lord commanded us to perform all these statutes, to fear the Lord, our G-d, for our good all the days, to keep us alive, as of this day. And it will be for our merit that we keep to observe all these

commandments before the Lord, our G-d, as He has commanded us.” (Deuteronomy 6, 24-25)

Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto (Biblical commentator, Italy, 19th century) explained these verses charmingly:

The commandments are for our own good because through them social issues will be repaired peacefully and honestly, and besides this, we will have charity and merit if we keep them, and G-d will give us rewards for this.

In conclusion, the significance of faith in one G-d is that G-d is beneficent, that the world was created out of goodness, and that the relationship between man and G-d goes through His laws of justice whose purpose is to fill the world with goodness.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Va'etchanan: In Mind and Heart

Chanan Morrison

The Aleinu prayer, recited at the conclusion of every prayer service, contains the following verse:

יְדַעְתָּ הַיּוֹם וְהִשְׁבַּחְתָּ אֱלֹהֵי לְבָבְךָ

“Know it today and ponder it in your heart: God is the Supreme Being in heaven above and on the earth below — there is no other.” (Deut. 4:39)

What is the difference between “knowing it” and “pondering it in our heart”?

Two Stages of Acceptance

Sometimes, people admit that there is a gap between what they know intellectually and what they are ready for emotionally. They will say, “Yes, this makes sense. This is a better way, a healthier way, a truer way. Still, it’s not for me. It’s too hard; I cannot do it.”

Therefore, the Torah emphasizes the importance of two steps. First, we need to recognize the truth. This is the initial cognitive stage of יְדַעְתָּ הַיּוֹם, “know it today.”

This stage is critical, but it is still only on a theoretical level. It must be followed by the second step: to internalize that which the mind comprehends. We need to accept emotionally the ramifications of this understanding and be willing to act upon it. That is the second stage, וְהִשְׁבַּחְתָּ אֱלֹהֵי לְבָבְךָ, “ponder it in your heart.”

The second stage of practical acceptance should be rooted in the initial step of intellectual comprehension. As the Sages taught (Berachot 13a), “First accept the kingdom of Heaven, and then the yoke of practical mitzvot.”

Above and Below

The verse continues by stating that God is supreme in both “the heaven above and on the earth below.” What does this mean?

This does not refer to God’s unity in the universe, but to our own inner unity when we accept His reign. “Heaven” and “earth” are metaphors for our two major faculties: the mind and the heart. We need to be consistent so that how we act is not detached from what we believe.

In summary, we should accept God’s kingship on both levels:

To understand intellectually — in the “heaven above” — using our minds, in cognitive thought and belief.

And to act upon that wisdom on a practical level — “on the earth below” — with our hearts and our will, by implementing our intellectual understanding in the realm of deed and action.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 299-300. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 324-325)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Va'eschanan

פרשת ואתחנן תשפ"א

ואתחנן אל ד' בעת ההיא

I implored Hashem at that time. (3:23)

In the *Zera Kodesh*, the *Ropshitzer Rebbe*, *zl*, observes that the *pasuk* neglects to identify “that time.” Was Moshe *Rabbeinu* referring to a specific time? The *Ropshitzer* explains that this omission is by design. The Torah is teaching us a critical lesson with regard to *tefillah*, prayer. No specific time is established for petitioning Hashem. We can approach the Almighty at any time. No “appointments” are necessary. A son need not have a special time to speak

with his father. (If he does, both father and son have a problem.) Hashem is our Heavenly Father, Who waits for our entreaty with a warm welcome. Even if the response is not what we are hoping for, our supplication will be heard, our emotions felt and saved. No prayer is lost; no tear is wasted.

The *Rebbe* says that a person should never say to himself, “Right now, at this moment, I do not have the lucidity to pray. I need to be in a proper presence of mind to be able to articulate my needs correctly. Later on, when I am free of some of the burdensome pressures that are overwhelming me, I will be able to *daven* like a *mentch*. This is an incorrect way of thinking. One should *daven* whenever the need arises, regardless of his frame of mind. No wrong time exists to speak to a father.

Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, would *daven* to Hashem in the most natural manner, as if this were the only way he could ever accomplish or obtain anything. When he would return from praying at the *Kosel Maaravi*, he would remark in *Yiddish*, “I asked Him for this or that.” Everyone knew that “Him” was a reference to Hashem. This was his usual vernacular – He spoke with “Him.” His relationship with Hashem was very real, like a son to his father.

Rav Abramsky's Shabbos table was set with its fine linen, dishes and flatware as early as Friday morning. A student who was visiting that morning inquired why the family was preparing for *Shabbos* so early in the day. He explained that, years earlier, upon immigrating to *Eretz Yisrael*, his wife’s grandfather, the venerable *Radbaz, zl*, moved to Tzfas where he maintained a *yeshivah*. He became gravely ill and the medical establishment had already despaired his returning to good health. He suddenly spoke the following: “Hashem, what is it You want of me? I study Torah all day. I authored a commentary on the *Yerushalmi* (which no one else had really achieved). If You want me to write a commentary to *Bavli*, You already have so many other commentaries that cover the gamut of *Bavli*.” As soon as he concluded his short “request” of Hashem, he closed his eyes and appeared to be drifting off into a deep sleep. A few minutes passed, and he opened his eyes and spoke. He turned to his *rebbeitzin* and made a request, “Please, I ask that every Friday morning when I return home from *Shacharis* that the *Shabbos* table should already be set. I was told by ‘Heaven’ that my cure is dependent upon this.” *Rav Abramsky* said, “In deference to the *Zaide's* custom, we, too, set our table early.” (The purpose of redacting this story is to show how the *Radbaz* prayed to Hashem. It was his conversation with the Almighty.)

Rav Abramsky would walk over to the *Kosel* and place his face close to it and speak to the stones. His close students wanted to know what their saintly *Rebbe* said to the stones. As the *Rav* was lost in his conversation with the stones, they carefully moved closer in order to listen. This is what they heard: “*Ribbono shel olam*,” he wept, “You are the greatest *Rebbe* of all. How do I know this? It is written, *Hamelameid Torah l'Amo Yisrael*. ‘How will *Moshiach* know Torah?’ Where will he study it? Not in Brisk, Ger, Porat Yosef or Ponovez. Where then? Apparently, You, Hashem will teach him. So I ask, ‘If you can teach Torah to *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*, what would be if you would learn Torah with me?’” This is how *Rav Abramsky* prayed to Hashem! He conversed with the Almighty like a son to his father.

Raising good, G-d-fearing, Torah-abiding children does not just happen. It requires much vigilance, hard work, and, most of all, prayer, or, as the *Brisker Rav* was wont to say: *Tehillim mit treren*, “*Tehillim* accompanied by copious weeping.” He observed that his father, *Horav Chaim, zl*, cried for him even after he was a *Rosh Yeshivah*! Indeed, *Rav Chaim's* father, the *Bais HaLevi, zl*, *davened* for his son even after he was *Rav* in Brisk.

Likewise, someone once asked the saintly *Chasam Sofer* how he merited to have such a holy son as the *Ksav Sofer*. The *Chasam Sofer* removed his hat, turned it over and said, “I filled this hat with tears to merit having such a precious son.”

We all want good children – on our terms. We check off all the boxes on the parenting guides to make certain that we do everything correctly. What about *tefillah*, prayer? Perhaps, because it is not included in all the parenting guidebooks, it is not necessary. We maintain otherwise. It is our first and only line of defense. Without Hashem’s participation and blessing, the guidebooks are meaningless. If we do not petition His blessing, then we are failing our children as parents.

Rabbeinu Bachya (Shemos 19:3) writes: “It is befitting for a woman to *daven* to Hashem following the lighting of candles, for this is a *mitzvah* that helps her very much. This is the time in which she should *daven* that Hashem grant her children who are enlightened with Torah.” Parents once came to one of the *gedolim* and cried concerning their son’s spiritual status, which had dwindled terribly. Sadly, he had deviated from the Torah way. What could they do? The *gadol* replied that the mother should light and accept *Shabbos* upon herself thirty minutes prior to candle-lighting time. This should be followed by intense prayer from the depth of her heart, with tears and pleading to Hashem. Their child would return. He did. *Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl*, said that whenever he had a difficulty or a problem with a child, the first thing he did was speak to Hashem and ask for His help and guidance. He asked that Hashem give him sound counsel

on how to speak with his child effectively in addressing the different situations that they faced.

As I wrote in the beginning: Nothing just happens. We must ask – nay, beg – for it. Only then can we hope to merit Hashem’s blessing.

וזאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל

This is the Torah/teaching that Moshe placed before Bnei Yisrael. (4:44)

V'nasan lanu es Toraso, “And Hashem gave us His Torah” is the motif that should accompany each Torah learning session. When we study Torah, we are hearing the words of Hashem and carrying out His will. He gave us His Torah, so that we should learn it, learn from it, observe its precepts and lessons. It is from the Torah that we, as Jews, receive and accept our guidance concerning our *derech ha'chaim*, way of life.

The Jew that lives his life with the Torah as his lodestar has the ability to navigate the murky, stormy waters of life, to battle the winds that can throw his ship off course, to move forward despite the strong changing currents that smash against his ship. He can ride the towering waves that come crashing down. Yes, as long as he keeps his eyes trained on that guiding light, he is assured that his ship will stay its course.

Torah is Hashem’s directive to His People through which He speaks to us. We have only to listen. For those who have difficulty hearing its message at first, we have erudite, G-d-fearing Torah scholars who are available to provide us with its interpretation. Their teachings are *daas Torah*, the wisdom of the Torah, lessons and sage advice from a mind honed only on Torah. The Torah is referred to as *Toras emes*, the Torah of truth, since it is Hashem’s words, His communication; it is *emes l'amito*, Absolute unembellished truth.

The World *Agudas Yisrael* was established in 1912 at a conference held in Katowice, Poland. The goal of the conference and the crux of *Agudas Yisrael's* purpose was the strengthening of Orthodoxy and its institutions and to infuse its adherents with a sense of global unity. To this end, the organizers felt it prudent to headline the conference with a premier Torah personality, a leader whose erudition was without peer and whose commitment to Torah was incontestable. They turned to *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, of Brisk to address the conference as its primary speaker. The presence of the illustrious *Rosh Yeshivah* would send a powerful message concerning the significance of this auspicious convocation. *Rav Chaim* demurred, claiming that he did not involve himself in public forums. He was a *Rosh Yeshivah/Rav* to whom Torah study was sacrosanct and his only area of endeavor. He was *kulo Torah*, wholly devoted to Torah study, throughout every fiber of his essence.

When the organizers heard *Rav Chaim's* negative response, they turned to the *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, who was one of the prime motivators of this event. He felt that a strong, unified *Agudah* would fortify *Klal Yisrael* against the winds of assimilation and secularism that were blowing very strongly, unabated by any bulwark to prevent them from penetrating the Orthodox perimeter. The *Chafetz Chaim* sent a personal messenger to petition *Rav Chaim* to attend and speak. Understandably, when the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest of world Jewry, asks, one responds affirmatively. *Rav Chaim* agreed to attend and address the assemblage.

On the appointed day, Orthodox Jews from all walks of life converged on Katowice. *Roshei Yeshivah, Rabbanim, Admorim*, Polish, Hungarian, Lithuanian and German Jews of all stripes sat together as what they were: family. The conference began with a recitation of *Tehillim*, followed by the opening address, rendered by *Horav David Hoffman, zl*, author of *Melamaid L'hoil, Rosh Yeshivah* of the Hildeshaimer Seminary in Berlin and premier German and European *posek, halachic* arbiter. The next speaker, who would define the purpose and motif of the conference, was the *Brisker Rav, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik*.

Rav Chaim began with the following words, “*Morai v'Rabbosai*, my friends, I would like to share with you a story from which we can deduce the approach we are to take to living as committed Jews. A Jew who lived in a small village earned his livelihood by traveling from town to town selling his wares. He would leave his home on Sunday morning and return for *Shabbos*. One day, he arrived in a village and entered the grocery store with the intention of purchasing something to eat. He asked the man who was working behind the register the price of certain cookies; the response was, ‘*Drei*’ (three ruble). He pointed to another item and inquired about its price, ‘*Drei*.’ A third item was presented to the young man and the price had not changed: ‘*Drei*.’ Something was not right. He asked to meet the owner of the establishment. The young man pointed to the back of the store.

The man entered the owner’s “office” and said, “It is not my custom to mix in business that is not mine; I feel that when one can prevent a Jew from losing money, however, he must intervene. You are about to lose your grocery business. That young manager is selling everything for ‘three’ ruble. He is even selling normally expensive, valuable items for the low price of three ruble. Why are you doing this?”

The storekeeper smiled and explained, “The young man who manages my grocery store was born mute. After years of programs and private tutors, they

were able to teach him one word: *Drei*. That is all he knows and, thus, all he will ever be able to vocalize. The young man spent some time searching for work, anything that would provide him with some livelihood. He was unsuccessful in finding work. I owed his father a debt of gratitude, however, that went back twenty years. I, too, was without work and unable to support myself. I ended up in prison for stealing a few ruble so that I could buy food. This young man’s father, at great expense to himself, was able to procure my release. The least I could do was provide an avenue for his son to find meaningful work. Knowing fully well that this young man can articulate only one word, *Drei*. I arranged everything in the store in bags, with each bag priced at three ruble. Obviously, the more valuable the item, the smaller the bag. Thus, if for instance, one pound of grapes was 6 ruble, I prepared bags that were only half a pound, and so on and so forth. Indeed, every bag in the store is three ruble. All bags are not the same size.”

Rav Chaim concluded his story, stopped for a moment, and looked at the thousands of Jews who sat before him: “I was born a ‘mute,’ and, throughout the years, I have been educated to learn only one word: Torah. That is all I know. Thousands have converged here on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*. Everyone is prepared with worthy ideas, programs, etc. to elevate and intensify our personal and collective commitment to *Yiddishkeit*. This is all wonderful and meaningful. I ask only one thing: Every decision, agreement, mandate, petition that arises from this gathering should all be individually placed in a ‘bag’ in such a manner that when ‘I’ (who can say only one word) am asked, ‘What is this?’ I will be able to say, ‘Torah.’ This is the only word that I know, because this is the only criterion that matters. It is either Torah – or it is insignificant.” With that, *Rav Chaim* concluded his address and returned to his seat. The conference’s motif had been defined and launched. The leadership was now empowered to follow through on the criterion set forth by *Rav Chaim*.

ושנתם לבניך

You shall teach them thoroughly to your children. (6:7)

Rashi comments that “children” is not an exclusive category. It applies, likewise, to one’s students, since the Torah considers students to be like children. We have a responsibility to reach out and teach, or see to it that all children are taught. If one has limited time, and he must decide between teaching his own children or someone else’s children, however, his children take precedence. *Horav Yechezkel Sarna, zl, Rosh Yeshivas* Chevron, and premier expositor of the Slabodka approach to *gadlus ha'adam*, the greatness of man, was a prime example of a *Rosh Yeshivah/Rebbe* to whom his *talmidim*, students, were like children. Indeed, he wondered (concerning the above *Rashi*), if students are included in the injunction of teaching Torah, why did the Torah not simply write *V'sheantam l'talmidecha*? He explains that the Torah is actually referring to the attitude that should prevail in the loving relationship between a *rebbe* and *talmid* – no different than a father to his son. If I may add that the student’s attitude must be reciprocal – like a son to his father. One does not go without the other; otherwise, something is not right.

An incident occurred in the *yeshivah* in which one of the *bachurim*, students, was stricken with a bout of mental illness. He became quite ill, to the point that the *Rosh Yeshivah* decided that he had no recourse but to have him admitted to a medical facility that specialized in treating mental illness. Two of the older students, who had distinguished themselves both in learning and in their relationship with the *Rosh Yeshivah* (thus feeling that they could talk freely and express their feelings), decided to ask *Rav Sarna* how he could do such a thing. [They probably felt that the student would not receive the proper care and that, by being sent away, he was being neglected.]

The two students decided to present their feelings to the *Rosh Yeshivah*. They knocked on his door, and, as soon as he opened it, they asked, “How does one send a *bachur* from the *yeshivah* away? If that *bachur* was the *Rosh Yeshivah's* son, would our *Rebbe* have acted likewise? Would the *Rosh Yeshivah* have sent his own son to such a facility?” It was obvious that these two *bachurim* were infused more with temerity than with rationale. It was clear that the *Rosh Yeshivah* would be compelled to respond in a strong and decisive manner. *Horav Meir Chodos, zl, the Mashgiach* of Chevron, who happened to be sitting with *Rav Sarna*, wisely decided that this would be a good time to leave.

Rav Sarna looked at the two *bachurim* and asked, “Did you eat breakfast?” The two young men looked at one another incredulously and then turned back to the *Rosh Yeshivah* and replied, “Yes.”

“Did you sleep well last night?” *Rav Sarna* asked. Once again, they replied affirmatively, not knowing where *Rav Sarna* was going with this line of questioning.

“I did not sleep last night, or the night before, or the night before. I also have been unable to eat for days. Do you want to know why? Do you want to know what is troubling me, what it is that is preventing me from eating or sleeping? It is the current situation of your *chaver*, colleague. He is my son. After all, he is a student of the *yeshivah*. As such, he is my son. The anxiety and worry I harbor concerning his present condition permits me neither to eat nor sleep.

“On the contrary, since you came with the directive that I treat him as a son, then, by extension, he is your brother. How are you able to eat and sleep

knowing that your brother is so ill? Furthermore, as brothers, are you prepared to step forward and assume responsibility for him? Will you take him into your *dirah*, apartment, care for him, feed him, see that he sleeps and receives the emotional help that he so badly needs?"

The *Rosh Yeshivah's* stinging words broke through their smug exterior. He was right. They were as responsible as brothers as he was as a father. They assumed the responsibility and, within a few months, he emerged from his deep depression. The *Rosh HaYeshivah* had taught them that *eilu ha'talmidim*, "these are the children," means that, just as a Torah student is the *rebbe's* son, everyone in the class is his brother. What a powerful lesson!

Va'ani Tefillah

יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך – *Yiheyu l'ratzon imrei fi v'hegyon libi lefanecha.*

May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You.

David *Hamelech* authored the above words, because he was well aware that regardless of one's ability to articulate his needs, he still sustains requests and deep feelings that elude his outward expression. Some feelings are confined to the heart, because the petitioner does not know how to express himself properly. In some instances, he is quite aware of a burning issue, but does not know how – or is ashamed – to express himself, because, by praying for one source of aggression to stop, it might be the precursor of another. Thus, he allows it to remain concealed within the recesses of his heart, but this does not mean that it does not hurt. Furthermore, we often pray by rote, issuing words without prior cognitive support. Such prayer does not emanate from within our being, but remains a superficial expression.

Yiheyu l'ratzon imrei fi – is the prayer that serves as the summation, when we realize that we either might have left something out or what we have expressed was ill-conceived and not presented properly. *Yiheyu l'ratzon* can actually make the "save" on the previous prayer, but it must be expressed with profound forethought.

In loving memory of our dear Mother & Bubby,

Mrs. Chana Silberberg - נפ"ל אב תש"ס - ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Mimi Soloman & Family

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Honor the Elderly!

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In the aseres hadibros, honoring parents features significantly, thus, we will discuss:

Question #1: Respect your elders?!

"Am I required to stand up anytime I see a senior citizen walking down the street?"

Question #2: Age before wisdom?!

"I give a daf yomi shiur. Many of those who attend are old enough to be my grandfather. Am I required to stand up for them when they arrive at the shiur?"

Question #3: Elder older?

"Does one older person need to stand up for another older person?"

Introduction:

In parshas Kedoshim, the Torah teaches that there is a mitzvah to stand up before an older person and to treat a "zakein" with respect. The words of the posuk are: *Mipnei seivah takum vehadarta penei zakein*, "you should stand up for an older person and treat an 'elder' with respect" (*Vayikra* 19:32).

To begin with, we will raise several additional questions: How old does the person need to be to qualify as being "older"? Does it make a difference if it is an older man or an older woman? For how long must I remain standing? Is there any difference between someone who is "older," in *lashon kodesh*, *seivah*, and someone who is an "elder," which is the way I translated the word *zakein*? Is a demonstration of respect required, regardless of how religiously observant the older person is?

Elder or older?

I was very deliberate to translate the word *zakein* as "elder." Indeed, the *lashon kodesh* word *zakein*, and the English word *elder*, carry the same two different meanings. The word *zakein* can mean an older person, but it can also mean a scholar, or someone who is respected for his sage advice and leadership qualities. Both meanings are similarly included in the English word "elder," but not necessarily in the word "older." Thus, the expression, "respect your elders," does not have to refer to someone older than you are, since there can be a young elder, but it is difficult to have a young elder.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 32b) presents a three-way dispute as to what type of older person, or "zakein," is included in the mitzvah. According to the *tanna kamma*, the mitzvah applies only to someone who is both a Torah scholar and elderly. In his opinion, there is no requirement to stand up for a profound Torah scholar who is young. Rabbi Yosi Hagelili disagrees, contending that there is a mitzvah to rise and show respect both to an older person who is not a profound

scholar, as long as he knows some Torah, and to a Torah scholar, even if he is young. A third *tanna*, *Isi ben Yehudah*, rules that there is a requirement to stand up for any Torah scholar and for an older person, provided the older person is basically Torah observant. (This reflects the opinion of *Rabbeinu Tam*, which is the approach accepted by the halachic authorities. According to *Rashi*, *Isi ben Yehudah* requires standing up for an older person, even if he is willingly non-observant, and even if he is a *rosho*.)

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 32b-33a) concludes that the halacha follows the third *tanna*, *Isi ben Yehudah*, which is accepted by the halachic authorities. Thus, there is a requirement to stand up for an older person, if he is halachically observant, even if he is not a scholar.

The Rambam's conclusion is that a young *talmid chochom* should demonstrate honor to someone elderly, even if the older person is not a *talmid chochom*. This means that he is required to rise slightly to demonstrate honor, but he is not required to stand up fully (*Hilchos Talmud Torah* 6:9, as explained by *Tur Yoreh Deah* 244 and later authorities). The *poskim* refer to this demonstration of honor as *hiddur*.

There is a minority opinion that no one is required to stand up fully before an older person who is not a Torah scholar, and that it is sufficient to rise slightly (*hiddur*), as a show of honor (*Shu"t Binyamin Ze'ev* #243; see *Aruch Hashulchan*, *Yoreh Deah* 244:10). However, the *Tur* (*Yoreh Deah* 244) and most later authorities do not accept this approach. They conclude that it is a *mitzvas aseih min haTorah* for anyone but a *talmid chochom* to stand up for an older person.

Why is a *talmid chochom* exempt?

This sounds strange! Where else do we have a mitzvah that applies to everyone but a *talmid chochom*? The answer is that the Torah's mitzvah is to show respect to Torah scholars and to elderly people who are Torah observant. Of the two categories, a Torah scholar deserves greater respect. If a *talmid chochom* were obligated to stand up for a non-educated elderly person, this would mean that the Torah is respecting age before wisdom. In fact, the Torah respects Torah wisdom before age.

Nevertheless, the "young" *talmid chochom* should rise slightly to demonstrate his respect for the older person. Since rising slightly, without standing up completely, is not a *tircha*, this is not considered showing disrespect to the Torah that the young *talmid chochom* represents.

Age before wisdom?!

At this point, let us address the second of our opening questions: "I give a daf yomi shiur. Many of those who attend are old enough to be my grandfather. Am I required to stand up for them when they arrive at the shiur?"

In other words, is there a requirement for the *rebbe* to stand up for his *talmid* who qualifies as a *seivah*? This question is discussed by several *acharonim*. The work *She'eiris Yaakov*, by *Rav Yisroel Yaakov Algazi*, is quoted as ruling that the *rebbe* is required to stand up for his *talmid*, the *seivah*. However, the commentary *Leiv Meivin*, by *Rav Bechor Yitzchak Navardo*, a nineteenth-century, Turkish *posek*, proves that the *rebbe* is required to stand up for his *talmid* only when the *seivah* himself is a *talmid chochom* and only when the *rebbe* is not obviously a much greater scholar than the *seivah* (*Hilchos Talmud Torah* 6:9). In other words, the only time a *rebbe* is required to demonstrate honor to an older person who is his *talmid* is when they are both *talmidei chochomim* of approximately similar stature, such that the younger *talmid chochom* is not obviously a much greater scholar than the older one. Thus, whether our daf yomi *maggid shiur* is required to stand up for the golden-aged attendees of his shiur is a dispute between the *She'eiris Yaakov* and the *Leiv Meivin*.

An older woman

Is there a mitzvah to stand up for an older woman?

The *Sefer Chassidim* (#578) rules that there is. Presumably, he is referring to a woman who is halachically observant, even if she is not very knowledgeable about halacha. There are halachic authorities who may disagree with the ruling of the *Sefer Chassidim* (see *Halachos Ketanos* 1:154; *Shu"t Beis Yehudah*, *Yoreh Deah* #28; *Birkei Yosef*, *Choshen Mishpat* 17:5; *Bris Olam* #578).

Two elderlies

Is an elderly person required to rise for another elderly person?

The *Tur* suggests that two *talmidei chachomim* or two elderly people should show respect (*hiddur*) for one another, although they are not required to stand up fully. This approach is codified by the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah* 244:8). Some authorities explain that this is only when the two are of approximately equal stature as *talmidei chachomim*. However, if one of the *talmidei chachomim* is a greater *talmid chochom* than the other, the "lesser" *talmid chochom* is required to stand up for his more learned colleague (*Leiv Meivin*).

How old?

For how old a person are you required to stand up?

In the context of this mitzvah, the halachic authorities mention what appear to be three different ages.

1. The Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 6:9) says that the mitzvah applies to someone “pronouncedly old,” which does not appear to have an obvious, objective criterion.

2. Based on the words of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (end of Chapter 5), ben shiv'im le'seivah, the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch rule that these laws apply to a person of the age of 70.

3. The Arizal is quoted as being strict to observe this mitzvah for people who have reached the age of 60 (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:4).

However, the Tur explains that the Rambam's term “pronouncedly old” means 70, and that he is not disputing the Rambam in this matter.

In addition, there are various interpretations why the Arizal applied this mitzvah to someone who achieved the age of 60. Most conclude that the Arizal agrees with the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch, but that he had a personal chumrah, which was not halachically required, to stand up for a person once the honoree turned 60. Therefore, most rule that even those who follow kabbalistic practices are required to rise only for someone who is 70 years old (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:1; Leiv Meivin).

The halachic conclusion follows the opinion of the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch, ruling that the requirement to stand up for an older person applies only when the older person is at least 70 years old. This halacha holds true today, notwithstanding that 70 is no longer considered advanced in age.

An older person may be mocheil on his honor, and someone who knows that a particular person really does not want people to stand up for him should follow the older person's wishes. Disregarding his personal desire is not demonstrating respect.

No respect

There is no requirement to rise and show respect when you are in a place where demonstrating respect is inappropriate, such as a bathhouse or bathroom.

When do you stand?

The requirement to stand up for a talmid chochom or an older person applies only when he is within four amos, approximately seven feet, of where you are. There are exceptions to this rule. There is a requirement to stand up for the person who taught you most of the Torah that you know, called your rebbi muvhak. In this case, you are required to stand up once you see the rebbi walking by, even at a distance (Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 244:13).

Why four amos?

If you stand up when the talmid chochom or the older person is within your four amos, it is apparent that the reason you stood up is to honor him.

Don't lose work time

There is an interesting halachic ruling, that there is no requirement to rise and show respect when a person will lose work time as a result. Therefore, a self-employed person is not required to stand up, should he be working when an elderly person comes by, and a worker in the employ of someone else is not permitted to rise while he is working, since he is taking away from the time he owes his employer. In other words, an employee is not permitted to be machmir and stand up when it costs money to a third party. Although one can argue that, in today's business environment which accepts reasonable coffee breaks and other occasional, brief interruptions, it is permitted for an employee to stand up to show respect for a talmid chochom, we learn a very important lesson how halacha views the responsibility of an employee to his employer. This discussion will be left for a different, future article.

Standing up while learning Torah

The halacha is that someone in the middle of studying Torah is required to stand up for a talmid chochom or for an elderly person (when the halacha requires, as explained above). This is because of a general rule that performing mitzvos of the Torah pushes aside studying Torah.

Transported

What is the halacha, if the elderly person is being carried or wheeled in a wheelchair? Is there still a responsibility to rise when he passes within four amos? The answer is that there is a responsibility to rise when the elderly person passes by, regardless as to whether he is walking or being transported (see Kiddushin 33b). Therefore, it is required to stand up when an older person passes you while he is being pushed in a wheelchair.

As I mentioned above, you are required to stand up for an elderly person, once he is within four amos of where you are. There is a dispute among authorities whether you may sit down as soon as the scholar, or elderly person, passes by, or whether you should wait to sit down until he has passed beyond your four amos (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:12; Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 244:13).

At this point, we can address our opening question:

“Am I required to stand up anytime I see a senior citizen walking down the street?”

The answer is that if he is over seventy years old (or appears to be), observes halacha, and you are not busy earning a living, you are required to stand up for him, once he is within your four amos.

In shul or while davening?

Is there a mitzvah to stand up for a talmid chochom or an elderly person when you are in the middle of davening? There is an authority who contends that since you are in the middle of showing respect to Hashem, you should not, then, show respect for a human, who is, himself, required to show respect to Hashem (quoted by Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:1). However, the other halachic authorities disagree, contending that fulfilling Hashem's mitzvah is showing respect to Hashem, and, therefore, should be observed while you are davening (see Birkei Yosef ad locum and Shu"t Radbaz that he quotes).

Your whole house

The Birkei Yosef raises the following question: In general, halacha considers your entire house to be one area of four amos. This has many halachic ramifications. For example, upon awaking in the morning most people wash their hands somewhere in the house, without being careful that they walk less than four amos before doing so.

The question he raises is whether we consider the entire house to be four amos germane to standing up for an older person. If we do, that would mean that whenever you are indoors and you see an older person walking around or being transported in the same house, you are required to remain standing up for him until he reaches his destination, even if he never comes within your four amos!

The halachic authorities conclude that there is no difference between being inside or being outside – in either instance, you are not required to stand until the older person is within your four amos. This is because the point of four amos germane to this mitzvah is that a greater distance away is not apparent that you are standing to demonstrate honor. This is true whether you are indoors or outdoors, and, therefore, there is no requirement to stand up indoors for an older person until he is within your four amos (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:5).

Discordant scholar

The Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 244:13) rules that there is no requirement to stand up to show respect for a Torah scholar who creates disputes that are not for the sake of Heaven. This ruling would also apply to an elderly person who creates disputes that are not lesheim shamayim. Even if he meets the age requirement and is observant, if he is a baal machlokess, there is no mitzvah to rise for him.

Can't see

Does the mitzvah to stand up for a talmid chochom or an elderly person apply when the honoree will be unaware that you did so, such as, if he cannot see? The She'eilos Uteshuvos Halachos Ketanos (1:154) rules that you are not required to stand up for an older person who cannot see that you did so (quoted by Shearim Hametzuyanim Behalacha 144:5). However, many other authorities dispute this conclusion (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:2).

Conclusion

When the posuk (Bereishis 24:1) mentions that Avraham Avinu got older, it uses the expression, ba bayamim, “he came with his days,” the first time this expression occurs in Chumash, even though many people had lived much longer than Avraham. The Gemara explains that this was the first instance of a person looking like an old man. Most people are sensitive about looking older, but the Midrash writes that Avraham Avinu asked to look elderly, so that people would know to treat him with respect! As the Gemara expresses it, “Until the time of Avraham, there was no concept in the world of people looking old. Someone who wanted to talk to Avraham, would (by mistake) go to Yitzchok, since they looked so similar, and vice versa. Avraham then prayed to Hashem, and the concept of appearing elderly began for the first time in history” (Bava Metzia 87a). The Bereishis Rabbah adds, “Avraham requested to look old. He said to Hashem, ‘Creator of all worlds, a man and his son can arrive in a place, and no one knows which of them to honor. If you crown him with the appearance of being elderly, people know whom to honor!’ Hashem answered him. ‘You requested it; it will begin with you.’ From the beginning of the Torah, until Avraham, there is no mention of anyone getting old” (Bereishis Rabbah 65:9).

Avraham Avinu's outlook should serve as a wise counterbalance to modern society's adulation and adoration of youth. This approach makes aging something to dread, rather than something deserving of respect. Instead, Avraham Avinu referred to signs of advanced age as a well-earned “crown.”

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה