



BS"D

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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAESCHANAN - 5785

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**Tidbits • Parashas Va'eschanan** - Nachamu 5785 Ira Zlotowitz  
<[Iraz@klalgovoah.org](mailto:Iraz@klalgovoah.org)> Unsubscribe Parashas Va'eschanan - Nachamu •  
August 9th • 15 Av 5785 **In memory of Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz ZT"l**  
This Shabbos, August 9th, is Tu B'Av. Av Harachamim and Tzidkascha  
are omitted. Several notable events took place on Tu B'Av: The decree that  
the generation of the Midbar would die and not enter Eretz Yisrael was not  
carried out on those still alive in the 40th year. The prohibition against  
women marrying outside of their shevet was lifted. The prohibition enacted  
against Shevet Binyamin after the tragic episode of Pilegesh b'Givah was  
lifted. Hoshea removed the guards that Yeravam had placed to prevent Bnei  
Yisrael from Aliyah Leregel to Yerushalayim. During the beginning of the  
Second Beis HaMikdash, the annual wood quota needed for that winter's  
korbanos was filled. The Roman occupiers permitted burial of the victims  
of the massacre at Beitar during the Bar Kochba rebellion. Miraculously,  
the bodies had not decomposed, despite exposure to the elements for  
possibly a year. The single women of Yerushalayim would dress in white  
and dance in the vineyards seeking to attract appropriate shidduchim.  
The minhag of most Ashkenazi congregations is to stand when the Aseres  
HaDibros are read during Kerias HaTorah of Parashas Va'eschanan. Most  
Sephardic congregations are particular not to follow this practice.  
The haftarah of "Nachamu Nachamu Ami" is leined. This is the first in a  
series of seven haftaros known as the Shivasa D'nechemta, the seven  
haftaros of consolation.

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is at 10:43 PM on Friday night,  
August 8th.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 3

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Avodah Zara 52 • Yerushalmi: Pesachim 72 •  
Mishnah Yomis: Zevachim 8:6-7 • Oraysa (coming week): Moed Katan  
16a-18a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 194:1-11

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rabbi to wish  
them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to  
connect with them as well!

Shabbos Nachamu is Shabbos Parasha Va'eschanan, August 9th and is also  
Tu B'Av. Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Elul is in two weeks Shabbos  
Parashas Re'eh.

Rosh Chodesh Elul is on Sunday & Monday, August 24th-25th.

Va'eschanan: Hashem denies Moshe's (515!) pleas to be allowed to enter  
Eretz Yisrael • Do not add to or subtract from the commandments • Torah  
wisdom will make you great in the eyes of the nations • No nation is as  
close to Hashem as you are • Remember how the nation stood at Har Sinai  
• Hashem took you out of Mitzrayim to be His special people and to serve  
no one but Him • Hashem will not forsake you in exile because of His  
covenant • Never has any nation been shown miracles like those you have  
witnessed nor survived being addressed by Hashem • Hashem is supreme  
and there is nothing besides Him • Moshe sets aside three cities of refuge  
east of the Yarden • The Aseres HaDibros • Shema Yisrael • The mitzvah  
of Ahavas Hashem • Tefillin and Mezuzah • Do not forget Hashem amidst  
plenty • Transmit the story of the Exodus to your children • Destroy the  
nations of the land; don't mingle with them or learn from them • You are a  
holy nation to Hashem • Hashem is generous to those who love Him and  
keep His mitzvos • Hashem punishes His enemies

Haftarah: The haftarah of Nachamu (Yeshaya 40:1-26) relays not only the  
consolation over the churban, but also foretells the consolation the nation  
will experience in the future, following instances of pain and destruction.  
Despite endless persecution, "Netzach Yisrael lo yishaker", our nation  
continues to survive, constantly rejuvenated through solace ordained from  
Above.

Parashas Va'eschanan: 118 Pesukim • 8 Obligations • 4 Prohibitions

1) Do not covet another's possessions. 2) Accept the yoke of Heaven. 3)  
Love Hashem. 4) Set aside time to study Torah. 5) Recite Krias Shema  
twice daily. 6-7) Wear tefillin on the arm and head. 8) Affix mezuzos to  
your doorposts. 9) Do not suspect an accepted Navi of falsifying a  
prophecy. 10) Conquer and destroy the Seven Nations that inhabit Canaan.  
11) Do not be overly gracious or grant gifts to idol worshippers. 12) Do not  
intermarry with the Seven Nations.

Mitzvah Highlight: The Chinuch says that it is within the power of man to  
quash thoughts and pangs of jealousy that come to him, as one's heart and  
mind are, in fact, under a person's control.

"נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי" Be comforted, be comforted My people (Haftarah of Shabbos  
Nachamu - Yeshaya 40:1)

The Yalkut Shimoni (Yeshaya 44:3) relates that the greatest Nevi'im  
attempted to console Klal Yisrael after the churban, as did the Avos and  
Moshe Rabbeinu, to no avail. Only once Hashem joined personally in  
comforting them were they comforted. נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי - Comfort them  
together with Me.

Surely, the nation was trusting of the words of the great Nevi'im; why then  
was it necessary for Hashem personally to comfort them?

Rav Yeruchem Olshin shlit"a quotes the Maharal (Netzach Yisrael 9) that  
explains that the churban and resulting exile are a result of the breakdown  
in the relationship between Hashem and His chosen nation. The various  
sins only resulted in galus once it reached a point where the covenant and  
connection were considered broken. According to this approach, Rav  
Shneur Kotler zt"l explains, that in essence, the devastation of galus felt by  
the nation was the separation from the Almighty. Therefore, for the words  
of consolation to be appreciated, they needed to hear from Hashem Himself  
that the relationship and closeness will be attained once again.

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from: YUTorah <[yutorah@comms.yu.edu](mailto:yutorah@comms.yu.edu)> date: Aug 7, 2025, 6:02 PM

**Sometimes More is Less**

**Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

In this week's Torah reading, which describes Moses' repeated entreaties to

God that he be permitted to enter the Land of Israel, there are a striking number of allusions to excess, even in a single verse: God responds (Deut. 3:26) “Rav lakh – enough!” or literally, “this is too much from you”. “Al tosef daber Elai – do not speak to me anymore (lit., do not add to your talking)”. The verse begins by stating God’s anger, but the word that is used is *vayitabber*, which comes from the same word used for pregnancy and for a leap year, conveying “fullness”. Then, seemingly unrelatedly, we read of the prohibition of *baltosif*, of adding on to the mitzvot of the Torah (4:2).

It is perhaps self-evident why there is a prohibition to subtract from the Torah, as commanded in the same verse, in fact prompting the question of why it needs to be stated. The problem with adding to the Torah, in contrast, is harder to understand.

There are a number of suggestions as to why this is: one is that the Torah is a perfect balance of values, often requiring one to make room for the other. In fact, this is stated explicitly a few verses later (4:6), and, notably, the weekday Torah reading from this morning dips into these second aliyah and includes this verse. One who thinks he is going “above and beyond” may actually be simultaneously subtracting from some crucial area. Another suggestion is that, in actuality, it is indeed subtracting from the principles of the Torah that is the concern. However, one who assigns to himself the authority to add to the Torah will also ultimately come to subtract (see Torah Temimah).

This concern for excess and imprecision is present in all areas, even in moral judgements. One who uses extreme language in this area may think he is expressing elevated sensitivity and righteousness; in reality, however, he may be detracting from the ability of such terminology to accomplish its stated goals. Further, he may actively ignore, or even validate, moral travesties through this disproportionate judgement.

This is evident on the world stage at this moment. Accusations against Israel that result in an endorsement of an openly genocidal terror group, that turn a blind eye to deniably starving hostages being obviously tortured, and that encourage that group to continue and recommit to that behavior, undermine the very idea of morality.

from: **The Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Legacy** <info@rabbisacks.org>

date: Aug 7, 2025, 11:20 AM

subject: **A Tiny, Treasured People (Va'etchanan)**

written by Rabbi Sacks in 2012

There is a statement made towards the end of Parshat Va'etchanan, and it is so inconspicuous that we can sometimes miss it, but it is a statement with such far reaching implications that it challenges the impression that has prevailed thus far in the Torah, giving an entirely new complexion to the biblical image of the people Israel.

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 This is not what we have heard thus far. In Bereishit, God promises the patriarchs that their descendants will be like the stars of the heaven, the sand on the sea shore, the dust of the earth, uncountable.

Abraham will be the father, not just of one nation but of many. At the beginning of Exodus we read of how the covenantal family, numbering a mere seventy when they went down to Egypt, were “fertile and prolific, and their population increased. They became so numerous that the land was filled with them” (Ex. 1:7).

Three times in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses describes the Israelites as being “as many as the stars of the sky” (Deut. 1:10, Deut. 10:22, Deut. 28:62). King Solomon speaks of himself as set among “the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number” (1 Kings 3:8). The prophet Hosea says that “the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted” (Hos. 2:1).

In all these texts - and others - it is the size, the numerical greatness, of the people that is emphasised. What then are we to make of Moses’ words that

speak of its smallness? Targum Yonatan interprets it not to be about numbers at all but about self-image. He translates it not as “the fewest of peoples” but as “the most lowly and humble of peoples.” Rashi gives a similar reading, citing Abraham’s words “I am but dust and ashes,” and Moses and Aaron’s, “Who are we?”

Rashbam and Chizkuni give the more straightforward explanation that Moses is contrasting the Israelites with the seven nations they would be fighting in the land of Canaan/Israel. God would lead the Israelites to victory despite the fact that they were outnumbered by the local inhabitants.

Rabbenu Bachya quotes Maimonides, who says that we would have expected God, King of the Universe, to have chosen the most numerous nation in the world as His people, since “the glory of the king is in the multitude of people” (Prov. 14:28).

God did not do so. Thus Israel should know they are a people extraordinarily blessed that God chose them, despite their smallness, to be His *am segulah*, His special treasure.

Rabbenu Bachya finds himself forced to give a more complex reading to resolve the contradiction of Moses, in Deuteronomy, saying both that Israel is the smallest of peoples, and also “as many as the stars of the sky.” He turns it into a hypothetical subjunctive, meaning: God would still have chosen you, even if you had been the smallest of the peoples.

Sforno gives a simple and straightforward reading: God did not choose a nation for the sake of His honour. Had He done so He would undoubtedly have chosen a mighty and numerous people. His choice had nothing to do with honour and everything to do with love. He loved the patriarchs for their willingness to heed His voice; therefore He loves their children.

Yet there is something in this verse that resonates throughout much of Jewish history. Historically Jews were and are a small people: today less than a fifth of one per cent of the population of the world. There were two reasons for this. First is the heavy toll taken through the ages by exile and persecution, directly by Jews killed in massacres and pogroms, indirectly by those who converted – in fifteenth century Spain and nineteenth century Europe – in order to avoid persecution (tragically, even conversion did not work; racial antisemitism persisted in both cases). The Jewish population is a mere fraction of what it might have been had there been no Hadrian, no crusades, and no antisemitism.

The second reason is that Jews did not seek to convert others. Had they done so they would have been closer in numbers to Christianity (2.2 billion) or Islam (1.3 billion). In fact, Malbim reads something like this into our verse. The previous verses have said that the Israelites are about to enter a land with seven nations, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Moses warns them against intermarriage with them, not for racial but for religious reasons: “they will turn your children away from following Me to serve other gods.” Malbim interprets our verse as Moses saying to the Israelites, ‘Don’t justify outmarriage on the grounds that it will increase the number of Jews. God is not interested in numbers.’

There was a moment when Jews might have sought to convert others (to be sure, there was one instance when they did. The Hasmonean priest-king John Hyrcanus I forcibly converted the Edomites, known as the Idumeneans. Herod was one of their number). The period in question was the Roman Empire in the first century. Jews numbered some 10 per cent of the empire, and there were many Romans who admired aspects of their faith and way of life. The pagan deities of the Hellenistic world were losing their appeal and plausibility, and throughout the centres of the Mediterranean, individuals were adopting Jewish practices. Two aspects of Judaism stood in their way: the commandments and circumcision. In the end, Jews chose not to compromise their way of life for the sake of making converts. The Hellenistic people who sympathised with Judaism mostly adopted Pauline Christianity instead. Consistently throughout history, Jews have chosen to be true to themselves and to stay small rather than make concessions for the sake of increasing numbers.

Why have Divine Providence or human choice or both, eventuated in the sheer smallness of the Jewish people? Could it be, quite simply, that through the Jewish people God is telling humankind that you do not need to be numerous to be great. Nations are not judged by their size but by their contribution to the human heritage. Of this the most compelling proof is that a nation as small as the Jews could produce an ever-renewed flow of prophets, priests, poets, philosophers, sages, saints, halachists, aggadists, codifiers, commentators, rebbes and roshei yeshivot; that they could also yield some of the world's greatest writers, artists, musicians, film-makers, academics, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople and technological innovators. Out of all proportion to their numbers Jews could and can be found working as lawyers fighting injustice, economists fighting poverty, doctors fighting disease, and teachers fighting ignorance. You do not need numbers to enlarge the spiritual and moral horizons of humankind. You need other things altogether: a sense of the worth and dignity of the individual, of the power of human possibility to transform the world, of the importance of giving everyone the best education they can have, of making each of us feel part of a collective responsibility to ameliorate the human condition, and a willingness to take high ideals and enact them in the real world, unswayed by disappointments and defeats. Nowhere is this more in evidence today than among the people of Israel in the state of Israel: traduced in the media and pilloried by much of the world, yet still, year after year, producing human miracles in medicine, agriculture, technology, the arts, as if the word "impossible" did not exist in the Hebrew language. When, therefore, we feel fearful and depressed about Israel's plight, it is worth returning to Moses' words:

"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."

Small? Yes. Still surrounded, as the Israelites were then, by "nations larger and stronger than you." But that small people, defying the laws of history, outlived all the world's great empires, and still has a message of hope for humanity. You don't have to be large to be great. If you are open to a power greater than yourself, you will become greater than yourself. Israel today still carries that message to the world.

from: Aish.com Weekly Torah Portion <newsletterserver@aish.com>

date: Aug 7, 2025, 7:00 AM

subject: V'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)

### **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**by Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig**

V'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)

GOOD MORNING! The Shabbat after Tisha B'Av is called "Shabbat Nachamu – Sabbath of Consolation." It is named after the first words of the haftarah (a scriptures reading in synagogue after the weekly Torah portion). This week's haftarah begins with the opening verse of Isaiah 40, and refers to the Almighty instructing his prophets to bring solace to the Jewish nation, "Comfort my people, comfort them." Shabbat Nachamu is no ordinary Shabbat; it is seen as a spiritual turning point. After three weeks of sorrow and reflection on the many tragedies that befell our people, this Shabbat offers the first rays of comfort, signaling a movement toward healing and renewal. In many communities, the atmosphere is notably joyful. Some traditions include special meals, singing, and even communal gatherings or outdoor celebrations. Some sages (see Ritva on Ta'anit 30a) say that the food we eat on this Shabbat should be extra special, like that of a chag – festival.

It is also a popular time for weddings, as the period of semi-mourning known as the Three Weeks has ended and the spirit of hope and consolation makes it an auspicious time to celebrate new beginnings. This is particularly relevant to this week's Torah reading where we find one of the consequences of straying from the Almighty: "God will scatter you among the nations, and only a small number will remain among the nations to which God will lead you" (Deuteronomy 4:27).

This, astonishingly accurate, predictive statement can be better understood with the following comparison. According to a Chinese census taken around 2 CE, there were about 50 million Chinese people in the world. Today, there are about 1.5 billion Chinese people. Columbia University's Professor Salo Baron, who was considered among the most important researchers and historians of Judaism of that period, estimated the number of Jews in the world at that time to be about eight million.

If the Jewish population had grown at the same rate as the Chinese, there would be close to 240 million Jews in the world today. Yet, as the Torah presciently foretold, the worldwide Jewish population hovers around 13 million. Obviously, worldwide dispersion, persecution, and outright annihilation all contribute to this rather depressing statistic. However, this week's Torah reading also closes with a message of hope:

"God did not desire you, nor choose you, because you were greater (in number) than any people. Rather, He chose you because you were the least of all peoples" (Deuteronomy 7:7).

At first blush, the presumption that any people should qualify to be chosen as "God's Nation" merely on the strength of population size seems rather odd. Why should that be a qualifying feature at all?

The great Biblical commentator known as Rashi takes a novel approach to this verse. He explains (ad loc) that the Torah is not discussing population size at all. Instead, Rashi says that the verse is telling us that the Jewish nation was specifically chosen because they do not ascribe greatness to themselves. As the verse goes on to say, "because you were the least of all peoples."

Rashi cites examples of Jewish leaders who, despite their lofty status, did not ascribe any greatness to themselves. Abraham was the founder of Judaism and, according to the Torah, took on a role in world leadership (Genesis 17:5). Nevertheless, immediately after that designation, he referred to himself as nothing more than "dust and ash" (Genesis 18:27).

Again, shortly after the great miracles of the Ten Plagues, the Splitting of the Red Sea, and the freeing of the Jewish nation from bondage, Moses and Aaron referred to themselves as "totally insignificant" (Exodus 16:7). If we examine the royal line of Jewish kings, we see a similar pattern – the first king of the Jewish people was King Saul who was chosen for his humble and modest personality. In fact, even after Samuel anointed him king he simply went home and did not even tell his family that he had been appointed king. When Samuel wanted to present him to the people Saul actually hid!

There is an extraordinary lesson here in how Judaism views leadership. The Talmud says that kingship is in reality servitude (Horayot 10a and 10b). When King Solomon died and the people came to his son (and heir to the throne) Rechavam to complain that King Solomon's tax burdens were too great, he sought advice from the elders that advised his father. They told him. "If you will be a servant to these people and speak gently to them, they will be your subjects forever" (Kings I 12:7). In other words, for a king to be successful must view himself as a servant of the people. He ignored their advice and the kingdom became divided; 10 of the 12 tribes established a separate monarchy.

Elsewhere (Kiddushin 82b) the Talmud suggests the jobs to which certain animals would be best suited, e.g. a fox who is cunning would make a good salesman. The Talmud projects that a suitable vocation for a lion would be a porter. This seems very strange, how is it possible that the king of all the animals would be a lowly porter?

The Talmud is teaching us that a king's main function is to empower others. A king, to be both effective and accepted as a leader, must ensure that his position is never solely about him; his focus must be on making everyone around him great. Regarding the Almighty Himself, the Talmud states, "Said Rabbi Yochanan, 'Everywhere you find His greatness you'll also find His humility'" (Megillah 31a). This means that God Himself ensured that creation is not about Him; it is about man fulfilling his ultimate potential. The essence of creation is for man to have a space he perceives as his own and then to use his free will to build a relationship with the Almighty and achieve the most blissful existence possible, in this world and the next. To summarize Newton's Law of Universal Gravity, objects exert a force on one another equal to their mass. Imagine an elephant playing tug of war with a mouse; even though they both exert equal force on the rope, the mouse does all the moving. This gravitational force or "attraction" of smaller objects to larger ones is a law of physics and simply a reality of life. This concept is used all the time to get individuals to join larger groups; Apple, McDonald's, and Amazon continually urge people to join the hundreds of millions of others who enjoy their product. Because of this tendency to want to belong to something "bigger" the Torah dispels the presumption that the Almighty chose the Jewish people because of their large population. In theory, one might think that it would make sense for the Almighty to choose the largest and most influential people as his emissaries in this world; this way everyone would "see the light" and quickly hop on the popular bandwagon. But that would be a colossal mistake.

When one simply joins a movement to belong to something larger, it also means giving up personal development and growth. Consider monolithic societies like communism where individual achievement is meaningless. Nobody in that society has any incentive to develop themselves. Because man was created to develop himself and achieve, this arrested development leads to overall misery, low morale,

and a downward spiral of the human spirit.

It is exactly for this reason that, according to Rashi, the Almighty chose the Jewish nation to be His ambassadors to the world. We are small in number; we are not seeking more adherents; in fact, Judaism wholeheartedly discourages it! Judaism is totally unique in that it has a non-threatening universal message for the world: “You do not have to change your affiliation. You can develop yourselves through the seven Noachide laws – i.e. worship the one true God (monotheism), be moral (don’t kill, don’t steal, etc.), don’t abuse animals, and set up a just society through court systems.” That’s it!

Simply put, Jews believe that you do not have to be Jewish to build a relationship with the Almighty and go to heaven. As Jews, our goal should be to practice the leadership of our founding fathers Abraham and Moses whose approach to others was always about making them great and never focusing on their own personal achievements. We should focus on helping others build an awareness of the Almighty and teach how they too might live in a theocentric universe. This is the role of the Jewish nation in the world.

The superiority complex that many Jews maintain as “God’s chosen people” is totally unjustified. We were chosen to help others become great; we are not “better” than others. Moses – for all his greatness – did not feel that he was “better” than anyone else. The example set by the founders of Judaism is that true leadership is about helping others achieve greatness and not focusing on your own self-aggrandizement.

Sadly, this very message is lost on many. There are whole segments of Jewish society that have chosen to live within large monolithic communities and have all but forsaken helping their brethren achieve similar personal development. There is an air of elitism about them that should be particularly alarming to anyone who is paying attention. This self-congratulatory attitude results in self-absorption, which leads to moral decline.

Unfortunately, when we forget our roots and Jewish society becomes too self-absorbed then division grows within our ranks. Subsequently, the Almighty has to remind us, painfully, that we need one another and that we should be focused on others’ needs. This is the message of Shabbos Nachamu. It is a beacon of light after darkness, inviting individuals and communities to console one another and restore unity, and embrace hope as they move forward and heal as a unified nation.

Torah Portion of the week

Va’etchanan, Deuteronomy 3:23 - 7:11 Moses pleads with God to enter the Holy Land, but is turned down. (Remember, God always answers your prayers – sometimes with a “yes,” sometimes with a “no,” and sometimes with a “not yet.”) Moses commands the Children of Israel not to add or subtract from the words of the Torah and to keep all of the Commandments. He then reminds them that God has no shape or form and that we should not make or worship idols of any kind.

The cities of Bezer, Ramot, and Golan are designated as Cities of Refuge east of the Jordan river. Accidental murderers can escape there to avoid revengeful relatives. They then wait there until tried.

from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

date: Aug 7, 2025, 10:32 AM

subject: Morals and Meanings in Va’eschanan

Shabbos Nachamu – A Double Measure of Comfort

The haftarahs for the seven weeks that follow Tisha b’Av are known as “Shiva de’Nechemta – the Seven [Haftarahs] Comfort.” Normally, words of comfort can help a person forget their sorrows and look forward to better times. In these seven weeks, the matter attains a higher level, for the longing that is inspired by hearing about the comfort that awaits us in future times can itself be instrumental in bringing those times about.

The first of the seven special haftarahs begins with Hashem’s call to comfort the Jewish people. Indeed, is after this opening call that the Shabbos receives its name: Shabbos Nachamu. The verse reads:

נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי יֹאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

Comfort, comfort, My people, says your God.[1]

Commenting on the double expression in our verse, “nachamu nachamu,” the midrash says that in the future, we will be comforted in double measure.[2]

This idea seems somewhat puzzling. Presumably, there is a certain point when we will be fully comforted. What is the meaning of being comforted beyond that point?

What does it add?

In truth, the matter begins earlier than this, for our verse proceeds to state:

כִּי לָקַח מִיָּד ה' כְּפָלִיִּים בְּכָל חַטּוֹתָיִהּ

For she has received from Hashem’s hand a double measure for her sins.

Here too, we wonder, what does it mean to receive a “double measure” of punishment? Surely, there is a certain amount of retribution that is due for our wrongdoings, beyond which anything else is superfluous!

**Rabbi Akiva’s Laughter** There is a well-known episode that related in the Gemara concerning Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues.[3] They were once passing by the Temple Mount and they witnessed foxes emerging from the sight where the Holy of Holies had stood. Upon seeing this, Rabbi Akiva’s colleagues started crying, while he started laughing! Upon being asked why he was laughing, he responded by asking his friends why they were crying. They replied, “Seeing a site so holy that now lies in utter desolation and degradation, shall we not cry?” To this, Rabbi Akiva responded that there are two prophecies which are mentioned in conjunction with each other, one of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and other of the future redemption. He continued, “Now that I have seen the first prophecy being fulfilled, I know that the second one will be fulfilled as well.”

These words themselves need explanation. Did Rabbi Akiva not believe that the future redemption would occur until he saw the prophecy of the destruction fulfilled? Additionally, even if he is now assured that the redemption will take place in future, surely the current state of destruction is still cause for mourning – and certainly not for laughter!

**Present and Future Blessings** The Gemara states:

הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, עַל בְּשׂוּרוֹת טוֹבוֹת אוֹמֵר “בִּירוֹךְ הוּא” וְעַל בְּשׂוּרוֹת רָעוֹת אוֹמֵר “בִּירוֹךְ הוּא”

In this world, upon hearing good tidings, one says, “Blessed is He Who is good and does good,” while upon hearing bad tidings one says, “Blessed is the true Judge.” But in the World to Come all of [the blessings] will be, “Blessed He Who is good and does good.”[4]

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, in his commentary Tzalach to the Gemara, explains that when we say that in future times there will only be the blessing of Hatov v’Hameitiv, this does not mean merely to say that there will be no more bad tidings, for in that case, why focus on the absence of the blessing and not on the absence of the cause for the blessing, i.e., bad tidings themselves?

Rather, the Gemara means to say that in the future we will recite the blessing Hatov v’Hameitiv even regarding things over which we recited the blessing Dayan ha’Emes in this world! As if to say, in the future we will come to understand how even things that we perceived at the time to be bad were in reality for our benefit. In this light, there will be no more room for the blessing over bad tidings for we will come to recognize that all tidings were in reality good ones.[5]

Indeed, this is the meaning of being punished in double measure, for the difficulties experienced by the Jewish people in exile are in fact twofold. Beyond the hardships themselves, there is the additional difficulty of being unable to fathom how these experiences are part of Hashem’s plan and, indeed, where He is during these times. To this end, the verse states that in the future the comfort will likewise be in double measure. Not only will we be comforted in the normal sense of the word, assured that our travails are behind us and only good things are to come, but we will also come to understand how the difficult times brought all this about.

Returning to the episode with Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues mentioned above, the commentators explain that Rabbi Akiva was not talking about this faith in the future redemption occurring, but about something much deeper. His message to his colleagues was that the pairing of the two prophecies is not merely informational in nature, it is causal. The disintegration brought about by the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash is itself the means through which the future redemption will come about. In the same way that a seed disintegrates before it then develops into a plant, so too the preceding order is reduced to nothing in order to make way for the future glory of the Beis Hamikdash and the Jewish people. With his penetrating and far-reaching vision, Rabbi Akiva was able to look upon the destruction of the present and see before his eyes the assembly of the future redemption.[6]

How telling are the Gemara’s concluding words concerning that episode:

אָמְרוּ לוֹ, “עֲקִיבָא נִיחַמָנוּ, עֲקִיבָא נִיחַמָנוּ”

They said to him, “Akiva, you have comforted us. Akiva, you have comforted us.”

Why did they state this twice? For like our Haftarah, they had been privy to a glimpse of the twofold comfort of the future. Not only that good times would ultimately come, but that all their current experiences were ultimately a preparation for those times.

Knowledge of the dual nature of the comfort that awaits us in the future already affords us some measure of comfort in the present, even as we are currently only witness to the destruction described in the first prophecy. May we soon merit to see the fulfillment of the second prophecy, in all its glory!

[1] Yeshayahu 40:1.[2] See Vayikra Rabbah 10:2.[3] Makkos 24a.[4] Pesachim 50a.[5] Author of responsa Nodah b’Yehudah.[6] R’ Leib Mintzberg, Ben Melech p. 235. Copyright © 2025 Journeys in Torah, All rights reserved. <http://www.journeysintorah.com> Journeys in Torah 2/4 Rechov Yitzchok ben Nachum Bayit Vegan 90045 Israel

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Aug 7, 2025, 3:55 AM

subject: **Rav Kook on Va'Etchanan**: Introducing Prayer with Praise

Va'Etchanan: Introducing Prayer with Praise

Moses' Prayer The Torah records Moses' pleas for permission to enter the Land of Israel:

"O God, Eternal! You have begun to show me Your greatness and power. What force is there in heaven or earth that can perform deeds and mighty acts as You can? Please, let me cross over and see the good land...." (Deut. 3:24-25)

Rabbi Simlai, in the Talmud, analyzed this prayer and drew out its structure, noting two distinct parts:

Praise — "You have begun to show me Your greatness...." Petition — "Please let me cross...." This, Rabbi Simlai explained, is a model for all prayers. One should begin with praise of God, and only afterward present one's requests.

We need to understand this model. Is it simply a matter of etiquette, just as one would flatter a mortal king before making a request? Or is there a deeper significance to this protocol for prayer?

How Does Prayer Work?

Rav Kook explained that the requirement to precede prayer with God's praise relates to the very foundations of prayer and its efficacy. Following this format prevents us from grossly misinterpreting the mechanics of prayer.

One might think that prayer is some sort of magic loophole built into the framework of Divine providence, and that by pleading our case it is possible to cause God to change His mind. The notion that we have the power to change God's will, however, is untenable.

Rather, prayer is a wonderful gift that allows us to change and refine ourselves. Prayer does not effect a change in God; prayer effects a change in us. It is only by virtue of the soul's moral and spiritual elevation that prayer has the power to annul harsh decrees. We cannot change the basic universal order manifested in a particular decree. But we can change ourselves. Then, as a result of our transformation, the decree is no longer relevant.

Thus it is advisable to introduce every prayer with praise of God. Such praise affirms God's eternal nature and ensures a correct understanding of how prayer works.

Even Moses

It is striking that Rabbi Simlai's insight was gleaned from examining a prayer of Moses. One might consider himself above making such a mistake regarding the nature of prayer. Yet we find that even Moses, despite his unparalleled grasp of spiritual matters, took care to introduce his request with praise of God. Certainly we should follow Moses' lead, thereby ensuring that we correctly recognize the true nature of prayer.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 147)

from: **Joshua Kruger** <genesis@torah.org>

to: parsha-halacha@torah.org

date: Aug 5, 2025, 7:22 PM

subject: Parsha Halacha for the Shabbos Table - Reciting the Shema

**Parshas Vaeschanan**

**Reciting the Shema**

(Written by Josh and Tammy Kruger, in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer of the Institute for Dayanim)

The Story

In the city of Balagan, on a street named Gevalt, lived the Mevulbal family. They were very nice and funny and very very very mixed up. Today Reuven, their son, was starting third grade after a fun summer break.

"Goodbye Mom and Dad. I'm off to school." he called out as he left his home.

"Have a great day, Reuven" replied Mrs. Mevulbal. "I hope you make lots of friends in your new class."

Reuven quickly found his way to school and entered the classroom.

"Boy, these kids are really short. I'm going to be the star basketball player" he thought.

"You must be Reuven Mevulbal" said the teacher.

"Yes" he said proudly. "How did you know?"

"Because this is a kindergarten class" smiled the teacher. "It seems that you're a bit mixed up. No worries, I'll take you to your class after we finish tefila". She offered Reuven a seat, and then began to sing modeh ani with the class.

"Oh my goodness" thought Reuven "these students aren't saying the words properly. They're going to need a lot of help."

Within a few minutes it was time to say the keriyas shema. Reuven covered his eyes with his hand. As the class starting saying the words he thought to himself "I wonder if these little kids know that they're supposed to cover their eyes?" He opened up his fingers slightly and peeked through them to check. He was happy to see that everyone else also had their eyes covered.

"Thank you for your help" whispered the teacher "but were you able to have kavana on the meaning of the words you just said?"

"Oh no!" thought Reuven. "I didn't. Do I have to say it again?"

The Discussion

Q: What is the connection between our story and the parsha?

A: The first section of keriyas shema is found in our parsha (Devarim 7:2).

Q: Reuven should have had kavana when he said the shema. Now that he has made the mistake, does he have to repeat it?

A: If someone performed a mitzva without kavana, there is a machlokes regarding whether the mitzva counts. Some poskim rule that the mitzva counts and that there is no need to repeat it. Other poskim rule that it doesn't count and needs to be repeated. However, in the case of saying the first two lines of keriyas shema ("shema yisrael" and "baruch shem kevodo"), all poskim agree that kavana is needed. Therefore, Reuven must repeat these pesukim (Shulchan Aruch, 63:4).

Q: What should we concentrate on when saying the first line of the shema?

A: There are two important thoughts to have:

1- Hashem is our G-d (Elokeinu)

2- There is only ONE Hashem (Echad)

Q: Why do we cover our eyes with our right hand when we say the first line of shema?

A: In order to help our kavana we cover our eyes in order to prevent us from being distracted by what is happening around us (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 61:5). The first person recorded to have covered his eyes when he said keriyas shema was Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (Berachos 13b).

Parsha Halacha for the Shabbos Table © 2023 by Torah.org.

from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalchorowitz@gmail.com>

date: Aug 7, 2025, 8:05 AM

subject: V'Eschanan 5785: To Gaze Upon the Pleasantness of Hashem By Michal Horowitz on August 7, 2025

In Parshas V'Eschanan, the Torah delineates for us many foundations of our nation, including (but not limited to): Tefila, Eretz Yisrael, Achdus Hashem, chinuch ha'bonim, leadership and Matan Torah.

The parsha opens with Moshe's prayers to be allowed entry into the Holy Land, and the commentators explained that he asked 515 times to be allowed in, which is the gematria (numeric value) of the opening word of the parsha: ואתחנן.

Moshe beseeched Hashem and said: אֶעֱבְרָה-נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַשְּׂכֵנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַנָּהָר הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְכֵנּוּ בָּהּ - please let me cross over and see the good land that is on the other side of the Yarden; this good mountain (Yerushalayim) and the Levanon (the Beis HaMikdash) (Devarim 3:25 with Rashi).

Here, in the last days of his life, Moshe requests but only one thing of Hashem: to enter into His holy abode, the place where His Shechina dwells in His holy city.

Hashem's reply to Moshe was: רַב־לָךְ אֱלֹהִים דַּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בְּדִבְרֵי הַזֶּה - it is enough for you! Do not continue to speak with Me further about this

matter, עלה ראש הפסוקה ושא עיניך נמה וצפנה ותימנה ומזרחתה וראה בעיניך כילא מעבר, ascend to the peak and lift your eyes to the west, the north, the south and the east, and see with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Yarden (Devarim 3:25-27).

Moshe - the greatest prophet to ever live (Devarim 34:10), the most humble man to ever live (Bamidbar 12:3), the greatest leader we have ever had and the most masterful teacher - was denied access to E"Y, both in life, and in death.

And yet, in our days and in our time, what was withheld from Moshe has been granted to us. What generations of our forefathers could only dream of - through the long, dark night of exile - in our times became a reality. I have quoted from my grandfather's memoirs, "In Seven Camps in Three Years," many times. Originally written in Yiddish, and published in the Krasnik yizkor book, my grandfather wrote: "After that they drove us to Budzin, where there were already hundreds of Jews from Krashnik and the area. And here the true hell began. As soon as we were delivered to the murderous commandant we had at once a free morning before we went out to work, they told everyone to march single file. He removed from the line whoever did not please him. As we exited the camp, those who had been removed (from the line) were taken to a grave and shot. That day, one hundred and five Jews were killed... Reb Peretz Feder and I slept on one pallet and talked continually about the murderers that they were sent by G-d and their end is near. We suffer now so that Moshiach will come. Whoever will survive this hell will see a Jewish state..."

Regarding our millennia-long, never-ending, passionate love and yearning for the land, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, teaches, that at the time of the Covenant Between the Pieces (Bereishis 15), it is as if Hashem said to Avraham:

"And before [your children receive the land], ידע תדע כי-גר יהיה ורעה, [know you shall surely know] you wouldn't live in luxury. You wouldn't wait as a free people until the grant will be finalized, formalized. ידע תדע כי-גר יהיה, [know you shall surely know that your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs] it means they'll be strangers, רעבדים, slaves, נענו אהם, tortured, ill-treated. שנה [four hundred years]. And throughout that period, that dark night of galus, you'll have only one dream, and one vision, and one aspiration, and one hope. What will be the hope? To get back to the land. לשנה הבאה בירושלים [next year in Jerusalem].

And after you'll come to Eretz Yisrael, I assure you, that you'll be deeply in love with the land, it will be an eternal love, not just a friendship affair" (See The Rav Thinking Aloud on the Parsha, Bamidbar, p.118-122).

And yet, the tremendous gift of our nation in our homeland - the matana tova of Eretz Yisrael that Hashem bestowed upon Avraham and his children for all time - comes to us at a great cost. Chazal already taught us this truism when they said:

תנא, רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר: שלש מתנות טובות נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל, וכולן לא נתנו אלא על ידי יסורין. אלו הן: תורה וארץ ישראל והעולם הבא. It was taught in a Braisa: Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: The Holy One, Blessed be He, gave Israel three precious gifts, all of which were given only by means of suffering. And they are: Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the World-to-Come (Brachos 5a).

I heard a beautiful idea from Rabbi Zev Leff shlita on Tehillim 27:4. The psalmist tells us (we begin reciting this chapter twice daily with the start of Elul):

אחת שאעלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש שבתי בבית ה' פלימי תני לתנות בנעם ה' ולבקרי בהיכלו

One [thing] I ask of Hashem, this I ask: that I may dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to see the pleasantness of Hashem and to visit His Temple (Tehillim 27:4).

The one thing that King David asks is really the three things that every Jew yearns for, and the very three things that are acquired through suffering: תורה, ארץ ישראל, חיי עולם הבא. While, b'chasdei Hashem, the matana tova of E"Y has become a miraculous reality for us, after almost 2,000 years of wandering, the yesurin that come along with it are its companion.

From the dire, horrific plight of our hostages, Hashem yerachem v'yaazor, to the fallen soldiers, to the thousands wounded and injured (both physically and emotionally), to our unceasing fight on the world-stage to maintain our G-d-given hold on this land, to the economic ramifications of this drawn-out war... Eretz Yisrael is our land and will always be our land. This Divine Promise is the absolute truth, and a non-negotiable fact.

Yet we long and hope, pray and dream, for the day when the yesurin will no longer be part and parcel of our land, and peace will be restored to the city of peace, for the time when "old men and old women will sit in the streets of the city... and young boys and girls will play in her streets" (Zecharia 8:4-5) in everlasting tranquility, unbounded joy, and revealed and open love between Hashem and Am Yisrael.

LZ" N IDF fallen ha'kadosh v'ha'tahor Noam Shemesh z'l HY"D. Noam, age 21, fell on 18 Sivan 5785 (June 14, 2025) in battle in Gaza. About Noam, his mother Efrat shetichyeh - with whom I met yesterday in her home in Yerushalayim (Tuesday August 5) for close to two hours, learning about her wonderful, committed, dedicated, courageous and heroic son - said he had an ayin tova, a lev tov and did everything in a modest, quiet fashion for his soldiers (he was a mefaked), his country and his nation. Noam served on many borders (he fought in the Jordan Valley, the Lebanese border, Tulkarem, and other places), but when he was not sent into Gaza on milu'im after Oct.7, he requested to be sent into Gaza to fight the wicked enemy there and do his part for our land.

Any time Efrat asked Noam what he needed, or what she could get for him, he replied, "B"H, yesh li kol - I do not need anything, B"H I have everything I need."

When serving in the north a couple of months after Oct. 7, in the very cold winter, he gave away his coat to a fellow soldier who was cold, claiming the sleeves "were a bit too short" for him anyway, and his friend needed it more than he did. During the shiva, his commander told Efrat he was not surprised to hear Noam gave away his coat, for he reported that Noam was always looking to see what other soldiers needed, and giving to them was his greatest joy.

He fell on Shabbat afternoon at 5pm, a time which Efrat noted is one of great Divine chessed and rachamim (kindness and mercy). She said it was a chessed of Hashem that he fell right away and did not suffer, and went to his eternal rest during such a holy time of the week.

אחת שאעלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש שבתי בבית ה' פלימי תני לתנות בנעם ה' ולבקרי בהיכלו

One thing (that is really three things) I ask of Hashem, this I ask: to dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my eternal life, to gaze upon the pleasantness of Hashem - the pleasantness of Noam who is now very close to Hashem - and to visit His holy abode.

May we merit everlasting peace, comfort, geula, and simcha for our entire nation and our Land.

שנוכה לבשורות טובות, שבת שלום, וחדש מנחם אב Michal

From: **Daniel Keren** <keren18@juno.com>

Shabbos Stories For Parshas Va'eschanan 5785

Volume 16, Issue 45 15 Menachem Av 5785/August 9, 2025

Printed L'illuy nishmas Nechama bas R' Noach, a"h

Having gotten his **Tefillin** from one of the most prominent scribes of his time, Reb Michel Prager was quite proud of them. He would always point out how dear they were to him and how rewarding it was to wear them. Throughout his lifetime he had been faced with numerous challenges and difficulties, but never did he miss the opportunity to wear his tefillin. As a Chassidishe Yid, Reb Michel's davening played a major role in his life, and knowing that his tefillin were so special made it all the more gratifying. Although he knew that there were some opinions that encouraged checking tefillin every so often, Reb Michel was careful not to have the sealed boxes opened for fear of exposing them to air and dust, and perhaps ruining them. And so, the tefillin were never checked.

One day, however, seventy-two years after he first put on the tefillin for his bar mitzvah, someone inadvertently switched their tefillin with his, and this man gave what he thought were his tefillin to a sofer (scribe) for checking. The sofer (scribe) carefully checked all the words, scrutinizing them to ensure their validity. Suddenly, he let out a gasp. "Oy Gevalt! These tefillin are missing an entire word!" He continued to check the shel yad (hand) portion of the tefillin and found a missing word in them as well, rendering the entire pair pasul (invalid). The man who had brought the tefillin to be checked was quite upset, but soon realized that these were not his tefillin at all. Upon closer examination he was able to determine that they were Reb Michel's tefillin. It was unbelievable! Reb Michel's tefillin were posul.

How would they break the bad news to the elderly man? He was 85 years old and the shock, horror, and disappointment of never having fulfilled a mitzvah of which he had been so proud could possibly cause him enough grief to endanger his life.

Several of the elderly members of the shul conferred and decided that they had no choice but to tell him. A doctor was brought along just in case Reb Michel experienced any medical problems. "Reb Michel," one of the elder gentlemen said, "we have something important to tell you," slowly they spelled out the story — how the tefillin were switched, how the tefillin were taken to a sofer, and how Reb Michel's tefillin were found to be posul - invalid. They didn't have to explain further. Reb Michel understood that he had never properly fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin. Not even once.

At first Reb Michel sat there frozen. They worried. Had he heard them? How was he going to react? They were wondering what else they should do when suddenly Reb Michel stood up and started smiling. At first Reb Michel began to laugh and then he started to sing and dance, instead of joining him they watched with pity, assuming that he was "losing it," This was someone who took more pride in his tefillin than in any other mitzvah. Who could blame him now for losing control? He sang and danced around the room, skipping with joy. To see an 85-year-old act this way was quite unusual and, under the circumstances, very sad. But, no one dared to interfere. After all, he was entitled.

Finally, he finished dancing and singing. Suddenly he looked up and noticed everyone staring at him. He then explained. "Do you know what this means? Had my tefillin never been checked, I never would have had [the opportunity to fulfill this precious mitzvah. But now I will. For this, I am very grateful."

And then, with tears streaming down his eyes, he began to unwrap a pair of kosher tefillin and put them on his head and on his arm. With a smile on his face and tears running down his cheeks. 85-year-old Reb Michel Prager fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin for the very first time. (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – "Touched by a Story", p. 205, Reb Yechiel Spiro.)

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From: **Daniel Keren** <keren18@juno.com>

Shabbos Stories For Parshas Va'eschanan 5785

Volume 16, Issue 45 15 Menachem Av 5785/August 9, 2025

### **A Touch of Class**

#### **By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn**

Rabbi Pinchas Hirschprung, a prominent student in the Lubliner Yeshivah was asked to travel to America to solicit funds for the yeshivah. He thought it would be helpful to get a letter of recommendation from Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodinsky, a leading Torah scholar of the generation. He traveled to the town of R' Grodinsky, the nature of his visit. R' Grodinsky readily agreed to write the letter on behalf of the yeshivah.

After R' Grodinsky completed the letter, the two began to discuss Torah topics. A number of people gathered around to listen as dozens of Talmudic passages were cited and countless commentaries were quoted verbatim - from memory! The people listened with astonishment as the great sage verbally fenced with the young student.

Then R' Grodinsky quoted a passage from Masechet Yoma. He cited it

as being on page 49. The young student suggested that it was actually on page 48. "No," insisted R' Grodinsky, "if I remember correctly, it's on page 49."

The young man, who was already known as an accomplished talmidhacham with a phenomenal memory, was positive it was on page 48. He asked R' Grodinsky, "Perhaps we can check it out. Is there a gemara readily available?" "It's not necessary," said R' Grodinsky as he touched the student's arm gently, so as not to let him get the gemara. "I see your mind is young and sharp, and I am already an old man. You're probably right. Why look it up? I might be embarrassed."

The young student felt bad for R' Grodinsky. The conversation continued, and eventually the student left.

Shortly after he left, the young man went to check the gemara to see who was right. When he found the passage, he was startled. He was wrong, and R' Grodinsky was right! The passage was indeed on page 49.

R' Hirschprung says it was then that he understood why R' Grodinsky didn't want him to check it out in front of those assembled in the room. For it was he, the student, who would have been embarrassed, and R' Grodinsky, in his kindness, wanted to save him from that humiliation. So instead of checking the source, R' Grodinsky made a disparaging comment about his own (non-existent) failing.

Reprinted from the Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – "Around the Maggid's Table by Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn.)

from: Aish.com Weekly Torah Portion <newsletterserver@aish.com>

date: Aug 7, 2025, 7:00 AM

subject: V'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)

### **Rabbi Avraham Twerski's Insights on the Torah**

by Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski

V'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11 )

In my work treating alcoholics, I have found that the greatest success for sustained abstinence from alcohol is through participation in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. One of the fundamentals of this program is taking "one day at a time." The addicted alcoholic cannot conceive never again being able to drink. Inasmuch as he has relied on alcohol to feel good, he sees a lifetime of sobriety as being completely unrealistic. There is no point in even trying to do the impossible.

Therefore, he is taught a new philosophy, "Take one day at a time. There is nothing that you can do today about tomorrow's drinking, so there is no point in thinking about it. It is not impossible for you to stay sober just for today. That is certainly within your ability. So stay sober today, and when tomorrow comes, you can deal with its challenges then."

One of my friends would write down each day how many days he had been sober. When he died at age 83, it was found that the night before he had written the number 16,472. He had been sober for 46 years because he took one day at a time.

The concept of taking one day at a time was promoted by Alcoholics Anonymous, which originated in the mid 1930's. More than 150 years ago, Rabbi Moshe Sofer (Chasam Sofer) cited the above verse as teaching this concept.

The Talmud quotes ben Sira, "Do not agonize about tomorrow's problems, because you have no way of predicting tomorrow" (Sanhedrin 100b). The Chasam Sofer says that this is the way one can vanquish the yetzer hara, the lower self. If a person thinks that he must resist the yetzer hara's temptations throughout his entire lifetime, he might consider it impossible and may give up without trying. Therefore, Chasam Sofer says, think about resisting the yetzer hara only today. That is certainly within everyone's abilities.

This is what Moses told the Israelites. "You can cleave unto God and observe all His mitzvot if you think only about living this day. Don't take on tomorrow's challenges today."

I am indebted to one of my alcoholic patients who called me, citing the



verse in the Torah which says that Jacob love Rachel so intensely, that the seven years he had to wait for her seemed to him like just a few days (Genesis 29:20). He noted that some commentaries say that this is contrary to nature. Separation from someone you love makes each day seem endless, rather than the reverse.

"But if you look closely at the words in the Torah," my patient said, "the answer is obvious. The Torah says that the seven years were yamim achadim, which means single days. Jacob was able to tolerate the long separation because each day he thought, 'I only have to deal with today,' and that was doable."

It is standard operating procedure for people to make "New Year resolutions," and it is common knowledge that they invariably fail. The reason is that "I will not smoke this entire year," or "I will not eat excessively this entire year" is too great an undertaking, and one fails because one cannot conceive of succeeding. The correct thing to do is, as Chasam Sofer says, to tackle only today's problem today. Breaking a resolution down to bite-size pieces makes it feasible to keep.

The Lamm Archive [www.yu.edu/drlamm](http://www.yu.edu/drlamm)

**Rabbi Norman Lamm** August 15, 1970 The Jewish Center Shabbat Nahamu 5730

### The Mechanics of Consolation

In their commentaries on today's special Haftorah, the Rabbis (in their Yalkut) tell us of the following imaginary yet very real conversation: ישעיהו רבינו תאמר שלא באת לנחם אלא : אמרו ישראל לישעיהו, חנינא בר פפא אמר: ק"לאותו הדור שחרב בהם יאמר " אין כתיב כאן אלא "אמר אלוֹקִים". לכל הדורות באתי לנחם, אמר להם? בימי אלוֹקִים".

Israel said to Isaiah: Isaiah, our Teacher, would you say that your consolations were directed only to that generation in whose days the Temple was destroyed? Said Isaiah to them: No, I have come to console all the generations. For it is not written, "comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, said your God," but it says "comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, sayeth (or: will say) your God."

Consolation, then, is not an act in isolation. It is a process, and it applies not only to one specific time, but it is relevant to all times. It is therefore worth pondering: what does this subtle yet powerful psychological transformation consist of? What are the mechanics of this profound personal redemption which we call *nechama*?

I ask this not only as an abstract or rhetorical question. There are practical consequences. People are caught up in the depths of despair and grief. What should or can consolation mean to them? Or, the *menachamim*, those who go to console the mourners: very often they are at a loss, they do not know how to translate their good wishes into acceptable words. That is why they often do the wrong thing, why the task of offering condolences is often so difficult, why otherwise intelligent people are frequently reduced to silly prattle.

Furthermore, in the history of our people we are the great Generation of *Nechamah*. We are the generation that has gone from the depths of Auschwitz to the heights of the State of Israel. We have experienced consolation. Therefore, it behooves us to understand it, so that we can better understand ourselves and the times in which we live.

The answer to our question, the key to the nature of this phenomenon called consolation, may be found in our Haftorah, that beginning with the immortal words, *Nachamu, nachamu ami*. Let us adumbrate several items that emerge from a deeper study of this Haftorah.

First, in order to console properly, you must never understate or underestimate the extent of the pain and the grief. To be the proper *menachem*, you must acknowledge the depths and singularity of suffering. At bottom, all suffering is highly individual.

When Isaiah and the Prophets are told to console Jerusalem, they are told: דברו על לב

for – כי לקח מיד ה' כפלים בכל הטאתיה, ירושלים, speak to the heart of Jerusalem,

Jerusalem has received punishment from God, double the amount her sins warranted.

Often we try to show the mourner that others have suffered more or at least equally. In one sense, this is helpful, for it lets the mourner feel that he is not completely alone, that he is part of the community of the miserable. But never, never must this be overdone. For to try to show the sufferer that his suffering is not really that bad denies him the uniqueness of his loss. And ultimately it is futile too, because it makes a mockery of the particular misfortune that only he knows so intimately and that no other can fully share.

Hence the first rule of consolation is to show that you identify with the sufferer insofar as possible, that you appreciate the sharp edge of grief, both its extent and its incommunicable singularity, and that you understand the sense of void and emptiness, the loss and the pain. That is what we usually mean by the word "empathy."

Second, successful consolation requires confidence or faith. In order to receive *nechamah*, you must believe that it will or at least *can* come. It is not at all necessary to understand *how* it will take place – the true mourner usually believes that it can never take place through natural, rational means. Let it be so. But he must believe that it can happen, even if the means are irrational or supernatural.

Thus does Isaiah say to his disconsolate people: קול קורא במדבר, a voice cries out in the desert, כל גיא ינשא וכל הר וגבעה ישפלו, every valley will be raised and every mountain and hill will be leveled.

What is Isaiah trying to tell his people by these geographical lessons? It is, I believe, this: even as when they look at a mountainous region they cannot imagine it to be straight and level, so when they consider the peaks of their pain and the depths of their despair, they cannot believe that these can level out into normalcy. Yet they must believe! For the voice cries out in the desert of the heart and the wilderness of the soul, that if the Lord God wills it, it will happen.

In this sense, the source of *nechamah* is in the mourner himself. The *menachem*, the one who offers his condolences, can only assist. The consoler is at most a midwife of restoration and consolation, one who presides at its emergence from the depths of the heart of the one who sits in grief. Third, where grief is the result not of accident or nature, but of defeat in a struggle, in an ideological contest or in spiritual strife, there *nechamah* derives from the sense of vindication. If one has gone down for the sake of an ideal, then his survivors can be consoled only when those ideals are justified in the course of time.

Thus does the Prophet say to his people, having suffered defeat not only physically and politically, but spiritually as well: דבר כל בשר יחדו כי פי ה' דבר, and the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh together will see that the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The martyrs of Israel will have been vindicated when their pagan antagonists will bow their heads and accept the truth of the Lord God of Israel who reveals Himself to all men, justifying the martyrdom and the sacrifices of the holy ones of Israel. Today, our *nechamah* as a people will be incomplete as long as the enemies of Israel prosper, as long as anti-Semitism is rampant – even if it be disguised as anti-Zionism, whether of the right or the left, especially the New Left, whether White or Black, whether by non-Jew or by Jew. Finally, the fourth element we may detect in this Haftorah as to the mechanics of

consolation is this: *nechamah* implies the replacement of the loss to the extent that it is possible.

Indeed, there can never be complete restoration for a human being. This is so, because each human being, created in the Image of God, is unique, and that which is unique cannot, by definition, be replaced.

But if there can be no complete restoration, the void can be filled subjectively, at least partly. A parent or a mate has passed on; a home can be rebuilt and a measure of *nachas* can still come into life.

When our mother Sarah died, her son Isaac was grief-stricken. Not until he met and married Rebecca did the situation change. Then we read: אחרי אמו



יִצְחָק, that Isaac was consoled after his mother. After the sense of desolation and loneliness and emptiness, Rebecca—as our Rabbis tell us—brought back light and a sense of family and companionship into the bereft home. Rebecca could never replace Sarah, any more than Sarah could replace anyone else. But she could fill the void in the heart and in the life of Isaac. That is consolation.

So our Haftorah tells us of consolation. Those who were destroyed cannot be brought back to life. No one can fully take their place. But in the life of our ongoing people, *nechamah* means the return to Zion, the upholding of the desolated land, the new dignity possessed by our people after the humiliation of defeat and exile.

We Jews today know that the six million martyrs of the Holocaust are irreplaceable. No Jewish state, no prosperity, no newfound respectability, can ever, ever make up for the horrendous loss that we suffered. But to the extent that it is possible without Messiah (or even with him), the State of Israel is our *nechamah*. It is our only consolation, the only thing left we have to hang on to after we have reached the very bottom of the pit of despair.

Therefore, Israel is everything we have. Hence, any danger to the State of Israel is a threat to our only source of consolation and evokes from within the heart of every Jew an immediate response: that the demons of Auschwitz are coming to life again. Take away this consolation of ours, and we are back in the depths, the unplumbed depths of *avelut* such as the world has never known. If any Jew wants to know the source of Jews' loyalty to the State of Israel, he must know that our loyalty is powered by the past of having experienced Auschwitz. Zvi Kolitz was one-hundred percent correct when he stated in this Synagogue this past year that the secret of the success of Israel's army is not that Israeli soldiers knew what they were fighting for, but that they know what they are fighting against. The current ceasefire, just begun by American initiative, is the only break in the

escalating crisis that has gripped Israel since the 1967 victory. But, as we all know, it is not an unmixed blessing. It is as much danger as it is opportunity. It is something which holds the most serious consequences for all Israel and all world Jewry.

We must hope and pray that our government will support Israel in the full measure it deserves. We should like to be proud as Americans in knowing that Israel is being helped by America in ways that the world does not know yet. But whatever may happen, American Jews must support Israel in its resistance to Egyptian trickery and Russian treachery—and what, Heaven forbid, may yet become American betrayal.<sup>1</sup>

American Jews must not be found wanting. For this is our particular responsibility today.

Israel is our *nechamah*. Without it, *chalilah*, we are back in the pit of anguish. I do not believe the time has come to take with any immediate urgency the words of Menachem Begin in the Knesset, that American Jews must take to the streets to demonstrate. But we may yet be called upon to act politically and economically and socially. Then we shall have to take to the streets indeed, despite our bourgeois respectability and self-restraint, even if it means incurring<sup>1</sup> Israel's victory in the Six-Day War left the entirety of the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula up to the eastern bank of the Suez Canal under Israeli control. Egypt was determined to regain Sinai, and also sought to mitigate the severity of its defeat. Sporadic clashes were taking place along the cease-fire line, and Egyptian missile boats sank the Israeli destroyer INS *Eilat* on October 21 of the same year. Egypt began shelling Israeli positions along the Bar Lev Line, using heavy artillery, MiG aircraft and various other forms of Soviet assistance with the hope of forcing the Israeli government into concessions. Israel responded with aerial bombardments, airborne raids on Egyptian military positions, and aerial strikes against strategic facilities in Egypt. The strategic bombing of Egypt had mixed military and political results. The international community and both countries attempted to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict. The Jarring Mission of the United Nations was supposed to ensure that the

terms of UN Security Council Resolution 242 would be observed, but by late 1970, it was clear that this mission had been a failure. Fearing the escalation of the conflict into an "East vs. West" confrontation during the tensions of the mid-Cold War, the American president, Richard Nixon, sent his Secretary of State, William Rogers, to formulate the Rogers Plan in view of obtaining a ceasefire. In August 1970, Israel, Jordan, and Egypt agreed to an "in place" ceasefire under the terms proposed by the Rogers Plan. The plan contained restrictions on missile deployment by both sides, and required the cessation of raids as a precondition for peace. The Egyptians and their Soviet allies rekindled the conflict by violating the agreement shortly thereafter, moving their missiles near to the Suez Canal, and constructing the largest anti-aircraft system yet implemented at that point in history. The Israelis responded with a policy which their Prime Minister, Golda Meir, dubbed "asymmetrical response", wherein Israeli retaliation was disproportionately large in comparison to any Egyptian attacks. The wrath of the Government and the population. We shall have to pay any price in order to stand at the side of Israel, our consolation. In commenting on the double verb, *nachamu nachamu*, the Rabbis said: נחמורו עלינו: נחמורו תחתנו.

נחמורו תחתנו, let the upper world console, let the lower world console.

Permit me to give my own contemporary interpretation of that Midrashic comment. If we want Almighty God from His *Olamot Ha-elyonim* (His Upper Worlds) to offer us comfort, if we want to be able to look forward to an undisturbed life, to a peaceful existence for our children and children's children, to a continuation of our people and an opportunity for them to thrive without threat and anguish and danger—then, *nachamuhu tachtonim*, we who inhabit this lower world must first offer our comfort to the State of Israel, we must first preserve and enhance this sole source of *nechamah* that has been given to us at this juncture of history.

Only if we are successful in offering *nechamah* to the State of Israel can we look forward to *nechamah* for us from the Higher Worlds of Almighty God.

It is our hope and prayer that true peace will emerge from the present critical state. But no matter what happens, we are bound to act fully, with Jewish honor and resolve, to preserve this sole consolation which has filled the void in our lives after the Holocaust.

May we be successful in offering that *nechamah*, our support. And may we, in turn, receive *nechamah* from God on High, the kind of consolation that will bring peace to all of mankind. \_\_

### **Daf Yomi: Cornea Transplants and the Continuing Contribution of a Fallen Soldier**

RIETS Kollel Elyon Aug 6

**Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

The inspiring and uplifting story of two blind children receiving the gift of sight thanks to the corneas of a fallen soldier, Reei Biran, a"h, draws upon the intersecting of two passages recently covered in the Daf Yomi.

The issue of cadaveric organ donation is a complex and emotionally charged topic within Jewish law, presenting a profound conflict between the imperative to save a life (*Pikuach Nefesh*) and several fundamental prohibitions related to the deceased. One of these prohibitions is that of deriving benefit (*issur hana'ah*) from a cadaver, conveyed in the daf a few weeks ago (*Avodah Zarah* 29b). Other halakhic issues include *Nivul HaMet* (the prohibition against desecrating the dead body), and *Kevurah* (the obligation to bury the entire body). The vexing question of brain death and the determination of the time of death, a matter of enormous controversy, is outside the scope of this discussion, which will presume the unequivocal death of the donor.

The prohibition of benefiting from a cadaver is debated as to whether it is sourced in the Torah or is rabbinic (see Hil. Eivel 14:21, *Kiryat Sefer* and *Mishneh L'Melekh*); either way, one would assume, it should be suspended if a

life can be saved, as are almost all Torah prohibitions. One minority dissenting view was articulated by Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger in his Resp. Binyan Tzion (# 170-171; see also Resp. Devar Yehoshua, III, 24:1). He argued that benefiting from a dead body, at least without prior consent from the deceased, constitutes a form of theft (gezel). According to this perspective, a person retains a form of ownership (ba'alut) over their body even after death. Most authorities, however, did not accept this view and allowed such benefit to save a life (see Resp. Lev Avraham, 72).

Cornea transplants, however, introduced an added complexity in that they are often not immediately life-saving, which complicates the direct application of Pikuach Nefesh. This led to a separate, nuanced discussion. Many authorities opined on the matter, which draws upon a number of source texts and logical arguments, and the positions were prominently represented by Rabbi Isser Yehudah Unterman, who argued to permit, and Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, the Sredei Eish, who contested all of the individual arguments (II, 120), while also acknowledging the many who permitted it and the validity of accepting that view.

One major argument was based on a passage from a recent daf (Avodah Zarah 28b), which implied that an eye ailment can be life-threatening because the eye is "connected to the heart." Following this, the Shulchan Arukh (OC 328:9) ruled that one may violate the Sabbath to treat an eye condition, even if life-threatening danger is not immediately apparent.

A central point of contention among halakhic authorities, particularly in the modern era, is whether to follow the Talmud's reasoning on the eye's connection to the heart, even if it does not align with modern medical science. The Tzitz Eliezer (XIV, 89), Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg, a leading halakhic authority on medical issues, held that the Talmud's ruling remains valid, regardless of doctor's opinions.

An innovative approach was put forth by Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (Chokhmah Shlomo, OC 328:46), who suggested that restoring a blind person's sight allows them to perform mitzvot, such as observing the Sabbath, and is thus considered a form of Pikuach Nefesh, in the sense that the latter is explained by the Talmud as justified on the Sabbath "so that many more Sabbaths can be observed". This reasoning in turn is based on a minority opinion in the Talmud that a blind person is exempt from the commandments. Even though this view was rejected by almost all authorities, R. Kluger applied to this the principle of accepting a minority position in life-saving matters. This opinion was considered too creative for many later authors (see Resp. LeHorot Natan, IX, in kuntres V'Chai Bahem; Resp. Tzitz Eliezer, VIII, 15, 10:14; Resp. Minchat Shlomo, II, 84). There were authorities who independently considered blindness to be life-threatening, without recourse to the Talmudic passage or to related interpretations, but due to the vulnerabilities inherent in navigating the world with this condition. This would be more of a statistical approach toward Pikuach Nefesh than is usually the case, and also would be applicable only to blindness in both eyes.

Other arguments for leniency were advanced as well, including analyzing the prohibition of benefiting from a cadaver to consider whether it applied equally or at all to all parts of the body, and whether it was subject to any threshold of size (see Resp. Har Tzvi, YD 277).

A groundbreaking argument that allowed many authorities to accept cadaveric organ donation is the concept of a "revived organ." This perspective suggests that once a deceased organ, such as a cornea, is successfully transplanted into a living person, it is no longer considered a dead body part subject to the prohibition of benefit.

This approach is supported by several prominent authorities, who argued that the organ, now infused with the life of the recipient, is essentially "revived" (see Resp. Torat Michael, 56, and Resp. Devar Yehoshua I, 48). This interpretation draws on discussions in the Talmud (see Niddah 70b), such as the case of the son of the Shunammite woman being brought back to life by Elisha. The analogy is that an organ, once attached to a living body, becomes an integral part of that person and is no longer subject to the prohibitions related to the dead, such as a kohen encountering impurity (see Resp. Yacheil Yisrael, 81). The Seridei Eish, however, disputed the relevance of this idea, maintaining that the organ still retains a connection to the original owner and that its use constitutes a violation.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau (Resp. Yacheil Yisrael, 83) suggested that their debate hinged on the nature of the prohibition of benefiting from a cadaver. If this

prohibition is analogous to classical prohibitions like Chametz or Avodah Zarah, then it would seem that the rule should be responsive to a change in the object; if its status becomes different, it should no longer be prohibited. By contrast, the Seridei Eish appears to maintain that it is rooted in a concept of ba'alut (property rights) over one's body. In this framework, using an organ without prior consent is akin to theft, and even with consent, some may still object due to the sanctity of the body and the prohibition of Nivul HaMet (desecrating the dead). These concerns would not be mitigated by any revival of the organ that occurs through the implantation in the body of another. This perspective, however, which echoes that of the Binyan Tziyon mentioned above, has not been widely accepted as definitive halakhah. Further, at least some permutations within this view would allow for consent during the donor's lifetime (for further discussion see Resp. Ohr L'Tziyon, I, 28; Resp. Yabbi'a Omer, III, YD, 20-23; Resp. Yaskil Avdi, VI, YD 26; Resp. Even Pinah, I, 145). The notion of a deceased donor's body part returning to life, once joined to a living person, is a fascinating and inspiring one. In particular in this evocative instance, the idea that the eyes of this fallen shomer Yisrael will continue to function to protect and to uplift others is a needed comfort at this time of anguish and confusion.

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### **Intent and Clarity in Writing a Torah Scroll by R. Gidon Rothstein**

Aruch HaShulchan, Yoreh De'ah, Chapter 274, reviews laws governing writing a Sefer Torah, tefillin, and/or mezuzot, how the physical act, with proper intent and form, turns books into sacred objects.

The Scribe's Sacred Intent (Lishmah)

A valid sacred text must be written lishmah, for the sake of producing a holy object, such as a Torah scroll. Tur and Shulchan Aruch insist a scribe announce, before he starts to write, "I am writing this for the sake of the holiness of a Sefer Torah (Torah scroll)." The single declaration suffices for the entire scroll despite, as AH, se'if one, points out, the process taking many days, with many breaks.

It does not cover Divine Names. Each time he is about to write a Divine Name, the scribe is supposed to consecrate it individually, articulate ahead of time his intent to write a fully sanctified Divine Name.

Semag suggests the scribe include Names in his original declaration, adding a phrase to the effect of "all the Divine Names (azkarot) within this scroll will be for the sake of the holiness of the Name." For Semag, if the scribe later forgets, before writing one of the Names, this earlier declaration saves the day.

Rambam's Surprising Omission

Rambam speaks of this kind of announcement only before writing a Name, not before the scroll as a whole. He mentions only that writing a Divine Name without proper intent invalidates it. AH wonders why, especially since Gittin 45b assumes the preparation of the hides for the parchment need lishmah, wouldn't the writing itself?

He suggests Rambam thought the intent during the preparation of the hides carries over to the writing, making it automatically lishmah, no renewed declaration needed. He likens it to the slaughter of sacrifices, where the consecration of the animal lets us assume its slaughter is for the sake of the sacrifice. Rambam focuses on the Divine Name, because its holiness requires a special, explicit intent that can't be covered by a general assumption.

The bottom line? Practical halacha follows Tur and Shulchan Aruch,

an initial declaration for the whole scroll, specific ones before writing each Divine Name. AH questions without resolution why Beit Yosef didn't explicitly state that skipping this initial declaration invalidates the scroll, as the Tur does.

#### Copying and Verbalizing: Moses as Our Guide

SA obligates a scribe to copy from an existing Torah, no letter written from memory. It is how Moshe Rabbenu wrote the Torah, we learn in Bava Batra 15a: God spoke, and Moses wrote. More, the scribe must read each word aloud before writing it.

AH notices a potential inconsistency, SA's ruling on how to write tefillin, Orach Chayyim 32, where he does not obligate the scribe to say the words before writing them in the new tefillin. Based on the portrayal of Moshe, however, he is sure the scribe must say the words aloud. Instead of hearing them, as Moshe did from God, the scribe sees them, in the previously written document.

When a scroll was written without consulting another document, or the scribe didn't say the words out loud before writing them, Yerushalmi allowed using it only in cases of dire need. AH leans to validating the scroll if it was already written that way, because Rambam doesn't list these as disqualifying factors. Moshe himself, in fact, did not verbalize the last eight verses of the Torah when he wrote them.

#### The Art of the Letter: Spacing and Form

Se'if eight turns to technicalities of the writing. Each letter must be surrounded by blank parchment on all four sides. A hair's breadth should separate letters, although any separation is enough. If letters touch, the scroll is invalid.

Too big a separation might make one word look like two, also a fatal flaw for the validity of the scroll. Between words, the scribe should leave the width of a small letter. Less than that, we ask an average skilled child to read the word(s); if he sees them as one—even if it should be clear, because the first word had an ending letter, such as a mem sofit—the scroll is invalid.

For form, AH shares general comments in se'if nine, specific ones thereafter. Every letter has a specific shape, in the absence of which it is not valid, even if a child reads it correctly, even if it doesn't look like some other letter. (Should the letter look like another, a dalet like a reish, for example, the letter must be corrected before we could read from the scroll).

An example of a letter violating its form would be if either or both of the two yud-like protrusions from the central line of the letter aleph were not touching that central line. The letter isn't a valid aleph if that happens. In reverse, the heh and kof, the two letters with multiple parts, are invalid if written as a single, continuous body.

Se'if ten goes through letters easy to write incorrectly. We already noted the yuds of the aleph; so, too, the tops of the letters shin, ayin, tzadi, and mem must be connected to the body of the letter; the back of a bet must be square, lest it look like a kaf, which must be rounded to not look like a bet. Dalet and reish, a final mem and a samech, all can be confused with other letters if we are not careful. Se'if eleven has more confusable letters, a yud and a vav, if written too long or too short, and similarly with a zayin and a nun at the end of a word.

If a letter's identity is in doubt, a "neutral" child is consulted. If children disagree, the scribe makes the call. If we consult only one child, we follow what he says.

#### Regional Styles and Ketivah Tamah

Tur, citing his father, the Rosh, points out that letter forms differ between regions (Ashkenazic vs. Sephardic script). These variations don't invalidate the scroll, it being a problem only if it has issues explicitly mentioned in the Gemara (like a heh looking like a chet). AH confirms that current variations of scripts, such as Beit Yosef and Arizal, are all also valid, as long as they meet the basic halachic

requirements.

Se'if fourteen notes tradition's understanding of the Torah's command "And you shall write them" to imply "perfect" writing. This means avoiding common confusions, aleph for an ayin, tet for a fei, and other similar, some of which we have already mentioned.

Sections of the Torah also matter. Although not punctuated, the Torah sets off its parts, sometimes with a gap to the end of the line before the next part starts, called petuchah, and others where the new section starts on the same line, called setumah, closed.

Errors in any of these, or if a song of the Torah was formatted incorrectly (the Song of the Sea is supposed to have each phrase on top of blank space underneath it, where Ha'azinu has writing on top of writing, the blank space in between), or the ink is wrong, the Torah would have to be hidden away, nignaz, rather than used.

#### Maintaining Tradition

A Torah scroll with vowels (nikud) is invalid, even if they're later erased! Ditto if the scribe makes ink notations of the ends of verses. Since Hashem gave the Torah without these, adding them ignores the tradition, a serious matter. Removing them doesn't help, because the letters were written with disregard for tradition, and disregard isn't erased along with the vowels.

Simpler errors, such as where the scribe spaces a verse a bit longer away than usual for a word, is fine as long as it does not look like a new section (less than nine letters' gap).

Not quite our topic, but the last se'if reports Rema's allowing a scribe to remove excess ink from a freshly written letter, if he needs the ink or wants the scroll to dry faster. Since the letter is not being diminished, it does not raise the same red flags as using a Chanukah candle for its light, disrespectful treatment of the mitzvah.

This is true even for ink on Divine Names, as long as it is truly excess. If there's just enough, removing would diminish the letter, which is forbidden. Using this removed "holy" ink for mundane writing would be like the Chanukah candle case, a denigration of the mitzvah.

Next time, our last foray into Aruch HaShulchan He-Atid (AHH), the prohibition on rebelling at the instructions of the Great Sanhedrin.

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#### The Thundering Noise of Silence - Essay by Rabbi YY

**Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabiyy@theyeshiva.net>

The Thundering Noise of Silence When Ruth Walked Alone and Reb Leivik Danced Alone

"He Has a Rich Father"

A poor beggar was soliciting a handout from Baron Rothschild. Displeased with the amount he'd been given, the beggar complained, "Your son gave me twice as much.

"Well, my son can afford to," said Baron Rothschild. "He has a rich father."

Gifts of Wood

This coming week (Thursday, August 14) is the 20th day of the Hebrew month of Av. The Talmud[1] relates a narrative that occurred on this very day, in the process of re-establishing Jewish life in the Holy Land in the fourth century BCE, following the destruction of the First Temple.

When the Jewish people returned to the Land of Israel, after seventy years of exile in Babylonia, to resettle the land and rebuild the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple), they faced many hardships. The community was small and poor (most Jews chose to remain in exile; only 42,000 Jews made Aliya) and threatened by many enemies. In contrast to the gold-gilded glory of the First Temple (built by King Solomon at the peak of Jewish power and prosperity), the Temple they built was made of simple stone and mortar. The Temple treasury could not even afford to pay for firewood for the altar.

Several families came forth to resolve the problem. Each donated a large quantity of firewood; when the supply brought by one family was exhausted, another family brought its donation. In this way, nine families supplied wood for the first critical year of the Beit Hamikdash's existence, till the Temple treasury could afford to obtain wood independently.

To reward their generosity, the prophets of the time instituted that the date of

when each family began to donate wood, should be fixed in the Temple calendar. Each year, when a particular family's day came along, the family was granted the privilege to again supply wood for the altar, even if the Temple coffers were full and its wood-room stocked with firewood. These donations were accompanied by a special ceremony, and the day was celebrated as a festival by the donating family.[2]

One of the wood-offering days is the 20th of Av, on which a family called "Pachas-Moab," from the tribe of Judah, brought wood to the Temple.

#### Debate on Genealogy

Now, the Talmud engages in a discussion regarding the identity of the family titled "Pachas-Moab." Who were they, and where did they come from? The Talmud quotes an argument between two of the greatest sages, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yosi, two famed Tanaaim (Talmudic scholars) living in Israel in the second century CE, one century after the Roman destruction of the Second Temple.

...משנה תענית כו, א: זמן עצי כהנים והעם תשעה... בעשרים בו בני פחת מואב בן יהודה גמרא תענית כה, א: תנא בני פחת מואב בן יהודה הן הן בני דוד בן יהודה, דברי ר' מאיר. רבי יוסי אומר הן בני יואב בן צריה.

רש"י: הן הן בני דוד בן יהודה—דוד מלך ישראל, ואהכי קרו ליה פחת מואב שבא מרות המואביה. יואב בן צריה—שבא מרות המואביה כי צריה אם יואב אחות דוד היתה שנאמר (דברי הימים א, ב) ואחיותיהם צריה ואביגיל.

According to the opinion of Rabbi Meir, the family whom the Mishnah titles "Pachas-Moab" traced its lineage to King David, living some five centuries earlier. According to Rabbi Yosi's view, the family came from David's nephew—Yoav ben Tzeruyah, who served as the Commander-in-Chief of King David's armies. (Yoav's mother Tzeruyah was a sister of King David, so Yoav was David's nephew.)

Why was the family titled "Pachas-Moab?" Because according to both opinions, the members of these families were descendants of Ruth, a Moabite woman who converted to Judaism, and later became the great-grandmother of David and his sister Tzeruyah. (Ruth married Boaz, and mothered a son named Oved. He was the father of Yishai, the father of King David). "Pachas Moab" means a leader of Moab, and Ruth was a Moabite princess who became Jewish.

#### Who Cares?

Yet this entire discussion seems superfluous. The Talmud is addressing an event that occurred hundreds of years earlier when a particular family donated wood to the Temple. Why is it relevant to know whether they traced their lineage to David or his nephew? Do we have to argue about everything?

What is more, the argument takes place among Talmudic sages who lived one century after the destruction of the Temple, in which the entire tradition was a thing of history. To debate at such a moment the exact genealogy of the family who once contributed wood on one specific day (and their descendants carried on the tradition throughout the Second Temple era), seems irrelevant. There is something else that is disturbing. The Torah prohibits us from reminding converts about their non-Jewish origin in a way that might make them feel uncomfortable.[3] The Torah views this as a great sin and repeats it numerous times. Why, then, does the Mishnah describe this family as "Pachas-Moab," the descendants of Moab—one of the ancient archenemies of the Jewish people? Especially in this context, when our sages are attempting to praise the family and its generosity, why would we emphasize its complicated origins?

Unless of course, this detail would shed light on the entire story.

#### True Giving

The cut-off time (pun intended) for wood-cutting in the land of Israel is the 15th of Av, which marks the height of summer; after this date, the heat of day diminishes, and the wood that is cut is more moist and prone to worming, and it is forbidden to use worm-infested wood for the altar.[4] Thus, the family that contributed wood on the 20th of Av brought wood to the Temple at a time when their own wood supply could no longer be replenished with wood of good quality; hence, their gifts were held in special regard.

What is more, the families who donated the wood were not giving it for their own benefit, but rather for the rest of the community and the benefit of the Holy Temple. This wood would be used also for the many individual Jews who were obligated to bring an offering to the Temple, including many sinners who, according to the Torah, had to atone for their sins by bringing an offering. These families could have said to themselves: "Why should we give up precious wood to take care of Jewish sinners? Let them bring their own wood!" Yet they gave away their wood so that every single Jew would be able to bring his or her sacrifice to the Temple's altar.

Standing in a forest in the smelting heat of an Israeli summer to cut wood

(for, as mentioned, once the intensity of the heat is diminished, the wood is not "kosher" any longer for Temple use) is an arduous and grueling task. Yet this family stood in the forest for many days, weeks, and perhaps months, cutting enormous quantities of wood. And then they took all this wood and gave it away—and in a time when it cannot be replenished—so that every single Jew, even a Jew they never heard of and who has committed many a sin, would be able to enjoy a burning flame in the Temple and offer his/her sacrifices to the Almighty.

Furthermore, the multitudes of Jews who benefited from the contribution of this family would never know to whom credit is due. There was no "plaque" on the altar reminding every visitor who was responsible for the donated wood. This was a donation given without accolades.

And they did not do this begrudgingly, but with tremendous happiness, to the extent that they would mark this day each year as a day of festivities since they saw this as one of the happiest days in their lives!

Such a family, which gives in such a fashion and with such joy, professes a certain unique moral characteristic running in its "veins." This is why the Talmud engages in a discussion regarding the genealogy of this family who donated the wood on the 20th of Av. [5] What the Talmud is searching to understand is not just the factual genealogy, but from where this family inherited this type of generosity? Who educated and inspired these children?

And the answer is "Pachas-Moab." This family came from a woman named Ruth, a Moabite princess who became Jewish. It is her story that explains their story.

#### The Story of Ruth

The story of Ruth is movingly transcribed in the biblical book of Ruth. It begins in the famine-stricken Land of Israel during the historical period of the Judges, approximately in the Jewish year 2787 (973 BCE). The wealthy and influential Jew, Elimelech, and his pious wife, Naomi, together with their two sons, Machlon and Kilyon, abandon their land and their people in search of a better future. In Judea, Elimelech was besieged by the burdens of Jewish communal life and the onslaught of hungry beggars seeking food and money. He relocates with his family to the pagan land Moab, situated in today's Jordan, on the Eastern Bank of the Jordan river.

In the land of Moab, the family loses its fortune, and Elimelech dies. His sons marry Moabite princesses: Machlon marries Ruth, and Kilyon marries Orpah. Ruth and Orpah were the daughters of Eglon, king of Moab. Soon after their marriages, Machlon and then Kilyon suddenly die. The once esteemed Naomi is now a penniless, childless widow, a stranger in a foreign land. Her husband and both of her sons have died. She is left alone with two young daughters-in-law who are widows too. Naomi decides to return home to the Holy Land.

When the mourning period for her sons ends, Naomi begins her arduous, painful journey back to her land and her people. Ruth and Orpah faithfully begin to accompany her. They travel together forty steps. But then Naomi stops them. She discourages them from continuing the journey, urging them instead to return to their parents' homes and to the affluent palace life of their youth.

"Return, my daughters," Naomi tells them. "Why should you go with me? I am an old, broken widow; life has been cruel to me. You girls have a bright future ahead of you. You are young and beautiful. Go back and open a new chapter in your life."

One daughter-in-law, Orpah, is persuaded. The sober logic of her pious mother-in-law sits well with her. She exchanges her frail, elderly mother-in-law for a new and hopeful future, back with her own people and culture.

But the other daughter-in-law, Ruth, is not persuaded by her mother-in-law's plea. She is determined to share a common destiny with Naomi whatever the future may hold.

רות א, יד: ותשנה קולן, ותבקנה עוד; ותשק ערפה לחמותה, ורות דבקה בה.

"Orpah," the Tanach says, "kissed her mother-in-law (goodbye), but Ruth cleaved to her."

With immortal heroic words, enshrined in the majestic hearts of our people, Ruth declares:

רות א, טז: ותאמר רות אל-תפגעני-בי, לעזובך לשוב מאתך: כי אל-אשר מלכתי אלך, ובאשר תליני אליו, עמך עמי, ואלהינו אלדנו. וישם אקבר: כה יעשה יהוה לי, וכה יוסף, כי הנחת, יצירתי ביני וביןך.

"Wherever you will go, I will go. Where you will lodge, I will lodge. Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die."

And so it was. Orpah went back to Moab, where she began a new life for herself. Ruth voluntarily remained with her mother-in-law—I think that such a thing never occurred again in Jewish history[6]—and she became a Jew, though she was now destitute and lonely. From a royal, aristocratic, and

wealthy background, Ruth was now isolated and impoverished. She was a convert from a nation that was seen as an archenemy of the Jewish people (to the extent that no male converts of that nation were ever allowed to marry ordinary Jewish women[7]), so she knew that eyebrows would rise when people heard about her origin. This former princess was forced to get on line with the beggars to collect leftover grain from field owners, so she would survive.

#### The Soul of Ruth

Why did Ruth make such a sacrifice? Why did she subject her life to such difficulty, when there was absolutely no obligation on her to follow her mother-in-law, and she could have easily followed her sister-in-law? What motivated her decision?

Her photo and bio were not posted on any websites. She was not a “story,” a sensation, a “woman of valor.” No one sang her praises and marveled at her commitment. At that point, Ruth was no more than a poor wanderer, out of the limelight. What inspired her was one cause only, expressed in her above-mentioned proclamation to Naomi: “Wherever you will go, I will go. Where you will lodge, I will lodge. Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die.” Her agenda was nothing but the truth. No fanfare, no accolades, no attention, no validation, no reward, no comfort, and no recognition. Ruth was a princess within—she did not need external validation; she did things for G-d, and for G-d alone, and that was enough.

Ultimately, her name was engraved in the annals of our history. Ruth married a judge named Boaz, they gave birth to a boy named Oved, the father of Yishai, who fathered King David. Ruth was David’s great-grandmother. The entire royal Davidic dynasty, including the Moshiach himself, stems from a female Moabite convert to Judaism—Ruth.

Why did she, a Moabite convert, become the mother of Jewish royalty? Because in Judaism, the definition of a true leader is someone who is not in it for any purpose of fame, honor or power; his or her only agenda is serving G-d and His people. This is what Ruth was all about: Years before anyone knew her name, she was committed heart and soul to the cause. “Wherever you will go, I will go. Where you will lodge, I will lodge. Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die.”

#### Impact of a Mother

Some six centuries later, a Jewish family living at the onset of the Second Temple era, demonstrated extraordinary and selfless generosity. They would stand for weeks in a burning-hot forest, engaged in excruciating labor, in order to give a contribution which they could not replenish for the sake of people they do not know, and who will never know them, many of them of a low spiritual caliber, sinners among Israel.

Whence did they obtain this level of commitment? — The Talmud is eager to know.

The answer: They came from either the family of David or from his general, Yoav. Yet this does not cut it. David and Yoav were both great men, but at a very young age, they had become popular and influential; their praises were sung among the multitudes. Their fame reached the entire nation. This family, in contrast, possessed the unique quality of utter selfless commitment even without receiving any validation. Where did this come from?

Ah! “Pachas—Moab!” This was the gift of Ruth, the Moabite princess who left everything behind to embark on an unknown journey, one which might bring her nothing but scorn from her new people, who disliked Moab. Why? Because “Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die.”[8]

Here we have a classic illustration of Epigenetics. Ruth lives some six centuries before this family donates the wood. Yet in Judaism, the behavior of parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents makes a deep imprint on their children and descendants, even many centuries later. Ruth inculcated something within her family that did not depart from them even hundreds of years later.[9]

#### The Rebbe’s Father

I found it moving that the 20th of Av—the day commemorated in the Talmud as the day when the descendants of Ruth contributed their wood to the Temple—is also the *yahrzeit* of the great leader, sage and Kabbalist, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1878-1944), father of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the who died in exile in Kazakhstan, after the Communists had imprisoned and exiled him due to his work in teaching and upholding Yiddishkeit in the Ukraine. Like Ruth, there were the years of his life when he was completely under the “radar,” exiled by the Stalinist regime to a remote village in Kazakhstan. From his position as one of the most prominent and influential Rabbis in Ukraine, he was plunged into a town with no Jews, and with barely

the necessities for life.

His wife, Rebbetzin Chanah, who voluntarily went to join him in his exile, describes her husband’s behavior under those insane conditions. One image I can’t get out of my mind. It is Simchas Torah. In the past, Reb Leivik would lead the festive dancing in the grand shul in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, where he served as chief Rabbi. Hundreds and hundreds of Jews would come to dance with him. There was a special joyous melody he would sing each year on Simchas Torah, and it was known in the city as “The Rabbis’ Song.” (His son, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, would also sing this song each Simchas Torah).

Now he was in a one-bedroom apartment, infested with mice and many other rodents, filled with mud, the cold penetrated the thin walls of the hut. His landlord was not friendly to Jews and had many pigs roaming the house.

But it was Simchas Torah! Rebbetzin Chanah describes how suddenly she saw the same shine on her husband’s face as in the good years. Alone in the world, without a single student or friend, Reb Leivik began to say “Atah Hareisa” in the same profoundly emotional tone he had always done it. And then he began singing. Which song? His usual Hakafof song, which he would sing each year in his own shul. For hours, he danced, his face aglow with a radiance from another world. It was an embodiment of Ruth’s immortal words: “Wherever you will go, I will go. Where you will lodge, I will lodge. Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die.”

#### The Lesson to Us

This entire narrative of 20 Av contains a vital lesson for each of us. Sometimes we think to ourselves: Does it matter what I do in private? If I can get honored with a dinner, fine. If at least my mother-in-law can find out about my good deeds and praise me, wonderful. If everyone in shul gives me “yasher koach,” awesome. But to do something kind for another person, and no one will ever find out? To do one mitzvah that does not have a visible impact on the world? To help one Jew come closer to G-d without him or her ever finding out that I get the credit? To forgo one’s immoral temptation in the privacy of my life without anyone ever finding out what a great hero I am? Does it matter if I hold myself back from hollering or insulting my spouse or my child or my employee when no one will ever know what I have just done?

Oscar Wilde once said, “The nicest feeling in the world is to do a good deed anonymously and have somebody find out.” But in Judaism, our paradigm of leadership and inspiration is a woman named Ruth. She taught us that we do not live for other people’s accolades, but for G-d, for truth. G-d knows what I’ve done. Every good deed done anonymously is known and cherished by your Creator. G-d embraces every breath you take, every sacrifice you make, and every Mitzvah you do for His sake.[10]

(Please donate here. In honor of the Yartzeit of Reb Levi Yitzchak, watch a fascinating class by Rabbi YY about a debate between the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his father about the power of thoughts in Jewish law and spirituality. Click here to

[1] Taanis 12a; 26a; 28a[2] See Talmud *ibid*. [3] See Talmud Bava Metzia 58b; 59b and all biblical sources referenced there. [4] *Ibid.*, 31a; Middot 2:5. [5] The same is true considering the donation on 20 Elul. There too there is an argument about the genealogy of the family (Talmud, Taanis 28a). Indeed, this family too came from Ruth! See Likkutei Sichos, vol. 4, pp. 1103-1107; vol. 9 pp. 86-90. [6] A similar humorous remark was made by the Lubavitcher Rebbe during the Farbrengen of 20 Av, 5732 (1972). [7] Even concerning the women of Moab, there was a fierce debate. Hence, Ruth marrying Boaz remained a controversial issue for generations, see Talmud Yevamos 76a-b. [8] Why the argument if they came from David or Yoav? Why is that relevant and what is the logic behind each opinion? See Likkutei Sichos vol. 4 pp. 1103-1107. [9] This also answers a question: How can the sages argue about facts, in which only one opinion can be correct, and the other false? Yet, in reality, both views hold that this family came from both David and Yoav. The argument is, which person in the family is most responsible for their behavior (See Likkutei Sichos *ibid*). [10] This essay is partially based on talks delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on the 20th of Av in the years 5711 and 5732 (August 22, 1951 and July 31, 1972). Parts of them were published in Likkutei Sichos, vol. 4, pp. 1103-1107; *ibid.*, vol. 22 Vayikra. Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 9 pp. 86-90. The connection with Ruth I developed based on Sichos Kodesh 5732 Sichas Chaf Av.