

Weekly Parsha VAYELECH 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Our teacher Moshe is described in the Parsha as being near the end of his life in this world. Yet, the Torah also describes his last days on earth as being vigorous, healthy, while continuing to teach and guide the people of Israel, as he had done for the past 40 years. The Torah itself testifies that even on the last days of life in this world, he was able to climb mountains, and gather the Jewish people at his feet to continue the process of accepting the covenant which guarantees the eternity and future of Israel.

He is not to be judged as an ordinary human being. That is certainly true spiritually where he ranks as the greatest of prophets and the supreme lawgiver in all human experience. But it is also true that physically he did not suffer the usual fate of human beings who age and lose much of their original vitality and influence.

The ravages of time are pretty much inescapable for all of us ordinary human beings. The Torah never records for us that Moshe "missed a day" at work because of fatigue or illness. Rather, he ranks above ordinary mortals in his physical prowess that did not diminish even in the days before he died. At the end of his life, the Torah itself says that his vision never faltered, nor did his physical condition wither or deteriorate.

In all respects, we must view him as the miracle man of all ages. The Torah indeed records the physical ailments and deteriorating eyesight of our patriarchs Isaac and Jacob. But when it comes to Moshe, none of these physical problems appear to affect him.

Yet, Moshe is but a mortal human being. He does not escape from the eventual fate of all creatures who come into this world. There is long series of comments that appear in Midrash where even Moshe's soul that resides within his body, pleads with heaven that the removal of the body and soul relationship does not occur.

It apparently suffices that Moshe is active and vital in his final moment on earth. This fact is highlighted by the word that depicts him as going and walking even in his final days and testifies to this unnatural natural wonder associated with him in his life. In spirit and knowledge, Moshe remains with us even today, even after the events described in this week's reading of the Torah. Perhaps that is also included in the idea that no one knows the actual place where Moshe is buried. It is part of his eternal legacy of life and perpetual accomplishment, that there are no markers or monuments to depict where his remains lie. We can, therefore, truly say that Moshe still walks amongst the Jewish people.
Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

Consensus vs. Command? (Vayelech 5782)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZL

What do you say to your successor? What advice do you give them? Vayelech is the place to look for the answer, because it is here that Moses finally handed the reins over to Joshua, and he and God both give him a blessing for the future. But they gave different blessings.

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Listen to them and they sound almost the same. Moses says "Be strong and of good courage, for you will come [tavo] with this people into the land" (Deut. 31:7). God says, "Be strong and of good courage, for you will bring [tavi] the Israelites into the land" (Deut. 31:23). Tavo or tavi, "come with" or "bring." The words sound and seem similar. But the difference as understood by the Sages was total.

Here is how Rashi puts it:

Moses said to Joshua, "Make sure that the elders of the generation are with you. Always act according to their opinion and advice." However, the Holy One blessed be He said to Joshua, "For you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them" – meaning, "Bring them even against their will. It all depends on you. If necessary, take a stick and beat them over the head. There is only one leader for a generation, not two."

These are the two extremes of leadership: consensus or command. Moses advised Joshua to pursue a policy of consultation and conciliation. What he was saying in effect was, "You don't need to follow the people. You are the leader, not they. But you do need to work

with the elders. They too are leaders. They constitute, in effect, your team. They need to feel that they are part of the decision-making process. They will not expect you always to agree with them. Often they will not agree with one another. But they do need to feel consulted.

"If they sense that you are not interested in their opinions, if the impression they have of you is of a person determined to do things his way regardless of everyone else because you know better, they will attempt to sabotage you. They will do you harm. They may not succeed. You may survive. But you will be injured. You will limp. Your standing among the people will be diminished. They will say, how can we respect one who is not respected by the elders?"

"I speak from experience. The Korach rebellion was serious. It was not just Korach; it was also the Reubenites, and other leaders from the various tribes. And though the rebellion was cut short in the most dramatic way possible, we were all diminished and nothing was quite the same ever again. So: make sure that the elders of the generation are with you. If they are, you will succeed."

God, according to the Sages, took the opposite approach. "The time has come to leave the wilderness, cross the Jordan, conquer the land and build the kind of society that honours the human beings I made in My image instead of enslaving and exploiting them. Don't look for consensus. You will never find it. People's interests are different. Their perspectives are not the same. Politics is an arena of conflict. I did not want it to be that way, but having given humanity the gift of freedom, I cannot take it back and impose My will by force. So you must show the people the way.

"Lead from the front. Be clear. Be consistent. Be strong. The last person who gave the people what they wanted was Aaron and what they wanted was a Golden Calf. That was nearly the end of the Jewish people. Consensus, in politics or business or even in pursuit of truth, is not leadership but the abdication of leadership. I chose you to be Moses' successor because I believe in you. Therefore, believe in yourself. Tell the people what they must do, and tell them why.

"Be respectful of them. By all means, listen to them. But at the end of the day the responsibility is yours. Leaders lead. They do not follow. And believe me, though they may criticise you now they will eventually admire you. People want their leaders to know the way, go the way and show the way. They want them to be decisive. Always treat people with the utmost courtesy and respect. But if they do not behave toward you as you do toward them, if they oppose and try to frustrate what you are doing, there may be no choice but to take a stick and hit them on the head. There is only one leader in a generation. If everyone is empowered, there is no music, only noise; no achievement, only an endless committee meeting at which everyone speaks and no one listens."

Those were, then and now, the two great options. But notice something odd. The person urging consensus is Moses. But Moses never acted by consensus. This is the man who almost had to drag the people out of Egypt, through the sea, and across a howling desert, the man who did things of his own initiative without even asking God.

This is the man who broke the Tablets of Stone hewn and engraved by God Himself. When did Moses ever lead by consensus? To be sure he had seventy elders, princes of tribes, and a devolved structure of administration with heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, but though they helped him, they did not advise him nor did he seek their advice. What suddenly turned Moses into a peacenik, a lead-by-consensus man?

That is one problem. The other is the advice given by God Himself: lead from the front, even against their will. But that is not how God acted, as understood by the Sages. This is what they said on the words immediately prior to the creation of humanity, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26):

“Let Us make man”: From here we learn the humility of the Holy One, blessed be He. Since man was created in the likeness of the angels, and they would envy him, He consulted them...

Even though they [the angels] did not assist Him in His creation, and there is an opportunity for the heretics to rebel (to misconstrue the plural as a basis for their heresies), Scripture did not hesitate to teach proper conduct and the trait of humility, that a great person should consult with and receive permission from a smaller one.[1]

The Sages, puzzled by the plural, “Let us make man,” interpreted it to mean that God consulted with the angels. Despite the fact that the use of the word “us” was dangerous – it could be read as compromising the pure monotheism of Judaism – nonetheless the principle of consultation is so important that the Torah takes the risk of being open to misinterpretation. God consults, according to the Sages. “God does not act tyrannically toward His creatures.” (Avoda Zara 3a)

To be sure, the Sages said that at Sinai God suspended the mountain above the Israelites and said, “If you say ‘No,’ this will be your grave.” (Shabbat 88a) But this is not the plain sense of the verse. To the contrary, before he gave the Torah to Israel he commanded Moses to explain to the people what was being proposed (Ex. 19:4-6). And it was only when the people – “all the people together” (Ex. 19:8) “with one voice” (Ex. 24:3) – that the covenant was made. That is the biblical basis for the idea, in the American Declaration of Independence, that governments gain their authority from “the consent of the governed.” The very act of giving humans freedom means that God never forces us against our will. As Eisenhower once said, “Hitting people over the head is not leadership: it is assault.” So why was God here, as it were, speaking out of character?

The answer, it seems to me, is this: Both God and Moses wanted Joshua to know that true leadership cannot be a one-sided affair, be it the pursuit of consensus or command-and-control. It must be a deft balance of both. They wanted Joshua to hear this in the most striking way, so each said what they were least expected to say.

Moses, whom everyone associated with strong, decisive leadership, in effect told Joshua, “Don’t forget to strive for consensus. Your task is not what mine was. I had to take people out of slavery. You have to lead them into a land of freedom. Freedom means taking people seriously. The leadership of a free people involves listening, respecting and striving for consensus wherever possible.”

God, who gave humans their freedom and never imposed Himself on people against their will, said, “Joshua, I am God; you are not. I have to respect people’s freedom. I have to let them go the way they are determined to go, even if it is wrong and self-destructive. But you are a human among humans and it is your task to show them the way that leads to justice, compassion and the good society. If the people do not agree with you, you have to teach them, persuade them, but ultimately you have to lead them, because if everyone does what is right in their own eyes, that is not freedom but chaos.”

In short, leadership is not simple. It is complex because it involves people and people are complex. You have to listen, and you have to lead. You have to strive for consensus but ultimately, if there is none, you must take the risk of deciding. Had they waited for consensus Lincoln, would never have ended slavery, Roosevelt and Churchill would never have led the free world to victory, and Ben Gurion would never have proclaimed the State of Israel.

It is not the job of leaders to give people what they want. It is the job of leaders to teach people what they ought to want. But at the same time they must involve people in the decision-making process. Key figures and constituencies must feel that they were consulted. Collaborative, consultative, listening leadership is essential in a free society. Otherwise, there is autocracy tempered by assassination.[2]

Leaders must be teachers but also learners. They must be visionaries and yet have time for the details. They must push people but never too far, too fast, or they will fail. They must speak to the better angels of our nature, teaching us to love not hate, forgive not seek revenge. They must always prefer the peaceful solution to the one that involves taking a stick and hitting people on the head, even though they are prepared to do so if

there is no alternative. Leaders must be capable of more than one style of leadership. Otherwise, as Abraham Maslow said, “Those who only have a hammer treat every problem as if it were a nail.”[3]

Considering the effort, energy, stress and pain, why anyone should seek to be a leader would remain a mystery, were it not for this luminous truth: there is no better way to flood life with meaning than to have lifted others and helped them to a greatness they never knew they had; to have together with others righted some of the wrongs of this injured earth and its creatures; to have acted rather than waited for others to act, and to have brought others with you, for the greatest leader on earth or in heaven cannot lead alone.

These are what make leadership the greatest privilege by which any of us can be blessed. As Moses said to Joshua, “Happy are you to have merited leading the children of God.” (Rashi to Num. 27:18) The crown of leadership is invisible, yet you know who is wearing it and who is not. It is there, in front of you, waiting for you to put it on.[4] Wear it with pride and may all you do be blessed.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayelech (Deuteronomy 30:1-31:30)/ Yom Kippur

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “Now, therefore write this song for you, and teach it to the People of Israel...” (Deuteronomy 31:19).

Is Yom Kippur a happy day or a sad day? Many associate the Day of Atonement with solemnity and trepidation. Indeed, according to most translations, the Torah specifically states regarding this holiest of days, “you shall afflict your souls” (Lev. 16:29).

The great Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, however, suggests a radically different understanding of this day. “On Tisha B’Av, I can’t eat because I’m so sad,” he said. “On Yom Kippur I have no need to eat, because I’m so happy.” But what of the command to afflict oneself? What is the basis for his happiness?

In truth, his interpretation reflects a deep insight about the essence of the day, based on the fact that the Hebrew letters that form the root, “affliction” (“ayin-nun-yud”), are also the letters that form the root for expressions of joyous song. For example, the Torah states (Deut. 26:5) regarding the declaration of the farmer, who, filled with feelings of happiness, brings the First Fruits (Bikkurim) to the Temple: (“V’anita v’amarta”), “you shall happily sing and declare...”, with the proper musical cantillations.

Similarly, at the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds, the Torah (Ex. 15:21) reports, “And Miriam (happily) sang to them” (“V’ta’an la’hem Miriam”)

This gives us a fresh perspective on the aforementioned verse in Leviticus, which as we noted above, is usually translated as “you shall afflict yourselves”. However, re-reading the Hebrew original – (“anu et nafshoteichem”) – in light of the above, we can accurately understand it as “you shall make your souls sing”. Indeed, the next verse explains why we should be happy: “For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to purify you; from all your sins shall you be purified before God.”

We can now gain an appreciation of the verse in our portion that refers to the Torah as a song. In what way is the Torah a song? Because like a song, the Torah can bring us great happiness via the commandments, which allow us to ennoble and sanctify ourselves. In the same way that we enjoy a great high when we accomplish a difficult task and perform it well, so, too, does the song of the Torah allow us to rejoice in the potential of human nature and the ability of the human being to achieve a life of morality and holiness.

It is for this reason that the Day of Atonement is fundamentally a day of happiness. One might have thought that with all the fasting and the many hours spent in the synagogue, we should relate to the day in purely solemn terms. But Yom Kippur is not a fast of sadness. Rather, it is when we re-discover our great spiritual capacity to be like the angels who never need food or drink, soaring close to God, and transcending the physical. It is then that we understand the meaning of true rejoicing: spending twenty-five hours in fellowship with the Divine, without need

of physical comforts. This experience opens the window to the spiritual rejoicing that gives us such great comfort and well-being.

Indeed, the custom in yeshivot is to ecstatically sing and dance with renewed vigor and dedication after the last Shofar blasts are sounded at the end of the Ne'ila prayer, at the conclusion of the fast. The excited students and teachers declare with their enthusiasm: Behold, we have transcended our physical selves. We have climbed upwards into the Divine embrace. We feel Your gracious compassion, and we are ready and hopefully worthy to attempt to perfect ourselves and the world. Shabbat Shalom!

Insights Parshas Vayelech - Tishrei 5781

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Shmuel ben Allegra.

"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Bringing Torah Down to Earth

I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in, and Hashem has told me you shall not cross this Jordan (31:2).

This week's parsha opens with Moshe addressing all of Bnei Yisroel on the last day of his life. Rashi (ad loc) explains "I can no longer go out and come in" as referring to "[going out and coming] in the words of the Torah. This teaches us that the knowledge handed down and the wellsprings of wisdom had become closed to him."

In other words, on the last day of his life Moshe was no longer "connected" to the source of the Torah and its wisdom. The question is, why? Why was it necessary for Moshe to be closed off to the wisdom and wellsprings of Torah on the last day of his life?

In last week's parsha we find a remarkable statement, "This commandment that I command you today is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in the heavens [for you] to say, 'who will go up to the heavens and bring it down for us...'" (30:11-12). While many commentators (Ramban ad loc etc.) understand this verse to be referring to the mitzvah of repentance, Rashi (ad loc) explains that this is referring to the Torah itself. Meaning if it was up in the heavens someone "would have to go up after it, and learn it" (Rashi 30:12).

What does Rashi mean by, "if the Torah was up in the sky somebody would have to ascend after it and study it to bring it down"? as Moshe was alive the Torah was literally in the heavens. That is, the domain of Torah remained with Hashem and his heavenly court. Moshe was "connected" to the source. He had learned all the mitzvos and the deep meanings that Hashem intended for us to know. If there was a question as to what the proper course of action Hashem wanted from us, we merely had to ask Moshe. If Moshe was unclear (like in the story of the person who gathered wood on Shabbos) or if he forgot a halacha (such as in the case of the daughters of Tzelaphchad) Moshe could go directly to Hashem to clarify.

On the last day of his life the Torah was gifted to the Jewish people. The Torah became our domain. Our sages were now the final authority as to what the proper halacha was in any given situation. Therefore, even if Hashem disagreed with the sages' interpretation, we would still follow their interpretation (see the Talmudic dispute between R' Eliezer and the other sages wherein Hashem seemingly sides with R' Eliezer but we follow the ruling of the sages, Talmud Bavi Baba Metzia 59b).

On the last day of his life Moshe finished writing the entire Torah and gave it to the Jewish people (see 31:9). In order for him to properly give over the Torah, so that it could become the domain of Bnei Yisroel (and no longer in the heavens), Moshe could no longer have access to the secrets and wellsprings of the Torah. Thereby, on Moshe's final day, the Torah became wholly ours, and our responsibility to properly define.

What Are Kids Good For?

Gather together all the people – men, women, small children [...] so that they will hear and so that they will learn and they will fear Hashem... (31:12)

This week's parsha contains the mitzvah of hakhel – the gathering of the entirety of the Jewish people on the holiday of Sukkos following the shemitta year. The king at that time would read from different sections in the Chumash of Devarim from an elevated platform. The Gemara (Bavli Chagiga 3a) explains that the men came to study and the women came to hear. The Gemara then asks; "Why did the very small children come? To give reward to those that brought them" (ibid).

Maharsha (ad loc) explains that the Gemara wonders why the Torah discusses the children in this verse and then mentions the children again in the very next verse. In fact, the next verse clearly explains that the children are coming to learn from the experience. So, explains Maharsha, the first verse must be talking about children that are too young to gain from the experience. Therefore the Gemara explains they are only coming in order "to give reward to those that bring them."

Simply understood, the Gemara seems to be saying that the extra strain of bringing the very young children will bring some kind of reward to their much beleaguered parents. Perhaps this can be understood along the lines of the Talmudic dictum (Avos 5:26) "commensurate to the pain is the reward." But notwithstanding the fact that children can inflict exquisite discomfort on their parents, this cannot be the sole reason for bringing them. First of all, older children can be even more painful to drag to a speech that they can hardly understand. Second, if it is simply to make the experience more difficult, why shouldn't even people without young children have to do something to make the experience more trying? Why are only parents of very young children worthy of this added aggravation?

Obviously, there has to be another reason why we bring very young children to such a gathering. Have you ever noticed that some sports crazy fans bring their one year old children to baseball and football games decked out in baby sized team jerseys and other team themed items? What possible purpose can there be in such an effort? Clearly the child will have no recollection of the event or of his parents' single-minded obsession; so, why would someone go to all that effort?

The answer has to be that it is an internalization, for ourselves and our children, that we want our legacy to be connected to this ideal. There are families that take great pride in being multigenerational fans of certain teams. So too, by the mitzvah of hakhel we are expressing the ideal, that our deepest desire is for our children to be connected and bound to the values of the Torah and the Jewish people. The reason these parents earn special reward isn't because of the added aggravation; it is because they are making the greatest expression of their personal commitment to Hashem and his Torah. They want their children to follow in their footsteps and the legacy of the Jewish people.

Power of Speech

The Kol Nidre service is essentially an annulment of oaths and vows; a shortened version of the Hatoras Nedarim that is performed after Shacharis on Erev Rosh Hashanah. Why is our most solemn day of the year ushered in with the concept of vows and oaths?

Rambam (Yad Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1) implies that the primary aspect of repentance is "Vidui" – the verbalized confession of one's sins. Why is verbalization of sins such an important component of the process?

Targum Onkelos (Bereishis 2:7) explains the possuk "And he blew into [Adam's] nostrils a living soul" that Hashem imbued Adam with the ability to speak. This was a replication, as it were, of Hashem's power of speech given to man. In other words, just as Hashem created the world with words (see Avos 5:1), man was similarly endowed with the ability to create new realities through speech.

This is the essence of how a prohibition of a neder can take effect and become a binding commitment. Man can transform the reality of an object from being permitted to prohibited. So too is the process of repentance. Essential to the teshuvah process is the verbalization of a sincere heartfelt confession along with the commitment to sin no more. Through speech alone, man can transform his reality from being a sinner to being penitent.

This is the message of Kol Nidrei; through our speech we effectuate our transformation. The concept of oaths and vows, then define the nature of

Yom Kippur. This is the day we use our speech to beseech Hashem to transform us through his forgiveness.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Vayeilech 5782-2021

“Appreciating our own Inner Worth”

(updated and revised from Vayeilech 5761-2001)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s parasha, parashat Vayeilech, is almost always read together with the preceding parasha, Nitzavim. They are read separately only when there are two Shabbatot between Rosh Hashana and Sukkot, neither of which coincide with a holiday.

On this Shabbat, which is known as “Shabbat Shuva,” the Shabbat of Repentance, we read, in Deuteronomy 31:10-13, of the mitzvah of הַקְהֵל —Hak’hayl. The Torah reports, that after the people of Israel settle in the Land of Israel, once every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot, all the people are to be called together, men, women and children to study Torah from the mouth of the king.

Hak’hayl was an extraordinary event, underscoring the fact that during the Sabbatical year, when the land lay fallow, citizens of Israel must enhance themselves religiously and spiritually by studying Torah. The king of Israel is expected to serve as the paradigm for all of Israel by leading the studies personally, teaching and learning Torah with the people.

The specific portion of the parasha in which Moses gives the people the directive concerning hak’hayl is introduced with the following words. The Torah, in Deuteronomy 31:9 states: וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת, וַיִּתְּנֶהָ אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי, הַנִּשְׂאִים אֶת אֲרוֹן בְּרִית הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֵל כָּל זָקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, that Moses wrote down the Torah and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the Covenant of G-d, and to all the elders of Israel.

While the text relates that Moses wrote down the Torah and specifically delivered it to the hands of the priests and the elders, it is clear that religion in Judaism was not only intended to be of the concern of the priests, or to be the province of a small esoteric circle of leaders. The priests are merely the guardians and teachers of the Torah. The religious truths found in the Torah were intended to be the everlasting possession of the entire people. This is what is clearly indicated in the verse in Deuteronomy 33:4: תּוֹרָה צִוְּהָ לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה, מִזְרְשָׁה קְהֵלֶת יִעֲקֹב, Moses commanded us the Torah, it is an inheritance to the entire congregation of Jacob.

As is often true in Judaism, we encounter an antinomy, a contradiction between the primacy of two reasonable principles: finding the proper and necessary balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of the congregation. So, for instance, while it is the Jewish people’s custom to pray with a congregation, as part of a minyan—a quorum, the most significant prayer—the Amidah, is always recited silently, as if we are praying alone, as individuals. And while the community has certain powers, the powers that the community have, really derive from the individuals within the community. It is this balance of the needs of the individual and the needs of the community that Judaism does so well.

This delicate balance, is also reflected in the role played by the festival of Rosh Hashana (which begins on Monday evening, September 6th) and that introduces a 10 day period of collective repentance. But we dare not lose sight of the key role that the individual plays in achieving collective forgiveness. Each person must see him or herself as the key element in the successful achievement of forgiveness, not only on a personal level, but for the entire Jewish people.

When it comes to seeking forgiveness, those who are truly contrite often view themselves as unworthy, not only unworthy of G-d’s forgiveness, but unworthy of participating in the communal contrition of the Jewish people. Not so, says Judaism. Each and every soul is precious to G-d. Each and every soul can qualify for Divine forgiveness, and each and every soul has the power to become the determining factor to achieve successful Teshuva—repentance for the entire Jewish people.

I would like to share a meaningful parable which I believe conveys a powerful message regarding an individual’s true worth.

A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of the pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, the other pot was perfect. And while the perfect pot always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master’s house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For two full years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one-and-a-half pots full of water to his master’s house.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, the cracked pot spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. “I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you.” “Why?,” asked the bearer. “Of what are you ashamed?”

“I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master’s house,” the pot said. “Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you do not get full value from your efforts.”

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, “As we return to the master’s house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.” Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old, cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But, at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because as usual, it had leaked out half its load. And so again, it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, “Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot’s side? That’s because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day, while we walk back from the stream, you’ve watered them. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master’s table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have had this beauty to grace his house.”

The moral of course is that each of us has our own unique flaws. We’re all “cracked pots” (some more cracked than others). But it’s the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding. We must take each person for what they are and look for the good in them.

And there is much good out there. There is a lot of good in each one of us. Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape. We must remember to appreciate all the different people we encounter in life!

Each of us has the power to change the world. In order to accomplish this, we all need to focus on our own self worth, and learn to appreciate the abundant good that is to be found in others.

לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה תִּכְתְּבוּ — L’shana Tovah Tikatayvu – May you be inscribed for a year of health and peace.

Please note: Rosh Hashana 5782 is observed this year, beginning tonight, Monday evening, September 6, and all day Tuesday and Wednesday, September 7 and 8, 2021.

The Fast of Gedaliah will be observed on Thursday, September 9, 2021, from dawn until nightfall.

The New Year holiday is immediately followed on Friday night and Saturday, September 10th and 11th, by Shabbat Shuva.

Wishing you a שָׁנָה טוֹבָה —Shana Tovah, a very happy and health New Year. *May you be blessed.*

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Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

The Song of Torah, The Road to Teshuva

In Parshas Vayeilech (31:16-19), Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu that in the future Klal Yisrael will forsake Him and serve foreign gods. As a result, Hashem will hide his face from Klal Yisrael and they will be subjected to many trials and tribulations until they will admit that all of

their misfortune is due to the fact that Hashem is no longer in their midst. But even so, Hashem will continue to conceal his face (hasteir astir panai bayom hahu) because they served other gods. The posuk (31:19) concludes, "So now, write this song for yourselves and teach it to Bnei Yisrael; put it in their mouths, so that it can bear witness for me against Bnei Yisrael."

Rashi explains that "this song" in the posuk refers to Parshas Ha'azinu in which Hakadosh Boruch Hu warns Klal Yisrael that if they abandon the Torah, they will suffer dire consequences. But Chazal understood that the posuk also refers more broadly to the entire Torah, and it is the source of the mitzvah on every Jew to write a sefer Torah. Why is the mitzvah to write a sefer Torah mentioned specifically in the context of Hashem hiding His face from Klal Yisrael? And why is the Torah called a song? Moreover, why does Hashem continue to hide His face even after Klal Yisrael realizes that all their difficulties are a result of their being distant from Hakadosh Boruch Hu?

Perhaps the answer is that recognizing their guilt (hakaras hacheit) and even expressing regret (charata) cannot rescue Klal Yisrael from their misery. Until they chart a new path and change their actions, Hakadosh Boruch Hu will continue to conceal His face from them. That is why the posuk mentions the mitzvah of writing a sefer Torah because it is Torah study, more than anything else, that can help set a person on a path to teshuva.

How does talmud Torah lead to teshuva? Imagine a prince decides to go on a business trip which will force him to be away from the palace for many months. Before the prince sets out on his journey, his father, the king, gives him a letter, and tells him to read it only a week after his ship leaves the port. The son is anxious to know what his father has written in the letter, but out of respect for his father, he waits to open the letter until a week has passed. Finally, he eagerly tears open the envelope, and as he starts reading, he is overtaken with emotion. He reads how much his father and the family love and admire him, how they will miss him dearly, and that they hope he will be successful in his business venture and will bring honor to the family name. His father asks him to always remember that he comes from royalty. He should never degrade himself in his actions, but rather he should behave in a manner that befits the son of a king. As the prince continues to read, he feels a longing for his father, and he accepts upon himself to do his best to bring honor to the family.

In a similar sense, the Torah is a letter of love that Hashem has written to Klal Yisrael. In it, He expresses His boundless affection for the Jewish people (Va'eschanan 7:8), how impressed He is with their yiras shamayim (Va'eschanan 5:25-26), and how He only wants their good (Eikev 10:13). Hashem emphasizes how He has given Klal Yisrael the Torah which is a blueprint to help them navigate the complicated and challenging world in which we live. And He assures them that if they follow this guideline, they will achieve their full potential as a mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh and merit everlasting reward and ultimate satisfaction.

One who perceives Hakadosh Boruch Hu's love for Klal Yisrael as expressed in the Torah will naturally desire to connect with Him. And that is really the essence of teshuva. The Mabit writes that teshuva involves "drawing close to Hashem from a distance of sin" (Beis Elokim, Sha'ar HaTeshuva 1.) Through talmud Torah, a person develops a better understanding of Hakadosh Boruch Hu. He appreciates Hashem's love for every Jew. He is awed by Hashem's patience, His compassion and kindness, and that recognition draws a person toward Hakadosh Boruch Hu.

Reflecting on the words of the Torah can strengthen a person's ahavas Hashem, and that will awaken within him a desire to connect with the Ribbono Shel Olam. For such a person, Torah is not just an intellectual pursuit; it is a song, because it reminds a person of Hashem's never-ending love for Klal Yisrael, and that recognition generates a longing to draw closer to Him. This is why the Torah discusses the mitzvah of writing a sefer Torah in the context of Hashem's concealing his face from Klal Yisrael because Torah study is the catalyst that can motivate a

person to translate his inner feelings of teshuva into a tangible change of behavior.

It is not surprising, then, that Hakadosh Boruch Hu chose to give the second luchos on Yom Kippur. This is the day that Hashem agreed to forgive Klal Yisrael for cheit ha'egel and from then on it was established as a day of atonement and forgiveness. What better way for Hashem to express his affection for Klal Yisrael and His desire to reconnect with them than by giving them the gift of Torah which serves as a constant reminder of our special relationship with Him.

Yom Kippur is a day we feel a mix of fear and joy. We tremble at the prospect of standing in judgment before Hashem, but we do so with a measure of confidence because we remember Hakadosh Boruch Hu's great love for us. We sing proudly about our unique relationship - "we are your children and you are our Father...we are your friend and you are our Beloved." And we hope and pray that Hakadosh Boruch Hu will draw us close to Him and have mercy on us, that He will accept all our tefillos and grant us a year of health and happiness and beracha - for us and for all of Klal Yisrael.

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Jerusalem Post

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Vayelech: The concealed face of God

Why is a punishment in the Torah described as "the concealment of God's face", and what is the meaning of this?

This week's parasha is one of the last parashot in the Torah. It describes the last preparations before the death of Moses, and the passing of the torch to his student Yehoshua bin Nun, who would later lead the nation to settling the Holy Land.

God calls to Moses and Yehoshua to enter Ohel Mo'ed (the Tent of Congregation), the Mishkan, and there He conveys to Moses a gloomy forecast of what the future holds for the Jewish nation in the coming years – a forecast that came true in its entirety. According to this forecast, the Jewish nation will worship other deities and breach its covenant with God. In response, God will conceal His face from His people:

"And My fury will rage against them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them... and many evils and troubles will befall them; and they will say on that day, 'Is it not because our God is no longer in my midst, that these evils have befallen me?' And I will hide My face on that day, because of all the evil they have committed..." (Deuteronomy 31:17)

These verses do not describe a punishment that the Jewish nation will receive for leaving the covenant, but that God will hide His face, and this "hastarat panim" – the concealment of God's face – will be what causes the troubles that afflict the Jews. Why is the punishment described this way, and what is the meaning of this?

The term is fundamental in Jewish religious philosophy. When we believe in one God, and believe He has a relationship with His creations, we actually believe God is entirely good. We cannot accept evil and suffering from God, even if the person deserves it. Indeed, these verses describe the punishment that happens when God hides His face and temporarily looks away, allowing for chance to afflict the person being punished.

This sense, that there is no evil that stems from God but only because He conceals His face, has accompanied the Jewish people throughout the most difficult hardships.

But sometimes, for the faithful, this experience of God hiding His face and not being present in the suffering he is enduring, is unbearable. Rabbi Baruch Rabinowitz (1914-1997) was a Holocaust survivor who worked to save thousands of Jews from being sent to extermination camps. At the end of his life, he wrote a book called Binat Nevonim where he describes the Holocaust from the perspective of a believing Jew. He writes as follows:

"Though we knew this was all from God... despite this, in our hearts, we could not accept this. We could accept God's decree, but we could not make peace with the feeling... that He hid His face from us, and that

He does not want to know what's happening to us; as though after He handed us over to our enemies, He turned His back to us, without looking at what these enemies are doing to us." (Binat Nevonim, pages 131-133)

He found a solution to this difficult experience in the words of the Talmud: "And I will hide My face on that day," the Holy One, Blessed be He said. "Even though I hid my face from them... His hand is outstretched over us, as it is stated: 'And I have covered you in the shadow of My hand.'" (Isaiah 51:16) (Tractate Chagiga 5:2)

When a person doesn't want someone else to see him, he has two options: to cover his own face and turn his head away, or to extend his hand out to cover the other's face so he won't be able to see him. When we read that God might hide His face, we imagine it like a person turning away and ignoring what he sees, or covering his own face with his hand. But the sages of the Talmud say, based on what is written in the book of Isaiah, that "hester panim" should be compared to a person covering his friend's face so the friend can't see him, even though he is still present and can totally see his friend. If so, when someone is suffering, it is not that God is hidden or has disappeared. He is completely present, but temporarily, the person cannot experience His good and compassionate presence.

We hope for a good year, one in which our lives are full of God's beneficent presence. With that, we still need to remember that even during the times of suffering and sorrow we have endured, God is with us, even if we cannot sense it, as was written by Rabbi Nachman of Breslev:

"Even during a concealment within a concealment, Hashem, may He be blessed, is certainly there. Behind all the difficult, confusing, challenging things that stand before you (Hashem says:) – I stand." (Likutei Moharan 56:3)

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayeilech

פרשת וילך תשפ"א

וד' הוא ההלך לפניך הוא יהיה עמך

Hashem, it is He Who goes before you; He will be with you. (31:8)

Hashem never leaves us. He listens to our prayers. The reply that we receive may not be what we are seeking, we have no question that Hashem has listened. During our periods of travail, when we think that we are alone - we are not. He is there sharing in our pain. Sadly, some people have great difficulty coping with pain, to the point that they become overwhelmed with despair and give up hope. They forget that a loving Father in Heaven guides the world, and whatever occurs is by His Divine decree. While it is understandable to feel anxious, to lament, to grieve, despair reflects a lack of faith. A Jew believes in Hashem and knows that He listens to us. While this may not erase the pain of loss, it does make it somewhat easier to bear.

A Holocaust survivor who had lost his entire family immigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* following the liberation. Depressed and dejected, he turned to the *Chazon Ish*, זל, hoping to receive *divrei chizuk*, words that would hearten him, because he had descended to a point where he felt that his *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, had waned terribly, and, worst of all, he no longer cared.

The *Chazon Ish* listened to his tale of woe and related the following story to him. A woman ran a lucrative business without any assistance from her husband. One day, she took a large amount of money with her and traveled to the large wholesale market to purchase wares for resale in her shop. Unfortunately, she somehow lost her money pouch. She was frantic, so she immediately went to the *Rav* of the city to announce publicly that anyone who found a money pouch should return it forthwith to the *Rav*. After a while, a man appeared at the *Rav's* home and claimed that he had found the money pouch. He felt that because it had been some time since it was lost, the owner of the bag had surely despaired of its return. Hence, it belonged to him,

according to the principle that once an owner gives up hope of the return of a lost item, the finder may keep it.

The *Rav* was not certain how to rule with regard to this case, because the man's claim to the bag of money was not without merit. He decided to present the question to the *Kovner Rav*, *Horav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor*, זל, for his ruling in the matter. The *Kovner Rav* ruled that the money should be returned to the woman, as the money did not really belong to her. As long as she is married, her possessions belong to her husband. Thus, whatever money she had was her husband's money. Since he was unaware that it had been lost, he could not be *meya'eish*, give up hope. The wife's *yi'ush* was worthless, because it was not her money.

"Having said this," the *Chazon Ish* said, "it is no different in your situation. You may not/or cannot be *meya'eish*, despair, over your situation, since your life and mission in this world is not under your control. You were sent here by Hashem to live out your life and serve Hashem by glorifying His Name in the world. You do not 'own' yourself. 'You' belong to Hashem, and He has not given up hope on you."

Hope is not optional for a Jew. It is part of our DNA. We believe in Hashem, Who has never forsaken us. Rather than focus on the negative, we should look back on the positive. *Kaveh el Hashem*, hope to Hashem, is the only way for us to live. It is through the medium of hope that we have been able to pull ourselves up and out of the muck of despondency, to emerge stronger with renewed faith in the Almighty. A well-known story (of which a number of variations abound) characterizes Jewish hope and resilience during the worst moments in our collective history. *Simchas Torah* is meant to be a joyous festival, filled with dancing with the Torah, celebrating our relationship with it. In Auschwitz, this joyous holiday, like so many others, was far from joyous. People were in pain; people were suffering from fear; people were dying. They had no one with which to dance. On *Simchas Torah* night, an elderly Jew – a Jew who had lost everything – every member of his family had been murdered, still had one thing that kept him going: hope. He walked over to a young boy and asked, "Do you know the *Shema*?" The young boy answered, "Yes. I know the *Shema* and much more."

"The *Shema* will do," the man replied.

At that moment, the man called to the others on the block, "*Rabbosai*, it is *Simchas Torah*, the time to dance around the Torah and sing." The man lifted up the boy as the Torah is lifted and embraced him the way one would embrace the Torah. The other Jews danced around the old man with his "Torah," the young boy who represented the future of the Jewish People. They danced and wept tears of hope, not despair. This is who we are, and this is why we continue to survive. We are all here on a mission. As such, we continue until that moment that we can say, "Mission accomplished."

ואמר ביום ההוא על כי אין אלקי בקרבי מצאוני הרעות האלה. ואנכי הסתר אסתור פני ביום ההוא

He will say on that day, "Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?" And I will surely conceal My face on that day. (31:17,18)

Hashem warns that if *Klal Yisrael* does not put a halt to their sinful behavior, He will have no recourse but to conceal His Countenance from them. *Rashi* explains *hester panim*, Divine concealment, as if Hashem does not see our pain. *Targum Onkeles* adds, "I will distance them, and remove My *Shechinah* from them." Apparently, the Torah has a concept of sinful behavior which incurs punishment. If we do not sin, we will, of course, not receive any affliction or hardship which we do not deserve. It seems, however, that if one sins continuously, almost as if ignoring Hashem's Presence, it indicates that he does not care or he has been so victimized by his *yetzer hora* that he has relegated himself to a state of rebellion. It would appear that *hester panim* adds to the punishment. What is added to the actual pain of the punishment?

The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* explains that as long as the *Shechinah* is present and actively involved in the punishment, it can

arouse Heavenly mercy. For example, when a child acts up and deserves punishment which he duly receives, he still has the capacity to arouse his father's compassion to refrain from carrying the punishment through in its fullest form. Likewise, in our relationship with the Almighty. Even when we deserve the punishment, we can always plead, cry and do whatever it takes to arouse Heavenly mercy. We are Hashem's children, and He will listen. Once the punishment goes into *hester panim* mode, this all changes.

Continuous sin is a sin without pause. At no time do we take a break to mull over our actions, realize our mistakes, express our remorse and halt our sinful behavior until the next time that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, takes hold of our senses. Continuous sin indicates that one simply does not care, has no need to reconsider his actions, and is not concerned about their ramifications. Such action does not beget a merciful response.

Hester panim is a terrible decree. *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, explains that when *Klal Yisrael* experiences *hester panim*, some of our people begin to have spiritual doubts about Hashem. When they do not experience His Presence, they begin to wonder where He is. (Veritably, He is there – but concealed. The question that was on the mouths of some Jews during and following the Holocaust was: “Where was G-d during the Holocaust?” The answer is: “Where was He not?” Anyone who “opened” his eyes saw Him.) As a result of this doubting, serious deficiencies in their faith begin to emerge through the cracks. These lacunae in faith are the precursor of yet greater *hester panim*. The cycle continues until someone wakes up, realizes what is happening, and acts to prevent even greater damage.

How does one stop the decline and put an end to the *hester panim*? *Horav Levi Dicker, zl*, observes that while warning us of the possibility of *hester panim*, the Torah introduces a positive note: *ki lo sishkach mi pi Zaro*, “The Torah will not be forgotten by future generations.” The antidote to *hester panim* is Torah study. Even when Hashem conceals His Presence from among us, we can alleviate the situation by immersing ourselves in Torah study.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains why this is so. *Chazal* teach that from the time of the destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash*, it is as if Hashem has no “place” in this world other than the *daled amos shel halachah*, four cubits of Torah study. Hashem can be found wherever Torah is studied. *Hester Panim* is not manifest where Torah is studied.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes that this phenomenon was evident with regard to the *Mirrer Yeshivah*. The cataclysmic destruction of European Jewry was continuing unabated in Europe, while the *yeshivah*, having safely escaped to Kobe, Japan, and then to Shanghai, China, was able to relocate and re-establish the institution for the duration of the war. It was no vacation. They suffered physical deprivation and never lost sight of their brethren in Europe, but, amidst their Torah learning, they did not experience *hester panim*.

Horav Yitzchak Menachem Dancyger, zl (Akeidas Yitzchak), was the leader of thousands of *Alexander chassidim*. He was murdered by the Nazis in Treblinka. Concerning the *pasuk*, “Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?” he asked, “Why should this person be punished with *hastoras panim*? Why should Hashem conceal Himself from him?” He responded, “A Jew should believe that in the thick of every *tzarah*, trouble, affliction, illness, Hashem is with him experiencing his pain. Because he claims that Hashem is not with him – Hashem in turn conceals himself from him.” If we would only realize this. We are never alone – especially during those moments of serious travail when we think Hashem has forsaken us, He is right there with us!

We do not despair. We do not give up hope. A Viennese physician who endured three years of purgatory in Auschwitz was asked why among the Jewish inmates who served as *kapos* (prison functionaries who were themselves prisoners, assigned by the Nazis SS guards to supervise forced labor or carry out administrative tasks), there were no *rabbanim*. What was the secret of their invulnerability to this opportunity for making life easier for themselves? The *kapos* were, for the most part, men of great intellect who saw an opportunity to save

themselves from forced labor (at times at the expense of their brothers and sisters). This would have been a perfect opportunity for the rabbis, who certainly were not lacking in acumen. They, too, could have taken advantage and ameliorated their imprisonment, so that they could live.

The physician replied that a person who understands that life has purpose and everything that occurs in his life has meaning – a goal and an objective – does not relinquish his *Tzelem Elokim*, Divine image (to collaborate with human vermin such as the Nazis). He cries, he is in pain; he will scream – but he will not give up hope. All this is for a reason. He is part of a Divine Masterplan.

Heretofore, we have adhered to *Rashi's* explanation of *hester panim*, which suggests that Hashem acts as if He does not see our distress during our periods of travail. This is due to our forsaking the covenant when the relationship between us and Hashem becomes challenging as a result of our less than satisfactory behavior. Hashem's concealment causes – or at least facilitates – our travail.

The *Bechor Shor* offers an alternative interpretation. He writes that Hashem conceals His Presence, because He cannot bear to witness His children in pain. Thus, His concealment is an act of love and compassion – not punishment. It is no different from a loving father who must turn his eyes away when he sees his child suffering and in pain. According to this *p'shat*, explanation, Hashem's concealment is not the cause of our pain; rather, it is Hashem's “coping” mechanism. If we would only feel the same way about ourselves as Hashem feels about us, we would not have to experience the pain and grief which result from our misdeeds.

When bad things happen, we immediately pass judgment and blame Hashem. Why is He doing this to us? We never bother giving Him the benefit of the doubt and assume our personal responsibility for what takes place in our lives. We conveniently forget our shortcomings, but never seem to overlook Hashem's actions which do not coincide with our expectations. We claim that we do not see Him, but we simultaneously refuse to open up our eyes and look. At times we have a “fog” around us which might take years to dissipate. The following intriguing story, quoted by Rabbi Nachman Seltzer, is a classic example.

A distinguished *Rav*, a noted speaker, was flying to America for a lecture series. In the seat next to him was a Jew who was about to sink his teeth into his non-kosher meal. The man was clearly Jewish, the label on his dinner had his name, Mr. Weinstein (not a very gentle name). This troubled the *Rav*, because the airline gladly served kosher meals. In fact, one had to specifically order non-kosher. “Excuse me, sir, I see that you are Jewish,” the *Rav* began. “May I ask why you ordered a non-kosher meal?” The man smugly replied, “I do not keep kosher.” “Still, you could have ordered a kosher meal,” the *Rav* countered. “What part of ‘I do not keep kosher’ do you not understand?” was the man's terse reply. This was the end of their conversation.

An hour later, the man said to the *Rav*, “Let me explain why I have nothing to do with religion. I was in the camps. I had already lost my wife and most of my children. I had one son left, Kasriel Menachem, a young, sweet boy. All we had was each other. Then the Nazis came and separated us. My son cried bitterly. I begged them to take me instead. They took my lovely Kasriel into a room. I never saw him after that. One of the other Jewish prisoners informed me that a Nazi had shot Kasriel. That was it. G-d had taken everything from me.” Needless to say, the rest of the trip was traveled in silence. The plane landed in America, and the two travelers went to their individual destinations.

Fast forward four years. The *Rav* was in Yerushalayim for *Yom Kippur*, *davening* in one of the larger *shuls* in Meah Shearim. During a break, he went out to get some air. As he walked a bit, he noticed an older man sitting at a bus stop smoking a cigarette on *Yom Kippur*. He was disturbed by the sight: on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar year, in the Holy City of Yerushalayim, a Jew was publicly smoking with impunity. His revulsion turned to shock when he moved closer and saw that the man was none other than Mr. Weinstein!

“Mr. Weinstein, *Gut Yom Tov*, do you remember me?” “Yes, yes. From the plane; the rabbi who insisted that I eat kosher,” was Mr. Weinstein's reply. “Things have not changed. I am still not religious,”

he added. “Well, you know that today is *Yom Kippur*. Our *shul* will recite *Yizkor*, the prayer for the dead, in a few moments. Why not join and have a prayer recited for your son.” Mr. Weinstein agreed. This was one thing to which he was willing to concede.

Tears rolled down Mr. Weinstein’s face as he recited the prayers. At the end of *Yizkor*, the *chazzan*, leading the service, motioned to Mr. Weinstein to come over, and he would recite a public *Keil Malei Rachamim* (special prayer for the departed). Mr. Weinstein came over and the *chazzan* began the prayer. When he reached the part where the name of the departed is inserted, he turned to Mr. Weinstein and motioned for the name of his son. “Kasriel Menachem *ben* Yechezkel Sargo.” Suddenly, the *chazzan* began to shake uncontrollably. Sweat poured down his face as he looked at Mr. Weinstein and cried out, “*Abba! Abba!*” and then he passed out.

Mr. Weinstein’s son somehow had lived through the terror, immigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, grew up, married and raised a beautiful *Torahdik* family. Mr. Weinstein’s life changed. The *nachas* that had eluded him all of these years returned. He died an observant Jew, having witnessed Hashem’s Divine Plan in its “entirety.”

ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת

So now, write this song for yourselves. (31:19)

The *Talmud Chagigah* 15b quotes Rabbi Yochanan, who asks: “What is the meaning of that which is written (*Malachi* 2:7), ‘For the *Kohen*’s lips should keep knowledge and they should seek Torah from his mouth; for he is an angel of Hashem, Lord of Hosts’?” The *pasuk* is teaching: If a *rebbe* is similar to an angel, they should seek Torah from his mouth, but, if not, they should not seek Torah from his mouth.” Obviously, the comparison of an angel to a *rebbe* requires elucidation. *Rambam* offers a basic explanation, taking a frank approach. A *rebbe* must be a role model who adheres to the Torah way of life. Like an angel, he is an agent of Hashem, and, accordingly, he must act in a manner becoming such responsibility. A second approach looks at the angel’s unswerving fidelity to his mission. The angel neither adds nor subtracts from his mission. He is completely devoted to his sender and is not interested in his own benefit. The *rebbe* should act likewise. Third, the angel stands straight and unmoving. He focuses totally on his mission with no concerns for himself and his spirituality. When the angel is on his mission, everything that concerns himself comes to a halt. Likewise, the *rebbe*’s only concern is his student – even if that means that the *rebbe*’s own spiritual status suffers. A *rebbe* must often sacrifice his own growth for that of his students.

We now come to a fourth explanation which addresses the above *pasuk* and is innovative in the sense that it focuses less on comparing the *rebbe* to an angel, and more on the *rebbe* imparting the overreaching and demanding significance of – and requirement for – Torah study at all times, under all conditions, regardless of inconvenience or adversity. *Chazal* (*Megillah* 3a) relate the incident which took place during the siege of Yericho (*Yehoshua* 5:14) when a Heavenly angel appeared to Yehoshua to reprimand him for the people’s neglecting to study Torah. During the day they were engaged in war and, thus, exempt from learning. At night, however, when the fighting stopped, they no longer had an exemption. The angel said to Yehoshua: “This afternoon, you failed to offer the daily *Tamid*, afternoon sacrifice, and now (after dark) you have neglected to study Torah.” Yehoshua asked, “For which of these two misdeeds did you come (to reprimand me)?” The angel replied, *Atah bassi*; “I have come now,” which is explained by the *Rivan* as a reference to the sin of neglecting to study Torah, as it says in our *parshah*, *V’atah*, “Now, write this song (the Torah) for yourselves.” From here, we derive that the study of Torah is even greater than offering sacrifices.

Having said this, *Horav Shmuel Kaminetzky, Shlita*, observes that the angel was unforgiving in his demand that the people – even in the midst of a war – should not neglect their Torah study. True, it was night, and they were exhausted from a day of heavy warfare on the battlefield, and they needed to nourish themselves, to rest their weary bodies, and pull themselves together emotionally. Nonetheless, the angel was relentless in his demand that they should have studied Torah. We

brook no compromise with regard to Torah study. It is our life source. One does not sever himself from his life source because it is inconvenient or even overwhelming.

This is *Chazal*’s message regarding the required similarity between a *rebbe* and an angel – not any angel, but the angel that spoke to Yehoshua and conveyed the message that Torah is paramount. Torah reigns supreme. The angel sets the standard for the *rebbe* to emulate. It is a lofty bar to reach, but then teaching Torah is in and of itself a lofty mission which lays the foundation for the future of *Klal Yisrael*.

Va’ani Tefillah

אלקי נצור לשוני מרע – *Elokai netzor leshoni mei’ra*. G-d, Guard my tongue from evil.

We ask Hashem to guard our tongue from evil. What are we doing to protect our tongue from evil? What right do we have to ask Hashem to guard our tongue if we are doing nothing on our own to prevent *lashon hora* from leaving our mouth? Indeed, as noted by the *Chafetz Chaim*, we find a *halachah* in the Torah that clearly states the opposite. One may not ask someone else for assistance unless he himself participates. (Obviously, this is in such a circumstance that the person is physically capable of participating, but chooses not to.) Concerning the law of *perikah u’te’inah*, loading and unloading, an animal that has fallen under its burden. If the owner of the animal/load helps, then one must work to lift the animal and burden. If, however, he sits back and “allows” you to complete the *mitzvah* by yourself, you are not responsible to lift the animal/burden. Why should protection from *lashon hora* be any different? When we ask Hashem to help us in guarding our tongues from evil, He will respond, “Help Me, work alongside Me, and together We will triumph over *lashon hora*.” Otherwise, we have no right to ask, and Hashem has no requisite to help us.

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By his children and grandchildren, Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha

For the week ending 5 October 2019 / 6 Tishri 5780

Pie Crusts, Pas Paltur and the Aseres Yemei Teshuva

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

A neighborhood housewife recently asked if I would be able to help her understand why some of her relatives did not partake of her dessert specialty, pareve ice cream pie, on the previous Shabbos. I asked her if the pie crust was Pas Yisrael. She said it was not, but as far as she knew, these relatives were not stringent with that halacha, rather relying on the common leniencies (see below). I explained to her that even so, Shabbos changes everything! But, to properly understand why, some background is in order.

Which Pas is Which?

In the times of the Mishna, Chazal forbade us from eating Pas Akum - bread and bread-like items that were baked by non-Jews,[1] even if said bread does not have any kashrus concerns,[2] in order to dissuade us from assimilation and intermarriage.[3] This prohibition pertains exclusively to bread products containing one or more of the five major grains: wheat, barley, oats, spelt or rye,[4] and generally includes baked goods that have the form of bread (Tzuras HaPas).[5]

If however, a Jew participated in the baking process by lighting the fire, stoking the coals under the bread being baked, or by putting the bread on the fire, and thereby taking an active part in the actual baking process, or even in some small way,[6] the bread becomes permitted, and is known as Pas Yisrael.

In later years, due to the fact that many baking ovens were owned or operated by non-Jews, making it difficult to procure Pas Yisrael products, Chazal later qualified this prohibition, and created a new class of bread products known as Pas Paltur, literally “Baker’s Bread”. This refers to bread products baked in a bakery or commercial setting, where there is no personal or intimate contact between the baker and customer,

thereby drastically reducing the chance of intermarriage, and is therefore permitted.[7]

Some authorities, including the Rema,[8] maintain that Chazal's heter of Pas Paltur applies in all cases, even when Pas Yisrael is readily available. However, many decisors, including the Shulchan Aruch and the Shach,[9] argue that this heter is only applicable if one cannot purchase Pas Yisrael of similar type, quality or price:[10] and stress that one should otherwise strive to obtain Pas Yisrael exclusively.

Don't Let It Pas You By

Although the leniency of Pas Paltur remains in effect year round, the Shulchan Aruch, in Hilchos Rosh Hashana qualifies it and writes that during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, one must be stringent and eat only Pas Yisrael.[11]

What is most interesting is that the cited source for this ruling, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shabbos Ch. 1, Halacha 3), makes no real mention of this! The exact quote is that "one should make sure to eat 'Chullin B'Tahara,'" meaning to make sure that their food should not become impure, "for seven days a year."

Rabbeinu Yona[12] explains this passage as denoting that even if one cannot ensure that his foods remain "pure" the whole year, he should nevertheless do his utmost to make sure it remains so at least seven days a year. Many early authorities, including Rav Nissim Gaon, the Machzor Vitri,[13] and R' Yehuda Hachassid[14] understand that the seven days mentioned in the Yerushalmi are actually alluding to the week between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.[15] So now that we have a time frame, we can work on defining what exactly 'Chullin B'Tahara' is in fact referencing.

The first mention of this phrase actually referring to Pas Yisrael, is by the Rosh,[16] who writes that the minhag is to refrain from eating Pas Akum during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, based on this statement of the Yerushalmi. This is also how his son, the Tur,[17] and later the Shulchan Aruch, cited the halacha. That is how an obscure passage in the Yerushalmi was defined and later codified as the requirement to be makpid on eating only Pas Yisrael during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva.

7 = 10

The only issue remaining is that the Yerushalmi mentioned only seven days that one should refrain; however, the Aseres Yemei Teshuva are ten days! How can this be reconciled?

The Tur explains that since there already is a mitzvah that one must purify himself before a Yom Tov,[18] it was unnecessary for the Yerushalmi to mention the actual days of Rosh Hashana. Similarly, it is needless to mention the prohibition on Yom Kippur, as aside for being the holiest day of the year, it is also a Biblical fast day.

The Ran,[19] on the other hand, offers an alternate explanation. He reasons that it is unnecessary to mention Rosh Hashana, as everyone cooks and bakes in their own homes in honor of the Yom Tov, and therefore the bread is automatically considered Pas Yisrael. Either way, 'seven days' can still accurately be referring to the Aseres Yemei Teshuva.

Shabbos: Pas (Paltur)Nisht!

However, other authorities learn that the extra missing days are including the Shabbos between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur (Shabbos Shuva).[20] They extrapolate that just as on this Shabbos one must be vigilant, so too on every Shabbos one must as well, as every Shabbos of the year is considered more important and contains more kedusha than the Aseres Yemei Teshuva.[21]

Therefore, as a corollary to the halacha of being vigilant with eating Pas Yisrael during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, many authorities, including the Magen Avraham, Shulchan Aruch Harav, Chayei Adam, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Aruch Hashulchan, and the Mishnah Berurah, rule that on Shabbos and Yom Tov one should refrain as well from eating Pas Paltur, and be makpid on eating Pas Yisrael exclusively. In fact, the Rema himself writes that it is proper to follow this minhag, as well.[22] [Nevertheless, if one is unable to obtain Pas Yisrael products during these special times, one may rely on Pas Paltur.[23]]

This explains why our frustrated housewife's relatives preferred to forgo a delicious Shabbos dessert in this world, while picking up some "just desserts" for the next.[24]

Postscript: There are several other reasons given to explain why it is proper to be makpid on Pas Yisrael during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, including to serve as a reminder of the unique status of these days,[25] and to beseech Hashem not to judge us stringently, just as we have adopted a practice which is not stringently required of us.[26] The Mishnah Berurah and Rav Moshe Feinstein mention that it is proper during this time period to be stringent when it comes to all questionable issues, not just Pas Paltur.[27] Based on this, Rav Doniel Neustadt, in his The Daily Halacha Discussion (pg. 5) posits that it is appropriate for those who are lenient with Chalav Stam year round, to be machmir on Chalav Yisrael during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, as well.

[1] See Mishnah in Avodah Zarah (35b) and accompanying Gemara (36a-b). The prohibition of Pas Akum is one of the eighteen Gezeiros that Chazal established on that famous, fateful day when Beis Shamai overruled Beis Hillel. See aforementioned Gemara, Mishnah in Shabbos (13b) and accompanying Gemara (17b), as well as Yerushalmi (Shabbos Ch. 1, Halacha 4; 12a in the Friedman edition and 9b in the Me'orei Ohr edition).

[2] See Pischei Teshuva (Yoreh Deah 112, 2), and on more of a contemporary note Kovetz M'Beis Levi on Yoreh Deah (pg. 47; citing Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner).

[3] Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 112, 1). This prohibition applies even when intermarriage does not, i.e. eating with a non-Jewish priest who has no children. See Rashba (Shu"t vol. 1, 148), Rema (Yoreh Deah 112, 1), Shach (ad loc. 4), Taz (ad loc. 1), Chochmas Adam (65, 1), Pri Megadim (Yoreh Deah 112, Mishbetzos Zahav 1), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 9). The Ramban (Chiddushim to Avodah Zarah 35b s.v. od ra'isi) declares that anyone who thinks that the Gezeira of chasnus no longer applies, is making a "taus gedolah, u'mi shehorah kach, ain lismoch alav." The halachos of Pas Yisrael and Pas Paltur, etc. are discussed by the Tur, Shulchan Aruch, and their main commentaries in Yoreh Deah 112 at length.

[4] Tur (Yoreh Deah 112) quoting his father, the Rosh, Shulchan Aruch (ad loc. 1), Taz (ad loc. 2). The Pri Chadash (ad loc. 5), however, advances the notion that in far-off islands where all bread is made out of an inferior grain (e.g., rice), then this prohibition might possibly apply to it as well.

[5] Although some authorities, including the Avnei Nezer (Shu"t, Yoreh Deah 92, 7) and the Matteh Yona son (Yoreh Deah 112, 1) opine that snacks which are not 'Oleh Al Shulchan Melachim' ("Fit For a King's Table") would not be included in the prohibition, nevertheless, the majority opinion follows the Pri Megadim (ad loc. Mishbetzos Zahav 3), Tiferes L'Moshe (ad loc. 2), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 13, 14, 31), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 19) that these are included, as the Tur, Shulchan Aruch and their main commentaries do not seem to make such a distinction. The different types of foods which this applies to are addressed in an article titled 'The Parameters of Pas Paltur.'

[6] According to the Shulchan Aruch and Rema (ad loc. 9 and Yoreh Deah 113, 7), this includes increasing the heat level even minutely, by throwing a toothpick into the fire or blowing on it. Most Acharonim agree as well [see for example the Chida's Shiyurei Bracha (Yoreh Deah 112, 18) and Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parashas Chukas 5)]. However, the Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 112, 27), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 60) maintain that one should only rely on these leniencies under extenuating circumstances; rather, one should strive to perform the actions listed above, as they are actually mentioned by the Gemara. Additionally, several Rishonim, including the Ramban (cited in the Ran 15b s.v. v'assa and v'af) and Rosh (Avodah Zarah Ch. 2, 33) disapproved of relying on said leniencies, as throwing a toothpick into a fire does not really add much to the baking process. [This argument is partially based on how these Rishonim understood the heter of the Gemara. The Ramban (Hilchos Maachalos Assuros Ch. 17, end 13; see also Teshuvos HaRashba vol. 1:228) understood that the act of throwing a toothpick into the fire makes it recognizable that a Jew added something, albeit small, to the baking process, and that is sufficient. The Ramban and Rosh, however, maintained that the thrust of the Gemara's heter was that a Jew needed to be an active part of the actual baking process, and a toothpick's overall contribution is quite negligible.] This is also the Minchas Yitzchak's (Shu"t vol. 4, 28, 4) conclusion lemaaseh.

[7] Yerushalmi (Shabbos Ch.1, Halacha 4; 9b-10a in the Me'orei Ohr edition), Rif (Avodah Zarah 14b in his pagination), Tosafos (Avodah Zarah 35b s.v. michlal), Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 112, 2). Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah vol. 1, 48) ruled that if a Jewish-owned large commercial bakery needed to hire non-Jewish workers, even though the bread might actually have been baked by those non-Jewish workers, the bread does not have the status of Pas Akum, and is fully permitted to be eaten.

[8] Including the Rema (Yoreh Deah 112, 2), Biur HaGr"a (ad loc. 4), Levush (ad loc. 3), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (38, 1), and Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parshas Chukas 2).

[9] Including the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 112, 2, and 5), Shach (ad loc. 9), Arizal (cited by the Ben Ish Chai ibid.), Chochmas Adam (65, 2), Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 112, 9), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 23). According to this opinion, the distance given that one should travel to obtain Pas Yisrael products (instead of being lenient and eating Pas Paltur) is four mil [see Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 16)], generally assumed to be seventy-two minutes, (but there are opinions of up to ninety-six minutes). The Pri Chodosh (ad loc. 28) points out that this is only if one was already traveling in that direction; however, if one is not traveling, then he does not have to travel that length of time, but rather only eighteen (or twenty-four) minutes [as per the Chochmas Adam's (65, 4) understanding of the Pri Chodosh's opinion]. The Pischei Teshuva (ad loc. 6) cites the Shu"t Beis Yosef (35) that there is no difference if one is walking or riding on a horse, that one must traverse the same distance. The Aruch Hashulchan (ibid. end 18) echoes this as well, that the "Chachamim hishvu midoseihem," or made a one-size-fits-all edict. However, the Mishnah Berurah (163, Biur Halacha s.v. b'richuk) writing on a similar topic where Chazal (Pesachim 46a) and later, the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 163:1) give a distance of four mil (Neillas Yadayim prior to "breaking bread"), comments that it is improbable to differentiate between someone walking or riding on a

"flying camel," and understands that the Gezeirah was referring to an amount of time, which is one-size-fits-all, that one must travel the amount of time it takes to walk such a distance, meaning seventy-two minutes and not an actual distance. On this topic, see Chelkas Binyomin (pg. 59, *Biurim s.v. ad dalet milin*). [Yet, in this author's estimation, it seems possible to say that "Chachamim hishvu midoseihem" on this topic that "there is no difference between walking or riding on a horse" cited by the Aruch Hashulchan, might actually be referring to time, like the Mishnah Berurah's opinion, and they may not actually be disagreeing; v'tzarich l'ayen b'zeh]. This discussion affects another contemporary debate upon the distance one in the city must travel to daven with a minyan (Tefilla B'Tzibbur, shiur mil. [See Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 90, 16; based on Gemara Pesachim 46a), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 40:11), Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 90, 17), Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 52), and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 20; adding that this is the distance of a "Russian Parsa").] Rav Shmuel Halevi Vosner (Shu"t Shevet Halevi vol. 8, 19 and vol. 9, 37) asserts that regarding Tefilla B'Tzibbur (as opposed to Netillas Yadayim), even the Mishnah Berurah would agree that the halacha is referring to distance and not time, citing precedent from the Shoel U'Meishiv (Shu"t Mahadura Kama vol. 3: end 103), who maintains that halachic shiurim are set "left derech hateva," and do not take innovations into account. On the other hand, Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 1, 97 and 98), in a discussion on the importance of Tefilla B'Tzibbur, opines that even regarding Tefilla B'Tzibbur, the shiur mil is referring to time and not distance, adding that Hashem will surely repay expenses incurred while ensuring to daven Tefilla B'Tzibbur. [Regarding the significance of Tefilla B'Tzibbur, see also Shu"t Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim vol. 2, 27).] Also regarding the din of Pas Paltur, the Be'er Sarim (Shu"t vol. 4, 49) maintains that even according to the machmir opinion if one did not have access to Pas Yisrael and relied on eating Pas Paltur, and Pas Yisrael later became available, the Pas Paltur bread already in his possession still remains permitted to be eaten, "l'kol hadei'os".

[10] Although the hetter of price difference is not clearly mentioned by the Shulchan Aruch, it is nonetheless mentioned by several Acharonim, including the Pri Toar (112, 6; who explains that "nicer bread" is actually referring to saving money on it), the Zivchei Tzedek (ad loc. 14), and the Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. end 30). This author also sees this hetter quoted in the name of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv. However, Rav Shmuel Halevi Vosner is cited (Kovetz M'Beis Levi on Yoreh Deah, pg. 47, end footnote 8) as not relying on this leniency. Rav Moshe Feinstein is quoted (Mesores Moshe vol. 1, pg. 238, 61) as explaining the shittah of the Shulchan Aruch and Shach as that it is preferable not to rely on the hetter of price difference unless one is an "ami" and therefore cannot afford the more expensive Pas Yisrael bread, or if one does not (at the time of purchase) have the money on him to pay for the more expensive Pas Yisrael bread. See Rav Yaakov Skoczylas' recent *Ohel Yaakov on Hilchos Maachalei Akum* (pg. 22) who cites both sides to this debate, including the opinions of many contemporary Poskim who ruled leniently. See also Chelkas Binyomin (112:51) who posits to be stringent, without citing any sources, simply stating that this is the mashmaos of the Shulchan Aruch. This position has struck this author as odd, as several earlier authorities explicitly ruled to be lenient with this exact issue.

[11] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 603: 1), based on the Tur (ad loc.) quoting the Yerushalmi (Shabbos Ch. 1, Halachah 3). Also ruled by the Rosh (end Maseches Rosh Hashanah), Ravayah (cited by the Mordechai ad loc. end 559), Ran (ad loc. s.v. garsinan b'Yerushalmi), Rema (Toras Hachatas 75: 1), Levush (ad loc. 1), Shach (Yoreh Deah 112: 9), Beis Hillel (ad loc. 2), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 143: 1), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (130: 2), Matteh Efraim (603: 1), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 603: 1 and Yoreh Deah 112: 17), Mishnah Berurah (603: 1), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 1 and Yoreh Deah 112: 23).

[12] Rabbeinu Yona's commentary to Avos (Ch. 3, 13), cited in Bein Kesseh L'Essor (Ch. 2, pg. 21).

[13] Machzor Vitry (vol. 1, 337).

[14] Sefer Hachassidim 1069.

[15] There are also other minority opinions that explain that these seven days are referring to other times of the year. See Bein Kesseh L'Essor (pg. 28 - 32) at length.

[16] Piskei HaRosh (Rosh Hashana Ch. 4, 14).

[17] Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 603). This is also the opinion of other Rishonim including the Ravayah (Avi HaEzri 527, pg. 208), Mordechai (cited by the Ran below), and the Tashbetz (Shu"t vol. 1, 117). However, it must be noted that the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 603, 1) is uneasy at this connection, and raises a critical point: if eating 'Chullin B'Tahara' truly means only keeping Pas Yisrael, then as soon as the bread is placed in one's mouth, it will no longer keep its 'purified' status, as everyone nowadays is ritually impure.

[18] See Gemara Rosh Hashana (16b), Rambam (Hilchos Tumas Ochlin Ch. 16, 10), and Sma"G (Positive Mitzvos 246).

[19] Ran (Rosh Hashana 12b in the Rif's pages s.v. garsinan). Although one might argue that nowadays this is not necessarily the case, it might be worthwhile to see Biur Halacha (242 s.v. v'hu m'kvod Shabbos), who decries the common "custom" of buying challos for Shabbos and Yom Tov from a bakery instead of baking them personally at home L'Kavod Shabbos V'Yom Tov.

[20] Biur HaGr"a (Orach Chaim 242, 1; 529, 1; 603, 1) and Damesek Eliezer (Orach Chaim 242, 3). See explanation in Bein Kesseh L'Essor (Ch. 2, pg. 40, footnote 87).

[21] Bigdei Yesh'a (Orach Chaim 242, 4), cited in Bein Kesseh L'Essor (pg 38 - 39).

[22] Including the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 242, 4), Matteh Yehuda (ad loc. 5), Shulchan Aruch Harav (ad loc. 13), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 1, 4), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (72, 6) Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 242, 45) and the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 6). The Rema himself (Darchoi Moshe, Orach Chaim 603, 1) writes that it is proper to follow this minhag, as well. There is however, the notable minority opinion of the Elyah Rabba (Orach Chaim 242, 10; and in Elyah Zuta ad loc. 8) who maintains that regarding Shabbos, while it is nevertheless proper to be makpid on Pas Yisrael on Shabbos and Yom Tov due to Kavod Shabbos V'Yom Tov, it is not an actual halacha to do so, as he holds that is not comparable to the requirement during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva. The Yad Efraim (ad loc. s.v. unavi) implies this way as well and the Levushai Srad (ad loc. s.v. u'm"m) cites both sides of the machlokes with no clear ruling. Yet, both the Machatzis HaShekel (ad loc. 4 s.v. shehataam) and Pri Megadim (Eshel Avraham ad loc. 4 s.v. b'Darchoi Moshe) answer up the Elyah Rabba's taynos, and maintain that one must indeed be stringent on Shabbos with Pas Yisrael products as well. The Mishnah Berurah (Shaar HaTziyun 18) adds that "afilu b'soch haSeudah nachon lizaher," and concludes (ad loc. 6) that if one is 'anus' and the only

possible bread he has to make Kiddush on is not Pas Yisrael, he may then nevertheless use it for Kiddush (Hamotzi).

[23] Tur (Y.D. 112:2), citing the Gaonim. Also cited by the Ramban (Chiddushim to Avodah Zarah 35b s.v. mah), Ran (ad loc. 14a in the Rif's pagination), Rashba (Toras Habayis, Bayis 3, Shaar 7), and Beis Yosef (ad loc.), and practically by the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 1) as well. In his Shaar Hatziyun (ad loc. 4), the Mishnah Berurah cites the Nachlas Shivah (Shu"t 72), who maintains that in years of famine, even during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, it is fully permitted to purchase rolls from a non-Jewish baker, and then re-cook them afterward (even though this generally would not be sufficient to be considered Pas Yisrael).

[24] The importance of exclusively eating Pas Yisrael products on Shabbos was emphasized in an amusing anecdotal exchange that I recently heard from my father, renowned kashrus expert Rav Manish Spitz. Approximately thirty-five years ago, he met Rav Berel Wein, who was head of the OU's Kashrus department at that time, and asked him why the OU granted hashgacha on Stella D'oro (Swiss Fudge) cookies (a.k.a. "Shtreimel Cookies"), as they were merely Pas Paltur. [Meaning, he wanted to know why the OU did not ensure that their Pas products were Pas Yisrael.] Rav Wein's adroit retort was succinct: "So don't eat them on Shabbos!" Interestingly, according to a New York Times article in 2003 (accessible at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/12/nyregion/of-milk-and-cookies-or-how-orthodox-jews-saved-an-italian-recipe.html>), Orthodox Jews are so widely associated with the Italian Stella D'oro "Shtreimel Cookies," that just the idea that these cookies were being reformulated as dairy caused such an outcry and sales to plummet, that parent company Kraft Foods ultimately rescinded their plan, keeping the beloved cookies pareve.

[25] Levush (Orach Chaim 603).

[26] Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 143, 1) and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (130, 2).

[27] Mishnah Berurah (Shaar HaTziyun 609, 1) and Shu"t Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim vol. 3, end 12). However, the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 603: 2) qualifies that this is only referring to issues that are intrinsically permitted me'ikar hadin, that there is a hiddur to be makpid during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva. However, matters that are debated whether they are muttar at all, yet many customarily follow the lenient opinion, such as being makpid on Glatt meat or eating Chodosh in Chutz La'aretz, he avers that one should not take on to be makpid on the during this period. This is because once one is stringent for a week – it is as if he was saying that I am now following the stringent opinion. If so, he cannot go back to relying on the lenient opinion. Thanks are due to Rabbi Dovv Lebowitz for pointing out this important source.

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

Much of this article is based on Rabbi Eliezer Brodt's excellent sefer, Bein Kesseh L'Essor (Ch. 2).

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and L'iluy Nishmas Shoshana Leah bas Dreiza Liba and R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, and L'Zechus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!

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Needed: A Paradigm Shift

Jonathan Rosenblum - Mishpacha Magazine

September 9, 2021

The central message of Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance is that He is on our side

There are those who approach the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah (the Ten Days of Repentance) as accountants — i.e., as if our principal task is to bring our Divine balance sheet into the black, with our zechuyos (merits) outweighing our avonos (sins), and thereby secure a favorable judgment for the year to come. And indeed, they can find support for that approach in the minhag (custom) brought in halachah to take on certain extra stringencies during this period — such as refraining from non-Jewish bread.

Even a superficial reading of the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 3:1) reinforces such a bookkeeping approach: "Every person has zechuyos and avonos. One whose zechuyos are greater than his avonos is a tzaddik...

In his sefer Teshuvah (Mosaica Press), Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein points to a very different approach to the entirety of Elul, culminating in the Ten Days of Repentance. His starting point is a comparison of two comments by Rashi. At the conclusion of Moshe Rabbeinu's second period of forty days on the Mountain on 29 Av, Rashi writes, "On this day the Holy One, Blessed be He, was reconciled with Israel and told Moshe, 'Carve out for yourself two tablets'" (Rashi to Devarim 9:18).

At the end of the third period of forty days, however, Rashi adds a crucial word: "On that day, the Holy One, Blessed be He, was reconciled with Israel b'simchah, and said to Moshe, 'I have forgiven in accord with your words'" (Ibid). The difference lies in one word — with joy. The goal of forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom Kippur is not the avoidance of punishment, but rather the creation of a vibrant, pulsating

relationship with Hashem at a time when Hashem draws near to make Himself uniquely accessible to us.

In one of the maamarim of Rav Dovid Cohen, Rosh Yeshivas Chevron, on Rosh Hashanah, I found a hint to the same idea. After beginning with a discussion of the special potential inherent in the days of Elul up until Yom Kippur, Rav Cohen offers a lengthy disquisition on the nature of tefillah (prayer). The connection between the opening paragraph of the maamar and what follows is unclear. Surely, what is incumbent upon us in tefillah applies throughout the entire year.

Rav Cohen defines the primary goal of prayer as the creation of a recognition of absolute dependence upon HaKadosh Baruch Hu, a feeling that without Hashem's help we can achieve nothing. As the Ramchal explains in Derech Hashem, this recognition in Shacharis protects us from over-involvement in worldly affairs:

"[As much as it is necessary for the soul to descend into this world,] it is crucial that the soul not descend further than is appropriate. For the more it gets caught up in matters of this world, the more it distances itself from the ultimate Light. Now, the Creator has prepared an antidote for this concern, namely that first a person should draw close and stand before Him, and ask of Him all his needs, and cast upon Him his lot. This will be the beginning point of all his earthly involvement, so that when he then goes about his endeavors... he will not become overly enmeshed in physicality and earthliness, having preceded them by ascribing all to G-d."

By stressing prayer, as he does, while discussing the forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul, the Chevron Rosh Yeshiva suggests that the purpose of those days is creating a more intense relationship with Hashem. And the primary means for doing so is through tefillah, literally speaking to Hashem.

That also helps to explain the universal custom of reciting Selichos prior to Rosh Hashanah and through Erev Yom Kippur. Rabbi Bernstein asks: What is the point of asking Hashem to forgive us? Either we have done teshuvah, and we will be forgiven, or we have not, and no amount of imploring will help. He notes further that there is very little in the Selichos that is directly connected to teshuvah, whether in the form of the enumeration of our sins or in expressions of regret and a determination to not repeat our sins.

But the answer to this conundrum is that Selichos are a form of tefillah, and as such are part of developing a relationship with Hashem. And the strength of that relationship is the key to all that follows.

IN SHORT, the first task of forty-day period culminating in Yom Kippur is an entire shift in perspective — the development of a G-d consciousness.

Eventually, there will come a time for the pointillist approach to teshuvah — an assessment of our greatest temptations, of the habits that make us most vulnerable to those temptations, and the development of kabbalos (resolutions) designed to short-circuit those bad habits. We can hardly expect to develop a vibrant, ongoing relationship with Hashem if we are mired in sin.

But that is a secondary step. First must come the entire paradigm shift in thinking. The mashal of the besotted lover — Ani l'dodi v'dodi li — is meant to be taken very seriously. Just as thoughts of the beloved are

never far from the consciousness of the besotted lover, so must Hashem be at the forefront of our thoughts. (See Hilchos Teshuvah 10:3.)

That involves, inter alia, trying to imagine a world in which Hashem's reign has been fully realized. So much of the Rosh Hashanah davening points us in that direction. "Uv'chein, tein pachdecha — And so too, Hashem, our G-d, instill Your awe upon all Your works..." "Uv'chein, tein kavod — And so too, O Hashem, grant honor to Your people, praise to those who revere You..." "Uv'chein tzaddikim yiru v'yismachu — And so the righteous will see and be glad...." These are words to be savored and thought about.

And thoughts about a world in which Hashem's presence is manifest lead to others: What would each of us be like if we really lived with an awareness of Hashem's presence, and took seriously the injunction to be kedoshim (holy people) worthy to living in proximity to Him? Chazal tell us that a person would never sin unless the spirit of foolishness entered into him. That means that he somehow "forgot" that Hashem is always present.

It is not enough to recognize that Hashem is always present; the central message of Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance is that He is on our team. He has come down from His throne to make it easier for us to form a relationship with Him.

Both Rav Cohen and Rabbi Bernstein offer hints as to how we can take advantage of the opportunity. In his discussion of tefillah, Rav Cohen cites the opinion of Reb Chaim Brisker that one has not fulfilled his mitzvah of tefillah if he did not have in mind that his davening takes place standing in the presence of the King of Kings. It matters not that other Acharonim argue with Reb Chaim's psak: No one contests that it is the optimal way to daven.

And it is indeed a paradigm shift. From that one recognition, everything else follows — the way we stand; our focus on the words; and, yes, our eagerness to avail ourselves of the opportunity to cast our needs upon Hashem.

The paradigm shift with respect to mitzvos is to view them as gifts from Hashem to allow us to connect to him. The word mitzvah itself is from a root indicating joinder or connection. The negative of that view of mitzvos is an approach to mitzvos as an arbitrary set of obligations, a sort of checklist to be gotten through, so we can get on with what we really want to do.

May we all succeed in flipping our perspective to attain the teshuvah described by the Rambam — the kind of teshuvah capable changing us overnight from distant from Hashem to Jews cleaving to the Shechinah (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 7:7).

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