

Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd you shall remember the entire journey which Hashem your G-d has brought you through the desert for these forty years, in order to cause you to suffer, to test you, to know what is in your heart—whether you will keep His commandments or not” (Devarim 8:2). Since G-d is all knowing—including knowing our thoughts and capabilities—and is outside the realm of time, G-d already knows whether we will follow His commandments or not. It seems rather incongruous, then, for G-d to deliberately bring us stress and pain so that he can find out what we are really made of.

This is true of any “test” that G-d may put us through, as He already knows whether we will pass or fail even before the test takes place. The commentators discuss this issue at length regarding G-d’s tests,¹ with the most common approach being that the purpose is not to show G-d whether the one being tested is righteous or not (as He obviously knows), but to enable others to know where that person stands.²

However, this only explains the test itself; our verse says that besides the “test,” there is a separate aspect of “to know what is in your heart.” If the “test” implies getting others to know, then these words can’t also mean that “others will know what’s in your heart.” Since the “others” are already implied in the fact that G-d “tested” us, and He already knows what is in our heart, what additional “knowledge” is being gained, and by whom, by bringing us through the desert for forty years?

The Ramban (Shemos 16:4) says that “it was possible [for G-d] to bring them by way of the cities that were around them, [yet] He brought them through the

¹ See, for example, the commentaries on Beraishis 22:1 (when G-d tested Avraham), on Shemos 16:4 and on our verse.

² The “others” that the test is supposed to inform can be other humans (Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim 3:24); the administering angels—so that they can understand why we are more precious to G-d than they are (Sefornu, Beraishis 22:12 and Devarim 8:2); or G-d’s attributes—so that His attribute of mercy can’t claim that the person deserves more, and His attribute of strict justice can’t demand a harsher sentence (Chizkuni, Shemos 16:4). Why the angels and/or G-d’s attributes would need “proof” rather than trusting G-d’s decision is a separate issue, beyond the scope of this piece.

desert [of] ‘snakes, vipers and scorpions’ and [caused] that they would only have bread from heaven (the mun) -- [only] one day’s needs [falling] each day -- [in order] to test them, to make it better for them in the end that they will believe in Him forever.” In other words, by putting us through the hardship of the journey through the desert it would benefit us by enabling us to maintain our belief for generations to come. We would know that we were able to follow G-d into the barren desert and trusted Him daily for our sustenance, making it easier to trust (and believe) in Him all those years later. We are the ones that, after having passed the test, will know what is in our own hearts; that we are able to keep His commandments. Besides informing others whether we are righteous or not, the test is a way for us to gauge ourselves, where we are holding in our “avodas Hashem” (service of G-d).

It can be much easier to live up to ideals when things are going our way. But how do we react when things begin to unravel? “When the going gets tough, the tough get going” is a very appropriate saying; we can’t really know if we are tough until the situation becomes tough—only then will we find out if we “got going” or “got trampled.” We might be magnanimous under perfect conditions, but how will we react under adverse conditions? Are we honest only when it’s convenient—or when being dishonest (or exaggerating) will improve our circumstances, or do we admit the truth even when it is uncomfortable? Can we maintain our standards of kashrus even when the choices are limited? Do we set aside time to study Torah no matter what, or does it depend on how our day is going? The only way for us to know is to experience those tough times and see how we respond. Afterwards, we can try to adjust accordingly.

The Rambam (Laws of Repentance 2:1) writes that a complete and full repentance is not reached until the opportunity to commit the same exact sin arises, and, because of the repentance, he refrains from doing it. Obviously a person cannot put himself into a situation where he might be tempted to sin. Yet, it is only when confronted with such a “test” that he can truly know if he has completed the teshuva process (for that sin).

While it is true that G-d tests us for other reasons, one of the reasons He tests us is so that “we will know what is in our (own) hearts,” as it is only when confronting adversity that we can truly see how strong our commitment is to “following His commandments.”

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This week's Torah portion centers around the land of Israel: the necessity and guarantee that we conquer it, its natural beauty and resources, replete with rivers, wells, mountains and valleys, its luscious fruits, vegetables and grains, and its impressive stone quarries and copper mines. Indeed, even when the Biblical text directs us to recite the blessing after a meal, our blessing does not relate to the food but rather to the land: "You shall eat, you shall be satisfied and you shall bless the Lord your G-d for the good land which He has given you (Deuteronomy 8:10)"—the land and not the food! Why? Secondly, the Talmud maintains that there are three blessings, Biblically ordained, (from our Torah portion of Ekev) which comprise the Grace over meals: the first for the food as a divine gift, derived from the message of the manna which descended from heaven (Deuteronomy 8:3-6); the second for the land; and the third for the restoration of Jerusalem. Why is Jerusalem a separate blessing, and wherein does the uniqueness of our capital city differ from the uniqueness of the land in general? Ought Jerusalem not be included in the general blessing for the land?

And finally, the Biblical text goes on to describe the Torah covenant which G-d gave to Moses and to Israel, the subsequent sin of the golden calf, the Divine forgiveness and re-confirmation of Israel's election—but all in the backdrop of the importance of the land, the universal nature of our G-d who is above all powers (Deuteronomy 10:17-21), and the universal nature of our covenant, which, if obeyed, will bring universal fructification of the fields, prosperity and well-being to the world (Deuteronomy 11:12 following). How is all of this connected?

I have written in the past of the two Biblical covenants which G-d made with Israel, the first (with Abraham) known as the "covenant between the pieces" (Genesis 15), and the second (with the entire nation) at Sinai with the Divine Revelation (Exodus 20,24: 6-8). These two covenants are generally interpreted as the national covenant—in the "covenant between the pieces", G-d promised Abraham children and delineated the borders of the land of Israel, population and homeland being two essential prerequisites of a nation—and the religious covenant, since the Revelation at Sinai expressed the Divine laws, ritual, ethical and moral—which G-d obligated the Israelites to observe.

And indeed the Jewish people are uniquely both a nation as well as a religion, with Rav Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook seeing the national covenant as being most significant (Epistles,455) and Rav Joseph B. Soloveichik seeing the religious covenant as reflecting our true destiny (Kol Dodi Dofek).

In light of the questions I have asked, I would like to add a dimension to the interpretation of these two covenants. Yes, the first covenant with Abraham expresses Israel as a nation-state. But the second covenant at Sinai was not only a religious covenant, creating Israel as a faith community with a unique relationship with G-d; it was also a covenant with the world, expecting all of the nations to at least accept the seven laws of morality initially given to Noah: not to engage in the evil practices of idolatry, not to blaspheme G-d, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to eat the limb of living animal, and to establish courts of law to enforce these laws.

Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher and jurist of the twelfth century, codifies the fact that G-d commanded Moses at Sinai to teach Israel the 613 commandments and all of the nations of the world these seven commandments of morality and peace (Laws of Kings 8,10). Even the ten commandments themselves are very universal in their message, the first announcing G-d as the Lord of freedom (His basic message to the totalitarian despot Pharaoh), the next two denouncing all forms of idolatry, the fourth invoking the Sabbath as a symbol of G-d the universal creator of all life (even our Gentile servants must rest on the Sabbath like us), the fifth demanding that we respect our parents and the next five dealing with moral issues of inter-personal relationships (three of which are included in the Noahide seven).

The land of Israel is the special gift of G-d to the Jewish people; it is the one land which is meant to supply Israel with sustenance and security, food and borders. Given the fact that we live in an unfriendly world which often attempts to destroy us—perhaps because of the lessons of morality we are commanded to import to a world which is more interested in control and conquest—it is crucial that there be at least one land to feed and protect us. Hence our blessing for a

meal harks back to the one land which provides us with the food over the long haul of history.

Jerusalem, however, is much more than the capital city of Israel; Jerusalem is the home of the Holy Temple, a sanctuary with a message of peace for all the nations of the world (Isaiah 2, Micha 4, Zecharah 7,8,9). Indeed the very name Jerusalem means the City of Peace. Both covenants are inter-related. Only from the back-drop of a nation-state ruled democratically with justice and compassion will we be able to influence a world of nation-states. But the true goal of Israel, the land as well as the people, is centered around Jerusalem, with its moral message to the world. Hence, the blessing following Israel the land in our Grace after Meals is the blessing for Jerusalem and our Bible portion continues its description of the land with the Revelation at Sinai, the universal G-d of the world, and the ultimate well-being of the world once fundamental morality is accepted.

Post Script: I recently took my grandchildren to see "Matrix Revisited". How surprised I was to find a movie which describes a world in between humans and machines (enslaved humans become unfeeling machines, devoid of free will); the humans are protecting Zion (Jerusalem), which has a Divine promise that it will never fall. Victory will come when hope (HaTikvah) and love (You shall love your neighbor like yourself) will enable the Master of the Keys to enter the chamber of the "One" who is the true source. This is precisely the message of our Torah. © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion begins with the statement "Ve-hayah ekev tishmeun et ha-mishpatim ha-eileh - and if you listen to these laws" reward will come. (Deuteronomy 7:12-15) Since the common Biblical term for "if" is "im," many commentators have wondered why the Torah uses the word "ekav" instead.

In one of his most famous comments, Rashi notes that the word ekev connotes a human heel. What the text is teaching is the importance of keeping those commandments that seem less important, like the dirt that one kicks up with one's heel. The message is simple: what appears to be less important is of great importance. In fact, reward depends on keeping the ekev-type commandments.

Alternatively, ekev can mean to pursue, like one running on his or her heels to attain a certain goal. True reward comes to an individual who not only keeps the commandment, but does so with eagerness and anticipation. The yearning reflects an excitement that translates into a higher level of commandment performance.

Much like the heel is the extremity of the body, ekev also refers to the redemptive period that will come

at the end of days (aharit ha-yamim). That time of redemption will come when there is a commitment to listen to the words of the Torah which direct us to lead ethical lives in accordance with God's will.

One last thought. Perhaps ekev reminds us of our forefather, Yaakov (Jacob) who was born holding the heel of his brother Esau. Yaakov is later given an additional name - Yisrael. The name Yaakov, refers to our third patriarch as an individual - husband, father, brother, and son. Yet whenever the Torah calls him by the name Yisrael, it has far reaching implications for the development of the Nation of Israel.

From this perspective, ekev tishmeun is the counterpoint and amazing parallel of Shema Yisrael (Deuteronomy 6:4) which we read just last week. Shema Yisrael speaks of our responsibility as part of the Nation of Israel to keep the commandments and profess belief in God. Ekev tishmeun serves as a safeguard to remind us that we not only have communal responsibilities, but each of us as individuals, must explore our personal relationship with God.

Sometimes it is easier to follow the law as part of a nation, as this is a public statement, open for all to watch. The challenge is to commit when one is alone. The redemptive period will arrive when not only the nation connects with God, but when each one of us, like Yaakov, quietly, modestly, and without fanfare, yearns to keep and observe even the smallest of mitzvot.

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Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Shaul Robinson, Barnet Synagogue

The Sidra of Ekev prepares the Children of Israel to finally enter the Land of Israel. Moses praises the Land that the Jewish People are about to inherit.

"For the L-d your G-d brings you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey; A land where you shall eat bread without scarceness, you shall not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig bronze." (Devarim 8: 7-9) and "A land which the L-d your G-d cares for; the eyes of the L-d your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." (Devarim 11:12)

The well known joke of the 'You Don't Have to Be Jewish' era is that if Moses had turned right instead of left when he came out of Egypt, we would have had all the oil and the Arabs would have had the orange juice!

But, the question must still be asked—why this land? Why, of all the lands, all the countries in the world, did Hashem choose to give Canaan to the Jewish people? And, as the Jewish people's claim to that land in contemporary times is constantly being

besmirched and delegitimized, what is the lesson for us in our own day?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the German scholar of the 19th Century and the architect of the revival of Orthodox communal life provides a most beautiful and salutary answer.

It is true, as the verses quoted from this morning's Sidra indicate, that the land of Israel is a beautiful land with the capacity for sustaining its population. But there was another side to the land, too. This was the land of Sodom and Gomorrah—places of great wickedness. This was the land which, despite its small size, had been fought over by many peoples and armies—the land of the war of the 4 kings and the 5 kings. This was the land whose inhabitants, the Canaanites, had degenerated to levels of moral licentiousness.

Hashem chose the Land of Israel, says Rabbi Hirsch, because it is the land with the greatest potential for violence, bloodshed and depravity. Why did that dubious distinction qualify it to become the homeland of the Jewish people? Because the Jewish People are to enter the land of Israel not just to build a country for themselves. Their mission is to build a society of Goodness, Morality and Torah that will be a shining example to the rest of the world.

"Just that land G-d chose to plant therein his people—who themselves are not the most tractable, whose fundamental character is obstinacy, so that if the Divine Fire of Torah would succeed in winning over this people on this land itself, then there can be no race of mankind in no land who cannot be won."

In choosing to give the Land of Israel to the Jewish people, Hashem is showing his love and hope for all mankind. When the Jewish people—stubborn and rebellious as they can be, enter the land of Israel, the most fought over and violent place on the planet, and in the eyes of the whole world, through loyalty to the Torah they create a society of breathtaking morality and goodness, then every nation and individual will be inspired to replicate such goodness and morality in their own lands. © 2004 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In this week's Torah portion, a new element appears with respect to the second set of Tablets, one that does not appear in the earlier account in the book of Shemot. In the earlier passage, it is written that in order to prepare for the second set of Tablets G-d commanded Moshe, "Carve out for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that appeared on the first tablets, which you shattered. Be ready for morning, and in the morning you

will ascend onto Mount Sinai and stand there before me, at the top of the mountain." [Shemot 34:1-2]. In this week's portion, Moshe repeats this command almost word for word, with one addition. "Carve out for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones, and ascend to me on the mountain, and make for yourself a wooden ark. And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered, and you shall put them into the ark." [Devarim 10:1-2]. What is the point of this command, to place the tablets in a wooden ark? Why is it mentioned only with respect to the second Tablets, and only in Devarim?

It seems that the place set aside for the Tablets in the description in Shemot is the Ark that was made by Betzalel, which was constructed of acacia wood and coated with gold. This is evidently what was referred to in the verse, "Place in the Ark the testimony that I will give you" [Shemot 25:16]. The objective of placing the Tablets in the Ark was in order to create a special construction that would lead to the appearance of the Shechina, the Presence of the Almighty. "Place the cover on the Ark, on the top, and in the Ark you will put the testimony that I give you. And I will meet you there, and I will talk to you from above the cover, between the two Keruvim which are on the Ark of Testimony." [25:21-22]. Thus, the basis is the Tablets of testimony, which symbolized what Moshe received in a unique one-time only occasion at Mount Sinai, and this is covered with the "Kaporet," from which the Almighty continued to be revealed to Moshe.

As opposed to this, the ark that is described in Devarim is not connected to the Tabernacle. In fact, the subject of the Tabernacle does not appear in Devarim at all. As Rashi notes, the straightforward interpretation of the verse is that "this was not the Ark that was made by Betzalel, since the work of the Tabernacle did not begin until after Yom Kippur. Moshe did not command them to make the Tabernacle until after he descended from the mountain, and Betzalel made the Tabernacle first and then the Ark and the other utensils. Thus, this must have been a different ark." The question then becomes: Why was it necessary to place the second Tablets in a separate ark?

Evidently, the need for a second ark was a consequence of the sin of the Golden Calf and the shattering of the Tablets. In the previous chapter in Devarim, Moshe describes how he broke the Tablets. "And I turned and descended from the mountain... The two Tablets of the covenant were in my two hands... I took hold of the two Tablets and threw them down, and I shattered them in front of your eyes." [Devarim 9:15-17]. According to the description in this week's portion (as opposed to what is described in Shemot—see Ramban and Ibn Ezra), Moshe broke the Tablets before G-d had changed His mind about destroying the nation. Thus, the shattering of the Tablets is an expression of the cancellation of the covenant between the Almighty and Bnei Yisrael.

However, after G-d accepted Moshe's prayer, the covenant was once again in force. From then on, the Tablets would no longer be held as a temporary item in Moshe's hands, a situation that permitted them to be broken. The Tablets would be kept in the Ark, a sign of their permanence and the permanence of the covenant that they symbolized between the Almighty and the nation of Yisrael.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's parsha, Moshe tell us that he was instructed by God to craft an ark of wood in which to place the tablets of stone that he brought down from Sinai and upon which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. The major commentaries to the Bible, such as Rashi and Ramban, differ in their interpretations of the purpose of this wooden box. One opinion states that the wooden box was the ark that went out to war with the armies of Israel. Another opinion is that it was the wooden box that was inserted between the two golden boxes of Bezalel and that the three boxes together formed the great golden ark that contained the tablets of stone in the Mishkan and the Temple. There is also an opinion that the wooden box that Moshe created was merely a temporary home for the tablets of stone, until the Mishkan and the golden ark was completed to house them. It served no other purpose then and disappeared afterward from Jewish life. As with all matters of Torah, all of these different interpretations have validity and a message for our times and us. The different interpretations speak to us of the different situations that Israel faced and faces. The common message is that Israel cannot succeed without the Holy Ark of the Law and the tablets of stone from Sinai that reside within it.

Israel triumphs in war not only because of its superior weaponry and technology but also because of its human morale, spirit, faith and courage. All of these latter attributes are derived from the moment of revelation at Sinai. It is there that God told us: "Today you have become a nation!" Thus Moshe's wooden ark must always accompany us when the armies of Israel are forced to go to war. War requires an ark of wood, one of a living spirit, of trees that can bear fruit and provide comfort and shade and not an inanimate one of gold. The golden ark has its place but not on the battlefield. Spirit, tenacity and courage, all Torah virtues, are the stuff of victory and survival.

The golden ark, in order to be effective, must contain within it the wooden ark as well. Gold is royalty but it is also hubris, arrogance and a false assessment of self. To house the Torah it cannot be made purely of gold. The Torah searches for humility and a lack of ostentation, an understated home, if you will. Thus between the splendor and shine of the two golden boxes of the Mishkan and the Temple, resides a

wooden box fashioned by Moshe and ordered by God as a reminder of the necessity of contriteness of spirit and a true self-assessment.

And finally, the Torah always requires a home, a place to be within Israel. Sometimes the place is great and impressive and sometimes it is small and ordinary. The rabbis taught us not to look at the container but rather at the contents. While the great golden residence of Torah is being built we are still obligated to have it reside amongst us, even if only in a plain wooden box. Over our long history, these lessons have been impressed on our soul and psyche. Wherever we go in life and wherever our destiny takes us, the Torah accompanies us, but only if we create a container - even is only of wood - to carry it along on the journey of life. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah continues the theme of comfort and presents the strong feelings of the Jewish people in exile. The prophet Yeshaya captures their concern and presents their deeply sensed feeling of rejection. Yeshaya quotes, "And Zion said Hashem has forsaken and forgotten Me." (49:14) The long, dark years of exile have caused the Jewish people to sincerely believe that Hashem has abandoned them never to return. There are no indications of redemption in the air and the rapid spiritual decline of the times certainly does not reflect the glorious era of Mashiach. Therefore, the Jewish people reluctantly conclude that the master plan must have changed and their long awaited redemption will never come to fruition.

To this, Hashem responds and informs the Jewish people that they are gravely mistaken. Hashem says, "Can a mother ever forget her child; cease to have compassion for him?! Even if she could, I will never forget you!" (49:15)

Hashem revealed to His people that His concern for them extends beyond all human concerns. The Jewish people are too meaningful to Hashem to allow Him to forget them. Hashem adds, "Behold I have engraved you on My palm; your glorious walls are constantly before Me." (49:16) Hashem tells His people that, in reality, they remain His constant focus every single day. The Malbim (ad loc.) explains that the ultimate purpose of the world can only be accomplished through the Jewish people. The glorious era of redemption revolves around them and it is only they who can reveal to the entire world the truths of Hashem. Hashem therefore awaits their return with anxiety in order that His master plan can come to fruition. He has, figuratively, affixed them to the palm of His hand and always sees them in their final stages of

redemption. In actuality, He is constantly maneuvering world events in order to bring about the redemption. The Jewish people are therefore, by definition, the center of all world events. Contrary to the Jewish people's opinion, Hashem never takes His mind off His people and is always anxiously awaiting their return.

The prophet continues to share breathtaking glimpses of our final redemption and then raises the obvious question. Why don't the Jewish people sense this special relationship? If, in fact, Hashem cares so much for them why don't they feel it? Why does Zion consider herself so neglected and forgotten? The prophet answers this with a penetrating question from Hashem, "Why have I come and no one was there; have I called and no one responded?" (50:2) Hashem indicates that He has extended Himself on numerous occasions but the Jewish people did not respond and didn't even bother to be there. In essence, Hashem has done His part in helping us sense His concern but we have not responded.

Our Chazal in Mesichta B'rochos (6B) share with us their painful insight regarding this issue and explain this passage in a most vivid form. They inform us that when Hashem brings His presence to a synagogue in anticipation of a quorum of ten and does not find them there He is immediately angered. To such situations Hashem responds, "Why have I come and no (quorum) was there for Me; have I called and no one responded." This statement suggests that we have overlooked a serious dimension of our relationship with Hashem. To begin we quote the Gemara in B'rochos (6A) which informs us that when a quorum congregates for the sake of prayer Hashem's presence goes out to greet them. Hashem's desire to be with His people is so significant that He even goes out to meet them, awaiting their arrival to His sanctuary? From this we understand that prayer is far greater than an obligation or responsibility. Prayer is an opportunity to unite with our Creator and associate with Him. So significant is this relationship that Hashem even precedes His people and anxiously awaits their arrival to his home.

We should cherish this opportunity and attempt to foster this relationship at all costs. It goes without saying that we should never ignore this opportunity and abuse this relationship. If Hashem deems it appropriate to be there we should certainly do our part to respond to His kindness and warmth. If we fail to attend we are causing Hashem to extend Himself in vain and can not expect positive results to follow.

Hashem is truly angered by our arrogance and accepts our behavior as a sign of indifference or rejection. Yeshaya concludes, "How can we expect to sense Hashem's warmth and concern?" If we truly desire a relationship with Him we must do, at the least, our part to receive Hashem's gesture of warmth and to be there when His is there.

The prophet continues this theme and asks, "Who amongst you reveres Hashem, listens to the voice

of His servant, but went into darkness leaving no radiance for himself. He should trust in Hashem and rely upon Him." (50:10) Chazal, (Brochos 6B) again interpret this passage in a unique manner and reveal another important insight about prayer. They explain that the prophet was referring to the daily minyan attendee who failed once to attend his prayer services due to a pressing personal appointment. In response to this absence Hashem brings the situation to the attention of others. They ask, "What has happened to this G-d fearing individual who was accustomed to approaching Hashem on a daily basis?" Now, the man has gone to a place of darkness and no light from Hashem will shine upon him. He should have relied upon Hashem rather than failing to keep his appointment with Hashem in His office. (see Rashi ad loc.)

This response also seems quite harsh to us. After all, the person was always a G-d fearing individual who constantly attended prayer services. Why is he being so severely denounced for this and even worse, regarded as going to a place of darkness? The answer seems to be in the concluding words, "He should trust in Hashem and rely upon Him." Apparently we are noticing a change of attitude and a principal deviation here. Prayer represents our recognition that everything, our livelihood included, is in the hands of Hashem. Our first appointment of the day is with Hashem wherein we request that all of our day's experiences will be met with success. Our happiness, health and wealth are all up to Hashem and we therefore request of Him that He pay serious attention to all our needs.

However, one who cancels his daily appointment with Hashem demonstrates that he considers matters to be in his personal control. He couldn't meet with Hashem today because a more pressing need existed. Excluding Hashem for the moment, this personal appointment was necessary in order to secure his personal finances. If he didn't attend he could forfeit his opportunity of producing financial success.

Hashem responds that this person has forgotten the most basic principal of life. He should have trusted in Hashem because ultimately even the success of this meeting depends upon Him. Hashem would have "shined His light upon him" if he would have followed the formula. But now, after demonstrating his lack of faith, he has gone away from Hashem. From this point on his relationship has been severely effected and Hashem chooses not to allow this person to sense His true concern for him.

Yes, Zion feels neglected and doesn't sense Hashem's interest in her. But, as the prophet reveals, this is not Hashem's doing. We have always had the opportunity of prayer and could always enjoy a warm personal association with Hashem in His very own home. However it is we who abuse our privilege and force Hashem to keep His distance from us. If we would

take prayer more seriously we would always feel the helping hand of Hashem.

How appropriate are these lessons which are read in conjunction with this week's parsha, Eikev. Because, in fact, the central theme of the parsha is to never forget Hashem and His kindness. This week, Moshe Rabbeinu reminds us that our sustenance and livelihood are in Hashem's hands, rather than our own.

In addition, Moshe Rabbeinu introduces the opportunity of fervent prayer and informs us that continued success and satisfaction are the natural results of such perfect service. (see Devorim 8:17, 18 and Devorim 11: 13, 14, 15)

May we merit to continuously develop our relationship with Hashem through our prayer and receive the radiance of Hashem always. © 2004 torah.org & Rabbi D. Siegel

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar with an allusion to the parsha's first Medrash Rabba. In the time of Chazal, a new type of menorah (lamp) was invented. What was new about this menorah was the following feature. The menorah was made of components which could be assembled or disassembled. Thus, the parts could be joined to make a whole lamp, (and vice versa.) In this context, the Medrash raised a halachic question. While in use, the menorah might fall; and because of its unique design, might come apart. The menorah's owner might then reassemble it. Reassembling the menorah, however, would involve a melacha (an activity forbidden on Shabbos) -- the melacha of boneh (construction). Hence, Medrash Rabba asks: To avoid such a potential outcome, have Chazal instituted a protective law that would prohibit moving such a menorah on Shabbos in the first place?

The Sfas Emes extracts from this discussion one thought that is pertinent to his discourse, namely, the possibility that a person can construct a complete keili (instrument; vessel) by assembling its components. As we will see below, he is able to view this halachic issue as, at one level, a metaphor. Now the Sfas Emes calls up a series of pesukim that come to (his, and thence, to our) mind by association. These references may seem to totally unrelated to the menorah that we might construct by joining its parts. But trust the Sfas Emes to put it all together.

The Sfas Emes cites the parsha's first Rashi, quoting the Medrash Tanchuma. To understand what is coming, bear in mind the following. Our parsha begins "Vehaya eikev tish'me'un es ha'mishpatim..." ("It will come to pass as a result of your observing the commandments..."). As you see, the word "eikev" has the sense of "as a result of" or "in exchange for". It so happens that there is another word in Hebrew with the

exact same spelling (in Hebrew): "ahkeiv"— the heel of the foot. The pesukim with which the Sfas Emes works start from this basic "remez"—"eikev" as an allusion to the heel of a person's foot.

In that perspective, the Sfas Emes (and Rashi) refer us to a pasuk in Tehillim (49:6). That pasuk sees Dovid Hamelech as saying (in colloquial mode): "I'll tell you what really scares me as I contemplate my Yom Hadin (Day of Judgment). I'm not worried about the severe mitzvos ("hechamuros"). I am worried about the mitzvos "kahlos", i.e., those that I, like most people, take lightly." In figurative terms, we might refer to these as mitzvos on which people tread with their heels. Hence, Dovid Hamelech's reference (in the pasuk just cited) to "ahvon ahkeivai," that is, "the aveiros that I have done with the heels of my feet". (What might be examples—in our lives—of such mitzvos that too often, we treat lightly? One such case might be talking about divrei chol (weekday matters) on Shabbos. Another example might be: saying the tefila that concludes virtually each davening, -- "Aleinu Le'shabei'ach"— without kavana.)

Another text that the word "eikev" brings to mind is Tehillim (19:13): "... beshomrom eikev rav." (ArtScroll: "... in observing them [the mitzvos], there is great reward."). Finally, by association with the word "rav", the Sfas Emes introduces still another pasuk from Tehillim (31:20): "Mah rav tuvcha asher tza'fanta liyerei'echa!" ("How wonderful are the good things that you are keeping hidden for the people who have yir'as Shamayim!")

A fair question at this point is: this chain of "eikev" allusions is all well and good. But what does this have to do with the Medrash with which we started— about the menorah that could be assembled from its components? You will soon see.

The Sfas Emes observes that HaShem made the world such that all things created should be brought together to be close to Him. (We now see why the Sfas Emes started this ma'amar with the metaphor of constructing the menorah by assembling its disparate components.) This task—linking people and nature together in a great chain of being connected to HaShem—may seem remote from our life and our concerns. But note: What is the word that describes the condition of a world in which people are not linked—not to each other, not to nature and not to HaShem? The word is "alienation". And "alienation" is often used to characterize the sicknesses of the society in which we live.

Who has the responsibility for bringing together the many different components of creation? The Sfas Emes tells us that HaShem has given this assignment to Klal Yisroel—to bring all creation together, for the glory of HaShem. Continuing, the Sfas Emes explains how to go about accomplishing this mission. He observes that radiance (he'ara) of HaShem is present in all creation. Our job, explains the Sfas Emes, is to live

our lives in constant awareness of that glow: HaShem's Presence in all things. By so doing, we connect all things to HaShem. Achieving that goal requires us to bring our desire to do HaShem's ratzon (will) even in everyday, routine matters. This is the reason for the Torah's reference to "eikev"—the heel of the foot, the limb farthest from the head. There, in mundane, everyday matters, HaShem's Presence is most hidden, and therefore hardest to discern.

Perceiving the whole world aglow with the Presence of HaShem helps us unify and bring together all that we encounter. Continuing in this vein, the Sfas Emes recalls the intimacy we achieved with HaShem at matan Torah (Revelation at Sinai). Parsha's Eikev begins: "tishme'un eis ha'mish'patim" ("You shall hear the ordinances"). This means, explains the Sfas Emes, that we can (and should) be aware of and hear the radiance of HaShem that is present in all creation. (The phrase "hear the radiance" evokes matan Torah, where Bnei Yisroel "saw the sounds").

The mitzvos encompass all aspects of our lives. Thus, by performing mitzvos, we can constantly be aware of HaShem's Presence, if only we try. The Sfas Emes has already told us that mitzvos can be our modality for assembling life's disparate components in homage to HaShem. He sharpens this point by his reading of the word "mitzva". He reads this key word as a derivative of the word "tzavta"—a linking, a grouping (Note: the word in modern Hebrew for a pliers—i.e., a tool for holding things together—is "tzevat".) This reading makes it easier to see the link between doing mitzvos and recognizing HaShem's Omnipresence.

This all sounds beautiful. But one would appreciate some form of a "take-home lesson"—practical advice on implementing these ideas in everyday life. If that is what you seek, you have come to the right address. For, as you may recall, the Sfas Emes also had the job of being the Gerrer Rebbe. As such, he had much experience with the religious life, and unique wisdom on how to live it. He concludes with two thoughts that can well serve as a take-home lesson.

First, the Sfas Emes tells us that, to succeed in our awesome assignment, we must start with yir'as HaShem—awe of HaShem. From yir'a, a person can progress to ahava (love) of HaShem. But it all begins with yir'a. Second, the Sfas Emes now refers to yir'a as a "mitzvo kahla". Why? Because yir'as HaShem is, as he phrases it, "kefi retzon ha'ahdam". That is, in reality an attitude of yir'as HaShem—awe of HaShem—depends on a person's will. In matters of yir'a, volition sweeps all.

Careful readers will have noted an important omission in the Sfas Emes's presentation. The parsha's first pasuk—and the one which the Sfas Emes uses to launch the ma'amar—focuses on reward. The Sfas Emes evidently agrees on the centrality of this theme. For, as we saw, he cites two pesukim in Tehilim which say important things about reward. But if we scrutinize

the ma'amar in search of the Sfas Emes's own thoughts on the subject, we come up empty-handed!

I suggest a simple explanation for the Sfas Emes's failure to discuss reward. A simile will help. Consider the case of a star athlete—say, a basketball player—who is asked to present a talk on the sport to a group of novices. For this athlete, basketball is his life. As a star, he is paid an astronomical salary. But as an enthusiast, he would be willing to play without that high reward. In his talk to the novices, he will have to mention the word "salary"; but for the most part, he will discuss what matters to him in the sport—namely, playing the game.

RABBI ZVI MILLER

The Salant Foundation

The heart is our spiritual center. The Torah instructs us to cut away the barrier of your heart (Devarim 10:16). The Ramban explains: "Your hearts should be open to know the truth...and you should not err to think that there is any benefit in serving intermediate forces, i.e., angels, idols, planets, etc."

After Klal Yisrael experienced the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt why would they give any credence to any power other than HaShem, the Master of the Universe?

In this material world in which we live the radiance of Hashem is hidden. No matter how clearly HaShem reveals Himself, once the revelation has passed, the soul is cast in darkness. The nature of this 'blackout' makes it impossible for humans not to err. The heart is vulnerable to all seductions and grasps at any force that seems attractive or powerful enough to help him.

Klal Yisrael, because of the special favor that we found in the eyes of HaShem have been endowed with the clarity to recognize the worthlessness of non-Elokim forces. Despite the deceptive comfort of placing our faith in planets, angels, or superstars—HaShem has instilled a consciousness within the Jewish soul. We know that all these deceptive powers are unconditionally and totally subject to the Divine Will.

Hence, Klal Yisrael has an inner light, a sensitivity that enables us to distinguish between truth and falsehood. We acknowledge this gift everyday in our morning prayers—"Blessed is HaShem...Who separated us from those who stray from the truth."

Deep in our soul we know the truth. However, we must open our hearts to connect with this innate awareness. Therefore, the verse instructs us—cut away the barrier of your heart. Meaning, the people of Israel must see beyond the smoke-screen and reject the false persuasions. Then we will be free to embrace the eternal Torah and its everlasting truth and good.

Implement: Envision the gate of your heart opening and HaShem bathing your heart in light. [Based on *Da'as Torah of Rabenu Yerucham HaLevi*]