

# Toras



# Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

### RavFrand

**“F**or you shall surely open your hand to him.” (Devarim 15:8) First, the Torah tells us (15:7), “If there be a pauper among you, one of your brethren, in one of your gateways in your land that God your Lord has given you, do not harden your heart nor close your hand tight against your impoverished brother.” This is clearly telling us to give charity to the poor person. Then the Torah continues, “For you shall surely open your hand to him and provide him with the necessities he is missing.” This seems to call for a higher level of charity not covered by the first commandment.

There was once a Jew in Vilna who took a great interest in local history. In the course of his research, he would often go out to the old cemetery and read the inscriptions on the tombstones. He was able to gather a surprising amount of information in this fashion.

One day, he came across two adjacent graves. According to the inscriptions, the two men were brothers, both talmidei chachamim, both extraordinary baalei tzedakah, philanthropists. Strangely, the two tombstones shared an inscription from Eishes Chayil, the last chapter of Mishlei (31:20). The inscription began on one tombstone with “she extended her palm (kappah) to the poor” and was completed on the other with “and she stretched out her hand (yadeha) to the pauper.”

The man was puzzled. First of all, he had never seen an inscription shared by two tombstones. Second, inscriptions from Eishes Chayil were used almost exclusively for women. There was obviously a story behind all this, and by all appearances, an interesting story. The man sought out one of the oldest men in the Vilna community and asked him about the inscription. The old man indeed had a story to tell.

These two brothers were Torah scholars of the highest order, and they were also wealthy and extremely generous in their charities. They were much respected and admired in the community.

Suddenly, their fortunes took a turn for the worse. Some of their businesses failed. Their investments stagnated. People began to wonder and whisper. Why would such a thing happen to such sterling people?

The Rabbinical Court of Vilna also heard the stories and took the matter under advisement. “How can this be,” declared one of the judges, “that two such exemplary talmidei chachamim should be going bankrupt? It is a chillul Hashem! We have to do something about it.”

“But what can we do about it?” asked another judge. “Should we give them a loan?”

“No, of course not,” said the first judge. “We have to get to the bottom of this and correct it.”

“But how?” said the second judge.

“There is a simple way,” offered a third judge. “We have to summon the brothers to court and interrogate them about everything they’ve done for the past few years. I have no doubt they will answer our questions truthfully.”

The Rabbinical Court questioned the brothers for hours and discovered only one instance of wrongdoing. The Halachah demands (Kesubos 50a) that a person should not give away more than a fifth of his wealth to charity, but the brothers often exceeded this limit. Their only crime was that they gave too much charity!

What was to be done about this? The Rabbinical Court decided that the brothers could not be trusted to stay within the prescribed limits. Therefore, they themselves took control of the finances and decreed that anyone approaching the brothers for charitable donations should come to the Rabbinical Court’s appointed administrator of the brothers’ accounts.

The poor appeared on the doorstep of the brothers, and they duly directed them to the court-appointed administrator of their accounts.

“We’ve been to him already,” they protested, “and he is not nearly as generous as you’ve always been. We’ll never feed our children on what the administrator gives us.”

The brothers’ hearts melted, but what could they do? They didn’t have control of their money. So they began to give away the silver in their cabinets to the poor. Eventually, this trove was also depleted, and they were left with one silver spoon between them.

The next day, when a beggar approached each of the brothers, they broke the last spoon in half. One took the spoon part and gave it to a beggar, and the other took the handle and gave it to a beggar.

This wonderful act of charity was memorialized on their tombstones, relying on a wordplay. The

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beginning of the verse, "She extended her palm (kappah) to the poor" - kappah also meaning "her spoon" - appeared on the first tombstone. The completion of the verse, "And she stretched out her hand (yadeha) to the pauper" - yadeha also meaning "her handle" - appeared on the other.

This is an example of "opening the hand" of the highest order. © 2004 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

**A**mong the commandments taught in this week's Parsha is the prohibition against listening to a "prophet" or "dreamer" that tries to convince others to worship other gods (Devarim 13:2-6). Instead, the one who tried to turn us away from the true worship is put to death, "for he has spoken falsely about Hashem your G-d who took you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to push you off of the path that Hashem your G-d has commanded you to travel on." I would have thought that promoting idol worship was the crux of the problem; why does Moshe (who said these words) add that G-d took us out of Egypt? The numerous great things that G-d has done (and still does) for us should be irrelevant to the basic issue of abandoning His service for that of a false god.

We find the same thing a little later, when we are commanded to stone (if there were testifying witnesses) a friend or family member that tries to "convert" us to another deity, "for he tried to push you off from Hashem, your G-d, who took you out of Egypt from the house of slaves" (13:11). Why does there seem to be such an emphasis on G-d having taken us out of Egypt? Isn't the point of contention the attempt to recruit others to worship idols, not what the One true G-d has done for us?

Another (seemingly unrelated) issue from our Parsha that deserves a closer look is the prohibition against adding onto or subtracting from any of the commandments (13:1). For one thing, why is it sandwiched in-between the prohibition against idol worship and the prohibition against following a prophet that tries to lead us astray? Additionally, many of the prohibitions that are Rabbinic in origin would appear to run counter to this. To use an example found in our Parsha, we are not allowed to mix milk and meat (14:21), yet this prohibition has been extended to include fowl (i.e. chicken).<sup>1</sup> How were our Sages allowed to prohibit something that the Torah permitted? Isn't that a violation of "adding onto the Torah?"

Regarding these last points, the Chizkuni (4:2) says that "this is an answer to those heretics- may they be erased from the book of life- that are skeptical about the Talmud, and say 'how could the sages of Israel add numerous things in the Talmud that are not in the Torah, as it is written, 'do not add onto it and do not remove from it.'" This (the context of the prohibition) is the answer to their words, for this expression occurs only twice in the Torah, and is only [taught] regarding a deity and its worship. It means to say that you should not add any worship onto worshipping G-d with an additional worship, nor should you worship Him (G-d) any less: Here in Va-eschanan it is written, 'don't add onto the thing [which I have commanded you]' (4:2) followed immediately (4:3) with 'your eyes have seen that which G-d did by Ba'al Peor' (the idol that the Moavite women had enticed some to worship) and in Parshas Re'ay it is written, 'do not add onto it and do not subtract from it,' which was immediately preceded by 'for even their sons and daughters they burn with fire to their gods.' Other commandments, however, G-d did not warn us not to do add to if the purpose is to create a protective fence around the Torah."

While this explains the positioning of this prohibition, Rashi had told us (4:2) that adding a fifth paragraph into our Tefillin, an extra species to the four taken with the lulav, or a fifth set of fringes onto a garment were included in "not adding onto it." Although these "additions" cannot be considered a "protection" for their respective commandments, since there's no question that they are not meant to change the service from the One G-d to a false god (but is only an addition onto the commandment itself), it would seem that the Chizkuni's approach does not fully apply. After all, it was not just worshipping a god other than G-d that was

<sup>1</sup> There is a dispute about whether milk and fowl is forbidden Biblically or Rabbinically (see Chullin 113a, where it only Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yosi Hagelili who say that it is Biblically permitted, with Rabbi Akiva implying that it is Rabbinically prohibited—see Tosfos there, and on 104b where they conclude that milk is Biblically prohibited after fowl); we follow the opinion that it is only a Rabbinic prohibition (see Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Dayah 87:3).

included in the prohibition, but even adding a "new" type of worship to G-d.

When describing the origins of idol worship, the Rambam (Laws of Idol Worship 1:1) writes that the initial mistake was that "they (the first idol worshippers) said that since G-d created these stars and the heavenly spheres to run the world, and He put them on high and gave them honor, and they serve the ones that serve before Him, they [these celestial bodies] are worthy of praise and glory and of being given honor- and this is G-d's will to make great and to honor those that He made great and honored, just as a king wants to honor his servants and those who stand before him, as this is a way of honoring the king." In other words, the original intent was not to worship a different deity, but that the way to worship the One G-d was by worshipping His celestial servants. The mistake was that this was not what G-d had wanted or commanded, and is therefore prohibited. The term for "idol worship" is "avodah zarah," literally "foreign worship," as it refers to a type of worship that is foreign, rather than to the item being worshipped (as opposed to "avodas kochavim," which refers to worshipping the stars, not the type of worship). Even if the worship is aimed at the Creator, if it is a type of worship that He did not command, it is considered foreign, and therefore classified as "idol worship." (It was only later, the Rambam continues, that the worship was aimed at the celestial body itself rather than being intended as a form of worshipping G-d.)

We find a similar concept by Shaul (Shemuel I 15:22-23) when he brought the animals captured from Amalek as offerings to G-d instead of destroying them: "And Shemuel said, 'does G-d want offerings and sacrifices as much as He wants one to listen to G-d's voice? Behold listening is better than a quality sacrifice, paying attention (following) [is better than] the fats of rams. For like the sin of one who asks a soothsayer so is the sin of anyone who rebels against the words of the Torah, and like the sins of a nation that worships idols is the sin of every man that adds on [to the commandment]; because you despised the word of G-d, He has despised your being king."

There is no question that Shaul was bringing these offerings to G-d, yet Shemuel compares his worshipping G-d in a form that he was not commanded, to those that worship idols- mentioning specifically that "adding on" is tantamount to idol worship. This is what the Chizkuni meant as well, that any form of worship- even if it is meant as a way of worshipping G-d- is considered "foreign" if it was not commanded, unless it is designed as a protection for G-d's actual commandment. (Notice how the "idol worship" mentioned prior to the prohibition against adding to or subtracting from the Torah is a warning not to copy the modes of worship used by the idol worshippers, even if used as a means of worshipping G-d.)

Returning to the Rabbinical prohibition against eating milk and fowl together, the Rambam (Laws of Forbidden Foods 9:4) writes that milk and fowl (as well as "wild" animals, i.e. deer) is Rabbinically forbidden so that people won't become accustomed to eating them together and "come to eat Biblically [prohibited] meat and milk [together], as the verse only says a 'kid in it's mother's milk' (which might be understood to exclude any animal whose young is not called a "kid," such as a calf or a lamb), therefore (to avoid confusion over which animals are included in the prohibition) they forbade all meat (even fowl) with milk." The prohibition against eating milk and fowl is therefore not an "addition," but a "protection," to ensure that no one thinks Biblically forbidden meat is not really "meat" and can be mixed with milk.

If, however, the prohibition was not designed as a means of protecting an already existing commandment (such as saying that if G-d doesn't want me to eat milk and meat, He probably doesn't want me to eat milk and fish, or milk and fowl, together either), it would be problematic, and considered a foreign worship. As would adding a fifth paragraph into the Tefillin, etc.

Imposing a new restriction, or adding a "new" means of worship- one not designed to protect an existing one- shows a lack of confidence in the authenticity of the Torah. If we know that the Torah contains the exact mode of worship that G-d desires, there would be no reason to adjust it. Adding onto it, or taking away from it, is like saying that there is a better way to serve G-d than what is taught in the Torah. Which is like saying that the Torah is not how G-d communicated with us- that He gave us no manual by which to know how to live and serve Him.

When describing the reason why the exodus story is so primary to Judaism, and why so many commandments are connected to remembering our being taken out of Egypt, the Ramban (Shemos 13:16) tells us that a miracle that defies nature, especially when foretold by a prophet, proves that there is a Creator that is involved with His creations. This proof does not come to answer every critic, or to prove this to every generation. Rather, once we know that it was done, as it was when G-d took us out of Egypt, we know that the Creator supervises the world He created.

The ten plagues, the splitting of the sea, the manna from heaven, the clouds of glory, the well of water and the public revelation on Mt. Sinai all testified not only to G-d's existence, but to His interaction with us. Denying the authenticity of the Torah, and therefore the exact means of worship contained within it, denies that G-d cares enough about the world He created to communicate with it, and be involved with it- an involvement epitomized by our exodus from Egypt. This might be why, when describing one who tries to entice others to worship idols- i.e. to worship G-d in a different way- Moshe refers to the sin as "trying to turn you away

from Hashem, your G-d, who took you out of Egypt." G-d is involved in His world, and has informed us how to worship Him.

As we welcome in the month of Elul this coming week, and begin the period of (increased) introspection, let us rededicate ourselves to the ideals contained in the Torah, following the path G-d has laid out for us within it. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

**“B**ehold, I present before you this day a blessing and a curse; the blessing when you hearken to the commandments of the Lord your G-d... and the curse if you do not hearken to the commandments of the Lord your G-d..." (Deuteronomy 11:26-28)

There are three important and fascinating issues which emanate from these verses. The reader will note that I translated the very first verb in the opening verse, "present" (Hebrew, notein), as in the noun "present" or "gift" (Hebrew, Matana, the noun built from the verb naton) One can well understand the positive elements of a blessing, but how can the Biblical text refer to a curse as a blessing? And clearly, what the Almighty is giving or presenting "on this day" are both a curse as well as a blessing!?

The second issue is the fact that the blessings and curses referred to here are more specifically delineated later on in the Biblical text (Deuteronomy 27:11 -- 28), within the context of the planned entry of the Israelites into the Land of Israel. Indeed, this is the third covenant, in addition to the national covenant which G-d made with Abraham when He promised our founding patriarch children and a homeland (Genesis 15), and the religious covenant which G-d made with the Israelite nation when He revealed to them the Torah at Sinai (Exodus 20). It is called the covenant of mutual responsibility, of co-signership, by the Sages of the Talmud (B.T. Sotah 32, areivut, Hebrew) Why are the blessings and curses associated with our keeping or not keeping the Torah bound up specifically with the Land of Israel? Does this third covenant of areivut (co-signership) not apply equally to the Jews living in the diaspora communities?

And finally, this third covenant is dramatized around two majestic mountains near Shekem: six of the tribes ascend Mount Gerizim, the other six ascend Mount Eybal, and the priests, Levites and Holy Ark remain below between the mountains. The Levites turn first towards Mount Gerizim with the blessings and then towards Mount Eybal with the curses, and with each pronouncement the Israelites atop the mountains respond Amen (B.T. Sotah, *ibid.*, Deuteronomy 27:12, Rashi *ad loc.*). What is the unique message of these mountains? After all, the very next verse in the opening portion of our Torah reading testifies as to the

inextricable bond between this third covenant, the Land of Israel, and the two mountains: "And it will be when the Lord your G-d will take you to the land you have entered there to inherit, then you shall present the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Eybal (Deuteronomy 11:29)." What is the connection?

Let us begin with the Divine gift or present of a blessing and a curse. I believe the Bible is teaching us that the greatest gift which the Almighty bestows upon humanity is the gift of freedom of will, the human possibility to choose between right action and wrong action, between perfecting the world or polluting the world. Undoubtedly built in within the very structure of free will is the possibility of one's taking the wrong path and bringing about the curse of destruction. However, without free-will, the human being would be no different from a rat in a maze, a mere puppet or pawn; with free will— despite its concomitant dangers—the human being is a partner to the Divine, "but slightly less than G-d, crowned with honor and glory; whose G-d— given task it is to perfect the world in the Kingship of the Divine.

Since Israel is the land set aside for the Israeli nation-state, the sovereign society which enables us to serve as a "beacon-light to the gentile nations," the back-drop of the Temple Mount from whence the message of ethical monotheism and a G-d of love, justice and peace will eventually be accepted by the world, the final expression of the success of our mission and the true gift of our free will can only come to fruition in Israel and Jerusalem. And since the task G-d has set for us and we have accepted for ourselves is a formidable one, fraught with danger and demanding enormous discipline and dedication, the best metaphor for our challenge is climbing to the top of a steep and rocky mountain. In the words of Rav Nachman, "The entire world is a very narrow bridge, (from which it is all too easy to fall into a deep abyss). But the essence is, not to be afraid." And when one succeeds in climbing a mountain like Grizim, Eybal or Everest, the "high" at the top, the sense of accomplishment and success, is a gift of satisfaction which has no equal.

A number of years ago, I truly understood the gift of our freedom of choice to fulfill our mission of "tikkun olam", the perfection of the world. One of our Yeshivot which combines Torah study and army service was under heavy enemy attack during this current Oslo War. Forty IDF soldiers and two tanks were protecting the Academy; each Thursday I gave our students a shiur (Torah lecture). One particular Thursday, one of the soldiers came in to hear my class; I noticed him immediately, not only because he took copious notes but mainly because he was very tall and very Black. In a discussion with him after class, he told me he came from Nigeria, his name was Dan, and he became Jewish because of "tikkin olam," his pronunciation of tikkun olam, the perfection of the world. He explained that when a delegation of Israel's 'Peace Corps to the

'Third World' came to Nigeria to impart new techniques in agriculture and medicine, he was befriended by one of them who happened to be an observant Jew. This "friend" taught him about "tikkun olam," invited him to visit Israel, and the rest is history.

I invited him to share Friday evening dinner with my family and me. He accepted for the following week—but never got to my home. He was killed in the line of duty by a Palestinian sniper's bullet. Only the Yeshiva attended his funeral at Mount Herzl cemetery; his family in Nigeria was informed, but never responded....

Three months later, my wife woke me up from a Shabbat afternoon nap and apologetically explained that I had important guests. I found a middle-aged Black couple sitting in my living-room drinking tea, "We don't understand why our son came to Israel, we don't understand why our son converted to Judaism, and we don't understand why our son had to die. Everyone we asked said that you could tell us, that shortly before he was killed he had a long conversation with you..."

We spoke for more than three hours. A few months ago I was invited to the "hanukkat habayit" (house-dedication) of Dan's parents and put up the mezuzah. This amazing couple went to Ulpan Akiba to learn Hebrew, converted to Judaism, and now have made their home in Netanya. I hammered in the mezuzah;

Dan's mother spoke. She said, "All my friends back home in Nigeria ask why we made such a move to such a dangerous place. There is only one reason: 'tikkun olam.'" © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**his week's portion—according to many commentators, including Rashi—makes it clear that God's words to the Jewish people were not all recorded in the ones found in the Torah. We are told in this parsha, "and you shall slaughter as I've commanded you." (Deuteronomy 12:21) One would expect the details of how to slaughter to be spelled out—after all God says "as I've commanded you." Yet, nowhere in the Torah are the specifics of how to ritually slaughter mentioned. It follows then that the details, as our text indicates, were spelled out by God, although they're not found anywhere in the Torah text.

This is not the only place where this phenomenon occurs. The Torah, for example, states "observe the Sabbath day." (Deuteronomy 5:12) Yet, the specifics of how to observe the Shabbat are not found in the Torah.

All this points to a divine aspect of the Torah that was given alongside the written text, this is known as the Torah she-be'al peh, the Oral Law. Additionally, not only were many of God's words transmitted orally,

but also the words of our sages were designated to be passed through the oral tradition. This begs a fundamental question: Why was there a need to have an oral transmission—why wasn't it all written down? Several answers come to mind.

Ironically, transmission of ideas through the generations is more exact through the oral legacy. Once written, especially in ancient times when very few copies existed, it was easy for one scribe to tinker with texts and change them, whether purposefully or not. For this reason, many forms of contemporary law, are not written down.

Another possibility: Had everything been written down, it would have sent the message that rabbinic law is closed and that the process of interpretation had come to a halt. The oral transmission sent the message that rabbis in each generation, basing themselves on the earlier text and principles of developing the law, could continue to evaluate and contribute to an understanding in their own particular times.

One last thought. Had everything been written down, a rebbe, a teacher of Torah would have been unnecessary—after all, it's all in the book. The oral transmission made a rebbe, a living person who could teach and lead by example, indispensable. Ultimately, such personalities are necessary for Torah to be sustained.

In time, however, the Jewish community was no longer capable of remembering the oral dictates, and hence, we were left with no choice but to commit the oral law to writing. The challenge, even as we study the oral law from a written text, is to recognize why it was, at first, not put to paper—to remember the precision of the law, that it is ongoing, and it requires a rebbe, a living role model, to teach it. Through both avenues; through the oral and the written, the Torah of God remains dynamic and alive. © 2004 *Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA*

#### **RABBI LABEL LAM**

### **Dvar Torah**

**I**f your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is like your own soul will entice you secretly, saying; "Let us go and worship the gods of others"—that you did not know, nor your forefathers, from the gods of the peoples that are all around you, those near to you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth—you shall not accede to him and hearken to him; your eye shall not take pity on him, you shall not be compassionate nor conceal him. Rather you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be the first against him to kill him, and the hand of the people afterwards. You shall pelt him with stones and he shall die; for he sought to make you stray from near HASHEM your G-d, Who takes you out of Egypt

from the house of slavery. All Israel shall hear and fear, and they shall not again do such an evil thing in your midst. (Devarim 13:7-12)

I realize that these words sound awfully barbaric and all too brutal in our sensitive and civilized times. It should be understood though that this is not an incitement to violence.

1) For these events to unfold we need to employ a court with the license to administer capital punishment.

2) We haven't had such a body for thousands of years.

3) We are bidden to obey the laws of the land, in the places in which we find ourselves.

4) Even still, the Talmud informs us that a court that killed once in seventy years was already considered a murderous court. So what is the practical value of learning about this "seducer"?

Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv ztl. turns the whole lesson around. He said that we have a principle that HASHEM's reward for good deeds always far outweighs His punishment for bad deeds. Now a "mesis umadiach"—a seducer or recruiter who tries to lead Jews to idol worship is punished with death, even if his efforts were unsuccessful. From here we can deduce how great is the reward of one who tries to bring his friend closer to G-d.

The Chovos HaLevavos writes the following remarkable words, "My brothers you should know, that if a person would reach the loftiest levels of perfection in the eyes of The Almighty and already have achieved the level of the prophets having their quality of character, praiseworthy conduct, selfless devotion, and pure love of the Creator—he still will not have approached the accomplishments of the individual who directs people to the proper way and who draws close those who are distant to the service of The Almighty. His merits increase and are compounded by the moment through the achievements of those who were affected to serve The Creator."

According to the 1990 CJF National Population Study regarding American Jewry the intermarriage rate for Jews is a staggering 72%, more than half of Jewish children under the age of 18 are raised outside the Jewish faith, out of the 5.5 million Jews, an estimated 3.5 million are not affiliated with synagogues or other Jewish Institutions.

There's a story about thousands of star fish left to dry in the sun when the tide retreated and a man is busy throwing them one by one into the sea. An onlooker asks critically whether he hopes to save all the star fish to which the man replies, "No, but for the ones I reach it makes a huge difference!"

Fourteen years have passed since this survey was taken and I'm not sure matters have improved significantly. Therefore we have less of an imperative to throw stones but rather we do have an abundance of

opportunities to reach the stars. © 2004 torah.org & Rabbi L. Lam

#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In this week's Torah portion, Moshe commands Bnei Yisrael, "Everything that I command you is what you must observe, do not add anything to it, and do not subtract anything" [Devarim 13:1]. This is a repeat of the same command that was already given in the Torah portion of Va'etchanan, "Do not add on to what I am commanding you and do not subtract from it, in order to observe G-d's commands, which I command you." [4:2]. The prohibition of detracting from the mitzvot is easy to understand, but why should it be forbidden to add? The sages do not agree about the limits of this prohibition. Rashi, in this week's portion, explains that the prohibition is to add on to the details of a mitzva. "Do not add—for example, five sections in Tefillin, five species to be held with a lulav, or four blessings by the Kohanim." Ramban, on the other hand, writes in Va'etchanan that the prohibition also includes adding an entirely new mitzva. "In my opinion, this even includes one who invents a new mitzva on his own, in the way that Yeravam instituted a new holiday." (See I Melachim 12:33).

In looking for the straightforward meaning, we should first note that in both passages the prohibition is related to idol worship. In this week's portion, it appears at the end of a passage forbidding idol worship in the way it is normally performed. "Take care lest you follow them, after you have conquered them, lest you pursue their gods, saying: How do these nations worship their gods, can I do the same? Do not do this to your G-d, for they have engaged for their gods in every abomination before G-d, all that He despises. They have even burned their sons and daughters for their idols." [Devarim 12:30-31]. Thus, the reason for the prohibition may be the fear that Bnei Yisrael will be impressed by the fervor of the idol worship of the surrounding nations. Because of this danger, Moshe warns Bnei Yisrael that the religious fervor of the idol worshippers is not a worthy model, and he emphasizes the great danger involved in the route of fanaticism, which brings them to burn their own sons and daughters as a sacrifice to their idols.

This same concept is also implied by the context of the words in the portion of Va'etchanan. "Do not add anything to whatever I command you... Your eyes have seen what G-d did to Ba'al Pe'or—for every man who followed Ba'al Pe'or was destroyed by your G-d from your midst. But you who remain attached to your G-d are alive to this day" [4:2-4]. The most definitive proof that it is wrong to make additions to any of G-d's commands can be seen from Ba'al Pe'or. That too involved an unprecedented level of ecstatic idol

worship (as is emphasized, "And Yisrael became attached to Ba'al Pe'or... those who were attached to Ba'al Pe'or" [Bamidbar 25:3-5]). Evidently, this stemmed from how captivated Bnei Yisrael were from the intensity of the idolatrous experience, which combined both illicit sex and idol worship. For this reason, Moshe takes note of the death of those who followed Ba'al Pe'or, in contrast to those who were attached to G-d, for they expressed their attachment to G-d by observing the mitzvot properly.

Thus, in two places Moshe warns that in worshipping G-d it is necessary to follow the rules shown in the Torah, and that anybody who adds new rituals will cause more harm than good

### RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

## Sfas Emes

**T**his parsha begins with a focus on choice. We hear Moshe Rabbeinu saying: "Re'ei a'nochi no'sein lif'nei'chem ha'yom bracha u'klalla". (ArtScroll: "See. I present before you today a blessing and a curse ..."). The Sfas Emes notes that implicit in this pasuk is a key fact of life: that HaShem has endowed us with "bechira chofshis"—free will—to choose between good and evil.

The Sfas Emes develops this thought by citing an insight from his Grandfather. The Chidushei HarRim had commented on the fact that every morning, we say a bracha (blessing) whose inner message may initially be hard to grasp. In that bracha, we thank HaShem for giving roosters the ability to distinguish between day and night (and accordingly, to crow at daybreak). A bracha on this theme seems bizarre. Why did Chazal introduce it into our daily davening? The Chidushei HaRim explained that this bracha is a daily reminder that, just as HaShem gives the rooster the ability to distinguish between day and night, so, too, has He given us the free will necessary to choose between right and wrong.

You may be wondering: the fact that we have free will is well known. Why does the Sfas Emes bother to mention—and to emphasize—it? The answer is straightforward. In reality, most people in today's world are not aware—and do not acknowledge—that they have bechira chofshis. Much research in present-day sociology and psychology focuses on the causes of given human behavior. Often the links of causality are drawn so taut that the behavior being studied seems inescapable. As the French proverb says: understanding behavior often amounts in practice to excusing it. Further, free will implies responsibility and accountability for our actions—something that many people are not willing to accept. So, it turns out that in reality, bechira chofshis is not a well-known fact. We can thank the Sfas Emes for bringing the subject up, and giving us the opportunity to think about it.

The Sfas Emes gives us his reaction to a word in the pasuk which begins the parsha. As cited above, that pasuk says: "Re'ei... hayom ...." That is, "I present... today". Normally, we would expect that a person who has done wrong would lose some of his capacity to choose between right and wrong; that is, his free will. Not so, says the Sfas Emes, who is working with the word "today". Every day, HaShem renews creation ("ha'me'chadeish be'chol yom tamid ma'asei be'reishis"), As part of this daily renewal HaShem gives us new bechira chofshis, thus enabling us to start anew. And, adds the Sfas Emes, quoting a pasuk in Yechezkel (33:12), "A person who is returning will not stumble". The Sfas Emes moves on now to another topic, a set of ideas brought to mind by a single Hebrew root. The root with which the Sfas Emes has chosen to work is "shamor"—usually translated as: to guard; to protect; to take care of; to observe. The Sfas Emes begins by citing a Medrash (4, 4) on a pasuk in Eikev (Devarim, 11:22). The pasuk contains a double use of words derived from the root "shamor". Thus: "Ki im shamor tish'merun es kol ha'mitzva..." (ArtScroll: "If you will observe the entire commandment...") Note the double verb "shamor ti'sha'merun". Both parts of this double verb are in the active voice (i.e., "... you will observe"). However, in nonpshat mode, the Medrash reads the second verb as "tishameirun"; i.e., in the passive voice. Thus, the Medrash understands the pasuk to be saying: "If you take proper care of [the mitzvos], you will be taken care of properly".

The Sfas Emes continues, alluding to another question of the Medrash. The pasuk cited says: "If you will observe the entire commandment..." ("kol hamitzva"). This phrase seems to refer to a single mitzva which—if we observe it properly—is equivalent to our observing the entire Torah. What mitzva can that be? Chazal answer that the unique mitzva which encompasses the entire Torah is Shabbos. How do they arrive at that answer? By allusion. The pasuk indelibly inscribed in our mind is: "Shamor es yom Hashabbos..." That is: "Take proper care of Shabbos." (Devarim, 5, 14).

The Sfas Emes reacts to this idea with astonishment. He asks: Why does Shabbos need special care? He replies by alluding to a classic Medrash. The Medrash describes how, after the first week of creation, all the days of the week paired up with each other. Yom Rishon paired with Yom Sheini (Sunday with Monday), and likewise all the other days of the week—except Shabbos, which could find no mate. When Shabbos told HaShem how unhappy she was for lack of a mate, HaShem replied: "Klal Yisroel will be ben zugeich (your marriage partner)."

(Do not be taken aback by the Medrash's (and the Sfas Emes's) personification of Shabbos as wife. This metaphor is no more extreme than one which most of sing (with gusto) every Friday night—in "lecha Dodi". We know, from the text of Shir Hashirim, that HaShem

can be referred to as "Dodi"—my beloved.. Thus, the words in "lecha Dodi" have us saying to HaShem: "Come, my Beloved, let us welcome the kalah"; i.e., Shabbos personified as a bride.)

Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us that just as a wife is given to her husband to provide her with proper care, ("husband" actually means "to take care of"), so, too, does Shabbos need us to take proper care of her. (Note how the Sfas Emes's view of marriage is the reverse of the conventional view. The conventional view sees the man as having a wife in order to have someone to take care of him.) What does "proper care" mean in the context of shemiras Shabbos? Presumably, observance of Shamor and Zachor—the mitzvos that HaShem has given us to define our relationship with Shabbos. And, continues the Sfas Emes, our relationship with Shabbos is reciprocal; i.e., it goes in both directions. Thus, we are commanded (Shemos, 35 : 3) to observe Shabbos wherever we live ("bechol moshe'vosei'chem"). So, too, Shabbos has stuck loyally with Klal Yisroel in all of our distant dwellings. Further, Shabbos gives chiyus (vitality; vibrancy) to all creation.

How do we know this? From two pesukim (Bereishis, 2:1-2) that we recite kiddatush every Shabbos: "Vayechulu Hashamayim..."; and Vayechal..." The Sfas Emes is reading these two words as coming from the root "chal", and thus as related to the word keli—a vessel. Mention of the word "keli" immediately evokes the phrase "keli machzik beracha"—that is, a vessel that contains a blessing from HaShem. That phrase, in turn, evokes the maxim that the best vessel for holding a beracha is shalom (peace; harmony). And sure enough, Shabbos is closely related to shalom.

The Sfas Emes has taken us on a circuit of associations: shamor; Shabbos; kala; vayechulu; keli; beracha; shalom. That circuit is not easy to follow, So it helps to keep its central feature in mind. Shabbos brings a special blessing: to fill all creation—heaven and earth—with the chiyus of HaShem. We can all partake of this additional flow of HaShem's Presence that comes on Shabbos, each of us at his own capacity.

What can we do to increase our capacity to receive HaShem's additional presence on Shabbos? The Sfas Emes tells us that subordinating one's personal agenda (one's nefesh) and giving a lower priority to one's physical wants (one's guf) will help. The Sfas Emes underlines this vital point by noting still another meaning—and hence another allusion—of the root "shamor".

The word "shemarim" is the Hebrew word for lees (the sediment after grapes have been squeezed to make wine). The Sfas Emes leads us to a phrase in Yeshayahu (7:4): "Hishameir vehashkeit..." ("Be calm and still..."). He quotes Rashi on that pasuk to bring home the point about keeping one's personal agenda and one's bodily wants in their proper place. Rashi tells us that, left in their proper place—the bottom—the lees,

too, can enhance the wine. © 2004 torah.org & Rabbi N.C. Leff

**RABBI ZVI MILLER**

## The Salant Foundation

**T**here are two aspects that comprise the act of giving charity: 1) the actual giving of the gift; and, 2) the willingness of the heart to give. The Torah (Devarim 15:10) teaches the importance of giving charity with positive feelings: "You shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him..."

Rashi comments (Devarim 15:7) that there are some people who give charity, yet struggle in their hearts over parting with their money. Hence, although they give, they do not give with an open, generous heart.

The manner of giving of a person whose heart is troubled over giving is marked by delays. Therefore, even if he grants a gift or performs an act of kindness for another person it will stumble forth with delays and limitations. Whereas, a gift that is given by a person with a good heart flows forth in great abundance, i.e., he gives generously and desires to bestow much benefit upon the recipient.

Moreover, the sign of a 'good heart' is manifest in the benefactor's desire to give generously, i.e., the giver performs his kindness without a trace of resentment. Therefore, there are no interruptions in his giving because he desires to continuously give and help.

The desire to give more and more is the essence of Divine kindness. The loving kindness of HaShem for his creations flows forth continuously without any limitation. Like the roaring current of a mighty river, the kindness of HaShem constantly grows and increases. Hence, the Divine kindness flows unbounded and uninterrupted. Our liturgy in the Grace After Meals expresses this goodly attribute of HaShem: And through His great goodness we have never lacked.

The Torah teaches us that the primary component of giving is not in the actual gift, rather, in the good feelings and desire to give—to give with one's full heart. Our religion was founded by Avraham, who was a master of compassion and loving kindness of the heart. May we follow in Avraham's footsteps and give abundantly and without bounds.

Implement: Do a kind deed for someone today—put your heart into it—and give to him or her again. [Based on Da'as Torah of Rabenu Yerucham HaLevi]

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