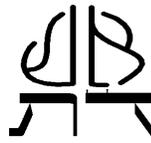


Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd I prayed to G-d at that time, saying” (Devarim 3:23). Usually, the inclusion of the word "saying" indicates that the following words can, or should, be repeated to others. For example, when G-d spoke to Moshe "saying," it is an instruction to Moshe to tell it to the nation. In order to explain the word "saying" in our context (where Moshe was talking to G-d, so there would seem to be no one to repeat it to), Rashi says that this is one of three places where Moshe insisted that G-d give him an answer. The "saying" therefore refers to the response Moshe was asking be given.

However, in what we assume would be another of those three places (Bamidbar 12:13), Rashi quotes Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya in the Sifri (Bamidbar 105 and 134) that there are four places where Moshe said he would not stop asking G-d until he received an answer (as there is the extra "saying" in those cases as well): Our Parsha (when Moshe asked if he can go into Israel), the situation where Rashi quotes this Sifri (when Moshe prayed for Miriam to be healed), in Shemos (6:12-- "answer me whether You will redeem them [from Egypt] or not"), and when Moshe asked G-d to appoint a new leader (Bamidbar 27:15-17). So are there three or four places that Moshe asked G-d to tell him what the answer will be?

To complicate things even further, The Sifri in Devarim (26, as well as in the Sifri Zuta on Bamidbar 27:15) adds a fifth situation where Moshe asked for the answer immediately¹: When the nation became thirsty in Refidim (Shemos 17:1-4), Moshe was afraid that they would stone him, so (according to the Sifri) asked G-d whether he will succumb to them (lit. "fall in their hands or not"). So now we're not only left wondering whether

¹ It is interesting to note that, as Rabbi Micha Berger has told me, the Sifri in Devarim does not come from the same "source" as the Sifri in Bamidbar; the latter is from Rabbi Yishmael's school, while the former, along with the Sifri Zuta on Bamidbar, is from Rabbi Akiva's school. Although we would still need to understand why one "school" considered there to be only 4 situations where Moshe asked G-d for an immediate answer while the other counted 5, it cannot be considered a "contradiction" between the Sifri in Bamidbar and the Sifri in Devarim- only a difference of opinion.

there were 3, 4 or 5 times that Moshe asked G-d for an immediate answer, but why, since in all five circumstances it does add the word "saying," don't all of these "sources" count all of these cases?

Another aspect that deserves a closer look is why Moshe insisted on getting an answer- and if (in one or two of these situations) he wasn't asking for one, why the word "saying" is added anyway. Additionally, why did Rashi specifically choose these two (of the three or four applicable cases) to explain what "saying" is saying?

The Maharal (on our Rashi) explains that in only three of these instances was Moshe praying for something to happen (that G-d should heal Miriam, that He should appoint a new leader, and that He should allow Moshe to enter the land), and these are the three our Rashi is referring to. Moshe did ask for an answer five times (as the Sifri in Devarim indicates), but his asking whether he would be harmed by the nation was inappropriate- as it implied that the nation would do harm to him, leading G-d to respond that he "walk before them" (Shemos 17:5), i.e. they never intended to do such a thing. It was therefore left off by the Sifri (and Rashi) in Bamidbar. The other request, whether or not G-d would redeem Israel from Egypt, was not a full request either, as he wasn't asking G-d to redeem them now, only if they will eventually be redeemed. Since it was not a request that something be done (only a request for information), Rashi did not include it. However, since Moshe did want G-d to redeem them, it was counted by the Sifri.

The Maharal's approach does not explain why Moshe wanted an answer right away, nor why Rashi chose these two cases to tell us that he did. He also does not address why Rashi used two different standards for what qualifies as a request (counting 4 cases in Bamidbar and 3 in Devarim). We also would have expected the differences (as to what qualifies as a request for an answer) to be in the need for getting the answer (the "saying"), rather than in the nature of the question; according to the Maharal, Moshe asked for an answer in all five cases, but which cases were listed was based on what type of questions they were (requests for action or for information), not on the type of answer expected.

The Eitz Yosef (Devarim Rabbah 2:4) says that Moshe wanted an answer as to whether or not he would enter the land because he wanted G-d to either let him go in, or to tell him to stop asking. If it were the latter, Moshe would be fulfilling G-d's word by refraining from

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asking any more. G-d's response included telling Moshe "you have plenty" (Devarim 3:26), i.e. you now have the reward of this additional "mitzvah" of ending this prayer. It was in order to create this extra "mitzvah" that Moshe wanted G-d's immediate answer.

If we are to be consistent, then the other times that Moshe asked for an answer would also have been for the purpose of creating an extra "mitzvah" when following G-d's new instructions. When Moshe asked G-d to appoint a new leader, he wanted the "mitzvah" of handing over the reins (which he fulfilled by "taking Yehoshua"). When he asked that Miriam be healed (thus shortening her period of "tumah"), it included knowing how long to wait before traveling; when G-d responded that she must remain secluded for 7 days, Moshe was then able to perform the newly created "mitzvah" of secluding her and waiting those 7 days before moving on. And when Moshe asked G-d whether He would take the nation out of Egypt, it led to Moshe being commanded to take the nation out (Shemos 6:13). The fifth instance, however, could not have been to create another "mitzvah," as the question was only whether he would be harmed by the nation or not.

It is possible then, that the Sifri in Bamidbar only counted the times that Moshe's request for an answer was designed to create a new "mitzvah." The Sifri in Devarim, on the other hand, was counting all the times that Moshe asked for an immediate answer, even if it was not for the purpose of creating a new mitzvah. As a matter of fact, the Sifri in Devarim (and the Sifri Zuta in Bamidbar) does not list G-d's answers, while in Bamidbar the Sifri lists not only Moshe's requests, but the answers as well. Perhaps this is precisely because the answers were a vital part of the equation, since it was the additional mitzvah that Moshe coveted.

There might be another reason why Moshe insisted on getting an answer. Rashi had told us (Devarim 1:3) that Moshe purposely waited until right

before he died before rebuking this new generation. If G-d were to grant his request to enter the land, then it would not yet be appropriate to give them this rebuke! When Moshe asked G-d to give him an answer regarding the new leader, it also had a very practical purpose- who he should prepare to be the next leader. Similarly, after seeing that his speaking to Paro (Pharaoh) had the opposite effect, making it harder on the nation, Moshe needed to know whether he should go back now and try again, or wait until Paro and the nation were more ready for the redemption.

This cannot be said about the other two cases, though. Moshe hadn't asked what to do to quench the nation's thirst; he had asked whether or not they would harm him. There was no action to be taken based on when Miriam would be healed either; Moshe would have to wait until she was better before doing anything. Therefore, if Rashi understood Moshe's need for an answer to be in order to react accordingly, there were only 3 cases that fit this description; Rashi tells us by the third of these that "Moshe said to G-d 'I will not leave You alone until you inform me whether or not You will fulfill my request.'"

When explaining Moshe's prayer that Miriam be healed, since the request for an immediate answer could not have been in order to know how to proceed, Rashi could not limit the number of situations to 3, so quoted the Sifri that there were 4 cases where "Moshe asked G-d to respond whether or not He'll do as he asked," which according to the Eitz Yosef was (at least in one of those cases) in order to fulfill a "commandment" that would otherwise not have been given. If this is so, we can understand why it was specifically in this case, which didn't meet the criteria of "needing to know in order to know how to proceed," that Rashi quotes the Sifri, even though it would (otherwise) be just as appropriate in the other 3 instances.

May G-d fulfill all of our requests, including our recent one that he restore Jerusalem to its full glory.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Torah portion for this week is Vaetchanan which always comes out on the Sabbath after Tisha B'Av, the Sabbath of comfort, the bleak black fast in commemoration of the loss of our Temples and loss of our national sovereignty in Jerusalem. It is very strange however, that the Torah reading for Tisha B'Av is also taken from this portion of Vaetchanan. I would like to analyze a number of strange features surrounding Tisha B'Av which will illuminate the portion of Vaetchanan which has become so deeply associated with the fast we have just experienced.

The Sabbath before Tisha B'Av, the Sabbath of last week—is called Shabbat Hazon, the Sabbath of vision. But why is it called the Sabbath of Vision? Yes, I

understand that it receives its name from the first word of its prophetic reading (haftorah) for last week's Sabbath, Hazon Yeshayahu, the vision of Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1), a description of an Israelite nation which substitutes empty ritual for heartfelt righteousness, self-seeking indulgences for support for indigents. But the very word hazon really means an uplifting, prophetic vision of a better future. Why call the Sabbath before Tisha B'Av with a name Hazon, which suggests exalted sights?

Furthermore, which Torah portion do we read on the fast day of Tisha B'Av itself? Our tradition records that during the forty-year desert sojourn, each Israelite would dig his/her own grave and enter into it on the night of Tisha B'Av; the next morning, those who were alive would walk out upright, but thousands were left dead in their graves each year. During the Mishanic period (100BCE -- 200CE), the Tisha B'Av reading was the episode of the sin of the scouts, the evil report which turned the Israelites away from the conquest of the Land of Israel, the initial loss of the land which is a reflection of our two subsequent losses of our land.

But then the Men of the Great Assembly changed the reading to the historiosophy in the portion of Vaetchanan, prophecy of exile and return (Deuteronomy 4:25-40) which concludes with the repentance of the Israelites "in order that you may have long days on the land which the Lord your G-d gave to you forever." I understand reading the cause of our desert doom on this day of destruction and dispersion. I find it difficult to understand why we read of return and repentance on such a day!

My final question is a textual—contextual one from this week's Torah reading. The fifteen verses of historiosophy are a quintessential kaleidoscope of Jewish history, beginning with our return from the Babylonian exile, the period of reconstruction and transgression in Israel re-claimed, destruction, dispersion and assimilation throughout the world (worshipping word—the cross of Christianity—and stone—the El Aksa mosque of Islam, Deuteronomy 4:28), our repentance and our miraculous return to Israel, which we are expressing today. But strangely enough, this magnificent account opens with the words, "When you will bear children and children's children, and live a long time on the land...." (Deuteronomy 4:25). Why open the historical fate and destiny of a nation with its population growth? And if our nation at that point in time would have been at a zero or less than zero population growth (as is most of Europe today), would it have made a difference in terms of our Jewish historical experience?

I believe that the answer to our questions can be found in a fascinating interpretation of a Mishnah in Avot that I recently heard from Rav Shalom Gold. When Rav Yohanan ben Zakkai asked each of his disciples to express what he believed to be the most exemplary personality trait, Rav Shimon said, "one who sees that

which is born." Ha'ro'eh et ha'nolad (Mishnah Avot, 2, 13). This is usually taken to mean, one who sees the results of his actions before he does them, and on that basis decides what to do. Rav Gold gave this teaching another twist: one must see from whom one was born, we must be aware that we did not emerge from a vacuum, and that we must pay our debts to our past by accepting responsibility for our future.

Rav Avigdor Amiel ztz"l, Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv during the period of the establishment of the State of Israel, cites the following poignant Tisha B'Av midrash: "When the Holy Temple was destroyed, the Holy One Blessed be He wept. He said, 'My children, where are you? My loved ones, where are you? My priests, where are you? The Holy One said to Jeremiah, 'I can only be compared today to an individual who had an only son, who led him under the nuptial canopy, and found him dead beneath the canopy. Call Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses from their graves, for they will be able to weep with me. Jeremiah went to the Cave of the Couples in Hebron woke them from their slumber, telling them they had been summoned by the Almighty. They said to him, 'Why?,' for they had not heard of the destruction. Jeremiah said, 'I don't know,' because he feared lest the forefathers lay upon him the charge, 'How did you allow such a tragedy to befall our children in your life-time?'"

Judaism believes that the Almighty guarantees redemption. That is why this Sabbath, after Tisha B'Av is called the Sabbath of Comfort. Mostly because of the first words of its prophetic reading, "Take comfort, take comfort my people" (Isaiah 40:1). Indeed, the next six Sabbaths will all have a prophetic reading relating to national comfort and redemption leading up to Rosh Hashanah, which begins the Ten Days of Repentance. Yes, G-d guarantees redemption. But when and how depends upon the actions of His children, upon our political, moral and ethical deeds. We were elected by G-d to fulfill the special mission of bringing the message of ethical monotheism to the world. We were born to special patriarchs and matriarchs, we were granted unique forbears who were prophets and teachers, and the Almighty Himself forged us as a nation out of the furnace of Egypt and amidst great wonders and miracles. Now our destiny is in our hands, dependent upon our repentance and return to our homeland. All of this is expressed in the historiosophy read on Tisha B'Av beginning with a reminder that we were born into a special family, granted special miracles by G-d, and so slated for special responsibility.

The formative and formidable challenge of Tisha B'Av is the word Eicha, the first word of the Scroll of Lamentations, which means Wherefore (wherefore is the Sacred City alone and desolate), our challenging question to G-d after the destruction. But the Hebrew letters Eicha also spell Ayeka, where are you, i.e. G-d's challenge to us: where are you in these fateful times fraught with possibility for redemption?

Tisha B'Av is not merely a day of desolation and despair. The prophet Zechariah tells us that Tisha B'Av will one day become a Festival of great rejoicing. When? It depends upon us. That is the exalted vision of the Sabbath before Tisha B'Av, when the prophet Isaiah concludes his chastisement with a ringing declaration of faith—in G-d, but first and foremost in humanity. That is also why our Sabbath after Tisha B'Av is the Sabbath of comfort. But we will only be comforted and redeemed when we turn towards G-d with all our hearts and listen to His voice, when we begin our days of repentance.

The one agonizing question we must face on Tisha B'Av is Ayeka, where are you? Jeremiah was frightened to give an answer before those who formed and bore him. We will only be able to accept Isaiah's comfort of this week's prophetic reading if we can respond that we are on the road to repentance. © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

For the second time in the Torah, the Aseret Ha-Dibrot (The Ten Commandments, or more accurately translated as the Ten Utterances) are spelled out. The difference between this text and the one presented in Exodus must be carefully analyzed—after all, these Utterances were said by God only once.

The most famous of the contrasts is found in the word which begins the mandate to keep Shabbat. In our portion, the Torah states shamor. (Deuteronomy 5:12) In Exodus, however, the Torah states zakhor. (20:8) In a famous response to this apparent contradiction, the Rabbis conclude that these two words were said simultaneously by God as they reflect different dimensions of Shabbat observance. (Berakhot 20b)

It can be suggested that zakhor is a direction to the mind; to remember the Shabbat. Shamor on the other hand, means to observe through action. Here, the Torah may be suggesting that it is important to translate thinking and contemplating

Shabbat into doing Shabbat.

Alternatively, the Rabbis suggest that both zakhor and shamor relate only to observance. Zakhor refers to the affirmative commandments of Shabbat (i.e. kiddush, candle lighting, prayers). Shamor, on the other hand refers to the prohibitive commandments, staying away from actions that would violate the laws of Shabbat. (Beranhot 206).

These two categories of observances not only delineate legal categories, they actually teach conceptual ideas as well. Zakhor, for example, the affirmative commandment, elicits a feeling of ahavat Hashem—one does the law because one loves God. Shamor, the prohibitive commandment, evokes feelings of yirat Hashem—one refrains from violating the law

because one fears the Almighty. (Ramban, Exodus 20:8)

Rambam takes the interpretation one step further. The love of God, corresponding to zakhor, encourages one to seek to imitate the Divine. When in love, we strive to be like the ones we love, in this case we strive to be like God. Once approaching this goal and nearing God, one can't help but be awestruck sensing feelings of deep finitude in comparison to the infinite and endless God. From this perspective, yirat Hashem, corresponding to shamor, means being in awe of God rather than fearing God. (Yad, Fundamentals of Torah 2:1)

Shabbat is a day when we imitate God by involving ourselves in inner creativity by intensifying our learning and family connections. In this way, we attempt to mirror the ultimate Creator, thus expressing ahavat Hashem. In the same breath,

however, Shabbat is a day when we feel in awe of God by reflecting on the enormity of God's creations and refraining from all productive activity. Through the Shabbat, we deeply feel the omnipotent nature of God in comparison to our meager selves. This is the awe of yirat Hashem.

As a logical outgrowth of these ideas, the late Rabbi Zvi Dov Kanotopsky argues that zakhor and shamor are opposite sides of the same coin; being together with, while at the same time, in awe of, the Almighty. Although they come at it from different pats, these expressions lead to the same conclusion—the celebration of and critical stature of Shabbat as a day of the Lord and the Jewish people. © 2004 *Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

This week's Torah portion starts with Moshe's prayer to the Almighty that he should be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. G-d refuses the request, and Moshe blames Bnei Yisrael. "And G-d was angry with me because of you (Rashi:

you were the cause of this), and He did not listen to me" [Devarim 3:26]. In a later passage, Moshe again claims that he was not allowed to enter the land because of Bnei Yisrael. "And G-d became angry with me because of your words, and He swore that I would not cross the Jordan" [4:21].

At first glance, it seems unreasonable to blame Bnei Yisrael for the fact that Moshe did not enter the land. Wherever the punishment of Moshe and Aharon is mentioned, the Almighty emphasizes that it was because they rebelled against His command. This is what is written before the death of Aharon: "For he will not go into the land which I have given to Bnei Yisrael, because you opposed my command at Mei Meriva" [Bamidbar 20:24]. It is also what the Almighty told

Moshe before He commanded him to appoint Yehoshua as his replacement:

"You opposed my word in the Tzin Desert when the nation quarreled, to sanctify me with water before their eyes" [27:14]. A similar note appears after the epic poem of Ha'azinu: "Because you revolted against me within Bnei Yisrael, with respect to the water of controversy at Kadesh in the Tzin Desert, and you did not sanctify me among Bnei Yisrael" [Devarim 32:51].

This same theme appears in another surprising context. In last week's Torah portion, we read Moshe's description of the sin of the scouts, and he adds the following: "Nobody from these people, this evil generation, will see the good land which I promised to give to your fathers... G-d was also angry with me because of you, saying, you will not go there either" [Devarim 1:35,37]. What connection is there between the sin of the scouts, which took place in the first year after the Exodus, and Moshe's sin, almost forty years later? The Ramban explains, "That is, your sin at that time of the scouts kept you away from the good land, and then you continued to sin again, until you also prevented me from crossing over. Moshe wanted to mention the punishment of all those who could not enter the land together as one group, in that it was all caused by their sins." Moshe's claim was related to the circumstances. If Bnei Yisrael had not complained, the entire affair of the water of controversy would not have occurred, and then Moshe also would not have sinned.

Perhaps this verse can teach us that the fact that Moshe blamed Bnei Yisrael is related to a deeper link. Moshe was able to detect the seed that led to his not being allowed to enter the land in the events of the first year of their journey. The sin of the scouts was a strong indication that Moshe had not succeeded in teaching the people to have faith in G-d, and therefore this generation had to die in the desert. Forty years later, when it became apparent that the newer generation also suffered from problems of faith, as could be seen in the affair of the water of controversy, it was finally decided that Moshe could not enter the land with them. Moshe felt that if his sin of opposing the will of G-d had remained on a level between him and the Almighty he would have been forgiven. Since, however, his sin in the end was linked to his leadership, he did not have an opportunity to repent. And this is the meaning of the words, "G-d was angry with me—because of you."

The Cycle of Consolation and Destruction

by Mrs. Billah Admanit, Lecturer in Talpiot and Herzog Colleges

The Torah reading on Tisha B'Av, describing the punishment of exile, is taken from this week's portion, Va'etchanan. This is of course not the only place in the Torah where exile is mentioned. Why, then, was this specific passage chosen, one that appears in

the portion which is read on the Shabbat of consolation, Shabbat "Nachamu"?

The answer is that this choice indicates a two-way link between destruction and consolation. In the Torah reading of Shabbat, we repeat the passage that we read on the fast day, reminding us of the weeping and despair of that difficult day, only a few days before. On the other hand, even on the fast day itself, we are given the news, as part of the same passage in the Torah, that in the future we will be consoled. "For your G-d is a G-d of mercy, He will not abandon you and He will not destroy you" [Devarim 4:31].

A similar link can be seen with respect to the reading of Eicha, on the eve of Tisha B'Av. Eicha ends with a description of punishment, "For if you have despised us..." [5:22]. But the sages decided that we should then repeat the verse before this, "Return us to you, and we will repent..." [5:21], in order to end the reading on an optimistic note. A similar custom exists at the ends of three other books: Kohellet, which is read on Succot, Malachi, which is the Haftara of Shabbat Shuva, and Yeshayahu, which is the Haftara when Rosh Chodesh occurs on Shabbat. In each case, the verse before the last is repeated at the end, not only when the passage is read in a synagogue but also in most of the printed volumes of the Tanach.

While it may be that the reason for the repetition is to end the reading on a positive note, this is less suitable for Eicha than for the other three books. There would seem to be no need to ease the pain on Tisha B'Av, when Eicha is read. Another possibility is that the verse is repeated in order to emphasize the cyclical nature of life. After the last verse, "You have been very angry with us..." [5:22], we repeat the previous verse, "Renew our days as of old [5:21]." But this then reminds us again of the last verse, and we find ourselves in a never-ending cycle. Thus, punishment and consolation are deeply intertwined. Mourning begins with a promise of salvation at the end, but the joy of relief is diluted with the knowledge that it might be severed. Salvation is not totally self evident, and if mistakes are repeated they may lead to a new disaster. The concept of a cycle can also be seen from the sequence of Haftarot. After three successive Haftarot of suffering between 17 Tamuz and Tisha B'Av, we read seven Haftarot of consolation. But these are followed immediately by Shabbat Shuva: "Return, Yisrael, to your G-d, for you have faltered in your sin" [Hoshaya 14:2]. Sin is liable to bring on new suffering.

What meaning is there to consolation that might have an ending? A period of consolation is an opportunity to rebuild, but it is a long process that requires a constant effort. Revival is a demanding task, and it is necessary to work very hard without a stop in order to justify it. Consolation depends on [understanding] the verse, "Lift your eyes on high, and see who created these..." [Yeshayahu 40:26]. The

possibility to expand the consolation depends on the activities of mankind.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

You shall know this day and take to your heart that HASHEM, He is G-d - in heaven above and on the earth below- there is none other. (Devarim 4:39)

There's a story about a man in an insane asylum in the mid-west that insisted on eating kosher food. When the hospital refused he demonstrated his sincerity by going on a hunger strike. It became an administrative nightmare but they were forced to capitulate. They had kosher food shipped from hundreds of miles away each day for this one patient. One of the Jewish doctors was making his rounds on Saturday morning and he saw this same man smoking a big cigar. The doctor was aghast. He promptly rebuked the patient, "You turn the whole hospital upside down for Kosher food and here it is the holy Sabbath and you're smoking a cigar?!" He took another big puff and said, "Doc, don't forget! I'm crazy!"

Similarly we often find it difficult to live up to what we know since we tend to act on the warmth of feelings rather than cold information alone. The ideal is when we are emotionally engaged with that which our sober intellect has confirmed true. The question remains even after we are convinced of a critical fact of life like the existence of G-d or the truth of Torah, how does one excite the heart and make it really real? It's frighteningly possible to pass the written exam and fail in the practicum of life. That's crazy! What then is one to do?

A) Take a phrase and repeat it over and over again with more animation and emotion. Pictures, colorful and textured will begin to sprout from the words over time as they become more densely packed with meaning.

B) Koneh lechah chaver- Acquire for your self a friend, says the Mishne in Pirke Avos. That's nice too. The word K'neh can also mean a pen. Let your pen be your friend. Sit with a blank page and ask a question on the top. What lasts? Let it flow unedited. Make lists of 25 things. How can I be a better husband/father/Jew? Let it flow. Edit later!

C) Take a media diet. Life unfolds like a soap opera. You can come back months later and find out you missed little. After a while you might begin to think your own thoughts and hear your own heart beating separate from the noise of the world.

D) Teach others. Nothing causes a person to know something more intimately than to be in a position of having to teach somebody else.

E) Do some quiet acts of goodness without the knowledge or approval of any other persons. By so doing you will have opened a private "inner-world"

account and forged a deep personal relationship with HASHEM.

F) Learn Torah passionately and with a highlighter.

Reb Klonymous Kalman of Piaseczno writes, "There is a type of prophetic revelation that comes when one looks into a holy book. Not knowledge of the future, for that ceased when the Temple was destroyed. Rather, it is guidance and a call to service of G-d and the holiness of Israel. At times, we have all experienced looking into a holy book and suddenly becoming extremely moved by a certain idea. A word pierces our heart and gives us no rest for years, until it can transform us into a different person and sanctify and uplift us. What is going on? We have already heard this idea from others and seen it in books, yet we remained untouched. Yet now, the matter suddenly penetrates our heart and mind. This is a form of looking into the Breast Plate worn by the High Priest. There too, all the letters were written, yet only some of them would shine into the eyes of the Kohen; and only a Kohen with divine inspiration. Another Kohen could stand beside him and not see a thing."

Taking action on any or all, of this partial list of proven methods can help launch one of life's most exciting and yet all too neglected adventures. From a pure intellect begins the long journey to the heart.
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RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

This parsha begins with Moshe Rabbeinu davening to HaShem. So it comes as no surprise that the first paragraph of Medrash Rabba on the parsha focuses on the subject of tefila (prayer). So, too, the Sfas Emes also concentrates today on the topic of prayer.

The Medrash begins by quoting a statement of R. Yochanan. He tells us that "The Torah uses ten different words to refer to prayer". These ten synonyms include "hischanen" (pleading), "tze'aka" (crying out), and eight others. R. Yochanan's statement seems totally straightforward; and a person might be tempted to skip ahead to more innovative material. Fortunately, the Sfas Emes did not skip ahead, but instead, gave the matter some thought. His cogitation led the Sfas Emes to ask a basic (and startling) question. The Hebrew word most often used to refer to prayer is "tefila". But, notes the Sfas Emes, the word tefila is not included in R. Yochanan's list of ten synonyms for prayer!

Not only does the Sfas Emes pose a fundamental question on R'Yochanan's statement, but thoughtfully, he also provides an answer. In true Sfas Emes fashion, his answer leads him—and us—to a paradox. That apparent inconsistency, in turn, leads him—and us—to a radical new insight. And not to just

any insight, but to an insight that can help us in our avoda, our service to HaShem.

The Sfas Emes tells us that the key feature of prayer is not prayer itself, but rather preparing oneself for prayer. In that vein, the Sfas Emes reads the ten terms that the Medrash lists not as referring to prayer itself, but rather to "hachanos" (preparations) for prayer. Thus, the Sfas Emes explains, the ten terms listed refer to ten avenues and suggested aids ("derachim v'eitzos") conducive to reaching a state in which one is truly in contact with HaShem. In that perspective, the Sfas Emes reads our parsha's first pasuk as: "Va'eschanan" [I prepared myself for prayer]... "laymor" [and then I prayed].

If the hachanos for prayer are more important than prayer itself, the implication for our avoda is clear. Prayer is not about presenting our ish list to HaShem. Prayer is about focusing our attention on our relationship with Him. As we concentrate our thoughts on that relationship, we can achieve a sense of awe (yir'ah) and perhaps of love (ahava) for HaShem.

How does a person prepare for prayer? Getting into the right mindset requires both one's own efforts and—perhaps surprisingly—help from HaShem. On the latter point, the Sfas Emes quotes a pasuk in Tehillim (10:17): "Tach'in li'bam; tak'shiv ahz'necha" (ArtScroll: "Guide their hearts; let Your ear be attentive.") But a person's own efforts to open a channel are also crucial. Thus, the Sfas Emes tells us that a person may even use merrirus (bitterness) as his avenue to real tefila.

Real tefila is an outpouring of one's heart to be in contact with HaShem. A person who is davening in earnest recognizes his total dependence on HaShem. Rashi (following the Sifri on the parsha's first pasuk) makes an important observation in this context. He notes that even though tzadikim have many good deeds to their credit, when they daven, they do not rely on those credentials. On the contrary, they petition HaShem for "matnas chinam" (a pure gift—one for which nothing is given in exchange).

Why so? Because of the basic fact of life just noted: that true tefila entails recognizing one's total dependence on HaShem. In such a one-way relationship, there is no place for a quid pro quo, (a "this for that") deal negotiated with HaShem.

The Sfas Emes takes us further in his examination of prayer. He reports a comment of the Kotzker Rebbe which essentially raises the question of "Why pray?" The Kotzker prefaced his comment with a quote from Iyov (41:3): "Mi hik'dimami va'ashaleim". In the present context, this pasuk translates roughly as HaShem saying to Iyov: "Don't I always pay my debts on time? And since my books are always up-to-date, what scope is open for tefila to change events?" Phrased more sharply, the Kotzker said: the fact that a person has to approach HaShem to ask for something implies that the person does not deserve that something. For, if the person truly deserved that something, he would not

have to pray for it. The Sfas Emes addresses the Kotzker's question by taking us back to the word "Va'eschanan". Working "bederech remez" (allusion) he notes that the letters of the word "va'eschanan" can be rearranged to make two key words: "hachana" (preparation) and "chinam" (a free gift). The Sfas Emes uses both of these resonating words to bring home his earlier remarks about prayer. As we have seen, a person must approach prayer with hachana. In that hachana, a person recognizes how little HaShem owes him and; hence, how much would fulfilling his request be in the nature of matnas chinam.

The Sfas Emes sees the prayer situation as follows. Realistically speaking, a person starts his davening with a bakasha (a personal request). But as the person gets into his/ her davening, the person can be swept away into a deeper conversation with HaShem. Tefila can initiate interaction with HaShem in which He takes over, and the person can let go, becoming a passive participant in the prayer dynamic. The Sfas Emes gives us a meta-pshat to help us absorb what he is saying. He views the word "Va'eschanan" as a nif'al (passive—

probably an Aramaic Ispa'el) construction. This lets us read "Va'eschanan" as: "I was prayed". Surely, this is the ultimate in prayer as total dependence on HaShem

Indeed, a person can be so swept away that he forgets about his bakasha! His tefila becomes so much leSheim Shamayim (focused only on the glory of HaShem) that HaShem has to remind the person what he came to request. Thus, we end with a unique perspective, in which we rely on HaShem to put the right words in our mouths. And lest you think that this perspective is "extreme" or too Chassidische, the Sfas Emes quotes a pasuk in Mishlei (16: 1): 'Le'ahdam me'archei lev; u'mei HaShem ma'aneh lashon". That is: "A person has his thoughts about what to say; but what he actually says comes from HaShem." Truly what the Sfas Emes has been telling us. © 2004 Rabbi N.C. Leff and torah.org

RABBI ZVI MILLER

The Salant Foundation

“You shall safeguard and observe them for they are your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations...” (Devarim 4:6). This verse requires an explanation. The reason that we observe the Torah is to fulfill the Divine Will. If so, why does the verse suggest that the purpose of Mitzvah observance is to be "wise in the eyes of the nations"?

In order for a person to fulfill the Torah he has to acquire wisdom of spiritual matters, as well as, worldly matters. For instance, the Vilna Gaon, in his commentary to Mishlei, teaches that in order for a judge to render just rulings he must be an expert in human nature, i.e., insightful of the various personality types,

deceptive tactics of dishonest people, and the schemes of thieves. Furthermore, the Torah states that *derech eretz*—human decency and etiquette—precedes the study of Torah.

The aforementioned verse teaches us that the Torah itself is a complete resource of worldly wisdom. Through Torah study, one can achieve a perfect of knowledge of both religious, as well as, secular wisdom.

Hence, we interpret the verse as follows: You shall safeguard and observe them, For they are your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations, meaning, that the truth of the Torah is consistent with the highest levels of secular wisdom. Torah scholarship is accomplished by mastery of both the spiritual and worldly realms of Torah knowledge. May we absorb both aspects of the Torah so that we fulfill the Torah in truth, holiness, and peace.

Implement: Reflect on the fact that Torah contains complete wisdom of both the spiritual and material realms. *[Based on Ohr Rashaz, the writings of the Alter of Kelm, Rabbi Simcha Zissel]*

TORAH CENTER OF DEAL

The Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

In the Shema, which we read every day, we are commanded to love Hashem. The commentators are puzzled; how can one be commanded to love? Isn't love a natural emotion which one either has or doesn't have? Can we be forced to love?

The answer is that there is inborn within every person the ability to love Hashem. We were created by Hashem and endowed by Him with the capacity to feel love for Him. However, there are obstacles and impediments which block our natural love for Him. We have egos, selfishness, personal desires and certain facets of our character which can prevent our love from coming out. This is why we are commanded to love Hashem, to bypass these obstacles and to allow our innate love to surface. By observing the beauty of nature and the perfection of the creation, we will be inspired to think about Hashem and ultimately to allow the love for Hashem to surface and be a factor in our lives. Shabbat Shalom.

"And now Yisrael, listen to the statutes and the laws so that you may live and go and take possession of the land" (Debarim 4:1)

Rabbi S.R. Hirsch notes that this pasuk presents the Torah's prescription for life. Free-willed obedience and adherence to the laws mandated by Hashem allows us truly to "live." Only by devoting all of our energies to the observance of Hashem's laws do we attain life. His laws must shape our thought processes and regulate our sensitivities. If Torah does not regiment our life, if its values are not our values, then we have not lived; we have merely existed. Free-willed

obedience to the Torah serves as the criterion for our individual lives, transforming mere existence into true living. So, too, it is the sole condition for our national life to be granted credence and acceptability in our own land. (Peninim on the Torah)

"This is the teaching that Moshe placed before the Children of Israel" (Debarim 4:44)

The preceding pesukim discuss Moshe's setting aside three cities of refuge on the east bank of the Jordan. What is the connection between this pasuk and establishing cities of refuge?

Many people are reluctant to do things which they do not expect to complete; however, our Sages teach that is a *misvah* comes to your hand, "al tachmitzenah -- do not allow it to become 'leavened' by delaying its performance"—i.e. do as much of it as you can though you may not be the one to ultimately complete it. For example, King David knew that it would not be he who would build the Bet Hamikdash, yet he amassed gold in order to facilitate its eventual completion.

In addition to the three cities of refuge that Moshe designated, an additional three were to be established after the Jewish people entered Eress Yisrael. Since the three in Jordan did not serve as refuge until the three in Eress Yisrael were established, one might suppose that Moshe would be reluctant to prepare the first three cities. Nevertheless, he did whatever part of the *misvah* he could do, though he would ultimately not be the one that would complete it.

The Torah is telling us that, "This is the teaching that Moshe placed before the Children of Israel"—with the act of separating the three cities, which at the time served no purpose, he conveyed an important message to Klal Yisrael regarding Torah and *misvot*: Always endeavor to do good deeds and *misvot*, even if you will not complete them and receive the full credit.

Alternatively, when the Jews were in Eress Yisrael, the cities of refuge would protect someone who killed his fellow unintentionally. Even the one who committed premeditated murder would run to these cities of refuge and gain protection until he was brought before the *bet din* for trial.

Once the Jews were exiled, they no longer had cities of refuge. However, our Sages tell us (Makkot 10a) "Dibrei Torah *koltin*—the study of Torah provides refuge." Hence, one who committed a transgression intentionally or unintentionally, thereby causing spiritual damage to his soul, can gain refuge and rectify it by entering into Torah study.

The Torah alludes to this by relating that Moshe built the cities of refuge and concludes with the words, "Vezot haTorah—This is the Torah that Moshe placed before the Children of Israel"—to teach that Torah study provides refuge from the spiritual harm caused by iniquities. (Vedibarta Bam)