

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

**T**his week's Biblical portion of Ekev is in effect a song of praise to the Land of Israel: "The Lord your G-d is bringing you to a good land, a land of streams of water, wells and deep reservoirs which come forth from valleys and mountains. It is a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and date honey. It is a land in which you will eat bread without suffering, which lacks for nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you can mine forth copper. And so you shall eat, be satisfied, and praise the Lord your G-d for the good land which He has given to you...." (Deut 8:7-10)

But there is an introduction to the paean of glory to the Land of Israel which the Biblical text records: "The whole of the commandments which I command you this day to observe to do is in order that you may live, propagate, come to and inherit the land which the Lord has sworn to your ancestors." (Deut 8:1) What this verse teaches us is that our price for living in Israel is our commitment to the commandments of the Torah. Indeed, our backsliding will result in the loss of the land, in our exile from Israel. As the Biblical text has previously exhorted: "You must not become defiled with all of these (immoral acts of sin)... Then the land will become defiled and I will visit the iniquity upon it; and the land will vomit out her inhabitants." (Leviticus 18:24,25)

From this perspective, the Land of Israel must be seen as a test. We must be worthy to live in what we believe is a special land, constantly under direct Divine supervision, which is especially sensitive to the proper conduct of its inhabitants. Just as occurred in the Garden of Eden, the punishment for sin is exile.

And our Biblical portion of Ekev makes one additional point clear. After it speaks of the special quality of the land, it recounts the sins of the desert—especially the idolatry surrounding the Golden Calf—and the breaking of the Sacred Tablets of Stone. Moses was told by G-d to go down from the mountain and go out to his nation, which was acting sinfully and perversely. Once again, the Sages of the Talmud clarify precisely what G-d's message to Moses was:

"Said Rabbi Eliezer, 'The Holy One blessed be He said to Moses our teacher, get down from your greatness! The only reason I gave you your great role

was because of the Israelites. If the Israelites are sinning, what do I need you for?'"

Just imagine the scene: Moses is atop the mountain in a supernal spiritual realm in splendid isolation with G-d. He needs neither food nor drink while he is receiving the many secrets of the Torah from the Divine. In effect, we are witnessing the greatest Kollel in history, with G-d as the Rosh Yeshiva (Head of the Academy, as it were) and Moses as the disciple. And the Almighty is saying to Moses that he must leave this Kollel and go out to an erring nation. G-d is explaining to all generations that He did not enter into the Covenant of Torah with the intellectual or spiritual elite of Israel alone, but that he rather gave His holy teachings to the entire nation, "from those who chop down the trees to those who draw forth the waters" (Deut 29: 10). And because the Torah is the treasure of all of Israel, Moses' place is in teaching them rather than in learning alone from G-d. This will explain an amazing teaching of the Sacred Zohar that every Jew has his own special letter within the Torah; and therefore each letter is in effect a soul of another Jew. In so far as a Jew is ignorant of Torah and has not connected his soul with its Divine letter, the Torah itself becomes incomplete and even invalid. The completion of the Torah requires the connection of each Jew to at least some part of its teaching! To put it in a slightly different way, our Torah is the heritage of the entire Jewish nation and is too precious to remain in the hands of only one small sector of world Jewry. And just as every Jew must be involved in Torah so must every Jew be involved in the Land of Israel. The Talmud teaches that every Jew has 4 cubits in the land of Israel—and each and every Jew must at the very least claim his portion. Maimonides teaches that the sanctity of the land of Israel depends upon the Jews living therein, and that the specific laws of the land of Israel—such as the tithing of the produce and the sabbatical laws, only take effect when all (or at least most) of the Israelites live within its borders. (Maimonides, Laws of the Chosen House 6:16 and Laws of Tithings 1, 26)

What this means is that our claim to the land of Israel is only valid when all of its inhabitants live in a manner worthy of its sacred soil, especially in terms of our interpersonal relationships (see Isaiah 1); similarly the sanctity of the land of Israel can only be fully expressed when all of the Jewish people are settled within it. Ultimately both the Torah of Israel and the land

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of Israel cry out for every single one of the people of Israel to become intimately involved with them. © 2006  
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### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**O**ver and over our portion emphasizes the importance of inheriting the land of Israel. (Deuteronomy 8:1, 9:1) Why is Israel so crucial to our covenant with G-d?

In the end, the goal of the Jewish people is to do our share to redeem the world. This is our mission as the chosen people and this can only be accomplished through committing ourselves to the chosen land, Israel.

In fact, the first eleven chapters of the Torah are universal. G-d chose humankind over all species. He created. But humankind did not fulfill the chosen role G-d had assigned to it. The world was destroyed by flood, and soon after all of humanity was spread across the earth in the generation of dispersion.

G-d then chose Abraham and Sarah to be the father and mother of the Jewish people. Their mandate was not to be insular but to be a blessing for the entire world. It is not that the souls of Abraham and Sarah were superior; it is rather their task which had a higher purpose.

Ultimately, we became a people who are charged to follow halakhah, the pathway to Torah ethicism, which leads to the redemption of the Jewish people, through which the world is to be redeemed. Our task is to function as the catalyst in the generation of the redeemed world. The movement of chosenness is not from the particular to the more particular, but rather from the particular to the more universal. Chosenness is, therefore, not a statement of superiority but of responsibility.

The idea of our chosenness has always been associated with our sovereignty over the chosen land. From this perspective, Israel is important not only as the place that guarantees political refuge; not only as the place where more mitzvot (commandments) can be performed than any other; and not only the place where - given the high rate of assimilation and intermarriage in the exile - our continuation as a Jewish nation is assured. But first and foremost, Israel is the place, the

only place, where we have the potential to carry out and fulfill our mandate as the chosen people. In exile, we are not in control of our destiny; we cannot create the ideal society Torah envisions. Only in a Jewish state do we have the political sovereignty and judicial autonomy that we need to be the or lagoyim (light unto the nations) and to establish a just society from which other nations can learn the basic ethical ideals of Torah.

Of course, Jews living in the Diaspora can make significant individual contributions to the betterment of the world. And there are model Diaspora communities that impact powerfully on Am Yisrael and humankind. But I would insist that the destiny of the Jewish people-that is, the place where we as a nation can realize the divine mandate to Abraham of "in you will be blessed all the peoples of the earth"-can only be played out in the land of Israel.

From this perspective, those living in the chosen land have the greater potential to more fully participate in carrying out the chosen people idea. Only there do we, as a nation, have the possibility to help repair the world-the ultimate challenge of Am Yisrael.

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### RABBI LEVI COOPER

## Brazen Attacks on Contributors

**C**ommunity leaders often have to face brazen individuals who, under an altruistic guise, shamelessly try to destroy anything positive, besmirching the good name of contributors without regard for the damage inflicted or anguish caused. To be sure, leaders are not infallible; as we all know, they can err. Effective leaders recognize their shortcomings, should be able to admit blunders and appreciate constructive critique. Nevertheless, for people who give of their time and energy for the betterment of their environs, a scathing personal attack can leave deep scars.

Bald-faced attacks on leaders are not a new phenomenon. Upon concluding his silent Amida prayer, the great leader Rabbi Yehuda the Prince would add the following supplication: "May it be Your will, G-d our Lord, and the Lord of our ancestors, that You save us from brazen individuals and from the trait of brazenness, from an evil person and from an evil mishap, from the evil inclination, from an evil companion, from an evil neighbor, and from the destructive Satan, and from a harsh judgment and from a harsh legal adversary, whether it be a member of the covenant or whether it not be a member of the covenant" (B. Berachot 16a).

Having completed the requests enshrined in the Amida for communal well-being, Rabbi Yehuda, known simply as Rebbi, would add a heartfelt request for Divine protection from all manner of evil, first and foremost from brazen individuals.

What is the nature of this brazenness? Commentators explain that these are people who issue heartless personal attacks that are often difficult to counter (Abudraham, 14th century, Spain, and others). Indeed, the Talmud comments that Rebbi would offer his prayer, even though he had bodyguards by the order of the Roman emperor Antoninus. These personal guardians protected Rebbi from those who stood against him, but could not safeguard the scholar from scathing personal onslaughts. From such harm, Rebbi turned to the Almighty for protection. Thus Rebbi followed in the footsteps of King Solomon, who acknowledged: "Unless G-d watches over the city, the watchman keeps vigil in vain" (Psalms 127:1).

Elsewhere the Talmud relates that Rebbi was confronted by a brash personal assault (B. Shabbat 30b). An individual approached Rebbi and charged: "Your wife is really my wife, and your children are really my children," thus insinuating that the accuser had an affair with Rebbi's wife, and the children Rebbi assumed to be his own were in fact the issue of the accuser. The charge was a serious one, for not only was the accuser casting aspersions on the fidelity of Rebbi's wife and endangering the future of their relationship, but had the charge been true it would have rendered the children mamzerim, forbidding them to marry within the general Jewish community.

The Talmud continues, relating how Rebbi saw no use in retorting or refuting the scandalous claim for this would only have embroiled him in a fruitless argument. Rebbi even refrained from calling the accuser a liar, for surely the accuser would retort: "It is not I who am the liar, but you, Rebbi, who is the liar!" If anything, honoring the allegation with a serious response would only have succeeded in giving credence to the accuser and weight to his words.

Instead, Rebbi offered him a glass of wine, as if to thank him for bringing the matter to his attention. Unsuspectingly, the accuser drank the wine and his body exploded, putting an end to the accusations.

A further anecdote relates how Rebbi's student, Rabbi Hiyya - and according to some versions of the story Rebbi himself - was once accosted by a similar charge: "Your mother is my wife, and you are my child," insinuating that the scholar's lineage was doubtful and he should be considered a mamzer. Once again we are told that the accuser met his demise after drinking a proffered glass of wine.

Rabbi Aharon Levin, one of the leaders of Polish Jewry before World War II who served in the Polish Sejm and tragically perished in the Holocaust, related to the challenges facing community leaders

through the lens of Rebbi's prayer. He notes that people who steer clear of communal responsibility are never the target of the scornful attacks. Conversely, people who contribute to society are almost perforce going to be criticized, for it is impossible to satisfy the whims of everyone. Furthermore, detractors are often the types of people who exude negative energy, always complaining and never acknowledging positive endeavors.

What is the most appropriate response to audacious criticism? Rabbi Levin states that leaders need to be aware and prepared for such assaults that come with public office. Moreover, they should try their utmost to ignore callous individuals, for they seek only to destroy and harm, not to build and repair, and their words are naive in the face of achievement.

Rabbi Levin's approach may indeed reflect the bitter experience of those who give of their time and energy for the betterment of the community. It is little comfort, however, knowing that the words of these bad-mouthers should be ignored, blown away as chaff by the wind. When we give of ourselves to the community we leave the privacy of our own domain. It is at these moments that we are so vulnerable, as we have given of mind, body and soul, providing an opening for inconsiderate criticism. It is at these times that the nasty, stinging words of such ungrateful constituents hurts most. Indeed, character assassination may be inevitable, yet when it comes we are still wounded.

Alas, most leaders do not benefit from the Divine protection afforded to Rebbi, and our false accusers do not miraculously burst. The only solution, therefore, is to turn to the Almighty, beseeching Him to save us from such bitter people.

It is interesting that Rebbi formed this appeal as the conclusion of his silent prayer. We have adopted this request as part of the first blessings with which we open our day before stepping out into a landscape that often appears heartless. © 2006 Rabbi L Cooper. Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyzes a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**P**arashas Aikev contains the second paragraph of the Shema, "vehaya im shumoa" (Devarim 11:13-21), "and it will be, if you listen" (to G-d's commandments). Although the word "shumoa" means to listen, the Torah uses a double-language ("shumoa tishme-u"), to imply more than just listening. Rashi tells us that this doubling of the word "listen" teaches us that "if you listen to the old, [then] you will [also] listen to the new," adding that the reverse is also true, as the Torah

also uses a double-language by forgetting: "And it will be, if you forget Hashem your G-d" (8:19), teaching us that "once you start to forget, you will forget everything." But what does Rashi mean when he tells us that if we listen to the old we will listen to the new? Luckily, these words are found in the Talmud, and Rashi explains them to us there.

"Come and see how different G-d is from flesh and blood, [for with] flesh and blood an empty vessel can hold things [while] a full vessel cannot hold anything [additional]. But G-d is not that way; [something full] can hold [additional items], [while something] empty cannot hold anything, as it says (Shemos 15:26), 'if you listen ("shumoa tishma") [to G-d's voice]. If "shumoa" (you listen), [then] "tishma," you will be able to listen, [but] if you don't [listen] you will not be able to listen. Another interpretation (of the double-wording for listen) is that if you listen to the old [then] you will [also] listen to the new, 'and if you will turn your heart [away, and don't listen] (Devarim 30:17) you will no longer be able to listen" (Berachos 40a).

Notice how the Talmud's second interpretation for the double-language of "listen" is what Rashi quotes on our verse. There, Rashi explains the first approach to mean that once you start listening, you will continue to listen (which fits with the parable of the full vessel, as G-d "fills" the person who already "listened" with more), and explains the second approach to refer to reviewing what one has learned; one who reviews what he has previously learned (the "old") will be able to "listen" anew. At first glance Rashi seems to be saying that according to both approaches the result is being able to hear new things, the only difference is what brings about this result, just listening the first time or reviewing it several times.

However, there is an almost identical Talmudic lesson elsewhere (Succah 46b), with the only difference being which verse they are learned from. There, instead of quoting the double-language used in Shemos, the Talmud quotes a verse from later in Devarim (28:1) that says "and it will be if you will listen (also "shumoa tishma") to G-d's voice." There (in Succah), Rashi explains the first approach to mean that if you make a habit of listening you will continue to learn more, and the second approach to mean that if you review what you have learned you will gain new insights into the same material. It would seem, then, that when Rashi quotes the Talmud's second approach to explain our verse, he is telling us that the double-language of "listening" teaches us that if we review what we have learned, we will not only understand it better, but also gain fresh insights.

Nevertheless, there are several difficulties that arise from Rashi's explanation of our verse and the Talmudic sources it is based on.

First of all, why does the Talmud use two different verses for the same lesson(s)? Shouldn't it

stay consistent and use the same verse in both places? Secondly, Why does Rashi apply the Talmud's explanation to a *third* verse, and not to (at least) one of the verses the Talmud uses? Additionally, why does Rashi explain what seem to be parallel pieces in the Talmud differently? In Berachos he explains the first "listen" of the first approach as referring to *starting* to listen, while in Succah he says it refers to continual listening (not just the first time). And while in Berachos he doesn't explain what the second "listen" of the second approach refers to (implying that it retains the same meaning as in the first approach, being able to learn additional things), in Succah he tells us that the second "listen" of the second approach refers to gaining new insights into the old material, not learning brand new material. Finally, Rashi on our Parasha contrasts "listening" to "forgetting" (based on the Sifray on 11:22), while the Talmud contrasts it with "not listening." Why did Rashi deviate from the Talmud in the place he applied its explanation and in the way he concluded the lesson?

The Aruch La-ner (on Succah) addresses the first question, explaining that the two approaches in the Talmud are being applied, in both places, to the two different verses. The verse quoted in Berachos was said when G-d gave us our very first commandments after leaving Egypt. It teaches us that if we listen to what we are first being taught now, we will be able to continue hearing new lessons, while if we don't even start listening, we won't be able to hear anything further. The verse quoted in Succah was said right before Moshe died, after we already heard all the commandments. Therefore, the double-language in that verse teaches us that if we review what we have learned, we will gain fresh insights into the "old" material.

When Rashi explains the Talmud, he almost always stays "local," explaining it based on what the text says there without trying to make it fit with similar pieces of Talmud elsewhere (as opposed to Tosfos, who primarily tries to make everything work together). If we apply the Aruch La-ner's approach to Rashi, it follows that Rashi's explanations of the two approaches would fit with the context of the verse quoted in each piece. Therefore, in Berachos, where the double-language is used in the context of hearing things for the first time, Rashi explains the two approaches accordingly-starting to listen, and reviewing what they are about to hear, with the result (either way) being (or possibly being) the ability to hear additional things. In Succah, where the verse refers to "listening" after already having heard everything, Rashi can't explain the first approach as *starting* to listen, but to making it a habit of listening, i.e. always keeping your ears open to hear new things, which allows for constantly learning new things. The second approach, which, as in Berachos, refers to reviewing what one has learned,

brings about fresh insights into what was already learned (rather than learning additional things) precisely because all of the commandments have already been taught.

The bottom line is that the Talmud teaches us that there is a lesson to be learned from the double-language of "listening," although what that lesson is depends on the context of the verse. Our verse also uses a double-language, but is not referring to learning what to do, but actually doing them. Applying the lesson of the Talmud to our context means either that by following the commandments we will be able to keep additional commandments, or that by following the commandments (even without having a full understanding of them) we will gain deeper insights into their meaning when we continually fulfill them. While both are true, assuming that one is keeping all of the commandments, only the latter applies. Perhaps this is why Rashi utilizes the wording of the second approach when explaining our verse.

Whereas the Talmud, which is referring to learning about the commandments, contrasts it with refusing to learn about them, Rashi contrasts our verse, which refers to keeping the commandments, with not keeping them, and therefore uses a different, more appropriate verse. Rather than just quoting the Talmud, Rashi is applying what we learn from the Talmud to our verse. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)**

## **Daf HaShavua**

by *Rabbi Reuven Livingstone,*

*Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue*

“**A**nd now O Israel, what does the L-d your G-d ask of you? Only to fear the L-d your G-d...” [Devarim 10:12]”

Rather unusually, this exhortation is preceded by the word *ve'ata*-and now- which certainly gives it a special sense of immediacy. Why is it, though, that there is a need of such an expression of urgency in the Almighty's request that we fear him-particularly as we don't generally find this type of expression in connection with other mitzvot?

Some suggest that the expression has a different connotation and is in fact directed specifically toward the generation of the exodus-as if to say;

'now that you have experienced the miracles of Egypt, the revelation at Sinai and the many miracles of the wilderness you are truly ready and able to be in awe of Hashem'. This is all well and good, but the unfortunate implication is that later generations who had not witnessed these events might very well be unable to achieve a proper sense of the divine power and majesty. This understanding not only limits the verse-but would also largely exempt the rest of us from its great charge.

Perhaps there is a message here of a much more universal nature. The well known joke has it that when we come to Shul and listen to the Rabbi's sermon-we always prefer to imagine that he is speaking to our neighbour, to the chap in the back row, to virtually anybody-other than ourselves.

Likewise, when the Torah here speaks of fearing G-d, it is human nature to rationalise that it doesn't mean me. After all, I seem to get by quite well without it; and for that matter what's all this 'fear' stuff about anyway? Surely it is a concept for another place, another time and another person!

Thus, the inclusion of *ve'ata* becomes highly relevant. Far from being an arcane mitzvah well beyond our reach and comprehension, here is a 'foundation commandment' addressed not only to you and me-but also to this very moment- to here and to now! Moreover, this word also sounds just like another common Hebrew term [spelled with an aleph, not an ayin] which immediately catches our attention; *ata*-you [as in 'yes, you!'].

Fearing G-d is really about living our lives with a sense of His omnipotence and omniscience. The illusion-or rather the delusion-that we are in full control and answerable only to our-selves-is as ridiculous as it is spiritually dangerous. Therefore, here is a mitzvah that we all need to 'get straight' before we can get anywhere.

And, far from being addressed to the chap next door, this request of G-d is not only in the second person-it is also sent recorded delivery and marked urgent!

#### **THE HAFTARAH**

by *Rabbi David Lister, Muswell Hill Synagogue*

"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller, / Knocking on the moonlit door; / ...But only a host of phantom listeners / That dwelt in the lone house then / Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight / To that voice from the world of men. (The Listeners, Walter de la Mare, 1912)

The conundrum of the "host of phantom listeners" hangs in the air even after the traveller has ridden off and the poem finishes. Who are they? Why are they there?

A similar riddle is implicit in our Haftarah. G-d upbraids us, asking, "Why have I come and there is no-one here? Why have I called and nobody answers?"

We might ask: If there is no-one there, to whom is G-d speaking?

Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch offers a context which guides us towards an answer. He says that G-d "calls" to us with every special day in our calendar. The Torah refers to them as *mikra'ei kodesh*, sacred callings.

Every Shabbat and Yom Tov, G-d calls not only to us, but with the phantom unrealised spirituality that

could be ours. He asks that ghost of ourselves "Why is no-one here? Why just smouldering untapped spiritual energy?"

Now we understand why this admonition is included in this, the second of the Haftarat of Comfort after Tisha b'Av. Our magnificent alter ego is already alive, and is worth talking to. Our mission now, on the road to Rosh Hashanah, is to step into that self and make it our own. © 2006 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

#### **RABBI LABEL LAM**

### **Dvar Torah**

“**A**nd these words that I command you today should be upon your heart and you should teach them to your children.” (Devarim 6:6)

"And teach them to your children to speak in them with your sitting in your house and with your going on the way and with your lying down and your rising up..." (Devarim 11:19)

A Rabbi asked a young lady in the audience, "What is your parents' greatest source of pleasure?" The young lady smiled proudly and answered, "Me!" Then he followed up with a 2nd question. "What is your parents' greatest source of pain?" A gloomy expression overtook her countenance and she somberly replied, "My sister!" Children often hold the key to both our happiness and our anguish. Why is that so?

Let's try an experiment. Slump your shoulders, put a scowl on your face and dull the tone of your voice. Now recite lifelessly, "I'm so happy! This is the best day of my life!" Will anyone be convinced by your words? Now throw your shoulders back. Put on a winning smile and shout with enthusiasm, "I am so miserable! This is the worst day of my life!" Which is more credible, your words or your posture? I believe that this test demonstrates that actions trump words and tone trumps text.

Johnny's father received a call from the principal. The principal told him, "We have to talk about your son's behavior!" The father insisted on knowing what he had done. "When the principal informed him, "Your son is stealing pencils from the other kids in school." The father shot back defensively, "I don't know why he should need to steal pencils from the other kids in school. I bring home all the pencils he needs from the office!" Aha!

A fellow I had learned with decided to put on Tefillin as his son's Bar Mitzvah approached. His son told him, "Dad, I want to do just like you. When I'm 47 years old I too am going to start to put on Tefillin!"

A student I had in Hebrew Day School many years ago was a chronic complainer to the point of being a nuisance and distraction to the class. His every move was accompanied by some exaggerated exclamation, "You almost banged my whole head off!"

It was puzzling. Where were all these statements coming from? Then one day I saw his mother getting out of the car in front of the school. When she slammed shut the car door she exclaimed emphatically, "The door almost tore my whole arm off!" She continued her melodramatic monologue all the way into the school. Aha!

A great woman and mother of a remarkably successful family shared with me three keys to her having raised such a wonderfully functional Torah family. 1) She spent personal time with each child. 2) She made sure to find out what they were up to and with whom. 3) Her husband always had a Sefer-a Torah book in his hand!

The Chasam Sofer learns this verse which is scribed and scrolled and affixed to door after door throughout our homes, "And you should teach your children to speak in them" as an instruction in "how to"-accomplish that parental task. Children will learn mostly through observing the manner in which you sit in your house, go on your way, lie down and rise up. Those actions will speak volumes in volume. As one child told his parents, "Your actions are so loud I cannot hear what you are saying!" When speech and action are congruous though then there can be a lasting educational impact.

The first paragraph of Shema reads, "You should place these words upon your heart and (then) teach them to your children..." Why? Children read the heart. They know all too well by tone and by deed what we hold sacred. Parents announce with perfect articulation, "This is who I am and this is what I do." Similarly at Mt Sinai we heard, "I Am HASHEM... that took you out of Egypt", effectively stating, "This is who I am and this is what I do!" And so it is today the First Commandment of Parenting. © 2006 Rabbi L. Lam and Project Genesis, Inc.

#### **MACHON ZOMET**

### **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**A**fter Moshe describes the sin of the Golden Calf (Devarim Chapter 9) and receiving the second set of Tablets (10:1-5), two very surprising verses appear: "And Bnei Yisrael journeyed from the springs of Bnei Yaakon to Moseira, where Aharon died and was buried, and Elazar his son replaced him as priest. From there they traveled to GudG-d, and from GudG-d to Yotvah, a land of streams." [10:6-7]. All the commentators have difficulty with this sequence. What is the connection between the death of Aharon, which took place in the fortieth year of the journey, and the second Tablets, which were given in the first year? In fact, right after these two verses Moshe returns to the sequence of the first year, after the sin of the Calf: "At that time, G-d separated the tribe of Levi to carry the Ark of the Covenant, to stand before G-d and serve

Him, and to bless in His name" [10:8]. What then is the reason for mentioning Aharon's death in the middle of the description of the events of the first year?

Most of the commentators explain that Moshe mentions Aharon in order to emphasize that he did not die because of the sin of the Golden Calf. In the previous chapter, Moshe noted, "And G-d scolded Aharon, wanting to destroy him, but I also prayed for Aharon at that time" [9:20]. Moshe therefore notes that "he was not punished with destruction, neither in his own body nor in his descendents, since he did not die until the fortieth year, when he was old and satisfied, and his son replaced him as a priest" [Ramban]. However, this is still hard to understand. Why was it necessary to note this fact, when Moshe already declared in the previous chapter that he had prayed for Aharon, and there was no reason to think that the prayer had not been successful.

It may be that the reason for mentioning Aharon's death is the opposite of what we have written above. Moshe describes the affair of the Golden Calf in very harsh terms, and this leads to the conclusion that Aharon bore a very serious level of responsibility. This means that the description of Aharon's death may very well be related to the events of the Calf. Even though he was forgiven for the sin, the fact that Aharon died in the desert and was not allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael can be blamed not only on the water of "Mei Merivah" but also because of the role he played with respect to the Golden Calf.

This approach seems especially reasonable in view of how Moshe describes what he was told in Chapter 1. There Moshe says with respect to the sin of the scouts, "I was also scolded by G-d because of you, saying, you will also not go there" [1:37]. This implies that for Moshe too the punishment of not being allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael was not only because of Mei Merivah but was part of G-d's punishment for Bnei Yisrael's sin of the scouts, which included Moshe, the leader of the people. The use of the same word for both Aharon and Moshe-"hitanaf"-implies that the same punishment of dying outside of Eretz Yisrael is involved.

Thus, at first Aharon's punishment was meant to be harsher than it was, he was to be "destroyed." However, as a result of Moshe's prayer, he was given a lighter punishment. Aharon lived forty more years in the desert, but in the end he died before the journey ended and did not enter the land, because of the role he had played in the sin of the Golden Calf.

**DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

## What's Bothering Rashi

**T**his week's parsha continues Moses' talk to the People, preparing them for entrance into the Land of Israel. It is full of encouragement to trust in G-d's

help and warning that they should be worthy of that help.

A brief comment leads to insights in psychology and the Torah. "And you shall love the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 10:19)

"Because you were strangers" - RASHI: "A blemish that you possess, do not attribute to your friend."

Rashi's comment seems simple enough. It recalls similar Rashi-comments in Exodus 22:20 and Leviticus 19:34 which also refer to strangers (i.e. converts).

Let us compare these comments and see a question that arises from such a comparison: (1) Our verse: "And you shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (2) Exodus 22:20: "A stranger don't taunt or oppress, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (3) Leviticus 19:34: "And when a stranger dwells with you in your land, do not taunt him, and you should love him as yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

As you compare these verses and Rashi's comment here, what would you ask?

A Question: While all three verses contain the same phrase, "...because you were strangers in the land of Egypt," and on these verses Rashi also comments, "a blemish you possess, do not attribute to another," yet these verses differ from ours. In the other two verses there is a prohibition to harm the stranger. In Exodus 22:20 it says, "Don't taunt or oppress a stranger." In Leviticus 19:34 it says, "Don't taunt him." Our verse, on the other hand, only says, "Love the stranger." There is no prohibition against taunting him. To use Rashi's phrasing, there is no mention of "blemishes" in our verse.

The question is: Why does Rashi mention blemishes? Rashi's warning is appropriate when there is a prohibition against taunting him, but our verse says nothing about acting disrespectfully towards the stranger. Our verse speaks of loving him. Why does Rashi repeat the aphorism, "a blemish you possess, do not attribute to another"?

Can you see what prompted this comment?

An Answer: Our verse enjoins us to love the stranger "because we were strangers in Egypt." What sense does that make? It is understandable that we should love someone because he did us a favor. But to love someone just because we had similar experiences? Because both he and we were strangers? Why? It makes as much sense to say, "Love basketball players because you too were once a basketball player!" How does Rashi's comment deal with this difficulty?

An Answer: Rashi is telling us that since the Torah reinforces the command to "love the stranger" with the reminiscence of our Egyptian experience, the

point of the verse must be: do not inflict on the stranger that which we went through when we were strangers in Egypt. In this light, "love" consists of not doing evil towards the stranger; of not taking advantage of the stranger because he is less powerful than we as we were less powerful than our Egyptian taskmasters.

This is reminiscent of Hillel's interpretation of "Love your neighbor as yourself," which he gave to the gentile who professed interest in converting to Judaism. His words, "What is hateful to you, do not do to another" are a way of rendering the Torah's positive command of "loving" as a negative prohibition not to harm another.

In our verse as well, Rashi transposes the Torah's positive command to love the stranger into a negative admonition "don't ascribe to him your faults."

It is interesting to note in this regard, that psychologists have understood the dynamics underlying negative, racist, stereotypes, the prejudices people hold for certain minorities in their midst, to be, in reality, projected images of their own weaknesses. They project onto others those traits which are distasteful to them and which they cannot accept as part of themselves. This projection ascribes to the other their own "wickedness," thereby accomplishing two psychological maneuvers at once \* denial of one's own imperfection as well as projecting the anger one has for oneself onto another. This is exactly the meaning of "A blemish you have do not attribute to another." The Torah's psychological astuteness predates Freudian defense mechanisms by a few years.

As I pondered this verse and the Rashi-comment on it, I wondered why the Torah had to use the idea of "love" to begin with. If the verse means the avoidance of doing harm to the stranger, why say "you shall love the stranger"? That seems a bit much.

Then I noticed the context of the verse and I saw something interesting. This section begins with verse 10:12, which says: "Now Israel, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d, to go in all of His ways, to love Him" etc.

After Moses tells us to "go in all of His ways," the verse (Deut. 10:19) continues to tell us of His ways:

"He does justice to the orphan and the widow and He loves the stranger to give him bread and clothes."

We see that this whole section is a lesson in Imitatio Dei, to imitate G-d's ways. He loves the stranger, so you too shall love the stranger. That is probably why this language was used here.

The idea of love \* G-d's love for Israel, Israel's love for G-d and G-d and man's love of others \* is a central theme in this section. This is attested to by the fact that the word "love" appears seven times in this parsha \* from verse 10:12 until the end of the parsha. (Count them: Verses 10:12,15,18,19;11:1,13,22.) This is a telltale sign that the Torah wants to emphasize this

idea of love. (For a fuller discussion of the significance of the "Seven" Code in the Torah, see "Studying the Torah: A Guide to In-depth Interpretation.") © 2006 Dr. Avigdor Bonchek & Project Genesis

#### TORAH CENTER OF DEAL

## The Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

“It will be that you listen.” (Debarim 11:13)

The second paragraph of Shema, which we say every day, appears in this perashah. Since we say it so often we tend to overlook its important lessons. Hashem says to us, If you listen to the misvot, the rains will fall correctly and your crops will be blessed, etc. Then, when we lower our voices a little it says, If our hearts stray from Hashem, G-d forbid, there will be no rains, etc. and other events will happen which will make us realize our mistakes so we can come back to Hashem.

The lesson is, whenever something goes wrong, before we go around blaming the world, maybe Hashem is nudging us back to Him. The principle of Reward and Punishment is pivotal in our religion. When we do good, we deserve Blessing and G-d forbid, the reverse also happens. Although there are many other factors which may influence the Heavenly judgment, let us not forget the basic rule: Listening to Hashem brings berachah and going against Him brings problems! May we merit to bring on ourselves only berachah.

“If you will say in your heart, These nations are more numerous than we, how can I conquer them? Do not fear them, remember what Hashem did to Pharaoh and all of Egypt.” (Debarim 7:17-18)

Bitahon eliminates worry. What is worry? You are afraid that in the future there will be a situation that you will not be able to cope with. But if you remember how Hashem has helped you in similar situations in the past, you will find it easier to trust in Him in the present. Moshe told the Israelites that if they questioned how they would be able to defeat the nations who live in Canaan, they should recall their past experience of how Hashem helped them in a similar situation with the Egyptians. Your heart will be free from worry when you have an awareness that Hashem has already helped you cope with difficulties in the past. Whenever you find yourself worrying about the future, ask yourself, In what ways has Hashem already shown me that He can help me overcome a difficulty similar to this?

When you have financial difficulties, remember how you worried about financial matters before and still you managed. When you are afraid you might not do well on a test, remember when you felt that way in the past and you still did well. If you fear new situations, remember other new situations you worried about and still were able to cope with satisfactorily. (Growth through Torah)