

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

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Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi David Katanka, Portsmouth & Southsea Hebrew Congregation

This week's Parsha discusses the mitzvah of Shiluach HaKan, the sending away of the mother bird before taking her young. The Torah promises as a reward for following this mitzvah, "it will be good for you and you will lengthen days."

The Midrash here comments that Hashem does not want a man or woman to "weigh out" mitzvot and only perform those of greater reward. He therefore hid the rewards of the mitzvot so that they will be carried out with a pure heart.

Only the reward of two mitzvot are revealed, the hardest mitzvah of "Honour your parents", and the easiest of "sending away the mother bird". For each of these, the reward is the same—a lengthening of days. (The Talmud in Kiddushin 40a explains this as referring to the Eternal World, not this one.) A parable is brought: a king hired labourers to work in his orchard and did not reveal to them the payment for each task. At the day's end, he asked each worker what he did. One said, "I worked the pepper bush", and the king gave him a gold coin. One who worked with the olive trees, however, received 200 coins. The workers then asked the king "Why didn't you tell us the value of each tree?" The king responded, "If I had done that, my orchard would not have been completed, for everyone would only have worked on the more valuable trees."

The Midrash Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu explains that the Torah was created for the Jewish people, and not the other way round. The Shem MeShmuel asks: Since this is so, what is wrong if everyone concentrates their efforts mainly on the mitzvot of the greatest reward? Furthermore, how can it be that the hardest and easiest mitzvot have the same reward? The Mishna clearly states "according to the difficulty, so is the reward!" (Avot 5:27)

The answer to the first question lies in the Kabbalistic understanding of the human body and soul, and its interaction with the physical and spiritual worlds. The human body is understood to consist of 248 essential limbs and 365 essential sinews corresponding to the 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. Likewise, the soul and spiritual universe correspond to this system.

Therefore, in order for a person to complete his body and soul, he needs to perform all the mitzvot, not just the ones of greater reward. Yet, the question still remains: no person can perform all the mitzvot, seeing as certain mitzvot are only for the king, for the priests, etc, so how can anyone be a part of this spiritual community if he lacks parts of his being? In addition, the Rambam explains that if someone performs one mitzvah for the sake of Heaven with a pure heart, he is a member of the spiritual community in the World to Come.

The answers to these questions can be easily grasped through the scientific discovery of DNA. The concept of a single cell containing the potential for an entire body has been well known in the Torah for thousands of years.

The Shem MeShmuel explains that every mitzvah contains in it the potential for all the other mitzvot. Therefore, by performing one mitzvah, a person can complete his whole body. Yet, what is the unifying force that makes one mitzvah contain all the mitzvot? It is the fact that a person is carrying out G-d's will. If one just wants to do what Hashem requires, one has tapped into the uniting force of all the mitzvot.

However, this is only possible if the person does not know the rewards of the mitzvot. If the reward would be the basis of one's efforts, then indeed, the orchard would never be complete because the mitzvot would be imperfect. However, when the rewards are known, every mitzvah one does is for pure motivations and even one mitzvah can express one's true desire, to do G-d's will. In this way, the hardest mitzvah is rewarded just like the easiest because they both are complete expressions of wanting to perform G-d's will, and thereby contain all the mitzvot.

In essence, every mitzvah holds the key to showing our love and awe of our Creator. Yet, of course, each mitzvah will be evaluated and rewarded according to its unique difficulties for each particular situation, as the Mishnah states, "according to the difficulty, so is the reward".

THE HAFTARAH

by Rabbi Mordechai Wollenberg, Cardiff Synagogue

This week's haftarah, the fifth in the "seven haftarot of comfort", which we read between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashanah, relates Isaiah's lament to Jerusalem, the city in mourning, having twice lost her

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children. She is tempted to give up and to retreat into herself, yet Isaiah tells her the opposite-that she will recover, she will expand southward and northward, her offspring will inherit nations, and will settle desolate cities, and, with abundant mercy G-d shall gather them in.

A quick glance into the history of the modern State of Israel would certainly give weight to these words. From 1948, a barren desert wasteland was transformed into a fertile oasis. Jerusalem has expanded in all directions, and we have experienced the 'ingathering of the exiles' to the Holy Land in our lifetimes.

Later on, Isaiah reassures us with the words of G-d: "but for a brief moment have I forsaken you, and with abundant mercy shall I gather you in" and later assures us of G-d's unending love and covenant of peace.

At these difficult times for Israel, it is of some comfort to be reminded that just as all the other prophecies contained within the Haftarah have come into being, we similarly await the day, not far off, when they will all be fulfilled and Jerusalem along with all of Israel will enjoy true and lasting peace and tranquillity.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“When you make your friend a loan of any amount, you shall not enter his home to take a security pledge for it. You shall stand outside, and the individual to whom you made the loan should bring the security pledge to you outside. If that individual is poor, you shall not sleep with his security pledge. You shall rather return the security pledge to him when the sun sets, so that he will be able to sleep with his garment and will bless you. This will be for you an act of righteousness before the Lord your G-d" (Deut. 24:10-13)

The Hebrew word tzedek or tzedakah is usually translated as justice or righteousness, describing an act which is right or just to do. I understand that it is compassionate to return a security pledge to an indigent borrower, but is it necessarily just to do so? I

would like to deepen my question by drawing the reader's attention to the foundation of the passage we have just sited, the basic commandment concerning the relationship between the creditor and the borrower.

"If you would lend money to my nation, the poor individual who is with you, you shall not act toward him as a creditor nor should you charge him interest" (Exodus 22:24). This commandment was given immediately after the exodus from Egypt, and is apparently directly connected to the manner in which the freed Israelite is to treat his more indigent fellow. There are however a number of problems with the text. First of all, the passage opens "If you would lend money". Our sages insist that this is one of the few instances in the Bible where the subjunctive im - which is usually translated as if which is conditional and voluntary - is to be translated as "when" which is imperative and obligatory. However the question still remains as to why the text used the subjunctive im?

Secondly, we know that the Bible never uses extra words. Why does the text not read "if you will lend money to the poor who is with you", rather than as it presently appears mentioning "my nation" which seems entirely superfluous. Thirdly, when the Talmudic Sages explain the continuation of the verse, that you not treat the borrower as a creditor, they describe a situation in which you see the borrower walking towards you and they insist that you walk the other way. They do not wish the borrower to be embarrassed by meeting you. But this sounds rather absurd. Perhaps he ought be embarrassed, especially if the time limit for the loan has already expired, after all he owes you the money.

And finally, why are you forbidden to charge interest? If you are allowed to charge rent for the use of your apartment, why can you not charge "rent" for the use of your funds? You certainly might have earned money had you yourself invested the funds that you lent out!

The famed nineteenth century commentary known as the Ohr Hahaim Hakadosh explains as follows. If this world were truly perfect no one would be a borrower and no one would be a lender. Each individual would have enough material possessions at his disposal to take care of his needs. Therefore he reads the passage from the book of Exodus in a very literal fashion "If you will lend money to my nation" - which means, if you are blessed with an excess of funds as a result of the unfair nature of this world, you must be aware of the fact that "those" (funds actually belong to the) poor individual who is with you. In effect, G-d has given the funds meant for the indigent in trust to you. Obviously therefore it is incumbent on you to lend him the money. You must at the same time realize that you dare not treat him as a creditor or charge him interest- because you are merely returning to him what is actually his.

In a similar vein when I give a loan to a poor person I dare not, take away the only blanket or robe which he owns as a security pledge. I must be aware of the fact that by lending him the money I am only helping G-d right the inequity in a world which is still waiting to be perfected and redeemed. © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI LEVI COOPER

The Merit of Facilitators

In rabbinic thought, Torah study is the ultimate endeavor, plumbing the depths of our tradition in an attempt to access the will of the Almighty and reveal the path of our destiny. The Jewish bookcase beckons us to personally participate in this invigorating venture.

Where this personal encounter is not possible, we are encouraged to provide opportunities for others to experience the texts of our heritage. Thus people who support the worthy enterprise of Torah study should undoubtedly be commended. What is the relative value of the contribution of these facilitators? Is their role merely secondary to the foremost objective of Torah study?

Keeping in mind that in talmudic times women generally did not have opportunities to study and their task was limited to facilitating the study of men, the key to our question may lie in the Talmud's attitude to the female role with regard to learning Torah (B. Berachot 17a; see also B. Sotah 21a).

Our sages highlight three aspects of women's relationship to Torah study that grant them eternal merit: First, women bring their young brood to the synagogue where the children would learn to read scripture. Second, they allow their husbands to journey to the beit midrash (study hall) where Talmud is analyzed. Third, they wait for their husbands to come home from the study hall.

This third aspect is somewhat puzzling: Why should merit be culled for waiting for the return of those who frequent the beit midrash? Perhaps responding to this riddle, Rashi (11th century, France) expands the talmudic statement: "They wait for their husbands, and give them permission to go and study Torah in another city." While their husbands were away for extended periods, these faithful wives would patiently wait for the return of their spouses. Thus Rashi slightly alters this third aspect to bring it in line with the two previous actions. The thrust of the talmudic passage, therefore, is that merit is accrued through facilitating the learning of others - bringing children to school and allowing others to study even at the expense of lengthy absence.

Our passage gives voice to the limited prospects for women in talmudic times to be involved in the coveted, acclaimed and central act of Torah study.

As we know, our age has witnessed - and indeed continues to witness - titanic shifts in the

opportunities for women to be ensconced in learning Torah. In many circles, the female role in Torah study is no longer limited to facilitating the male experience. Nevertheless, the talmudic passage can still be read with contemporary relevance by focusing on the lauded facilitatory role in Torah study.

Indeed, our tradition has a paradigm for facilitating the study of others that is not cut along gender lines: The Yissachar-Zevulun partnership.

Our sages tell us that two of Jacob's sons - Yissachar and Zevulun - had a fascinating arrangement (Tanhuma, Vayehi 11). Zevulun was a businessman in the shipping industry. His fleets were highly successful, plying the Mediterranean basin. Zevulun's brother, Yissachar, was an academic who spent his days immersed in Torah study. The two brothers had a deal: Zevulun supplied Yissachar with his material needs, while Yissachar's merit was bestowed upon his brother. In this way Zevulun facilitated Yissachar's learning, and merited a portion of the reward for the Torah endeavor.

Normative Jewish law recognizes such an arrangement: One can contract a partnership, where one party supports another in exchange for the reward granted for Torah study (Shulhan Aruch and Remah, 16th century).

Though we extol those who devote their energies to plumbing our hallowed texts, combing page after page of our beloved books, we must not forget their peers who admirably facilitate this act.

Our sages, however, go further, noting a scriptural anomaly: In the Bible, Zevulun is mentioned before his older brother, Yissachar, both in the blessings Jacob grants his children on his deathbed (Genesis 49:13-15) and in the blessings Moses bestows before his demise (Deuteronomy 33:18). From this irregularity, our sages conclude that the facilitator is greater than the facilitated, for without the support of Zevulun, Yissachar would never have been able to study Torah: "If there is no material sustenance, there can be no Torah" (M. Avot 3:17).

This is a position of serious import, but is it merely a charade? Do we really believe that the facilitators are the champions of our people, or are we in truth tactically trying to encourage their support for the real stars - those who study Torah?

Returning to our talmudic passage about women: Before detailing how those who do not study Torah can gather merit, our sages declare: "Greater is the promise that the Holy One, blessed be He, made to women than to men." This claim is buttressed by a scriptural reference: "You women who are at ease, rise up and hear my voice; you confident daughters, heed my speech" (Isaiah 32:9) - indicating that women will be both "at ease" in this world and "confident" of attaining the World-to-Come (Rabbi Ya'acov Reisher, 17th-18th centuries, central Europe).

Women in talmudic times did not have opportunities to study Torah. Traditionally, they are exempt from time-bound commandments. Hence their avenues towards merit appear to be limited. Our sages tell us they can still cull merit by facilitating others along their journey. Significantly, this merit appears to be of greater worth than the merit of those who are empowered to act.

It can always be alleged that the talmudic passage is self-serving in that it urges support for its own cause - Torah study - and hence should not be cited as proof. Nevertheless, cogent arguments should be considered for the value of facilitating others.

Empowering others to study should not be underestimated, for it is often a hapless role. Facilitators may be awarded a plaque or honored in some other way, but they are revered for abetting others to do what we value so dearly - learning Torah. In this way, their role can be perceived as secondary to the primary purpose and ultimate objective of studying Torah. From this perspective, facilitators are truly champions of our people. © 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 analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

“**A**ll is fair in love and war.” Not so in Judaism. In fact, the test of moral standards is not how one acts when things are peaceful, clear and smooth. Such instances do not by and large require moral strength. Rather the test of moral integrity truly presents itself when facing difficult situations.

One example of such an instance is during war. It's precisely then when soldiers can take advantage of the weak and the captured using the excuse that "all is not fair." It is precisely then that the Torah demands that we conduct ourselves with the greatest moral fortitude.

Note the law of a woman captured during war. (Deuteronomy 21:10-14) The Torah tells us that such a woman is to shave her hair, let her nails grow and weep for her father and mother a full month. Only after that process, the Torah says, "she shall be a wife to you."

A classic difference emerges between Nachmanides and Maimonides. Nachmanides believes that after the thirty-day period, the captured woman can be forced to convert and marry her captor. Still, for Nachmanides, during the thirty days, the soldier must observe firsthand how the captured woman is in deep mourning. Clearly Nachmanides sees this law as the Torah doing all that it can in order to evoke feelings of sympathy towards the captured woman in the hope that

ultimately her plight would be heard and she would be freed.

Maimonides takes it much further. The thirty days of mourning were introduced as a time period in which the soldier tries to convince the captured woman to convert and marry. After the thirty days, however, the woman has the right to leave her captor. Under no circumstances can she be forced to convert or marry.

Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld argues that Maimonides' position is not only morally correct but it fits into the context of our portion. Note that the portion concludes with the mandate to destroy the nation of Amalek. (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) Amalek's sin was attacking the weakest. Here, one sees the great contrast. Amalek set out to abuse the most vulnerable. Maimonides tells us that Jewish law prohibits taking advantage of the weak. Indeed, the test of morality is how one treats the most vulnerable.

War is horrific. Given its horror, our portion reminds us of our responsibility even in those circumstances to conduct ourselves morally. This is a mandate that the IDF is superbly fulfilling today. As one we should all declare - Kol Hakavod le-Tzahal. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Among the many topics of importance discussed in this week's parsha is that of the relationship between employer and employees. The Torah also discusses the relationship between debtor and creditor and between the grantor of collateral and the holder of such collateral. A creditor and/or lender are not allowed to oppress the borrower and/or debtor. The creditor/lender is certainly entitled legally to have his obligation redeemed by the debtor/borrower. But he is not allowed to abuse the debtor/borrower, to threaten him or her or to abuse that person's right of privacy in his or her home.

The Torah always attempts to protect the rights of the lender, for only in such a fashion can there be assurance that there will be people willing to lend money to the needy. But the Torah, ever mindful of the fact that "a borrower is always a slave unto the lender," protects that borrower from the abuses, physical and social, that such a relationship may entail. The Torah, which always balances and reconciles conflicting legal and moral values, does so here regarding the creditor-debtor relationship.

The same sense of balance is striven for in the Torah regarding the employer-employee relationship as well. The employer is not to exploit the worker that labors on his behalf. He is to pay the employee a fair wage and must pay it to him in a timely fashion. But the

employee in turn is duty bound to work in an honest and diligent manner for the employer. As can readily be understood, the employee is not allowed to steal from the employer - not time, money or property. These two contrasting values of the relationship between employers and employees form the basis for all discussions of Jewish labor law in the Talmud and the codes of Jewish law. The Torah is not on the side of either the employer or the worker. It is on the side of fairness and rectitude in societal matters.

Ramban, in looking at Jewish social law as a whole, asserts that the underlying principle in all of these matters is that of family. Jews are a family one to another and therefore the accepted norms of family behavior are to be enforced even if the Jews involved feel less than familiar - to the employer, the creditor, and the lender. In a family one does not take interest for a loan to another family member. One does not tend to exploit the labor of a family member, just as one is willing to work for the general good of society over and above narrow, selfish considerations.

The ideal Jewish family is free of abuse and exploitation. It jealously protects the individual's right to privacy and strengthens the ability of a debtor to protect his home and belongings from prying eyes and grasping hands. Therefore, all of the societal laws of the Torah, when viewed from the perspective of family love and cooperation, are in harmony with all societal values.

For in a functioning and loving family there are no victims and no bullies. There are only next of kin that are 'flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone.' And this is the goal of family that the Torah wishes us to achieve through its instructions and commandments regarding all societal issues. ©2006 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah displays Hashem's boundless love for the Jewish people. In the end, after a long painful exile, the Jewish people will be granted permission to return to Eretz Yisroel. Most appropriately, the prophet Yeshaya opens and invites Yerushalayim to rejoice over the ingathering of her exiles. He says, "Rejoice barren city who never expected such an overwhelming influx within your walls...Extend your annexes without interruption...Because your children will inherit the cities of the nations and settle the desolate areas." (54:1-3) The proportions of the Jewish redemption will be so overwhelming that Eretz Yisroel won't be capable of containing it. Yerushalayim will overflow from her newly

acquired inhabitants and the surrounding areas will rapidly fill to capacity. The entire Judean hills will be saturated with newly sprouted neighborhoods but the Jewish influx will continue. The new wave of Jews will take possession of the entire land of Israel and settle therein but even these broadened quarters will not suffice. The return will be so encompassing that Zion will truly wonder in bewilderment from whence did all of her people emerge.

Yet the kindness of Hashem won't end here and the prophet continues to describe the setting of the future. Yeshaya tells the Jewish people, "Do not be afraid or embarrassed because your shameful past will never be remembered." (54:4) He adds in the name of Hashem, "I forsook you for a brief moment and I will gather you in with great compassion. With mild anger I concealed My countenance from you and with everlasting kindness I will have mercy upon you." (54:7,8) These passages reflect the concern of the Jewish people over their dark and rebellious past. They hesitate to return to Hashem because their previous wrong doings remain fresh in their minds. They cannot imagine bonding perfectly with Hashem given how unfair they acted towards Him in the past. Hashem responds that they should not hesitate to return because no trace will remain of their earlier ways. Hashem's blessing will be so encompassing that it will be virtually impossible for the Jewish people to relate to their earlier experiences. They will develop such close relationships with Hashem that they will be incapable of imagining what it was like without Him. How could they have ever appreciated life without their close and perfect relationship with Hashem?!

The prophet continues and reveals to us the merit through which this unbelievable experience will transpire. Yeshaya says in the name of Hashem, "For the mountains may move and the hills may sway but My kindness will never leave you and My covenant of peace will never be swayed." (54:10) In explanation of these words, our Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (477) share with us a beautiful insight. They explain that the mountains mentioned here refer to the firm and sound merits of the Patriarchs and the hills refer to those of the Matriarchs. Although the Jewish nation continuously draws upon these merits for its basic existence there are times when even these merits do not suffice. The Jews stray so far from the proper path that they cease to identify with the virtues of the Patriarchs. During such times, Hashem doesn't identify with the Jewish people as children of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs and the mountains and hills-merits of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs- begin to sway and can not be of any assistance. Yeshaya advises the Jews that in those difficult moments they should cleave to acts of loving kindness. In return for their loving kindness Hashem promises to show them His loving kindness resulting in the indescribable proportions mentioned earlier.

With the above insight we begin to comprehend the unbelievable Messianic era awaiting the Jewish nation. The Malbim (ad loc.) explains this merit of loving kindness and notes that, by nature, kindness is boundless. Unlike compassion and mercy which depend upon the recipient's worthiness, kindness is shown without calculation or consideration. The recipient of pure kindness is never deserving of it and such acts are therefore not subject to limitations. In essence whenever Hashem showers His kindness upon someone it is, by definition, unlimited and everlasting. This, incidentally is the deeper meaning of Dovid Hamelech's words in Tehillim, "For His kindness is everlasting." (107:1) Accordingly, when the Jewish people will be the beneficiaries of Hashem's kindness they will experience it in boundless proportions. They will be privileged to establish such closeness to Hashem that they will never be capable of understanding life without Him.

However, in order to elicit true kindness from Hashem the Jewish people must conduct themselves in a very special manner. To this end Yeshaya offers them an inside tip and advises them to cleave to acts of loving kindness amongst each other. When, in the end of time, we will be totally committed to benefiting others Hashem will reciprocate in that same manner. If we will provide for others above and beyond our obligation Hashem will do the same. We now understand that those acts of loving kindness-by definition beyond the call of duty-will truly serve as the keys to our glorious future. Such acts of pure kindness are not subject to calculations and computations and are the true expression of boundless concern for others. Hashem therefore responds with His acts of loving kindness and showers us with His boundless love in the most indescribable proportions. Eretz Yisroel will be continuously expanding to allow for the influx and our association with Hashem will be so perfect that our entire life will revolve totally around Him. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

This week's parsha contains more mitzvot (74) than any parsha in the Torah. Among them are various mitzvot that pertain to Jewish conduct in warfare.

Rashi refers to Targum. We must understand what he means. "Do not deliver a slave to his master who was rescued to you from his master." (Deuteronomy 23:16)

"Do not deliver a slave"-RASHI: "As its Targum. Another interpretation: Even a gentile slave owned by a Jew, who fled from outside the Land to the Land of Israel." The problem here is: What kind of slave Jew or Gentile-is running from his master? Rashi refers to Targum Onkelos, who seems to say, "Don't return a

gentile slave to his master." The Ramban understands this the same way.

If this is correct (the Mizrachi, on the other hand, says that Targum means a Jewish slave of a gentile master), then Rashi offers two interpretations, the first from the Targum that this is (according to the Ramban) a non-Jewish slave escaping from his gentile master. Rashi's second interpretation is from the Talmud (Tractate Gittin 45a) which says this is a non-Jewish slave escaping from his Jewish master. In neither case should the slave be returned to his master.

The first is p'shat, the second, drash. Why do you think the first is p'shat? Hint: See the context of this verse.

An Answer: The interpretation that this is a slave running from his non-Jewish master fits best with the context of the previous verses. From verse 10 and onwards, the Torah speaks of Israel at war with their gentile enemies. This is the most likely scenario for a slave to escape from his gentile master to the winning side. He may even have heard that Jewish masters must treat their servants with a certain amount of decency. But whenever Rashi offers two interpretations, we can ask a question. A Question: Once Rashi has given us p'shat, which is reasonable and fits in well with the context, why does he need to offer a second, drash, interpretation?

An Answer: The first interpretation is too reasonable! Meaning, it is obvious that if a gentile slave escapes from his pagan, idol worshipping master, we should not return him to that kind of life, particularly if he begs us not to do so. There is no reason in the world why we should return him to his master. This is so self-evident that the Torah doesn't even have to command us regarding this. Therefore, Rashi gives us the second interpretation, which is not at all obvious. This is a case of a gentile running away from his Jewish master. Why shouldn't he be returned? Why is one Jewish master better than another? The answer is that one master lives in the Land of Israel and the other does not.

In the Ramban's words: "He (the escaping slave) should serve those dwellers of the Land of Hashem, and thus be saved from serving those who dwell in the impure lands (outside of the Land of Israel) which have no mitzvot conducted in them."

Spoken as a true lover of Zion! And the Ramban certainly was one. © 2006 Dr. Avigdor Bonchek & Project Genesis

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt." These words appear twice in our Parasha, only a few verses apart (Devarim 24:18 and 22). Not only that, but there have already been three other times where Moshe told the nation that they should remember that they had been slaves in

Egypt. Although remembering the exodus is certainly of vital importance, to the extent that we are commanded to be consciously aware every day and every night that we, as a nation, were slaves in Egypt until G-d took us out, it is still a bit curious that Moshe felt it necessary to repeat it so often.

The Sefornu explains each of the five based on their context. The first is in the "10 Commandments," concluding the commandment to "keep the Sabbath" (5:14). Here, the Sefornu tells us that the reference to the exodus is because our servants should also "rest," as we rested from our "servitude" when G-d took us out of Egypt. The second (15:15) is said after commanding us to give gifts to our Jewish slave when he goes free after 6 years, with the Sefornu equating this with the material wealth we took with us when we left Egypt; his servitude should end as ours did, having possessions. The third (16:12) comes after the commandment to "celebrate before G-d" and to incorporate others in our celebration, including our servants and others who are less fortunate. The Sefornu explains that we had no money (as all of our possessions were "owned" by our Egyptian masters), so could not have any festive banquets. Therefore, now that we can afford such celebrations, we should include those who cannot. The fourth, the first of the two in our Parasha (24:18), comes after a warning not to mistreat those less fortunate and, when not adversely affecting others, to treat them better than otherwise required. The Sefornu connects this with G-d having treated us better than we deserved when He took us out of Egypt. The last one (24:22) follows the requirement to leave the individual olives and grapes that were not initially harvested for the needy, where the reminder (according to the Sefornu) to remember that we were slaves in Egypt coming because we were needy then and could understand their plight. The Ibn Ezra doesn't explain each of the five mentions, but in several of them points out the connection between the reference to slaves and/or the downtrodden and our need to remember that we were once in a similar situation.

Rashi only makes the connection once, regarding the gift to the newly freed Jewish slave. This connection is made in the Sifray (upon which Rashi is probably based), but I haven't seen any other connection made by our sages (in either the Talmud or the Midrashim) by the other four. Rashi does comment on three of them (including the first in our Parasha) that G-d took us out of Egypt in order for us to follow His laws and commandments. Which leaves us to wonder why Moshe would point this out after these specific commandments more than any other, and why he did so numerous times. It's possible that the gift to the newly freed slave is the only time a specific connection is made because it parallels our experience when we left slavery, whereas the others refer to things we should understand because we were once in a similar

situation. Our slaves should rest because we couldn't, not because we also did. We include those less fortunate in our festive meals because we didn't have any, not because we did. And we strive to treat the downtrodden fairly because we weren't, not because we were. On the other hand, we give a going away present because we got one, not because we didn't.

What intrigued me more, however, were the explanations of the Ramban. First he brings the Ibn Ezra's connecting the commandment to include the downtrodden in our festive meals with our once being downtrodden, but prefers an explanation similar to Rashi's, that it refers to all the commandments, including but not limited to the one referenced. Yet, when it came to treating the downtrodden fairly, he quotes Rashi's approach that remembering we were slaves reminds us to do all the commandments (since He took us out of Egypt so that we can fulfill them), but prefers something similar to the Ibn Ezra's, that this reminder that we were once downtrodden is connected to the need to treat those in that situation fairly. Why does the Ramban switch from one to the other?

It would seem, though, that all would agree that the reminders in these locations that we were once slaves all stem from the fact that the preceding mitzvos refer to the downtrodden. For the Ibn Ezra, this is enough to warrant the reminders there. The Ramban would agree with the Ibn Ezra but for one thing: there is a festive meal at *all* the festivals, not just on Shavuot (the festival the mitzvah to include the downtrodden is given in). If the Torah chose this festival to teach us this lesson, it must be for a reason. The Ramban may therefore understand this reference to imply not just this specific commandment, but all the commandments of the Torah, which was given on Shavuot. Rashi takes it a step farther, agreeing that these locations were chosen for the reminders because of their context, but adds that the reminders apply not just to these commandments, but to all commandments. After all, He took us out of Egypt so that we would keep *all* His commandments, not just the ones that deal with the downtrodden. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

One of the rare cases in the Torah when a person is punished by another person in a manner that is "measure for measure" can be seen in the laws of "Yibum" and "Chalitzah"-when a man is commanded to marry the childless wife of his dead brother (Devarim 25:5-10). The Torah attempts to meet a great challenge that is the result of a tragedy-a man dies without leaving any children, such that there will be no continuation or memory of his family line. The Torah provides a novel solution for the problem: If a man marries his dead brother's wife, the son that is born will

be considered as the son of the dead man, and in this way "his name will not be eradicated from among Yisrael" [25:6].

This action requires a sacrifice by the brother, since his own son will not be named for him. There may also be other reasons why a man would not want to marry his sister-in-law (see Ruth 4:6). The act of Yibum, marrying the woman, is a mitzva, based on the obligation to honor the memory of the dead man. The Torah did not in fact require a man to establish a new home if he is strongly opposed to the idea, since such a home would not last for very long. However, it provided three sanctions to prevent men from refusing to observe the mitzva. These are actions that must be performed in front of the elders of the city. (Note that the elders are mentioned three times in the passage: "And his yevamah-sister-in-law shall rise up to the gate, to the elders... And the elders shall call him... And the yevamah shall approach him in front of the elders...") Here are the three sanctions: The easiest one to understand is, "She shall spit in front of him and declare: This is what will be done to the man who refuses to rebuild his brother's house" [25:9]. Spitting, especially in the Torah, is an expression of shame and humiliation. This can be seen from what G-d said to Moshe with respect to Miriam, "If her father had spit in front of her, would she not be shamed for seven days?" [Bamidbar 12:14]. Somebody who gives precedence to his own private needs instead of his obligation to his dead brother clearly deserves to be spit at in front of the elders of the city.

Another sanction is, "She shall remove his shoe from his foot" [25:9]. What is the significance of this action? Evidently the act of wearing shoes is related to a relationship of being a master. In places where man is not in charge, he has been commanded, "Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" [Shemot 3:5]. (See also Yehoshua 5:15 and Mishna Berachot 9:5.) This was also the way that Yeshayahu was to demonstrate the future exile. "Go open the sack over your thighs, and remove your shoes from your feet... This is how the King of Ashur will treat the captives of Egypt and the exile of Kush, young and old will be naked and barefoot." [20:2-4]. Thus, one who refuses his obligation to continue his brother's house will be put to shame and made to appear as if he is no longer master over his own heritage. Finally, "His name in Yisrael will be: the Home of the Removed Shoe" [25:10]. Once again the symbolism is clear. One who does not feel obligated to act for his brother so that "his name will not be eradicated from among Yisrael" [25:6] will have his own name erased. His house will no longer be linked to his own name, rather it will be named for his removed shoe. The name of his house will be a permanent reminder of his unkind act, when he refused to build his brother's house.

An Excess of Alternatives Leads to Ambiguity

by Rabbi Shlomo Schock

Every driving teacher knows that the first important step in proper driving is self confidence. Hesitation and a lack of determination can transform the best of drivers into a dangerous person. When we sit in a Beit Midrash or in a library and we swing back and forth spiritually, we can be very self satisfied and happy. It is not only permitted, it is actually desirable that we should attempt to extract the main thesis from every opposing viewpoint. Starting with a cocktail of ideas we can then conceive of a novel approach that was never expressed before. It is not in vain that the Tefillin we wear on our heads consist of four separate boxes, implying that many alternatives are acceptable in the world of the spirit. In contrast, the Tefillin on our hands is only one box, because in the world of accomplishment it is impossible for two conflicting policies to be in effect at the same time. It is wise at the theoretical stage to take into account all the possible alternatives of a subject, but when we come to take action the time has come to make a decision and to act according to one specific option.

When our enemies from the north and the south show their desire in an all-out war to destroy us, the wisest path will be to gather all our information and to "leave for war." Waging war in the fullest sense of the word will serve as the basis for victory. We must gather together everything we can in order to win the war. This can be compared to a medical operation, which may be painful but should be done quickly. To attempt to be both "considerate" and also "victorious" leads to hesitation, and the price then becomes much higher than attempting to fight an all-out war.

In this week's portion, it is written, "When you camp against your enemy, take care against every bad thing" [23:10]. Rashi explains, "take care, because the devil makes accusations in a time of danger." The ambiguity stemming from the devil leads to ambiguity at a time of danger, when we hesitate and stumble. The way to avoid the danger is to abandon our usual selves and to act in a way that is not typical for us.

All of our faith is based on the ability to leave. In the case of the Exodus from Egypt, the exit itself is not as important as the question of the place from which we came. We had many difficulties to overcome when we left, just as we had difficulties leaving all the other places during our long history of exiles.

The many references in our sources to the Exodus, many more than the creation of the world, lead us to the conclusion that by the act of leaving, first from Egypt and then from all the other places, we are continuing the holy act of creation. What will be the point of all of these acts of leaving if they do not teach us to "leave" for the next war, as will be necessary?