

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

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

### Daf HaShavua

*by Rabbi Martin van den Bergh, Wembley Synagogue*

**T**he commencement of Selichot tonight marks the second phase in the run up to the Yamim Noraim.

The first phase began on the second day of Rosh Chodesh Ellul, with the daily weekday blowing of the Shofar and reciting Psalm 27 at the end of Shacharit and Ma'ariv. Both phases awaken us to heed the call of the Prophet Jeremiah: "Return, you faithless children, and I will heal your faithlessness" (Jeremiah 3.22) and engage in the process of repentance.

Repentance presupposes both an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and a willingness to change. We are, however, averse to admitting our faults, a fact recognized by our Sages. So how do we encourage others to recognise their faults: by gentle persuasion or with sermons of "fire and brimstone"?

A story of the Chafetz Chaim points to the former course. He was giving a talk on the Mitzvah to reprove one's neighbour, when a maggid remarked: "Rabbi, I was in a certain town where people were breaking the norms of modesty and purity, and were violating the Shabbat openly. One Shabbat, with an aching heart I gave an impassioned sermon against all the breaches of sanctity. Before I could finish, an angry tumult arose in the congregation. As I was almost being pulled from the pulpit by force I was thinking how appropriate the words of the Sage are-'I wonder if there is anyone in this generation who will accept rebuke?'".

"Please," asked the Chafetz Chaim, "describe to me, my friend, how you delivered your sermon." "How?" he enquired. "Could I possibly have passed by such sinful behaviour in silence? Of course not. I cried out from the pain in my heart. O yes, I raised my voice to them in chastisement and warning."

The Chafetz Chaim, replied. "Tell me, my friend: when you obey the Torah's commandments by putting on Tefillin, do you raise your voice also to thunder and storm? What difference is there between observing the mitzvah of Tefillin and fulfilling the mitzvah of reprove a sinner? Plainly, just as there is no need to rant and thunder when we obey the Torah's command to 'bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes', so does the mitzvah of 'You shall surely reprove your neighbour' require no strident outcry!"

Acts of admonishment should not destroy or belittle. but should maintain our own dignity and that of others. When we sin, whether against G-d or against our fellow human beings, our own dignity and self-esteem is affected. We are worthy of standing before G-d, not because we have been angels, but because we have the ability to recognise our failings and resolve to correct them, as Moses declared at the commencement of today's Sidra: "You stand this day, all of you, before the L-d your G-d".

This Shabbat marks my departure for Hong Kong. It has been a great privilege to serve Anglo-Jewry. May our communities here continue to stand before G-d upholding our Torah while resolving to grow spiritually, morally and religiously. May we all be inscribed in the Book of Life. © 2006 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**A**fter telling the entire nation to "be strong and remain brave" (Devarim 31:6), Moshe turned to Yehoshua in front of them and encouraged him to "be strong and remain brave" as well (31:7). As if Moshe saying so wasn't enough, G-d Himself tells Yehoshua to "be strong and remain brave" (31:23).

And this wasn't the first time. When G-d told Moshe that he will not take the nation into the Promised Land, He told him to "strengthen" Yehoshua to prepare him for the task (1:38). Then again when Moshe begged G-d to let him enter the land, he was told to "strengthen and make [Yehoshua] brave," for he will be the one who leads the nation into their inheritance (3:28).

This encouragement (or warning that Yehoshua will not be successful without being strong and brave) didn't stop after Moshe died either. Three times within four verses (Yehoshua 1:6-7 and 9) G-d tells the new leader that in order to succeed he must "be strong and remain brave." Obviously, it was very important that Yehoshua be "strong and brave," but why did it have to be repeated so many times?

When G-d told Yehoshua to "be strong and remain brave" (31:23), it was in the midst of His commanding Moshe to teach the entire nation the song of "Ha'azinu" (31:19), because it was inevitable that the nation would sin and would suffer all of the terrible

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things described in last week's Parasha (see 31:16-21 and 31:29). Imagine what must have gone through the minds and hearts of the people. Here it is, Moshe's last day, and besides losing their (human) leader and having to transition to new leadership, they are told that they will ultimately fail and be thrown out of the land they were so looking forward to living in throughout their journey in the desert. Pretty disheartening. Yet, despite knowing that ultimately they will be forced into exile, they are supposed to stand up against the mighty inhabitants of Canaan to conquer it.

Anybody who has had to work hard in order to accomplish something has experienced moments of truth when one must reach deep inside to muster up enough strength and courage to fight through all of the seemingly endless obstacles that come up. It is the strength of conviction towards reaching the goal that keeps one going, despite not knowing if things will work out in the end; a conviction that would be nearly impossible to maintain if it was known that the goal would either never be reached or only be temporary. Knowing that it was inevitable that they would not stay in the land they would have to work so hard to conquer could have made it very difficult, if not impossible, to succeed. Perhaps it was for this reason that Yehoshua (and the nation) had to be encouraged so strongly, and so often, to "be strong and remain brave." It will not be easy, and will not be permanent, but it is well worth it - so stick with it and don't give up.

In one week we will be standing before G-d in judgment, as Rosh Hashana begins the "ten days of repentance" that culminate with Yom Kippur. Have you made your New Year's resolutions yet? Hopefully we have become bit better over the year, having gained more knowledge and grown spiritually since last year. But were we able to keep *all* of last year's promises? Sure we *wanted* to, but I don't think I'm going out on a limb by saying that most people have not. How can we go into the High Holidays thinking that this year will be different? Knowing that chances are we will not be able to fulfill this year's promises either can sabotage the process, thereby preventing a whole-hearted attempt at true introspection and meaningful improvement.

"Be strong and remain brave!" Even if we can't conquer all of our weaknesses, we can surely try. We become better via the attempt itself, and, at the very

least, can minimize the effects of our current flaws. And we can improve in some areas (if not all), but must first identify which areas need improvement. The process itself brings us closer to the Creator, along with a better prospect for a happy and healthy 5767. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**P**arshat Nitzavim, the first of the two portions we read this week, is replete with the message of teshuvah (repentance). Teshuvah is most often associated with our return to G-d. This portion also speaks of a different form of teshuvah - the return of G-d.

Note the sentence "V'shav Hashem...et shevutkha" which is often translated "then the Lord your G-d will bring back your captivity." (Deuteronomy 30:3) The term used here is not "ve-heishiv" which means G-d will "bring back" your captivity, rather it is "ve-shav" which literally means that G-d "will return with" your captivity. The message according to the Midrash is clear. When we are in captivity G-d is in exile with us. (Rashi, Deuteronomy 30:3) Thus, when we return, G-d returns with us as He, too, has been exiled.

Similarly, G-d first appears to Moshe in a burning bush telling him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. (Exodus 3:2) The Midrash points out that G-d purposely appears in the lowly bush to teach that He felt the pain of the Jewish people enslaved in Egypt. As we were lowly, so did G-d feel that lowliness. G-d is one in our suffering, empathizing with our despair. (Rashi, Exodus 3:2)

This idea teaches an important message. G-d is a G-d of love who cares deeply for His people. Hence, when we are cast aside, G-d suffers with us and is cast aside as well.

This concept finds expression in the mourning process. When leaving someone sitting shiva, we recite the formula of "ha-Makom yenehem etkhem - may G-d comfort you." But suppose there is only one mourner? Should we use the word etkhem (you, plural) rather than otkha or otakh (you, singular).

Many rabbis insist that we still use the plural form. According to this view, it can be suggested that even when one mourns alone, one is not alone. G-d feels our loss to the extent that He is sitting shiva with us, hence etkhem. From this perspective, G-d is the comforter and the comforted. And so we recite, may G-d comfort you - with the you including G-d.

No wonder then, when reciting kaddish, we begin with "Yitgadel, ve-yitkadesh" which means "may G-d become great, and may G-d become holy." With the death of a human being, with a family in bereavement, G-d, as it were, is not fully great and holy as He suffers with us. Thus, these words are in the

future tense. Indeed, the kaddish may be interpreted as our words of comfort to G-d Himself.

As we participate in the teshuvah process on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur this idea teaches that G-d is one with us, caring, leading and carrying us from step to step, higher and higher. As we return to G-d, G-d returns to us. © 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 SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

“**A**nd you are standing this day all of you, your elders the leaders of your tribes and every person of Israel, from those who chop the wood to those who draw forth the water to enter into the Covenant with the Lord your G-d...” (Deuteronomy 29:9-11)

Moses is now establishing the third and final covenant between the Israelites and G-d, immediately prior to their entry into the Land of Israel. Obviously he wishes to include the entire spectrum of different financial, intellectual and social classes of the Israelites - from the highest to the lowest. This formulation is therefore a strange one; the verse should have stated "from the elders to the choppers of wood, from the heads of your tribes to the drawers of the water" and not "from those who chop the wood to those who draw forth the water", since these last two categories are very much on the same class level. Is Moses' formulation telling us something which we cannot see when we merely read the simple words of the text?

I believe the answer can be found in the very following words of the Biblical text, which declare that the Covenant includes "those who are presently with us standing today before the Lord your G-d as well as those who are not standing with us today." (Deut. 29:13,14) This very special Covenant includes historic Israel, the people of past, present and future. Since G-d is eternal, it makes sense that he must enter into a relationship with all generations, from the very origins of our nation until its ultimate culmination. Now the Bible does describe our very first patriarch and the founder of our nation as one who chops wood. When Abraham was commanded by G-d to bring his most beloved son Isaac as a whole burnt offering the text specifies "And he (Abraham) chopped the wood for the offering" (Genesis 22:3) and Elijah the prophet is Biblically pictured as the one who draws forth water (Kings 1, 8:44). When Elijah established a contest at Mount Carmel between the Prophet of G-d and the prophets of the idol Baal, he instructed, "fill up four jugs with water and pour them out upon the whole burnt offering."

From this perspective, the Midrash provides a fascinating insight into Moses' formulation. Why did the Master prophet Moses use the expression "from the

choppers of wood to the drawers of water"? Perhaps he was utilizing a short-hand method of saying from Abraham the chopper of wood to Elijah the one who drew forth the water, from the very first Jew to whom G-d charged with the mission that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you" until the very last Jew before Messianic times, the great herald who says "behold I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord " (Malakhi 3:23) In effect, Moses is establishing G-d's covenant with the whole of Jewish history, from its very dawning with the founder of ethical monotheism until its culmination at the realization of a world of peace in messianic times.

Fascinatingly enough these two over towering Biblical personalities meet together in a major Jewish Life-cycle event as well as in a major Hebrew calendar event. We begin every male circumcision with the very Biblical verse in which the Almighty began to command the first patriarch to have himself and his household circumcised: "Walk before me and you shall become whole and pure" (Genesis 17: 1) And of course the 'Chair of Elijah' is prominently featured in every circumcision as well when - especially in the Oriental traditions - many songs are chanted in praise of the honored guest Elijah. Both of these great individuals deserve to be honored - and to meet together - at every circumcision. After all, G-d promised Abraham that his progeny would live forever, and that the Divine Covenant - expressed in the flesh of every male Jew by means of the circumcision ceremony - would be an eternal covenant. In effect, G-d's mention of Abraham is also a confirmation that the Almighty is fulfilling His promise made more than 4,000 years ago. And since it was Elijah who - in a moment of anger and frustration at the wayward backsliding of the Jewish nation - cried out to G-d, "(the Israelites) are not keeping Your Covenant", it is only poetically just that the Almighty insist that Elijah be present at every circumcision ceremony in order to show him that the Jews are far more faithful than he had thought they would be.

And Abraham and Elijah meet once again at every Passover Seder celebration. Abraham's initial 'Covenant between the Pieces' is cited at the very beginning of our retelling of the Exodus from Egypt, and a special goblet for Elijah - which Jewish legend insists that he himself comes to drink a little bit of - is prepared as we open the door to greet him before our closing Grace after the Meal. The golden chain of Jewish history is punctuated by moments of travail and sacrifice - as symbolized by the blood of the circumcision rite, as well as by exalted expressions and experiences of redemption, as symbolized by our seder celebration. It is only fitting that Abraham the chopper of the wood and Elijah the drawer of the water should be featured when Moses presents the Covenant which

will span Jewish history from beginning to end. © 2006  
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**RABBI LEVI COOPER**

## Desiring the Heart

**T**he behavior of our contemporaries is a common yardstick we use to assess our conduct. Without such an index, we measure our own progress or contribution in a vacuum. The Talmud describes how the sages of Yavneh would gauge their own deeds in an oft-repeated lesson (B. Berachot 17a):

"I am a creature and my peer is a creature: My work is in the city and his work is in the field; I arise early for my work and my peer arises early for his work. Just as he does not aspire to distinguish himself by doing my work, thus I do not aspire to distinguish myself by doing his work. And lest you say: 'I do much and he does little' - [this is not accurate] for we have taught: 'Both the one who does much and the one who does little [are equal], as long as each person directs his heart towards Heaven."

It's a captivating motto declaring different - but equally valid - spiritual roles in our society. There is, however, some uncertainty regarding the character of the speaker in this adage, and even more haziness regarding the identity of the speaker's peer. The commentators offer a number of suggestions.

Since the lesson was taught by the sages of Yavneh, Rashi (11th century, France) suggests that the passage refers to Torah scholars who are comparing their existence with the lives of their uneducated peers. The contribution of the scholar, dedicated to poring over the texts of our Tradition, seems to be far more significant than those of the unlearned farmer who spends his days toiling in the fields. The sages reject this appraisal, reminding themselves that our roles should be gauged according to the heartfelt quality of our service to G-d.

Though Rashi's approach focuses on occupational locations - the city versus the field - it is strange to find the sages calling the unlearned "haveri" (my peer). As one commentator points out, this term is usually reserved for the learned (Maharsha, 16th-17th centuries, Poland). To whom might this passage be referring? Perhaps the peer is also one involved in daily Torah study, albeit to a lesser extent than the Yavneh sages. Though the peer's inherent capabilities don't reach those of the sages, his contribution is duly recognized, for Torah study is judged according to investment, not achievement.

This approach, however, lacks strong textual support. Does the one who learns minimally find himself only in the field? Moreover, where in the passage is there a hint that the peer has studied at all? Perhaps most significantly, this approach validates only two similar models: those who learn excessively and those who learn minimally. Is there no room for

acknowledging those whose service to G-d does not bring them into the study halls?

A third suggestion compares those who study with those who provide financial support for scholars (Rabbi Yoshiya Pinto, 16th-17th centuries, Damascus). The Almighty created us for different roles - some of us were created to study, others to support those who study. We both rise early: the scholar rises to learn Torah, while the merchant rises to provide the scholar with sustenance. The scholar could not succeed in the business world; the merchant would not thrive in the beit midrash (study hall). The necessary symbiosis between the two makes their contributions of equal value in a final reckoning.

A more narrow reading understands the speaker to be the Talmudist whose peer, the Mishnaist, has not reached great depths of scholarship (Rabbi Naftali Katz, 17th-18th centuries, Poland). The Talmudist performs his public duty by ruling on matters of law, never shying from his communal responsibility. The Mishnaist studies with no airs of being a halachic decisor, plugging away at the basic texts of our canon. The two scholars are vast distances apart, yet they are assessed not by how much material they studied, but by how sincerely they studied it.

Though this reading seems to be hierarchical, its proponent insists that the sages were not trying to score points over counterparts who played a lesser role in the formation of normative practice. This may be a difficult claim to embrace, for the passage clearly seems to acknowledge the contribution of the Talmudist, while praising the Mishnaist for not being pretentious.

Thus we see that many commentators reduced the impact of this passage, defining the study of Torah as the only legitimate course. Going outside the confines of the beit midrash is validated only when there is still some minimal interaction with Torah, or when leaving is aimed at supporting Torah study. As we have seen, only Rashi validated the deeds of the unlearned, a route that involved no Torah study.

Using Kabbalistic language, the late-19th century Baghdadi scholar Rabbi Yosef Haim returned to the explanation offered centuries earlier by Rashi, albeit in a contemporary voice. The speaker in this passage is indeed a Torah sage, and his counterpart is none other than the unlearned merchant. The scholar remains in the study halls within the city, while those involved in business must travel beyond the town limits.

The Baghdadi commentator, however, tweaks the declaration that neither party encroach on the other's turf. The merchant doesn't claim he would study at the beit midrash benches if he weren't burdened with earning a living. The scholar, in turn, acknowledges that if he were involved in the business world, perhaps he would not be able to maintain a high standard of honesty in his dealings. The sage might be tempted to

claim that, in a final assessment, his contribution is greater for he has busied himself with Torah. Such an accounting is foolish, for faithful business transactions equally contribute to the repairing of our fragmented world.

Thus we see that the heart's heavenly intent is the most important consideration when gauging the worth of our actions. As our sages have simply stated (B. Sanhedrin 106b, and widely quoted): "The Holy One, blessed be He, desires the heart." © 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 YISSOCHER FRAND

### RavFrand

In Parshas Nitzavim, the Torah says, "For you know how you lived in the Land of Egypt and how you traversed the nations whose countries you have passed through. You have seen their abominations and their detestable idols (es shikutzeihem v'es giluleihem) of wood and stone, of silver and gold that were with them." [Devorim 29:15-16] The Torah refers to the pagan idols of the nations in a most derogatory fashion. The word "sheketz" means disgusting. The root of the word "giluleihem" is "galal," the word describing human excrement.

The Brisker Rav points out that the above cited pasukim [verses] first refer to the idols of the nations in the most disrespectful of terms- es shikutzeihem v'es giluleihem-but then describe them in terms of raw materials-wood and stone (etz v'even), silver and gold (kesef v'zahav). Etz v'even does not sound so bad. Kesef v'zahav even sound attractive.

Which is it? Are the idols sheketz and galal or are they kesef and zahav?

The Brisker Rav explained that this pasuk [verse] is teaching that when a person first sees something disgusting, his immediate and natural reaction is one of revulsion. "This is nothing short of disgusting." But human tendency is that after a person sees it for a while and gets used to it, it does not seem as disgusting anymore. It is then perceived in quite neutral terms- like wood and stone. Ultimately, if a person continues to see it and becomes even more accustomed to it, that which the person originally considered revolting and abominable will be considered like silver and gold.

This addresses one of the most basic of human traits that is both the bane of mankind and at the same time is also the salvation of mankind: We can become accustomed to anything. If we could not get accustomed to anything, we would not be able to survive. Sometimes, we see people who went through

the concentration camps, where the conditions were unspeakable. How did they do it? The answer is that to some extent, they got used to it. That ability can be very useful. But on the other hand, this same ability can be very destructive. UNFORTUNATELY, we can become accustomed to anything. That which was once disgusting can become the norm.

This is indeed what the Gemara means when it says "This is the way of the evil inclination: Today it advises-do thus. Tomorrow it advises- do thus. Until eventually it advises-go worship idols." [Shabbos 105b] The slippery slope proceeds. At each step, a person rationalizes that which had originally been "unthinkable". It doesn't bother us anymore and in fact becomes the next plateau from which a person sinks lower and lower until the person eventually goes on to worship idolatry.

If a person had been away from this country for ten years and returned today and listened just to the radio-to family oriented programming- the person would be startled at the language used and the type of topics being discussed. One merely has to pick up a copy of the daily New York Times to be shocked by things that would have considered obscene 10 years ago. What happened?

We become spiritually deadened by what we see on billboards, by what we see as advertisements on buses or subways, and by what we hear on radio stations. It is mind-boggling!

Ten years ago, this was "shikutzeihem v'giluleihem". It was disgusting! Then it became "etz v'even". We became accustomed to it. Now it is even like "kesef v'zahav asher imahem". We already expect it and look forward to hearing and reading it.

#### **Grabbing The Conductor's Hand**

I heard the following story from Rabbi Ephraim Waxman. I don't want the same thing that happened to him to happen to me, so I am relating this story at this time:

Rabbi Waxman once davened for the Amud on Yom Kippur in a certain Yeshiva. Before Neilah, he was asked to speak to the congregation to give them spiritual arousal before the final prayers of Yom Kippur. He related the following parable.

There was once a person who had to travel by train between two cities. He inquired as to the price and was told that there was a sliding scale. A regular seat in "Coach" was a certain amount. First class was quite a bit more. However if he would arrive at the train station 4 hours before departure, he could purchase a first class ticket for the same price as coach. The fellow was not keen on spending four hours at the train station waiting for his train so he decided to forgo the first class ticket.

He was then told that if he would arrive 2 hours before departure, he would be guaranteed his choice of

coach seats. After that it would be first come, first served. But again he said to himself "Why do I have to go there 2 hours early, waste my time, and sit around? So I won't get my choice of coach seats!"

He was then told that if he arrives a half hour before departure, all the seats will have been sold. The train will have standing room only available. "But," our passenger figures, "it is a short trip. What do I care if I need to stand? I'll come a half hour early and will buy a standing room only ticket."

As things have it, he does not come 4 hours early. He does not come 2 hours early. He does not even come a half hour early. He comes at the last minute. He comes down to the platform and the train is leaving. He starts running and running after the train and he sees that the conductor on the caboose is holding out his hand. If he can just latch onto the conductor's hand, the conductor will pull him onto the train. He runs and runs and tries to grab that hand.

Rabbi Waxman then quoted the sentence from our liturgy "You send forth your hand to sinners" (Ata nosen yad l'poshim). Rabbi Waxman explained that Neilah represents the idea of Ata nosen yad l'poshim. One who waits until Neilah to do Teshuva is like the passenger running after the train to try to grab the conductor's hand.

Rosh Chodesh Elul is like 4 hours before the train leaves. That is when a person can get first class for the price of coach. Rosh HaShanna is like 2 hours before departure time-when a person can still get his selection of coach seats. The Ten Days of Repentance is first come first serve. The earlier prayers on Yom Kippur are like "standing room only." However Neilah is already "Ata nosen yad l'poshim".

Rabbi Waxman then said to the Yeshiva students "My friends, now is the time for "You stretch forth Your hand to the sinners." He proceeded to daven Neilah from the Amud and felt that the atmosphere throughout the room was highly charged with spiritual emotion.

A young student came to him after Neilah and said, "Rebbe, why did you not tell us this story on Rosh Chodesh Elul?" I do not want anyone to blame me for not telling such a story earlier, so I tell it now. © 2006 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

**DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

## What's Bothering Rashi

**T**his week we have two short parshiyot as a double portion, Nitzavim-Vayelech. These parshiyot were spoken by Moses on the last day of his life. In Nitzavim, Moses reviews the covenant between Israel and Hashem; warns again about the folly and evils of idol worship and describes the destruction in the Land that will follow as a consequence of straying from the Torah path. It also contains the section on Teshuva, returning to Hashem.

In Vayelech, Moses bids good bye to his People; again designates Joshua to lead the People. Hashem tells both Moses and Joshua how the People will stray in the future. Then Moses prepares them to hear the Song, Ha'azinu (the next parsha).

The first Rashi-comment in Vayelech, which is a non-comment, sparks thoughts. "And Moses went and spoke these words to all of Israel." (Deuteronomy 31:1)

"And Moses went"-RASHI: [no comment] This "Rashi-comment" is a bit strange, for there is no comment here. The question is: Why does Rashi give us a dibbur hamatchil when he has no comment to offer on these words? Many have wondered about this strange phenomenon.

The answer is quite simple. We have already explained ( See What's Bothering Rashi? Bamidbar Verse 1:1), that Rashi begins his commentary to every Torah Portion in the Chumash by quoting the first words of the parsha which form the name of that parsha, whether or not he has a comment to make. Our parsha is named Vayelech, so Rashi quotes the words (Hebrew) "Vayelech Moshe" even though he has no comment to make on these words.

There are similar instances of this in the book of Deuteronomy. See the first comment in parshat Re'eh (Deut.11:26) and parshat Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:1). Many other such cases can be found throughout Rashi's Torah commentary. Rashi's lack of commentary is more obvious in our verse, because here Rashi has no other comment on this verse. But in the two cases cited above Rashi does have a comment on other words in the first verse, although his comment has nothing to do with his first dibbur hamatchil. That dibbur, as we said, is placed there because they are the first words of the parsha.

This custom of quoting the first words of each parsha probably was done to show the student where a new parsha began. Remember, originally, Rashi's commentary was hand written on a separate scroll, without the words of the Chumash accompanying it. Only after the printing press was invented (several hundred years after Rashi's death) was the Torah printed together with commentaries. Then Rashi's commentary was on the same page as the Torah's words themselves. Since we mention the printing press, it is interesting to note that the first Hebrew book printed (circa 1470) was Rashi's Torah commentary. At this first publication it was printed without the Chumash. In other words, Rashi was printed even before the Torah itself was printed! This is some indication of the high regard his commentary had already gained among the people by the 15th century.

Although Rashi does not comment on the words "And Moses went," other commentators do. As you look at the verse, can you think of the question they deal with?

A Question: The Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel and others ask: Where did Moses go? The Torah only says "And Moses went," but doesn't say where he went or why he needed to go anywhere. In the previous parsha, Nitzavim, it says that Moses addressed the whole nation (Deut. 29:9). What need then was there for him to go anywhere since, in our parsha, he continued to speak to the people and the whole nation was present?

Some Answers: The Ramban explains that after Moses finished his address to the people (in Nitzavim), the people returned to their tents. Now Moses wanted to bid them farewell before his death. This was a personal message and he wanted to deliver it personally. And so "he went" from the Camp of the Levites, where he resided, to the Camp of Israel, where the people resided and personally bid them farewell.

The Ibn Ezra gives an interesting explanation of the reason for Moses' going to each tribe. He says that Moses wanted to console them on his imminent death. He told them they should not fear, for Hashem will guide Joshua, who will take care of them after his death. The Ibn Ezra speculates that it was at this time, on these individual visits with each tribe, that Moses gave them his final blessings, as is recorded later in parshat V'zot Habrachah.

Moses could just as easily (actually, more easily for him) have called the people to assemble before him, as he had done whenever he had a message for them. But his humility prevented him from exploiting his lofty position as leader and the respect the people had for him. Instead, he personally went from tribe to tribe to pay his last farewells. Moses' modesty is thus as evident on the last day of service to his people as it was on his first day, forty years earlier, when he was chosen to lead them. At that time he said in his self-effacing manner "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" (Exodus 3:12). The circle is now closed when Moses, at the end of his public service, humbly makes his way to each tribe to speak with them personally and convey his blessings to them. © 2006 Dr. A. Bonchek & torah.org

**RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## Haftarah

**T**his week's haftarah marks the climax of a seven week series of reflection on Jewish redemption. In this final presentation, Hashem announces His personal return to the Jewish people. Now that every other dimension of redemption is in place, the time has finally arrived for Hashem to rest His Divine Presence amongst His people. Eretz Yisroel has been revived, Yerushalayim has been rebuilt, the exiles have returned en masse, but the ultimate objective has yet to be seen. In response to this, the prophet Yeshaya quotes the Jewish people saying, "I will be gladdened by Hashem, My soul will rejoice over My G-d." (61,10) Chazal in

Yalkut Shimoni (505) view the Jewish people's response to be specifically related to the return of Hashem to Yerushalayim. The Jewish people respond to all the magnificent prophecies of their glorious future and proclaim that their true source of happiness is but one, the return of Hashem to His beloved people. They sorely long for the privilege of sensing the presence of Hashem amongst them and feeling the closeness and love He has for His people. They resolve that they will be gladdened and happy only through His return to them.

The prophet continues and describes the proportions of this return and the extent of Hashem's cherished relationship. "No longer will you be referred to as forsaken because about you it shall be proclaimed, 'My desire is in you.'" (62, 4) Hashem pledges to fully identify with His people and to display His true desire in them. His relationship with them will be so encompassing and evident that a newly gained identity will be conveyed upon the Jewish people, "Hashem's desirable one". But a worry crosses the minds of the Jewish nation concerning the nature of their forthcoming relationship. After all, weren't they previously associated with Hashem in similar proportions before being rejected by Him? If so, they reason that although Hashem will truly return to them it will only feel to them like a remarriage. Their long awaited association will have a nostalgic air to it and won't bring them the true happiness they seek.

The prophet responds and reveals to them the indescribable proportions of their new relationship. Yeshaya says, "Hashem will rejoice over you like a groom over His bride." (62, 5) The Radak explains that Hashem's return to the Jewish people will possess all the freshness and novelty of a groom to his bride. Their relationship represents the epitome of happiness and appreciation as they begin forging their eternal bond with love and respect. In this same manner Hashem's newly founded relationship with His people will possess similar qualities. It will be so complete and perfect that it won't leave room for reflections upon their past. The happiness and fulfillment that they will experience will be so encompassing that it will feel like a fresh start, a relationship never experienced before. The Radak adds an indescribable dimension to this relationship and explains that this sense of newness will actually continue forever. Instead of becoming stale and stagnant their relationship with Hashem will always be one of growth and development and will constantly bring them to greater heights. Each newly gained level of closeness will be so precious and dear to them that it will be regarded as a completely new relationship replete with all of its sensation and appreciation.

But the most impressive factor of all is that the above description is not only our feelings towards Hashem but is, in truth, Hashem's feelings towards us. The prophet says that Hashem Himself will forever

rejoice over us with the sensation of a groom over His newly acquired bride. From this we discover that Hashem's feelings towards His people are literally boundless. Even after all the straying we have done, Hashem still desires to unite with us in the proportions described above. He desires to erase the past and establish a perfectly new relationship, so perfect and new that it will continuously produce the heightened emotions of a bride and groom for eternity.

These emotions are, in truth the hidden message behind the tefillin which we don each day. As we wrap the tefillin strap around our finger we recite special passages expressing our betrothal to Hashem. This experience represents our placing the wedding ring of Hashem on our finger, portraying our perfect relationship with Him. But our Chazal (see Brochos 6a) inform us that Hashem also wears tefillin. In proof of this they cite a passage in this week's haftorah which states, "Hashem swears by His right hand and by the strength of His arm." (62, 8) Chazal explain that the words, "the strength of His arm" refer to the tefillin worn on the left arm. The Maharsha expounds upon this concept and explains that Hashem actually binds Himself to the Jewish people. Hashem's tefillin, like ours, represent devotion and commitment, His commitment to His beloved people. Hashem cherishes His relationship with us and as an expression of His commitment to us, He also wears a betrothal band. Eventually our boundless love for Hashem will find its expression together with Hashem's boundless love for us and together we will enjoy this indescribable relationship forever and forever. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**A**t the end of last week's Torah portion, after the description of the blessings and the curses, it is written, "These are the words of the covenant that G-d commanded Moshe to make with Bnei Yisrael in the land of Moav, aside from the covenant that He made with them at Chorev" [Devarim 28:69]. Thus, two covenants are compared to each other—the one at Mount Chorev, as opposed to the new one, in Devarim, on the Plains of Moav, right before the nation enters Eretz Yisrael. How are the two covenants related? Why is one covenant not sufficient?

Evidently the key to answering these questions can be seen by comparing how the two covenants are described. In the beginning of this week's portion, the covenant on the Plains of Moav is described as follows: "But it is not only with you that I make this covenant and take this oath. Rather, it is for whoever stands with us today before our G-d and for whoever is not here with us today." [29:13-14]. This is quite similar to what is written about the covenant of Chorev, at the beginning

of Moshe's sermon about the mitzvot: "It is not with our fathers that G-d made this covenant, but with us, we who are here today, all of us alive today." [5:3]. By comparing the two passages, we can see the important difference between them. With respect to Chorev, Moshe emphasizes that the covenant was made with those who were with him "today," while at Moav the opposite is emphasized: the covenant obligates both those who were there "today" and also those who were not there, referring to the future generations.

Evidently this difference stems from an important element emphasized in the book of Devarim. The covenant at Chorev is based on the fact that those who accepted its terms had themselves experienced the appearance of G-d. "G-d spoke to you face to face, on the mountain, from within the flames" [5:4]. Thus, this covenant first and foremost obligates the people who were present at the momentous event. Only later on is it explained why the children, who were not present, are also obligated by the covenant (see 6:20-25). The covenant at Moav, on the other hand, was not aimed at individuals but rather at the entire nation, "in order to establish you today as a nation for Him, while He will be a G-d for you" [29:12]. Since this covenant is with the nation, it automatically includes whoever is part of the nation. And that is the reason that this week's Torah portion emphasizes the severity of those who separate themselves from the nation. "A man or a woman, or a family or a tribe..." [29:17] who worships idols, will be punished measure for measure:

"And G-d will separate him because of the evil from all the tribes of Yisrael" [29:20].

Indeed, throughout all the chapters describing the covenant of the Plains of Moav there is a recurring theme—in essence only at this moment, right before the entry into the land, are Bnei Yisrael transformed into a real nation, one that will take possession of its heritage. This is what Moshe told the people explicitly in the previous portion: "Listen Yisrael, today you have become a nation for your G-d" [27:9]. A phrase that is repeated many times in the passage of the curses is, "Let the nation reply, Amen." While Bnei Yisrael are called a nation throughout the Torah, it is only now that this term takes on its full meaning, creating new mutual obligations between the Almighty and His nation.



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