

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“You shall not do like all that we are doing here today, each man what is fitting in his eyes” (Devarim 12:8). What is it that Moshe was telling them they couldn't do? Looking at the context can usually clue us in.

First Moshe told them that once they enter the Land of Israel they had to destroy all the places where the other nations had worshipped their deities (12:2). They had built alters in numerous locations, especially on high places and in fertile locations, and they all had to be razed. He then informed them that such decentralized worship would not be allowed even when worshipping the one true G-d (12:4-7). Instead, we will have one place of central worship, a place of G-d's choosing. We know that that place would be Yerushalayim (Jerusalem), and the repetition of this theme (12:11 and 12:13-14) teaches us that the same applied to the 369 years that the Mishkan was in Shiloh. Our verse telling us that things will be different then they are today, followed by the reason they will be different (12:9, "for we haven't reached our place of rest or our inheritance," which refer to Shiloh and Yerushalayim), indicates that the difference between then and now lies precisely in the topic at hand, i.e. the prohibition against bringing an offering any place we want and the requirement to bring it at the chosen place of central worship. When we get to our destination (Shiloh, and then Yerushalayim), we will not be able to do the things we are doing today, when we can bring our offerings to G-d whenever and wherever we see fit.

There's just one not-so-minor problem with this: In the desert and at the Plains of Moav (where Moshe was addressing the nation), it was also forbidden to bring an offering anywhere they wanted. All offerings had to be brought to the Mishkan (Vayikra 17:3-4), a requirement that remained in effect until the nation reached Gilgal, in the Land of Israel (Zevachim 112b).

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Therefore, Moshe could not have meant that we will no longer be able to bring an offering anywhere we want, as they had already been forbidden to. So what was it that Moshe was telling them they couldn't do that they had been doing "here today?"

Rashi, Rabbeinu Bachye and the Ralbag explain our verse in the exact opposite way. Rather than saying that they will no longer be able to bring offerings anywhere they want to (as they already couldn't), Moshe was telling them that they will be able to bring offerings wherever they want, once they reach Gilgal, until Shiloh is built. "You shall not do like we are doing here today," where private altars are forbidden, but "each man can [do] what is fitting in his eyes." Presumably because "you shall not do" implies forbidding something that had been permitted, Rashi focuses on another difference between the times that private altars are forbidden and when they are permitted. Only when private altars are forbidden can offerings of a personal obligation be brought; when private altars are allowed no private obligations can be brought at all, not even on the "large," central altar in the Mishkan. According to Rashi, our verse reads, "you shall not be able to do what we are allowed to do here today," as now we can bring any and all offerings, even personal obligations (such as a sin-offering), while once we reach Gilgal "[only] those things that a person sees fit to bring," i.e. voluntary offerings, will be allowed.

Although the Talmud (Zevachim 117a-118a) clearly understands "what is fit in a person's eyes" to refer specifically to voluntary offerings (and not to bringing offerings wherever a person wants), there are still several aspects of Rashi's (and by extension the Talmud's) explanation that don't seem to fit the context and verbiage of our verse.

First of all, why would Moshe, right in the middle of telling the nation about the requirement to bring offerings only at the place G-d chooses, stick in that "oh, by the way, even though now we also are limited to one location, the Mishkan, and I am telling you that eventually we will once again be limited to just one location, once we cross into the land, there will be a period of time (14 years) when this limitation doesn't apply." The context clearly focuses on the prohibition, not the exception.

Secondly, Moshe doesn't just say that "we have, until now, been limited, but won't always be." He says that things will be different than they are "here,

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today." This implies that there is something unique about the immediate place (here) and/or time (today), something that differentiates it from before "today" and before they got "here." But the prohibition against private altars (and the resultant ability to bring personal obligations) was in place since the Mishkan was built, 39 years before this verse was said! Why does Moshe add that they will not do later what they are doing "here, today" rather than just saying "now," as if the situation in the Plains of Moav is different than it was while traveling in the desert?

Additionally, while according to Rabbi Meyer personal obligations were prohibited during the period of time that private altars were permitted, according to Rabbi Yehudah all offerings were always allowed to be brought on the central altar of the Mishkan. The only thing that changed was whether a person could bring a voluntary offering on a private altar or not. How would Rabbi Yehudah read our verse if everything allowed before Gilgal was still allowed in Gilgal?

The Mishna (Zevachim 112b) tells us precisely when private altars were permitted and when they were forbidden. They were forbidden once the Mishkan was built, permitted when the nation reached Gilgal, forbidden in Shiloh, permitted in Nov and Givon, then forbidden (forever) once the Temple was built in Yerushalayim. Let's examine why it was forbidden or permitted in each of these locations.

The verses before and after the one we are discussing tell us that once we establish a central place of worship, private altars are forbidden. When the Mishkan was moved to Shiloh, the "portable" walls that were put up and taken down were replaced by stone walls (even though the ceiling was still the same), and in the Temple the entire structure was "permanent" (or at least as permanent as structures get). This qualified these two locations as being "established, chosen places of worship," negating private altars. In Nov and Givon, the original Mishkan from the desert was used, albeit without the Aron (ark of the covenant, which had been captured when Shiloh was destroyed). This was certainly a temporary situation, so private altars were permitted.

In the desert, the Mishkan moved from place to place, so was also "temporary," but G-d had specifically outlawed private altars to make sure that all offerings

were brought to Him (Vayikra 17:7; keep in mind that the nation had left Egypt only a year before, where they were part of its idol-worshipping culture, and they were traveling in the desert, where demon-worship was common). Additionally, the entire nation set up camp around the Mishkan, so was nearby when the need or desire to bring an offering arose.

In Gilgal, the Mishkan was only going to stay there until the land was conquered and distributed (to each Tribe). Also, rather than everyone being nearby, the nation had begun to spread out across the land. Therefore, even though the Aron was still in the Mishkan, private altars were allowed. However, the situation in Gilgal was very similar to the one in the Plains of Moav. The Mishkan was going to cross over into the land with the nation, and the people started to spread out past the "camp," especially the Tribes of Reuvain, Gad and (presumably) half of Menashe, who were fortifying their newly acquired cities and building barns for their animals (since their families and property would be there while they helped conquer the land on the western side of the Jordan River). Also, the fear of idol-worship that existed in the desert didn't apply in the Plains of Moav, and the nation was now 40 years removed from Egyptian culture. Yet, despite people being far away from the Mishkan, and the Mishkan only being at its current location temporarily, private altars were still forbidden until they reached Gilgal. (Technically, there still was a "camp," even if many left it for extended periods of time, so the original prohibition of bringing an offering "in the camp or outside of it" still applied.)

It is possible, therefore, that Moshe realized that the nation might assume that being in Gilgal would be no different than being in the Plains of Moav, and just as private altars were forbidden where they were now, they would be forbidden in Gilgal as well. Consequently, when Moshe was telling them about the prohibition that would begin in Shiloh, he first had to tell them that in Gilgal things would not be the same as they were "here, today" in the Plains of Moav. "You shall not do like we are doing here today," despite the similarities between here and Gilgal, as in Gilgal "each man [can do] what is fitting in his eyes," including bringing an offering on a private altar. Only when we reach a point of "resting" (from the conquest, etc., which was in Shiloh), and then again when we reach our inheritance (when the Temple is built in Yerushalayim) must all offerings be brought at the central place of worship. May we reach that point again, soon. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“See, I am giving before you this day a blessing and a curse...” (Deut 11:26)
So opens our Biblical portion, which is making

reference to the covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eybal which dramatically concludes the Book of Deuteronomy and precedes our entry into the land of Israel. What I would like to analyze in this commentary is a curious and seemingly pedantic detail, a strange grammatical formulation which, when properly understood, will shed light not only upon the nature of this third and final Pentateuchal covenant but also upon a fundamental philosophy of our religious nationality.

Our verse began with a singular verb which addresses an individual, re'eh - see, but then continues with a plural pronoun, lifnehem - (giving) before you, addressing a multitude. This grammatical switch in number - from singular to plural - is especially worthy of note, since when we do find such Biblical changes they take place in the opposite direction, from plural to singular. In the Biblical portion of the Decalogue, for example, G-d's introduction addresses in plural form the multitude of Israelites (Exodus 18: 4 ff : "You have seen -re'etem - what I have done to Egypt, and I lifted you - et'hem upon eagles' wings..."), but then switches to the singular form in the ten commandments themselves (Exodus 20:1 ff: "I am the Lord your G-d - E-lohekha, singular - whom I took you - hotzeitikha, singular - from the land of Egypt..., You shall not murder, lo tirtzah, singular").

Nahmanides explains the switch from plural to singular, and catalogues many other instances when such a transition in number appears, as the desire of G-d to make certain that His words are being heard not only as a command to the general masses but also as a personal injunction to each and every individual! (Ramban, on Genesis 18:3 s.v. Al na).

In effect, G-d is thereby appearing as a Hassidic Rebbe rather than as a Congregational Rabbi, in accordance with the common folk understanding of the distinction between the two. When a congregational Rabbi speaks, every individual believes that he is addressing the person next to him; when a Hassidic Rebbe speaks, every person listening knows and feels that he is addressing him personally.

But if this is the case, how can we understand our opening verse, in which G-d begins with the singular and continues with the plural? I believe that this unusual grammatical phenomenon speaks to the very definition of this third covenant, known as the covenant of arevut or mutual responsibility (B.T. Sotah 33 b). The Israelites, divided by the tribes in two groups of six stand together to receive G-d's blessings on Mt. Gerizim and G-d's curses on Mt. Eybal, poised before Shekhem and ready to enter the Promised Land. Our Biblical portion provides the exact location: "Are they not beyond the Jordan, ... in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the Aravah, over against Gilgal, beside the oak tree of Moreh?" (Deut 11:30). And the term aravah, or plains, is taken by the sages of the Talmud as a double entendre (play on words), the Hebrew arev also

meaning co-singer, the individual who takes financial responsibility if a borrower reneges on the payment of his debt. This is the covenant which insists that every Israelite must see himself as part of a whole, as a member of a nation which sees itself as a united organism whose separate individuals feel inextricably and indelibly bound to each other in fate, destiny and responsibility. Hence G-d begins with the singular and continues into the plural in order to impress upon the individual Israelite that he must in some way merge with the multitude that he must assume responsibility for the entire Jewish people, that "every Israelite is a co-signer, responsible for every other Israelite."

This is what I believe to be the higher meaning of a shomer torah u-mitzvot, literally a guardian over the Torah and Tradition. It is not sufficient to merely study Torah and to perform the commandments; just as a guardian takes responsibility for the objects in his possession, so must each of us - everyone in his/her own way - take responsibility for the dissemination of Torah and the establishment of proper Torah institutions in his/ her community, in his/her generation.

It is recorded that the famed Rav Meir Shapiro of Lublin (early twentieth century) was forced into a dispute with a Cardinal concerning the quality of our Jewish tradition. "The Talmud is blatantly anti - Christian," argued the Cardinal. "Does it not state that 'only Israelites are called adam (Hebrew for human beings) whereas Gentiles are not called adam,' and therefore we Gentiles are not considered by you to be human beings?!" The Rabbi explained that there are four synonyms for human being in the Hebrew language: gever, ish, enosh and adam. The first three of these nouns have both a singular and a plural: gevarim, ishim, aneshim; only adam has only one form, both singular and plural, humanity - a compound noun, including every one together as a single organism. If a Jew is suffering in an Islamic - Fundamentalist country, or if Israel seems to be in danger, Jews world - wide demonstrate and flock to their homeland. This is a unique Jewish quality, built into our third covenant. In the case of the Jewish nation, the singular merges into the plural, the individual Jew is an inextricable part of his people. © 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI LEVI COOPER

Fine-Tuning Our Prayers

With the advent of the hassidic movement in the late 18th century, the contours of the regnant prayer endeavor were challenged and many new paths to heartfelt communion with G-d were explored. One of the popular innovations was delaying the beginning of the service to provide the opportunity for mental, emotional and spiritual preparation for the prayer journey.

Undeniably, preparations for prayers were not the invention of the 18th-century Hassidim; our sages

tell us that the pious people of old - who also bore the moniker Hassidim - would tarry for one hour and only then pray so that they might direct their hearts to the Almighty (M. Berachot 5:1). One sage adduces scriptural support for the practice of preparatory meditation (B. Berachot 32b): "Fortunate are those who bide in Your house" - readying themselves for prayer, and only afterwards - "they will yet praise You" (Psalms 84:5).

Following this mold, some Hassidim would spend much of their day ensconced in prayer. Many traditionalist opponents of the fledgling movement viewed this preoccupation with prayer with distaste, asserting that such lengthy prayer preparation went beyond the rabbinic paradigm (Rabbi Ya'acov Emden, 18th century, Altona).

Hassidim, for their part, felt that preparation was no indulgence; indeed, it was a necessity for successfully and effectively venturing into the Divine world of prayer. To highlight the importance of attaining the right mindset before embarking upon prayer, hassidic masters composed prayers that were to be recited before the onset of the service.

The idea of a prayer to precede prayer can already be found in the Talmud. Though the Amida originally began with the blessing recalling the unique relationship between our forefathers and the Almighty, we herald the prayer with a biblical verse (Psalms 51:17): "G-d, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise" (B. Berachot 4b; 9b). This verse is not considered essential, and if one were to inadvertently omit it there would be no need to repeat the Amida (Rabbi Israel Meir Hakohen of Radin, 19th-20th century, Poland). Nevertheless, our sages tell us the verse which requests Divine guidance does not constitute an unnecessary interruption and is a valid extension of the prayer.

Drawing on this talmudic passage, the much-loved hassidic master, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev (1740-1809), explained that this additional line was a later addition, born of the need to focus before commencing the Amida. According to the Berditchever, the former greats had no regular need for this preparatory formula.

Nevertheless, even the heroes of old had occasion to turn to G-d before beginning their prayers. Thus the Berditchever expounds the claim of Moses: "And I pleaded with G-d at that time, sayingÉ" (Deuteronomy 3:23). Having exhausted known prayer avenues, Moses turned to G-d with beseeching guidance as to how to effectively pray. Moses was therefore saying: "And I pleaded with G-d at that time" - having unsuccessfully tried to pray - "as to what to say."

A disciple of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, Rabbi Yosef of Nemirov related a wonderful parable in his correspondence with an anti-hassidic activist: There was a king who delighted in music. He chose musicians

who would visit the palace daily to play for his enjoyment. The musicians were handsomely rewarded for their efforts and those who arrived before the appointed time were awarded a bonus. For the musicians this was a labor of love, for they were driven by adoration for the king, paying little attention to the reward.

As nature would have it, some of the musicians were more talented and diligent than their counterparts, arriving well before their peers with instruments that were in splendid condition. Yet they all arrived by the appointed time, playing out of love for their master and enchanting the king with a magnificent daily musical routine.

Time passed and the children took the place of their ancestors. The children, alas, lacked the talent and the pure motives of their predecessors. They were single-mindedly interested in remuneration for their services, paying little attention to the quality of the music. Indeed, some of the new musicians followed the example they had seen in their youth, arriving early at the palace. Sadly, their instruments were not tuned properly nor had they adequately practiced; all that concerned them was the monetary bonus for early arrival.

The others also followed in the footsteps of their predecessors, arriving at the appointed time, regrettably with no preparation. Their musical achievements were also sorely lacking. Their late arrival meant they hurriedly went through the routine, all the while eying their wages.

When the king heard the cacophony of these so-called musicians, he walked out. Unfortunately, the musicians were so oblivious to reality they did not perceive the displeasure of the king and continued the daily ritual.

Among these charlatans were a few worthy people, who realized their instruments were not in good working order and that they lacked the necessary talent to please the king. They decided to devote time and energy to fixing their instruments and improving their skills. This investment meant they would arrive at the palace after the appointed hour. When they entered, they heard the racket of their colleagues and could not concentrate on the task at hand. They found a quiet corner where they were able to play.

Having fulfilled their daily quota and having earned their coveted reward, the purported musicians left the palace while their earnest peers lingered, trying their utmost to improve their melodies. The king beheld their sincere efforts and was pleased. True, they lacked the talent of their predecessors and their instruments were not as finely tuned, yet they were troubled by these blemishes and had gone to great lengths to rectify them.

Preparing for prayer is like tuning a musical instrument; a necessity before any quality performance.

It is the difference between a harmonious symphony and a discordant cacophony. Preparation for the prayer journey can be as simple as a biblical verse beseeching G-d for Divine assistance, or it can constitute hours of meditation. It is this groundwork that enhances the melodious harmony of our prayers. © 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

This week's Torah portion gives us a curious mitzvah. It tells us not to add or subtract to the commandments. (Deuteronomy 13:1) This seems to go against the idea of the ongoing development of Jewish law on the part of the rabbis. (See Deuteronomy 17:8-13)

Consider, for example, one of the dietary laws. The Torah states that one may not eat meat and milk together. The rabbis take this prohibition, and extend it to include the consumption of fowl and milk. Does this extension violate the prohibition of adding to the Torah?

Rambam (Maimonides) feels that this in fact may be the case. He codifies that if one maintains that fowl and milk are enjoined by Torah law, this extension is a violation of adding to the Torah. However, if the rabbis declared that as an added precaution, because of the similarity between fowl and animal food, that fowl together with milk is rabbinically forbidden-including fowl as a rabbinic prohibition is perfectly legitimate. (Laws of Mamrim 2:9)

This idea helps explain a well known midrashic comment on the Garden of Eden narrative. According to the text of the Torah, Eve tells the serpent that G-d had commanded that the tree of knowledge not be touched. Eve, however, adds to the decree. As the Midrash explains, G-d had only forbidden eating, not touching. The serpent then pushed Eve against the tree, declaring, "as you have not died from touching it, so you will not die from eating thereof." In the words of Rashi: "She added to the command (of G-d), therefore, she was led to diminish from it." (Rashi, Genesis 3:3,4)

One could argue that Eve acted properly, after all, she, like the rabbis, only tried to protect G-d's commandment by extending the prohibition to touching. Her mistake, however, was saying that G-d had actually issued such a command. She should have declared that while G-d forbade the eating from the tree, as a precaution, as a "fence" around the law, she decided not to touch it as well.

Thus, rabbinic law is pivotal. Still, it is important to understand which laws are rabbinic and which are biblical in nature.

One final note: Separate from rabbinic legislation and interpretation is the halakic realm of humra. Humra is imposing a very stringent observance of the law. While stringency can elevate spirituality, it is essential to know when a practice falls into the category of humra and when it does not. Failure to make this distinction can often lead to the humra becoming the only accepted practice. This can be dangerous because it can lead to a lack of understanding and intolerance of the sometimes wide range of practices within a certain rabbinic law.

So, rabbis can extend the laws when there is a critical need, but they must do so with a realization of their responsibility not to blur the lines set out in the Torah. Throughout the ages rabbis have done so with the hope that their interpretations and legislations bring people closer to G-d and to one another. © 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

Seeing is believing and the first word in this week's parsha is r'eih -see. The Torah is evidently of the opinion that belief can be obtained by seeing life and events. There are things that are self-evident, and that by viewing those events one can make a correct and cogent choice between blessing and curses, between good and evil and between eternal life and mere human mortality.

The prophet Isaiah portrays the non-believers and doubters as being sightless people - blind to reality and history. Especially in our time when the ideologies of the past century that led so many millions astray and that also had a disastrous effect on the Jewish people as a whole have been proven worthless, it takes a particular form of sightlessness to continue to somehow believe in them. Even a cursory glance at Jewish history will reveal that the survival of the Jews as a people and as a force for civilization in the world is inextricably tied to its faith and observance of Torah values and lifestyle.

And if one only looks and correctly sees the situation of Israel and the Jews in the world today, one must be struck by the accuracy of the predictions for Israel as recorded in the book of Dvarim thirty-three hundred years ago. By seeing things clearly and correctly one can choose blessing and eternal life for one's self. And that is true for the totality of Israel and indeed for all of mankind as well.

At the conclusion of Moshe's life, the Torah informs us that he "saw" all of the Land of Israel and also foresaw all of the events that would befall the people of Israel there "even until the last day." It is interesting to note that the Lord saw fit, so to speak, to

show him the future and let him see it with his own eyes rather than just tell or describe it to him. Seeing it impresses its reality to Moshe's human eyes. Moshe is the symbol of farsighted vision in Jewish history. Therefore, he is the greatest - the father, so to speak - of all prophets.

When Jeremiah is told of the coming destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, he is not informed of it by a declaration of G-d. Rather, the Lord, so to speak, asks him: "Jeremiah, what do you see?" It is by seeing the impending catastrophe with his own eyes that Jeremiah is able to give focus and passion to his message of warning to the people of Israel.

Seeing however requires more than good eyesight. It also implies an understanding of what is being seen, a backdrop to the actual item scene. And that is why the study of Torah, the understanding of the story of the Jewish people is so vital for our time and current circumstances. The Torah is essentially our spectacle to correct distorted vision and blind spots. It bids us to see clearly and correctly. We would be wise to don those spectacles and thereby choose blessing and eternal life for ourselves. © 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 reflects Zion's illustrious future during the Messianic era. The haftorah begins with a call to Yerushalayim to sing over the return of her masses. The prophet Yeshaya invites her to expand her borders to allow for the overwhelming influx of Jewish people who are returning home. Yeshaya tells Zion not to be embarrassed because no trace of her previous shame will remain. He assures her that Hashem's kindness is here to stay and that His peace will be with her forever.

Suddenly, Yeshaya takes a sharp turn and proclaims, "Afflicted stormy city who is not consoled." These words indicate a strong unwillingness of Zion to be comforted. Although the ingathering of the exiles has occurred and the land of Israel has been rebuilt, Zion cannot be consoled. Her two thousand years of ruins demand to be accounted for. In the past, she had served as the focal point of the world, the apex of society. But for ages, her respect, dignity and elevated status were taken from her. Instead of splendor and glory, she constantly experienced shame, degradation and destruction. When reflecting upon her glorious past she cannot help but remember the shameful years that followed and cannot be consoled.

Hashem responds to Zion and says, "Behold I will lay your floors with precious stones and set your

foundation with sapphires." (54:11) To begin, Hashem assures Zion that she will be restored to her previous glory. But Hashem expanded this kindness and pledged to render her more desirable than ever before. He promised that her splendor will be so magnificent that her floors and walls will actually be studded with jewels and precious stones. Her physical beauty will transcend every existing structure in the world and she will literally glisten from diamonds. Every moment spent in Zion will be an unforgettable experience which will irresistibly attract the masses to view her splendor.

This development addresses the physical dimensions of Yerushalayim but what about her spiritual heights? For two thousand years Zion has not been functioning as the Torah center of the world. How can she be comforted from this loss? In response to this, the prophet adds a major dimension and says, "And all of your children will be students of Hashem and much peace will be amongst them." (54:13) This means that Torah perspectives will be readily available to all the children of Zion who will now be students of Hashem. Chazal (see Yalkut Shimoni 479) explain this reference to mean that peace and harmony will exist amongst Torah leadership. As Chazal view things, present day confusion and diversity result from human limitations found within Torah study. Until the era of Mashiach one must rely upon the finite human mind for the transmittal of Torah knowledge from teacher to student. Being that the teacher's intellect is limited it follows naturally that the student's absorption of Torah knowledge will have even greater limitations. Yeshaya reveals that in the time of Mashiach matters will drastically improve. Because, Zion will be privileged to study Torah from its original source, Hashem. One readily understands that because there are no limitations to Hashem few limitations will exist amongst His students. The clarity resulting from this study will produce unparalleled levels of peace and harmony with everyone basically following the same Torah path of observance.

The prophet expands this vision and opens this renaissance to the nations of the world as well. He addresses them and says, "All who are thirsty go and drink water, acquire without pay wine and milk." (55:1) Chazal(Yalkut ad loc.) explain that water refers to Torah knowledge and wine and milk refer to spiritual sustenance. Even the nations of the world will be invited to Torah study and unique spiritual experiences. Radak explains that Hashem's wondrous revelations will yield an unprecedented thirst for knowledge. The nations will be so inspired by Hashem's miracles that they will flock to Zion to study His word. Zion will finally return to her previous spiritual greatness and serve as the Torah center of the world for the Jewish people. But in addition the Torah of Zion will be fully appreciated even by the nations of the world. Even they will see

Torah as their true source of life and will flock to Zion to absorb Hashem's every word.

Yeshaya now completes the picture and says, "Behold nations that never knew you will run to become your servants because the glory of Hashem will shine upon you." (55:5) The inhabitants of Zion will be held in such high esteem that nations from near and far will come to serve their every need. With this final detail, Zion will be totally healed. She has been promised her original splendor. In addition she will become the most desirable physical spot on earth. Her children will be privileged to study Torah directly from Hashem. She'll serve as the center of Torah for the entire world, nations of the world included. Finally, through her reflection of Hashem's glory, she'll attract untold nations who will display total subservience. Her lonely, forsaken past will be erased for eternity and she will forever enjoy her well earned status as the most desirable physical and spiritual site in the entire world. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

This week's parsha speaks of laws pertaining to coming into Eretz Yisrael, destroying the pagan idols and establishing the House of G-d; the laws of a true prophet and the false prophets; the list of kosher animals and fowl; the ways of the Land-tithing the produce, shemitta (the Sabbatical year), and it ends with a brief review of the Holy Days.

Rashi cites evidence for the antiquity of the Oral Law Code. "When the place which Hashem, your G-d, has chosen to place His name there, is distant from you and you will slaughter from your cattle and your herd which Hashem has given you, as I have commanded you, and you shall eat in your gates as all your soul desires." (Deuteronomy 12:21)

"And you will slaughter etc. as I have commanded you"-RASHI: "This teaches us that there is a command regarding slaughtering [animals to be eaten], how one should slaughter, and these must be the laws of slaughtering which were told to Moses at Sinai."

The laws of shechita, ritual slaughter, are an important part of daily Jewish living. The fact that meat must be prepared in a specifically kosher manner is something with which every traditional Jewish household is familiar. These laws are quite complex and precise. Yet, despite their centrality in Jewish life, these laws are nowhere to be found in the Written Torah! Why something so basic to the Torah way of life should be missing from the Torah, is answered in our verse.

Rashi bases his comment on the fact that the verse tells us that we are to slaughter an animal "as you were commanded." Yet, nowhere in the Written Torah do we find a command relating to slaughtering

animals in a specified halachic manner. Thus, Rashi concludes that these laws were, in fact, commanded to us, but since they were not incorporated into the Written Torah, they must have been given by G-d to Moses orally at Mt. Sinai.

I have chosen this Rashi-comment, not because of any difficulty in interpretation, but rather because it teaches a very important concept about the Oral Torah. The halachic corpus in Judaism is comprised of different levels of authority. There are the 613 mitzvot that are taught to us in the Written Torah and explained in finer detail by the Sages in the Talmud. These explanations, based on argumentation and analysis, comprise a substantial part of what is called the Oral Law. The source of these laws was also G-d, Who gave them to Moses at Sinai together with the Written Law. There are other laws that the Talmudic Sages themselves promulgated; they are called Rabbinic Laws, and are of a lesser authority than the Written Law. Some examples of these: The laws of muktza on the Sabbath; taking the Four Species on Sukkot for the seven days of the holiday, in the synagogue; and the writing of a marriage contract (ketuba).

There is yet another category of laws called "halachah l'Moshe mi'Sinai"- "a law given to Moses at Sinai." These are laws that do not appear in the Written Torah, nor are they laws decreed by the Sages. And while there is no hint of them in the Written Torah they, nevertheless, have the same authoritative level as the laws found in (or derived from) the Written Law. Rashi is telling us that the laws which regulate the slaughtering of animals belong to this latter category.

The implications of Rashi's statement are quite significant from an historical and a theological perspective. What this means is that along with the Written Law, an accompanying codex of laws was received by Moses from G-d and imparted by him to the people at Sinai. It must be emphasized that these laws existed at the time of Moses (as is implied by our verse). They were not later accretions to the basic Sinai laws.

Thus when the Torah says, "and you shall slaughter as I have commanded," this indicates clearly that we were commanded at some point by G-d as to how to slaughter animals, even though we find no hint of these laws in the Written Torah.

The whole question of the existence of a corpus of Oral Law, which accompanied the Written Law, has now become a matter of dispute between traditional Jewish philosophy and more modern interpretations of Judaism. Our verse offers validation for the belief that the Oral Law Tradition did indeed exist side-by-side, contemporaneously, with the laws found in the Written Torah. © 2006 Dr. Avigdor Bonchek & Project Genesis

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Soul Desire

In this week's portion, the Torah allows us to partake in our material desires, but only according to Torah proscriptions. The Torah clearly allows the consumption of meat, albeit with a few caveats. The Torah states, "If the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose to place His Name will be far from you, you may slaughter from your cattle and your flocks that Hashem has given you, as I have commanded you, and you may eat in your cities according to your heart's entire desire. Even as the deer and the ayal are eaten, so may you eat it, the contaminated one and the pure one may eat it together: Only be strong not to eat the blood—for the blood, it is the nefesh—and you shall not eat the nefesh with the meat." (Deuteronomy 12:21-23).

Nefesh has various meanings, simply stated it is the life force of the animal - perhaps what we would call "the soul of the matter." Clearly, the consumption of blood is a despicable act in the Torah view (a fact conveniently overlooked by the centuries of libelers who had us drinking, mixing, baking and cooking with it). In addition, the process of extricating all blood from the animal is clearly and intricately defined through the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch.

However, delineating the prohibition as one of combining the consumption of the nefesh with the meat surely goes beyond the prohibition of eating or drinking blood. Surely there is a deeper connotation to the prohibition of the strange concoction of nefesh and meat.

Rav Yehuda Laib Chasman was considered to be one of the luminaries of the mussar movement. Before he immersed himself completely in the world of Torah and mussar, he had a business that sold flour to bakers. He would devote a portion of his day to his business and the remaining time he would spend at the famed Talmud Torah of Kelm under the tutelage of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, the illustrious Alter of Kelm.

One day on the way into the Yeshiva, Rav Ziv called Reb Yehuda Laib over to the side and pointed to the white powder that covered the sleeve of his jacket. Rabbi Chasman took this observation to be a clear moralistic evaluation.

"Rabbi Ziv is pointing out that the flour is becoming part of me. If it is already all over my garments, and it is still with me when I leave my store, then it has become too much a part of me."

With that, he made a personal decision that changed his life completely. He returned home, and figured out together with his wife that the amount of their current assets would more than cover any outstanding debts and allow them to sustain themselves. They sold the business, and Rabbi Chasman enrolled full-time at the Volozhiner Yeshiva,

eventually emerging the great luminary whom we all revere.

Some of us like meat: whether it is the actual beef or the proverbial materialistic affairs in which we indulge. And that's OK to a point. After all, we are only human.

But the Torah tells us to be careful to separate the soul from the meat. The holy from the mundane. It wants us to understand that other than the quest for the prime rib, which we wish to consume, there are more noble pursuits that should consume us. Therefore, the Torah tells us to clearly delineate the difference and tells us that although we may indulge in worldly pleasure we should be careful not to allow the soul to become devoured with the meat. Thus, it clearly commands, "Do not eat the nefesh with the meat." A good meal is totally permissible. It even lifts the spirit. However, materialistic indulgences as such should surely never become our obsession or sole desire. For then, it will become part of our nefesh. It will become tantamount to our soul desire. ©2002 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Our parashah opens, "See, I put before you today a blessing and a curse. That blessing: when you hearken to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, that I command you today. And the curse: if you do not hearken to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d..." We read similarly in Parashat Nitzavim (30:15), "See, I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil." The midrash Yalkut Shimoni comments: "Lest a Jew say, 'Since Hashem has placed two paths before me, a way of life and a way of death, I may choose whichever I wish,' therefore the Torah says (30:19), 'You shall choose life.'"

R' Yitzchak Eliyahu Landau z"l (1781-1876; Vilna) explains: In man's mundane affairs, if one person (call him "Reuven") instructs another person ("Shimon") to do something for Shimon's own benefit, Reuven will not punish Shimon for failing to do that thing. The only loss that Shimon will suffer because of his failure is that he will not obtain the promised benefit. One might think, therefore, that when Hashem gives us a choice between good and bad and between life and death, He does not care which we choose. If we perform the mitzvot we will be rewarded, and if we don't perform the mitzvot, we will not be punished. (So one might think.)

Says the Torah: "You shall choose life." The reason Hashem created the world was to share His Goodness, and if we do not choose life, we frustrate His very goal in creating us. Therefore, we are commanded to choose life, and we will be held accountable if we do not. (Patsheggen Ha'ketav: Divrei Chachamim) © 2000 Rabbi S. Katz & Project Genesis, Inc.

Pray for an Israeli Soldier: A letter from the National Council of Young Israel

TO ACHEINU BNEI YISRAEL:



AFTER HEARING THE HEART-RENDERING APPEAL OF GEDOLEI TORAH TO INTENSIFY OUR TEFILOS AND TORAH LEARNING DURING THIS VERY DIFFICULT TIME FOR KLALL YISRAEL IN ERETZ YISRAEL, WE HAVE UNDERTAKEN TO JOIN AND ADD TO THEIR REQUEST.

THE TORAH INFORMS US THAT IN THE WAR THAT MOSHE RABBEINU AND KLALL YISRAEL WAGED AGAINST MIDYON, MOSHE "DRAFTED" ELEF L'MATEH, ELEF L'MATEH--ONE THOUSAND SOLDIERS FROM EACH SHEVET/TRIBE. THE MEDRASH RABBA AND THE YALKUT SHIMONI EXPLAIN THAT IN FACT, EACH SHEVET SENT ONE THOUSAND PAIRS, TWO THOUSAND INDIVIDUALS--ONE THOUSAND TO FIGHT AND ONE THOUSAND TO DAVEN. EACH SOLDIER HAD HIS DESIGNATED PERSON WHOSE TASK WAS TO DAVEN AND LEARN FOR HIS SPECIFIC SOLDIER COLLEAGUE. AND THE TORAH TELLS US--V'LO NIFKAD MIMENU ISH, NO ONE WAS KILLED FROM AMONGST THE JEWISH ARMY.

WE BROUGHT THIS IDEA TO RAV CHAIM KANIEVSKY, SHLITA,, HE WAS QUITE HAPPY ABOUT THE IDEA AND POINTED OUT THAT DOVID HAMELECH INSTITUTED THE PLAN, AS WELL. EACH INDIVIDUAL WHO WAS IN COMBAT HAD A DESIGNATED PERSON WHO WAS DAVENING AND LEARNING IN HIS MERIT.

THEREFORE, WE ASK OF EVERYONE --SOLDIERS, RESIDENTS OF CITIES AND TOWNS THAT ARE UNDER ATTACK, THOSE THAT ARE IN SHELTERS, ALL THAT FIND THEMSELVES IN DANGER, TO CONTACT US, TO GIVE US YOUR HEBREW NAME AND THE HEBREW NAME OF YOUR MOTHER. WE WILL FIND A JEW WHO WILL ACCEPT UPON HIMSELF/HERSELF TO DAVEN AND LEARN, SPECIFICALLY AS A MERIT FOR YOUR SAFETY AND SECURITY.

WE CALL UPON THE JEWISH COMMUNITY--MEN AND WOMEN, ADULT AND YOUTH, IN THE DIASPORA, TO JOIN IN THIS HOLY ENDEAVOR, ACCEPT A NAME OF A SOLDIER OR CIVILIAN WHO FINDS HIMSELF/HERSELF IN DANGER. BOND WITH ACHEINU BNEI YISRAEL IN ERETZ YISRAEL AND "PARTNER" IN TORAH AND TEFILAH WITH A SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL, HAVE THAT PERSON, BY NAME, INCLUDED IN YOUR TEFILOS, TORAH LEARNING AND ACTS OF CHESED.

IF YOU WISH TO PARTNER WITH A JEW IN ISRAEL, PLEASE CONTACT US AND WE WILL SHARE WITH YOU A JEW WHO WOULD BE HONORED AND APPRECIATIVE TO BE PART OF YOUR TEFILOS AND TORAH LEARNING.

**BY TELEPHONE, BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 8-10 PM IN ERETZ YISRAEL, 011-972-2-581-1911; BY FAX, 011-972-2-651-2950;
BY E-MAIL MAORTLMO@BEZEQINT.NET**

IN THE MERIT OF OUR CONCERN FOR EACH OTHER, MAY WE SEE A SUCCESSFUL END TO THIS WAR, AS IT SAYS IN THE PASUK, V'LO NIFKAD MIMENU ISH, WITHOUT THE LOSS OF EVEN JUST ONE MORE PERSON.

--THE LETTER IS SIGNED BY THE BOSTONER REBBE, SHLITA AND RAV SIMCHA HAKOHEN KOOK

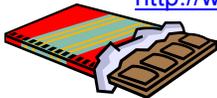
--IF WE AT NATIONAL COUNCIL OF YOUNG ISRAEL CAN ASSIST IN MATCHING A CONCERNED JEW WITH A BROTHER OR SISTER IN ISRAEL, A SOLDIER OR CIVILIAN, PLEASE DO CALL UPON US. TEL 212-929-1525 EXT 100/101; FAX 212-727-9526; E-MAIL EXECVP@YOUNGISRAEL.ORG

--THANK YOU, TIZKU L'MITZVOT

Rabbi Pesach Lerner

Send a hug and a chocolate bar to an Israeli soldier!(Free)

http://www.websense-media.co.il/has_200706/default.asp?gid=friend



Send pizza or a burger to an Israeli soldier!



PizzaIDF.org

לזכר נשמת דוב מתתיהו בן צבי הערש, ע"ה
לכבוד דניאלה חיה בת שמואל מרדכי

FROM: LEMAAN ACHAI:

Not just the date is 24/7 - that's how the community in Bet Shemesh is responding to the War and its Refugee Crisis.

Phase One - The first few days of this war brought untold numbers of families fleeing the rockets & terror of the North, to their families and friends in Bet Shemesh. One local family has 35 guests in their small apartment; another has 15, in addition to their own family of seven. Hundreds of other apartments in our town now have sundry extra folks who've turned up, and are being warmly hosted.

Phase Two - In a remarkable cross-community coordinated program, Bet Shemesh Municipality, together with the Community Centers, Charitable Organizations and many volunteers, have undertaken a community-based refugee relief program.

Two schools have so far been opened up their doors (Shaalei Torah and Uziel); Shaalei Torah has taken 105 people from Tiveria/Tiberius and Hatzor; Uziel school has 52 people from Naharia; 35 in Nofei Aviv; 9 in Maorot Yeshiva from Naharia; 41 at the Kadosh Family. Total: 233 refugees.

In addition, many of the families who are lodging with their families and friends in Bet Shemesh (Phase One), are now hitting the limits of reasonable hospitality. Both financially and emotionally, too many people in too small a place on zero-budget for who-knows-how-long, is a major stress.

Basic meals have been arranged for all these people. Everyone has a mattress, blanket, access to showers, etc. Summer camps have been initiated for the kids, run by Ariel and Bnei Akiva Youth Groups. The Community Centers are helping with cultural activities and arranging volunteers. A buddy scheme has been set up, matching incoming refugee families with local hosting families (who provide laundry, showers, and social support). The whole community is working on this - 24/7.

Lema'an Achai www.lemaanachai.org, together with Deputy Mayor Mr. Shalom Lerner, has been mandated to raise and manage the funding of the food and other primary needs of this shell-shocked & transient population. (No Government funds have been made available for this).

The cost is currently \$2200/day. And rising.

Current Status: We have many calls each day from towns all over the North of Israel - pleading with us to accept more buses of despairing families, unable to take the constant air raid sirens, exploding rockets, the cramped bomb shelters and fearful, screaming kids.

We want to immediately accept the next 200-300 people into our very hospitable and welcoming town. In order to do this we need more money for food; we need to buy more mattresses, blankets and other basic items. Total cost will be around \$4000/day, plus \$10,000 in purchased goods.

Third Phase: We are also developing a solution for when the schools become overloaded. So that we can accommodate 1000 or even more refugees. We're looking at tent cities and other emergency-relief solutions.

Please donate now generously to:-

24 Hour Credit Card Service in Israel –
972 2. 99.999.33

US Tax Deductible Donations:
Checks payable to: "US Friends of Lema'an Achai"
Memo line - "Refugee Relief"
PO Box 532, Oceanside, NY 11572-0532

FROM THE EFRAT FOUNDATION:

As a result of the many missiles raining down on the communities in Israel's North and the evacuation of civilians from that area, we are hosting at this point in Efrat, close to 300 people and we'll be happy to take more if needed. Our social services in coordination with the municipalities of Karmiel, Moshav Or Haganuz, Moshav Bar Yochai, Tzfat and the Bay area outside Haifa, has coordinated the arrival here of these evacuee families.

The families that have arrived are already in the dormitories of our Educational facilities which have been re-opened despite being closed for the summer vacation. These facilities will service the rooms, provide a dining hall with hot meals, and activities for the children. The Efrat Emergency Medical Center is providing medical attention free of charge. We are opening our hearts to them and trying to give them some minimum relief in the hope that the fighting will soon be successfully over, and they will be able to return home. Many of our local residents are involved in the logistics, planning, hosting, and opening their homes on a voluntary basis, including our youth.

The Efrat Municipality is funding the food for all these people on our own. The cost of hospitality for a person for a day is \$20 for meals and \$5 for activities and transportation for the kids.

We ask you at this time of emergency to help us now! Help fund a brother from the North by sponsoring them! You can really help! Your tax deductible donation can be made out to:

The Efrat Development Foundation (payee)
EIN 20-2178658 (501 C 3)
for our "Ezra LaTzafon" (Assistance to the North)
project, and sent to:

Efrat Development Foundation USA
c/o Mr. Joe Katz,
Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone, LLP,
190 Willis Ave, Mineola, NY 10501