

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes starts by alluding to the first paragraph of Medrash Rabba of Parshas Behar. The Medrash, in turn, quotes a pasuk in Mishlei (18:21): "Maves vechayim beyad halashon." (ArtScroll: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue.")

Why does the Medrash discuss the power of speech here, in Parshas Behar? The formal reason is straightforward. Later in the parsha (25, 17), the Torah tells us to avoid "ona'as devarim," i.e., from giving people grief-hurting people-with what we say. Hence, the focus on being careful with one's speech. Still, the question persists. The Torah tells us about "ona'as devarim" well into the parsha. Why does the Medrash give this topic star billing by discussing it in its very first paragraph?

I suggest that Chazal chose to focus on the potential good or potential harm that we can do with what we say because, in fact, "maves vechaim beyad halashon." That is, our words can do much good or much harm. A (partial) list of harmful speech includes: foul language; citing the name of gentile G-ds; saying things that cause pain to the listener; saying things that are not true; and, of course, old reliable-lashon hara.

By the same token, what we do say can bring much good. Here is an example of a mode of speech which, when utilized, can increase the 'chayim'-life and joy-of which the pasuk in Mishlei speaks. Unfortunately, many people suffer from low self-esteem. In that context, it is important to let people know when they are doing a good job. Why? Because a remark of commendation from an outside observer can help replace self-doubt with self-confidence. And a deserved pat on the back can correct the distorted self-image from which a person with low self-esteem typically suffers.

To drive home the point that our speech can be either highly destructive or highly constructive, the Medrash provides some metaphors. One metaphor speaks of a burning coal. If a person uses his mouth to breathe on the ember, he can revive its fire. By contrast, if the person uses his mouth to spit on the coal, he will extinguish its fire.

Mention of the burning coal draws the Sfas Emes into the discussion. Certainly, he explains, HaShem's chiyus is present throughout Creation. For

when He created the world, Hashem used the Torah, which we know is compared to fire. Hence, just as the burning coal radiates fire, so too does HaShem's Presence permeate all Creation. But HaShem created the world in such a manner that the Torah, with its light and its warmth, is hidden, as in the burning coal.

Further, the metaphor of the burning coal-whose internal fire is not apparent-brings with it a major responsibility for us. For, continues the Sfas Emes, we are charged with the mission of searching for (and finding!) the illumination of the Torah that is present everywhere.

These are truly beautiful thoughts; but what do they mean? What does the Sfas Emes have in mind when he says that we can-and indeed, must-find the Torah's illumination in every thing in the world? I emphasize that what follows here in an effort to answer this question is only le'anius da'ati-i.e. comes only from my very limited knowledge. But the issues here are so important that it is worth trying to address the question.

We need some help. I suggest that we can get the necessary help from R. Nachman of Breslov (z'ta.). On the very first page of his sefer Likutei Maharar, R' Nachman writes: "Ki ha'ish ha'yisra'eili tzarich tamid lehistakeil ba'seichel shel kohel davar. U'lekasheir ahtzmo el ha'chochma ve'haseichel she'yeish be'chol davar. Kedei she'yair lo ha'seichel she'yeish be'chol davar lehispareiv laShem yisborach ahl yedei oso davar" That is: "For a Jew must always look for the seichel (intelligence/rationality/logic) that is present in all things. And he should attach himself to the knowledge and the rationality present in every thing will provide him with light, and thus enable him to come closer to HaShem via that thing."

R. Nachman is telling us that HaShem built rationality into the world. (When I say 'rationality', I refer to such features as cause/effect-in counter-distinction to randomness or chaos.) Hence, by observing the world around us and learning how it works, we can be aware of HaShem's Presence. And the rationality that we perceive can bring us closer to HaShem.

These ideas of R' Nachman can help clarify a key thought of the Sfas Emes that may previously have been obscure. I refer to the Sfas Emes's recurring dictum that what we do in our work during the weekdays-our asiya; our ma'aseh- can be a form of avoda (serving HaShem, worship). Some possibilities

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for avoda (worship) in the course of avoda (weekday work) come readily to mind. An obvious example is the physicist or the biologist who marvel at the uncanny way with which HaShem put this world together. But R. Nachman's insight shows us that the potential for avoda (service of HaShem) in the course of one's weekday avoda (work) also exists in more humble occupations.

For example, consider the case of a salesperson who sells shoes. Rationality here would require that he find the shoe that truly fits a customer's feet. The salesperson searches-using trial-and-error as well as measurement-until he finds the right shoe. By finding the accurate solution to his problem, the salesperson brings to light the presence of rationality-and hence, HaShem-in his world. (You may find this example farfetched. If so, it probably means that you have never encountered the irrationality of buying and wearing a pair of shoes that did not fit.)

Likewise, consider a bond trader who detects a possibility for profitable arbitrage. That opportunity reflects irrationality-i.e., momentary disequilibrium in the market. Hence, by executing trades that correct the disequilibrium, the bond trader is bringing about rationality, and thus revealing HaShem's presence in his weekday activity.

More generally, the same possibility for avoda is open in any context where a person solves problems. By "figuring things out," a person can find the rationality that HaShem built into the situation. But like the fire in the ember, the rationality cannot be perceived unless we make an effort. By trying to understand the logic of a phenomenon or of a situation, a person can bring himself closer to HaShem.

In an earlier version of this shiur, when I mentioned the the bond trader who was taking advantage of an arbitrage opportunity, a professional bond trader raised a basic objection. This bond trader had much experience in buying and selling financial assets. He had never felt that by executing trades for profitable arbitrage, he was revealing rationality, and hence, HaShem's presence.

This bond trader's objection brought to mind a story about Shelomo Hamelech (King Solomon). One day while traveling on the road, Shelomo Hamelech encountered two men who were transporting a heavy

stone. The king stopped and asked them what they were doing. The first person replied, "I am carrying a heavy stone." The second man answered, "I am building the Beis Hamikdash!" The moral of the story as it applies to our bond trader? It helps to see oneself in accurate metaphysical context. © 2007 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah teaches us a profound lesson in trust and faith in Hashem. The prophet Yirmiyahu introduces the haftorah by proclaiming, "Hashem is my strength, my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble." Yirmiyahu proceeds and admonishes the Jewish people for pursuing foreign avenues and engaging in strange practices for security. He warns them that they are subject to forfeiting their wealth and possessions because of their public involvement in idolatry.

He then delivers a crushing blow in the name of Hashem and says, "And you will forsake your land which you are to blame for mistreating the inheritance I gave you and you will be enslaved to your enemies in a foreign land."(17:4) This is the dreadful prophecy about their pending exile from their precious homeland, Eretz Yisroel. Yet, Yirmiyahu devotes his attention to one specific detail as the cause of their exile. He immediately follows with serious reprimand about trust and says, "Cursed is the person who trusts in man...and turns his heart away from Hashem... Blessed is the person who trusts in Hashem." The juxtaposition of these words suggests that the Jewish exile was caused by lack of trust. Apparently, the previous criticism of mistreating the land related to this fault. Rashi develops this and explains that the admonition referred to their failure to properly observe Shmita laws. Yirmiyahu chastised them for mistreating their inheritance by refusing to return it to its true owner during Shmita.

This explanation requires serious reflection. Although the mitzvah of Shmita is undoubtedly significant, it seems to be treated with extreme severity. The prophet equates lack of Shmita observance with total lack of faith in Hashem. This suggests that one who does not properly adhere to Shmita laws has no trust and faith in Hashem!? This is difficult to digest after considering the severe demands of Shmita. During that year, one may not exert any effort towards his personal sustenance and livelihood. Hashem demands that one place his total faith and trust in Him. If one does not achieve this lofty level and fails to display total faith can he be compared to an agnostic possessing no faith?

We can raise similar concern regarding the repercussions of profiting from Shmita fruit. In addition to Shmita's agricultural prohibition one is prohibited

from engaging in any profitable transaction with fruit grown during the Shmita year. The Talmud predicts the severe hardships one will endure for violating this prohibition. His first repercussion will be his sale of all his fields and possessions. This process could continue and include the sale of his home and eventually even result in the sale of his daughter as a maid servant. (see Kiddushin 20a) These punishments seem extremely severe relative to their offense. There are many grave sins whose consequences are trivial in comparison to those of Shmita violations. What establishes Shmita so significant as to warrant these responses?

We can shed light on this entire subject through the Malbim's classic commentary on this week's haftarah. He explains that the prophet discusses three approaches to one's faith in Hashem. Yirmiyahu showers praise and blessing upon one who places his total trust in Hashem. Although this person undoubtedly involves himself in securing his sustenance he realizes that Hashem is ultimately his true provider. A second prevalent attitude comes from those of dual allegiance, who place their trust in Hashem and in their personal efforts. Although this is certainly not a supreme form of service and doesn't receive words of praise it is nonetheless acceptable. There exists yet a third attitude amongst some, one that is totally unacceptable and condemned by the prophet. Yirmiyahu curses one who places total trust in his personal involvement without even including Hashem as a factor in the equation. This person totally disregards Hashem's involvement and believes that he obtains success and fortune exclusively through personal efforts.

These insightful words place the mitzvah of Shmita in its proper perspective. Every seventh year Hashem reminds us that He is constantly involved in our lives and sustenance. Hashem facilitates this recognition by restricting us from personal involvement in our livelihood for an entire year. One who adheres to Shmita's restrictions clearly demonstrates his total faith in Hashem as his provider. However, one who violates Shmita's laws shows his total belief and trust in his personal efforts. Hashem absolutely banned these efforts during that year and will undoubtedly have no part in helping them bear fruits. Such activity reflects a defiant attitude that Hashem need not be involved for one to succeed. He expresses to all that irrespective of Hashem's approval or involvement these efforts will nevertheless produce as usual.

This totally unacceptable attitude inevitably engages Hashem in a clear demonstration that all sustenance and provisions are ultimately His doing. Hashem's response to such misguided individuals will be to gradually force them to sell their possessions in exchange for basic sustenance. This process helps them realize that all possessions come from Hashem and that He is their sole provider. A similar response

will be given to the Jewish people when they display this defiant attitude. Hashem will remind them that He controls their lives and not themselves. Their failure to observe Shmita laws will cause them to forfeit their privilege of living in Eretz Yisroel, the land of Divine Providence. Conceivably whoever merits to live in Eretz Yisroel should sense Hashem's closeness and direct involvement in every step of their lives. If the entire nation fails to recognize this reality it truly has nothing to gain from dwelling in the king's palace. Hashem will therefore banish the people from His presence until they recognize and learn to appreciate His active role in their lives.

If we could only internalize this lesson our lives would be so much better. May we soon merit to return to our father's table with His full return to His people in the nearest future. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

We have a double portion Torah-reading this week, Behar-Bechukotai. We will analyze Rashi on the following verses, which speaks of the blessings Israel will reap when they follow the word of G-d.

"And I will give peace in the land and you shall lie down and none shall make you tremble; and I will rid an evil beast from the land, neither shall the sword pass through your land. And you shall pursue your enemies and they shall fall before you by the sword." (Leviticus 26:6-7)

"Before you by the sword"-Rashi: "One by the sword of the other."

This comment tells us that the enemy will kill themselves by their own "friendly fire." What would you ask on this strange comment?

A Question: An obvious question is: Why does Rashi now say that the enemy falls by the hand of his fellow comrade-in-arms, and not that he fell by the sword of the Israelite, which is the more simple interpretation? What led Rashi (and the Midrash) to this far-fetched interpretation? What's bothering Rashi here? Hint: Look at the verses before this one.

An Answer: Had not the previous verse said "The sword shall not pass through your land"? If there is no sword in the land, how can the enemy fall by your sword? Another indication that this war was not waged in the Land of Israel is that the earlier verse also promised: "I will give peace in the land..." So there was neither war nor sword in the land. If so, how did the enemy "fall before you by the sword"?

Actually, this question can be answered satisfactorily even without Rashi's interpretation that they died by their own hand. What answer would you give?

An Answer: The verse says clearly "and you shall pursue your enemies..." Thus, the battle may have

been waged outside the borders of the Land of Israel. Outside of Israel, there may be both war and swords and the Israelites may have killed the enemy there.

Why, then, must Rashi resort to the unlikely explanation that the enemy will kill each other?

An Answer: Some commentators on Rashi say that the words "before you" are the clue; they are superfluous. The enemy always falls "before you." These commentators conclude that these redundant words lead Rashi to claim that the enemy will die even before you reach them-"before you." How? By their own comrades.

But another, fascinating, answer has been suggested. An amazing answer has been suggested which shows the subtle nuances that can be uncovered in the Torah, if we only look for them. The Nefesh Hager, a commentary on Targum Onkelos, points out an astounding consistency throughout the Torah: Whenever the Torah speaks of Jews or (G-d) killing others, the words used are, in Hebrew, "l'phi charev"- "according to-or by-the sword."

Whenever gentiles are described as doing the killing, the word used is "l'charev" alone. Examples of the former can be found in: Genesis 34:26; Exodus 17:13; Numbers 21:24; examples of the latter can be found in: Isaiah 65:12; Psalms 7:62.

But our verse is the exception because it uses the word "l'charev" (and not "l'phi charev") even though the Israelites are attacking the gentiles. This is evidence that the gentiles, and not the Israelites, are the ones who are doing the killing! "Each by the sword of the other."

The term is a colloquialism. It literally means, "by the mouth of the sword." What sense can be made out of this strange nuance? A little thought should give you the answer. Hint: See Genesis 48:22 where Jacob tells Joseph that he took the city of Shechem "be'charbi u'vekashiti" and Rashi brings Onkelos' translation of the words "sword" and "bow" as "my prayer and my requests."

An Answer: On the basis of that Rashi we can conclude that when the Jew wages war he precedes battle with prayer to the Almighty. The symbolic meaning of the phrase "l'phi charev" is that the mouth (prayer) always precedes the sword in battles waged by Jews! © 2007 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.com

RABBI ZVI MILLER

The Salant Foundation

After HaShem created man and the universe, he gave man dominion over the earth. Accordingly, man utilizes the earth to provide for his needs and comforts. He raises great cities and flourishing civilizations. So great is man's power on the earth, he tends to forget that all of his strength and success comes from his Creator.

In light of this, HaShem instructs us to perform the Mitzvoh. The general purpose of most Mitzvoh is to instill within us the consciousness that HaShem is the King of the universe. In fact, Mitzvoh are intertwined in every aspect of our lives. In this manner, they awaken for us a constant awareness of HaShem.

For instance, every seven years the Torah instructs us to let the land lay fallow. During the seventh year, we do not have permission to plow or plant. In this way, we will reflect that HaShem gave us the land and the wondrous bounty that it gives forth.

Similarly, on the holy Shabbos a person removes himself from his business concerns and devotes himself entirely to HaShem. The rest from worldly affairs grants him the opportunity to focus on the goodness and kindness of HaShem, who grants him life and provides his every need.

In His love for us, HaShem endows us with vast powers in order to grant us the opportunity to emulate His kindness and good deeds. Additionally, in order to create a balance between confidence and humility, HaShem instructs us to perform the Mitzvoh. May the Mitzvoh that we perform enlighten us with the consciousness that we are in the presence of our kind and holy Creator. [Based on Da'as Torah of Rav Yerucham] Today: When you do a Mitzvah, concentrate on the awareness that HaShem is King of the universe.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What has happened to the leadership of Israel, the representatives of our own citizens as well as to the world community, who initially marched into the arena of history as giants of vision and conviction but have now degenerated into discredited, squabbling and scandal-ridden pygmies, shamelessly holding onto positions which their very presence empties of stature and significance? Where have we gone wrong, and how can we correct ourselves?

I believe the answer lies in a proper understanding of our portion of Behar, but requires an introduction from the very earliest verses of the Bible. Our Book of Books is universal in its scope, vision and ethos, opening as it does with the majestic words, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth." The Biblical reach goes far beyond Israel and Jew; our G-d is G-d of the universe, and He has created the human being - not only Jew - in His own Divine image.

Alas, neither Adam nor Noah was ready to accept the Divine morality of the freedom and the inviolability of the human being, or to subject themselves to the personal discipline and delayed gratification necessary for the structuring of a truly moral world. The delicious fruit and tantalizing wine of the moment were too tempting for each of them...

The Bible continues, and from the three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Yafet, are derived the seventy nations of the world (Gen.10.11). They build "a city and a tower whose top extends to the heavens in order to make for themselves a (grandiose) name;" G-d confounds their materialistic and selfish goals by making "babble" of their speech so that they do not understand - and so cannot communicate with - each other, and scatters them all over the face of the entire earth (Gen. 11: esp. 4-8).

And then G-d elects Abram, establishing a covenant with this first Jew, whereby He guarantees him progeny (which will never be destroyed) and the land of Israel (to which Israel will ultimately return); G-d makes Abram into an eternal nation (Gen 15).

However, G-d has not chosen Abram to the exclusion of the world. Much the opposite, G-d changes Abram's name to Abraham, from "exalted father" (Av ram) to "father of a multitude of nations" (Avir hamon goyim) (Gen: 17:4,5). And even before the name change, G-d charges Abraham with the divine mission that "through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth." (Gen 12:3), since Abraham must found a "holy nation and kingdom of priest-teachers" who will lead the world to morality, peace and redemption. Israel must become G-d's entranceway into the world.

Hence, it should not come as a surprise to find that the Bible views Israel as a mirror of - and eventually a model for - the entire world; Israel is the heart, conscience and reflection of the world, as well as the means for the repair (tikkun) of the world. And so if the three sons of Noah fathered the seventy nations of the world, it makes sense that the three patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - father the seventy souls who came down to Egypt and formed the Jewish nation (Exodus 1:5). Jacob's dream ladder is rooted in earth with its "top extending to the heavens" (Gen 28:12), and the midrash on virtually all of the verses of this dream sequence identify the place of dream as Mt. Morah, Jerusalem and the ladder as being the Holy Temple (see Rashi esp on 28:2 and 17), paralleling the ladder and the temple with the tower-ziggurat of Babel. Indeed, when the Jews are not worthy, they too will be exiled and scattered to all four corners of the world, just as G-d scattered the babbling nations all over the face of the earth. But eventually the City of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple-tower in its midst will serve as a tikkun (repair) for the Tower of Babel, when its Torah of peace will spread to the west, the east, the north and the south, when all nations rush to it and become united for commitment not for self aggrandizement, but rather for commitment to the service of G-d: "Then shall I transform for the nations one clear speech for all of them to call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder" (Zefaniah 3:9)

Nowhere is our function as model for world more clearly expressed than in our Biblical portion of

Behar, where the land of Israel is set up to be worked for six years, granted a Sabbatical (both the land and its owners) on the seventh and when all debts are likewise to be rescinded. After the seventh Sabbatical, the fiftieth year becomes the Jubilee: "And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and declare freedom for the land and all of its inhabitants; it is a Jubilee for you, when every person shall return to his/her homestead, to his/her family and family estate..." The Jubilee reflects our national dream - and mission - for world redemption; "the land" in the verse just cited may well refer to the entire land which G-d created together with the heavens, and on which all of humanity must be free and secure.

The founding fathers of Israel - like David Ben Gurion - may not have been observant Jews, they may not even have consciously believed in G-d, but they did believe in the necessity of the Jewish homeland, and they shared in the Biblical vision of our mission to the world. They understood the necessity of the land of Israel for the future of the Jewish people and of the necessity of Israel's Ten Commandments for the future of the world. They were idealists, who were profoundly committed to an ideal greater than they were, and were selfless in their pursuit of this ideal. Hence, even though the Agrarat Commission did not find her responsible for the failures at the beginning of the Yom Kippur War, Golda Meir resigned none-the less, deeply disappointed in herself because she believed she had disappointed her nation. And to the best of my knowledge, our early heads of state all died with very small personal estates. Their idealism inspired them to give to, not to take from, the government and the higher ideal they served.

Tragically, the present leadership never appeared to have seen Knesset Yisrael - historic Israel - as greater than they were, and never articulated a mission - to themselves or their nation-which was worthy of selfless sacrifice and commitment. They were often confused as to Israel's right to be in the Middle East and sometimes seemed to echo Yossi Beilin's position that his grandfather should have voted for Uganda in Herzl's World Zionist Congress. Unless we, the people of Israel, feel strongly enough about our right to be where we are and about our mission to inspire a world committed to freedom, peace and security for all. And unless we choose leaders who share these goals and ideals, then we just may not be the generation worthy of realizing the dream of the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption. Hopefully, we are now cleansing ourselves. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**W**homsoever brings merit to the masses (i.e. causes them to do the right thing), sin does

not come from him. And whomever causes the masses to sin, is not given the chance to repent." After telling us these two extremes, the Mishnah (Avos, 5:18 in most editions) brings proof for these statements: "Moshe merited (for himself) and brought merit to the masses, [so] the merit of the masses is attributed to him, as it says (Devarim 33:21) 'he did the righteousness of G-d, and [did] His laws with Israel.' Yeruvum ben Nevum sinned and caused the masses to sin, [so] the sin of the masses is attributed to him, as it says (Melachim I 15:30), 'because of the sins of Yeruvum, who sinned and who caused Israel to sin.'"

However, the proofs do not seem to match the original statements. Although we are told that whomever causes the masses to fulfill what G-d's wants will not sin themselves, all we are shown is that Moshe was credited with the good deeds of the nation as if he had done them himself (as it says "with Israel," not "for Israel"). How do we learn from there that even if he otherwise would have sinned, because he helped the nation it wouldn't happen? Besides, does free will get tossed once the choice is made to benefit others? How can it be said that once an individual helps the public he will no longer sin?

Similarly, while we certainly can see that the nation's sins were attributed to Yeruvum, how do we know that he couldn't have done teshuvah (repented) if he wanted to? And, if he sincerely regretted his actions and resolved to change, why would the opportunity to do teshuvah be taken away from him?

Before attempting to tackle these issues, there is one more aspect worth pointing out. The Mishnah doesn't say that whomever brings merit to the masses can no longer sin, but that sin does not come from him, implying that only inadvertent sins are prevented. Avos d'Rav Noson (40:3), which says that "whomever brings merit to the masses, sins do not come about because of him" also seems to be saying that others won't sin because of him, not that he himself will not or cannot sin. The Talmud (Yuma 87a), on the other hand, explains that "sins do not come from him" in order to avoid a situation where the students went to Gan Eden (paradise) while the one who caused them to do G-d's will in the first place ends up in Gehenum (purgatory). This would be true no matter what kind of sin the teacher did, requiring that any and all sins be prevented, including ones that he himself does. Likewise, the Tosefta (Yuma 4:11) says that "whomever brings merit to the masses is not given the chance to sin, so that his students don't inherit the world [to come] while he descends to the depths (a euphemism for purgatory)." Which one is it? If all sins will be prevented, why imply only that he won't cause others to sin? And if only inadvertent sins will be prevented, won't the teacher sometimes end up in a worse place than the students? And why does the

Tosefta attribute the sin directly to him if he only caused it inadvertently?

The Talmud (and Tosefta and Avos d'Rav Noson) tells us that the corollary is also true; the instigator's teshuvah is prevented so that the "teacher" doesn't go to Gan Eden while the "students" suffer in Gehenum. This is not as difficult to understand, though, as once we establish that the sins others do are attributed to the one who caused them to sin, it follows that since full teshuvah means undoing every aspect, teshuvah can not be achieved while any of the sins done by the others still exist (see Midrash Shmuel). Nevertheless, the rationale would then be that teshuvah cannot be done because the extent of the sin was so widespread, not because we wouldn't want the instigator to be able to get to paradise while those he influenced suffer the consequences of the actions he convinced them to do.

The Maharal points out that "bringing merit to the masses" (and "causing the masses to sin") does not refer to having an affect on more than one person, or on a minimum number of people. Even if one affects many people, they are all, in essence, individuals. Rather, the Mishnah is referring to affecting an entity as a whole, even if, as a result, it is individuals in that entity that are affected. Moshe did not sit down and teach each individual member of the nation the Torah, but taught it to the whole nation; it was up to each individual to gain as much as possible from each lesson. Yeruvum did not approach each individual in the Northern Kingdom and persuade him to worship a golden calf. He set the golden calves up at each end of the kingdom hoping that they would go there instead of Jerusalem. In the end, though, each individual had to decide for himself whether to stay local and worship before the calf or to travel all the way to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple.

In general, when one causes another to do something (whether positive or negative), it could be argued that the decision whether to actually do it or not is ultimately up to the individual, so that person should really get all the credit (or blame). Even if the one who helped should get credit (or blame) for his role, only the one who actually does it should get credited with the action (or inaction). This is especially true when the attempt to influence is done in a general way (such as teaching Torah to a group) rather than individually (i.e. approaching someone to ask him to come to learn). It was only the opportunity that was made available; the decision whether to take advantage of that opportunity is solely up to each individual. Our Mishnah is telling us (and proving) that one who affects the masses is not only credited with giving others the opportunity, but also considered as if he did the actual deed (good or bad) himself. Why is this so? Well, if the only blame that the instigator gets would be for creating the opportunity, repentance would only mean regretting having created

that opportunity and resolving never to do so again. It would be rather easy for the instigator to repent even while the ones who followed his lead are still sinning (and would have to repent for the actual sin). They would end up down below while he would be up above. In order to prevent this from happening, full blame is placed on the instigator as well, to the extent that their sins are also considered his sins. If they don't all fully repent, he can't achieve full repentance, and he is stuck wherever they end up.

On the flip side, we have an additional problem that arises. Every opportunity that arises includes the opportunity to miss an opportunity. Providing the opportunity to sin includes providing the opportunity to avoid sinning. Even if the instigator is "credited" with the gain made by those who resisted temptation, the punishment for successfully causing others to sin will be enacted, and the "teacher" will suffer with the "students." However, in a case where one tries to be a positive influence, the "blame" for creating the opportunity to miss an opportunity to grow spiritually would only apply to the teacher, not the students. Even if the teacher did nothing wrong, if any students react the wrong way, it can be attributed to the teacher. In order to avoid having the teacher suffer the consequences while the students that took advantage of the opportunity enjoy Gan Eden without him, these sins are either prevented from happening or blocked from being attributed to him. Free will is still fully in play, and the "teacher" that chooses to sin will be able to sin (and be punished for it). However, G-d will make sure that inadvertent sins that could have arisen from his attempt to bring merit to the masses will not adversely affect him.

We see from Moshe that the positive actions of the nation were attributed to him and that despite all the negative reactions that occurred throughout the 40 years (see Abarbanel), it was only the positive actions that were attributed to him. More importantly, we see the contrast between Moshe and Yeruvum, and how influencing the masses positively is considered as if the good deeds themselves were done, while causing the masses to sin is considered as if the actual sin was done by the instigator. Therefore, the latter is unable to achieve full repentance while the former is given special protection from causing inadvertent sins. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

This week's Torah portion opens with a description of the mitzva of Shemitta, describing its main element: "For six years you shall plant your field, and for six years you shall tend your vines, and gather the crops. And in the seventh year, the land will have a Shabbat of rest." [Vayikra 25:3-4]. At first glance, this

seems to be a repetition of what is written in the portion of Mishpatim. "And for six years you shall plant in your land and gather its crops. And you shall not tend to it in the seventh year" [Shemot 23:10-11]. Why did the Torah write two separate passages about Shemitta?

Many different reasons have been suggested for the mitzva of Shemitta. The Rambam explains that the reason for the mitzva is social and ethical, "to have mercy and pity on all mankind, as is written, 'Let the paupers of your nation have what to eat' [Shemot 23:11]" [Moreh Nevuchim 3:39]. On the other hand, the Sefer Hachinuch views the main idea of Shemitta as a mitzva between man and G-d. "Man should remember that the earth which gives him fruits every year does not do this because of its power and traits, but rather is controlled by its master. And when He wants to, He gives a command to abandon the land." [Mitzva 84].

Evidently, the two approaches correspond to the difference between the two passages, in Shemot and in Vayikra. In this week's portion, Shemitta is presented as a mitzva between man and G-d: "And the land will rest, a Shabbat for G-d" [Vayikra 25:2]. The verses quoted at the beginning of this article—"For six years you shall plant your field, and for six years you shall tend your vines, and gather the crops. And in the seventh year, the land will have a Shabbat of rest."—are very similar to what is written in the Ten Commandments—"For six days shall you work and perform all your tasks. And the seventh day is Shabbat for your G-d." [Shemot 20:8-9]. In both cases, the reason given for the mitzva is to recognize the Almighty as the creator of the world. As a matter of fact, the approach of the entire portion of Behar is from the aspect of a mitzva between man and G-d. An example is the command to free slaves, which is not described as a moral obligation (as in Devarim 15:15) but rather as a religious requirement: "For they are my slaves, whom I took out of Egypt. They shall not be sold as slaves." [Vayikra 25:42]. This is the point of view about the mitzva of Shemitta in this week's portion.

In Shemot, on the other hand, Shemitta is presented as a mitzva related to social elements, with the objective that "the paupers of your nation will eat, and the remainder will be eaten by the animals of the fields" [Shemot 23:11]. This can be contrasted with this week's portion, which notes a different group of people who will eat the produce. "And the Shabbat of the land will be for you to eat, for you, and your slaves and maidservants, and your workmen and residents who live with you." [Vayikra 25:6]. It is not the poor people who are emphasized but rather the equality of all people, based on the realization that the entire land belongs to G-d. In Shemot, the mitzva of Shemitta is written together with other mitzvot between one man and another, such as "Do not modify the judgment of a pauper in his controversy" [Shemot 23:6] and "Do not oppress a stranger" [23:9].

The conclusion is that the different approaches of the commentators about the nature of Shemitta correspond to the two different passages where this mitzva appears in the Torah. It is both a mitzva whose purpose is to provide support for the poor people and also a mitzva with the objective of showing the central message of the Torah portion: "For the land is mine, you are temporary dwellers and residents with me" [Vayikra 25:23].

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion clearly states that good people are rewarded while evil people are punished. In the words of the Torah: "If you keep my commandments...then I will give your rains in their season...but if you will not listen to Me...I will bring terror over you." (Leviticus Chapter 26)

Throughout the ages, this principle has raised difficulty. After all, there are countless examples of good people who suffer and evil people who flourish. This is the famous philosophical question of *tzaddik vera lo*, the righteous who suffer. Doesn't this reality run contrary to what the Torah states in our portion?

Another problem with the concept of reward and punishment is the directive "not to serve the Master for a reward, but to serve Him with no reward in mind." (Ethics 1:3) This seems to contradict our portion which suggests that good deeds are performed for reward.

One way to approach these questions is to imagine that good people are always rewarded and evil people are automatically punished. In such a world, freedom of choice would be non-existent. If for every ten dollars one gives to charity one would receive twenty dollars-everyone would give charity. Similarly, if every time one speaks slander one's tongue would cleave to the palate-no one would speak wrongly.

Indeed, in a world of precise reward and punishment, humankind would be bereft of freedom of choice. Since freedom of choice is central to the human condition, it follows, that in a world of exact reward and punishment, our very humanity, would be jeopardized.

But how can one explain this week's portion which clearly speaks of reward for good deeds and punishment for misdeeds?

Rav Ahron Soloveitchik of blessed memory suggests that the answer may lie in understanding that there are two types of reward and punishment. There is reward and punishment on an individual level and then there is reward and punishment on a collective level.

On the individual level, as the Talmud states, there is no reward for doing a mitzvah in this world- that comes in the world hereafter. (Kiddushin 39b) A promise of reward in the hereafter will not compel individuals to act properly. Human choice would remain intact.

In this world, however, reward and punishment does operate on a collective level. When one does something positive, the larger community benefits. Similarly, when one does something negative, the community suffers.

Note that in this week's portion when discussing reward and punishment, the text is in the plural. Similarly, in the second portion of the Shema recited morning and night, reward and punishment is in the plural. In fact, when reward is written in the singular it refers to an individual's portion in the world to come. An example is "Honor your father and mother that your days may be long." (Exodus 20:1)

We have come full circle. The good can suffer in this world as there is no exact reward and punishment for individuals. However, when doing the right thing, we do so not necessarily for ourselves, but for the benefit of the community.

In a world that emphasizes the primacy of the self, our portion tells us that fully controlling the destiny of the self is not possible. However, the portion tells us that as a "we," we have tremendous power. We have the ability to wreak destruction on the world, but we also have the power to infuse it with peace and goodness. © 2007 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 KATZ

Hama'ayan

“If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments..." 26:3) Rashi writes that "If you will follow My decrees" refers to toiling in Torah study. If so, writes R' Akiva Yosef Schlesinger z"l (Hungary and Yerushalayim; died 1922), we can understand why this verse follows immediately after the verse, "My Sabbaths you shall observe." Specifically, the Midrash Tanna D'vei Eliyahu states that the primary time for Torah study is on Shabbat, when one is free from working. (Torat Yechiel)

"Then they will confess their sin and the sin of their forefathers, for the treachery with which they betrayed Me... I, too, will behave toward them with casualness and I will bring them into the land of their enemies." (26:40-41)

Why, if Bnei Yisrael confess their sins, will Hashem behave toward them with casualness and bring them to the land of their enemies? R' Moshe Freidiger z"l (communal leader in Pest, Hungary) explains:

Teshuvah means confessing one's sins and not making excuses. Here, Bnei Yisrael will confess, but they will justify their actions by saying that their forefathers acted the same way. Such "teshuvah" will be rejected. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot). © 2007 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org