

Toras Aish



Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Go up to the top of the high point (of Mt. Nevo) and lift your eyes to the west and to the north and to the south and to the east" (Devarim 3:27). Even though Moshe was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, G-d allowed him to see all of it (see Rashi). However, since Moshe was standing to the east of the land, in the Plains of Moav, looking eastward would mean turning his back to the Jordan River (and the land that lay beyond it). Why would G-d tell Moshe to look to the east, away from the Promised Land, if the purpose of "lifting his eyes" was to see the land that he could not enter?

One of the answers suggested (see Netziv on the Sifray on Bamidbar 26:12-14) is that G-d wasn't telling Moshe to look to *his* east (or west or north or south), but to the eastern part of the land (etc.). True, that part was west of his location, but he was being told that he would be able to see the entire land, from its eastern border to its western border and from its northern-most point to its southern-most point. Although this answers our original question, it doesn't seem to be consistent with several other things.

Usually, when the four directions are mentioned, they are paired north-south and east-west (see Bereishis 13:14 and 28:14). Avraham and Yaakov were both inside the Promised Land when G-d told them that they would inherit the land on all four sides of them, and we can understand why G-d used the length and width directions together to show the dimensions of the land that their children will inherit. If G-d was telling Moshe to do the same (although from a different perspective, being outside the land), we would have expected a similar pairing of the directions. Yet, Moshe is told to first look to the west, and then, instead of seeing the entire width by looking to its eastern boundary, is told to look north. He is then told to see the entire length, by looking south, before being told to look east. Not only that, but these directions are neither clockwise nor counterclockwise! By following G-d's directions, first Moshe had to look straight ahead of him, then to his right, then all the way to his left before looking either in front of him or behind him. Why did G-d have Moshe (or at least Moshe's head) spinning in circles rather than either up-down/right-left or in a

continuous circle (which, when the time came, he actually did; see Devarim 34:1-3)?

Additionally, the terms for east and south are usually "kedem" and "negev" (see Bamidbar 34:1:12, besides the above references). Here, though, "mizrah" is used for east and "taiman" for south. The Daas Sofrim suggests that these changes were made in order to indicate that Moshe should also look at the countries (i.e. enemy nations) to the east and south (and by extension, north) of Israel. But this would only work if Moshe was being told to look to *his* east and *his* south. If he was being told to look at the eastern and southern parts of the land, however, the countries beyond those boundaries would not be part of the picture.

Finally, Rashi tells us (Devarim 3:27) that G-d was telling Moshe that he could see the entire land, proving this from a later verse (34:1) that says, "G-d showed him the entire land." If the four directions in our verse refer to the areas in the west, north, south and east of the land, why would Rashi need to bring a different verse to show that Moshe saw all of it; doesn't our verse say the same thing?

It would therefore seem that G-d was in fact telling Moshe to look to *his* east, even though he was standing beyond the eastern border of the land he so desired to see. The question is why would G-d tell him to look behind him and see land that he already saw, and was able to walk through?

The Oznayim Latorah suggests that G-d was telling Moshe to look not just at the land that was about to be inherited, but at all the land that would eventually be inherited, including the lands that were still off limits because they were occupied by Lot's children (Amon and Moav) and Aisav's children (Seyir). By looking behind him, to his east, Moshe was able to see all of the land that was promised to Avraham. Nevertheless, Moshe's request was to go and see the land on the other side of the Jordan; it seems a bit awkward that G-d is telling him to look at an area that he could already see (and visit). And if the point was to see the entire land that would be inhabited by Israel, we needn't go to the future to include land to Moshe's east, as they had already conquered the land from Sichon and Og that the Tribes of Reuvain and Gad (and half of Menashe) would live in. Besides, when Moshe is actually shown the land (34:1-3), it is only the north, center and south that we are told he sees. If G-d was

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making a point of having Moshe see the larger Israel (whether current or future), why wasn't this also part of what he was shown?

I would like to suggest that G-d was only showing Moshe the land on the other side of the Jordan, the land infused with the full holiness of the Land of Israel, the land that Moshe was not allowed to enter and that he so much wanted to see. But, as the Sifray at the end of Sefer Devarim (357) tells us, he wasn't just shown the land, but all of what would happen there, both the good and the bad. And in order to get a full picture of the future history of Israel, a geographical context was necessary.

For much of its history, Israel was at the crossroads of civilization. The road from Egypt and the African continent to Europe, or to Babylonia, Persia and the Far East (via the Fertile Crescent), went right through Israel. Its own resources were only part of the story; the countries to its north and south, and especially to the east (not just the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians and the Persian exile, but all of the border skirmishes on the eastern side throughout the years) had a great impact on Israel's future (and still do).

Therefore, first Moshe was told to look to his west, where the Land of Israel was. Then he was told to expand his view, to see not just the northern and southern parts of Israel, but the countries that lay beyond. Finally, Moshe was told to turn around, and look to his east. Not because this was also part of the land of Israel, but because in order to understand what it would be like to live in Israel, he also had to see the countries that were to his east (and to the east of Israel). © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Without the world, what would G-d be? The answer is simply, G-d. On the other hand, without G-d, the world would cease to exist.

G-d is so powerful that without the world He would not be reduced one iota. In the same breath, G-d's immanence is such that without Him the world would be nothing. Rashi enhances this idea through his interpretation of the famous sentence found in this week's portion, Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu

Hashem Ehad. "Hear O Israel the Lord is our G-d the Lord is One." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

In the words of Rashi, the verse comes to tell us that "Hashem, the Lord, who is our G-d, now...He will be in the future One Lord, as it is stated... 'in that day shall the Lord be One and His name One.'" (Zekhariah 14:9) The implication is clear: G-d in the world today is not fully One in the sense that he has not been accepted by all of humankind. It is up to us, who know of G-d's greatness, to spread the name of G-d so that He will be received as One throughout the world.

The second paragraph of the well known Aleinu prayer makes this very point. There we yearn for the time when "the world will be perfected under the reign of the Almighty, le-takein olam be-malkhut Shakai" and all humankind will express allegiance to G-d.. "On that day," the paragraph continues, quoting the sentence from Zekhariah which Rashi understands as an explanation of Shema, "G-d will be One, and His name One." Note that the whole paragraph is in the future, implying that in the present G-d is not One in the sense that He has not been embraced by all.

This idea is also echoed in the text about Amalek where G-d swears by His name and throne that He will forever war against Amalek. G-d's name and throne are written uniquely as they are incomplete in the text -keis, Kah. (Exodus 17:16) Indeed, Rashi writes: "The Holy One blessed be He swears that His name and throne will not be whole and One until Amalek will be utterly blotted out."

Once again it is up to the human being, with G-d's help, to eradicate Amalek or the forces of Amalek. In this sense, while G-d does not need the human being-as He is, of course, independent and self existent-we have a strong and important role in His future. For only through the efforts of humankind will His name be One and His throne be complete.

In one word: while the existence of G-d does not at all depend upon humankind, the manifestation of G-d and the proliferation of the Divine message in this world very much depends on each and every one of us. © 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The most cogent lesson from this week's parsha is that there are no indispensable human beings in this world. Human beings are not replaceable and no two are alike, but they are not indispensable. One generation leaves and the next one arrives but somehow the world continues to exist.

There was no greater leader or prophet than Moshe. He cannot be replaced per se. But the world generally and the Jewish people particularly are able to

exist and accomplish even after his demise and absence. Moshe, the rabbis of the Talmud tell us, was the sun while Yehoshua, his beloved disciple and successor, was only the moon. But the moon was sufficient to conquer and settle the Land of Israel for the Jewish people and to prevent any form of idolatry to compromise the faith of Israel.

I think that the symbolism of the great miracle of Yehoshua in "stopping" the sun and moon at the time of his battle with the Canaanites in the Valley of Ayalon, indicates this lesson of non-indispensability. Moshe and Yehoshua, the sun and the moon, can be "stopped"- they can disappear and no longer be active, but eventually the battle must be fought, in any case, by the people of Israel.

No reliance on the sun and the moon is justified. The bitter lesson of life in all of its enormity is that every generation, every person, has to fight the battle of life and spirit and triumph even if we are not the equal of the generations that preceded us and even if our leadership pales in comparison to the type of leadership that went before us in Jewish life.

Jewish life after the death of Moshe must have been terribly different from the time of his life. A leader and prophet like Moshe occurred only once in human history. But a new generation arose that did not know Moshe personally. Had Moshe survived to lead this new generation there would have been the clear and present danger that Moshe, who was now treated as a great but still human being, would be treated as a G-d.

Leaders are matched to their times and generations. They are never to be viewed in the abstract or absolute. The generation of Moshe perished in the desert of Sinai. That great generation of our ancestors that stood at Sinai and received and accepted the Torah never came to the Land of Israel. And if they never arrived in Israel then Moshe also could not arrive. The leader and the generation that he leads are permanently intertwined.

That is the essence of the story in the Talmud about Choni Hamaagel who after waking from a seventy year sleep asked for his death since his generation and peer group no longer lived. No one is indispensable and every generation passes from the scene. The leader of one generation, no matter how great and wise he is, is not necessarily the proper head of the next generation. And that is the lesson that Moshe himself comes to realize and understand in today's parsha.

This is implicit in G-d's statement, so to speak, not to discuss the matter of entering the Land of Israel with Him further. The secrets and mysteries of human social existence remain hidden from human view and understanding. © 2007 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 SHLOMO RISKIN**Shabbat Shalom**

What does it mean to 'fear' G-d? This Sabbath, which follows the black fast of Tisha B'Av, is called the Sabbath of Comfort, derived from the first words of the prophetic reading "Comfort you, comfort you My people..." (Isaiah 40:1). We read in the Biblical portion, "there is none (no one or no thing) besides Him (Deut 4:35) and then "this is the commandment, the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord your G-d commanded.... in order that you may fear the Lord your G-d." (Deut. 6:1-3) How can single minded service to the one and only G-d whom we are supposed to fear according to the biblical text possibly bring us comfort? Once again, I understand the importance of loving G-d but find it difficult to be commanded to fear Him.

The Midrash provides a marvelous analogy which enables us to understand the biblical import. Love is a very inclusive emotion; I first learned to love and to feel loved from my parents, and those who have received such love and have offered such love are able to continue to love others. And the truth is that aside from the exclusiveness of the sexual relationship that one has with one's spouse, the healthy individual is capable of many sincere loves. The Midrash then describes the situation of an individual who seems to be running directly towards a dog; he is stopped by his friend, who cries after him, "You are so afraid of dogs, how come you are running towards them?" The hapless individual, who never stopped running, cries backwards at his friend, "but just look at the lion who is chasing me from the other direction". My fear of the lion cancelled out my fear of dogs.

Fear of G-d has the power to truly make the individual free; if one fears G-d, He will then fear no individual - whether that individual be his employer, his totalitarian leader, or even someone whom he would like to please in order to get ahead. The only one whom we will try to please is G-d. Such emotion will prevent anyone's moral compass from going off course and will enable him to feel free and truly human despite the difficulties of the environment in which he may find himself.

From that backdrop I would like to revisit a passage from the Talmud which we generally study on Tisha B'Av, the passage which gives the reason for the destruction of the Holy Temple (B.T. Gittin 55 b 56 a,b) The Talmud first tells of a mix-up in invitations to a fancy dinner which found the host's enemy, Barkamza, in the position of having been an invited guest. The host asks his enemy to leave; Barkamza is willing to pay for his own portion and then to pay for half the feast and then to pay for the entire feast, but all to no avail. Since he was publicly ejected from the dinner and Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulas was present at the event

and said nothing, the humiliated Barkamza decided to bring ruin upon the Jewish community. He informs the Emperor of Rome that the Jews are rebelling against him - and proves his charge by telling the Emperor that any offering that he will give to the Holy Temple of Jerusalem will not be accepted by the Priests. The skeptical Emperor gave a choice calf to Barkamza who immediately caused there to be a blemish on the lips or the eyes of the offering - a kind of blemish considered of no consequence by the Romans but ordinarily rejected by the Hebrews.

The Holy Temple authorities initially intended to offer the sacrifice despite the blemish in order to prevent strife between the Roman Emperor and the Jewish community. Said Rabbi Zecharai ben Avkulas, "They will say that we sacrifice blemished offerings on our altar". The Kohen Priests then thought to have Barkamza killed before he had a chance to return to Rome and report to the Emperor that indeed his offering had not been sacrificed. Said Rav Zecharia ben Avkulas, "They will say that individuals who place a minor blemish on an animal meant to be sacrificed is killed by the Temple authorities" They neither offered a sacrifice nor did they kill Barkamza; the Roman armies were dispatched to destroy the Holy Temple. The Talmudic passage at this point concludes, "The humility (Hebrew, Anvetanuto) of Rav Zecharia ben Avkullos caused our sanctuary to be burnt and our Temple to be destroyed". Rav Yedidya Frankel, a former Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv Yaffo, gave the following interpretation: The humility of Rav Zecharia ben Avkulas was his greatest tragedy and a cause of his undoing and the Temples destruction. He is paralyzed, incapable of rendering a halakhic decision. On the one hand, he is frightened of what the right wingers will say if he allowed the blemished animal to be offered; they will charge the Holy Temple with liberal reformism because they sacrificed a blemished animal. On the other hand, he is frightened by what the left-wingers will say if he has the informant killed. He pictures in his mind's eye all sorts of demonstrations against a Temple leadership which finds a human being worthy of death for merely having blemished a potential sacrificial offering. Because he does not have the courage of his convictions and he doesn't understand that a true rabbi only seeks to please G-d and is therefore oblivious to what various political factions might say, he is the real cause of the destruction of the Temple.

This is the same Zecharia ben Avkulas who remained silent at the famous dinner which ejected the mistaken invitee. Why did he remain silent? What was a rabbi doing at such a dinner, especially when this was the period before the destruction and a time of grave poverty within a heavenly taxed Judean community. Might it have been that the party host was an important supporter of Rav Zecharia's Yeshiva, and so he was afraid to risk the donation by angering the

insensitive host ? Clearly, this was one rabbi who did not truly fear G-d and so he greatly feared the people. A rabbi who is truly free looks not to the right, not to the left, and not to the wealth but only to what he truly believes is G-d's will and the honest conclusion of Jewish Law. I always advise my rabbinical students that when having to choose between pleasing G-d and pleasing the people, they are better off attempting to please G-d. G-d has a much longer memory than people do. © 2007 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

The second time this week, after the first time on Tisha B'Av, we read the passage which starts, "When you give birth to children..." [Devarim 4:25]. The first part of the passage (4:25-30) discusses two scenarios for the future? exile and redemption. It seems likely that in what he says Moshe wants to contradict possible mistaken ideas by Bnei Yisrael about these two events.

First, Moshe warns the nation: "When you give birth to children and grandchildren and you have been in the land for a long time, you will become corrupt and make idols, some kind of image. And you will do evil in G-d's eyes, making Him angry. I bring heaven and earth to you today as witnesses, that you will be quickly expelled from the land which you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not remain on it for a long time, you will be destroyed. And G-d will disperse you among the nations..." [4:25-26]. Evidently Moshe purposely emphasizes the concept of being in the land "a long time." After the nation lives for a long time on the land, the people might begin to think that their possession of the land is permanent and does not depend on their following G-d's commands. As is written by the Ramban, "Since you will have lived in the land for a long time and you will feel secure, perhaps you will forget G-d." In fact, this warning came true during the era of the First Temple, and more than once the people claimed that the option of being sent into exile was not a reasonable one. For example, the prophet warned them, "The settled cities will be destroyed, and the land will be desolate" [Yechezkel 12:20]. And the nation reacted with disdain: "The days will be lengthened, and the prophecy will be lost" [12:22]. It was therefore important for Moshe to emphasize to Bnei Yisrael that exile is a real option and that Bnei Yisrael must follow G-d's path in order to avoid it.

However, Moshe is also quick to present the other side of the coin. "And there you will worship items made by man, from wood and stone... And you will search from there for your G-d, and you will find Him, because you will seek for Him with all your heart and all your soul... For your G-d is merciful, He will not

abandon you or destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant with your fathers." [4:28-31]. The nation must be aware that just as exile is a possibility so are redemption and the mending of the ways. And this is relevant for another approach that appeared during the exile, which the prophets also warned against. Bnei Yisrael might become convinced that their being sent to exile meant that their fate was sealed, like the other nations, since in the end the only place where it is really possible to worship G-d is in Eretz Yisrael. The expulsion from the land might have been viewed as shattering the link between the nation and the Almighty, as was felt, for example, by the tribes of Gad and Reuven (Yehoshua 22:24-25; see also Shmuel I 26:19). Among other prophecies, in reaction to this approach and with a clear link to this week's Torah portion, the people were told, "What you imagine will never happen? when you say, we will be like the other nations, like the families of the earth, who worship wood and stone... And I will take you out of the other nations, and I will gather you from among the other lands where you have been dispersed" [Yechezkel 20:32-34].

The time spent within Eretz Yisrael might possibly be temporary, but the time in the exile will definitely be temporary, and in the end the nation of Yisrael will return to its land. And this fact means that the punishment of exile is even more significant? it is not a period of severed contact but rather a time of renewal.

A Full Secular and Holy Life

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan

In the last article, we discussed the spirit? "ruach"? and its place in the national conscience. We wrote that the ruach represents the culture of a nation, and that in Yisrael this culture is centered on the Oral Torah and the creativity involved in being occupied with it. This discussion might have seemed to imply that we are not related in depth to secular culture. But this is not so. Our nation is linked to all the elements of human life and happiness, as long as it is not an expression of the lowest levels of human life. We are part of every intellectual movement, we are related to the roots of scientific innovations, and we are certainly linked to every moral demand? even if it does not stem directly from the Torah. Many points of contact link us to the entire population of the earth: The shared bodily needs of all mankind, and the various realms of living, such as commerce, economics, industry, agriculture, and the army. In these realms we operate in parallel with the other nations, and we cooperate with them. However, the existence of this cooperative element does not blur the sharp line between being "a nation that dwells alone" [Bamidbar 23:9] and our joining together with other nations. Rather, because of the division, our cooperation with the other nations takes on a different appearance.

Our special culture is what makes us unique with respect to every other nation. We have something that no other nation has, and this is our glory. All of the universal matters that we listed above are not our natural habitat. Our innermost link is reserved for the point of holiness, and this is in its very essence at a higher level than the realms of the other nations. The gap between the holy and the secular is immeasurably greater than the gap between man and beast. But the command for us to be holy is based on the properties of the underlying secular layer. In the light of the Torah which was given to us all the different parts of our lives become infused with glory when they are used as the basis for creating a "kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation" [Shemot 19:6]. And that is the basis for insisting that the only culture of Bnei Yisrael is the Torah, even if they are interested in and have a need for the various segments of secular life.

I often find the need to address this issue in various different frameworks where I have the privilege of being a teacher. I have developed a standard response to the matter. I bring to the lesson a copy of "Mamarei Ha'Reiya", the collected works of Rabbi A.Y. Kook, and open it on page 502 to read from an article about literature: "My demand from Hebrew literature is very different from my demand from general literature. When I turn to general literature, I am interested in such matters as politics, sociology, and all the other elements that drive the spirit of mankind. With respect to this material, I am a human being just like every other human being, and I am not missing any human trait. But when I enter the realms of our own literature, I remove my shoes, because I am about to enter a holy realm..."

After I have read this passage, I tell my listeners that these are not the words of Rabbi Kook but that they were written by another author? Azar (Alexander Ziskind Rabinowitz). His letter to a newspaper is quoted in the book because Rabbi Kook reacted to it very harshly. Rabbi Kook wrote: "You have gone too far, sir. You have overstepped the bounds by demanding that our literature should only be concerned with questions of eternity. I find it hard to believe that these words, which are totally removed from real life, were written by an educated man who knows the world and is familiar with life as you are. I can only put the blame for this negative approach on the unclean nature of the exile, which continues to twitch within your soul."

Rabbi Kook wrote harsh words. He was certainly aware that this question is one of the key elements which arise before us on the path to rejuvenation of Yisrael and full national revival. The link to holiness is an integral part of our souls, and it is absolutely necessary to maintain the purity of this link and its supremacy. The goal of sanctity is not to curtail the flow of life, but rather to enhance and glorify it. The meaning of a full life is to take care of every element,

without leaving any corner behind. Let us end with the continued words of Rabbi Kook: "We must not restrict our literature to the halls of the holy, as you wrote, rather we must broaden the limits of the holy to encompass all of the secular life and all of its requirements, including all the science that is needed? 'On that day, on the bells of the horses will be written the words, Holy to G-d' [Zecharia 14:20]."

RABBI ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

They sinned doubly, as it says, 'Jerusalem has sinned a sin.' And they were stricken doubly, as it says, 'She has received double for her sins.' And she will be comforted doubly, as it says, 'Be comforted, be comforted, my people.' (Yalkut Eichah 1118) This Midrash can be understood in light of the comments of Ibn Ezra and Sforno on the concluding verses of our parsha: "When your son will ask you in the future-What are the testimonies and statutes and judgments, which G-d our G-d has commanded you? -- and you shall tell your son we were slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out of Egypt with a strong hand... and G-d commanded us to do all these statutes for our good all the days, to give us life as this day" (Deut. 6:20-24).

Ibn Ezra explains that the son's question is not what the mitzvot are, but why we were given a yoke different than all other peoples. The Torah's answer is that we must have trust that the mitzvot are for our own good, because G-d saved us from slavery by taking us out of Egypt. Sforno elaborates that while the benefit of mitzvot is predominantly in the World to Come, they also bring us life in this world.

G-d introduces Himself at the beginning of the Ten Commandments as the G-d Who took us out of Egypt, and not as the G-d Who created heaven and earth. This reminds us that just as the redemption from Egypt was for our benefit, so too, the mitzvot are for our good, and not for G-d's sake. Though, as the Sages say, mitzvot were not given to us to enjoy, but rather as a yoke around our necks; the purpose of that yoke is, in the final analysis, our good.

The Haggadah attributes the Torah's question here to the wise son. The answer given to him in the Haggadah is that we do not eat after the Korban Pesach is all that is in our mouths at the moment of redemption. In the end, it is the benefit from mitzvot, such as eating the Korban Pesach, that remains with us. The Torah begins with G-d's loving kindness-His clothing Adam and Eve- and ends with His loving kindness-burying Moses. The entire foundation of Torah is chesed-G-d's total giving to those who serve Him. The Torah is, in its entirety, an expression of G-d's desire to do good for us. It is not an imposition on our life, but rather a framework within to earn eternal reward for our own good.

Delving deeper, Torah begins with the kindness of covering man's humiliation, his physical body. It gives us the means to utilize that body in G-d's service and thereby purify and elevate it. Moses was the culmination of this process of elevation to being G-d-like. He transformed his physical body into something so holy that only G-d could bury it and put it away until the resurrection of the dead. That is the very essence of Torah- to remove the shame of pure physicality by elevating the physical to G-dliness.

When one sins, he actually commits a double crime: the first is rebellion against G-d; the second against himself in his disregard of the benefit from the mitzvah. Hence the punishment is also double. Not only does G-d punish him for his rebellion, just as a parent punishes a child to discipline him and guide him back to the right path. He also robs himself of the great benefit G-d so much desired to bestow upon him.

Consequently the comfort will also be double. The ultimate benefit will finally be realized, and, in addition, we will understand that the punishment itself was for our own good to prevent us from losing our eternal reward. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.com

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

This parsha begins with Moshe Rabbeinu davening to HaShem. So it comes as no surprise that the first paragraph of Medrash Rabba on the parsha focuses on the subject of tefila (prayer). So, too, the Sfas Emes also concentrates today on the topic of prayer.

The Medrash begins by quoting a statement of R. Yochanan. He tells us that "The Torah uses ten different words to refer to prayer." These ten synonyms include "hischanen" (pleading), "tze'aka" (crying out), and eight others. R. Yochanan's statement seems totally straightforward; and a person might be tempted to skip ahead to more innovative material. Fortunately, the Sfas Emes did not skip ahead, but instead, gave the matter some thought. His cogitation led the Sfas Emes to ask a basic (and startling) question. The Hebrew word most often used to refer to prayer is 'tefila'. But, notes the Sfas Emes, the word tefila is not included in R. Yochanan's list of ten synonyms for prayer! Not only does the Sfas Emes pose a fundamental question on R'Yochanan's statement, but thoughtfully, he also provides an answer. In true Sfas Emes fashion, his answer leads him-and us-to a paradox. That apparent inconsistency, in turn, leads him-and us-to a radical new insight. And not to just any insight, but to an insight that can help us in our avoda, our service to HaShem.

The Sfas Emes tells us that the key feature of prayer is not prayer itself, but rather preparing oneself for prayer. In that vein, the Sfas Emes reads the ten terms that the Medrash lists not as referring to prayer

itself, but rather to "hachanos" (preparations) for prayer. Thus, the Sfas Emes explains, the ten terms listed refer to ten avenues and suggested aids ("derachim v'eitzos") conducive to reaching a state in which one is truly in contact with HaShem. In that perspective, the Sfas Emes reads our parsha's first pasuk as: "Va'eschanan" [I prepared myself for prayer]... "laymor" [and then I prayed].

If the hachanos for prayer are more important than prayer itself, the implication for our avoda is clear. Prayer is not about presenting our wish list to HaShem. Prayer is about focusing our attention on our relationship with Him. As we concentrate our thoughts on that relationship, we can achieve a sense of awe (yir'ah) and perhaps of love (ahava) for HaShem.

How does a person prepare for prayer? Getting into the right mindset requires both one's own efforts and-perhaps surprisingly-help from HaShem. On the latter point, the Sfas Emes quotes a pasuk in Tehillim (10:17): "Tach'in li'bam; tak'shiv ahz'necha" (ArtScroll: "Guide their hearts; let Your ear be attentive.") But a person's own efforts to open a channel are also crucial. Thus, the Sfas Emes tells us that a person may even use merirus (bitterness) as his avenue to real tefila.

Real tefila is an outpouring of one's heart to be in contact with HaShem. A person who is davening in earnest recognizes his total dependence on HaShem. Rashi (following the Sifri on the parsha's first pasuk) makes an important observation in this context. He notes that even though tzadikim have many good deeds to their credit, when they daven, they do not rely on those credentials. On the contrary, they petition HaShem for "matnas chinam" (a pure gift-one for which nothing is given in exchange).

Why so? Because of the basic fact of life just noted: that true tefila entails recognizing one's total dependence on HaShem. In such a one-way relationship, there is no place for a quid pro quo, (a "this for that") deal negotiated with HaShem.

The Sfas Emes takes us further in his examination of prayer. He reports a comment of the Kotzker Rebbe which essentially raises the question of "Why pray? The Kotzker prefaced his comment with a quote from Iyov (41:3): "Mi hik'dimami va'ashaleim". In the present context, this pasuk translates roughly as HaShem saying to Iyov: "Don't I always pay my debts on time? And since my books are always up-to-date, what scope is open for tefila to change events?" Phrased more sharply, the Kotzker said: the fact that a person has to approach HaShem to ask for something implies that the person does not deserve that something. For, if the person truly deserved that something, he would not have to pray for it. The Sfas Emes addresses the Kotzker's question by taking us back to the word "Va'eschanan". Working "bederech remez" (allusion) he notes that the letters of the word "va'eschanan" can be rearranged to make two key

words: "hachana" (preparation) and "chinam" (a free gift). The Sfas Emes uses both of these resonating words to bring home his earlier remarks about prayer. As we have seen, a person must approach prayer with hachana. In that hachana, a person recognizes how little HaShem owes him and; hence, how much would fulfilling his request be in the nature of matnas chinam.

The Sfas Emes sees the prayer situation as follows. Realistically speaking, a person starts his davening with a bakasha (a personal request). But as the person gets into his/ her davening, the person can be swept away into a deeper conversation with HaShem.. Tefila can initiate interaction with HaShem in which He takes over, and the person can let go, becoming a passive participant in the prayer dynamic. The Sfas Emes gives us a meta-pshat to help us absorb what he is saying. He views the word "Va'eschanan" as a nif'al (passive-probably an Aramaic Ispa'el) construction. This lets us read "Va'eschanan" as: "I was prayed." Surely, this is the ultimate in prayer as total dependence on HaShem. Indeed, a person can be so swept away that he forgets about his bakasha! His tefila becomes so much leSheim Shamayim (focused only on the glory of HaShem) that HaShem has to remind the person what he came to request. Thus, we end with a unique perspective, in which we rely on HaShem to put the right words in our mouths. And lest you think that this perspective is "extreme" or too Chassidische, the Sfas Emes quotes a pasuk in Mishlei (16:1): 'Le'ahdam me'archei lev; u'mei HaShem ma'aneh lashon". That is: "A person has his thoughts about what to say; but what he actually says comes from HaShem." Truly what the Sfas Emes has been telling us. © 2007 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah introduces a special series of haftorah readings related to our final redemption.

In this opening one the prophet Yeshaya delivers the Jewish people warm words of comfort from Hashem. After over one thousand years of exile the time will finally arrive for the Jewish nation to return to Hashem and His Promised Land. But, as Chazal explain (see Yalkut Shimoni Yeshaya 443, 445) the painful scars of exile, persecution, and rejection will remain fresh in their minds and it will be difficult to approach Hashem and rebuild a relationship. In addition, they will remember vividly all their acts of defiance and will be embarrassed to return to Hashem. Hashem therefore turns to His nation and expresses to them warm words of comfort and console.

Hashem instructs the prophet Yeshaya, "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call her because her long term has been served and her sin has been forgiven." (40:2) After all of this time, the Jewish people will find it difficult to accept that Hashem is truly interested in

them. Although, the time for redemption has arrived they have not thoroughly cleansed themselves from all of their wrongdoings. They question how they could entertain establishing a perfect relationship with Hashem without having even perfected their ways. Hashem responds, "Her sins have been forgiven because she suffered an abundant and full measure for them." (*ibid.*) The *Malbim* (*ad loc.*) explains this to mean that the harsh severity of their sufferings will compensate for their incomplete steps of repentance. The Jewish people deserve their redemption after enduring and outliving the most horrifying and tragic experiences with steadfast faith in Hashem. During their painful exile they consistently demonstrated unwavering commitment to Hashem and an inseparable attachment to Him.

Our Chazal (see *Yalkut Shimoni Yeshaya* 443, *Beraishis* 162) share with us an additional dimension about Yeshaya's words of comfort. They quote a passage in *Shir Hashirim* referring to the era of the final redemption and the profound statement the Jewish people will make then. They plead to Hashem, "If only, You could be like a brother to me." (*Shir Hashirim* 8:1) Chazal see this brotherly relationship as a reference to the indescribable compassion that Yosef Hatzadik showed his brothers. After the atrocious behavior the tribes displayed towards Yosef they could never forgive themselves for those misguided actions. They therefore delivered a message to Yosef beseeching Him to forgive them without harboring any ill feelings towards them. In response to their plea, the Torah states "And Yosef comforted them and spoke to their hearts." (*Breishis* 50:21) Chazal explain that mere words of comfort and assurance were not sufficient to allay their fears. Yosef therefore saw it appropriate to appeal to their hearts and redirect their thinking. He convinced his brothers how meaningful they were to him and how their safety and prominence served as key factors in his attaining and maintaining his position of glory.

The Jewish people express their wish that Hashem act in this same manner with them. They find it impossible to forgive themselves for all the wrong they have done to Hashem. However, as Yosef appealed to his brothers' hearts and redirected their thinking, Hashem can certainly do the same. They plead with Hashem to remove any trace of ill feelings for all their years of unfairness to Him. Chazal conclude that as Yosef allayed his brothers' fears Hashem will do the same for His people. Therefore, when instructing Yeshaya to comfort the Jewish people, Hashem states, "Comfort them and speak to their hearts." Yeshaya, as Yosef, is charged with a mission of conveying to the Jewish people how significant each and every one of them is to Hashem.

Yeshaya faithfully says to the Jews, "Hashem will lead you like a shepherd tends his flock, gathers them in his arm, carries them in his bosom and gently

leads young ones." (40: 11) Yeshaya informs them that Hashem does care about every Jewish soul as a shepherd cares for each of his sheep. Although the Jewish people had previously strayed and suffered so much for their wrongdoing Hashem still cares about them in indescribable measures. Yeshaya beckons the Jews not to be hesitant or embarrassed to return. Hashem cares so much for each one of them that He will personally escort them back to Him.

Yeshaya continues, " Who measured the depths of the water by his fists, the span of the heavens by his hand, the width of the land by the measure of three fingers or the weight of mountains and hills on a scale? Behold the nations are but a remaining drop in a bucket, the rust of a scale." (40: 12,15) Although in our eyes, the entire world and its inhabitants are of enormous proportions, in the eyes of Hashem they are but tiny minuscule dots. They all serve a general purpose but the concern and focus of Hashem is not specifically upon them. Yeshaya concludes, "Lift your eyes heavenward and see who created these, He who brings out the myriads by number and to each He calls by name. (40: 26) The prophet is referring to the millions of stars found in the heaven. Each of them serves a specific purpose and is identified by name at all times. Each star is significant and every one occupies a prominent position in the master plan of Hashem.

In view of all the above we can suggest the following interpretation to the final words of the haftorah. Dovid Hamelech in *Sefer Tehillim* (Psalm 147) makes a similar reference to the stars in the heavens. He says, "Hashem is the builder of Yerushalayim; He will gather in the dispersed of Israel. He counts the stars by number, to all He calls by name. (147: 2,4) The Ibn Ezra interprets Dovid Hamelech's profound verses in the following manner. The Jewish people have been scattered all over the world which should be indicative of their insignificance. To this Dovid Hamelech responds and reminds us that the stars are also scattered over the vast span of the horizon. However, Hashem knows every one of them and identifies him by name and purpose. In this same vein Hashem knows every Jewish person and identifies with him by his individual name and purpose. Following this thought we can appreciate Yeshaya's words in this same manner. At the time of redemption Hashem will display His appreciation for each and every Jewish soul and personally escort him back to Eretz Yisroel. Every Jewish person counts because he occupies an important role in the scheme of the glory of Hashem. To Hashem every Jewish soul is greatly significant because his personal role adds a unique and distinct dimension to the majesty of Hashem. May we merit soon the realization of these comforting words with the coming of Mashiach and the ingathering of the exiles.