

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he last portion of the Torah reverberates with the image of circles. After all, immediately after its reading, we start the Torah from the beginning again. The circle symbolizes the deep meaning of Simchat Torah. We have, indeed, come full circle.

Not coincidentally we read this portion on Simchat Torah, the holiday when we dance in circles, and lovingly embrace the Torah as we joyously celebrate the cycle of public Torah reading.

Circles have a tremendously deep meaning. First of all, they symbolize love. We encircle those we deeply care for through embrace. In the words of Rav Shlomo Carlebach: "When you love someone very much, you embrace them. Isn't that stupid? To put your hands on their back? I would say put your hands on their face. On their back? But you know what that means? It means I love you so much I won't let you fall. Whenever you're downhearted, whenever you think you have no strength any more, whenever you're falling you can just rely on me. I'll hold you up."

Rav Soloveitchik offers another understanding of circles. He notes that the word teshuvah-repentance, is associated with the turning of the cycle of the year. (2 Samuel 2:1). As one moves further from Rosh Hashanah, one in fact is closer to the next Rosh Hashanah. Similarly, no matter how estranged one may be from G-d, there is the belief that one is approaching the Divine. The same applies to G-d's revelation, the Torah. Even if alienated from Torah study, one possesses the inner calling to reconnect with Torah learning.

Another thought comes to mind. In a circle, everyone is equal as all participants are equi-distant from the center. Unlike Shavuot, which emphasizes pure learning and invariably separates people into categories of the more and less knowledgeable, Simchat Torah is the great equalizer, for regardless of one's level of knowledge, we are all the same, reaching out, clasping the hand of the other, with whom we dance and sing.

No wonder, our portion-which accentuates the circular power of Torah-begins with the word ve-zot. (Deuteronomy 33:1) The first ve-zot in the Torah-and all firsts set the standard-speaks of the blessing

Ya'akov (Jacob) gave his sons. There, ve-zot refers to the cycle of life-as Ya'akov implores his sons to follow in his footsteps, and, he asks that he be returned to be buried with his ancestors. (Genesis 49:28, 29)

And when the Torah, wrapped around its circular wooden poles is lifted, we declare-ve-zot ha-Torah-representative of its circular nature. The point is accentuated on Simchat Torah. For it is then that the lifter of the Torah inverts his hands, manifesting the language of circularity-of love, of return, of equality.

May we, on this Simchat Torah, encircle the Torah with endless love, depth, and holiness. © 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 ZVI MILLER**

### The Salant Foundation

**M**oshe was the Father of all Prophets. He, alone, attained the highest level of Divine knowledge.

When Moshe's tenure of leadership was complete, HaShem chose Yehoshua bin Nun to be Moshe's successor. It would be reasonable to assume that Yehoshua was selected because he, too, was outstanding in Torah scholarship.

However, there were others in this generation who were superior to Yehoshua in Torah scholarship. If so, what qualifications did HaShem recognize in Yehoshua that merited him with the leadership?

The Torah revealed to Moshe the reason why HaShem chose Yehoshua, "Yehoshua has served you with outstanding devotion and has afforded you much honor. He would always be the first one in morning to greet you and the last one at night to depart from your presence. Each day he would arrange the benches in the study hall, as well as, place fresh tablecloths on the tables. Since he served you with his whole heart, it is fitting that he should serve the People of Israel, as the verse says: 'The one who guards the fig tree shall eat its fruits and the one who guards his master shall be honored.'" (Midrash Raba 12)

Amazingly, the primary criterion for leadership of the Jewish people is not Torah wisdom! Rather, Yehoshua merited leading the Nation of Israel because he devoted himself, on a daily basis, to honor Moshe, his teacher. Additionally, he regularly honored the Torah itself as well as its students.

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Yehoshua's love of Torah reflected his heartfelt recognition of Torah's supreme and incomparable preciousness. He expressed his passion for Torah through honoring Moshe Rabenu and his students.

Before Moshe's passing, he transferred his knowledge of Torah to Yehoshua. The love of Torah and its students, that Yehoshua had developed, made him a fitting vessel to receive the Torah.

May our hearts be filled with love of Torah and honor for its students. In turn, HaShem will bless us with Torah wisdom and many opportunities to serve the People of Israel. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**W**hat happened to Shimon? Right before Moshe dies, he mentions eleven of Yaakov's twelve sons, giving each of those Tribes a blessing. Why was Shimon left out?

The Sifray (followed by many commentators) points out that Moshe really included Shimon in Yehuda's blessing, using the words "listen, oh G-d, to the voice of Yehuda," as the word "listen" is comprised of the first three letters of Shimon's name. The rest of the verse is therefore explained three-fold, being applied to the Tribe of Yehuda, to the Tribe of Shimon, and to King David. Nevertheless, there must be a reason why Moshe only hinted at Shimon's blessing, rather than blessing them explicitly, as he did the rest of the Tribes.

Rashi, after telling us that Shimon was included in Yehuda's blessing, quotes Midrash Tehillim (90:3), which explains that Shimon didn't get their own blessing because "[Moshe] had it in his heart about them for what they had done in Shittim." This refers to when Zimri, the head of the Tribe of Shimon, got involved with a Midyanite woman after many others (mostly from his Tribe) had done so. Certainly a terrible thing, but hadn't those who sinned already perished? 24,000 people died in a plague (Bamidbar 25:9), and Zimri was killed by Pinechas. Why did the rest of the Tribe have to suffer because of them? And the Midrash doesn't say that Moshe didn't bless Shimon because of the sin, but that Moshe "had it in his heart against them" because of it, implying that there was some

personal animosity involved, and it (the personal animosity) was the reason he held a blessing back, with the sin (or affront) being the cause of Moshe's feelings. How can the Midrash imply that Moshe allowed himself to have any personal animosity at all, let alone against a whole Tribe, and that he let that animosity get the better of him to hold back the Tribe's blessing because of it?

Some of the Baalay Tosfos (e.g. Riva) say that Shimon and Levi both lost their blessings because they wiped out the city of Shechem and because they spearheaded the movement to get rid of Yosef. However, Levi got their blessing back when they answered Moshe's call after the sin of the "golden calf." This, they explain, was what Moshe meant when he told them that by stepping up they would be "getting a blessing" (Shemos 32:29), i.e. the blessing they had previously lost. Shimon, on the other hand, committed additional sins (such as by Zimri), so never got their blessing back. Although this does not address the issues we raised with Midrash Tehillim, it provides an interesting contrast. I have previously discussed how Zimri's actions may have been a response to his Tribe's demand that he do something to prevent their being prosecuted for sinning ([www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/pinchas.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/pinchas.pdf)). While Levi responded to sin by confronting the sinners (even those from their own Tribe), Shimon responded by trying to minimize it. The Sifray also contrasts Levi and Shimon, with both "borrowing" from G-d (by Shechem and Yosef). While Levi "repaid the loan" (by the "golden calf") and then "lent to G-d" (when Pinechas thwarted the plague started by Zimri and his Tribe), Shimon not only did not "repay the loan," but "borrowed more" (at Shittim). It is now clear why Shimon wasn't worthy of getting a blessing; the question still remains regarding what Moshe's "feelings" had to do with it.

When Moshe commanded the Children of Israel regarding the blessings and curses to be said by Mt. Grizim and Mt. Aival, Rashi (Devarim 27:24) tells us that there were only eleven curses, not twelve, because each blessing/curse corresponded to one of the Tribes, "and no curse was written to correspond to Shimon because [Moshe] didn't have it in his heart to bless them before his death when he blessed the other Tribes, so he didn't want to curse them." Since each of the eleven contained both a blessing and a curse, each Tribe had both directed towards them. Was it the corresponding blessing that Moshe wanted to withhold from Shimon, or the curse? Rashi's wording indicates it was the curse, as a sort of pre-paid compensation for not getting a blessing later. But by withholding the curse, the blessing that went along with it was also being withheld, so how would it compensate for not getting a blessing later? Previously ([www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/kiTavo.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/kiTavo.pdf)) I suggested that each of the eleven blessings/curses served the specific

purpose of testifying that its corresponding Tribe was not guilty of that sin. The Talmud (Shabbos 55b) tells us that the curse against those that have relations with their father's wife which, was directed at Reuvain, proved that he was not guilty of such a transgression (and only moved Yaakov's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's). As the Talmud puts it, "is it possible for his descendants to stand on Mt. Aival and say 'cursed is the one who lies with his father's wife' if he had committed that sin?" Withholding a curse from Shimon, therefore, was a negative thing, not a positive one, for it meant that there was nothing that Shimon might have been accused of that was untrue. Rather than compensating for not getting a blessing later, being left out by the curses worked in tandem with it; for the same reason they didn't get a blessing, they were not "blessed" with a curse, i.e. they were not worthy of either.

Moshe wanted to bless Shimon, just as he blessed Reuvain despite Yaakov reprimanding him, and just as he blessed Levi despite his initially being in the same situation as Shimon. He just couldn't, because the traits of Aisav that Yaakov accused both Shimon and Levi of having (see Beraishis Rabbah 99:6) were still evident in Shimon. Yaakov separated the two brothers, hoping that this would lead to their improvement. For Levi, it worked, but not for Shimon. Moshe was afraid that blessing them would help them succeed at things that were not positive, so had to withhold it. He therefore took the next step, making Shimon join with Yehuda, so that Yehuda could bring out the best in them. They would live together (Shimon's inheritance in the Land of Israel was part of Yehuda's) and were included in Yehuda's blessing. It was not because of any personal animosity, G-d forbid. Moshe would have loved to give Shimon their own blessing. However, because of what occurred at Shittim, he couldn't bring himself to do it. So he did the next best thing—he included them with Yehuda, hoping that they could end up being blessed along with them.

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### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## **Making It by Breaking It**

**T**he last verses of the Torah encapsulate a glorious career of leadership of the father of all prophets, Moshe, into a few brief sentences. "Never has there risen in Israel a prophet as Moses whom Hashem had known face to face: as apparent by all the signs and wonders that Hashem had sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and all his land. And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

Powerful descriptive. But it is as cryptic as it is powerful. What is the strong hand and that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel? Does it refer to

the horrific plagues brought on Egypt? Perhaps it refers to the splitting of the sea or the opening of the earth to swallow Korach and his rebellious cohorts?

Rashi tells us that the words "Moshe performed before the eyes of Israel" refers to something totally different, perhaps very mortal. Rashi explains that the posuk (verse) refers to the smashing of the tablets upon descending Mount Sinai and seeing the nation frolic before the Golden Calf. He quotes the verse "and I smashed the tablets before your eyes" (Deuteronomy 9).

Rashi's comment evokes many questions. Why is smashing the Luchos counted as an awe-inspiring feat? And more important, is this the final way to remember Moshe the man who smashed the Luchos? Is that the parting descriptive of Judaism's greatest leader?

Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant, was Rav in a city when a typhus epidemic erupted. Despite the peril of the contagious disease, Rabbi Lipkin went together with a group of his students to aid the sick, making sure they had food and clothing. The roving first-aid committee imposed strict restrictions upon the townsfolk, imploring them to eat properly every day in order to ward off immunological deficiencies.

Yom Kippur was fast approaching, and Rabbi Lipkin decreed that due to the menacing disease, absolutely no one was to fast on Yom Kippur despite it being the holiest day of the year.

The town's elders were skeptical. They felt that Rabbi Salanter had no right to impose such a ruling on those who were not afflicted. Despite their protestations, Rabbi Salanter was unfazed. In fact he made his point in a very dramatic way.

On Yom Kippur morning, immediately after the shacharis services, he went up to the bimah, made kiddush, drank the wine, and ate a piece of cake!

Immediately, the townsfolk were relieved. They went to their homes and followed suit.

The elders in the town were outraged at this seemingly blatant violation of Jewish tradition. They approached Rabbi Lipkin to protest his disregard for the sanctity of the day, but Rabbi Lipkin remained adamant. "I have taken a group of students for the last month, and together we have attended to scores of typhus victims. I guaranteed every mother that each of their children will return home healthy. On my guarantee not one of those students became ill!"

He turned to the elders and declared. "When you are able to make such guarantees then you can tell me the laws against eating on Yom Kippur!"

The Torah ends with the greatness of Moshe. It refers to his great accomplishments as his Yad haChazaka, his strong hand before the eyes of Israel—the breaking of the two Tablets Of Law. Moshe's greatness was not only knowing how to accept the Ten Commandments, but when to smash them as well. And

though not every one of us is equipped with the ability to overrule a practice or tradition, Klall Yisrael knows that when the time to act is called for the great ones will arise to build and cure by smashing what needs to be broken. Because whether it is breaking a fast or breaking the tablets, it takes a great man to understand the time to build and an even greater man to know when it is time to tear down. © 1999 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he Succot festival will end this coming week with the special holiday of Simchat Torah. Whereas on Shavuot we commemorate the anniversary of the granting of Torah to Israel at Mount Sinai, on Simchat Torah we simply rejoice in the fact that we possess the holy Torah. But the celebration on Simchat Torah, like all Jewish commemorative events that have survived the test of time and changing societal circumstances, follows a ritual, a halachic standard. What makes Simchat Torah different from all other holidays in the Jewish calendar year is that it has no basis in biblical, Talmudic or rabbinic literature. It is a holiday of custom and folklore that emanated from within the Jewish people - a popular invention of Israel to express its love and appreciation for Torah.

Most of the customs that form the basis of the Simchat Torah celebration arose between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries in Central Europe and then spread throughout the remainder of the Jewish world. The centerpiece of Simchat Torah is the fact that the Torah readings of the year, read publicly every Sabbath throughout the year, comes to its conclusion on Simchat Torah. The ancient custom of Babylonian Jewry to complete the reading of the Torah every year - the custom of the Jews in the Land of Israel was to complete the Torah reading cycle every three years - was adopted by world Jewry in the fifth century. When the Jews went into exile from their homeland of the Land of Israel, they also adopted the custom of keeping a second day of the holidays as per the Talmud. Thus, Shmini Atzeret, the eighth day of Succot, so to speak, (in reality, Shmini Atzeret is technically a holiday all unto itself) also had a second day added to it in the Exile. Since Shmini Atzeret itself had no special mitzvot connected to it except that of rejoicing, the Jewish people took the second day of Shmini Atzeret and converted it into Simchat Torah and a day of great rejoicing because of the Torah. In present-day Israel, where only one day of the holiday is observed, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated simultaneously on the same day.

On Simchat Torah, everyone in the synagogue receives the honor of being called for an aliyah to the Torah. Thus the final portion of the Torah is read many times over on that day in order to accommodate this

custom, this in spite of the fact that such repetitions are frowned upon on other occasions of the Torah reading throughout the year. The final person called to complete the Torah reading is called the "Chatan Torah" - the bridegroom of the Torah. A tallit is spread over the "Chatan" and the Torah and serves as a "chupah" - a wedding canopy, symbolizing the eternal love bond between the Torah and the people of Israel. The cycle of the reading of the Torah is now commenced immediately and another chatan - "Chatan Bereshith" is called to the Torah and the first section of the Torah, Bereshith, is now read aloud, again under the canopy of the tallit. The Torah reading itself is preceded by seven "hakafot" - circling processions of those in the synagogue carrying all of the the Torahs from the ark of the synagogue. The "hakafot" are accompanied by song and dance (and unofficially, liquid refreshment) and a great spirit of merriment and joy. A special aliyah to the Torah that includes all of the children present, even infants, takes place. It is deemed a particular honor for the adult who leads the children in the blessings over the Torah and this aliyah, called "Kal Hanarim," signifies the continuity of Torah study and observance among the Jewish people over all of its generations. It is the guarantee of our future, for as long as there is Torah amongst Israel and the love of that Torah is transmitted to our children, Israel will survive and prosper. Jews who tragically lose their connection to Torah inevitably disappear from the Jewish scene. Simchat Torah is the day of connection to Torah. It should therefore never be ignored or forgotten. © 2002 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### **RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG**

### **Weekly Thoughts**

**L**ast year, around this time, I was visiting an apartment building which houses a number of Jewish tenants. We went from apartment to apartment, visiting people over the festival and inviting them to take part in the Mitzvah of the Four Species (taking the Lulav, Etrog, myrtle and willow [bound] together, and waving them in all directions symbolizing the omnipresence of G-d, the scattered nature of the Jewish people and the unity of all different types of people).

We visited one older lady who spoke with a Hungarian accent. She said she would be delighted to have the chance to wave the Lulav. We stood in the doorway of the apartment and I started to recite the blessing, word by word, with this lady repeating after me. After a few words of the blessing "Boruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech..." (Blessed are You, L-rd Our G-d, King.) she broke down and was unable to

continue. The lady's adult daughter, who by now had joined us, explained that this was bringing back painful memories of a childhood where the lady had lost her relatives in the Shoah (Holocaust). I apologized and we left them alone. I felt very bad about the whole incident - here we were, trying to enthuse and bring joy to Jewish people on the festival, and we had - however unintentionally - ended up causing somebody distress.

The story does not, however, end there. We also had a mobile Succah with us, on a trailer attached to a van, which was parked on the street. We told the residents about it and some wanted to come out and see, to eat a piece of homemade cake in the Succah. Even though it was raining by now and we did not want to cause distress to anyone, one lady in particular said she would come and join us a few minutes later. It turned out that this lady was the neighbor of the Hungarian lady, and they both came out to the mobile Succah, very slowly, with the neighbor supporting the first lady. It seems the neighbor had witnessed the previous encounter and had taken it upon herself to comfort the lady and to bring her to join us in the mobile Succah. They came into the Succah and had something to eat and drink.

We spoke a little - the Hungarian lady was apologetic for what had transpired earlier. I told her that she certainly had nothing to apologize for and I was sorry that we had caused her any distress. She was amazed and delighted that we had a Succah, out here on the street, in public! She explained that all she recalled from her childhood was having to practice Judaism in secret, fearful of discovery. She was frightened and a little overwhelmed by this public performance of a Mitzvah. I commented that we are fortunate to live in times where we can proudly demonstrate our Judaism and carry out Jewish commandments and traditions publicly, without fear of arrest or worse, and that this added an extra special dimension to all the mitzvot we were able to perform. We talked a while and then they left us. I was overjoyed that we had left them on a positive note, inspired by the neighbor's kindness and care.

Afterwards, reflecting on these events, I realized how often we make blessings without giving too much thought to what is going on. Here was this lady who could not even pronounce all the words of a blessing, because it had so much deep meaning and significance from her past.

It made me count my own blessings. We are privileged to live in times where we can, almost universally, practice Judaism freely and publicly, we can take time off work for religious festivals and enjoy the protection of secular law in many countries. Our institutions and organizations are proudly Jewish, with no need to hide what they represent. A glance into history reveals that this is a comparatively recent phenomenon.

In addition, it struck me that although the Hungarian lady may not have finished saying her blessing I had no doubt in my mind that it was said with so much sincerity and depth that it went straight up to the highest place. May all of us merit such sincere and true approach to our spiritual matters. © 2003 Rabbi M. Wollenberg & torah.org

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

### **Haftorah**

**T**his week we read a special Haftorah portion in light of the fact that this Shabbos is Erev Rosh Chodesh. This particular segment deals with the heartbreaking separation of Yonason from his dearest and most beloved friend Dovid and Dovid's secret escape from the threatening wrath of Shaul Hamelech. Shaul, then acting as king over Israel, had the mistaken impression that Dovid was a threat to his reign and viewed him as a rebel who deserved, according to Torah law, to be executed. Yonason the king's son, maintained an entirely different outlook on the matter and idolized Dovid's accomplishments to the point of yearning for Dovid to assume the mantle of leadership over Israel. These diametrically opposing views finally came to a head when the king publicly denounced his son for his disgraceful attitude. Yonason read his father's message efficiently and secretly informed Dovid to flee for his life. After an emotional scene of departure Yonason sent Dovid away in peace and reinstated their vow that nothing would ever separate the two families from each other.

The timely reading of this particular segment and the occurrence of its events around Rosh Chodesh suggest a corollary between the reign of Dovid Hamelech and Rosh Chodesh. Indeed we find many customs related to the new moon that reinforce this association. Our Chazal in Sanhedrin 42a instituted that we recite a blessing over the new moon each month. The nature of this Mitzvah is to recognize the orbit of the moon and its exact and affixed progression and digression beginning from a small crescent, extending to a full moon and then decreasing and disappearing. Yet, in the midst of the recital we say with excitement, "Dovid, King over Israel is alive and enduring". This peculiar practice suggests that the moon and King Dovid's reign have much in common. Chazal (Pesikta Rabasi 15) tell us that in actuality King Dovid's reign was patterned exactly according to the moon. The moon comes to its fullest appearance on the fifteenth day, and then begins its gradual decline until it totally disappears. Once the moon is completely out of sight it then begins its gradual reappearance. Chazal explain that the reign of the House of Dovid resembled the appearance and disappearance of the moon. Likened to the moon, the glory of Israel's reign slowly began to appear in the time of Avrohom Avinu and developed to its fullest maturity fifteen generations later in the era of

Shlomo Hamelech, Dovid's son. From that point onwards the monarchy, like the moon, began its gradual descent until its total disappearance fifteen kings later during the era of Tzidkiyahu Hamelech. The Maharsha (Sanhedrin 38a) develops this thought and cites that even within the actual dynasty of King Dovid there were thirty figureheads. In fact, the household of Dovid enjoyed fifteen kings until its downfall during the reign of Tzidkiyahu Hamelech. But even after that point there existed a structure of rulership from the House of Dovid for many generations later. The Midrash concludes that when the reign of Dovid will totally disappear the time will be ripe for the gradual appearance of Moshiach.

We conclude the prayers over the new moon with a special request that Hashem restore the moon to its perfect brilliance and then we recite the following passage "And the Jewish People will seek Hashem and their King Dovid". Once again we discover King Dovid as an integral part of our Rosh Chodesh service. Our Chazal ( see Rashi Breishis 1:15 ) teach us that the moon was originally created with the same brilliance as that of the sun. However, the light of the moon was decreased and will remain that way until the era of Moshiach. In this prayer the brilliance of the moon is likened to the glorious reign of Dovid Hamelech. We entreat Hashem to restore the moon to its original brilliance and likewise to restore the reign of Dovid Hamelech to its original splendor. The insightful words of the Maharsha are quoted in completion of this thought that the numerical value of the above cited phrase "Dovid, King over Israel..." equals the exact value of the words "Rosh Chodesh".

We can now appreciate the lesson of this week's haftorah and its encouraging theme. From the view of an outsider the events of the haftorah are terribly disheartening. Dovid had continuously demonstrated remarkable strengths and leadership qualities throughout his faithful years serving as Shaul Hamelech's general. Although Yonasan had been destined to be Shaul's successor, Dovid's superb qualities convinced even Yonasan to step aside and allow Dovid to rise to power. Now, because of King Shaul's grave misunderstanding all must be forfeited and Dovid's glorious career must come to an abrupt end. Yet, Yonasan remains steadfast and is totally convinced that justice will prevail and Dovid will eventually rise to his well deserved position of authority. The moon seems to be disappearing, but Yonasan knows that it will reappear in its proper time. He, therefore reinstates his pact with Dovid (see Malbim 20:13,14) that when he rises to his position of leadership never to forget the household of Yonasan and his father. We draw our faith from these words and, as we look towards the moon, we express our total faith in Hashem. We recognize that the disappearance of the Kingdom of Israel, like the moon, is a guaranteed

indication of its reappearance and we entreat Hashem to restore the Kingdom of Dovid to its original glory and splendor, speedily in our days. © 1999 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

**RABBI YISROEL CINER**

## Parsha Insights

**T**his week we once again begin the yearly cycle of Torah-reading with parshas Breishis. "In the beginning"... Starting again...

We've gone through intense introspection during the days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur—sorting out who we really are and what role we must play in Hashem's master-plan. Almost immediately afterwards we spent seven days enveloped in the loving embrace of the succah—forsaking the comforts of our permanent homes and moving into temporary ones. Focusing on what is really permanent and what is really temporary, what is truly important and where our priorities must lie. Hashem seems to be laying out the groundwork for us, preparing us with the prerequisites needed to start again...

With that we begin the Torah: "Berishis barah Elokim... {In the beginning of Hashem's creation...}[1:1]." Hashem created a perfect world, day by day, until He reached the pinnacle of His creations—"Na'aseh Adom b'tzalmenu kidmusenu {Let us make man in the form of the angels (Rashbam), similar to us that he'll make free-will decisions based on his knowledge and understanding (Sforno).}[1:26]." The holiness of Adom Harishon is totally beyond our grasp. The angels wanted to sing praises to him as they do to Hashem.

The Ramban reveals to us the nature of Adom Harishon before his sin. He did all that he was supposed to do as part of his innate character, just as the heavens and its hosts do the will of Hashem without any deviation.

He was given one commandment—not to eat from the Etz Ha'da'as Tov V'ra {the Tree of Desiring Good and Evil}. The fruit of this tree would put into a person the desire to choose tov {good} or ra {evil}.

We stated above that Adom Harishon was intrinsically a free-will being. How was there free-will before the knowledge of and desire for ra?

Rav Chaim Volozhiner explains in his classic Nefesh HaChaim that Adom Harishon before the sin did have the ability of choosing tov or ra. However, he was the embodiment of unsullied purity and holiness without any internal leaning toward ra. Any desire toward ra came from an external source (the nachash {primordial snake}), as an outsider might try to convince a person to jump into a fire. By eating from the Etz Ha'da'as, man's desire to do ra entered the person himself to the point that it appears that he really wants to do it!

Rav Dessler explains this further. In our present state of 'after the sin' we hear our desires for ra

in first person. "I really want to do that... I really want to go there..." The desires for tov then speak up in second person. "You know that you really shouldn't... You know it's wrong..." The "I" is the want to do ra. The mutiny has been so complete that we totally identify with the ra. That was not the case with Adom Harishon. As the Ramban wrote, his "I" only wanted to do what was tov. An internal desire to go against the will of Hashem was incomprehensible to Adom Harishon. It was like wanting to jump into a fire. How could "I" want to do ra? How could "I" want to cause myself destruction?

The Rambam writes that before the sin, Adom Harishon had no concept of tov and ra. Rather, his decision making process decided between sheker {falsehood} and emes {truth}. Meaning, when one sees with perfect clarity the goodness of good and the evil of evil, the decision is one of truth or falsehood. Only good, the will of Hashem, is true and enduring. Evil, going against the will of Hashem and thinking something could be gained by that is the most ridiculous falsehood imaginable. However, as we move further and further from that clarity, our decision begins to take the shape of good and evil, right and wrong, proper and improper. Ra becomes a possibility... I can gain plenty by choosing and doing ra but I shouldn't do it... It's wrong... We've lost sight of the intrinsic truth and falsehood of the decision. The Etz Ha'da'as Tov V'ra {the Tree of Desiring Good and Evil} confused the decision of truth and falsehood into one good and evil.

If Adom Harishon had that absolute clarity, how could he have gone ahead and eaten from the tree that Hashem had commanded him not to?

Again, Rav Dessler explains. The decision to sin could only have come from a misunderstanding. From mistakenly thinking that true tov would result from his actions. Adom Harishon felt that in his present state he could only produce a minimal kiddush Hashem {sanctification of Hashem's name}. He and the world were in such a pure state. The decision to choose truth/good was such a simple one. If, however, both he and the world were to be lowered a bit, to move a bit closer to ra, and if in that state he would still recognize ra as being the sheker that it is, then the kiddush Hashem {sanctification of Hashem's name} that he would bring about would be that much greater. The external seduction spoke to him in second person. "You are obligated to do that! Truth and love of Hashem demand it of you! To not do it and thereby not bring about your maximum kiddush Hashem, that will be your sin!"

That was the test that Adom Harishon was faced with. A harrowing decision of which course of action was true emes/tov. Rav Dessler writes that Chaza"l, in their crypt manner, allude to this. The nachash said that by eating, "you'll become like Elokim, knowers of good and evil [3:5]." Rashi explains this in a

baffling manner. You'll become like Elokim—you'll create olamos {worlds}.

We've mentioned many times before that Hashem hid Himself in this world in order to allow us free-will. The Hebrew word for world is 'olam' which means hidden. The world is defined as the place wherein Hashem hides Himself. Our choosing of tov would 'earn' us the ultimate tov—connecting to the Source of and epitome of Tov—connecting to Hashem Himself. What results is that the creation of the world was a creation of seeming evil for the purpose of bringing about ultimate good.

Adom Harishon was told by the nachash that he too would create olamos. He too would be a partner in this creation. By eating from the Etz Ha'da'as he too would create seeming evil for the purpose of bringing about ultimate good.

It was his lofty madregah {spiritual level} which led to his mistake. With the clarity he had, he couldn't imagine the darkness and confusion of ra. He couldn't imagine just how difficult things could and would become. He thought the tests would be easy to pass and one would have to be crazy to succumb to ra. He decided to create evil to bring about good. He ate from the Etz Ha'da'as.

What was at the core of Adom Harishon's mistake? The thought that something could be gained by going against the Will of Hashem. What is at the core of every aveira {sin} that we, the descendants of Adom Harishon, commit? The thought that something can be gained by going against the will of Hashem. That clear decision of emes {truth} and sheker {falsehood} that has become clouded into one of tov {good} and ra {evil}.

This week we once again begin the yearly cycle of Torah-reading. "In the beginning"... Starting again... A new year... Perhaps that is the most important point to gird ourselves with as we begin again. That absolute truth and absolute falsehood. The realization that absolutely nothing can be gained by going against the Will of Hashem. © 1998 Rabbi Y. Ciner & Project Genesis, Inc.

### **RABBI SHMUEL CHOUEKA**

## **The Rabbi's Message**

**[H]**ebel brought an offering before G-d, which was favorably received. Kayin's offering, however, was not brought with sincerity and was rejected by G-d, whereas Kayin was disappointed and dejected.] G-d said to Kayin, "Why are you angry, and why are you morose? If you do well, there will be acceptance, and if you do not do well, sin waits for you at the door. Its desire is to ensnare you, but you can be master over it" (Beresheet 4:6-7)

Kayin's first offense was not a cardinal sin. True, he had been less than completely sincere in his worship of G-d, but this was hardly a calamity. Kayin's

reaction, however, was one that forebode grave consequences because he became bitter and morose.

G-d's words to Kayin were a lesson to all mankind throughout all times. If we recognize a misdeed for what it is, and understand that human frailty makes us vulnerable to error, then we need not be overly harsh on ourselves. We can admit a mistake, make our amends, and we can then redeem ourselves and be restored to the good graces of G-d and man. If, however, we fail to correct our wrongs, and in our defensiveness become bitter and resentful, then we invite further misdeeds. The forces that tempt us to sin are powerful and lie in wait for us, and although we have the strength to vanquish them, we can do so only if we rid ourselves of festering anger and resentments.

Kayin's inability to admit his wrongdoing and divest himself of his resentment ultimately led to the murder of Hebel, a grave sin which doomed him to be a fugitive, feeling himself pursued by every living thing, and finding no peace anywhere on earth.

How familiar a pattern, and how little mankind has learned from history! Indeed, one of the Talmudic Sages states that the brief passage "This is the book of the history of man" (5:1) is a great and comprehensive principle of Torah. If only we had learned the simple lessons of Beresheet, how different the course of history would have been, and how infinitely happier each of us would be.

### Let There Be Light

"And the earth was desolate and void, and darkness was upon the waters, and Hashem said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Beresheet 1:2,3)

The Hafess Hayim used to say that these verses at the beginning of the Torah serve as a tremendous inspiration in times of darkness. At the beginning of creation the world was completely dark without even the faintest hint of any light. One cannot chase away darkness with sticks and axes. But kindle just one small candle and the darkness is gone. When the entire world is in total darkness, one statement of Hashem, "Let there be light," is sufficient to light up the world. Although there are times when the world is encompassed by a spiritual darkness which endangers its very existence, there is always hope. In one instant, Hashem can send forth His word and there will be a great light.

Whenever you feel despair it is because you tell yourself that things are presently awful and that all is hopeless. At such moments you do not feel it possible that there will be a bright future. If, however, you keep in mind that Hashem has the power to shine forth a magnificent light, you will overcome your negative attitude of despair. From the bottom of your heart you will call upon our Creator to shed light upon the world. Even before the light appears, you will be full of hope. You realize that the darkness itself is part of

Hashem's plan. Whenever you feel darkness, develop the habit of repeating, "Let there be light." Just by repeating these words over and over you will begin to feel the light of Hashem penetrating your heart and soul. Even if your personal situation remains as it is, when you experience Hashem's light you will have the strength to deal with any situation from a position of spiritual strength. (Growth through Torah)

### What's Your Name?

"And Adam named all the domestic animals and the birds of the heavens and all the wild animals" (Beresheet 2:20)

The Midrash states that Adam, after having named the various creatures, was asked by Hashem, "What shall your name be?" He answered, "I shall be called Adam." "And what is My Name?" asked Hashem. To this Adam responded, "Hashem."

This interchange between Hashem and Adam obviously demands explanation. We may suggest the following: Man is able to achieve the greatest levels and intelligence and culture. He can attain such heights of profundity that he is able to select the correct name which truly describes the essential characteristic of every living creature. However, he still may not understand his own essence. Man is not always cognizant of his own characteristics, his potential and his purpose in life. Man sometimes does not know that he is an "Adam" and therefore different from all other living creatures. This was Hashem's query to Adam. "Do you know your own name and purpose?" When Adam correctly responded to the first query, Hashem once again questioned him, "Do you know My Name?" Man with all his intellect and wisdom must realize that unless he reflects on the source of everything he can still corrupt himself and perform the most reprehensible acts. The awareness of man's name is not enough; it is necessary to know Hashem's Name. No culture, despite its greatest achievements, is assured of overcoming its animalistic desires unless there is an awareness and recognition of Hashem. We have witnessed some of the most scientifically and intellectually developed societies sinking to the nadir of depravity and brutality, committing wanton murder and destruction. This was Hashem's message to Adam. It is not enough for man to know what he is and represents; it is necessary for man to have the cogent awareness of the existence of Hashem and His constant presence over him. (Peninim on the Torah) © 2001 Rabbi S. Choueka & Torah Center of Deal

