

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Biblical reading of Devarim always falls out on the Sabbath preceding Tisha B'Av, the black, bleak fast commemorating the destruction of our Holy Temples. This is not merely an "accident" of the calendar; in our Biblical portion, Moses reviews his life as leader of Israel in his farewell address to his people and he cries out, "How so ("Eicha") can I bear your troublesomeness and your burdens and your belittling barbs?" (Deuteronomy 1:12), a verse which begins with the same word that opens the Scroll of Lamentations ("How so," - "Eicha" - "does she sit alone, the city filled with our nation"). Hence, according to most customs the Torah reader on the Sabbath chants the Biblical verse Eicha with the very same haunting melody used for the Eicha reading on Tisha B'Av.

What is the real significance of our mourning when we weep for the destruction of the Temple? How truly important could the Temple have been if Judaism managed to survive without it for the last 2000 years? And if the essence of the Temple was the sacrificial rite, how many modern Jews can really identify with the slaughter of animals as offerings for a Temple?

I believe that if we explore a fundamental difference of opinion between two great Jewish leaders- Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Akiva- we will gain a great insight into the most profound significance of our Temple, an insight which will instruct us as to the irretrievable loss we suffer as a result of its destruction. It is common knowledge that Rabbi ben Zakkai managed to leave Jerusalem and meet with Vespasian, the leader of the Roman armed forces besieging the Temple, with the request that he spare the City of Yavneh and her wise men, the Sanhedrin of seventy-one Jewish Sages. Rabbi Yohanan was willing to relinquish Jerusalem and the Temple so long as the Jews could remain in Israel and maintain their ongoing interpretations of the Oral Law (69 C.E.).

Approximately six decades later, Rabbi Akiva bitterly condemned this accommodating stance of the teacher (R. Yohanan) of his two teachers (R. Yehoshua and R. Eliezer) referring to a verse from the Prophet Isaiah which he applied to ben Zakkai: "G-d turns the sages backwards and transforms their wisdom into foolishness" (B.T. Gittin 56 a,b). Apparently, Rabbi Akiva believed that Rabbi Yohanan gave up too much

too soon, that he should have continued to fight in order to retain Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. Indeed, R. Akiva put his ideas and ideals into practice by spearheading the Bar Kochba rebellion against Rome (app. 135 C.E.) for the avowed purpose of Israel's liberation of Jerusalem and rebuilding of the Holy Temple.

What was the fundamental difference of opinion between these sages? Apparently, R. Yohanan ben Zakkai believed that the only value (in addition to the prohibitions of murder, sexual immorality and idolatry) for which one may forfeit one's life is the survival of the Jewish nation; hence the Bible introduces the concept of a life-endangering obligatory war (milchemet mitzvah) for the sake of the conquering the land of Israel at the dawn of our history, because without the land of Israel there would never have developed a nation of Israel. Given the overwhelming might of the Roman Empire and the Roman armies, Rabbi Yohanan concluded that if the land of Israel and the Torah of Israel could be secured - Yavneh and her wise men - it would be unnecessary and even halakhically unacceptable to risk the survival of the Jewish people in a war for Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

Rabbi Akiva believed differently. He understood the function of the Holy Temple and Jerusalem as being cardinal to the mission of Israel, a holy nation and a kingdom of priest-teachers (to the world) through whom all of the families of the earth are to be blessed. It is the people of Israel who were entrusted to teach the world that G-d created every human being in His Divine image, that each individual must be free and inviolable, and that our G-d of love and morality demands a world of peace and security for all. The city from which this message must emanate is the City of Jerusalem, the City of Peace (Yeru Shalom); the mechanism by which this mission is to be advanced is the Holy Temple, the beacon from which the Torah will go forth to all nations of the world, impressing upon them how "swords must be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift sword above nation and humanity will not learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2, Micah 4, Zecharia 7,8,9). Without our involvement in disseminating this teaching to the world, there is no purpose to our national being, believed Rabbi Akiva. Hence the centrality of our Messianic

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vision and the necessity of our continuing to fight for Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

Rabbi Akiva's belief and support for Bar Kochba turned out to be faith in a mission that ended in failure. The subsequent Hadrianic persecutions and the resulting Jewish exile wrought havoc upon our nation, and it became clear to the overwhelming majority of our Sages that Rabbi Yohanan had been correct; after all, it was R. Ben Zakkai who rescued the future of Judaism by his initiating the 'exchange' with Vespasian.

But now the situation has changed radically. Contemporary history, post-Holocaust, teaches us that the nation of Israel cannot survive without a Jewish State and a Jewish army; the fact that we do live in a global village in which one madman with (G-d forbid) nuclear power can destroy the entire world teaches us that unless the inviolability of the human being and the universal acceptance of a G-d of peace becomes an axiom of all humanity there will be no free humanity left in the world, and certainly no Jewish Nation. For today's world, Rabbi Akiva has become vindicated; only a Holy Temple teaching fundamental and absolute morality in our City of Peace can secure the future of Israel and the free world in our global village! © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha of Dvarim traditionally precedes the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, Tisha b'Av.

There are many connections between the parsha and the fast day but I feel that the main connection lies perhaps in the word "dvarim" itself. The word means "words" and, as Rashi points out, the nuance of the word in Hebrew is almost harsh. The words of Moshe in Dvarim are stern and reprimanding. They are the bitter truth that people are so loath to hear.

Soothing promises and vague commitments are much more popular and acceptable to the public. The rabbis of the Midrash emphasize the statement of Solomon that it is better to hear criticism from a true friend than to hear flattery and compliments from an enemy. These are words that are always to be remembered. The enemy that the Midrash refers to is Bilaam and the friend is Moshe. The flattery of Bilaam led eventually to thousands of deaths among the Jews.

The words of Moshe have preserved the Jewish people for countless generations. And this is the story of Tisha b'Av and its connection to the parsha and the word "dvarim."

The prophets of Israel, Yeshayahu, Yirmiyahu, Amos, Hoshea and others all spoke harsh words to Israel and warned of the impending tragedy. The false prophets who are always to be found in our midst retorted with soothing words and lies that were sweet to the ears of the public. Thus, the destruction of the Temple and Jewish sovereignty became inevitable. We always prefer to hear sweet lies than to have to listen to harsh and painful truths.

The haftorah of Shabat Dvorim is always the first chapter of Yeshayahu, which begins with the Hebrew word "chazon." In fact, the Shabat preceding Tisha b'Av is always named Shabat Chazon after this first word of the haftorah of parshat Dvarim. "Chazon" means vision, prophecy. Vision can be positive or otherwise. A madman has a vision of world domination and the extermination of other human beings. A righteous person has a vision of a better, more peaceful, moral society. The great Chasidic masters stated that a person is judged in heaven not only on what that person accomplished and omitted to do but on the visions and goals that motivated that person in this world.

It is not only what a person is, it is also important to realize what that person wishes to be in order to be able to judge the person correctly. Though "chazon" can many times indicate a negative or sad prophecy, the word itself is a neutral one. One can choose whatever vision one wishes to choose.

Therefore Yeshayahu chooses the word "chazon" to begin his book of prophecy. What is the vision of the Jewish people? What kind of a nation do they wish to be? This choice is particular and pertinent to individual human beings as well. Hearing the words of Moshe and of Dvarim can be of immense help to us in deciding what our "chazon" - national and individual, should be. © 2008 *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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's parsha discusses the issue of war and reveals that war is only undertaken as a last resort.

The portion opens by proclaiming, "When you come close to a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it" (Deuteronomy 20:10). Rashi maintains that this verse only applies to the first half of the paragraph that deals with optional wars (Deuteronomy 20:10 -15). Hence, this part concludes with the words, "thus shall you do (seek peace) to all

the cities which are very far off from you, which are not of the cities of these nations" (Deuteronomy 20:15). But regarding the conquest of the seven Canaanite nations, obligatory war, peace overtures are not made. According to Rashi, this, in fact, is the intent of the second half of this paragraph (Deuteronomy 20:16 -18).

Ramban disagrees. He insists that the opening verse, which outlines the obligation to seek peace first, is a general statement about both obligatory and permissible war. After all, Yehoshua (Joshua) offered peace to the Seven Canaanite nations, nations whom we were obligated to confront militarily.

For Ramban, the paragraph is divided following this general heading. The first half addresses optional war where those not directly involved in the military conflict are spared (Deuteronomy 20:11 -15). The last half of the paragraph tells us that in the obligatory war, no one escapes, everyone is to be decimated (Deuteronomy 20:16 -18).

Ramban adds that peace could be achieved, even in the case of the Seven Nations, those who manifested the worst of immorality and idol worship. If they renounce their evil ways and abide by basic ethical principles, they would be allowed to remain in the land.

Ramban, one of the greatest lovers of Zion , teaches us that even when it comes to conquering the land, there is a perpetual quest for peace. This position has been echoed in the State of Israel's relationship with its neighbors. Israel has always reached out to make peace and gone to war only when absolutely necessary.

All this is reflected in the pledge taken by Jewish soldiers as they are conscripted into the army. They commit themselves to what is called Tihur Ha-Neshek, Purity of Arms. This proclamation recognizes the necessity of self defense, but insists that war, if necessary can be conducted with a sense of purity, a sense of ethics, and with the spirit of a longing for peace, the true spirit of the Torah. © 2008 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 ABBA WAGENSBERG

Between the Lines

This week we begin Deuteronomy, the last Book of the Torah, consisting of Moses's final words to the Jewish people before they enter the Land of Israel. In this week's parsha, Moses recalls certain infamous events of the previous 40 years, such as the incident with the spies. He repeats the words he spoke to the people at that time: "The Lord your G-d, has given ("natan") the land to you. Go up and inherit it" (Deut. 1:21).

This verse presents a few technical difficulties. First, why does Moses say that G-d has already given

the land to the Jewish people? The Jews have not yet entered Israel, and thus have not officially taken possession of it. Why, then, is the verb "to give" in the past tense ("natan")? Furthermore, why does Moses say, "Go up and inherit [the land]" if he knows that the Jews will have to wage war before inheriting it? It seems that Moses should have said, "Go up and wage war"!

We could suggest a way of understanding the upcoming war based on the words Moses spoke to the nation immediately before the Splitting of the Sea: "G-d will wage war for you" (Exodus 14:14). When G-d promises to wage war for the Jewish people, there is no doubt as to the outcome. Therefore, even though the people are now facing an imminent battle, it is a battle that G-d has commanded them to fight, so it is already considered a victory.

This explains Moses's statement, "G-d... has given the land to you." The land is essentially already in the possession of the Jewish people, even though they have yet to go to war against the Canaanite nations. This also explains why Moses says, "Go up and inherit [the land]." If the war is as good as won, the Jews have only to inherit the land that G-d has promised them. Perhaps this is why Moses concludes the verse by saying, "Do not be afraid." The outcome of the battle is guaranteed; there is nothing to be nervous about.

A support to this interpretation appears later in the parsha, when Moses recalls the battle the Jewish people waged against Sichon, the Amorite king (Deut. 2:31-34). First, G-d told Moses, "Go and inherit [Sichon's] land" (Deut. 2:31). Then Sichon's army attacked the Jewish forces (Deut. 2:32), after which G-d gave the Jews the victory (2:33). The order of these verses illustrates our point. The Jewish people began to possess Sichon's territory even before Sichon attacked! When G-d does battle for us, victory is assured from the outset.

At the end of the war against Sichon, the Jewish people utterly destroyed all of Sichon's cities, along with the men, women and children (Deut. 2:34). The word used for "men" in this verse is "m'tim," a very unusual term. Why does Moses use this word rather than the more common term "anashim"?

We could suggest that the word "m'tim" be read as "maitim," meaning "dead people." In other words, when the Jewish forces captured Sichon's cities, the inhabitants were already considered "dead." This hint in the text emphasizes that G-d's promise guarantees the ultimate outcome.

Maimonides explains at length that this is the Jewish perspective on every war we fight: "When the Jewish people enter into war, we rely on the Hope of Israel and its Savior [G-d], the One who redeems us from distressing times, and we know that we are waging war for the unification of G-d's Name. Place your soul in His hand and do not be afraid or panic..."

Anyone who wages war with all his heart and without fear, with the sole intention of sanctifying G-d's Name, will have no harm come to him and no evil will befall him..." (Hilchot Melachim, 7:15).

The Book of Deuteronomy is also called "Mishneh Torah," implying a repetition of previous events. Similarly, Jewish history repeats itself. We don't know how current events in the Land of Israel will continue to unfold, but we know that, throughout the ages, Jews have put our trust in G-d that we will be victorious.

May we all merit to witness the peace that comes from loving and respecting every human being, living in harmony, and serving G-d together. © 2008 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.com

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

In this week's Torah portion Moshe begins a historical summary of the main events that happened to the nation of Yisrael, including a description of the sin of the scouts. As we have noted in the past, whenever Moshe describes an event he emphasizes some points that do not appear in the earlier descriptions. This is also true about the case of the scouts, which is told from a different viewpoint than in the book of Bamidbar. The two descriptions are different in many ways (the one that is probably best known is the question of whether the mission was initiated by G-d or by the nation), but in this article we will discuss only one of the differences.

In Bamidbar the scouts are blamed for the nation's sin. They are described as central figures within the nation: "All of them were prominent men, the heads of the Bnei Yisrael" [Bamidbar 13:3]. They are all listed by name. When they return from their mission, the Torah emphasizes that the scouts not only answered the questions that they were asked but also added their own comments, which showed a basic lack of faith in G-d: "We will not be able to rise up to the nation, because it is stronger than us" [13:31; see Rashi]. The Torah then adds that their "objective" description was distorted and purposely slanted: "And the ones who scouted out the land slandered the land to Bnei Yisrael, saying, the land through which we passed devours its inhabitants" [13:32]. The Torah therefore notes that the scouts (except for Yehoshua and Kalev) were singled out for a special punishment. "And with respect to the men whom Moshe sent to scout the land, and who then returned and caused the nation to complain by slandering the land: These men who slandered the land died in a plague before G-d" [14:36-37].

In this week's portion, however, the role of the scouts themselves is not mentioned, and the finger of guilt is pointed exclusively at the nation itself. In fact,

the scouts are described as having fulfilled their mission faithfully. All they are quoted as saying is, "And they said, the land which our G-d has given to us is good" [Devarim 1:25]. Moshe notes that the nation reacted by rejecting the land, and that they were the ones who viewed the objective description in a bad light. "And you gathered in your tents and said, in His hate for us G-d took us out of the Land of Egypt, to put us into the hands of the Emorites to destroy us. Where will we rise up, our brothers have melted out hearts, saying, the nation is large and greater than us, the cities are big and fortified in the sky, and we even saw the children of giants there." [1:27-28]. Evidently this explains why Moshe did not give the names of the scouts and just called them "men" [1:23], since in this description they do not play a central role. And in fact the scouts are not singled out for a special punishment, rather the entire generation is punished.

Thus, the Torah shows two ways of looking at the sin of the scouts. The first is from the viewpoint of the scouts themselves, in that they gave a negative interpretation to objective facts, and the second is that of Bnei Yisrael, who adopted a rebellious and negative approach which they evidently would have reached by themselves even without the encouragement of the scouts.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

These are the things that Moshe told to all of the Jewish people on the east side of the Jordan in the desert, in the plain opposite the Red Sea, between Paran, and Tofel, and Lavan, Chatzerot, and Di Zahav, 11 days from Chorev by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-Barnea. (Bamidbar 33:1-2)

Thus begins Moshe Rabbeinu's parting address to the Jewish nation that he led for 40 years, and his summary of the major events that occurred during that time until that point. However, it would be a mistake to assume that he was talking only to the Jewish people of that time, and not to all of the generations that were destined to follow.

For, unfortunately, the grand plan for the Jewish people and Creation was not actualized in Moshe Rabbeinu's lifetime, and not since then, for that matter. What the greatest prophet who ever lived began we are still trying to conclude. Indeed, the Jewish people are a work in progress, which is why, the Arizal explains, Moshe Rabbeinu reincarnates into each generation, to finish the job he started (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20).

Just like you "don't fix what aint broke," you can't fix what you don't know is broken. Yes, the Jewish people sinned here, and the Jewish people sinned there. However, if we don't understand the essence of what they did wrong each time they erred, then how

can we guarantee that we don't perpetuate the same errors, rather than rectify them?

This is what the Talmud means when it says that, "A generation in which the Temple is not built is considered to be one in which it was destroyed" (Yerushalmi, Yoma 1:10). For, the generation in which the error that caused its destruction is corrected, is the generation in which the temple will be rebuilt. Therefore, if the temple has not returned in a specific generation, then it means that the error is still being made, and that it would cause the destruction of the temple in that generation, if it was still standing.

Conversely, the Talmud states, "If one has dayah, it is as if the Temple was rebuilt in his time" (Brochos 33a). For, it is dayah that allows one to see truth, recognize error, and appreciate the importance of correcting it. With dayah, a person can rise to the level of spiritual awareness and perfection that can, eventually, result in the return of the Temple.

Well, it is about to be Tisha B'Av, 5768. It is 1,938 years since the destruction of the Second Temple, and 2,430 years since the destruction of the First Temple, which the Second Temple never really replaced. And, not only has the temple not returned to its holy abode, but its holy spot is being occupied by an enemy, while the Jewish people show little if any movement in the direction of rebuilding it.

Indeed, 80 percent of world Jewry is assimilated, and over 50 percent is intermarried, while those who still adhere to a Torah lifestyle are mostly concerned about personal local issues and needs. Even when outreach is done, it focuses little on the reality of the temple, or our role in bringing about the Final Redemption having the Temple returned to us.

It is not being rebuilt in our time. Therefore, it is as if it is destroyed in our time. So, isn't it about time to sit down and ponder what, after over three millennia of history, is missing from the Jewish people?

Since the Talmud makes a strong connection between the sin of the Spies, and Tisha B'Av itself (Ta'anis 29a), it is as good a place as any to get to the bottom of the matter. Understanding the essence of their sin will reveal to us the essence of our sin, and why the Temple has not returned until this very day.

As Rashi points out, the Torah twice mentions the departure of the Spies on their mission, the second time to inform us that, just as they returned with bad advice, so too had they left with bad advice (Bamidbar 13:26).

However, one could argue, what difference does it make when the Spies went bad? The bottom line is that, when they returned to give their report to Moshe and the nation, they spoke badly about Eretz Yisroel and weakened the resolve of the people to go up and conquer the land.

After all, they could have changed their minds about what they were going to say to the people upon

their return, between the time they had departed and the time they had returned, a dozen times. Would it have mattered? The important thing is that, at the moment of truth, when they stood before the Jewish nation, which waited with baited breath to hear their report, they said the wrong thing.

The answer to that question is also in Rashi. As Rashi points out, one of the very complaints they had about the Land of Canaan, that "the land swallows its inhabitants" (Bamidbar 13:32) had been arranged G-d to their advantage. He had arranged for the Canaanites to be too pre-occupied with burying their dead to chase down a few strangers investigating their land, a blessing for the Spies to be sure.

Yet, the Spies did not notice the wonderful Divine Providence in that, but rather, instead, saw it as a curse of the land. What G-d had intended to be a blessing for them they perceived as a curse, as a reason to not go up and claim their destined inheritance. Rather than see an opportunity to fulfill the prophecy given to Avraham Avinu hundreds of years before, they chose instead to block it, begging the question: How could they have been so off?

The answer is, as Rashi alludes, the attitude with which they left to perform their mission. Indeed, explains Rashi, the verse is telling us that what they said on the way back was completely a function of what they thought on the way there, long before they had even seen the land. For, perception is a function of assumption, and their incorrect assumptions about life as a Jew and in Eretz Yisroel meant that they could only perceive reality one way, and it caused them to see G-d's blessing as a curse.

What assumption had they incorrectly made? They had assumed that the ideal life which they enjoyed in the desert was the ideal way for a Jew, who wants to serve G-d, to live. That is why they could reject the land right before G-d and not be afraid of Divine retribution. They had assumed that G-d would read their hearts and see that it was their drive to learn Torah unhampered by the menial concerns of daily survival that had brought them to that point, and that He would praise them for it.

How shocked were they when they found out that, not only did G-d not praise them, but rather, He cursed them instead. Then, and only they did they wake up and realize how that had not been on the same page of G-d as they had previously assumed. However, by that time, even though retroactively they saw everything differently, it was too late to do anything about the situation, and they died in the desert instead.

As the rabbis point out, on Yom HaDin, G-d will only have to say, "I am G-d," and we will fall back, as Yosef's brothers did when he revealed himself to them, speechless. Why? Because "I am G-d" means that G-d will reveal to us each and every time He tried to direct us through the events and people in our lives, and how

we just ignored the significance of both. How many times have we ignored Hashgochah Pratis, passing up opportunities for growth, and perhaps, on some occasions, even freedom, because we lack the eyes to see it for what it is?

Well, first of all, there had been the 12,000,000 Jews who died in the Plague of Darkness, because they had ignored Hashgochah Pratis and chose to remain in Egypt instead. Then later on, there had been the Spies, who had mocked Yehoshua and Caleiv, choosing instead to remain in the desert rather than take the land that had been meant for them since Creation. And, who knows how many countless others have followed in the same crooked footsteps, and suffered similar fates as well?

Therefore, Hashgochah Pratis inserted the word "eichah" into this week's parsha (Devarim 1:12), the future Yirmiyahu's lamentation about the fall of the Jewish people and the destruction of the Temple. It is also a word whose letters are the same as the word "aiyehkah" which G-d asked to Adam HaRishon after he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil-words whose gematrios are 36 -- the number that refers to the light of Hashgochah Pratis.

It means only one thing: the events of history are a function of Hashgochah Pratis, but the perception of them are completely a function of our own assumptions about life. Just because we perceive reality a certain way does not mean that is the way it actually exists. It is possible to live day-to-day with the wrong assumptions about life, and get by, until truth overtakes them and we have a rude awakening.

How can one be sure about their perception of reality? Check out your assumptions about life, about Torah, about Jewish history, etc. False assumptions result in false perceptions, and false perceptions result in an acute inability to read the "writing on the wall" that G-d leaves behind for us in order to know what He wants from us at any given point in time, personally, or nationally.

Correct your assumptions and you correct your perceptions, and you gain the invaluable ability of being able to speak G-d's language and understand His messages. Tisha B'Av is the day on which we are asked to do this, in order to avoid adding another reason, G-d forbid, to make the ninth of Av the national day of mourning that it has become. © 2008 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah concludes the three week series related to the exile of the Jewish people and the destruction of their Bais Hamikdash. This final reading goes down on record as the strongest message of reprimand ever delivered to the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya depicts the moral

conduct of the Jews as being the most corrupt and wicked one since the days of Sedom and Gemorah. He declares the Jews to be even worse than animals, and says in the name of Hashem, "The ox knows his master and the donkey his owner's feeding tray but My nation doesn't know and doesn't even consider Me. Woe guilty people, heavy with sin, evil and corrupt children who forsook Hashem and disgraced Israel's Holy One." (1:3,4) Yeshaya continues with more harsh words of chastisement, and says, "Why should you continue to be beaten if you just increase your straying? From head to toe there is no clear spot, only stabs, bruises and open wounds. But you have not treated them, not bandaged them or even softened them." (1:5,6) The prophet indicates that after all the beatings they have received the Jewish people haven't even made an attempt to rectify their faults.

Yeshaya then concentrated on the Jewish service in the Bais Hamikdash and attacked them even on that account. He expressed that Hashem was displeased with their sacrifices and lacked interest in their service. Hashem says, "When you come to see Me who asked you to trample on My courtyard? Don't continue bringing useless offerings; your incense is disgusting to Me. I cannot tolerate your gatherings on Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh, and I despise your festivals and celebrations; they're too much bother for Me." (1:12,13) The Jewish people were going through the motions of Judaism but lacked any level of sincerity. They assembled in the Bais Hamikdash during the holiday seasons but did not dedicate their efforts to Hashem, rather to themselves. Even their prayers, their direct line to Hashem, were being rejected. Yeshaya said in the name of Hashem, "When you stretch out your hands in supplication I will ignore you; even when you increase your prayers I won't listen because your hands are full of blood." (1:15) These last words refer to the increasing number of murders and crimes that were taking place amongst the Jewish people, even in the Bais Hamikdash proper. Yeshaya said that Hashem had literally closed the door on His people and was not interested in seeing or hearing from them anymore.

Suddenly, we discover a complete change of nature and the prophet extends the Jewish people an open invitation. Hashem says, "Please go and reconcile; if your sins are likened to scarlet they will be whitened like snow and if they are like deep red crimson they will be like white wool. If you consent and listen then you will eat the goodness of the land." (1:18,19) This seems to indicate a total reversal of direction. Moments earlier, the prophet proclaimed that Hashem had absolutely no interest in His people and despised their trampling on His property. Hashem was so angry and disgusted with them that He severed all lines of communication. And now, one passage later Hashem was prepared to brighten and whiten the Jewish people to the extent of glistening snowflakes?!

The answer to this perplexing message is found in the insightful words of Chazal in explanation of a profound statement of the Jewish people in Shir Hashirim. Shlomo Hamelech presents the feelings of the Jewish people during their last moments before their bitter exile from their homeland. They describe themselves in the following succinct manner, "I am asleep but my heart is awake." (Shir Hashirim 5:2) Rashi (ad loc.) quotes the words of Chazal in the Pesikta which explain the Jewish people's message. The Jews stated that although they fell into a deep slumber and basically abandoned Hashem's service, Hashem, the heart of the Jewish people, will always remain awake. The inner contact between Hashem and the Jewish heart can never become disconnected.

The Jewish people's message to Hashem was that He overlook their atrocities and focus on their inner essence. Even if the external expression of the Jewish people displays total disinterest in Hashem the internal bond between Hashem and His people will always remain. Buried beneath the many thick layers of indifference which coat the heart is a pure and sincere feeling for their true beloved father, Hashem. True, their actions do not display any semblance of interest in Hashem, however the fact remains that the Jewish heart can always be motivated. Hashem can always reach the bottom of their hearts and reengage them in His perfect service.

We now understand the sudden change of nature in this week's haftorah. The behavior of the Jewish people was truly abhorrent but this only represented the external layers of their heart. When addressing their actions Hashem stated in the most harsh terms that He had no interest in His people. However there always remains an inner dimension to the Jewish people, the faint call from within them to return to their true source of existence, Hashem. When addressing this inner essence Hashem is always prepared to motivate His people and even invites them to be cleansed and glisten like snowflakes.

This is the hidden secret of the Jewish people's eternal existence. From the vantage point of their actions, the Jews, at times, fall into a deep coma developing the most inconceivable immoral behavior. They do not demonstrate any inner interest to be with Hashem or any sincerity to serve Him. But Hashem, the heart and pulse of the Jewish nation remains connected to His people. His love for them is so boundless that He never gives up on them. And so, when their actions are totally corrupt Hashem dresses that inner dimension of theirs. He beckons them to reconcile their ways and informs them that He is prepared to do virtually anything for them. If they do return He will cleanse them and even brighten them like glistening snowflakes. This remarkable dialogue reinforces the fact that Hashem always cares about us and is forever awaiting our return. He constantly yearns for that glorious moment

when all of His people will reflect the name of our month, Av, and proclaim, "You are our (Av) father and we are Your sons!" May this day come speedily in our times. © 2008 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

When Moshe recaps the journey from Egypt to their current location on the border of the Promised Land, he mentions the prohibition against conquering any land from either Moav (Devarim 2:9) or Amon (2:19). Whereas the land of Og is described as being "the land of the Refa'im" (3:13), i.e. part of the land promised to Avraham's descendants (Beraishis 15:20), the land occupied by Amon and Moav is described as land that "might [mistakenly] be thought of as [the land of the] Refa'im" (Devarim 2:11 and 2:20). The Torah doesn't actually use the word "mistakenly," but as Rashi points out, the context indicates that we might have *thought* the land of Amon and Moav was the "land of the Refa'im" (and therefore tried to conquer it), but since it is not *really* the "land of the Refa'im," but land given to Amon and Moav (who conquered it from Refa'im-like giants), it is off-limits. Rashi adds one more point to his commentary, though (in both places), saying that this land (which belongs to Amon and Moav) was not included in the land given to Avraham.

However, Rashi himself tells us (2:5) that the land given to Amon and Moav was in fact included in what was given to Avraham. Avraham was given the land of 10 nations; seven of them were conquered by the Children of Israel (Israel, or Yisrael, being Avraham's grandson Yaakov), one was conquered by the nation that descended from his grandson Aisav, and two were given to the descendants of his nephew (and brother-in-law) Lot. How can Rashi say that the land of Amon and Moav was not given to Avraham if he had just told us that it was?

When the Torah gave the boundaries of the Land of Israel in Parashas Mishpatim (Shemos 23:31), the Sea of Reeds was listed as the eastern (or southeastern) boundary. Although this has never actually been the boundary of the Land of Israel, when Moshiach comes it will be (see Rabbeinu Avraham ben Haramban on Shemos 23:31 and Ibn Ezra on Zecharya 9:10). At that point, Israel will include the land of all 10 nations, i.e. all of the land that was given to Avraham (see Rashi on Devarim 19:8). Had we not sinned (with the golden calf or the spies), we would have entered Israel in the second year after the exodus and inherited all 10 nations. Instead, we wandered for 40 years and only got seven of them. But, if we would have inherited the land that the descendants of Lot were given, where would they have lived? It would seem, then, that Amon and Moav were given more than just two of the 10 nations that G-d promised to Avraham. They weren't

given any of the other eight, but land that didn't belong to any of the 10.

Although they initially lived in the area given (temporarily) to Lot from Avraham, Amon and Moav spread into the neighboring lands as well (Tosfos tells us that the Refa'im-like giants that lived in the area rebelled against G-d, relying instead on their brains and brawn, so G-d punished them by giving them over to those much weaker than they were). It was in this area that they would have lived had the Children of Israel inherited the land of all 10 nations promised to Avraham. Because we weren't worthy of getting all 10 yet, they were able to live on the land they conquered, as well as on the land they got from Avraham. But they conquered much more land than G-d intended them on having (long term), as they also conquered land that would eventually go to the Tribes of Reuvain and Gad. Because we are forbidden from taking their land from them, first Sichon had to conquer the "extra" land from Amon and Moav so that we could conquer it from him. (Whether this land would have been part of Israel even had we entered from the south in the second year is part of a much larger discussion; I will only raise the possibility that had we taken the land of all 10 nations, including part of where Amon and Moav lived, perhaps they could have kept the part that Sichon ended up conquering instead.)

As it turns out, then, the lands of Amon and Moav fall under three different categories: (1) the land that was given to Avraham and temporarily given to the descendents of Lot, (2) the land that was conquered by those descendents and held onto even after the war with Sichon, and (3), the land that they had conquered, lived in long enough for it to be considered the land of Moav (see Bamidbar 21:28 and Devarim 1:5), but was then conquered by Sichon who in turn was conquered by Israel. This can explain why Ur, which had belonged to Moav but was conquered by Sichon (Bamidbar 21:28) can still be considered part of the land that Moav still retained (Devarim 2:9). As Rashi points out, Ur is not (just) a city, but the name of a province; part of that province was conquered by Sichon while part of it wasn't (see Ibn Ezra, however, who maintains that after Sichon conquered Ur, Moav got it back).

After the Children of Israel conquered land that had belonged to Amon and Moav, they could have easily thought that the other land that Moav had conquered, which was also not part of the land of the two nations given to Lot via Avraham, should also belong to them. After all, the "land of the Refa'im" was one of the seven that Israel gets, and there were "Refa'im" who had lived on that land. Therefore, G-d had to tell them that this was not really the land of the Refa'im. And even though it wasn't part of the land given to Lot via Avraham, it was given to the descendents of Lot nonetheless. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In Parshat Devarim Moshe recounts placing "ministers over thousands, over hundreds, ministers over fifties, and ministers over tens..."(1:15). If there were leaders governing thousands and hundreds, isn't it obvious that they would govern fifties and tens? What does the Torah add by including those specifications?

The Sforno says that there is an implied rebuke in the appointment of judges over Israel, because they could not stop bickering and arguing to the point that every group of ten needed its own personal judge. While the Sforno implies that each person was overly concerned with his own property, in order for an argument to reach the courts, there also needs to be a lack of communication and an inability to reconcile differences.

If needless hatred begins with a lack of communication, then increased communication can remove the hatred and divisions that remain between us. With proper communication, we can not only properly mourn the Temple's destruction, but we can also make our own best efforts to ensure that it is rebuilt! © 2008 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI ZEV S. ITZKOWITZ

A Byte of Torah

Why did Moses gather "all of Israel" in order to teach them the Law? The normal process of proliferation of the Law was from Moses to Aaron, from Aaron to his sons, from Aaron's sons to the Elders, and then from the Elders to the rest of the Children of Israel. However, by reviewing and teaching all that Hashem gave at Mount Sinai, Moses was essentially recreating the original receiving of the Torah. This recreation required a duplication of the events in which the Children of Israel received the Torah, namely, gathering all of Israel together (Ramban). © 1995 Rabbi Z.S. Itzkowitz

