

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd if you listen to my commandments, which I am commanding you today, to love Hashem your G-d" (Devarim 11:13). Rashi, explaining the words "to love Hashem," says "that you shouldn't say I will learn Torah in order to become rich, in order that I be called 'rabbi' [or] in order that I receive reward; rather, all that you do, do out of love, and the honor will come in the end." Why, if the idea is not to do something that G-d commanded for selfish reasons, does Rashi add that the benefit will come in the end anyway? If the point is to do it because G-d wants you to and not because you will gain personally from it, wouldn't it have been more effective to not tell us that we will gain from it anyway? Doesn't telling us this undermine the notion of doing it "leshaim shamayim," for the sake of heaven?

What makes this question more difficult is that Rashi's source is the Sifri, which leaves out the last part (that honor will come in the end). Although it is true that the Talmud (Nedarim 62a) includes it, the Talmud is not discussing our verse, but a different verse that talks about "loving G-d" (30:20). The Talmud's formulation is that we shouldn't learn Torah in order to be called "wise," be called "Rebbi," or be called "an elder, and be able to sit in Yeshiva." So Rashi is quoting the Sifri's explanation on our verse, which is appropriate, but tacking on the Talmud's addition that honor will come in the end. Putting aside why the Talmud adds this, why would Rashi open up this can of worms by quoting the Talmud's addition if the Sifri does not mention it? Wouldn't he have been better off, been able to make the point better, without adding that the personal gain will be there anyway?

One of the issues the commandment to "love G-d" brings up is how emotions can be legislated at all. We can be told to "do" something, or to "not do" something, but how can we be commanded to feel a certain way? The common explanation is that the commandment to love G-d is really a commandment to

do things that bring about (or bring out) this emotion, specifically to learn Torah. Since the commandment to love G-d is followed immediately with the commandment to learn Torah (6:6-7), the way to develop an emotional attachment to G-d is to study His Torah. This idea is attributed to the Sifri, but a closer look at the wording of the Sifri indicates a slightly (yet substantially) different thought.

On the words "and these things that I am commanding you today should be on your heart" (the beginning of the commandment to learn Torah), the Sifri comments as follows: "Why is this said? Since it says 'and you shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart,' I wouldn't know in what way the Holy One, blessed is He, is loved, so the Torah tells us "and these things that I am commanding you today should be on your heart,' for by doing so you will recognize your Creator and attach yourself to His ways." What the Sifri seems to be telling us is that the definition of "loving G-d" is to recognize Him and to become close to Him, and that the way to get to that point is through the study of Torah. Rather than the definition of "love" being known (an emotional feeling) with the commandment to learn Torah taught right after it to teach us how to attain (or uncover) it, the commandment to learn Torah coming after it teaches us what is meant by the word "love."

Rashi (6:6) spells it out even more clearly, asking, "what is this love?" and answering, "And these words shall be,' as through this (learning Torah) you will recognize the Holy One, blessed is He, and cling to His ways." It is the definition of "love" that "these words" fill us in on, not (just) how to get there. When we get to "know" G-d better by learning His Torah, we get to understand more of what He is about, so that we can emulate Him and thereby get closer to Him.

Although this might be a key to understanding the Torah's definition of "love" vis-a-vis the commandment to "love G-d," it still remains hard to quantify. There is a minimum amount of matzo that must be eaten in order to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzo. Similarly, there are guidelines for every mitzvah regarding how to fulfill it properly (with going above and beyond being praiseworthy). How much "love" must one have for (or show to) G-d in order to fulfill this requirement? "Love" can't mean having an emotion, as emotions can't be measured. But it can't merely be "emulating G-d" either, because there's no way to

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quantify it (and we can't really be like G-d anyway). And keeping his commandments are required anyway, whether done with or without "love." What it can refer to, though, is the motivation for following his commandments.

"You shouldn't say I will learn Torah in order to become rich, in order that I be called 'rabbi' [or] in order that I receive reward; rather, all that you do, do out of love." If we do a mitzvah for selfish reasons, because we will be given honor by others or will be rewarded for it, it is not being done out of "love" for our Creator (more like out of love of ourselves). If we do it because G-d commanded us to do it, then it can be considered out of "love" for Him. Not necessarily emotion-based love, but because we understand that if G-d told us to do it, it must be the right thing to do. Learning Torah helps us appreciate who G-d is, so that we can understand even more that He knows what is most appropriate for us to do and not do. We can be the best we can be by emulating Him, and recognizing this and having it be our motivation for keeping the Torah is the starting point for "loving G-d." Sure, it can (and often does) grow into an emotional yearning to be with/like G-d, more consistent with the standard definition of "love," but it would seem from Rashi and the Sifri that the commandment to "love G-d" means to keep His commandments for the right reasons, i.e. "lishma."

Does this mean that this has to be the only reason a mitzvah is done for it to be considered "out of love?" What if there are several motivations working together at the same time? Does co-existing with a selfish reason negate the fulfillment of the mitzvah to "love G-d?" If the commandment to "love G-d" is to fulfill a mitzvah because G-d commanded it, getting a side benefit at the same time might minimize the level of the fulfillment of mitzvah to "love G-d," but shouldn't negate it. The main point is to recognize that G-d commanding it makes it the best approach of action, with learning Torah being the means to appreciate this all the more. Therefore, when defining for us what "loving G-d" means, Rashi (and the Talmud) adds that "the honor will come in the end," i.e. don't worry about that aspect and put it out of your mind, so that it won't be your primary reason for doing the mitzvah. Rather, do it because G-d wants you too, and don't think about the other stuff, as you'll get that too. Yes, it would be better

if G-d's commandment was the only motivation for doing it, but when defining the parameters of the mitzvah, and speaking to the majority who haven't reached the level (yet) of doing it only because G-d said to, it was important to add that having those other motivations too doesn't nullify the fulfillment of the mitzvah to "love G-d." For many, being reassured that their more selfish reasons will also be fulfilled allows them to focus on the real reason to do the mitzvah, i.e. because G-d wants us to. Rashi quoted the Sifri, because its comments are on our verse, but adds the Talmud's comment, because it is important in helping us understand the mitzvah and fulfill it.

Knowing that we will benefit personally might make it more difficult to *only* do it for G-d's sake, but does not make it more difficult to *also* do it for G-d's sake. And that is all that is required to fulfill the mitzvah, which is the point of the verse Rashi is coming to explain. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**N**ot by bread alone does a human being live, but rather by that which comes forth from the Lord's mouth does a human being live" (Deut. 8:3). How does the Bible view "life," that span of time that every individual desperately wishes to preserve and to lengthen, but which we don't always take proper advantage of? The sad truth is that no one is quite certain how best to use whatever time he/she may be given or to what purpose to dedicate it: How best to "spend" one's life is the question of questions, and one who lives without asking and answering that question runs the risk of leaving this world without ever having lived at all!

Apparently the Almighty came to the conclusion that the newly freed Israelites were not yet ready to enter the Promised Land; they required an educational "training" period of forty years - a complete generation - in the desert no-man's-land, a kind of "trial by heat and by cold" with lessons to be learned by a strange mixture of Divine bounty mixed together with human uncertainty:

"You shall remember the entire journey on which the Lord your G-d led you these forty years in the desert in order to afflict you, to test you to know that which is in your heart; will you keep His commandments or not? He will afflict you and He will make you hungry; He will provide you with the manna to eat which neither you nor your ancestors experienced previously in order to teach you that not by bread alone does a human being live but rather by that which comes forth from the Lord's mouth does the human being live" (Deut. 8:2-3).

One way to consider the desert experience of the manna is to see it as a kind of "time-out," or respite, from G-d's edict that "by the sweat of your brow shall

you eat bread," the critical punishment meted out to Adam and Eve when they were exiled from the Garden of Eden.

On the one hand, in the desert G-d was the beneficent Provider of food which the Israelites only had to gather rather than to manufacture, every individual receiving precisely what he needed each day; on the other hand, the Israelites had neither the discomfiture nor the exhilaration that results from the competition, the ingenuity, the sickness unto death of failure and the dizzying satisfaction of success which accompany the back-breaking, tension-producing dedication to the market-place or the agricultural farm. Along these lines, the most ancient (and I believe, authentic) versions of the rabbinically accepted Aramaic translation of the Biblical text, Targum Onkelos, takes the last words cited to read, "Not by bread alone does the human being exist but rather by that which comes forth from G-d's mouth does a human being live." Targum differentiates between the bread necessary for human existence, and the word of G-d crucial to human life.

For a clearer explanation of Targum's intent, let us study the second Mishnah in the seventh chapter of the Tractate Shabbat where the Mishnah provides us with the list of the thirty-nine prohibited physical activities on the Sabbath (melakhot). The Midrash generally assumes that the source of these prohibited activities are the very constructive acts involved in the building of the tabernacle to G-d, the Mishkan (Exodus 31:13). However, one of the prohibited activities of the Mishnah is "baking," whereas in the construction of the Mishkan the dye extracts of the plants had to be "boiled" in order to color the skins which covered the wood. The Talmud explains the discrepancy by saying that the Mishnah wished to highlight the procedures in bread manufacture; and indeed when looking at the prohibited acts from this perspective, the entire Mishnah prohibits first bread manufacture, then clothing manufacture, then leather manufacture, and finally acts of building. In effect, the Mishnah is teaching that the search for food, clothing and shelter - so central to physical existence and nutritional subsistence - is to be eschewed on the Sabbath day.

And the truth is that animals, no less than humans, also require food and need protection, on occasion, from the elements, forcing migration when weather conditions become intolerable. What makes the human being uniquely human is that which goes beyond physical existence, the spiritual spark of G-d within his/her, the soul, the heart and the mind of the human being which enables him/her to give, to communicate with the other, to love, to repair and to create. Animals as well as humans search for things; only humans enter into relationships with others.

Most human beings spend their lives in working for their physical existence, in amassing commodities

and the ultimate commodity (money), in collecting objects and things. In the desert they were freed from this pursuit, with the exception of the little time it would take to gather the manna - and no one could take more than his/her needed portion. They could spend their time receiving - and pondering over - G-d's words, G-d's desire that we share with those less fortunate, G-d's gift of family and friendship and community and love. The desert experience was a kind of eternal Sabbath, a taste of a more perfect world, when we learn to do without material extras but would hopefully begin to understand that the real purpose of human life would be to live by G-d's words.

No wonder, then, that the Hebrew word hayim, life, is always in the plural - because there can be no meaningful human life devoid of loving relationship with others. The two "yods" in the center are the shortened form of expressing G-d's name, but they also express two Jews together (yud is Yiddush for Jew or Yehudi). The two surrounding Hebrew letters, chet at the beginning and mem at the end, spell out the Hebrew word 'chom,' which means warmth, alluding to the love, sensitivity and caring which is central for meaningful human activity on earth. I have never met an individual on his death-bed who regrets the hours he didn't spend in the office - but most individuals on their death-bed do regret the hours they didn't spend with family. People are not remembered for the structures they erected; they are remembered for the lives they have touched and the human situations they have helped. The weekdays are given over to involvement with things, objects; Shabbat is reserved for relationships - human encounters which can leave insights and memories which live beyond the physical lives of either individual.

Rav Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev once saw a person running to and fro as if he were 'chasing his own tail.' "Where and why are you running?" the Rabbi asked. "I am running to make a living," came the reply. "Just make sure that in the process you don't lose your life," remarked the wise Rabbi. © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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One of the most famous and quoted passages of the Torah appears in this week's parsha - "man does not live by bread alone." This phrase has entered general literature in all of its forms but it certainly has not entered human life in much reality.

Many if not most people still believe that man does live by bread alone and that the life of spirit is nice but it is not really part of this world and our basic existence.

The Torah emphasizes often and especially in this series of parshiyot in which we are currently engaged, the importance of the manna in forming a Jewish people characterized by ultimate faith and spirit.

The manna is the food of angels - of heaven itself. It leaves no residue in the human body and adjusts its taste to the wishes of those who consume it. It supplies physical nourishment but it is not bread or any other human food. It is the food of spirit, of hope and longing and of the pursuit of G-dliness.

The manna educated Israel that dependence upon G-d is the reality of human existence and that eventually everyone has to eat the food of heaven in order to live a truly meaningful life. Manna cannot be stored for another day. It falls fresh daily except for Shabat, because this day itself envelopes us with the purely spiritual - nothing more is needed.

The manna fell every day and served as a constant reminder that the relationship between the Creator and the created is continual and permanent. Truly, man cannot live by bread alone.

When the Jewish people finally entered the Land of Israel and settled it, the manna stopped falling. Real bread was now necessary for the existence of the nation and of its individual members. This proved to be and continues to be one of the supreme tests of national and individual Jewish life - how does one retain a sense of spirituality while toiling to acquire bread to live on?

Providing time for the study of Torah, performing mitzvot and granting priority to true Jewish values in our lives helps us answer this difficult question. Shabat and the holidays also provide us with an escape from pursuing bread alone and allow us to refocus our attention on our Creator-created relationship.

It is not for naught that the rabbis insisted that our speech and even our thoughts on Shabat and the holidays not deal with the bread of daily toil and struggle. Instead we are to treat the food of Shabat as though it were of heavenly origin.

The secret ingredient in Shabat food according to the Talmud is Shabat itself. To be able to live at least one day of the week on the word of G-d, so to speak, and not on the bread of man is a truly spiritual experience.

The Jewish story of survival and destiny over millennia is the proof of the words of the Torah - man does not live by bread alone. © 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 portion begins with the statement "Vehayah ekev tishmeun et ha-mishpatim ha-eileh - and if you listen to these laws" reward will come (Deuteronomy 7:12 -15). Since the common Biblical

term for "if" is "im," many commentators have wondered why the Torah uses the word "ekav" instead.

In one of his most famous comments, Rashi notes that the word ekev connotes a human heel. What the text is teaching is the importance of keeping those commandments that seem less important, like the dirt that one kicks up with one's heel. The message is simple: what appears to be less important is of great importance. In fact, reward depends on keeping the ekev-type commandments.

Alternatively, ekev can mean to pursue, like one running on his or her heels to attain a certain goal. True reward comes to an individual who not only keeps the commandment, but does so with eagerness and anticipation. The yearning reflects an excitement that translates into a higher level of commandment performance.

Much like the heel is the extremity of the body, ekev also refers to the redemptive period that will come at the end of days (aharit ha-yamim). That time of redemption will come when there is a commitment to listen to the words of the Torah which direct us to lead ethical lives in accordance with G-d's will.

One last thought. Perhaps ekev reminds us of our forefather, Yaakov (Jacob) who was born holding the heel of his brother Esau. Yaakov is later given an additional name - Yisrael. The name Yaakov, refers to our third patriarch as an individual - husband, father, brother, and son. Yet whenever the Torah calls him by the name Yisrael, it has far reaching implications for the development of the Nation of Israel.

From this perspective, ekev tishmeun is the counterpoint and amazing parallel of Shema Yisrael (Deuteronomy 6:4) which we read just last week. Shema Yisrael speaks of our responsibility as part of the Nation of Israel to keep the commandments and profess belief in G-d. Ekev tishmeun serves as a safeguard to remind us that we not only have communal responsibilities, but each of us as individuals, must explore our personal relationship with G-d.

Sometimes it is easier to follow the law as part of a nation, as this is a public statement, open for all to watch. The challenge is to commit when one is alone. The redemptive period will arrive when not only the nation connects with G-d, but when each one of us, like Yaakov, quietly, modestly, and without fanfare, yearns to keep and observe even the smallest of mitzvot. © 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 MORDECHAI WILLIG

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“To walk in all His ways and to cleave to Him" (Devarim 11:22).

"Is it possible to cleave to Hashem? Is He not a consuming fire (4:24)? Rather, cleave to the students of Torah and to the chachamim, and Hashem will consider it on your behalf as if you cleaved to Him." (Rashi)

"Is it possible for a person to walk behind the Shechina (13:5)? Is He not a consuming fire? Rather, follow his attributes of chessed, clothe the naked, visit the sick, consol the mourners." (Sotah 14a)

"Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful." (Shabbos 133b)

The progression of the passuk, as understood by Chazal, implies that character refinement, such as loving-kindness and mercy, must precede, and should result in, cleaving to talmdei chachamim. Why is this so?

The gemara in Pesachim (49b) recounts that R' Akiva said, "When I was an am ha'aretz, I said 'Who would give me a talmid chacham and I would bite him like a donkey'". In other words, R' Akiva would be so angry at the talmid chacham as to want to harm him, and, as a result, would grit his teeth (Maharsha). Yet, when R' Akiva was a shepherd, Rachel saw that he was modest and lofty (ma'ali), and offered to marry him if he would go to a rav to study Torah (Kesuhbos 62b). How could one who was lofty wish to bite a talmid chacham?

R' Akiva did not hate talmdei chachamim. Rather, because he thought that they acted arrogantly and hatefully towards the unlearned amei ha'aretz he wished to bite them. But, to compound the original question, we know that R' Akiva was also a shomer mitzvos (Tosafos). So, how are we to understand the above?

Tosafos implicitly criticizes the Torah scholars of R' Akiva's time for improperly conveying the impression, even to a person as astute as the young Akiva, that they hated amei ha'aretz. Such an impression typically results in the unlearned, even those who are modest and refined individuals, harboring a hatred that they perceive is reciprocal.

"One should learn Torah and serve Torah scholars. His dealings with bryos should be pleasant. What do bryos say about him? Fortunate are his father and teacher who taught him Torah. Woe unto bryos who do not learn Torah. This person who learned Torah, see how pleasant are his ways, how refined are his deeds." (Yoma 86a)

A Torah scholar should make Hashem's name beloved to all bryos. As a result, Jews will come closer to Torah observance, and non-Jews will develop a greater respect for Torah and its scholars. In this way, Hashem's name will be sanctified, and the Jewish people earn the title "Yisroel, in whom I (i.e. Hashem) take glory" (Yeshayahu 49:3).

The Mishna in Avos (4:1) states, "Who is honored? He who honors others (bryos), as it is said,

'For those who honor Me I will honor' (Shmuel I 2:30)". The proof text the mishna cites refers to honoring Hashem, not humans, so how does it prove that we must honor other people? The answer lies in the word "bryos". We must love bryos simply because they are creations of Hashem (Tosafos Yom Tov, Avos 1:12). Similarly, we honor humans because they all are created in Hashem's image (Breishis 9:6) and are, therefore, beloved (Avos 3:18).

Notwithstanding the divine image in all humans, we are required to clearly differentiate between right and wrong, and distance ourselves from that which is wrong. A difficult balance is required of us in our dealings with, and attitude towards, non-observant Jews. They, like us, are described as children of Hashem (Devarim 4:1), worthy of additional love (Avos 3:18), even if they do not conduct themselves as proper sons (R' Meir, Kiddushin 36a). Yet, we must establish separation to insure that we remain observant even as we yearn to bring the non-observant closer to Torah. In a similar vein, most excruciatingly difficult is the balance required by talmdei chachamim in their dealings with, and attitude towards, unlearned observant Jews. If manifest love is not exhibited by Torah scholars towards observant amei ha'aretz, there is a risk of actions being misinterpreted. This in turn can lead to a schism within the observant community.

The Tosafos cited earlier does not say that a talmid chacham should not be aware of the cosmic spiritual importance of learning Torah, an awareness which perforce gives one a measure of pride when one is heavily engaged in Talmud Torah. However, Tosafos does demand that a talmid chacham not allow pride to convey a message of condescension towards the unlearned. In every circumstance a Torah scholar must strive to make his love for the unlearned manifestly clear. Otherwise, he bears some responsibility for the Akivas of his time, i.e. modest and refined people who think that chachamim reject or disdain them and, in turn, respond in kind.

The animosity generated by the lack of manifest love is a double catastrophe. Firstly, it prevents the masses from cleaving to chachamim and their students.

"One who does not cling to chachamim, does not establish love for them in his heart, does not attempt to help them when he is able, violates this mitzvah. His punishment is great, because they are the endurance of Torah, and a strong foundation for the salvation of the souls. For one who associates with them will not quickly sin." (Sefer Hachinuch 434)

Aside from the spiritual impoverishment and the greater possibility of sin consigned to those who do not fulfill this mitzvah, the second disaster is the disharmony that can develop within the observant

community. This can lead to the type of baseless hatred which led to the churban.

We can now understand how character refinement, i.e., walking in the ways of Hashem, should result in cleaving to talmedei chachamim. When R' Akiva was exposed to true Torah scholars, his modesty and refinement of character, i.e. his walking in Hashem's ways, enabled him to penetrate the smokescreen of misunderstanding of his earlier stage of life and to adhere to talmedei chachamim. This progression from not only walking in Hashem's ways, but to cleaving to Torah scholars, lead, in R' Akiva's case, to his becoming the greatest chacham of his day.

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RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG

Between the Lines

This week's parsha contains the verse, "...Not by bread alone does man live; rather, on all that comes from the mouth of G-d does man live" (Deut. 8:3). We will return to this verse shortly, after we see a few other Torah sources about eating.

In Parshat Beshalach, Moses speaks to the Jewish people regarding the manna, saying, "Eat it today, for today is Shabbat; today you will not find it in the field" (Exodus 16:25). The manna was the Jewish people's primary sustenance during their 40 years in the wilderness. Based on the three-fold repetition of the word "today" in this verse, the Talmud (Shabbat 117b) derives that we must eat three meals on Shabbat.

When the day before Passover is Shabbat, bread may not be eaten for the third Shabbat meal. The Remah (Orach Chaim 444:1) states that, according to the Ashkenazi custom, egg matzah may not be eaten either. Instead, in this situation, fruit, meat and fish make up for the lack of bread or matzah. Furthermore, the Magen Avraham notes that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai used to spend the third Shabbat meal studying Torah, and this satisfied his obligation.

Where do we see that studying Torah can be an adequate substitute for eating a meal? The verse mentioned earlier from this week's parsha ("...Not by bread alone does man live; rather, on all that comes from the mouth of G-d does man live") may explain this. The mitzvah of a Shabbat meal is not through eating "bread alone." We greatly enhance the meal by learning Torah-the Divine wisdom "that comes from the mouth of G-d."

We can suggest that this idea specifically refers to the third Shabbat meal. In the verse about the manna mentioned above, the third mention of the word "today" corresponds to the third meal: "Today you will not find [the manna] in the field." We can infer from here that we do not always find the nourishment for the third meal in the produce of the field. Rather, we can be nourished as well by using our mouths to speak words of Torah, as the verse says, "The matter is very near to

you, in your mouth and in your heart to perform it" (Deut. 30:14).

Among certain circles, the third Shabbat meal tends to be neglected. This is a troubling oversight, since all three meals are an integral part of the mitzvah of Shabbat and are obligatory according to Jewish law. The Talmud (Shabbat 118a) teaches that our care in eating all three Shabbat meals will protect us from three calamities that precede the messianic era: the war of Gog and Magog (Armageddon); the "birth pangs of Messiah" (severe disagreements among Torah scholars [Rashi]); and the judgment of Gehenom. Each meal seemingly protects us from one of these three punishments.

The third Shabbat meal is traditionally referred to as Shalosh Seudos (literally, "three meals"), or more accurately, Seudah Shlishit ("third meal"). The siddur Yesodei Yeshurun, however, explains that Shalosh Seudos is actually a truer description of the meal. Eating the first two Shabbat meals is a mitzvah-but we are hungry anyway. It can therefore be difficult to tell whether we are eating these meals for G-d or just to satisfy our own hunger. Only once we reach the third meal (especially in the winter, when we sit down at the table again just an hour after finishing lunch) can we discern our true motivations for eating. When we push ourselves to eat the third meal, despite our lack of hunger, it is clear that we are eating only in order to fulfill a mitzvah. Our pure intentions for this meal are then retroactively applied to the first and second meals as well. The reward for all three meals is contained in the third-hence its traditional designation as Shalosh Seudos ("three meals").

In contrast to the weekday prayers, each of the three Amidah prayers on Shabbat is different. The Friday night Amidah mentions the creation of heaven and earth; the liturgy on Shabbat morning discusses Moses's bringing the Torah down from Mount Sinai; and the Amidah on Shabbat afternoon describes the messianic era, when G-d's unity will be universally recognized.

The commentator Ohr Gedalyahu explains that each Shabbat meal corresponds to one of these monumental historical events. Thus, as we gather to eat the three delicious Shabbat meals, we also have the opportunity to digest their significance. On Friday night, we focus on strengthening our belief that G-d created the world. On Shabbat day, we celebrate receiving the Torah. And at the third meal, we tap into an energy of purity and sanctity that will characterize the messianic era. Our awareness of the potential of these times can help us make the most of every Shabbat.

May we be blessed with the highest of Sabbaths-not just this week, but also when we eventually reach the messianic era, described as "a day that is entirely Shabbat." Through the mitzvah of

strengthening ourselves in Shabbat, its meals, and what they represent, may we be spared the difficulty and upheaval of the End of Days, and soon merit to live in a world where every day will have the sanctity of Shabbat. © 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 turns to the nation of Yisrael with the following statement: "And now, Yisrael, what does your G-d ask of you, except to fear your G-d, to go in His ways, and love Him, and to serve G-d with all your heart and all your soul, and to observe G-d's mitzvot and His laws which I command you today, as it is for your own benefit." [Devarim 10:12-13]. There is a well known question about this verse. The beginning of Moshe's words seem to imply that he is about to present some small demands, something that is simple and easy to perform. But then he continues with a detailed list of demands which include the entire Torah: the fear of G-d, loving Him, serving Him, and observing His commandments and laws. The Talmud asks the following famous question: "Does this mean that the fear of G-d is a simple thing?" [Megillah 25a]. The answer is, "Yes, with respect to Moshe it is a simple thing. This can be compared to a man who is asked for a large vessel which he has, and it therefore appears to him as if it were a small vessel. But if he is asked for a small vessel which he doesn't have, it appears to him as if it were very large."

However, the simple interpretation of the verse seems closer to the explanation of the Ramban. He claims that the limit in the verse does not refer to the demands on Bnei Yisrael, which are indeed many and significant, but rather to the end of Moshe's words: "as it is for your own benefit." Since in the end the result of all of the demands will be beneficial to Bnei Yisrael, it will not be hard for the people to fulfill them. This idea, that the observance of the mitzvot is for the benefit of Yisrael, is a very important concept which is repeated several times in the book of Devarim. (For example, "You shall go along the entire path which your G-d has commanded you, so that you will live and things will be good for you, and you will live long lives on the land which you will possess" [5:30]; see also 6:25.) The Ramban explains the following verse along the same lines too: "Behold, your G-d has possession of the heaven and the heaven above it, and also the earth and everything on it." [10:14]. This implies that since the Almighty is in any case in complete control of the universe the need to perform the mitzvot is solely for the benefit of Yisrael.

Evidently this line of reasoning is also the key to understanding the following verses. "It was only your ancestors who G-d desired, loving them, and He chose their offspring after them? you-from among all the other

nations, as is true to this very day. And you shall circumcise the barrier of your hearts and no longer make your necks stiff." [10:15-16]. Mentioning that the Almighty chose our forefathers, together with the commandment to open our hearts, is an allusion to the passage of the human circumcision and to the corresponding command: "And you shall circumcise your impure flesh, and let this be a symbol of a covenant between Me and you" [Bereishit 17:11]. The novelty in Moshe's words is the symbolic meaning he attaches to the mitzva of circumcision, demanding not only a physical act but also spiritual "circumcision," meaning to remove the internal restraints which interfere with observing the mitzvot. This act of removal is necessary so that the people will absorb the main theme of this passage? the point that observing the mitzvot is solely for the benefit of the nation of Yisrael.

RABBI ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

“[G-d] loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. You must also show love toward the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Deut. 10:18-19)

The Torah informs us of G-d's great love for the ger (convert). Since we are required to emulate G-d, it follows that we must also love the convert. Why, then, is it necessary to add, "for you were gerim in Egypt?"

Maimonides (Responsa No. 369) points out that the Torah commands us to respect and honor our parents and obey a prophet, but it does not command us to love them. Yet we are commanded to love the convert just as we are commanded to love G-d. To understand this we must understand the Torah concept of love.

The numerical value of "love" is the same as "one." Love is the product of unity between individuals, a recognition of a commonality and affinity. In our relationship to G-d this commonality is intrinsic, since we are created in G-d's image. Likewise, we share common responsibilities and goals with our fellow Jew. He is our peer in Torah and mitzvot. Parents and spouses, however, aside from the intrinsic commonality they share as Jews, may have nothing else in common.

Of course we must work to develop and nurture an affinity and commonality in the latter relationships. Love of a parent is an enhancement of honor; love of a spouse is a rabbinical directive (Maimonides, Ishus 15:19). And most certainly it is an ideal to love and honor the righteous. However, the Torah did not command us to create an affinity where it does not exist intrinsically. Rather, where such an affinity exists naturally, the Torah commands us to develop it.

Maimonides, in the aforementioned response, writes to a convert whose mentor insulted him and called him a fool for asking a legitimate question:

...That which he called you a fool is very perplexing. One who left his father and mother, and his birthplace, and his nation, which is now in power, whose heart and mind led him to cling to a nation that is today detested by the nations of the world, ruled over by slaves, and to recognize and understand that their religion is the true and righteous one; one who understood the ways of Israel, and pursued G-d, and entered the path of holiness, and entered under the wings of the Divine presence, and sat at the dust of the feet of Moses, the master of all prophets; one who desires G-d's mitzvot, whose heart inspires him to draw close to bask in the light of life, and to ascend to the level of angels, to rejoice and take pleasure in the rapture of the righteous; one who cast out this mundane world from his heart and did not follow vain and idle things-is a person who reached this lofty stature to be called a fool?

G-d has not designated you a fool, but rather an intelligent and wise and understanding individual, who proceeds on proper paths, the student of Abraham, who likewise left his father and birthplace to follow G-d. May He Who blessed Abraham, and rewarded him in this world and the next world, bless and reward you properly in this world and the next. May He lengthen your days, so that you will be able to teach G-d's laws to His congregation, and may you merit to see all the consolations in store for Israel in the future, and may the good that G-d will do for us also devolve upon you, for G-d has spoken good concerning Israel.

The convert has discovered on his own what the Jew was born with. Yet, the Sages tell us (Yevamos 48b), a convert sometimes experiences hardships after the conversion due to the fact that he procrastinated in converting. The Chida explains that every convert has an innate spark of holiness that is suppressed and lies dormant until he becomes aware of it and converts. He procrastinated in not acting upon that spark.

The famous convert and martyr, Avraham ben Avraham, posited that while each nation rejected the Torah when G-d offered it to them, there was a minority that was willing to accept the Torah. It is the descendants of that minority who eventually convert.

Through a proper halachic conversion, the convert transforms himself into a new individual. That spark of holiness is transformed into a Jewish soul and replaces his previous identity as a non-Jew. He is a newborn person with no halachic connection to his past.

G-d shows particular love and solicitude for the convert, feeding and clothing him. Food is man's basic necessity. Out of recognition of the elevated essence of the convert, G-d provides his essential necessities. Clothing represents one's honor. By providing clothing, G-d honors the convert.

On the one hand, we share an intrinsic affinity with that which the convert chose and accepted upon

himself. Nevertheless, it is difficult to relate to the convert with a sense of total affinity, since his embrace of Torah and mitzvot was voluntary and ours was by birth. Therefore the Torah could not merely exhort us to emulate G-d in loving the convert, since there is an impediment to actually fulfilling this command. Thus the Torah adds, "for you were gerim in Egypt."

We can appreciate and identify with the convert, for in our national experience we also were quasi-gerim, when we left Egypt and accepted the Torah. Although we were already potentially Jews from the time of Abraham, and all that had to be done was bring out the potential that already existed at Sinai (see Gur Aryeh to Genesis 46:10); we experienced at Sinai a conversion, an acceptance of Torah and mitzvot not binding upon us at birth. Because we share that experience with the convert, we can be commanded to recognize and enhance that commonality.

The Sages comment (Yevamos 47a) that converts are as difficult for the Jewish people as spachas (an affliction of the skin). On the one hand, non-Jews who convert for ulterior motives, who basically masquerade as Jews, are a plague and sickness to the Jewish people.

On the other hand, Jews who convert for the reasons Maimonides describes and who undergo a halachic conversion are a pleasant affliction for the Jewish people. Just as tzora'as (skin affliction) is a lesson to goad one to repent and improve, the devotion and meticulous observance of mitzvot of a true convert are an indictment of those born Jews who are not as devoted, meticulous or appreciative of their heritage.

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RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“I grasped the two Tablets and threw them from my two hands ...” (9:17) There is an opinion among the Rishonim / medieval authorities that if one releases his hold on a stone and it kills someone, he is liable for murder. It is not necessary that one apply his own force to the stone, for example, by throwing it. R' Yitzchak Yehuda Trunk z"l (Poland; 1880-1939) writes that this view may be supported by our verse. Why did Moshe mention that he was grasping the luchot before he threw them. down? Perhaps he meant to say that he did not actually throw the luchot. Rather, he was grasping them in his hands, and when he stopped grasping them, it was as if he threw them. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot) © 2001 Rabbi S. Katz & Project Genesis

