

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**F**or Hashem your G-d is repulsed by all who do these things.” Although I have translated the word “to’aiva” as “repulsive,” the most commonly used translation is “abomination.” This term is used by the Torah to describe numerous things, indicating that they are more than just “wrong,” but “repulsive.” The section of the verse quoted above actually appears twice in our Parasha. The first time (Devarim 22:5) it is used to describe G-d being “repulsed” by cross-dressing, i.e. men wearing women’s clothing or women wearing men’s clothing. The second time (25:16), it describes G-d being repulsed by dishonest business practices. However, when discussing how detestable cheating others is, besides saying “all who do these things” the Torah adds, “all who are involved in deception.” Why does the Torah use two phrases, rather than just one? What does the second phrase teach us that we wouldn’t know if there were only one phrase?

On one level, this added phrase indicates that dishonesty is considered worse than other “abominations.” It is interesting to note that while stealing is not called an “abomination,” stealing via deception is. Does it really matter how one cheats (or is cheated)? Why is taking something from others through misrepresentation worse than taking it behind their back, or by force? Why is G-d super-repulsed by those who cheat others through deception more than other forms of cheating and stealing?

Numerous suggestions have been given to explain the Torah using two phrases (e.g. Midrash Hagadol, Or Hachayim, Kli Yakar and Netziv). The context of the verses, which discuss having deceptive weights and measurements without any mention of actually using them, indicates that the “abomination” refers to “those who do these things,” i.e. have the tools with which to deceive others, even if they never use them. Merely owning an inaccurate scale, weight or measure is an “abomination,” let alone using it. The verse may therefore be telling us that it is an abomination to have the means of deceiving others, and an additional abomination to actual deceive others (a “double abomination”). Owning the tools to deceive is worse than just stealing because it is then much easier to become a repeat offender. The institutionalization of

deception is therefore more of an abomination. Nevertheless, the second phrase, which refers to the deception itself rather than the institutionalization of deception, teaches us that stealing via deception (even if it’s not “institutionalized”) is an abomination. We would still need to explain why stealing via deception is more “repulsive” than other theft.

In Mishlay (Proverbs), Sh'lomo HaMelech (King Solomon) refers to the “repulsiveness” of deception several times. However, whereas one verse that mentions non-standard weights and measures being an “abomination” (20:10) is set in a context of kindness and honesty (20:6), innocence (20:7 and 20:9), and purity and being straight/just (20:11), the verse that speaks of “deceitful scales” being an “abomination” (11:1) appears in a context of righteousness and wickedness (10:30-32) and sin and modesty (11:2). Because the context here is “dayos” (how we mentally approach things) rather than action, the Ralbag understands it to be referring to thinking straight (not crooked) rather acting straight (not crooked). “For G-d is repulsed by those who weigh their thoughts with deceitful scales, meaning [those] who don’t know to be careful during contemplation from things that mislead, as this is among [the things] that bring one to making great (i.e. large) wrong arguments which will bring about a great amount of heavy destruction. However, [G-d’s] will is that they (the ideas being contemplated) be weighed with a ‘perfect stone’ that doesn’t have anything extra nor anything missing, and this is [accomplished] by watching the ways and the orders that straighten a person out by guarding from making mistakes in the thought process.”

Rabbeinu Yonah (Mishlay 20:10) says that Sh'lomo would not just repeat the commandments of the Torah, so each of the three mentions of deceitful weights, measures and scales much be teaching us an added dimension. According to Rabbeinu Yonah, the first mention in Mishlay of deceit being an “abomination” (11:1) refers to lying (even if the untruth doesn’t bring monetary gain), the second (20:10) refers to a “deceitful heart” (similar to the Ralbag’s explanation of the first mention), and the third (20:23) refers to taking back compensation from someone who cheated you through deceit; even if money was stolen from you, deceitful tactics can’t be employed to get the money back since deceit is always an “abomination.”

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It can therefore be suggested that reason the Torah added the second phrase of "all those who act deceitfully" in our Parasha is to include not just making (and using) deceitful weights and measures, but any kind of deceit, whether it be lying to others, or lying to oneself by being less than objective during contemplation.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 92a) equates lying, or more specifically, misrepresenting things through words, with idol worship. The Maharsha says that this comparison is made because truth is the basis for the Torah, whereas other belief systems are built on falsehood. Therefore, dealing in falsehood is tantamount to giving credence to false beliefs. As the Talmud says in numerous places (e.g. Shabbos 55a), "the seal of G-d is 'truth'."

If what separates the Torah (and worshipping the One True Creator) from everything else is its truth, deceit undermines its value and authority. Acting deceitfully either means not subscribing to the same value system as the Torah, or not believing it to be true. Either way, a supposedly Torah-observant person who acts deceitfully creates the biggest kind of "chillul Hashem," profaning of G-d's name, as the message it sends is that the G-d of the Torah is not truthful, and/or is not true. Stealing is bad enough, but when done through deceit, it is a complete "abomination," and extremely repulsive to the One True G-d. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

This week's sedra provides us with a fine example of the humanity of Jewish law - as well as the way the sages interpreted the Torah. Our point of departure is this passage: When men have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. If the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make him lie down and have him flogged in his presence with the number of lashes his crime deserves, but he must not give him more than forty lashes. If he is flogged more than that, your brother will be degraded in your eyes. (Deut. 25: 1-3)

The passage is not straightforward, since in Jewish law lashes are not a form of punishment in civil

cases as the verse seems to imply. However, our focus will be on the last phrase: "your brother will be degraded in your eyes".

The sages derived from this a fundamental principle, namely the rehabilitation of an offender once he has served his punishment. In the earlier part of the passage the offender is called ha-rasha, translated here as "the guilty" but which literally means "the wicked". At the end, however, he is called "your brother". From this, the sages (Sifre ad loc.) drew the conclusion that "once he has been beaten, he becomes [again] your brother".

This has both a specific and more general application. The specific rule applies to offences that carried with them the severe punishment of karet, literally "being cut off" from one's people. In many cases this was interpreted as a divine rather than human punishment; the human punishment was to receive lashes. The principle that "once he has been beaten, he becomes [again] your brother" was taken to mean that the human punishment cancels the divine punishment. Once the offender has been beaten, there is no residual guilt (Mishnah, Makkot 3: 15).

In addition, however, the sages inferred the far wider principle that when the guilty has received the punishment his offence deserved, he is restored to his earlier status. For example, he is permitted to be a witness, and his testimony is not invalidated by the fact that previously he had been found guilty of an offence. The stain on his character is temporary, not permanent. Offenders are to be rehabilitated.

This led to a specific enactment by the sages, known as takkanat ha-shavim, a rule designed to remove obstacles to penitence. The Mishnah (Gittin 5:5) teaches that "If a beam which was acquired by robbery has been built into a building, restitution for it may be made in money so as not to put obstacles in the way of penitents."

The rule is that in the case of robbery, the guilty party must return what he has taken to its rightful owner ("He shall restore that which he took by robbery", Lev. 5: 23). This makes obvious sense. If a robber were allowed merely to make monetary compensation rather than return the stolen object, the law would, in effect, allow someone to acquire an object - albeit at a price - by violence. That must be wrong.

Yet this rule was suspended in a case where returning the object would involve massive loss on the part of the robber. The situation envisaged by the Mishnah is one where, having stolen a beam, the robber has used it to build a house. Restoring the beam would involve tearing down the house. A sense of guilt at the original crime might induce remorse in the robber and an effort on his part to return objects he has wrongly taken. If, however, this would involve disproportionate loss on his part - not just returning the stolen object, but also having to dismantle what he has built using it - he might decide that restitution was just too costly, and decide against giving the object back.

So what, one might say. The man is a robber. What matters is the right of the innocent - the original owner of the beam - not the right of the guilty. Surely the robber, by breaking the law, has forfeited any claim on the court's clemency. Yet Jewish law ruled otherwise. To be sure, the owner must be compensated for his loss. Without this, he will have suffered an injustice. But we must have concern for the offender also, in the sense that we must clear away any obstacles in the path of his return to law-abidingness. The sages fully understood that this was not part of Torah law. It required a positive enactment, takkanat ha-shavim, on their part. But the sages would not have made this enactment if they did not feel that it was in the spirit of Torah law.

They went further still. We find in the Talmud (Baba Kamma 94b) this remarkable principle: "If robbers or usurers [repent, and of their own accord] are prepared to restore what they have wrongly taken, it is not right to accept it from them, and one who does so is not acting with the approval of the sages." The Talmud explains how this teaching emerged from an actual case.

In the time of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, head of the Jewish community in the early third century, a robber decided to end his life of crime and restore everything he had wrongly taken to its owners. His wife said to him: "Fool. If you give back everything you have taken, you will not be left with even the belt you are wearing." The rule was then instituted those who had been robbed should not insist on the return of their property.

Needless to say, this does not apply to a robber who has been brought to court - only to one who has, without any prompting other than his own conscience, decided to confess his guilt and make amends. Nor does it apply if the robber still has the stolen objects in his possession. Nor is it a legal requirement. The rightful owner may still take the robber to court if he so chooses. Some go so far as to say that this was never intended as a permanent enactment, for it is all too easily exploitable: robbers could steal and then pretend to be penitent (see Maggid Mishneh to Rambam, Hilkhos Gezeilah 1: 13). Yet despite all this, Maimonides writes: "Even though robbing someone is like taking their life . . . we must help [a robber who repents of his own accord] and pardon him in order to bring him back to the right path of penitents" (Hilkhos Gezeilah 1: 13).

Another principle the sages articulated - this time on the basis of a biblical command - was that one should not make reference to a penitent's past. One should not say to someone who committed a crime, but has now served his sentence and expressed remorse, "Remember the crime you committed". To do so is to be guilty to "verbal oppression", which is forbidden by the verse, "You shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your G-d; I am the Lord your G-d" (Lev. 25: 17; Rambam, Hilkhos Teshuvah 7: 8). In the tenth century, Rabbenu Gershom instituted a rule that one who made

public mention of a penitent's earlier deeds was to be excommunicated (Teshuvot Chakhmei Tzofat, 21).

The rules of rehabilitation are complex, and I make no attempt to summarise them here. Yet it is clear that from earliest times the sages tempered their concern for justice with a desire to help criminals and wrongdoers find their way back to honesty and society. What mandated them to do so was the teaching of the prophet Ezekiel: "Son of man, say to the house of Israel: This is what you have been saying, 'Our offenses and sins weigh heavily on us, and we are sick at heart because of them. How can we survive?' Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, that you may not die, O house of Israel.'" (Ezekiel 33: 10-12)

Not only were these teachings many centuries ahead of their time. They also have much to teach us today. Retributive justice is not incompatible with a sense of human dignity and freedom. To the contrary, it is based on them. Jewish law is concerned not only to protect the rights of those who have been wronged, but also to help wrongdoers rebuild their future. Guilt, in Judaism, is about acts, not persons. It is the act, not the person, that is condemned. Once the criminal has served his punishment and repented of his crime, he becomes, once more, "your brother". © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

“**A**ll is fair in love and war.” Not so in Judaism.

In fact, the test of moral standards is not how one acts when things are peaceful, clear and smooth. Such instances do not by and large require moral strength. Rather the test of moral integrity truly presents itself when facing difficult situations.

One example of such an instance is during war. It's precisely then when soldiers can take advantage of the weak and the captured using the excuse that "all is not fair." It is precisely then that the Torah demands that we conduct ourselves with the greatest moral fortitude.

Note the law of a woman captured during war. (Deuteronomy 21:10-14) The Torah tells us that such a woman is to shave her hair, let her nails grow and weep for her father and mother a full month. Only after that process, the Torah says, "she shall be a wife to you."

A classic difference emerges between Nachmanides and Maimonides. Nachmanides believes that after the thirty-day period, the captured woman can be forced to convert and marry her captor. Still, for Nachmanides, during the thirty days, the soldier must observe firsthand how the captured woman is in deep mourning. Clearly Nachmanides sees this law as the Torah doing all that it can in order to evoke feelings of sympathy towards the captured woman in the hope that

ultimately her plight would be heard and she would be freed.

Maimonides takes it much further. The thirty days of mourning were introduced as a time period in which the soldier tries to convince the captured woman to convert and marry. After the thirty days, however, the woman has the right to leave her captor. Under no circumstances can she be forced to convert or marry.

Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld argues that Maimonides' position is not only morally correct but it fits into the context of our portion. Note that the portion concludes with the mandate to destroy the nation of Amalek. (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) Amalek's sin was attacking the weakest. Here, one sees the great contrast. Amalek set out to abuse the most vulnerable. Maimonides tells us that Jewish law prohibits taking advantage of the weak. Indeed, the test of morality is how one treats the most vulnerable.

War is horrific. Given its horror, our portion reminds us of our responsibility even in those circumstances to conduct ourselves morally. This is a mandate that the IDF is superbly fulfilling today. As one we should all declare - Kol Hakavod le-Tzahal. © 2010 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 YAAKOV NEUBERGER

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Is there a more sobering and even disquieting sound in our tradition than the Elul shofar, announcing that Rosh Hashana is upon us once again and then marking the march of time as we get closer and closer? It is in this two step fashion that the Rosh (at the end of Maseches Rosh Hashana) presents the history and observance of the Elul shofar. The earliest source of this practice presents it as a rabbinic legislation but sees it limited to blowing the shofar on rosh chodesh Elul alone. A medrash (Pirkei Derabi Eliezer, chapter 46) records that on our very first Rosh Chodesh Elul, a few months after matan Torah and the calamitous chet haeigel, we were, understandably, a shaken and spiritually diminished people. As Moshe was invited to ascend Har Sinai to accept the luchos one more time, we grew concerned that we would err once again in calculating Moshe's return, and despair over his absence. Therefore we decided to sound the shofar as Moshe left us. The medrash concludes that as the Rabbis realized that Hashem was greatly honored by this shofar sound, they legislated its reenactment every rosh chodesh Elul. The Rosh further comments that we then continue to sound the shofar every morning of the month to remind us to do teshuva.

What impressed our sages so, that they decided to memorialize that one sounding of the shofar of rosh chodesh? Moreover, did the Rosh record a second and independent practice which happens to

dovetail with the rabbinic enactment of rosh chodesh? Are we to continue memorializing that event throughout Elul, and if so, why?

I would suggest that the shofar of Elul reminds us of the avoda of Elul, the spiritual responsibilities and challenge that we face throughout our preparation for the yomim tovim. I believe that the decision to sound the shofar as Moshe ascended added a voluntary but often time indispensable dimension to the teshuva process. Perhaps that is why Hashem himself was honored in an unparalleled fashion at that moment. Let me explain.

It is well known that the mitzvah of teshuva prescribes that we must respond to our flaws and errors through admission of our lapses, expression of regret and shame at our lack of compliance to Hashem, and articulate our further commitment to do better going forward. Rambam teaches that our thought process must be earnest enough to win the nod of Hashem himself, and further teaches that the process is completed once it is tested and we err not again (Hilchos Teshuva chapter 2).

However Moshe's generation adopted a new behavior to bolster their pledge for the future and thus introduced a new concept to the teshuva process. The halachos of teshuva are fully satisfied by a genuine and deep cheshbon hanefesh-soul searching introspection and commitment. Yet we know that we often have trouble following through, especially if we are repeat offenders and have unsuccessfully tried with all the seriousness we can muster, to improve. Many of us find ourselves honestly mentioning the same misstep in the al cheits year after year.

The shofar reminds us of a technique that we established long ago when we experienced deep remorse of the past and profound fear of our frailty in the future. Sometimes even deep seated regret may simply not be enough. Action may be required. In halacha and in the mussar seforim it is called making a "geder-fence", a protective measure.

In practice the person who has trouble arousing himself for minyan makes a geder to learn with someone else before davening adding extra pressure on himself when he is still half asleep. The person who finds the days roll by without learning will establish the geder of setting his time to learn immediately after dinner or maariv. Similar gedolim may aid the individual who never finds the time to exercise or to make the all important phone calls. Self awareness and creativity will help one find a protective move or act that will forestall compromising another's privacy or dignity, and maintaining the standards of interpersonal conduct for which we strive.

The decision to sound the shofar that rosh chodesh Elul signaled the deepest remorse, the insightful realization of human weakness, and launched a form of tikun that deserved eternal observance. Later generations understood this and established the daily

shofar so that we would consider this tikun over and over again as part of our avodah throughout the month of Elul. © 2010 Rabbi Y. Neuberger & The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and she does not find grace in his eyes because he has found her to be sexually immoral, he shall write her a bill of divorcement, give it to her in her hand, and send her away from his house" (Deuteronomy 24:1). This text is the source for divorce law in Judaism.

At first glance, the Torah seems to be making two clear statements: first, that a divorce can only be initiated if a major sin of adultery has been committed, and second, that it is the husband who must give the bill of divorce into the hand of his wife unilaterally.

Our sages within the Oral Law of the Talmud interpreted these verses differently. They taught that sexual immorality is merely an example of what could go wrong in a marriage; the operative factor is the first part of the verse, "...she does not find grace in his eyes." Because they realized that marriage can become intolerable even though the couple has been faithful to each other, the rabbis permitted divorce as long as both husband and wife agreed to one.

They also ruled that it is still the husband who must give the divorce to the wife, though the wife has the right to initiate divorce proceedings, certainly if he is abusing her and even if she simply finds him detestable. If the rabbinical judges feel that a divorce is warranted, they could have the husband beaten up until he agrees to give one to his wife. (B.T. Ketubot 63, Rambam Laws of Divorce, Chapter 2, Law 20). So anxious were the rabbis to make certain that women would not be unfairly subjected to an impossible marital relationship that the Talmud brings five instances whereby the rabbis themselves can nullify and abrogate a marriage, if the husband acts like a scoundrel and refuses to give his wife a divorce.

And when there were objections to the principle that a religious court could send legal "enforcers" to "beat him until he declares that he really wants to divorce her" - since such corporal enforcement is the very antithesis of a volitional act - Maimonides explains that since every Jew really wants to do what is right, and since it is right for the husband to free his wife from a marriage she finds intolerable, the corporal enforcement merely helps him do what he knows he should do.

Although Jewish law, as codified in the 16th-century Shulhan Aruch, was loathe to enforce a divorce when the woman had no more compelling grounds than "I am no longer in love with him; I find him detestable," the courts did coerce the husband if they discovered more convincing objective reasons, such as sexual

dysfunction, physical abuse, etc. One of the important functions of Ohr Torah Stone's Monica Dennis Goldberg women advocates and their Yad L'isha Legal Aid Center and Hotline is to expand the possible reasons for compelling husbands to give divorces. For example, verbal abuse can be just as insidious as physical abuse, and male philandering can be just as destructive to family life as female promiscuity.

It should also be noted that no 21st Century religious court in an enlightened country can enforce its decisions by beating an individual until he "agrees" to accept its ruling. Hence, other means of "enforcement" have been introduced, such as rescinding the recalcitrant husband's passport, canceling his driving license and - if all else fails - sending him to prison. In this way, we maintain the biblical norm - it is still the husband who gives the get - while the woman is now offered a real opportunity to "sue" for divorce, initiating the process when a marriage reaches the point of utter misery.

In this way the religious courts in Israel remain true to Jewish law at the same time that they can do everything possible to alleviate the suffering of a woman whose husband will not free her of his own volition. And this is fully in accordance with the statement in the Talmud, "in order to free an aguna [a woman denied a get by her husband], the sages employed every leniency" (B.T. Gittin 2b, 3a.).

So, to quote a Yiddish adage, if it's so good, then why is it still so bad? In recent years - via the Knesset's religious political party system of wheeling and dealing - one of the leaders of the haredi world has effectively taken over the Chief Rabbinate and its courts. One of the latest decisions regarding divorce is based on a Responsum by a noted scholar, Rabbi Shmuel de Medina (known as the Maharashdam, 1506-1589), a minority opinion that maintains that the only time a religious court can obligate a husband to give a divorce is if the husband refuses, absolutely and categorically, to give her one. If, however, the husband says he will give a divorce, but only on condition that, say, he receive substantial payment or visiting rights (alone) to children that he has abused, then the wife must acquiesce if she wants a divorce. Tragically, the policy of many of our chief rabbinical court judges today is to accept the view of the Maharashdam!

G-d is defined as a G-d of love and compassion when He is asked by Moses to explain the way in which He wants His wishes to be expressed in this world (Exodus 34: 5-6). The Talmud expresses this truth by doing somersaults to free a woman from a difficult marital situation, even to the extent of accepting the single testimony of a woman or of a gentile in order to make her free. The use of a minority stringent opinion in order to keep a woman chained to an impossible marriage or in order to wrest from her difficult conditions of payment or children visitations in return for a divorce goes against the spirit as well as the letter of Talmudic

Law and the way in which it was interpreted by generations of decisors (poskim). For the sake of the G-d of compassion, our religious courts must be compassionate towards the agunah. © 2010 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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The parsha of Ki Teitzei contains the second most numerous count of mitzvot in the Torah, topped only by the count of mitzvot in the parsha of Kdoshim in Chumash Vayikra. The commentators to the Torah discuss why these mitzvot that first appear in Ki Teitzei, all of whom are ultimately derived from the granting of the Torah at Mount Sinai almost forty years earlier, find their place in the Torah here in Moshe's final oration to the Jewish people.

Their approach to the issue differs. Some are of the opinion since many of these mitzvot are related to war, settling the land, domesticated human life and the like they appear here because of the impending life altering change for the Jewish people. From a miraculous existence in the desert to a more natural and normal society living They were now in their own land with all of the changes and problems that such a radical shift of circumstances implies.

Others merely say that this is an example of the Talmudic dictum that the Torah is not bound in its teachings and text to any narrative time line; there is no chronological order to the Torah. Even though these mitzvot appear to us in writing here for the first time in the Torah text, they were essentially already taught to the Jewish people in the desert long before by Moshe.

There are other explanations to the placement of these mitzvot here in our parsha advanced by many of the great commentators to the Torah. All possible explanations are valid and they are not mutually exclusive.

If I may be bold enough to add my insight to this matter as well, I would say as follows: The Jewish people are now about to become a nation and to establish their own government in the Land of Israel. They will have to fight many battles, bloody and painful, to establish their right to the Land of Israel and to establish their sovereignty over the territory that it encompasses.

They will need an army, a civil government, a judicial system, an economy and labor force and all of the other necessary trappings that accompany nation building and establishing a territorial entity and effective government. In the face of these demands it will be likely that they will think that they may discard the spiritual yoke of the mitzvot imposed upon them at Sinai.

It will be easy to say that mitzvot were necessary in the Sinai desert where no other demands on our time, energy and service existed for us. But now

we have more pressing business at hand and therefore the punctilious observance of mitzvot is no longer required of us.

Moshe comes in this parsha, in the midst of his valedictory oration to the Jewish people, to remind them that mitzvot and Torah are the only effective guarantee of Jewish success and survival even while engaged in building and defending Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.

Moshe in effect says to them: "Here are some more mitzvot that will help you succeed in building the land and your sovereignty over it." Moshe's message is as germane to our time as it was to the first Jews who arrived en masse to settle in the Land of Israel thirty-three centuries ago. © 2010 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

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah displays Hashem's boundless love for the Jewish people. In the end, after a long painful exile, the Jewish people will be granted permission to return to Eretz Yisroel. Most appropriately, the prophet Yeshaya opens and invites Yerushalayim to rejoice over the ingathering of her exiles. He says, "Rejoice barren city who never expected such an overwhelming influx within your walls... Extend your annexes without interruption... Because your children will inherit the cities of the nations and settle the desolate areas." (54:1-3) The proportions of the Jewish redemption will be so overwhelming that Eretz Yisroel won't be capable of containing it. Yerushalayim will overflow from her newly acquired inhabitants and the surrounding areas will rapidly fill to capacity. The entire Judean hills will be saturated with newly sprouted neighborhoods but the Jewish influx will continue. The new wave of Jews will take possession of the entire land of Israel and settle therein but even these broadened quarters will not suffice. The return will be so encompassing that Zion will truly wonder in bewilderment from whence did all of her people emerge.

Yet the kindness of Hashem won't end here and the prophet continues to describe the setting of the future. Yeshaya tells the Jewish people, "Do not be afraid or embarrassed because your shameful past will never be remembered." (54:4) He adds in the name of Hashem, "I forsook you for a brief moment and I will gather you in with great compassion. With mild anger I concealed My countenance from you and with everlasting kindness I will have mercy upon you." (54:7,8) These passages reflect the concern of the Jewish people over their dark and rebellious past. They hesitate to return to Hashem because their previous

wrong doings remain fresh in their minds. They cannot imagine bonding perfectly with Hashem given how unfair they acted towards Him in the past. Hashem responds that they should not hesitate to return because no trace will remain of their earlier ways. Hashem's blessing will be so encompassing that it will be virtually impossible for the Jewish people to relate to their earlier experiences. They will develop such close relationships with Hashem that they will be incapable of imagining what it was like without Him. How could they have ever appreciated life without their close and perfect relationship with Hashem?!

The prophet continues and reveals to us the merit through which this unbelievable experience will transpire. Yeshaya says in the name of Hashem, "For the mountains may move and the hills may sway but My kindness will never leave you and My covenant of peace will never be swayed." (54:10) In explanation of these words, our Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (477) share with us a beautiful insight. They explain that the mountains mentioned here refer to the firm and sound merits of the Patriarchs and the hills refer to those of the Matriarchs. Although the Jewish nation continuously draws upon these merits for its basic existence there are times when even these merits do not suffice. The Jews stray so far from the proper path that they cease to identify with the virtues of the Patriarchs. During such times, Hashem doesn't identify with the Jewish people as children of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs and the mountains and hills-merits of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs- begin to sway and cannot be of any assistance. Yeshaya advises the Jews that in those difficult moments they should cleave to acts of loving kindness. In return for their loving kindness Hashem promises to show them His loving kindness resulting in the indescribable proportions mentioned earlier.

With the above insight we begin to comprehend the unbelievable Messianic era awaiting the Jewish nation. The Malbim (ad loc.) explains this merit of loving kindness and notes that, by nature, kindness is boundless. Unlike compassion and mercy which depend upon the recipient's worthiness, kindness is shown without calculation or consideration. The recipient of pure kindness is never deserving of it and such acts are therefore not subject to limitations. In essence whenever Hashem showers His kindness upon someone it is, by definition, unlimited and everlasting. This, incidentally is the deeper meaning of Dovid Hamelech's words in Tehillim, "For His kindness is everlasting." (107:1) Accordingly, when the Jewish people will be the beneficiaries of Hashem's kindness they will experience it in boundless proportions. They will be privileged to establish such closeness to Hashem that they will never be capable of understanding life without Him.

However, in order to elicit true kindness from Hashem the Jewish people must conduct themselves in a very special manner. To this end Yeshaya offers them

an inside tip and advises them to cleave to acts of loving kindness amongst each other. When, in the end of time, we will be totally committed to benefiting others Hashem will reciprocate in that same manner. If we will provide for others above and beyond our obligation Hashem will do the same. We now understand that those acts of loving kindness-by definition beyond the call of duty-will truly serve as the keys to our glorious future. Such acts of pure kindness are not subject to calculations and computations and are the true expression of boundless concern for others. Hashem therefore responds with His acts of loving kindness and showers us with His boundless love in the most indescribable proportions. Eretz Yisroel will be continuously expanding to allow for the influx and our association with Hashem will be so perfect that our entire life will revolve totally around Him. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

In this week's parsha of Ki Saitzay we are told which nations have restrictions on their marrying into the Kahal (marrying a daughter of a Kohen, Levi or Yisroel) even after having gone through the conversion process. They will be full-fledged Jews in all ways with the exception of this marriage-related restriction. There are different laws for different nations. The vast majority can convert and be part of the Kahal.

Mitzrayim and Edom are restricted until the third generation. If one converts, he can only marry another convert. Any child born from that union, the second generation, has the same restriction and again, can only marry a convert. A child born from that union, the third generation from the original convert, is permitted to marry into the Kahal.

"An Ammonite or a Moabite cannot enter the Kahal of Hashem... forever." [23:4] Their restriction goes far past that of Mitzrayim and Edom.

Why is that? What terrible acts were performed that became part of their spiritual DNA passed down generation to generation, restricting them from ever marrying into the Kahal Hashem?

"For they did not meet you with bread and water on the way as you left Mitzrayim {Egypt} and because they hired Bilaam the son of B'or to curse you. [23:5]"

That seems a bit strange. Hiring Bilaam to curse and destroy us is certainly grounds for such a harsh restriction. But not offering us food and water? They simply held back a chessed {act of kindness}! Furthermore, why was that reason cited first, the implication being that it was the primary factor?

The Be'er Yosef writes that the passuk {verse} is explaining why their restriction is much greater than that of the Mitzrim {Egyptians}. Rashi in his comments about the Mitzrim writes: "Even though they threw your male infants into the river, they hosted you in your time

of need." [23:8] With all of the atrocities that the Mitzrim committed during our period of slavery, they had hosted and fed Yaakov and his family during the seven years of famine. There was some kindness that they had shown to Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel}. They were therefore permitted to enter the Kahal after three generations.

From this we can now understand Amon and Moab. Had they done any kindness to Bnei Yisroel, that would have negated to a certain degree even the fact that they had hired Bilaam to destroy us. Had they offered us food and water that would have mitigated their restriction.

The passuk is telling us that since they didn't even do that small kindness, they will therefore receive the full brunt of their having hired Bilaam to destroy us—they will be eternally barred from the Kahal.

From this we can see the power of even small acts and how Hashem takes everything into consideration.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski tells the story of a scoffer who told Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev that he could prove the Torah to be wrong. "It says in the Shema prayer," he told him, "that if we sin Hashem will get angry and punish us. I am a serious sinner, yet I am wealthy and happy!"

Rav Levi Yitzchak lovingly replied, "My son, for you to know this, you must have read the Shema. You should know that the reward for reciting Shema even a single time is so great that all the wealth in the world may not be enough to compensate for it!"

Rabbi Twerski also tells of a young man in Kiev who found that in Czarist Russia, a Jew had no chance for success. He therefore adopted a non-Jewish identity that even included working and eating on Yom Kippur. He was then able to advance to a prestigious position in the government.

One day the body of a man washed ashore. There was no way of determining his identity but by the virtue of the fact that he was wearing tzitzis {a four-cornered garment with strings} he was recognized as a Jew and was given a Jewish burial.

When this young man heard of this, he thought that although he didn't want his Judaism to stand in the way of his success, ultimately he too would want a Jewish burial. He therefore began to wear tzitzis—this would not divulge his identity in his lifetime but would ensure him a Jewish burial at the time when advancement would no longer be an issue.

Once he began to observe this single mitzvah, subtle changes began to take place. He fasted on Yom Kippur and found an excuse to miss work on that holy day. He began to avoid non-kosher food and gradually became observant of those mitzvos that could be performed without revealing his Jewish identity. Eventually he quit his position in government and became totally observant.

My wife attended a shiur last night and afterwards shared it with me. One of the messages conveyed was that during this time when there seems to be an absence of heavenly compassion to Bnei Yisroel, we must do our utmost to show compassion and kindness. That is a way to 'jump-start' compassion from Hashem as He mirrors our actions.

One mitzvah, one act of kindness—every little bit counts in a big way... © 2010 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

At the very end of Parshat Ki Tetzei we encounter one of the more famous commandments, instructing us to remember what Amalek did to us as we left Egypt. While the whole world saw the Jews as untouchables, Amalek decided to kill us by attacking the weak people lagging behind, thus proclaiming to the world that they weren't afraid of G-d by attacking His nation. However, they WERE scared of the Jews themselves, which is why they attacked the weak ones. Strangely, though, the next few Pesukim (verses) tell us to wipe out the memory of Amalek from this world. So which is it? Should we remember what they did to us, or should we wipe out their memory and forget? To top it all, the Torah then tells us AGAIN to not forget!?

To help us understand the issues involved here, Chazal (our Rabbis) have explained, using an analogy, that it's as if Amalek jumped into scolding hot water, and although they were burned, they cooled the water, and everyone around them was a little bit more comfortable with the hot water. As the book "Majesty of Man" elaborates, human nature dictates that the more we see of something, the less sensitive we are to it. So what's the solution? Well, the Torah tells us to remember, erase, and yet remember: Remember the elements in this world that would pick on the weak and defy G-d and authority, but only so that you could erase them, thereby erasing their influence. The final step is to never forget what happens when we surround ourselves with negative influences. As human nature dictates, and as the history books (following this battle) record, we are influenced by our society, neighborhood, and by our friends. Just as we must be careful not to let ourselves be affected by anything negative, we must also remember that we can have a positive or negative effect on those around us. May we have the strength to control ourselves and inspire others! © 2010 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

