

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

So shall you bless the children of Israel: Say to them, 'May the Lord bless you and keep you; May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; May the Lord lift His face towards (forgive) you and grant you peace'. And they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:22-27)

Efrat, Israel - What is the real meaning of love? And why is it that the Priests-Kohanim, the ministers of the Holy Temple and Torah teachers of the nation, must administer their priestly benediction "with love"? What has "love" to do with their specific leadership role?

In our Biblical portion, the Almighty tells Moses to command Aaron [the High Priest-Kohen] and his sons, "...So shall you bless the children of Israel: Say to them, 'May the Lord bless you and keep you; May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; May the Lord lift His face towards [forgive] you and grant you peace.' And they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:22-27).

This priestly benediction was a regular part of the daily Temple service. To this very day, here in Israel, every morning during the repetition of the Amidah, the descendants of Aaron bestow this blessing upon the congregation. Prior to blessing the congregation, the Priest-Kohanim recite the following benediction: "Blessed are You, O Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron, and commanded us to bestow a blessing upon His nation Israel with love." What is the significance of these last two words, "with love"? And if the Priest-Kohen does not feel love in his heart for every member of the congregation, does this disqualify his blessing?

A Midrash asks why the command to bless Israel is prefaced by the words "say to them." It answers that this teaches that the Cantor, the representative of the congregation who repeats the Amidah for all the congregants, must say each word of the benediction, which is then repeated word by word by the Priest-Kohen (Midrash Sifrei 6, 143).

Rashi points out that the Hebrew "Emor" ("say") is vocalized with a Kametz punctuation, as in the word "Zakhor" which is used in the command to remember the Sabbath day and remember the day we came out of

Egypt. This implies an active form of the verb, as in remembering the Sabbath by our weekly repetition of the Divine primordial week of creation in which we too actively work for six days and creatively rest on the Sabbath, or in our re-experiencing the Egyptian servitude and exodus on the seder night. Apparently, the Kohen-priest must "actively" bless. Rashi adds that the Hebrew "emor" is spelled in the longest and fullest form possible, in order to teach us that the Priest-Kohen "must not bestow his blessing hastily, but rather with intense concentration and with a full, loving heart" (Rashi, ad loc). There is even a French, Hassidic interpretation of the word which claims that the Hebrew emor is akin to the French amour, meaning with love!

Our G-d is a G-d of unconditional love, both before and after we sin; thus, the very opening of the Ten Commandments, G-d's introduction to His Revelation of His laws, is, "I am the Lord who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the House of bondage." The Almighty is telling His nation that by taking them out of difficult straits of Egyptian slavery, He removed our pain thus demonstrating His love for us! It is almost as if he is explaining that His right to command them is based upon His having demonstrated His love for them.

A religious wedding ceremony is fundamentally a ritual acceptance of the mutual responsibilities of husband and wife. The marriage document, or Ketubah, is all about the groom's financial obligations to his bride. And yet, our Talmudic Sages teach us that the young couple must love each other in order to get married, that the overarching basis for every wedding ceremony is "You shall love your friend like yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). The nuptial blessings refer to bride and groom as "loving and beloved friends" (B.T. Kidushin, 41a). Our Sages are telling us that there can be no real love without the assumption of responsibility; when I declare my love for you, I must take a certain degree of responsibility for easing your life and sharing your challenges.

The Hassidic Rebbe, Reb Zushia told of how inspired he was by a marvelous conversation he overheard between two drunks at an inn. "I love you, Igor," said one drunkard to the other. "You don't love me," said his friend. "I do love you," protested the first. "You don't love me," insisted Igor. "How do you know that I don't love you?" shouted the first in exasperation. "Because you can't tell me what hurts me," answered Igor. "If you can't tell me what hurts me, you can't try to

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make it better. And if you don't try to make it better, you certainly don't love me."

Love and responsibility are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, the very Hebrew word for love, "ahavah," is based on the Aramaic word for giving. The Kohen-Priest who is a Jewish teacher and a Jewish leader, simultaneously functions as the agent of the Almighty and of the nation. He must take responsibility for his nation, he must attempt to "brand" them with G-d's name, with G-d's love, and with G-d's justice. He must communicate with his nation, symbolized by the cantor, or shaliah tizbur. He must know what hurts his nation and what his nation needs, and then he must actively try to assuage that pain while raising the nation closer to the realm of the Divine. In short, he must love his people and take responsibility for them, as the benediction before the blessing explains so very well!

The Sages of the Talmud ordained that at the time of the priestly benediction, the congregation should think of their dreams - individual and corporate - crying out, "Master of the Universe, I am yours and my dreams are yours..." The Hebrew word dream, "halom," has the same letters as "hamal," meaning love and compassion, as well as "laham," which means to fight, struggle, or wage war. Dreams which continue to engage us when we are awake are dreams of love and passion, such as the return to Zion which was "as in a dream" (Psalms 126:1). Dreams, as loves, are the beginning of responsibility, a responsibility which often means struggle and even war. Kohen-Teachers must love their student-congregants and take responsibility for them, teaching them to likewise take responsibility for one another and for the dream. Only then will our dreams and G-d's dreams be one dream: the perfection of the world, Tikkun Olam. © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The idea of the nazir always raises questions and problems. The idea of monasticism is certainly not a basic Jewish value. Just the opposite seems to be true from the ideas and statements of the rabbis in the Talmud and from Jewish societal behavioral patterns over the centuries.

Jewish society in all of its divisions and manifestations is engaged, vital and gregarious, social to the extreme with a brashness of involvement in all fields of human endeavor, thought and progress. Yet the Torah describes for us quite clearly and vividly the necessity for some necessity of monasticism, be it permanent or temporary, in Jewish life and social order.

Yet even this monastic situation is not meant to separate the nazir from active participation in societal and communal life. Shimshon, the prime example of the nazir in our Tanach is nevertheless the leader of Israel, its chief judge and commanding warrior. There are halachic restrictions placed upon the nazir but locking one's self away from Jewish society is certainly not one of them.

There are restrictions regarding retaining purity and cutting one's hair, avoiding any sorts of defilement and on consuming wine and affiliated beverages. These restrictions amongst others certainly remind the nazir of his special status, but the nazir is still positively a member of the general society in all senses of participation in normal human life.

If anything, a nazir now becomes a model for others for the attempt to achieve probity and purity in a world of the impure and sometimes wicked. So even though the rabbis are not really happy with someone becoming a nazir, nezirim and nezirut are a necessary piece of the human puzzle that the Torah describes for us.

The Talmud also teaches us that the impetus for becoming a nazir is also societal. It stems not from the inner wish of the individual to forego certain pleasures and norms of life as much as it stems from the wish for a protective shield from the dissoluteness and licentiousness of the surrounding society.

Apparently, in a perfect world, the whole concept of nezirut would be unnecessary. But the Torah judges human life, even Jewish life, as it really is in our imperfect world and not as it should somehow be. And, therefore, the nazir becomes a necessary ingredient in our Torah society.

Over the ages there have been a number of outstanding people who have chosen the way of the nazir for themselves in their lifetimes. However, the reticence of the rabbis and Jewish tradition on this matter has prevented nezirut from becoming widespread or even accepted behavior.

The Torah does not seek to impose burdens upon one's life as much as it intends to guide, channel and temper our choices and behavior within the framework of a wholesome complete life. This is also part of the lesson of the parsha of nazir to us. In essence, by knowing that becoming a nazir is an acceptable last resort in dealing with immorality and heartbreak, we are able to avoid this by living daily according to Torah precepts and values and shunning foreign and immoral influences in our lives and communities. © 2010 *Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian,*

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RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

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In Parshas Nasso, the section about the Nazir [the person who vows to abstain from wine, hair cutting, and contact with the dead for at least 30 days] immediately follows the section about the Sotah [suspected adulteress]. Our Sages suggest that this juxtaposition teaches that whoever sees a Sotah in her state of humiliation, should take a nazirite vow to abstain from wine [Sotah 2a].

Rav Aharon Feldman, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel, made the following very true observation: One might have argued that just by witnessing the events associated with the Sotah's humiliation that alone would be enough of an inspiration and moral lesson for people to behave themselves in the future. Why do Chazal suggest that under those circumstances one should additionally vow to abstain from wine?

The lesson is that if one witnesses a scene as traumatic and awesome as that associated with a Sotah's punishment and then does nothing with that inspiration, this will deaden the person from any future inspiration. If an amazing sight? one that should shake people up-happens in someone's lifetime and he or she lets it pass with equanimity and without acting upon it, then the next time such a thing happens, the person will become insensitive to the wonderment (hispaylus) that such a scene should engender in a person.

Rav Feldman related that in the Slabodka Yeshiva in Europe during Simchas Torah, they would open up the mechitza separating the men from the women so that the women behind the mechitza would be able to see the hakofos (dancing around with the Torah). The women were very excited to see the dancing and the honor being given to the Sifrei Torah. However one girl was not moved by the scene. She did not even bother getting up from her seat to watch the festivities. Who was this girl? It was the daughter of the town's scribe (sofer). She saw Sifrei Torah on her dining room table every day so seeing a sefer Torah was not such a big deal to her. Simchas Torah for her was "Just another day at the office".

If a person sees the amazing event of a Sotah being humiliated and he lets it go by without it changing him, without doing anything about it, then the next time a wondrous event occurs, his attitude will be "been there; done that".

This does not just apply to witnessing a Sotah in her moment of humiliation. There are other events that shape our lives that sometimes occur on a fairly common basis? both good events and bad events. If we

let these events nonchalantly pass without doing anything about them, then we are spiritually deadening ourselves from appropriate reaction to future events of significant import. In order to prevent going through life so spiritually numb that nothing makes a difference, one who sees the humiliation of a Sotah should take upon himself a nazirite vow to abstain from wine.

One Needs To Be Flexible and Bend The Rules Sometimes To Bring Peace

The Sotah process entails within it the dramatic ritual of erasing G-d's Name by placing it in water and forcing the Sotah to drink this water to prove her innocence. If she is in fact guilty, drinking this potion will cause her to die a extraordinary gruesome death. Under normal circumstances, the making of such a potion would involve a Biblical prohibition? erasing the Name of G-d. However, G-d-as it were-says "My Name that was written in holiness shall be erased by water to make peace between husband and wife."

Clearly this involves a miraculous process, but the question that needs to be considered is why G-d made it work in precisely this fashion. Why was it necessary to take the Divine Name and erase it to accomplish this test of the woman's guilt or innocence? The same miraculous "explosion of the woman" could have occurred with water mixed with dirt from the floor of the Temple or with ashes from the altar. Why did G-d's Name have to become part of this potion? Why create a process that involves this seemingly unnecessary erasure of Hashem's Name?

The answer must be that the Almighty is teaching us a lesson that is vital for Shalom Bayis (domestic tranquility). The lesson is that when it comes to making peace it is sometimes necessary to bend the rules. One cannot stand on principle all the time. One must not always be yelling "the law is the law!" The Master of the Universe is teaching us that to preserve domestic tranquility, it is even sometimes permissible to erase the Name of G-d. True this miracle could have been accomplished with ashes or with dirt, but the symbolism would be lacking.

The Torah introduces the laws of Sotah with a peculiar expression "A man, a man whose wife goes astray and commits trespass against him..." [Bamidbar 5:12]. The commentaries note that repetition of the word "Ish" [a man] is indicative of a husband who is "too much of a man"? i.e.? too domineering and too controlling. When the atmosphere in the house is one of over assertiveness on the part of the husband, a likely result will be that the wife will go astray.

G-d teaches here that sometimes the way to bring peace between people requires bending the strict letter of the law. There was no greater way to teach this lesson than to allow "My Name that is written in sanctity" to be eradicated in water.

The Medrash tells of a man whose wife went to hear a lecture from Rabbi Meir one Friday night. It was

a long lecture and by the time the woman returned home, the Shabbos candles had already burned out. The husband chastised his wife that she failed to come home in a timely fashion to get benefit from the Shabbos candles as the law requires. He forbade her from stepping foot back in the house until she spat in Rabbi Meir's eye.

The Medrash continues that Eliyahu haNavi came to Rabbi Meir and explained the situation between the husband and his wife. Rav Meir found the woman and told her that he had a certain eye disease and his doctor told him the only way he would be cured of the disease would be to have someone spit in his eye seven times.

There in the Beis Medrash, the woman approached Rabbi Meir publicly and spat into his eye seven times. She then returned to her husband and told him that she not only fulfilled his condition of spitting in Rabbi Meir's eye once, she did it seven times!

The students asked Rabbi Meir why he allowed himself to be disgraced in such a fashion. He responded that he learned a kal v'chomer from the Almighty. If G-d can forgo His honor to bring peace between husband and wife, certainly Rabbi Meir can forgo on his own honor to accomplish the same goal.
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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**T**aking a Closer Look (Rabbi Dov Kramer)
"Moshe received the Torah from Sinai."
These opening words of Pirkay Avos are ingrained in the psyche of the Jewish people. It can't refer to the "Ten Commandments," as it wasn't just Moshe who "received" them; the entire nation heard G-d speak those words (even if they couldn't discern the words of the last eight). In schools and Yeshivos worldwide, these words are taught to mean that G-d taught Moshe the entire Torah, start to finish - the Written Law and the Oral Law and everything they encompass - during the forty days that Moshe spent atop Mt. Sinai. Indeed, this is what the traditional literature seems to teach us as well. "Scripture, Mishnah, Laws, Talmud, Toseftos, Agados, and even what an earnest student is, in the future, going to say before his teacher, all of them were said to Moshe at Sinai" (Vayikra Rabba 22:1).

Yet, the Talmud (Menachos 29b) tells us that when Moshe saw G-d connecting "crowns" onto the letters of the Torah, he asked why. Upon hearing that there will be a great scholar (Rabbi Akiva) who will learn out "piles of laws" from these crowns, Moshe asked to be shown this scholar. G-d allows him to "sit in" on one of Rabbi Akiva's shiurim (lectures), but Moshe was unable to follow what was being taught, which caused him to feel weak. After a student questioned Rabbi Akiva about the source for a particular law, with Rabbi

Akiva responding that "it is a law that was taught to Moshe on Mt. Sinai," Moshe's mind is put at ease. If every law, every piece of Talmud, every valid point raised by every student in history, was taught to Moshe at Sinai, how could Moshe not have understood what Rabbi Akiva was teaching? Additionally, how could Rabbi Akiva claim that it was a law taught to Moshe, if Moshe himself didn't know it and couldn't follow the lecture? No matter how Rabbi Akiva arrived at his conclusion, once the law itself was taught, Moshe should have recognized it; why did it take Rabbi Akiva's saying it came through Moshe to put Moshe's mind at rest? Not only that, but why did Moshe even have to ask G-d the reason He was putting "crowns" on the letters in the first place? If he had been taught everything, shouldn't he have already known that there would be "crowns" and why they were there?

Rashi (in Menachos) sidesteps these questions (whether on purpose or not) by saying that Moshe hadn't finished learning all that he was going to be taught. Therefore, once he heard that he just hadn't reached that part of the curriculum yet, his mind was put at ease. This would fit very nicely with Rabbi Yishmael's opinion (Chagiga 6a-b) that only the general categories were taught at Sinai, with Moshe being taught the details in the Mishkan; Moshe saw the "crowns" being added while still on Mt. Sinai, but wouldn't be taught what they were for, or even the law details derived from them, until his private lessons with G-d continued in the Mishkan. However, Rashi (Vayikra 25:1) clearly follows the opinion of Rabbi Akiva who says that all the details were taught at Sinai (and repeated in the Mishkan and then again at Arvos Moav). [The Talmud (ibid) equates Rabbi Yishmael's opinion with Bais Shammai and Rabbi Akiva's with Bais Hillel, so it is certainly understandable why Rashi (and the Rambam, Introduction to his Commentary on the Mishnah 1) follows Rabbi Akiva.] Nevertheless, Moshe seeing G-d adding the "crowns" before he had completed his lessons on Sinai can explain why he hadn't already known why they were there.

The Maharsha (in Menachos), however, says that Moshe's request to be shown the scholar who will learn "piles of laws" from the "crowns" was for G-d to "reveal to him those secrets of the connections (i.e. the crowns, which were connected to all those laws) that will be revealed in the future to Rabbi Akiva." If they wouldn't be revealed until Rabbi Akiva learned them out, they must not have been taught at Sinai. The Aitz Yosef (a commentary on the Ein Yaakov) says that although Moshe was taught all of the Oral Law, he wasn't taught how each and every law that was to be transmitted orally was hinted to in the Written Law. Therefore, it wasn't the laws Rabbi Akiva was teaching that Moshe was unfamiliar with (as Moshe was taught all of them), but how those laws can be derived or remembered ("connected") via the "crowns" on the letters. This approach isn't fully satisfactory, though, as

it doesn't explain Moshe "feeling weak" and then "his mind being put at ease." Did Moshe know that he wasn't going to be taught the "connections" between the Written Law and the Oral Law? If he did, then not knowing them wouldn't have been a surprise. He may have "felt weak" if he wasn't able to comprehend how the connections were made (although limiting Moshe's ability to comprehend is a bit hard to accept), but this "weakness" shouldn't have been resolved when Rabbi Akiva attributed the law to what Moshe was taught at Sinai (as it has nothing to do with his ability to follow the process of connecting the Oral Law to the Written Law). Likewise, if Moshe was not aware of these connections or that he was not going to be taught them, wouldn't G-d have explained that to him when Moshe asked about the "crowns?" If his "feeling weak" was a result of realizing that he wasn't going to be taught them, how does Rabbi Akiva's attributing the law to what Moshe was taught at Sinai alleviate this? More importantly, the Midrash (and its parallel in Koheles Rabbah 5:8) doesn't say that "any law" that a student brings up to his teacher was taught to Moshe at Sinai, but that anything he "says," meaning his suggestions for how to understand a concept, how to apply it, or how to connect it to the verse, not (just) the law itself. [It should be noted, however, that the parallel statements in the Yerushalmi (Pe'ah 2:4) and Koheles Rabbah (1:9/10) have it as "anything an earnest student will teach."] The expression being anything other than "any law taught throughout the generations," especially when it is not the teacher doing the "saying" but the student, indicates that Chazal were not limiting the things taught to Moshe at Sinai to just the laws themselves.

In the Introduction to his Commentary on the Mishnah (1), the Rambam explains what Chazal meant when they said that every detail was taught to Moshe at Sinai. [It should be noted that, from a practical standpoint, it makes absolutely no difference whether this was taught to Moshe at Sinai or in the Mishkan; either way the transmission was directly from G-d to Moshe, who then passed it along to Yehoshua (etc.).] "Here is an example for you: G-d said to Moshe, 'you shall live in huts for seven days' (Vayikra 23:42). Afterwards, He made it known that this obligation applies only to males, not females, nor does it apply to the sick or those who are traveling, [he was taught] that its covering (roof) can only be made from materials that grow from the ground and it cannot be covered with wool or silk or with vessels - even those made from materials that grow from the ground, such as pillows and clothing. And He made known that eating, drinking and sleeping in it (the succah) all seven days is mandatory, and that its inner area cannot be smaller than seven hand-breadths long by seven hand-breadths wide, and that the height of the hut cannot be less than ten hand-breadths." This is true of all 613 commandments, "the commandment in writing and the details/explanation orally."

Later (4), the Rambam creates five categories of law: (1) Details/explanations that were transmitted through Moshe that are hinted to in the Written Law and can be extrapolated from them; (2) Laws that cannot be derived from verses, but were transmitted through Moshe; (3) Laws that were not transmitted through Moshe, but can be extrapolated from verses; (4) Decrees made by the prophets and/or sages to ensure that the biblical commandments are not violated; and (5) Decrees made not to protect already existing commandments, but to help facilitate spiritual growth (such as learning the laws of Pesach a month prior) or societal needs (such as "pruzbol"). The latter three categories were not transmitted by G-d to Moshe and then from Moshe to Yehoshua (etc.), although it is theoretically possible that G-d shared them with Moshe but did not command/authorize him to teach it to the nation (possibly to allow for each generation to have an impact, making it a "living Torah"); the Maharsha's understanding of Moshe's request to meet Rabbi Akiva indicates that not everything was taught to Moshe, not that it was taught to him but he had to keep it to himself. [Just as there is no difference in the transmission process whether something was taught to Moshe on Mt. Sinai or in the Mishkan, there is no difference in the transmission process whether it was not taught to Moshe or taught to him but not transmitted to others.]

When articulating the role of the Sanhedrin (Hilchos Mamrim 1:3-4), the Rambam reiterates his position from his Introduction to his Commentary on the Mishnah that anything that was transmitted through Moshe will never become a matter of dispute. This position is not universally held (see Igeres Rav Sherira Gaon, end of chapter 2); a straightforward reading of the Talmud (Sanhedrin 88b) that the Rambam bases his next halacha (4) on indicates that disputes arose not only regarding new laws enacted, but regarding laws that had been previously transmitted, including those that originated from Moshe who was taught them at Sinai, but had been forgotten. Nevertheless, the Rambam is unequivocal that the disputes in the Talmud arose from differences of opinion about how to enact (or apply) new laws, and these laws did not originate at Sinai. These new laws could fall into any of the three latter categories described above, including the third category, i.e. laws derived from the verses through the system of extrapolation (the "13 attributes" read every morning at the end of "karbanos"). This system of extrapolation was taught to Moshe at Sinai, and he passed it on to be used in every generation to learn out new law details and apply them to any situation that arose (see Maharatz Chiyos on Berachos 5a). [The Ritva (Eruvin 13b) says that Moshe was taught all the possible outcomes using this system, and therefore they are all considered "the words of the Living G-d."]

Moshe didn't have to be taught how electricity works in order to teach him whether it qualifies as something forbidden on Shabbos or not, and if so, how.

Once the ground rules were taught to him and put into the halachic system, after electricity was invented they can be used to determine, based on what was taught to Moshe at Sinai, what its status is.

Included in what Vayikra Rabbah (and Koheles Rabbah and the Yerushalmi) say was taught to Moshe at Sinai was "Scripture." This is expanded elsewhere to mean not just Chumash, but the Prophets and Writings as well (Berachos 5a), including Megilas Esther (Megila 19b). How could all of Tanach have been taught to Moshe at Sinai if the events hadn't occurred yet? Did Moshe know that Korach was going to rebel well before he did? How could he send the spies to scout out the Land if he knew what the tragic outcome would be? Did G-d tell Moshe about the nation sinning with the "golden calf" (Shemos 32:7-8) by teaching him Parashas Ki Sisa? Was Moshe taught about the Levi'im assisting the Kohanim in the Mishkan/Temple even before the circumstances that necessitated them replacing the first-born had occurred?

In Berachos, Rashi doesn't explain the word "Scripture" to mean the actual text, but that "it's a mitzvah to read the Torah." The Maharsha expands on this, adding the guidelines for reading the Torah (i.e. not by heart, with its vowels and cantillation), and says that the Prophets and Writings are a separate category because their laws aren't the same as for Chumash. I have previously discussed what the Talmud meant when it said that Moshe was taught Megilas Esther at Sinai (www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/tzav.pdf, pg. 4), with the "bottom line" being that it was not the actual text that was taught to Moshe, but the authorization to include a future text about Amalek in the canon of Writings. In doing research for this essay, Baruch Hashem I found that the Maharatz Chiyos (in Megila) says this as well. This doesn't mean that no part of the biblical text was given to Moshe at Sinai. As I discussed last week, Rashi (Shemos 24:7) says that all of Sefer Beraishis and most of Sefer Shemos was given at Sinai (before the public revelation), and I suggested that the Ramban might agree (albeit after the public revelation). We can add Terumah/Tetzaveh (and part of Ki Sisa) to that text, since the Mishkan was commanded at Sinai (during the first 40 days on Mt. Sinai according to the Ramban and during the third set of 40 days according to Rashi). All, or at least parts, of Parashas Behar was taught at Sinai, so it's possible that this text was given to Moshe at Sinai as well. Since the Chizkuni says that the "tochacha" was the "Sefer haB'ris" described by Matan Torah, he would add Parashas Bechukosai (or at least a good portion of it) as being a text given at Sinai. (Whatever wasn't given in text form at Sinai was given to Moshe in the Mishkan, either along the way, or all at once in Arvos Moav, when the complete Torah text was given to the nation.)

What about Agada, the non-legal parts of the Talmud and Midrash? Much has been written about the nature of Agada, and space is too limited (and time too

short) to give it a full treatment (IY"Y one day I hope to). For the purposes of our discussion, suffice it to say that the format of Agada, whether it be teaching spiritual messages through story-telling, or reconstructing history using the same system used to either reconstruct or construct law (after all, the law becomes what the Sanhedrin decides, but they can't decide how old Rivka was when she married Yitzchok), just as Moshe was taught the system of determining laws, he was given the system (and permission) to expound verses that have no (direct) impact on what we should do.

Based on this, we can easily explain how Moshe did not know the laws Rabbi Akiva was teaching, let alone how they were derived from the "crowns" of the letters, and why he felt better after hearing Rabbi Akiva say that it was based on what was taught to Moshe at Sinai. These were laws that fell into the Rambam's third category, so had not been taught to Moshe, and Moshe became unsettled when he wasn't sure that Rabbi Akiva was using the system given at Sinai to figure these laws out. Once Rabbi Akiva explained that his method of learning them from the verses (and letters) was consistent with what was taught to Moshe at Sinai, he felt better. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The story of Ruth is one of a family in dissolution. Naomi's husband and two sons die leaving her with her two daughters in law, Orpah and Ruth. By the end of the book, family is found once again. Ruth marries Boaz and they have a child Obed, who is raised by Naomi. (Ruth 4: 17)

From this perspective, the book of Ruth parallels the story of Judah and Tamar in the book of Bereishit. There, too, the family of Judah was in disarray. Two of his sons, Er and Onan, had died. Judah was reluctant to have his third son, Sheilah marry Tamar, the widow of his older two sons.

At the conclusion of the story, Judah's family also comes together after he has relations with Tamar from whom twins were born.

Interestingly, the mechanism used to reunite the fragmented family in both stories is yibum-the Levirate marriage. In the yibum process, a man is directed to marry the widow of his brother who had been childless. In the case of Ruth, she marries Boaz; Judah does the same when he marries Tamar.

Rabbi David Silber points out similarities in the yibum of the two stories. In both, a double yibum is performed. Judah marries Tamar since both of his deceased sons to whom Tamar had been married, had no children. Boaz marries Ruth, but through Ruth, the line of Naomi, was perpetuated.

In both stories, the man performing the redemption is reluctant to perform the good deed.

Judah hesitates to allow Tamar to marry into his family; Boaz also seems reluctant to marry Ruth.

Another common feature in each of these stories is that a woman teaches the reluctant man his responsibility to bring the family together. Tamar does this by reminding Judah of his responsibility to marry her and Ruth does the same, reminding Boaz of his responsibility.

Finally, it can be suggested that both stories are segues to our nationhood. Soon after Judah's family is reunited, we become a nation, and the book of Exodus begins. Soon after, Ruth and Boaz marry they have a child, from whom ultimately the Messiah will come-marking the redemption of the Jewish people.

Both of these stories remind us all of the confluence between family and nation. In this time of great challenge and struggle in Israel, may we feel the pain of what is happening not merely as fellow members of the Jewish nation, but in the deepest way, as members of our own family. © 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.

YOUNG ISRAEL OF PASSAIC-CLIFTON

Rus on Shavuos

by Rabbi JB Love

Rabbi Eliezer believes that a holiday should be spent either entirely in G-dly pursuits or entirely in, more mundane, personally fulfilling activities such as eating and drinking and the like. Rabbi Yehoshua believes that the day should be divided, "half for G-d and half for yourself."¹

Everyone agrees, though, that the holiday of Shavuos must have in it an element of physical (self) indulgence. "Were it not for that day," says Rav Yosef, "[who knows] how many Yosefs there are in the street."² (I.e. it is the *tora*, given on that day, which separates me from the ordinary "Yosef", hence I owe it to my **self** to celebrate.)³ The physical self and its needs must celebrate *matan tora*.

One must celebrate the receipt of the *tora* with eating and drinking. *Sh'lamim*- peace offerings were brought at Mt. Sinai and at the acceptance of the *tora* at Mt Eval.⁴ The *sh'lamim* sacrifice is the utmost sign of our sanctification of our physical needs, our eating is on

¹B. Pesachim 68b

²Ibid.

³It is an interesting side-note that Rav Yosef was, in his late age, afflicted with loss of memory and had to be reminded of what he, himself, had taught. A *talmid chacham* who forgets his studies is honored for having been a vessel for the *tora* as were the broken *luchos*. Hence it is fitting that Rav Yosef honored his **physical** self on *shavuos* in honor of the *tora*. Only his having learned *tora* allowed for its vessel to be honored.

⁴V. Ramban to Sh'mos 24:11

a par with the burning of a sacrifice to G-d.⁵ We **live** by the *tora*, in this corporeal world.⁶ Was it not that Moshe was able to argue that we are corporeal, we would have lost the *tora* to the angels.⁷

Even the negative commandments in the *tora* must be kept cognizant of our physical being and our desires. Everything in this world can and should be used to serve the Creator, even if some things are used to that end by their being denied. Their denial, though, must be a conscious one, one which recognizes their existence. "One should not say, 'I couldn't eat forbidden foods, but, rather, I could eat them but my Father in heaven has forbidden me.'"⁸ The item (and/or the emotion or desire), though not indulged in, must be "used", via conscious denial, for G-d's service, not ignored.

So many of the inventions and innovations which made *tora* study and life possible throughout the ages have come from outside the "tora world". Printing, to name just one. The physical, mathematical and scientific discoveries which almost daily open up new worlds in the understanding of the deepest "secrets" of the *tora* come from the secular laboratory and classroom.⁹ The haven for the remnant of the *tora* of Europe, in which it flourishes as never before, a haven, seen by many as the "first bud of redemption," is the realization of a secular socialist dream. Not to mention the haven which was born of the theist Founding Fathers of our own democracy.

To deny the reality of the world in the service of G-d is to deny G-d's mastery over all of creation. It is to shirk our responsibility of giving all of the world back to G-d.¹⁰ It is to make the "Satan" an adversary of G-d rather than His servant. It is the ultimate *k'fira*-blasphemy.

An act of incest,¹¹ one of treachery,¹² of desire,¹³ of intermarriage,¹⁴ impropriety¹⁵ and of

⁵V. Onkelos, *ibid.* who reverses the analogy.

⁶"*v'chai bahem*" (Vayikra 18:8) and v. B. Yoma 85b et.al. where the maintenance of body **and** soul is the purpose of the *tora*.

⁷B. Shabos 88b-89a

⁸Rashi, Vayikra 20:26

⁹In the verse "May G-d expand Yefes, may he dwell in the tents of Shem," (B'raishis 9:27) *chazal* see an allusion to the Greek language which would make its way into the halls of *tora*. No doubt philosophy and other parts of Western culture, which became the handmaidens of the *tora*, are meant as well. Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin zl the world is a "book" written by G-d just as is the *tora*. Innovations in the study of each influence the other and both may be interpreted through *p'shat*, *remez*, *d'rash* and *sod*. (V. Tzidkas Hatzadik, maamar 90 and 177)

¹⁰The *nazir* brings a sin offering for having shunned wine for one month or more, and this in the service of G-d. Avoiding the permitted in the service of G-d is wrong just as is the indulging in the prohibited. (V. Rashi to B'midbar 6:14)

¹¹Lot's daughters, B'raishis 19

¹²Lavan's marrying Leah to Yaacov, *ibid.* 29

¹³Yehuda and Tamar, *ibid.* 38

¹⁴Machlon and Rus, Rus 1

adultery¹⁶ were the sources of the ultimate redemption of mankind.¹⁷ Nothing, absolutely nothing, in this world is void of G-dliness. There is a difference, however, between acts done in the “name of Heaven,” those done inadvertently, and those done as conscious sins meant to subvert the rule of G-d. (According to an opinion among Chazal, some acts which are reported as sins were not actual sins at all but merely improper behavior.)¹⁸

When no choice was available but to commit a sin in order to bring about a deliverance, *chazal* even saw a praiseworthy act in the commission.¹⁹ When, unfortunately, some acts were done purposely with sinful intent, and were righted by those who committed them they too became a sanctification of His Name. These brushes with the “dark side” sometimes unconscious, sometimes in error and sometimes so tinged with remorse as to retroactively redeem them, have facilitated the use of even the forbidden for the service of G-d. Yehuda who admitted his error and did right by Tamar, or David, for instance, whose acceptance of G-d’s punishment and repentance became the standard bearers of those attributes.²⁰

All purposeful “descents” into the realm of sin in the misguided belief that the “good” would out have relegated their advocates to the hall of Jewish shame.

¹⁵Rus and Boaz, *ibid.* 3

¹⁶David and Bas-Sheva, Sh’*muel* II 11. See the next two notes.

¹⁷V. Or Hachayim, B’*raishis* 49:9 for the metaphysical underpinnings of this phenomenon.

¹⁸B. Shabos 56a re David.

¹⁹V. E.g., Rashi to B’*raishis* 19:31. Tamar certainly had righteous motivation. Yael (Shof’*tim*’4) is praised by D’*vora* and *chazal*. (B. Yevamos 103a and Nazir 23b) No’*omi*’s counsel to Rus might fit into this category. None of these people committed these acts expecting amnesty for their sin, they agreed to be sacrificed on the altar of redemption. That they received praise was the testimony of a Gracious G-d to their sincerity. G-d’s signet, after all, is *emes*. See also Yaakov Elman, *Progressive Derash and Retrospective Peshat* published in *Modern Scholarship in the study of Torah/ Ed. Shalom Carmy, Jason Aronson Inc., New Jersey, 1996, especially pp. 242-249.* Elman shows a stream of thought, begun with Rabbi Yehonasan Eibshuetz and later redacted by Chasidic authors, which ultimately gives *k’lal yisrael* the imprimatur of deciding which works were divinely inspired. If, ultimately, they are accepted by *yisrael*, they are deemed to have been written *b’ruach hakodesh*. What we called “History” would be the combination of *tora, yisrael v’kudsha b’rich hu*. (Ironically, both R’Eibshuetz and Chasidus spent a while in limbo awaiting just such approval.)

²⁰The loneliness and depression we oft feel when having (G-d forbid) sinned must be seen as a wake-up call to seek G-d inside ourselves and to repent. Having thus “used” the sin to reach deeper (or if you will higher) in search of our nearness to G-d, we enable whatever good (G-dliness) existed in that bit of reality to be brought to light. One more element of the world given back to G-d. These are the heights *ba’alei t’shuva* reach that *tzadikim* can’t. (B. B’*rachos* 34:) It is when we allow the loneliness and depression to leave us devoid of G-d that we have taken Him out of that part of the world, out of ourselves, for that matter. This is the sin in sin. How sin leads to yet more sin. (M. Avos 4:2)

The misguided kabalistic ideas of Shabetai Tzvi and Jacob Frank are stark examples.

What’s more, even though we may believe that good will ultimately come of everything, no credit can be given an unrepentant sinner, even if some good does ultimately come from the sin. Nowhere is Lavan credited with the *sh’vatim* of Leah. Rus, who corrected her husband’s sin of intermarriage through her conversion and subsequent modesty and piety, receives the credit for the Davidic line, not Machlon. The Essenes, Karaites, Sabbateans and others receive no credit for whatever rectification was made because of their heresy. Nowhere are the Essenes credited (they are blamed) with the Rosh Chodesh laws promulgated because of them, nor the Karaites with the renaissance of study of scripture after the tenth century. Their effects had to be rectified by others, the good, though ultimately reached, is never attributed to their efforts.

Though it smacks of revisionism, history seems to have decreed small credit for the Karaites for their work on the *messora* and the same fate is shared by Dr. Schechter and company whose emptying of the Cairo Geniza is seldom, if ever, accredited with the wonderful contributions to Torah it allowed for. No more credit is given for these “Jewishly” motivated endeavors than is given to the creator of audio tape for the opportunity afforded Rabbis Wein and Frand. “History” seems to be the judge, in retrospect, of what was or wasn’t meant *l’shem Shamayim*, awarding, in the annals of *tora*, praise to the G-d fearing, anonymity in neutral cases, and ignominy in the case of the sinner.

In the story of Rus otherwise mundane realities are interwoven in the story of G-d’s omnipresence in the world. No’*omi*’s constant attribution of all events, good and ill, to G-d,²¹ everyday greetings carrying the blessings of G-d,²² a torah leader of his generation whose work in his field is a means for helping his people, a “chance”²³ of two people which holds the seed of universal redemption, a forbidden marriage which is the precursor of the blood of kings, a rather purposeful enticement to the physical with an eye toward the redemptive,²⁴ and the stock of Mashiach hiding in a forbidden nation.²⁵ Many reasons have been given for the reading of *megilas rus* on the holiday of *shavuot*. Here, we may well have yet another. © 1997 Rabbi JB Love

²¹E.g. Rus 1:21, 2:20

²²*Ibid.* 2:4

²³*Ibid.* 2:3 The phrase is magnificent in its irony.

²⁴No’*omi* trusted both her daughter-in-law and Boaz to recognize their feelings and use them properly. (V. Rus Rabba 6:1,4) Boaz, recognizing full well his feelings and emotions, knew just when those feelings were to be denied for the service of G-d. (V. B. Sanhedrin 19b).

²⁵On the other hand, Boaz saw very clearly that Rus, for her good and for the sake of goodness itself, was not to be left as one denied for the sake of G-d but to be brought through expounding the *tora* from the forbidden to the permitted, nay, essential. (Rus Rabba 4:1)