

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This week's biblical portion opens with a poignant entreaty by Moses: "Please may I be allowed to pass through and see the good land which is beyond the Jordan..." The Midrash pictures Moses going so far as to beseech entry even as an insect, just to be able to see, touch and traverse the good and holy land which is our legacy and patrimony. But the Bible records Moses continuing: "But the Lord was angry with me because of you and would not hearken to me..." (Deuteronomy 3:26). Why does Moses blame the Israelites, saying "because of you"? Wasn't Moses barred from entering Israel because he struck the rock rather than speaking to it? (Numbers 20:12). I believe that a deeper understanding of Moses' character and personality will help us to explain precisely what he meant when he claimed it was because of the Israelites that he was prevented from entering the Land.

From the very beginning, Moses was reluctant to accept his leadership position. His argument is stated very clearly: "I beg of You, my Lord, I am not a man of words, not from yesterday, not from the day before, but from the time when You first spoke to Your servant; heavy of speech and heavy of tongue am I" (Exodus 4:10). Contrary to conventional wisdom, Moses is not saying that he stammers; after all, G-d immediately counters: "Who gives a person a mouth with which to speak... if not I, who am the Lord? Now go and I shall deal with your mouth and I will teach you how to speak" (ibid 4:11). Yet Moses, nevertheless, continues to repeat the same argument (see for example, 6:30), even after G-d promised to cure his stutter. What is Moses really saying?

The Biblical text itself states that "[the Israelites] did not listen to Moses because of impatience and hard work" (Exodus 6:9) - usually taken to mean that the impatience and backbreaking work of an enslaved and downtrodden people made it difficult if not impossible for them to believe that their situation could ever change. But the medieval commentator Ralbag (Gershonides) has a radical interpretation of this biblical passage. He interprets it to mean that it is because of Moses' impatience with the masses and because of Moses' hard spiritual work to elevate himself intellectually and religiously, that Moses would not be capable of convincing the people to follow G-d.

After all, Moses already had difficult experiences with the Hebrews. After he had killed the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave, he found the Hebrews squabbling among themselves and grossly ungrateful for his selfless deed: "Who made you a minister and judge over us? Do you wish to slay me just as you slew the Egyptian?" (Exodus 2:14). As a result, Moses left Egyptian society and escaped to the desert of Midian, where - in the isolation which only a shepherd in a wasteland can experience - he joined himself to a famous seeker of G-d named Jethro, preferring the eternal "fellowship" of G-d to the fickle moods of a fractious people.

Therefore when Moses called himself "heavy of speech," he wasn't referring to a speech defect; he was rather referring to his personality. He understood that transforming the Hebrews from embittered and small-minded slaves into an inspired nation committed to becoming a holy people and a kingdom of priest-teachers would require nurturing small talk; he would have to become more of a Rebbe than a Rav listening to paltry concerns and petty complaints until - step by step - his sheep would become elevated into a "G-d enthused" nation. "This is not for me," the Midianite seeker of G-d is telling the Almighty. "I am a man of heavy speech, not of small talk; I cannot be expected to be concerned with the questions and the problems of the individual Israelites. Is it not too much to expect that the one who speaks to the G-d of the cosmos, whose intellect has been developed to such an extent that it divines G-d's active intellect to enable the Torah of Moses to be the Torah of G-d, to also at the same time deal with the self-centered resentments and rebellions of a nation-in-progress? I don't have the patience for it; I'm working too hard spiritually and climbing too high to be brought down to earth by small-minded people." G-d nevertheless insists, and Moses attempts to acquiesce.

Moses listens to the kvetching, he suffers the rebellions and revolutions, but eventually, when he realizes that he hasn't brought his people to G-d, and he hasn't elevated them to the highest values, he loses patience. He calls them "rebels" and wishes to strike this stiff-necked nation! He loses the ability to speak to them, to teach them, to nurture and guide them. As a consequence, he cannot continue to lead them and bring them into the Promised Land. "But it's not my fault," says Moses. "I explained from the beginning that one who truly speaks to G-d would not be able to speak to puny, petty and puerile people. It was "because of

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you," the people of Israel, your inability to learn and grow quickly enough, that I lost my patience and love for you, resulting in my having to relinquish my dream..."

Postscript

The story is told that the founder of the Hassidic movement, Reb Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov, would always pray the additional Amida on the Sabbath morning for an inordinately long time, almost a full hour. The hungry Hassidim became impatient for Kiddush, so the gabbai (sexton) came up with a great idea: after the people had concluded their own prayer, they could quietly leave, go home, and make Kiddush, returning before their revered rebbe ended his prayer.

One Sabbath, however, as soon as the people quietly walked out of synagogue, the rebbe took three steps backward, signaling the end of his prayer as well. The bewildered congregants all ran back into the synagogue wondering why the rebbe had completed his prayer so quickly. The Ba'al Shem Tov explained: "Every Sabbath," he said, "I rise to great spiritual heights, especially during the additional Amida, I feel that I am climbing a ladder to the supernal heavens before the heavenly throne of G-d. But the rungs of the ladder are the souls of my Hassidim; without them, I cannot climb. This Sabbath morning, after 10 minutes I felt the ladder crash to the ground. I had no choice; I had to conclude my prayer..." ©2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

We all believe in the power of prayer. There have been controversial but yet seemingly proven studies that have shown that somehow prayer and being prayed for are of definite physical help to the sick, the bereaved and the troubled. Yet prayer oftentimes leaves us unfulfilled and unanswered. Prayer does not seemingly avert disasters, sadness and even tragedies.

All of us face the challenge of unanswered prayer, when our hopes and requests are apparently ignored and refused by Heaven. Many times this fact of life causes a crisis of faith and belief within a person. King David in his Psalms reflects on this issue many times. The book of Iyov deals with it as well. And to a

certain extent it is the main issue raised in this week's parsha.

Moshe's prayers are not answered. In fact the Lord instructs him to stop raising the issue of his entry into the Land of Israel with Heaven. There is a finality to Heaven's refusal to answer or even deal with Moshe's prayers any longer. Moshe's prayers, which have saved his people, his brother and sister and others from Heavenly wrath, are now of no effect regarding his own personal request.

The rabbis of the Talmud phrased it succinctly: "The prisoner himself cannot free himself, by himself, from his own confinement." Moshe will not lead his beloved people into the promised Land of Israel. His time has ended and his prayer will forever remain unanswered. There is therefore a note of inevitable sadness that hovers over this parsha.

Over the millennia of Jewish commentary and exposition of the Torah many reasons have been advanced as to why Moshe's prayer was so finally and flatly rebuffed. Among the ideas advanced is that the time for Yehoshua's leadership had arrived and that the dominion of one ruler cannot overlap the dominion of his successor even by a hair's breadth.

Another thought advanced is that Moshe's generation would not enter the Land of Israel so it would be an apparent unseemly favoritism for Moshe alone to be able to do so. A third idea is that Moshe would appear to the new generation entering the Land of Israel as a supernatural figure, a type of god in a world of pagan belief that regularly deified humans, especially national leaders. Therefore, for the sake of Israel itself, he could not be allowed to lead them into the Land of Israel.

As valid as all of these ideas are, the blunt truth is that we cannot read G-d's mind, so to speak. Living human beings, the finite, can never grasp the Infinite One. So we must be satisfied to remain unsatisfied in our search for the reasons for unanswered prayers.

Our true refuge lies in faith and acceptance of the unknowable. This in no way weakens the resolve and necessity to continue praying. It merely lowers our levels of expectation and tempers our hubris that somehow Heaven must follow our wishes and dictates. Moshe accepts the fact that his prayers will now go unanswered. His example serves as a lesson for all of us. ©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 NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

They were a new generation. Some of them had experienced the Exodus as very young children. Most had been born during the forty years of confinement in the Desert. Now, as they stood on the

threshold of the Promised Land, the older generation had all died. The future belonged to the young and innocent. And sadly, Moses would not be there to share it with them.

As Moses prepared to bid them farewell, he spoke to them words that would fortify their faith and leave them with an enduring sense of inspiration. To this end, he recalled the gathering of the people at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. "Investigate the records of the past," he declared. "Has there ever happened such a great thing, or was anything similar ever reported, that a nation should hear the Lord's voice speaking from the fire, as you have heard, and survive?"

The commentators are puzzled. Why does Moses refer to the revelation at Sinai "as you have heard" when in fact it was their parents who had heard, not them? This was a new generation most of whom had not even been born at the time.

The answer lies in a phenomenon known as national memory. Let us take American history as an example. How do we know there was a Civil War? After all, this war took place over a century ago, and no one alive today has a personal recollection of it. So how do we know that it actually took place? Is it because documentary evidence proves that it happened? Of course not. There is a much more fundamental reason. Anything that happens in full public view and is experienced by the entire nation automatically becomes part of our national memory. Even after the individuals who lived at the time pass on, the experience lives on in the national consciousness from generation to generation. We know the Civil War took place because America, collectively, remembers it.

Throughout the ages, people have come forward and claimed divine revelations.

For one reason or another, their claims may have seemed credible to some of the people of their times, thereby gaining them a following. But as generation follows generation, the credibility of such claims fades. Why should people accept the word of self-proclaimed prophets whom they have never seen with their own eyes? Why should they make the leap of faith?

Not so with the revelation at Sinai, Moses was telling the Jewish people. Belief in the divine origin of the Torah requires no especial leap of faith. It was given in full view of millions of people, and as such, it was indelibly inscribed in the national memory. Each of you, as individuals, may not have been there, but it is firmly rooted in your national memory. It is as if you have seen it with your own eyes and heard it with your own ears.

A king died unexpectedly, leaving behind two sons. The older son was a somewhat lackluster, lackadaisical character, while the younger son was bright, articulate and ambitious.

Not surprisingly, the royal succession came into question. Some believed that by rights of primogeniture

the throne should go to the older son. Others insisted that the welfare of the kingdom would be better served with the younger son on the throne.

A special meeting of the Council of Ministers was convened to debate the question of the succession, and both princes were invited to air their views.

"Gentlemen," said the younger prince, "I have some very important news for you. The problem of the succession has been solved. My father appeared to me in a dream last night and told me in no uncertain terms that he wants me to succeed him as king."

"If I may be so bold, your highness," one elderly minister replied, "It seems to me that nothing has been solved. If your father really wanted you to be king, he should have come to us in our dreams, not to you in yours."

In our own lives, living in a global multi-cultural society, we are surrounded by myriad religious and ideological messages that are at odds with the fundamental tenets of Judaism, and it would not be surprising if at times we entertained some doubts and anxiety concerning our faith. At such times, we should recall the words of Moses that speak of the revelation at Sinai "as you have heard." Each of us has indeed heard it, because it is imbedded in our national memory. For thousands of years, Jewish people have willingly sacrifice their lives for the Torah because we have all "heard" Hashem's voice speaking to us at Mount Sinai as vividly and distinctly as if we had been standing there in the flesh when it took place. © 2010 Rabbi D. Travis and Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And you shall do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:18). What does this verse come to teach us?

The Ramban, Nachmanides, cites the words of our Sages who explain that this verse exhorts us to go beyond the dictates of the law in our dealings with our fellow human beings. The Ramban adds that this is a very great principle, since it is impossible for the Torah to actually list every last detail as to how a person should behave with his neighbors and friends.

The Talmud (Bava Metzia 30b) states that Jerusalem was destroyed because its inhabitants failed to go beyond the letter of the law. Rabbi Zalman of Volozhin explained that this alone was not the cause of the destruction, for they had other transgressions as well. However, had they gone beyond the letter of the law in dealing with others, G-d would have gone beyond the letter of the law in dealing with them. Consequently, Jerusalem would have been saved (Toldos Odom).

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian used to cite this passage during the month of Elul (the month preceding Rosh Hashanah). He added that before Rosh Hashanah

everyone tries to find extra merits. From here we see that the most effective merit is to go beyond the letter of the law in our dealings with others (Lev Eliyahu).

Rabbi Yosef Hurwitz, Rosh Yeshiva of Novardok, used to say, "Someone who is lax in fulfilling matters that are beyond the obligation of the letter of the law will eventually be lax in fulfilling laws that are explicitly expressed and self-evident" (T'nuas Hamussar). *Based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2010 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd I prayed before G-d at that time" (Devarim 3:23). At which time? "After I conquered the land of Sichon and Og" (Rashi). What did conquering that land, on the eastern side of the Jordan River, have to do with Moshe's request to cross over and see the land on the western side? "I thought that perhaps the vow (not allowing me to get to the Promised Land) had been undone (ibid). Most understand Moshe's hope that G-d would now allow him to cross the Jordan to be based on his giving the Tribes of Reuvein and Gad (and half of Menashe) their portion on the eastern side, thereby bestowing the land with the status of "Eretz Yisrael" (the Land of Israel). Once Moshe was already inside "Israel," he hoped to be able to cross further into Israel. However, the wording of Rashi (and the parable used in the Sifri, which is Rashi's source) strongly indicate that it was not assigning the land to specific Tribes that led Moshe to think that he might be able to cross the Jordan, but the fact that he had conquered the land on the eastern side.

Even had he not conquered the lands of Sichon and Og, Moshe would apparently have still been able to enter the land on the eastern side of the Jordan. He had asked Edom permission to pass through the northwestern corner of their land to get to Moav, and asked Moav permission to pass through their land to get to the Plains of Moav ("Arvos Moav"), from where the nation would enter the Promised Land. When Edom (and Moav) refused to give passage rights, the Children of Israel traveled around Edom until they reached the land of Sichon, whereupon Moshe asked Sichon permission to pass through this land. Had Edom (and Moav) or Sichon granted them permission, Moshe would have led his nation to Arvos Moav, bid them farewell, and ascended Mt. Nevo. Getting to Arvos Moav doesn't seem to have been an issue had it still belonged to Moav or Sichon; it was only after conquering it that Moshe thought that perhaps he could go farther and cross the Jordan. This is borne out by Rashi saying that Moshe thought the vow had been rescinded after he had "conquered" Sichon and Og, not after he "entered" it. Besides, if entering the land that would eventually become part of Eretz Yisroel was the trigger, entering the land that had been occupied by

Sichon should have been enough; there would be no reason to include Og's land as part of why Moshe thought things might have changed.

What was it about conquering the lands of Sichon and Og that led Moshe to believe that he might be able to cross the Jordan River? And why was it only after conquering both Sichon and Og (and not just Sichon) that Moshe thought he might be able to do so?

The conversation between Moshe and the Tribes of Reuvein and Gad, and the implementation of their request, raises several issues as well. Their initial "request" (Bamidbar 32:1-4), was not really a request, but a relaying of information; they had a lot of cattle, and the land they had conquered was perfect for cattle. They didn't ask for it explicitly, but seemed to hope that upon being informed of the "match" between their needs and that land, Moshe, Elazar and the Tribal Chiefs would realize on their own that the land should be given to them (and would offer it to them). But they didn't. Instead, the paragraph describing the first communication ends.

Then, in a new paragraph (Bamidbar 32:5-15), they bring up the subject a second time, asking for the land to be given to them as their inheritance. Why didn't Moshe (et al) respond the first time the topic was brought up?

Rashi (32:24) explains the back and forth between Moshe and Reuvein/Gad to include fighting at the front lines until the land on the west side of the Jordan is conquered, and waiting to return until after the land has been divided and the other Tribes know which portions they are getting. Why was waiting for the land to be divided so important, and why is doing so described as being "for G-d?" This issue becomes even more puzzling when we take into account Rashi's comments regarding the division of the land (Bamidbar 26:54, which parallel Rashbam's comments on Bava Basra 122a, see also Ramban on 26:55 and Rashi on 33:54), describing the "lottery" which affirmed the division of the land made via the Urim v'Tumim. We would have expected only 10 Tribes to need the lottery to determine which land they would inherit, but instead there were slips with the names of all 12 Tribes and another 12 slips upon which the 12 areas were written. Since Reuvein and Gad already received their portions of land, why were their names/portions included in the lottery? Additionally, why, if only Reuvein and Gad had requested that their portion of the land be on the eastern side, did Moshe include, seemingly out of nowhere, half the Tribe of Menashe, and also give them their portion on the eastern side of the Jordan?

What would have happened had Reuvein and Gad not asked for the land on the eastern side? Would they have received a portion on the western side, with everybody else? What would have been done with the land on eastern side? (I have previously suggested that had the Eirav Rav survived, perhaps they would have received this land. Even if this were true, since they

don't seem to have survived, what would have been done with it had Reuvein and Gad not asked for it?) Would each Tribe get a portion of it? How would they deal with having some land on the east side, unconnected with their land on the west side? Would it become their vacation spots? Some understand the Ramban (Bamidbar 21:21) to mean that this land would remain desolate, but it is clear from the context that this would only be until the land on the western side of the Jordan was conquered. It is unclear what would have happened to the land of Sichon and Og had Reuvein and Gad not asked for it as their inheritance. I am going to suggest the possibility that even had they not asked, Reuvein and Gad would have received the exact same land. Even though only the land on the western side is considered the "land flowing with milk and honey" (as we shall discuss shortly), there are advantages to the land that was conquered by Moshe (not Yehoshua), where Moshe taught them Torah, and where the manna fell (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/sukkos.pdf). If the advantages of the land on the eastern side related better to Reuvein and Gad than those of the eastern side, it would not be as if they were being shortchanged by getting "Eiver HaYarden" ("the other side of the Jordan"), and the lottery would make it clear that their land was as appropriate for them as the other portions were for the other Tribes. After being on the land that was going to be theirs, Reuvein and Gad could feel the connection between themselves and the land. Not just because it served their needs by being able to sustain their large amounts of cattle, but because this was really their land and they could sense that.

From this perspective, let's reexamine the conversation between Reuvein/Gad and Moshe (et al). Moshe knows that the land just conquered will eventually be given to Reuvein and Gad (and half of Menashe). Had they not conquered it, everybody (besides Moshe) would cross the Jordan, conquer the seven nations on the western side, and then conquer the land on the eastern side that did not belong to Edom, Amon or Moav. At that point, Yehoshua and Elazar would conduct the lottery (etc.), and each Tribe would be given their appropriate portion. However, now that it was conquered, Moshe is faced with a dilemma. If he gives the land just conquered to the Tribes that will eventually get them anyway, it's not fair to the other Tribes, who have to wait to get their land, and will have to fight against the nations in Canaan while Reuvein and Gad are already settling their land. On the other hand, if he doesn't give Reuvein and Gad (and half of Menashe) their land now, that means that they will have to shlep their families and all of their belongings over the Jordan, live in temporary dwellings until the land is conquered and divided up, and then shlep everything back over the Jordan to their permanent homes. There is another factor to be taken into account as well.

Rambam (Hilchos Terumos 1:2-3) describes the difference between land conquered by individuals

("kibush yachid") and land conquered by the nation ("kibush rabim"), and what qualifies for each category. Even land on the western side of the Jordan would not be fully considered "Eretz Yisroel" if conquered by individuals rather than by the whole nation. Yehoshua, knowing the land wouldn't be fully conquered in his lifetime, therefore divided it up before he died (even before it was fully conquered). This way, when each Tribe conquered their own territory after he died, it would be based on the nation's will, not just the Tribe's, and would qualify as being "Eretz Yisroel" in every regard. Land that is not officially part of Eretz Yisroel can become Eretz Yisroel, provided it was conquered by the nation after Eretz Yisroel was fully conquered and divided/settled (see Hilchos Melachim 5:6). Based on this, Rabbi Peretz Steinberg, shlita (Pri Eitz Hachayim on Bamidbar 32:1-2, published in 5766) suggests that had Reuvein and Gad returned before the rest of the land was divided (even if it were after the western side of the Jordan was conquered), their land would not be considered Eretz Yisroel (for mitzvos such as terumah and maaser). This would be another reason not to give the land to Reuvein and Gad before everyone else gets theirs.

When Reuvein/Gad asked for the land, there was no offer of fighting on the western side (and therefore no indication of waiting until after the land was divided). The first time they brought it up, Moshe didn't respond, hoping they would think things through, and offer to fight on the western side (etc.). But they didn't, even when they brought it up the second time. It would be bad enough if the other Tribes would have to fight Canaan without the help of all 12 Tribes, especially if the two Tribes that wouldn't fight were the ones with the best warriors. If the two Tribes that didn't join them had requested not to fight (by asking for the land on the eastern side), it would be that much worse. Therefore, Moshe laces into them, comparing the damage done if they don't fight to the damage done by the spies. Reuvein and Gad get the message, and offer not only to join the fight on the western side, but to lead it. And they promise not to return "home" until the rest of land is divided, so that their land will be considered Eretz Yisroel. Moshe tells them that their leading the war was necessary if they want to keep the land on the eastern side (the "tenai kaful"), but asks them to keep the other part of their promise too, not to return until the land is divided (see Rashi on 32:24). This won't affect keeping the land, but will affect its status regarding mitzvos, and is therefore worth keeping "for G-d."

Once Moshe was willing to give Reuvein and Gad their portions, he was faced with another dilemma. Can he give Reuvein and Gad their land now, but not give Menashe theirs? Menashe must have also felt a connection to their land, with Menashe's son Machir even naming his son Gilad (Bamidbr 26:29), the name of the land they felt connected with. (Gilad was the name the area was known by since Yaakov and Lavan

built the pile ("gal") of stones that was witness ("eid") to their covenant, and was where the caravan that brought Yosef to Egypt originated from.) Menashe may not have been as bold as Reuvein and Gad to ask for their portion now, but that doesn't mean they didn't want it now too. How could Moshe make half the Tribe of Menashe shlep their families and possessions across the Jordan to live in Gilgal until the land is divided, and then shlep everyone and everything back, if Reuvein and Gad didn't have to? Therefore, when Moshe allowed Reuvein and Gad to stay on what would become their land anyway and start building its infrastructure, he also gave Menashe the land that they were going to get on the eastern side.

Before the land was divided, the laws of Shemita didn't apply even to the land on the western side of the Jordan (see Sifri on Vayikra 25:2). This is learned from the wording of the verses, which tells us that Shmita laws won't start until "you come to the land that I am giving you" (25:2) and you work on "your field" and "your vineyard" (25:3), i.e. the one assigned to you. The Sifri (here and on 23:10 regarding the Omer offering) explains the words "the land" to mean "the special land," i.e. the land that flows with milk and honey, and the words "that I am giving you" to exclude the portions of Reuvein and Gad, which wasn't "given to them" but they asked for. This difference may have practical implications regarding Bikurim (first fruits), as according to one opinion in the Yerushalmi (Bikurim 1:8), Bikurim can be brought from Menashe's portion on the eastern side of the Jordan, but not from Reuvein and Gad's portions. The topic of which land-based laws apply where and when is a very complex one, but the points to take from them that are relevant to us are that the laws aren't necessarily the same for all of the land on the eastern side of the Jordan, none of the land-based laws applied there before the land (on the western side) was divided, none would have applied there had Reuvein/Gad not waited to return until after the division, and not all of them applied to the western side before the division took place.

Had permission been granted to get to Arvos Moav without having to conquer any land first, Moshe would not have thought that his being able to enter land that will eventually become Eretz Yisroel meant he could cross the Jordan. Even after the land of Sichon was conquered, since this became necessary in order to get to Arvos Moav, there was no indication that anything had changed. (This may be why Moshe "feared" Og, as his land wasn't necessary for access to the Promised Land.) However, once Og's land was conquered too, Moshe thought that things might have changed, as now he was standing on land that would become Eretz Yisroel, and was conquered for that purpose. Even though there is a difference between the land on the eastern side of the Jordan and the western side, those differences would be minimized after the

land was divided, and not all of the mitzvos applied on the western side either until then.

Therefore, after conquering both Sichon and Og, Moshe asked if he could cross over to the western side of the Jordan. Not necessarily to stay there forever, but at least before the land was divided and all the mitzvos applied there, he should be allowed to "cross over and see it" (Devarim 3:25). After all, he was already standing on land that would become Eretz Yisroel once the land was divided. ©2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Moshe (Moses) in this week's portion implores G-d for permission to enter into Israel. In the end, the request is denied. Even as Moshe uses every possible argument, G-d declares that He would never ever step foot into the Holy Land.

Not only is Moshe destined never to come to Israel, even his remains, his bones, would not be buried there. This in glaring contrast to Yosef (Joseph). Although Yosef died in Egypt, when the Jews leave that country, they carry Yosef's bones for burial in Israel.

One wonders why? Why is Yosef buried in Israel while Moshe is not. The Midrash takes up this question and responds: Yosef while in Egypt was always identified as a Jew. Note that when the butler suggests to Pharaoh that Yosef could interpret his dreams, he refers to Yosef as the na'ar ivri-the Hebrew lad. (Genesis 41:12) Having been identified as a Jew, Yosef was deemed worthy for burial in Israel.

Moshe on the other hand was not identified as a Jew. In fact, Yitro's (Jethro) daughters tell their father that ish Mitzri - an Egyptian man, saved us from the shepherds who were harassing us. (Exodus 2:19) Not being identified as a Jew, Moshe is denied burial in the Holy Land.

For me this Midrash brings to mind the days I spent visiting Israeli soldiers during the 1982 Lebanon War. One soldier, Shimon ben Tzion from Kiryat Arba was burnt from head to toe. Every day when visiting, I'd ask him to share a dvar Torah with me. Finally, on the last day there, he offered to me the Midrash cited above.

Looking into my eyes between his bandages, he asked: "but why should Moshe have been punished for telling the truth? Unlike Yosef who was born in Israel and, therefore, is identified as a Hebrew, Moshe was born in Egypt. Thus, Moshe being identified as an Egyptian should not cast poor light upon him."

Turning himself even more to me, Shimon quoted Rabbi Kook of blessed memory, that no matter where a Jew is born, he is born in Israel. This was Moshe's mistake. Although born in Egypt, he was existentially a sabra, born in Israel. Here was this courageous soldier's way of telling me as I was about

ready to leave for the United States, to remain connected to Israel.

Years later, our son Dov interviewed Avital Sharansky for his elementary school class report. Avital spent her Sabbath with our family during the days when she advocated on behalf of her imprisoned husband Natan. Dov asked Avital, "Where were you born?" Avital answered, "Israel." My young Dov was flabbergasted. "But you're from Russia, everyone knows that." Avital answered, "every Jew, no matter where born, was born in Israel. And every Jew, no matter where that Jew is, is in Israel."

An important message to consider, especially these days, when so many of our people feel disconnected from Israel, afraid to travel to the Holy Land. It reminds us of our challenge, to remain linked, to remain meshed with Israel, our homeland, forever especially during these difficult times. © 2006 *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 BERNSTEIN

Ha'aros

Yom Kippur and Tisha B'av have certain similarities in their practices, yet they are essentially different.

Although both are full day fasts and have similar prohibitions, they stand for different ideas. Laws which illustrate the differing functions of the two days include the following:

On Tisha B'av, learning Torah is basically not allowed, and we sit on the ground as mourners. Yom Kippur, on the other hand, represents the day in which the Torah was given the final time (following the Eigel Hazahav—the Golden Calf).

The reason for similarity of practices of Yom Kippur and Tisha B'av is that both are days of introspection and self-improvement or "Teshuva;" however, Tisha B'av is a time of mourning over the past, while Yom Kippur is a time of rejoicing over the future.

Since the Gemara says that the first Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because they did not say the brocha for the Torah properly, it is fitting that Torah learning would be forbidden at the time commemorating the destruction. This is not a time of connection, of spiritual attachment, but a time to reflect and consider our ways.

Yom Kippur, on the other hand, is the greatest time of connection and spiritual attachment—the day the Torah was finally given to Yisrael.

The Past

In the recorded lectures of Rav Yerucham Levovitz, we find that Tochacha—ethical reproof—deals with past events. The worst thing is for a person to see himself as righteous. He should learn to

constantly see his errors, until he realizes that he is not the tzadik (righteous leader) that he thinks he is.

Moshe reproved the people, time and again, without break. He had nothing positive to say about them. In reality, over the course of many years, they made very few mistakes. However, Moshe would not give them the benefit of the doubt, but constantly reminded them of their errors. This is the goal, actually—to constantly remember our mistakes, as Dovid Hamelech (King David) said: "My sin is always before me."

The Medrash states: "One who reproves a person, will afterwards find favor, more so than one of smooth speech..." The verse is praising Moshe, who reproved Yisrael and kept them from haughtiness. The opposite is true of Bilam, who praised the people sweetly, and brought them to pride and carelessness.

Midos Chamura Me'veiros

Nesivos Shalom described why Pirke Avos is studied. People think that the main requirements of the Torah are its mitzvos. Although we often hear about the middos—qualities of character—these seem to be too subtle for the common man. It is enough to work on the basic Torah requirements.

This is what people feel, but it is not so. Just as we will be judged for fulfilling the mitzvos, so, too, we will be judged for our qualities of character. In fact, the Rabbis were more stringent with middos than with mitzvos. So we find, "Anyone who becomes angry, it is as if he served idols." "Regarding someone who is haughty, Hashem says, 'There is not room for both of us.'" Such strong statements were not said in relation to mitzvos.

The Daas Torah has an entire section on this subject (end of Bamidbar). Rav Moshe Cordevero showed that the Torah is addressed to the intellectual soul; therefore, it mainly discusses mitzvos. The character qualities are based on the animal soul. However, the animal soul is more fundamental; hence, character qualities are more stringent than mitzvos. The Daas Torah compares it to a house. We normally look at the house by the external aspects visible to the eye. However, a beautiful house with poor foundations is not very valuable. Damage to the surface may destroy the entire house. Correcting flaws in the foundation will be costly, difficult work. However, a house with a strong foundation will withstand damage and continue to be useful for generations.

Similarly, the animal soul and the character qualities are the foundation, and are more basic than performing the commandments.

The Daas Torah advances an idea as to why the Torah rarely commands character qualities. The Torah is essentially needed for those things that we would not have thought of on our own. However, character attributes are common sense. There is no need to make commandments for them. In a similar manner, the people of the world are judged for

character qualities, even though most of the Torah does not apply to them. If they are not warned, how can they be punished? The answer is that moral qualities are common sense, logical matters, and everyone is obligated to be aware of them.

The second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of "sinas chinom"—baseless hatred. Such a horrible tragedy occurred, because of faults of character. © 2000 Rabbi Y. Bernstein & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Mountain of Faith

There is a fascinating sequence of verses in this week's portion which tell us that it is our responsibility to remember more than just the Commandments, but the manner in which they were given. Moshe exhorts the nation, "Now, Israel, listen to the decrees and the mandates that I teach you to observe. You shall not add to them nor subtract. See I have taught you decrees and ordinances as Hashem commanded me." Moshe warns the nation to "safeguard and perform them, for they are your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the nations who will hear all the decrees and declare that surely this is a wise and sagacious nation" (cf. Deuteronomy 2:1-9). What follows is a warning to remember the scenario of Sinai. And though its remembrance would seem much less significant than that of the observance of the laws themselves, the Torah uses stronger terminology in reminding us. "Only beware for yourselves and heed your very souls, lest you forget the words that your eyes saw and lest you remove them from your heart. You must make them known to your children and your children's children the day you stood before Hashem at Chorev" (Deuteronomy 2:9-11). Moshe continues to remind the Jews of the fiery scenario and the awe-filled events of the revelation at Mount Sinai.

What bothers me is a simple question. If Moshe already impressed upon his nation the importance of the actual laws, if he already explained to them that it is those commands that will inspire other nations to marvel at the brilliance and veracity of the Jews, then why is the scene at Sinai such an integral part of the faith? Why is the warning both to the Jews and their souls seemingly stronger concerning the revelation scenario, greater than that of the admonition to obey the complex laws of the Torah?

A prominent Rosh Yeshiva lived next door to the simple clerk of his celebrated yeshiva. The Rabbi had scores of people visiting him asking him advice for the most difficult complexities, Talmudic or otherwise. The clerk did his job in the yeshiva office and attended to the needs of the Rosh Yeshiva, faithfully and devotedly.

Both of them had sons. The revered Rabbi's son did not follow in his father's footsteps. He became a professor, in a secular university, something that

brought consternation to his father. As a young man he began to shine in the yeshiva world and was well on his way to become a Torah luminary.

One day, after the Rosh Yeshiva's son, attired in the casual uniform of a secular intellectual, visited his father at the Yeshiva, an intellectual debate ensued between the two. When the professor left, the Rosh Yeshiva had let out a short sigh of frustration, whispering something about the difficulty in raising children to follow one's ideals.

One of the rabbis in the Yeshiva approached his mentor. "Rebbe," he meekly began. "I don't understand. The secretary of the Yeshiva merited to have his children become brilliant and devoted Torah scholars. What did he do so special that his sons are so strongly committed to Torah study?"

The Rosh Yeshiva did not let him continue. "I do not know for sure," he answered. "But one thing I can tell you. At my Shabbos table I was discussing questions on Maimonides writings and Talmudic difficulties. He was singing zemiros (songs of faith and devotion)."

The Torah exhorts us to keep the laws as they will inspire others to marvel at Jewish wisdom. But Moshe adds the finality of the argument. Do not ever forget that we stood at Mount Sinai, saw the fire and heard G-d's voice! The intellectual analyzing, even actual observance, is, of course, of utmost importance. But nothing supercedes the simple faith of the G-d fearing Jew who traces his steps to the foot of the mountain. The Chasid Rav Yosef Ya'avetz, one of the great rabbis who was exiled during the Spanish Inquisition, writes that Jews whose observance was based on intellectualism withered in the face of Torquemada's torments. The simple Jews with simple faith remained loyal and steadfast throughout. It is obviously important to think, to rationalize and to perform. But Moshe tells us to watch ourselves and our souls lest we forget what really happened some 3,300 years ago. Because when look for the bottom line, it's at the bottom of the mountain. © 1999 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.



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