

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**here are times when an ancient text seems to speak more directly to where we are now than to the time when it was first written. Rarely has that been truer than in the case of the famous first comment of Rashi to the Torah, to the words: "In the beginning, G-d created..." Let us listen to it in its entirety: "Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah should have begun with the verse, 'This month shall be to you the first of months' (Exodus 12:2) which was the first commandment given to Israel. Why then did it begin with, 'In the beginning'? It began thus because it wished to convey the idea contained in the verse (Psalm 111:6), 'The power of his acts He told to his people, in order to give them the estate of the nations.' So that if the nations of the world will say to Israel, 'You are robbers because you took by force the land of the seven nations,' Israel might reply to them, 'The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He created it and gave it to them, and by His will He took it from them and gave it to us.'"

Rashi might have been speaking directly to us in 5771/2010, in an age of anti-Zionism, boycotts, sanctions and divestments against Israel, and even a growing questioning of the State's right to exist.

Rashi (1040-1105) lived in Troyes, Northern France, at a time when the position of Jews under Christian rule was beginning seriously to worsen. He lived through the most traumatic event of that period, the massacre of Jewish communities in the Lorraine at the beginning of the First Crusade in 1096. Jews in his day were persecuted and powerless. They had no realistic hope of imminent return to the land.

As to the logic of Rabbi Isaac's interpretation, it seems strained. Why did the Torah begin with creation? Because that is a fundamental of Jewish faith. Rabbi Isaac seems to be arguing that since the Torah is primarily a book of commandments, it should begin with the first command-at least the first given to the Israelites as a collective entity. But clearly not everything in the Torah is command. Much of it is narrative. So Rabbi Isaac's question is odd.

So too is his answer. Why relate creation to a challenge to the Israelites- right to the land? Why, if Rabbi Isaac's interest is solely in commandments, not give the obvious halakhic answer: the story of creation

is told to explain the command to keep Shabbat. It is all highly perplexing.

In fact, however, Rabbi Isaac is making a very cogent point indeed. Some years ago a secular scholar, David Clines, wrote a book entitled *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. His conclusion was that the single overarching theme of the Five Books of Moses is the promise of the land. That is surely the case. There are sub-themes, but this dominates all others. Seven times in Bereishit G-d promises the land to Abraham, once to Isaac, and three times to Jacob. The rest of the Mosaic books, from the beginning of Exodus when Moses hears about "the land flowing with milk and honey," to the end of Deuteronomy, when he sees it from afar, is about Israel, the destination of the Jewish journey.

There is a fundamental rule of literary form. Chekhov said: if there is a gun on stage in the first act of a play, it must be part of the plot or it should not be there at all. If the central theme of the Mosaic books is the promise of the land, the beginning must in some way be related to it. Hence Rabbi Isaac's point: the creation narrative must have to do with the land of Israel. What could this be if not to signal that the promise in virtue of which the Jewish people holds title to the land comes from the highest conceivable source, the sovereign of the universe, the Author of all.

No sooner have we said this than an obvious question arises. Why should a religion be tied to a land? It sounds absurd, especially in the context of monotheism. Surely the God of everywhere can be served anywhere.

Here too Rabbi Isaac steers us in the right direction. He reminds us of the first commandment given to the Israelites as a people, as they were about to leave Egypt.

Judaism is not primarily about personal salvation, the relationship between the individual and G-d in the inner recesses of the soul. It is about collective redemption, about what it is to create a society that is the opposite of Egypt, where the strong enslave the weak. The Torah is the architectonic of a society in which my freedom is not purchased at the cost of yours, in which justice rules and each individual is recognised as bearing the image of G-d. It is about the truths Thomas Jefferson called self evident, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." It is about what John F Kennedy meant when he spoke of "the belief that the

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rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of G-d."

We are social animals. Therefore we find G-d in society. That is what we discover when we reflect on the basic structure of the Torah's many commands. They include laws about the administration of justice, the conduct of war, ownership of land, employer-employee relationships, the welfare of the poor, the periodic cancellation of debts, in short, an entire legislative structure for the creation of what Rav Aaron Lichtenstein called societal beatitude.

Laws shape a society, and a society needs space. A sacred society needs sacred space, a holy land. Hence Jews and Judaism need their own land.

In four thousand years, for much of which Jews lived in exile, the people of the covenant were scattered over the face of the earth. There is no land in which Jews have never lived. Yet in all those centuries, there was only one land where they were able to do what almost every other nation takes for granted: create their own society in accordance with their own beliefs.

The premise of the Torah is that G-d must be found somewhere in particular if He is to be found everywhere in general. Just as, in the creation narrative, Shabbat is holy time, so in the Torah as a whole, Israel is holy space. That is why, in Judaism, religion is tied to a land, and a land is linked to a religion.

But now we come to the most perplexing part of Rabbi Isaac's comment. Recall what he said: Should anyone call into question the Jewish people's right to the land of Israel, the Jewish people can reply, "G-d created the universe. He divided earth into many lands, languages and landscapes. But one small land He gave to the Jewish people. That is our title to the land."

How on earth could Rabbi Isaac think of this as a compelling answer? Almost inevitably, someone who challenges the Jewish people's right to the land of Israel will not believe in the G-d of Israel. So how will a reference to Israel's God make Israel's case?

Ironically, we know the answer to that question. Today the overwhelming majority of those who challenge Israel's right to exist believe in Israel's G-d, that is to say, the G-d of Abraham. They belong to the large family of faith known as the Abrahamic monotheisms. To them, we must humbly say: when it comes to political conflict, let us search for a political solution. Let us work together in pursuit of peace. But

when it comes to religion, let us not forget that without Judaism, there would be no Christianity and no Islam. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism never sought to convert the world and never created an empire. All it sought was one tiny land, promised to the children of Israel by the creator of the universe, in whom Jews, Christians and Muslims all believe.

Sadly, Rabbi Isaac was right, and Rashi was right to quote him at the beginning of his Torah commentary. The Jewish people would be challenged on its right to the land, by people who claimed to worship the same G-d. That same G-d summons us today to the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of human life, and the imperative of peace. And that same G-d tells us that in a world of 82 Christian nations and 56 Muslim ones, there is room for one small Jewish state. © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**“H**evel" - literally vapor, the transparent, fleeting exhalation of breath - is an unlikely word to sum up the intense period of the Jewish calendar that ends this Shabbat with Shabbat Bereishit. Yet it appears in the Yom Kippur liturgy, serves as the main theme of Ecclesiastes, which we read on Succot, and reappears in this week's Torah reading as the name of a hapless son (Abel) of Adam and Eve. Why is hevel such an important theme at this time of year?

Let us briefly examine each of these occurrences of the word to see if we can find a connecting thread. During the closing amida prayer on Yom Kippur, the liturgy juxtaposes two glaringly opposite characteristics of the existential nature of the human being. First it asks, "What are we? What meaning have our lives? What is our power? What can we say before You, Lord our God, since all the great heroes are as nothing compared to You? ...Most of their deeds are empty voids; the days of their lives are as vapor (hevel) before You. The difference between humans and animals is naught (ayin in Hebrew) because everything is vapor (hevel)." Then the liturgy switches gears and declares, "From the beginning, You have separated and distinguished the human, recognizing his ability to stand before You."

The stark contrast between the human being who is no different from a beast and the human being chosen from all other creatures to stand in the Divine presence leaves us trying to ascertain the true, existential nature of man. The mystery is increased by Ecclesiastes, in which there is a constant refrain: "Vapor of vapors, vapor of vapors. The whole of life is vapor." Finally, when the second son of Adam and Eve is named Hevel, or vapor - this is surely a reference to the briefness of his life, snuffed out by his brother Cain. Abel never married and did not have progeny.

I believe that an understanding of the fundamental distinctions in the respective lifestyles and life values of the first siblings will explain the true meaning of 'hevel.' The Bible tersely defines each of these young men in terms of their occupations: "Abel was a shepherd, whereas Cain was a tiller of the earth" (Genesis 4:3). Abel is mentioned first - perhaps because a shepherd, who lives off the wool and milk of living sheep, preserves and nurtures life, leaving plenty of time for meditation with the Divine, appreciation of nature, and communication of traditions and values to the next generation. None of this would apply to the tiller of the soil, whose backbreaking work often takes advantage of animal labor, exhausts the natural nutrients of the earth and rarely leaves time for cultural or religious pursuits.

Even though Abel's life may have been all too brief and transitory, he nevertheless influenced subsequent generations: Jabal (his great-grandnephew, whose name is linked to Abel) "was the first to dwell in tents and breed cattle, and Jubal, who was the first to handle the harp and flute" (Gen. 4:20-21) - both occupations of the spirit rather than mere materialistic aggrandizement. Moreover, all three names (Jabal, Jubal and Abel) are linked to yovel, the Jubilee year, the millennium, the ultimate period of peace and redemption. It is undoubtedly from this perspective that the Zohar maintains that King David, progenitor of the messiah, was a transmigrated soul (gilgul) of, or a repair for, Abel. Fascinatingly, King David was also a shepherd in his youth and a gifted musician who played the lyre and composed the Psalms.

Allow me one more leap of exegesis to complete the picture. The Bible describes how God took dust from the earth and breathed into it the breath, or "vapor," of life, thereby forming a human being - an animal creature with the internal spark of the Divine (Genesis 2:7). The word yovel also means shofar, ram's horn, into which the human being exhales his vapor in a symbolic commitment to uplift and inspire the animal world, and especially his animal self, with the essential eternity of the Divine. We may live brief lives, akin to vapor. Nevertheless, we have the ability to communicate, to exhale and express our Divine spirit, and thereby influence subsequent generations to achieve redemption. Indeed, as recited at the end of Yom Kippur, "the difference between man and beast is Eternity [ein-sof], for everything lies in the vapor of human, humane expression [hevel]." © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he completion of any significant portion of Torah learning is always an occasion for Jewish celebration. Any siyum (a completion of a tractate of Talmud or Mishna) is usually accompanied by a feast

to help commemorate the happy event. There is a great sense of satisfaction and accomplishment at having seen a difficult intellectual and time consuming task to its successful conclusion.

So it is naturally understandable that the occasion of our completing the annual cycle of Torah readings with the reading of V'zot Habracha on the final day of the Succot holiday makes it the most joyful day of the entire magnificent holiday season of the month of Tishrei. Simchat Torah affirms our faith in Jewish continuity and our unshakable belief in the divinity of Torah that Moshe brought to Israel from Mount Sinai.

It is the holiday basically created by the Jewish people itself, replete with customs and nuances developed over the ages that have hardened into accepted practice and ritual. Here in Israel when Simchat Torah and Smimni Atzeret occur simultaneously on the same day, Simchat Torah, the folk holiday, has almost pushed Shmini Atzeret, the biblical and halachic holiday aside in thought and practice.

This is a practical example how sometimes Jewish custom based upon intense love of and attachment to Torah frequently overwhelms Torah ritual itself. What makes Simchat Torah so special is the fact that we begin to read from the beginning of the Torah again immediately so that there is no gap in our study and devotion to it. This is usually the case with all ceremonies of siyum in Jewish life where the completion of one tractate immediately leads to the beginning of study of another one.

In reality the Torah ends on an apparently sad note for the final part of the reading describes to us poignantly the death of our great teacher Moshe. He will never enter the Land of Israel but only be able to glimpse it from afar. His generation whom he shepherded for forty years has passed away, his sons will not inherit his position or power, and in his great gift of prophecy he is aware of the terrible problems that his beloved people of Israel must yet face and overcome through their long journey of history and destiny.

Yet the joy of the presence of Torah within our nation overcomes these feelings of melancholy. As long as the words and ideals of Moshe still live amongst the Jewish people then there is great reason to rejoice. It means that we have not lost our way and that the eternity of Moshe and Israel is guaranteed. The nations of the world resent the fact that somehow we still have a chance to rejoice or attempt to live normal productive lives under terrible duress and distress.

Witness Time magazine's outrageous cover story that Israel is not interested in peace since we are attempting to live life normally and enjoyably. This absurd and malicious idea was echoed in Roger Cohen's op-ed piece (Cohen is the regular contributing op-ed, resident assimilated court Jew in the palace of the New York Times) cluck clucking that raising our children and preserving our sanity and putting bread on

the table of our family somehow takes immediate precedence over satisfying Saaeb Erekat and Mohammed Abbas and their irrational demands.

Simchat Torah comes to teach us that we should rejoice when we are able to do so and celebrate our existence and accomplishments even if things are not 100 percent as we would wish them to be. Completing the Torah reading is a matter of perseverance and so is all of Jewish life.

The Torah's description of the death of Moshe is meant to impress us with the fact that Judaism is not the cult of the personality. Even when the greatest of Jews ever, Moshe, as the Torah itself describes him in the final words of its text, dies and leaves us bereft and alone, we are not to overly mourn and certainly not to despair.

We may yet continue to rejoice because the eternal Torah is still present within us with great vigor and vitality. As far as we are concerned the game is never over. We suffer and fall but we are never defeated. That is the power that the Torah grants us. It is the source of our great joy in celebrating the completion and simultaneous beginning of the reading of the Torah this year. So be it for all of the years yet to come. © 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

I've always wondered why Sukkot falls just a few days after Yom Kippur. After all, the rabbis ask, we started living in booths in the desert after the exodus from Egypt.

Perhaps it is because Yom Kippur is a day when we find God by withdrawing from all forms of physicality-eating, drinking, cohabitation. Everything concerning life energy is prohibited. This is the one day when through abstaining, we try to reach great spiritual heights.

Sukkot falls on the heels of the Day of Atonement to teach that the real way to find spirituality is not by withdrawing from the world but rather by finding holiness in the physical world.

Thus during the Sukkot festival we live in the sukkah. In nature which God created. We lift the lulav and etrog and recite a blessing to God to declare that He can be found in every form of life.

In many other religious faiths one enters the world of the spirit by leaving the body. In Judaism one enters the world of the spirit by sanctifying the body.

A fitting story comes to mind. Berel was on his way from Pelz to Kelz. He had heard that in Kelz he could attain great spiritual heights. As he rested for the night, he left his shoes pointed in the direction he was

walking only to have a trickster turn them around as he slept.

The next morning, Berel arose and started walking according to the way his shoes were pointed, in the same direction he had come from the day before. A deep sense of satisfaction came over him as he approached the "new" city, stream, house and family. Berel had found his spirituality not in the Heavens but in the very same physical place he had left.

Sukkot follows just days after Yom Kippur as a counterbalance to that solemn day. It reflects the sentiments of Rav Kook who once said, "There is nothing unholy, only the holy and the not yet holy." © 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 MORDECAI KAMENETZKY**

## **Smashing Success**

Did you ever wonder how the Torah ends? After all, if you were to write The Book, you surely would have ended on a high; at least when encapsulating the life of Moshe. I should have ended with Moshe's triumphant exit or by mentioning an eternal action. And indeed, textually, it sounds like the Torah does just that.

The last two verses in Chumash read: In all the signs and the wonders, which the L-rd sent him (Moshe) to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land; and in all the mighty hand, and in all the great awe, which Moshe wrought to the eyes of all Israel (Deuteronomy 34:11-12)

I would have explained mighty hand and the great awe as the great miracles that Moshe performed in the desert or the in defeating our enemies. But Rashi quotes a Sifri to explain these final verses in a very curious manner. And all the strong hand [This refers to] his receiving the Torah on tablets with his hands. And all the great awe [This refers to the] miracles and mighty deeds [that were performed for Israel] in the great and awesome wilderness before the eyes of all Israel This expression alludes to where] [Moshe's] heart stirred him up to smash the tablets before their eyes, as it is said, and I shattered them before your eyes (Deut. 9:17).

Imagine! Rashi chooses to identify the closing words that the Torah describes as one that Moshe wrought to the eyes of all Israel as none other than the smashing of the, Luchos, the Two Tablets given to him at Sinai. Is there no better way to end the Torah? Is this Moshess defining act that is worthy of interpreting as the great awe done before the eyes of Israel? After all, many miracles were done before the eyes of Israel why choose the smashing of the Luchos? Is there no better way to venerate Moshe in the final yearly reading of the Torah?

The Volozhin Yeshiva was founded in 1803 by Rav Chaim of Volozhin the premier student of the Vilna

Gaon. It was a ground-breaking institute as, until its founding, there were no organized Yeshivos. Students who wanted to learn Torah would have to find their own rebbe, a place to eat and sleep and a group of like-minds to study with. Volozhin Yeshiva provided shelter and food plus a mass of brilliant students who would grow in Torah knowledge together.

Indeed, through the decades of its existence the greatest Jewish minds and ultimately leaders of Judaism emerged, among them Rabbi Avraham Dovber Kahana Shapira, Rabbi Abraham Issac HaKohen Kook, Rabbi Shimon Shkop, Rabbi Boruch Ber Leibowitz. Yet in 1892, its Dean, the revered, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin decided to close its doors and shut down, the Yeshiva perhaps forever.

The Russian Government, at the time, demanded the introduction of certain secular studies. They also wanted to regulate the curriculum with dictates that included, "All teachers of all subjects must have college diplomas; no Judaic subjects may be taught between 9 AM and 3 PM; no night classes are allowed; total hours of study per day may not exceed ten." Rather than comply, Rabbi Berlin closed the yeshiva. The episode occurred during an era of the Yeshiva's greatness. The number of students approached four hundred. They came from the entire Russian Empire from Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, and Poland and even from western countries like Britain, Germany, Austria, and the United States. Volozhin was the center of Torah study the heart of which was the Holy Yeshiva. But that did not stop, the Netziv from closing the doors.

I often wonder, what went on in his mind when he made that decision. Did he think that this may be the end of organized Yeshiva study forever? Did he worry about the hundreds of students who perhaps would now never become great Torah Leaders? I don't know. I doubt he thought of the later emergence of great yeshivos, among them Telshe, Slobodka, Kletzk and Kelm, Mir that managed to arise. I cannot imagine that he thought of countless other institutions of Torah study that now host tens of thousands of students who in the tradition of Volozhin study day and night with no Government dictates or secular interference.

What would have been had he compromised? What would have been if he did water-down his values and traditions to meet the demands of the Russian Government? I posit that there may have been many fine scholars and observant Jews that may have emerged from the New Volozhin Seminary, but would have had a Reb Boruch Ber or Reb Shimon?

I think his act defined the future of the face of Jewish Torah scholarship. And so did Moshe's smashing of the Luchos. He did what he had to do in order that a Phoenix of Torah and observance would reemerge from the broken pieces. And thus the day in which we rejoice in the completion of the Torah, we thank Moshe whose bold act enabled a new vision and

commitment that ultimately defined the future of Yiddishkeit. © 2010 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

#### RABBI LIPMAN PODOLSKY

## Yeshivat HaKotel

In this, the Foundation Parsha, we are introduced to one of the pillars of existence, the mitzvah of Shabbos (Breishis 2:1-3). Indeed, Shabbos is designed to remind us of the unfathomable miracle of Creation ex nihilo-Zeicher l'Maaseh Breishis (Shmos 20:10). One seventh of our lives is devoted to the observance and sanctification of this special day. But what is this mysterious Shabbos? Why do we do it?

In our Shabbos morning tefillos we recite: "You, Hashem our G-d, did not give it [the Shabbos] to the nations of the lands; nor did You, our King, bequeath it to idol-worshippers; and in its contentment the uncircumcised shall not abide. For to Israel, your nation, have You given it with love; to the descendants of Yaakov, whom You have chosen." Similarly, in Kiddush we proclaim: "For us did You choose, and us did You sanctify from all the nations; and the Shabbos of Your holiness, with love and favor, did You give us as an inheritance." What is so singular concerning the relationship between our nation and Shabbos, something apparently totally irrelevant to the gentiles? After all, they also have their "day off"!

The Maharal, in "Derech Chaim" (his commentary on Pirkei Avos, pp. 13-15), explains: Creation can be subdivided into two main categories: 1) Space (including all physicality); 2) Time. Since Hashem is the ultimate and only "One", everything that He creates must also be one; all aspects of Creation must necessarily be directed to one unified aim. What is that purpose? The order of Creation provides a hint. Whatever was created last is the purpose. All else was created in advance as a preparation, to set the stage for the ultimate design.

The purpose [Tachlis] of Time is Shabbos [note: Vayechulu derives from the same root as Tachlis]. Thus Shabbos was created last. The preceding days serve the Shabbos (see Beitzta 16a). Shabbos crowns Time; Shabbos breathes meaning and purpose into the soul of Time. Shabbos is the "One" in the realm of Time.

The Tachlis of Space is Am Yisrael. Thus, we were introduced on the stage of Creation after all of the seventy root nations. "Breishis-Because of Israel, who were called Reishis (Yirmiya 2:3), the universe was created (Rashi, Breishis 1:1, quoting from the Medrash)." All else was created to serve Am Yisrael (Sanhedrin 37a; Brachos 58a). Am Yisrael completes and perfects all existence; it breathes meaning and purpose into the soul of the universe. Am Yisrael is the "One" in Space.

It is not, therefore, surprising that the two "Ones" join together as "One". "Said the Shabbos to

Hashem, For each [day] You have provided a mate [Sunday-Monday; Tuesday-Wednesday; Thursday-Friday], but for me You did not provide a mate. Replied Hashem, The Jewish People shall be your mate. And when Yisrael stood at Mount Sinai, Hashem said to them, 'Remember the day of Shabbos to sanctify it' (Shmos 20:7) -- Remember that which I said to the Shabbos, that 'the Jewish People shall be your mate' (Breishis Rabba 11:8)."

Only Hashem, the infinite, omnipresent Creator, can truly be One. All creations must be mated. "It is not good for man to be alone... (Breishis 2:18)" (See also Bava Basra 74b.) Every day has a partner except for Shabbos. Every nation has a partner [e.g. Yishmael and Esav-just read the papers!], except for Am Yisrael. Despite their individuality, their 'Oneness', they both craved to be paired up. Thus Hashem made the shidduch: a bond between Time and Space, between Shabbos and Yisrael. This relationship is most manifest when the Jew sanctifies the Shabbos.

Consequently the Torah was given specifically on Shabbos (Shabbos 86b). For it was at Har Sinai that Klal Yisrael was born a nation, a distinct entity in-and the underlying Tachlis of-Space. On that day, Hashem singled us out from among all the nations, and gave us His Torah-the culmination and raison d'etre of Creation (Rashi Breishis 1:31). On that very day the Jews were commanded: Remember the day of Shabbos to sanctify it [I'kadsho], sharing the very same terminology through which a Kallah becomes bonded to her Chassan [Harei At Mekudeshes Li]. Henceforth, Shabbos became our Kallah; as we sing, Bo'i Kallah, Bo'i Kallah.

Practically speaking, how should a Jew utilize his day off with his Kallah? Merely abstaining from forbidden labor would seem to fall far short of the ideal (imagine spending the day with your Kallah simply abstaining from insulting her). And the Torah does require a certain sanctification. Whatever does it mean?

The Ramban defines: "We should view the cessation [of forbidden labor] in light of the fact that it is a holy day, a day on which to free ourselves from mundane thoughts and the nonsense of the Times; a day on which to provide spiritual pleasure to our souls in the ways of G-d, to go to Torah scholars... to hear the words of G-d... (Vayikra 20:7)."

Shabbos is not a day for reading newspapers (even the Times). Shabbos is not a day for Risk and/or Monopoly. Shabbos should not be squandered devising innovative ways to kill Time. Shabbos is a golden opportunity to recharge our batteries with the life-giving energy of spirituality, of our Neshama Yeseira (additional soul). The more we invest in Shabbos, the more we receive in return-in more ways than we can imagine.

A Jewish, American, Olympic bicycle champion made Aliyah. He idealistically chose to devote his talents to his newly adopted country. Finally, Israel would win the ever-elusive gold medal. His victory was

a matter of course. The rules, however, stipulated that he participate in the tryouts for the Israeli Olympic team, which happened to be scheduled on Shabbos. Our champ had only recently become a Shabbos observer. How ironic and tragic, he thought, to be forced to desecrate the Shabbos in the country of the Jews. He tried to sway the committee to change the day, or to at least make an exception in his case, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. The committee preferred to forego a certain gold medal rather than accommodate a Shabbos observer. He missed the tryouts, and as a result, was prevented from participating in the 1972 Olympics in Munich.

He later commented: "I thought that I had given up my life for the sake of Shabbos. In the end, I was shown that it was Shabbos that gave me life."

Remember the Shabbos! © 2002 Rabbi L. Podolsky & Yeshivat HaKotel

**RABBI YAAKOV HABER**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

In the story of the Creation of the world, it is recorded that "G-d blessed the seventh day" (Gen. 2:3). How did He bless the Sabbath? According to Rashi, He blessed it with manna, by providing a double portion on Fridays, while the Israelites were in the desert.

This may seem strange—here we have a chronicle of events (the Creation) of enduring importance, and yet this blessing is to apply for a mere forty years some time in the future, when the Jews will be in the desert!

Another such incongruity occurs on the fifth day, with the creation of the "taninim" (sea monsters), which is the only occasion where it does not say: "Vayehi chen" ("And it was so"). Why is that? If G-d created something, then, presumably, it WAS so. (Or we should perhaps rather ask why why it does say "Vayehi chen" on other occasions.)

The Ramban explains this by quoting Rashi, who quotes an Aggada (Bava Basra 74b) to the effect that these "taninim" are the Leviathan and its mate, who (the female) was then slain and salted for a future banquet, with the Messiah. So here we have something created and immediately killed and preserved, all for the sake of a single meal, some time in the future!

There seems to be a mismatch between the presentation of these things here (the blessing of the Sabbath, the creation of the taninim) and their (apparently) rather restricted purpose.

The problem, I think, lies in our attitude of assuming that something which is important must occupy a lot of time and space. But this need not be so! We cannot judge the importance of something based on its immediate obvious value.

An example of this occurs in the story of Noah, who sent a raven out of his ark to search for dry land (8:7). According to the Midrash, the raven asked Noah:

"Why me? Why not send one of the many other creatures here?" "Well," answered Noah (with more frankness than tact, we might think) "you do not have much purpose in the world—you are not kosher, you cannot be brought as a sacrifice, you do not sing sweetly—so it will not be a big loss to the world if you don't survive." Be that as it may, the raven did survive, and his descendants later had an important function in helping Elijah survive in the desert by bringing him food (I Kings 17:6).

So Noah was wrong about the apparent uselessness of ravens in the scheme of things; and that is the point—we can all be wrong when we try to judge the importance of something or someone in G-d's plan.

Another example is given when Moses, commanded by G-d to wage war against the Midianites, decided that he should also wage war against the Moabites, since (he felt) they were worse—the Midianites had only aided them in their attacks on the Jews. But he was wrong here, and G-d commanded him not to attack the Moabites. With hindsight, we can see why: from the Moabites came Ruth, from whom came the house of David. Hence it was important in the scheme of things that the Moabites be permitted to survive -- many generations of a whole nation, who were unfriendly to the Jews, so that ultimately Ruth might emerge.

Thus even Moses could misjudge the importance of a nation, and certainly any of us is incapable of judging the value of any nation, or group, or individual. We are incapable of making such a judgment, without having G-d's vision of the world as a whole, which means that we are simply incapable of making such a judgment.

Occasionally, we may wonder of someone, what value he could possibly have to anyone else. This is a mistake! We cannot know anyone's purpose in life—even our own! It could be that such a person's life could be justified by a single action of his, or of one of his descendants, many generations down the line! We can never know such things, and should never attempt such judgments. © 1988 Rabbi Y. Haber

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Moshe, G-d's servant, died there in the land of Moav" (Devarim 34:5). There is much discussion in the traditional sources about how Moshe, who wrote the whole Torah (Devarim 31:24) and gave it to the nation during his lifetime (31:26, see also 31:9), could have written these words. After all, if he were still alive it hadn't happened yet, and writing it as if he had died (past tense) is not being fully truthful, as for a (very) short time the Torah said he died when he actually hadn't. There are two primary sources that deal with this issue (Sifre, on the verse, and the Talmud, Bava Basra 15a and Menachos 30a, with slight

variations in the way it is worded in the Talmud). Although some treat them as if they are one source (see Vilna Gaon's version of Sifre), the seemingly minor differences between them being quoted intact (see Midrash Lekach Tov) indicate that they should be dealt with separately. (This is confirmed by Midrash HaGadol quoting both of them, separately, as two different versions.) The basic idea is the same though, with two opinions given. The first says that the last eight verses of the Torah were written by Yehoshua, not Moshe (dictated to him, through prophecy, by G-d), while the second insists that it had to be Moshe who wrote them, as Moshe gave the completed text to the nation before he died.

The differences in the primary sources are: (1) In the Talmud, the first opinion is stated by either Rabbi Yehuda or Rabbi Nechemya, while the Sifre gives it no attribution; (2) Some versions of each pose the question as how Moshe could write that he died while he was still alive, while others ask how he could have written it (or anything) after he was dead; (3) Sifre has it as Rabbi Meyer who insisted that Moshe wrote these verses too, while the Talmud quotes Rabbi Shimon (bar Yochai) saying that it had to be Moshe; and (4) Sifre doesn't differentiate between these eight verses and the rest of the Torah, simply telling us that Moshe wrote down whatever G-d told him to, while the Talmud says that these eight verses are different, either because for the rest of the Torah Moshe repeated what G-d said before writing it down whereas these verses were just written down, or the rest of the Torah Moshe wrote in ink while these were written in tears (we'll discuss what this means later), or both. (There is one manuscript of the Sifre, quoted by Finkelstein, that also has the words "in tears;" Rashi is either quoting this version or is combining aspects of both sources.) All versions end with a proof text from Yirmiya (36:18), where Baruch says that he wrote down what Yirmiya told him; how this proves anything is included in the discussion.

There are numerous issues that arise from these sources; the three I would like to focus on are: (1) Why is the Talmud only concerned about the last eight verses? The previous four would seem to be just as problematic, as Moshe couldn't have written that he "ascended Mt. Nevo" (34:1) if he died there. Did he "see the Land," descend, write these verses in the Torah, give it to the nation, then re-ascend? A straightforward reading of the verses indicate that once he ascended, he never came back down; even if Yehoshua wrote the last eight verses, how could Moshe have written these four? (2) According to the opinion that Yehoshua wrote about Moshe's death, how could the Torah tell us that Moshe gave the nation a completed Torah scroll? (3) According to the opinion that Moshe wrote even the last eight verses, how is the original question answered? Is it possible that there could be any part of the Torah that wasn't true, even if it were only for a short period of time?

Ibn Ezra tells us that in his opinion, it wasn't just the last eight verses of the Torah that were written by Yehoshua, but the final 12 verses. Ibn Ezra's approach to Chumash is a topic onto itself, one well beyond the scope of this piece. It is not uncommon for him to quote Chazal and then offer his own opinion, based on the text itself. Other Rishonim (early commentators) also offer approaches that are different than Chazal, and in our situation too Rabbeinu Miyuchas says that Yehoshua wrote the last 12 verses, and an opinion quoted by the Orchos Chayim (Hilchos K'riyas Sefer Torah 10) has the difference between the rest of the Torah and the final verses of the Torah applying to the last twelve verses, not just the last eight. This doesn't help us understand why Chazal were only concerned with the last eight verses, how Moshe presented a completed Torah to the nation if numerous verses were written by Yehoshua after he died, or how to understand the opinion that Moshe wrote every verse.

It is interesting to note that of the final twelve verses, only eight of them have this issue, as the final four could have easily been written by Moshe before he died. Despite the wording of the primary sources indicating that it was the final eight verses that were under discussion, and it was from Moshe's death on, not from his ascending Mt. Nevo, Kol Bo (Hilchos Tefilas HaMoados 52 and Hilchos K'riyas HaTorah 20) says it was the eight verses from 34:1-34:8 that are different than the rest of the Torah. Even though this helps the first of the three issues I am focusing on, it doesn't address the last two, and has to deal with the additional issue of the strong indication that it was specifically the last eight verses that are different.

Even though Moshe went up Mt. Nevo right before he died, and he was commanded to do so shortly before he did (Devarim 32:48-52), this commandment was first made back in Parashas Pinachas (Bamidbar 27:12). The Abarbanel (in Bamidbar and on our verse) says that Moshe was given the commandment so early in order that he can (and should) go up Mt. Nevo whenever he wants to see the Promised Land, even before his final day. He points out that from the content of the blessings Moshe gave the tribes, such as the Temple being built on Binyamin's land (see Rashi on Devarim 33:12), the description of Yosef's land (33:13-16), Zevulun living by the sea shore (33:18-19) and the abundance of Asher's olive oil (33:24), we know that the prophetic vision Chazal describe Moshe having (seeing all of Jewish history) atop Mt. Nevo was not limited to his final trip up to "see" the Land. Even though Moshe "saw" much more on his final "viewing" (the Abarbanel continues), since the blessings were given before he went up for the last time, Moshe must have seen the future during earlier viewings as well.

Although the Abarbanel discusses the issues surrounding the last eight (and twelve) verses at length, he does not suggest the thought I had that there is no

problem with Moshe writing that he went up Mt. Nevo even though he died there because he could have written it having his earlier trips in mind. When G-d dictated these verses to him, G-d knew they would ultimately refer to Moshe's final trip up Mt. Nevo, and Moshe likely knew that since he would die there this is how it would be understood. Nevertheless, since it is literally true that when Moshe wrote these words down he had previously ascended Mt. Nevo, there is no issue with his writing these words, and no need for Yehoshua to write them. Thanks to the Raza D'Shabsi index on Bava Basra, I saw that the Panim Yafos says something very similar (based on Moshe being commanded to ascend Mt. Nevo in Parashas Va'eschanan, Devarim 3:27, rather than in Parashas Pinachas), baruch shekivanti. (It is puzzling, though, that this question regarding the additional four verses was asked by the Chasam Sofer and left unanswered, since he quotes the Panim Yafos elsewhere, referring to him as his "Rebbi.")

Rabbi Yaakov Emden (She'aylas Yaivitz 1:33) discusses some of these issues at length as well, including how Moshe could have given a "complete" Torah to the nation before he died. He suggests that the two opinions here reflect a discussion elsewhere (Gitin 60a) regarding how the Torah was given, whether Moshe wrote down each piece as it was commanded or wrote it all down all together at the end of the 40 years. If it were the former, then until the next "scroll" was written, the combined previous scrolls could be considered a complete text; only after a new commandment was issued, and a new scroll written, did the previously "complete" scroll become incomplete (at least until the news scroll was added to it). Therefore, at the time Moshe gave the text to the nation, it was a "complete" text, i.e. containing all of the words that would ever be dictated to Moshe. Even though (according to this opinion) Yehoshua would then add eight more verses, and a scroll without those verses would be considered incomplete, at the time of Moshe's death, this was a complete Torah scroll. Another approach (albeit similar) is found in the Mordechai (Hilchos Ketanos 956) who says that since the last eight verses "were going to be added in the future by Yehoshua," Moshe not having written them yet did not make the text that Moshe gave the nation incomplete. It is unclear what the Mordechai meant by this; it may just be another way of saying what the Yaivitz would say many years later (although the Mordechai doesn't mention the Talmudic discussion regarding how the Torah was written). I would suggest that rather than G-d dictating the last eight verses to Yehoshua, it is possible that G-d dictated them to Moshe with the instructions that he not include them in the Torah (as it wouldn't yet be 100% true), but to instruct Yehoshua to write them in the Torah when they become true. Therefore, since the instructions were given as to how to make it complete, and all that could be written by Moshe had been written,

the text given to the nation before Moshe died was considered a complete one. [This could also explain a confusing comment made by Tosfos (Menachos 30a) regarding the word "today," but due to time/space constraints I will spare the details here.]

Although the wording of our version of the Sifre implies that the issue Rabbi Meyer was addressing was purely practical (how could Moshe write about his own death in past tense), with the answer being that since the words were dictated to him by G-d (Who knows what will happen) there is no problem, it becomes difficult to understand why anyone would need to be of the opinion that Yehoshua had to write the final verses. Additionally, there would be no need to mention any differences between the rest of the Torah and these eight verses. Nevertheless, this is how Abarbanel understands Rabbi Meyer and Rabbi Shimon, with Baruch's statement about Yirmiya being quoted to "prove" that it was the norm for a book to be written by the author dictating his (or His) words to a scribe, who didn't add any words/thoughts of his own. The overwhelming majority of commentators, however, understand the issue to be how Moshe could have written words (his having died) that weren't true at the time they were written.

Rabbeinu Bachye (Devarim 34:1) says this is not any more of an issue than any other words of prophecy that had not come true at the time they were written. Although he doesn't explain how Baruch's words are a proof text, it can be suggested that not only did Yirmiya dictate to him what to write just as G-d dictated the Torah to Moshe, but Yirmiya's words were also words of prophecy that had not yet come true; just as that is not problematic, neither are those things that G-d dictated to Moshe that hadn't occurred yet, including Moshe's death. Nevertheless, there would seem to be a big difference between writing words of prophecy that did not yet occur and writing down narrative that did not yet transpire.

Rashi (in Menachos) mentions two differences between the last eight verses and the rest of the Torah, explaining that because Moshe was crying while writing about his death he couldn't repeat the words G-d dictated to him. (There seems to be no significance to the Talmud's mentioning that the rest of the Torah was written in ink, as this apparently was true for the last eight verses as well.) The words of Baruch are quoted to show another situation where sad news (the punishments Yirmiya was prophesizing would occur if the nation didn't repent) prevented a scribe from first repeating, for the sake of clarity, what had just been dictated to him. Rashi doesn't explain how the concern that led the first opinion to say that Yehoshua wrote the last eight verses is addressed, but the Maharsha (in Bava Basra) does (or at least tries to), suggesting that there is a difference between saying something that is not true, and writing it down. Why writing something that hasn't happened is less problematic than speaking it out

is not explained. Toldos Udum (on the Sifre) ties this issue into a discussion (Gitin 26b) whether a contract written and signed before the money changed hands was valid or not. According to one opinion, since at the time they signed the contract the loan hadn't yet occurred, witnesses that signed it, saying that it had, appear to be liars, while according to the other opinion it is understood that they are not saying that it had occurred already, but that the borrower-to-be agreed to obligate himself to pay it back if/when loaned. Therefore, had Moshe said he had died, it would be untrue, but merely writing it down just meant acknowledging that it was going to happen. (I would add that writing it down indicates that it is information for future use, while saying it indicates information for use from this point forward.) The [incomplete text of the] Toldos Udum leaves off with a question, asking how G-d could have said it if saying something that did not yet happen seems to be an untruth, but this shouldn't be a problem, for several reasons. First of all, G-d only said it so that Moshe could write it down, so would fall under the same category as "understood to be for future use." Secondly, since G-d is outside the limits of time/space, the future is as much the present to Him as the present is (and past is); from G-d's perspective, Moshe had already died. Additionally, it was only Moshe who heard G-d say these words, and Moshe knew he hadn't yet died.

Several commentators (including Ritva and Mizrachi) understand the Talmud to be saying that Moshe wrote the last eight verses literally with his tears, dipping his quill in them, instead of in ink. After Moshe died, Yehoshua filled it in with regular ink, thus allowing it to be a complete text before Moshe died since all the words were there, while containing no untruths, as the part about Moshe's death wasn't in ink, and it was therefore not a kosher Torah scroll. (Rav Yaakov Emden didn't like this approach because if it was a valid writing it wasn't true, and if it wasn't, the Torah wasn't complete when given to the nation. Nevertheless, if the issue wasn't getting a kosher Torah, but a complete text, this approach seems to have some merit.) It is unclear how Baruch's quote regarding Yirmiya supports this notion, since Yirmiya's words were written in ink.

Another approach, suggested by the Vilna Gaon and others, changes the definition of the word "dema" (in the Talmud) from "tears" to "mixed up," as in when terumah gets mixed into chulin. Since the Torah existed before the world was created, the same issue we have regarding Moshe's death would apply to every bit of narrative in the Torah, as none of it had happened yet. However, as the Ramban explains in his introduction to the Torah, the Torah consists of different combinations of G-d's names, and as things "happened" after creation, the letters were rearranged and formed words that matched the reality. The suggestion is made that the last eight verses of the Torah remained in the form of G-d's name ("mixed up"),

and these letters were dictated to Moshe. After he died, Yehoshua was taught how to divide the letters into words, allowing there to be a complete scroll (i.e. containing all the letters) that Moshe gave to the nation without any untrue words being contained in it. (Rav Yaakov Emden's issue of there not being a kosher scroll would seem to apply here as well, as would the issue of Baruch's words being a proof text.)

Death comes in stages, although halachically we must define at what point it actually occurs. Several suggestions are made based on the notion that someone could be considered "dead" while still actually alive (see Gur Aryeh), including a kabbalistic one by the Rokayach (quoted by the Maharil, Responsa #203/231; also see Sefer Chasidim #547) based on our having a counterpart in heaven that no longer gives us spiritual nourishment when we are supposed to die. This notion applies even more if we consider that Moshe prolonged his life by writing 13 Torah scrolls on his last day, causing the sun not to set for hours (see [www.rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-nitzavim-vayaylech-5770](http://www.rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-nitzavim-vayaylech-5770)); it is therefore likely that his "upper" self had died well before his "lower" self did, including before he wrote that he had died. If Moshe was considered "dead" when he wrote these words, they wouldn't be false. (It would also explain why some versions frame the question as how Moshe could write anything after he had died, with the answer being that he could do so because he was considered dead even if he was still physically alive.)

I would like to add one more scenario: Beraishis Rabbah (96:3) says that losing one's status is considered like dying. Chazal tell us that Moshe wanted to enter the Land of Israel so much that he asked that Yehoshua take over and he (Moshe) would enter as one of the people, not as the leader. However, when G-d spoke to Yehoshua and not to him, he realized that he couldn't bear not knowing exactly what G-d had said and not everything He had said, and accepted his imminent death. This loss of status might have been enough to consider Moshe as having died, even before he was no longer able to finish taking G-d's dictation.

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### **RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG**

## **Moving Fast into the Garden**

**T**he Midrash relates that bringing together the "arba'ah minim"-four species on Succos, represents the notion that all of Bnei Yisroel are one and should be viewed as such regardless of their level of commitment to Judaism. The "esrog"-citron has both a taste and a fragrance, thus representing those amongst Bnei Yisroel who possess Torah knowledge and good deeds. The "lulav"-palmbranch, which lacks fragrance but has a taste contained in the dates produced by the palm tree, depicts those Jews who possess Torah knowledge but lack good deeds. The "hadas"-myrtle branch possesses a fragrance but lacks

a taste, reflecting those Jews who practice good deeds but do not engage in the study of Torah. The "aravah"-willow branch has neither a taste nor a fragrance, representing those amongst Bnei Yisroel who have no Torah knowledge and do not engage in good deeds.

We do not use the dates produced by the palm in the performance of the mitzva, rather the branch of the tree, which is tasteless. Therefore, why is the lulav branch considered to have a taste?

Citing the Maharil, the Ramah teaches that we should begin building a Succah as soon as Yom Kippur concludes, thereby moving immediately from the fulfillment of one mitzva to the fulfillment of another. Why must we move immediately to the mitzva of Succah rather than charity, Torah study, or any other mitzva?

The Talmud derives the laws pertaining to the construct of the Succah from the clouds which arose from the Garden of Eden. What is the connection between the Garden of Eden and the Succah? The Talmud relates that when Bnei Yisroel received the Torah on Shavuot, they reached the level of Adam prior to the sin in the Garden of Eden. However, when they committed the sin of the Golden Calf, Bnei Yisroel returned to the level of Adam after he was banished from the Garden for having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge. On Yom Kippur Bnei Yisroel received atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, and they should have gone into Eretz Yisroel, built the Beis Hamikdash, and once again attained that special closeness with Hashem. However, instead they committed the sin of the spies which resulted in the death of that entire generation.

Succos represents the time period when, after having received atonement on Yom Kippur, we enter the Garden of Eden, i.e. the Succah. This is the reason why the construct and decor of the Succah, as well as the four species which we are commanded to take in it are made to resemble a garden. Immediately after Yom Kippur we are preoccupied with building the Succah, displaying our desire to attain this elevated level of closeness with Hashem by joining him in the Garden of Eden.

The Midrash teaches that one of the characteristics of the Garden of Eden was that the bark of the fruit trees tasted of the fruit. Taking the branch of the palm tree to represent the taste of the dates is reflective of the notion that we are recreating our existence in the Garden of Eden. This is the reason for the custom to bless the lulav in a Succah. The lulav in the Garden of Eden has the required symbolism. © 2008 Rabbi Y. Zweig & Project Genesis, Inc.

