

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

One of the gifts of great leaders, and one from which each of us can learn, is that they frame reality for the group. They define its situation. They specify its aims. They articulate its choices. They tell us where we are and where we are going in a way no satellite navigation system could. They show us the map and the destination, and help us see why we should choose this route not that. That is one of their most magisterial roles, and no one did it more powerfully than did Moses in the book of Deuteronomy.

Here is how he does it at the beginning of this week's parsha: "See, I am setting before you today the blessing and the curse -- the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known." (Deut. 11:26-28)

Here, in even more powerful words, is how Moses puts it later in the book: "See, I set before you today life and the good, death and the bad... I call Heaven and Earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, so you and your children may live." (Deut. 30:15, 19)

What Moses is doing here is defining reality for the next generation and for all generations. He is doing so as a preface to what is about to follow in the next many chapters, namely a systematic restatement of Jewish law covering all aspects of life for the new nation in its land.

Moses does not want the people to lose the big picture by being overwhelmed by the details. Jewish law with its 613 commands is detailed. It aims at the sanctification of all aspects of life, from daily ritual to the

very structure of society and its institutions. Its aim is to shape a social world in which we turn even seemingly secular occasions into encounters with the Divine Presence. Despite the details, says Moses, the choice I set before you is really quite simple.

We, he tells the next generation, are unique. We are a small nation. We have not the numbers, the wealth, nor the sophisticated weaponry of the great empires. We are smaller even than many of our neighbouring nations. As of now we do not even have a land. But we are different, and that difference defines, once and for all, who we are and why. God has chosen to make us His stake in history. He set us free from slavery and took us as His own covenantal partner.

This is not because of our merits. "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land." (Deut. 9:5) We are not more righteous than others, said Moses. It is because our ancestors -- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah -- were the first people to heed the call of the one God and follow Him, worshipping not nature but the Creator of nature, not power but justice and compassion, not hierarchy but a society of equal dignity that includes within its ambit of concern the widow, the orphan and the stranger.

Do not think, says Moses, that we can survive as a nation among nations, worshipping what they worship and living as they live. If we do, we will be subject to the universal law that has governed the fate of nations from the dawn of civilisation to today. Nations are born, they grow, they flourish; they become complacent, then corrupt, then divided, then defeated, then they die, to be remembered only in history books and museums. In the case of Israel, small and intensely vulnerable, that fate will happen sooner rather than later. That is what Moses calls "the curse."

The alternative is simple -- even though it is demanding and detailed. It means taking God as our Sovereign, Judge of our deeds, Framer of our laws, Author of our liberty, Defender of our destiny, Object of our worship and our love. If we predicate our existence on something -- some One -- vastly greater than ourselves then we will be lifted higher than we could reach by ourselves. But that demands total loyalty to God and His law. That is the only way we will avoid decay, decline and defeat.

There is nothing puritanical about this vision. Two of the key words of Deuteronomy are love and joy.

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated in memory of
Rachel Menucha bat Tzivia, z"l
by Debra Markowitz & David Kaplan

The word "love" (the root a-h-v) appears twice in Exodus, twice in Leviticus, not all in Numbers, but 23 times in Deuteronomy. The word "joy" (with the root s-m-ch) appears only once in Genesis, once in Exodus, once in Leviticus, once in Numbers but twelve times in Deuteronomy. Moses does not hide the fact, though, that life under the covenant will be demanding. Neither love nor joy come on a social scale without codes of self-restraint and commitment to the common good.

Moses knows that people often think and act in short-term ways, preferring today's pleasure to tomorrow's happiness, personal advantage to the good of society as a whole. They do foolish things, individually and collectively. So throughout Devarim he insists time and again that the road to long-term flourishing -- the 'good,' the 'blessing,' life itself -- consists in making one simple choice: accept God as your Sovereign, do His will, and blessings will follow. If not, sooner or later you will be conquered and dispersed and you will suffer more than you can imagine. Thus Moses defined reality for the Israelites of his time and all time.

What has this to do with leadership? The answer is that the meaning of events is never self-evident. It is always subject to interpretation. Sometimes, out of folly or fear or failure of imagination, leaders get it wrong. Neville Chamberlain defined the challenge of the rise to power of Nazi Germany as the search for "peace in our time." It took a Churchill to realise that this was wrong, and that the real challenge was the defence of liberty against tyranny.

In Abraham Lincoln's day there were any number of people for and against slavery but it took Lincoln to define the abolition of slavery as the necessary step to the preservation of the union. It was that larger vision that allowed him to say, in the Second Inaugural, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds." (Second Inaugural Address, United States Capitol, March 4, 1865) He allowed neither abolition itself, nor the end of the Civil War, to be seen as a victory for one side over the other but instead defined it as a victory for the nation as a whole.

I explained in my book on religion and science, *The Great Partnership*, that there is a difference between the cause of something and its meaning. The search for causes is the task of explanation. The search for meaning is the work of interpretation. Science can explain but it cannot interpret. Were the Ten Plagues in Egypt a natural sequence of events, or Divine punishment, or both? There is no scientific experiment that could resolve this question. Was the division of the Red Sea a Divine intervention in history or a freak easterly wind exposing a submerged and ancient riverbank? Was the Exodus an act of Divine liberation or a series of lucky coincidences that allowed

a group of fugitive slaves to escape? When all the causal explanations have been given, the quality of miracle -- an epoch-changing event in which we see the hand of God -- remains. Culture is not nature. There are causes in nature, but only in culture are there meanings. Homo sapiens is uniquely the culture-creating, meaning-seeking animal, and this affects all we do.

Viktor Frankl used to emphasise that our lives are determined not by what happens to us but by how we respond to what happens to us -- and how we respond depends on how we interpret events. Is this disaster the end of my world or is it life calling on me to exercise heroic strength so that I can survive and help others to survive? The same circumstances may be interpreted differently by two people, leading one to despair, the other to heroic endurance. The facts may be the same but the meanings are diametrically different. How we interpret the world affects how we respond to the world, and it is our responses that shape our lives, individually and collectively. That is why, in the famous words of Max De Pree, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality." (*Leadership is an Art*, New York, Doubleday, 1989, p.11)

Within every family, every community, and every organisation, there are tests, trials and tribulations. Do these lead to arguments, blame and recrimination? Or does the group see them providentially, as a route to some future good (a "descent that leads to an ascent" as the Lubavitcher Rebbe always used to say)? Does it work together to meet the challenge? Much, perhaps all, will depend on how the group defines its reality. This in turn will depend on the leadership or absence of leadership that it has had until now. Strong families and communities have a clear sense of what their ideals are, and they are not blown off-course by the winds of change.

No one did this more powerfully than Moses in the way he monumentally framed the choice: between good and bad, life and death, the blessing and the curse, following God on the one hand, or choosing the values of neighbouring civilisations on the other. That clarity is why the Hittites, Canaanites, Perizzites and Jebusites are no more, while the people of Israel still lives, despite an unparalleled history of circumstantial change.

Who are we? Where are we? What are we trying to achieve and what kind of people do we aspire to be? These are the questions leaders help the group ask and answer, and when a group does so together it is blessed with exceptional resilience and strength. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"But the place which the Lord your God shall choose from among all of your tribes to place His Name there, for His dwelling place, shall you seek and shall you come there. And you shall bring there your whole burnt offerings and your sacrifices..." (Deut. 12:5-6).

Apparently, the Torah is here speaking of our Holy City of Jerusalem, because it appears in the context of Israel's entry into the Promised Land and the necessity to destroy the altars of idolatry before establishing our Temple to God. But why is Jerusalem not named?

The Bible has already identified Malki-Zedek as the King of Salem (Jeru-Salem the City of Peace) as far back as the period of Abraham (Gen. 14:18), and Mount Moriah had been designated as the place where the Almighty "would be seen" right after the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22:14). Moreover, the Bible has no hesitation in identifying places; witness the specific geographic description of Mount Gerizim and Mount Eyal (Deut. 11:29, 30). So why the reluctance to name Jerusalem in this particular context of the Bible?

Maimonides deals with this question in his great philosophic masterpiece, Guide for the Perplexed (part 3, chapter 45). He establishes the principle that Divine Service in the Temple was mainly directed against idolatry. Mount Moriah was the highest mountain in the region, so it was specifically chosen by God for the Holy Temple in order to attest to the superiority of God over all other idols! And this Divine intent had previously been revealed to Abraham, as we have seen. If so, why does Moses here hide the precise identity of the City of God?

Maimonides offers three reasons. First of all, he felt that publication of the name of the unique city would only incite the other nations to make war against Israel in order to acquire Jerusalem for themselves. Second, the other nations might even attempt to destroy the city – if only in order that the Israelites not acquire it. And finally, Moses feared lest all the tribes would fight over it, each desirous of having Jerusalem within its own borders!

I believe that in addition to Maimonides' prophetic insights, there is even further significance behind Moses' reluctance to reveal the precise name of the city. In the ancient world, every nation-state had its own god – whom the citizens believed lived within the boundaries of that nation-state. Jerusalem was to be the city which would house the Holy Temple of God – but God would exclusively dwell neither within the Temple nor within that city; God was the Lord of the entire universe, who could not be encompassed even by the heaven of the heavens, by the entire cosmos, so certainly not by a single structure or even a single city.

One of the most difficult messages Moses had to convey to his people was that God is not limited by physical dimensions. Yes, Maimonides sets down in his Mishneh Torah that the sanctity of Jerusalem is the sanctity of the Divine Presence (Shekhinah), and just as the Divine Presence is eternal and can never be destroyed, so the sanctity of Jerusalem is eternal and can never be made obsolete (Laws of the Chosen Temple, 6:14). The great Sage's point is that the Divine Presence can never be physically destroyed because the Divine Presence is not a physical entity, it is not in any way subject to creation or destruction.

There is one place in the world, teaches Moses, where God has consistently been recognized as the Creator of the world and foundation of ethical monotheism for all of humanity. One's name is not one's physical being, but one's name is the medium by which one is recognized and called upon. Malki-Zedek, ancient King of Jerusalem and identified with Shem the son of Noah, recognized God as the power who enabled Abraham to emerge victorious in his battle against the four despotic Kings and thereby rescue Lot from captivity; Abraham himself recognized God as the ultimate arbiter over life and death, the one to whom we must commit ourselves and our future, when he brought his beloved son Isaac to the akedah on Mount Moriah (Jerusalem). God's name is on Jerusalem; it is the city in which the God of ethical monotheism is to be recognized and served!

Finally, the name Jerusalem is not specifically mentioned because this recognition of God as the guardian of justice and compassion, lovingkindness and truth is necessary not only for the people of Jerusalem, not only for all the tribes of Israel, but rather for the entire world. When God initially elects Abraham, the Almighty charges him and his descendants with a universal mission: "Through you all the families of earth shall be blessed". (Gen. 12:3). The prophet Isaiah speaks of our vision of the end of the days, when the Holy Temple will rise from the top of the mountains, and all nations will rush to it to learn from our ways: "From Zion shall come forth Torah and the word of God from Jerusalem... so that nation shall not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn war anymore." (Isa. 2:3-4)

May the God who cannot be confined to any physical place reveal His teaching of peace and security from Jerusalem His City to every human being throughout the world. ©2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Stripping away all the details that oftentimes clutter our lives, we can agree that the type of life that we live is pretty much dependent upon the choices that we make throughout our lifetimes. Often, these

choices were made when we were yet young and immature. Nevertheless, we are forced to live by those choices and decisions, that we may now, with greater life experience under our belts, regret.

Personal choices, professional and career choices, lifestyle choices all combine to make up our individual life stories. This week's Torah reading highlights the importance and consequences of choices that we make. Many times, we make serious choices when we are not in a serious mood. Many important choices are made flippantly, on the spur of the moment, or under the influence of others. Peer pressure is a fact of life, especially for the young, and often, when we allow others to make choices for us, at the end they are very detrimental to our well-being.

It is simply peer pressure that causes young people to take on unhealthy life habits -- smoking is a prime example of this -- and once the habit is ingrained within us, it is very difficult to break, and escape from its consequences. Life inflicts upon us, on a daily basis, the necessity of making decisions. What choices we do make become the expression of gift of free will that the Lord has endowed us with. Choices are, therefore, the highest form of human opportunity, as well as being the most dangerous and perilous of all the human traits.

The Torah, in this week's reading, presents us with the most basic choice that we can make -- the stark choice between eternal life and death itself. At first glance, this choice is a relatively simple one to make. The life instinct within us, as human beings, is always present. However, we are witness to the fact that many times human beings make choices that are anti-life. There are many distractions that exist in this world, many illusory ideas and false prophets that somehow combine to dissuade us from choosing life. The Torah, therefore, encourages us and even warns us to choose life.

We acknowledge in our daily prayers that the Lord implanted within us an eternal soul which can sustain eternal life within us. We should not fritter away this most precious of gifts. Therefore, when we consider choices that exist before us regarding our behavior and attitudes, we should always judge the matter through the prism of a life and death choice. This makes even the most simple and apparent decisions that we make in life of great consequence and lasting importance.

In effect, there are no small choices, for they all have consequences and later effects that are unknown to us when we make the choice. Seeing these decisions that way may grant us life. It will enable us to choose wisely and carefully, and to allow our good instincts and fundamental human intelligence to control our emotions and desires and help us make correct life choices. ©2021 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

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Bal Tosif

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

It is forbidden to add onto the *mitzvot*. This includes extending a mitzva in time (such as adding an extra day to a holiday), increasing its quantity (such as adding a fifth species to one's *lulav*, or a fifth biblical text inside one's *tefillin*), or creating a new mitzva. An obvious question arises: how then could our Sages prohibit actions that were not prohibited by the Torah, such as eating chicken with milk?

Some answer that the prohibition of *Bal Tosif* applies only if those making an addition claim that it is a mitzva in the Torah. No one ever claimed that eating chicken with milk is biblically prohibited.

Others state that the law of *Bal Tosif* applies only to adding positive commandments. In contrast, our Sages were allowed to prohibit additional things. This answer, though, does not explain how the Sages were permitted to create the holidays of Purim and Chanukah.

An example of extending a mitzva in time is sitting in the *sukkah* on Shmini Atzeret, the day which follows Sukkot and on which there is no mitzva to sit in the *sukkah* (at least in Israel; it is more complicated in the Diaspora). Some *Rishonim* write that one may do so if he makes sure there is a *heker*, something unusual, to make it clear that he is not trying to fulfill a mitzva. Along the same lines, Rav Kook states that a *heker* was necessary for the rabbinically-added holidays, so no one could confuse them with biblical *mitzvot*. Thus, Purim is celebrated on different dates depending upon whether or not one lives in a walled city. There is no comparable rule for any other mitzva. And Chanukah lighting has different levels of observance – the minimal requirement, the enhanced level, and the extra-enhanced level. This too is unique.

Two types of additions do not constitute a problem of *Bal Tosif* according to most opinions. One type is adding in frequency. For example, performing the same mitzva numerous times a day is not prohibited. A second type is broadening the ranks of those who perform a mitzva. For example, a woman is allowed to perform a mitzva from which she is exempt. Nevertheless, there is an opinion that even these two types transgress the prohibition of *Bal Tosif*, if the person performing an extra mitzva mistakenly believes the Torah mandates it. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The first word in Parashat Re'eh, re'eh, is one of the most significant terms found in the Torah. In fact, God is described as a ro'eh (one who sees) on

three different levels.

The first time the word is found, the Torah states that after creating light or energy, God saw (va'yar) that it was good (Genesis 1:4). This is anthropomorphic. Still, as God saw, so do we have the power to see.

On a deeper level, re'eh means to see in the sense of empathizing with the other. Note the description just prior to the deluge in the time of Noah. There the Torah states, "and the Lord saw [va'yar] that the wickedness of humans was great on the earth" (Genesis 6:5). This could mean that God saw with a sense of feeling the horror that was unfolding – the wickedness of humankind that He had created. As God felt pain for humankind, so, too, should all of us, created in God's image, empathize with the other.

There is yet another understanding: re'eh may transcend sight, referring more broadly to vision; that is, the covenantal vision of a world redeemed. Indeed, after Abraham and Sarah have been chosen, the Torah states, "and the Lord appeared [va'yera] to Avram and said, 'To your seed I will give this land'" (Genesis 12:7). We, in turn, are asked to join in partnership with God to help realize the covenantal dream.

Re'eh as used in Parashat Re'eh seems to echo the covenantal approach. In fact, when God covenantally chooses Abraham, the Torah states, "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you" (Genesis 12:3). Similar language is used in our portion – "See [Re'eh], I have placed before you a blessing and a curse" (Deuteronomy 11:26).

And just as Abraham first built an altar to God in Shechem–Elon Moreh (Genesis 12:6) and, according to the Midrash, his rendezvous with God reaches a crescendo in Jerusalem (Bereishit Rabbah 39:16, interpreting Genesis 12:9), so Parashat Re'eh discusses how the blessing and curse will be put forth on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, which are in the area of Elon Moreh (Deuteronomy 11:29, 30). Not coincidentally, the portion proceeds to discuss our obligations once we enter the land and reach Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:1–19).

Thus, re'eh as covenant spans the Torah, moving from promise closer to fulfillment. ©2021 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd the curse; if you do not listen to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, and you veer from the path..." (Devarim 11:28) People often have the understanding of keeping Torah and Mitzvos as a reward and punishment scheme. Hashem wants you to do what He tells you. If you listen

and behave, then He will reward you. If you go against His will, He will punish you. Your whole life, then is built around trying to please someone because He is more powerful than you. This, however, is a misconception which leads to much sorrow.

The truth of the matter is that Hashem is the most generous and loving being in existence and His commandments have nothing to do with pleasing Him, but with pleasing US. You see, He created a world specifically for the purpose of helping us refine ourselves into good people and gave us tasks that would get us to that point. Because His essence is being good to others, He set up mechanisms in the universe for giving people benefit when they do the right thing. This also means that people who don't do the right thing may fail to trigger the reward mechanism.

The Ohr HaChaim explains that the curse is the very fact that one doesn't listen to Hashem. It's not a result of it, but rather not following Hashem because one has chosen to believe in other powers is, in and of itself, a curse which brings suffering upon a person. Going "off the derech" of Hashem, meaning that you are willing to follow false gods and powers, leads one to get lost on the road of life.

Imagine you were on a trip and the road sign directed you towards your destination. However, you decided that the other direction seemed like a nicer road. You might make your way down it surrounded by beautiful scenery and exciting roadside attractions, but you'd be going further and further afield. You would eventually wind up lost, not because of any malice, but because you chose to take a different direction.

Moshe told the Jews: I'm laying down two paths. One leads to a life of fulfillment, satisfaction and pleasure, in this world and the next. The other is a path that leads anywhere else. If you choose the path I'm telling you, you'll be happy. If not, you will find yourself cursed. Though you will blame it on Hashem, in truth, it was all your own doing, and you won't even realize it. That's why I'm placing it before you so clearly. The choice is yours, but know the consequences of that choice.

"I have a surprise for you," said the man's wife. "I made your mother's famous chocolate nut cake for dessert!" The man looked forward to the treat but after one bite he was sorely disappointed.

Noting his distaste, his wife bristled. "Well, if you don't like it, don't blame me," she said testily. "It's your mother's recipe."

He paused to choose his words carefully, then said, "Um... This doesn't taste like hers. Are you sure you didn't change anything?"

"Well," she answered brusquely, "I didn't have four egg whites, so I just used two whole eggs. And I don't like slivered almonds so I used peanuts.

And yes, instead of applesauce, I substituted stewed prunes which I think are healthier. But

otherwise, it's exactly your mother's recipe! If you don't like it blame her." ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Observance of the Mitzvot

In Parashat Re'ei, we find a warning given by Moshe concerning a false prophet. "If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream and he will give you a sign or a wonder. And the sign or the wonder comes about of which he spoke saying, 'let us follow the gods of others that you did not know and we shall serve them.' Do not listen to that navi (prophet) or to that dreamer of a dream because Hashem, your Elokim, is testing you to know whether you love Hashem with all your heart and with all your soul. Hashem, your Elokim, you shall follow, and Him you shall fear, His commandments you shall keep, and to His voice you shall listen, you shall serve Him, and to Him shall you cleave. And that prophet or that dreamer of a dream shall be put to death for he had spoken fabrication against Hashem your Elokim who takes you out of the land of Egypt and who redeems you from the house of bondage to make you stray from the path on which Hashem your Elokim has commanded you to go, and you shall destroy the evil from your midst."

The Me'am Lo'ez points out, there are six different statements that are made concerning our responsibilities towards Hashem: (1) teleichu, follow Him, (2) tira'u, fear Him, (3) tishmoru, keep His commandments, (4) tishma'u, listen to Him, (5) ta'avodu, serve Him, and (6) tid'bakun, cleave to Him. Whenever we find a collection of phrases such as this, our Rabbis will always look to the context of these phrases to give us the p'shat, the simple, straightforward explanation of the phrases in light of that context. The Rabbis will also seek out a deeper understanding in the form of d'rash. Since these ideas are all mentioned in other sections individually or in a smaller grouping, it is clear that, especially since these ideas are now grouped together as one unit, a deeper meaning to this pasuk is implied. The fact that this entire pasuk seems to be an interruption of the crime of the prophet who intends to lead the people astray, also lends itself to a deeper interpretation than the actual text itself.

S'forno does not see this pasuk as an interruption, but interprets each of the phrases in light of the surrounding p'sukim. He is presenting us with the p'shat. The S'forno comments that we should follow in the path of Hashem and not in the path of this navi or dreamer. Even though this navi is already an important figure in our community and highly respected, we should fear Hashem and not him; we should listen to this navi's voice only when he is saying to keep the command of Hashem, but not when he is leading us in a wrong direction; we should serve Hashem alone by performing His sacrifices but not the sacrifices of a

foreign god; and we should cleave to Hashem and not despise His commandments at the instruction of this false navi.

Rashi's chooses to comment on only four of the six commands, and he takes his comments from the Sifrei, an exegetical Midrashic commentary to Sefer D'varim that some attribute to Rabbi Akiva. Rashi's comments are also seen as contextually based and referring to commands to the B'nei Yisrael in contrast to the instructions given by this false prophet. Rashi comments that we should keep Hashem's commandments as found in the Torah of Moshe; we should listen to the voice of the nevi'im as found in Sefer Nevi'im; we should serve Hashem in His Temple as opposed to the houses of idol worship as instructed by this false prophet; and we should cleave to His ways by imitating Hashem, by performing acts of kindness, by burying the dead, and by visiting the sick. Though Rashi's words are more interpretive than S'forno's, we would still classify them more in the realm of p'shat.

The Ramban's comments are a cross between p'shat and d'rash. The Ramban explains that we should: follow the advice of Hashem or those who represent Him (a prophet); fear Hashem for it is He in Whose hand is every living thing, and He alone gives us life and can reward or punish us; keep His commandments, listen to Hashem's voice as commanded through the prophets; serve Hashem by studying His Torah, and serve Hashem in His Temple by performing the sacrifices as He has commanded; and cleave unto Hashem by remembering Hashem's love for us.

The Ohr HaChaim explains that each of these six commands is a reminder of the six different Orders of the Mishnah. Teileichu is the Seder Zera'im. This Order contains laws involved with the field and gifts to the poor. Included is the law of ma'aser or the tenth which is given to the Levi'im. One receives all of his food from Hashem and the Rambam explains that one should eat and drink in order to keep his body healthy in order to follow Hashem's mitzvot. Tira'u reminds us of Seder Mo'eid. This is reflected in the statement that Shabbat is an ot, a sign, and the holidays are also called otot, signs. The Or HaChaim explains that the Tikunei HaZohar tells us, "they fear Shabbat as one needs to fear their punishments." Tishmoru reminds us of Seder Nashim, since one must be very careful with all of the laws of women concerning Nidah and family purity. Tishma'u reminds us of Seder N'zikin, since one must listen carefully to the rulings of the judge concerning the payment of damages and other rulings of guilt and innocence. Ta'avodu deals with Seder Kodshim as this involves the laws of service in the Temple as well as of the various sacrifices. Tidbakun is a reminder of Seder Taharot. In this section we deal with the laws of purity and impurity all of which affect our ability to remain close to Hashem. When one is

impure, he is forbidden to enter the Temple Mount and sometimes even the entire camp of the society.

When one sees the variety of each of these different commentaries, it is clear why the study of Torah is such a fascinating experience. But the study of Torah is not only for that fascinating experience. It is much more for the observance of those mitzvot which are specifically described in the pasuk that was presented, namely to follow His commandments, to understand His actions and emulate them, and to cleave to Hashem. May our study of Torah each week help us to accomplish that purpose. ©2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

The Tell Tale Heart

There is a well-known anecdote related by Rav Moshe Leib Ehrlich, the Rebbe of Sassov. He once overheard the drunken conversation between 2 Russian peasants.

The first man told the second how much he loved him. The man replied that he couldn't truly love him. Once again, the first man confessed his true love of the second and was rebuffed.

"Ivan, we have been close friends for so many years. How can you say that I don't love you?"

His friend replied, "Alex, if you loved me, you would know what I need. That is true love".

The Sassover Rebbe said that from these two people he came to understand what true love of another entails. While he, the "Rebbe" claimed to love all Jews, in fact, it was Ivan the drunk, who truly grasped the deeper meaning of love.

Judaism obligates us to provide for what another needs. That requirement stretches beyond the material to encompass the needs in the emotional and spiritual realm.

This is fundamental in the Jewish philosophy of kindness and charity as related in Parshat Re'eh: כִּי־פִתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת־יָדְךָ לְלוֹ וְהֶעֱבַט תֵּעָבִיטֵנוּ. דִּי מַחְסֵרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסַר לּוֹ: "Rather, you shall open your hand to him, and you shall lend him sufficient for his needs, which he is lacking."

Most often, when people are lacking material needs, there is much more to the story. They also seek the warmth, concern, and reassurance from the one giving. What comes from the hand should originate in the heart. In fact, halacha dictates that even if one doesn't have what to give, he should, at the very least, offer the requestor a smile and kind word.

The Kli Yakar comments that many of the Torah commandments regarding charity are "doubled", e.g. "עֵשֶׂר תַּעֲשֶׂר" (you shall surely tithe), "פִּתַח תִּפְתַּח" (you should surely open) and, "וְהֶעֱבַט תֵּעָבִיטֵנוּ" (and you should surely lend). He explains that the doubling signifies actions that require the opening of the hand as well as the opening of the heart.

There is an inherent embarrassment in having to ask another for help. The petitioner might question his or her self-worth in not being able to provide for themselves and their families. Shame shadows them.

By giving someone a smile and/or encouraging word with the donation, you have not only filled their hand but their heart and soul as well.

Just as money of the hand will enter the hand, words of the heart will enter (and warm) the heart.

This week marks the 33rd Yahrzeit of my saintly father-in-law, Rav Dov Swerdloff, Z"l. While not materially wealthy, he was fabulously rich in Torah and good deeds.

In the spirit of the Kli Yakar, R' Dov always put his heart where his hand was.

One time he received an invitation to the engagement party of the child of a friend. The father of the girl was quiet and seemed bothered by something. While everyone else was rejoicing for the new couple, this man was concerned about he would be able to pay even the minimum of wedding expenses.

R' Dov saw and understood this. He knew what his friend truly needed at this time. He went over to the father, put his hand on his shoulder and said: "Mazel tov! Mazel tov! Just as we are here with you now, so too we will be with you for the wedding".

The father replied, "of course R' Dov. You and the rest of the friends will certainly be invited to the wedding!"

R' Dov repeated, "Just as we are here tonight, so too we will be with you for the wedding".

The words sunk in. The father would not need to worry about the burden of the wedding expenses. His demeanor immediately changed and his joy was felt by all for the remainder of the evening.

On the spot R' Dov Swerdloff decided to create a Hachnasat Kalla fund, to help this man and countless other needy families shoulder the burden of making weddings.

True to his word, Rav Dov was there, with other friends, to arrange the payment of the hall, photographer, and music on the night of the wedding.

We are surrounded by requests to help others. Our family, friends, neighbors and even strangers at some time turn to us in need.

Too often, we view such requests as someone putting out their hand to demand something from ours.

What opportunities! Our tradition teaches us that those in need are here in order to give us the privilege and merit to help them and thus fortify our own moral basis.

Let us ensure that we do it right.

כִּי־פִתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת־יָדְךָ teaches us that even before opening our hand, we should open our heart and discern what the other truly needs and how to best fulfill that request. *In loving memory of Rabbi Dov Swerdloff, Z"l* ©2021 Rabbi A.

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RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

TorahWeb

Among the fifty-five mitzvos found in Parshas Re'eh, the Sefer Hachinuch counts the mitzvah of tzedakah as containing both a negative and positive mitzvah. The restriction is not to harden one's heart in response to the request of the needy, and the positive mitzvah is to give tzedakah in accordance with one's ability.

It is fascinating to note that the Chinuch (#479) begins his discussion of the mitzvah of tzedakah by defining the mitzvah as to give "b'simcha u'v'tuv levav -- With happiness and a glad heart." It is understandable that the mitzvah of Vesamachta Bechagecha (#488, also found in this parsha) requires that one be in a happy and joyous state of being during the Shalosh Regalim. Why, however, does the Chinuch require the emotional element of simcha to accompany the mitzvah of tzedakah? He does not instruct us to affix a mezuzah nor to don one's tefillin b'simcha; what is special about this mitzvah that must be done b'simcha? I'd like to suggest two answers to this question.

The first answer is based on the Gemara (Bava Basra 10a) where Turnas Rufus asked R' Akiva, if Hashem loves the poor of Israel, why does He not provide for them Himself? R' Akiva answered that Hashem ordained the mitzvah of tzedakah to save the wealthy from "dino shel Gehinom", that they be rewarded and not punished in the world to come. Commenting on this Gemara, the Alter of Kelm taught that it is not the giving of the tzedakah per se that saves the donor, but rather the manner in which he gives, namely fulfilling that which the Torah prescribes "Lo yerah l'avivcha bisitcha lo" -- one is not to feel bad and resentful when giving tzedakah. It is, says the Alter, the attainment of "v'avavta l'reacha kamocha", feeling the plight of the other, i.e. not only giving him money but uplifting his spirit, which saves the donor from Gehinom. Therefore, he must give "b'simcha u'v'tuv levav", to attain the necessary emotional and uplifting manner in which the mitzvah is performed.

Our second answer is a lesson from Shemos (22:24) where the Torah teaches that we should lend money to, "es heani imach", which literally means "to the poor person who is with you."

According to the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh, the Torah is teaching the donor that what appears to be a magnanimous manifestation of generosity on his part, is, in reality, simply giving the poor and needy what is rightfully theirs. How so? Hashem orchestrates society such that (Devarim 15:11), "destitute people will not cease to exist within the land", and He blesses and endows others



with more than they need, thereby enabling them to give to the poor what is rightfully theirs. If one truly appreciates the privilege of being chosen to be a giver, then he will be in a state of simcha and tuv lev, recognizing that Hashem has blessed him with the privilege of doing His work.

It is so sad, and indeed tragic, that often when a meshulach or needy individual comes to someone's door, a parent might instruct his children "tell them I am not home." This behavior is doubly misfortunate. Firstly, the parent is teaching that it is okay to lie. Secondly, the foolish parents do not realize that they are missing out on a golden opportunity. What could have been a positive opportunity to assist and enrich, both monetarily and emotionally, an individual, as well as adding dividends to their life insurance for their soul, was not only wasted, but unfortunately there was a violation of mitzvah 488, that of hardening one's heart in response to the request of tzedakah.

In addition, Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuva 3:36) writes that it is possible for one to give charity to a needy individual, but if he does so in a cold and begrudging fashion, he has violated the prohibition of (15:7) "Lo sisametz es levavcha -- You shall not harden your heart." Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 249:3) legislates that one is to give tzedakah "b'sever panim yafos" and "b'simcha u'v'tuv levav." The Gr"a attributes the source for this to the Avos D'rabi Nosson (13:4), "Havei mikabel es kol ha'adam b'sever panim yafos", which teaches us that we are to be cheerful and respectful not only to our friends and all other individuals we meet, but especially to the indigent and downtrodden of society.

This Sunday is Rosh Chodesh Elul. There are many acronyms which charge us to appreciate this month. The Megaleh Amukos, Rav Nosson Shapira, who was the Av Beis Din in Crakow and a great mekubal, ascribed the following acronym to Elul: Echad Ladin V'echad L'tzedakah. The Gemara (Chagiga 14a) understands a verse in Daniel (7:9) to mean that there are two thrones in Heaven. The Gemara understands the two thrones to be Echad Ladin V'echad L'tzedakah, meaning one throne is for Hashem to execute justice and the other is for tzedakah. Many attribute the recitation of Tehillim 47 -- lam'natzeiach -- on Rosh Hashana prior to the blowing of the shofar to be based upon the verse contained therein, "alah Elokim b'truah", meaning Hashem has ascended with the blast. "Alah Elokim b'truah" is understood by Vayikrah Rabbah (29) to mean that the blowing of the shofar accompanied by the repentance of the Jewish nation causes Hashem to arise from The Throne of Judgement and ascend The Throne of Mercy. May we use this acronym to remind us of the great opportunity we have especially in the month of Elul to give tzedakah in a manner of b'simcha u'v'tuv levav and thereby merit to be judged by Hashem b'tzedakah. ©2021 Rabbi B. Yudin and TorahWeb.org