

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In parshat Mishpatim we witness one of the great stylistic features of the Torah, its transition from narrative to law. Until now the book of Exodus has been primarily narrative: the story of the enslavement of the Israelites and their journey to freedom. Now comes detailed legislation, the "constitution of liberty."

This is not accidental but essential. In Judaism, law grows out of the historical experience of the people. Egypt was the Jewish people's school of the soul; memory was its ongoing seminar in the art and craft of freedom. It taught them what it felt like to be on the wrong side of power. "You know what it feels like to be a stranger," says a resonant phrase in this week's parsha (23: 9). Jews were the people commanded never to forget the bitter taste of slavery so that they would never take freedom for granted. Those who do so, eventually lose it.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the opening of today's parsha. We have been reading about the Israelites' historic experience of slavery. So the social legislation of Mishpatim begins with slavery. What is fascinating is not only what it says but what it doesn't say.

It doesn't say: abolish slavery. Surely it should have done. Is that not the whole point of the story thus far? Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery. He, as the Egyptian viceroy Tzofenat Paneach, threatens them with slavery. Generations later, when a pharaoh arises who "knew not Joseph," the entire Israelite people become Egypt's slaves. Slavery, like vengeance, is a vicious circle that has no natural end. Why not, then, give it a supernatural end? Why did G-d not say: There shall be no more slavery?

The Torah has already given us an implicit answer. Change is possible in human nature but it takes time: time on a vast scale, centuries, even millennia. There is little doubt that in terms of the Torah's value system the exercise of power by one person over another, without their consent, is a fundamental assault against human dignity. This is not just true of the relationship between master and slave. It is even true, according to many classic Jewish commentators, of the relationship between king and subjects, rulers and ruled. According to the sages it is even true of the relationship between G-d and human beings. The

Talmud says that if G-d really did coerce the Jewish people to accept the Torah by "suspending the mountain over their heads" (Shabbat 88a) that would constitute an objection to the very terms of the covenant itself. We are G-d's avadim, servants, only because our ancestors freely chose to be (see Joshua 24, where Joshua offers the people freedom, if they so chose, to walk away from the covenant then and there).

So slavery is to be abolished, but it is a fundamental principle of G-d's relationship with us that he does not force us to change faster than we are able to do so of our own free will. So Mishpatim does not abolish slavery but it sets in motion a series of fundamental laws that will lead people, albeit at their own pace, to abolish it of their own accord. Here are the laws: "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything... But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life." (Ex. 21:2-6)

What is being done in these laws? First, a fundamental change is taking place in the nature of slavery. No longer is it a permanent status; it is a temporary condition. A Hebrew slave goes free after seven years. He or she knows this. Liberty awaits the slave not at the whim of the master but by divine command. When you know that within a fixed time you are going to be free, you may be a slave in body but in your own mind you are a free human being who has temporarily lost his or her liberty. That in itself is revolutionary.

This alone, though, was not enough. Six years are a long time. Hence the institution of Shabbat, ordained so that one day in seven a slave could breathe free air: no one could command him to work:

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your G-d. On it you shall not do any work, neither you... nor your male or female servant... so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your G-d brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. That is why the Lord your G-d has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." (Deut. 5:12-14)

But the Torah is acutely aware that not every slave wants liberty. This too emerges out of Israelite

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history. More than once in the wilderness the Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt. They say: "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost-also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic" (Num. 11: 5). As Rashi points out, the phrase "at no cost" [chinam] cannot be understood literally. They paid for it with their labour and their lives. "At no cost" means "free of mitzvot," of commands, obligations, duties. Freedom carries a highest price, namely, moral responsibility. Many people have shown what Erich Fromm called "fear of freedom." Rousseau spoke of "forcing people to be free"-a view that led in time to the reign of terror following the French revolution.

The Torah does not force people to be free but it does insist on a ritual of stigmatization. If a slave refuses to go free, his master "shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl." Rashi explains:

"Why was the ear chosen to be pierced rather than all the other limbs of the body? Said Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai:...The ear that heard on Mount Sinai: 'For to Me are the children of Israel servants' and he, nevertheless, went ahead and acquired a master for himself, should [have his ear] pierced! Rabbi Shimon expounded this verse in a beautiful manner: Why are the door and the doorpost different from other objects of the house? G-d, in effect, said: 'The door and doorpost were witnesses in Egypt when I passed over the lintel and the two doorposts, and I said: 'For to me are the children of Israel servants'-they are My servants, not servants of servants, and this person went ahead and acquired a master for himself, he shall [have his ear] pierced in their presence."

A slave may stay a slave but not without being reminded that this is not what G-d wants for His people. The result of these laws was to create a dynamic that would in the end lead to an abolition of slavery, at a time of free human choosing.

And so it happened. The Quakers, Methodists and Evangelicals, most famous among them William Wilberforce, who led the campaign in Britain to abolish the slave trade were driven by religious conviction, inspired not least by the biblical narrative of the Exodus, and by the challenge of Isaiah "to proclaim freedom for captives and for prisoners, release from darkness" (Is. 61:1).

Slavery was abolished in the United States only after a civil war, and there were those who cited the Bible in defence of slavery. As Abraham Lincoln put it in his second Inaugural: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same G-d, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just G-d's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged."

Yet slavery was abolished in the United States, not least because of the affirmation in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal," and are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights, among them "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Jefferson, who wrote those words, was himself a slave-owner. Yet such is the latent power of ideals that eventually people see that by insisting on their right to freedom and dignity while denying it to others, they are living a contradiction. That is when change takes place, and it takes time.

If history tells us anything it is that G-d has patience, though it is often sorely tried. He wanted slavery abolished but he wanted it to be done by free human beings coming to see of their own accord the evil it is and the evil it does. The G-d of history, who taught us to study history, had faith that eventually we would learn the lesson of history: that freedom is indivisible. We must grant freedom to others if we truly seek it for ourselves. re of no avail. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd He did not stretch out His hand against the aristocrats of the children of Israel; they gazed at G-d and they ate and they drank.” (Exodus 24:11) What is the best way to worship G-d? Does G-d prefer ascetic fasts and physical deprivation or celebration through food, wine, song and dance? Some difficult verses in this week's biblical portion give rise to this debate amongst the commentators.

The Israelites have experienced the revelation at Sinai, events then reach a climax with the sealing of the Covenant. "And (Moses) sent out the young men of the children of Israel and they offered whole burnt offerings and they sacrificed bulls to the Lord as peace offerings to G-d" (24:5).

Moses concludes the Covenant with all of the Israelites who cry out, "Whatever the Lord says we shall do and we shall internalize" ("na'aseh ve'nishma") (24: 7).

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu and the 70 elders begin to climb up Mount Sinai, "And they saw the Lord of Israel, and under His feet was the likeness of sapphire brickwork, like the essence of the heavens for purity. And He did not stretch out His hand

against the aristocrats of the children of Israel; and they gazed at G-d and they ate and they drank..." (24:10,11).

The greatest leaders of Israel, experienced a vision of the Heavenly realm surrounding the invisible Divine Being. They respond to this with celebrations: eating sacrificial meats and drinking wine libations. Rashi comments that these young men looked - perhaps to try to see the Divine form - and for this together with their vulgar and mundane behavior; eating and drinking at the height of an ethereal, spiritual experience, they were worthy of punishment, but G-d, in His infinite compassion did not harm them.

Perhaps, this episode was a precursor to the idolatrous worship of the Golden Calf, which took place only 40 days later. Then, the people "offered whole burnt offerings and they brought peace offerings. The people sat to eat and drink after which they rose up for an orgiastic celebration" (32: 6,7). From the beginning of this chapter, the emphasis is on "seeing", because in the absence of Moses' physical presence, the nation was desperately seeking a G-d they could see.

This is one of the rare instances in which Rashi's commentary departs from the interpretation of the Targum Onkelos, the authorized Aramaic translation of the Bible. Rashi criticizes these young men for eating and drinking at the height of their spiritual experience. The Targum, on the other hand, sees their celebrations as a worthy and noble reaction to the Divine acceptance of the sacrifices which occurred without mishap: "There was no harm done to the aristocrats of the children of Israel; they saw the glory of the Lord and they rejoiced in their animal offerings which were received with satisfaction by the Lord."

I would argue that Targum is closer to the straightforward reading of the text. Rashi is uncomfortable with the people trying to see G-d and then giving physical expression to their celebrations. For the Targum, so long as there is no physical representation of G-d whatsoever and since G-d showed no displeasure at the actions of these young men, what they did was perfectly in order.

G-d is pure spirit, but we human beings are not disembodied intellects or non-corporeal souls. Just as we were created with body, so must we celebrate G-d's gifts with our bodies. The worship of the Golden Calf was a very different story. Then, the Israelites became obsessed with experiencing a G-d that could be seen, and so they created a physical god, a molten calf. They not only ate and drank from their sacrificial offering; they rose up to orgiastic excess, hence they were then punished.

One final observation, it is relatively easy to worship G-d when fasting in synagogue; it is far harder to transform eating and drinking into a religious experience of thanksgiving to G-d. But I believe that this is the great contribution which Judaism makes to religious experience. We sanctify the body with the commandment of circumcision for men and mikveh for

women. We sanctify our Sabbath table with wine and bread as a replica of G-d's altar in the Holy Temple, which was replete with the showbread and the wine libation.

The real test of the truly religious personality is not whether they can deny the physical, but whether they can sanctify it. And so the Hassidim explain the Talmudic adage, "There is no kiddush, [sanctification of the wine], except in a place where an entire meal is eaten" not only to refer to the specific commandment to connect the Kiddush on Shabbat to a meal, but also as a message for life: If you want to gauge people's sanctity, don't examine them praying in the synagogue, look at them when they are eating at the table with their family and friends. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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A viable legal system is of necessity composed of two parts. One is the law itself, the rules that govern society and are enforced by the proper designated legal authorities. The other part of the legal system is the moral, transcendental value system that governs human and societal behavior generally. If the legalities and rules are the body-the corpus of the legal system, then the value system and moral imperatives that accompany those rules are the soul and spirit of that legal system.

In a general sense, we can say that the Written Law represents the body of the legal system while the accompanying Oral Law represents the soul and spirit of Jewish jurisprudence and Jewish societal life and its mores and behavior. The Written Law is interpreted and tempered by the Oral Law that accompanies it, and both of these systems are Divine in origin.

And, it is perfectly understandable how, for instance, "an eye for an eye" in Jewish law means the monetary value of the injury must be paid to the victim of that injury but not that the perpetrator's eye should also be put out as punishment for his behavior.

In the Talmud we have many examples of the overriding moral influence of the Oral Law when applied to the seemingly strict literal words of the Written Law. The rabbis of the Talmud taught us that there is even a third layer to Jewish law that governs those that wish to be considered righteous in the eyes of man and G-d and that is the concept of going beyond what the law-even the Oral Law-requires of us.

So, when studying this week's parsha of laws, rules and commandments we must always bear in mind the whole picture of Jewish jurisprudence in its many layers and not be blinded by adopting a purely literal stance on the subject matter being discussed by the Torah in the parsha.

Throughout the ages, the process of halachic decision-making has been subject to this ability to see

the forest and not just the trees, to deal with the actual people involved and not only with the books and precedents available concerning the issue at hand. Every issue is thus debated, argued over, buttressed and sometimes refuted by opposing or supporting sources. Independence of thought and creativity of solutions are the hallmarks of the history of rabbinic responsa on all halachic issues.

There are issues that are seemingly decided on the preponderance of soul and spirit over the pure letter of the law. There is the famous responsa of the great Rabbi Chaim Rabinowitz of Volozhin who allowed a woman, whose husband had disappeared, to remarry though the proof of her husband's death was not literally conclusive. He stated there that he made "an arrangement with my G-d" that permitted her to remarry.

This is but one example of many similar instances strewn throughout rabbinic responsa of the necessary components of spirit and soul that combine with literal precedents that always exist in order to arrive at correct interpretations of the holy and Divine books of law that govern Jewish life. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As the Jews stood at Mt. Sinai receiving the Torah, they "ate and drank." (Exodus 24:11) Isn't this inappropriate, especially when considering the holiness of the moment?

Rashi, in fact, maintains that the people acted improperly. It can be suggested that only because of divine mercy were the Jews spared a punishment. So, at the very moment of revelation, G-d manifests Himself as loving and forgiving.

Unlike Rashi, Targum insists the Jews did not literally eat and drink - for it would never enter their minds to do so at such a powerful time. Still, he suggests that the moment of revelation was so exalting, it was as if they ate and drank.

Although Rashi and Targum disagree as to whether the Jews actually ate or drank, both maintain that it is wrong to do so during a moment of deep spiritual experience.

Ramban sees it differently. He maintains that while the Jews did eat and drink, it was not inappropriate. They ate the peace offerings, and drank, making it "an occasion for rejoicing and festival...Such is one's duty to rejoice at the receiving of the Torah."

Here, Ramban offers a critical insight. While some insist that the pathway to spirituality is the suppression of the body, others maintain that the pathway to G-dliness is to sanctify the physical. In fact,

the very essence of halakhah is to take every moment of human existence and give it spiritual meaning.

For most faith communities, a moment of revelation could never involve eating and drinking. Ramban points out that for the Jewish people, physical enjoyment may not contradict Divine revelation. After all, the goal of Torah is to connect heaven and earth.

Once, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch decided to vacation. He was asked by his followers how he could indulge himself in such frivolity. Rabbi Hirsch responded that when, after death, he would come before G-d, G-d would ask him, "Shimshon, why didn't you see my Alps?" R. Hirsch said that he wanted to have what to answer. For Hirsch, the Alps are manifestations of G-d's creative power. Through an experience of pleasure, he was able to experience the Divine.

And at the moment of revelation, we are taught a similar message. Torah is not meant to separate us from the real world of physical needs and desires. Even eating and drinking can enhance the most holy of moments. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And these are the laws that you shall place before them" (Sh'mos 21:1). The Talmud (Kiddushin 35a) learns from this verse that although there are some laws that are gender specific (as, generally speaking, women are not required to fulfill positive commandments whose fulfillment is based on the onset of a specific time period), women are otherwise required to keep the Torah and its laws. Specifically, this verse is used as the source that the civil laws (the set of "laws" that Moshe was commanded to "set before them") apply equally to men and women. There is much discussion about how the verse teaches us this.

Rashi (Bava Kama 15a) says that the expression "before them" is all inclusive, and therefore teaches us that unless otherwise indicated, the laws of the Torah apply to women as well. Tosfos (in Bava Kama, as well as several other places in the Talmud) asks how "before them" can include women, if it is understood to be referring to judges (Gittin 88b), not the nation as a whole, and meant to exclude some from being eligible to judge. Although women are not excluded from judging based on this word, since there is a different source that excludes women from being a judge, how can a word that refers to judges teach us that women are included in the commandments?

There are two aspects to this question. First of all, if "them" refers to judges, and women can't be a judge, women can't be what is meant by, or included in, "them." Some (such as Tosfos in Bava Kama; see also Ritva on Kiddushin 35a) say that women can be judges, thereby removing this question. Another approach, found in many of the other places Tosfos discusses the issue, is that the word "before them" has a dual meaning, and refers to both the judges and to those who appear before the judges. Therefore, even if the "them" that refers to judges is exclusionary, and may not be able to refer to women (if women cannot be judges), the part of "them" that refers to the litigants can refer to women. Which brings us to the second issue; if the word "them" is, at any level, exclusionary, understood as "them, but not others," how can it be used to be inclusive, to teach us "all of them?"

Rashba (Bava Kama 15a) says that the expression "before them" really is inclusive, and can teach us that a category we might have otherwise excluded is included. When the Talmud uses the verse to exclude some from being judges, it is not based on the word "before them," but on the words "placed before them." Since "placing" implies having the authority to enforce the decisions reached, it must be referring to the judges themselves, as well as limiting the eligibility of a judge to those who can enforce whatever decision is reached. Nevertheless, it is still awkward for the word "before them" to be part of an expression that is exclusionary for one thing, while-at the same time-teaching us that a category that would have been excluded from something else, is included instead.

Ran (in his commentary on the Rif in Gittin) implies that the word "before them" does not need to be able to add a category that would have otherwise been excluded; it only verifies that additional categories are not being excluded. Therefore, since the starting point is that the Torah's laws apply to women as well, and "before them" only excludes some from being judges, we have no reason to exclude women. However, the Talmud asking how we know that women are included in these laws indicates that the starting point is not that they were included.

Maharam (Bava Kama 15a) suggests that since the basis for "them" to be referring to judges-the numerous verses in the section of the civil laws that mention judges-is not adjacent to the expression "before them" (the closest one, 21:6, is five verses away), both messages are being sent simultaneously; some are excluded from being judges while others are being included as potential litigants. Again, though, the same term being used to exclude some is being used to include others that would not have otherwise been included. Which one is it? Does "them" imply "all of them," or does it imply "these, but not those?" How can it be both?

Gan Raveh, based on Merya Dachya (B'raishis 3:4), suggests that the source for including women is

not the word "before them" (since that expression is exclusionary by nature), but the word "you shall place" (see Ritva on Kiddushin 35a). According to Hebrew grammar, the letter "tav" at the beginning of a word can be either feminine (when used in third-person form) or masculine (in second-person form). Therefore, the word "tasim" can mean either "you (a male) shall place," or "she (a female) shall place." Since it can be either masculine or feminine, both genders are included in the "mishpatim" (laws) that are being "placed." Divray Chanoch, a commentary on Gan Raveh, brings numerous other cases of words that begin with a "tav" and can therefore refer to both genders, and explains how it addresses a particular issue. For example, Adam was told not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, with the word "eat" starting with a "tav" ("to'chal"); it therefore meant that neither he (told to him in second-person) nor Chava (referring to her in third-person) could eat from it. (Merya Dachya uses this to explain how she was included in the prohibition that was told only to Adam.) Similarly, that women are obligated to tell over the story of the exodus at the Seder could be learned from the word "t'saper;" you (males) and she (females) must tell it over. However, Divray Chanoch brings a number of other examples that strongly indicate that the letter "tav" at the beginning of a word cannot be teaching us that both genders are being addressed. For example, since the verse regarding the mitzvah to eat matzoh uses the word "to'chal," there should be no reason for the Talmud (P'sachim 43b) to base a woman's obligation to eat matzoh on her being prohibited from eating chametz. Additionally, in the examples given, all of the "tav" words are addressed to the person/people included in the obligation or prohibition. In our verse, on the other hand, Moshe is being addressed, told to place these laws before them (whether the "them" is the nation or the judges); how can these laws be said to apply to both genders based on the form of the wording said to Moshe?

When Rashi told us that "everyone was included," he didn't say that "women were added." The implication is that it is the context of the verse that teaches us who is included, not extra words. Therefore, since the entire nation heard G-d speak at Mt. Sinai (not just the men), when G-d continues by telling Moshe what to teach "them," He must have meant "all of them," including the women. Rashi himself says that the first letter of the verse, the seemingly extra "vav," connects what follows it with what was taught at Sinai. Additionally, the Talmud actually has three proof-texts which teach us that women are included in the Torah's laws, one regarding prohibitions, one regarding civil law, and one regarding manslaughter. Two of them say explicitly that the laws described apply to both "man and woman;" only the source for civil law is ambiguous. There are several laws taught right before the civil laws (Sh'mos 20:20-23); based on the other two sources, these laws would apply to women even if the civil laws

did not. Therefore, without any modifier that specifically excludes women, the context of the previous verses indicates that the "them" the civil laws were presented to refers to the same people the previous commandments were addressed to. And since that included women, the civil laws must apply to them as well.

This might be the starting point implied in the Ran, that without a modifier the context indicates that women are also included. However, he also refers to the lack of the expression "speak to the Children of Israel," an expression used to introduce the laws taught immediately before the civil laws (20:19). When Tosfos distinguishes between the judges and the litigants, it is not as problematic if the word "them" excludes (from being judges) those who had not been included in the context in the first place (see Rabbeinu Avigdor, a Tosafist quoted in Kovaitz Shitas Kammai on Bava Kamma 15a, and Ritva on Kiddushin 35a). And since that context includes women (see Nimukay Yosef on Bava Kama and Mahari Bairav, Rav Yosef Kairo's rebbe, on Kiddushin 35a, baruch shekivanti), they are included in the civil laws as well. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Double Jeopardy

A true story, that I heard, [but will only repeat with the names changed,] casts a light that can be used to explain the seemingly extra phraseology. The sudden death of Velvel Mansberg, two months before Pesach, left his bereaved widow and four young children in a terrible state of despair. The community tried hard to help them put their lives together after their terrible ordeal.

During a trip to the shoe store a week before the Yom Tov, the salesman, who knew the sad situation, went to the back of the store. He came out with a very special treat. He slowly handed each child a large, helium-filled, Mylar balloon. He started with the youngest. "One for Tzippy, one for Dovi, one for Leah, one for Shimmi, and," he slowly said with a smile, "one for Mommy."

As the children were cherishing their shiny balloons, Leah began walking out of the store. She opened the door and confidently let go of her beautiful balloon. Both Mrs. Mansberg and the salesman watched in shock as the balloon floated skyward.

"Why did you do that?" snarled the insulted salesman. Trying to compose himself, he added, "You know, Leah, it is terribly wrong to throw away a gift- especially in front of the person who gave it!"

Five-year-old Leah ignored the salesman's protests as she watched the Mylar balloon float away. She waited until all that appeared was the image of a silver coin floating like a feather. With one eye focused on the clouds, she turned to her mother and stoically

explained her actions. With tears swelling in her eyes she explained, "Tatty didn't get one."

The Kotzker Rebbe once explained, "Every pain you cause an orphan is twofold. In addition to the taunt or callous remark, there is another hurt. The orphan thinks, "He would not have done that if my father was here to protect me!"

Images of a lost loved one never leave the widow or child. Every action embodies a remembrance of their parent or spouse. Sometimes it is hard to realize that their feelings are amplified by deep reflections. "What would Mommy have said?" "What if my husband was alive?" "I am sure that my Tatty would not have let this bully start with me!"

Those tragic memories die hard. When there is pain, the pain is doubled, and so is the cry. First there is the pain of the actual occurrence, then there is the pain of reflection; what would have or could have been." It is important to guard our tongues and watch for any words that may cause pain. Flippant remarks may cause agonizing ramifications. Surely then, it is more important to watch for words that may double the pain. For Hashem tells us, "... hear I shall hear the cry." And He hears that pain-twice. © 2011 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Parshas Sh'kalim, deals with the collection of funds for the Bais Hamikdash. Before King Yehoash's reign, the Bais Hamikdash was seriously neglected and much repair work was necessary to restore it to its original splendor. When the righteous King Yehoash came into power, he immediately instructed the kohanim to collect the necessary funds. After their unsuccessful attempt in achieving this goal he personally spearheaded the collection and received an overwhelming response.

The reason for this terrible neglect is explained in Divrei Hayomim (2:23) wherein the wicked Queen Atalya and her sons are blamed for the deteriorated condition of the Bais Hamikdash. The royal family severely mistreated the holiest structure in the world by carelessly roaming inside it, bringing much damage to its interior walls and structure. Although the Jewish people consistently donated funds to repair the Bais Hamikdash, the wicked sovereign repeatedly misappropriated them. Instead of using them for the Bais Hamikdash, she channeled them to further her idolatrous practices. After the pious Yehoash came to power, he removed idolatry from the royal family and faithfully applied the collected funds to their intended usage. After many years of neglect, the Bais Hamikdash was finally restored to its previous glory.

The pattern in this haftorah is reminiscent of the Jewish people's formative stages as a nation. This

week's maftir reading alludes to the Jewish people's comeback after abusing their financial resources, resulting in their most shameful plunge in history. (see Daas Z'kainim S'hmos 30:13). Moments before the Jewish people miraculously left Egypt, Hashem rewarded them with abundant wealth. Hashem effected a change of heart in the ruthless Egyptian slave drivers and they generously showered the Jewish people with gifts and wealth. However, the Jewish people did not properly appreciate Hashem's unbelievable favor and became influenced by their newly gained wealth and power. During very trying and desperate moments, their newly gained sense of control heavily influenced them. Instead of turning to Hashem for assistance, they applied their wealth and golden ornaments towards securing their own destiny and produced the Golden Calf. Hashem severely responded to this grave offense and the Jewish people sincerely repented to Hashem. Hashem then granted them opportunity to rectify their sin by inviting them to participate in the erection of the Mishkan. They learned their lesson well and generously applied their money to a most appropriate cause, the construction of Hashem's magnificent sanctuary. Hashem recognized their new approach to wealth and its potential good and deemed them worthy of His Divine Presence for the next thousand years.

The reading of Parshas Sh'kalim and its accompanying haftorah are a most befitting introduction to the month of Adar. We read in Megillas Esther (3:9), that the wicked Haman offered the king an impressive ten thousand silver blocks in attempt to purchase the Jewish people from the wicked King Achashveirosh. Haman intended to use his wealth to influence the king to grant him permission to destroy the entire Jewish nation. However, Chazal teach us that Haman's efforts were preempted by the the Jewish people's annual donation during the month of Adar to the Bais Hamikdash. By no coincidence, Hashem instructed the Jewish people to annually donate this exact sum- ten thousand silver blocks-to His treasury for sacrifices in the Bais Hamikdash. Hashem said, "Let the Jewish nation's sacrificial donation of ten thousand blocks preempt Haman's attempt to influence the king with his ten thousand blocks" (see Mesichta Megilla 13b).

The meaning of this seems to be that the Jewish people's annual donation demonstrated their proper understanding of wealth and its power. They allocated their wealth to the most worthy of causes and eagerly donated annually-without fail-ten thousand blocks of silver to Hashem and the Bais Hamikdash. This perfect approach to wealth and its positive values protected them from Haman's financial influence on the king. The Jewish people understood the true value of wealth and were not personally influenced by its potential ills. Therefore, they were not subject to Haman's financial influence and his powerful seductive approach to the king could not determine their fate. Eventually, the king would and did see through Haman's

madness for power and all Haman's power and financial influence were of no avail. ©2011 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Room for Compromise

“To the great men of the Bnei Yisrael He did not stretch out His hand. They gazed upon G-d and they ate and drank.”

"Hand" here means power or strength. The power that the pasuk speaks of is the strength to endure one of the most intense experiences known to Man.

We sometimes unconsciously make the mistake of thinking of the material world and its experiences as real, concrete and substantive. Spirituality, we think, is ethereal. We associate it with dreamy clouds. We see it as vapor-like and airy. In truth, however, an actual spiritual episode can be crushing and suffocating to a person not prepared to deal with its overwhelming power.

If a person is fortunate enough to be treated to authentic visions of Divinity, two consequences can follow along. The first is that HKBH grants him not only the experience, but a Divine influence that gives him clarity and understanding. Through it, he can decipher and process the encounter, not just experience it. He also gives the person the ability to withstand the power of that experience, which might otherwise overwhelm him. Instead, he is helped to become a vehicle for the Shechinah.

When a person endures such an episode, and gains the insight and enlightenment that flows from it, he feels incredible joy-the high of basking in the light of the King.

The "great people" of our pasuk, on the other hand, pushed beyond the limits set for them. They contemplated more than was appropriate for them, more than they were allowed to comprehend. Hashem therefore did not "stretch out His hand" to support them, or to give them the insight to comprehend what they beheld. Without that special support, they should have been grievously injured by the experience. In fact, they would have been, had it not been for the merit of that special day. They were nonetheless punished. Even though they experienced what they did, they did not emerge with great insight or enlightenment. They were not sated by the encounter, but were left with a spiritual void. There was still room within them to eat and drink, unlike others who experienced revelatory visions, whose thoughts would not and could not turn to mundane affairs like dining.

Alternatively, the effect of a strong dose of Divine presence upon an unprepared person can be devastating. It can even be fatal. In this case, HKBH did not want to spoil the joyousness of the occasion, and their punishment was suspended. The experience did

leave its mark, however. It weakened and exhausted them to the point that they required food and drink to restore their equilibrium.

In any event, they had to settle for snack food, rather than the unique spiritual experience that they had tried to achieve by pushing the envelope. (Based on the Ha'amek Davar, Shemos 24:11)

Divine Anagrams

"Ascend to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the tablets of stone and the Torah and the commandment..."

"Torah" here means the written text. So says the gemara (Berachos 5A). The Yerushalmi (Berachos 6:1) understands our pasuk similarly, creating an identity between the Torah text and mitzvos. (I.e. just as studying a Torah text requires a berachah before, so do mitzvos.)

The Torah referenced here cannot mean the text of the Torah as we have it today. That text was not completed until the end of the fortieth year after the Exodus. Rather, our pasuk speaks of the primordial Torah, which consisted entirely of different holy Names of HKBH (as explained by Ramban in his introduction to Chumash), and with which He created the world.

A gemara in Avodah Zarah (3b) describes Hashem's daily schedule, as it were. During the first three hours of the day, according to the gemara, He sits and involves Himself with Torah. The can understand this along the lines of our discussion. Each day, He creates the world anew. He does this in a similar manner to His original act of Creation. The world came into being through the use of His Names; its daily renewal involves the same use of Names, read from the Torah. This is His involvement with Torah.

The primordial Torah was in Moshe's possession from the time of Sinai. It was inscribed in its entirety on the luchos-both first and second. It would have read very differently from what we see in front of us. It took forty years for the ur-text to be expanded and recombined. This happened slowly, one parshah at a time, until the entire work was concluded with Moshe's death. (Based on Ha'amek Davar, Shemos 24:12)

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RABBI YAAKOV BERNSTEIN

Haaros

Hashem is the ultimate nistar (hidden one). He is so hidden that He disguises His very name. Not only is it very difficult to find His name, but He lends out His name, as well.

Your authorized signatory can sign in your stead, and you may have a difficult time in court denying your authorization. Still, the lawyer with a power of attorney has his own name-he just uses yours. Hashem has an authorized signatory, but the agent is referred to by Hashem's actual name! "I am sending you a

malach... be careful, listen to his voice and don't rebel against him-he will not forgive your iniquities, because My Name is 'in him'." (Shmos 23:20-21) The malach goes by Hashem's Name. We must listen to his voice because he is authorized to speak for Hashem. However, he cannot forgive because your disobedience is not directed against him. He is only the agent, but the commands are Hashem's.

Why does Hashem use an agent? Is this a way of distancing Himself from the people, or will they be empowered by such a strong force on their behalf?

Rashi (Shmos 23:20) explains that the news that Hashem was sending a malach was actually informing them that they would not be deserving of Hashem alone- they would have to make do with an agent. Ramban comments that, if so, this decree was not fulfilled in Moshe's lifetime. Moshe protested and was assured that the agent would not be necessary as long as Moshe lived (Shmos 33:15-16).

According to Ramban, however, the promise of the malach was something very special. This malach was the Shechina-the emissary of Hashem. Hashem's Presence would assure them of great success, and Moshe would not take this opportunity lightly. Although Moshe successfully protests the sending of a malach (33:15-16), this refers to a lesser agent. (HaRakanti in Ki Sisa)

Ramban and Rashi disagree regarding the meaning of the verse (Shmos 24:1) "To Moshe he said, 'Come up to Hashem-you, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and the seventy elders...' " Isn't Hashem speaking? Why doesn't it state, "Come up to Me?"

Rashi understands that the malach was speaking. (Sanhedrin 38b, also Rashbam [Shmos 24:1])

Ramban (Shmos 24:1), however, says that, on the contrary, Hashem was indeed speaking. Hashem told Moshe that he, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and the seventy elders were to go to the malach! Even though the verse states, "Come up to Hashem," it is referring to the malach of whom it is said, "My Name is with him." Hashem accompanies His malach, who is His personal emissary.

The malach is referred to by Hashem's Name because this indicates that Hashem is there, too. The Netziv explains that the king travels with his security unit. If the king wants to defend the honor of a friend, it isn't respectful for the king to brandish a weapon himself; he sends his personal bodyguard to do the job. Since the duty of the bodyguard is to serve the king personally, it is a great sign of distinction for the friend to be served by the king's agent.

See Sha'arei Aharon. Rashi and Ramban are in agreement that a distant agent would be disappointing and unwelcome. Certainly Hashem has many agents, but Klal Yisrael needs Hashem Himself to directly oversee His projects from an immediate proximity.

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