

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Having set out the broad principles of the covenant, Moses now turns to the details, which extend over many chapters and several parshiyot. The long review of the laws that will govern Israel in its land begin and end with Moses posing a momentous choice. Here is how he frames it in this week's parsha: See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a 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)

And here is how he puts it at the end: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil ... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live. (Deut. 30: 15, 19)

Maimonides takes these two passages as proof of our belief in freewill (Hilkhot Teshuvah 5: 3), which indeed they are. But they are more than that. They are also a political statement. The connection between individual freedom (which Maimonides is talking about) and collective choice (which Moses is talking about) is this: If humans are free then they need a free society within which to exercise that freedom. The book of Devarim represents the first attempt in history to create a free society.

Moses' vision is deeply political but in a unique way. It is not politics as the pursuit of power or the defence of interests or the preservation of class and caste. It is not politics as an expression of national glory and renown. There is no desire in Moses' words for fame, honour, expansion, empire. There is not a word of nationalism in the conventional sense. Moses does not tell the people that they are great. He tells them that they have been rebellious, they have sinned, and that their failure of faith during the episode of the spies cost them forty extra years of delay before entering the land. Moses would not have won an election. He was not that kind of leader.

**Please keep in mind
Mindel Esther bas Gittel
for a refuah shelaima**

Instead he summons the people to humility and responsibility. We are the nation, he says in effect, that has been chosen by God for a great experiment. Can we create a society that is not Egypt, not empire, not divided into rulers and ruled? Can we stay faithful to the more-than-human hand that has guided our destinies since I first stood before Pharaoh and asked for our freedom? For if we truly believe in God - not God as a philosophical abstraction but God in whose handwriting our history has been written, God to whom we pledged allegiance at Mount Sinai, God who is our only sovereign - then we can do great things.

Not great in conventional terms, but great in moral terms. For if all power, all wealth, all might belong to God, then none of these things can rightfully set us apart one from another. We are all equally precious in His sight. We have been charged by Him to feed the poor and bring the orphan and widow, the landless Levite and non-Israelite stranger, into our midst, sharing our celebrations and days of rest. We have been commanded to create a just society that honours human dignity and freedom.

Moses insists on three things. First we are free. The choice is ours. Blessing or curse? Good or evil? Faithfulness or faithlessness? You decide, says Moses. Never has freedom been so starkly defined, not just for an individual but for a nation as a whole. We do not find it hard to understand that as individuals we are confronted by moral choices. Adam and Eve were. So was Cain. Choice is written into the human condition.

But to be told this as a nation - this is something new. There is no defence, says Moses, in protestations of powerlessness, saying, We could not help it. We were outnumbered. We were defeated. It was the fault of our leaders or our enemies. No, says Moses, your fate is in your hands. The sovereignty of God does not take away human responsibility. To the contrary, it places it centre-stage. If you are faithful to God, says Moses, you will prevail over empires. If you are not, nothing else - not military strength nor political alliances - will help you.

If you betray your unique destiny, if you worship the gods of the surrounding nations, then you will become like them. You will suffer the fate of all small nations in an age of superpowers. Don't blame others or chance or ill-fortune for your defeat. The choice is yours; the responsibility is yours alone.

Second, we are collectively responsible. The phrase "All Israel are sureties for one another" is

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rabbinic but the idea is already present in the Torah. This too is radical. There is no "great man" theory of history in Judaism, nothing of what Carlyle called "heroes and hero-worship." The fate of Israel depends on the response of Israel, all Israel, from "the heads of your tribes, your elders and officers" to your "hewers of wood and drawers of water." This is the origin of the American phrase (which has no counterpart in the vocabulary of British politics), "We, the people."

Unlike all other nations in the ancient world and most today, the people of the covenant did not believe that their destiny was determined by kings, emperors, a royal court or a governing elite. It is determined by each of us as moral agents, conjointly responsible for the common good. This is what Michael Walzer means when in his recent book *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* he calls biblical Israel an "almost democracy."

Third, it is a God-centred politics. There was no word for this in the ancient world so Josephus had to coin one. He called it "theocracy." However, this word has been much abused and taken to mean what it does not, namely rule by clerics, priests. That is not what Israel was. Again an American phrase comes to mind. Israel was "one nation under God." If any single word does justice to the vision of Deuteronomy it is not theocracy but nomocracy, "the rule of laws, not men."

Biblical Israel is the first example in history of an attempt to create a free society. Not free in the modern sense of liberty of conscience. That concept was born in the seventeenth century in a Europe that had been scarred for a century by religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. Liberty of conscience is the attempt to solve the problem of how people with markedly different religious beliefs (all of them Christians, as it happened) can live peaceably with one another. That is not the problem to which biblical Israel is an answer.

Instead it was an answer to the question: how can freedom and responsibility be shared equally by all? How can limits be placed on the power of rulers to turn the mass of people into slaves - not necessarily literally slaves but as a labour force to be used to build monumental buildings or engage in empire-building wars? It was the great nineteenth century historian Lord Acton who rightly saw that freedom in this sense was born in biblical Israel: The government of the Israelites

was a Federation, held together by no political authority, but by the unity of race and faith, and founded, not on physical force, but on a voluntary covenant ... The throne was erected on a compact, and the king was deprived of the right of legislation among the people that recognised no lawgiver but God ... The inspired men who rose in unending succession to prophesy against the usurper and the tyrant, constantly proclaimed that the laws, which were divine, were paramount over sinful rulers ... Thus the example of the Hebrew nation laid down the parallel lines on which all freedom has been won.¹

It is a beautiful, powerful, challenging idea. If God is our only sovereign, then all human power is delegated, limited, subject to moral constraints. Jews were the first to believe that an entire nation could govern itself in freedom and equal dignity. This has nothing to do with political structures (monarchy, oligarchy, democracy - Jews have tried them all), and everything to do with collective moral responsibility.

Jews never quite achieved the vision, but never ceased to be inspired by it. Moses' words still challenge us today. God has given us freedom. Let us use it to create a just, generous, gracious society. God does not do it for us but He has taught us how it is done. As Moses said: the choice is ours. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Behold, I am placing before you this day both a blessing and a curse..." (Deuteronomy 11:26)

Despite the looming security issue facing our still-fledgling state, once again, thousands of Israelis of all ages have taken to the streets and are peacefully and passionately demonstrating for stabilization of basic food costs and energy supplies, for greater social justice within Israeli society and for more affordable housing for those with less financial resources.

Apparently, despite the meteoric economic success of our young "startup nation" and at the same time that an economic debacle has overtaken America and Western Europe - nevertheless, it is the glaring gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots" within our populace which is the crucial issue crying out to be rectified.

In a fascinating parallel vein, within the US the major political parties are at loggerheads before the upcoming presidential election as to how to extricate America from its economic doldrums. Would the majority best be served by expanding the responsibility of government to provide employment, housing and proper healthcare for all its citizens in a welfare socialist-state environment? On the other hand, ought

¹ Lord Acton, *Essays in the History of Liberty*, Indianapolis, Liberty Classics, 1985, 7-8

government merely provide maximal opportunity for individual citizens to create jobs and housing as an integral part of successful business expansion and to render optimal healthcare by encouraging the best scientific minds to enter the medical profession in a more free-wheeling capitalistic climate? The goal in both countries is the same; to enable its citizenry of all economic strata including the infirm, the handicapped and the "stranger," to enjoy "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as fully as possible.

The portion of Re'eh opens by presenting each Jew with a choice between a life of blessings or a life of curses, with the blessings to be rendered "this day" on Mount Gerizim and the curses on Mount Ebal.

The Bible continues to give commands, blessings and curses on "this self-same day" (Deut. 11:26-28), and we are told that "this day" marked the entrance of the Jews into Israel under Joshua (Deut. 27:11-12). It was a day of a third covenant, additional to the previous Covenant between the Pieces (Genesis 15) as well as to the previous covenant at Sinai. This third covenant (Deut. 29:11) occurred in the Arava (Deut. 1:1).

The Talmud (B.T. Sota 37B), mindful of the fact that this covenant is bound up with the entry of the Israelites into the Land of Canaan (henceforth Israel), refers to this as the Covenant of Responsibility or Co-Signership, (the Hebrew *arev* means co-signer, an obvious wordplay emanating from the place Arava, Arvot Moab) underscoring the fact that once the Israelites inhabit the Promised Land, we must each take responsibility for each other, for every sector within our population. And this means especially social justice for the weaker segments of our population, as the 12 curses on Mount Ebal testify, most notably "cursed is he who perverts justice for the strange (foreigner), orphan or widow" (Deut. 27:19).

The Bible expects society to respond to the needs of the indigent. Tithes were to be given to the Levites and the Priests-Kohanim - remember that they were the landless ministers of the Temple and teachers of Torah, so their gifts could be seen today as school tuition and synagogue dues. Every third and sixth year of the seven-year Sabbatical cycle each farmer had to give tithes for the poor. Farmers also had to leave over a spare portion of land to be tilled by the poor, who would reap their own harvest. Note that everyone gave the same percentage for the tithe, each individual (not a governmental agency) himself administered to whom to give his tithe, and the poor was given a piece of land to work - not a welfare hand-out for doing nothing. In a much later generation, Maimonides rules that the highest form of charity is giving an individual a job to prevent his penury (Mishne Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10,7).

All of this proves that the Bible is concerned - and the government of Israel must be concerned - for

every citizen's ability to have a suitable roof over their head and a healthy meal on their table.

This responsibly means that there is a necessity for breaking the monopolies of tycoons who also control media, for seeing to it that teachers and doctors are well paid for their services, for lowering costs of staple foods and gas, for restructuring unfair tax systems, for privatizing land sales and demanding that a certain percentage of apartments go to students and young families and for streamlining our bureaucracy.

What it does not mean is the creation of a socialist welfare state which dramatically failed under Communism (despite the slogans on behalf of social justice and even failed in our more benign form of the Kibbutz Movement). Hence I was very much taken aback last year by all the red flags predominantly displayed at the demonstrations - and even a hammer-and-sickle flag in the Haifa demonstrations. I would submit that the responsibility of the individual to help himself as fostered by capitalism with proper safeguards for the weaker segments of society has so far proved to be the most effective. © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's parsha the Torah continues with the theme that runs through the previous parshiyot of Dvarim, that we are always faced with stark choices in life - either blessings or curses, good or evil. The words of the Torah seemingly offer little option for middle ground on these basic issues of belief and behavior. Yet, we are all aware that the events in life are rarely, if ever, all or nothing, one hundred percent blessing or curse. In fact, Jewish tradition and teachings instruct us that hidden in tragedy there is always a glimmer of hope and goodness, and that all joy and happiness contains within it the taste of the bittersweet.

Jewish philosophy and theology has taught us that evil somehow has a place in God's good and benign world. We are faced with the problem of why the Torah addresses these matters without nuance, in such a harsh way which seemingly brooks no compromise, without a hint of a middle ground. After all, the Torah is not a debating society where one is forced to take an extreme uncompromising stand in order to focus the issue being discussed more sharply and definitively.

Many rabbinic scholars of previous generations have maintained that it is only in our imperfect, post Temple period that we are to search for good in evil and temper our joy with feelings of seriousness and even sadness. But in the ideal and idyllic world, where the Divine Spirit is a palpable entity, the choices are really stark and the divisions are 100 percent to zero.

Far be it from me to not accept the opinion of these great scholars of Israel. However I wish to interject a somewhat different thought into this matter. This parsha begins with the word re'eih - see. As all of us are well aware, there are stages in life that we can see well only with the aid of corrective lenses. Without that correction, we can easily make grave mistakes trying to read and see what appears before us.

If we have to read small print, such as looking up a number in the Jerusalem telephone directly - it is almost impossible without the aid of corrective lenses. Well, this situation is not limited to the physical world, of just our actual eyesight, but it applies equally to our spiritual world of Torah observance and personal morality.

Many times we think we are behaving righteously when we are in fact behaving badly because we are not seeing the matter correctly. We are not wearing our corrective lenses, with the benefit of halacha, history, good common sense and a Jewish value system that should govern our lives. Without this advantage, we see blessings and curses, good and evil, all blurry and undefined before our eyes.

The Torah wishes us to see clearly - to instinctively be able to recognize what is the blessing in our life and what is not. The Torah itself has been kind enough to provide us with the necessary corrective lenses to see clearly and accurately. These lenses consist of observance of Torah and its commandments and loyalty to Jewish values and traditions. © 2012 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

This week's portion - according to many commentators, including Rashi - makes it clear that God's words to the Jewish people were not all recorded in the ones found in the Torah. We are told in this parsha, "and you shall slaughter as I've commanded you" (Deuteronomy 12:21). One would expect the details of how to slaughter to be spelled out - after all God says "as I've commanded you." Yet, nowhere in the Torah are the specifics of how to ritually slaughter mentioned. It follows then that the details, as our text indicates, were spelled out by God, although they're not found anywhere in the Torah text.

This is not the only place where this phenomenon occurs. The Torah, for example, states "observe the Sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:12). Yet, the specifics of how to observe the Shabbat are not found in the Torah.

All this points to a divine aspect of the Torah that was given alongside the written text, this is known as the Torah she-be'al peh, the Oral Law. Additionally,

not only were many of God's words transmitted orally, but also the words of our sages were designated to be passed through the oral tradition.

This begs a fundamental question: Why was there a need to have an oral transmission - why wasn't it all written down? Several answers come to mind.

Ironically, transmission of ideas through the generations is more exact through the oral legacy. Once written, especially in ancient times when very few copies existed, it was easy for one scribe to tinker with texts and change them, whether purposefully or not. For this reason, many forms of contemporary law, are not written down.

Another possibility: Had everything been written down, it would have sent the message that rabbinic law is closed and that the process of interpretation had come to a halt. The oral transmission sent the message that rabbis in each generation, basing themselves on the earlier text and principles of developing the law, could continue to evaluate and contribute to an understanding in their own particular times.

One last thought. Had everything been written down, a rebbe, a teacher of Torah would have been unnecessary - after all, it's all in the book. The oral transmission made a rebbe, a living person who could teach and lead by example, indispensable. Ultimately, such personalities are necessary for Torah to be sustained.

In time, however, the Jewish community was no longer capable of remembering the oral dictates, and hence, we were left with no choice but to commit the oral law to writing. The challenge, even as we study the oral law from a written text, is to recognize why it was, at first, not put to paper - to remember the precision of the law, that it is ongoing, and it requires a rebbe, a living role model, to teach it. Through both avenues; through the oral and the written, the Torah of God remains dynamic and alive © 2008 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 SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Re'eh tells us that "no prophet may advocate idol worship no matter the circumstances. If he does he is considered a false prophet, even if he's able to perform miracles." (Deuteronomy 13:2-6) The obvious question is how can a false prophet have the ability to perform miracles?

Rabbi Akiva (in Talmud Sanhedrin 90a) contends that when the Torah speaks of this prophet performing miracles, the prophet was then a true one. Only later did he deflect to the wrong path. Once becoming a false prophet he is no longer able to perform miracles. As Rabbi Avi Weiss extracts, this answer underscores a critical concept in Judaism,

especially as the month of Elul, the thirty days of introspection before the High Holidays begin: notwithstanding one's achievement or spiritual level there is always the possibility of failing (i.e. false prophet), and an equal possibility of improvement (i.e. Teshuva (repentance) before Rosh Hashana)! While the Parsha depicts a prophet that has fallen from grace, rising to grace is just as viable. Just like the prophet, we are judged based on where we are now, and how much we've improved, not on where we once were. © 2012 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, reveals to us a secret dimension of this significant date. In fact, as we will discover, Rosh Chodesh possesses the potential of assuming a greater personality than ever seen before. Its heightened effect will be so powerful that it will be likened to the impact of one of our three Yomim Tovim.

The prophet opens the haftorah with a fiery message regarding the privilege of sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. Yeshaya declares in the name of Hashem, "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My foot stool. What home can you build for Me and what is an appropriate site for My Divine Presence?" The Radak explains that Hashem was rejecting the notion of His requiring an earthly abode wherein to reside. Even the span of the universe barely serves as a throne where upon Hashem rests, how much more so our small Bais Hamikdash. But the purpose of His earthly abode is in order for us to experience His Divine presence. And it is in this uplifting environment that we offer sacrifices to Hashem and commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

Yeshaya continues and expresses Hashem's view of the Jewish people's sacrifices at that time. Hashem says, "One who slaughters the ox is likened to smiting a man; he who sacrifices the sheep is akin to slashing a dog's neck; a meal offering is like swine's blood....(66:3) The Radak explains Hashem's disturbance and informs us of the attitude of those times. The people would heavily engage in sin and then appear in the Bais Hamikdash to offer their sacrificial atonement. However, this uplifting experience was short-lived and they would return home and revert to their sinful ways. Hashem responded and rejected their sacrifices because the main facet of the sacrifice was missing, the resolve to elevate oneself. From Hashem's perspective, a sacrifice without an accompanying commitment was nothing more than an act of slashing a useful animal.

The prophet continues and notes the stark contrast between the above mentioned and the humble and low spirited people. Hashem says, "But to this I gaze, to the humble and low spirited and to the one who trembles over My word." (66:2) These humble people

do not need the experience of the Bais Hamikdash. They sense the Divine Presence wherever they are and respond with proper reverence and humility. Unlike the first group who limits Hashem's presence to the walls of the Bais Hamikdash, the second views the earth as Hashem's footstool and reacts accordingly. In fact we were told earlier by Yeshaya that they are actually an abode for His presence as is stated, "So says Hashem, "I rest in the exalted and sanctified spheres and amongst the downtrodden and low spirited ones."(57:15)

In a certain sense we resemble the first group when relating to our Rosh Chodesh experience. Rosh Chodesh is a unique holiday because its entire festivity consists of a special Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. There are no specific acts of Mitzva related to Rosh Chodesh and there is no halachic restriction from productive activity. However, the first day of the month provides the opportunity for introspect. After our serious contemplation over the previous month's achievements we welcome the opportunity of a fresh start. We offer a sacrifice in atonement for the past and prepare ourselves for the challenges of the new month. Unfortunately this new opportunity is met with trepidation and is always accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and remorse. Because each Rosh Chodesh we realize how far we have strayed during the previous month and we look towards the next month to be an improvement over the past.

This is the limited status of our present Rosh Chodesh. However, as we will soon learn, a greater dimension of Rosh Chodesh was intended to be and will eventually become a reality. The Tur in Orach Chaim (417) quotes the Pirkei D'R'Eliezer which reveals that Rosh Chodesh was actually intended to be a full scale Yom Tov. The Tur quotes his brother R' Yehuda who explains that the three Yomim Tovim correspond to our three patriarchs and that the twelve days of Rosh Chodesh were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. This link reveals that each Rosh Chodesh truly has a unique aspect to itself and that one of the Biblical tribes' remarkable qualities is available to us each month. However, as the Tur explains, due to an unfortunate error of the Jewish people this opportunity has been, to a large degree, withheld from us.

But in the era of Mashiach this error will be rectified and the experience of Rosh Chodesh will actually reach its intended capacity. Yeshaya reflects upon this and says at the close of our haftorah, "And it will be that from month to month.... all will come and prostrate themselves before Hashem." (66:23) The Psikta Rabbsi (1:3) explains that in the days of Mashiach we will have the privilege of uniting with Hashem every Rosh Chodesh. All Jewish people will come to the Bais Hamikdash each month and experience His Divine Presence. During the illustrious era of Mashiach sin will no longer exist and Rosh Chodesh will be viewed exclusively as an opportunity for

elevation. Each month will provide us its respective quality and opportunity which we will celebrate through the Rosh Chodesh festivities. The sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh will reflect our great joy over being with Hashem and will no longer contain any aspect of remorse or sin. In those days, the experience of His Divine Presence in the Bais Hamikdash will be perpetuated throughout the month and the entire period will become one uplifting experience.

This, according to the Maharit Algazi is the meaning of our Mussaf section wherein we state, "When they would offer sacrifices of favor and goats as sin offerings.... May you establish a new altar in Zion.... and we will offer goats with favor." With these words we are acknowledging the fact that the goats which had previously served as sin offerings will now become expressions of elevation. Without the need to reflect upon our shortcomings of the previous month, Rosh Chodesh will be greeted with total happiness, and we will welcome with great joy the uplifting spiritual opportunity of each respective month. © 2012 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

*by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne*

This Shabbat we can already begin to feel the atmosphere of Teshuva, repentance, about which the Rambam wrote: "Repentance is a great thing in that it brings the people closer to the Shechina... The previous night this person was hated by the Holy One, Blessed be He... Today he clings to the Shechina." [Hilchot Teshuva 7:6-7]. What does clinging to the Shechina mean?

There is a hint of the meaning of this concept in this week's Torah portion. "Follow your G-d and fear Him, and observe His mitzvot... And cling to Him" [Devarim 13:5]. That is, after fulfilling the mitzvot there remains an obligation to cling to G-d. The sages commented, "Cling to His ways-be kind, bury the dead, and visit the sick, as did the Holy One, Blessed be He." [Rashi, Sotta 14]. The mitzvot are the specific actions that a man is obligated to perform, but beyond the mitzvot he is required to follow a straight path, since "G-d created mankind in a straight way" [Tanchuma Bereishit 7]. Here is what the Rambam writes:

"Do not say that repentance is only valid for sins which entail some real action, such as robbery, illicit sex, and theft. Just as a person is required to repent from such actions, so is he or she required to search for his own evil traits. He must repent from his feelings of anger, and enmity, from lightheartedness and from pursuit of wealth and honor, and from searching for forbidden foods. It is necessary to repent from all the sins, and these sins are more serious than those which involve direct action. When a man is deeply involved in

such matters it is very hard for him to stop." [Hilchot Teshuva 7:3].

In his introduction to Bereishit, the Natziv writes some important things about this matter. Bereishit is called "Sefer Hayashar"-it tells us the stories of our Patriarchs, who conducted themselves on a straight path, as Bilam said, "Let my death be the death of the straight ones" [Bamidbar 23:10]. We are told about the Almighty that "he is righteous and follows the upright path" [Devarim 32:4]. And we are told with respect to the people of the Second Temple, "They were righteous and pious, and they labored over the Torah, but they were not upright in their manner." They therefore suspected that anybody who was not just like them was a Tzeduki, and the result was that people were killed. "And this was the reason that the judgment was accepted by the people, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, is straight and will not tolerate such righteous people-only those who are honest and upright in their actions and not twisted, even if their actions are done in the name of heaven." [Natziv].

It is not sufficient to observe the mitzvot between man and G-d. It is also necessary to develop the proper deeds and to be upright, and in addition to act in this way in the social realm. Here is how the Rambam ends his book Moreh Nevuchim, which is involved exclusively in abstract matters: "A wise man should not show excess pride in his wisdom... let the proud one show pride in this: In being wise and knowing Me..." [Yirmiyahu 9:23]. The Rambam writes that the verse purposely does not then add what might have been expected, "for I am One G-d," or "I am not a physical body," but rather states, "for I am G-d, who performs kindness, justice, and charity in the land, for that is what I want-this is the declaration of G-d." [ibid]. The Rambam explains, "That is My goal, that you show examples of kindness, justice, and charity in the land in the way that I made clear in the Thirteen Traits. We are meant to emulate them, and this is the proper way for us to behave."

This then is the ultimate goal of mankind-to cling to G-d. "The holy path is based on the principle of comparison-a man's private behavior should be the same as that of G-d" [Mussar HaKodesh, 199]. © 2012 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“For there will always be needy in the midst of the land; therefore I am commanding you, saying, open, you shall open your hand, to your brother to your poor and to your needy in your land" (D'varim 15:11). Several commentators wonder why the word "saying" is included in this verse. Couldn't the same message have been sent by just saying (pardon the pun) "therefore I am commanding you to open your hand?" Isn't the word "saying" used to relate what a

communication was about when it is being introduced (i.e. "and G-d spoke to Moshe, saying"), to allow the communication to be shared with others? In this case, the word "saying" appears in the middle of Moshe's "communication," part of a speech that was given to the whole nation, thereby eliminating any need to include permission for it to be shared with others. What is this "saying" trying to convey?

Some (e.g. Mizrahi) think that this is the issue Rashi is addressing when he comments that Moshe "said" to them "I am giving you advice for your own benefit." Whether that means that there are two aspects to Moshe's words—the commandment to support the poor and the advice to do so (as Gur Aryeh suggests), or the "saying" refers to encouraging each other to fulfill this commandment (as B'er Ba'sadeh suggests), according to these commentators it was the seemingly extra "saying" that led Rashi to quote the Sifre's explanation of the verse. However, there is no indication in the Sifre itself that this is what was being addressed. Netziv understands the Sifre to be explaining how the reason given, that there will always be poor people, affects the mitzvah. After all, even if there would be periods of time when no one needed help, the mitzvah would still apply if and when the need arose again. The Sifre therefore explains that aside from the commandment to support the needy, Moshe advised that since there will always be needy, it is better to be the ones giving than to be the ones who need to be on the receiving end (see Malbim).

Toldos Adam does explain the Sifre in a way that addresses the seemingly extra "saying;" since giving charity, besides being incumbent on each individual, is also mandatory from a communal aspect, to the extent that collecting charity can be imposed on those who wouldn't otherwise give it, Moshe advised those doing the imposing that they should try to talk any reluctant individuals into giving rather than taking it by force. Gan Raveh quotes Sh'ar Bas Rabim in the name of the author of Seder HaDoros as combining this concept with B'er Ba'Sadeh's suggestion (that "saying" refers to telling others they should give) and the Talmud's statement (Bava Basra 9a) that the status of someone who gets others to give charity is greater than that of someone who gives the actual charity, with the extra word "saying" adding that not only should we give charity, but we should try to convince others to give charity. (Putting a discussion of what it means that it is greater to convince others to give than to actually give on the side for now, it is a great incentive to become a fundraiser, and to pledge matching funds—which encourages others to give as well.)

Although telling others to give charity is good advice, and convincing others to give charity too is a great thing, I think there might be a more straightforward way to explain the use of the word "saying" in this context. (That doesn't negate those thoughts on a "d'rash" level; I would like to suggest

something on a "p'shat" level.) Abarbanel, in his introduction to Sefer D'varim, writes that the bulk of Sefer D'varim is Moshe's own words. G-d may have told Moshe to speak to the nation and reiterate the laws and concepts he had already taught them, but the actual words were Moshe's, not G-d's that Moshe was repeating. After Moshe finished his final series of lectures, G-d told him to write them down and include them in the Torah. This is what is meant by "these are the words that Moshe spoke" (D'varim 1:1); they were literally Moshe's words, with G-d giving him a divine stamp of approval by asking to him include them—word for word—in the Torah.

When Moshe spoke to the nation about giving (and doing) charity, he used a double-wording, several times, to emphasize its importance. He told us to "open, you shall open" our hands to the needy (15:8), "lend, you shall lend" him money (ibid), and "give, you shall give" him charity (15:10). The implication of this double-wording is that we should keep our hand open/lend money/give charity continuously, not just once or twice. As Rashi puts it (15:8), we should open our hand "many times," i.e. as often as is necessary. Why must we give continuously? "For there will always be needy in the midst of the land;" since there will always be those in need, we have to "keep our hands open" all the time. I would suggest that this was what Moshe meant when he used the word "saying;" the reason I (Moshe) relayed the commandment to open your hand by "saying" (referring to his previous words) the double-wording of "open, you shall open your hand" is because the need to give will always be there. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

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“But this shall you not eat from among those that bring up their cud or have completely separated split hooves: the camel, the hare, and the hyrax, for they bring up their cud, but their hooves are not split—they are unclean to you; and the pig, for it has a split hoof, but not the cud— it is unclean to you" (14:7-8)

The Torah's listing of kosher and nonkosher animals, which seems somewhat technical, contains many lessons beyond the mere details of what we may and may not eat.

Rav Noach Weinberg, Rosh Yeshivah of Aish HaTorah, who was directly responsible for bringing tens of thousands back to Yiddishkeit and an exponentially larger number through his students, would point out (based on a Gemara in Chullin 60b) that there is proof that an all-knowing God wrote the Torah from the verses listing the animals that chew their cud but do not have split hooves, and the animal that has split hooves and does not chew its cud. Would a human put his

credibility on the line by predicting that at no point in the future would a single animal that is not on that list be found somewhere in the world? And indeed, some three millennia after the Torah was given, and with all the searching science has done for unknown species, not a single such animal has been found!

Aside from strengthening our faith, however, these verses also teach us a lesson in how to view, and relate to, other people. The point of the verses listing the animals that have only one kosher sign is to teach us that they are not kosher. It would seem appropriate, then, to list the sign that causes them to be nonkosher first. Yet we see that the Torah lists them as the camel, the rabbit, and the hyrax, which chew their cud but do not have split hooves, and the pig, which has split hooves, but does not chew its cud.

Why does the Torah list the kosher signs of these animals first if the non-existent signs are the only ones we really need in order to label these animals nonkosher?

A Midrash explains that the Torah is trying to teach us that even when something is not kosher, we should find a way to mention something praiseworthy about it first. Even something as treif as chazir (pig) deserves to have its positive trait pointed out.

If the Torah does so for nonkosher animals, how much more do we have to learn to have this consideration with regard to people?

Bosses, employees, children, students, coworkers, and neighbors will invariably have some negative traits. It might be our job, from time to time, to deliver a negative message.

This Midrash is teaching us that even when we have to deliver a negative message to others-to tell them that they are "nonkosher" in some way- we should always find a way to point out their positive attributes or qualities first. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

The Midrash Tanchuma cites the verse in our parashah (12:29), "When Hashem, your G-d, will cut down the nations where you come, to drive them away before you, and you drive them away and settle in their land," and comments: Rabbi Levi said: To what may this be compared? To a king who planted a vineyard on his property which had great cedar trees. The king cut down the cedar trees but left the thorny undergrowth. His servants and household members asked him, "Our master the king! The thorns which grab onto and tear our clothes you left, but you chopped down the cedar trees?!" He answered, "If I had removed the thorns, with what would I have hedged my vineyard? Rather, I did the right thing, and when the vineyard is established, I will burn the thorns."

The midrash continues: The Jewish People are Hashem's vineyard, as we read (Yeshayah 5:7), "The

vineyard of Hashem, Master of legions, is the House of Yisrael." When Hashem brought Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael, He cut down the cedars, as it says (Amos 2:9), "I destroyed the Emorite before them, whose height was like the height of cedars." However, He left some descendants of the Canaanites in the Land to ensure that the Jewish People kept the Torah, as it is written (Shoftim 3:1), "These are the nations that Hashem left remain, to test Yisrael through them." When the vineyard becomes established in its observance of Torah, then (as we read in Yeshayah 33:12), "Nations will be like burning-sites for lime, like cut thorns set aflame."

What is the midrash teaching? R' Avraham Meir Rosen z"l (Warsaw; 19th century) explains: When we are mature enough as a nation to remain dedicated to Torah without having the nations remind us of our obligations, then we will be free of their persecution. Until then, the nations of the world will continue to prick us like thorns surrounding a vineyard. (Be'ur Ha'amaramim)

"You are children to Hashem, your G-d..." (14:1) R' Shalom Noach Brazovsky z"l (the Slonimer Rebbe; died 2000) writes: If a Jew had any inkling of his own worth, he would not sin. In this vein, R' Avraham Weinberg z"l (1804-1884; the first Slonimer Rebbe) interpreted the verse (Mishlei 3:11), "Hashem's rebuke, my child, do not denigrate"-

Hashem's rebuke is, "You are My child." Therefore, do not denigrate yourself. Remember that you are a prince, and a prince is expected to behave in a certain way. Don't embarrass yourself. One who appreciates his own worth won't, so-to-speak, sell his birthright for a bowl of lentils.

R' Brazovsky continues: The legendary chassidic master, Reb Zusia, once heard an itinerant maggid / preacher deliver a fire-and-brimstone speech to a large group. When he finished, no one seemed to have been moved by his words. Then R' Zusia rose and said, "Dear brothers! Doesn't Hashem love you and care for you? How is it possible to transgress His will?" Immediately, heart-rending cries filled the synagogue.

Afterward, the maggid asked R' Zusia, "Didn't I portray in vivid detail the terrifying punishments of Gehinom? Why did that have no impact on them, while your words, which were not frightening at all, had an immediate effect on them?"

R' Zusia answered: "Your words had the effect of closing their hearts, scaring them until they could no longer feel. My words had the opposite effect."

The Gemara (Sotah 3a) says that a person doesn't sin unless a spirit of insanity comes over him. What this means, says R' Brazovsky, is that a person cannot sin unless he forgets who he is and how much he is worth. (Netivot Shalom: Kuntres B'chochmah Yivneh Bayit p.8) © 2012 S. Katz and torah.org