

Toras Aish



Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

A sequence of verses in this week's sedra gave rise to a beautiful Talmudic passage -- one that has found a place in the siddur. It is among the readings we say after the Evening Service on Saturday night as Shabbat comes to an end. Here is the text on which it is based: "For the Lord your G-d is G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G-d, who shows no favouritism and accepts no bribe. He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing." (Deut. 10:17-18)

The juxtaposition of the two verses -- the first about G-d's supremacy, the second about His care for the low and lonely -- could not be more striking. The Power of powers cares for the powerless. The infinitely great shows concern for the small. The Being at the heart of being listens to those at the margins: the orphan, the widow, the stranger, the poor, the outcast, the neglected. On this idea, the third century teacher Rabbi Yochanan built the following homily (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 31a): "Rabbi Yochanan said, Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility. This is written in the Torah, repeated in the Prophets, and stated a third time in the Writings. It is written in the Torah: 'For the Lord your G-d is G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G-d, who shows no favouritism and accepts no bribe.' Immediately afterwards it is written, 'He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.' It is repeated in the Prophets, as it says: 'So says the High and Exalted One, who lives for ever and whose name is Holy: I live in a high and holy place, but also with the contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.' It is stated a third time in the Writings: 'Sing to G-d, make music for His name, extol Him who rides the clouds -- G-d is His name -- and exult before Him.' Immediately afterwards it is written: 'Father of the fatherless and judge of widows, is G-d in His holy habitation.'"

It is this passage that found its way into the (Ashkenazi) service at the end of Shabbat. Its presence there is to remind that that, as the day of rest ends and we return to our weekday concerns, we should not be

so caught up in our own interests that we forget others less favourably situated. To care only for ourselves and those immediately dependant on us is not "the way of G-d".

One of the more unusual aspects of being a Chief Rabbi is that one comes to know people one otherwise might not. These were three moments that made a deep impression on me.

From time to time Elaine and I give dinner parties for people within, and also outside, the Jewish community. Usually, at the end, the guests thank the hosts. Only once, though, did a guest not only thank us but also asked to be allowed to go into the kitchen to thank those who had made and served the meal. It was a fine act of sensitivity. No less interesting was who it was who did so. It was John Major, a British Prime Minister. Greatness is humility.

The oldest synagogue in Britain is Bevis Marks, in the heart of the City of London. Built in 1701, it was the first purpose-built synagogue in London, created by the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who were the first to return to England (or practice their Judaism in public: some had been marranos) after Oliver Cromwell gave permission in 1656 for Jews to return after their expulsion by Edward I in 1290.

Modelled on the Great Synagogue in Amsterdam, it has stayed almost unchanged ever since. Only the addition of electric lights has marked the passing of time -- and even so, on special occasions, services are candle-lit as they were in those early days.

For the tercentenary service in 2001, Prince Charles came to the synagogue. There he met members of the community as well as leaders of Anglo-Jewry. What was impressive is that he spent as much time talking to the young men and women who were doing security duty as he did to the great and good of British Jewry. For security reasons, people volunteer to stand guard at communal events -- part of the work of one of our finest organizations, the Community Security Trust. Often, people walk past them, hardly noticing their presence. But Prince Charles did notice them, and made them feel as important as anyone else on that glittering occasion. Greatness is humility.

Sarah Levene (not her real name) died tragically young. She and her husband had been blessed by G-d with great success. They were wealthy; but they did not spend their money on themselves. They gave tzedakah on a massive scale -- within and beyond the Jewish community, in Britain, Israel and elsewhere.

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They were among the greatest philanthropists of our time.

When she died, among those who felt most bereaved were the waiters and waitresses of a well-known hotel in Israel where they often stayed. It transpired that she had come to know all of them -- where they came from, what their family situation was, the difficulties they were going through, the problems they faced. She remembered not only their names but also the names of their spouses and children. Whenever any of them needed help, she made sure it came, quietly, unobtrusively. It was a habit she had wherever she went.

After her death I discovered how she and her husband came to be married. He was older than she was, a friend of her parents. She had some weeks free in the summer before the start of the academic year, and Mr Levene (not his real name) gave her a holiday job. One evening after work they were about to join her parents for a meal. In the street they passed a beggar. Mr Levene, punctilious about the mitzvah of tzedakah, reached into his pocket and gave the man a coin. As they were walking on, Sarah asked him to lend her some money -- a fairly large sum, which she promised she would repay at the end of the week when he paid her wages.

He did so. She then ran back to the beggar and gave him the money. "Why did you do that?" he asked, "I had already given him some money". "What you gave him", she said, "was enough to help him for today but not enough to make a difference to his life."

At the end of the week, Mr Levene gave her her wages. She handed him back most of the money, to repay him for the sum he had lent her. "I will accept the money," he told her, "because I do not want to rob you of your mitzvah." But -- as he himself told me after her death, "It was then that I decided to ask her to marry me -- because her heart was bigger than mine."

Throughout their marriage they spent as much time and energy on giving their money to charitable causes as they did on earning it. They were responsible for many of the most outstanding educational, medical and environmental projects of our time. I have had the privilege of knowing other philanthropists -- but none who knew the names of the children of the waiters at the hotel where they stayed; none who cared more for those others hardly noticed or who gave help more

quietly, more effectively, more humanly. Greatness is humility.

This idea -- counter-intuitive, unexpected, life-changing -- is one of the great contributions of the Torah to Western civilization and it is set out in the words of our sedra, when Moses told the people about the "G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G-d" whose greatness lay not just in the fact that He was Creator of the universe and shaper of history, but that "He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing." Those who do this are the true men and women of G-d. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"For the Lord your G-d is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill... Give thanks to the Lord your G-d for the good land which He has given you"(Deuteronomy 8:7-10)

These verses comprise a paean of praise to the beauty, fruits and natural resources of the Land of Israel. In these four verses, the word eretz (land) is repeated seven times as a refrain and twice it is described and defined by the word tova (good).

This description of the Land of Israel takes the form of a poetic song, which is very different from a descriptive narrative. A narrative depends upon logic to make its point; a song is the product of profound emotion and heartfelt commitment.

The general Hebrew term for "inheritance" is yerusha. But there are two objects that the Bible designates as morasha (heritage): the Land of Israel (Exodus 6: 8) and the Torah of Israel (Deuteronomy 33:4).

The difference between yerusha and morasha is that a yerusha comes very easily, usually in the form of a bequest which the recipient may use however he wishes, even wasting it on useless or unnecessary acquisitions; a morasha is acquired by hard work and must be given as a precious heirloom to the next generation.

The word morasha is therefore in the causative (hiphil) tense - to "give over." A sum of money is a yerusha; a Sabbath candelabra or a kiddush cup is a morasha.

The root letters of both yerusha and morasha are the same (yod or vav, resh and shin) and when these same letters are written in a slightly different order, they spell out the word shir (song).

We have seen here how the Bible describes the Land of Israel as a song; the Bible also calls the Torah a song (Deuteronomy 32:44). Moreover, our Sages interpret the word morasha as if it were written me'orasa, a fiancée; both the song of Torah and the

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song of the Land of Israel are expressions of profound love and commitment.

Hence, the people of Israel seem to be wedded in eternal marriage to the land - and the land assumes an almost personal form, like the beloved bride of her husband, Israel. The Israelite people "comes" (biah) into the land and sends out his seed upon it.

The Bible even uses the phrase kidashtem - "And you shall sanctify the land [from the same root as kiddushin, engagement] on every fiftieth Jubilee year" (Leviticus 25:10).

The Land of Israel will relate and respond only to the people of Israel just as a loving wife and husband will only relate to one another. Hence, whereas the land always yielded its produce for Israel, during the 2,000 years of our exile the land refused to give its produce to those who came in her place. None were able to bring forth the luscious fruit from it. Indeed, this is what gave rise to the "Green Line": where Jews farmed the land, it was green and where the Arabs worked the land it was brown. And although our nation may have been separated from our land, we were never divorced from it. Israel the land remains our first love and eternal bride.

When the Jews worked the land in accordance with the dictates of the Torah, allowing it to lie fallow every seventh year, giving tithes to those who were landless and providing food for the teachers and ministers of the Holy Temple, the land responded in kind and produced abundantly for Israel. But when the Israelites neglected the sabbatical years and the tithes, the land gave itself over to our conquerors and became desolate, making up for all of the years when we did not leave it fallow in the sabbatical years (see Leviticus 26:34). Israel and the land have a mutual mandate to act with mutual respect and loving-kindness.

When I first came to Israel, I heard a radio interview with Ya'acov Hazan, one of the founders of Mapam (the United Workers Party) and the Shomer Hatzair kibbutzim. The interviewer knew that Hazan came from a very religious and anti-Zionist family, and therefore asked him the origin of his Zionism. Hazan explained that when he was about 10 years old, he fell ill with anemia, and his father was advised by doctors to apprentice him to a Lithuanian farmer in order to "strengthen his blood."

The young boy worked hard alongside the farmer. What amazed him was how the farmer constantly smiled while engaged in this backbreaking work.

When the youth asked him the source of his joy, he answered, "Don't you hear the music and the song of the land as it begins to yield its produce?" The young boy bent down and cupped his ear to the ground, but heard nothing at all. With a knowing smile, the peasant farmer explained, "You see, it's not your land. If it were, you too would hear the song and smile at the sound of the music."

At that moment, Hazan decided that as soon as he was old enough, he would go to his land and hear its song. The interview ended with the final words of 96-year-old Ya'acov Hazan: "I still work the land and I still hear its music." © 2013 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Ekev – the word itself and the parsha generally – stresses the cause and effect equation that governs all human and Jewish history. Blessings and sadder events are conditioned on previous human behavior, attitudes and actions. Life eventually teaches us that there is no free lunch. The rabbis stated it succinctly in Avot: "According to the effort and sacrifice, so too will be the reward."

There are really no shortcuts in life. All attempts to accommodate eternal Jewish practices and values to fit current fads and societal norms, have ended in abysmal failure. The road of Jewish history is littered with the remains of people and movements who looked to reform and improve Judaism and instead only succeeded in making it irrelevant to their followers.

The Torah emphasizes that Moshe brought the people closer to Heaven but he did not degrade heaven by dragging it down to the level of the people. The tragedy of much of American Jewry and of many secular Jews generally is not that Judaism was too hard and difficult – rather, it was rendered too easy and convenient and thus had no meaning in their lives and everyday existence.

Moshe in this week's parsha (as he does generally in the book of Dvarim) emphasizes the difficult times that the people endured in their forty years sojourn and travels in the desert of Sinai. And Moshe does not deign to promise them a rose garden in the Middle East upon their entry into and conquest of the Land of Israel. He warns them of the consequences of abandoning G-d and Torah. The G-d of Jewish and general world history is exacting and does not tolerate the easy path that leads to spiritual weakness and eventual physical destruction.

Rashi in this week's parsha comments that this message is particularly true regarding the "small" things in life that one easily crushes with one's akeiv – heel. It is the small thing that truly characterizes our personality and our relationships with others and with our Creator as well.

I have noticed that there is a trend in our current society that when eulogies are delivered they concentrate on the small things in life – on stories, anecdotes, memories and personal relationships – rather than on the public or commercial achievements of the deceased, no matter how impressive those achievements might have been.

It is the small things in life that engender within us likes and dislikes, feelings of affection and love and emotions of annoyance and frustration. So our Torah is one of myriad details and many small things. The G-d of the vast universe reveals Himself, so to speak, to us in the atom and the tiny mite. For upon reflection and analysis there are really no small things in life.

Everything that we do and say bears consequences for our personal and national future. It is this sense of almost cosmic influence exercised by every individual in one's everyday life that lies at the heart of Torah and Judaism. We build the world in our own lives' seemingly mundane behavior. © 2013 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

And I prostrated myself before G-d like the first time, forty days and forty nights" (D'varim 9:18). Based on Moshe telling the nation how long he had begged G-d not to destroy the nation despite their having worshipped the golden calf (see 9:26), Rashi reconstructs the timeline of Moshe's primary stays atop Mt. Sinai. Included in Rashi's timeline is that at the end of the third set of 40 days/nights G-d told Moshe "I have forgiven [them], as you have spoken." This timeline, including G-d's words to Moshe, seems to be based on the Midrash Tanchuma (Ki Sisa 31), but are more likely based on his version of Seder Olam (6; see R' Chaim Paltiel on Bamidbar 14:20). Numerous commentators ask how these words ("sulachti kid'varecha") could be quoted as having been said after the sin of the golden calf if they weren't said then, but after the sin of the spies (Bamidbar 14:20).

Rashash, commenting on Sh'mos Rabbah (51:4) also using G-d's response after the spies as if He said them after the golden calf, quotes several other instances where Midrashim and Rishonim do the same thing, as well as referencing it being presented that way in the Yom Kippur liturgy. Obviously, quoting G-d's words of forgiveness after the sin of the spies as if they were said after the sin of the golden calf is not an isolated incident, but seems to be the norm. The question is why (and how it could be done if it's really a misquote).

Rabbeinu Bachye (Bamidbar 14:17) mentions that Chazal understood G-d's response of "sulachti kid'varecha" as having been said regarding the sin of the golden calf, and explains G-d's response after the spies as "I have already forgiven them for the golden calf, as you (Moshe) asked of Me, but I cannot do so for the sin of the spies." If this is what G-d was saying, then the words "I have forgiven them as you have spoken"

does in fact refer to the sin of the golden calf. However, although this could explain the way Chazal position things in some places (such as the end of chapter 46 of Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer), it cannot be used to explain all of the times that these words are said to be about the sin of the golden calf. For example, Rashi (quoting the way Chazal say it) says that on that day (Yom Kippur) G-d said "sulachti kid'varecha," meaning it was said on Yom Kippur itself, not months later referring to what had been said on Yom Kippur. Nevertheless, there are several commentators who either give or quote this answer to explain Rashi.

Tosfos Shantz (Bava Kama 82a, quoted in Shita M'kubetzes) brings two approaches to explain Seder Olam using "sulachti kid'varecha" as if it was said after the sin of the golden calf, with the first being the same as Rabbeinu Bachye's approach. The second (which is also given by several of the Tosafists on Bamidbar 14:20) has Moshe saying the words "sulachti kid'varecha," quoting what G-d had said after the golden calf. According to this, the verses in Bamidbar (14:19-20) would read: "please forgive the sin of this nation as is consistent with the greatness of Your kindness, and as You have carried this nation (despite their missteps) from Egypt until this point by Your saying (after their previous missteps, including the golden calf) 'sulachti kid'varecha.'" G-d's response would then start with His saying (14:21-23) that even so, this generation cannot see the Promised Land. Although this does allow the words "sulachti kid'varecha" to have been said (by G-d) after the golden calf, the verses do not flow well. First of all, the switch from Moshe's prayer to G-d's answer would occur without any indication that it is a different speaker (whereas the straightforward reading has G-d's response starting after "and G-d said," as it normally would). Not only is there no indication that the speaker changed from verse 20 to verse 21, but the normal indication of such a change (which is now still Moshe speaking) is in verse 20! Even if there are times when biblical verses switch speakers without warning (Tosfos Shantz references Yirmiyahu 26:20), if there was a "false indicator" of such a switch in the previous verse, wouldn't the text to clarify where the switch is actually taking place? Additionally, Moshe had just addressed G-d in the second person ("Your kindness," You have carried"); if he was still talking to G-d, why would he all of a sudden switch to the third person ("and G-d said")? It is therefore very difficult to say that "sulachti kid'varecha" was said by Moshe, quoting what G-d had said after the golden calf.

Some of these Tosafists add another possibility, that G-d was saying He had, in the past, forgiven them ("sulachti") just as Moshe was asking Him to do again now ("kid'varecha"), but He couldn't grant them the same level of forgiveness this time. Based on this, G-d had said "sulachti" after the golden calf. However, the word "kid'varecha" would still first be

said after the spies, even though it's included in what Rashi quotes G-d having said after the golden calf.

Chizkuni (see also Zichron Moshe) takes a completely different approach, suggesting that the words "sulachti kid'varecha" are not a direct quote, but a paraphrase, catchwords based on what G-d said after the sin of the spies whose concept applies to what happened after the sin of the golden calf as well. In both cases, the nation sinned, G-d got angry enough to wipe them out, and Moshe's intervention saved them. Therefore, the expression "I have forgiven, as you have spoken" applies to both, even if those words were only actually spoken after the sin of the spies. (Taz says they were actually said by both, even though the Torah only recorded it by the spies.) Although Chizkuni only says that it is Rashi who is paraphrasing the words G-d said after the golden calf by using the words said after the spies, since this "paraphrase" is so widespread, it would apparently be an already established paraphrase that Rashi is just quoting. Although this seems to be the most acceptable of the approaches I have come across, by taking a closer look at how prophecy may work we may be able to expand the concept a bit further.

Every communication between two beings can be broken down into two parts, the message itself and the medium through which the message is communicated. (The message is affected by other things as well, such as the perception of the one receiving it, but I am going to focus on just these two aspects.) This is true from a technical standpoint as well as from a conceptual standpoint, although they work in opposite ways. For example, if you are reading this on a computer screen, these words started as words typed into MS Works on a Windows XP based netbook, which were saved as a file made up of ones and zeros, and then sent electronically (with many "way stations" in-between) to your computer -- which could be any make or model, which is using any of a myriad of software programs to reassemble the ones and zeros back into words. We've gone from words to bytes and back to words, with an extreme likelihood that there was a faithful reproduction. On the other hand, what those words are trying to convey has gone (or is in the process of going, as I write this) from a concept in my mind into words that are being read by you, that I hope will faithfully recreate the concept in your mind. How successful I am is dependent on many things, none the least of which is my deficient writing skills (which I hope to improve). Rather than the starting and ending point being words with technology transmitting the words from one place to the other, the concept is the starting point and the words are the conduit through which I am hoping to transmit my thoughts to you.

When it comes to prophecy, is the means of communication between the divine and the mortal merely words? Does G-d speak using human language, or does he "upload" the concept He is trying to convey

in a different way. Obviously I can't speak from personal experience (that's my story and I'm sticking to it), but prophecy seems to be conveyed through "visions," scenes in the prophet's mind that may include words, but whose message is conveyed through the entire experience. Moshe is described as the "father of all prophets," who had extreme clarity for his "visions" ("aspaqlarya ha'me'ira") and was able to experience his prophecy while awake and in full control of his faculties. It would seem that his prophecy was more like a "download" from G-d, where the "ones and zeros" were kept intact (a Vulcan mind-meld?), with the trick being to reconstruct things in a way that enabled the concepts to be explained to others. This might be what is meant that everything in the Torah, even the Oral Law, was taught to Moshe at Sinai. Not that G-d told Moshe every conversation between Abaye and Rava (et al), but that the concept of every mitzvah was transferred so fully into Moshe's mind that every aspect brought out throughout history was included in Moshe's "download."

Allow me to give a concrete example. After Aharon's sons died when they "brought a strange fire before G-d," Moshe told his brother "this is what G-d spoke, saying 'through my close ones I will be sanctified and upon the face of the entire nation will I be honored'" (Vayikra 10:3). "Where did G-d speak thus? 'And I will meet there for the Children of Israel and I will be sanctified through my honor'" (Rashi, referencing Sh'mos 29:43). Those don't seem to be the same words, do they? Yet the "words" G-d "spoke" as related in Vayikra are presented as if they are the same "words" G-d "spoke" in Sh'mos. It would seem that Moshe is not referring to literal words that G-d spoke, but to a concept that was relayed, one that was initially told to others via the words that appear in Sh'mos but were later transmitted via different words in Vayikra. Both accurately conveyed a facet of what G-d had communicated to Moshe, but neither could transmit the whole picture. Moshe was telling Aharon that when G-d had communicated with him, a communication that was put into one set of words initially, included in that same communication, that same "download," was the meaning conveyed by the words Moshe used after the death of Aharon's sons. The bottom line is that G-d's communication with Moshe was not through words; it was his communication with us that uses words.

After Moshe pleaded with G-d not to destroy the nation and G-d forgave them, how is that "forgiveness" communicated to us? After the golden calf, the words used by the Torah are "behold I (G-d) am executing a covenant, before your entire nation I will perform wonders that have not been created in all the land and in all the peoples, and the entire nation that you (Moshe) are amongst will see the action of G-d, for it is awesome, that which I (G-d) do with you" (Sh'mos 34:10). After the sin of the spies, the words used by the Torah are "I (G-d) have forgiven, as you (Moshe) have spoken" (Bamidbar 14:20). The concept is the same,

G-d forgiving the sins of the nation because of Moshe's intervention, even if the words are different. If G-d never used actual words to communicate this concept in the first place, does it matter which version of the words used to describe the same concept is quoted? The Torah may have used the words "sulachti kid'varecha" only after the spies, but the concept G-d conveyed to Moshe was the same as had been conveyed after the golden calf. Therefore, when referencing the forgiveness attained through Moshe's intervention, the words used are the ones that are much more succinct.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As a child I attended Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. Every day when coming to morning services I was mesmerized by an older man named Rabbi Chaim Gelb. I can still remember Reb Chaim calling out "Amen." Sometimes he'd give me a candy and ask me to recite a blessing so that he could mightily respond "Amen."

At Yeshiva University rabbinical school years later, I was deeply influenced by the saintly Rav Dovid Lifschitz. I can still remember Rav Dovid on Simchat Torah surrounded by his students leading us in the niggun "ve-taher libeynu"- words in which we call out to G-d to purify our hearts. It seemed to me whenever Rav Dovid would pray it would be in the spirit of that niggun.

This week's portion offers a halakhic base that enhances the meaning of both of these stories. The torah states "u'le-avdo bekhhol levavkhem." "And you shall serve G-d with all your heart." (Deuteronomy 11:13) Maimonides concludes that this is the source of prayer. U'leavdoh means that every day we are obligated in prayer.

It would seem that Rambam believes that prayer is a religious obligation. I may not feel like praying-still there is a religious imperative to serve G-d daily.

This was my sense of Reb Chaim Gelb's prayer. Standing before G-d he would call out "Amen." One could sense the great joy he felt in fulfilling the mitzvah of prayer.

There may be another way to understand Maimonides. Without G-d many people feel a deep sense of loneliness. For these individuals, life has no meaning if G-d is absent. Like a lover who constantly longs for his beloved, so does one feel constant despair without G-d. From this perspective, one prays daily as one is in constant search of the Lord without whom life is impersonal, void and empty.

This latter approach to Rambam fundamentally differs with the first. In the first, the desire to pray does not emanate from the petitioner but from G-d. We, therefore, have an obligation, whether we feel it or not, to serve G-d daily. In the second approach the need to

pray comes from the petitioner as an expression of constant angst if G-d is not present.

This was the feeling behind the fervent prayer of Rav Dovid Lifschitz. In his heartfelt "ve-taher" I sensed a tzaddik who felt ongoing emotional spiritual pain if he was not in rendezvous with G-d. Like a fish seeking water, Rav Dovid sought the ongoing presence of G-d.

My father-in-law, Zalman Aryeh Hilsenrad, was a deeply devout Jew. He named his first book (a compilation of articles he wrote for the Jewish Press) "Tzam'ah Nafshi, My Soul Thirsts." Years later he penned a second volume. He called it "My Soul Thirsts Still," nothing less than our second approach to Rambam.

The challenge is to realize that during prayer both approaches are necessary. Solely praying to G-d without listening to our souls minimizes our individual worth. At the same time, expressing only our individual needs to G-d is selfish. May we be blessed to find the balance of listening to G-d and listening to ourselves.

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah continues the theme of comfort and presents the strong feelings of the Jewish people in exile. The prophet Yeshaya captures their concern and presents their deeply sensed feeling of rejection. Yeshaya quotes, "And Zion said Hashem has forsaken and forgotten Me." (49:14) The long, dark years of exile have caused the Jewish people to sincerely believe that Hashem has abandoned them never to return. There are no indications of redemption in the air and the rapid spiritual decline of the times certainly does not reflect the glorious era of Mashiach. Therefore, the Jewish people reluctantly conclude that the master plan must have changed and their long awaited redemption will never come to fruition.

To this, Hashem responds and informs the Jewish people that they are gravely mistaken. Hashem says, "Can a mother ever forget her child; cease to have compassion for him?! Even if she could, I will never forget you!"(49:15)

Hashem revealed to His people that His concern for them extends beyond all human concerns. The Jewish people are too meaningful to Hashem to allow Him to forget them. Hashem adds, "Behold I have engraved you on My palm; your glorious walls are constantly before Me." (49:16) Hashem tells His people that, in reality, they remain His constant focus every single day. The Malbim (ad loc.) explains that the ultimate purpose of the world can only be accomplished through the Jewish people. The glorious era of redemption revolves around them and it is only they

who can reveal to the entire world the truths of Hashem. Hashem therefore awaits their return with anxiety in order that His master plan can come to fruition. He has, figuratively, affixed them to the palm of His hand and always sees them in their final stages of redemption. In actuality, He is constantly maneuvering world events in order to bring about the redemption. The Jewish people are therefore, by definition, the center of all world events. Contrary to the Jewish people's opinion, Hashem never takes His mind off His people and is always anxiously awaiting their return.

The prophet continues to share breathtaking glimpses of our final redemption and then raises the obvious question. Why don't the Jewish people sense this special relationship? If, in fact, Hashem cares so much for them why don't they feel it? Why does Zion consider herself so neglected and forgotten? The prophet answers this with a penetrating question from Hashem, "Why have I come and no one was there; have I called and no one responded?" (50:2) Hashem indicates that He has extended Himself on numerous occasions but the Jewish people did not respond and didn't even bother to be there. In essence, Hashem has done His part in helping us sense His concern but we have not responded.

Our Chazal in Mesichta B'rochos (6B) share with us their painful insight regarding this issue and explain this passage in a most vivid form. They inform us that when Hashem brings His presence to a synagogue in anticipation of a quorum of ten and does not find them there He is immediately angered. To such situations Hashem responds, "Why have I come and no (quorum) was there for Me; have I called and no one responded." This statement suggests that we have overlooked a serious dimension of our relationship with Hashem. To begin we quote the Gemara in B'rochos (6A) which informs us that when a quorum congregates for the sake of prayer Hashem's presence goes out to greet them. Hashem's desire to be with His people is so significant that He even goes out to meet them, awaiting their arrival to His sanctuary? From this we understand that prayer is far greater than an obligation or responsibility. Prayer is an opportunity to unite with our Creator and associate with Him. So significant is this relationship that Hashem even precedes His people and anxiously awaits their arrival to His home.

We should cherish this opportunity and attempt to foster this relationship at all costs. It goes without saying that we should never ignore this opportunity and abuse this relationship. If Hashem deems it appropriate to be there we should certainly do our part to respond to His kindness and warmth. If we fail to attend we are causing Hashem to extend Himself in vain and can not expect positive results to follow.

Hashem is truly angered by our arrogance and accepts our behavior as a sign of indifference or rejection. Yeshaya concludes, "How can we expect to sense Hashem's warmth and concern?" If we truly

desire a relationship with Him we must do, at the least, our part to receive Hashem's gesture of warmth and to be there when His is there.

The prophet continues this theme and asks, "Who amongst you reveres Hashem, listens to the voice of His servant, but went into darkness leaving no radiance for himself. He should trust in Hashem and rely upon Him."(50:10) Chazal, (Brochos 6B) again interpret this passage in a unique manner and reveal another important insight about prayer. They explain that the prophet was referring to the daily minyan attendee who failed once to attend his prayer services due to a pressing personal appointment. In response to this absence Hashem brings the situation to the attention of others. They ask, "What has happened to this G-d fearing individual who was accustomed to approaching Hashem on a daily basis?" Now, the man has gone to a place of darkness and no light from Hashem will shine upon him. He should have relied upon Hashem rather than failing to keep his appointment with Hashem in His office. (see Rashi ad loc.)

This response also seems quite harsh to us. After all, the person was always a G-d fearing individual who constantly attended prayer services. Why is he being so severely denounced for this and even worse, regarded as going to a place of darkness? The answer seems to be in the concluding words, "He should trust in Hashem and rely upon Him." Apparently we are noticing a change of attitude and a principal deviation here. Prayer represents our recognition that everything, our livelihood included, is in the hands of Hashem. Our first appointment of the day is with Hashem wherein we request that all of our day's experiences will be met with success. Our happiness, health and wealth are all up to Hashem and we therefore request of Him that He pay serious attention to all our needs.

However, one who cancels his daily appointment with Hashem demonstrates that he considers matters to be in his personal control. He couldn't meet with Hashem today because a more pressing need existed. Excluding Hashem for the moment, this personal appointment was necessary in order to secure his personal finances. If he didn't attend he could forfeit his opportunity of producing financial success.

Hashem responds that this person has forgotten the most basic principal of life. He should have trusted in Hashem because ultimately even the success of this meeting depends upon Him. Hashem would have "shined His light upon him" if he would have followed the formula. But now, after demonstrating his lack of faith, he has gone away from Hashem. From this point and on his relationship has been severely effected and Hashem chooses not to allow this person to sense His true concern for him.

Yes, Zion feels neglected and doesn't sense Hashem's interest in her. But, as the prophet reveals,

this is not Hashem's doing. We have always had the opportunity of prayer and could always enjoy a warm personal association with Hashem in His very own home. However it is we who abuse our privilege and force Hashem to keep His distance from us. If we would take prayer more seriously we would always feel the helping hand of Hashem.

How appropriate are these lessons which are read in conjunction with this week's parsha, Eikev. Because, in fact, the central theme of the parsha is to never forget Hashem and His kindness. This week, Moshe Rabbeinu reminds us that our sustenance and livelihood are in Hashem's hands, rather than our own.

In addition, Moshe Rabbeinu introduces the opportunity of fervent prayer and informs us that continued success and satisfaction are the natural results of such perfect service. (see Devorim 8:17, 18 and Devorim 11: 13,14, 15)

May we merit to continuously develop our relationship with Hashem through our prayer and receive the radiance of Hashem always. © 2002 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

In His first contact with Avraham, the Holy One, Blessed be He, marked out the path for his household and indicated the ultimate goal of the nation of Yisrael. "Go for yourself from your land and from your birthplace to the land I will show you, and I will make you into a great nation... and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." [Bereishit 12:1-3].

Four separate stages are described. (1) "Go for yourself" -- for your own benefit, in order to build up your specific personality. (2) "And I will make you into a great nation" -- After each individual develops himself or herself, the basis is established for nationality, and this takes place in Eretz Yisrael. (3) "I will make you into a great nation" -- after the physical "body" of the nation is established, the spiritual form of the nation will appear. As the sages wrote, "I will create from you the nation about which it is written, 'For what great nation has G-d so close to it... and what great nation has laws and regulations that are so just' [Devarim 4:7]." [Bereishit Rabba 39:11]. And then comes the final objective: (4) "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." You will serve as a model for all humanity, leading them all to say, "Come, let us rise up to the Mountain of G-d... And He will teach us of His ways, and we will learn of His paths, for Torah will emanate from Zion..." [Yeshayahu 2:3]. And with this, the nation of Yisrael will have achieved its goal.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook wrote similar ideas with respect to the Grace after Meals that appears in this week's Torah portion. The Talmud teaches us,

"Moshe set up for Yisrael the first blessing ("He who feeds His world") when the manna fell. Yehoshua added the blessing about the land (the second blessing) when they entered the land. David established the blessing 'about Your nation Yisrael and about Your city Jerusalem,' and Shlomo added the blessing about the great and holy Temple." [Berachot 48b].

The structure of the Grace after Meals is an outline of the way to build up the nation of Yisrael. It starts with the individual, and the first element is to maintain the existence of the private and physical individual. This is followed by the more comprehensive building of the body in general. What follows is the building of the spiritual image of the nation, and then the spiritual makeup of all humanity.

Moshe established the first blessing when the manna fell, in order to take care of the personal physical needs. Yehoshua added the blessing of the land when they entered it and were involved in building up the national body. Then the time came to take care of the spiritual form of the nation. David then wrote the blessing, "for Your nation Yisrael," since Jerusalem turns all of the Jews into "Chaverim," people who join together at a high level. And after the spiritual national objective was accomplished, Shlomo took care of the general spiritual goal, as he said in his prayer, "...So that all the nations of the world will know that G-d is the deity" [I Melachim 8:60].

Why was all this linked to the Grace after Meals? At no other time is a person so intimately involved with his own personal interests than when he or she is eating. This is a time when "a person might sink to the level of coarse feelings and personal animal pleasures." The sages taught us how to combine the involvement with building up the personal body and the glorious objective of building up the more general goal, and in the end building up humanity as a whole. A person should be aware that he is not eating just to satisfy his own selfish need, but that after he provides strength to his body he passes this ability on to building up the community as a whole. In this way, the Grace after Meals provides us with "a ladder standing on the ground with its top in the sky, so that we can rise up from the lowly stage of the individual to the glorious heights of humanity as a whole." © 2013 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet. Translated by Moshe Goldberg

