

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

That very day the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain which you go up, and be gathered to your people... For you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel."

With these words there draws to a close the life of the greatest hero the Jewish people has ever known: Moses, the leader, the liberator, the lawgiver, the man who brought a group of slaves to freedom, turned a fractious collection of individuals into a nation, and so transformed them that they became the people of eternity.

It was Moses who mediated with G-d, performed signs and wonders, gave the people its laws, fought with them when they sinned, fought for them when praying for Divine forgiveness, gave his life to them and had his heart broken by them when repeatedly they failed to live up to his great expectations.

Each age has had its own image of Moses. For the more mystically inclined sages Moses was the man who ascended to heaven at the time of the giving of the Torah, where he had to contend with the angels who opposed the idea that this precious gift be given to mere mortals. G-d told Moses to answer them, which he did decisively. "Do angels work that they need a day of rest? Do they have parents that they need to be commanded to honour them? Do they have an evil inclination that they need to be told, 'Do not commit adultery?'" (Shabbat 88a). Moses the man out-argues the angels.

Other sages were more radical still. For them Moses was Rabbenu, "our rabbi"- not a king, a political or military leader, but a scholar and master of the law, a role which they invested with astonishing authority. They went so far as to say that when Moses prayed for G-d to forgive the people for the Golden Calf, G-d replied, "I cannot, for I have already vowed, One who sacrifices to any G-d shall be destroyed (Ex. 22:19), and I cannot revoke My vow." Moses replied, "Master of the universe, have You not taught me the laws of annulling vows? One may not annul his own vow, but a sage may do so."

Moses thereupon annulled G-d's vow (Shemot Rabbah 43:4).

For Philo, the 1st century Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Moses was a philosopher-king of the type depicted in Plato's Republic. He governs the nation, organizes its laws, institutes its rites and conducts himself with dignity and honour; he is wise, stoical and self-controlled. This is, as it were, a Greek Moses, looking not unlike Michelangelo's famous sculpture.

For Maimonides, Moses was radically different from all other prophets in four ways. First, others received their prophecies in dreams or visions, while Moses received his awake. Second, to the others G-d spoke in parables obliquely, but to Moses directly and lucidly. Third, the other prophets were terrified when G-d appeared to them but of Moses it says, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33: 11). Fourth, other prophets needed to undergo lengthy preparations to hear the Divine word; Moses spoke to G-d whenever he wanted or needed to. He was "always prepared, like one of the ministering angels" (Laws of the Foundations of Torah 7: 6).

Yet what is so moving about the portrayal of Moses in the Torah is that he appears before us as quintessentially human. No religion has more deeply and systemically insisted on the absolute otherness of G-d and man, heaven and earth, the infinite and the finite. Other cultures have blurred the boundary, making some human beings seem godlike, perfect, infallible. There is such a tendency-marginal to be sure, but never entirely absent-within Jewish life itself: to see sages as saints, great scholars as angels, to gloss over their doubts and shortcomings and turn them into superhuman emblems of perfection. Tanakh, however, is greater than that. It tells us that G-d, who is never less than G-d, never asks us to be more than simply human.

Moses is a human being. We see him despair and want to die. We see him lose his temper. We see him on the brink of losing his faith in the people he has been called on to lead. We see him beg to be allowed to cross the Jordan and enter the land he has spend his life as a leader travelling toward. Moses is the hero of those who wrestle with the world as it is and with people as they are, knowing that "It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to stand aside from it."

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The Torah insists that "to this day no one knows where his grave is" (Deut. 34: 6), to avoid his grave being made a place of pilgrimage or worship. It is all too easy to turn human beings, after their death, into saints and demigods. That is precisely what the Torah opposes. "Every human being" writes Maimonides in his Laws of Repentance (5: 2), "can be as righteous as Moses or as wicked as Jeroboam."

Moses does not exist in Judaism as an object of worship but as a role model for each of us to aspire to. He is the eternal symbol of a human being made great by what he strove for, not by what he actually achieved. The titles conferred by him in the Torah, "the man Moses," "G-d's servant," "a man of G-d," are all the more impressive for their modesty. Moses continues to inspire.

On 3 April 1968, Martin Luther King delivered a sermon in a church in Memphis, Tennessee. At the end of his address, he turned to the last day of Moses' life, when the man who had led his people to freedom was taken by G-d to a mountain-top from which he could see in the distance the land he was not destined to enter. That, said King, was how he felt that night: "I just want to do G-d's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land."

That night was the last of his life. The next day he was assassinated. At the end, the still young Christian preacher-he was not yet forty-who had led the civil rights movement in the United States, identified not with a Christian figure but with Moses.

In the end the power of Moses' story is precisely that it affirms our mortality. There are many explanations of why Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. I have argued that it was simply because "each generation has its leaders" (Avodah Zarah 5a) and the person who has the ability to lead a people out of slavery is not necessarily the one who has the requisite skills to lead the next generation into its own and very different challenges. There is no one ideal form of leadership that is right for all times and situations.

Franz Kafka gave voice to a different and no less compelling truth: "He is on the track of Canaan all his life; it is incredible that he should see the land only

when on the verge of death. This dying vision of it can only be intended to illustrate how incomplete a moment is human life; incomplete because a life like this could last for ever and still be nothing but a moment. Moses fails to enter Canaan not because his life was too short but because it is a human life." (Diaries 1914-1923, ed. Max Brod, trans. Martin Greenberg and Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken, 1965, 195-96.)

What then does the story of Moses tell us? That it is right to fight for justice even against regimes that seem indestructible. That G-d is with us when we take our stand against oppression. That we must have faith in those we lead, and when we cease to have faith in them we can no longer lead them. That change, though slow, is real, and that people are transformed by high ideals even though it may take centuries.

In one of its most powerful statements about Moses, the Torah states that he was "a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his strength unabated" (34: 8). I used to think that these were merely two sequential phrases, until I realised that the first was the explanation for the second. Why was Moses' strength unabated? Because his eyes were undimmed- because he never lost the ideals of his youth. Though he sometimes lost faith in himself and his ability to lead, he never lost faith in the cause: in G-d, service, freedom, the right, the good and the holy. His words at the end of his life were as impassioned as they had been at the beginning.

That is Moses, the man who refused to "go gently into that dark night", the eternal symbol of how a human being, without ever ceasing to be human, can become a giant of the moral life. That is the greatness and the humility of aspiring to be "a servant of G-d."
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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The very joyous and ritually rich festival of Sukkot comes at the heels of Yom Kippur, the Day of Forgiveness and Purity. Now that, hopefully, we have been forgiven for our transgressions, we begin afresh with a clean slate. It is certainly a wonderful feeling to start off the New Year with joyous days of familial and communal togetherness. We celebrate, by eating our meals in colorfully decorated booths (sukkot) which remind us of G-d's protection in the desert. And our prayers in the synagogue are punctuated by the waving of the Four Species through which we thank G-d for His agricultural bounty.

From this description, it would seem that the emphasis is on religious ritual connecting G-d and Israel. However, the great legalist-philosopher Maimonides makes the following comment in his Laws of Festivals (6:18): When a person eats and drinks in celebration of a holiday, he is obligated to feed converts, orphans, widows, and others who are

destitute and poor. In contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard (or sukka) and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is not indulging in rejoicing associated with a mitzvah, but rather the rejoicing of his gut.

And with regard to such a person the verse, (Hoshea 9:4) is applied: "Their sacrifices will be like the bread of mourners, all that partake thereof shall become impure, for they kept their bread for themselves alone." This happiness is a disgrace for them, as implied by the verse (Malachi 2:3): "I will spread dung on your faces, the dung of your festival celebrations."

The Four Species are symbolically described by the Sages of the Midrash as representing four types of Jews: the "Etrog Jew" is both learned and filled with good deeds; the "Lulav Jew" has learning but no good deeds; the "Myrtle Jew" has good deeds but no learning and the "Willow-branch Jew" has neither learning nor good deeds. We are commanded to bind these four together, in order to remind us that a Jewish community consists of many types of Jews all of whom must be accepted and lovingly included within our Jewish community. Hence, a festival which superficially seems to be oriented solely in the direction of religious ritual actually expresses important lessons in human relationships.

To this end, I would like to relate a story. Reb Aryeh Levin, of sacred memory, was renowned as a righteous person of Jerusalem. He was known for his punctilious observance of each of the ritual commandments and his overwhelming compassion for every human being. Two days before the advent of the Festival of Sukkot, he went to the Geula district of Jerusalem to choose his Four Species. Immediately, word spread that the great tzaddik Reb Aryeh was standing in front of a long table in the street selecting his species. A large crowd gathered around him, after all, the etrog (citron) is referred to in the Bible as a beautiful fruit (etz hadar), and since we are enjoined to "beautify the commandments," observant Jews are especially careful in purchasing a most beautiful and outstanding etrog. Everyone was interested in observing which criteria the great tzaddik would use in choosing his etrog. To the amazement of the crowd, however, Reb Aryeh looked at one etrog and put it down, picked up a second, examined it, and then went back to the first and purchased it together with his three other species. The entire transaction took less than five minutes. The crowd, rather disappointed, rapidly dispersed imagining that the great rabbi had a very pressing appointment.

One person decided to follow Reb Aryeh to see exactly where he was going. What could be more important than choosing an etrog the day before Sukkot? this Jerusalemite thought to himself. Rav Levin walked into an old age home. The individual following him, waited outside and 90 minutes later the great Sage

exited. The Jerusalemite approached him "Revered Rabbi", he said. "Please don't think me impudent, but I am anxious to learn a point of Torah, and therefore, I am asking the question." The great commandment of Sukkot include the waving of a beautiful etrog. I am certain that visiting the elderly individual or individuals in the Old Age home is also an important mitzvah, but they will be in the Old Age Home during the Festival of Sukkot as well as after it. The purchase of the etrog is a once a year opportunity. I would have expected the revered rabbi to have spent a little more time in choosing the etrog."

Rav Levin took the questioner's hand in his and smiled lovingly "My dear friend", he said. "There are two mitzvot which the Torah employs the term hidur, (beautification), one is: the mitzvah of a beautiful etrog (pri etz hadar), (Leviticus 23: 40) and the second is beautifully honoring the face of the aged - (vehadarta pnei zaken) (Leviticus 19:32). However, the etrog is an object and the aged individual is a subject, a human being and not a fruit. Hence, I believe one must spend much more time in beautifying the commandment relating to the human being than beautifying the commandment relating to a fruit. © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This song of Moshe is the song of the Jewish story. It accurately portrays the arc of Jewish history in its glorious as well as its dolorous moments. The Ramban's comment as to the proof of the holiness and accuracy of Moshe's prophetic words - "If someone stood and accurately foretold what would happen many centuries later, would not one in hindsight be forced to admit to the truth of that prophet and his words upon seeing the minute fulfillment of that prophecy" - certainly carries even more weight in our age, a further eight centuries removed from Ramban's time.

Moshe calls forth the heaven and earth to bear witness to his words of prophecy, for he is aware that human logic and memory can never really be trusted. Unfortunately, memory can be dimmed and lost, and logic distorted and/or ignored. In fact it is these factors - lost memory and flawed logic - that Moshe identifies as the cause of the sins of the Jewish people and of much of the predicted travail that will accompany them throughout their history.

It is not so much that there is a rebellion against G-d and Torah in our current society as it is that G-d and Torah have simply been forgotten, erased from the Jewish consciousness - for many Jews they simply do not exist. And in such a climate of almost willful forgetfulness, certainly any attempt to convince others of the errors of their ways by the use of logic is doomed to frustrating failure.

Moshe concludes his visionary song/poem on an optimistic note. Somehow the covenantal relationship between G-d and Israel will remain binding and unbroken even unto the end of days. There will always be a core group of Jews who will not allow themselves - as well as others - to forget.

Events will constantly jog the Jewish memory and new generations will arise and ask: "Who are we and why are we here?" And the response to those questions can only be found in the eternal memory bank of the Jewish people and their history.

It is a very difficult task to restore memory but the fact that Moshe promises us that G-d and Torah will never be completely forgotten by all of the Jewish people reassures us that somehow the restoration of Jewish memory is possible and even guaranteed. And our logic will eventually not fail us as well.

We will survey our world and our situation and come to logical and holy conclusion as to what our policy and path in life should be. A nation of wisdom and insight, creativity and scholarship will not always remain illogical and foolish.

Moshe also encourages us by promising that eventually our enemies will be vanquished and shamed. Their nefarious ambitions will be thwarted and the Lord will balance all accounts with those who attempted to destroy the Jewish people. Good sense, accurate memory, strength of purpose and clarity of ideals will prevail and rule the Jewish world. Moshe's song will continue to be heard throughout eternity. © 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 BENJAMIN YUDIN

TorahWeb

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 90B) relates a dialogue between Roman philosophers and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya. The philosophers asked him for a biblical source that Hashem will resurrect the dead, and that He knows what will be in the future. He answered that both principles emerged from the following verse (Devarim 31:6), "Hashem said to Moshe, behold you will lie with your fathers and rise will this nation and stray after the G-ds of the peoples of the land." The Talmud (Yuma 52a-b) teaches that the word "v'kom- and rise" can be understood either referring to the preceding phrase, thus teaching that Moshe will rise again, hence a source for t'chias ha-maysim (the resurrection of the dead), or can be understood to introduce the second half of the verse foretelling what will be in the future. In any event, these two concepts are juxtaposed in the Torah.

Rav Yosef Salant zt"l, in his B'ear Yosef, asks a fascinating question based upon the above. The Rambam teaches (Hilchos T'shuva 5:8) that Hashem's

knowledge of all that will transpire doesn't diminish man's free will. Based on the above, let us examine G-d's creating of man. It is clear from the Torah that man was created with the capacity to live forever. In (Berashis 2:17) we are taught "But of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat thereof, for on the day you eat of it you shall surely die". G-d knew that Adam would violate this command; He knew that man would become mortal. What happened to His initial plan and desire that man be immortal? How could it be that His plan would be thwarted?

The B'ear Yosef answers that His desire that man be eternal combined with His knowledge that man will sin and bring death into the world caused Hashem to incorporate a Plan B (t'chias ha-maysim) into creation. It is interesting to note, that in chapter 2 of Berashis the word "v'yeetzer-and He formed" is used twice in the chapter. In verse 7, when speaking of the formation / creation of man, the word is spelled with two yud s; in verse 19 regarding the creation of the animals, the same word is spelled with but one yud. Rashi (v7) explains that the two yud s demonstrated that he was formed initially with the capacity of two formations, one at the present time and a second at the time of t'chias ha-maysim. At that time His initial desire and plan regarding man's immortality will be actualized. Every morning, we reiterate, (Proverbs 19:21) "Many designs are in man's heart, must the council of Hashem, only it will prevail".

I believe the above teaching is applicable regarding the mitzvah of teshuva. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 7:5) teaches, that the Torah (Devarim 30:1-3) "hivticha-promises / assures" us that the Jewish nation will do teshuva and be redeemed.

Too often, going into Yom Kippur one could be frustrated by, "been there, done that!" Hopefully, each individual will sit down in solitude and absolute privacy, following the advice of the Chayey Adom, and compose a list of shortcomings, sins, and manners that we wish to confess, correct and more important abandon in the forthcoming year. However, upon reflection they come to realize that many items on the list are repeats. Can teshuva really happen? The answer is definitively yes! The Jewish nation can and will do teshuva. Using the above model of t'chias ha-maysim, Hashem both knows if our desires are sincere or not and assures us that if the present set of circumstances does not work for the particular individual and the particular challenge, "harbei sheluchim l'aMokom-many are avenues are available to Him", to enable man to actualize his teshuva. However, we don't know what different circumstances will be orchestrated from On High to enable us to do teshuva, or if they will be as pleasant as the present environment. Therefore, be smart and seize the moment and do teshuva shelaimah now.

Yom Kippur is always referred to in the plural-as Yom HaKippurim- in the Torah, as both the living and the deceased are judged on this day, thus reminding us

of that which we affirm in the second blessing of every Shemoneh Esrei "He maintains his faith to those who sleep in the dust". As He maintains His faith to them, we can rest assured that He will assist us in our teshuva, if only we take the first sincere step. © 2012 Rabbi B. Yudin and the TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**s I read/call out the name of Hashem, attribute greatness to our G-d" (D'varim 32:3). This, the Talmud (B'rachos 21a) says, is the source for saying a blessing before studying Torah, as Moshe told the nation to say "amen" ("attribute greatness to our G-d") when he makes the blessing ("as I read the name of G-d") before he teaches them the "song" (see 31:19), which has the status of "Torah." Rabbi Avrohom Shain, sh'lita, asks how Moshe could have first made the blessing for learning Torah as he began teaching the "song," if on that same day he had already taught them several other things, starting (at the very least) with what was taught at the beginning of Parashas Nitzavim (see Rashi on 29:9), which includes two of the 613 Biblical commandments (gathering everyone every seven years for the public Torah reading and writing a Sefer Torah). Shouldn't the blessing have already been made much earlier that day, before Moshe started teaching them anything? Additionally (he asks), why is the obligation to make a blessing before learning Torah, or the need to teach the nation to answer "amen" to it, first taught here, before the "song?" Shouldn't it have been part of the daily routine, done before every lecture Moshe gave?

Although the question is a good one, it's not as strong as it might at first seem, as the mitzvos weren't introduced all at once (see Midrash HaGadol on Bamidbar 16:1, where Korach's wife asked him which new commandment Moshe taught that day). It is therefore certainly possible that this was where the obligation to make the blessing on Torah study was first introduced. Nevertheless, we should still try to figure out why this was where it was introduced.

Being that the requirement to make the blessing only applies before studying Torah (a blessing is not made before studying science, even though it entails G-d's creation(s), which can help us understand Him better, nor is a blessing made before any other field of study), and this was when the Torah was completed and given to the nation in its written form, if the "song" Moshe was about to teach was the first part of the Torah that had the status of "Torah" when it was taught, we could understand why it was specifically here that the blessing had to be made, and introduced. However, the teachings Moshe was taught at Sinai are also referred to as "Torah" (see Sh'mos 24:12; see also D'varim 4:8 and 44), so if the blessings had been introduced prior to the "song" being taught, it would

seem they would have had to be made at the earlier Torah sessions Moshe taught as well.

Rabbi Shain quotes the Talmudic discussion (B'rachos 11b) about which categories of Torah study a blessing is made on. Everyone agrees that when studying actual verses a blessing must be made; Rav Huna says that it is only when studying the verses, R' Elazar says that studying Midrash also requires a blessing but studying Mishnah or G'mara does not, R' Yochanan says that Mishnah also does (but not G'mara), and Rava (whom the halacha follows) says we must make a blessing even before learning G'mara (the equivalent of our Talmud). Rabbeinu Yonah explains that the dispute centers around what is considered "studying the verses," as everyone agrees that a blessing is only made when studying the written Torah but not when studying the oral Torah. The disagreement between these sages is about what is considered "studying the verses." Rava was of the opinion that even when studying the discussions that explain the Mishnah, since ultimately it will explain what the verses mean, a blessing must be made. Based on this, Rabbi Shain suggests that until the Torah had the status of being "written," no blessing was required, and since the Torah was first written right before the "song" was taught (D'varim 31:24), this was the first piece of Torah that required a blessing.

Two issues still need to be addressed. First of all, there is a Talmudic dispute (Gitin 60a) as to whether the Torah was written down section by section, as G-d taught it to Moshe, and then combined into one scroll after all the sections were completed, or was written down all at once, right before Moshe died. If it wasn't written down until Moshe's last day, right before he taught the nation the "song," it can be suggested that what Moshe taught until then didn't have the status of "Torah She'b'k'av" (written Torah). But if Moshe wrote each section down as it was taught to him, why weren't those lectures considered teaching "the written Torah?"

One possible answer is to insist that if the source for making a blessing on Torah study is from Moshe's remarks right before the "song," then the Torah must have not have been written down until that last day. The Talmud (B'rachos 48b) provides additional sources for the requirement to make a blessing on Torah study, sources not affected by when the Torah was written down. The opinion that the Torah was written down section by section could rely on one of these other sources for the blessing. Another possibility is to suggest that Moshe didn't write each section down until after he taught it to the nation, so at the time of the lecture it was not yet considered "written Torah" and didn't need a blessing. The "song," on the other hand, was written down before it was taught (see D'varim 31:19 and 31:22), and therefore required a blessing. [It is possible that the reason the requirement to make a blessing before studying Torah was first introduced here is because it was the first lecture after the Torah had

been completed, especially since each Tribe now had a copy (see 31:9), allowing for easier and more frequent Torah study.]

The second issue is raised by Rabbi Shain, that the "song" actually begins with the word "Haazinu" (32:1), while the verse which serves as the blessing before studying Torah is two verses later (32:3). If a blessing was needed before teaching the "song," how could Moshe have taught two verses of the "song" before making the blessing? His answer is similar to what I suggested several years ago (<http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/haazinu.pdf>) to answer a similar question, that the first two verses of the "song" were actually just an introduction, but not part of the song itself. When Moshe was teaching it to the nation, his "lesson" started from the fourth verse, which is why the blessing on that "lesson" is in the third verse. Even though the introduction is written in the Torah as part of the "song," and was written down before the "lesson" was taught (therefore having the status of "written Torah"), when Moshe gave his introduction he wasn't quoting Torah verses; the Torah verses were based on what he was about to say. The body of the "song" itself, though, was a straight "Torah lesson," possibly the first that required a blessing. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Davar B'Ito

“The Tzur-perfect is His work. All his ways are justice." Tzur is usually translated as "Rock," signifying the strength and permanence of G-d. The word can also be seen, however, as related to yotzer, depicting Hashem as the Creator of everything. This would be attractive, because misunderstanding of Hashem's providential justice often stems from failing to appreciate His role as Creator.

By "perfect" we mean to repudiate the view of those who complain about His justice, or what they think is injustice. They note that G-d allows/causes events that disrupt, injure, or ruin what previously seemed to be perfect. Our pasuk asserts that they opposite is true. Hashem's providence perfects what previously was flawed. The psukim that follow address historical episodes, showing the justice in tragic events that befell our people. One overarching idea introduces them: All His ways are justice.

"Justice" is not quite the same as "just." While Hashem's ways are certainly just, the Torah here has us focus on images of justice, of the way issues are addressed in a court of law. A judge extracts a kingly sum from a defendant. An uninformed observer sees a well-to-do person leave the court practically a pauper. Seemingly, the defendant has been harmed, injured, left far less whole and perfect than when he entered. A person who followed the trial, and heard the judge explain why he finds the defendant guilty of grand larceny, knows that the judge is making things right-not

wrong- by relieving him of money that he obtained illegally.

HKBH's providence works similarly. Many things seem unfair to us. However, we are unaware that there is justice in these events, and that they actually right the wrongs that we cannot see.

Our pasuk emphasizes why we can have this confidence. It calls Hashem the "Tzur," underscoring His role as Creator. He could not be the Creator without a mastery of everything that is unfathomable to us, but from which we understand that all knowledge is included in the "everything" that He masters. His providence can be extensive because His knowledge is complete. Additionally, as Creator, He has an interest and stake, so to speak, in what happens in His world. Human activities affect the integrity and function of His creation. He cannot simply "look away," or forgive every trespass. He made reward and punishment parts of the fabric of Creation. His providence must be seen as a form of justice, sometimes taking something from one place and moving it elsewhere, just as a court would do.

Chanah spoke these words: "Do not abound in speaking with loftiness upon loftiness. Let not haughtiness come from your mouth. Hashem is the G-d of thoughts. Deeds are accounted by Him." (Shmuel-1 2:3 The translation follows the written text, which has the word lo spelled with a vav.) She addresses three popular misconceptions about G-d's providence-or more accurately, three positions, all of which deny G-d's providence.

The first sees G-d as so elevated and exalted above the events of the human world, that He has no knowledge of them at all. The second rejectionist position posits that G-d certainly could know about all events of this world, but effectively abandoned it from His active interest. He does not consider earthly happenings significant enough to give them any attention. A third argument leaves Hashem aware and even interested in human events, but choosing to look the other way. It is not honorable for Him to have to interpose Himself in the petty concerns, conflicts and events of human beings.

Chanah's peroration addresses all three. She admonishes the first group. "Do not abound in speaking with loftiness upon loftiness," i.e., do not claim that G-d is so lofty that He cannot know of human conduct. Her message continues with a consideration of the other two groups, first combining them into one position: "Let not haughtiness come from your mouth." In other words, refrain from making the claim that He is so aloof from human affairs that His knowledge of them is of no effect.

She then offers her counter-assertions to all three, serially. To those who maintain that G-d cannot know of human events, she says, "Hashem is the G-d of thoughts." Since it was Hashem Who created human minds, how could it be that He does not know their content?

To the second group she says, "Deeds are accounted by Him." He cares, and he holds Man accountable for his actions. He does so because He gave Man unusual ability to impact the world around him. Man's actions build up and destroy. A medrash (Vayikra Rabbah 26:7) reacts to a verse in Amos (4:13) "He forms mountains and creates winds. He recounts his deeds to a person." What is it that Hashem recounts to a person? That a person's actions form mountains and create winds. Hashem potentiated human activity to have far greater impact than Man might think. So long as Hashem has an interest and purpose for His world, He most assuredly takes interest in Man's activities, because those activities either advance His purposes, or impede them.

To the third group, Chanah addresses the same phrase, but meant slightly differently. The keri-the way traditions tells us to read the verse, even if the written form differs-of the verse has the word lo spelled with an aleph. This changes the meaning to "Deeds are not accounted by Him." Elements of reward and punishment do not require His intercession, so to speak. He does not need to do the accounting directly. He set up His world in a manner in which deeds have consequences; He need not "do" anything for those consequences-both positive and negative-to occur.

We can imagine our world as somewhat similar to a large machine. If a child were to climb past the barriers and reach into the innards of the apparatus while it was operating, his arm would be mangled. Objecting to the owner of the machine that it is not fair that an innocent child should be hurt will be of no consequence. Neither the owner nor the machine can be told to look the other way. Nor would following that suggestion help the poor child. The machine operates blindly, without differentiating between one person and the next. There is nothing unfair about this. Nor should the owner be seen as the agent of the child's loss. Similarly, Hashem created a world in which there are consequences to spiritual misconduct just as there are consequences to disobeying the constraints of physical laws.

Briefly, a firm, non-trivial consideration of Hashem as Creator creates the intellectual space in which we understand Hashem's concern for the consequences of human actions, and His equipping the world with the capacity to reward and punish those actions. (Based on Ha'amek Davar and Harchev Davar, Devarim 32:4) © 2012 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

There is a custom each evening of Sukkot, to invite special guests-ushpizin—into the Sukkah. Every evening the patriarchs, matriarchs and their families are welcomed.

Ushpizin sets the tone for the holiday of Sukkot. The Sukkah itself is built outdoors open to the public. And the four species-the lulav and etrog-represent all types of Jews. If any one of the species is missing, the mitzvah is invalid, teaching the critical importance of each and every person. In a real sense, the ushpizin parallels the paragraph recited at the outset of the Passover Seder, wherein we invite guests to the seder table.

In Jewish history, there were towns that were especially hospitable; some were actually called ushpizin. My father was raised in Oswiecim which the Nazis later transformed into the notorious Auschwitz death camp. He once told me that the Jews referred to the town as Oshpitzim, a Polish corruption of the word ushpizin, in tribute to the well-known hospitality of the Jewish residents to travelers and wayfarers.

We follow this approach by affectionately referring to our synagogue as "The Bayit." As a bayit, a home is a place of love and welcome, so too does the very name of our synagogue convey our basic credo of endless love and welcome.

Not coincidentally the custom of ushpizin falls just days after the high holidays. Many Jews primarily identify with their Judaism on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And so, immediately after the holidays, we leave the synagogue and build the Sukkah. In a sense we're saying, even if one finds it difficult to come to the synagogue, the synagogue will come to you.

This invitation is meant for all Jews, even the most extreme non-believer even an apikorus, one who rejects fundamental principles of faith. Note, each of the words in the text presented by Rabbi Elazar: "Know what to answer a heretic-Da ma sh-tashiv l'apikorus." (Avot 2:14)

Da, to know, in the biblical sense means to love. In other words, react to the apikorus with love. Ma, of course, means what. When dealing with an apikorus, one ought to listen closely and respectfully to his or her questions and learn from them. Sh as a prefix asks us to pause. Tashiv can be related to the word teshuvah, which from a mystical perspective means to encourage the wrongdoer to return to the inner good that he or she possesses. The prefix Lamed of l'apikorus denotes that one is to have a direct I-thou encounter with the person who has gone astray.

Of course, wisdom and Torah knowledge are crucial in order to respond to an apikorus. Still, the approach should be one of endless love, using persuasive rather than coercive arguments. To those who have challenged a nonjudgmental approach to an apikorus, suggesting that it leads to situation wherein there is neither tzaddik or rasha, I would argue that with regard to one's relationship to G-d, G-d must be that judge.

And that should be our approach as we recite the ushpizin. To embrace our people regardless of affiliation, commitment or background; to welcome them

in with endless and infinite love. © 2000 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 Haazinu is Moshe's last speech, delivered as a song because songs reach deeper into our souls. In the beginning of the song (32:4), it says "The Rock! -- Perfect is his work, for all his paths are justice; a G-d of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He". This statement is loaded, saying that Hashem is perfect, just, fair, righteous, and without iniquity. What's strange is that it begins with comparing G-d to a rock, and then saying that G-d's work is perfect. What's the Torah trying to tell us by mentioning a rock, and by using all those terms? Luckily, the Chafetz Chaim answers one question with a story about having faith: A man had an only son that was sick, and spared no expense finding him a cure. One doctor finally cured the boy, and told the father that the son got sick because of certain meat that he ate. The father vowed to keep that meat away from his son. Years passed, the father had to go away on a business trip, and he had his family watch the boy. After he left, the boy was tempted by the smell of the meat, ate some, and became deathly ill again. When the father returned, he called the doctor and begged him to do all he could. Once again the doctor was successful in healing the boy, and the father decided to never leave his son again. A while later the father had a party (with meat), and when the son walked in, the father quickly rushed him out. The guests all watched in wonderment, but they didn't understand that it was for the son's sake.

We are the guests, wondering why things are happening in our lives, but we now know that G-d's work is just, fair, and perfect as a ROCK in every way. But a rock is not perfect, you say? Well, it may not be perfect in shape or color, but it's solid, consistent, and always grounded, which are the qualities G-d shows us, and the very qualities we should emulate this coming year. By this time next year, may we all be ROCK Jews, in every sense of BOTH words. © 2012 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“Baruch atah Hashem, the King Who pardons and forgives our iniquities and the iniquities of His people, the family of Yisrael, and removes our sins every single year, King over whole world, Who sanctifies Yisrael and the Day of Atonement." (The conclusion to the middle berachah of the Yom Kippur shemoneh esrei)

R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (1905-1994;

Klausenberger Rebbe) cites R' Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev z"l (1740-1809), who said: When we recite this berachah, we are like a child who wants a candy or a cookie but his father won't give it to him. What does the child do? He recites a berachah on the food, knowing that his parent won't allow the berachah to be said in vain. Similarly, we say a berachah, "Baruch atah Hashem, the King Who pardons and forgives our iniquities... and removes our sins every single year," in the hope that Hashem will not allow our berachah to be in vain. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Halichot Chaim p.25)
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YITZ WEISS

Divine Embrace

One of the themes of Sukkot is to recognize that G-d is our protector. We go out of our permanent homes into a temporary dwelling and expose ourselves to the elements. In so doing we recall that G-d was our guardian when we left Egypt into the desert and remains our protector today.

The minimum requirement for a kosher sukkah is not four walls, but two walls and a tefach (a handbreadth). If we were to construct a sukkah based on the minimum, we would really be exposed to the elements! Two walls and a bit don't seem to offer much protection! How are we to feel secure?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l compares the sukkah measurements to an arm: two "walls" - i.e. from the shoulder to the elbow, and from the elbow to the wrist, and a tefach - the hand. Rav Auerbach says that sitting in the sukkah one is literally in the embrace of G-d!

May this year be one where we see the protection of G-d on a daily basis and the coming of Moshiach! Have a great yom tov! *This dvar torah was told by Rabbi Aaron Cohen in Cong. Tifereth Israel, Passaic, NJ*



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