

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

One of the most profound disagreements in Judaism is that between Moses Maimonides and Judah Halevi on the meaning of the first of the Ten Commandments.

For Maimonides (1135-1204), the first command is to believe in G-d, creator of heaven and earth: "The basic principle of all basic principles and the pillar of all sciences is to realise that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being. If it could be supposed that He did not exist, it would follow that nothing else could possibly exist. If however it were supposed that all other beings were non-existent, He alone would still exist... To acknowledge this truth is a positive command, as it is said: 'I am the Lord your G-d' (Ex. 20:2, Deut 5:7)." (Yesodei ha-Torah, 1:1-5)

Judah Halevi (c. 1080-c.1145) disagreed. The greatest of medieval Hebrew poets, Halevi also wrote one of Judaism's philosophical masterpieces, *The Kuzari*. It is framed as a dialogue between a rabbi and the King of the Khazars. Historically, the Khazars were a Turkish people who, between the seventh and eleventh centuries, ruled a considerable area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, including southern Russia, northern Caucasus, eastern Ukraine, Western Kazakhstan, and northwestern Uzbekistan.

Many Jewish traders and refugees lived there, and in 838 the Khazar King Bulan converted to Judaism, after supposedly holding a debate between representatives of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths. The Arabic writer Dimashqi writes that the Khazars, having encountered the Jewish faith, "found it better than their own and accepted it". Khazaria thus became, spiritually as well as geographically, an independent third force between the Muslim Caliphate and the Christian Byzantine Empire. After their conversion, the Khazar people used Jewish personal names, spoke and wrote in Hebrew, were circumcised, had synagogues and rabbis, studied the Torah and Talmud, and observed the Jewish festivals.

The *Kuzari* is Judah Halevi's philosophy of Judaism, cast in the form of the imagined conversation between the King and a rabbi that led to the King's conversion. In it, Halevi draws a portrait that is diametrically opposed to what would later become Maimonides' account. Judaism, for Halevi, is not

Aristotelian but counter-Aristotelian. The G-d of the prophets, says Halevi, is not the G-d of the philosophers. The key difference is that whereas the philosophers found G-d in metaphysics, the prophets found G-d in history.

This is how Halevi's rabbi states his faith: "I believe in the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land, after having brought them through the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way..." (*Kuzari* I:11)

"He goes on to emphasise that G-d's opening words in the revelation at Mount Sinai were not, 'I am the Lord your G-d, creator of heaven and earth' but 'I am the Lord your G-d 'I am the Lord your G-d, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'" (*Kuzari* I:25).

Halevi lived before Maimonides. Nachmanides (R. Mosheh ben Nachman, 1194-1270) lived after, but he too disagreed with Maimonides' interpretation of the opening verse of the Ten Commandments. His objection is based on a passage in the *Mekhilta*: "'You shall have no other gods besides me.' Why is this said? Because it says, 'I am the Lord your G-d.' To give a parable: A king of flesh and blood entered a province. His servants said to him, 'Issue decrees for the people.' He, however, told them, 'No. When they accept my sovereignty, I will issue decrees. For if they do not accept my sovereignty, how will they carry out my decrees?'"

According to Nachmanides the verse, "I am the Lord your G-d, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" is not a command, but a preliminary to the commands. It explains why the Israelites should be bound by the will of G-d. He had rescued them, liberated them, and brought them to safety. The first verse of the Decalogue is not a law but a statement of fact, a reason why the Israelites should accept G-d's sovereignty.

Thanks to a series of archeological discoveries in the twentieth century, we now know that Nahmanides was right. The biblical covenant has the same literary structure as ancient near eastern political treaties, of which the oldest known are the "Stele of the Vultures" (before 2500 BCE), recording the victory of Eannatum, king of Lagash, over the people of Umma, both in southern Mesopotamia, and the treaty of Naram-Sin, king of Kish and Akkad, with the people of Elam (c. 2280 BCE). Other, later treaties have also been

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discovered, involving Hittites, Arameans and Assyrians. One details a pact between the Hittite king Hattusilis III and the Pharaoh Rameses II, regarded by some scholars as the Pharaoh of the exodus.

These treaties usually follow a six-part pattern, of which the first three elements were [1] the preamble, identifying the initiator of the treaty, [2] a historical review, summarizing the past relationship between the parties, and [3] the stipulations, namely the terms and conditions of the covenant. The first verse of the Ten Commandments is a highly abridged form of [1] and [2]. "I am the Lord your G-d" is the preamble. "Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" is the historical review. The verses that follow are the stipulations, or as we would call them, the commands. Nachmanides and the Midrash are therefore correct in seeing the verse as an introduction, not a command.

What is at stake in this difference of opinion between Maimonides on the one hand, Judah Halevi and Nachmanides on the other? At the heart of Judaism is a twofold understanding of the nature of G-d and His relationship to the universe. G-d is creator of the universe and the maker of the human person "in His image". This aspect of G-d is universal. It is accessible to anyone, Jew or gentile. Aristotle arrived at it through logic and metaphysics. For him, G-d was the "prime mover" who set the universe into motion. Today, many people reach the same conclusion through science: the universe is too finely tuned for the emergence of life to have come into being through chance (this is sometimes called the anthropic principle). Some arrive at it not through logic or science but through a simple sense of awe and wonder ("Not how the world is, but that it is, is the mystical" said Wittgenstein). This aspect of G-d is called by the Torah, Elokim.

There is, however, a quite different aspect of G-d which predominates throughout most of Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. This is G-d as He is involved in the fate of one family, one nation: the children of Israel. He intervenes in their history. He makes a highly specific covenant with them at Sinai -- not at all like the general one He made with Noah and all humanity after the Flood. The Noahide covenant is simple and basic. The sages said it involved a mere seven commands. The Sinai covenant, by contrast, is highly articulated, covering almost every conceivable aspect of life. This aspect of G-d is signaled by the use of the four-letter

name for which we traditionally substitute (since the word itself is holy and could only be pronounced by the High Priest) the word Hashem (on the two aspects and names, see Kuzari IV:1-3; and Ramban to Exodus 3:13).

Maimonides, the philosopher, emphasized the universal, metaphysical aspect of Judaism and the eternal, unchanging existence of G-d. Judah Halevi and Nachmanides, the one a poet, the other a mystic, were more sensitive to the particularistic and prophetic dimension of Judaism: the role of G-d in the historical drama of the covenant. Both are true and valid, but in this case, Halevi and Nachmanides are closer to the meaning of the biblical text. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Without the world, what would G-d be? The answer is simply, G-d. On the other hand, without G-d, the world would cease to exist.

G-d is so powerful that without the world He would not be reduced one iota. In the same breath, G-d's immanence is such that without Him the world would be nothing.

Rashi enhances this idea through his interpretation of the famous sentence found in this week's portion, Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Ehad. "Hear O Israel the Lord is our G-d the Lord is One." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

In the words of Rashi, the verse comes to tell us that "Hashem, the Lord, who is our G-d, now...He will be in the future One Lord, as it is stated... 'in that day shall the Lord be One and His name One.'" (Zekhariah 14:9)

The implication is clear: G-d in the world today is not fully One in the sense that he has not been accepted by all of humankind. It is up to us, who know of G-d's greatness, to spread the name of G-d so that He will be received as One throughout the world.

The second paragraph of the well known Aleinu prayer makes this very point. There we yearn for the time when "the world will be perfected under the reign of the Almighty, le-takein olam be-malkhut Shakai" and all humankind will express allegiance to G-d.. "On that day," the paragraph continues, quoting the sentence from Zekhariah which Rashi understands as an

explanation of Shema, "G-d will be One, and His name One." Note that the whole paragraph is in the future, implying that in the present G-d is not One in the sense that He has not been embraced by all.

This idea is also echoed in the text about Amalek where G-d swears by His name and throne that He will forever war against Amalek. G-d's name and throne are written uniquely as they are incomplete in the text -keis, Kah. (Exodus 17:16) Indeed, Rashi writes: "The Holy One blessed be He swears that His name

and throne will not be whole and One until Amalek will be utterly blotted out."

Once again it is up to the human being, with G-d's help, to eradicate Amalek or the forces of Amalek. In this sense, while G-d does not need the human being-as He is, of course, independent and self-existent-we have a strong and important role in His future. For only through the efforts of humankind will His name be One and His throne be complete.

In one word: while the existence of G-d does not at all depend upon humankind, the manifestation of G-d and the proliferation of the Divine message in this world very much depends on each and every one of us.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This Shabat is Shabat Nachamu, the Shabat that begins for us a cycle of comfort and consolation after the weeks of sadness and mourning over the past tragedies of the Jewish people. These next seven weeks of healing comfort will lead us into the bright, new year that awaits us. In this week's parsha there is to be found, so to speak, the short course and synopsis of all of Judaism - the Ten Commandments, the Shema and the explanation of the Exodus from Egypt to be given to the wise son.

In a general sense, the entire structure of Torah and Jewish life is encapsulated for us in the parsha of the week. Since this Shabat is invariably also Shabat Nachamu, it is not difficult to see that the Torah is teaching us that comfort and consolation are spiritual values and attainments and not necessarily dependent upon material wealth or worldly success.

Our society, so rich in material goods and advanced technology, suffers greatly from all sorts of mental and social dysfunction. Depression is the "black dog" (Churchill's words for his recurring bouts of depression) that affects over a third of the citizens of the Western world! True comfort and serenity within human beings are difficult to achieve and most precarious to maintain.

The Torah in this week's parsha, in order to help and guide us, gives us a formula to achieve this elusive goal of contentment. And, it lies within the parameters of those three principles of Jewish faith outlined in the parsha of the week.

The Ten Commandments create for us a structure of belief and morality that every individual can aspire and ascribe to, no matter how decadent the society in which one finds oneself enmeshed in. The moral strictures that protect life, property and person are the basic rules of Jewish faith and life. The dysfunction between parents and children, a 24/7 commercial world, accepted robbery and corruption as

a social norm, daily murders and a completely sexually dissolute society - how can one avoid being depressed in such a milieu?

All of civilization teeters on the fulcrum of those Ten Commandments. They point the way out of the social morass that sucks us down to destruction. The Shema is the vehicle of connection of our soul with the Creator Who fashioned us and gave us life. The belief in the one and universal G-d Who rules and is omniscient and omnipotent is the greatest gift of the Jews to the human race. It gives us discipline and security, purity and nobility, the whiff of immortality and the security in knowing that life is never in vain.

And finally, the understanding of the uniqueness of Israel in G-d's scheme of things, as represented in the story of the Exodus from Egypt, gives structure and perspective to our national and personal lives. But it takes wisdom and knowledge - a wise son - to appreciate and treasure this memory of the distant past. Memory alone can also give us a sense of comfort and well-being and contribute towards the consolation and contentment we so ardently seek.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Comfort you, comfort you, My People" (Isaiah 40:1) The Shabbat after Tisha B'Av is known as the Shabbat of Comfort, a phrase taken from the first verse of the prophetic reading from Isaiah. Additionally, a most fascinating festival day-one which is unfortunately not very well known-falls just about one week after the bleak fast for the destruction of both of our Holy Temples. An analysis of this festival, known as Tu B'Av, "the 15th day of Av," will reveal a striking similarity between it and the Shabbat of Comfort.

The conclusion of the last Mishna of tractate Ta'anit (26b) teaches as follows: "Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, 'There were no greater festive days in Israel than the fifteenth day of Av and Yom Kippur, when the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in borrowed white dresses so as not to embarrass those who didn't have their own. They would go out and dance in the vineyards. What would they say? 'Young man, lift up your eyes and see whom you wish to choose for yourselves. Do not cast forth your eyes after beauty, but cast forth your eyes after family. "False is grace and vanity is beauty; a woman who fears the Lord is the one to be praised"; and the scriptures further state, "Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her deeds praise her in the gates."

The Talmud then cites the Tosefta, which provides a more descriptive picture: "The beautiful ones among them, what would they say? Cast forth your eyes

after beauty, for woman was only created for beauty. The ones with good pedigree, what would they say? Cast forth your eyes after family, because woman was only created for children. The plain ones, what would they say? Take your wares for the sake of heaven, as long as your adorn us with gold (and then even the plain-looking women will appear to be beautiful)."

Apparently, the 15th day of Av was a kind of Sadie Hawkins day, when the women would entice the men to marry them; and each woman would emphasize her particular quality: beauty, family or "for the sake of heaven." And, as the Mishna concludes, it is chiefly the attributes of fear of G-d and performance of good deeds which truly count in assessing the proper wife.

The Talmud adds, "It is clear why Yom Kippur is a Festival, since it brings forgiveness and absolution, since it is the day when G-d gave the second tablets [as a sign of His forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf]; but what is the reason for the joy of the 15th Av?" The Talmud then gives seven possible reasons, from the suggestion that on that day members of the tribes were permitted to marry one another, to the opinion that on 15 Av, the desert generation stopped dying, to the astronomical fact that from that day on, the sun begins to lose its strength and the days begin to be shorter.

Permit me to add another possible reason, one which would also explain the unique manner in which we are to celebrate the 15th of Av.

Josephus records that on the afternoon of the ninth day of Av 70 CE, the Holy Temple was set aflame; this was the day of heaviest fighting. It would be logical to assume that as Jews witnessed Jewish sovereignty and G-d's very throne smoldering, they tore their garments and sat on the ground, sitting shiva not only for the lost lives, but also for the disappearing dream of at-hand redemption.

If the seven-day mourning period began on 9 Av, it must have concluded on 15 Av, the seventh day, about which our sages rule that "partial mourning on that day is accounted as if one had mourned the complete day." Hence, they rose from their shiva on 15 Av, Tu B'Av.

It was precisely on the day that their shiva concluded that our Sages ordained the merriment of Tu B'Av. This parallels the joy when the High Priest emerged unscathed from the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur; a sign that Israel had indeed been forgiven! The Holy Temple may be burning to the ground, but the Jewish nation remains alive and G-d's commitment to His eternal covenant remains intact (as is clear from this week's reading, which we also read on Tisha B'Av. (Deut. 4:25-32)

As the Midrash teaches, G-d exacted punishment from the wood and stones of a physical edifice, albeit a holy one, but He demonstrated His ultimate forgiveness by keeping His nation alive and His covenant operational. This is why and how 9 Av will one day be a day of great celebration.

G-d ordains Tu B'Av as a day of weddings; Judaism sees every wedding ritual as a ringing confirmation of the future of the Jewish people, as a personal commitment to continue the nation and the faith because "there will yet be heard on the streets of Judea and in the great plazas of Jerusalem, sounds of gladness and sounds of rejoicing, sounds of grooms and sounds of brides." (Jeremiah 33: 11)

Judaism bids us never to despair. Certainly our generation has not been disappointed! © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“You (Moshe, said in the masculine) go close and hear all that Hashem our G-d says, and you (Moshe, said in the feminine) shall tell us all that Hashem our G-d tells you, and we will hear and we will do" (D'varim 5:24). This verse, with Moshe paraphrasing what the nation had said to him right after they heard the "Ten Commandments" from G-d Himself, contains interesting nuances. First of all, why did Moshe perceive that the nation referred to him as a female (the second "you"), and why, if he did, did he use the masculine form for the verse's first "you"? Secondly, why was the communication between G-d and Moshe referred to twice? Couldn't the paraphrase have been made shorter by just saying "you tell us all that G-d tells you" rather than first asking Moshe to hear what G-d says and then asking him to tell them what G-d told him? Additionally, from this verse it seems that immediately after the nation heard G-d speak, they reversed the "secret code" (see Shabbos 88a: "who revealed to My sons the secret that the angels use") which they had employed when they accepted G-d's covenant, telling Moshe they would now "hear" before they "do," instead of first committing to "do" whatever G-d commands them and then "hearing" what it is He commanded (see Sh'mos 24:7). If so, why did they lose the "special adornments" received for first saying "we will do" and then saying "we will listen" after the golden calf (see Rashi on Sh'mos 33:4) if even before that sin they had retracted this formula?

Rashi addresses why the second "you" is in the feminine form, explaining that Moshe became "weakened" by the distress he felt because the nation had asked to hear what G-d has to say from Moshe rather than hearing it directly from G-d, which indicated that they were "not in a hurry to get close to G-d out of love." Curiously, Rashi (whose comments here are not based on any known Midrash) did not explain Moshe's weakness as being based on the nation reversing their commitment from "doing" first and then "hearing" to now "hearing" before they "do," apparently this reversal was not problematic. The question is why not, as well as what Rashi meant by "not hurrying to get close to G-d out of love" (which is not the same as not loving G-d,

only fearing him, as if it were Rashi would have put it in much simpler terms.)

The Talmud (Makos 23b-24a, see Ramban on Sh'mos 20:1) tells us that the nation was only able to understand the first two of the "Ten Commandments;" for the rest of them they only heard G-d's "voice," but could not make out any words. Previously (see pg. 4 of <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5772/vaeschanan.pdf>) I suggested that this was a result of every "utterance" of G-d being "shaleim," complete, and therefore simultaneously including every aspect of the concept being "uttered." For example, G-d commanded us to "keep the Sabbath" and "remember the Sabbath" simultaneously ("Shamor v' Zachor b'Dibur Echad"), since both constitute the very nature of our fulfillment of the commandment (the things we must do and the things we can't do). More than one reason for keeping the Sabbath was "announced" in the very same moment; because G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh (Sh'mos 20:10) and because we were slaves in Egypt and He redeemed us (D'varim 5:14-15). The prohibition against doing work was "stated" together with all its qualifications (such as bringing the Sabbath offerings in the Temple, which would otherwise constitute violating the Sabbath). Because all of the details and qualifications of each commandment were said together (in the very same utterance), the nation couldn't distill the different "voices" to understand what was being said, and needed Moshe to explain it to them. The first two commandments, on the other hand, that there is only one G-d and that there is no other deity, have no qualifications, so were able to be understood by everyone. [According to this, it was only the first part of the second commandment that the nation was able to "hear" (Sh'mos 20:3 and D'varim 5:7), since there were multiple details in the rest of this commandment.] Every other commandment, though, has details, specifications and qualifications that could not be "heard," i.e. understood, by anyone who was not on Moshe's level of prophecy because they were all stated at once.

Before hearing G-d "speak," the nation committed themselves to "doing" whatever G-d commanded even before "hearing" what the commandment was. This commitment didn't change after hearing G-d "speak;" it was their awareness of what it would take to fulfill G-d's commandments that changed. Rather than just "doing" based on hearing G-d's instructions and trying to "understand" it afterwards, they realized that they had to understand the details of each commandment in order to know exactly how to properly fulfill it. They needed Moshe to explain each commandment to them, and therefore asked him to do so; they would "hear" what G-d was really saying from Moshe, and then, after understanding how to fulfill G-d's commandment, "do" it. The changing of the order from "do and then hear" to "hear and then do" was not because their commitment was any

weaker, but because their understanding of how to fulfill that commitment had become stronger.

Moshe felt "weakened" because he thought that despite not being able to take any action after hearing directly from G-d until it was explained to them, the nation would/should still want to hear G-d's words directly from Him, out of "love" for G-d and a desire to be as close to Him as possible. (Compare this with Moshe's reaction when he realized that they wanted a copy of the Torah even though they would need the Kohanim/Levi'im to fully explain it, see Rashi on D'varim 29:3.) It wasn't because they changed the order, now insisting on "hearing" the commandments before "doing" them, as they would rightfully need to "hear" Moshe explain them before being able to "do" them. It was their not wanting to hear the words from G-d directly, which was understandable based on the danger it posed (see 5:22). Nevertheless, to Moshe it was indicative of "not hurrying to get close to G-d" (something that Moshe apparently had difficulty relating to). Since it wasn't Moshe having to hear it that "weakened" him, but that they only wanted to hear it from Moshe (and not from G-d first), only the second "you" is in the feminine form. And since the cause of the change from "doing then hearing" to "hearing then doing" was the realization that they needed Moshe to first "hear" (and understand) what G-d said so that he could then explain it to them, there are two clauses in the verse; first Moshe would distill the many "voices" inherent in G-d's commandments, then he would tell the nation precisely what G-d was commanding them and how they should implement it. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Don't Forget

In Parshas Voeschanan we find the very famous portions of the Torah that are imbedded in the soul of the nation: The Ten Commandments and the Shema Yisrael. Although every word of the Omnipotent carries equal force, these commanding portions are better known, if not better observed, by the nation.

But powerful as they are, they were not given in a vacuum. Moshe forewarns the nation not to forget the message of Sinai and to impart its message and its relevance to future generations. "Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:9). In order to comprehend the posuk, it must be separated into two distinct parts. "Beware not to forget the things that your eyes have beheld from your heart all your days." In addition, the Torah adds, "you shall teach the Torah to your children and children's children."

Nevertheless, the grammar is surely questionable, "lest you remove them from your heart all

the days of your life, and make them known to your children." In its simplest form, the verse seems at best contradictory. Look at the words. Beware that you do not remove the teachings from your heart and make them known to your children. How is that possible? If one removes the teaching from his own heart, how can he pass it to his children? The Torah should have overtly inserted some phrase or word clarifying the transition.

The perplexing composition in its simplest form surely leaves for a creative interpretation, perhaps the omission of the transitional word lends itself to a drash that deviates from the obvious meaning.

Thousands of people receive this weekly D'var Torah. In return, I receive many stories for possible use as anecdotal parables. Here is one from the archives.

Junior came home from day camp one day without towel.

"Where is your towel?" asked his mom.

"I don't know," he sighed. "I could not find it after swimming. Maybe someone took it."

The mother was irate. "Who could have taken your towel? It was a great towel! Junior you would never take someone else's towel. You know I raised you differently than that. Right?"

A few moments later, she was on the phone with the day camp director.

"Hello. There is a young thief in your camp!"

"How so?"

"My son had a towel stolen from camp! He brought it in today and it was nowhere"

"Calm down," came the voice on the line. "I am sure that no one stole it. Please describe the towel to me."

"Sure I can! It was white and big. You could not miss it. It had the words Holiday Inn emblazoned on it!"

The Leket Amarim interprets the verse in its purest and most simplistic form, revealing a deeper meaning that belies the simplicity of the verse.

"Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children."

Often when it comes to our actions, we forget the principles that we were taught as youngsters, but we remember them when chiding our children and pontificating.

We may give our children a speech about honesty and integrity, and only minutes later command them to tell a caller on the telephone that, "my father is not home."

We may give speeches about integrity and corporate greed only to have pushed our own portfolios in a certain direction through creative manipulation.

And so, the Torah warns us not to forget its principles for ourselves yet to teach them to our children. Consistency is the message of the moment.

For yourself. For your children. For eternity. © 2002
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RABBI YAAKOV BERNSTEIN

Haaros

Yom Kippur and Tisha B'av have certain similarities in their practices, yet they are essentially different.

Although both are full day fasts and have similar prohibitions, they stand for different ideas. Laws which illustrate the differing functions of the two days include the following: On Tisha B'av, learning Torah is basically not allowed, and we sit on the ground as mourners. Yom Kippur, on the other hand, represents the day in which the Torah was given the final time (following the Eigel Hazahav—the Golden Calf).

The reason for similarity of practices of Yom Kippur and Tisha B'av is that both are days of introspection and self-improvement or "Teshuva;" however, Tisha B'av is a time of mourning over the past, while Yom Kippur is a time of rejoicing over the future.

Since the Gemara says that the first Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because they did not say the brocha for the Torah properly, it is fitting that Torah learning would be forbidden at the time commemorating the destruction. This is not a time of connection, of spiritual attachment, but a time to reflect and consider our ways.

Yom Kippur, on the other hand, is the greatest time of connection and spiritual attachment—the day the Torah was finally given to Yisrael.

In the recorded lectures of Rav Yerucham Levovitz, we find that Tochacha—ethical reproof—deals with past events. The worst thing is for a person to see himself as righteous. He should learn to constantly see his errors, until he realizes that he is not the tzadik (righteous leader) that he thinks he is.

Moshe reproved the people, time and again, without break. He had nothing positive to say about them. In reality, over the course of many years, they made very few mistakes. However, Moshe would not give them the benefit of the doubt, but contently reminded them of their errors. This is the goal, actually—to constantly remember our mistakes, as Dovid Hamelech (King David) said: "My sin is always before me."

The Medrash states: "One who reproves a person, will afterwards find favor, more so than one of smooth speech..." The verse is praising Moshe, who reproved Yisrael and kept them from haughtiness. The opposite is true of Bilam, who praised the people sweetly, and brought them to pride and carelessness.

Nesivos Shalom described why Pirke Avos is studied. People think that the main requirements of the Torah are its mitzvos. Although we often hear about the middos—qualities of character—these seem to be too

subtle for the common man. It is enough to work on the basic Torah requirements.

This is what people feel, but it is not so. Just as we will be judged for fulfilling the mitzvos, so, too, we will be judged for our qualities of character. In fact, the Rabbis were more stringent with middos than with mitzvos. So we find, "Anyone who becomes angry, it is as if he served idols." "Regarding someone who is haughty, Hashem says, 'There is not room for both of us.'" Such strong statements were not said in relation to mitzvos.

The Daas Torah has an entire section on this subject (end of Bamidbar). Rav Moshe Cordevero showed that the Torah is addressed to the intellectual soul; therefore, it mainly discusses mitzvos. The character qualities are based on the animal soul. However, the animal soul is more fundamental; hence, character qualities are more stringent than mitzvos. The Daas Torah compares it to a house. We normally look at the house by the external aspects visible to the eye. However, a beautiful house with poor foundations is not very valuable. Damage to the surface may destroy the entire house. Correcting flaws in the foundation will be costly, difficult work. However, a house with a strong foundation will withstand damage and continue to be useful for generations.

Similarly, the animal soul and the character qualities are the foundation, and are more basic than performing the commandments.

The Daas Torah advances an idea as to why the Torah rarely commands character qualities. The Torah is essentially needed for those things that we would not have thought of on our own. However, character attributes are common sense. There is no need to make commandments for them. In a similar manner, the people of the world are judged for character qualities, even though most of the Torah does not apply to them. If they are not warned, how can they be punished? The answer is that moral qualities are common sense, logical matters, and everyone is obligated to be aware of them.

The second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of "sinas chinom"—baseless hatred. Such a horrible tragedy occurred, because of faults of character. © 2000 Rabbi Y. Bernstein and Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "For which is a great nation that has a G-d Who is close to it, as is our G-d in all our calling to Him" (Deut. 4:7).

Should one only call out for the "big things"? To think that prayer to G-d is only for the "big things" is a big mistake! We must turn to G-d for help and understanding in everything we do.

The Chazon Ish, a great rabbi, cited the Talmud which relates that Rav Huna had 400 barrels of wine that spoiled. His colleagues told him to do some soul-searching regarding the cause of this loss. Rav Huna said, "Do you suspect me of having done anything improper?"

The Sages responded, "Do you suspect G-d of doing something without just cause?" They then told him that he was not giving his sharecropper the agreed upon portion of the crop.

"But, he is a thief!" Rav Huna protested. "He steals from me. I have a right to withhold from him."

"Not so," the Sages said. "Stealing from a thief is still theft" (Talmud Bavli, Berachos 5b).

"Suppose," the Chazon Ish said, "that something like this would occur today. The search for the cause would be whether the temperature in the room was improper or the humidity too high or too low. Few people would search for the cause within themselves, in their ethical behavior. We should know that G-d regulates everything except for our free will in moral and ethical matters. As with Rav Huna, nothing happens without a cause." *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. © 2013 Rabbi K. Packouz & torah.org*

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

Shabbat Shalom

In today's parsha there is a rather remarkable statement. Moses, in the course of his long speech, gives a justification for the children of Israel to follow the commandments: "For that is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations, so that, when they hear all these statutes, they will say: 'Surely a wise and understanding nation is this great nation'" (Deut. 4:6). This seems to be saying that we should observe the commandments so as to impress the nations around us, and is rather different from the contrary advice that we often hear, which is that we should perform the mitzvos notwithstanding the opinions (and even derision) of the people around us. How can we reconcile these two viewpoints?

Think of a school classroom. Those children who perform badly will generally be failed and held back. But suppose that the whole class does badly! They won't fail everyone. More likely, they will fire the teacher!

Suppose now that the whole world is becoming increasingly immoral. It struck me that perhaps we, the Jews, should be held responsible for that—we are supposed to be a "light unto the nations"! We are a teacher whose whole class has failed! What should we do about this?

In Pirke Avos it is written: "He [R' Chanina ben Dosa] used to say: Anyone who is liked by his fellow men is liked by G-d; anyone who is not like by his fellow men, is not liked by G-d" (3:13, trans. Birnbaum). Now

this seems strange—we all know that many people are liked by their fellows because they perform popular (but not necessarily noble) actions or because they make flattering statements, and other people are disliked because they refuse to stoop to such things. So what could this mishna mean?

I want to suggest that it means that anyone who is sufficiently liked by G-d (by virtue of being a tzaddik) develops thereby a certain personality which is admired by other people, regardless of what he might or might not say or do.

Many of us have had the experience of being in the same room as someone who impresses us favorably merely by his presence. (This is often the case with a tzaddik.) We feel that we are in the presence of an exceptional personality.

It is recorded that whenever the saintly Rabbi Joseph Chaim Sonnenfeld used to walk from his home to the synagogue or house of study in Jerusalem, the Arabs in the market would rise as he walked by. They could sense that there was something special about him!

This is what I believe the verse from the Torah portion quoted above means. It is not that we should try to impress the people around us by our performance of mitzvos—they might very well laugh at our observance of kashrus, or tefillin, for example. However, as a result of performing such mitzvos, our characters will undergo an improvement, and it is this that will cause the people of the world to say: "Surely a wise and understanding nation is this great nation". In this way we can fulfil our task of being a light unto the nations. © 1989 Rabbi Y. Haber

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

You shall know this day and take to your heart that HASHEM, He is G-d - in heaven above and on the earth below- there is none other. (Devarim 4:39)

There's a story about a man in an insane asylum in the mid-west that insisted on eating kosher food. When the hospital refused he demonstrated his sincerity by going on a hunger strike. It became an administrative nightmare but they were forced to capitulate. They had kosher food shipped from hundreds of miles away each day for this one patient. One of the Jewish doctors was making his rounds on Saturday morning and he saw this same man smoking a big cigar. The doctor was aghast. He promptly rebuked the patient, "You turn the whole hospital upside down for Kosher food and here it is the holy Sabbath and you're smoking a cigar?!" He took another big puff and said, "Doc, don't forget! I'm crazy!"

Similarly we often find it difficult to live up to what we know since we tend to act on the warmth of feelings rather than cold information alone. The ideal is when we are emotionally engaged with that which our

sober intellect has confirmed true. The question remains even after we are convinced of a critical fact of life like the existence of G-d or the truth of Torah, how does one excite the heart and make it really real? It's frighteningly possible to pass the written exam and fail in the practicum of life. That's crazy! What then is one to do?

A) Take a phrase and repeat it over and over again with more animation and emotion. Pictures, colorful and textured will begin to sprout from the words over time as they become more densely packed with meaning.

B) Koneh lechah chaver- Acquire for your self a friend, says the Mishne in Pirke Avos. That's nice too. The word K'neh can also mean a pen. Let your pen be your friend. Sit with a blank page and ask a question on the top. What lasts? Let it flow unedited. Make lists of 25 things. How can I be a better husband/father/Jew? Let it flow. Edit later!

C) Take a media diet. Life unfolds like a soap opera. You can come back months later and find out you missed little. After a while you might begin to think your own thoughts and hear your own heart beating separate from the noise of the world.

D) Teach others. Nothing causes a person to know something more intimately than to be in a position of having to teach somebody else.

E) Do some quiet acts of goodness without the knowledge or approval of any other persons. By so doing you will have opened a private "inner-world" account and forged a deep personal relationship with HASHEM.

F) Learn Torah passionately and with a highlighter.

Reb Klonymous Kalman of Piaseczno writes, "There is a type of prophetic revelation that comes when one looks into a holy book. Not knowledge of the future, for that ceased when the Temple was destroyed. Rather, it is guidance and a call to service of G-d and the holiness of Israel. At times, we have all experienced looking into a holy book and suddenly becoming extremely moved by a certain idea. A word pierces our heart and gives us no rest for years, until it can transform us into a different person and sanctify and uplift us. What is going on? We have already heard this idea from others and seen it in books, yet we remained untouched. Yet now, the matter suddenly penetrates our heart and mind. This is a form of looking into the Breast Plate worn by the High Priest. There too, all the letters were written, yet only some of them would shine into the eyes of the Kohen; and only a Kohen with divine inspiration. Another Kohen could stand beside him and not see a thing."

Taking action on any or all, of this partial list of proven methods can help launch one of life's most exciting and yet all too neglected adventures. From a pure intellect begins the long journey to the heart. © 2004 Rabbi L. Lam & Project Genesis, Inc.