

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

"If only you would listen to these laws..." (Deut. 7:12). These words with which our parsha begins contain a verb that is a fundamental motif of the book of Devarim. The verb is sh-m-a. It occurred in last week's parsha in the most famous line of the whole of Judaism, Shema Yisrael. It occurs later in this week's parsha in the second paragraph of the Shema, "It shall be if you surely listen [shamo'a tishme'u]... (Deut. 11:13). It appears no less than 92 times in Devarim as a whole.

We often miss the significance of this word because of what I call the fallacy of translatability: the assumption that one language is fully translatable into another. We hear a word translated from one language to another and assume that it means the same in both. But often it doesn't. Languages are only partially translatable into one another. (Robert Frost said: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." Cervantes compared translation to the other side of a tapestry. At best we see a rough outline of the pattern we know exists on the other side, but it lacks definition and is full of loose threads.)

The key terms of one civilization are often not fully reproducible in another. The Greek word megalopsychos, for example, Aristotle's "great-souled man" who is great and knows he is, and carries himself with aristocratic pride, is untranslatable into a moral system like Judaism in which humility is a virtue. The English word "tact" has no precise equivalent in Hebrew. And so on.

This is particularly so in the case of the Hebrew verb sh-m-a. Listen, for example, to the way the opening words of this week's parsha have been translated into English:

- "If you hearken to these precepts..."
- "If you completely obey these laws..."
- "If you pay attention to these laws..."
- "If you heed these ordinances..."
- "Because ye hear these judgments..."

There is no single English word that means to hear, to listen, to heed, to pay attention to, and to obey. Sh-m-a also means "to understand," as in the story of the tower of Babel, when G-d says, Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand [yishme'u] each other" (Gen. 11:7).

As I have argued elsewhere, one of the most striking facts about the Torah is that, although it contains 613 commands, it does not contain a word that means "to obey." When such a word was needed in modern Hebrew, the verb le-tzayet was borrowed from Aramaic. The verb used by the Torah in place of "to obey" is sh-m-a. This is of the highest possible significance. It means that blind obedience is not a virtue in Judaism. G-d wants us to understand the laws He has commanded us. He wants us to reflect on why this law, not that. He wants us to listen, to reflect, to seek to understand, to internalise and to respond. He wants us to become a listening people.

Ancient Greece was a visual culture, a culture of art, architecture, theatre and spectacle. For the Greeks generally, and Plato specifically, knowing was a form of seeing. Judaism, as Freud pointed out in *Moses and Monotheism*, is a non-visual culture. We worship a G-d who cannot be seen; and making sacred images, icons, is absolutely forbidden. In Judaism we do not see G-d; we hear G-d. Knowing is a form of listening. Ironically, Freud himself, deeply ambivalent though he was about Judaism, in psycho-analysis invented the listening cure: listening as therapy.

(Anna O. [Bertha Pappenheim] famously described Freudian psychoanalysis as "the talking cure," but it is in fact a listening cure. Only through the active listening of the analyst can there be the therapeutic or cathartic talking of the patient.)

It follows that in Judaism listening is a deeply spiritual act. To listen to G-d is to be open to G-d. That is what Moses is saying throughout Devarim: "If only you would listen." So it is with leadership -- indeed with all forms of interpersonal relationship. Often the greatest gift we can give someone is to listen to them.

Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz and went on to create a new form of psychotherapy based on "man's search for meaning," once told the story of a patient of his who phoned him in the middle of the night to tell him, calmly, that she was about to commit suicide. He kept her on the phone for two hours, giving her every conceivable reason to live. Eventually she said that she had changed her mind and would not end her life. When he next saw the woman he asked her which of his many reasons had persuaded her to change her mind. "None," she replied. "Why then did you decide not to commit suicide?" She replied that the fact that someone was prepared to listen to her for two

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hours in the middle of the night convinced her that life was worth living after all. (Anna Redsand, Viktor Frankl, a life worth living, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006, 113-14.)

As Chief Rabbi I was involved in resolving a number of highly intractable agunah cases: situations in which a husband was unwilling to give his wife a get so that she could remarry. We resolved all these cases not by legal devices but by the simple act of listening: deep listening, in which we were able to convince both sides that we had heard their pain and their sense of injustice. This took many hours of total concentration and a principled absence of judgment and direction. Eventually our listening absorbed the acrimony and the couple were able to resolve their differences together. Listening is intensely therapeutic.

Before I became Chief Rabbi I was head of our rabbinical training seminary, Jews' College. There in the 1980s we ran one of the most advanced practical rabbinics programmes ever devised. It included a three-year programme in counselling. The professionals we recruited to run the course told us that they had one precondition. We had to agree to take all the participants away to an enclosed location for two days. Only those who were willing to do this would be admitted to the course.

We did not know in advance what the counsellors were planning to do, but we soon discovered. They planned to teach us the method pioneered by Carl Rogers known as non-directive or person-centred therapy. This involves active listening and reflective questioning, but no guidance on the part of the therapist.

As the nature of the method became clear, the rabbis began to object. It seemed to oppose everything they stood for. To be a rabbi is to teach, to direct, to tell people what to do. The tension between the counsellors and the rabbis grew almost to the point of crisis, so much so that we had to stop the course for an hour while we sought some way of reconciling what the counsellors were doing and what the Torah seemed to be saying. That is when we began to reflect, for the first time as a group, on the spiritual dimension of listening, of sh-m-a Yisrael.

The deep truth behind person-centred therapy

is that listening is the key virtue of the religious life. That is what Moses was saying throughout Devarim. If we want G-d to listen to us we have to be prepared to listen to Him. And if we learn to listen to Him, then we eventually learn to listen to our fellow humans: the silent cry of the lonely, the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the people in existential pain.

When G-d appeared to King Solomon in a dream and asked him what he would like to be given, Solomon replied: lev shome'a, literally "a listening heart" to judge the people (1 Kings 3:9). The choice of words is significant. Solomon's wisdom lay, at least in part, in his ability to listen, to hear the emotion behind the words, to sense what was being left unsaid as well as what was said. It is common to find leaders who speak, very rare to find leaders who listen. But listening often makes the difference.

Listening matters in a moral environment as insistent on human dignity as is Judaism. The very act of listening is a form of respect. The royal family in Britain is known always to arrive on time and depart on time. I will never forget the occasion -- her aides told me that they had never witnessed it before -- when the Queen stayed for two hours longer than her scheduled departure time. The day was 27 January 2005, the occasion, the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The Queen had invited survivors to a reception at St James' Palace. Each had a story to tell, and the Queen took the time to listen to every one of them. One after another came up to me and said, "Sixty years ago I did not know whether tomorrow I would be alive, and here I am talking to the Queen." That act of listening was one of the most royal acts of graciousness I have ever witnessed. Listening is a profound affirmation of the humanity of the other.

In the encounter at the burning bush, when G-d summoned Moses to be a leader, Moses replied, "I am not a man of words, not yesterday, not the day before, not from the first time You spoke to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Ex. 4:10). Why would G-d choose to lead the Jewish people a man who found it hard to speak? Perhaps because one who cannot speak learns how to listen. A leader is one who knows how to listen: to the unspoken cry of others and to the still, small voice of G-d. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Guard yourselves lest you forget the Lord your G-d...lest you eat and be satisfied... and your heart becomes haughty and you forget the Lord your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage" (Deuteronomy 8:11-14). This week's Biblical portion of Ekev is a magnificent paean of praise to the glories of the land of Israel, a land especially set aside for the Hebrews which will

provide them with plentiful vegetation, luscious fruits and wealth producing natural resources necessary for their ultimate success as a nation. And at the precise center of this lyrical description of a unique land for a unique people, comes the commandment for the mother of all blessings, the Grace recited after meals: "And you shall eat and be satisfied, and you shall bless the Lord your G-d for the good land which He has given you" (ibid. 8:10).

A careful study of this chapter, which contains exactly twenty verses, reveals three major Biblical concepts which parallel the three Biblical blessings of our Grace after Meals: firstly, that everyone lives not by bread alone but by what emanates from G-d, the Universal Sustainer (ibid. 8:2-3 with the first blessing thanking G-d "who feeds all"), secondly, that G-d has brought the Israelites specifically to this land which will sustain us (ibid. 8:7-10, with the second blessing thanking G-d "for the land and the sustenance"); and thirdly that G-d adjures us not to forget Him and His laws lest we be destroyed from off the land He has given us (ibid. 8:11-20, with the third blessing beseeching G-d for compassion towards His nation, Israel and Jerusalem, and thanking G-d "the builder of Jerusalem").

Why are there two separate blessings, the second for the land and the third for Jerusalem? Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel just as Washington, D.C. is the capital city of the United States. Why not incorporate the restoration of Jerusalem with the restoration of the land of Israel, leaving two Biblical blessings for the Grace after Meals rather than three?

I believe that the Lord of Israel and the City of Jerusalem are two separate entities, two separate concepts, and two separate sanctities. Israel is a specific geographical location whose function is to provide nutrients and material benefits for the Israelite nation. And a nation-state requires a leader-ruler, who takes ministerial responsibility for the physical security and economic well-being of his citizenry. It makes sense that he live in a capital city, like Jerusalem which will also house other governmental agencies responsible for the smooth functioning of the commonwealth.

However, as chapter eight also makes clear, the land and the nation of Israel remain beholden to a Higher Leader, the ultimate Leader-Ruler of whoever may be elected or appointed to rule: He who is the Lord of all lords, the Universal King of all kings. He has inspired and in-spirited Israel with His message of compassionate righteousness and moral justice. He has revealed to Israel His demand for human freedom and ethical morality. He has commanded Israel to build for Him a House- on earth so that His teachings and values may dwell within humanity in this world.

This place of G-d's dwelling is the primary

Jerusalem, the expression of the true sanctity of Jerusalem. The mortal ruler whose throne is in Jerusalem, even King Messiah, is merely the representative, the spokesperson, for the true and universal Ruler of all rulers (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The Temple from whence G-d's teachings of love, morality and peace will extend to all the families of the earth (Isaiah 2, Micah 4) is the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, in the City of G-d Jerusalem, in the City of Peace Jerusalem, in the City of Wholeness and Universalism, Jerusalem, where "My house will be a House of Prayer for all peoples" when "all the nations will call upon the Name of G-d to serve Him in united resolve". (Zephania 3:9)

In order to distinguish between these two Jerusalems, the Jerusalem Capital City of Israel and the Jerusalem City of G-d, the Jerusalem of the Knesset and the Jerusalem of the Third Temple, the Jerusalem of today and the Jerusalem of our Messianic vision, it is most proper to refer to the later Jerusalem as Zion (see for example Psalm 132:13, "G-d has chosen Zion, a desirable dwelling place for Him", or Psalm 134:3, "May the Lord bless you from Zion"). And it is for this Jerusalem, which will be a light and a banner for all humanity, that we are praying in the third blessing of the Grace after Meals, especially as we mention, "Zion, the Sanctuary of Your Glory."

Postscript:

On Tisha B'Av, when we recited the "Nahem" prayer in the Minhah Amidah and spoke of a city which has been laid waste, scorned and desolate...like a barren, childless woman, devoured by the (Roman) legions", the words seem at best disingenuous and at worst ungrateful and blind to our present day miracle. I have adopted for my prayer and suggested for Efrat, the emendation of Rav Haim David HaLevi, who substituted the past tense (hayta - was) whenever the text is in the present tense. However, in light of this commentary I adopted this year the emendation of Rav Nahum Rabinowitz, Rosh HaYeshiva of Birkat Moshe, Maaleh Adumim, who substitutes "the mountain" for the "the city" which is now laid waste. If the subject of the prayer is Har Habayit, the Temple Mount, Zion rather than Jerusalem, then unfortunately, the prayer remains exceedingly relevant. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Rashi, in commenting on the first word of this week's parsha, employs an interpretation of the word eikev, which in the context of the verse itself means "since" or "because." It usually denotes a cause and effect relationship – because you will observe G-d's commandments, then blessings and physical rewards will descend upon you. Rashi, however, based on midrash, expands the meaning of the word eikev

andudes an alternative meaning of the word, meaning "foot" or "heel."

He comments that there are commandments and values in Jewish Torah life that the Jews somehow take lightly. They grind them into the dust of everyday life by stepping upon them with their foot and/or heel. It is these, so to speak, neglected commandments and values that are the true key for spiritual success and a good life. Rashi emphasizes to us that the choice of the word *eikev*, in the beginning verse of the parsha, is not merely a literary issue of vocabulary. Rather, in the choice of that word, the Torah is teaching us the valuable lesson of life that there really are no small things or inconsequential acts.

The rabbis in Avot taught us to be careful with "light" commandments just as we are justly careful with more stringent and weighty commandments. The rabbis emphasize that one does not know the true effect of the observance of these "light" commandments in the reward and punishment scheme of the judgment of Heaven. So the Torah in effect teaches us to watch our step and actions lest our heel unintentionally treads upon a holy commandment and/or value.

It is difficult for us to measure differing values and the weight and worth of any of the commandments of the Torah. In cases of conflicting values and contradictory instructions, the halachic process resolves for us what our behavior and action should be. Yet, on an intellectual and spiritual plane, we are always faced with decisions regarding our priorities of behavior and action.

I am attempting to muster some semblance of intent and devotion in my recitation of the prayers when a poor man shoves his hands in front of my face demanding that I give him some money. What shall I do? Shall I ignore the poor man and attempt somehow to regain my devotional intent in prayer or shall I abandon the prayer and grant a coin to the beggar? Which value shall I tread upon with my heel?

We are faced with such a type of dilemma on a regular daily basis. Somehow if we can balance our priorities and not subject any of them to be ground under our heels, great things can be accomplished. And even if we are unable to actualize such a balance, the recognition of the potentially conflicting values and actions – the realization that one is not ever to judge G-d's commandments as being light and heavy, important and less important – is itself a great step toward true spirituality and an understanding of Judaism.

In the American Revolutionary War there was a famous colonial flag that proclaimed: "Don't Tread On Me!" In effect, this is the message of the Torah regarding observance of commandments and our attitude towards Torah and tradition. ©2014 Rabbi Bere/ 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.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Although we may live lives dedicated to following the commandments of the Torah, the core question of "What does G-d ask of us?" is posed in the Torah portion this week. It offers the following answer; "Only," to "fear" and "love Him"...and to "observe the commandment of the Lord." (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13)

The fact that the Torah uses the word "only" seems to imply that following the commandments is a minimal request. Yet, keeping 613 commandments is far from a small demand, it is, indeed, a major commitment that requires all of the self.

Some suggest that these words, offered as they were by Moshe (Moses), were said from his perspective. For him, it was a minimal request because for Moshe, the prophet of prophets, keeping all of the mitzvot (commandments) came naturally.

This is a bit troubling for it seems that by using the term "only," Moshe, who was a master teacher was making a grievous error by not speaking on the level of the people. He was not speaking in the "language" they could understand.

The key to understanding the use of "only" may lie in resolving the larger question of why G-d gives the commandments at all. Are they primarily given for His sake, or for ours?

One could look at the mitzvot as G-d's way of expressing rulership over us. When we keep His laws we profess allegiance and commitment to Him.

There is, however, an alternative approach. The mitzvot are not haphazard laws given by a G-d who wants "only" to rule us just for the sake of ruling us. Instead, the commandments express what G-d feels is best for His people. They are for our sake. It's G-d's way of saying, I've created a beautiful world - follow these laws and you will find inner happiness. In the words of G-d to Avraham (Abraham), "hithalekh le-fanai veyei tamim, walk before Me, and you will find fulfillment." (Genesis 17:1) Note the similarity between hithalekh and halakha. G-d tells Avraham, follow the commandments, follow the halakha-and you will find inner peace and inner meaning.

By focusing on three major Jewish rituals, family purity, the dietary laws and Shabbat, we can better understand that the mitzvot are for our sake. These rituals correspond to the three basic human drives. Family purity corresponds to the sexual encounter, the dietary laws to eating, and Shabbat to the human quest for power. Since Judaism views human passions as G-d's gifts to us, the halakha is meant in part as a mechanism to sanctify these passions, allowing us to better appreciate and find

greater meaning in life itself.

Many have felt that a G-d of love would never have initiated commandments which seem to limit and restrict human beings. Yet, this week's parsha tells us while these "limits" and "restrictions" are complex and sometimes difficult to follow, they are the key to living a life of meaning and holiness. When Moshe tells us what G-d wants, he uses the word "only" - a minimalistic request - teaching that G-d gives the laws out of his great concern for our welfare, for what is best for us.

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd the Children of Israel traveled from B'eiros B'nei Ya'akun to Moseira; there Aharon died, and he was buried there, and his son Elazar took over his priestly duties" (D'varim 10:6). This verse says rather explicitly that Aharon died at Moseira, while previous verses (Bamidbar 20:22-28, 33:37-39) state explicitly that he died at Hor Hahar. In order to explain this discrepancy, Rashi (on our verse and on Bamidbar 26:13), based on Chazal (Yerushalmi Sotah 1:10), says that after Aharon died at Hor Hahar and the protective "clouds of glory" left, the nation was attacked. This in turn led to much of the nation retracing their steps with the intention of returning to Egypt. The Tribe of Levi chased after them to bring them back, and a civil war ensued, causing much loss of life (several prominent families were wiped out in this war). This war occurred at Moseira, so although the Levi'im were able to bring everyone (at least those who didn't die in the civil war) back, since the tragic consequences of the civil war were the result of Aharon's death, the nation mourned for him (again) at Moseira, and considered it as if he had died there rather than at Hor Hahar.

Rabbi Isaac S. D. Sassoon ("Destination Torah") points out that the Torah says Aharon died in Moseira even though this was not literally true, based on the nation's perception of where his death took place. Or as Rabbi Sassoon put it, "this explanation enshrines a cardinal principle, viz., that the Torah may report an event the way it is perceived by the people or remembered in their collective memory. It is a principle that should probably be seen as an offshoot of that other great hermeneutical law: 'the Torah uses language after the manner of people.' Put a different way, perception becomes reality, and a statement that would not normally be considered true or accurate is now considered a "true" statement.

That the Torah may teach things in a way that is, on its surface, misleading, is evident from how Rashi explains the death of Avraham's father, Terach, being stated well before it actually occurred: "And Terach died

in Charan" (B'reishis 11:32); "[he died] after Avram left Charan and came to the Land of Canaan and was there for more than 60 years." Rashi then proves this chronology before continuing: "and why did the Torah discuss Terach's death before discussing Avram leaving [Charan] (if he left so many years before Terach died)? So that it not be obvious to all [whereby] they will say that Avram did not fulfill [the commandment of] honoring his father, as he abandoned him in his elderly years and went away."

[It should be noted that Rashi's Midrashic source (B'reishis Rabbah 39:7) has it as Avraham being concerned that others would think he didn't honor his father. This is significant because rather than G-d trying to "hide" the true chronology in order to mislead those who might use Avraham leaving Terach behind as a way of rationalizing not honoring their parents, G-d was placating Avraham by minimizing his concern about how he would be perceived. Additionally, the Midrash (and Rashi) make it a point to add that technically Terach could have been considered "dead" since "the wicked are considered dead even while they are still (physically) alive," which could make the chronological impression (that Terach "died" before Avraham left Charan) a "true" one even if not literally true. Nevertheless, we do see that the Torah sometimes presents things in a way that is purposely misleading, in this case giving the impression that Terach died before Avraham left Charan even though in reality Avraham left many decades before Terach died.

It should also be noted that this need not be the reason Terach's death is recorded here, as it is normal for the Torah to finish a topic or sequence, even if part of it is not in chronological order, before moving on to the next topic (see Ramban). By the same token, there are other approaches that attempt to explain the discrepancy regarding where Aharon died (see Rashbam, Ibn Ezra and Ramban). Even so, the approach put forth by Rashi, with Midrashic backing, gives validity to the notion that the Torah is sometimes purposely misleading; how much more mainstream then Rashi can one get?!

An interesting aspect of Terach's death being presented in a misleading manner is that Rashi "spills the beans," as now we all know that Terach died well before Avraham left Charan. Nevertheless, after all is said and done we not only know the true chronology, but that honoring parents is of such primary importance that the Torah presented things inaccurately in order to protect it. Additionally, we may be blessed with a widespread study of Rashi, whereby the true chronology is now widely known, but this was not always the case (and still isn't always necessarily the case). [This is true of many concepts in the Talmud as well, where it is clear that it was assumed the "masses" would not become aware of them, but with the widespread study of Daf HaYomi have become known

to a much higher percentage of the population than seems to have been intended.] What becomes clear is that the Torah assumed a multi-tiered level of knowledge among those who study it, with a more superficial and possibly misleading layer intended for some, and a deeper, more complex layer for others. This places a certain level of responsibility upon those who can see beyond the superficial layer, as sharing some of the complexities may be detrimental to those ill-equipped to process them.

Rabbi Sassoon gives numerous other examples where the Torah (and Tanach in general) presents things in a way that isn't literally true, but on how they are perceived. For example, the three "men" who came to visit Avraham after his circumcision did not actually eat, even though the Torah says they did, since it appeared as if they did (see Rashi on B'reishis 18:8). Pharaoh really did "know" Yosef, even if he pretended he didn't, yet the Torah says he didn't because that's how he acted (see Rashi on Sh'mos 1:8). The King of Arad is described as a Canaanite king even though he was really a descendant of Eisav/Amalek because he disguised himself as a Canaanite and was therefore mistaken for one (see Rashi on Bamidbar 21:1; see Yalkut Shimoni for more details). Which leaves us wondering about other possible examples where the Torah describes the perception rather than the reality.

Did Chava really have a conversation with a talking snake, or was that just how she perceived it (see

<http://rabbidmk.wordpress.com/2011/10/18/parashas-berashis-5772/>)? Did the flood really affect the entire globe, or was it presented that way because that was how Noach and his family perceived it? Although Lot's daughters thought the whole world was being destroyed (B'reishis 19:31) yet that's not how things are described, in the context of the entire story, everyone else (including Lot) knew it was only S'dom (and its environs) that was destroyed. Did the Egyptians really make us work unreasonably hard, or was that just our perception? Based on how we are required to celebrate Passover (including the "bitter herbs") and the way our sages describe the torturous tasks the Egyptians made us do, it would be difficult to say it was just our perception. But without such guidance, how are we to know? Are we supposed to assume things are literally true unless there is a tradition that they may not be, or are we mature enough to think objectively and responsibly about what might or might not be literally true? By indicating that not everything in the Torah's narratives (as opposed to its halachic requirements and obligations) has to be taken at face value, a myriad of possibilities have been made available; it is up to us to make the best, and most appropriate, use of these possibilities (even if that means ignoring them). ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Ekev is where we learn of the benefits and rewards, punishments and consequences, of following and not following the Mitzvot (commandments) set forth for us in the Torah. Among those commandments is a famous one (8:10), which says that "you will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He gave you." If you just ate food, why are you thanking G-d for land? You should be thanking Him for the food itself. Why be indirect? The answer lies in understanding the true difference between animals and people... What separates us from animals is our ability to choose, and our exercising of that choice. Our nature tells us what we NEED to do, while our mind (and religion) tells us what we SHOULD do. Therefore, the more things we do simply because of habit and without thinking, the less free will we're exercising, which makes us more like animals. Conversely, the more restraint we exercise, the more freedom we're expressing, because we weren't slaves to our nature. What makes being a Jew so special is that we have so many 'choices' of commandments we can perform, and each of those positive choices make us less like animals and more like G-d.

With this in mind, even if we already 'perform' Mitzvot now, if we do it out of habit and without thinking and actively deciding to do them, we're just as guilty of doing it 'naturally'. For Jews, deciding to do something is just as important as doing it, because then we think about why we do it, and the source, reason, and meaning of it all become part of the action. Now we can understand why we thank G-d for the LAND, when we merely eat its bread: We not only thank G-d for the bread we eat, but we also think of the land that it came from, because we've thought it through to its source, instead of taking bread at face value. The lesson of the Parsha is for us to think about what we're doing, why we're doing it, and realize how much control we have. Perhaps we should think of at least one bad habit we have, and use this lesson to push us to overcome our natural tendency to blindly surrender to that habit. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Before entering the land of Israel at the end of 40 years wandering in the desert, Moses speaks to assuage the fear in the heart of the people:

"If you will say in your heart, these nations are more numerous than we, how can we conquer them? Do not fear them, remember what the Almighty, your G-d, did to Pharaoh and all of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 7:17-18)

How will this lessen their worry?

Worry is being afraid that in a future situation you will not be able to cope. (It is also interest paid in advance on a debt which oftentimes never comes due.) Remembering how the Almighty has helped you in similar situations in the past makes it easier to trust in Him in the present. Thus, Moses had the Jewish people focus on how the Almighty dealt with the Egyptians. Likewise, whenever you find yourself worrying about the future, ask yourself, "When has the Almighty already shown me that He can help me overcome a difficulty similar to this?" It will increase your calm and your trust in G-d. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org*

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. © 2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"**Y**ou will eat and you will be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem, your Elokim, for the good Land that He gave you." (8:10)

The Gemara (Berachot 50a) teaches: "From the way a person words his blessings, one can tell if he is a scholar or a boor. If he says (in the zimun / 'invitation' before bentching), 'Uv'tuvo / In His goodness, we have lived,' he is a scholar. If he says, 'U'mi'tuvo / From His goodness, we have lived,' he is a boor."

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005; a leading teacher of mussar) explains: If one says, "In His goodness, we have lived," he demonstrates his understanding that we are surrounded at all times by Hashem's goodness. But, if one says, "From His goodness, we have lived," he implies that Hashem sits aloofly in the Heavens and sends some goodness down to us, which is not true. (Da'at Shlomo: Shavuot p.497) © 2014 S. Katz & torah.org

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