

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

A New Beginning

The cycle of the Jewish year has already begun. We've approached Almighty G-d and asked him for forgiveness, beseeching Him for a year of health and prosperity. For the Jewish People, the High Holy days represents a time of renewal; a time for a new beginning.

I often wonder how we are able to approach Almighty G-d with the same yearly requests, given the fact that we are essentially the same people we were a year ago and probably didn't change much over the course of the year. Yet we approach G-d as if our slate has been wiped clean and we can begin anew, fresh and invigorated as if this was the first day of our lives. What a remarkable thought!

The possibilities are endless, and the opportunities allow us to envision for our families and ourselves the possibility of erasing our past and starting fresh.

This ability to look ahead and not necessarily to look back at the past is truly a G-d given talent; To somehow forget the past and to believe that the future will bring new and exciting possibilities without the influence of our misdeeds of the past; To see a person as good despite his/her past actions; To give them a second chance knowing full well that they might ultimately fail again.

We find this same concept in Jewish Education as well. When we begin the year educators should project the theme of Rosh Hashanah to all their teachers and students- the theme of a new beginning; a chance to start fresh and to right the past. Teachers tend to label children at a young age. Most times this label remains with the children throughout their lives, frequently stifling their growth and more importantly, their ability to change. I often overheard teachers talk negatively about students as early as the first day of school. Remarks such as "Oh yes I know him very well, he's a handful and he never does his work" resonate when they receive their student rosters. While their comments are meant as friendly warnings to their co-workers, their statements have a profound negative effect on any possibility that there is any hope for change in the future for this child.

Though we know our children intimately, and we know who are studious and who are discipline

problems, we owe it to ourselves and our students to look at each student as beginning a new slate. In the past, when I began my first Staff meeting of the year, I often told my teachers that this is the approach we should have when starting the school year. As difficult as this sounds, given the past record of a particular child, it nevertheless becomes incumbent on all educators to make the attempt and to allow the child to feel that he/she is given a new beginning, to start fresh and forge a new path for their future.

Though Judaism holds accountable the past deeds and misdeeds of an adult, they are nevertheless given the opportunity to assemble on Yom Kippur and ask Almighty G-d for forgiveness. Children, as well, must be allowed to feel that there is a chance for them to change despite their past actions. As Teachers and Educators we owe it to them to attempt with all our passion, love and understanding to give them this chance. ©2014 Rabbi Mordechai Weiss - Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigel Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and will be making Aliya this Summer. Any comments can be e-mailed to him at rvmordechai@aol.com

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Only now, reaching Nitzavim-Vayelech, can we begin to get a sense of the vast, world- changing project at the heart of the Divine-human encounter that took place in the lifetime of Moses and the birth of Jews/Hebrews/Israel as a nation.

To understand it, recall the famous remark of Sherlock Holmes. "I draw your attention," he said to Dr Watson, "to the curious incident of the dog at night." "But the dog did nothing at night," said Watson. "That," said Holmes, "is the curious incident."¹ Sometimes to know what a book is about you need to focus on what it does not say, not just on what it does.

What is missing from the Torah, almost inexplicably so given the background against which it is set, is a fixation with death. The ancient Egyptians were obsessed with death. Their monumental buildings were an attempt to defy death. The pyramids were giant mausoleums. More precisely, they were portals through which the soul of a deceased pharaoh could ascend to heaven and join the immortals. The most famous Egyptian text that has come down to us is The Book of

¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of Silver Blaze.'

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the Dead. Only the afterlife is real: life is a preparation for death.

There is nothing of this in the Torah, at least not explicitly. Jews believed in *olam haba*, the world to come, life after death. They believed in *tehiyat hametim*, the resurrection of the dead.² There are six references to it in the second paragraph of the Amidah alone. But not only are these ideas almost completely absent from Tanakh. They are absent at the very points where we would expect them.

The book of Kohelet/Ecclesiastes is an extended lament at human mortality. Havel havalim hakol havel: Everything is worthless because life is a mere fleeting breath. Why did the author of Ecclesiastes not mention the world to come and life-after-death? The book of Job is a sustained protest against the apparent injustice of the world. Why did no one answer Job: "You and other innocent people who suffer will be rewarded in the afterlife"? We believe in the afterlife. Why then is it not mentioned – merely hinted at – in the Torah? That is the curious incident.

The simple answer is that obsession with death ultimately devalues life. Why fight against the evils and injustices of the world if this life is only a preparation for the world to come? Ernest Becker in his classic *The Denial of Death*³ argues that fear of our own mortality has been one of the driving forces of civilization. It is what led the ancient world to enslave the masses, turning them into giant labour forces to build monumental buildings that would stand as long as time itself. It led to the ancient cult of the hero, the man who becomes immortal by doing daring deeds on the field of battle. We fear death; we have a love-hate relationship with it. Freud called this *thanatos*, the death instinct, and said it was one of the two driving forces of life, the other being *eros*.

Judaism is a sustained protest against this world-view. That is why "No one knows where Moses is

² The Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1, says that believing that the resurrection of the dead is stated in the Torah is a fundamental of Jewish faith. However, on any interpretation, the statement is implicit, not explicit.

³ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, New York, Free Press, 1973.

buried" (Deut. 34: 6) so that his tomb should never become a place of pilgrimage and worship. That is why in place of a pyramid or a temple such as Ramses II built at Abu Simbel, all the Israelites had for almost five centuries until the days of Solomon was the *mishkan*, a portable sanctuary, more like a tent than a temple. That is why, in Judaism, death defiles and why the rite of the Red Heifer was necessary to purify people from contact with it. That is why the holier you are – if you are a cohen, more so if you are the High Priest – the less you can be in contact or under the same roof as a dead person. G-d is not in death but in life.

Only against this Egyptian background can we fully sense the drama behind words that have become so familiar to us that we are no longer surprised by them, the great words in which Moses frames the choice for all time: See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil ... I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that you and your children may live.

(Deut. 30: 15, 19)

Life is good, death is bad. Life is a blessing, death is a curse. These are truisms for us. Why even mention them? Because they were not common ideas in the ancient world. They were revolutionary. They still are.

How then do you defeat death? Yes there is an afterlife. Yes there is *tehiyat hametim*, resurrection. But Moses does not focus on these obvious ideas. He tells us something different altogether. You achieve immortality by being part of a covenant – a covenant with eternity itself, that is to say, a covenant with G-d.

When you live your life within a covenant something extraordinary happens. Your parents and grandparents live on in you. You live on in your children and grandchildren. They are part of your life. You are part of theirs. That is what Moses meant when he said, near the beginning of this week's parsha: It is not with you alone that I am making this covenant and oath, but with whoever stands with us here today before the Lord our G-d as well as those not with us here today. (Deut. 29: 13-14)

In Moses' day that last phrase meant "your children not yet born." He did not need to include "your parents, no longer alive" because their parents had themselves made a covenant with G-d forty years before at Mount Sinai. But what Moses meant in a larger sense is that when we renew the covenant, when we dedicate our lives to the faith and way of life of our ancestors, they become immortal in us, as we become immortal in our children.

It is precisely because Judaism focuses on this world, not the next, that it is the most child-centred of all the great religions. They are our immortality. That is what Rachel meant when she said, "Give me children, or else I am like one dead" (Gen. 30: 1). It is what

Abraham meant when he said, "Lord, G-d, what will you give me if I remain childless?" (Gen. 15: 2). We are not all destined to have children. The rabbis said that the good we do constitutes our toledot, our posterity.⁴ But by honouring the memory of our parents and bringing up children to continue the Jewish story we achieve the one form of immortality that lies this side of the grave, in this world that G-d pronounced good.

Now consider the two last commands in the Torah, set out in parshat Vayelech, the ones Moses gave at the very end of his life. One is hakhel, the command that the king summon the nation to an assembly every seven years: At the end of every seven years ... Assemble the people – men, women and children, and the stranger living in your towns – so that they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your G-d and follow carefully all the words of this law. (Deut. 31: 12)

The meaning of this command is simple. Moses is saying: It is not enough that your parents made a covenant with G-d at Mount Sinai or that you yourselves renewed it with me here on the plains of Moab. The covenant must be perpetually renewed, every seven years, so that it never becomes history. It always remains memory. It never becomes old because every seven years it becomes new again.

And the last command? "Now write down this song and teach it to the Israelites and make them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them" (Deut. 31: 19). This, according to tradition, is the command to write [at least part of] a Sefer Torah. As Maimonides puts it: "Even if your ancestors have left you a Sefer Torah, nonetheless you are commanded to write one for yourself."⁵

What is Moses saying in this, his last charge to the people he had led for forty years, was: It is not sufficient to say, our ancestors received the Torah from Moses, or from G-d. You have to take it and make it new in every generation. You must make the Torah not just your parents' or grandparents' faith but your own. If you write it, it will write you. The eternal word of the eternal G-d is your share in eternity.

We now sense the full force of the drama of these last days of Moses' life. Moses knew he was about to die, knew he would not cross the Jordan and enter the land he had spent his entire life leading the people toward. Moses, confronting his own mortality, asks us in every generation to confront ours.

Our faith – Moses is telling us – is not like that of the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, or virtually every other civilization known to history. We do not find G-d in a realm beyond life – in heaven, or after death, in mystic disengagement from the world or in philosophical contemplation. We find G-d in life. We find G-d in (the key words of Devarim) love and joy. To find G-d, he says in this week's parsha, you don't have

to climb to heaven or cross the sea (Deut. 30: 12-13). G-d is here. G-d is now. G-d is life.

And that life, though it will end one day, in truth does not end. For if you keep the covenant, then your ancestors will live in you, and you will live on in your children (or your disciples or the recipients of your kindness). Every seven years the covenant will become new again. Every generation will write its own Sefer Torah. The gate to eternity is not death: it is life lived in a covenant endlessly renewed, in words engraved on our hearts and the hearts of our children.

And so Moses, the greatest leader we ever had, became immortal. Not by living forever. Not by building a tomb and temple to his glory. We don't even know where he is buried. The only physical structure he left us was portable because life itself is a journey. He didn't even become immortal the way Aaron did, by seeing his children become his successors. He became immortal by making us his disciples. And in one of their first recorded utterances, the rabbis said likewise: Raise up many disciples.⁶

To be a leader, you don't need a crown or robes of office. All you need to do is to write your chapter in the story, do deeds that heal some of the pain of this world, and act so that others become a little better for having known you. Live so that through you our ancient covenant with G-d is renewed in the only way that matters: in life. Moses' last testament to us at the very end of his days, when his mind might so easily have turned to death, was: Choose life. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd it shall be when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have presented before you... that I shall cause you to return to your heart amongst all of the Gentile nations to which the Lord your G-d has dispersed you. And you shall return to the Lord your G-d" (Deuteronomy 30:1-2).

With the tragically bitter prophetic curses of exile and persecution still ringing in our ears from last week's portion of Ki Tavo, this week- just several days before Rosh Hashanah, the first of the Ten Days of Return (Teshuvah)- we read this magnificent Biblical promise of return. It is a two pronged "return", both a return to our G-d and our Torah ("You shall hearken to His voice according to everything that I command you this day"(ibid.)), and it is a return to our homeland Israel ("If your dispersal will be at the ends of the heavens, from there will the Lord your G-d gather you and from there, He will take you. And the Lord your G-d shall bring you to the land which your forefathers inherited, and you shall inherit it" (ibid 4-5).

⁴ Rashi to Genesis 6:9.

⁵ Hilkhos Tefillin Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah 7:1.

⁶ Mishnah Avot 1:1.

I have a number of questions about this passage, which seems to be addressing our generation, the generation of return. First of all, is G-d exhorting us to fulfill the commandment of teshuvah, or is this a promise which G-d will eventually effectuate for us?

Second, is the term teshuvah - "return" - the most apt description for our experience in these times?

If an individual has been religious, but, left his religious commitments (a datlash in current Israeli jargon, one of the "formerly religious"), and then "returns" to religion, he may properly be called a baal teshuvah, a returnee. But if an individual who has never been religious, and is now becoming "born-again" religious, how we can refer to him as a "returnee"? He is not "returning" to anything; he is initiating a new experience!

And finally, the opening verses of our Biblical portion which also serve as a segue between the covenant with the curses and our optimistic passage of "return", begins: "You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your G-d, in order to pass into the Covenant of the Lord your G-d and into His imprecation, which the Lord your G-d seals with you today... Not with you alone do I seal this Covenant and this imprecation, but with whoever is here standing with us today before the Lord our G-d and with whoever is not here with us today" (Deut. 30:9-14).

To whom is the Bible referring when it speaks of "whoever is not here with us today"? It is usually explained as the future generations as yet unborn; but how can a Covenant-Contract obligate people who were not present to agree to assume the obligation? And if it refers to the Gentiles, who are responsible to keep at least the universal moral laws, they too cannot be bound by a Covenant-Contract for which they were not present.

To understand this passage, we must invoke the interpretation of Maimonides, who insists that our Biblical verses are "promising" that ultimately Israel will do teshuvah at the conclusion of their exile and will then be redeemed. (Laws of Repentance 7,5).

Indeed, the Prophet Ezekiel states that the later generations will never be able to completely reject G-d and His Covenant: "As for what enters your mind, it shall not be. That which you say, 'we will be like the (Gentile) nations, like the families of the land, to worship wood and stone,...I swear that I will rule over you... I will cause you to pass under the rod and I will bring you into the tradition of the Covenant" (Ezekiel 20:32-37).

We can understand the phrase "under the rod" to refer to the whip of the gentiles, whose persecution of us prevents us from assimilating (witness Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union and see the words of R. Yehoshua Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 97b.). Alternatively, "under the rod" may refer to the rod of

tithes, with which the owner assigned the sheep which would be chosen for G-d. We, Israel, are G-d's chosen people, created in His image and destined to be His light and witnesses to the nations of the world. That "portion from G-d on High" will never leave us; and so of necessity we eventually "return" to our truest nature and be the holy nations and Kingdom of Priest-teachers we were slated to be.

Thus, the prayer we recite each morning makes the truest statement: "My Lord, the soul which You gave me is pure; You created it, You formed it, and You planted it within me." That is our truest essence; and it is the Divine of every human being, created in G-d's image. As the greatest rule of the Torah states: "You shall love your friend, because he is like you; I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:18) - and so you and your Gentile friend are also like Me, who formed both of you from My womb, as it were.

The indelible essence of every human being is the G-dliness within him from which humankind can never ultimately escape. Hence G-d promises that in historic times (Zikhronot) the descendants of the people of the Covenant - endowed with their forbears' and with G-d's DNA- will accomplish their vocation of bringing the world into the Covenant. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah reading for this week is a fitting conclusion to the year that is about to depart from us. At the end of his long life and after decades of service to the Jewish people, Moshe renews the covenant between G-d and the people of Israel. He makes clear to the new generation of Jews standing before him, a generation that was not part of the experience of Egypt, nor present at the moment of revelation at Sinai, that the original covenant between G-d and the Jewish people remains in force. And he states that it will continue to be so throughout the Jewish future.

The covenant cannot be repealed, altered or ignored. It is the basis for all Jewish life and it is the leitmotif of all of Jewish history. Moshe admits that there will be events and occurrences in the story of the Jewish people that will be cruel, inexplicable and irrational. As he phrases it, there will be many "hidden, mysterious" events that the Jewish people will have to experience.

He offers no easy explanation to those events except to say that somehow they are related to the attempts of sections of the Jewish people to annul the covenant and its resultant consequences. The "hidden" part of the covenant belongs to G-d. The revealed part of the covenant – the obligations of Torah commandments and Jewish life – belong to the Jewish people and are relevant in all of their generations and

locales. The Jewish people and the Jewish State will always be judged through its relationship to this eternal covenant.

The existence of the covenant has caused us much pain and angst throughout the centuries. The other nations of the world harbor resentment against us because of the uniqueness of our relationship to the Creator of all, as exemplified by this covenant. Many Jewish thinkers have attributed anti-Semitism, in all of its virulent and even more benign forms, to a jealousy over the existence of G-d's covenant with the Jewish people.

The covenant has, nevertheless, remained the rock of Jewish identity over all of the ages. Just the knowledge of its existence has created a stubborn Jewish people – with a resolve to maintain its faith and lifestyle though a very small minority in a world of many billions. The Torah itself is the very essence of this covenant. It details its terms and conditions, and its study helps formulate the life that Jews are expected to live.

That is why the Torah demands that we study and are aware of this covenant morning and night, traveling, at home, in all times and places. There were, and unfortunately still are, those amongst us who wish to discard the covenant and its obligations and merely to blend in with the surrounding general society.

The Lord, so to speak, has warned us many times that He would not allow this to occur. All of Jewish history teaches us regarding the strength and eternity of this great covenant. In the year that is now dawning upon us, we should all resolutely renew the covenant in our hearts, minds and actions, in order to be blessed with a year of health, success and serenity.
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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd Moshe went" (D'varim 31:1). Where did he go? The verse continues, "and he spoke these words to all of Israel," leading Ibn Ezra to say, "he went to each and every Tribe" to either give them words of encouragement and/or to bless them. However, Ba'al HaTurim connects these words with the words of the preceding verse, which mentions our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok and Ya'akov, in the context of G-d having made an oath to give them the Promised Land; "he went to them to tell them that G-d had fulfilled His oath and brought Israel into the land." Although not the straightforward intent of the verses, since the Torah speaks on numerous wavelengths simultaneously, this "trip" is also being hinted to based on the proximity of these two verses.

Several commentators ask how Moshe could have relayed this message to the Patriarchs if the Children of Israel didn't enter the Promised Land until after he died. Rabbi Yitzchok Sorotzkin, sh'lita (Rinas Yitzchok III) discusses whether having conquered the land of Sichon and Og was enough to be considered having fulfilled the oath, tying it into whether the vow not to let Moshe enter the Promised Land was nullified when this land was conquered (and then assigned to some of the Tribes, see <http://tinyurl.com/ozk26pr>). Rav Sorotzkin dismisses the idea based on Gur Aryeh (D'varim 3:23) saying that the oath (not to let Moshe enter the land) was referring to the land west of the Jordan River, but there's another reason why that must be the land Moshe told the Patriarchs their descendants had entered (and therefore G-d had fulfilled His promise). Although Moshe actually informing them of this is hinted to in these verses, G-d asked Moshe to do so as He was showing him the land from atop Mt. Nevo (see Rashi on 34:4). Since it was "this land" Moshe was asked to tell them about, and "this land" referred to the land west of the Jordan, it could not have been the already conquered land that Moshe was supposed to tell our forefathers about. Which brings us back to the question of how he could do so if he died before it happened.

Tz'ror HaMor (34:3) suggests G-d was telling Moshe "after you saw [the land] with your own eyes and you set your eyes upon it with benevolence and prayed about it, [it is as if] they (the Children of Israel) have taken hold of it in your merit," so "you can tell the Patriarchs that I have fulfilled the oath and given it to them" even before they are physically in the land. B'er BaSadeh (34:4) compares it to when G-d told Moshe He had already begun to give Sichon and his land over to him (31:2) even before the war had started. Rashi explains how the land could be considered conquered prior to it actually being conquered: G-d "subdued the administering angel of the Emorites under Moshe's feet, and he stepped on his neck." Here too, when G-d told Moshe "I have shown it to you with your eyes," it meant in the spiritual realm, showing him that the administering angels of the seven nations of Canaan were subdued. Therefore, Moshe was able to tell the Patriarchs that it had already been accomplished.

When Ba'al HaTurim tells us that the last verse of Parashas Nitzavim and the first verse of Parashas Vayeilech are telling us that Moshe went to our forefathers to give them the information G-d had asked him to relate, he continues by saying, "and the Midrash says that from here we learn that the dead talk with each other." Obviously, then, Moshe didn't actually tell them until after he had already died. [Even without this being stated explicitly in the Midrash, how could Moshe have relayed the message to them while he was alive -- especially since they are buried in Chevron, where Moshe was forbidden from going. Did his "virtual tour"

of the Promised Land include being able to speak to them when he "visited" Kiryat Arbah?] Since this didn't occur until after Moshe had died, there is no reason to assume it happened before he could accurately tell them that G-d had fulfilled his promise and their descendants had entered the land. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The last two portions of the Book of Exodus apply and repeat information found in previous passages of the Torah. In Parshat VaYakhel, the Tabernacle is constructed in its detail following the prescriptions found in the portion of Terumah. In the portion of Pikudei, the priestly garments are made again following the details laid out earlier in the portion of Tetzaveh.

Why is it that the Torah needs to repeat every detail when describing the making of the Tabernacle and the garments? Wouldn't it have been enough for the Torah to simply say that the Temple was constructed and the garments were made as G-d had commanded?

Several reasons for repetition can be suggested. First, the Torah may want to make the very point that the commands were followed in great detail. Presenting the details of the law shows that nothing mandated by G-d was overlooked.

Another possibility is that presenting the details again points to a loving involvement in this process. Each step in making the Tabernacle and the garments was an expression of the love that Moshe (Moses) and the people felt towards G-d.

But for me, the answer to our question may lie in considering the sequence of events in the latter part of Exodus. The portion of Terumah deals with the command to make the Tabernacle. Tetzaveh follows with the command of the priestly garments. Immediately following these portions, the importance of Shabbat is mentioned in the portion of Ki Tisa.

Not coincidentally, the portion of Vayakhel, which follows Ki Tisa, mentions Shabbat at its very beginning. The building of the Tabernacle, found in Vayakhel, and the making of the garments, found in Pikudei, then follow. The sequence is truly a mirror opposite with one notable exception. Whereas the command of Tabernacle and priestly garments was followed by Shabbat, in the actual implementation of the laws, Shabbat comes first.

In Judaism, there are two sanctities, the sanctity of place and the sanctity of time. As important as place may be, time is of even greater importance. Perhaps then, it can be suggested that the reason why the Torah repeats the commandments in details is to point out that Shabbat, the epitome of the sanctity of time, is even more important than the sanctity of space represented by the Tabernacle and the garments.

In his book "The Sabbath," Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel points out that the acquisition of "space," is an appropriate human quest. But life goes wrong when one spends all of his/her time to amass "things." "For to have more, does not mean to be more."

It is interesting to note that the incident that falls between the command and the implementation is the sin of the Golden Calf. The keruvim, the angelic forms atop the Ark were holy objects; the Golden Calf which the Jews may have seen as a replacement was a defiling of place.

Precisely because of this perversion of the sanctity of space, the Torah deems it important to repeat the whole sequence, but to place Shabbat first so that its spirit be infused in every detail of the construction of the Tabernacle and making of the priestly garments. This teaches that ultimately we are people who carve out our empires in time and not in space. ©2013 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 MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Youthful Discretion

Children play a major role in this week's double portion. In Nitzavim, Moshe tells the nation, "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem." He enumerates the different categories of people, from elders to water-carriers, and he makes sure to include everyone, even the small children (cf. Deuteronomy 28:9-10).

In Vayeilech as well, the Torah is cognizant of the youth. Moshe commands that every seven years "the men, the women, and the small children, and your stranger who is in your cities shall gather in Jerusalem to hear the king read the Book of Devorim" (ibid 31:12). Commentaries expound that the aforementioned children are those who are too young to understand. But Moshe also talks about youngsters who have a basic grasp as well: "And their children... they shall hear and they shall learn to fear Hashem, your G-d, all the days that you live on the land to which you are crossing the Jordan, to possess it." The Ohr HaChaim explains that this verse refers not to toddlers, but rather to children who are old enough to learn the fear of Hashem. What troubles me is the end of the posuk, "they shall learn to fear Hashem, your G-d, all the days that you live on the land to which you are crossing the Jordan, to possess it."

Shouldn't the Torah say "all the days that they live on the land to which they are crossing the Jordan"? After all, we are teaching them, not the adults! Why does the Torah tell us to teach the children, for all the days that their parents live on the land to which you are crossing the Jordan, to possess it?

Lieutenant Meyer Birnbaum was one of the only Orthodox US army officers commissioned during World War II. Last year, he spoke at our yeshiva, and though I was enraptured by the harrowing tales of his war-time activities, one small incident that occurred to him as a young boy growing up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn during the Depression did not escape me.

In those days, few young men attended yeshiva or were committed to vigorous Torah observance. Meyer went to public school as well, but his parents wanted to raise him as an observant Jew. His friends would often make fun of his yarmulka, and few attended his bar-mitzvah. But that did not deter him. In fact, from the time he was old enough his mother would make sure that he attended the mincha service.

Imagine the sight. A young boy coming to pray together with a group of elderly men who were hanging on to their tradition while their inheritors looked for newfound freedoms outside the decaying walls of the synagogue. Even the men who came to pray were only there to say kaddish for a dearly departed. So when young Meyer entered the portals of the shul for the very first time their eyes widened in amazement. Their shock turned to pity as they assumed the young boy came to shul for the same reason that most of them came, and for the very reason that they prayed their children would one day come the sole purpose of saying kaddish.

The moment came when the kaddish yossum, the mourner's kaddish, was to be recited, and the congregation began in a cacophonous unison the hallowed words, "Yisgadal V'Yiskadash." Meyer just stared up into space, waiting to answer the first responsive Amen. He was startled by the jab in the ribs by a crooked finger, which left his searing side and began pointing to the correct place in the prayer book.

"Nu!" shouted the man, "They are saying kaddish!"

"I know that they are saying kaddish!" answered Meyer.

"So, what are you waiting for? Say along!"

Meyer did not understand where the conversation was heading. But he had no time to think when another old man looked his way, motioning for him to join the mourners in the kaddish recitation!

"But I don't have to say kaddish!" answered Meyer tearfully, "my parents are alive!"

"Your parents are alive?" asked the old-timer incredulously.

"Yes, thank G-d, they are both alive! Why do you think that they are dead and that I should say kaddish?"

They gathered around him as the final Amen was said and explained their actions. "We could not imagine someone your age coming to shul for any other reason!"

The Torah tells us that children must be trained

and taught not for post-parental existence, but rather it tells the parents "all the days that you live on the land to which you are crossing the Jordan." You must teach them to practice while you can enjoy the nachas as well! Torah is a living entity, not only to pass from dying embers to rekindle new flames, but rather to pass a vibrant torch with leaping flames onto the youth whose boundless energy will inspire new generations, when even you live on the land that Hashem has given you!

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah marks the climax of a seven week series of reflection on Jewish redemption. In this final presentation, Hashem announces His personal return to the Jewish people. Now that every other dimension of redemption is in place, the time has finally arrived for Hashem to rest His Divine Presence amongst His people. Eretz Yisroel has been revived, Yerushalayim has been rebuilt, the exiles have returned en masse, but the ultimate objective has yet to be seen. In response to this, the prophet Yeshaya quotes the Jewish people saying, "I will be gladdened by Hashem, My soul will rejoice over My G-d." (61,10) Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (505) view the Jewish people's response to be specifically related to the return of Hashem to Yerushalayim. The Jewish people respond to all the magnificent prophecies of their glorious future and proclaim that their true source of happiness is but one, the return of Hashem to His beloved people. They sorely long for the privilege of sensing the presence of Hashem amongst them and feeling the closeness and love He has for His people. They resolve that they will be gladdened and happy only through His return to them.

The prophet continues and describes the proportions of this return and the extent of Hashem's cherished relationship. "No longer will you be referred to as forsaken because about you it shall be proclaimed, 'My desire is in you'." (62, 4) Hashem pledges to fully identify with His people and to display His true desire in them. His relationship with them will be so encompassing and evident that a newly gained identity will be conveyed upon the Jewish people, "Hashem's desirable one". But a worry crosses the minds of the Jewish nation concerning the nature of their forthcoming relationship. After all, weren't they previously associated with Hashem in similar proportions before being rejected by Him? If so, they reason that although Hashem will truly return to them it will only feel to them like a remarriage. Their long awaited association will have a nostalgic air to it and won't bring them the true happiness they seek.

The prophet responds and reveals to them the indescribable proportions of their new relationship. Yeshaya says, "Hashem will rejoice over you like a

groom over His bride." (62, 5) The Radak explains that Hashem's return to the Jewish people will possess all the freshness and novelty of a groom to his bride. Their relationship represents the epitome of happiness and appreciation as they begin forging their eternal bond with love and respect. In this same manner Hashem's newly founded relationship with His people will possess similar qualities. It will be so complete and perfect that it won't leave room for reflections upon their past. The happiness and fulfillment that they will experience will be so encompassing that it will feel like a fresh start, a relationship never experienced before. The Radak adds an indescribable dimension to this relationship and explains that this sense of newness will actually continue forever. Instead of becoming stale and stagnant their relationship with Hashem will always be one of growth and development and will constantly bring them to greater heights. Each newly gained level of closeness will be so precious and dear to them that it will be regarded as a completely new relationship replete with all of its sensation and appreciation.

But the most impressive factor of all is that the above description is not only our feelings towards Hashem but is, in truth, Hashem's feelings towards us. The prophet says that Hashem Himself will forever rejoice over us with the sensation of a groom over His newly acquired bride. From this we discover that Hashem's feelings towards His people are literally boundless. Even after all the straying we have done, Hashem still desires to unite with us in the proportions described above. He desires to erase the past and establish a perfectly new relationship, so perfect and new that it will continuously produce the heightened emotions of a bride and groom for eternity.

These emotions are, in truth the hidden message behind the tefillin which we don each day. As we wrap the tefillin strap around our finger we recite special passages expressing our betrothal to Hashem. This experience represents our placing the wedding ring of Hashem on our finger, portraying our perfect relationship with Him. But our Chazal (see Brochos 6a)

inform us that Hashem also wears tefillin. In proof of this, they cite a passage in this week's haftarah which states, "Hashem swears by His right hand and by the strength of His arm." (62, 8) Chazal explain that the words, "the strength of His arm" refer to the tefillin worn on the left arm. The Maharsha expounds upon this concept and explains that Hashem actually binds Himself to the Jewish people. Hashem's tefillin, like ours, represent devotion and commitment, His commitment to His beloved people. Hashem cherishes His relationship with us and as an expression of His commitment to us, He also wears a betrothal band. Eventually our boundless love for Hashem will find its expression together with Hashem's boundless love for us and together we will enjoy this indescribable relationship forever and forever. ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"It will be that when he hears the words of this imprecation, he will bless himself in his heart, saying, 'Peace will be with me, though I walk as my heart sees fit'... Hashem will not be willing to forgive him, for then Hashem's anger and jealousy will smoke against that man, and the entire imprecation written in this Book will come down upon him, and Hashem will erase his name from under heaven." (29:18-19)

R' Betzalel Ashkenazi z"l (approx. 1520-1592; Egypt and Eretz Yisrael; author of the Talmud commentary, Shitah Mekubetzet) explains: Hashem created many different personality types so that people would choose different occupations and, between them, make civilization possible, something that would not happen if everyone had the same personality and chose the same occupation. Thus, a person might think that, since the world apparently needs him, he can sin to his heart's content and "there will be peace for me." Not so! our verse therefore warns. "Hashem will not be willing to forgive him." The world will indeed exist without his participation. (Derashot U'ma'amarim L'Rabbeinu Betzalel Ashkenazi p.4) ©2014 S. Katz and torah.org

Parsha Puns!

Don't wanna in\$ALT u but WATER u waiting 4? BRANCH out, BE STRONG & try not to make any egCOURAGEOUS errors! Make it an out\$TANDING shabbos!

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