

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Buried inconspicuously in this week's parsha is a short sentence with explosive potential, causing us to think again about the nature of Jewish history and the Jewish task in the present.

Moses had been reminding the new generation, the children of those who left Egypt, of the extraordinary story of which they are the heirs: "Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day G-d created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of G-d speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your G-d did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?" (Deut. 4:32-34)

The Israelites had not yet crossed the Jordan. They had not yet begun their life as a sovereign nation in their own land. Yet Moses was sure, with a certainty that could only be prophetic, that they were a people like no other. What has happened to them was unique. They were and are a nation summoned to greatness.

Moses reminds them of the great revelation at Mount Sinai. He recalls the Ten Commandments. He delivers the most famous of all summaries of Jewish faith: "Listen, Israel: The Lord our G-d, the Lord is one." He issues the most majestic of all commands: "Love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Twice he tells the people to teach these things to their children. He gives them their eternal mission statement as a nation: "You are a people holy to the Lord your G-d. The Lord your G-d has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession." (Deut. 7:6)

Then he says this: "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples." (Deut. 7:7)

"The fewest of all peoples? What has happened to all the promises of Bereishit, that Abraham's children would be numerous, uncountable,

as many as the stars of the sky, the dust of the earth, and the grains of sand on a seashore? What of Moses' own statement at the beginning of Devarim: 'The Lord your G-d has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky?'" (Deut. 1:10)

The simple answer is this. The Israelites were indeed numerous compared to what they once were. Moses himself puts it this way in next week's parsha: "Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your G-d has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Deut. 10:22). They were once a single family, Abraham, Sarah and their descendants, and now they have become a nation of twelve tribes.

But -- and this is Moses' point here -- compared to other nations, they were still small. "When the Lord your G-d brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations -- the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you..." (7:1). In other words, not only were the Israelites smaller than the great empires of the ancient world. They were smaller even than the other nations in the region. Compared to their origins they had grown, but compared to their neighbours they remained tiny.

Moses then tells them what this means: "You may say to yourselves, 'These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?' But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your G-d did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt." (Deut. 7:17-18)

Israel would be the smallest of the nations for a reason that goes to the very heart of its existence as a nation. They will show the world that a people does not have to be large in order to be great. It does not have to be numerous to defeat its enemies. Israel's unique history will show that, in the words of the prophet Zechariah (4:6), "'Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit,' says the Lord Almighty."

In itself, Israel would be witness to something greater than itself. As former Marxist philosopher Nicolay Berdyayev put it: "I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint... Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life

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of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history: all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny." (Nicolay Berdyayev, *The Meaning of History*, Transaction Publishers, 2005, 86.)

Moses' statement has immense implications for Jewish identity. The proposition implicit throughout this year's Covenant and Conversation is that Jews have had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers because we are all called on to be leaders, to take responsibility, to contribute, to make a difference to the lives of others, to bring the Divine presence into the world. Precisely because we are small, we are each summoned to greatness.

S. Y. Agnon, the great Hebrew writer, composed a prayer to accompany the Mourner's Kaddish. He noted that the children of Israel have always been few in number compared to other nations. He then said that when a king rules over a large population, he does not notice when one dies, for there are others to take his or her place. "But our King, the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He... chose us, and not because we are a large nation, for we are one of the smallest of nations. We are few, and owing to the love with which He loves us, each one of us is, for Him, an entire legion. He does not have many replacements for us. If one of us is missing, Heaven forbid, then the King's forces are diminished, with the consequence that His kingdom is weakened, as it were. One of His legions is gone and His greatness is lessened. For this reason it is our custom to recite the Kaddish when a Jew dies." (Quoted in Leon Wieseltier, *Kaddish*, London : Picador, 1998, 22-23.)

Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Gandhi said: "A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history." That must be our faith as Jews. We may be the fewest of all peoples but when we heed G-d's call, we have the ability, proven many times in our

past, to mend and transform the world. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Comfort you comfort you my nation, says the Lord your G-d." (Isaiah 40:1) This Shabbat takes its name from our prophetic reading (Shabbat Nachamu, "The Sabbath of Comfort"). Indeed, the entire month is known as Menachem Av, the comforting month of Av. And in the prophetic reading of Isaiah, the prophet adjures us to speak to the heart of Jerusalem, to do penance for our sins, to make a pathway for our Lord, to straighten out our crooked roads. In his magnificent lyric style, he is telling us to repent, for in repentance, we will find our comfort and our redemption.

The list of curses and punishments which came in the wake of the destruction of our Second Temple is catalogued in chapter 28 of the Book of Deuteronomy, and followed by the call to repentance in chapter 30. But repentance and return to what? First of all, to the Land of Israel. The nation has done that of its own volition since the rise of the modern Zionist movement in the 19th century, when we stopped waiting for the Messiah and beat our own path to our historic homeland.

But this certainly also includes return to G-d's Torah. Which commandments should we concentrate on? Should it be the ritual, should it be the ethical, and if both, then with which must we begin our repentance? Furthermore, since we are hopeful that this time our redemption will be not only national, but universal, what is to be our message to the world?

If we could only isolate the reason why we lost our Temples, we would then understand how to become worthy of the third and final Temple (remember that the Bible only speaks of two destructions and of two exiles, the first in Leviticus 26 and the second in Deuteronomy 28). And if we could discover why G-d elected Abraham in the first place, it would certainly be salutary to check our actions against G-d's design; then at least we could ascertain where we stand in G-d's eyes.

At the dawn of our history, the Almighty explains that "Abraham will become a great and mighty nation, that through him shall be blessed all the families of the earth, and that G-d has chosen, loved, and elected him because he has commanded his children and his household after him to guard the way of the Lord, to do compassionate righteousness and moral justice ("tzedakah u'mishpat," Genesis 18:18-19) What does tzedakah mean? The Bible itself explains this when it commands us not to oppress the stranger, not to afflict the widow or the orphan, because G-d hears their cries and will punish us by making our wives widows and our children orphans. (Exodus 22:21-26)

G-d in fact describes Himself as One who is gracious, who gives and loves even without cause and never expecting anything in return. (Exodus 34:6-7)

Moreover, G-d repeats that when we make a loan to the poor and receive a pledge in return, we must return the pledge to the borrower if he needs it - even though the creditor actually owns the pledge until the borrower pays up his debt. The return of the pledge beyond the requirement of the law is called by the Bible an act of tzedakah: righteousness together with compassion. (Exodus 22: 26)

In the first chapter of the Prophet Isaiah (the prophetic reading for the portion of Devarim, which always falls out towards the beginning of the Three Weeks of mourning), the prophet cries out that G-d is sated with our sacrificial animals, that He hates our monthly celebrations and festivals; it is G-d's will for us to rather judge the orphan and plead the cause of the widow. "Zion shall be redeemed through justice and we will return to her by means of our tzedakah, our acts of compassionate righteousness." (Isaiah 1:27) Hence you see the straight line from Abraham's election to Isaiah's warning regarding the Temple: our worthiness depends not on our ritual piety, but rather upon our compassionate righteousness and moral justice.

After the destruction, the Prophet Jeremiah makes a ringing declaration which we read on Tisha B'Av itself: "So says G-d, let the wise not be praised for their wisdom, let the strong not be praised for their strength, let the wealthy not be praised for their wealth. Only for this is one to be praised: understand and know Me because I am the Lord who does loving kindness, moral justice and compassionate righteousness on earth. It is these things that I wish." (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

How do we match up to these ideals? Let me tell you a true incident which for me is a metaphor of our times. A young man attended a yeshiva in Tzfat. The first morning he arrived a bit late for breakfast and there was no milk left for his coffee. He went to the grocery, purchased a container of milk and placed the container in the Yeshiva refrigerator with a sign, "Private Property." The next morning, the container was gone. He bought another container, on which he added to the previous sign, "Do Not Steal." The next morning, that container too was missing. He purchased a third container, adding to the sign "Questionable Gentile Milk" (halav akum). This time no one took his container; he left the yeshiva. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's parsha the Torah records for us the revelation at Sinai and a restatement of the Ten Commandments. The text of the Ten Commandments as recorded in this week's parsha differs somewhat from the text of the Ten

Commandments as they appear in parshat Yitro. These differences are commented upon and explained to us in the Talmud, Midrash and in the later commentaries to the Torah.

The major discrepancy in text concerns the description of Shabbat. Whereas in parshat Yitro we were commanded zachor - remember – the Shabbat to sanctify it, here in parshat Vaetchanan we are told to safeguard – shamor – the Shabbat and not to desecrate it by performing forbidden acts of work. The Talmud teaches us that these two words – zachor and shamor - were uttered at Sinai, so to speak, simultaneously in one breath.

There are a number of lessons to be learned from this explanation of the rabbis as to why there are two different texts advanced in the Torah regarding Shabbat. One of the lessons is that words, no matter how holy and precise they may attempt to be, are still insufficient to convey the breadth and scope of eternal values and spiritual holiness.

Again, words, no matter how beautiful and varied they may be, constrict us and always leave room for misinterpretation and ambiguity. There are truly no words, which by themselves can convey the concept of the serenity, holiness and spiritual and physical uniqueness of Shabbat. So we are forced to say that different words have to be said and heard in a simultaneous fashion in order for the listener to begin to grasp the true value in understanding Shabbat.

Another important lesson to be learned from the duality of expression regarding Shabbat is that there is an intrinsic combination of values in the holiest day of the week. The serenity and spiritual quality of the day cannot be achieved simply by discussing it or spiritually and theoretically identifying with it. It is the forced abstention from the mundane activities of the every day week – the restrictions, if you will – that contribute mightily to the positive feeling and emotional peace of the day of Shabbat. Without shamor, zachor remains an unachievable goal. And without zachor – the wine of kiddush, the special bread and meals of the day, etc. – shamor - become very burdensome and unattractive.

So therefore these two facets of Shabbat must be enjoyed and enforced in a simultaneous fashion in order for the true meaning of the day to take hold within the body and soul of the Jew. The observance of Shabbat therefore is a matter of intellectual and emotional sophistication. A Shabbat without restrictions is meaningless. It is just another Tuesday. A Shabbat without prayer, Torah study, proper dress, food and physical pleasure and relaxation lacks vitality and negates the holy spirit of the day.

It is the dual nature of Shabbat that gives it its special character and holy demeanor. Therefore the rabbis correctly taught us that zachor and shamor were communicated at Sinai as one statement and

package. Therein lies the magic of the holy day of Shabbat. ©2014 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion presents a grim forecast of the Jews' fortune. G-d says that following their entry into the land of Israel, the Jews would sin, resulting in their exile. The Torah then states: "And there you shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear, nor eat, nor smell." (Deuteronomy 4:28) This sentence may be descriptive of further sins the Jewish people would commit once driven out of Israel. Yet, one could also look at it another way; not as a description of sin, but as part of the initial punishment Am Yisrael would bear.

Abarbanel describes the punishment as follows. Once exiled the Jews would worship idols. Although they would be aware of the false nature of these idols, they would be forced to serve them in order to protect themselves and save their lives. To paraphrase Abarbanel, this is not mentioned as a sin but a punishment. Despite their recognition in their hearts of their true G-d, they would have no choice but to pray to idols and lie about their true belief, a tortuous punishment indeed.

Biur agrees that the sentence is descriptive of punishment, yet sees the punishment differently than Abarbanel. Biur suggests that in exile we would find ourselves in a foreign culture imbued with a value system contrary to Torah. To restate Biur, there is no greater punishment than the soul drowning in the abomination of sin from which one cannot escape. There is no worse soulful pain and punishment than recognizing the evil of one's actions but not being able to withdraw-having become so accustomed to committing this sin (hergel aveirah).

Nehama Leibowitz points out that these two commentators reflect the challenges of their respective generations. Abarbanel lived in Spain in the latter part of the 15th century during the period of the Spanish Inquisition. It was then that the Catholic Church demanded that Jews worship their man-god, otherwise they would be killed. Hence, he sees the punishment here as descriptive of what his generation was experiencing. At the risk of being killed, Jews had no choice but to outwardly leave their faith.

Biur of Devarim was Hertz Hamburg who lived in the 18th century in Western Europe. The challenge of his generation was the enlightenment which ensnared the Jewish people and caused rampant assimilation. The threat was not physical but spiritual. For Biur, our Torah speaks of Jews who leave the faith,

not because their lives are threatened, but because they have been swept up in the temper of the times.

In truth, Abarbanel and Biur speak of the physical and spiritual tasks that we face throughout history. What both of these challenges have in common is the promise which immediately follows in the text that somehow against all odds we would extricate ourselves from that exile and return to G-d-in fulfillment of G-d's covenant with the Jewish people. As the Torah states, "and from there you will seek the Lord your G-d." (Deuteronomy 4:29)

The season of Tisha B'Av not only commemorates our being forced into exile, but it forces us to focus on the low points and tragedies we have experienced as a people in the Diaspora. With this seasonal backdrop, the challenges brought forth in this parsha become frighteningly clear. And so, the Torah gives us a most appropriate reading for Shabbat Nahamu, the Shabbat of comfort-a portion that describes reality, yet emerges with the promise of seeking out G-d and returning to a path of connection and holiness. ©2009 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

After telling the Children of Israel that his many fervent supplications asking G-d to allow him to enter the Promised Land were denied, Moshe finishes his thought by saying "and we dwelled in the valley, opposite Bais P'or" (D'varim 3:29). Rashi tells us that Moshe was telling the nation "you became attached to a foreign deity, [but] nevertheless (quoting the next verse), 'and now, Israel obey the statutes (etc.)' and everything will be forgiven for you, [whereas] I did not merit being forgiven (so can't enter the land)."

Several issues are raised regarding Rashi's explanation. First of all, when contrasting the nation being forgiven after sinning (and therefore being able to enter the land) with his not being forgiven (and therefore not being able to enter the land), why is Moshe focusing only on the sin of P'or? What about all the other sins the nation committed that didn't prevent them from entering the land? Secondly, how can Rashi say that the people he was addressing had sinned with P'or if just a few verses later (4:3-4) Moshe tells them that whomever followed P'or was "destroyed by G-d," but "you, who clung to Hashem your G-d, are all alive today"? Finally, and perhaps most puzzling, is that this thought, that he couldn't enter the land but they could even though they weren't more worthy than he was, sounds like "sour grapes." Why include this comparison when discussing G-d not letting him go?

From Rashi's wording (quoting the next verse) it is apparent that the nation hadn't yet been forgiven.

By following G-d's commandments they will be, and thus will be able to enter the land, but the forgiveness was not yet complete. This is also apparent from Rashi's explanation regarding Moshe burial place (34:6), "opposite Bais P'or," as he was buried there so that he can bring continual atonement for the sin of P'or. Obviously, full atonement hadn't been attained in Moshe's lifetime, or there wouldn't need to be atonement after his death. Additionally, there is an explicit verse in Y'hoshua (22:17) that says that the nation hadn't yet been purified from the sin of P'or. Therefore, Moshe specifically used this sin when contrasting his not being able to enter the land with their being able to, as they hadn't been fully forgiven yet but were still allowed to enter.

[The Maharai is among the commentators who suggest that Moshe chose this sin precisely because his grave was needed for continual atonement, making this sin at least a partial cause for Moshe not being allowed to enter the land. This strengthens the notion that Moshe was blaming them for his inability to enter the Promised Land, which he did on numerous occasions (see 1:37, 3:26 and 4:21). Nevertheless, this need not be "sour grapes," as Moshe might have done this so that they wouldn't complain about his not being there to help them anymore, as it was their fault (or for their benefit) that he wasn't. Nevertheless, Rashi's wording, which includes Moshe not being forgiven, implies that the comparison was not meant just to blame them.]

The Taz, based on the Talmud (Sanhedrin 61b) differentiating between someone who worships foreign deities superficially ("out of love or fear of another human") and someone who really believes it has substance, suggests that the verse that says all who followed P'or were "destroyed by G-d" refers to those who really worshipped it, while those who were still alive yet needed atonement had only gone through the motions of idol worship in order to ingratiate themselves to the women of Moav. However, Rashi's wording, with Moshe saying the nation was forgiven even though they "attached themselves" to P'or, indicates more than just going through the motions. [The same word for "attached" that Rashi uses is the verb used by the Torah to describe what caused G-d's anger to flare (Bamidbar 25:3) and used to describe what the sinners did to deserve capital punishment (25:5). It would therefore be very difficult to say Rashi chose this word to describe a less severe sin than fully worshipping P'or.]

Tzeidah La'derech goes a step farther, suggesting that the ones who were still alive yet needed atonement were those who weren't involved in the sin at all, at least directly, but shared in the responsibility for not having prevented the others from sinning. Zichron Moshe goes even farther, quoting the Zohar which says it was only the Eirev Rav (mixed

multitude of converts who joined Israel when they left Egypt), or the offspring of the Eirev Rav who had married into the Tribe of Shimon, who sinned at P'or. Rather than Moshe saying that the Children of Israel were forgiven for their sin even though he wasn't forgiven for his, he was saying that the nation wasn't punished for the sin of the Eirev Rav even though he was punished for what the nation had done. Obviously, these approaches are at least as difficult to fit into Rashi's wording as the Taz's approach. (Zichron Moshe's approach is even more problematic, as he says the nation didn't need to be forgiven, which is contrary to Rashi's explanation of why Moshe was buried opposite P'or and to the verse in Y'hoshua.)

Perhaps when Moshe said "all who followed P'or were destroyed by G-d" he was referring to the Eirev Rav, as well as to anyone else who wanted to leave the structured, Torah-centered life of the Children of Israel to live a life of complete abandon, represented by P'or. Unfortunately, there were many in the nation who did sin at P'or too, even if they didn't want to leave the lifestyle completely. They had succumbed to temptation to a degree worthy of capital punishment, until Pinachas' action saved them, causing G-d's anger to subside, but still needed atonement for their sins. Moshe was telling them that as long as they "kept the program," fulfilling G-d's commandments and not giving in to temptation again, they would be forgiven (at least to the extent of being able to enter the land), even if they still needed atonement.

The question that remains, though, is why Moshe brought this up now, when discussing his inability to enter the Promised Land. I would suggest that Moshe was trying to counter a thought process that might have resulted specifically from his not being allowed to enter the land.

Usually, when the righteous are punished, it sanctifies G-d's name (see Rashi on Vayikra 10:3), as if G-d holds even those close to Him accountable, surely He will hold the rest of us accountable. However, the opposite thought might occur as well; if the righteous can't escape punishment, how can the rest of us avoid it? (And this is true, but doesn't exempt us from avoiding sin. Nor does it counter the fact that the more we sin the more punishment we deserve/will get.) As Moshe was preparing the nation to continue without him, he felt it necessary to share with them how much he wanted to go with them into the Promised Land, how hard he begged G-d to let him do so, even just to "pass over and see it" (D'varim 3:25). At the same time, he was afraid that when the nation heard that his request was denied, their resolve to follow G-d would weaken, as if even Moshe couldn't avoid G-d's wrath, how can we? Therefore, Moshe wanted to tell them two things.

First of all, Moshe told them that the reason G-d didn't give in was for their benefit (see Rashi on 3:26), whether this benefit was having his burial site be

a continual atonement for them, or making it possible for the Temple to be destroyed so that G-d could take out His anger (so to speak) on "wood and stones" rather than on the nation itself, or making it necessary for Moshe to enter the land after the "resurrection of the dead," whereby he can lead the rest of the generation that died in the desert in with him. Since G-d's refusal to let him into the Promised Land was not based on Moshe's deeds (alone), they couldn't/shouldn't apply it to themselves.

Secondly, Moshe wanted to make sure they knew that even if they messed up, G-d would forgive them. Rather than the emphasis being "even though G-d forgave you He refused to forgive me," Moshe was saying "even though He didn't forgive me, He will forgive you, as long as you keep His Torah." There were no "sour grapes" on display; Moshe was simply trying to get the message across that even though he was unsuccessful in his attempt to change G-d's mind, they would be able to avoid future punishment, by following G-d's commandments (including repentance if a mistake is made). ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

The degree to which the mitzvah of ahavas Hashem is fundamental to a life of Torah and mitzvos is captured in its expression in krias Shema as well as its presence in our tefillin. As we enter our homes and kiss the mezuzah we once again acknowledge the centrality of ahavas Hashem in our lives. How do we practically fulfill this core mitzvah?

There are several important aspects of avodas Hashem that are vehicles for a proper fulfillment of ahavas Hashem in our daily lives. The Rambam in the end of Hilchos Teshuva equates loving Hashem with knowing Hashem. Just as the love one feels for another person increases the better one gets to know that person, so too the more we know Hashem the more intense our love for Him becomes. How do we attain this knowledge requisite knowledge of Hashem?

The Rambam explains that by delving into His wisdom we can know Hashem, and that wisdom is composed of two parts. First, by studying the intricacies of His creation we can attain a greater understanding of Hashem and thereby enable our love of Him to grow. In Sefer Hamitzvos the Rambam highlights that Hashem revealed the second aspect of His knowledge to us in His Torah. The greater understanding of Torah one achieves, the more one knows, and thereby loves, Hashem. This relationship between ahavas Hashem and talmud Torah appears in the Shema itself. The Sifrei, as quoted by Rashi, notes that immediately after the Torah commands us to love Hashem we are instructed to immerse ourselves in talmud Torah. It is only through a deep commitment to talmud Torah that one can reach the lofty goal of ahavas Hashem.

We usually associate ahavas Hashem with mitzvos bein adam lamakom. And yet, even our service bein adam lachaveiro depends upon internalizing our love for Hashem. Chazal interpret the mitzvah of "v'holachta b'drachav -- to walk in the path of Hashem" as the source for the mitzvah of chessed; Hashem performs countless acts of chessed and we are supposed to imitate Him. We naturally look to imitate those whom we admire. As such, by following the example of Hashem and performing acts of kindness we express our love and admiration for Him.

Ahavas Hashem also expresses itself in merging our bein adam lamakom with our bein adam lachaveiro. Chazal teach us that part of ahavas Hashem is to bring others to love Hashem. One who exemplifies ahavas Hashem and is pleasant to other human beings will encourage others to lead their lives in a similar manner. We are commanded to love Hashem with all our hearts, our souls, and our possessions. This intense love comes about from our pursuit of the knowledge of Hashem, and it is this love that results in our performance of chessed and sets the tone for our interpersonal behavior.

On a personal note, I am writing this dvar Torah as I am returning from being menachem avel two families who lost sons in Gaza. These kedoshim, as well as our other brothers who gave their lives for the entire Jewish people, have fulfilled ahavas Hashem and ahavas Yisroel in the ultimate sense, "bechol nafshecha -- with your entire soul." These young men sacrificed everything so that the Jewish people can live in safety and security. As we approach Shabbos nachamu, we extend our comfort to all of the grieving families and pray that Hashem will comfort His people by rebuilding the Beis Hamikdash and thus enable us to once again know Him even more and serve Him with maximal love. ©2014 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Don't Forget

In Parshas Va'eschanan 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. ©2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah introduces a special series of haftorah readings related to our final redemption.

In this opening one the prophet Yeshaya delivers the Jewish people warm words of comfort from Hashem. After over one thousand years of exile the time will finally arrive for the Jewish nation to return to Hashem and His Promised Land. But, as Chazal explain (see Yalkut Shimoni Yeshaya 443, 445) the painful scars of exile, persecution, and rejection will remain fresh in their minds and it will be difficult to approach Hashem and rebuild a relationship. In addition, they will remember vividly all their acts of defiance and will be embarrassed to return to Hashem. Hashem therefore turns to His nation and expresses to them warm words of comfort and console.

Hashem instructs the prophet Yeshaya, "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call her because her long term has been served and her sin has been forgiven." (40:2) After all of this time, the Jewish people will find it difficult to accept that Hashem is truly interested in them. Although, the time for redemption has arrived they have not thoroughly cleansed themselves from all of their wrongdoings. They question how they could entertain establishing a perfect relationship with Hashem without having even perfected their ways. Hashem responds, "Her sins have been forgiven because she suffered an abundant and full measure for them." (ibid.) The Malbim (ad loc.) explains this to mean that the harsh severity of their sufferings will compensate for their incomplete steps of repentance. The Jewish people deserve their redemption after enduring and outliving the most horrifying and tragic experiences with steadfast faith in Hashem. During their painful exile they consistently demonstrated unwavering commitment to Hashem and an inseparable attachment to Him.

Our Chazal (see Yalkut Shimoni Yeshaya 443, Beraishis 162) share with us an additional dimension about Yeshaya's words of comfort. They quote a passage in Shir Hashirim referring to the era of the final redemption and the profound statement the Jewish people will make then. They plead to Hashem, "If only, You could be like a brother to me." (Shir Hashirim 8:1)

Chazal see this brotherly relationship as a reference to the indescribable compassion that Yosef Hatzadik showed his brothers. After the atrocious behavior the tribes displayed towards Yosef they could never forgive themselves for those misguided actions. They therefore delivered a message to Yosef beseeching Him to forgive them without harboring any ill feelings towards them. In response to their plea, the Torah states "And Yosef comforted them and spoke to their hearts." (Breishis 50:21) Chazal explain that mere words of comfort and assurance were not sufficient to allay their fears. Yosef therefore saw it appropriate to appeal to their hearts and redirect their thinking. He convinced his brothers how meaningful they were to him and how their safety and prominence served as key factors in his attaining and maintaining his position of glory.

The Jewish people express their wish that Hashem act in this same manner with them. They find it impossible to forgive themselves for all the wrong they have done to Hashem. However, as Yosef appealed to his brothers' hearts and redirected their thinking, Hashem can certainly do the same. They plead with Hashem to remove any trace of ill feelings for all their years of unfairness to Him. Chazal conclude that as Yosef allayed his brothers' fears Hashem will do the same for His people. Therefore, when instructing Yeshaya to comfort the Jewish people, Hashem states, "Comfort them and speak to their hearts." Yeshaya, as Yosef, is charged with a mission of conveying to the Jewish people how significant each and every one of them is to Hashem.

Yeshaya faithfully says to the Jews, "Hashem will lead you like a shepherd tends his flock, gathers them in his arm, carries them in his bosom and gently leads young ones." (40: 11) Yeshaya informs them that Hashem does care about every Jewish soul as a shepherd cares for each of his sheep. Although the Jewish people had previously strayed and suffered so much for their wrongdoing Hashem still cares about them in indescribable measures. Yeshaya beckons the Jews not to be hesitant or embarrassed to return. Hashem cares so much for each one of them that He will personally escort them back to Him.

Yeshaya continues, " Who measured the



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depths of the water by his fists, the span of the heavens by his hand, the width of the land by the measure of three fingers or the weight of mountains and hills on a scale? Behold the nations are but a remaining drop in a bucket, the rust of a scale." (40: 12,15) Although in our eyes, the entire world and its inhabitants are of enormous proportions, in the eyes of

Hashem they are but tiny miniscule dots. They all serve a general purpose but the concern and focus of Hashem is not specifically upon them. Yeshaya concludes, "Lift your eyes heavenward and see who created these, He who brings out the myriads by number and to each He calls by name. (40: 26) The prophet is referring to the millions of stars found in the heaven. Each of them serves a specific purpose and is identified by name at all times. Each star is significant and every one occupies a prominent position in the master plan of Hashem.

In view of all the above we can suggest the following interpretation to the final words of the haftarah. Dovid Hamelech in Sefer Tehillim (Psalm 147) makes a similar reference to the stars in the heavens. He says, "Hashem is the builder of Yerushalayim; He will gather in the dispersed of Israel. He counts the stars by number, to all He calls by name. (147: 2,4) The Ibn Ezra interprets Dovid Hamelech's profound verses in the following manner. The Jewish people have been scattered all over the world which should be indicative of their insignificance. To this Dovid Hamelech responds and reminds us that the stars are also scattered over the vast span of the horizon. However, Hashem knows every one of them and identifies him by name and purpose. In this same vein Hashem knows every Jewish person and identifies with him by his individual name and purpose. Following this thought we can appreciate Yeshaya's words in this same manner. At the time of redemption Hashem will display His appreciation for each and every Jewish soul and personally escort him back to Eretz Yisroel. Every Jewish person counts because he occupies an important role in the scheme of the glory of Hashem. To Hashem every Jewish soul is greatly significant because his personal role adds a unique and distinct dimension to the majesty of Hashem. May we merit soon the realization of these comforting words with the coming of Mashiach and the ingathering of the exiles.

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