

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Jobbik, otherwise known as the Movement for a Better Hungary, is an ultra-nationalist Hungarian political party that has been described as fascist, neo-Nazi, racist, and anti-semitic. It has accused Jews of being part of a “cabal of western economic interests” attempting to control the world: the libel otherwise known as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fiction created by members of the Czarist secret service in Paris in the late 1890s and revealed as a forgery by The Times in 1921.

On one occasion the Jobbik party asked for a list of all the Jews in the Hungarian government. Disturbingly, in the Hungarian parliamentary elections in April 2014 it secured over 20 per cent of the votes, making it the third largest party.

Until 2012 one of its leading members was a politician in his late 20s, Csanad Szegedi. Szegedi was a rising star in the movement, widely spoken of as its future leader. Until one day in 2012. That was the day Szegedi discovered he was a Jew.

Some of the members of the party had wanted to stop his progress and spent time investigating his background to see whether they could find anything that would do him damage. What they found was that his maternal grandmother was a Jewish survivor of Auschwitz. So was his maternal grandfather. Half of Szegedi’s family were killed during the Holocaust.

Szegedi’s opponents started spreading rumours about his Jewish ancestry on the internet. Soon Szegedi himself discovered what was being said and decided to check whether the claims were true. They were. After Auschwitz his grandparents, once Orthodox Jews, decided to hide their identity completely. When his mother was 14, her father told her the secret but ordered her not to reveal it to anyone. Szegedi now knew the truth about himself.

He decided to resign from the party and find out more about Judaism. He went to a local Chabad Rabbi, Slomó Köves, who at first thought he was joking. Nonetheless he arranged for Szegedi to attend classes on Judaism and to come to the synagogue. At first, Szegedi says, people were shocked. He was treated by some as “a leper.” But he persisted. Today he attends synagogue, keeps Shabbat, has learned Hebrew, calls himself Dovid, and in 2013 underwent circumcision.

When he first admitted the truth about his Jewish ancestry, one of his friends in the Jobbik party said, “The best thing would be if we shoot you so you can be buried as a pure Hungarian.” Another urged him to make a public apology. It was this comment, he says, that made him leave the party. “I thought, wait a minute, I am supposed to apologize for the fact that my family was killed at Auschwitz?”

As the realization that he was a Jew began to change his life, it also transformed his understanding of the world. Today, he says, his focus as a politician is to defend human rights for everyone. “I am aware of my responsibility and I know I will have to make it right in the future.”

Szegedi’s story is not just a curiosity. It takes us to the very heart of the strange, fraught nature of our existence as moral beings.

What makes us human is the fact that we are rational, reflective, capable of thinking things through. We feel empathy and sympathy, and this begins early. Even newborn babies cry when they hear another child cry. We have mirror neurons in the brain that make us wince when we see someone else in pain. Homo sapiens is the moral animal.

Yet much of human history has been a story of violence, oppression, injustice, corruption, aggression and war. Nor, historically, has it made a significant difference whether the actors in this story have been barbarians or citizens of a high civilization.

The Greeks of antiquity, masters of art, architecture, drama, poetry, philosophy and science, wasted themselves on the internecine Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta in the last quarter of the fifth century BCE. They never fully recovered. It was the end of the golden age of Greece.

Fin de siècle Paris and Vienna in the 1890s were the leading centres of European civilization. Yet they were also the world’s leaders in antisemitism, Paris with the Dreyfus Affair, Vienna with its antisemitic mayor, Karl Lueger, whom Hitler later cited as his inspiration.

When we are good we are little lower than the angels. When we are bad we are lower than the beasts. What makes us moral? And what, despite it all, makes humanity capable of being so inhumane?

Plato thought that virtue was knowledge. If we know something is wrong, we will not do it. Aristotle thought that virtue was habit, learned in childhood till it

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becomes part of our character.

David Hume and Adam Smith, two intellectual giants of the Scottish Enlightenment, thought that morality came from emotion, fellow feeling. Immanuel Kant believed that it came through rationality. A moral principle is one you are willing to prescribe for everyone. Therefore, for example, lying cannot be moral because you do not wish others to lie to you.

All four views have some truth to them, and we can find similar sentiments in the rabbinic literature. In the spirit of Plato, the sages spoke of the tinok shenishba, someone who does wrong because he or she was not educated to know what is right.¹ Maimonides, like Aristotle, thought virtue came from repeated practice. Halakhah creates habits of the heart. The rabbis said that the angels of kindness and charity argued for the creation of man because we naturally feel for others, as Hume and Smith argued. Kant's principle is similar to what the sages called sevarah, "reason."

But these insights only serve to deepen the question. If knowledge, emotion and reason lead us to be moral, why is that that humans hate, harm and kill? A full answer would take longer than a lifetime, but the short answer is simple. We are tribal animals. We form ourselves into groups. Morality is both cause and consequence of this fact. Toward people with whom we are or feel ourselves to be related we are capable of altruism. But toward strangers we feel fear, and that fear is capable of turning us into monsters.

Morality, in Jonathan Haidt's phrase, binds and blinds.² It binds us to others in a bond of reciprocal altruism. But it also blinds us to the humanity of those who stand outside that bond. It unites and divides. It divides because it unites. Morality turns the "I" of self interest into the "We" of the common good. But the very act of creating an "Us" simultaneously creates a "Them," the people not like us. Even the most

universalistic of religions, founded on principles of love and compassion, have often seen those outside the faith as Satan, the infidel, the antichrist, the child of darkness, the unredeemed. They have committed unspeakable acts of brutality in the name of G-d.

Neither Platonic knowledge nor Adam Smith's moral sense nor Kantian reason has cured the heart of darkness in the human condition. That is why two sentences blaze through today's parsha like the sun emerging from behind thick clouds: You must not mistreat or oppress the stranger in any way. Remember, you yourselves were once strangers in the land of Egypt. (Ex. 22: 21) You must not oppress strangers. You know what it feels like to be a stranger, for you yourselves were once strangers in the land of Egypt. (Ex. 23: 9)

The great crimes of humanity have been committed against the stranger, the outsider, the one-not-like-us. Recognising the humanity of the stranger has been the historic weak point in most cultures. The Greeks saw non-Greeks as barbarians. Germans called Jews vermin, lice, a cancer in the body of the nation. In Rwanda, Hutus called Tutsis inyenzi, cockroaches.

Dehumanize the other and all the moral forces in the world will not save us from evil. Knowledge is silenced, emotion anaesthetized and reason perverted. The Nazis convinced themselves (and others) that in exterminating the Jews they were performing a moral service for the Aryan race.³ Suicide bombers are convinced that they are acting for the greater glory of G-d.⁴ There is such a thing as altruistic evil.

That is what makes these two commands so significant. The Torah emphasizes the point time and again: the rabbis said that the command to love the stranger appears 36 times in the Torah. Jewish law is here confronting directly the fact that care for the stranger is not something for which we can rely on our normal moral resources of knowledge, empathy and rationality. Usually we can, but under situations of high stress, when we feel our group threatened, we cannot. The very inclinations that bring out the best in us – our genetic inclination to make sacrifices for the sake of kith and kin – can also bring out the worst in us when we fear the stranger. We are tribal animals and we are easily threatened by the members of another tribe.

Note that these commands are given shortly after the exodus. Implicit in them is a very radical idea indeed. Care for the stranger is why the Israelites had to experience exile and slavery before they could enter the Promised Land and build their own society and

¹ See Shabbat 68b; Maimonides Hilkhoh Mamrim 3: 3. This certainly applies to ritual laws, whether it applies to moral ones also may be a moot point.

² Haidt, Jonathan. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Pantheon, 2012.

³ See Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2003.

⁴ See Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (un)making of Terrorists*. New York: Ecco, 2010. The classic text is Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*. New York: Harper and Row, 1951.

state. You will not succeed in caring for the stranger, implies G-d, until you yourselves know in your very bones and sinews what it feels like to be a stranger. And lest you forget, I have already commanded you to remind yourselves and your children of the taste of affliction and bitterness every year on Pesach. Those who forget what it feels like to be a stranger, eventually come to oppress strangers, and if the children of Abraham oppress strangers, why did I make them My covenantal partners?

Empathy, sympathy, knowledge and rationality are usually enough to let us live at peace with others. But not in hard times. Serbs, Croats and Muslims lived peaceably together in Bosnia for years. So did Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda. The problem arises at times of change and disruption when people are anxious and afraid. That is why exceptional defences are necessary, which is why the Torah speaks of memory and history – things that go to the very heart of our identity. We have to remember that we were once on the other side of the equation. We were once strangers: the oppressed, the victims. Remembering the Jewish past forces us to undergo role reversal. In the midst of freedom we have to remind ourselves of what it feels like to be a slave.

What happened to Csanad, now Dovid, Szegedi, was exactly that: role reversal. He was a hater who discovered that he belonged among the hated. What cured him of antisemitism was his role-reversing discovery that he was a Jew. That, for him, was a life-changing discovery. The Torah tells us that the experience of our ancestors in Egypt was meant to be life-changing as well. Having lived and suffered as strangers, we became the people commanded to care for strangers.

The best way of curing antisemitism is to get people to experience what it feels like to be a Jew. The best way of curing hostility to strangers is to remember that we too, from someone else's perspective, are strangers. Memory and role-reversal are the most powerful resources we have to cure the darkness that can sometimes occlude the human soul. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

If the bull gores a manservant or a maidservant, he shall give silver [in the amount of] thirty shekels to his master, and the bull shall be stoned." (Exodus 21:32) In last week's commentary on the portion of Yitro, we showed how the Covenant at Sinai expressed the Israelites' commitment to the Jewish religion, to the values, rituals and interpersonal commandments which would transform us into G-d's "chosen treasure from amongst all of the nations..., into a Kingdom of priest-teachers and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6). The symbol of this Covenant is blood – the blood of the sacrificial offerings, some of

which was sprinkled on the altar (for G-d), and some upon the nation, with Moses declaring, "Behold, the blood of the Covenant, which the Lord has sealed with you on the basis of all these words" (Ex. 24:8) What is the symbolism of this blood? It is certainly strongly reminiscent of the prior Covenant between G-d and Abraham, the Covenant between the Pieces, which featured animals cut in half, with Abraham and G-d (as it were) passing between the blood of the pieces.

This covenant guaranteed Abraham's descendants eternal life as a nation with secure borders for the Land of Israel.

Abraham's covenant and the covenant at Sinai both seem to emphasize a mutual, two-sided contract, between a sovereign Lord and a free nation committed to live in accordance with His commands.

The earlier covenant (Between the Pieces) is also bound up with the covenant of circumcision, which also requires taking some blood from the male organ of propagation at eight days of age. The Bible iterates and reiterates that blood is the very life of the organism.

Indeed, the Hebrew term for "human being" – Adam – is built upon the Hebrew word dam, "blood." It is as though the Bible is teaching that without offering sacrificial blood for the sake of these covenants, there will be no life – not for the Jewish people and not for humanity as a whole. We must be willing to sacrifice blood for our Covenant, and in return we will receive the blood of external life.

Rashi, our classical commentator, goes one step further, suggesting that the Sinaitic Covenant of the sprinkling of the blood upon the nation sealed our conversion (gi'ur) to Judaism. Our Sages teach that our ancestors entered into the Jewish Covenant by means of circumcision, ritual immersion and the sprinkling of the blood. At Sinai, we were converted – which explains the necessity of our acceptance of the commandments, "we shall do and we shall internalize."

And as we saw last week, this conversion was a real celebration; the whole burnt and peace offerings of the youth occasioned great joy, as the Bible demands, "on the days of your Rejoicing, and your Festivals and your New Moons you shall blow the bugles over your whole burnt offerings and your peace offerings" (Num 10:10). Hence in profound spiritual enjoyment, Moses calls out, "Behold the blood of the Covenant" and "Moses, Aaron, his sons, and the Seventy Elders go atop the mountains... look upon the Lord, and eat and drink" (Ex. 24:8-11). A conversion is a cause for rejoicing – despite, or because of, the blood sacrifice and of life eternal.

Close to three years ago, on my way to the village of Poutti in Uganda, I spent a Shabbat as scholar in residence in the Orthodox school in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi: There was a one African woman who caught my attention, even from the women's section, because of her ecstatic prayer and

her obvious familiarity with the Hebrew chants. When I met with her afterwards, she explained that many decades before a voice from heaven had led her out of the Baptist Church and into an Orthodox synagogue, where the Sabbath – and not Sunday – was kept as the Lord's Day. She said that all of her children and grandchildren observed the commands of our Holy Bible. The goal of her life was to become Jewish; her name was Wanjiku.

As the world – or Divine Providence – turns, Tarfon (an African who studied for one year in our Efrat Yeshiva Hesder Mahanayim and came from Poutti, where several hundred Africans have been following Torah commandments for 100 years) fell in love with Ruth, Wanjiku's granddaughter; I made a return visit to Poutti to perform their wedding, but first to convert Ruth (who indeed had been living a completely observant life) as well as Wanjiku in the new mikve (ritual bath) which now graces Poutti.

For Wanjiku, the ritual immersion was no simple act; she had recently suffered a stroke. Nevertheless, after her immersion, she looked absolutely radiant. She said that she had believed for many decades that her conversion would eventually come, and that this day of her rebirth was the happiest day of her life. When I gave her the new name of Emuna (Faith), she exclaimed the sheheheyanu blessing with tears of joy and choked emotion. My then 14-year-old grandson, Eden, who accompanied me on the trip, whispered, "I always heard how Judaism is an obligation, a yoke of responsibility. I had to come to Africa to learn that Judaism is a joyous privilege and a gift of G-d." ©2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the most puzzling, if not even disturbing subjects, discussed in biblical and halachic detail, appears in this week's Torah reading. That subject matter concerns itself with the institution of slavery – of literally owning another human being and defining them as human chattel. Certainly, the entire subject matter grates on the ears and sensibilities of Western citizens in our current twenty-first century.

We remember the words of Abraham Lincoln that if there is any wrong in human society, slavery is certainly that wrong. Yet, as a matter of cold hard fact and reality, slavery still exists in a large part of human society today and was certainly the norm in all human societies for many millennia. Only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did Western societies begin the slow, painful and always violent change of mindset and practice and legally abolish slavery.

Large parts of the Moslem world today still incorporate slavery as part of their social and economic fabric of life. So, we moderns ask the question, certainly to ourselves if not publicly, why does it seem

that the Torah accepts and even condones the practice of slavery? It devotes a great deal of space and thought to regulating it, limiting it, and making it more humane and less brutal.

Yet, in the final analysis it does not speak out against the practice nor does it forbid it as being a moral and legal wrong. To the true believer, this question like all questions regarding religion and faith, has really no validity. To the nonbeliever, there never is an acceptable answer to any of one's doubts and questions regarding faith and revelation.

To many if not most of us who, though believing are nevertheless troubled by seeming moral inconsistencies and who search for Torah relevance in our everyday lives, this type of question gnaws at us.

The Talmud many centuries ago pointed out the inefficiencies and economic backwardness that slavery inflicts upon society. Its famous statement was: "One who purchases a slave to serve one's self is in reality acquiring a master over one's self." Yet, even here it is the impracticality of slavery that is being attacked and not the immorality of the institution itself.

Many of the great Torah commentators, especially of the last few centuries, have attempted to deal with this issue. They saw in it – in this Jewish attitude toward slavery - an institution that could rehabilitate the criminal, give opportunity to the helpless poor, educate the ignorant and bring the pagan to monotheistic society and its enlightened practices and attitudes.

As true and high sounding as these goals are at best, they still do not sound a ringing condemnation of the institution of slavery itself. I think that we are forced to say that since the Torah was given to all societies and all times – an idea emphasized by Maimonides throughout his works – the Torah, as was its wont in many cases, spoke to a current and long-lasting society that could not imagine a world where slavery should no longer exist.

It regulated the institution and look forward to a time such as ours where, in most human societies, that institution would no longer exist. The Torah never commanded the acquisition of slaves. It tempered the practice, waiting for the time when it would cease to be an issue. ©2015 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And I (G-d) will send the hornet before you, and it will drive out the Chivi and the C'naani and the Chiti from before you" (Sh'mos 23:28). There are three times in Tanach where the hornet (as opposed to bees) are mentioned, and all three are

regarding the conquest of the Promised Land. Besides the verse in our Parasha, Moshe mentions it in his address to the nation shortly before his death, telling them not to fear the nations of Canaan, but instead to remember the mighty and wondrous things that G-d did to Pharaoh and Egypt, as G-d will do similar things to all the nations they fear (D'varim 7:19). He then adds (7:20) "and in addition, Hashem your G-d will send the hornet against them, until all of those who remain and are hidden from you are destroyed." The third mention comes at the end of Sefer Y'hoshua (24:12), as part of G-d's message to the nation in Y'hoshua's address/challenge to them shortly before his death. There, the hornet (used in the singular form all three times because it refers to the species) was said to have driven out the kings who dwelled on the eastern side of the Jordan River, even though the previous verse (24:11) mentions crossing to the western side of the Jordan and conquering the nations there.

There are numerous issues related to the biblical mentions of the hornet that deserve a closer look; I will only attempt to deal with some of them here. First and foremost is whether the verses are literally referring to hornets attacking our enemies, or meant figuratively, or not really referring to hornets at all. Rav Saadya G'on and Ibn Ezra both explain the word "tzirah" to refer to a physical illness, related to the word "tzora'as" (which is a physical condition, specifically a skin condition), not the flying insect. Ralbag understands "the hornet" to be a non-literal term used to refer to the extra-ordinary means G-d will use to defeat our enemies. Although in his commentary on Chumash the Malbim does not explain what "tzirah" refers to (with his silence implying that it refers to the hornet), in his commentary on Y'hoshua he explains it figuratively, with our conquering of the mighty kings of Sichon and Og on the eastern side of the Jordan instilling fear in the nations on the western side, who reacted as if there were hornets to fear.

Malbim's approach works well to explain mentioning defeating Sichon and Og after having already mentioned defeating the nations on the western side, as the victory on the western side was aided by the previous victories on the eastern side, which had an effect similar to hornets in that they instilled fear in the nations on the eastern side. It does not, however, explain what the first two mentions are referring to. Although it is possible that the first mention, which was said before Sichon and Og were defeated, refers to the fear created by what happened to Egypt (see Sh'mos 15:14-16), and the second mention refers to the same fear as the third, the future tense ("will send the hornet") implies that the fear hasn't set in yet, and in both cases the circumstances that would have created that fear had already occurred. Additionally, the other nations being fearful was already mentioned explicitly (Sh'mos 23:27), so there is no need to express them being

fearful in other terms, and there is no reason for Moshe to specify that this fear would overtake "those who remained and those who are hidden" more than it would anyone else.

Rashi (see also Radak on Y'hoshua and Rabbeinu Bachye on D'varim 7:20) tells us that the "tzirah" is a flying insect, which seemingly means he takes it literally. Although it is possible that the term needs to be defined literally before we can understand what it means allegorically, since no allegorical explanation is subsequently given, it is fair to assume that Rashi did understand it literally. He tells us that the hornets smote them in their eyes and injected venom into them, causing their death, which fits the description of what attacking hornets would do (except for the stings being specifically in the eyes, which is certainly possible -- especially if being sent directly by G-d, but that's a digression we will avoid for now). Rashi then adds a direct quote from the Talmud, that the hornets never crossed the Jordan River, a comment that has generated much discussion (starting with the Talmud itself). [It should be noted that Rashi's quote of this statement is where, in the earliest editions of Rashi, his commentary on the verse ends. This is borne out by how Rashi is quoted by the earlier commentaries, e.g. Chizkuni, who quotes Rashi and then quotes the further explanation of the Talmud without mentioning that Rashi also quotes it.]

In the Talmud, the question is posed as to how it could be said that the hornets never crossed the Jordan if our verse (Sh'mos 23:28) says that G-d said He would "send the hornet before us." Quoting this verse (rather than the one in D'varim) is interesting, from two perspectives. First of all, how does it prove that the hornets crossed the Jordan? Maybe it's only referring to the wars with Sichon and Og, which took place on the eastern side, thereby negating the need for them to cross! Although many answer this question by pointing out that three of the seven nations are mentioned, and only two were on the eastern side (an issue that can bring about yet another digression), since the context of the surrounding verses is the conquest of all the nations (including those on the western side), with the next verse continuing by telling us that the nations that the hornets will drive out will "not be driven out in one year, lest the land be desolate and the beasts of the field become abundant," it is obvious that the hornets will not be operating on just one side of the Jordan. Secondly, why prove that the hornets also operated on the western side of the Jordan from the verse in Sh'mos, when the one in D'varim was said after Sichon and Og had already been conquered, and must therefore be referring to conquering the land on the other side of the river?

In order to explain how it could be said that the hornets never crossed the Jordan if the verse says that they did, Reish Lakish suggests that they stayed on the

eastern side and shot their poison over to the western side, where it blinded the nations on the other side and rendered them incapable of having children. Although technically this answers how the hornets could impact the war on the western side if they never crossed the river, practically speaking, it's impossible. Yes, I know, nothing is impossible when G-d is involved, but since He almost always operates within the rules of nature that He, in His infinite wisdom, set up (see <http://tinyurl.com/nrwr9kc>), and hornets inject their venom into their victim by stinging them (and, even if they could access their venom, or that of other creatures, in other ways, throwing them across a river seems rather unlikely), this answer doesn't seem to hold water (pardon the pun). Besides, since the nations on the western side were to be defeated slowly, why have this miraculous venom tossing -- with each subsequent toss being made further and further west -- done repeatedly, rather than just allowing the hornets to cross?

Rav Papa gives a different answer, suggesting that there were two separate groups of hornets, one during Moshe's time and one during Y'hoshua's, with Moshe's hornets not crossing the Jordan and Y'hoshua's crossing. Therefore, the verses that discuss defeating the nations on the western side are referring to Y'hoshua's hornets, while the statement that says the hornets didn't cross is referring to Moshe's. Although this approach seems much more straightforward, it has one glaring weakness; why is there no mention of these hornets in Sefer Y'hoshua, when the land on the western side being conquered is discussed? It's possible, though, that Y'hoshua's hornets were not as out of the ordinary as Moshe's; their role was, as described in D'varim, to clear out the individuals who were hiding. When they hid underground or in caves, they inadvertently (from their perspective; G-d made sure it occurred that way) disturbed hornets nests, causing the hornets to chase after them and either stung them or bring them out into the open where the nation could take care of them. Since these were a different set of hornets, with a different purpose, the Talmud could not use them to prove that the hornets described in Sh'mos crossed the river, nor were they out of the ordinary enough to be included in Y'hoshua's description of these conquests. Rav Papa was suggesting that the verse in Sh'mos was referring to both sets of hornets, with only the second kind "crossing" to the western side.

Getting back to Reish Lakish's approach, I would suggest that he understood the hornets literally, as G-d sent real hornets to defeat Sichon and Og. These hornets accomplished two things; they stung the soldiers of Sichon and Og's armies, thereby defeating them, and, in doing so, created a fear in the rest of the nations of Canaan, including those on the western side of the Jordan. Since this fear was created by the

hornets, it is described as their "venom," which was figuratively "thrown across the river" to affect those on the other side, where it "blinded them," i.e. made it impossible for them to see how they could be victorious, and caused them to lose their virility, similar to how Rachav described how her people were affected by their fear of the Israelites (see Rashi on Y'hoshua 2:11). This fear, described in D'varim and Y'hoshua as being caused by the hornets helping defeat Sichon and Og, could not prove that Moshe's hornets crossed the Jordan, so the Talmud quoted the verse in Sh'mos. Reish Lakish was suggesting that this long term effect of the hornets, the fear they created, was being referred to there as well.

As far as why this fear is described in D'varim as targeting "those who remained and those who are hidden" more than anyone else, Reish Lakish may understand the verse to be describing the length of time the fear created by Moshe's hornets would last, not who they would affect; it would last "until all who remained," including "those who hid themselves," so were able to stay alive longer, "were destroyed." This is also why it was stated in the future tense even though it had already occurred, as Moshe was describing how long the fear would last, not that it would come about. But it was the fear created by real hornets that crossed the Jordan, with the real hornets staying on the eastern side. © 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Talmud states that the source of prayer is the biblical phrase: "And you shall serve Him with all your heart." (Deuteronomy 11:13) Service is usually associated with action. One can serve with his or her hands or feet but how does one serve with the heart? The Talmud concludes that service of the heart refers to prayer. (Ta'anit 2a)

Interestingly, Maimonides quotes a slightly different text from this week's portion as the source of prayer. He states that "It is an affirmative commandment to pray every day as it says 'and you shall serve the Lord your G-d.'" (Exodus 23:25) (Rambam: Laws of Prayer 1:1). What is the conceptual difference between using this source as the basis for prayer and using the text quoted in the Talmud?

Rabbi Yosef Caro suggests that the verse from Deuteronomy cited by the Talmud may be understood as simply offering good advice rather than requiring daily prayer. It may alternatively refer to the service of learning Torah. The text in Exodus, however, deals clearly with prayer. (Kesef Mishneh on Rambam, *ibid*)

Another distinction comes to mind. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin notes that the text quoted by Maimonides is found in the context of sentences that deal with liberating the land of Israel. It is possible that Maimonides quotes this text to underscore the crucial

connection between prayer and action. Prayer on its own is simply not enough.

It can be added that the Talmudic text quoted as the source for prayer may be a wonderful complement to the text quoted by Rambam. Remember the sentence quoted in the Talmud states and you shall serve your G-d "With ALL your heart." Note the word all. In other words, while one should engage in action, prayer has an important place. Even in a life full of action, the prayer that one must find time for, must be with one's entire, full and complete devotion. It may be true that quantitatively, prayer may have to be limited, but qualitatively it must be deep and meaningful.

The balance between action and prayer is spelled out in the Midrash when talking about Ya'akov (Jacob). The Midrash insists that when Ya'akov prepares to meet Esav (Esau) he prays deeply. Yet, at the same time, he is fully active by preparing for any outcome of this most unpredictable family reunion. The balance between prayer and action comes to the fore. (See Rashi Genesis 32:9)

More than ever, we need to internalize the integral connection of productive action with deep prayer. In that way we could truly serve G-d with all our heart. ©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 DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Parshas Sh'kalim, deals with the collection of funds for the Bais Hamikdash. Before King Yehoash's reign, the Bais Hamikdash was seriously neglected and much repair work was necessary to restore it to its original splendor. When the righteous King Yehoash came into power, he immediately instructed the kohanim to collect the necessary funds. After their unsuccessful attempt in achieving this goal he personally spearheaded the collection and received an overwhelming response.

The reason for this terrible neglect is explained in Divrei Hayomim (2:23) wherein the wicked Queen Atalya and her sons are blamed for the deteriorated condition of the Bais Hamikdash. The royal family severely mistreated the holiest structure in the world by carelessly roaming inside it, bringing much damage to its interior walls and structure. Although the Jewish people consistently donated funds to repair the Bais Hamikdash, the wicked sovereign repeatedly misappropriated them. Instead of using them for the Bais Hamikdash, she channeled them to further her idolatrous practices. After the pious Yehoash came to power, he removed idolatry from the royal family and faithfully applied the collected funds to their intended usage. After many years of neglect, the Bais

Hamikdash was finally restored to its previous glory.

The pattern in this haftorah is reminiscent of the Jewish people's formative stages as a nation. This week's maftir reading alludes to the Jewish people's comeback after abusing their financial resources, resulting in their most shameful plunge in history. (see Daas Z'kainim S'hmos 30:13). Moments before the Jewish people miraculously left Egypt, Hashem rewarded them with abundant wealth. Hashem effected a change of heart in the ruthless Egyptian slave drivers and they generously showered the Jewish people with gifts and wealth. However, the Jewish people did not properly appreciate Hashem's unbelievable favor and became influenced by their newly gained wealth and power. During very trying and desperate moments, their newly gained sense of control heavily influenced them. Instead of turning to Hashem for assistance, they applied their wealth and golden ornaments towards securing their own destiny and produced the Golden Calf. Hashem severely responded to this grave offense and the Jewish people sincerely repented to Hashem. Hashem then granted them opportunity to rectify their sin by inviting them to participate in the erection of the Mishkan. They learned their lesson well and generously applied their money to a most appropriate cause, the construction of Hashem's magnificent sanctuary. Hashem recognized their new approach to wealth and its potential good and deemed them worthy of His Divine Presence for the next thousand years.

The reading of Parshas Sh'kalim and its accompanying haftorah are a most befitting introduction to our month of Adar. We read in Megillas Esther (3:9), that the wicked Haman offered the king an impressive ten thousand silver blocks in attempt to purchase the Jewish people from the wicked King Achashveirosh. Haman intended to use his wealth to influence the king to grant him permission to destroy the entire Jewish nation. However, Chazal teach us that Haman's efforts were preempted by the the Jewish people's annual donation during the month of Adar to the Bais Hamikdash. By no coincidence, Hashem instructed the Jewish people to annually donate this exact sum -- ten thousand silver blocks -- to His treasury for sacrifices in the Bais Hamikdash. Hashem said, "Let the Jewish nation's sacrificial donation of ten thousand blocks preempt Haman's attempt to influence the king with his ten thousand blocks" (see Mesichta Megilla 13b).

The meaning of this seems to be that the Jewish people's annual donation demonstrated their proper understanding of wealth and its power. They allocated their wealth to the most worthy of causes and eagerly donated annually -- without fail -- ten thousand blocks of silver to Hashem and the Bais Hamikdash. This perfect approach to wealth and its positive values protected them from Haman's financial influence on the king. The Jewish people understood the true value of wealth and were not personally influenced by its

potential ills. Therefore, they were not subject to Haman's financial influence and his powerful seductive approach to the king could not determine their fate. Eventually, the king would and did see through Haman's madness for power and all Haman's power and financial influence were of no avail. ©2015 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Sealed and Delivered

This parsha is called Mishpatim. Simply translated it means ordinances. The portion entails laws that deal with various torts and property damages. It discusses laws of damages, of servitude, of lenders and borrowers, employers and laborers, laws of lost items and the responsibilities of the finder. Many of these mitzvos that are discussed in the section of Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat. But there are quite a few mitzvos mentioned that engage the purely spiritual quality of the Jew. Some of them deal with kosher restrictions, others with our relationship with the Almighty.

One verse that deals with the requirement of shechita (ritual slaughter) begins with a prelude regarding holiness. "People of holiness shall you be to Me; you shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field; to the dog shall you throw it (Exodus 22:30). The question is simple. There are many esoteric mitzvos whose only justifiable reason is spiritual. Why does the Torah connect the fact that Jews should be holy with their prohibition of eating meat that was torn as opposed to ritually slaughtered? There are myriad mitzvos that require self-control and abstention. Can there be another intonation to the holiness prelude?

(I heard this amazing story a number of years ago from a reliable source; I saved it until I was able to use it as an appropriate parable to answer a scriptural difficulty. I hope that this is it!)

Dovid, a serious yeshiva student, boarded the last flight out of Los Angeles on his way back to his Yeshiva in New York. He was glad that they were going to serve food as he had left his home in a rush and did not get a chance to eat supper. Sitting next to him on the airplane, was a southern fellow who knew little about Judaism, and considered Dovid a curiosity. As the plane flew eastward, he bantered with Dovid about Jews, religion and the Bible, in a poor attempt to display his little bits of knowledge. Hungry and tired Dovid humored him with pleasantries and not much talking. He was pleased when his kosher meal was finally served. The kosher deli sandwich came wrapped in a plastic tray, and was sealed with a multiple array of stickers and labels testifying to its kosher integrity. His new-found neighbor was amused as Dovid struggled to break the myriad seals and reveal the sandwich, which unbelievably looked just as appetizing as the non-kosher deli sandwich the airline h

ad served him.

"Hey," he drawled, "your kosher stuff doesn't look too bad after all!" Dovid smiled and was about to take his first bite into the sandwich when he realized that he had to wash his hands for the bread. He walked to the back of the plane to find a sink. It took a little while to wash his hands properly, but soon enough he returned to his seat. His sandwich was still on his tray, nestled in its ripped-open wrapping, unscathed.

And then it dawned upon him. There is a rabbinic ordinance that if unmarked or unsealed meat is left unattended in a gentile environment, it is prohibited to be eaten by a Jew. The Rabbis were worried that someone may have switched the kosher meat for non-kosher.

Dovid felt that in the enclosed atmosphere of an airplane cabin, nothing could have happened. After all, no one is selling meat five miles above earth, and would have reason to switch the meat, but a halacha is halacha, the rule is a rule, and Dovid did not want to take the authority to overrule the age-old Halacha.

Pensively he sat down, made a blessing on the bread and careful not to eat the meat, he took a small bite of the bread. Then he put the sandwich down and let his hunger wrestle with his conscience. "Hey pardner," cried his neighbor, "what's wrong with the sandwich?"

Dovid was embarrassed but figured; if he couldn't eat he would talk. He explained the Rabbinic law prohibiting unattended meat and then added with a self-effacing laugh, "and though I'm sure no one touched my food, in my religion, rules are rules."

His neighbor turned white. "Praise the L-rd, the Rabbis, and all of you Jewish folk!" Dovid looked at him quizzically.

"When you were back there doin' your thing, I says to myself, "I never had any kosher deli meat in my life. I thought I'd try to see if it was as good as my New York friends say it is!"

Well I snuck a piece of pastrami. But when I saw how skimpy I left your sandwich, I replaced your meat with a piece of mine! Someone up there is watching a holy fellow such as yourself!"

The Pardes Yosef explains the correlation of the first half of the verse to the second with a quote from the Tractate Yevamos. The Torah is telling us more than an ordinance. It is relating a fact. "If you will act as a People of holiness then you shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field; to the dog shall you throw it. The purity of action prevents the mishaps of transgressions. Simple as that. Keep holy and you will be watched to ensure your purity. Sealed and delivered. ©2015 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

