

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In a much watched TED talk Simon Sinek asked the question: how do great leaders inspire action? (https://youtu.be/u4ZoJKF_VuA) What made people like Martin Luther King and Steve Jobs stand out from their contemporaries who may have been no less gifted, no less qualified? His answer: Most people talk about what. Some people talk about how. Great leaders, though, start with why. This is what makes them transformative. (For a more detailed account, see the book based on the talk: Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. New York, Portfolio, 2009.)

Sinek's lecture was about business and political leadership. The most powerful examples, though, are directly or indirectly religious. Indeed I argued in *The Great Partnership* what makes Abrahamic monotheism different is that it believes there is an answer to the question, why. Neither the universe nor human life is meaningless, an accident, a mere happenstance. As Freud, Einstein and Wittgenstein all said, religious faith is faith in the meaningfulness of life.

Rarely is this shown in a more powerful light than in Va'etchanan. There is much in Judaism about what: what is permitted, what forbidden, what is sacred, what is secular. There is much, too, about how: how to learn, how to pray, how to grow in our relationship with G-d and with other people. There is relatively little about why.

In Va-etchanan Moses says some of the most inspiring words ever uttered about the why of Jewish existence. That is what made him the great transformational leader he was, and it has consequences for us, here, now.

To have a sense of how strange Moses' words were, we must recall several facts. The Israelites were still in the desert. They had not yet entered the land. They had no military advantages over the nations they would have to fight. Ten of the twelve spies had argued, almost forty years before, that the mission was impossible. In a world of empires, nations and fortified cities, the Israelites must have seemed to the untutored eye defenceless, unproven, one more horde among the many who swept across Asia and Africa in ancient times. Other than their religious practices, few contemporary observers would have seen anything

about them to set them apart from the Jebusites and Perizzites, Midianites and Moabites, and the other petty powers that populated that corner of the Middle East.

Yet in this week's parsha Moses communicated an unshakeable certainty that what had happened to them would eventually change and inspire the world. Listen to his language: "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 miracles, 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 eyes?" (Deut. 4:32-34)

Moses was convinced that Jewish history was, and would remain, unique. In an age of empires, a small, defenceless group had been liberated from the greatest empire of all by a power not their own, by G-d himself. That was Moses' first point: the singularity of Jewish history as a narrative of redemption.

His second was the uniqueness of revelation: "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our G-d is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" (Deut. 4:7-8)

Other nations had gods to whom they prayed and offered sacrifices. They too attributed their military successes to their deities. But no other nation saw G-d as their sovereign, legislator and law-giver. Elsewhere law represented the decree of the king or, in more recent centuries, the will of the people. In Israel, uniquely, even when there was a king, he had no legislative power. Only in Israel was G-d seen not just as a power but as the architect of society, the orchestrator of its music of justice and mercy, liberty



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and dignity.

The question is why. Toward the end of the chapter Moses gives one answer: "Because He loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them." (Deut. 4:37). G-d loved Abraham, not least because Abraham loved G-d. And G-d loved Abraham's children because they were his children and He had promised the patriarch that He would bless and protect them.

Earlier though Moses had given a different kind of answer, not incompatible with the second, but different: "See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my G-d commanded me... Observe them carefully, for this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'" (Deut. 4:5-6)

Why did Moses, or G-d, care whether or not other nations saw Israel's laws as wise and understanding? Judaism was and is a love story between G-d and a particular people, often tempestuous, sometimes serene, frequently joyous, but close, intimate, even inward-looking. What has the rest of the world to do with it?

But the rest of the world does have something to do with it. Judaism was never meant for Jews alone. In his first words to Abraham, G-d already said, "I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you, I will curse; through you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Jews were to be a source of blessing to the world.

G-d is the G-d of all humanity. In Genesis He spoke to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, and made a covenant with all humankind before He made one with Abraham. In Egypt, whether in Potiphar's house, or prison, or Pharaoh's palace, Joseph continually talked about G-d. He wanted the Egyptians to know that nothing he did, he did himself. He was merely an agent of the G-d of Israel. There is nothing here to suggest that G-d is indifferent to the nations of the world.

Later in the days of Moses, G-d said that He would perform signs and wonders so that "The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord" (Ex. 7:5). He called Jeremiah to be "a prophet to the nations." He sent Jonah to the Assyrians in Nineveh. He had Amos

deliver oracles to the other nations before He sent him an oracle about Israel. In perhaps the most astonishing prophecy in Tanakh He sent Isaiah the message that a time will come when G-d will bless Israel's enemies: "The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria My handiwork, and Israel My inheritance'" (Is. 19:25).

G-d is concerned with all humanity. Therefore what we do as Jews makes a difference to humanity, not just in a mystical sense, but as exemplars of what it means to love and be loved by G-d. Other nations would look at Jews and sense that some larger power was at work in their history. As the late Milton Himmelfarb put it: "Each Jew knows how thoroughly ordinary he is; yet taken together, we seem caught up in things great and inexplicable... The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us." (Milton Himmelfarb and Gertrude Himmelfarb. Jews and Gentiles. New York, Encounter, 2007, 141)

We were not called on to convert the world. We were called on to inspire the world. As the prophet Zechariah put it, a time will come when "Ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that G-d is with you'" (Zech. 8:23). Our vocation is to be G-d's ambassadors to the world, giving testimony through the way we live that it is possible for a small people to survive and thrive under the most adverse conditions, to construct a society of law-governed liberty for which we all bear collective responsibility, and to "act justly, love mercy and walk humbly" with our G-d (Micah 6:8). Va-etchanan is the mission statement of the Jewish people.

And others were and still are inspired by it. The conclusion I have drawn from a lifetime lived in the public square is that non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. They find it hard to understand why Jews, in countries where there is genuine religious liberty, abandon their faith or define their identity in purely ethnic terms.

Speaking personally, I believe that the world in its current state of turbulence needs the Jewish message, which is that G-d calls on us to be true to our faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith. Imagine a world in which everyone believed this. It would be a world transformed.

We are not just another ethnic minority. We are the people who predicated freedom on teaching our children to love, not hate. Ours is the faith that consecrated marriage and the family, and spoke of responsibilities long before it spoke of rights. Ours is the vision that sees alleviation of poverty as a religious task because, as Maimonides said, you cannot think exalted spiritual thoughts if you are starving or sick or

homeless and alone. (The Guide for the Perplexed, III:27) We do these things not because we are conservative or liberal, Republicans or Democrats, but because we believe that is what G-d wants of us.

Much is written these days about the what and how of Judaism, but all too little about the why. Moses, in the last month of his life, taught the why. That is how the greatest of leaders inspired action from his day to ours.

If you want to change the world, start with why.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"You are a holy nation to the Lord your G-d... a treasured nation from amongst all the nations.... It was not because you were more numerous than all the nations... that G-d chose you since you are the smallest of all nations. It is rather because G-d loves you and because of His keeping of the oath which He swore to your ancestors..." (Deut 7:6-8)

What is the real meaning of the "election" of Israel? It cannot be because we are better than all other nations; to dispel that notion one need only to turn again to the prophetic sections we've been reading these past three Sabbaths from Jeremiah and Isaiah, railing and thundering against the Israelites because of their immorality and hypocrisy.

Nor is it because the nation of Israel was a paragon of virtue in the early days of its formation. On the contrary, during the early chapters of Deuteronomy Moses actually recounts the backsliding of our people from the wanton worship of the Golden Calf just forty days after the Revelation at Sinai, to all of the petty complaints and serious rebellions against Moses (and G-d!) throughout the Book of Numbers. G-d could not possibly have been under any illusions about the superior moral quality of this family – nation that He had "chosen."

Were we then elected because we were "the least among nations," the fewest in number and the weakest in power, as the above quoted text would suggest? Is that a reason for being chosen? What is the source of this "love" for us of which our Bible speaks? Can it be that the Creator of the Universe fell prey to a totally arbitrary and irrational love which is the Achilles' heel, the tragic undoing of so many of His mortal creatures, when love is merely an expression of emotion to the total exclusion of logic?

Furthermore, why refer to this particular Sabbath as Shabbat Nahamu, the Sabbath of comfort? Historically, the Israelites continued to fast in memory of the destruction of the First Temple throughout the period of the rebuilt Second Temple and renewed Jewish sovereignty in Jerusalem. We know this from a variety of sources, including Zechariah 7,8, from

Josephus, 2nd Commonwealth historian, as well as from the legalist- philosopher Maimonides (Interpretations of the Mishnah, Rosh HaShanah 18). After all, even our miraculous survival and subsequent rebuilding cannot begin to remove the pain of the righteous adults and innocent children who lost their lives in the period of destruction, or erase the force of the agonizing question, Eicha?! Can our generation's remarkable return to our promised homeland provide any kind of reasonable response to the piercing question mark which arises from the smoke-stacks of Auschwitz and Buchenwald? So, from whence comes our comfort?

Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, in his masterful work Faith after the Holocaust, cites a bold and startling passage of the Talmud (B.T. Yoma 69b) which sheds light on this issue:

"Said R. Yehoshua ben Levi (a survivor of the Second Temple devastation): Why was our Judicial synod called the "Men of the Great Assembly"? Because they restored the (Divine) crown to its pristine glory.

Moses came and countered, 'the great, powerful and awesome G-d' (Deut. 10)

Jeremiah came and declared, 'The Gentiles have undermined the infrastructure of His Temple; where is His awesomeness?' And he (Jeremiah) deleted (the word) awesome (from G-d's praises in the Amidah).

Daniel came and cried out, 'The Gentiles are subjugating His children; where is His power?'

And he (Daniel) deleted (the word) powerful (from G-d's praises in the Amidah).

They (the Men of the Great Assembly, who formulated our prayers) came and restored, saying, 'The very opposite is the truth! Herein lies the power behind G-d's power: that He conquers His instinct (to set evil off at the pass before it wreaks its damage) and has patience for the wicked (to wait for them to repent and repair the world). And herein lies His awesomeness: were it not for the awesomeness of the Holy One Blessed be He, how could one (paltry) nation withstand and survive the (powerful) nation's roundabout.'

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's message is indubitably clear. G-d has created an imperfect world of freedom of choice, a seemingly absurd and lawless world in which individuals will do even that which the Almighty would not want them to do (the Kabbalistic notion of tzimtzum, the willful "contraction" of the goodness and justice of the Creator of the Universe, as it were, in order to leave room for a world of free choice). As the prophet Isaiah (45:7) declares, "Creator of light and Maker of darkness, Doer of peace and Maker of evil (sic), I am the Lord, the Doer of all these things." G-d has confidence – and even guarantees – that eventually the wicked will repent, that human

beings will eventually succeed in repairing and perfecting this world in the Kingship of the Divine, that there will eventually be a messianic period of world peace and well-being (Isaiah 2, Micah 4, Zechariah 7-9). Hence G-d allows the world to proceed in accordance "with its customary way," without preventing stolen seed from taking root in the ground, or withering the hand uplifted to smite an innocent human. Hence, "there is not reward for commandments in this world;" only in the other, eternal world of souls and spirituality will there be proper rewards for deeds well done (B.T. Kidushin 39).

Israel plays a pivotal role in this drama. We are G-d's "holy nation and priest-teachers" to the world (S'forno, ad loc), the descendants of Abraham who chose G-d before G-d chose him (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah Laws of Idolatry 1, 1-3), guaranteed by G-d of eternal progeny who would eventually live in the Land of Israel and teach ethical monotheism to the entire world (Genesis 12:1-3)

Those who opposed ethical monotheism, relying on might rather than right, brute violent power rather than love and morality, have all too often ruled the world – from Pharaoh the totalitarian despot of Egypt, to Nazi Hitler to radical Wahabi Islam. The very survival of Israel, our miraculous ability to remain alive despite Egyptian enslavement and holocaust conflagration with horrific exiles and persecutions in between, – regardless of the fact that we are the most paltry in number and the weakest in power of all nations of the world (indeed, for almost 2000 years we were completely stateless and army-less), – makes us G-d's witnesses, *adat HaShem*, testifying that G-d is indeed a G-d of love and morality, a G-d of right over might, a G-d of morality over brute force.

This is G-d's power, this is G-d's awesomeness, and this is the source of our great comfort: G-d chose you since you are the smallest (weakest) of all nations, because G-d loves you" – not because you are perfect but because you are morally better than your enemies, and because your very survival testifies to the existence and eventual triumph of a G-d of Justice, morality and peace. ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah reading of this week contains within it portions that we read in the synagogue on the morning of Tisha B'Av. With unerring accuracy the story of the Jewish people is predicted in full detail. The consequences of national sin and of an immoral society are outlined – the destruction of the Temples, the loss of national sovereignty, exile, persecution and a history of horror and unending dangers and sacrifice.

The history of the Jewish people, by its very nature, is peculiar and different than all others. There

are no nations, races, religions or groupings of people who can be deemed guiltless. So then the question arises, why were and are we singled out for our particular fate and story? And the answer that the Torah itself grants us is that all of this is a result of the ancient and eternal covenant of the Lord made with our ancestors and renewed with us in every generation and every circumstance.

It is very difficult to deal with or explain the nature of a never-ending mutually binding commitment. Agreements are made on a daily basis with governments and individuals, companies and partnerships, with advance knowledge that these commitments are not permanent and are subject to change, as circumstances dictate. Conflicts of interest always arise and outside circumstances will always vary from what they were originally. But the nature of the relationship of the Jewish people to its Creator is such that the commitments never change and the obligations of the original covenant are always in force.

The return of the Jewish people to Zion and to the Land of Israel can only be seen and understood in light of the commitment described in the Torah reading of this week. Thousands of years ago Moshe foresaw that eventually Jews would leave the Exile, whether forcibly or voluntarily, and would return to their ancient homeland. Somehow, this is part of the covenant between Israel and G-d.

And so, over the last two centuries Jews came home, first in a trickle and then in a steady stream and finally – regarding the Jews of Russia – in a mighty torrent. All sorts of Jews made this journey – socialists, communists, secular Zionists, religious Zionists, religious anti-Zionists, believers, and freethinkers all somehow made this passage of return.

The ostensible reasons for their so doing are varied in the extreme. But even to the most jaded of our observers, it should be clear that there is an underlying motive that drives this story. And that is the eternal bond of the original covenant made with our father Abraham and renewed through his generations and millennia of Jewish life by countless others.

The harrowing story of the Jewish exile, represented by the sad fast day of Tisha B'Av represents one extreme of the terms of the covenant. The dawning redemption of Israel, the people and the land, which we are witness to if we but remove the blinkers from our eyes, is the other part of the covenant. In the words of the rabbis of the Talmud, Israel, Torah and G-d are one. We are all bound together in the great and holy covenant that guides our national existence. ©2016 *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

For the second time in the Torah, the Aseret Ha-Dibrot (The Ten Commandments, or more accurately translated as the Ten Utterances) are spelled out. The difference between this text and the one presented in Exodus must be carefully analyzed—after all, these Utterances were said by G-d only once.

The most famous of the contrasts is found in the word which begins the mandate to keep Shabbat. In our portion, the Torah states shamor (Deuteronomy 5:12). In Exodus, however, the Torah states zakhor (20:8). In a famous response to this apparent contradiction, the Rabbis conclude that these two words were said simultaneously by G-d as they reflect different dimensions of Shabbat observance (Berakhot 20b).

It can be suggested that zakhor is a direction to the mind; to remember the Shabbat. Shamor on the other hand, means to observe through action. Here, the Torah may be suggesting that it is important to translate thinking and contemplating Shabbat into doing Shabbat.

Alternatively, the Rabbis suggest that both zakhor and shamor relate only to observance. Zakhor refers to the affirmative commandments of Shabbat (i.e. kiddush, candle lighting, prayers). Shamor, on the other hand refers to the prohibitive commandments, staying away from actions that would violate the laws of Shabbat (Berakhot 206).

These two categories of observances not only delineate legal categories, they actually teach conceptual ideas as well. Zakhor, for example, the affirmative commandment, elicits a feeling of ahavat Hashem—one does the law because one loves G-d. Shamor, the prohibitive commandment, evokes feelings of yirat Hashem—one refrains from violating the law because one fears the Almighty (Ramban, Exodus 20:8).

Ramban takes the interpretation one step further. The love of G-d, corresponding to zakhor, encourages one to seek to imitate the Divine. When in love, we strive to be like the ones we love, in this case we strive to be like G-d. Once approaching this goal and nearing G-d, one can't help but be awestruck sensing feelings of deep finitude in comparison to the infinite and endless G-d. From this perspective, yirat Hashem, corresponding to shamor, means being in awe of G-d rather than fearing G-d (Yad, Fundamentals of Torah 2:1).

Shabbat is a day when we imitate G-d by involving ourselves in inner creativity by intensifying our learning and family connections. In this way, we attempt to mirror the ultimate Creator, thus expressing ahavat Hashem. In the same breath, however, Shabbat is a day when we feel in awe of G-d by

reflecting on the enormity of G-d's creations and refraining from all productive activity. Through the Shabbat, we deeply feel the omnipotent nature of G-d in comparison to our meager selves. This is the awe of yirat Hashem.

As a logical outgrowth of these ideas, the late Rabbi Zvi Dov Kanotopsky argues that zakhor and shamor are opposite sides of the same coin; being together with, while at the same time, in awe of, the Almighty. Although they come at it from different pats, these expressions lead to the same conclusion—the celebration of and critical stature of Shabbat as a day of the Lord and the Jewish people. ©2016 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

“And I entreated G-d at that time” (D'varim 3:23). Rashi explains what “that time” refers to -- “after I conquered the land of Sichone and Oge,” as well as why it led to Moshe asking G-d to let him enter the Promised Land -- “I thought the vow (not to let me enter) may have been undone.” Now that he had conquered land that would become part of the Land of Israel (as evidenced by it already being assigned to some of the Tribes), and he was physically in that land, Moshe thought he might be able to cross over to the other side of the Jordan River as well (see <http://tinyurl.com/zbxxdlc>).

In order to get to the land of Sichone, the nation had circumvented Edom (Bamidbar 21:4, D'varim 2:1-8), and moved north past Mo'av (Bamidbar 21:10-13, D'varim 2:8-9 and 2:18) until they reached Sichone's border. Moshe then asked for permission to pass through his land, but instead of granting it, Sichone attacked and was defeated, with his land being conquered (Bamidbar 21:21-24, D'varim 2:24-36). The end result (after Oge also attacked and his land conquered as well), was the Nation of Israel no longer living in the wilderness, but in Arvos Moav (Bamidbar 22:1), across the Jordan River from Jericho. It was there that Moshe addressed the nation before his death (D'varim 1:5), renewed the covenant between the nation and G-d (D'varim 29:9-14), and from where the nation crossed the Jordan. However, their starting point (from where they departed to get there) was Kadesh (Bamidbar 20:22), which is south of the Promised Land on the western border of Edom, and from where, or near where, the spies had been sent (Bamidbar 13:26). Therefore, just as in the first year they would have entered the Promised Land from the south had there been no sin of the spies (D'varim 1:19-21), they should have been able to enter from the south in the 40th year as well, after the generation that had sinned died out.

Why did they have to go all the way to Arvos Moav to enter the land from the eastern bank of the Jordan River rather than just going north from where they were, entering from the south, as had been the original plan?

One possibility is based on the need to renew the covenant that had been enacted with the generation that came out of Egypt with the next generation (see Rashi on D'varim 4:45). When the covenant was first made, the nation was at Mt. Sinai, isolated from outsiders, and able to focus on its details. Had the nation been able to enter the Promised Land shortly thereafter, the covenant experience at Sinai was enough to allow them to enter from Kadesh [Barneya]. After 40 years, though, when this same covenant-entering experience was repeated, it couldn't be done at Kadesh, near others who were hostile to them (e.g. Edom, Amalek and Canaan), as they wouldn't have the same peace of mind and lack of distractions. Arvos Mo'av, on the other hand, after Sichone and Oge (and the nearby Emori), as well as Midyan, had been defeated and were no longer a threat, and Mo'av had learned its lesson after trying to hire Bilam (so no longer tried to drive them out, for the time being at least), provided a better setting (in some respects) than Sinai (which was in the desert) for the covenant renewal. Although had Edom and Mo'av, or Sichone, let the nation pass through their land to get to Arvos Mo'av it wouldn't have been as peaceful a setting (as there would have then been hostile neighbors), this will be addressed below, when another possibility is presented.

There are numerous explanations given for why, after the exodus from Egypt, G-d didn't lead the nation right into the Promised Land by taking "the Way to the Land of the P'lishtim" (Sh'mos 13:17), using a much longer route instead. Rabbi Y'hoshua ben Levi (Sh'mos Rabbah 20:14) compares the situation to a king who had 12 sons, but only 10 pieces of land, so instead of giving the land to his sons and creating tension between them, the king waited until he purchased two more pieces of land, whereby he could give a full tract to each of them. Similarly, G-d said that if he brought the nation straight to the Promised Land, there wouldn't be a portion for each of the 12 Tribes. Therefore, He kept them in the desert until they were able to conquer the land from Sichone and Oge, so that R'uvein and Gad and half of M'nashe could take it. After that, He brought them into the Promised Land (west of the Jordan River), where the other Tribes would get their full portions too.

There are several things to digest from this Midrash. For one thing, it supports the notion (discussed in the above referenced piece from 5770) that Gad and R'uvein would have (eventually) received that same land even if they hadn't asked for it. For another, it indicates that the land would have been

conquered from Sichone and Oge no matter what; when Moshe asked Sichone for permission to pass through his land, there was no real possibility of Sichone saying "yes" and thereby avoiding being conquered (see Rambam, Hilchos T'shuvah 6:3, that Sichone's free will was removed). Nevertheless, Moshe is praised for "pursuing peace" (see Bamidbar Rabbah 19:27), although it is unclear whether Moshe knew that Sichone would not, and could not, give permission. The request from Mo'av (Shoftim 11:17) likely falls into a similar category; even if Yiftach used it to show that there was no ill intent towards Mo'av (and, by extension, Amon, see Malbim, Torah Or, on Devarim 23:4), ultimately, Sichone conquered the land from Mo'av so that it could eventually be conquered by the Children of Israel (who weren't allowed to wage war with Mo'av, see D'varim 2:9). Another aspect that needs to be dealt with is that this Midrash is coming to explain why G-d led us the long way from Egypt, indicating that the delay in the desert was necessary even before the sin of the spies. [This issue is discussed by the commentators on the Midrash.] A related issue is what would have happened had the spies (and nation) not sinned, as the nation would have then entered the Promised Land from the south. If there were only 10 portions available (at the time) for 12 Tribes, how could they enter from the south?

The Land of Canaan is described as being inhabited by seven nations (D'varim 7:1), but Avraham was promised that his descendants would inherit the land of 10 nations (B'reishis 15:19-21). The three additional nations are the lands that were inhabited by Edom (Eisav's descendants) and Amon and Mo'av (Lot's descendants), lands that stayed within Avraham's family, but would eventually (after Moshiach) also be given to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov (see Rashi on B'reishis 15:19). The difference between the Land of Israel being comprised of seven nations or 10 nations is reflected in its boundaries as well. There are times when the boundaries are said to extend until the Euphrates River (B'reishis 15:18, Sh'mos 23:21 and D'varim 1:7), and times when its northern boundary is very far south of the Euphrates (Bamidbar 34:7-9), as sometimes the Torah is referring to what the boundaries could have been, and one day will be, and other times refers to what it ended up being because we weren't ready or able to fulfill our destiny (yet).

When we left Egypt, we were not ready, and therefore not able, to conquer all 10 nations. Before we received the Torah, the only way we could have entered would have been by having Sichone conquer part of the land of Mo'av first (since we couldn't take it from Mo'av ourselves), and then conquering it from Sichone and assigning it to two (and a half) Tribes. Which meant entering from the east (waiting until Mo'av and Sichone had sinned enough to lose their land, or at

least part of it). After we received the Torah, even after we recovered (somewhat) from the sin of the golden calf, we became worthy of conquering all 10 nations (as evidenced by the boundaries given in Sh'mos and the beginning of D'varim), and we could have/would have entered from the south, and conquered the lands that had, until then, been given to Edom, Amon and Mo'av, thereby having enough for all 12 Tribes. After the sin of the spies, though, we were no longer able to conquer those three lands, so couldn't enter from the south, as there would have only been enough for 10 of the 12 Tribes on the western side of the Jordan. We couldn't conquer land from Amon/Mo'av, and Sichone wouldn't have attacked us (as he only attacked, and was given prominence by the nations on the eastern side of the Jordan, in order to prevent us from entering the Promised Land, see Rashi on Bamidbar21:23, and in this scenario we would have already been in the land; it is also unlikely that Sichone would have taken land from Mo'av if there was no need for them to be the ones to block us from entering the land). [If we had attacked Sichone rather conquering his land after he attacked us, Amon/Mo'av would understandably claim that we would have attacked them too had Sichone not taken their land first; Yiftach was able to take the high road because Moshe had asked permission to peacefully cross through but was denied, and because we didn't attack Sichone and Oge, but they attacked us.] Therefore, after the sin of the spies, we had to enter from the east, conquering the land Sichone had taken from Mo'av, so that there would be enough for all 12 Tribes.

From this perspective, we can understand not only why we had to travel around Edom and then continue north to enter the Promised Land from the east rather than just entering from the south, but why Moshe thought that perhaps he would be able to cross the Jordan River. After all, he had helped conquer, and was already within, the land of two of the 12 Tribes. Why shouldn't he be able to see the rest of the land too? ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI ELIAKIM KOENIGSBERG

TorahWeb

In this week's haftorah, the navi Yeshaya tries to comfort Klal Yisrael for the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. "Nachamu nachamu ami, yomar Elokeichem -- be comforted, be comforter my nation, says your G-d" (Yeshaya 40:1). What words of comfort does the navi offer? How can we possibly be consoled when we have lost so much?

The posuk says, "A voice calls out, 'Proclaim to the world that all flesh is like grass, and all its kindness is like the blossom of the field.' The grass withers, the blossom fades...indeed people are like grass. The grass withers, the blossom fades, but the word of our G-d remains forever. (Yeshaya 40:6-8)" What message

does the navi wish to convey in these pesukim? How is the fact that man withers and fades away with time a source of comfort? And what does this have to do with the loss of the Beis HaMikdash?

Perhaps the navi is saying the following. The physical world beckons us with its materialism and pleasure. But all physical pleasure is ephemeral; it's fleeting. None of the gashmiyus of this world lasts forever. A juicy steak or a good ice cream cone can be mouthwatering and enjoyable. But their memory fades quickly. They're like a passing dream.

There is only one thing that one can enjoy in this world and the feeling lasts, and that is dvar Hashem. U'dvar Elokeinu yakum l'olam -- the word of our G-d remains forever. The pleasure from dvar Hashem, from words of Torah, from any spiritual experience, lasts forever, for all eternity. This is the message of the navi: if you want to have lasting pleasure in this world, do not become obsessed with materialism. Connect yourself to Torah and to spirituality, to something of real value, and then you will experience lasting pleasure, both in this world and the next.

Moreover, this is the way to reconnect to the Beis HaMikdash. Chazal say, "From the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the only thing Hakadosh Boruch Hu has in his world are the four amos where halacha is studied" (Berachos 8a.) What does this mean? We say in kedusha, "m'lo chol ha'arets k'vodo -- Hashem's glory fills the entire world." How can Chazal say that Hashem only has the four amos of Torah study?

The answer lies in the difference between a makom and a bayis. A makom is a place, but a bayis is the primary location of someone or something. While the entire world is a makom for the Shechina, the primary location of the Shechina in this world is the Beis HaMikdash. That is the ultimate beis Hashem.

After the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the primary location of the Shechina, the place that Hashem still calls home so to speak, is the beis medrash where Torah is studied. The smallest size for a bayis is four amos by four amos. That is the required measurement to define a bayis for the halachos of mezuzah, ma'akeh and nigei batim (Sukka 3a). When Chazal said that nowadays Hashem only has the four amos of halacha, they meant that after the churban Beis HaMikdash, the bayis of the Shechina is the four amos of the beis medrash where people are studying Torah. The place where one can still feel the special kedusha of the Beis Hamikdash, even today, is in a bayis where the words of Torah are studied. And it is through limud HaTorah that one can still feel a special closeness to the Shechina.

This is the message of comfort that the navi gives to Klal Yisrael. Even if there is no Beis Hamikdash today, you can still behold a glimmer of its

kedusha. You can still connect to the Shechina, to something of lasting value, by studying dvar Hashem in the beis medrash. That is why the beis medrash is called a mikdash me'at because it gives us a "little" taste of the intense kedusha that was found in the Beis HaMikdash. And that is why limud HaTorah is so important because the spiritual joy we feel when experiencing the sweetness and beauty of Torah can help us maintain our connection to Hakadosh Boruch Hu, while at the same time it makes us yearn for the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash where the kedusha and spiritual ecstasy were even greater. ©2016 Rabbi E. Koenigsberg & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“I entreated HASHEM at that time, saying, 'HASHEM -- G-d, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand, for who is [like] G-d in heaven or on earth who can do as Your deeds and Your might? Pray let me cross over and see the good land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon.'... and HASHEM said to me, 'It is enough for you; speak to Me no more regarding this matter. Go up to the top of the hill and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward and see with your eyes, for you shall not cross this Jordan. But command Yehoshua and strengthen him and encourage him, for he will cross over before this people, and he will make them inherit the land which you will see.'" (Devarim 3:23-28)

Moshe begs HASHEM to enter the Land of Israel and not only is his passionate request denied but he is told to ask no more. That would be enough to frustrate his aspirations. What happens next is extremely puzzling. Moshe is told, to go up to the top of the hill and lift his eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward and see the entire land. Then it is explained to him that he will not cross the Jordan but rather Yehoshua will lead the Nation of Israel into the Promised Land.

It seems Moshe is being taunted and teased. Imagine a child petitioning his father for a toy he desperately wants and the father flatly refuses, telling him not to ask again. Instead of giving the boy what he wants, he brings the child to Toys r Us and leads him throughout the store. After whetting his appetite the father informs him that his little brother will be granted his choice in the store. This approach would seem to further compound Moshe's desperation and frustration!?

Why is Moshe being treated this way? What is the purpose? Let us consider a few approaches.

We can appreciate that Moshe did not want to enter the Land of Israel for some frivolous desire. He wanted to do the Mitzvos that could only be performed

by entering the Holy Land. Our sages tell us that if a person tries to do a Mitzvah but is prevented by circumstances beyond his control, then it is considered as if he did it! If I go to visit someone in the hospital but he got better and went home, then I get the Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim.

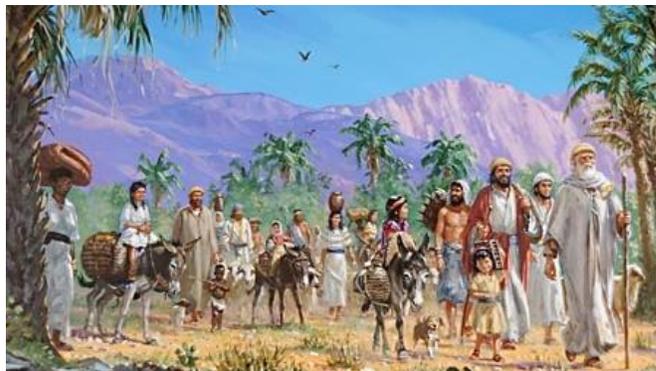
I must first do everything in my power to accomplish the task. I cannot sit at home and wait for someone to heal and then say I wanted to visit. By begging HASHEM and looking deeply into the land Moshe had effectively done everything in his power and was therefore granted the fulfillment of having done the Mitzvos of the Land of Israel.

Moshe did not want to enter just for himself. His entire life was given over to guiding and teaching his people. Knowing that Yehoshua would be a reliable leader to continue his work is a source of comfort and not a point of jealousy.

In the Kabbalistic literature Moshe is aligned with the Sefira, the trait of Netzach -- Victory -- Eternity. What is the relationship between the two meanings of Netzach -- Victory and Eternity? When a person struggles mightily and is victorious versus negative forces he has forged an eternal bond. Nobody represents this idea more than Moshe.

Everything he strove to do made a lasting impression. The Exodus he led from Egypt is remembered daily -- yearly until and including the Era of Moshiach! The Torah he landed on earth is forever! The people he dutifully shepherded are an eternal people, outlasting the life of other nations.

Moshe's looking into the Land of Israel was no simple survey. It was a gaze that installed in the Nation of Israel a focus and a direction we have never lost. ©2016 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org



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