

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The contribution of Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, to political thought is fundamental, but not well known. In this study I want to look at the institution of monarchy. What does it tell us about the nature of government as the Torah understands it?

The command relating to a king opens with these words: "When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,' be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses..." (Deut 17:14-15).

It continues by warning against a king acquiring "great numbers of horses for himself". He "must not take many wives", nor may he "accumulate large amounts of silver and gold." He must write a Sefer Torah, and "he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and... not consider himself better than his brothers, or turn from the law to the right or to the left."

The entire passage is fraught with ambivalence. The dangers are clearly spelled out. There is a risk that a king will exploit his power, using it to acquire wealth, or wives, or horses (one of the status symbols of the ancient world). This is exactly what Solomon is described as doing in the Book of Kings. His "heart may be led astray". He may be tempted to lord it over the people, considering himself "better" than everyone else.

The most resonant warning note is struck at the outset. Rather than commanding the appointment of a king, the Torah envisages the people asking for one so that they can be "like all the nations around us". This is contrary to the whole spirit of the Torah. The Israelites were commanded to be different, set apart, counter-cultural. To want to be like everyone else is not, for the Torah, a noble wish but a failure of imagination and nerve. Small wonder then that a number of medieval commentators held that the creation of a monarchy is not a biblical imperative. Ibn Ezra held that the Torah did not command it but merely permitted it. Abarbanel -- who favoured republican government over monarchy -- regarded it as a concession to popular sentiment.

However, the key passage is not here but in I Samuel 8. As predicted in Deuteronomy, the people do eventually request a king. They come to Samuel, the

prophet-judge, and say: "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

Samuel is displeased. God then tells him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected Me as their king." This seems to be the heart of the matter. Ideally, Israel should be under no other sovereign but God.

Yet God does not reject the request. To the contrary, God had already signalled, through Moses, that such a request would be granted. So He says to Samuel: "Listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do." The people may appoint a king, but not without having been forewarned as to what are the likely consequences. Samuel gives the warning in these words: "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots... He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants... and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day."

Despite the warning, the people are undeterred. "'No!' they said. 'We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.' When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. The Lord answered, 'Listen to them and give them a king.'"

What is going on here? The sages were divided as to whether Samuel was setting out the powers of the king, or whether he was merely trying to dissuade them from the whole project (Sanhedrin 20b). The entire passage, like the one in Deuteronomy, is profoundly ambivalent. Is God in favour of monarchy or against? If He is in favour, why did He say that the people's request was tantamount to rejecting Him? If He is against, why did He not simply command Samuel to say no?

The best analysis of the subject was given by one of the great rabbis of the 19th century, R. Zvi

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Hirsch Chajes, in his *Torat Nevi'im*. His thesis is that the institution of monarchy in the days of Samuel took the form of a social contract -- as set out in the writings of Locke and Rousseau, and especially Hobbes. The people recognise that they cannot function as individuals without someone having the power to ensure the rule of law and the defence of the nation. Without this, they are in what Hobbes calls a "state of nature". There is anarchy, chaos. No one is safe. Instead, in Hobbes' famous phrase, there is "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" (Hobbes was writing in the wake of England's civil war). This is the Hobbesian equivalent of the last line of the Book of Judges: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."

The only way to escape from anarchy is by everyone agreeing to transfer some of their rights -- especially the use of coercive force -- to a human sovereign. Government comes at a high price. It means transferring to a ruler rights over one's own property and person. The king is entitled to seize property, impose taxes, and conscript people into an army if these are necessary to ensure the rule of law and national security. People agree to this because they calculate that the price of not doing so will be higher still -- total anarchy or conquest by a foreign power.

That, according to Chajes, is what Samuel was doing, at God's command: proposing a social contract and spelling out what the results would be. If this is so, many things follow. The first is that Ibn Ezra and Abarbanel were right. God gave the people the choice as to whether or not to appoint a king. It was not compulsory but optional. The second -- and this is the fundamental feature of social contract theories -- is that power is ultimately vested in the people. To be sure, there are moral limits to power. Even a human king is under the sovereignty of God. God gives us the rules that are eternal.

Politics is about the laws that are temporary, for this time, this place, these circumstances. What makes the politics of social contract distinctive is its insistence that government is the free choice of a free nation. This was given its most famous expression in the American Declaration of Independence: "to secure these rights

(life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness) Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." That is what God was telling Samuel. If the people want a king, give them a king. Israel is empowered to choose the form of government it desires, within the parameters set by Torah law.

Something else follows -- spelled out by R. Avraham Yitzhak haCohen Kook (*Responsa Mishpat Cohen*, no. 143-4, pp. 336-337): "Since the laws of monarchy pertain to the general situation of the people, these legal rights revert [in the absence of a king] to the people as a whole. Specifically it would seem that any leader [shofet] who arises in Israel has the status of a king [din melekh yesh lo] in many respects, especially when it concerns the conduct of the people... Whoever leads the people may rule in accordance with the laws of kingship, since these encompass the needs of the people at that time and in that situation."

In other words, in the absence of a king of Davidic descent, the people may choose to be ruled by a non-Davidic king, as they did in the age of the Hasmoneans, or to be ruled instead by a democratically elected Parliament, as in the current State of Israel.

The real issue, as the Torah sees it, is not between monarchy and democracy, but between government that is, or is not, freely chosen by the governed. To be sure, the Torah is systematically skeptical about politics. In an ideal world, Israel would be governed by God alone. Given, however, that this is not an ideal world, there must be some human power with the authority to ensure that laws are kept and enemies repelled. But that power is never unlimited. It comes with two constraints: first, it is subject to the overarching authority of God and His law; second, it is confined to the genuine pursuit of the people's interests. Any attempt by a ruler to use power for personal advantage (as in the case of King Ahab and Naboth's vineyard: 1 Kings 21) is illegitimate.

The free society has its birth in the Hebrew Bible. Far from mandating a retreat from society, the Torah is the blueprint of a society -- a society built on freedom and human dignity, whose high ideals remain compelling today. *Covenant and Conversation 5777 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**W**hen a matter shall arise for you too wondrous for judgment, whether it be capital, civil, or ritual, you shall go up to the judge of those times, and according to the law which they shall teach you, and according to the judgment which they shall tell you to do, do not stray neither from the right nor the left of the word that they declare to

you" [Deut. 17:8-11]. In an era when strict interpretations of Jewish Law are in vogue, and when Orthodox rabbis who render decisions with a broader perspective face withering personal and professional attacks, we would do well to revisit the concepts of freedom of thought and the right of dissent within the realm of Jewish Law. Is there, in fact, room within the Jewish legal system for individual freedom and conscientious objection to majority opinions?

For guidance, let us look at the model of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. To what extent did the sages of that august legal body admit pluralism into the halls of their debates? In truth, the Sanhedrin always encouraged dissenting opinions, even beginning their judicial inquiry with the views of the youngest and least learned, to encourage everyone to state his opinion without being intimidated by the views of more senior colleagues.

But there are limits to this pluralistic spirit. For instance, a member of Sanhedrin must not oppose the authority of the judicial majority. One who does is categorized as a rebellious elder (*zaken mamreh*), and his offense is considered a capital crime [Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 87a], assuming that he proactively attempts to influence others to defy the court in practice.

However, the law of the "rebellious elder" is shaded with subtleties. The aforementioned passage in the Talmud points out that one is not condemned as a *zaken mamreh* if the disagreement is limited to verbal preaching against the decision, while accepting the ruling in practice. Furthermore, not only does one who disagrees have a right to do so, he is obligated to explain the reasons for his disagreement. After all, if he is correct, he may eventually convince others to see things his way.

What happens, however, if the dissenter is a "conscientious objector"? Fascinatingly, the first mishna in Tractate Horayot forbids a scholar from performing an act that the Sanhedrin permitted but which he believed was prohibited, noting that if a recognized scholar knows that a decision of the Sanhedrin is incorrect, but he nevertheless acts in accordance with the majority, he has committed a transgression and must bring a sacrifice! In other words, not only may he go against the majority, but failure to do so is a sin that requires ritual atonement.

Our sages add, "One might think that even if they tell you that right is left and that left is right, you must nevertheless listen to them? It is for this reason that the Torah specifies [do not stray from] right and left, in order that you may understand that only when they tell you about the right this is right and the left that is left, then must you listen to them" [Jerusalem Talmud, Horayot 1:1].

These sources clearly guide the sage to follow his conscience when he is firmly convinced of the

correctness of his position. If he ignores his own knowledge as to what constitutes a correct practice, his transgression in following the incorrect view of the Sanhedrin obligates him to bring a sacrifice. [An important exception to this rule of freedom of dissent is the calendar, since nothing ensures the unity of the Jewish people and threatens our fragmentation more than the calendar. In that regard, there must be unanimity.]

Support for the Sage's right to dissent is further found in Tractate Eduyot [5:6], where we read that the sage Akavya ben Mahalalel disagreed with the majority opinion on four issues. He was offered the coveted position of Av Beit Din, second-in-command of the Sanhedrin, but only on condition that he change his mind on his dissenting opinion. Akavya's response was that he would rather be called a fool all his days and not be considered wicked before God for even one moment for having sacrificed his vision of truth for the lure of high rabbinic office.

The mishna goes on to record one view that maintains that Akavya was excommunicated and that when he died the court threw stones upon his coffin. However Rabbi Yehuda vehemently disagrees: "Heaven forbid that Akavya would have been excommunicated, for the courtyard of the Holy Temple was never closed in the face of a Jew as great in wisdom and in fear of sin as Akavya ben Mahalalel."

Rabbi Yehuda names a different sage whom the court excommunicated and whose coffin was pelted with stones. The conclusion of this mishna courageously affirms the right of conscience of an individual scholar granting accolades to Akavya for refusing to bend to the will of the majority.

Perhaps the confusion between Akavya and the other figure is the mishna's subtle way of stating that going against the majority demands a price. Many will not understand what you are doing; your coffin may be pelted with stones. But in the end, your name will be cleared and your courage will be praised. As long as wisdom, reverence for God, and fear of sin motivate your decisions, you dare not mute your individual conscience when you enter the courtyard of the Holy Temple of Jewish law. ©2017 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The first verses of the parsha address one of the great weaknesses of human life -- personally, socially and governmentally -- the weakness of corruption. Corruption comes in many forms and modes. The outright bribery of officials and judges is certainly understood to be a most heinous form of corruption for it undermines the very basis of a lawful society. There are enough examples of this type of corruption in our past and current national life to prove

to us how damaging and destructive this immoral policy can be.

But the Torah speaks not only of the blatant corruption of open bribery and trading judicial and governmental favors for money, but also of a more subtle and perhaps even more insidious type of corruption that apparently falls short of the legal definition of bribery. This type of corruption leaps upon us almost unawares and is hard to define or even recognize. Chance remarks, a courtesy extended, a past favor given innocently, all remain as potential points of corruption.

The Talmud relates to us that the great amora, Mar Shmuel disqualified himself from judging a case that was brought before him because one of the litigants had earlier in the day allowed Mar Shmuel to pass before him on a narrow footbridge. Now Mar Shmuel as the chief judge and head of the yeshiva in Nehardea in third-century Babylonia is certainly entitled, as a matter of respect to Torah scholars, to pass first on the narrow footbridge. Yet, Mar Shmuel felt that even that small measure of respect, inconsequential as it may appear on the surface, could be enough to influence his decision and corrupt his judgment.

But an even more subtle shade of corruption exists and is exposed in Jewish thought. This is the corruption of self-interest. It clouds our minds, imposes upon us a narrowness of vision and leads inevitably to damage in the long run. The great men of Mussar and of Chasidut both speak of a person who is a meshuchad -- who is corrupted by selfishness, self-interest and an inability to see the consequences of his behavior and actions.

This corruption stems from prejudice, ignorance and the inability to control one's desires. "Since I want to do it, it must be justified and correct" is the mantra that creates such an insidious form of self-corruption. The Torah therefore sets standards as to behavior and actions. Following and adhering to those standards minimizes our penchant for self-corruption. It does not however remove it completely from our lives.

Only continual self-analysis of one's behavior and motives can effectively combat self-corruption in its minutest form. One can therefore never rely upon one's previous acts of piety or goodness to be a guarantee against self-corruption. Every day is a new battle and every choice in life is a new challenge to our innate integrity and holiness of purpose. Corruption blinds the wise and skews the righteous. Recognizing its omnipresent dangers and being aware of its challenges

is the beginning of our battle against self-corruption and its delusions. ©2017 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

The Torah's sympathetic attitude toward ecology surfaces in a law legislating conduct during war.

This week's portion states: "When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it, to seize it, do not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for from it you will eat and you shall not cut it down." The Torah then offers a rationale explaining why the tree should not be cut down: "Ki ha-Adam etz ha-sadeh lavoh mi-panekha be-matzor." (Deuteronomy 20:19) What do these words mean?

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra offers a simple answer. Human beings depend upon trees to live. We eat their produce. Cutting down a tree is, therefore, forbidden, as it would deny the human being food which is essential for life. For Ibn Ezra, the explanation should be read as a declarative statement. Don't cut down the fruit tree for a person is the fruit tree, depending upon it for sustenance.

Rashi understands the rationale differently. For Rashi, "Ki ha-Adam" should be read as a rhetorical question. "Is a tree a person with the ability to protect itself?" In other words, is the tree of the field a person that it should enter the siege before you?

A fundamental difference emerges between Ibn Ezra and Rashi. For Ibn Ezra, the tree is saved because of the human being, i.e., without fruit trees it would be more difficult for people to find food. Rashi takes a different perspective. For him, the tree is saved for the tree's sake alone, without an ulterior motive. Human beings can protect themselves; trees cannot. The Torah, therefore, comes forth offering a law that protects the tree.

The Torah's tremendous concern for trees expresses itself powerfully in numerous parables. One of the most famous is the story of a traveler in the desert. Walking for days, he's weary and tired, when suddenly he comes upon a tree. He eats from its fruit, rests in the shade and drinks from the small brook at its roots.

When rising the next day, the traveler turns to the tree to offer thanks. "Ilan, Ilan, bameh avarkheka, Tree oh Tree, how can I bless you? With fruit that gives sustenance? With branches that give shade? With water that quenches thirst? You have all of this!"

In a tender moment, the traveler looks to the tree and states, "I have only one blessing. May that which comes from you be as beautiful as you are." (Ta'anit 5b, 6a)



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This story has become a classic in blessing others with all that is good. Our liturgy includes the classic Talmudic phrase, "These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world." (Shabbat 127a) Trees and human beings interface as trees provide us with metaphors that teach us so much about life.

To those who disparage the environment, our Torah sends a counter message. Trees must be protected, not only for our sake, but for theirs—and for the message they teach about life. One Shabbat, as I walked with my eldest granddaughter Ariella, greeting everyone with Shabbat Shalom, she saw a tree, embraced it, and said, "Shabbat Shalom Tree." Ariella certainly has internalized the message of the importance of the tree, may we all be blessed with this lesson as well. ©2017 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah refers to the ultimate in spirituality: "to love the Lord, your God, and to walk in His ways all the days..." (Deut. 19:9). What does it mean to "walk in His ways"? Why does the Torah stress "all the days"?

The Sages explain that walking in God's ways means that we must emulate Him by bestowing kindness and being compassionate. Some people mistakenly think that if they do someone a favor, especially a major one, that they have fulfilled their obligation to do chesed (kindness) for the next few weeks. Therefore, says Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, the Torah stresses that the obligation of chesed is all the days. Every single day of our lives we must go out of our way to do someone a favor. This is how we can be like the Almighty!

It is a matter of focus and thinking ahead. Make it your policy to hold the door for someone. If a car wants to enter from a side street, allow it to enter in front of you. Before you leave your home in the morning, put a coin for tzedakah in a pushka (a charity box). It is so easy, if you plan in advance. Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Battle Cry of the Jew

Approaching war correctly may be more difficult than waging war itself. In order to prepare Klal Yisrael for war a series of queries were presented to them. Soldiers who were newlywed or had recently built new homes or planted new vineyards were told by the officer in charge to leave the army and return home. Furthermore, soldiers who were faint of heart morally or

spiritually were asked to return home so as not to weaken the hearts of others in battle.

But war must begin with encouragement. So before the officers ask the questions that may relieve some soldiers from active duty, the kohen gives a moral boosting speech. The kohen opens with Judaism's most famous words, "Sh'ma Yisrael -- Hear Oh Israel! You are about to approach battle on your enemies. Let your hearts not wither and do not fear, tremble, or be broken before them. For Hashem who will go with you, fight with you, and save you" (Deuteronomy 20:3-4).

Rashi comments on the hauntingly familiar expression of "Sh'ma Yisrael -- Hear oh Israel!" Those words are the national anthem of the Jewish nation whose doctrine of belief is contained in the declarative that follows. "The L-rd our G-d the L-rd is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Rashi connects the pre-battle pep-talk in Parshas Shoftim with the famous words read week's earlier in Parshas Va'eschanan. He explains that the expression, "Hear oh Israel" used in the kohen's prologue is actually used as a hint to Hashem. The kohen is in essence reminding Hashem of the unofficial anthem that Jews recite twice daily, world-over. The kohen is in essence declaring that "even if the Jewish people have only the merit of the words Hear oh Israel, they are worthy to be victorious and saved (from the ravages of war)."

I was wondering. Isn't the kohen talking to the people? If Rashi tells us that with this choice of words there is a subtle message to Hashem, can we not also presume that there is perhaps, an important, if only subtle message to His nation as well?

Refusenik Yosef Mendelevitch, imprisoned in a work camp by Soviet authorities refused to give up his religious convictions. He made a kipah, which he wore proudly in the work camp.

Once the KGB colonel in charge of the camp heard of Mendelevich's behavior, he summoned him to his office and threatened him.

"Take that off your head or I will kill you!" he demanded.

Mendelevich was not moved. "You can kill me, but I will not take it off." The officer was shocked by Yosef's calm attitude. In desperation he grilled him. "Are you not afraid to die?"

Mendelevich just smiled softly. "Those who will die by the commands of Brezhnev are afraid of death. However those who believe that our death will be by the command of G-d are not afraid of His command."

Perhaps the symbolism of using the words of the Sh'ma Yisrael, which connect to our sincere faith in the oneness and unity of the Almighty is profoundly significant.

The kohen is commanding the Jews to enter the battlefield without fear. There is no better familiar declaration than that of Sh'ma Yisrael. Those words kept our faith and calm-headedness throughout every

death-defying and death-submissive moment throughout our history. During the Spanish inquisition, it was on our lips. During the Crusades it was shouted in synagogues about to be torched. And during the Holocaust Sh'ma Yisrael was recited by those who walked calmly to meet the Author of those hallowed words that captured the faith of Jewish souls more resolutely than the fetters that held the frail bodies.

The Chofetz Chaim would urge soldiers to constantly repeat the paragraph of the Sh'ma Yisrael during battle. It would sustain their faith as it would calm their fears. And the words Sh'ma Yisrael remain the battle cry of the simple Jew who maneuvers through a world filled with land-mines of heresy and temptation.

It is the battle-cry of our faith and in encouraging a nation to be strong and remembering that Hashem is with us. And no matter what the message is, there is no better introduction than, Sh'ma Yisrael. And there are no better words during the battle either. ©2017 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah reveals to us another impressive dimension of our final redemption. The haftorah begins with the prophet Yeshaya representing Hashem and tells the Jewish people, "I Myself am the one who will console you." (51:12) The Jewish people were told that Hashem will personally comfort them and redeem them from their exile. Yeshaya continues and says, "And I am your Hashem.... who will firmly establish you. Say to the inhabitants of Zion, 'You are My people.'" (51:16) These passages indicate that there is some hesitation on the part of the Jewish nation regarding their return to Zion. There seems to be an insecurity in the minds of the Jewish people concerning the permanence of their return. The Jewish people have experienced before the process of exile and return but their return was short-lived. They therefore express their concern to Hashem and request some guarantee that, this time, their return will be permanent. Hashem responded that this time He would personally bring them back to Zion and that their fears were over.

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 474) explains the significance of this response with the following parable. Chazal compare this situation to a king who became enraged with his queen. He was so disturbed over her behavior that he totally rejected her and banished her from the palace. After a period of time he reconsidered his behavior and desired to reunite with her. He informed her of his intentions and she responded that she would consent to return on the condition that he doubled the amount of her kesubah (marriage financial agreement). Chazal conclude that we should appreciate the Jewish people's predicament in this

same manner. Hashem's initial relationship with His people was established through the agreement of the Ten Commandments wherein Hashem opened with the words, "'I am your Hashem.'" This relationship proved, from the Jewish people's end, to be unfortunately an imperfect one and they eventually strayed severely from the proper path. After their actions became absolutely inexcusable Hashem was forced to reject them and exile them from Zion. Now, Hashem was requesting their return and He found it appropriate to double His relationship with them. He therefore reflected this and announced, "'I Myself' will console you." This indicated that Hashem would increase the revelation of Himself to His people and their experiences with Him. In response to this the Jewish people readily accepted Hashem's offer and consented to return to Zion.

The indescribable scope of Hashem's new commitment is presented to us at the close of the haftorah. Yeshaya says, "How beautiful is the sight on the mountain of the proclaimer of peace; proclaiming goodness and salvation and saying to Zion, "Your Hashem has come to reign.... the sound of your onlookers raising their voice in unison and singing, because with perfect clarity they will behold the return of Hashem to Zion." Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (428) explain these verses and remind us that it is virtually impossible in our days to sense Hashem's presence with perfect clarity. Even when our nation merits this unique experience of feeling Hashem's presence it is accompanied with heavy ramifications. But in the era of Mashiach this will no longer be so. The Baal Haturim (Bamidbar 14:14) shares this understanding and contrasts the nation's experience at Mount Sinai to their experience during the era of Mashiach. Although they did merit to directly "view" Hashem's presence when He stated in the Ten Commandments, "I am your Hashem", this experience was overwhelming to them and they lost consciousness. Chazal (see Shabbos 88b) reveal to us that they were miraculously revived after each one of the commandments. However, in the era of Mashiach the Jewish people's spiritual capacity will be greatly increased and they will be capable of viewing Hashem's presence with total clarity. This comment is based on the passage in this week's haftorah which states, "Because with perfect clarity they will behold Hashem's return to Zion." The actual wording reads, "From eye to eye" which indicates that we will per se look Hashem directly in the eye. Hashem's return will be so tangible to the Jewish people that they will actually merit to sense His presence with perfect clarity.

We now return to the parable of the king and gain special insight into the era of Mashiach. During the receiving of the Torah, the Jewish people experienced an elevated relationship with Hashem and merited to truly sense Him amongst them when He said, "'I am your Hashem.'" However this revelation was far beyond

their physical and spiritual capacity and it did not yield everlasting results. They could not fully absorb this experience and when this great revelation occurred they could not remain in a total state of consciousness. The revelation therefore remained one sided, and from Hashem's standpoint "I am Hashem" had been shown. However, from the Jewish people's vantage point the revelation was not absorbed or internalized and they eventually destroyed their relationship by following foreign ideals and false deities. Now that their return to Hashem was being suggested they responded with great concern, "What will guarantee that we won't repeat our previous failings?" Hashem answered, "'I Myself' will redeem you." Hashem informed them that this time the return will assume far greater proportions than ever before. By the time of redemption the Jewish people will be prepared to adequately absorb the revelations of Hashem and internalize them. These revelations will yield most perfect results and an everlasting bond will be established between Hashem and His people. "I" and "Myself" will be felt reflecting a perfect revelation from Hashem's standpoint and an adequate absorption and internalization of this from the Jewish people as well. In essence Hashem will lay the Jewish people's fears to rest by doubling His commitment. Not only will there be a revelation from His side but even we, mortal beings, will absorb this revelation and relate to it with perfect clarity. Our "eye", our sense of Hashem and His "eye", the actual degree of His revelation will be one and the same. This will yield a most perfect relationship, an everlasting association with our true husband and father above. Oh! May we merit to see this day! ©2017 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

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Home Inauguration

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Inauguration of one's home in Israel is a Mitzvah, as we learn from this week's portion in which the Torah states when discerning who will go to war, "whichever man who has built a house but has not inaugurated it, should return to his home". Our Sages derive that this refers to a home in Israel.

The definition of the term "Inauguration" according to "Targum Yonatan", is that he has not affixed a Mezuzah on the doorpost, while the Radak States that the term is referring to someone who has not eaten a festive meal in it yet.

Some believe that to make it a "Seudat Mitzvah" (a meal that is a Mitzvah), one has to recite words of Torah ("Divrei Torah"), while others state that because it is in Israel, that in itself is a Mitzvah, therefore precluding the necessity of Divrei Torah, however in the Diaspora it would be necessary to recite "Divrei Torah".

Generally when one would purchase something new, as in a new garment, one would recite the blessing of "Shehechyanu". However since in the case just cited it is the individual who is making the blessing for himself, as opposed to when acquiring a home in which generally there are more participants in the acquisition, such as his wife and family, the blessing of "Shehechyanu" is not recited. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

I would once again like to apologize for not having written the past few weeks. I was running a boys sleep-away camp and my family and I were also sleeping away -- far away from my computer! I'd like to share some of the experiences that I had there as they somewhat relate to the parsha and very strongly relate to life.

This week we read the parsha of Shoftim. "Shoftim v'shotrim teeten l'cho b'chol sh'a'recha {Appoint for you judges and officers at all of your gates} [16:18]."

The S'forno explains that the Torah first commanded the mitzvos which apply to the individual and then commanded those which apply to society at large. These include our judges, leaders, kings, kohanim {priests} and prophets.

Our parsha opens this second set of commandments with the obligation of setting up a proper judicial system in each of our cities. This system includes the shoftim {judges} who pass judgment on the different controversies and the shotrim {officers} who enforce the judge's decision.

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l points out that the word: "lecho {for you}," seems superfluous and disjointed. This 'society-type' commandment could have simply stated "appoint judges and officers"! Why did the Torah add the word: "lecho"? He explains that the Torah is teaching us a very fundamental concept. In addition to the need for society at large to have these shoftim and shotrim, each individual must be both a judge and officer over himself. "Lecho -- for you." Over you. Constantly overseeing your own action and making sure that they are what they should be.

The Mishna [Avos 2:18]states: "Al t'hee rosho bifnei atz'm'cho," literally, don't be evil before yourself. The Rambam explains this to mean that we shouldn't judge ourselves as being wicked. Our behavior is greatly influenced by our self-image. One of the basic precepts in discipline is to condemn the behavior and not the child. You are not bad! You did something bad... If I'm wicked then I'll act in a wicked way. The Mishna therefore teaches us not to judge ourselves as being wicked. It very well might turn into a self fulfilling prophecy. Another explanation provides a totally different angle. Al t'hee rosho bifnei atz'm'cho -- don't

be evil before yourself. Others might give you a lot of honor and speak very highly of you... They might view you as a role model and aspire to be like you... But you know the truth!!! You are very painfully aware of your shortcomings and your lapses. You know who and what you really are. Don't allow yourself to be blinded by their praises. Al t'hee rosho bifnei atz'm'cho -- don't be evil before yourself, because you know the truth about yourself.

Therefore, as Rav Moshe wrote, we must be judges and officers over ourselves. Where should these judges sit? "B'chol sh'a'recha {In all of your gates}." The Shla"h Hakodesh writes that a person has seven gates: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and a mouth. The way that these gates are used will either build or destroy the person. A person must appoint shoftim and shotrim to control the flow through these gates. Guarding our tongues from lashon harah (derogatory speech) is a very worthwhile topic but I'd like to discuss a very different problem. Of the almost one hundred boys in camp there were two, very opposite boys, who in my opinion stuck out. One of them was one of two twins. This was the twin's second summer in the camp. They both have learning disabilities, and encountered difficulties fitting in and 'making it' in a camp with 'normal' kids. One was very homesick throughout. The staff spent many hours with him trying to help him adjust and reach the point where he'd want to stay. He had constant ups and downs swinging from "I love it here" to "I'm out of here". It was decided that since he had 'stuck it out' for a serious amount of time and still wanted to leave that we'd send him home but make him feel like a hero for lasting as long as he did and not like a failure for leaving early. His twin brother was very different. A bit more socially adept and determined, he wanted camp to last forever. He too had his difficult moments but some added attention was all he needed. At one point when he needed a boost, I handed him a whistle and appointed him to be my assistant. Everyone took it lightly besides him. To him, being in charge of a camp was very serious business. He would run from field to field to make sure that all was running smoothly and then proudly report back to me that all was well.

At the end of camp, many campers feel emotions but most are too inhibited to openly express them. This boy became the speaker for the camp. "My heart, my heart, my heart is aching," he'd say to me. "My heart aches that camp is ending. My heart, my heart, my heart is aching!"

At the far other end of the spectrum was another boy. He had suffered a personal loss in his life a few years back and was having difficulty adjusting. This translated into difficulties in getting along with others and sometimes destructive behavior. I was biding my time, hoping that at some point during the short camp season I'd be able to have a meaningful discussion with him besides the disciplining that my

position demanded of me.

On an overnight, just a few nights before camp was going to end, he was caught with toothpaste in hand about to 'raid' another camper who, deep in his sleep, had no intention at that time of brushing his teeth and no constructive use for toothpaste. I was awakened by his angry yells at the staff member who had the audacity to thwart his plans by confiscating his toothpaste.

I spoke to him for a little while about his pain and anger and about the destructive and self-defeating way he was expressing it. I then told him that I understand that he's angry about life in general and asked if he'd like to go for a walk and talk a bit. I was shocked when he said he would.

We went off to the side and I began to ask him questions about his loss. I got him to discuss it but only in a detached manner. I tried so hard to open him up and get him to express some real feelings but I couldn't break that wall he had erected around him. During the course of our conversation it became clear to me that he really had no one with whom he was able to discuss his loss and cry together with.

The contrast still startles me. One camper, mildly retarded, with almost no inhibitions, able to unabashedly express exactly what he was feeling. Expressing it, coming to terms with it and able to move on. Another camper, 'normal', with a fortress built around him, unable to unload, unable to deal with himself and his environment.

"Shoftim v'shotrim teeten l'cho b'chol sh'a'recha {Appoint for you judges and officers at all of your gates} [16:18]." We must judge and guard ourselves. We also must find those whose guards are working overtime, suffocating and stifling their need to express their pain in an honest and constructive manner and help free them from those shackles. ©2017 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org



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