

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

What do you do when you have achieved it all, when you have risen to whatever career heights fate or providence has in store for you? What do you do as age lengthens its shadow, the sun sinks, and the body is no longer as resilient or the mind as sharp as it once was?

That has become a major problem as life expectancy has increased in most parts of the world. There has been nothing quite like it in history. In America, in 1900, average life expectancy was around 41 years, in Europe 42.5. Today in Britain, for men it is 79, for women 83. Much of that has to do with a huge reduction in infant mortality. None the less, the sheer pace in the rise in longevity -- every decade since 1900, life expectancy has risen by about three years -- remains remarkable. What will keep you young in spirit even if the body does not always keep pace?

The biblical case study is Moses, of whom we are told that even at the end of his life, "his eye was undimmed and his natural energy unabated." At the opening of today's parsha he says, "I am now a hundred and twenty years old. I can no longer come and go, and the Lord has told me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.'" Rashi points out that the "I can no longer" does not mean that he lacked the strength. It means that he no longer had permission. The moment had come when he had to hand on the role of leader to his successor and disciple, Joshua. He himself stayed full of vigour, as the passion of his speeches in the book of Devarim, delivered in the last month of his life, testify.

To understand what Moses epitomises at the end of his life, two closely related concepts are helpful. The first is Erik Erikson's idea of generativity, the seventh of his eight life stages. Relatively late in life, he argues, many people's perspective changes. They begin thinking about legacy, about what will outlive them. Their focus often shifts from self to others. They may devote more time to family, or community, or care

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or voluntary work. Some mentor young people who are following in their career path. They make commitments to others. They ask themselves, how can I contribute to the world? What trace will I leave on those who will live on after me? What, in the world, is better because of me?

The second and related idea is David Brook's concept of the second mountain. Speaking to people over 70, he found that early in their lives they had identified the mountain they were going to climb. They had specific aspirations about family and career. They had a vision of the self they wanted to become. By age 70, some had achieved it and were happy. Others had achieved it only to find it not entirely satisfying. Yet others had been knocked off the mountain by misfortune.

At a certain age, though, many identified a second mountain they wanted to climb. This mountain was not about achieving but about giving. It was less about external accomplishment (success, fame) than about internal accomplishment. It was spiritual, moral; it was about devoting yourself to a cause or giving back to the community. It is often, he says, a yearning for righteousness, an inner voice that says, "I want to do something really good with my life." This second peak, associated with later life, may well prove more significant to our sense of self-worth than the ego-driven ascent of the first mountain.

The case of Moses sets all this in dramatic perspective. What do you do if you have already achieved what no human being had ever done before or would ever do in the future? Moses had spoken to God face to face. He had become His faithful servant. He had led his people from slavery to freedom, put up with their complaints, endured their rebellions and prayed for -- and achieved -- their forgiveness in the eyes of God. He had been the agent through which God had performed His miracles and delivered His word. What else is left to do after such a life?

His closest friends and allies, his sister Miriam and brother Aaron, had already died. He knew that the



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decree had been sealed that he would not cross the Jordan and lead the people on the last stage of their journey. He would not set foot in the Promised Land. Unlike Aaron, whose children inherited his priesthood to eternity, Moses had to live with the fact that neither of his sons, Gershom and Eliezer, would become his successor. That role would go to his assistant and faithful servant Joshua. These were, surely, huge disappointments to set alongside the momentous achievements.

So, as Moses faced his own life's end, what was there left to do? The book of Devarim contains and constitutes the answer. As it says in its opening chapter: "In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the Israelites... On the east bank of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses began expounding this law..." No longer the liberator and miracle-worker, Moses became Rabbenu, "our teacher," the man who taught Torah to the next generation.

The way he does so in Devarim is stunning. No longer, as before, does he simply articulate the law. He explains the theology behind the law. He speaks about the love of God for Israel and the love Israel should show to God. He speaks with equal power about the past and the future, reviewing the wilderness years and anticipating the challenges ahead.

Above all, coming at the subject from every conceivable direction, he warns the young people who will enter and inherit the land, that the real challenge will not be failure but success; not slavery but freedom; not the bread of affliction but the temptations of affluence. Remember, he says again and again; listen to the voice of God; rejoice in what He has given you. These are the key verbs of the book, and they remain the most powerful immune-system ever developed against the decadence-and-decline that has affected every civilisation since the dawn of time.

That last month in Moses' life, which culminates in today's parsha as he finally hands over the reins of leadership to Joshua, is one of the supreme instances in Tanakh of generativity: speaking not to your contemporaries but to those who will live on after you. It was Moses' second mountain.

And perhaps the very things that seemed, at

first sight, to have been disappointments, turned out in the end to have played their part in shaping this last chapter in that great life. The fact that he knew he would not accompany the people into the land, and that he would not be succeeded by his sons, meant that he had to turn into a teacher of the next generation. He had to hand on to them his insights into the future. He had to make the people his disciples -- and we have all been his disciples ever since.

All of this suggests a powerful and potentially life changing message for all of us. Whatever our life has been thus far, there is another chapter to be written, focused on being a blessing to others, sharing whatever gifts we have with those who have less, handing on our values across the generations, using our experience to help others come through difficult times of their own, doing something that has little to do with personal ambition and much to do with wanting to leave some legacy of kindness that made life better for at least someone on earth.

Hence the life-changing idea: Whatever your achievements, there is always a second mountain to climb, and it may turn out to be your greatest legacy to the future. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd I will surely hide My face on that day for all the evils which they shall have perpetrated, in that they have turned to other gods." (Deuteronomy 31:18) But how do we narrow the gulf between a hidden God and a revealed God? Why does God choose to hide Himself?

Indeed, one of the thorniest theological issues in Judaism (or any religion) is how to tackle this question of a hidden God or, in more familiar terms, a world which seems absent of God's goodness and justice, a world in which evil people go unpunished while the good tragically suffer! In his path-breaking work *Faith after the Holocaust*, Rabbi Eliezer Berkowitz explores this concept of God's "hiddenness" as it appears in different contexts in the Torah. I'd like to review these in order to help us attempt a glimpse into the divine notion of justice in this world.

Our biblical text cited above sees a "hidden God" as punishment for abandoning His ways if we sin. God hides Himself, and the more we sin, the more hidden shall the face of God become. This idea of hiddenness as punishment is very logical if we posit the mutuality of the God-human relationship; the Almighty will relate to us in direct proportion to how we relate to Him. If we hide ourselves from Him, estrange ourselves from His ways of compassion and loving-kindness, so will He hide Himself from us, seem to be estranged

from our tragedies and suffering.

In this manner we can begin to understand the Prophet Isaiah and the connecting relationship he posits between the God of hiddenness and the God of Salvation: "You are a God who hides Yourself, the God of Israel who brings salvation" (Is. 45:15). Earlier, the prophet declares, "And I shall anxiously await a Lord who hides His face from the House of Judah and I will hopefully anticipate Him" (8:17). Strangely enough Isaiah's vision calls for redemption and our most anticipated yearnings as emanating from a hidden God. What can this possibly mean?

Fundamental to Jewish theology is the idea that the Almighty created an imperfect, incomplete world, "The Former of light and the Creator of darkness, the Maker of peace and the Creator of evil, I am the Lord who makes all these things" (Is. 45:7). Who will perfect and complete this world? Who will bring the Hidden God out of His hiding place? God's human partners, created in the divine image; the human being has freedom of choice and a portion of God on High to help him make the right choice and to empower him to enthrone God and enable goodness to reign (see Aleinu, Al Kein prayer after every Amida).

When will this perfection occur? When humanity learns to live in peace, overcome the evil instinct, respect every human as being free and inviolate, and dedicate his/her abilities towards curing disease and solving problems of natural calamities, when all the wicked of the earth will turn to God and His laws. At that time God will become manifest in the world, He and His name will become One, and the world will be perfected under the kingship of the Divine.

And God created such a world because He has full confidence that His creature-partners will eventually repent, repair and perfect humanity and the world! Until this ideal state comes about – God's face will remain hidden, His glory and goodness will not be totally in evidence.

A story is told about the Spolyer Grandfather, a hasidic master who once came upon children playing hide-and-seek and, when he saw one of the children crying, he stopped and asked, "Why the tears?" The child answered that he'd been hiding for the longest time, but no one had come to look for him. The elderly Jew looked up to heaven and cried out, "Master of the Universe, I know You're hiding because You want us to find you, but what happens if You continue to remain hidden and Your children stop looking? Before it's too late, reveal Yourself." If we could address God as directly and simply as the Spolyer Grandfather, what a huge step we'd be taking towards revealing the "hidden face" of God. It is crucial, however, that we never stop looking for Him – and if we search hard enough, and understand that we must perfect ourselves even as we search for Him, we shall certainly make Him appear. And He promises, through all of our prophets, that at

least a faithful remnant will never stop looking, and that we will make Him appear in a perfected and repaired world (Is. 2, Mic. 4). ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Moshe, our great teacher and leader, the greatest of all prophets and the lawgiver of the Torah to Israel and the world, remains in his role as the greatest teacher even on his last day at on earth. And the words of Moshe, as recorded for us in this week's Torah reading, are probably some of the strongest words of prophecy that exist in the Holy Scriptures.

Moshe, like all great teachers, is vividly aware of the shortcomings that exist in his classroom. He knows that his students are lazy, backsliders, uninterested in the subject being taught, and generally a sullen and rebellious lot. Yet, like all great teachers, he is full of hope and optimism regarding their eventual future and that his efforts to educate and guide them would not be a waste.

There will come a day when the students will remember what the teacher said long ago and take it to heart and apply it to life and to circumstances, both personal and national. It is this innate knowledge that every teacher has that keeps the teacher striving even in the face of difficulties.

Eventually, the lessons of life and history will sink in and the student will become aware of what the teacher was attempting to convey. Even though the student may have chosen to ignore or even forget what was taught to him for a good portion of one's lifetime, there will always be a day of recognition and remembrance.

The Talmud teaches us that the words in the message of the teacher are not truly absorbed by the student until at least 40 years later. We have teachers when we are young and then, by our very nature, we are unable to truly appreciate and internalize what we are being taught. Knowledge and facts can be taught but spirit and life wisdom are much more difficult for students to absorb.

So, the teacher is relegated to planting seeds within the student that in the fullness of time and the richness of experience will eventually blossom and become meaningful. This is exactly how Moshe phrases his prophecy in this week's Torah reading. He speaks of a far distant future, of the end of days, a time when all the human plans and certainties have been exhausted and proven to be of little value, and it is at that time that the Jewish people will seek to return to their status as a holy nation and a kingdom of priests.

They will remember the lessons that Moshe taught them in their youth and that they have so sorely neglected over centuries of exile and even of rebirth. And these lessons will now rise up before them and

drive them towards eternal goals and eventual vindication and triumph. ©2018 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

In the portion of Va-Yelekh, Moshe (Moses) declares that God has not permitted him to enter the land of Israel. (Deuteronomy 31:2) There are specific reasons which explain why Moshe was denied this right. The classical approach is that Moshe sinned when he hit rather than talked to the rock. (Numbers 20:7-13) The Midrash points out that Moshe may have been denied entry for killing the Egyptian who had attacked a Jewish slave. (Exodus 2:11-12) Moshe, according to the Midrash, could have used less force to stop the Egyptian. But is there a more general message that can be learned from the decision to ban Moshe from setting foot into the land he longs to see?

The classic work on Jewish mysticism, the Zohar, stresses the spiritual growth from Noah to Avraham (Abraham) to Moshe and beyond. (Vayerah 218-220) While Noah remained silent when told by God that the world would be destroyed, Avraham engaged God in debate when hearing that the city of Sodom would be devastated. Moshe takes it to another level. Not only does he intercede when God tells him that the Jews would be "consumed" for building the Golden Calf, but throws his personal lot in with his people: If you do not forgive the people's sin, he says to God, "erase my name from the book You have written." (Exodus 32:32)

The message is clear. Avraham did what Noah could not do. Moshe reaches an even higher level than Avraham. But it can be suggested that even Moshe could not realize all of his dreams. He doesn't enter the land; this is left for his disciple Joshua and future generations.

"It is not for you to complete the task," says Rabbi Tarphon, "but neither are you free to refrain from it." (Ethics 2:21) We are all part of Jewish history, and the most crucial aspect of that history is that we are all part of a process.

Perhaps for this reason the Torah uses the expression, "and you will return until (ad) the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 30:2) The word "ad" implies that as high as one reaches spiritually, as close as one comes to God, one never arrives, the goal is never completed, indeed, there are always more steps to be taken.

A delightful tale makes this very point. A rebbe once turned to his disciples and asked, "There is a ladder with 50 rungs. One Chassid is on the 25th rung,

another on the 10th. Who is higher?" "Has our rebbe gone mad?" the students asked each other. "Of course, the one on the 25th." "No, my children," answered the rebbe. "It depends on which way you're going."

During these days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur whose central theme is growth and transformation, this message deserves consideration. It teaches that the most important element of teshuvah (repentance) is moving in the right direction—reaching higher, higher and higher still. ©2018 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 DAVID S. LEVIN

The Last Mitzvah

Parashat Vayeilech contains the final mitzvah of the Torah, Hakheil, gather together. The Torah tells us, "And Moshe commanded them (the elders of Yisrael) saying 'at the end of seven years at the time of the sh'mittah year, during the festival of Sukkot. When all of Yisrael comes to appear before Hashem, your Elokim, in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all of Yisrael in their ears. Gather together the people, the men, the women and the small children, and your stranger who is in your gates so that they will hear and so that they will learn, and they will fear Hashem, your Elokim, and be careful to perform all of the words of this Torah. And their children who do not know, they shall hear and they shall learn to fear Hashem, your Elokim, all the days that you live on the land to which you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of it.'"

It is important to understand the historical context within this halachah. There is no mitzvah found in the Torah to read the Torah every week on Shabbat or during the week. This was initiated later by the Rabbis as they understood that many Jews were unfamiliar all the laws of the Torah. Originally the Torah reading was spread over a three-year cycle with one third of a parasha read each Shabbat. This reading did not take place regularly until the Babylonian exile. The only opportunity to instill the words of the Torah onto the masses of the B'nei Yisrael when they entered the Land of Israel with Yehoshua was this Hakheil ceremony on intermediate days Sukkot. The reading of the Torah that took place was not the entire Torah but the Book of Devarim which is often called Mishneh Torah or the second Torah, Deuteronomy, which means the second telling. Sefer Devarim contains a large collection of the laws which are found in the other four Books of the Torah as well Moshe's warnings of the dire consequences should the B'nei Yisrael stray and worship other gods. There are also mitzvot which were not mentioned earlier in the Torah.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin asks why the holiday

of Sukkot was chosen for this mitzvah rather than Shavuot which commemorates the giving of the Torah, or Pesach, which freed the Jews from slavery and enabled them to receive mitzvot from Hashem. Each of the holidays is defined by its connection to teva, nature. Pesach is also known as Chag HaAviv (the Holiday of Spring), Shavuot is also known as Chag HaBikurim (The Holiday of the First Fruits), and Sukkot is known as Chag HaAsif (the Holiday of the Ingathering of the produce). In a year of Sh'mittah, there is no ingathering of the harvest and there would normally then be a lack of simchah, joy, that accompanies this harvest and is a requirement of the holiday which is also known as Z'man Simchateinu, the time of our great joy. But the Sh'mittah year is a time when the B'nei Yisrael were freed from their work in the fields and were able to devote their time to the study of Torah. At the end of that year there was a different type of harvest, a Chag HaAsif Ruchani, a spiritual harvest. To increase the joy of the ruchani harvest, the King would read from the scroll of the Torah to the delight of the B'nei Yisrael. This would encourage the Jewish farmers to set aside time for the study of Torah even during their hectic schedules of the regular six years.

HaRav Sorotzkin gives us another reason why the Hakheil occurs at the end of the Sh'mittah year. Hashem demonstrated the miracles and wonders in Egypt prior to the time that Hashem took the B'nei Yisrael out of Egypt. He then gave us the mitzvah to tell the story of the going out from Egypt at our Seder. Hashem looked for an appropriate time to help those "that did not know" the mitzvot to gain that knowledge. What more appropriate time could He choose except after a year in which the land lay fallow yet there was still enough to eat for the entire year from the extra crops with which Hashem had blessed them in the sixth year of the cycle?

The Kli Yakar touches on one of the most important aspects of Hakheil, namely to enlighten the B'nei Yisrael to the words of Hashem and to encourage them to do teshuvah. We must remember that this entire parasha was uttered on the last day of Moshe's life. Moshe spoke directly with Hashem as no other prophet in the history of the Jewish People had done or will do. As Rabbi Avraham Gordimer explains, "After Moshe's death, the direct prophetic connection would be forever gone. So, too, was this time to cherish, as upon entry to Eretz Yisrael, the nation would begin to split up.... Hakheil is the re-creation and reenactment of Moshe's monologue to the entirety of the Jewish nation, all together, before entry to the land."

It is appropriate for us to read about the Hakheil ceremony at this time of year. It is a reminder for us even today to increase our study of Torah so that we are familiar with the laws and our responsibilities. This involves more than just the study of the written law, the Five Books of Moshe – the Chumash. We must

broaden our scope to include gemara and halachah or we will fail to include the practical application of the laws that we learn in the Chumash. Our Torah is built on two frameworks, the Oral and the Written Law, which must be combined to understand what is expected of us.

This is the underlying reason why I endeavor to write drashot each week to share with you. My wish is that these drashot should not be used as an end and a fulfillment of our responsibilities to learn about our Torah. They are shared as a stepping stone, a thought provoker, an enabler to entice us to dig deeper and to search even more for truth. I say us because I include myself among those who continue to contemplate on that which Hashem has enabled me to discover in His Torah. May we all continue to grow in our understanding of Hashem's Torah and in that way grow in our connection to Hashem. I cannot think of a more meaningful wish during the Aseret Y'mei Teshuvah, the Ten Days of Returning to Hashem. May you all be written and sealed for a healthy year and a year of growth in Torah and observance. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

A New Beginning

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

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

The possibilities are endless, and the opportunities allow us to envision for our families and ourselves the possibility of erasing our past and starting fresh. This ability to look ahead and not necessarily to look back at the past is truly a G-d given talent; To somehow forget the past and to believe that the future will bring new and exciting possibilities without the influence of our misdeeds of the past; To see a person as good despite his/her past actions; To give them a second chance knowing full well that they might ultimately fail again.

We find this same concept in Jewish Education as well. When we begin the year educators should project the theme of Rosh Hashanah to all their teachers and students- the theme of a new beginning; a chance to start fresh and to right the past. Teachers tend to label children at a young age. Most times this

label remains with the children throughout their lives, frequently stifling their growth and more importantly, their ability to change. I often overheard teachers talk negatively about students as early as the first day of school. Remarks such as "Oh yes I know him very well, he's a handful and he never does his work" resonate when they receive their student rosters. While their comments are meant as friendly warnings to their co-workers, their statements have a profound negative effect on any possibility that there is any hope for change in the future for this child.

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

Though Judaism holds accountable the past deeds and misdeeds of an adult, they are nevertheless given the opportunity to assemble on Yom Kippur and ask Almighty G-d for forgiveness. Children, as well, must be allowed to feel that there is a chance for them to change despite their past actions. As Teachers and Educators we owe it to them to attempt with all our passion, love and understanding to give them this chance. ©2014 Rabbi M. Weiss - Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years. He and his wife D'vorah live in Efrat. All comments are welcome at rvmordechai@aol.com

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"Evil will befall you in the End-of-Days because you will do evil in the eyes of God, and will provoke Him to anger by what you do." (Devarim 31:29) This verse was said by Moshe Rabbeinu in 2488, or 1273 BCE, 3,291 years ago. Here we are, now in 5779, 3,291 years later, living in that period of time he referred to as the "End-of-Days." And, we can testify that, just as Moshe warned, evil has befallen us, the Jewish people.

Well, not this year, thank God, at least SO far. Right now it is relatively quiet for the Jewish people, compared to what it was like in the 1940s. Not that we don't still provoke God by what we do. We CERTAINLY do. It's just that, for some reason, God is having MERCY on us at this time and we should NOT take it for granted.

Because it is not. It is not "granted." In fact, it

may only be the calm before the storm. There still IS one more "War of Gog and Magog" left to go -- there are supposed to be THREE historically -- with the last being the worst ever. Even if WE can't see How. Even if WE can't see WHEN.

Yes, there IS the possibility that it has already happened. But, if it had, wouldn't we have known about it if it did? A major world war is not something happens outside of one's peripheral vision. Something as big and devastating as a major international conflict usually takes Center Stage when it occurs.

UNLESS, that is, it didn't happen all at ONCE.

As the Vilna Gaon explains in a few places, there is also the installment plan. That's where God takes a major unbearable suffering and divides it up into a lot of smaller bearable sufferings that are spread out over centuries, or even just decades.

He wrote THAT before there had ever been a Holocaust like the one in World War II. Anti-Semites before that had the will for one, but not the technology to pull it off. We needed the Industrial Revolution and all the advances since for that.

Since World War II, most of the "noise" has been in Israel. Most of the Jewish suffering has been there, fending off enemies that will stop at nothing to end the Jewish State. Has it been enough to constitute the FINAL War of Gog and Magog, or at least MOST of it?

Some would like to believe that the war has been an ideological one. We have been at war spiritually, and there is certainly a lot of truth. The casualties have been spiritual, and horrific. The Jewish American assimilation rate, we are told, is at LEAST 80 percent, with 1 in 2 Jews marrying "outside."

This has been called, appropriately, a SPIRITUAL Holocaust. And, as many point out, it is much BETTER, from a World-to-Come perspective, to die PHYSICALLY as a Jew than for a Jew to die SPIRITUALLY. So, maybe the final War of Gog and Magog is a spiritual one that is affecting countless Jews AROUND the world, and of which so few know or appreciate.

Let's face it. When conventional war occurs, EVERYONE knows about and follows it anxiously, UNTIL it is over. When a spiritual war occurs, like the one we are currently fighting, many people may know about it, but few care much about it, if it is not affecting their family personally. For the most part, people relate a lot more to PHYSICAL pain than to SPIRITUAL pain.

In fact, physical war usual evokes feelings of sympathy for the victims. Spiritual war can actually make the "victims" seem like "enemies." Jews who assimilate or intermarry can be looked upon as traitors to the nation, and evoke anger and delight when they fail. They only get sympathy from others who understand how they became so disenfranchised from the Jewish people.

But here's a point to consider. What does GOD say about them? How does God look at their lives? He knows who they are, what they have been through, and what can truly be expected from them given all the factors that make them who they are today.

From our perspective, they may appear whole and happy, which makes it hard to feel bad for them. From God's perspective, however, they may be more like handicapped people running the same race as people without the same hindrances. From HIS perspective, their lack of commitment to Torah may be forgivable, whereas ours may make us culpable. We just don't know.

Of the many things that still haunt me about the Holocaust, the one that unsettles me the most is how Divine Providence arranged it that religious and non-religious were made to look alike in the camps, and suffer the exact same inhumane conditions. No one expected the Nazis to show more or less respect to the religious than secular Jews. But they only worked for God; they were HIS instruments of Divine justice at that time. Siblings can lord themselves over one another, but parents love all their children the same.

Of course there is a big difference between someone who performs mitzvos and someone who doesn't, certainly with respect to reward in the World-to-Come. But we don't all start off from the same place in this world, and many secular Jews, even if they were once religious, given OUR paths in life, might have ended up living by Torah more devotedly than we do. We just don't know.

What we do know is that when we don't judge others to the side of merit, or show the proper amount of sympathy and empathy towards others less fortunate than us, physically OR spiritually, then it reflects badly on us. And THAT can turn a spiritual war into a physical one as well, God forbid.

It is no small matter that we enter Yom Kippur by first making a point of forgiving others who have wronged us. "Tefillah Zachah" is such an important introduction to Kol Nidrei that people try and get to shul early enough to say the whole thing. The wrong was the wrong, and the person will have to answer to GOD for having committed it, but not to US. We just don't know enough to properly judge the offender for what they have done. No matter how hard we try to wear their shoes, they will never fit just right.

Recently, it finally occurred to me why the Arizal placed such an emphasis on people accepting upon themselves the mitzvah to love others as they do themselves upon entering shul. Why not when we first wake up? Why specifically upon coming to pray?

Because, you notice people's idiosyncrasies a lot more when praying in the same minyan, and they can be VERY annoying. Without realizing it, such annoyances can cause a person to mentally and emotionally "separate" themselves from such people,

spiritually breaking up the minyan, so-to-speak. Communal prayer is supposed to be just that, communal, and harboring negative sentiments towards others interferes with that.

But, it is next to impossible to love an "annoying" person unless you first judge them to the side of merit, another mitzvah. You have to be able to say to yourself, "I would never do what they are doing. But maybe they have a reason for doing it, one that is not relevant to me, but is to them."

The crazier the world gets, the more idiosyncratic people become. It makes this mitzvah harder, but that only increases our merit in Heaven. And, merit is what we need in life, especially at this time of year, ESPECIALLY to hold off or prevent any evil coming to the nation at these End-of-Days.

It's a given that we're going to beg God for forgiveness for our sins against Him. It's right there in the Machzorim. But, our greatest merit may come from what's NOT really there, and to borrow the language of the Talmud: Just as you have judged others to the side of merit, may God always judge you to the side of merit. Gmar Chasimah Tovah. ©2018 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI CHAIM DOVID GREEN

DvarTorah

In this week's parsha the Torah talks about exposing our children to Torah, and Torah functions.. "And their children who don't know will hear, and learn to fear Hashem Your G-d _all of the days_ etc." Why does the Torah stress "all of the days"? Either the goal is to see to it that observance remains throughout one's generations, or it is a statement about the quality of our observance of Torah. That is to say that we can understand the words "all of the days" as expressing expectations to us specifically about how we perform commandments, as opposed to making sure observance remains in our families. Even so, we'll see that the two really go hand in hand.

The quality of observance which we are speaking of is consistency. Many commandments are meant to be performed daily. Nevertheless, many people have ebbs and flows. Sometimes we give it our best, and other times we backslide. Even though that might be very "human" - it is not the preferred way to be.

The Chofetz Chaim has a parable to illustrate this point. Reuven meets Shimon. "Greetings, Shimon. How are you?" Oh, Reuven, I don't wish it on you. I'm quite ill." "But Shimon, to look at you is to see a man who looks in the best of health." "Indeed, I feel well today, Reuven, but I'm suffering from a chronic fever. Today I may feel well, but I could wake up with a high fever tomorrow. I've been suffering with this for quite some time now. So you see, I really am a very sick man."

So it is with the way we run our lives. If we are not consistent in important matters, it is a reflection on our entire performance - even at the times we do work consistently. G-d wants our performance of His commandments to be done with consistent effort, enthusiasm, and forethought. If not, it is a statement about the entirety of our devotion to G-d and His commandments.

I believe there is another important point to emphasize here. The topic of the passage is conveying loyalty to G-d to children who were not in the wilderness experiencing G-d's miracles and salvation. It's not something which can be done in one day with a good speech, or an inspiring seminar. It's a process. We convey it to our children daily. They see what we consider important. What do we do enthusiastically on a daily basis? Well, of course, we never forget to come to the dinner table. Many people would say that a day is not a day without watching one's favorite show, or "chatting" on the internet. This is what we are conveying to those who emulate us. The things we do every day "religiously" are the things which are most important to us. By examining what we think is really important, we may find that we would alter some things we often do. We might even place a new emphasis on some things we would like to do, especially knowing that generations may emulate our qualities.

Before Yom Kippur, it is customary to introspect. Let us ask ourselves if the example we set is one which we would be proud to see in the next generation. What should we continue doing? What should we eliminate? What is the approach to take to self-improve? "In order that they will hear and learn...all of the days." © 1998 Rabbi C.D..Green & torah.org

RABBI ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

The Midrash (Yalkut Emor 651) comments on the verse, "You should take for you on the first day," that Succos is the first day for the accounting of sins. Many explanations are offered to explain this difficult Midrash.

The Shlah HaKadosh explains that in the four days between Yom Kippur and Succos people are so busy preparing for Succos that they have no time to sin. Others say that the influence of Yom Kippur and its power to expiate sins extends into these four days. Rabbi Yehonasan Eiebeshitz writes in Ya'aros Dvash that the gematria of 1vt 7n (the Satan) is 364, from which Chazal learn that the Satan, the evil urge, has power 364 days of the year, and not on Yom Kippur. The n signifies that five of the remaining days the Satan has reduced control. These are the days between Yom Kippur and Succos (counting a portion of the first day of Succos as the fifth day).

The effect of Yom Kippur is so overwhelming and inspiring that a Jew is catapulted to a level far

beyond his real attainment. We are judged according to our level, and therefore one on a higher level is judged more harshly for the same sin than one on a lower level. Thus if Hashem were to judge us immediately after Yom Kippur according to our level at that time, the result would be an unduly harsh judgment.

Just as before Rosh Hashanah we are given a minimum of four days of selichos in order to prepare ourselves to enter Rosh Hashanah as blemishless sacrifice, so we are given four days after Yom Kippur to settle back to our real level. The accounting of our sins during these four days is then retroactively calculated according to the level we reach on the first day of Succos. These four days are like a decompression chamber given to a deep sea diver.

Another aspect of these euphoric four days is the fact that we are so charged emotionally and so busy preparing the materials for Succos that even when we sin, those sins are rarely premeditated or calculated. Similarly, the preparations are also executed in a frenzied mood of elation that leaves little time or place for calculation and meditation. To a certain degree, this elation is positive. It corresponds to the days after that first Yom Kippur in the desert in which the materials for the Mishkan were donated and the people gave with unbridled emotion, without any calculation of necessity. Finally Moshe had to call a halt to this unbridled giving and announce, "Enough."

This powerful emotion is the raw material to be shaped with reflection into a MisEkan. The Torah relates in this week's parashah that Hashem bid Moshe to ascend Har Nevo to expire "in the midst of the day." The entire people had said they would try to prevent Moshe's death. The obvious question is: What could they have done to prevent Moshe from dying? The answer is nothing. But the people were so emotionally charged with love for Moshe despite the month-long rebuke to which they had been subjected, that rational calculation did not exist. By commanding Moshe to go up at midday to show their helplessness to prevent his passing, Hashem, at the same time, publicized this commendable desire of the Jewish People. Later the unbounded love for Moshe was refined and shaped into the loyalty which the people transferred to Yehoshua.

The four days between Yom Kippur and Succos correspond to the four letters of Hashem's Ineffable Name. Our feelings during these four days are raw material to be shaped in calm reflection and transformed into our calculated service of Hashem on the first days of Succos.

May we utilize the segulah of these four days to prepare for Succos and the mitzvah of lulav, symbolic of our victory on Yom Kippur, and by channeling the intense emotion with which we emerge from Yom Kippur so that it extends its influence into the entire year. © 2000 Rabbi Z. Leff

