

Toras אִשׁ Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In March 2015 I had a public conversation at Yale with the University's President Peter Salovey. The occasion was quite an emotional one. It celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the Marshall Scholarships, created by the British parliament as a way of expressing thanks to the United States for the Marshall Plan, that helped Western Europe rebuild its economies after the Second World War. The scholarships fund outstanding young Americans to study at any university in the United Kingdom. So the gathering that evening was about the links between Britain and the United States, and the role of universities in cultivating that generosity of spirit, epitomised by the Marshall Plan, that understands the need to build peace, not just wage war.

But it had another emotional resonance. Yale is one of the world's great universities. Yet there was a time, between the 1920s and 1960s, when it had a reputation for being guarded about, even quietly hostile to, the presence of Jews among its students and staff.¹ Happily that has not been the case since 1960 when its President, A. Whitney Griswold, issued a directive that religion should play no role in the admissions process. Today it is warmly welcoming to people of all faiths and ethnicities. Noting that fact, the President pointed out that not only was Yale that afternoon hosting a rabbi, but he too – Salovey – was Jewish and the descendant of a great rabbinic dynasty. Salovey is an Anglicisation of the name Soloveitchik.

Thinking back to that occasion, I wondered whether there was a more than merely family connection between the university president and his great distant relative, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, the man known to generations of his students at Yeshiva University as simply, "The Rav." Was there an intellectual and spiritual link also, however oblique?

There is, and it is significant. Peter Salovey's great contribution to the thought of our time is the concept he formulated together with John Mayer in a landmark 1989 article,² namely emotional intelligence –

popularised in 1995 by Daniel Goleman's best-selling book of the same title.

For many decades, IQ, or intelligence quotient, focused attention on a set of cognitive and reasoning tests as the primary measure of intelligence, itself considered as the best indicator of ability as, for example, a military officer. It took another brilliant Jewish psychologist of our time, Howard Gardner (of Harvard), to break this paradigm and argue for the idea of multiple intelligences.³ Solving puzzles is not the only skill that matters.

What Salovey and Mayer did was to show that our ability to understand and respond to not only our own emotions but also those of others is an essential element of success in many fields, indeed of human interaction in general. There are fundamental elements of our humanity that have to do with the way we feel, not just the way we think. Even more importantly, we need to understand how other people feel – the gift of empathy – if we are to form a meaningful bond with them. That is what the Torah is referring to when it says, "Do not oppress a stranger because you know what it feels like to be a stranger" (Ex. 23:9).

Emotions matter. They guide our choices. They move us to action. Intellect alone cannot do this. It has been a failing of intellectuals throughout history to believe that all we need to do is to think straight and we will act well. It isn't so. Without a capacity for sympathy and empathy, we become more like a computer than a human being, and that is fraught with danger.

It was precisely this point – the need for emotional intelligence – about which Rabbi Soloveitchik spoke in one of his most moving addresses, 'A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne.'⁴ People, he said, are mistaken when they think there is only one Mesorah, one Jewish tradition handed on through the generations. In fact, he said, there are two: one handed



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¹ Dan A. Oren, *Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale*, Yale University Press, 1988.

² Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1989). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9(3), 185-211.

³ Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences*, New York, Basic Books, 1983.

⁴ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, 'A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne,' *Tradition*, 17:2, 1978, 73-83.

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down by fathers, the other by mothers. He quoted the famous verse from Proverbs 1:8, "Listen, my son, to the instruction of your father (mussar avikha), and do not forsake the teaching of your mother (torat imekha)." These are two distinct but interwoven strands of the religious personality.

From a father, he said, we learn how to read a text, comprehend, analyse, conceptualise, classify, infer and apply. We also learn how to act: what to do and what not to do. The father-tradition is "an intellectual-moral one." Turning to "the teaching of your mother," Soloveitchik became personal, speaking of what he learned from his own mother. From her, he said:

I learned that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavour, a scent and warmth to mitzvot. I learned from her the most important thing in life – to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry and insensitive.⁵

To put it in other words: Torat imekha is about emotional intelligence. I have long felt that alongside Rabbi Soloveitchik's great essay, Halakhic Man, there was another one he might have written called Aggadic Woman. Halakhah is an intellectual-moral enterprise. But aggadah, the non-halakhic dimension of rabbinic Judaism, is directed to the broader aspects of what it is to be a Jew. It is written in narrative rather than law. It invites us to enter the minds and hearts of our spiritual forebears, their experiences and dilemmas, their achievements and their pain. It is the emotional dimension of the life of faith.

Speaking personally, I am disinclined to think of this in terms of a male-female dichotomy.⁶ We are all

⁵ Ibid. 77.

⁶ There are, to be sure, serious thinkers who have made just this claim, about the superior emotional intelligence of women. See Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, Allen Lane, 2002; Simon Baron Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, Penguin, 2004. See also Carol Gilligan's classic, *In A Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, 1982.

called on to develop both sensibilities. But they are radically different. Halakhah is part of Torat Cohanim, Judaism's priestly voice. In the Torah, its key verbs are le-havdil, to distinguish/analyse/categorise, and le-horot, to instruct/guide/issue a ruling. But in Judaism there is also a prophetic voice. The key words for the prophet are tzedek u-mishpat, righteousness and justice, and hessed ve-rahamim, kindness and compassion. These are about I-Thou relationships, between humans, and between us and God.

The priest thinks in terms of universal rules that are eternally valid. The prophet is attuned to the particularities of a given situation and the relationships between those involved. The prophet has emotional intelligence. He or she (there were, of course, women prophets: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther) reads the mood of the moment and how it relates to longstanding relationships. The prophet hears the silent cry of the oppressed, and the incipient anger of Heaven. Without the law of the priest, Judaism would have no structure or continuity. But without the emotional intelligence of the prophet, it would become, as Rav Soloveitchik said, soulless, dry and insensitive.

Which brings us to our parsha. In Ha'azinu, Moses does the unexpected but necessary thing. He teaches the Israelites a song. He moves from prose to poetry, from speech to music, from law to literature, from plain speech to vivid metaphor:

Listen, heavens, and I will speak;

And let the earth hear the words of my mouth.

May my teaching fall like rain,

My speech flow down like dew;

Like gentle rain on tender plants,

Like showers on the grass. (Deut. 32:1-2)

Why? Because at the very end of his life, the greatest of all the prophets turned to emotional intelligence, knowing that unless he did so, his teachings might enter the minds of the Israelites but not their hearts, their passions, their emotive DNA. It is feelings that move us to act, give us the energy to aspire, and fuel our ability to hand on our commitments to those who come after us.

Without the prophetic passion of an Amos, a Hosea, an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, without the music of the Psalms and the songs of the Levites in the Temple, Judaism would have been a plant without water or sunlight; it would have withered and died. Intellect alone does not inspire in us the passion to change the world. To do that you have to take thought and turn it into song. That is Ha'azinu, Moses' great hymn to God's love for His people and his role in ensuring, as Martin Luther King put it, that "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice." In Ha'azinu, the man of intellect and moral courage becomes the figure of emotional intelligence, allowing himself to be, in Judah Halevi's lovely image, the harp

for God's song.

This is a life-changing idea: If you want to change lives, speak to people's feelings, not just to their minds. Enter their fears and calm them. Understand their anxieties and allay them. Kindle their hopes and instruct them. Raise their sights and enlarge them. Humans are more than algorithms. We are emotion-driven beings.

Speak from the heart to the heart, and mind and deed will follow. *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

"Remember the days of yore, understand the years (shenot) of each generation." (Deuteronomy 32:7) Are we commanded to study world history? Certainly, I would say, on the basis of the simple meaning of the verse cited at the head of this commentary in accordance with the commentary of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Germany, 1808–1888). A proper study of history will reveal the consistent interplay between Israel and the nations of the world, the intellectual streams which influenced us – and in turn – which we influenced, and the hidden finger of God which guaranteed Jewish survival under the most difficult of conditions. And I would argue that the proper translation of the biblical verse cited above, as one may deduce from the biblical commentary of Rabbi Hirsch, is “understand the differences [shenot, not from ‘shana – year,’ but rather from ‘shinui – difference, change’] of each generation.”

It has aptly been said: “Yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, today is a gift granted to us by God, and that is why it is called ‘present.’” I would add that “today” is all that we really have to utilize, and we must utilize it well, with wisdom and with dispatch. But we cannot treat “today” with proper understanding and circumspection unless we are sensitive to the forces of history which preceded it, especially to the changes in zeitgeist (the temper and spirit of the time), which makes “today” different from “yesterday,” and the new opportunities which may enable us to set the stage for a better tomorrow.

The truth is that God revealed Himself to Moses as the God of history. It is also true that in the Book of Genesis El Sha-ddai or Elo-him is revealed as the God of power and creation; however when in the book of Exodus, Moses asks God for His name, the divine response is “Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh,” literally, “I shall be what I shall be” (Ex. 3:14). In effect, God is here introducing Himself first and foremost as the God of future tense, the God of history, the God of becoming, the God of future redemption (“Jehovah,” literally “He will bring about” redemption). This is very

much in keeping with Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi's Kuzari, who sees God as revealing Himself first and foremost in history, based upon the first of the Ten Commandments, “I am the Lord thy God, who took thee out of Egypt, the house of Bondage” (20:2).

And take note that this Name Ehyeh is very different from Maimonides' emphasis on the God of power and creation, Elo-him; Indeed Maimonides even goes so far as to explain Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh to mean I am that I am, I am the God of being, I am the Ground of Being (Paul Tillich), I am the essence of creation (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Foundations of Torah 1:1), completely overlooking the fact that Ehyeh is literally a future verb, “I will be.” Hence both ideas are correct: God is the powerful God of Creation and God is also the Redeeming God of history.

And this name Ehyeh is not as definitive as is Elo-him, the God of creation. The God of creation “worked” (as it were) alone in creating the world; in contrast, the God of history is dependent upon the world scene first and foremost on Israel. (For example, according to most interpreters redemption was in the divine plan almost immediately after the Exodus, but the refusal of Israel to conquer the land delayed the process immeasurably. There will eventually be redemption, as all our prophets guarantee in God's name, but since redemption requires Israel's intervention, and the eventual cooperation of the entire world of nations, God must leave the “end of days” open-ended.

And so the Bible after presenting the name Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh goes on to say, “So shall you [Moses] say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent Me to you; this is My name forever, and this is My remembrance for all generations’” (Ex. 3:15). Note an interesting linguistic nuance: In Deuteronomy chapter thirty-two, the text reads “dor vador,” understand the differences “of each generation” whereas in Exodus chapter three, we find “dor lador,” “this is My remembrance for all generations.” There are two names of God expressed in this passage in Exodus: the God of the patriarchs is the God of Jewish tradition from generation to generation, the God of eternal Torah and halakhic continuity, the God of the Shulhan Arukh, if you will; the God of history is the God of each generation, with that generation's specific demands conditioned upon the historical situation of the specific time.

Hence Rabbi Shimon Schwab records in his memoirs how, as a studious bar mitzva youth, decided to go to the Yeshiva in the city of Rodin because he was anxious to have contact with the Hafetz Hayim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, the gadol hador, the great luminary of the time, who lived in Rodin. The sage asked the youth if he was a Kohen-priest. When young Shimon answered in the negative, the Torah giant

commiserated that when the Messiah will come, only he – a Kohen – would be privileged to enter the sacred precincts of the Holy Temple. The reason for the priests' elevated status is that their tribal ancestors answered positively to Moses' call, "Whoever is with God, come to me." Since young Shimon's tribal ancestors did not heed that call, he would be excluded. The Hafetz Hayyim concluded:

And, I do not say these words lightly in order to hurt you. I merely wish to prepare you: in every generation a Divine Voice calls out the particular summons, challenge, and opportunity of that generation. Do not repeat the mistake of your forbears. Listen for God's voice in your generation, and make sure that you respond to God's call!

Clearly the Divine Voice in our generation is calling out to us to come to Israel, to prepare for our palpable redemption, to world redemption. ©2018 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

All Jewish history, past, present and future, is on parade before our eyes and ears in this final section of the great oration of Moshe to the Jewish people before his passing. The greatness and pettiness, the holiness and decadence of the people are in the immortal words of this week's Torah reading. But it is the first word of that reading that conveys the entire idea of Moshe's message.

The word 'haazinu' means not only to listen and to hear what is being said but it also conveys a deeper meaning of the message being conveyed. If one is deaf to the internal messages of Torah and of Jewish history, if one is unaware that one is being addressed and called to attention, then no message, no matter how important and brilliant, will ever accomplish its goal. The listener, so to speak, must want to hear and understand the message that is being addressed to him or her.

Anyone who has had the experience of teaching, especially in a classroom setting, knows the frustration of students unwilling or unable to concentrate and pay attention. There are great teachers who by the force of their personality and their talents are able to command others to listen to what they have to say. However, even the greatest of teachers, even Moshe the ultimate teacher, can find one's message ignored or left unheard. It is within the nature of the young, especially the student, to oftentimes purposely ignore the teacher and not be bothered to hear what in fact is being said and thought.

Moshe speaks to us from the heights of prophecy, from millennia ago. Every generation hears his words and every generation must apply those words to the circumstances of their time and place. This is the secret of the eternity of Moshe and his Torah.

I would think that by now the Jewish people would be aware that it is impossible, and even dangerous, to ignore the message of Moshe and of Jewish tradition. We are witness to a large swath of Jewish society that is either completely deaf to the message of Moshe, who are at best certainly tone deaf to its nuances and meanings. Our attention span is a very short and today, when we only have the patience for 30 second sound bites, it has become ever more difficult to concentrate and listen intently to messages of cosmic importance and eternal greatness.

The key to this Shabbat, coming as it does after the Shabbat of spiritual repentance and concentration, begins with the ability to listen and to hear and to internalize the message of Moshe. Simply listen to the rhythm of Jewish history and tradition and automatically one will become a better Jew and a better person. It is no accident that generations of Jews had their children commit to memory the total reading of this week, this great song of Moshe. ©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

Moshe (Moses) advises the people of Israel that in times of difficulty the song in this week's portion will bear witness that the covenant with Israel "shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring." (Deuteronomy 31:20,21)

No doubt Moshe had in mind the particular song of Ha'azinu. But it can also be suggested that song in general has often given the people of Israel the power to overcome the most serious of challenges. What is the magic of song that gives it such strength?

First of all, song goes beyond the intellectual word, stirring the soul. As health is a function of physical as well as emotional well being,—with the latter impacting powerfully on the former—so, too, does song have the spiritual energy to help us transcend the physical. It allows us to do things we never believed we could and understand things we otherwise could never grasp.

Second, song, more than word, has the unique characteristic of bringing together people of disparate backgrounds. From this perspective, song is a uniting force. With the collective energy achieved through song, the unreachable can be reached.

Third, song connects us with God. While heaven and earth seem apart, song can bring heaven down to earth and lift earth up to heaven. In this manner, song allows us to interface with God Himself.

In fact, while God speaks in the Torah, He never sings. Of course, God loves humankind

endlessly. Still, it ought to be noted that human love of God extends above the spoken word—lifting us closer to the Divine.

With this bond, we become more godly. As God is infinite, so can the human being, with the help of song, reach high, higher and higher still—realizing the impossible dream.

In no small measure, the Sukkah bears the primary quality of song—the ability to overcome. Indeed, the Sukkah can be viewed as a symbol of the Jew who, against all odds, has been able to survive.

As a child, I remember by Bubbie (grandmother) singing the Yiddish song, “A Sukkeleh.” It speaks of the resilience of the brittle Sukkah that can withstand the toughest of winds. The final words still ring in my ears: “With the first course, with little force, my daughter begins to bring in. She stands in her place and with tears on her face, says, tata (father) the Sukkah’s falling in.” The father responds: “Don’t be a child, don’t be so riled, the Sukkah is standing so long. We’ve lived in fear almost two thousand years and the Sukkah remains so strong.”

May we blessed with such transcendence.

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ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Hazin Lach

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

This title is not the beginning of a liturgical poem that one might recite, but rather signify the letters that start the various Aliyot in the portion of “*H’azinu*”. The Kohen starts from the “*He*” of “*H’azinu*”. The second letter appears six sentences later and starts with a “*Zayin*” signifying the word “*Zachor*”. The third Aliya starts with a “*Yud*” referencing the word “*Yarkivehu*”. The next Aliya starts with the letter “*Vav*” symbolizing “*va’yare*”. The fifth Aliya starts with the letter “*lamed*” symbolizing the word “*Lu*”. The sixth Aliya starts with the letter “*Kaf*” referring to the word “*ki*”. This continues to the end of the song and the seventh and last Aliya completes the portion to be read.

The purpose of these exact divisions is not to allow any stops during the song of “*Ha’ziunu*” except those enumerated above. The only possibility of adding an Aliya is at the end between the seventh Aliya and the end of the portion.

This division is found in the Code of Jewish Law (“*Shulchan Aruch* 428;5”) but there are those sages that divide the contents of the song in a different way, however still maintaining the format of beginning letters that was enumerated above. The *Rambam*, Maimonides, (Laws of Prayer 13;5) states that these intervals represent words that hint at the act of

repentance, since this portion is read before Yom kippur and though we generally shy away from beginning or ending an Aliya with words of rebuke, in this case it is acceptable since we are standing at the threshold of seeking repentance. Perhaps as well the words “*Haziv Lach*, indicates that the light (*Ziv*) and beauty is with the Jewish people at this time since they are actively involved in seeking repentance.

Additionally, there is a difference of opinion amongst our sages if we must retain this division stated when we read the Torah on Monday and Thursday and on Shabbat Mincha. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*. 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 ravmordechai@aol.com

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Message & Challenge

Moshe begins Ha’azinu with a song or poem to the B’nei Yisrael. In this song, Moshe is extremely critical of the people and repeats to the nation the prediction of their turning from Hashem and His punishment of exile from His land. The B’nei Yisrael are cautioned to take the words of this song to heart. The B’nei Yisrael are commanded to memorize and understand this poem: “And he said to them, ‘apply your heart to all the words that I testify against you today, which you are to instruct your children to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah.’” The B’nei Yisrael would no longer hear directly from Moshe as Moshe’s task of giving over the Torah was now completed. Now it would be the responsibility of the next generations to continue the study of Torah and the traditions, and pass these laws on to the next generation. Rashi explains that a person must concentrate his eyes, ears, and heart and direct them to the study of Torah. The Sifri compares this statement to Yechezkiel (Ezekiel)’s vision of the future Temple. Yechezkiel tells the people to direct their eyes, ears, and hearts to this image of the future Temple, and if the Temple is only a portion of the laws of the Torah, then how much more so should one concentrate on the entire Torah and its Laws.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the study of Torah is the source of life itself. Torah is what gives meaning to life. Our days on earth are numbered, yet it is not whether we have lived seventy or eighty years, but whether we have had seventy or eighty years of life. That can only come when one has sought meaning through the study and practice of Torah. When one performs even a simple act yet realizes that this is why Hashem has placed us on earth, he elevates that simple action into one that has meaning for his life and the lives of others. HaRav Sorotzkin is clear that the study of Torah must be

accompanied by the practice of those lessons in real life while understanding that our actions are our service to Hashem and His Torah.

Perhaps this is why this message from the Torah is in poetic form. We are told by the Netziv, head of the Volozhin Yeshiva, in his commentary, Ha'eimek Davar: "In the Talmud Nedarim (38) it is explicitly stated that the term "song" in Deuteronomy 31:19 means the whole of the Pentateuch. But surely the whole of the Pentateuch was not written in poetic form! We must therefore conclude that it possesses the nature and essential character of poetry. Everyone knows that there is a distinction between poetry and prose. In poetry, the subject matter is not plainly set forth as in prose. Additional explanations are necessary in order to indicate the allusions condensed into each expression. It is still, however, not considered to be merely allegory and homily, but this is the nature of poetry, even of that composed by the unlettered. It is obvious too that one who is aware of the background of the allusions and figurative expressions of poetry can better appreciate its character than the man who has only an external apprehension of the immediate literal meaning of the words, which may lead him to misunderstanding the poet's intention. Such is the nature of the Torah. Its story is not elaborated on and plainly explained, but it requires additional explanations in order to appreciate its allusions. This is not its homiletic meaning but this is the plain meaning of the Scriptures."

A section of the poem or song in Ha'azinu discusses the unique relationship of the B'nei Yisrael to Hashem. "When the Supreme One gave nations their portion, when He separated the children of man He set the borders of peoples according to the number of the B'nei Yisrael, for Hashem's share is His people, Ya'akov, the portion of His possession. He found him in a desert land and in the wastes of a wilderness, He encircled him He made him comprehending, He guarded him like the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle arousing his nest hovering over his young, he spreads his wings, he takes it, he carries it on his pinions. Hashem alone guided him and there was no foreign god with Him."

HaRav Sorotzkin takes the phrase, "according to the numbers of the Children of Israel," literally. He explains that the Rabbis of the Talmud agree that there were seventy languages in the world. This is the same number as the seventy descendants of Ya'akov who went down to Egypt to join Yosef. From the Rashbam he demonstrates that there were twelve nations in Canaan who was a descendant of Noach. This was to balance the twelve tribes of the Jews who would then possess the land. Even though the Jewish people would increase in number like the stars in the Heavens or like the sand at the sea, there would always be enough space in Israel to accommodate that nation.

There was not one Jew in the land when the B'nei Yisrael entered the land to possess it. One could easily cry out against the B'nei Yisrael that they displaced people from their land. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that it was for this reason that no nation was in possession of their own land from the time of creation. The pasuk says, "When the Supreme One gave nations their portion, when He separated the children of man," Hashem assigned each nation to take over another's land, a land in which they did not dwell. They ended up displacing people who then displaced others until everyone was in that particular land that was assigned to them. The B'nei Yisrael were given this land and it does not matter whether that land was inhabited by someone else before.

Hirsch continues, "Hashem did not allow the children of Israel to grow into a nation in the land destined for them to live in and to develop and grow under the influence and conditions of that land. In contrast to all other nations, he let them become a nation without a land, and then to take possession of the land destined for them which had already been fully cultivated and built up by others." This was done to make the B'nei Yisrael realize that they were a nation which would be known as the "People of Hashem" and only then as the inhabitants of a particular land. Other nations were entirely dependent on the land for their identity. The B'nei Yisrael were formed with the understanding and appreciation of Hashem and His Torah which they brought into the land and through that made the land a part of Hashem in their eyes. "Israel is to bring its spiritual, moral and social culture, as formed by Hashem, with it into the land, is not to subject itself and the life of its people to the land, but to subject the land to itself and the life of the people as fixed by Hashem."

This is the message and challenge of this poem. We are once again in our land, but our identity is much more than the land. We became a nation with the Giving of the Torah and must bring that Torah into the land we possess. May Hashem guide us to achieve that task. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"**Y**ou grew fat -- thick and covered with fat. As a result, they abandoned God Who made them, and mocked the Rock of their redemption." (Devarim 32:15) Complacency is spiritually dangerous! We were warned about it back in Parashas VaEschanan, and we are reminded of it here once again, in this week's parsha. We want the good, but we have a difficult time balancing it out with our spiritual responsibilities. As the Talmud says, "Few people eat from two tables." Materialism and spirituality USUALLY, to a large degree, come at the cost of one another.

It's simple. Just watch the way someone prays

to God when he is financially hurting, and someone else who is financially comfortable. The distraught person pours their heart out to God, but the complacent one tends to use prayer as a way to just "check in" three times a day.

In this world every blessing seems to also come with a curse, and vice-versa. Wealth is great, but it can lead to spiritual corruption. Health is wonderful, but it can make a person forget to thank God for it. Family and friends greatly enhance the quality of a person's life, but can also take a person away from other important matters, or result in additional burdens.

The Talmud says that Torah comes out of the mouths of the poor. Every form of suffering tends to increase spiritual sensitivity, not necessarily in everyone, but in a lot of people. It is easier to sympathize with others, or empathize with them. It's very hard to relate to other people's problems if they have never been yours as well.

For a person who does not believe in God or the Afterlife, it's no big deal. They don't care what other people are going through so long as they don't have to go through it themselves. As far as they are concerned life is random, and it just happened to pick them to succeed. Luck of the draw, and they have no one to thank for their success.

If you believe in God and eternal reward, then SPIRITUAL SENSITIVITY should be the most value commodity in the universe. It's a reliable mentor. It's an honorable companion. It's the truest friend a person can ever know, or need. It not only helps a person to DO the right thing, but it helps them to figure it out when it is not so clear what it is. It's a beacon by which to steer through the spiritual storm of life, and the sturdy ship on which to survive it.

Since spiritual sensitivity is so crucial to remaining connected to God and acting Godly, it is the mortal enemy of Amalek. This is why Amalek cut off the Bris Milah of the Jews he killed in battle, and then threw it Heavenward. It wasn't just the Jew he wanted to kill. It was that which he brought to the world and "imposed" upon mankind, CONSCIENCE being the most reviled of all.

This makes the battle for life the battle for spiritual sensitivity. When you hit your chest on Yom Kippur during Viduy, the Confessional Prayer, you were actually saying, "Sorry God for not being spiritually sensitive enough to avoid that sin, and that sin, and that sin, etc. Thanks to Yom Kippur, I AM spiritually sensitive enough to know it was a grave mistake, and I hope to fix that in the upcoming year, b"H."

This is why Succos comes on the heels of Yom Kippur. So much fun after such a serious day of teshuvah and kaparah? Who doesn't enjoy going out into the succah for a week and waving the Four Species in shul each day? Who doesn't look forward to all the dancing on Simchas Torah?

Well, you certainly SHOULD look forward to it... if you're spiritually sensitive, and want to remain that way the rest of the year. Let's face it, living in the succah for a week and eating out there is a BIG inconvenience. It's much easier to seat and serve everyone in the house, and I LOVE my bed. Most people do.

It's interesting that people willingly take on the same inconveniences when they go camping. When asked why they love it so much, they often talk about being reconnected to Nature, etc. But though they may not recognize it as a spiritual experience, or want to call it that, in the end, that is what they are having. They're connecting to God, on some sublime level, even the Atheist who loves the "Great Outdoors."

During Succos, I don't stop loving my dining room table, I just start loving God more. I don't stop enjoying my own bed. I just start enjoying being out there with God more. It started in Elul, kicked into gear during Rosh Hashanah, and reached a climax during Yom Kippur, and the entire journey has been one of increased sensitivity. It was bolstered by the constant shofar blowing. Succos is the time to ENJOY all that built-up and enhanced spiritual sensitivity.

One of the rearrangements of the word "Amalek" is Ayin-Mem-Lamed, and Kuf. "Kof" is Hebrew for "monkey," and the two parts translate as, "Work of the Monkey." Because, for all their "humanness," monkeys are still animals living as animals do. Amalek says, for all our animalness, let's live like one, which is easy to do if you are spiritually desensitized.

What a curse! There are a lot of things in life that we enjoy, but which secretly kill us. There is a reason why it takes discipline to eat properly, and to exercise regularly. It's just so much more fun to eat what you want and be a couch potato. Until that is it brings a person to death's door.

And that's what Amalek does, SPIRITUALLY. He feeds you what tastes good, gives you strong drink to wash it down, and helps you make merry. He doesn't tell you that he is secretly killing you spiritually. You need Yom Kippur for that, or the final Day of Judgment.

"This is the Blessing," which is the name of the last parsha of the Torah. What is the blessing? Spiritual sensitivity, because with it, you can become personally fulfilled and a partner with God in the perfection of Creation as well as your own.

Have a "Hug" Samayach by embracing spirituality. ©2018 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

YITZ WEISS

Hug Samayach!

[Yes, I swiped that title from the previous dvar torah!]

One of the themes of Sukkot is to recognize that Hashem is our protector. We go out of our permanent homes into a temporary dwelling and expose ourselves to the elements. In so doing we recall

that Hashem was our guardian when we left Egypt into the desert and remains our protector today.

The minimum requirement for a kosher sukkah is not four walls, but two walls and a tefach (a handbreadth). If we were to construct a sukkah based on the minimum, we would really be exposed to the elements! Two walls and a bit don't seem to offer much protection! How are we to feel secure?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l compares the sukkah measurements to an arm: two "walls" - i.e. from the shoulder to the elbow, and from the elbow to the wrist, and a tefach - the hand. Rav Auerbach says that sitting in the sukkah one is literally in the embrace of G-d!

May this year be one where we see the protection of G-d on a daily basis and the coming of Moshiach! Have a great yom tov! *This dvar torah was told by Rabbi Aaron Cohen in Cong. Tifereth Israel, Passaic, NJ*

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

The Gemara (Yoma 86a) teaches: "Rabbi Matia ben Charash asked Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah in Rome, 'Are you familiar with the four categories of atonement of which Rabbi Yishmael used to preach?' He answered: 'They are three, and Teshuvah accompanies each of them: (1) If one fails to fulfill an affirmative commandment and then repents, he is forgiven on the spot. (2) If one transgresses a negative commandment and then repents, Teshuvah protects him and Yom Kippur atones. (3) If one transgresses a sin that carries the punishment of Karet or the death penalty and then repents, Teshuvah and Yom Kippur protect him and suffering cleanses him. But, if he has the sin of Chillul Hashem / desecration of G-d's Name on his hands, Teshuvah alone cannot protect him, Yom Kippur cannot atone for him, and suffering cannot cleanse him. Rather, they all protect him until death cleanses him'." [Until here from the Gemara]

Nevertheless, writes R' Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z"l Hy"d (1885-1945; rabbi of, and Rosh Yeshiva in, Pietany, Czechoslovakia; killed in the Holocaust), one can be confident of atonement for all of his sins on Yom Kippur, even the most serious sins, with no need for suffering to cleanse him, if he prays with the congregation on this holy day. The reason is that the Teshuvah referred to in the above Gemara, which does not bring complete atonement, is Teshuvah performed out of fear of punishment. However, Teshuvah performed together with the congregation automatically has the status of Teshuvah performed out of love for Hashem. Such Teshuvah, the Gemara teaches, converts sins into merits, so that there is nothing left to atone. (Mishneh Sachir: Mo'adim p.234)

R' Meir Simcha Hakohen z"l (1843-1926; Dvinsk, Latvia) writes: A person who sins needs Hatzlachah / "good luck" in order not to cause a Chillul

Hashem. Two people might commit the same sin, but their paths to atonement will be completely different because one sinned when no one was looking and the other happened to sin in front of ten Jews, thus causing a Chillul Hashem.

Why is atonement for Chillul Hashem so difficult? R' Meir Simcha explains: We speak of Hashem having a Bet Din because G-d set up a system of justice in Heaven that mimics a human court system. [This based on our Sages teaching, "The Kingdom of Heaven is similar to a kingdom on earth." One reason why Hashem acts in this way may be that we would otherwise be unable to relate to Him.] As such, Hashem does not judge alone; rather, He sits in judgment together with angels. And, a court that includes angels cannot forgive a person for Chillul Hashem, as that would be equivalent to judges on a court voting to overlook an insult to the Chief Judge. Such a vote would itself be insulting to the Chief Judge.

Nevertheless, R' Meir Simcha writes, there is one opportunity each year to receive atonement for Chillul Hashem -- at Ne'ilah, when man's judgment is sealed. Although Hashem judges man together with angels, He alone seals man's judgment. Notwithstanding the Gemara quoted above, in the waning hours of Yom Kippur, when man's judgment is being sealed, Hashem does overlook His honor, and he forgives even Chillul Hashem if one's regret and remorse are sincere enough. (Meshech Chochmah: Haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah)

R' Ben Zion Neshet shlita (one of the senior rabbis in Tel Aviv, Israel) writes: In light of the above, we can suggest a novel interpretation for the words of the Pesach Haggadah (in the poem Adir Hu): "Ruling in royalty, feared of right [literally, 'Feared according to Halachah'] those who surround Him say..." In reality, Hashem rules alone. Nevertheless, according to Halachah -- i.e., the Gemara quoted above -- He must be greatly feared because of those who surround Him -- i.e., the angels around Him who prevent the sin of Chillul Hashem from being forgiven. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shir Tziyon p.119) © 2018 S. Katz & torah.org

