

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The popular author and TED lecturer Simon Sinek recently published a book entitled *The Infinite Game*.¹ Based on the distinction first articulated by James P. Carse,² it is about the difference between two types of enterprise. One, a finite game, has a starting and ending point. It obeys rules, recognises boundaries, and has winners and losers. Most sports are like this. So, often, is politics: there are campaigns, elections, rules and regulations, successful and defeated candidates. Businesses can be run this way, when they focus on quarterly profits, share price, market share and the like.

But there are also infinite games. These have no starting point or finishing line, no clear winners and losers, no agreed rules or boundaries. Art is like this. So are music and literature. Beethoven didn't win. Bach didn't lose. Great artists change the rules. That is what Beethoven, Schoenberg and Stravinsky did; so too did Van Gogh, Cézanne and Picasso. Politics can be like this when it rises above opinion polls and sets its vision on larger issues of justice, equality and the moral health of society. Education is a finite game when it focuses on exam results and qualifications, or it can be an infinite game when it is about breadth and depth of understanding and character development.

Finite games are played to win. Infinite games are played for their own sake. Finite games are usually performed in front of an audience of some kind. Infinite games are participative. We engage in them because we are changed by them. Van Gogh did not need to sell paintings to regard art as worthwhile. Beethoven was not seeking popularity when he wrote his late sonatas and quartets. James Joyce was not aiming at a bestseller when he wrote *Ulysses*.

Infinite games are not a means to an end: winning the championship, beating the market, victory in an election. Instead they are what psychologists call *autotelic*, that is, they contain their purpose within themselves. We do them because the activity is inherently creative, demanding, uplifting and ennobling.

It should be clear by now that these are not

simply two types of game. They are two different ways of playing a game. If, in any country at any time, politics is treated as a finite game in which all that matters are popularity ratings and election results, then it quickly becomes superficial, trivial, uninspiring. The quality of leadership declines. The public becomes cynical and disillusioned. Trust is eroded and the social bond becomes frayed. When politics is lifted by a sense of history and destiny on the part its leaders, when it becomes not the pursuit of power but a form of service-to-others and social responsibility, when it is driven by high ideals and ethical aspiration, then leadership becomes statesmanship and politics itself a noble calling.

This is not to denigrate finite games. We need them, because in many spheres of life we need rules, boundaries and time limits. But we must also have space for infinite games because they are among the highest expressions of the human spirit.

These reflections are prompted by two verses in today's parsha: Be sure to keep the commandments, decrees, and laws that the Lord your God has enjoined upon you. Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord... (Deut. 6:17-18)

The problem here is that the first verse seems to cover all 613 of the Torah's mitzvot. They are commandments, decrees or laws. Why then does the Torah add, "Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord"? Surely doing what is right and good is no more and no less than keeping God's commands, decrees and laws. Are these not two ways of saying the same thing?

However, as the Talmud³ explains: "And you shall do that which is right and good in the eyes of the Lord" means that one should not perform an action that is not right and good, even if they are legally entitled to do so. This is the basis of an important law in Judaism, *dina debar metzra*, "the law of the adjoining property." When a landowner comes to sell a tract of land, the owner of the adjacent land has the right to buy it. If it is sold to someone else, the buyer must return the land to the neighbour who then reimburses them for the price they paid for it.

This law is not about land ownership as such. In general, a landowner has the right to sell to whomever they choose. It is about doing "the right and

¹ Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, Portfolio Penguin, 2019.

² James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games*, Free Press, 1986.

³ Baba Metzra 108a.

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND ONLINE AT AISHDAS.ORG/TA.**

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the good” – what people sometimes call *menschlichkeit*. To the neighbour, the purchase of the land is an immense good. They can expand without dissipating their landholdings in different locations. To the outsider, losing this purchase is not a significant loss because they can acquire other fields elsewhere. The law of *bar metzra* departs from the usual principles of law in order to achieve a moral end: helping one’s neighbour.

Rashi, basing himself on this Talmudic passage, says that doing the right and good in the eyes of the Lord means “compromise, acting beyond the strict demands of the law.”⁴ Ramban agrees with this but goes on to make a fascinating and fundamental point:

And the intention of this is that from the beginning God said to keep God’s commandments, testimonies, and laws as God has commanded them. And now, it says: even regarding what God did not command, pay attention to do what is good and right in God’s eyes, because God loves goodness and righteousness. This is important because it is impossible to mention in the Torah all the details of people’s behaviour with neighbours and friends, or business conduct or local ordinances. The Torah mentions many such laws, such as: “Do not gossip”, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge”, “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbour”, “You shall not insult the deaf”, “You shall rise before the aged”, and so on. Now it states generally that one should do what is good and right regarding everything, including compromise and acting beyond the strict demands of the law.⁵

Ramban seems to be concurring with Rashi, but actually he is making a somewhat different point. Rashi is saying: keep the law and go beyond it. Ramban is saying that there are some things that cannot be specified by law: “because it is impossible to mention in the Torah all the details of people’s behaviour.” The Torah gives us specific examples:

⁴ *Lifnim mishurat hadin* actually means “within” not “beyond” the strict demands of the law. The meaning is: I have certain rights in law but I may decide not to exercise them because someone else’s welfare may be damaged if I do. “Within” means “I do not go up to the boundary in pressing my legitimate claim. I choose to forego my right.”

⁵ Ramban Commentary to Deut. 6:18; see also his commentary to Lev. 19:2 where he makes a similar case.

don’t gossip, don’t take revenge and so on. But the rest depends on the situation, the circumstances, and the person or people you are dealing with.

In the terms we encountered at the beginning of this essay: not all the Torah is a finite game. Much of it is. There are rules, commands, decrees and laws. There is the *halachah*. There are boundaries: milk, meat, public domain, private domain. There are beginnings and endings: the earliest time to say the morning *Shema* and the latest time. There are successes and defeats: either one does or doesn’t complete the counting of the Omer. All of this is finite even though it is dedicated to the One-who-is-Infinite.

Ramban’s point however (made also by the *Maggid Mishneh*⁶) is that there are significant areas of the moral life that cannot be reduced to rules. That is because rules deal in generalities, and human lives are particular. We are all different. So is every situation in which we find ourselves. Good people know when to speak, when to be silent, when to praise, when to challenge. They hear the unspoken word, sense the concealed pain, focus on the other person rather than on themselves, and are guided by a deeply internalised moral sense that leads them instinctively away from anything less than the right and the good. The “right and the good in the sight of the Lord” is about the part of the moral life that is an infinite game.

There is a fine account of such a person in Psalm 15: “One whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart... who does no wrong to a neighbour, and casts no slur on others;... who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind... Whoever does these things will never be shaken.”

I believe that we make a fundamental error when we think that all we need to know and keep are the rules governing interactions between us and our fellows. The rules are essential but also incomplete. We need to develop a conscience that does not permit us to wrong, harm or hurt someone even if the rules permit us to do so.⁷ The moral life is an infinite game which cannot be reduced to rules. We need to learn and internalise a sense of “the right and the good.” *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z”l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

You are a holy nation to the Lord your God... a treasured nation from amongst all the nations.... It was not because you were more

⁶ See *Maggid Mishneh* to Ramban, *Hilchot Shechenim* 14:3.

⁷ Ramban developed for this and similar cases the idea of *naval bi-reshut ha-Torah*. See His commentary to Lev. 19:2.

numerous than all the nations... that God chose you since you are the smallest of all nations. It is rather because God loves you and because of His keeping of the oath which He swore to your ancestors..." (Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

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

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

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

Furthermore, why refer to this particular Sabbath as Shabbat Nahamu, the Sabbath of comfort? Historically, the Israelites continued to fast in memory of the destruction of the First Temple throughout the period of the rebuilt Second Temple and renewed Jewish sovereignty in Jerusalem. We know this from a variety of sources, including Zechariah 7,8, from Josephus, 2nd Commonwealth historian, as well as from the legalist-philosopher Maimonides (Interpretations of the Mishnah, Rosh HaShanah 18). After all, even our miraculous survival and subsequent rebuilding cannot begin to remove the pain of the righteous adults and innocent children who lost their lives in the period of destruction, or erase the force of the agonizing question, Eicha?! Can our generation's remarkable return to our promised homeland provide any kind of reasonable response to the piercing question mark which arises from the smoke-stacks of Auschwitz and Buchenwald? So, from whence comes our comfort?

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

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

Moses came and countered, 'the great, powerful and awesome God' (Deut. 10)

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

Daniel came and cried out, 'The Gentiles are subjugating His children; where is His power?' And he (Daniel) deleted (the word) powerful (from God's praises in the Amidah).

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

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's message is indubitably clear. God has created an imperfect world of freedom of choice, a seemingly absurd and lawless world in which individuals will do even that which the Almighty would not want them to do (the Kabbalistic notion of tzimtzum, the willful "contraction" of the goodness and justice of the Creator of the Universe, as it were, in order to leave room for a world of free choice). As the prophet Isaiah (45:7) declares, "Creator of light and Maker of darkness, Doer of peace and Maker of evil (sic), I am the Lord, the Doer of all these things." God has confidence – and even guarantees – that eventually the wicked will repent, that human beings will eventually succeed in repairing and perfecting this world in the Kingship of the Divine, that there will eventually be a messianic period of world peace and well-being (Isaiah 2, Micah 4, Zechariah 7-9). Hence God allows the world to proceed in accordance "with its customary way," without preventing stolen seed from taking root in the ground, or withering the hand uplifted to smite an innocent human. Hence, "there is not reward for commandments in this world;" only in the other, eternal world of souls and spirituality will there be proper rewards for deeds well done (B.T. Kidushin 39).

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

Land of Israel and teach ethical monotheism to the entire world (Genesis 12:1-3)

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

This is God's power, this is God's awesomeness, and this is the source of our great comfort: God chose you since you are the smallest (weakest) of all nations, because God loves you" – not because you are perfect but because you are morally better than your enemies, and because your very survival testifies to the existence and eventual triumph of a God of Justice, morality and peace. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Shabbat immediately after the sad fast day of 9 Av is called Shabbat Nachamu -- the Shabbat of comfort and consolation. This Shabbat draws its name from the first two words of the prophet Yeshayahu, and this series of prophetic readings continues for seven weeks with a message of hope and contentment.

The prophetic readings leading up to the ninth of Av were only three in number, but the message of consolation is more than twice that in number. The prophet himself notes that the comforting message will be granted in a double manner (*Nachamu Nachamu*), and we receive seven weeks of comfort to counterbalance the three-week messages of doom and destruction.

We are all aware that there are many varied and valid reasons and motives for Jewish customs and traditions. All of these customs regarding the readings of these specific Haftorot and the reasons for them should not be treated lightly, and one should not dismiss them in a cavalier fashion simply because it may no longer seem to be appropriate to the situation.

Human life and behavior are too complex to attribute it to just one motive and reason. This is true regarding all details and aspects of Jewish tradition as well. There are ample examples in past and present Jewish society, how the abandonment of certain customs that modernists felt to be anachronistic

eventually led to violations of explicit Torah commandments and values themselves. Judaism should never be observed and viewed in a simplistic, superficial manner. It is too grand for such treatment.

There is a profound and important lesson to be derived from the fact that the prophecies of destruction required only three weeks of public reading while the prophecies of hope and consolation mandated a seven-week period of time on the Jewish calendar. Destruction requires far less time and effort to achieve its sad and nefarious goal. When the end comes, it does so with inevitably and swiftness. Great empires and powerful countries can exist for centuries but are consigned into the dustbin of history in only a few decades or even a few years. It is so much faster and easier to slide down than to attempt to rise and rebuild and struggle forward.

Rebuilding is a process, and it is never accomplished in an instantaneous and easy manner. There are many ups and downs that rebuilding will engender, disappointments, frustrations and even reversals. It will take much more time for the effort to comfort the Jewish people in its continuing effort to rebuild itself anew in its ancient homeland currently. The Jewish world was almost destroyed in a few years in the past century. It will take time to rebuild it. It is a continuing process along a very bumpy road.

We should be comforted realizing that the process has begun and is underway. There are many weeks and years ahead of us, as we continue our quest to be comforted. But we are already blessed with the knowledge that we have reached the season of comfort and consolation. ©2020 *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) in this week's portion implores God for permission to enter into Israel. (Deuteronomy 3:23) In the end, the request is denied. Even as Moshe uses every possible argument, God declares that He would never ever step foot into the Holy Land.

Not only is Moshe destined never to come to Israel, even his remains, his bones, would not be buried there. This in contrast to Yosef (Joseph). Although Yosef died in Egypt, when the Jews leave that country, they carry Yosef's bones for burial in Israel.

One wonders why? Why is Yosef buried in Israel while Moshe is not. The Midrash takes up this question and responds: Yosef while in Egypt was always identified as a Jew. Note that when the butler suggests to Pharaoh that Yosef could interpret his dreams, he refers to Yosef as the *na'ar ivri*—the Hebrew lad. (Genesis 41:12) Having been identified

as a Jew, Yosef was deemed worthy for burial in Israel.

Moshe on the other hand was not identified as a Jew. In fact, Yitro's (Jethro) daughters tell their father that ish mitzri – an Egyptian man, saved us from the shepherds who were harassing us. (Exodus 2:19) Not being identified as a Jew, Moshe is denied burial in the Holy Land. (Devarim Rabbah 2:8)

For me this Midrash brings to mind the days I spent visiting Israeli soldiers during the 1982 Lebanon War. One soldier, Shimon ben Tzion from Kiryat Arba was severely burned. Every day when visiting, I'd ask him to share a d'var Torah with me. Finally, on the last day there, he shared the Midrash cited above.

Looking into my eyes from the slits between his bandages, he asked: "but why should Moshe have been punished for being described as an Egyptian? Unlike Yosef who was born in Israel and, therefore, is a Hebrew, Moshe was born in Egypt. Thus, Moshe being called an Egyptian should not cast poor light upon him."

Turning himself even more to me, Shimon quoted Rabbi Kook, that no matter where a Jew is born, he is born in Israel. This was Moshe's mistake. Although born in Egypt, he was existentially a sabra, born in Israel. Here was this courageous soldier's way of telling me as I was about ready to leave for the United States, to remain connected to Israel.

Years later, our son Dov interviewed Avital Sharansky for his elementary school class report. Avital spent many Sabbaths with our family during the days when she led the freedom campaign on behalf of her imprisoned husband Natan, the famous Soviet Prisoner of Zion. Dov asked Avital, "Where were you born"? Avital answered, "Israel." My young Dov was flabbergasted. "But you're from Russia, everyone knows that." Avital answered, "every Jew, no matter where born, was born in Israel. And every Jew, no matter where that Jew is, is in Israel."

An important message, reminding us of our existential connection to Israel, our homeland. As Rav Nachman of Bratzlav once said, "Wherever I go, I am always only going to the land of Israel." ©2020 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 LEVIN

To Love Hashem

Parashat V'Etchanan is the source in our Torah for the basic statement of belief in Hashem that we recite twice every day in our tefillot. It is our statement of faith in the Oneness of Hashem and has been the final words of many Jewish martyrs who have given their lives to remain faithful to those words. But together with those six words of the Shema comes another important message. The Torah says, "And you shall love Hashem (Lord) your Elokim (G-d) with all

your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (possessions)."

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that most Hebrew words were formed by adding a beginning letter to a base of two letters. The beginning letter that is added has a characteristic that will be added to any word to which it is attached. The aleph at the beginning of ahav, love, is often reflexive, referring to the person acting with that word. The two-letter word hav (heh and vet) means to give or to bring. The word ahav then is a combination of "to give oneself and to bring to oneself." According to Hirsch, it is "the feeling of striving to get the closest attachment to the Other by completely giving oneself up to Him and endeavoring to make Him attached to you, i.e. Love, the most intimate bond between two beings." When the word ahav is then combined with the rest of the sentence, the love of Man to Hashem must be with everything that Man possesses; it is a love which is given with the wholeness of one's heart, one's soul, and one's possessions.

The question has always presented itself as to how Man can be commanded to love Hashem. The act of loving is an emotional and intellectual state which Man cannot control. The Rambam explains this love as an action which leads to love which in turn leads back to action. In Yesodei HaTorah (2:1) the Rambam writes, "The moment Man reflects on (Hashem's) deeds and creatures, both wondrous and great, perceiving through them His immeasurable and infinite wisdom, he cannot but love, praise and glorify Him, becoming seized of an overwhelming desire to know His great name." This study and observation of Hashem leads Man to the understanding of his own insignificance, and he is awed by the realization that Hashem is vitally concerned with Man in spite of his insignificance.

Bahya, in his classic work Chovot Hal'vavot, Duties of the Heart, sees the world as a distraction to Man in his search for Hashem. Man must look inside himself to discover that spark of Hashem that is planted in each person. Professor Nechama Leibovits explains that Bahya's Man discovers that "love here implies doing His will not out of an appreciation of His wonders and might but out of complete surrender to Him. It involves giving up the world including the contemplation of His creation as an expression of His marvels." The observation of Nature distracts Man from the contemplation of his inner soul; it is an obstacle that stands in his way and diverts his thoughts to extraneous matters so that it cannot be filled with the heavenly light.

Rashi approaches the love of Hashem from a more experiential direction. How can Man learn to love Hashem? "Perform His words (commandments) out of love. One who serves out of love cannot be compared to one who serves out of fear. One who serves at his master's side out of fear, once the master overburdens

him, he leaves and goes off.” One cannot be commanded to love Hashem but he can observe His commandments and serve Him out of love and appreciation rather than being concerned about any punishment. Serving Hashem with love leads eventually to the love of Hashem directly.

We are told to love Hashem “with all your heart (levav’cha)”. Hirsch explains that *leivav* as opposed to the simplified *leiv* indicates “the heart of hearts, the innermost center of the human organic body.” We are to love Hashem “with all your soul”, means with one’s “living and striving personality.” We are also commanded to love Hashem “with all your possessions or fortune”. According to Hirsch, “we have to prove our honoring Hashem in spirit and feelings, our love for Him, by investing the whole of our existence including our bodily existence, our desires, and our fortune.” We must be prepared to sacrifice our personal desires for the desires of Hashem. I am reminded of a young, recent ba’alat t’shuvah who came to my house late at night in tears. She had tried unsuccessfully for three years to be accepted in her High School talent performance. She was on the path to Hashem and yet was naturally drawn one last time to be accepted in her final year’s show. She was so excited that she was finally chosen but was now forced to make the decision of performing or not performing on Shabbat. She had to choose to love Hashem more than her own personal fame or desire. I told her that the decision had to be hers alone as only she could choose to love Hashem completely. Hirsch explains that “every thought, every feeling, every power that we have, everything that we possess is a bond that joins us to Him, that we possess as a pledge of His love, and dedicate to him as an offering of our love.” There is calmness, a satisfaction, that comes when we understand that we are to “fulfill not our own but His wishes, to be worthy to remain near Him, to make ourselves ever more and more worthy for His proximity. Man gives himself up entirely to the One Only Hashem and this complete resignation makes him harmoniously at one with whatever occurs in his life.”

It takes years to develop this kind of love of Hashem. We must begin by learning and performing His mitzvot out of a desire to become close to Hashem. As we begin to see His hand in everything we receive, we realize that the love that we have developed in doing His mitzvot is a love that we have directly for Hashem. We realize that everything that happens to us and for us is all a part of this love that Hashem has for us also. We begin to see our lives differently too. We see that disappointments we have, “tragedies” we experience, are all part of our “growing” process. We begin to see the good in everything we experience. Our love of Hashem refocuses and refines our vision. It is not a simple or easy level to achieve, but it is one that we can all approach. May Hashem assist us on this path and may we all experience a complete love of

Hashem “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Ga'al Yisrael

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

During the morning prayer service, one may not pause or interrupt between the blessing of redemption (*Ga'al Yisrael*), and the recitation of the *Amidah*. Even standing silently between them is prohibited. However, there is also a *halacha* that one must respond with an *Amen* after hearing a blessing. Thus, it would seem that someone who hears the *chazan* (cantor) complete the blessing of *Ga'al Yisrael* must answer *Amen*. But then he is creating an interruption between the blessing and the *Amidah*! What’s a person to do?

Some answer that saying *Amen* to *Ga'al Yisrael* is like saying *Amen* after one’s own blessing. In general, a person does not say *Amen* to his own blessing. However, if he is concluding a subject the *Amen* is considered part of the blessing and thus is not considered an interruption. (The classic example of this is in *Birkat HaMazon*, when we conclude our own blessing of “*Boneh Be-rachamav Yerushalayim*” by saying *Amen*.) Perhaps the *Amen* after *Ga'al Yisrael* is in the same category.

Others insist that the reciting of *Amen* at this point is an interruption and should be avoided. How can a person avoid taking sides in this disagreement?

The *poskim* offer three suggestions:

1. The person praying should try to reach *Ga'al Yisrael* a little before the *chazan*. He can then wait, recite *Amen* to the *chazan*’s blessing, then recite the blessing himself, and immediately begin the *Amidah*. However, this solution is not without its problems. First, one is not supposed to pause in the middle of the blessings following *Keriat Shema*. Second, ideally one is meant to begin the *Amidah* at the same time as the *chazan*.

2. The person praying should recite the blessing together with the *chazan*. In such a case, he is not required to say *Amen*, as a person does not say *Amen* to his own blessing. However, as we have seen, there is an opinion that in the case of *Ga'al Yisrael* a person does say *Amen* to his own blessing.

3. The person praying should start the *Amidah* before the *chazan*. Once someone is in the middle of the *Amidah*, he does not respond *Amen* under any circumstances. However, once again, this means one is not beginning the *Amidah* with the *chazan*.

A fourth solution is very commonly followed nowadays. Namely, the *chazan* recites *Ga'al Yisrael* under his breath. Since no one hears the blessing, no one needs to answer *Amen*. Interestingly, this practice is not mentioned anywhere in the literature. Can it be

that there truly is no source for it? ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Hashem was angry with me because of you and didn't listen to me." (Devarim 3:26) After 515 prayers to be allowed to enter the land of Israel, Hashem finally told Moshe to stop davening. It wasn't going to happen; he would not be allowed to enter the land of Israel. His prayers were effective to enable him to climb a mountain and see the land, but not to enter it.

It seems strange that Moshe, here, seems to be blaming the Jewish People for his inability to enter the Land of Israel. Not only that, he appears to imply that Hashem got angry with Moshe because of the Jews. For a leader, a father figure who has led his flock for four decades, is this appropriate? To be petty and say, "YOU ruined it for me!"?

Of course, this is not at all what happened. The commentaries have a few different ways of explaining this phrase. To begin with, it wasn't that the Jews did something to anger Hashem, (OK, some do say this) but Moshe. When he spoke to the Children of Israel and called them "rebellious," he degraded the honor of the Jewish People. This was an inappropriate way to speak to them, so Hashem got angry to defend their honor. With this, Moshe taught us the valuable lesson of treating others with dignity and respect.

Sforno explains that Hashem was angry that Moshe wished to ensure the Jews would remain in Israel permanently, when He had already decreed exile. On the one hand we learn not to flout Hashem's will (it won't succeed anyway) and on the other we learn that when Hashem decrees something, it is necessary for our own good and to stop it would be harmful to us. We should instead bear the difficulties with the understanding that there is a purpose to our travails.

Finally, the Malbim amplifies this message with something especially meaningful for Shabbos Nachamu. He says that had Moshe entered the land of Israel, he would have immediately ushered in the times of Moshiach. The Jews would have conquered all ten nations of Canaan (the 7 we know, plus Amon, Moav, and Se'ir/Esav.) The Bais HaMikdash Moshe built would never have been able to be destroyed. But there was a problem.

As we saw several times, the Jews then did not have the necessary level of Emunah and Bitachon, faith and trust in Hashem. Moshe would have been bringing them into a situation for which they were not prepared. When we faltered, there would have been no option for the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash or exile. All that would have been left would be to wipe us out and start again as Hashem did at the time of Noach.

By preventing Moshe from entering the land, Hashem was actually protecting us! When Moshe told the Jews Hashem got angry because of them, it was because what Moshe was proposing, though it seemed wonderful, would have had tragic consequences. We can now add to our lessons how much Hashem truly loves us; that no matter how bad things appear to us, He is treating us with love and compassion.

Shlomo HaMelech knew the language of every creature. A man begged to learn the language of birds. Shlomo said no but after persistent requests, he gave in. One day, the man heard the birds saying, "All the animals in this flock will die soon." The man quickly sold his animals and, sure enough, within a week they had all died.

Soon after, he heard birds on his window ledge saying, "This house will soon burn down." He sold his possessions and the house and made his money before the fire struck.

Finally, he heard the birds say, "This man will die soon."

Horrified, he ran to King Solomon. "I told you that you didn't want to know their language. You sinned and Hashem wanted to punish you through your flocks. You thwarted that plan and He intended to strike your home. You avoided that punishment too, and now there is nothing left to do but take your life. Hashem was doing you a favor but you "outsmarted" Him and now, sadly, you will have to pay the price." ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In this week's Parashah, the Torah recounts the Giving of the Torah. R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: Bnei Yisrael did not believe in Moshe because of the wonders that he performed, for one who believes because of wonders can have doubts, thinking that those wonders could have been acts of magic. Rather, Moshe performed wonders only to accomplish specific goals, not to prove the legitimacy of his prophecy. Why did Bnei Yisrael believe in Moshe? Because they saw and heard the Giving of the Torah with their own eyes and ears; they saw the fire and the thunder, and they heard Hashem calling to Moshe! [Until here from Rambam]

R' Yehuda Halevi z"l (Spain and Eretz Yisrael; approx. 1075-1141) would seem to disagree. He writes that when the king of the Khazars asked a Jewish scholar about his faith, the Jew replied: "We believe in the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, Who took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt with signs and wonders, Who sustained them in desert, Who gave them the Land of Canaan, Who sent Moshe with His Torah, and, after him, thousands of prophets to reinforce the Torah..."

R' Mordechai Neugroschl shlita writes that a

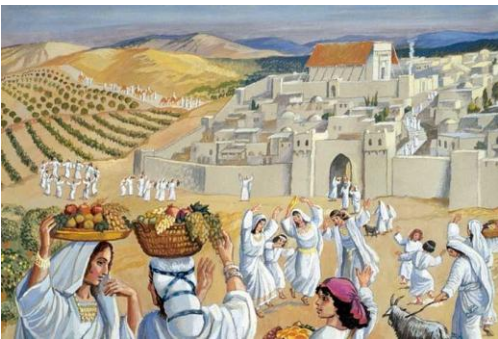
careful reading of these two sages' words shows that they do not disagree. Rambam is explaining why the Generation of the Exodus believed in Hashem and in Moshe: it was not because of the Plagues or other wonders, which might have been magic or sleight of hand; rather, it was because of the Revelation at Har Sinai. Once that Revelation occurred, however, we know in retrospect that Moshe was not a magician, but rather a true prophet. Thus, our own belief can be based on the wonders Moshe performed. (Ha'kuzari Im Beur Mi'darhei Ha'lev Ha'yehudi p.17)

"Let me now cross and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon." (3:25) The Gemara (Sotah 14a) asks rhetorically: Was Moshe Rabbeinu interested in entering Eretz Yisrael in order to eat its fruit? Rather, he wanted a chance to perform the Mitzvot associated with the produce of Eretz Yisrael. [Until here from the Gemara]

R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (1896-1974; Mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of *Enayim La'mishpat*) writes: In the "Al Ha'michyah" blessing, we pray to be able to eat the fruits of Eretz Yisrael ("V'nochal Mi'piryah / "And we will eat of its fruit..."). One reason may be that the fruits of Eretz Yisrael give the Land's inhabitants the physical strength to serve Hashem; thus, eating them is itself a spiritual activity for which we must be thankful. Yet, asks R' Arieli, the quoted Gemara seems to imply that asking to eat Eretz Yisrael's produce is not something praiseworthy!

Moreover, R' Arieli asks, how could the Gemara even entertain the idea that Moshe Rabbeinu's motivation for wanting to enter the Land was to eat its fruit? It could only be because the fruit also has spiritual qualities! Why, then, does the Gemara state that Moshe Rabbeinu did not need the fruits of the Land (except as a tool for performing Mitzvot)?

R' Arieli explains: When Bnei Yisrael reached Eretz Yisrael, the Mahn stopped falling. Apparently, the fruits of the Holy Land can provide the same physical and spiritual nourishment that the Mahn provided. Regarding the Mahn, the Gemara (Yoma 76a) comments on the verse (Tehilim 78:25), "The food of angels a man ate,"--this is Yehoshua (Moshe's successor).



Why not Moshe himself? This teaches that Moshe did not need even the spiritual benefits that the Mahn

provided. It follows that he also did not need the spiritual benefits that the fruit of Eretz Yisrael provide; therefore, the Gemara asks why he wanted to enter the Land. We, however, do need those benefits, so we do pray to eat of Eretz Yisrael's fruit. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha'geulah p.93-94)

"But you who cling to Hashem, your Elokim -- you are all alive today." (4:4) R' Yaakov Meir Spielman z"l (1813-1888; rabbi of Bucharest, Romania) writes: Philosophers have four views about the possibility of man "clinging" to G-d. Some say that it is impossible, for man is a lowly physical being and G-d is so lofty. Such people deny the possibility of prophecy, as well, and they are heretics. The second group acknowledges that man can cling to G-d after death, if his deeds warrant it. The third group believes in the possibility of prophecy, but believe that only one person in a generation can attain that level. The fourth group believes that not only prophets, but also philosophers can attain the ultimate connection to G-d, if they afflict their physical bodies for a long time.

R' Spielman continues: In our verse, Moshe Rabbeinu nullifies all of these opinions. (1) "But you who cling to Hashem, your Elokim" -- it is possible to cling to G-d; (2) "you are... alive" -- it is not necessary to wait until after one dies to cling to Him; (3) "all" -- not just the elite; and (4) "today" -- it does not have to take a long time. (Nachalat Yaakov: Introduction)

"You shall love Hashem, your Elokim, with all 'Levavcha' / your heart..." (6:5) Noting the Torah's use of "Levavcha" ("לבבך"), instead of the simpler "Libcha" ("לבך"), the Mishnah (Berachot 9:4) interprets: "With both your inclinations -- the Yetzer Ha'tov / good inclination and Yetzer Ha'ra / evil inclination."

R' Zvi Binyamin Auerbach z"l (1808-1872; rabbi of Halberstadt, Germany) explains: Rambam z"l notes in his work *Shemoneh Perakim* (ch.6) that there is a debate amongst philosophers whether it is preferable to have no temptation to sin in the first place or to be tempted, but to toil to overcome that temptation. The Torah's viewpoint, Rambam concludes, is that it depends on the type of sin. If something is inherently wrong--for example, murder, stealing, or cheating--it is preferable to have no temptation. But, if something is wrong only because the Torah prohibits it--for example, eating pork or wearing Sha'atnez--the proper attitude is: "I would love to do it, but what can I do? G-d said no!"

This, writes R' Auerbach, is alluded to in our verse: Love Hashem with your good inclination--i.e., when right versus wrong is obvious, serve Hashem because it is "right." And, love Hashem with your evil inclination--i.e., by subduing the Yetzer Ha'ra when the only reason for doing so is because of G-d's command. (Cheil Ha'tzava) © 2020 S. Katz & torah.org