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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

"If only you would listen to these laws…" (Deut. 7:12). These words with which our parsha begins contain a verb that is a fundamental motif of the book of Devarim. The verb is sh-m-a. It occurred in last week's parsha in the most famous line of the whole of Judaism, Shema Yisrael. It occurs later in this week's parsha in the second paragraph of the Shema, "It shall be if you surely listen [shamoa tishme'u]" (Deut. 11:13). In fact, this verb appears no less than 92 times in Devarim as a whole.

We often miss the significance of this word because of what I call the fallacy of translatability: the assumption that one language is fully translatable into another. We hear a word translated from one language to another and assume that it means the same in both. But often it doesn't. Languages are only partially translatable into one another.[1] The key terms of one civilisation are often not fully reproducible in another. The Greek word megalopsychos, for example, Aristotle's "great-souled man" who is great and knows he is, and carries himself with aristocratic pride, is untranslatable into a moral system like Judaism in which humility is a virtue. The English word "tact" has no precise equivalent in Hebrew. And so on.

This is particularly so in the case of the Hebrew verb sh-m-a. Listen, for example, to the various ways the opening words of this week's parsha have been translated into English:

If you hearken to these precepts…
If you completely obey these laws…
If you pay attention to these laws…
If you heed these ordinances…
Because ye hear these judgments…

There is no single English word that means to hear, to listen, to heed, to pay attention to, and to obey. Sh-m-a also means "to understand," as in the story of the tower of Babel, when God says, "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand [yishme'u] each other" (Gen. 11:7).

As I have argued elsewhere, one of the most striking facts about the Torah is that, although it contains 613 commands, it does not contain a word that means "to obey." When such a word was needed in modern Hebrew, the verb le-tzayet was borrowed from Aramaic. The verb used by the Torah in place of "to obey" is sh-m-a. This is of the highest possible significance. It means that blind obedience is not a virtue in Judaism. God wants us to understand the laws He has commanded us. He wants us to reflect on why this law, not that. He wants us to listen, to reflect, to seek to understand, to internalise and to respond. He wants us to become a listening people.

Ancient Greece was a visual culture, a culture of art, architecture, theatre and spectacle. For the Greeks generally, and Plato specifically, knowing was a form of seeing. Judaism, as Freud pointed out in Moses and Monotheism,[2] is a non-visual culture. We worship a God who cannot be seen; and making sacred images, icons, is absolutely forbidden. In Judaism we do not see God; we hear God. Knowing is a form of listening. Ironically, Freud himself, deeply ambivalent though he was about Judaism, invented the listening cure in psychoanalysis: listening as therapy.[3]

It follows that in Judaism listening is a deeply spiritual act. To listen to God is to be open to God. That is what Moses is saying throughout Devarim: "If only you would listen." So it is with leadership – indeed with all forms of interpersonal relationship. Often the greatest gift we can give someone is to listen to them.

Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz and went on to create a new form of psychotherapy based on "man's search for meaning," once told the story of a patient of his who phoned him in the middle of the night to tell him, calmly, that she was about to commit suicide. He kept her on the phone for two hours, giving her every conceivable reason to live. Eventually she said that she had changed her mind and would not end

[1] Robert Frost said: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." Cervantes compared translation to the other side of a tapestry. At best we see a rough outline of the pattern we know exists on the other side, but it lacks definition and is full of loose threads.

[2] Vintage, 1955

[3] Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim) famously described Freudian psychoanalysis as "the talking cure," but it is in fact a listening cure. Only through the active listening of the analyst can there be the therapeutic or cathartic talking of the patient.

her life. When he next saw the woman he asked her which of his many reasons had persuaded her to change her mind. "None," she replied. "Why then did you decide not to commit suicide?" She replied that the fact that someone was prepared to listen to her for two hours in the middle of the night convinced her that life was worth living after all.[4]

As Chief Rabbi I was involved in resolving a number of highly intractable agunah cases, situations in which a husband was unwilling to give his wife a get so that she could remarry. We resolved all these cases not by legal devices but by the simple act of listening: deep listening, in which we were able to convince both sides that we had heard their pain and their sense of injustice. This took many hours of total concentration and a principled absence of judgment and direction. Eventually our listening absorbed the acrimony and the two sides were able to resolve their differences together. Listening is intensely therapeutic.

Before I became Chief Rabbi, I was head of our rabbinical training seminary, Jews' College. There in the 1980s we ran one of the most advanced practical rabbinics programmes ever devised. It included a three-year programme in counselling. The professionals we recruited to run the course told us that they had one precondition. We had to agree to take all the participants away to an enclosed location for two days. Only those who were willing to do this would be admitted to the course. We did not know in advance what the counsellors were planning to do, but we soon discovered. They planned to teach us the method pioneered by Carl Rogers known as 'non-directive' or 'person-centred' therapy. This involves active listening and reflective questioning, but no guidance on the part of the therapist.

As the nature of the method became clear, the Rabbis began to object. It seemed to oppose everything they stood for. To be a Rabbi is to teach, to direct, to tell people what to do. The tension between the counsellors and the Rabbis grew almost to the point of crisis, so much so that we had to stop the course for an hour while we sought some way of reconciling what the counsellors were doing with what the Torah seemed to be saying. That is when we began to reflect, for the first time as a group, on the spiritual dimension of listening, of Shema Yisrael.

The deep truth behind person-centred therapy is that listening is the key virtue of the religious life. That is what Moses was saying throughout Devarim. If we want God to listen to us, we have to be prepared to listen to Him. And if we learn to listen to Him, then we eventually learn to listen to our fellow humans: the silent cry of the lonely, the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the people in existential pain.

When God appeared to King Solomon in a dream and asked him what he would like to be given, Solomon replied: lev shome'a, literally "a listening heart" to judge the people (1 Kings 3:9). The choice of words is significant. Solomon's wisdom lay, at least in part, in his ability to listen, to hear the emotion behind the words, to sense what was being left unsaid as well as what was said. It is common to find leaders who speak, very rare to find leaders who listen. But listening often makes the difference.

Listening matters in a moral environment as insistent on human dignity as Judaism. The very act of listening is a form of respect. To illustrate this, I would like to share a story with you. The royal family in Britain is known always to arrive on time and depart on time. I will never forget the occasion -– her aides told me that they had never witnessed it before – when the Queen stayed for two hours longer than her scheduled departure time. The day was 27 January 2005, the occasion, the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The Queen had invited survivors to a reception at St James' Palace. Each had a story to tell, and the Queen took the time to listen to every one of them. One after another came up to me and said, "Sixty years ago I did not know whether tomorrow I would be alive, and here I am talking to the Queen." That act of listening was one of the most royal acts of graciousness I have ever witnessed. Listening is a profound affirmation of the humanity of the other.

In the encounter at the Burning Bush, when God summoned Moses to be a leader, Moses replied, "I am not a man of words, not yesterday, not the day before, not from the first time You spoke to Your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Ex. 4:10). Why would God choose a man who found it difficult to speak to lead the Jewish people? Perhaps because one who cannot speak learns how to listen.

A leader is one who knows how to listen: to the unspoken cry of others and to the still, small voice of God. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Remember the entire path along which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the desert, He sent hardships to test you." (Deut. 8:2) "The land which you are about to inherit is not like Egypt." (Deut. 11:10) Our Biblical portion of Ekev devotes much praise to the glories of the Land of Israel; its majestic topography, its luscious produce, and its freely-flowing milk and honey. And in order to conceptually explain the truly unique quality of our land promised us by God, the Biblical text – in chapters eight and eleven of the Book of Deuteronomy – contrasts the Land of Israel with the desert experience of manna on

[4] Anna Redsand, Viktor Frankl: A Life Worth Living, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006, 113-14.

the one hand and the geographical and geological gifts of Egypt on the other, with Israel coming out far ahead. In this commentary – heavily inspired by Rav Elhanan Samet's "Studies of the Weekly Portions" – I shall attempt to understand what it is that makes the Land of Israel so special.

The Israelite wanderers are hardly enamored with the manna they receive in the desert. Again and again they complain about the lack of meat and fish (Numbers 11:1-7), about the scarcity of water and fruits, crying out in despair, "Why did you bring God's congregation into this desert? So that we and our livestock should die? Why did you take us out of Egypt and bring us to this terrible place? [The desert] is an area where there are no plants, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates, no water to drink" (11:4,5). And even in our portion of Ekev, God describes the desert years as years of "hardships to test you," of "chastisement and training" (Deut. 8:3,5). The moral message of the inexhaustible manna was merely to teach the people that the ultimate source of food is God, "so that you may observe His commandments and fear Him" (8:3,6).

Indeed, the desert's difficulties are contrasted with future life in the Land of Israel, the Torah narrative praising the Promised Land's blessings. In three packed verses (8:7-9) the land (eretz) – in contrast to the desert – is referred to seven times, a chiastic structure reveling in the seven special species of fruit for which Israel is esteemed (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and date-honey), a "good land with flowing streams and underground springs, gushing out in valley and mountain, whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will quarry copper."

The wondrous descriptions depict a wide range of foods and natural resources produced by the earth – from bread and olive oil to copper mines – all of which require serious human ingenuity, input and energy to create a partnership with God to properly develop the gifts inherent in the land. After all, to properly irrigate the fields, rainwater must be collected and gathered through the underground springs; the making of bread requires eleven agricultural steps; oil must be carefully extracted from the olive trees by means of olive presses; and the copper must be painstakingly quarried from the depths of the mountains. It is precisely this partnership between God and humanity that is critically necessary to develop – and ultimately perfect – the world which we have been given.

It shouldn't surprise us that Egypt, representing the very antithesis of the desert ("the gift of the Nile," in the words of Herodotus) is where agriculture had initially developed – a development which made the land of the Pharaohs the most commanding power of the ancient world. And so, chapter eleven of the Book of Deuteronomy, in our portion of Ekev, provides a dazzling parallel (verses 8-12) to the passage we discussed earlier (8:7-9), similarly emphasizing the "defining and leading" word eretz, land.

Interestingly enough, in our passage where "eretz" is mentioned seven times, the land of Israel is the focus of all but one, the fourth time, when it refers to Egypt. On one level the contrast is between land and desert, but the Torah's intention is to provide a contrast between Egypt and Israel, the latter introduced as the "land flowing with milk and honey" (11:9). The Biblical text continues: "Because the land you are about to inherit is not like Egypt, the place you left, where you could plant your seed and irrigate it with your feet, just like a vegetable garden" (11:10). Since the fertility of Egyptian land and the cultivation of its crops does not depend on rainfall but is effectively irrigated by the Nile's natural overflow and from the omnipresent moisture of the great river, Egyptians did not need to turn to the heavens for rain.

However, while Egyptian land may be easily cultivated, it remains a dry, desert valley, unlike Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey: milk derived from livestock grazing on fields of natural growing grass and honey from bees that thrive in areas blessed by a natural abundance of flora. It may be difficult to live only on milk and honey – but it is possible. And more importantly: "The land you are crossing to occupy is a land of mountains and valleys, which can be irrigated only by rain. It is therefore a land constantly under the Lord your God's scrutiny; the eyes of the Lord your God are on it at all times, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (Deut. 11:11,12).

Ancient Egypt had very little to offer in the God-human partnership. The rich, fertile soil of the 'gift of the Nile' makes the agricultural process a relatively simple one, its dependency on rain removed. Israel, abundant in its natural supply of resources, nevertheless must rely heavily both on plentiful rainfall as well as human input for a successful agricultural crop. And since Israel must rely on God – the obvious source for rain – the Israelites must be worthy of God's grace by dint of their ethical and moral conduct, their fealty to God's laws. Hence our Biblical portion concludes with a call to sensitive fulfillment of God's laws as the key to our successful harvesting of the land's produce. Perhaps this is really why Israel is called the land 'flowing with milk and honey: only milk and honey can be garnered without destroying any form of life whatsoever – human, animal or plant.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's portion includes the verse upon which is based the obligation to recite the Grace after Meals. The text reads "and you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God upon the land which is good" (Deuteronomy 8:10).

· The Talmud understands the first words, "and

you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God," as the obligation to offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God after eating.

· The phrase "upon the land" instructs us to add a blessing of thanksgiving to God for giving us the land of Israel.

· And the words "which is good" are taken to mean that an additional blessing thanking God for Jerusalem, the goodly spiritual center of the land, is included as a third blessing.

Here is the biblical basis for the first three blessings of the Grace: "hazan" – the blessing for food; "al ha'aretz" – the blessing for the land; and "Boneh Yerushalayim" – the blessing for Jerusalem (Berachot 48b).

The question arises: Thanking God for food is completely understandable, but why include blessings for Israel and Jerusalem?

It can be suggested that not only are we thanking God for the food that we've eaten, but we are also expressing confidence that food will be provided in the future. The place where this confidence is greatest is in Israel. In the Diaspora, even the most comfortable of Diasporas – and, when appropriate, we must always express gratitude to countries wherein we reside – we can never be sure of the way we will be treated in the future, hence, there is a level of uncertainty about where the next morsel will come from.

Indeed, Jews today keep the holidays for two days in the Diaspora out of concern that anti-Semitism could once again spiral, resulting in the confiscation of Bibles, prayerbooks, and yes, even Jewish calendars. To make sure Jews would know how to conduct themselves in such a circumstance, two days are still kept as was done millennia ago when calendars were not available. In the words of the Talmud: "Be careful with the custom of your ancestors…for it might happen that the government may issue a decree and it will cause confusion [concerning holiday observance]" (Beitzah 4b).

Lest we think that the focus of Israel is only land, the physical protection of Jews, we add the blessing of Jerusalem, symbolic of the spirituality of Israel so necessary for its survival. A land without a spiritual mission is like a body without a soul.

The Talmud adds that the rabbis introduced a fourth blessing (Hatov v'Hametiv) in which we recall that even after the destruction of the Second Temple, a period of devastation, Jews expressed thanks to God for allowing the bodies of those who fell in the rebellion against Rome to be returned. Miraculously, also, the remains were intact. Thus, the word tov is repeated (Berachot 48b).

This is an important message to all of us to do all we can to have the bodies of slain Israeli soldiers returned for proper burial.

Homiletically, it can be suggested that the double tov is a microcosm of all of Jewish history: no matter the challenge, no matter the setback, Jews never lost hope that one day things would again be "good," even "better" – Israel would be redeemed.

And so, concluding paragraphs were added to the Grace after Meals, expressing the hope that the Messiah would soon come.

The upshot: in expressing gratitude to God for food, we recount the basic themes that have carved out Jewish destiny and our dreams for the future – Israel, Jerusalem, and the hope of ultimate redemption. *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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"You shall eat and be satisfied and bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land He has given you." (Devarim 8:10) This is the source for the mitzvah of Birkas HaMazon, also known as "Grace after meals," or "Benching." Though most blessings are of Rabbinic origin, this one is a mitzvah d'oraysa, a Torah commandment.

The commentaries explain that when we eat to satiety, we are to also thank Hashem for giving us a good land like Israel where all this good is possible, not that we only need to fulfill this mitzvah when we are actually eating in Israel. The point is that we think about the slavery in Egypt and that Hashem took us out, and we then bless Him for His bounty.

What is unusual about this mitzvah is that it seems to be open-ended, only requiring one to recite the benching when he is satisfied. This could be a different amount for each person as some get filled up faster than others. In that case, we've created a "different Mitzvah" for each person, something we don't do. Additionally, what does being filled up have to do with the Land of Israel? I may be appreciative of the land yet still hungry, or be full yet not appreciate the gift of our heritage. Why do these seem to be interrelated?

The Mishna in Yoma cites that the amount of food one needs to eat on Yom Kippur to be liable for failing to "afflict" himself is a "koseves hagasa," food the size of a large fig with its pit. Though the size of food generally considered "eating" is a k'zayis, the size of an olive, the Rabbanan said that the larger amount of a koseves settles one's mind, but less than that does not.

What we see is that satisfaction does not emanate from the stomach, but rather from the mind. This is reminiscent of the promise of keeping Shemita, the Sabbatical year. Hashem promises us that if we keep the laws of Shemita we will be blessed, but only if we worry about what we will eat will He send an abundance in the sixth year, which will require much more work to harvest and store. Otherwise, we'd simple

be satisfied with less.

The posuk here is telling us that when you eat, whatever amount Hashem has given you, be it a simple meal of bread or a lavish feast like Shlomo HaMelech's (and he experienced both ends of that spectrum), if you reflect and consider the kindnesses that Hashem has given you, and the difficult situations from which He has rescued you, you will be able to appreciate what He gives you and find satisfaction in what He has given you today.

Then, with your mind in a good place and a happy and satisfied outlook, you will be able to bless Him as you should. The mitzvah is perhaps not so much about reciting the blessing, but getting yourself to the place where you appreciate every "little" thing, and even the potential good, and find yourself brimming with gratitude to the point where you simply must bless Hashem.

R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld z"l had a dream one night. He dreamed that if he bought a specific lottery number, it would win. When he awoke, he thought about buying the ticket.

"I have one lira to spend," he thought. "I can either use it to buy food for today, or I can buy the lottery ticket. HaShem gives me my parnasa every day. I must only use the money for today, and tomorrow He will provide again."

Of course, the number he dreamed of won.

Someone asked him if he felt bad about not buying the ticket. "Of course not," he replied. "I did what the Torah tells me I was supposed to do with my money. I am happy I did the right thing and have no regrets."

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Grace After Meals

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The verse instructs us to "Bless the Lord your G-d for the good land" (*Devarim* 8:10). Our Sages (*Berachot* 48b) extrapolate from here that the Torah requires three blessings to be included in *Birkat HaMazon.* The first blesses G-d for providing food (*Birkat HaZan*), the second blesses G-d for the Land of Israel (*Birkat HaAretz*), and the third blesses G-d for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (*Boneh Yerushalayim*). If they are based on the verse, how can the Talmud also tell us that Moshe instituted the first blessing, Yehoshua the second, and David and Shlomo the third? It must be that while the content was established at Sinai, the precise words that we recite were formulated by Yehoshua, David, and Shlomo.

Since *Birkat HaZan* was instituted by Moshe Rabbeinu, it is surprising that some versions of the blessing include the verse: "You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing" (*Tehillim* 145:16). After all, *Tehillim* was written by King David, who lived much later than Moshe. The likely explanation is that some of the verses of *Tehillim* were formulated at an early stage, and King David wrote them down at a later stage. This is borne out by the language used in *Birkat HaZan* to introduce the verse: "As it is **said**, 'You open your hand,'" and not "As it is **written**, 'You open your hand.'"

As we mentioned, the specific formulation of the blessings was originally different from what we recite today. A person could have fulfilled his obligation (for *Birkat HaZan*) by saying in Aramaic, "Blessed is the merciful One, King, the Creator of this bread." Along the same lines, when someone sings *Tzur MiShelo* – the Shabbat song whose structure is parallel to that of *Birkat HaMazon* and incorporates the same themes – it is possible that he has fulfilled his obligation to recite *Birkat HaMazon*. Accordingly, perhaps a person should have in mind when he sings *Tzur MiShelo* that he does not intend to fulfill his obligation. This way, he ensures that his fulfillment of the mitzva takes place only when he recites the classic *Birkat HaMazon*.

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Relating to Hashem

Parashat Eikev contains words of guidance from Moshe about how to relate to Hashem. The Torah cautions the people, "And now, Israel, what does Hashem, your Elokim, ask of you but to fear Hashem, your Elokim, to go in His ways and to love Him with all of your heart and with all of your soul." The Torah continues, "For Hashem your Elokim, He is the Hashem of the powers and the Lord of the lords, the great, the mighty, and awesome Hashem, Who does not show favor and does not take a bribe. He carries out the judgment of orphan and widow, and loves the stranger (convert) to give him bread and clothing. You shall love the convert (stranger) for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear Hashem, your Elokim, Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave, and with His name shall you swear. He is your praise and He is your Elokim, Who did for you these great and awesome things that your eyes saw."

Our first sentence gives us a series of descriptions of Hashem, each with a different aspect of His relationship with Man. Hashem is described as "the G-d of gods." The Or HaChaim interprets these words to mean that Hashem is the Supreme Being over all others that people may consider to be supreme. Hashem is G-d over the angels who are placed in charge of parts of the world but may act only at the bidding of Hashem. These are the Heavenly bodies. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin uses a secondary translation to mean "judge." He speaks of Hashem as the judge of all judges Who punishes the sinner. Hashem presides over every court as the final judge, Who will punish those who are unable to be punished because of a lack of witnesses or some other disqualification. He will also

correct any misjudgments on earth and reward those who have been punished unduly. Sforno understands that Hashem is "the purest of all the pure that are separated from all material matters."

The second description of Hashem is the Lord of the lords (Master of the masters). Sforno explains this to mean that Hashem is the leader of leaders, the Being that is in charge of all other leaders. The Ibn Ezra describes Hashem as being on a level above all others. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that all of Nature is submissive to His power, all the rulers of men to His rule. Rashi explains that "there exists no lord who can save you from His hand." Once we understand that Hashem is the only Supreme Being over all others, then we must also understand that no human leader or even an angel can save the sinner from Hashem's decree.

Hashem is described as "The great, the mighty, and awesome Hashem." Sforno tells us that no other being is on the same level as Hashem in His greatness, and that everything that exists owes its existence to Hashem. Hirsch explains that Hashem uses His might to rule the world. What makes Hashem awesome is the fact that He is "not indifferent to how His human beings live on earth, what they think and do and refrain from doing, people have to take His Will into consideration with all their thinking and willing and doing, and above all, to fear Him as soon as they dare to set their will and their actions in opposition to His Will."

The Torah continues, "He does not show favor." A judge may not show favor to either party in a dispute. He may not favor the poor against the rich nor the rich against the poor. He must judge solely on the content of the facts. Hirsch tells us that Hashem "only values the true value of men, and finds no substitute for true human worth either in social position or in descent, not in intellectual superiority and talents." Rashi and Sforno understand this phrase to mean that Hashem will not show favor to one who casts off the yoke of the mitzvot. This implies that Hashem does show favor to one who observes the mitzvot. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Aharon and his children were commanded to bless the people with the phrase, "Hashem causes His countenance to shine on you and be gracious to you." This can be understood to mean that Hashem will give favor to you when you observe His commandments. Hashem gave mitzvot to the B'nei Yisrael and they went beyond what was required of them in their love of Hashem. "How can I not show favor to Yisrael, for I wrote in My Torah 'you shall eat, you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem', and they are careful to bless Hashem even over an olive's worth or an egg's worth. How could I not show favor to them and bless My people with Peace?"

Hashem is described as, "He will not accept a bribe." Hashem cannot be tempted by money or any other form of gift. This might seem strange in light of the korbanot, sacrifices, which are designed by Hashem to forgive the people their sins. But a korban can only atone for a sin if it is accompanied by teshuvah, a redirection of one's life away from sin. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the bringing of a korban or the giving of tzedakah is a sign that teshuvah preceded the action, as the action would not have been done if one intended to continue on the wrong path. A person who has sinned is like a man carrying a bundle of sins over one shoulder. He must accumulate a bundle of mitzvot to carry over the other shoulder so that he is balanced. Now when he is judged it is as a person who has an equal number of sins and mitzvot.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains that we are not really worthy of using Hashem's name in our oaths unless the other conditions of fearing Hashem, serving Him, and clinging to Him are first a part of us. If one would swear in the name of the King or in the name of his friend, we would not accept his oath without knowing that he loved the King or his friend. It is that love which guarantees his fulfillment of the oath. Hirsch explains that our love of Hashem emanates from the fact that He guides our lives and our fate. It is because of Hashem's guidance and direction that we respond with our love for Him.

We see from each of these sentences that Moshe wished to convey to the B'nei Yisrael a deep sense of Hashem's involvement in the world. We must be cognizant of Hashem's presence in our own world and respond properly to Him. And what response is demanded of us? We must learn to connect to Hashem and to appreciate His guidance, and we must emulate Hashem's actions towards the people around us. We must be keenly aware of the needs of the widow and the orphan, and we must welcome and assist the strangers and converts in our midst. These are people without the normal support system within the community. There are others within our communities that need this support also. By emulating Hashem, we understand that these people are also our responsibility. We see how Hashem treats us, and we apply that same approach to our fellowman. May we be constantly aware of Hashem's special relationship with the B'nei Yisrael, and may we learn to emulate that same care to others.

RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

Money, the Root of All...

Tzedaka, charity, is one of the foundations of the Jewish people. Our ancestor Avraham was the paragon of doing for others and imbued his descendants with social responsibility and concern.

Jews, despite being a miniscule representation of the world population, are disproportionate in their charitable giving. Wherever they find themselves around the globe, the Chosen People have either created or strongly supported social causes.

All of this raises an interesting observation on this week's Parsha. In retelling their journeys in the desert, Moshe says: " שמלתך לא בלתה מעליך ורגלך לא בצקה זה ארבעים שנה" "Your clothing did not whither from upon you and feet didn't swell these 40 years"

Moshe reminds the Jewish nation that ALL of their needs, both physical and spiritual, were tended to by HaShem during their time in the desert. They were provided with food and clothing and suffered no ailments.

Rav Shimshon Pinkus, Z"L, points out that this means that there was no need for tzedaka for those first 40 years. How could it be that a nation, built on the principles of caring for others, would be bereft of the actions of charity and kindness?

His answer provides us with an understanding to just how powerful acts of tzedaka and chesed can be.

It is written (Mishlei 10:2) that צדקה תציל ממות "Charity can save one from death".

Due to the sin of the accepting the report of the spies, it was decreed on the generation in the desert to die off prior to entering the Land. It was a heavenly mandate that even Moshe could not avert.

Rav Pinkus explains that had the people been able to perform charitable acts, they would have overcome from the death sentence resulting from that decree. In order to be able to enter Eretz Yisrael, the people who participated with spies had to die in the desert.

Tzedaka is so powerful that it can reverse a divine punishment. In order to facilitate the fulfillment of the decree and allow entrance to the land, HaShem removed the opportunity to give to each other and took care of all of their needs Himself.

How is tzedaka so powerful that it can protect one from death?

Perhaps it can be understood from the famous saying "money is the root of all evil". Money represents materialism and all of the potential ills that it can bring. The pursuit of money can often steer a person away from spiritual growth. Money can be "dirty", both in the literal as well as figurative sense.

What happens when someone uses money for good?

They give of their own to someone who may be less fortunate. Rather than only building their own futures, they "invest" in the improvement of others.

When HaShem sees a person transform the potentially negative aspects of money to good He says, I too will change the bad to good and save them from death.

Everything and everyone in creation has potential, for good or not so good.

It is our choice how to channel our energies, resources and money.

While some might say that "money is the root of all evil", the Torah teaches us that when used properly, it can be the source for life as well.

May all of our pursuits culminate in good, for us as well as for the world around us.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And the Children of Israel traveled from B'eiros B'nei Ya'akun to Moseira; there Aharon died, and he was buried there, and his son Elazar took over his priestly duties" (D'varim 10:6). This verse says rather explicitly that Aharon died at Moseira, while previous verses (Bamidbar 20:22-28, 33:37-39) state explicitly that he died at Hor Hahar. In order to explain this discrepancy, Rashi (on our verse and on Bamidbar 26:13), based on Chazal (Yerushalmi Soteh 1:10), says that after Aharon died at Hor Hahar and the protective "clouds of glory" left, the nation was attacked. This in turn led to much of the nation retracing their steps with the intention of returning to Egypt. The Tribe of Levi chased after them to bring them back, and a civil war ensued, causing much loss of life (several prominent families were wiped out in this war). This war occurred at Moseira, so although the Levi'im were able to bring everyone (at least those who didn't die in the civil war) back, since the tragic consequences of the civil war were the result of Aharon's death, the nation mourned for him (again) at Moseira, and considered it as if he had died there rather than at Hor Hahar.

Rabbi Isaac S. D. Sassoon ("Destination Torah") points out that the Torah says Aharon died in Moseira even though this was not literally true, based on the nation's perception of where his death took place. Or as Rabbi Sassoon put it, "this explanation enshrines a cardinal principle, viz., that the Torah may report an event the way it is perceived by the people or remembered in their collective memory. It is a principle that should probably be seen as an offshoot of that other great hermeneutical law: 'the Torah uses language after the manner of people." Put a different way, perception becomes reality, and a statement that would not normally be considered true or accurate is now considered a "true" statement.

That the Torah may teach things in a way that is, on its surface, misleading, is evident from how Rashi explains the death of Avraham's father, Terach, being stated well before it actually occurred: "And Terach died in Charan" (B'reishis 11:32); "[he died] after Avram left Charan and came to the Land of Canaan and was there for more than 60 years." Rashi then proves this chronology before continuing: "and why did the Torah discuss Terach's death before discussing Avram leaving [Charan] (if he left so many years before Terach died)? So that it not be obvious to all [whereby] they will say that Avram did not fulfill [the commandment of]

honoring his father, as he abandoned him in his elderly years and went away."

[It should be noted that Rashi's Midrashic source (B'reishis Rabbah 39:7) has it as Avraham being concerned that others would think he didn't honor his father. This is significant because rather than G-d trying to "hide" the true chronology in order to mislead those who might use Avraham leaving Terach behind as a way of rationalizing not honoring their parents, G-d was placating Avraham by minimizing his concern about how he would be perceived. Additionally, the Midrash (and Rashi) make it a point to add that technically Terach could have been considered "dead" since "the wicked are considered dead even while they are still (physically) alive," which could make the chronological impression (that Terach "died" before Avraham left Charan) a "true" one even if not literally true. Nevertheless, we do see that the Torah sometimes presents things in a way that is purposely misleading, in this case giving the impression that Terach died before Avraham left Charan even though in reality Avraham left many decades before Terach died.

It should also be noted that this need not be the reason Terach's death is recorded here, as it is normal for the Torah to finish a topic or sequence, even if part of it is not in chronological order, before moving on to the next topic (see Ramban). By the same token, there are other approaches that attempt to explain the discrepancy regarding where Aharon died (see Rashbam, Ibn Ezra and Ramban). Even so, the approach put forth by Rashi, with Midrashic backing, gives validity to the notion that the Torah is sometimes purposely misleading; how much more mainstream then Rashi can one get?!]

An interesting aspect of Terach's death being presented in a misleading manner is that Rashi "spills the beans," as now we all know that Terach died well before Avraham left Charan. Nevertheless, after all is said and done we not only know the true chronology, but that honoring parents is of such primary importance that the Torah presented things inaccurately in order to protect it. Additionally, we may be blessed with a widespread study of Rashi, whereby the true chronology is now widely known, but this was not always the case (and still isn't always necessarily the case). [This is true of many concepts in the Talmud as well, where it is clear that it was assumed the "masses" would not become aware of them, but with the widespread study of Daf HaYomi have become known to a much higher percentage of the population than seems to have been intended.] What becomes clear is that the Torah assumed a multi-tiered level of knowledge among those who study it, with a more superficial and possibly misleading layer intended for some, and a deeper, more complex layer for others. This places a certain level of responsibility upon those who can see beyond the superficial layer, as sharing some of the complexities may be detrimental to those ill-equipped to process them.

Rabbi Sassoon gives numerous other examples where the Torah (and Tanach in general) presents things in a way that isn't literally true, but on how they are perceived. For example, the three "men" who came to visit Avraham after his circumcision did not actually eat, even though the Torah says they did, since it appeared as if they did (see Rashi on B'reishis 18:8). Pharaoh really did "know" Yosef, even if he pretended he didn't, yet the Torah says he didn't because that's how he acted (see Rashi on Sh'mos 1:8). The King of Arad is described as a Canaanite king even though he was really a descendant of Eisav/Amalek because he disguised himself as a Canaanite and was therefore mistaken for one (see Rashi on Bamidbar 21:1; see Yalkut Shimoni for more details). Which leaves us wondering about other possible examples where the Torah describes the perception rather than the reality.

Did Chava really have a conversation with a talking snake or was that just how she perceived it (see http://rabbidmk.wordpress.com/2011/10/18/parashas-berashis-5772/)? Did the flood really affect the entire globe, or was it presented that way because that was how Noach and his family perceived it? Although Lot's daughters thought the whole world was being destroyed (B'reishis 19:31) yet that's not how things are described, in the context of the entire story, everyone else (including Lot) knew it was only S'dom (and its environs) that was destroyed. Did the Egyptians really make us work unreasonably hard, or was that just our perception? Based on how we are required to celebrate Passover (including the "bitter herbs") and the way our sages describe the torturous tasks the Egyptians made us do, it would be difficult to say it was just our perception. But without such guidance, how are we to know? Are we supposed to assume things are literally true unless there is a tradition that they may not be, or are we mature enough to think objectively and responsibly about what might or might not be literally true? By indicating that not everything in the Torah's narratives (as opposed to its halachic requirements and obligations) has to be taken at face value, a myriad of possibilities have been made available; it us up to us to make the best, and most appropriate, use of these possibilities (even if that means ignoring them).