

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

On the opening phrase of Mishpatim -- "And these are the laws you are to set before them" -- Rashi comments: "And these are the laws' -- Wherever uses the word 'these' it signals a discontinuity with what has been stated previously. Wherever it uses the term 'and these' it signals a continuity. Just as the former commands were given at Sinai, so these were given at Sinai. Why then are the civil laws placed in juxtaposition to the laws concerning the altar? To tell you to place the Sanhedrin near to the Temple. 'Which you shall set before them' -- G-d said to Moses: You should not think, I will teach them a section or law two or three times until they know the words verbatim but I will not take the trouble to make them understand the reason and its significance. Therefore the Torah states 'which you shall set before them' like a fully laid table with everything ready for eating." (Rashi on Shemot 23:1)

Three remarkable propositions are being set out here, which have shaped the contours of Judaism ever since.

The first is that just as the general principles of Judaism (aseret hadibrot means not "ten commandments" but "ten utterances" or overarching principles) are Divine, so are the details. In the 1960s the Danish architect Arne Jacobson designed a new college campus in Oxford. Not content with designing the building, he went on to design the cutlery and crockery to be used in the dining hall, and supervised the planting of every shrub in the college garden. When asked why, he replied in the words of another architect, Mies van der Rohe: "G-d is in the details".

That is a Jewish sentiment. There are those who believe that what is holy in Judaism is its broad vision, never so compellingly expressed as in the Decalogue at Sinai. The truth however is that G-d is in the details: "Just as the former were given at Sinai, so these were given at Sinai." The greatness of Judaism is not simply in its noble vision of a free, just and compassionate society, but in the way it brings this vision down to earth in detailed legislation. Freedom is more than an abstract idea. It means (in an age in

which slavery was taken for granted -- it was not abolished in Britain or the United States until the nineteenth century) letting a slave go free after seven years, or immediately if his master has injured him. It means granting slaves complete rest and freedom one day in seven. These laws do not abolish slavery, but they do create the conditions under which people will eventually learn to abolish it. Not less importantly, they turn slavery from an existential fate to a temporary condition. Slavery is not what you are or how you were born, but something that has happened to you for a while and from which you will one day be liberated. That is what these laws -- especially the law of Shabbat -- achieve, not in theory only, but in living practice. In this, as in virtually every other aspect of Judaism, G-d is in the details.

The second principle, no less fundamental, is that civil law is not secular law. We do not believe in the idea "render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to G-d what belongs to G-d". We believe in the separation of powers but not in the secularisation of law or the spiritualisation of faith. The Sanhedrin or Supreme Court must be placed near the Temple to teach that law itself must be driven by a religious vision. The greatest of these visions, stated in this week's sedra, is: "Do not oppress a stranger, because you yourself know how it feels like to be a stranger: you were strangers in Egypt." (Shemot 23:9)

The Jewish vision of justice, given its detailed articulation here for the first time, is based not on expediency or pragmatism, nor even on abstract philosophical principles, but on the concrete historical memories of the Jewish people as "one nation under G-d." Centuries earlier, G-d has chosen Abraham so that he would "teach his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, by doing what is right and just." (Bereishith 18:19) Justice in Judaism flows from the experience of injustice at the hands of the Egyptians, and the G-d-given challenge to create a radically different form of society in Israel.

This is already foreshadowed in the first chapter of the Torah with its statement of the equal and absolute dignity of the human person as the image of G-d. That is why society must be based on the rule of law, impartially administered, treating all alike -- "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favouritism to a poor man in his lawsuit." (Shemot 23:2-3)

Please keep in mind
Refoel Yoel Ozer ben Chaya Malka
for a refuah shelaima

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives and various websites. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

To be sure, at the highest levels of mysticism, G-d is to be found in the innermost depths of the human soul, but G-d is equally to be found in the public square and in the structures of society: the marketplace, the corridors of power, and courts of law. There must be no gap, no dissociation of sensibilities, between the court of justice (the meeting-place of man and man) and the Temple (the meeting-place of man and G-d).

The third principle and the most remarkable of all is the idea that law does not belong to lawyers. It is the heritage of every Jew. "Do not think, I will teach them a section or law two or three times until they know the words verbatim but I will not take the trouble to make them understand the reason and significance of the law. The Torah states 'which you shall set before them' like a fully laid table with everything ready for eating." This is the origin of the name of the most famous of all Jewish codes of law, R. Joseph Karo's Shulkhan Arukh.

From earliest times, Judaism expected everyone to know and understand the law. Legal knowledge is not the closely guarded property of an elite. It is -- in the famous phrase -- "the heritage of the congregation of Jacob." (Devarim 33:4) Already in the first century CE Josephus could write that "should any one of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls. Hence to break them is rare, and no one can evade punishment by the excuse of ignorance" (Contra Apionem, ii, 177-8). That is why there are so many Jewish lawyers. Judaism is a religion of law -- not because it does not believe in love ("You shall love the Lord your G-d", "You shall love your neighbour as yourself") but because, without justice, neither love nor liberty nor human life itself can flourish. Love alone does not free a slave from his or her chains.

The sedra of Mishpatim, with its detailed rules and regulations, can sometimes seem a let-down after the breathtaking grandeur of the revelation at Sinai. It should not be. Yitro contains the vision, but G-d is in the details. Without the vision, law is blind. But without the details, the vision floats in heaven. With them the divine presence is brought down to earth, where we need it most. © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The full acceptance -- the naaseh v'nishma -- we will do and we will hearken -- of the Torah by the Jewish people appears in this week's parsha rather than in last week's parsha where the actual description of the revelation at Mount Sinai is recorded. We are all quite aware that the maxim that the devil lies in the details is incontrovertibly and unerringly correct. General acceptance of the ideas and values of the Torah is relatively easy to obtain from the people. Acceptance of and commitment to the nitty-gritty details of Torah and Halacha is another more complicated matter entirely.

The Torah does not record for us the full and unconditional acceptance by the Jewish people until this week's parsha, until after many of the details of the Torah have been spelled out and published. Only when details of the covenant are known can there be a true acceptance and agreement between the parties here, so to speak.

Moshe, here, serves as the true advocate and attorney for Israel in explaining, teaching and clarifying the laws of the Torah to the people. We are witness on a daily basis of how general agreement on issues in commerce, diplomacy and social relationships break down when put to the detailed test of practical enforcement and behavior.

Everyone is in favor of peace, equal opportunity for all, tranquility at home and in the family, national unity and other such noble ideas and values. It is the details of practicality that are the cause of these goals being unfulfilled for many people and nations. The Torah therefore advances these details first before there can be a full acceptance of naaseh v'nishma by the people of Israel.

This idea goes to the heart of the discussion regarding conversions to Judaism. Merely proclaiming that one wishes to be a Jew, without realizing what that really entails, is pretty much of a sham. What are the details of this covenant that one now wishes to enter into? Is it merely a warm hearted, even sincere, embrace of very general principles of monotheism and morality without knowledge of or commitment to the halachic details that govern daily Jewish living?

Halacha does not demand that the prospective convert know everything about Judaism before being accepted into the fold of Israel. But it does demand that the prospective convert know a great deal about Jewish law and life. Just being a "good person" or serving in the Israeli army, noble as these accomplishments truly are, do not yet qualify for one to be easily converted. Without knowing the details inherent in becoming a Jew, how can one enter into an eternal agreement with binding commitments that remain irrevocable?

The conversion process, which is a tactical and bureaucratic, and which certainly can be improved upon, is a matter of acceptance, sincerity, devotion and honest commitment. It should not be subverted by political pressures, demographic considerations or misplaced compassion. Only in knowledge and adherence to the details of the covenant of Sinai can the survival and growth of the Jewish people and its spiritual advancement be guaranteed. ©2013 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 SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“You must help repeatedly with him.” (Exodus 23:5)

'And these are the mishpatim [laws of moral justice] which you [Moses] shall set before Israel.' These opening words of our portion join together our civil law with the Ten Commandments of last week's portion of Yitro, creating one unit of Divine demands for moral justice emanating from Sinai (Rashi ad loc). Additionally, it is the concept of "mishpatim" that directly links Moses to our first patriarch, Abraham.

You will remember that G-d "chose [and loved] Abraham because he commands... his household after Him to keep the way of the Lord, doing righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19).

These twin ideals of our nation come up again and again; the prophet Isaiah (1:27) insists that "Israel will be redeemed through justice, and those who return to her [after the exiles] through righteousness," and the prophet Jeremiah exhorts us to understand that neither wisdom nor power nor wealth ought be sought after and praised, but praise is only deserved by people who do the following: "Contemplate and know Me, for I am the Lord who does loving-kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these is My desire" (Jeremiah 9:23). And it is important to note that this teaching of Jeremiah is in the Prophetic portion chanted on Tisha Be'av, the memorial day for the destruction of our Temples and our loss of sovereignty over our land.

It is easy to understand the meaning and significance of moral justice; everyone realizes that without law and order it would be impossible for a just society and a free world to endure. But precisely what is the meaning of righteousness (tzedaka)? The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Bible) translates the word as *kharitas*, as in the Hebrew *hen*, graciousness, undeserved gifts; this is obviously the origin of our English word and concept, charity. But is that really a proper understanding of the Hebrew *tzedaka*, an undeserved hand-out? Is that what the Bible expects the Jews to teach the world to do? As is necessary when attempting to understand the meaning

of an ambiguous "key word," let us examine its usage in another central biblical passage.

We are commanded to demonstrate human sensitivity in all our interpersonal dealings. Therefore, we find in the Book of Deuteronomy (24:10-13): "When you make your fellow a loan of any amount, you may not enter his home to take a security pledge for it. You must stand outside and the man to whom you gave the loan shall bring to you the security pledge outside. And if the [borrower] is poor, you may not sleep with his security pledge [which would usually be a cloak]. He [the lender] must return the security pledge to the [borrower] as soon as the sun sets, so that the borrower will sleep in his garment and bless you. For you [the lender] it will be an act of *tzedaka* before the Lord your G-d."

The Hebrew word *tzedek* is usually translated as justice, precise and exact treatment of each side. *Tzedaka* is apparently a different noun, although certainly related to *tzedek*. The Talmud logically rules that the lender acquires ownership over the security pledge until the loan is repaid; hence, there is no legal obligation on the part of the lender to return the pledge to enable the borrower to cover himself with it on a cold night.

Tzedaka is therefore the amalgamation of loving-kindness with justice; it is compassionate righteousness.

The Bible does not believe in dealing with poverty by giving undeserved hand-outs. Yes, those who have more than they require are responsible to help the poor; but the poor are likewise responsible to help themselves. Hence, although there is a tithe for the poor twice in the seven-year sabbatical cycle, that is only a comparatively small amount; every land-owner must put away a portion of land for the poor to plow and seed and nurture and reap, so that the poor in Israel can rise each morning to go to work and earn their daily bread. Witness the magnificent picture presented in the Scroll of Ruth, and how the landless and poverty-stricken returnee immigrant mother-in-law and Moabite convert daughter-in-law respectably worked in gainful employment every day in the fields of Boaz.

This week's portion (23:5) teaches: "If you see the donkey of your enemy crouching under its burden, would you refrain from helping him? You must help again and again with him." Yes, stipulates the Talmud, you must help even your enemy, but only if he works together with you; you are responsible for him - he, too, is your brother - but no more than he is responsible for himself. Only if he is physically unable to help himself must you lift up the animal without his input (Mishna, Bava Metzia 32a).

The Mishna teaches that "One who says that 'mine is mine and yours is yours' travels the middle of the road, perhaps even the golden mean; 'mine is yours and yours is mine' is an ignoramus; 'mine is yours and

yours is yours' goes beyond the requirement of the law; 'yours is mine and mine is mine' is wicked."

I would argue that a society in which the poor do not assume responsibility, but only demand entitlement is destined to fail.

The only answer is compassionate righteousness, whereby the wealthy are entitled to the fruits of their grains and labor while at the same time encouraged - sometimes even mandated - to share their bounty, a society where everyone who wishes to help improve their lot is given the wherewithal to do so.

© 2013 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Talmud states that the source of prayer is the biblical phrase: "And you shall serve Him with all your heart." (Deuteronomy 11:13) Service is usually associated with action. One can serve with his or her hands or feet but how does one serve with the heart? The Talmud concludes that service of the heart refers to prayer. (Ta'anit 2a)

Interestingly, Maimonides quotes a slightly different text from this week's portion as the source of prayer. He states that "It is an affirmative commandment to pray every day as it says 'and you shall serve the Lord your G-d.'" (Exodus 23:25) (Rambam: Laws of Prayer 1:1). What is the conceptual difference between using this source as the basis for prayer and using the text quoted in the Talmud?

Rabbi Yosef Caro suggests that the verse from Deuteronomy cited by the Talmud may be understood as simply offering good advice rather than requiring daily prayer. It may alternatively refer to the service of learning Torah. The text in Exodus, however, deals clearly with prayer. (Kesef Mishneh on Rambam, *ibid*)

Another distinction comes to mind. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin notes that the text quoted by Maimonides is found in the context of sentences that deal with liberating the land of Israel. It is possible that Maimonides quotes this text to underscore the crucial connection between prayer and action. Prayer on its own is simply not enough.

It can be added that the Talmudic text quoted as the source for prayer may be a wonderful complement to the text quoted by Rambam. Remember the sentence quoted in the Talmud states and you shall serve your G-d "With ALL your heart." Note the word all. In other words, while one should engage in action, prayer has an important place. Even in a life full of action, the prayer that one must find time for, must be with one's entire, full and complete devotion. It may be true that quantitatively, prayer may have to be limited, but qualitatively it must be deep and meaningful.

The balance between action and prayer is spelled out in the Midrash when talking about Ya'akov (Jacob). The Midrash insists that when Ya'akov

prepares to meet Esav (Esau) he prays deeply. Yet, at the same time, he is fully active by preparing for any outcome of this most unpredictable family reunion. The balance between prayer and action comes to the fore. (See Rashi Genesis 32:9)

More than ever, we need to internalize the integral connection of productive action with deep prayer. In that way we could truly serve G-d with all our heart. © 2013 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.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Oury Cherki, Machon Meir, Rabbi of Beit Yehuda Congregation, Jerusalem and Head of Brit Olam -- Noahide World Center

In this week's Torah portion we have an opportunity to meet an angel. "Behold, I am sending an angel ahead of you... And I will make enemies of your enemies, and I will oppress your oppressors... And I will destroy them." [Shemot 23:20,22]. The Holy One, Blessed be He, gave one of His angels a special task, to help Yisrael capture the land. We were not told this angel's name, but the sages said his name was "Matatron", derived from the fact that his position is behind the Divine Throne of Glory ("mata" means behind, "taron" means a chair).

The fact that an angel is sent on this mission is surprising. In the Torah portion of Ki Tissa, after the Holy One, Blessed be He, forgave the nation for the sin of the Golden Calf, when Moshe was told, "I will send an angel in front of you, and I will expel the Canaanite" [33:2], he objected and said that he did not want an angel -- "You did not tell me whom You would send with me" [33:12]. "If Your face does not accompany us, do not raise us up from this" [33:15]. Moshe even threatens that if the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not lead the nation by Himself, they would not be interested in continuing the journey to Eretz Yisrael. However, in this week's portion, Mishpatim, Moshe does not react to the news at all. Rashi offers one explanation, commenting on the verse, "Behold, I am sending an angel ahead of you" -- "Here Moshe was told that the people would sin (with the Golden Calf) and the Shechina tells him, 'I will not rise up within you' [33:3]." According to this, having an angel accompany the people was merely one of the possible alternatives.

However, the Ramban does not accept this approach. He feels that the angel in this week's Torah portion is different in essence from the one later on, in Ki Tissa. The angel in Ki Tissa is a minor one, of the type that is assigned to every nation of the world. Sending such an angel is a sign that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is repulsed by Yisrael, and that He no longer guides the nation directly but only through an intermediary. The angel in this week's Torah portion, on

the other hand, is one who is linked to the "face" of the Holy One, Blessed be He, as in the verse, "An angel from before Him (literally: an angel of His face) saved them, out of His love and mercy" [Yeshayahu 63:9]. This specifically refers to the Holy One, Blessed be He, directly guiding His nation. This is a type of angel that is desired both by G-d and by the nation as a whole. And that is what Moshe meant when he said, "If Your face does not accompany us" -- he wanted contact with the "Angel close to G-d's face."

And this explains why in this week's portion it is written, "Do not rebel against him... for My name is within him" [23:21]. The sages took this to mean, "Do not replace Me with the angel." Do not become confused between the angel and G-d, it is important to differentiate between the Creator and His messengers. Perhaps this is a hint of the tendency which appeared among Bnei Yisrael to make one of the creatures into a god. The Torah therefore warns that even the angel who is called by His own name -- "for My name is within him" -- must never be considered a replacement for G-d. This is the opposite of what was done by a group that rose up at the end of the era of the Second Temple, who deified a person whom they thought was an angel.

Just as He redeemed us with the aid of an "angel of His face," let us hope and pray that the full verse quoted above will be fulfilled: "An angel from before Him saved them, out of His love and mercy. In His mercy He redeemed them and took hold of them, and He carried them forever." © 2013 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Positioning Impositions

How would you feel? That is a question asked by a wide-ranging group of inquisitors ranging from kindergarten teachers chiding their immature charges, to philosophy professors lecturing to disciples about the worlds of the theoretical. Its validity sets the tone from issues that vary from the golden rule to admonitions at the supper table. And at first glance it seems that the Torah uses the maxim to mitigate a deficiency in our very own human nature.

"Do not taunt or oppress a ger (newcomer) because you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20). According to most commentators, the verse refers to the ger—a convert to Judaism. Others comment however, that it also applies to any newcomer, be it to a neighborhood, a synagogue, or a school. Rashi explains that the Torah forewarns the Jewish nation from being cocky toward anyone who would join our people. "After all," Rashi expounds, "the stranger can easily remind us of our since-forgotten experience in Egypt, where we, too, were strangers."

However, something bothers me. The Torah's set of values is pure and unmitigated by personal

partiality. So let us ask. Does it truly matter that we were once strangers? Is not it inherently wrong to taunt a newcomer? Shouldn't the Torah just say, "Do not taunt a newcomer? It is morally wrong!" Why is there even a mention of our Egyptian experience? Had we gone directly from Jacob's home to a settled life in the land of Israel, would we then be allowed to taunt newcomers? Of course not! Our years of servitude should not influence the morality of taunting others! So why does the Torah consider our bad experience a factor?

Dr. Norman Blumenthal has published extensively about the unique experience of Holocaust survivors' children. Without revealing actual details, he related a case history of a young man whose father had escaped from a Nazi concentration camp at the age of 16 years old. The fugitive did not hide in the forest or in a barn, rather he joined a group of gentile partisans. For the duration of the war, he lived with them, ate with them, and killed Nazis with them. Still, the courageous young man never gave up his convictions and feelings of Judaism.

The Holocaust survivor settled in the United States where he married and raised his son in a Jewish neighborhood with Jewish friends. Unlike his father, the child of the courageous survivor led a relatively tranquil life until his 16th birthday.

On that day his father, by then a very successful executive who was very active in the American Jewish community, turned to him and said, "Son, now the easy life is over. Just like me, now you must learn what it takes to survive amongst the gentiles!" He sent the young teen to a university in the southern part of the United States where Jews were as rare as snow. Within months, the young man, mercilessly taunted in a foreign environment, suffered a nervous breakdown. It took years of therapy to undo the shambles.

Perhaps we can understand the posuk in a new homiletic light. The sages declare that our experience in Egypt was very necessary, albeit uncomfortable, one to say the least. Under the duress of affliction we fortified our faith. Under the pressure of ridicule we cemented our resolve. Under the strain of duress we built families and sustained our identity. And perhaps it was that experience that laid the ability to endure far-reaching suffering, tests of faith that were only surpassed by the tests of time.

And now enter the convert John Doe who hails from a corporate office in West Virginia and has made a conscious, comfortable decision to join the ranks of Moses' men. Our first reaction may just be to have him bear the test of the Jew. Like bootcamp in Fort Bragg, or beasting at West Point, we may have the urge even a compulsion to put Mr. Doe through the rigors of our oppression. After all, that is the stuff of which we are made. We may want to taunt and tease because "we were slaves in a foreign land." The Torah tells us not to do so. "Do not taunt or oppress a ger (newcomer)

because you were strangers in a he land of Egypt." Do not impose your difficult experiences in life on others that are newcomers to your present situation. It is easy to say, "such men are made from sterner stuff" and proceed to harangue those who would join us. That should not be. Life has a personal trainer for every individual, and each soul has a particular program mapped out by the Almighty. Jews from birth may have had to suffer in Egypt, while converts have other issues to deal with. One's particular experience may not be fodder for the next person. Do not use your encounters as the standard for the entire world. One cannot view the world from the rear view mirror of his personal experience. © 1999 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Mishpatim -- Judgments. Mishpatim are laws that we understand their importance and relevance. They include the prohibitions against murder and thievery, honoring one's parents, instructions for judges and laws for monetary damages.

What seems a bit strange is that the parsha opens with the laws of slaves. "When you acquire a Jewish slave, for six years he will work for you and on the seventh year he shall go out free. [21:2]"

The Ramban explains that this work/freedom cycle of the slave actually alludes to the very foundations of Judaism. The six years of work followed by freedom in the seventh year are an allusion to creation -- the six days of "work" that were followed by the Sabbath. This same pattern is of course followed in the six years of farming that are followed by the Shmitah {Sabbatical} year and the seven Shmitah cycles followed by the Yovel {Jubilee}.

This mitzvah {commandment} also reminds us of the Exodus from Egypt, mentioned in the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am Hashem, your G-d, who took you out from Mitzrayim {Egypt}. [20:2]"

The Navi {Prophet} Yirmiyahu sternly rebuked Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} when they failed to adhere to this commandment and didn't free the slaves. The ultimate punishment was no less than galus {national exile}.

It seems that the association that should have been forged into our national consciousness by our slavery in Mitzrayim should have been so strong as to preclude our ever showing insensitivity to the plight of those enslaved.

When I was about ten years old, driving around my block on my bicycle, I envisioned myself as the next evil Kenievil daredevil stunt-rider. One particular area of the sidewalk afforded me an incredible opportunity to hone my skills. A tree root had lifted up the pavement giving me about a four-inch platform to fly off of. As I improved my ability to do 'wheelies' (pulling up the front

tire of the bike and riding just on the back tire), I decided to do my 'wheelie' as I flew off my 'platform.' I would fly in the air for a few seconds and then make my two-point landing -- my back tire followed shortly by the front one.

My stunt driving days came to an abrupt end one afternoon. My mom had been baking one of my favorite cookies and that distinct aroma had followed me as I left the house to ride my bike. I came to my 'platform' and performed my, by now, well-honed maneuver. However, instead of my classic two-point landing, I did a three-point. My front tire turned while I was in the air, resulting in a sequenced landing of: back tire, front tire, rider's chin...

A neighbor saw me black out and brought me home. My mom interrupted her baking to bring me to the hospital and my plans to be the next Evil Kenievil were stitched along with my chin.

A few weeks later my mom was again baking those cookies that I had loved. The smell made me sick to my stomach... I was so nauseous I had to leave the house. I have never been able to eat one of those cookies again. The association between the smell and my pain was just too strong.

Our experiences as slaves in Mitzrayim were so horrifying that such an association should have been made. The very notion of not following the mitzvos for slaves should have sickened us. If we later reached the point that those lessons had been forgotten, then we had to return to exile and experience that pain once again.

We are the product of our experiences both personal and national. Every experience is there for us to grow from in a way that otherwise would have been impossible. Only through learning from those experiences will we merit to leave the personal and national exile that we are presently subjected to. © 2013 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Parshas Sh'kalim, deals with the collection of funds for the Bais Hamikdash. Before King Yehoash's reign, the Bais Hamikdash was seriously neglected and much repair work was necessary to restore it to its original splendor. When the righteous King Yehoash came into power, he immediately instructed the kohanim to collect the necessary funds. After their unsuccessful attempt in achieving this goal he personally spearheaded the collection and received an overwhelming response.

The reason for this terrible neglect is explained in Divrei Hayomim (2:23) wherein the wicked Queen Atalya and her sons are blamed for the deteriorated condition of the Bais Hamikdash. The royal family severely mistreated the holiest structure in the world by

carelessly roaming inside it, bringing much damage to its interior walls and structure. Although the Jewish people consistently donated funds to repair the Bais Hamikdash, the wicked sovereign repeatedly misappropriated them. Instead of using them for the Bais Hamikdash, she channeled them to further her idolatrous practices. After the pious Yehoash came to power, he removed idolatry from the royal family and faithfully applied the collected funds to their intended usage. After many years of neglect, the Bais Hamikdash was finally restored to its previous glory.

The pattern in this haftorah is reminiscent of the Jewish people's formative stages as a nation. This week's maftir reading alludes to the Jewish people's comeback after abusing their financial resources, resulting in their most shameful plunge in history. (see Daas Z'kainim S'hmos 30:13). Moments before the Jewish people miraculously left Egypt, Hashem rewarded them with abundant wealth. Hashem effected a change of heart in the ruthless Egyptian slave drivers and they generously showered the Jewish people with gifts and wealth. However, the Jewish people did not properly appreciate Hashem's unbelievable favor and became influenced by their newly gained wealth and power. During very trying and desperate moments, their newly gained sense of control heavily influenced them. Instead of turning to Hashem for assistance, they applied their wealth and golden ornaments towards securing their own destiny and produced the Golden Calf. Hashem severely responded to this grave offense and the Jewish people sincerely repented to Hashem. Hashem then granted them opportunity to rectify their sin by inviting them to participate in the erection of the Mishkan. They learned their lesson well and generously applied their money to a most appropriate cause, the construction of Hashem's magnificent sanctuary. Hashem recognized their new approach to wealth and its potential good and deemed them worthy of His Divine Presence for the next thousand years.

The reading of Parshas Sh'kalim and its accompanying haftorah are a most befitting introduction to our month of Adar. We read in Megillas Esther (3:9), that the wicked Haman offered the king an impressive ten thousand silver blocks in attempt to purchase the Jewish people from the wicked King Achashveirosh. Haman intended to use his wealth to influence the king to grant him permission to destroy the entire Jewish nation. However, Chazal teach us that Haman's efforts were preempted by the Jewish people's annual donation during the month of Adar to the Bais Hamikdash. By no coincidence, Hashem instructed the Jewish people to annually donate this exact sum -- ten thousand silver blocks -- to His treasury for sacrifices in the Bais Hamikdash. Hashem said, "Let the Jewish nation's sacrificial donation of ten thousand blocks preempt Haman's attempt to influence the king with his ten thousand blocks" (see Mesichta Megilla 13b).

The meaning of this seems to be that the Jewish people's annual donation demonstrated their proper understanding of wealth and its power. They allocated their wealth to the most worthy of causes and eagerly donated annually -- without fail -- ten thousand blocks of silver to Hashem and the Bais Hamikdash. This perfect approach to wealth and its positive values protected them from Haman's financial influence on the king. The Jewish people understood the true value of wealth and were not personally influenced by its potential ills. Therefore, they were not subject to Haman's financial influence and his powerful seductive approach to the king could not determine their fate. Eventually, the king would and did see through Haman's madness for power and all Haman's power and financial influence were of no avail. © 2013 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Moshe came, and he told over to the nation all of G-d's words" (Sh'mos 24:3). It is quite difficult to keep track of the conversations between G-d and Moshe and between Moshe and the nation without a scorecard (see <http://ohr.edu/991> and <http://www.virtualjerusalem.com/holidays/shavuot/chronology.htm>). For example, even though the nation responded twice using the words "we will do everything that G-d has spoken" (19:8 and 24:3), the first one occurred on the 2nd day of Sivan (see Rashi on 19:8), in response to G-d's offer to enter into a covenant with them and make them His treasured nation (19:3-6), while the second occurred on the 4th (see Rashi on 24:1 and 24:3), and seems to refer to the nation accepting G-d's commandments to (temporarily) separate from their spouses ("p'risha"), to move back from Mt. Sinai during the lawgiving ("hagbala"), the seven Noachide laws and the laws taught to them at Marah (see Rashi on 24:3).

Rashi's comment that Moshe told the nation about the need to separate from their wives and move away from Mt. Sinai on the 4th day of Sivan has caused quite a stir, since the Talmud (Shabbos 86b-87a) says that Moshe told them about "hagbala" on the 3rd, while "p'risha" was done on the 4th (with Rashi explaining that when Moshe went back up on the morning of the 4th, he told G-d that the nation had accepted the "hagbala" that was commanded on the 3rd, after which G-d told him about "p'risha," which Moshe relayed to the nation later that day). How could Rashi say both were relayed to the nation on the 4th if the Talmud says explicitly that "hagbala" was told to them a day earlier?

Mizrachi poses this question and leaves it unanswered. Maharal (Gur Aryeh, who uses the days of the week rather than the days of the month and follows the opinion of the Rabanan when he frames the question, says that the need to do "p'risha" was said on

the 4th (the same day that "hagbala" was), but not undertaken until the 5th. Taz (Divray Dovid) doesn't understand Maharal's answer, since Rashi (on the Talmud) says explicitly that the two were not said on the same day. Besides, the 4th and 5th referred to by Maharal are the 4th and 5th days of the week, which correspond to the 3rd and 4th of Sivan, so if both were said on the 4th day of the week they would have been said on the 3rd day of Sivan, while Rashi on Chumash says that both were said on the 4th of Sivan. Although Taz says he has no answer to Mizrachi's question on Rashi, he nevertheless adds that Rashi must not have meant that both were said on the 4th, only that both were said by the 4th. (Rashi's wording indicates that he meant both were said on the 4th.)

It could be suggested that even if "hagbala" and "p'risha" were commanded separately, both could have technically been commanded on the 4th. Rashi (on the Talmud) says that Moshe was told about "hagbala" when he went up on the 3rd and he told the nation about it that evening, which could mean after the "day" ended and the next one started. Although the Talmud still calls this the 3rd, it might have done so to contrast "hagbala" with "p'risha," or because before the Torah was given it wasn't clear that the Children of Israel's days began the night before (see <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/naso.pdf>), while Rashi (on Chumash) called it the 4th because once Moshe added a day (so that the days of separation would begin at night, see Chasam Sofer on 19:10), after the sun set on the 3rd it really was considered the 4th. However, Rashi (24:1-3) implies that not only were they both relayed to the nation on the same calendar day, but at the same time, during the daytime ("bo bayom"), after G-d had told Moshe (on the 4th) to "go up." It would be very difficult to explain these words to be referring to two separate conversations.

Nachalas Yaakov points out that the original commandment of "hagbala" (19:12-13) was said to the entire nation, without making any exceptions, while the verse Rashi says refers to the 4th specifies that Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and the 70 elders can approach the mountain, and suggests that on the 3rd the general commandment was given, which is what the Talmud refers to, while on the 4th the specifics were added, which is what Rashi (on Chumash) is referring to. This gives added meaning to Moshe telling over "all of G-d's words," as not only was the need to do "p'risha" relayed, so were all the details of "hagbala." I would also add that it can't really be said that Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and the elders "went up to G-d" (24:1) if they never left Mt. Sinai in the first place. It was only after everyone moved away from Mt. Sinai (because of what was said on the 3rd) that these individuals could "go up to G-d" after being given permission to on the 4th.

Mizrachi's question is based on the assumption that Rashi's commentary on Chumash needs to be consistent with the Talmud. And this is usually true.

However, if another Rabbinic source from the Talmudic era provides a more straightforward reading of the verses, Rashi will sometimes explain them accordingly. And, in this situation, the Talmud says that "hagbala" was commanded before "p'risha" even though "p'risha" is mentioned (19:10-11) before "hagbala" is (19:12:13), and that they were commanded on different days even though the Torah implies that they were commanded at the same time. The Talmud's version of the events is not the only officially sanctioned version, as the Talmud (quoting Rava) says that according to everyone the Torah was given on Shabbos, while Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer (46, see Radal) and the M'chilta (B'shalach, Vayasa 1) say it was on a Friday. (Rava likely meant that in regards to the dispute between Rabbi Yosi and the Rabanan as to whether the Torah was given on the 6th or 7th of Sivan, which day of the week the Torah was given on was not in dispute. He was not saying that that no one, anywhere, says that the Torah was given on any day other than Shabbos.)

When the M'chilta discusses what G-d told Moshe to tell the nation and what their response was (Yisro, Bachodesh 2, expounding on 19:9), three opinions are quoted. The first, Rabbi Yosi HaG'lili, is that the discussion was about the need to move away from Mt. Sinai (i.e. G-d telling them they had to and their agreeing to do so), which is how Rashi on the Talmud explains this verse. The third opinion, Rebbe, is that the nation wanted to hear directly from G-d rather than indirectly, through Moshe. G-d's response is not included in the M'chilta, but Rashi uses this approach in his commentary on Chumash, and takes it a step further (on 19:10); G-d responds by saying "if so, that I am to communicate directly with them, they have to prepare themselves," through "p'risha" and "hagbala." (Although Rashi doesn't explicitly include "hagbala" in the response, the flow of the verses seem to indicate this, see P'nay Yehoshua on Shabbos 87a.) It is clear that Rashi is explaining the verses in his commentary on Chumash differently than the Talmud, following the M'chilta (or at least Rebbe's approach in the M'chilta) instead. [This is how Mirkeves HaMishna (a commentary on the M'chilta) and Torah Sh'laima (24:12) understand Rashi as well.] And since Rashi, in his commentary on Chumash, explains the verses according to the M'chilta rather than following the Talmud, there is no issue with his saying that "hagbala" and "p'risha" were commanded on the 4th of Sivan, which is a much cleaner way to read the verses, even if the Talmud quotes Rava saying that "hagbala" was commanded a day earlier. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

