Beraishis 5775 Volume XXII Number 4

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And G-d completed on the seventh day the creative work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His creative work which He had made." (Genesis 2:2)

On Rosh Hashana we began counting the 5,775th year since the creation of the world; this calculation is predicated upon the primordial first week of creation as having consisted of seven 24-hour days during which G-d made everything there is, from light to vegetation to animals to the human being.

Now, this biblical notion is in clear opposition to all accepted scientific data, which claim the earth to be millions of years old Carbon testing of fossils proves this contention, at least from a scientific perspective.

Is the acceptance of science over the literal reading of the biblical text to be considered heretical? A good friend of mine (an upstanding Orthodox rabbi of an Orthodox congregation) was recently informed by a Haredi rabbi that a conversion he had performed several decades ago was to be invalidated unless he would declare on oath that he believes the world to be no more than 5,775 years old. Is the age of the earth a cardinal article of Jewish faith to which every believing Jew must subscribe?

Literal belief in the seven days of creation is not included in Maimonides's Thirteen Principles of Jewish faith or even in Rabbi Yosef Albo's three principles (Sefer Ha'ikarim). So why does the Bible express itself in terms of six days of creativity culminating in one day of Sabbath rest? Why would the Bible utilize the Hebrew word for "day" (yom) with any meaning other than a 24-hour period?

The truth is that from the usage of the word "yom" it is possible to conclude the very opposite of the Haredi dogma just cited. The Bible is not interested in conveying literal and chronological facts in its story of Creation. After all, the sun and the moon were not created until the fourth day, and it is specifically their movements which are the determinants for our 24-hour day. Beyond any doubt, then, the word "yom" in the context of the seven days of Creation cannot mean a literal 24-hour day.

Furthermore, Maimonides, in his Guide for the Perplexed, interprets all of the early biblical stories until the advent of Abraham as allegories, whose purpose is to convey moral lessons rather than historical fact. And this certainly leaves the door open to maintain that "one thousand [or one million] years in Your eyes is like one day just passed" (Psalms 90:4). Each biblical day in the Creation story may well represent an epoch of thousands or millions or years.

But then why does the Bible convey the story in terms of primordial "week"?

In order to understand, I believe we must ponder a question raised by the commentary of Rashi on the very first words of the Bible: "Rabbi Yitzhak said the Torah ought not have opened with anything other than the first commandment ordained to the Israelites, which was to make the month [of the exodus from Egypt] the first month of the Hebrew calendar. So why does the Torah begin with the Creation story?"

Rashi's assumption is that the Torah is first and foremost a book of G-d's commands, and so it should have opened with the first commandment. Rashi's answer takes the most universal verse of the Bible (all other ancient peoples spoke of local deities; only our Bible opens with a G-d of the Universe) and transforms into a very particularistic (and prophetic) one: "If the nations of the world charge Israel with stealing by conquering and occupying the land of the 'seven nations'... Israel can respond: All of the earth belongs to the Holy One Blessed be He, who created it..., He has given the Land of Israel to us."

Nahmanides provides another answer, based on a different assumption. The Bible teaches theology and historiosophy, not only laws and commands.

It is important for us to know that G-d owns the world and owns us, by virtue of the rights of the Creator to his creation, and G-d ordains the punishment of exile for transgressions of His Commandments (Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, Israel from the Promised Land).

My revered teacher Rav Soloveitchik gives a third response: this first verse is a commandment, the very first commandment of the Torah. It is based upon the principle of Imitatio Dei, that we must walk in G-d's ways: "Just as G-d created a world, so must you humans create worlds. You must re-create the incomplete, imperfect world which G-d made. You must remove the darkness, leaving only the light; you must remove the evil, leaving only the good; you must remove the chaos, leaving only order." (J.B. Soloveitchik, The Lonely Man of Faith 1, D). This is the

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

linkage between Rosh Hashana and Bereishit, our mission to perfect the world in the Kingship of the Divine.

Hence G-d describes His original creation of the world as having taken place in one Divine week of six days of creativity and one day of rest; so must we model ourselves after Him, with each week of our lives being dedicated to six days of proactive change and re-creation of the world and one day of rest and appreciation of what it is.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Very shortly we will conclude the reading of the Torah cycle for this year. The Torah ends with the description of the passing of Moshe. The Torah pointedly tells us that there never will be another Moshe. We are also taught that there will never be another generation such as the generation of Jews that were redeemed from Egypt and who accepted the Torah on Mount Sinai. And, we are also taught the fundamental Jewish belief that there never will be another Torah nor will this one ever be modified or recast.

As such, there is a true sense of finality to this last chapter of the Torah. It not only details the end of an era and the mortality of a life but it serves to teach us another important lesson. And that lesson is that the past cannot be repeated and that every generation, just as every individual, is charged with the challenge of creating a new Moshe, so to speak, and a new sense of redemption, freedom and a new reacceptance of the Torah of Sinai.

The fact that Moshe is irreplaceable and that a new generation will not personally witness the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt and the revelation at Sinai in no way alters the demand, that this coming generation preserve and protect the eternal Torah and its values.

This very finality – the sealing of the books, so to speak - is itself one of the great lessons of this Torah reading. Reconstructing the past may be the preoccupation of historians and professors but in terms of life and achievement, it is only the present and future that can guarantee our survival and success.

There is a great danger in forgetting our past, whether as an individual and certainly as a nation. Without recalling the past we invite ourselves to be blindsided by unexpected events and the unpredictability of human nature and behavior. Yet there is a great difference between recalling and remembering the past and attempting to live in the past. Living in the past freezes us and makes us a relic instead of a vibrantly creative society.

Nostalgia is part of the human condition but oftentimes serves as a negative brake upon positive future progress. Throughout human history all attempts to recreate the past through sentimental or even imaginary means of fantasy have inevitably met with ultimate failure, if not even defeat and tragedy.

Inherent in the blessing that Moshe bestows upon his beloved people Israel, is his look forward. He sees the Land of Israel, where he will not now ever enter, and views the Jewish people settled therein. He sees all of the challenges that Jewish life in the future will bring to his beloved people while they are living in the Land of Israel and for the millennia thereafter, scattered throughout the world.

But he also sees the last days of the new redemption and the restoration of Israel to its Torah and homeland. And his warning, repeated throughout his lifetime, that the Jews should never return to Egypt, takes on new meaning. The Jews should never live exclusively in the past but always to begin again and anew, as we do with the Torah reading itself, and build a bright, secure and holy future.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why does the Torah begin with the Genesis story? If it is a book of Law, ask the rabbis, why not start with the first commandment?

To teach us, Rashi says, that G-d, having created the whole world, is its owner and has the right therefore to give Israel to the Jewish people. Here. Rashi turns a universalistic story into a nationalistic one.

The Midrash sees it differently. Why start with Genesis? To teach us that just as G-d created light from darkness, so too do human beings have the power to transform their lives, face all challenges and turn the deepest night into day. As the Hasidic rebbe said, a little bit of light has the power to drive away all the darkness.

But it's left for Ramban to suggest that we begin with the Genesis story to teach a fundamental

truth - sin results in exile.

I've always been bothered by this idea. After all, many sinners live in mansions, and in the post Holocaust era it's impossible to conclude that those who suffered sinned.

Perhaps Ramban was suggesting that exile is not only a physical but a psychological state. Sin, separates one from G-d, and in that metaphysical sense one is exiled.

G-d, for example, tells Cain after he murdered Abel, that Cain will be a wanderer. The text then says that Cain left the presence of G-d and lived in the land of Nod.

Is not the last part of this sentence contradictory? If he lived and took up residence why is he a wanderer?

But the answer may be; having sinned and left the presence of G-d he became a wanderer. Although living, physically in the land of Nod he was in perpetual inner exile.

One of the key messages of Judaism is to feel the presence of G-d. If I can feel Him, if I can feel that G-d cares about me and caresses me, says David in the Psalms, then even in the midst of suffering, I am not alone. 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"This is the land about which I (G-d) made an oath to Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'" (D'varim 34:4). The Talmud (B'rachos 18b-19a), apparently trying to explain why the word "saying" is needed, tells us that G-d was asking Moshe to tell our forefathers that He had fulfilled the oath he had made to them centuries earlier. These instructions to Moshe, the Talmud says, proves (1) that the deceased converse with each other, as Moshe fulfilled G-d's request and spoke to our forefathers after he died, and (2) that the dead are aware of what is happening to the living, as if they were totally removed from our world, Moshe relaying this information wouldn't register (see Rashi).

In his commentary on Chumash, Rashi references the Talmud's explanation of the word "saying," but doesn't mention the context. It is clear from the way he worded it, though, that he understands the information Moshe was to relay to be based on what he saw while he was alive, which raises the issue of how he could tell our forefathers that G-d had fulfilled his oath if the Promised Land wasn't conquered by the Children of Israel until after Moshe's death (see http://tinyurl.com/mal8whc). The Talmud must have also assumed that Moshe was supposed to relay information gathered while he was alive, since it was trying to prove that the dead are aware of what happens in our world from our forefathers being aware of what happens, as opposed to from Moshe being aware of what happened after he died (and then reporting the information to them). However, once it was established that the dead are aware of what happens to us, it is possible that G-d wanted Moshe to tell the m what happened after he died, after the land was actually given to the nation.

As far as why Moshe would be asked to tell the forefathers something that happened after he died rather than our forefathers knowing about it on their own, the Talmud asks this question, answering that the reason G-d asked Moshe to inform them of something they already knew was "so that they could give Moshe credit for it." What this means is unclear. Or Hachayim (D'varim 34:4) suggests it means so they can be thankful that Moshe worked so hard on their behalf to bring the nation to their place. I'm not sure why they wouldn't have already realized how much Moshe had done to bring the nation out of Egypt, lead them through all the trials and tribulations in the desert, and bring them to the doorstep of the Promised Land, nor why they wouldn't have already been grateful for all he had done even if he didn't give them information they already knew. Perhaps Moshe wouldn't have bothered them, nor would they have disturbed him, had G-d not asked Moshe to speak to them, with the information itself not being the focus, but the means through which our forefathers could express their thanks. It is also possible that G-d wanted to give Moshe one final mission, one that could only be accomplished by dying and speaking to our forefathers on the "other side," to help ease Moshe's transition from a life dedicated to doing things for G-d and His people to an existence where he couldn't do that anymore (see Ohav Yisroel, quoted by Bais Yosef on B'rachos 19a).

One thing that seems puzzling about the Talmudic discussion about whether or not the dead are aware of what occurs in our world is the omission of an earlier Talmudic explanation (B'rachos 9a-9b) of G-d's request of Moshe to have the nation ask the Egyptians for expensive items before they left "so that [Avraham] won't say that G-d kept His word regarding the slavery and the oppression but didn't keep His word about leaving with a great amount of possessions." If Avraham wasn't aware of what was happening, this wouldn't be an issue, yet the Talmud does not quote this verse (or this explanation of the verse) to prove that Avraham was aware of what was happening in Egypt with his children. [As a matter of fact, the "great amount of possessions" referred to the spoils gathered at the splitting of the sea a week later, not the gold and silver

items they took out of Egypt (see Vilna Gaon on B'rachos 9), so Avraham would have had to be so on top of things that G-d was concerned he would be worried for the week in-between that the promise hadn't been fulfilled!]

It should be noted that the source of the Talmudic teaching regarding the gold and silver taken out of Egypt was "the study hall of Rabbi Yannai" and the source of the Talmudic teaching regarding Moshe being asked to tell our forefathers that G-d had fulfilled His oath about the Promised Land was Rabbi Yonasan. Since Rabbi Yannai and Rabbi Yonasan where contemporaries (see Jerusalem Talmud, Kidushin 1:7), a teaching coming out of "the school of Rabbi Yanai" was later that Rabbi Yonasan's teaching. Since the Talmud's focus was on Rabbi Yonasan's opinion about what the dead are aware of (see Maharsha), something taught afterwards could not be included in this discussion. Besides, it may have only been after it was established that the dead are aware of what goes on in this world that leaving Egypt with expensive items could be explained in that context. Nevertheless, there is another possibility.

It is quite unlikely that Avraham would question G-d fulfilling His promise. And if it was G-d's promise that was being questioned, there is a larger issue than just Avraham questioning it, as G-d would have to fulfill it whether or not it bothered Avraham (or anyone else). Why attribute the need to fulfill the promise to how others would perceive things rather than to the need to fulfill the promise itself? I would therefore suggest that although the Talmud attributes this "concern" to Avraham, it is really a euphemism for a concern that some of his children might have had at gthe time of the exodus. Not a concern about whether or not G-d would fulfill His promise, but whether or not the time had come for G-d to fulfill that promise.

Although Avraham was told that his descendants would be "strangers in a strange land for 400 years" (B'reishis 15:13), they were only in Egypt for 210 years (see Rashi there). Some, such as Dasan and Aviram, doubted that it was time for the redemption yet, thinking that there were still 190 years of exile left (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/beshalach.pdf). A large percentage of the Children of Israel didn't think it was time to leave yet either, which is why so many died during the plague of darkness (see Rashi on Sh'mos 13:18 and Rosh on Parashas Bo). Doubts about whether it was really time for the redemption may have also entered the minds of those who were about to leave Egypt, especially since along with the 400 years that Avraham was told about was a promise that they would leave with great riches, and here they were, moments from what was supposed to be this redemption, and they had nothing! Getting the spoils at the sea a week later may dispel these doubts, but if they leave Egypt empty-handed, the doubts could persist until then. Therefore, G-d asked Moshe to have the nation ask the Egyptians for expensive items, whereby they would leave with riches.

If the reason for this request was not (or might not have been) to alleviate Avraham's concerns, it has no bearing on the issue of whether or not the dead are aware of what is happening in this world. There was therefore no reason for the Talmud to bring it into that discussion.

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

A Breath of Life

Judaism entered the world as a moral voice. It did so from the beginning, from its account of creation itself. There we read, almost like a litany, “G-d said, Let there be … and there was … and G-d saw that it was good.” The emphasis is on the word good. This is the language of morality, not myth. Nor is it science. Physics and chemistry do not speak about the “goodness” of the cosmos. Yet the Torah does, and for a reason. It wants us to know that there is a moral dimension to existence. Goodness is not something we invent. It is part of the text and texture of life as seen through the eye of faith.

Almost immediately the Torah plunges us into the drama of the human situation. Though G-d made humans “in His image,” they failed to live up to the challenge in those words. Adam and Eve, the first humans, disobeyed the first command. Cain, the first human child, became the first murderer. By the time we reach Noah the world is full of violence. “The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.” G-d creates order. Man creates chaos. That, according to the Torah, is the human drama this side of the messianic age. Do we create life or death, good or evil, justice or corruption, love or hate?

The story of Noah and the flood is testimony to the power of Torah to see history in moral terms. As is well known, other flood narratives existed in the ancient Near East, most famously the Akkadian Enuma Elish. On the surface the two narratives are similar but in reality they belong to different worlds. In the Akkadian story the gods send a flood because they are irritated by the noise humans are making. They decide to silence humanity much as we might swat a fly. In the Torah the flood narrative is inescapably moral. Humans have become corrupt. They live by might, not right. They are frustrating the very nature of creation. Noah alone is righteous. Therefore G-d will start again with him.

Eventually it was Abraham who was chosen as the role-model for humanity, specifically on ethical grounds: “For I have chosen him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him that they may keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” Almost immediately there is a momentous change

in the terms of the relationship between humanity and G-d. Abraham challenges G-d, specifically on moral grounds: “Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?” Such a challenge might seem the height of hubris – who are humans to judge G-d? – were it not clear from the text that G-d had invited Abraham to speak (“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”). We have here the first appearance of what Einstein would later call the “almost fanatical love of justice” that made him “thank his stars” he was a Jew.

Judaism is about our relationship with G-d, but it is also about our relationships with our fellow humans. Indeed the two are indivisible. The rabbis emphasized this at one of the climactic moments of the Jewish year, on Yom Kippur, when they chose as the haftarah this blazing passage from Isaiah: “Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

Equally emphatic is the haftarah (Isaiah 1) for the Shabbat before Tisha B’av, the day of Jewish grief: “Learn to do right. Seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless. Plead the case of the widow.”

Piety without justice, religious stringency without compassion, love of G-d without love of human beings – all these, argued the prophets, testify to a profound spiritual failure: the failure to understand that G-d wants us to act to others as we ask G-d to act toward us.

My reasons for choosing this topic this year are simple. Much Torah study today, beautiful though it is, is conducted by microscope rather than telescope. It focuses on individual brushstrokes, not the larger picture. One example illustrates the problem. There is a town in Israel where some very religious people objected to the clothes of an eight year old (modern Orthodox) girl on her way to school. Though modestly dressed, for them it was not enough. They spat at her and insulted her.

What struck me about that episode was that undoubtedly each of the men concerned was punctilious to cover the challah on Shabbat while making Kiddush. The reason we do so is to avoid shaming the challah by letting it see that we have chosen to do a mitzvah with the wine before the bread. When people are fastidious not to humiliate a loaf of bread but have no compunction in shaming a fellow human, then, as Shakespeare said, something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

The secular societies of the West also seem to have lost their way. There is a crisis of trust, as scandal has followed scandal: bankers taking irresponsible risks, journalists tapping phones, sexual misconduct by people in public life, leaders failing to lead, politicians failing to be statesmen, the collapse of basic values like honesty, integrity, duty and honour, and fundamental institutions like marriage and the family.

Great attempts were made during the Enlightenment to construct an ethic in purely secular terms. Kant found it in reason, David Hume in emotion: empathy, sympathy and fellow feeling. Jeremy Bentham located it in calculation of consequences: the greatest happiness for the greatest number. G. E. Moore thought it was a matter of intuition. We just know what is good without being able to say how or why. These theories, all interesting, are incompatible with one another. Several centuries of intellectual reflection have left us with no clear, coherent picture of the moral life.

More than fifty years ago, historian Will Durant gave the most apt description of what happens to societies when they lose their faith: Intellectual history takes on the character of a "conflict between science and religion". Institutions which were at first in the hands of the clergy, like law and punishment, education and morals, marriage and divorce, tend to escape from ecclesiastical control, and become secular, perhaps profane. The intellectual classes abandon the ancient theology and—after some hesitation—the moral code allied with it; literature and philosophy become anticlerical. The movement of liberation rises to an exuberant worship of reason, and falls to a paralyzing disillusionment with every dogma and every idea. Conduct, deprived of its religious supports, deteriorates into epicurean chaos; and life itself, shorn of consoling faith, becomes a burden alike to conscious poverty and to weary wealth. In the end a society and its religion tend to fall together, like body and soul, in a harmonious death.

Durant’s conclusion was one Israel’s prophets would have endorsed: “A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself within.” The message of the prophets was that a society that is not moral – not marked by justice, compassion, respect for human dignity, and honesty and integrity in public life – will not long survive. A free society is ultimately a moral achievement, brought about by an ethic of self restraint and commitment to the common good. Order in a free society is brought about less by police and surveillance than by a sense of right and wrong engraved on the hearts of citizens through lessons learned in school, observed in the home, and kept by the community as the template of its common life.

As large parts of the world in the Middle East,

sub-Saharan Africa and Asia begin to resemble the world before the Flood, the future of Western freedom is at stake. The barbarians are not yet at the gates, but their progress has been steady and disturbing. That young people, many of them from the West itself, are prepared to kill and die rather than "Choose life, that you and your children may live," is testimony to the depth of the crisis. Already in 1897, Emile Durkheim observed that in societies where there is moral confusion – he called it anomie – suicide rates rise. People need meaning, order, direction, self-restraint and a community in which they can find identity and self-respect. Without it they can do violence to others and themselves.

Now, therefore, is a time to listen again to what the Torah teaches about the moral life. These are the basic features of Jewish ethics:

1. There is a supreme emphasis on the dignity of the individual. We are each in the image and likeness of G-d. A single life is like a universe. Belief in the one G-d, singular and alone, has momentous implications for our respect for the human individual, singular and alone.

2. We are free and responsible moral agents, charged with choosing between good and bad, and we can be held to account for our deeds. Judaism is an ethic of will and choice, in contrast to ancient Greece which had, for the most part, an ethic of character and fate.

3. Life is sacred. Murder is more than a crime: it is a form of sacrilege since we are each in the image of G-d. In general, the Torah is a protest against the use of violence to attain human ends.

4. Love is at the centre of the moral life. Judaism is constructed on the foundation of three great loves: loving G-d "with all your heart, with all your soul and all your might," loving "your neighbour as yourself," and loving the stranger, a principle that, according to the sages, appears thirty-six times in the Torah.

5. Forgiveness is a central feature of Jewish ethics. Joseph forgives his brothers. G-d, responding to the pleas of Moses, forgives the people for the sin of the golden calf. A supreme day of atonement and forgiveness was written into the Jewish calendar on Yom Kippur. Forgiveness liberates us from being held captive by the burden of the past.

6. At the heart of Jewish ethics is the concept of covenant, a mutually binding pledge or promise between G-d and human beings. It was Nietzsche who saw that the capacity to make promises was the foundation of the moral life. Promises, freely undertaken and vigilantly honoured, allow us to create order without a loss of liberty.

7. Judaism embodies a dual ethic. There is the covenant made with Noah and through him all humanity, and the covenant accepted by the Israelites at Mount Sinai and renewed periodically since. The first is universal, the second particular. This is similar to the distinction made by Michael Walzer between "thin" moral principles that apply everywhere at all times, and the "thick" concepts that emerge out of Israel's unique historical experience and its vocation as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

8. Much of Jewish ethics exists in the form of rules and commands: halakhah (Jewish law). But there are other features of the moral life that cannot be prescribed by rules. There is "the right and the good," emphasized by Ramban. There is an ethic of virtue, set out by Maimonides in Hilkhot Deot. There is the concept of lifnim mishurat ha-din, acting within or beyond the limits of the law. There is middat hassidut, "saintly conduct," not required of everyone. There is the general imperative of "walking in G-d's ways."

9. There is more than one ethical voice in Judaism and this is what gives it its richness and complexity. There is the voice of the priest, summoning us to holiness and purity. There is the voice of the prophet calling us to righteousness, justice, loving-kindness and compassion. And there is the voice of wisdom, reminding us of the lessons of experience and the importance of deliberative judgment.

10. Judaism remembers what philosophy sometimes forgets, that morality is not just a matter of knowledge but also of action. It can sometimes be easy to know what is wrong, but painfully hard to avoid it. We suffer weakness of will. We yield to temptation. We act intemperately out of high emotion. There are times when we are led by the crowd. Morality is tested not only in the rarefied air of the academy but in the pressures of the market place and the public square. Jewish life is about the cultivation of virtue through loving families, caring communities, study, ritual, story-telling, celebration, historical recollection, symbolic action, prayer and penitence. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to sustain the life of virtue. The better angels of our nature need help if they are to prevail.

Matthew Arnold wrote that "as long as the world lasts, all who want to make progress in righteousness will come to Israel for inspiration as to the people who have had the sense of righteousness most glowing and strongest." Paul Johnson concluded his History of the Jews with the observation that to the Jews "we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption; of the collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind." There are tensions between Jewish ethics and the individualism and relativism of the contemporary West, but the greatness of Judaism has been its iconoclasm, its willingness to challenge the idols of the

age.

It is a pleasure and honour to dedicate these studies to the memory of two great Jewish individuals, Maurice and Vivienne Wohl of blessed memory, who lived and loved the life of virtue. Maurice was a visionary philanthropist on a vast scale, driven throughout his life by a sense of Jewish responsibility. Vivienne was a woman of the deepest humanity and compassion, who had a kind word for everyone. Together, they were a unique partnership of dedication and grace. For them, living meant giving. Through their Charitable Foundation, they continue to bring blessings into Jewish communities around the world. It was a privilege to know them. May these studies help sustain their memory as a source of blessing and inspiration.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Smashing Success

Did you ever wonder how the Torah ends? After all, if you were to write The Book, you surely would have ended on a high; at least when encapsulating the life of Moshe. I should have ended with Moshes triumphant exit or by mentioning an eternal action. And indeed, textually, it sounds like the Torah does just that.

The last two verses in Chumash read: In all the signs and the wonders, which the L-rd sent him (Moshe) to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land; and in all the mighty hand, and in all the great awe, which Moshe wrought to the eyes of all Israel (Deuteronomy 34:11-12)

I would have explained mighty hand and the great awe as the great miracles that Moshe performed in the desert or the in defeating our enemies. But Rashi quotes a Sifri to explain these final verses in a very curious manner. And all the strong hand [This refers to] his receiving the Torah on tablets with his hands. And all the great awe [This refers to the] miracles and mighty deeds [that were performed for Israel] in the great and awesome wilderness before the eyes of all Israel This expression alludes to where] [Moshes] heart stirred him up to smash the tablets before their eyes, as it is said, and I shattered them before your eyes (Deut. 9:17).

Imagine! Rashi chooses to identify the closing words that the Torah describes as one that Moshe wrought to the eyes of all Israel as none other than the smashing of the, Luchos, the Two Tablets given to him at Sinai. Is there no better way to end the Torah? Is this Moshess defining act that is worthy of interpreting as the great awe done before the eyes of Israel? After all, many miracles were done before the eyes of Israel why choose the smashing of the Luchos? Is there no better way to venerate Moshe in the final yearly reading of the Torah?

The Volozhin Yeshiva was founded in 1803 by Rav Chaim of Volozhin the premier student of the Vilna Gaon. It was a ground-breaking institute as, until its founding, there were no organized Yeshivos. Students who wanted to learn Torah would have to find their own rebbe, a place to eat and sleep and a group of like-minds to study with. Volozhin Yeshiva provided shelter and food plus a mass of brilliant students who would grow in Torah knowledge together.

Indeed, through the decades of its existence the greatest Jewish minds and ultimately leaders of Judaism emerged, among them Rabbi Avraham Dovber Kahana Shapira, Rabbi Abraham Issac HaKohen Kook, Rabbi Shimon Shkop, Rabbi Boruch Ber Leibowitz. Yet in 1892, its Dean, the revered, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin decided to close its doors and shut down, the Yeshiva perhaps forever.

The Russian Government, at the time, demanded the introduction of certain secular studies. They also wanted to regulate the curriculum with dictates that included, "All teachers of all subjects must have college diplomas; no Judaic subjects may be taught between 9 AM and 3 PM; no night classes are allowed; total hours of study per day may not exceed ten." Rather than comply, Rabbi Berlin closed the yeshiva. The episode occurred during an era of the Yeshiva's greatness. The number of students approached four hundred. They came from the entire Russian Empire from Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, and Poland and even from western countries like Britain, Germany, Austria, and the United States. Volozhin was the center of Torah study the heart of which was the Holy Yeshiva. But that did not stop, the Netziv from closing the doors.

I often wonder, what went on in his mind when he made that decision. Did he think that this may be the end of organized Yeshiva study forever? Did he worry about the hundreds of students who perhaps would now never become great Torah Leaders? I dont know. I doubt he thought of the later emergence of great yeshoivos, among them Telshe, Slobodka, Kletzk and Kelm, Mir that managed to arise. I cannot imagine that he thought of countless other institutions of Torah study that now host tens of thousands of students who in the tradition of Volozhin study day and night with no Government dictates or secular interference.

What would have been had he compromised? What would have been if he did water-down his values and traditions to meet the demands of the Russian Government? I posit that there may have been many fine scholars and observant Jews that may have emerged from the New Volozhin Seminary, but would have had a Reb Boruch Ber or Reb Shimon?

I think his act defined the future of the face of Jewish Torah scholarship. And so did Moshes smashing of the luchos. He did what he had to do in order that a Phoenix of Torah and observance would reemerge from the broken pieces. And thus the day in

which we rejoice in the completion of the Torah, we thank Moshe whose bold act enabled a new vision and commitment that ultimately defined the future of Yiddishkeit.

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

What Simcha Is

The festival of Sukkos is associated with simcha (joy): "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered the produce of the land, you will celebrate the feast of the L-rd seven days ... and you will rejoice before the L-rd your G-d seven days" (Lev. 23:39-40). The Gemara tells us about a joyful event that used to take place during Chol HaMoed Sukkos. That was the celebration of Simchas Beis HaShoeva, in which men would dance in the sukka, and sing songs that they had composed. However there are certain things about this celebration that we should be aware of: only tzaddikim, and the Gedolei HaDor, would be eligible to participate. Others could watch from the sidelines. The Gemara records the type of songs that would be sung on these occasions: tzaddikim would sing: "Happy am I that the behavior of my youth does not compromise my old age", and baalei tshuva would sing: "Happy am I that my old age redeems the behavior of my youth". It also records what one of the participants, R' Shimon ben Gamliel, did: he would juggle eight lit torches in the sukka, without any two of them touching each other; and he would also stand on his thumbs.

The Mishne says: "Anyone who has not witnessed Simchas Beis HaShoeva does not know what simcha is."

The question comes to mind: Why is simcha so associated with the sukka? We know that living in a sukka can be an uncomfortable experience, what with cold weather, and insects sharing our meals. No matter how humble our homes may be, we realize their comfort when we spend some time in a sukka, which, after all, does not even have a roof!

I was thinking about this, and concluded that that is the very reason for the joy! When we are in our homes, we tend to become involved with material concerns: Is the pile on our carpet thick enough? Should the wall-paper be changed? Should we get a better VCR? And so on, and so on. In a sukka, these concerns melt away, our neshamos (souls) have a chance to blossom, and each person can develop self-esteem, a feeling of his or her own worth.

This may explain the songs sung by the participants of Simchas Beis HaShoeva. The "B.T.'s", who might otherwise be depressed about their youthful behavior, would be glad about their present status, which more than compensated for it, and the other tzaddikim (the "F.F.B.'s"), who might otherwise be concerned about their apparent secondary status compared to B.T.'s (for it is written that "No tzaddik may stand in the place of a baal tshuva"), would be glad about their unsullied youth, as well they might.

The Gemara (ibid.) says that Hillel, on entering a sukka to participate in a Simcha Beis HaShoeva, would say, "Now that I am here, it is as if everyone is here," and on leaving, he would say, "Now it is as if everyone is leaving." This may seem uncharacteristically immodest of Hillel, who was a very humble man, but is understandable in terms of what we said above: he was, after all, the Gadol HaDor, and could justifiably view himself as such.

In the Talmud Yerushalmi is is written that the prophet Jonah, while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the festival of Sukkos, entered a sukka during the Simchas Beis HaShoeva, and it was on this occasion that the spirit of prophecy descended on him. From here, says the Gemara, we learn that simcha is necessary for prophecy. Happiness is not an end, but the beginning of the loftiest spiritual heights.

Parsha Puns!

If u wonder WATER we doing, the NAKED truth is I'm ADAMant not 2 leEVE things alone. So turn over a new LEAF & have an enLIGHTening SHABBOS!

Follow @ParshaPuns

Can't figure them out? Sign up for the solution by emailing yitzw1@gmail.com