

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

At a dinner to celebrate the work of a communal leader, the guest speaker paid tribute to his many qualities: his dedication, hard work and foresight. As he sat down the leader leaned over and said, "You forget to mention one thing." "What was that?" asked the speaker. The leader replied, "My humility."

Quite so. Great leaders have many qualities, but humility is usually not one of them. With rare exceptions they tend to be ambitious, with a high measure of self regard. They expect to be obeyed, honoured, respected, even feared. They may wear their superiority effortlessly -- Eleanor Roosevelt called this "wearing an invisible crown" -- but there is a difference between this and humility.

This makes one provision in our parsha unexpected and powerful. The Torah is speaking about a king. Knowing, as Lord Acton put it, that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely, it specifies three temptations to which a king in ancient times was exposed. A king, it says, should not accumulate many horses or wives or wealth -- the three traps into which, centuries later, King Solomon eventually fell.

Then it adds: When [the king] is established on his royal throne, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this Torah... It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to be in awe of the Lord his G-d and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not feel superior to his brethren or turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time in the midst of Israel. (Deut. 17:18-20)

If a king, whom all are bound to honour, is commanded to be humble -- "not feel superior to his brethren" -- how much more so the rest of us. Moses, the greatest leader the Jewish people ever had, was "very humble, more so than anyone on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). Was it that he was great because he was humble, or humble because he was great? Either way, as R. Johanan said of G-d himself, "Wherever you find his greatness there you find his humility." (Pesikta Zutrata, Ekev)

This is one of the genuine revolutions Judaism brought about in the history of spirituality. The idea that a king in the ancient world should be humble would

have seemed farcical. We can still today see, in the ruins and relics of Mesopotamia and Egypt, an almost endless series of vanity projects created by rulers in honour of themselves. Ramses II had four statues of himself and two of Queen Nefertiti placed on the front of the Temple at Abu Simbel. At 33 feet high, they are almost twice the height of Lincoln's statue in Washington.

Aristotle would not have understood the idea that humility is a virtue. For him the megalopsychos, the great-souled man, was an aristocrat, conscious of his superiority to the mass of humankind. Humility, along with obedience, servitude and self-abasement, was for the lower orders, those who had been born not to rule but to be ruled. The idea that a king should be humble was a radically new idea introduced by Judaism and later adopted by Christianity.

This is a clear example of how spirituality makes a difference to the way we act, feel and think. Believing that there is a G-d in whose presence we stand means that we are not the centre of our world. G-d is. "I am dust and ashes," said Abraham, the father of faith. "Who am I?" said Moses, the greatest of the prophets. This did not render them servile or sycophantic. It was precisely at the moment Abraham called himself dust and ashes that he challenged G-d on the justice of His proposed punishment of Sodom and the cities of the plain. It was Moses, the humblest of men, who urged G-d to forgive the people, and if not, "Blot me out of the book You have written." These were among the boldest spirits humanity has ever produced.

There is a fundamental difference between two words in Hebrew: anivut, "humility", and shiflut, "self-abasement". So different are they that Maimonides defined humility as the middle path between shiflut and pride. (Eight Chapters, ch. 4; Commentary to Avot, 4:4. In Hilkhot Teshuvah 9:1, he defines shiflut as the opposite of malkhut, sovereignty.)

Humility is not low self-regard. That is shiflut. Humility means that you are secure enough not to need to be reassured by others. It means that you don't feel



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you have to prove yourself by showing that you are cleverer, smarter, more gifted or successful than others. You are secure because you live in G-d's love. He has faith in you even if you do not. You do not need to compare yourself to others. You have your task, they have theirs, and that leads you to co-operate, not compete.

This means that you can see other people and value them for what they are. They are not just a series of mirrors at which you look only to see your own reflection. Secure in yourself you can value others. Confident in your identity you can value the people not like you. Humility is the self turned outward. It is the understanding that "It's not about you."

Already in 1979 the late Christopher Lasch published a book entitled *The Culture of Narcissism*, subtitled, *American life in an age of diminished expectations*. It was a prophetic work. In it he argued that the breakdown of family, community and faith had left us fundamentally insecure, deprived of the traditional supports of identity and worth. He did not live to see the age of the selfie, the Facebook profile, designer labels worn on the outside, and the many other forms of "advertisements for myself", but he would not have been surprised. Narcissism, he argued, is a form of insecurity, needing constant reassurance and regular injections of self-esteem. It is, quite simply, not the best way to live.

I sometimes think that narcissism and the loss of religious faith go hand in hand. When we lose faith in G-d, what is left at the centre of consciousness is the self. It is no coincidence that the greatest of modern atheists, Nietzsche, was the man who saw humility as a vice, not a virtue. He described it as the revenge of the weak against the strong. Nor is it accidental that one of his last works was entitled, "Why I am So Clever." (Part of the work published as *Ecce Homo*.) Shortly after writing it he descended into the madness that enveloped him for the last eleven years of his life.

You do not have to be religious to understand the importance of humility. In 2014 the Harvard Business Review published the results of a survey that showed that "The best leaders are humble leaders." (Jeanine Prime and Elizabeth Salib, 'The Best Leaders are Humble Leaders', Harvard Business Review, 12

May 2014.) They learn from criticism. They are confident enough to empower others and praise their contributions. They take personal risks for the sake of the greater good. They inspire loyalty and strong team spirit. And what applies to leaders applies to each of us as marriage partners, parents, fellow-workers, members of communities and friends.

One of the most humble people I ever met was the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. There was nothing self-abasing about him. He carried himself with quiet dignity. He was self-confident and had an almost regal bearing. But when you were alone with him, he made you feel you were the most important person in the room. It was an extraordinary gift. It was "royalty without a crown." It was "greatness in plain clothes." It taught me that humility is not thinking you are small. It is thinking that other people have greatness within them.

Ezra Taft Benson said that "pride is concerned with who is right; humility is concerned with what is right." To serve G-d in love, said Maimonides, is to do what is truly right because it is truly right and for no other reason. (Hilkhos Teshuva 10:2) Love is selfless. Forgiveness is selfless. So is altruism. When we place the self at the centre of our universe, we eventually turn everyone and everything into a means to our ends. That diminishes them, which diminishes us. Humility means living by the light of that-which-is-greater-than-me. When G-d is at the centre of our lives, we open ourselves up to the glory of creation and the beauty of other people. The smaller the self, the wider the radius of our world. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**T**he Levitic kohanim, the entire tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; the Lord's fire offerings and His inheritance they shall eat. But he shall have no inheritance among his brothers; the Lord is his inheritance, as He spoke to him." (Deut. 18:1-2) What is the essence of the exalted Hebrew month of Elul, the auspicious 30-day period of time prior to the Days of Awe in which, according to Hasidic philosophy, "The King is in the Field," when G-d is, as it were, more accessible to us than throughout the year?

How might we best prepare ourselves to meet the King while He is "in the field"? I believe that the story of Velvel, a Soviet refusenik I met in Riga, Latvia in the month of Elul 5730 (1970), offers an answer to this question.

Due to my intensive involvement on behalf of Soviet Jewry in the late 1960's, I was summoned to a meeting in Crown Heights (Brooklyn, NY) with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of blessed memory. The Rebbe, z"l, asked

me to be his shaliach (emissary) to establish centers of Torah learning in several cities in the Soviet Union, a mission that I felt honored to accept.

I filled my luggage with siddurim (prayer books), tallitot (prayer shawls), tefillin, and other holy objects for the Jews suffering behind the Iron Curtain, and flew, via Vienna, to the lion's den. During my two-week mission, I surreptitiously distributed these holy items to Jews in Moscow and Leningrad, before arriving in Riga, where I spent Shabbat.

On Friday night, I met a gentleman named Velvel in the city's main synagogue. During a long conversation after dinner, Velvel told me with deep sincerity that there was nothing in the world he wanted more than a new tallit, since the tallit that he had received when he turned Bar Mitzvah was in tatters. Armed with my remaining supply of Judaica, I gave one to him discreetly, which brought an ear-to-ear smile to his otherwise forlorn face.

The next day, during Shabbat morning services at the synagogue, Velvel entered the sanctuary proud as a peacock in his brand-new, sparkling blue and white tallit. I was mortified, as the KGB agents who had accompanied me to the synagogue would surely surmise that I, the outside agitator, was the source of this tallit.

As the cantor led the Torah processional through the cavernous, mostly empty sanctuary, Velvel drew near, and lifted the tzitzit (ritual fringes) of the tallit, in order to touch them to the Torah scroll and then kiss them.

The cantor, seeing Velvel, dramatically stopped the procession. A frosty silence overcame the sanctuary. Time seemed to freeze. Velvel's arm, outstretched in the direction of the Torah scroll, hung in mid-air suspended. The cantor stared at Velvel with disdain. Velvel reciprocated, keeping his arm extended in the direction of the Torah scroll.

The minute-long staring match went on for what seemed forever, with neither the cantor (who it turns out was also a KGB agent) nor Velvel giving an inch. Abruptly, Velvel screamed at the cantor in Yiddish:

"Ich hob nit kein moyreh!" (I am not afraid!) You've already taken everything that you can take away from me! When I began to come to shul and I lost my job as a result, my wife left me and she took the children with her. I have no job; I have no family. The only thing I have is my Jewish tradition. The only thing I have is this tallit. Ich hob nit kein moyreh. I am not afraid!"

The cantor, lowering his eyes in acknowledgment of Velvel's position, resumed the procession. Slowly and triumphantly, Velvel touched the Torah with the tzitzit and delicately kissed them. He had made a profound statement to everyone present: ultimately, we have nothing in life except for G-d, His Torah, and His commandments. Nothing else truly

matters.

This unforgettable, chilling story provides an invaluable insight into an enigmatic law of the Torah found in this week's reading Deuteronomy 18:1-2 stipulates that the Levites are to have no share in the inheritance of the Land of Israel. This seems rather unjust! In fact, Maimonides (Hilchot Shmittah v'Yovel, 13:12) asks and answers why this should be the case:

Why did the Levites not receive a portion in the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael...like their brethren? Because they were set aside to serve G-d and minister unto Him and to instruct people at large in His just paths and righteous judgments...He provides for them, as [Num. 18:20] states: "I am your portion and your inheritance."

This is the main lesson taught by my friend Velvel and the fundamental lesson of the month of Elul. This splendid time comes to remind us of our true purpose on this earth, to live a life dedicated to G-d. In the final analysis, nothing else matters. This does not require that we adopt an ascetic lifestyle alone on a mountaintop; on the contrary, a true life of holiness involves interacting with and relating to others.

Nevertheless, as Velvel demonstrated in Elul 5730 (1970), and as Maimonides wrote, to live a life dedicated to G-d is to acknowledge that ultimately, all we have is G-d, His Torah, and His commandments. Everything else is transitory and illusory. It is no wonder that it is precisely during this season that people are more prepared than usual to internalize this message. Perhaps this is because, indeed, "The King is in the Field." Let us go out to greet Him. ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

We are all in favor of equality and justice. The goal of all democratic societies is to have, as far as humanly possible, an incorruptible and fair judicial system. Since, however, judges are only human – no matter how knowledgeable and altruistic they may be, the perfect judicial system has never yet been achieved.

Nevertheless, in order to make society livable, we are bidden to obey the decisions of the court. As the Talmud itself points out, "even if they proclaim to you that left is right and right is left, you want to listen to them." The Talmud acknowledges that judicial error is a facet of life....for after all, left is never right and right is never left. So, how are judicial errors ever to be corrected?

The answer to that question usually comes with the passage of time and with the application of common sense to the realities of life. The famous dictum in Jewish life has always been "what wisdom cannot accomplish, time will." Heaven, so to speak, also takes a hand over time in adjusting erroneous judicial

decisions and somehow making things come out right in the end.

Yet, the Torah emphasizes to us that even though judicial error is possible if not even probable, we are to follow the decisions of our judges for otherwise anarchy will reign and society will dissolve. The decisions of judges may be analyzed and even disagreed with, but judges are to be respected and their judgments eventually are to be fulfilled. Ultimate justice is relegated to the provinces of Heavenly guidance.

Jewish tradition ascribes judicial decisions not merely to book knowledge and even to precedent, but also to common sense and an intuition of fairness and equity. The great Rabbi Israel Lipkin of Salant often pointed out that Heaven alone can take into account all of the facets, consequences and results of judgment, reward and punishment. The human judge is limited in perspective and foresight.

We are all aware of the law of unintended consequences, which dog all legislation and judicial decision. It is because of this that the Talmud ruefully has G-d, so to speak, busy undoing many of the decisions and actions of leaders and ordinary people in order to achieve the Divine will and purpose in the actions and decisions of humans.

All judicial systems contain a process of review and appeal from decisions made by lower courts. This is an inherent realization the judicial error is present and likely in all human affairs. It is of little wonder then that the phrase "trial and error" is so well known in the English language. The judicial system always attempts to correct and analyze itself. However, even in so doing, it is always subject to bias, preconceived notions and erroneous logic and decisions. Nevertheless the Torah emphasizes that judicial systems are mandatory for society to function. It is one of the basic seven laws of Noachide tradition. So, as in every other facet of life, the Torah bids us to do the best that we can but to be aware of our human limitations. ©2016 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's parsha discusses the issue of war and reveals that war is only undertaken as a last resort.

The portion opens by proclaiming, "When you come close to a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it" (Deuteronomy 20:10). Rashi maintains that this verse only applies to the first half of the paragraph that deals with optional wars (Deuteronomy 20:10-15). Hence, this part concludes with the words, "thus shall you do (seek peace) to all the cities which

are very far off from you, which are not of the cities of these nations" (Deuteronomy 20:15). But regarding the conquest of the seven Canaanite nations, obligatory war, peace overtures are not made. According to Rashi, this, in fact, is the intent of the second half of this paragraph (Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

Ramban disagrees. He insists that the opening verse, which outlines the obligation to seek peace first, is a general statement about both obligatory and permissible war. After all, Yehoshua (Joshua) offered peace to the Seven Canaanite nations, nations whom we were obligated to confront militarily.

For Ramban, the paragraph is divided following this general heading. The first half addresses optional war where those not directly involved in the military conflict are spared (Deuteronomy 20:11-15). The last half of the paragraph tells us that in the obligatory war, no one escapes, everyone is to be decimated (Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

Ramban adds that peace could be achieved, even in the case of the Seven Nations, those who manifested the worst of immorality and idol worship. If they renounce their evil ways and abide by basic ethical principles, they would be allowed to remain in the land.

Ramban, one of the greatest lovers of Zion, teaches us that even when it comes to conquering the land, there is a perpetual quest for peace. This position has been echoed in the State of Israel's relationship with its neighbors. Israel has always reached out to make peace and gone to war only when absolutely necessary.

All this is reflected in the pledge taken by Jewish soldiers as they are conscripted into the army. They commit themselves to what is called Tihur Ha-Neshek, Purity of Arms. This proclamation recognizes the necessity of self defense, but insists that war, if necessary can be conducted with a sense of purity, a sense of ethics, and with the spirit of a longing for peace, the true spirit of the Torah. ©2016 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

At the end of Parashas Shoftim, the procedures for preparing for war are discussed (D'varim 20:1-29), followed by instructions for waging war (20:10-20). Additional war-related laws are taught at the beginning of next week's Parasha as well (21:10-15), but in-between, the laws of the "Eglah Arufah," the calf whose neck is broken as part of the process after a corpse is found, are taught. Why are these laws inserted in the middle of the laws regarding going to war?

This question has two parts to it; why are they

adjacent to the laws of war, and why do they interrupt these laws (as opposed to being before or after them, allowing the laws pertaining to war to be taught contiguously). As we discuss some of the possibilities presented by the commentators, we will also discuss which of these aspects are addressed. Please note, though, that reasons are given why the laws taught at the beginning of next week's Parasha are adjacent to the laws that follow them (see Eliyahu Zuta 3, that marrying a captive leads to marrying a second wife, which to having a rebellious son); it is therefore possible that the last set of laws regarding war were moved until after Eglah Arufah to allow for this adjacency. Nevertheless, the interruption is significant, and worthy of discussion.

Ibn Ezra addresses both points, independently. First, he says (21:1, see also Chizkuni) that after teaching us about fighting our (national) enemy, we are taught about fighting one another. Obviously, this does not address why it is in-between laws regarding wars against our (national) enemies, but he will address that issue later. [The above-mentioned adjacencies could explain this as well.] The question we are left with on this point is that the category of fighting with each other, to the extent that one person kills another, was discussed earlier (19:1-13); shouldn't the laws of the Eglah Arufah be taught with them, there? Why wait until after teaching us the bulk of the laws regarding the nation going to war before coming back to private one-on-one wars?

Abarbanel's approach addresses this issue, as he says that the laws that are legislated by judges and political leaders are taught first, then Eglah Arufah, where the Kohanim also have a major role, then the "private" laws that are being directed towards individuals (such as those in next week's Parasha, including the ones that apply during wartime). [Ibn Ezra does not mention this aspect.] Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch elaborates further, explaining that after teaching the laws directed at the leaders (who make sure everything is being done properly), a law that deals with a situation that indicates that this leadership has failed (a corpse being found, rather than the person being protected by the authorities), is taught.

Ibn Ezra (21:10) explains the "interruption" as being based on the laws of the Eglah Arufah only applying in the Land of Israel. However, the previous "laws of war" refer to fighting enemies abroad too.

Ba'al HaTurim says that Eglah Arufah is taught with the laws of war because during wartime it is more common to find an unexplained corpse. However, since the Sifre (see also Sotah 47a) says this process only applies when murder is uncommon, it would seem that placing these laws here specifically, based on finding corpses being more common, is counter-intuitive. Rambam (Hilchos Rotzayach 9:12) attributes the reason why Eglah Arufah doesn't apply when murder is

common to the requirement that "no one knows who did the smiting" (21:1); if murder is happening regularly, it is likely that someone did see it occur, so knows who is guilty. It can therefore be suggested that since streets are likely vacated during war-time, no one was around to see who was responsible for this death, even such deaths occur more often than usual. Nevertheless, the context of the process indicates that this did not occur during wartime (see Rashi on 21:7).

The underlying message of the Eglah Arufah process is that each and every life is valuable; the leaders, both political and religious, must publicly atone for the unexplained death of just one person, likely an outsider, whose body was found outside the city limits. War can be very ugly, and usually is, and we can easily become desensitized to the loss of life that occurs (see Or HaChayim on 13:18). This is true even when just hearing about how many people are killed, let alone being actively involved in a war and taking the lives of others. It is therefore possible that the laws of the Eglah Arufah were placed next to (and after the bulk of) the laws of waging a war, and before laws that apply to individuals, precisely to teach us how valuable each and every life is. [Afterwards, I saw that Da'as Sofrim says something very similar, if not identical; baruch she'kivanti.] ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Home Inauguration

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

Inauguration of one's home in Israel is a Mitzvah, as we learn from this week's portion in which the Torah states when discerning who will go to war, "whichever man who has built a house but has not inaugurated it, should return to his home". Our Sages derive that this refers to a home in Israel.

The definition of the term "Inauguration" according to "Targum Yonatan", is that he has not affixed a Mezuzah on the doorpost, while the Radak States that the term is referring to someone who has not eaten a festive meal in it yet.

Some believe that to make it a "Seudat Mitzvah" (a meal that is a Mitzvah), one has to recite words of Torah ("Divrei Torah"), while others state that because it is in Israel, that in itself is a Mitzvah, therefore precluding the necessity of Divrei Torah, however in the Diaspora it would be necessary to recite "Divrei Torah".

Generally when one would purchase something new, as in a new garment, one would recite the blessing of "Shehechyanu". However since in the case just cited it is the individual who is making the blessing for himself, as opposed to when acquiring a home in which generally there are more participants in the acquisition, such as his wife and family, the blessing of "Shehechyanu" is not recited. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and

Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Gates of Justice

Parshas Shoftim begins with the command to appoint judges in all the cities of Israel. The Torah states: Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities -- which Hashem, your G-d, gives you -- for your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment (Deuteronomy 17:18). The issue is that actually the Torah does not say to appoint judges and officers in all the cities rather it uses a different Hebrew term all your gates. It is a strange expression. After all, the Torah is not referring to appointing officers to serve as border guards. Therefore the verse is translated as the gates of the cities, meaning, of course, all your cities. But why say the word gates instead of the word cities? Actually, the use of the word gates is analyzed by many commentaries, some that interpret the word gates as a reference to the personal gates of the human body the seven orifices which are a conduit to four of the five the senses i.e. two ears, two eyes, two nostrils and a mouth. The Shalah (Shnei Luchos HaBris) explains that those bodily gates of entry need both officers and judges who are constantly on guard to ensure that only the right matter is absorbed. However, I'd like to present a simpler approach.

Often the readers of Faxhomily and Drasha send in stories from anthologies or personal reminiscences that I might be able to use in future faxes. Here is one that I received not long ago, though, unfortunately, I do not have the name of the author. He related the following revealing story:

I remember my wife's grandfather of blessed memory. He was a shochet (butcher), a Litvishe Yid (Lithuanian Jew). He was a very sincere and honest Jew. He lived in Kentucky, and later in life he moved to Cincinnati. In his old age he came to New York, and that is where he saw Chassidim for the first time. There were not too many Chasidim in Kentucky and Cincinnati.

Once he went to a heart doctor in New York. While he was waiting, the door opened and a distinguished Chasidic Rebbe walked in accompanied by his gabbai (personal assistant). It seems that the Rebbe had a very urgent matter to discuss with the doctor, who probably told him to come straight into the office. The gabbai walked straight to the door and ushered the Rebbe in to see the doctor. Before going in, the Rebbe saw my grandfather waiting there.

The Rebbe went over to my grandfather and said, "I want to ask you a favor. I am going to be with the doctor just one minute, if it's okay with you. If it's not okay with you, I won't go in. One minute is all I need."

My wife's grandfather said okay, and the Rebbe went inside. He was in there for a minute or so, and then he came back out. The gabbai was ready to march

straight out the door, but the Rebbe walked over to him again, and said, "Was it okay with you? I tried hard to make it short. I think it was just a minute or two that I was there. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it." Later my wife's grandfather said to me, "I don't know much about Chassidim and Rebbes, but there's one Rebbe that I could tell you is okay."

Perhaps the Torah is telling us that those who adjudicate and lead are not only responsible to the people while they are in the court of justice. They are responsible even in their entries and exits as well. By telling us that judges must be appointed at the gates, the Torah may be telling us that the demeanor of the court officers and judges does not merely begin when the judges are performing official judicious acts in courts. Our leaders have a tremendous impact wherever they may be even at an entrance into the gates of justice. ©2016 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah reveals to us another impressive dimension of our final redemption. The haftorah begins with the words of Hashem to the Jewish people, "I Myself am the one consoling you." (51:12) The people were informed that Hashem would personally comfort them and return them from exile. Hashem continues and says, "And I am your Hashem...who will firmly establish you. Say to the inhabitants of Zion, 'You are My people.'" (51:16) These passages reflect some hesitation on the part of the Jewish nation to return to Zion. There seems to be a serious concern in their minds regarding the permanence of their return. They have experienced several returns in the past which were not enduring and they question if this one will be any different. To this, Hashem responds that He will personally bring them back to Zion guaranteeing their everlasting return.

Chazal (see Yalkut Shimoni 474) explain the guarantee found within this response with a mysterious parable. They compare this situation to a king who became enraged at his queen. He was so disturbed over her behavior that he rejected her and banished her from the palace. After some period of time he reconsidered his actions and desired to reunite with her. He informed her of his intentions to which she consented on the condition that he doubled the amount of her "kesubah" (marriage financial agreement). Chazal conclude that this same situation exists with the Jewish people. Hashem established His initial relationship with them when they accepted His Torah. At that time Hashem revealed Himself to His nation and proclaimed, "I am your Hashem." However, this relationship suffered much abuse and was eventually terminated. The Jewish people's behavior was so inexcusable that Hashem reluctantly rejected them and exiled them from Zion. Now, after so many years Hashem is displaying s

incere interest in their return. Recognizing their failure during their first relationship, they are doubtful if this second one will be any better. Even after all the magnificent revelations at Sinai they managed to stray and forfeit their relationship. What would secure that things would be any different this time? Hashem responded that He would increase His revelations which would guarantee an everlasting relationship with His people.

The incredible extent of Hashem's new commitment is presented to us at the close of the haftorah. Yeshaya says, "How beautiful is the sight on the mountain of the proclaimer of peace; proclaiming goodness and salvation and saying to Zion, "Your Hashem has come to rule... the sound of your onlookers raising their voice in unison and singing, because with perfect clarity they will behold the return of Hashem to Zion." Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (428) explain to us the impact of these verses and remind us that until this point it was virtually impossible to behold Hashem's presence with perfect clarity. Even when our nation did merit to sense Hashem's presence, it was with great limitations. However, in the era of Mashiach, all restrictions will be removed. The Baal Haturim (see commentary to Bamidbar 14:14) echoes this thought and contrasts the nation's experience at Mount Sinai to that of the era of Mashiach. Although the Jewish people once merited to "view" Hashem's presence they were incapable of maintaining their faculties throughout their experience. When Hashem began this relationship and proclaimed, "I am your Hashem", the experience was so overwhelming to them that they lost consciousness. In fact, Chazal (see Shabbos 88b) reveal to us that they were miraculously revived after each one of the commandments. This is in conjunction with the passage, "For man can not see Me and live." (Shmos 33: 20) However, in the era of Mashiach the Jewish people's capacity will be greatly increased and they will be capable of viewing Hashem with total clarity. This is what is meant in this week's haftorah when it states, "Because with 'eye to eye' they will behold Hashem's return to Zion." The words, "eye to eye" indicate that we will "per se" look Hashem directly in the eye. Hashem's return will be so tangible that they will actually merit to sense His presence with perfect clarity.

We now return to the parable of the king and gain new insight into the era of Mashiach. When the Jewish people received the Torah they experienced an elevated relationship with Hashem and merited to sense His Divine presence amongst them. However, this revelation was far beyond their physical and spiritual capacity and it did not produce everlasting results. When Hashem said, "I am your Hashem", His words could not be fully absorbed and the Jewish people did not remain in a full state of consciousness. The revelation remained one sided, and only from Hashem's standpoint was, "I am Hashem" shown in its

fullest extent. However, from the Jewish people's vantage point this revelation was not completely experienced and the relationship which followed was far from perfect. Eventually it came to an end with the Jewish people straying after strange ideals and false deities. Now, after a long period of rejection Hashem called upon the Jews to return. They responded with grave concern, "what will secure them from repeating their earlier failings?" Hashem answered, "'I Myself' am your redeemer." With this double expression of His name, Hashem informed them that the upcoming relationship will be double sided. This time the Jewish people will absorb the revelations in their fullest form. During the era of Mashiach the Jewish people will be adequately prepared to receive Hashem's presence in a full state of consciousness. Such revelations will yield perfect results and an everlasting bond will be established between Hashem and His people. This double expression, "I" and "Myself" reflects both a perfect revelation from Hashem's standpoint as well as an adequate absorption from the Jewish people's vantage point. In essence, Hashem will calm the Jewish people's fears by doubling His marriage commitment. Not only will there be a perfect revelation from His side but even from our mortal perspective there will be total absorption of this revelation. Our "eye" -- our sense of Hashem's presence -- and His "eye" -- the actual degree of His revelation -- will be one and the same. This will yield the most perfect relationship, an everlasting association with our true husband and father above. Oh! May we merit to see this day! © 2016 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Shoftim {Judges}. "Shoftim v'shotrim tetane l'cha {Judges and officers you shall appoint for yourselves} in all the gates that Hashem has given you for your tribes, and they shall judge the nation with righteous judgment. [16:18]"

The Kli Yakar points out that the passuk {verse} would have been more consistent had it said: "Judges... you shall appoint for yourselves... that Hashem has given you... and they shall judge you," as opposed to "and they shall judge the nation."

He explains that the passuk is addressing the powerful people of the community who are often involved in appointing the judges. Be sure to appoint shoftim {judges} who will not show preferential treatment to anybody -- even to those whom they owe their positions to.

That is the meaning of "Shoftim v'shotrim tetane l'cha {Judges and officers you shall appoint for yourselves}" -- make sure that they will be judges over you, the appointees. If you have done that, you can then be assured that "they shall judge the nation with

righteous judgment" -- that the general populace will receive just rulings.

The Talmud [Moed Katan 17A] offers some parameters as to the type of person one should choose to be the judge. Rabi Yochanan taught: If the Rav is like an angel of Hashem, then seek Torah from him. In what way is this Rav/Judge meant to be similar to an angel?

The Darchei Mussar explains that angels are described as not turning to either side as they move. This means that they do the will of the Creator without taking into account any 'outside' opinions. They go straight toward the pure fulfillment of Hashem's will.

That is an essential quality for judges. When a situation is brought before them, they must ignore all outside factors and decide what is the clear, pure will of Hashem as presented to mankind through the Torah. No other factors can be taken into consideration.

The story is told of a young man who was appointed to be the Rav of Hamburg. On the very first day of his arrival in town, he was approached by a woman who had a claim against one of the most prominent members of the community. The Rav, weary from his trip, asked if he could first get settled in and deal with the matter the next day. The woman however would not be put off, giving a number of reasons why it had to be done that day.

The young Rav called his shamesh {attendant}, instructing him to summon that wealthy individual to a Din Torah {Court based on Torah Law}. The shamesh seemed to be rooted to his place. "How can I summon this person to come before the Rav? The whole town trembles before him!" he thought to himself. He began to voice his concerns but the Rav refused to be intimidated. "Go and summon him immediately!" he told the shamesh.

The shamesh got as far as this man's door but didn't have the nerve to knock. He began to pace outside in the yard, hoping that the man would notice him and ask what he had come for. After a short while the man left his house and saw the shamesh outside. When the shamesh finally stuttered out an explanation, he curtly told him to tell the Rav that he'll come at his convenience.

The shamesh relayed the response to the Rav who sent him back with the following message: "The woman is not willing to wait and he therefore must come today." When the man heard this message he became furious. "Tell the Rav that he clearly does not yet know who is who over here. I run this community while he is only a guest here. If I said I'll come when I can, then I'll come when I can!"

When the Rav heard this message he rose like a lion. "You tell him that if I say that he must come today then he must come today! Otherwise I will have him excommunicated!" The shamesh begged him to send someone else with this last message but the Rav refused.

With no other option, the shamesh went this third time to the man. He literally delivered the message and then ran from the house.

A short while later this man came before the Rav with a big, warm smile. "Mazel tov! You have truly earned your position in this town!"

He explained that the community leaders were concerned that such a young Rav would not be able to stand up to the pressures of leading a community filled with such prominent and powerful people. This woman was sent with the pretense of a Din Torah as a way of determining that the Rav could stand up to the pressures. By focusing only on the will of Hashem, the Rav showed himself worthy and capable of this position.

Rav Moshe Feinstein offers another explanation for this passuk. "Shoftim v'shotrim tetane l'cha" -- every person must be a judge over himself. To be sure that we are doing the right things. To avoid rationalizing and making excuses. To ignore the pressures of what those around us might be saying and to do what we know is right. ©2016 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The Parsha says "what man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house and not let him make the heart of his brethren faint as well as his heart." In addition to the three categories of men who were exempt from military service (someone recently built a house, grew a vineyard, or recently married), a fourth category is added -- one who is fearful and fainthearted. Why would fear be a reason to be excused from fighting?

Rabbi Yossi Hagili explains that this category refers to someone who fears that he is unworthy of being saved in battle because of his transgressions. Rabbi Yossi adds that this is the reason why the other three categories were told to go home -- if someone were to leave the ranks because of his sins, he would feel embarrassed; however, since other groups were also sent home, his fellow soldiers wouldn't know why he was leaving. This is truly amazing -- a large number of soldiers were sent home during war time in order to save a sinner from humiliation. We learn from this that we must do everything possible to protect people from shame.

At a Pesach Seder, Rabbi Yitchak Hutner was splashed by wine inadvertently spilled, staining his kittel (the white robe worn by many at the Seder). To save the other person from shame, Rabbi Hutner immediately said "a kittel from the Seder not stained with wine is like a Yom Kippur Machzor (prayer book) not wet with tears." ©2013 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.