

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In the last month of his life, Moses gathered the people. He instructed them about the laws they were to keep and reminded them of their history since the Exodus. That is the substance of the book of Devarim. Early in this process, he recalled the episode of the spies -- the reason the people's parents were denied the opportunity to enter the land. He wanted the next generation to learn the lesson of that episode and carry it with them always. They needed faith and courage. Perhaps that has always been part of what it means to be a Jew.

But the story of the spies as he tells it here is very different indeed from the version in Shelach Lecha (Num. 13-14), which describes the events as they happened at the time, almost 39 years earlier. The discrepancies between the two accounts are glaring and numerous. Here I want to focus on two.

First: who proposed sending the spies? In Shelach, it was God who told Moses to do so. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Send men...'" In our parsha, it was the people who requested it: "Then all of you came to me and said, 'Let us send men...'" Who was it: God or the people? This makes a massive difference to how we understand the episode.

Second: what was their mission? In our parsha, the people said, "Let us send men to spy out [veyachperu] the land for us" (Deut. 1:22). The twelve men "made for the hill country, came to the wadi Eshcol, and spied it out [vayeraglu]" (Deut. 1:24). In other words, our parsha uses the two Hebrew verbs, lachpor and leragel, that mean to spy.

But as I pointed out in my Covenant & Conversation for Shelach Lecha, the account there conspicuously does not mention spying. Instead, thirteen times, it uses the verb latur, which means to tour, explore, travel, inspect. Even in our parsha, when Moses is talking, not about the spies but about God, he

says He "goes before you on your journeys -- to seek out (latur) the place where you are to encamp" (Deut. 1:33).

According to Malbim, latur means to seek out what is good about a place. Lachpor and leragel mean to seek out what is weak, vulnerable, exposed, defenceless. Touring and spying are completely different activities, so why does the account in our parsha present what happened as a spying mission, which the account in Shelach emphatically does not?

These two questions combine with a third, prompted by an extraordinary statement of Moses in our parsha. Having said that the spies and the people were punished by not living to enter the promised land, he then says: Because of you, the Lord was incensed with me also, and He said: you shall not enter it either. Joshua son of Nun, who attends you, he shall enter it. Strengthen him, because he will lead Israel to inherit it. (Deut. 1:37-38)

This is very strange indeed. It is not like Moses to blame others for what seems to be his own failing. Besides which, it contradicts the testimony of the Torah itself, which tells us that Moses and Aaron were punished by not being permitted to enter the land because of what happened at Kadesh when the people complained about the lack of water. What they did wrong is debated by the commentators. Was it that Moses hit the rock? Or that he lost his temper? Or some other reason? Whichever it was, that was when God said: "Because you did not trust in Me enough to honour Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them" (Num. 20:12). This was some 39 years after the episode of the spies.

As to the discrepancy between the two accounts of the spies, R. David Zvi Hoffman argued that the account in Shelach tells us what happened. The account in our parsha, a generation later, was meant not to inform but to warn. Shelach is a historical narrative; our parsha is a sermon. These are different literary genres with different purposes.

As to Moses' remark, "Because of you, the Lord was incensed with me," Ramban suggests that he was simply saying that like the spies and the people, he too was condemned to die in the wilderness. Alternatively, he was hinting that no one should be able to say that Moses avoided the fate of the generation he led.

However, Abarbanel offers a fascinating

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לעילוי נשמת

יהודה משה יוסף בן החבר קלונימוס ז"ל

Joseph M. Katzenstein

ו' אב תשע"ג

by Annette (née Katzenstein) & Victor Schabes and family

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alternative. Perhaps the reason Moses and Aaron were not permitted to enter the land was not because of the episode of water and the rock at Kadesh. That is intended to distract attention from their real sins. Aaron's real sin was the Golden Calf. Moses' real sin was the episode of the spies. The hint that this was so is in Moses' words here, "Because of you, the Lord was incensed with me also."

How though could the episode of the spies have been Moses' fault? It wasn't he who proposed sending them. It was either God or the people. He did not go on the mission. He did not bring back a report. He did not demoralise the people. Where then was Moses at fault? Why was God angry with him?

The answer lies in the first two questions: who proposed sending the spies? And why is there a difference in the verbs between here and Shelach?

Following Rashi, the two accounts, here and in Shelach, are not two different versions of the same event. They are the same version of the same event, but split in two, half told there, half here. It was the people who requested spies (as stated here). Moses took their request to God. God acceded to the request, but as a concession, not a command: "You may send," not "You must send" (as stated in Shelach).

However, in granting permission, God made a specific provision. The people had asked for spies: "Let us send men ahead to spy out [veyachperu] the land for us." God did not give Moses permission to send spies. He specifically used the verb *latur*, meaning, He gave permission for the men to tour the land, come back and testify that it is a good and fertile land, flowing with milk and honey.

The people did not need spies. As Moses said, throughout the wilderness years God has been going "ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go" (Deut. 1:33). They did however need eyewitness testimony of the beauty and fruitfulness of the land to which they had been travelling and for which they would have to fight.

Moses, however, did not make this distinction clear. He told the twelve men: "See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwallled or fortified?" This sounds dangerously

like instructions for a spying mission.

When ten of the men came back with a demoralising report and the people panicked, at least part of the blame lay with Moses. The people had asked for spies. He should have made it clear that the men he was sending were not to act as spies.

How did Moses come to make such a mistake? Rashi suggests an answer. Our parsha says: "Then all of you came to me and said, 'Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us.'" The English does not convey the sense of menace in the original. They came, says Rashi, "in a crowd," without respect, protocol or order. They were a mob, and they were potentially dangerous. This mirrors the people's behaviour at the beginning of the story of the Golden Calf: "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered against Aaron and said to him..."

Faced with an angry mob, a leader is not always in control of the situation. True leadership is impossible in the face of the madness of crowds. Moses' mistake, if the analysis here is correct, was a very subtle one, the difference between a spying mission and a morale-boosting eyewitness account of the land. Even so, it must have been almost inevitable given the mood of the people.

That is what Moses meant when he said, "because of you the Lord was incensed with me too." He meant that God was angry with me for not showing stronger leadership, but it was you -- or rather, your parents -- who made that leadership impossible.

This suggests a fundamental, counterintuitive truth. There is a fine TED talk about leadership. (Derek Sivers, 'How to Start a Movement.') It takes less than 3 minutes to watch, and it asks, "What makes a leader?" It answers: "The first follower."

There is a famous saying of the Sages: "Make for yourself a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend." (Mishnah, Avot 1:6) The order of the verbs seems wrong. You don't make a teacher, you acquire one. You don't acquire a friend, you make one. In fact, though, the statement is precisely right. You make a teacher by being willing to learn. You make a leader by being willing to follow. When people are unwilling to follow, even the greatest leader cannot lead. That is what happened to Aaron at the time of the Calf, and in a far more subtle way to Moses at the time of the spies.

That, I would argue, is one reason why Joshua was chosen to be Moses' successor. There were other distinguished candidates, including Pinchas and Caleb. But Joshua, serving Moses throughout the wilderness years, was a role-model of what it is to be a follower. That, the Israelites needed to learn.

I believe that followership is the great neglected art. Followers and leaders form a partnership of mutual challenge and respect. To be a follower in Judaism is not to be submissive, uncritical, blindly accepting. Questioning and arguing are a part of the relationship.

Too often, though, we decry a lack of leadership when we are really suffering from a lack of followership. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

There are two important issues which must be studied when approaching this week's Torah portion, the first theological and the second textual.

The theological question strikes us from the moment we open this fifth Book of the Bible: Moses is speaking with his voice to the people of Israel. Each of the other four Biblical books are written in the third person, in God's voice, as it were, recording the history, narrating the drama and commanding the laws. This fifth book is written in the first person. Does this mean that the first four books are God's Bible and the fifth Moses' Bible?

The fifteenth Century Spanish Biblical interpreter and faithful disciple of Maimonides, Don Isaac Abarbanel, queries "whether Deuteronomy was given by God from heaven, containing words from the mouth of the Divine as the rest of the Torah, or whether Moses spoke this book by himself... what he himself understood to be the intent of the Divine in his elucidation of the commandments, as the Biblical text states, 'And Moses began to elucidate this Torah'. (Deut 1:5)."

Abarbanel concludes that whereas the first four Books of the Bible are God's words written down by Moses, this fifth Book of the Bible contains Moses' words, which God commanded the prophet to write down. In this manner, Deuteronomy has equal sanctity with the rest of the five Books.

How can we understand this interpretation of Abarbanel? Perhaps Abarbanel is agreeing with a provocative interpretation of the verse, "Moses will speak, and the Lord will answer him with a voice" (Ex. 19:19), which I once heard in the name of the Kotzker Rebbe, who asked: "What is the difference whether God speaks and Moses answers Amen, or Moses speaks and God answers Amen?" God said Amen to the interpretation of Moses in the fifth Biblical book, I hope to further elucidate this idea by the end of this Commentary.

The second issue is textual in nature. The Book of Deuteronomy is Moses' long farewell speech. Moses feels compelled to provide personal reflections on the significance of the commandments as well as his personal spin on many of the most tragic desert events.

From the very beginning of Moses' monologue, he cites God's invitation to the Israelites to conquer the land of Israel. This would be the perfect introduction to a re-telling of the sin of the scouts whose evil report dissuaded the Israelites from attempting the conquest.

Indeed, he does begin to recount, "But you all drew near to me and said, 'Let us send out men before us, and let them scout out the land and report to us on the matter...'" (Deut. 1:22). But this retelling comes fourteen verses after God's initial invitation and these intervening fourteen verses are filled with what appears to be recriminations against a nation which Moses "cannot carry (bear) alone" (ibid 1:9). Only after this excursus from the topic at hand does Moses discuss the failed reconnaissance mission. Why the excursus? How does it explain the failed mission?

From God's initial approach to Moses at the burning bush, Moses was a reluctant leader. The reason was clear: Moses called himself "heavy of speech." I have previously explained this on the basis of an interpretation of the Ralbag, to mean that Moses was not given to "light banter". He was so immersed in the "heavy" issues, that he had neither the patience nor the interest to convince an ungrateful and stiff-necked people to trust in God and conquer the Promised Land. Moses spent so much time in the companionship of the Divine that he lost the will – and ability – to consort with regular humanity, to indulge in "people" talk, in "small" talk!

Moses knew himself. The verses leading up to the sin of the scouts are hardly an excuse. They explain his failure to give proper direction to the delegation of tribal princes, his inability to censure their report, his unwillingness to convince them of the critical significance of the conquest of the land. He could not bear the burden, the grumbings, of a nation which was too removed from God to be able to follow Him blindly.

Back to theology. Maimonides explains that even at Mount Sinai, the entire nation only heard a sound emanating from the Divine, a kol; each individual understood that sound in accordance with his specific and individual spiritual standing, in accordance to the level of his/her "tzelem Elokim," hence Divine Portion. Moses was the only one able to "divine" the precise will of God within that sound – the words of the 10 commandments (Guide to the Perplexed, II: 32). Moses was on such a high spiritual level that he internalized the will of God and was then able to express the Divine Will in the proper human verbiage! Hence we can readily understand why Moses, the greatest prophet of all time, loved to communicate and transmit the messages and commands of the Divine, but had little time or patience to communicate with his all-too-human and often grumbling nation. Hence Moses may not have always succeeded in relaying God's wishes to his generation, but he did succeed in giving over God's commands to all subsequent generations in the words of our eternal Torah.

But Moses also had a personal legacy to leave and an interpretation to give especially to the Jews of his generation! And so in the book of Deuteronomy, he spoke to his people, telling them not God's words but

his own. And God commanded him to write down the words of this Book as well for all eternity, God was thus granting the Divine imprimatur of Torah to Moses' Book of Deuteronomy – and making it His (God's) Book as well. In Deuteronomy Moses speaks and God answered Amen. This is how I would interpret the words of the Abarbanel. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our great teacher Moshe begins his final oration to the Jewish people in this week's Torah portion. He reviews for them the history of his stewardship of the Jewish people over the past 40 years. He recounts the miracles and tragedies that befell the Jewish people, from the Exodus from Egypt until the very day that they now stand at the banks of the river Jordan preparing to enter the land of Israel. It is a very detailed oration. Apparently, all the major events and issues, the highs and lows of the sojourn of Israel in the desert of Sinai, are remembered and recounted. He spares no detail or criticism as to what went wrong, and at the conclusion of this book, his love for the Jewish people is fully on exhibition by the manifold blessings that he bestows upon them.

Moshe mentions the heroes that arose to champion the cause of Torah and the Jewish people at moments of crisis, and he also tells us of those who fell short, i.e. how their acts of commission or omission led the Jewish people astray. He points out that heavenly guidance nurtured the Jewish people during this entire long span and assures them that the Creator will not abandon them in the future. But he also says that the Creator will hold them responsible for their behavior and their loyalty to Torah. What is striking to me is that Moshe omits any mention regarding the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle from his recollection of the history of the Jewish people in Sinai. Yet, in the text of the holy Torah itself, a great deal of space and detail is devoted to this subject. All the commentators are hard-pressed to understand why many eternal commandments are merely mentioned or hinted at, while the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle occupies a great deal of space and detail.

Though I have not found many Torah commentaries that discuss this omission, I have myself have thought about it at some length. I think that Moshe is communicating to us a subtle but vital lesson that will enable the Jewish people to survive national loss and destruction, exile and dispersion, and yet be able to rebuild itself physically and spiritually. Moshe is teaching us that all physical structures, though they are the holiest of all human endeavors endowed with godly spirit, so to speak, they are nevertheless only temporary.

The Mishkan/Tabernacle lasted for hundreds of

years in the desert and at Shilo in the land of Israel, but it eventually disappeared. The First Temple stood for 410 years but it too became only ruins. The Second Temple, which Herod rebuilt in enormous splendor and was one of the wonders of the ancient world, stood for 420 years. But it also was destroyed and disappeared. It is not the physical structure of buildings that has preserved the Jewish people until our very day. It is, rather, the Torah, its values and commandments, its worldview and systems of life that have enabled the Jewish people to survive and eventually prosper and rebuild themselves.

It is no accident that the majority of Jewish scholars follow the opinion that the third Temple will not be built by human beings, because it has to be eternal, and all human construction, no matter how grand, noble or lofty still remains only a temporary structure. Moshe, in his oration, speaks not only to his generation but to all later generations of the Jewish people. He does not dwell on physical structures which are always subject to ruin and replacement, but on the spiritual greatness of the eternal Torah that the Lord has bestowed upon the Jewish people. ©2020 *Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Even for those who believe the Torah was written by God, the Book of Deuteronomy seems problematic. After all, the phrase "And the Lord spoke to Moshe (Moses) saying" appears nowhere in the last book of the Torah.

In his introduction to Devarim, Abrabanel argues that although God speaks in the Torah, not every word in the Torah was said by the Almighty. On countless occasions human beings speak (e.g. Avraham, Pharaoh, etc) sometimes with Divine inspiration, sometimes not. Still, there is the axiom that the whole Torah is from God, in that God testifies that these words were said and upon His dictation and approval, recorded by Moshe in the Torah.

Hence, the Book of Devarim begins with God's declaration, "These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel...in the fortieth year...Moshe began explaining this Torah saying." (Deuteronomy 1:1-5)

In the words of Abrabanel, "although Moshe delivered his address to Israel on his own, the words as recorded in the Torah were not written on his own...However, God concurred with the words of His loyal representative, and by dictating and arranging these words...He revealed them, and Moshe heard and recorded them, like every part of the whole Torah."

Several ideas emerge from this analysis:

First, belief that the Torah comes from God

does not mean that God spoke every word of the Five Books of Moses at Sinai. After all, Moshe spoke the words of the Book of Devarim at the end of the forty year trek through the desert.

Second, the Talmud records the view that the Torah was given scroll by scroll (megillah nitnah). (Gittin 60a) In other words, during the trek in the desert, Moshe, as dictated by God, would teach a section of the Torah, and then write it down. In fact, the Talmud declares that the last section of the Torah describing Moshe's death was either – with God's approval – written by Moshe as he was crying, or by Yehoshua (Joshua). (Bava Batra 15a)

Third, the position of the Bible critics, that because of the different styles in the Torah, it must have had numerous authors, can be challenged. After all, in the Torah, different personalities spoke – their tone, their use of language differed. And, it ought to be added, that the style changes as dictated by the matter covered. Narratives, by definition, differ from legal presentations of law, which differ from descriptions of how the Mishkan was built or how the sacrificial service was offered.

Finally, as God is eternal, so is the Torah eternal, as the Torah in its entirety is an expression of God's revelation.

The portion of Devarim is always read on the Shabbat preceding the Ninth of Av. Despite the calamity of the destruction of the Temples, the Torah survived. God and His Torah are "forever." And so are the Jewish people to whom God gave the Torah. ©2020 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

A Well-Timed Rebuke

As we have seen over the past few parshiot, Moshe used this last week of his life to re-command the B'nei Yisrael with the mitzvot that Hashem commanded the previous generation at the beginning of the forty years in the desert. The children of those original families were about to enter the land, and Moshe wished to reiterate to them the responsibilities that they have to each other and to Hashem. Before Moshe began, however, the Torah gives us a long description of the exact location and the timing of this discourse which appears to be unusual in its depth.

The Torah says, "These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael across the Jordan in the desert, in the Plain, opposite the Sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzeirot and Di-Zahav. Eleven days from Horev, by way of Mount Seir to Kardesh-Barnea. It was in the fortieth year in the eleventh month on the first of the month when Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel according

to everything that Hashem commanded him to them. After he had struck Sichon the king of the Amorite who lived in Cheshbon and Og the king of the Bashan who lived in Ashtarot in Edre'i. On the other side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moshe began clarifying this Torah...."

The Torah lists a series of places in these first few sentences of the Sefer. According to tradition we are told that the names mentioned here may not be the actual names of the cities in the area but instead are couched in terms of sinful actions which the B'nei Yisrael committed in their forty years in the wilderness. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin points out that these are the same places mentioned in last week's parasha which concerned the numerous travels that the B'nei Yisrael had experienced. It was not uncommon for the same area to have several names based on incidents which had taken place within them. Rashi tells us that Moshe's rebuke of the people for their sins included these new names so that these new names would help the people reflect on the sins which they had committed there. That is why the area of Moab was discussed in terms of a wilderness even though the area did not have the physical nature of a wilderness. Thus, we see that the area referred to as Suf was not given that name because of the reeds that were there but instead as a reminder to the Jews of their complaints at the Red Sea (Yam Suf) many years prior to this. This is the same reason why our Rabbis tell us that there was never a place called Tofel or Lavan. These names instead are reminiscent of the complaints that the people had about the manna which they were miraculously fed.

Two time-frames are also spoken of in this section. The Torah tells us that the place where Moshe spoke was "eleven days from Horev, by way of Mount Seir to Kardesh-Barnea." The Ramban explains that this quote is to show us the vastness of the wilderness. Others, like Rashi, demonstrate that this is a criticism of the B'nei Yisrael. Had they not sent spies into the land and then believed the negative reports which they brought back, they would have already been at this point eleven days after leaving Mt. Sinai (Horev) and not after the forty years of punishment. The second time-frame is the pasuk, "it was in the fortieth year in the eleventh month on the first of the month when Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel according to everything that Hashem commanded him to them." This pasuk gives us the date of this speech in relation to the death of Moshe. The eleventh month is Adar and the day of this speech was the first of the month. We know from tradition that Moshe lived exactly one hundred and twenty years which means his death was on the seventh of Adar. This speech, therefore, was given in the last week of his life.

The Or HaChaim asks why Moshe chastised the people about the complaints that were made at the

Yam Suf, the Red Sea, when none of these people were old enough at the Red Sea to be held accountable. His explanation is similar to the Ramban's introduction to Sefer D'varim. Moshe had been the shepherd of his flock for forty years, yet he knew that his own sin would prevent him from leading the people into the Land of Israel. His words throughout Sefer D'varim were intended as a warning to the B'nei Yisrael that they were a stiff-necked people. This would be his last opportunity to guide the people for their future without him. Moshe had not seriously rebuked the people during the forty years in the desert because he knew that his words would be harsh and difficult for them to hear. He was also concerned with publicly embarrassing them which is a serious sin. Moshe understood the importance of giving the people the rebuke which they needed to hear, even if it would be harsh. He also wished to recommit the people to the Laws of the Torah which he repeated to them in his parting speech.

The Ramban's introduction to the Sefer speaks about one of the unusual aspects of this repetition of the law. When Moshe retold the Law to the people, "he does not mention anything relative to the law of the priests (Kohanim), neither about their performance of the offerings nor the ritual purity of the priests and their functions [in the Sanctuary], having already explained these matters to them. The priests, being diligent in their duties, do not require repeated admonitions. The Israelites, [the non-priests], however, are admonished time and again about the commandments that apply to them, sometimes to add further clarification and sometimes only to caution the Israelites with multiple warnings." The priests had their daily responsibilities in the Mishkan, and they knew they had to be diligent under penalty of Divine retribution. For the people, this constant fear was non-existent. Many of the laws for which they would be held responsible involved mitzvot which only came into effect once they had conquered the Land that they were promised. Up until now those laws were theoretical. Now that the B'nei Yisrael would enter the land and begin their conquest, these laws suddenly took on new importance. Many of the other laws were also laws which were not practiced by many because they did not deal with them on a regular basis, and these laws were also reviewed at this time.

It is interesting that today with the Land of Israel, there is the need to constantly review the laws which are applicable only in Israel and have been dormant for so many years. The Laws of the priesthood which can only apply in the Third Temple are sadly still not able to be practiced. There is, however, a movement of priests who have reproduced the tools and the clothing of the Kohanim and is preparing Kohanim in the study of these laws in the hope that the Temple will soon be rebuilt. But it is not only the Kohanim who must prepare for the Third

Temple. Non-Kohanim must also know how these laws apply to them, as the laws of ritual purity will affect all of us. May Hashem swiftly rebuild the Temple and may all His laws that were taught to Moshe and to the people become a relevant part of our daily lives once again. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

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Tisha BeAv Circumcision

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

A cup of wine is normally part of the circumcision ceremony. What is to be done when a *brit milah* takes place on Tisha BeAv and everyone is fasting? There are various opinions.

1. Early authorities cited by the *Ba'al Hatur* say that the blessing is made over the wine, but the wine is then put aside until the fast is over, at which point someone drinks it. Many *Rishonim* object to this because of the length of time which elapses from the recitation of the blessing until the actual drinking of the wine. Additionally, if the wine spills in the interim, the blessing will have been made in vain.

2. Some say that wine is not part of the ceremony on Tisha BeAv.

3. Others agree but add that once the blessing over wine is left out, the blessing that is generally recited after the *brit* should also be left out.

4. Still others posit that wine should be used, and children should be given it to drink. Some object because they feel that doing so might get the children used to drinking on the fast. However, advocates of this approach maintain that since a Tisha BeAv circumcision happens only infrequently, no bad habit will be ingrained as a result.

5. Some believe that a taste of the wine should be given to the infant who is being circumcised. There is certainly no concern in this case that the baby will acquire a bad habit.

There are many additional issues which relate to Tisha BeAv. Let us hope for the time when Tisha BeAv will become a joyful day, following the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of the Jewish people. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And it was in the fortieth year, in the twelfth month, on the first of the month, Moshe spoke to all Israel all the things that Hashem commanded them." (Devarim 1:3) The final book of the Torah, Devarim, begins just days before Moshe Rabbeinu leaves this world. It is now the first day of Adar; he will pass away on the seventh, just a week later. Now, he reiterates the mitzvot and the history of the past forty years.

Rashi here points out that the timing is very specific. Moshe waited to give Klal Yisrael 'mussar,' in

this case guidance for the future and learning from the past, until just before he left the world. From whom did he learn this? From Yaakov Avinu, who waited until the end of his life to criticize his sons, albeit in a constructive way. Rashi continues: Yaakov said, "Reuven, my son, do you know why I did not reprove you for your conduct all these years? So that you not leave me and join my brother Esav."

This seems quite a stretch. True, Reuven may have made an error in judgment, but seemingly it was not that bad. Chazal tell us that the sin he committed was moving Yaakov Avinu's bed to Leah's tent so that she not be dishonored or embarrassed by Yaakov putting his bed in the tent of Rachel's maidservant, and not what the literal verses seem to say. But is this act, done with noble intent, sufficient for Yaakov to fear that Reuven would completely turn wicked and join Esav? Why would he suspect Reuven of this?

Perhaps we are learning a great truth of human nature. Reuven was the bechor, but because he erred, he lost it. This is a painful thing. Had Yaakov told him then that it was his own fault, he would not want to have faced up to it. Instead, he would have gravitated to Esav who also lost the firstborn-status, and claimed that he was a victim.

It would have been comforting to Reuven to be in the company of another who went through what he did, and assuaged his ego by telling him he'd been wronged. It's much easier to blame someone else and having others support you in your position is very attractive. Yaakov was afraid that Reuven would join Esav not because he was bad, but because he did not want to suffer the pain of self-awareness. The youthful Reuven would have chosen to be close to Esav because it made him feel better, even as it unwittingly destroyed his soul and prevented him from ever realizing his mistake.

Therefore, Yaakov waited until the end of his life, when Reuven would not have to see him anymore and excuse himself or be embarrassed. Instead, Reuven would be free to reflect on the critique at his own pace and be able to correct what needed to be fixed when he was ready.

An older man was approached by a younger man who was beaming with a smile from ear to ear. He hugged the older man and said, "Rebbi, do you recognize me?" The older fellow admitted that he didn't. "You were my rebbi in cheder," he said, "and you made me what I am today."

"We were young and one of the boys got a very expensive watch. NOBODY got a watch before Bar Mitzvah then and we all crowded around to see it. At recess he left the watch on his desk and went to play. When he came back, it was gone. The Rebbi said whoever took it had to give it back but no one moved. Finally, he said that the boys should line up facing the wall with their eyes closed as he checked our pockets.

One by one the Rebbi checked until he found it in my pocket. I was sure I would be in big trouble but to my surprise, he sat back down at his desk, and told everyone to sit down. He said, "I want you to know that the watch was not stolen. It was taken by a boy struggling with his yetzer hara. We have to give him the chance to fix what he did; he's not a bad boy."

That Rebbi was you. I was so grateful you'd made everyone close their eyes so they didn't know it was me. I kept waiting for you to take me aside and scold me, but you never did. I thought to myself that if this is what it means to be a melamed, I want to be like that. And I have been teaching for over 30 years. Do you remember the story?" "Yes, I do." "So why did you never say anything to me?"

"The truth is," smiled the wise melamed, "I didn't know it was you. I ALSO had my eyes closed."

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RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"These are the words which Moshe spoke to all Israel on that side of the Jordan in the desert..." (Devarim 1:1 2:5) We're in the home stretch now, b"H. We started Berei-shis just under a year ago on Simchas Torah, and now we've started Devarim, b"H. Tisha B'Av is just over a week from now, and Rosh Hashanah is fast approaching. It's close enough that people are starting to wonder what it is going to be like, given the corona situation and returning limitations, at least here in Eretz Yisroel.

This week's parsha begins at the end of Moshe Rabbeinu's life. He is 120 years old to the day, born on the 7th of Adar and dying on the 7th of Adar. And as Rashi explains, there is no better time to criticize someone than on the day of one's death. Then they can speak freely without the criticized having to be embarrassed every time they see the criticizer.

The art of criticism is exactly that, an art. It is extremely easy to do, but much more difficult to do right. The goal of criticism is, or at least should be, to enlighten someone else to a better way of life. The result should be the one receiving the criticism saying, "Okay. I didn't realize I was doing that wrong. Let me make the change right away." Anything less and the criticism has basically failed, which is why many today choose to keep their complaints to themselves.

We have a mitzvah to set people straight, but only inasmuch as it doesn't make them bigger sinners. If we could help someone from sinning and don't, then their sin becomes ours as well. It is easy to err in either direction, especially if a person hates controversy.

There is an additional issue. Not everything we see as wrong is actually wrong. This is why we also have a mitzvah to judge a person to the side of merit, turning criticism sometimes into a question more than a statement. For example, instead of, "You did X the

other day," the person asks, "Did you know you do X?" This way a person has a chance, if necessary, to explain themselves and side-step the criticism.

Above all, the person doing the criticizing has to be l'Shem Shamayim, doing it for all the right reasons. They have to be sure that their criticism is not really a put-down on some level, which is why some have begun with, "I may not be the best person to tell you this, but you..." The admission makes the complaint seem more sincere, and easier to learn from.

Resh Lakish added another principle to the process. He said that a person should really make sure they have corrected themselves first before pointing out a perceived failing in someone else. Well, that just about shuts the door on many a critic right there.

That is from the side of those criticizing. What about from the side of those being criticized?

Criticism is a great opportunity for personal growth. If the criticism is unwarranted, then the person can happily shrug it off. But if the criticism has any validity whatsoever, even if it was given in the most horrendous way possible and from a person's greatest enemy, it still carries with it the potential for self-improvement, and that is worth everything.

All emotions aside, we're here for self-rectification. The goal of life is NOT pleasure. That is a SIDE benefit. The goal of life is PERSONAL FULFILLMENT, which does not always occur in the most pleasurable ways possible. How many years do people spend in school when they'd rather be on vacation? How many people suffer horrible jobs just to advance their careers? How many athletes punish their bodies for long periods just to become competitive?

If we do all that for physical and material improvement, how much more so should we do it for spiritual growth! WE don't, and for one specific reason: we can't see why we should, unless we're in an environment where everyone is doing the same thing, like in a yeshivah. Then at least we can measure the benefit of our efforts in this world, and not just in the next one.

I'm just reading the book recently published on Rav Noach Weinberg, zt"l, the founder of Aish HaTorah and my Rosh Yeshivah. I'm not that far into the book yet, but though some of it I already knew, most of it I did not. I knew he was a GREAT man, one in a generation, but the book is helping me to realize, somewhat, just how great.

As his earlier acquaintances and students recall what the Rosh Yeshivah was like in his early days, and what he went through to end up igniting what most in the Torah world had thought was only a pipe dream, one thing comes through most. A major part of his genius, and it is GENIUS, was to make Torah rewarding in the here-and-now for people who weren't yet sure if Torah was from God. They certainly had not yet accepted that there was such a thing as eternal

reward in the World-to-Come.

For those who have learned to love Torah from an early age, and who have never questioned its divine origin, this might be unnecessary. Lacking the psychological and emotional roadblocks between themselves and Torah expertise, they have hopefully entered the world of "Torah Lishmah." That is when you learn Torah for its own sake, and for doing so, it shares its other-worldly sweetness with its learner.

But for those of us who have a long way to go until we get to such a glorious point, and who have yet to believe enough in the World-to-Come to live for it, we need to be able to see what is in it for us now. It's what gets so many people in the door, hopefully long enough for them to realize that it is to their benefit that they learn Torah.

As I have mentioned in the past, when I first became somewhat observant, I thought I had done God a favor. I even told Him so. After learning some more and upping my commitment, I came to realize that He had done me a favor by bringing me to Torah, as much as I did Him one by accepting it. And then a year later, I had finally learned enough to know that if anyone had done anyone a favor, it had been God. He had not only put up with me before I lived by Torah, but He patiently waited for me as I waded in it before accepting it wholeheartedly.

And therein lies the secret of good tochahah -- criticism. If you say to someone, "Pssst, you wanna make a lot of money?" you will get their attention. If you look authentic, you will get their ear. If you prove reliable, you will get their money. As long as a person believes that they have something to gain by buying into your offer, they will at least consider it, if not actually buy in.

A good critic doesn't only point out another person's flaw. A master critic points out how it is to the benefit of the person they are criticizing, in the here-and-now, to fix their shortcoming. They will not hear someone trying to take them down, but someone trying to build them up. They will hear an offer they can't refuse. And the best part of all? They will be ever so grateful that you cared enough about them to share what you did to improve their quality of life. ©2020 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org



Tisha B'Av

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