

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he great transition is about to take place. Moses' career as a leader is coming to an end, and Joshua's leadership is about to begin. Moses blesses his successor. Then God does. Listen carefully to what they say, and to the subtle difference between. This is what Moses says: "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance." (Deut. 31:7)

And this is what God says: "Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I Myself will be with you." (Deut. 31:23)

The difference in Hebrew is even slighter than it is in English. Moses uses the verb tavo, "go with." God uses the verb tavi, "bring." It is the slightest of nuances, but Rashi tells us the words are worlds apart in their significance. They refer to two utterly different styles of leadership. Here is Rashi's comment: "Moses said to Joshua, 'Make sure that the elders of the generation are with you. Always act according to their opinion and advice.' However, the Holy One blessed be He said to Joshua, 'For you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them' -- meaning, 'Bring them even against their will. It all depends on you. If necessary, take a stick and beat them over the head. There is only one leader for a generation, not two.'" (Rashi on Deuteronomy 31:7)

Moses advises his successor to lead by consultation and consensus. God tells Joshua to lead firmly and with authority. Even if people do not agree with you, He counsels him, you must lead from the front. Be clear. Be decisive. Be forceful. Be strong.

Now this is a strange comment from Rashi, considering what we learned elsewhere about the leadership styles, respectively, of God and Moses. Listen first to the comment of Rashi on the words of God immediately prior to the creation of humanity: "Let Us make man in our image after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Who are the "Us"? To whom is God speaking and why? Rashi says: "From here we learn the humility of God. Since man was [created] in the image of the angels they might become jealous of him. He, therefore, consulted them. Similarly, when He judges Kings, He consults His heavenly court... Though they [the angels] did not help in his creation and [the wording of the verse] may give

the heretics an opportunity to rebel, [nevertheless,] Scripture does not refrain from teaching courtesy and the attribute of humility, that the greater should consult and ask permission of the smaller (Genesis Rabbah 8:9)." (Rashi on Gen. 1:26)

This is a remarkable statement. Rashi is saying that, before creating man, God consulted with the angels. He did so not because He needed their help: clearly He did not. Nor was it because He needed their advice: He had already resolved to create humankind. It was to show them respect, to pre-empt their jealousy of man, to avoid their resentment at not being consulted on so fateful a decision, and to show us -- the readers -- the fundamental truth that greatness goes hand in hand with humility. So it was God who acted according to the advice Moses gave Joshua: "Make sure that others are with you. Consult. Take their advice."

On the other hand, Moses acted the way God advised Joshua to do. "If necessary, take a stick and beat them over the head." Is that not figuratively what Moses did at Kadesh, when he hit the people with his words and the rock with his staff (Num. 20:1-12), for which he was condemned by God not to enter the Promised Land?

So we seem to have God saying words we associate with Moses' type of leadership -- firm, strong, decisive -- and Moses advocating the kind of leadership -- consensual, consultative -- that Rashi associates with God. Surely it should have been the other way around.

However, perhaps Rashi is telling us something profound. At the end of his life, Moses recognized one great failure of his leadership. He had taken the Israelites out of Egypt, but he had not taken Egypt out of the Israelites. He had changed his people's fate, but he hadn't changed their character.

He now realized that for this to happen there would have to be a different kind of leadership, one that handed back responsibility to the people as a whole, and to the elders in particular.

So long as there is a Moses performing miracles, the people do not have to accept responsibility for themselves. In order for them to grow, Joshua would have to engage in participative leadership, encouraging diverse views and listening to them, even if that meant going more slowly.

That is transformative leadership and it requires the leader to engage in what the kabbalists called *tsimtsum*, self-effacement.

Or as Rashi puts it: "Make sure that the elders of the generation are with you. Always act according to their opinion and advice" (Rashi to Deuteronomy 31:7)

As for God, He was not changing His mind. He was not suggesting that Joshua should become, in general, an authoritarian leader. He was suggesting that Joshua needed to do this just once. Listen carefully to the verse: "For you will bring the Israelites into the land" (Deut. 31:23) Recall that there was one occasion that condemned an entire generation to die in the wilderness -- the episode of the spies, in which the people lacked the faith and courage to enter and take possession of the land.

It was then that two men -- Joshua and Caleb -- stood firm, insisting against the other 10 spies, that they could conquer the land and defeat their enemies. God was saying to Joshua that there will be one future trial in which you must stand firm, even against the majority, and that will come when you are about to cross the Jordan. That is when the people are in danger of giving way to fear.

That is when your leadership will consist, not in consultation and consensus, but in allowing no dissent. That is when "it will all depend on you... There is only one leader for a generation, not two." Sometimes even the most consensual leaders must lead from the front and bring the people with them.

There is a time to discuss and a time to act, a time to seek agreement and a time to move ahead without waiting for agreement. That is what both God and Moses were telling Joshua in their different ways.

A leader must have the courage to lead, the patience to consult, and the wisdom to know when the time is right for each. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**“Y**ou are standing this day all of you before the Lord your God, your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your officers, even every person of Israel.” (Deuteronomy 29:9) Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma, explaining the connection between the multitude of grim warnings (tokhacha) unloosed in the prior portion of Ki Tavo, and this week’s opening words: “You are standing.” Our sages teach: since the Israelites heard one hundred curses minus two, in addition to the forty-nine in the book of Leviticus (chapter 26), their faces turned green and they didn’t understand how they would be able to stand up to so many chastisements (curses). Moses thus began to comfort them: “You are standing here today. You have greatly angered the Almighty [after all, you constantly complained in the desert, you worshipped the Golden Calf, you refused to conquer Israel] but nevertheless you have not been

destroyed and behold you are standing here today.” In effect, therefore, our opening has to be taken as a divine statement of consolation: You may well suffer, but you will never be destroyed.

Rabbi Yedidya Frankel, the late Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, asks three significant questions on this Midrash. First of all, why did it take the second set of chastisements to cause the Israelites to “turn green,” when the first set of forty-nine could hardly be described as benign experiences? Here is an example from Leviticus: “I will appoint terror over you, even consumption and fever, that shall make the eyes to fail, and the soul to languish, and you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it” (Lev. 26:16).

Secondly, the Jewish people seem to be recoiling at the massive number of curses – forty-nine from Leviticus plus another ninety-eight from Deuteronomy. But the fact is that last week’s portion goes out of its way to point out that the specific number of curses is hardly relevant because Israel will suffer every possible blow imaginable: “Also every sickness and every trauma, and every plague which is not written in this book of law, God will bring about against you until He destroys you” (Deut. 28:61).

And, in fact, the entire span of Jewish history bears out the horrible truth of this verse. For example, where in these warnings are the gas chambers of Auschwitz mentioned? And yet we were subjected to them! Hence, why does the added number of curses cause them to turn green?

Finally, asks Rabbi Frankel, from a stylistic point of view, why does the Midrash not utilize parallel language? If, with reference to Deuteronomy, the sages speak of “one hundred minus two” curses, apparently being interested in a round number, why with reference to the curses in Leviticus do they not say “fifty minus one”? Why then do they speak of forty-nine?

Rabbi Frankel brilliantly answers all of his questions by suggesting another interpretation of “one hundred minus two.” It is not another way of representing the number ninety-eight. If we go back to the initial set of chastisements in Leviticus (Parashat Bechukotai), we discover that, after the curses and the warnings are presented, the Torah then includes two comforting promises: “Then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember, and I will remember the land” (Lev. 26:42). Two verses later we read, “And even this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, and I will not abhor them, to destroy them utterly in order to nullify My covenant with them” (26:44). They were to be punished, but they would remain alive as a people and would be restored to the Land of Israel.

What prompted the Israelites to turn green with fright was when they heard one hundred additional curses in Deuteronomy, but “minus two” – devoid of any

comforting ending, without the two guarantees they had received with the prior set of curses. And if the chastisements of the book of Leviticus refer to the destruction of the First Temple and its subsequent exile, and the chastisements of the book of Deuteronomy refer to the destruction of the Second Temple and its subsequent exile (see Nahmanides, Lev. 26:16), the Israelites feared that there might not be a return and redemption after the second destruction. They feared that they would then be destroyed as a nation totally and irrevocably. To this end, Moses comforts them: "Atem Nitzavim – You are standing here," aren't you, despite the Egyptian exile and enslavement, despite your miserable backsliding in the desert! You are the people of an eternal covenant – and God's guarantee as to your eternality as a nation holds true for as long as world and history remain.

The manner in which Rabbi Frankel explains the Midrash is most optimistically comforting; we may suffer, but we will always survive! Of course, our collective tragedy is that even after the Holocaust, the total number of Jews in the world continues to decrease. Yet I believe that those who choose to remain Jewish today are all the more committed and are often much more serious than parents who took so much for granted. And it is precisely this minority of serious Jews which has been responsible for the preservation of our people.

If Josephus is correct that at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple there were five million Jews, then the natural birthrate of Jews should have easily reached 200 million by today. And even with all the deaths due to the rampant killings by our persecutors throughout history, we should still be left with one hundred million Jews today! But where are they? How did they disappear?

We must conclude that throughout our history, Jews have always defected, that we have lost many more Jews to the prevailing winds of assimilation than to the marauding swords of anti-Semitism. Sometimes the temptation to assimilate was too strong, and sometimes the sacrifice needed to remain Jewish was too difficult to bear. This is our destiny. Whoever is a Jew today is the product of generations of the most serious Jews in our history, the survival of the most committed. Moses may well be speaking to us today, after the Holocaust and in the wake of secular assimilation: "You are standing here today, all of you, before the Lord your God" – despite all your disasters and defections. Take heart!

An American magazine called *Look*, circulated in the millions, published a lead article in the early 1950's on the "Vanishing American Jew." *Look* magazine has long since vanished, but the American Jew is still holding strong. We are still standing here today – especially those of us in the burgeoning State of Israel – where our population has grown from 600,000 to six million in six decades – despite the ongoing struggle with the Arab states vowing our disappearance.

And my revered teacher and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, extracted one more crucial lesson from our Torah portion. There are two chapters of dire warnings and bitter tragedies in our Bible: chapter twenty-six in the book of Leviticus and chapter twenty-eight in the book of Deuteronomy. Many of our commentaries, most notably Nahmanides, link the chapter in Leviticus to the destruction of the First Temple and its concomitant exile, and the chapter in Deuteronomy to the destruction of the Second Temple and its concomitant exile. The first Babylonian exile was rather short in duration, barely fifty years, and was largely limited to one geographic area. Hence, the biblical chapter in Leviticus concludes with God's guarantee of Israel's eternity and our imminent return.

The second Roman exile caused our nation to be scattered all over the world and endured for close to two thousand years. And although it is true that there is no immediate guarantee of restoration – indeed, the restoration was long in coming – the opening words in Nitzavim, barely one chapter later, promise our eternal survival – and chapter thirty prophesizes our restoration:

"Even if you will be scattered to the ends of the heaven, from there will the Lord your God gather you and from there will He take you up. And the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers have inherited, and you shall inherit it, He will cause you to do well, and you shall be more numerous than were your ancestors." (Deut. 30:4–5)

The major difference is that whereas the first destruction is followed by a divine guarantee of almost immediate restoration, the second destruction will be much longer and will require Israel's "return" (teshuva) as its prerequisite. Hence before the divine promise of restoration "even from the ends of the heavens" comes the divine command: "And you shall return to the Lord your God and hearken to His voice" (Deut. 30:2). And "return" means two things: to the Land of Israel and to the Torah of Israel.

The first time, it was mostly up to God; the second time, it is mostly up to us! ©2024 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he Torah reading for this week is a fitting conclusion to the year that is about to depart from us. At the end of his long life and after decades of service to the Jewish people, Moshe renews the covenant between God and the people of Israel. He makes clear to the new generation of Jews standing before him, a generation that was not part of the experience of Egypt, nor present at the moment of revelation at Sinai, that the original covenant between God and the Jewish people remains in force. And he states that it will continue to be so throughout the Jewish future. The covenant cannot be repealed, altered or ignored. It is the basis for all Jewish

life and it is the leitmotif of all of Jewish history. Moshe admits that there will be events and occurrences in the story of the Jewish people that will be cruel, inexplicable and irrational. As he phrases it, there will be many “hidden, mysterious” events that the Jewish people will have to experience.

He offers no easy explanation to those events except to say that somehow they are related to the attempts of sections of the Jewish people to annul the covenant and its resultant consequences. The “hidden” part of the covenant belongs to God. The revealed part of the covenant – the obligations of Torah commandments and Jewish life – belongs to the Jewish people and are relevant in all their generations and locales. The Jewish people and the Jewish State will always be judged through its relationship to this eternal covenant. The existence of the covenant has caused us much pain and angst throughout the centuries. The other nations of the world harbor resentment against us because of the uniqueness of our relationship to the Creator of all, as exemplified by this covenant. Many Jewish thinkers have attributed anti-Semitism, in all of its virulent and even more benign forms, to a jealousy over the existence of God’s covenant with the Jewish people.

The covenant has remained the rock of Jewish identity over all of the ages. Just the knowledge of its existence has created a stubborn Jewish people – with a resolve to maintain its faith and lifestyle though a very small minority in a world of many billions. The Torah itself is the very essence of this covenant. It details its terms and conditions, and its study helps formulate the life that Jews are expected to live. That is why the Torah demands that we study and are aware of this covenant morning and night, traveling, at home, in all times and places. There were, and unfortunately still are, those amongst us who wish to discard the covenant and its obligations and merely to blend in with the surrounding general society.

The Lord, so to speak, has warned us many times that He would not allow this to occur. All of Jewish history teaches us regarding the strength and eternity of this great covenant. In the year that is now dawning upon us, we should all resolutely renew the covenant in our hearts, minds and actions, in order to be blessed with a year of health, success and serenity.

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## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### Hakhel

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

**G**ather (*hakhel*) the people – the men, women, children, and the strangers in your midst, in order that they may hear and so learn to revere the Lord your G-d” (*Devarim* 31:12). This refers to the

mitzva of *Hakhel*, which takes place on Sukkot at the conclusion of the *Shemittah* year. The Torah specifies the categories of people who are obligated to attend. Nevertheless, the verse’s inclusion of women may be limited, as we shall see.

Our initial assumption would be that women are not obligated in *Hakhel*. Since it takes place once every seven years, it seems to be a positive time-bound commandment (from which women are exempt). Yet the Mishnah tells us that *Hakhel* is an exception to the rule. There is another reason why women would might still be exempt. According to many opinions, the obligation of attending *Hakhel* is connected to the obligation to travel to Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage festivals. Only property owners are obligated to do so. Someone who does not own land is exempt from both the pilgrimage and *Hakhel*. Thus, it is possible that the verse’s inclusion of women in *Hakhel* is limited to the small minority of women who own land.

There is a disagreement about who is included in the category of children (*taf*) for this purpose. Some say that even the smallest children, namely nursing babies, must be brought to *Hakhel*. Others maintain that only children of educable age must be brought. According to this second opinion, who is watching over the little ones when all the parents are gathered in the *Beit HaMikdash*? If most women are exempt because they do not own land, this problem is solved. Furthermore, it is inconceivable that the whole nation gathers to hear and study the word of G-d, while leaving all the little children to run wild (or under the supervision of non-Jews, or impure Jews who are forbidden from entering the Temple. This is further support for the possibility that most women stayed at home for *Hakhel*.

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## RABBI AVI WEISS

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**W**e live in a world of memory and anticipation. So absorbed are human beings with remembering the past and worrying about the future that the present moment is fleeting and rarely experienced. We sing about “Yesterday” and “Tomorrow” but rarely about “Today.” Even when we are experiencing important events, we are often too excited or worried about what is yet to happen; in the process of waiting for the next moment, we fail to experience the power of the present.

Could this teaching be implicit in Moses’s words to the Israelites on the day of his death as found in Parashat Vayelech? “I am one hundred years and twenty years old this day [hayom]” (Deuteronomy 31:2). Why the necessity to add hayom?

The Talmud explains that, on its simplest level, hayom teaches that Moses lived exactly one hundred twenty years. His day of death was the same as his day of birth (Sotah 13b).

On a deeper level, it teaches that just as Moses

lived his last day fully, so he lived and so should we live every day fully.

This is the message of Thornton Wilder's famous play *Our Town*, about a woman who dies at a young age. After her death, the woman, named Emily, is given the opportunity to revisit any day of her life. In one magnificent scene, she is allowed to view her twelfth birthday. The dead Emily calls out to her living family but cannot be heard. She is anguished as she observes her family going about the day perfunctorily. The poignant narrative reads: I can't. I can't go on. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another. (She breaks down sobbing.) I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back – up the hill – to my grave. But first: wait! One more look.

Good-by, Good-by, world. Good-by, Grover's Corners...Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking...and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths...and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you.

Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? – every, every minute?

The importance of living in the moment is hinted at in the very first question God asks Adam. Adam has just disobeyed the divine command and eaten from the tree. God appears and asks, "Ayekah?" (Where are you? Genesis 3:9).

Commentators throughout the ages have noted that God obviously knew where Adam was. Ayekah, however, may be understood as an existential question in which God asks Adam to examine his place in the world. "Where are you?" is a question God asks all of us: Have you done your share to fix and improve yourself and the world?

Perhaps even more, ayekah is a kind of mystical question, in which God encourages all of humankind to be aware of its surroundings, to fully appreciate all that we experience, to be absolutely immersed in every minute, every nuance of life.

Not coincidentally, Parashat Vayelech is read in the High Holy Day season, when we end the service with the prayer hayom, repeating that refrain over and over. On these awesome days, we remind ourselves that the challenge of life is to live every day fully, to be conscious of each moment as it unfolds.

We are also spurred to recognize God's indispensable role in inspiring and sustaining the moment being experienced. As the popular adage goes, "Yesterday is history; tomorrow is a mystery; today is a gift from God. That's why it's called the present."

In this spirit, every morning I have found meaning in this reflection: Yedidi ahuvi, machmad nafshi, ana azor li lekabel be'ahava et hayom she'omed lefanai, yom kadosh ve'rav erech.

My beloved Friend, delight of my soul: please help me lovingly accept the day unfolding before me as

a holy day, a day of deep value.

Hayom. ©2024 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

"**Y**our children, your wives, and the convert in your midst, from your woodchoppers to your water drawers." (Devarim 29:10) Rabbeinu Bachya, in his introduction to Parshas Nitzavim, offers the parable of an archer who set up a target and began shooting his arrows at it. When he ran out of arrows, the target was still standing. This, he says, was Moshe's point in telling the Jews that they were "standing" before Hashem. Despite all the tribulations and suffering Klal Yisrael goes through, the arrows are finished, but our nation is not. We're still here.

In his speech to them, Moshe delineates that everyone was present. It was necessary for everyone to be there because they would accept responsibility for each other. Instead of simply being "every man for himself," each Jew is obligated to help his fellow Jew fulfill their obligations. We are responsible and culpable for their failures if we could have done something to help avoid them.

By mentioning the woodchoppers and water drawers, considered lowly occupations, Moshe was highlighting the fact that regardless of one's material station in life, they are an integral part of the Jewish nation, because within each of us is a spiritual component that cannot be compromised. A person doesn't need to be wealthy or famous or even brilliantly intelligent to aid others in their service of Hashem. We all have the ability to influence others, and should be willing to accept guidance from anyone, if they are giving proper direction.

This unification created a bond between us all that cannot be severed. It devolves upon us certain obligations and entrusts us with protecting the welfare of our fellow Jews, even when they themselves may not realize what they're lacking. How we behave affects others, so we must be very careful in the choices we make; they affect everyone else, too.

There is an interesting nuance of this posuk that can very easily be overlooked. The verse does not say, "You're all here, even the woodchoppers and water drawers." Rather, it says, "...from the choppers of your wood, to the drawers of your water."

Everyone standing there that day now became someone to be viewed in relation to myself. He isn't "a woodchopper;" he is "my woodchopper." He doesn't just carry water; he carries MY water. We have to recognize that everyone in this world has a role and a part to play.

They (and we) are here because Hashem wants them here. They have a place in the grand plan of

HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and we should be sure to respect and appreciation everyone for that – even ourselves. We should never feel that we don't matter. On the contrary, the world needs us, so it's up to us to be our best.

*Rabbi Shamai Blobstein is a noted Torah educator who has taught and mentored thousands of students, and helped many who struggled with various challenges such as learning disabilities. Never willing to write a student off, he recently spoke at a large gathering and shared the following idea: "When you are putting together a puzzle, there's a big picture there. Some pieces have the stars and moon on them, shining brightly in the sky. Some pieces are closer to the bottom of the picture, and they contain animals which are not as brilliant as the stars. Some pieces are rather plain and look just like other pieces, but they aren't the same.*

*In every puzzle, there is just a single piece that can fill the gap in each area of the puzzle. No other piece can take its place or the puzzle won't be complete. That is the world we live in. Each person has a role to fill, and if we do, and appreciate the others who do, we will all become whole."* © 2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

#### **RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## **The Redemption**

**M**oshe rebuked the B'nei Yisrael throughout Sefer Devarim as a warning against what he knew to be the future sins of the B'nei Yisrael once they had entered the Holy Land. Moshe reminded the people of the Laws of Hashem and reminded the people about the many times that they had failed to honor Hashem in the desert by rebelling against Him and His Laws. Moshe warned the people of the consequences they would face should they choose not to follow Hashem's Laws, yet spoke of the rewards they would receive by compliance. But Moshe knew that the people would stray and be exiled from their land twice. And Moshe knew that Hashem would forgive the people and one day return them to their land.

Moshe told the people, "It will be that when all these things come upon you – the blessing and the curse that I have presented before you – then you will take it to heart among all the nations where Hashem, your Elokim, has dispersed you; and you will return unto Hashem, your Elokim, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul. Then, Hashem, your Elokim, will return your captivity, and have mercy upon you, and He will gather you in from all the peoples to where Hashem, your Elokim, has scattered you. If your dispersed will be at the ends of the heavens, from there Hashem. Your Elokim, will gather you in and from there He will take you. Hashem, your Elokim, will bring you to the land of which your forefathers took possession of it; He will do good to you and make you more numerous than your forefathers. Hashem, your Elokim, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to

love Hashem, your Elokim, with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin asks why it says that it will only be after the people will receive both "the blessing and the curse that I have presented before you," that the people will react by returning to Hashem and His Torah. HaRav Sorotzkin answers that, "the blessing alone will not teach you to walk in the path of Good," and grant you a land flowing with milk and honey. And the curse alone will not convince you that without the blessing, the land will be one of hunger and thirst. It is only when one both observes the Laws of Hashem and avoid straying from the curse that will occur when you stray from those laws, that only then will one return his heart to serve Hashem. The Dubno Maggid explains that the curse alone would not have been enough to bring about teshuvah (return). The B'nei Yisrael might have looked at the curse and thought that this was just what the entire world was experiencing, not just the B'nei Yisrael. It would only be that when the B'nei Yisrael were suffering, yet the rest of the world was experiencing blessing, that the people would realize that Hashem was sending them a message to return to His Torah.

Rashi deals with the word "v'shav, He (Hashem) will return (you). Rashi explains that the word should have read "v'heishiv, He will cause (you) to return," as Hashem would seem to cause the people to return to the Land. Rashi explains that the Midrash tells us that Hashem was in exile with the B'nei Yisrael and would not return to His dwelling place until He returned together with His people. Rashi continues that Hashem would return His people one by one until all had returned with Him. The Ramban explains that when the people have experienced all of the curses mentioned near the end of last week's parasha, they will return to Hashem with all their hearts and all their souls. But they will also take upon themselves and their children to observe all of Hashem's Laws throughout all future generations. The Ramban also believed that there is a storehouse of souls in heaven and that Mashiach will not come until these souls have been purified and no longer need a body in which to further purify themselves.

The Ohr HaChaim asks why it was necessary for the Torah to say, "when all these things come upon you," when it could have said "when the blessings and curses come upon you." He answers that it could be because of the statement in the Gemara Berachot (54a), "Man is required to bless the bad just as he blesses the good." One must receive the bad things together with the good, with simcha, joy. In the morning prayers we say, Blessed are You Hashem our Elokim, our Elokim, the King of the Universe, Who creates light, and creates darkness, Who makes Peace, and creates Everything." Originally this blessing ended "Who makes Peace and creates Evil." This was changed so that people would not misunderstand that it is the rejection of Hashem and His Laws which creates the evil in the world. While it may

seem to be unusual to give blessing to the bad times, we must remember the words of Rabbi Akiva, who laughed when seeing that wild wolves were roaming on the ruins of the Temple, that if the prediction of the curses comes true, then the promise of the Redemption will also come true. The promise of the redemption is the promise of our paragraph.

The Kli Yakar was concerned that the B'nei Yisrael could easily have gotten the wrong message by being spread throughout the world. The people might have misunderstood this punishment and thought that Hashem's message was that He no longer desired their sacrifices, and they might no longer believe in the redemption and return to Israel. The people could have gotten the impression that Hashem no longer wished them to be involved in the commandments since a very large portion of the commandments only applied in the land of Israel (the shemittah year, the tithes of produce, etc.). But this assumption would be a big mistake. Hashem sent the people into exile so that they would do teshuvah and return to Him. This is evident by the pasuk itself, "and you will return unto Hashem, your Elokim, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul." Yet teshuvah does not mean that one has already performed all the commandments of Hashem, as many of those commandments will require returning to Israel and building the third Temple. According to the Kli Yakar, that is not the main desire of Hashem. What Hashem desires is for the B'nei Yisrael to return to Him, to listen to Him, and to obey His commands. That is the first step that Hashem requires. The second step is to return to Hashem from the exile and join with Him in dwelling in the Holy Land.

Today we have been blessed with the beginning of that redemption, the start of the return of the Jews to the Holy Land. Many who have returned have not fully accepted the first of Hashem's requirements: to listen to His voice and to observe His commandments. The first to return from the exile were part of this group. May we all learn to accept the first of our requirements so that our return will fulfill the second, the complete return from exile and the return of Hashem to His dwelling place on Earth. © 2024 Rabbi D. Levin

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Jewish Geography

Several months ago, I discussed the "other" Mishkan, Moshe's expanded tent that operated not only as a Beis Midrash where Moshe taught the nation the laws that G-d commanded him, but also where G-d communicated with him (<https://bit.ly/3XDY100>). Bamidbar Rabba (51:2) and Tanchuma (2/5) tell us that Moshe asked G-d what he should do with the extra material collected for the Mishkan, with G-d telling him to use it to make a second Mishkan. Midrash HaGadol (Shemos 38:21) refers to the regular Mishkan as the

"משכן שכינה" and the second Mishkan as the "משכן לבית" "מדרשו של משה." Other Midrashim (e.g. Sifre Zuta 18:4) refer to the regular Mishkan as "אהל העבודה" (since that's where the offerings were brought) and the second Mishkan as either "אהל הדברות" or "אהל העדות."

In order to deal with issues a second Mishkan raises, including G-d communicating with Moshe in two separate structures, I suggested that any communication only relevant for that generation (e.g. the census taken at the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar) took place in Moshe's tent (the second Mishkan), whereas commandments that were relevant for all generations were communicated to Moshe "between the two Keruvim that covered the ark" (Shemos 25:22) in the regular Mishkan.

Yalkut Shimoni (737) says this second Mishkan was the same size as the regular Mishkan; I suggested that this allowed the communications only relevant for that generation to be taken as seriously as those that applied to all generations. Both structures are referred to as "אהל מועד" (see Shemos 33:7), but since the "other" Mishkan wasn't as relevant for us, it's only hinted at in the Torah (but expounded upon in the Midrashim).

It's usually relatively easy to figure out which Mishkan each communication occurred in; if it's relevant for every generation, the communication occurred in the regular Mishkan's קדש הקדשים, whereas if it was only relevant for that generation, it occurred in the other Mishkan. However, in Parashas Veyeilech, there's a communication whose location isn't so obvious. This communication (Devarim 31:14-21) involved Yehoshua as well, and included instructions only relevant for that time and place. For example, it includes Moshe writing down "שירה" (i.e. adding it to the Torah) and teaching it to the Children of Israel (31:19). But it also includes the nation referring to the שירה when they suffer the consequences of not keeping G-d's covenant (31:20-21), which applies to the many generations after Moshe died. The Chinuch's 613th commandment (which is also Rambam's 18th positive commandment and Semag's 24th) – to write a Sefer Torah (or buy a new one if unable to write it) – is based on words in this communication, making it relevant for all generations. So, in which Mishkan did this communication occur?

There are strong indications that this communication did not take place in the regular Mishkan's קדש הקדשים (where the communications intended for all generations took place). First of all, it wasn't just Moshe who went into the אהל מועד for this communication; Yehoshua did too (31:14), and he wasn't allowed to enter the קדש הקדשים. He wasn't a כהן גדול, and even though he replaced Moshe, his prophecy did not reach the level of Moshe's. As I was reminded by Dr. David Luchins, only Moshe experienced prophecy "face-to-face," so G-d didn't communicate with Yehoshua "between the two Keruvim." Additionally, G-d appeared in a "cloud pillar," which wasn't only inside the



אהל מועד, but also by its entrance (31:15) so that the nation could see that the leadership was transitioning from Moshe to Yehoshua. Since the nation wouldn't be able to see this if it happened in the regular Mishkan, but could get close to Moshe's tent (the "other" Mishkan), it must have occurred there. Which leaves us wondering how one of the 613 Mitzvos could have been commanded in the other Mishkan.

There are several aspects of this commandment that set it apart. For one thing, the most straightforward way to read these instructions has them directed just to Moshe and Yehoshua, not the nation (see Ramban), telling them to write down the שירה and teach it to the nation. Secondly, the שירה refers to the song in Parashas Haazinu (see Rashi, Ramban and Rashbam), not the תורה. [When Rambam codifies the requirement to write a Sefer Torah (Hilchos STaM 7:1), he acknowledges that "שירה" doesn't mean the whole Torah; the entire Torah must be written because the שירה can't be written by itself.] Why was the requirement to write a Torah worded as if only the שירה had to be written?

There's another factor that separates this biblical commandment from the others – when it became a possibility. The Talmud (Nedarim 38a, which also says the שירה refers specifically to the song in Parashas Haazinu) says that originally the Torah was only given to Moshe and his descendants, but Moshe was gracious and shared it with the entire nation. Similarly, Rashi (Devarim 29:3) tells us that when Moshe gave a copy of the Torah to the Tribe of Levi, the other Tribes wanted copies too, indicating that the Torah wasn't originally intended to be referenced by everyone. How could there be a biblical commandment for each person to write (or own) a Sefer Torah if access was originally limited to only a select few?

It therefore seems that this commandment was only instituted shortly before Moshe's death, after the nation insisted that they also have copies of the Torah. When the Talmud (Sanhedrin 21b) says that the instructions to Moshe and Yehoshua to write the שירה include a commandment for the entire nation to write a Sefer Torah, it isn't saying that the word "שירה" refers to the whole Torah, but that embedded in the same words as the instructions to Moshe and Yehoshua to include the שירה in the Torah (and teach it to the nation) is the recently applicable commandment for everyone to write their own Torah. It was taught this way (as an embedded second layer) because it wasn't originally included in the commandments meant for all generations – which is also why it wasn't taught in the regular Mishkan, but in the "other" Mishkan, Moshe's (expanded) tent. © 2024 Rabbi D. Kramer

**SHLOMO KATZ**

## Hama'ayan

**P**arashat Nitzavim, which is always read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah -- sometimes, as

this year, together with Parashat Vayeilech, and sometimes alone -- is the Parashah of Teshuvah and of Mashiach. We read, for example (30:2-3), "You will return to Hashem, your Elokim, and listen to His voice, in accordance with everything that I command you today -- you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul. Then Hashem, your Elokim, will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you, and He will gather you in from all the peoples to which Hashem, your Elokim, has scattered you."

R' Yisrael Eliyahu Weintraub z"l (1932-2010; Bnei Brak, Israel) writes: There is a verse earlier in the Parashah which describes what mankind will look like in the generation before the final Teshuvah and the coming of Mashiach. We read (29:17-18), "Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, [who], when he hears the words of this curse, will bless himself in his heart, saying, 'Peace will be with me, though I walk in the way my heart sees fit.'" Walking in the way "my" heart sees fit, being completely self-centered, and demanding that everything be the way "I" want it to be characterizes that generation, R' Weintraub writes.

That attitude is the polar opposite of the purpose for which man was created, R' Weintraub continues. We were created to struggle, as the Gemara (Berachot 5a) comments on the verse (4:5), "Rigzu / Tremble, and sin not." The Gemara says: "A person should constantly Yargiz / incite the Yetzer Ha'tov against the Yetzer Ha'ra." It is through challenges that a person proves his loyalty to Hashem.

R' Weintraub writes further: Rosh Hashanah is closely associated with our Patriarch Yitzchak -- as is evident in the Torah readings, the many references to Akeidat Yitzchak, and especially the blowing of the Shofar, which recalls the ram that was offered in Yitzchak's place. Unlike Avraham, who is associated with the trait of Chesed / kindness, Yitzchak is associated with Din / strict justice. Yitzchak reminds us that there is a Judge who judges every last detail of our behavior.

But there is a deeper aspect to Yitzchak and Din: Yitzchak's contemporaries feared him because of his association with G-d's Justice. Thus, for example, Avimelech, the king of Gerar, drove Yitzchak away. But then, Yitzchak struck it rich, and Avimelech suddenly wanted to be his friend again, as described in Parashat Toldot. Yitzchak's success shows that, in fact, Din, living a life of accountability, brings happiness; living life like it is a free-for-all -- "I walk in the way my heart sees fit" -- does not bring happiness. It follows, writes R' Weintraub, that the Days of Judgment are not days to run away from, but rather to embrace, for ultimately, a life of Din can bring us success and happiness. (Nefesh Eliyahu: Ma'amarei Chodesh Ha'shevi'i p.27)

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