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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It is hard to trace with any precision the moment when a new idea makes its first appearance on the human scene, especially one as amorphous as that of love. But love has a history.[1] There is the contrast we find in Greek, and then Christian thought between eros and agape: sexual desire and a highly abstract love for humanity in general.

There is the concept of chivalry that makes its appearance in the age of the Crusades, the code of conduct that prized gallantry and feats of bravery to "win the heart of a lady." There is the romantic love that makes its appearance in the novels of Jane Austen, hedged with the proviso that the young or not-so-young man destined for the heroine must have the right income and country estate, so as to exemplify the "truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."[2] And there is the moment in Fiddler on the Roof where, exposed by their children to the new ideas in pre-revolutionary Russia, Tevye turns to his wife Golde, and the following conversation ensues:

Tevye: Do you love me?
Golde: I'm your wife!
Tevye: I know! But do you love me?
Golde: Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years, my bed is his…
Tevye: Shh!
Golde: If that's not love, what is?
Tevye: Then you love me!
Golde: I suppose I do!

The inner history of humanity is in part the history of the idea of love. And at some stage a new idea makes its appearance in biblical Israel. We can trace it best in a highly suggestive passage in the book of one of the great prophets of the Bible, Hosea.

Hosea lived in the eighth century BCE. The kingdom had been divided since the death of Solomon. The northern kingdom in particular, where Hosea lived, had lapsed after a period of peace and prosperity into lawlessness, idolatry and chaos. Between 747 and 732 BCE there were no less than five kings, the result of a series of intrigues and bloody struggles for power. The people, too, had become lax: "There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of G-d in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder" (Hos. 4: 1-2).

Like other prophets, Hosea knew that Israel's destiny depended on its sense of mission. Faithful to G-d, it was able to do extraordinary things: survive in the face of empires, and generate a society unique in the ancient world, of the equal dignity of all as fellow citizens under the sovereignty of the Creator of heaven and earth. Faithless, however, it was just one more minor power in the ancient Near East, whose chances of survival against larger political predators were minimal.

What makes the book of Hosea remarkable is the episode with which it begins. G-d tells the prophet to marry a prostitute, and see what it feels like to have a love betrayed. Only then will Hosea have a glimpse into G-d's sense of betrayal by the people of Israel. Having liberated them from slavery and brought them into their land, G-d saw them forget the past, forsake the covenant, and worship strange gods. Yet He cannot abandon them despite the fact that they have abandoned Him. It is a powerful passage, conveying the astonishing assertion that more than the Jewish people love G-d, G-d loves the Jewish people. The history of Israel is a love story between the faithful G-d and his often faithless people. Though G-d is sometimes angry, He cannot but forgive. He will take them on a kind of second honeymoon, and they will renew their marriage vows:

"Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the desert
and speak tenderly to her . . .
I will betroth you to me forever;
I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.
I will betroth you in faithfulness,
and you will know the Lord." (Hosea 2: 16-22)

It is this last sentence – with its explicit comparison between the covenant and a marriage – that Jewish men say when they put on the hand-tefillin, winding its strap around the finger like a wedding-ring.

One verse in the midst of this prophecy

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[1] See, e.g., C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960. Simon May, Love: A History. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011.

[2] The famous first line of Pride and Prejudice.

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deserves the closest scrutiny. It contains two complex metaphors that must be unraveled strand by strand:

"In that day," declares the Lord,
"you will call Me 'my husband' [ishi];
you will no longer call Me 'my master' [baali]. (Hosea 2: 18)

This is a double pun. Baal, in biblical Hebrew, meant 'a husband', but in a highly specific sense – namely, 'master, owner, possessor, controller.' It signalled physical, legal and economic dominance. It was also the name of the Canaanite god – whose prophets Elijah challenged in the famous confrontation at Mount Carmel. Baal (often portrayed as a bull) was the god of the storm, who defeated Mot, the god of sterility and death. Baal was the rain that impregnated the earth and made it fertile. The religion of Baal is the worship of god-as-power.

Hosea contrasts this kind of relationship with the other Hebrew word for husband, ish. Here he is recalling the words of the first man to the first woman:

"This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman [ishah],
Because she was taken from Man [ish]." (Gen. 2: 23)

Here the male-female relationship is predicated on something quite other than power and dominance, ownership and control. Man and woman confront one another in sameness and difference. Each is an image of the other, yet each is separate and distinct. The only relationship able to bind them together without the use of force is marriage-as-covenant – a bond of mutual loyalty and love in which each makes a pledge to the other to serve one another.

Not only is this a radical way of reconceptualizing the relationship between man and woman. It is also, implies Hosea, the way we should think of the relationship between human beings and G-d. G-d reaches out to humanity not as power – the storm, the thunder, the rain – but as love, and not an abstract, philosophical love but a deep and abiding passion that survives all the disappointments and betrayals. Israel may not always behave lovingly toward G-d, says Hosea, but G-d loves Israel and will never cease to do so.

How we relate to G-d affects how we relate to other people. That is Hosea's message – and vice versa: how we relate to other people affects the way we think of G-d. Israel's political chaos in the eighth century BCE was intimately connected to its religious waywardness. A society built on corruption and exploitation is one where might prevails over right. That is not Judaism but idolatry, Baal-worship.

Now we understand why the sign of the covenant is circumcision, the commandment given in the first of this week's parshiot, Tazria. For faith to be more than the worship of power, it must affect the most intimate relationship between men and women. In a society founded on covenant, male-female relationships are built on something other and gentler than male dominance, masculine power, sexual desire and the drive to own, control and possess. Baal must become ish. The alpha male must become the caring husband. Sex must be sanctified and tempered by mutual respect. The sexual drive must be circumcised and circumscribed so that it no longer seeks to possess and is instead content to love.

There is thus more than an accidental connection between monotheism and monogamy. Although biblical law does not command monogamy, it nonetheless depicts it as the normative state from the start of the human story: Adam and Eve, one man, one woman. Whenever in Genesis a patriarch marries more than one woman there is tension and anguish. The commitment to one G-d is mirrored in the commitment to one person.

The Hebrew word emunah, often translated as "faith," in fact means faithfulness, fidelity, precisely the commitment one undertakes in making a marriage. Conversely, for the prophets there is a connection between idolatry and adultery. That is how G-d describes Israel to Hosea. G-d married the Israelites but they, in serving idols, acted the part of a promiscuous woman (Hos. 1-2).

The love of husband and wife – a love at once personal and moral, passionate and responsible – is as close as we come to understanding G-d's love for us and our ideal love for Him. When Hosea says, "You will know the Lord," he does not mean knowledge in an abstract sense. He means the knowledge of intimacy and relationship, the touch of two selves across the metaphysical abyss that separates one consciousness from another. That is the theme of The Song of Songs, that deeply human yet deeply mystical expression of eros, the love between humanity and G-d. It is also the meaning of one of the definitive sentences in Judaism: "You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5).

Judaism from the beginning made a connection between sexuality and violence on the one hand, marital faithfulness and social order on the other. Not

by chance is marriage called kiddushin, "sanctification." Like covenant itself, marriage is a pledge of loyalty between two parties, each recognizing the other's integrity, honouring their differences even as they come together to bring new life into being. Marriage is to society what covenant is to religious faith: a decision to make love – not power, wealth or force majeure – the generative principle of life.

Just as spirituality is the most intimate relationship between us and G-d, so sex is the most intimate relationship between us and another person. Circumcision is the eternal sign of Jewish faith because it unites the life of the soul with the passions of the body, reminding us that both must be governed by humility, self-restraint and love.

Brit milah helps transform the male from Baal to Ish, from dominant partner to loving husband, just as G-d tells Hosea that this is what He seeks in His relationship with the people of the covenant. Circumcision turns biology into spirituality. The instinctive male urge to reproduce becomes instead a covenantal act of partnership and mutual affirmation. It was thus as decisive a turn in human civilisation as Abrahamic monotheism itself. Both are about abandoning power as the basis of relationship, and instead aligning ourselves with what Dante called "the love that moves the sun and other stars."[3] Circumcision is the physical expression of the faith that lives in love.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Speak to the children of Israel saying, when a woman conceives (tazria) and gives birth to a male … on the eighth day the child's foreskin shall be circumcised." (Leviticus 12:2-3) The Hebrew word "halacha" is the term used for Jewish law which is the constitution and bedrock of our nation; indeed, we became a nation at Sinai when we accepted the Divine covenantal laws of ritual, ethics and morality which are to educate and shape us into a "special treasure… a kingdom of priest-teachers and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6).

The verb of the root "hlch" means "walk"; progressing from one place to another, and not remaining static or stuck in one place, as in the biblical verses: "Walk before Me [hit'halech] and become whole-hearted" (Genesis 17: 1) and "You shall walk [ve'halachta] in [G-d's] pathways" (Deuteronomy 5: 33).

This is important since scientific discoveries and social norms are constantly evolving, and it is incumbent upon scholars to consider these changing realities when determining halachic norms, such as establishing time of death (no longer considered the cessation of the respiratory function, but rather now considered brain-stem death), which would allow for heart transplants.

For this reason, the Oral Law was never supposed to have been written down – for fear that it become ossified.

It was only because our lost sovereignty (70 CE), pursuant exile and almost incessant persecution might have caused us to forget our sacred traditions that the Sages reluctantly agreed to commit the Oral Law to writing in the form of the Talmud, declaring, "It is time to do for the Lord, they must nullify the Torah law" not to record the Oral Law (Tmura 14b).

However, thanks to responsa literature, where sages respond to questions of Jewish law from Jews in every country in the globe, halacha has kept "in sync" with new conditions and new realities.

I would like to bring to your attention a ground-breaking responsum published by the great Talmudic luminary Rav Moshe Feinstein in 1961, regarding the verse which opens our Torah portion. Reactionary forces opposed his ideas, burnt his books and harassed his household, but he refused to recant.

The Hebrew word tazria in the above quote literally means "inspermated," zera being the Hebrew word for seed or sperm. The rabbi was asked whether a woman who had been artificially inseminated, after 10 years of a childless marriage because of her husband's infertility, could still maintain sexual relations with her husband. In other words: did the "new invention" of artificial insemination by a man who is not her husband constitute an act of adultery, which would make the woman forbidden to her husband?

Rav Moshe responded forthrightly and unequivocally: "It is clear that in the absence of an act of sexual intimacy, a woman cannot be forbidden to her husband or considered to be an unfaithful wife …similarly, the child is kosher, because mamzerut (bastardy) can only occur by means of an act of sexual intimacy between a married woman and a man not her husband, not by means of sperm artificially inseminated." The sage added how important it is for us to understand the deep existential need a woman has for a child and how our "holy matriarchs" all yearned to bear children "and all women in the world are like them in this respect." If the mother does not know the identity of the sperm donor, it would not prevent the later marriage of the child (lest he/she marry a sibling), since we go in accordance with the majority of people, who would not be siblings to this child (Igrot Moshe, Even HaEzer, siman 10).

This responsum opened the door for many single women who refuse to be promiscuous, or to take a marriage partner solely for the sake of having a child with him, but who desperately wish to have a child of their own and continue the Jewish narrative into the next generation. Especially given the obiter dictum Rav Moshe included, in which he explained the importance

[3] The Divine Comedy, 33: 143-45.

of having a child especially to a woman and specifically states that he would have allowed the woman to be artificially inseminated ab initio (l'hat'hila — since the woman asked her question after she had already been inseminated), this responsum has mitigated to a great extent the problem of female infertility. If a given woman does not have a properly functional ovum, her husband's sperm can artificially inseminate a healthy ovum, which can be implanted within the birth mother who will then carry the fetus until delivery; and if a woman is able to have her ovum fertilized by her husband's sperm but is unable to carry the fetus in her womb, a surrogate can carry the fetus until delivery.

The question is to be asked: Who then is the true mother, the one who provides the fertilized ovum or the one who carries the fetus to its actual birth? Depending on the response, we will know whether or not we must convert the baby if the true mother was not Jewish.

Rav Shlomo Goren, a former chief rabbi of Israel (and previously the IDF chief chaplain), provides the answer from our parsha's introductory text: "When a woman is 'inseminated (tazria) and gives birth…" The word "tazria" seems at first to be superfluous. Rav Goren explains that it took 4,000 years for us to understand that this word is informing us that the true biological mother is the one whose ovum was "inseminated."

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Leprosy, the subject of one of our parshiot this week, is traditionally associated with the sin of slander. Thus, there is a similarity between the Hebrew word for leprosy - metzora - and the Hebrew words for speaking evil about another - motzei shem ra. The Torah reminds us of the danger of bad speech.

The ability to speak has the capacity to raise a human being above the lower animal world. Hence, Rabbi Yehudah Halevi labels the human being as medaber, one who speaks. Speech is what sets the human being apart.

But, the greater the potential to do good, the greater the possibility for that potential to turn into evil. Speech can raise one to the highest level, but if abused, it can sink us to the lowest depth.

Indeed, injurious speech has enormous ramifications. Although when we were kids, we would say "sticks and bones can break my bones, but names can never harm me," it is actually not true. Words and name-calling can actually hurt deeply. It also should be remembered that while a word is a word and a deed is a deed, words lead to deeds. Once a word has been said, it is almost impossible to take back, for a spoken word spreads to others in ways that can never be undone.

A rabbinic tale: A rabbi was once asked, what is the most expensive meat. He responded, "tongue." And the next day the rabbi was asked what is the least expensive meat. Here too he responded, "tongue." Such is the challenge of speech. One that the Torah reminds us about this week, and that we should all take to heart.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

We once again read about types of plagues and dermatological illnesses that create a climate of impunity and negativity. We are no longer privy to the identity and physical appearance of these plagues that are recorded for us in this week's Torah reading. These plagues are or were unknown to us and they are certainly not the modern form of leprosy, which was the usual understanding of them for number of past centuries. In the absence of true understanding of these plagues and of the existence of the Temple, currently this subject matter is an esoteric one rather than theoretical.

Nevertheless, as the Torah is always multi-layered and to be understood on many different levels and planes, there are certainly lessons that we can derive from this week's Torah reading that are relevant to our lives and society. All of us encounter plagues during our lifetime. They may be physical, mental, spiritual, financial, family associated or work related.

The Torah reading divides its litany of plagues into different categories. There are plagues that affect the physical body of the person, while there are others that manifest themselves in the clothing and/or in the structure of the home and residence where the person lives. Many of the commentators to the Torah have seen this division of the plagues that can afflict human beings as being categorized as personal, societal and familial.

These three areas of life – one's own being and body, one's society and community and one's family are the areas of life and existence that are most vulnerable to plagues – or troubles. They are also those areas of life that can bring one the most satisfaction and sense of achievement. In the world of the Torah, what is most fragile and potentially impure is also what can be the greatest source of strength and holiness.

These three areas of life require constant vigilance and effort to remain healthy, productive and noble. The Torah bids us to care for ourselves. Our bodies and our health are not to be abused or taken for granted. We oftentimes sacrifice our physical well-being for transitory gain and imagined security. This type of attitude creates a plague within us that sooner or later will affect and injure us.

Part of the idea of the quarantine that the Torah describes for us in this week's Torah reading is to give the individual an opportunity to analyze and think about one's self and how to properly take care of one's own physical well-being.

Next, no person should live in isolation. and Belonging to and contributing to a community – synagogues, charitable organizations, study groups, etc. – becomes our clothing, so to speak – the external persona that we project. The great Choni Hamageil of Second Temple times said it well: “if there is no community, then there is only death.”

And finally, family obligations should trump all other imagined obligations. There is a responsibility of great magnitude in bringing children into this world. That responsibility for raising, guiding, caring and training one's own family cannot be shunted off to schools, institutions, peer groups or others. To attempt to do so invites the appearance of plagues in one's own home. So, we should always be on the lookout to avoid these types of plagues. that do exist and abound in our world.

DR. ARNOLD LUSTIGER

Vort from the Rav

"Badad yeisheiv -- he shall dwell isolated." Many commentators have noted the similarities that exist between the requirements of a metzora, as outlined here, and those that apply to a mourner. Both must rend their garments and allow their hair to grow (compare Lev. 10:6 and 21:10), and just as a metzora must live in isolation outside his city, a mourner is confined to his home.

At the same time, however, there is one crucial difference between the two observances. In the case of a metzora, there is a requirement of ?uo?o? ??? , the metzora must live in solitude and not engage in any form of social activity. According to some views, a metzora may not even reside together with other metzora'im. The metzora is ostracized from the community. When a person observes aveilus, however, although he must remain in his home, he is not barred from social contact. To the contrary, the community is obligated to care for and visit the mourner, to ensure that he is not left to deal with his loss on his own.

There is another significant difference between a mourner and a metzora. Mourning observances are suspended on Yom Tov, because, as the Gemara (Moed Katan 14b) explains, the public festival celebration overrides the private, personal obligations of mourning. A metzora, by contrast, is not permitted to reenter his city or go to Jerusalem to offer the festival sacrifices; in this case, the public mitzvah of the holiday celebration does not override the individual's personal restrictions.

These distinctions are related. The nature of the Yom Tov festivity is amidah lifnei Hashem - standing before the Almighty. It is the experience of being in G-d's presence that triggers the obligation of simchah on the festivals. Although a mourner on a personal level feels distant from G-d as a result of his loss and the trauma he endures, he is nevertheless part of Am Yisrael who collectively experience the joy of amidah lifnei Hashem. The public festivity overrides his personal restrictions.

The metzorah is excluded from the community and is likewise distanced from the Mikdash. As such, he cannot experience amidah lifnei Hashem, and must therefore continue his observance of the tzara'as restrictions even on Yom Tov. (Shiurim Le-zekher Abba Mari, vol. 2, pp. 192-194, Koschitzky Virtual Beit Medrash).

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"Do [G-d's] will as your will in order that He will do your will as His will, and negate your will before His will in order that He will negate the will of others because of your will" (Pirkay Avos 2:4). Are we expected to have a "will," but sublimate it in order to do something more important/spiritual instead? Or should we work on ourselves to improve what our "will" is, so that we want the same things that G-d does? If our "will" is supposed to merge with His, becoming one and the same, how would G-d "doing our will" be considered "ours" rather than His? On the other hand, if our "will" is expected to remain distinct from His, isn't it disingenuous, or at least shallow, to do what G-d wants just so we can get what we want? How is it really doing what G-d wants if our reason for doing it is to get what we want? What does it mean to negate our will so that G-d won't let others do something we don't want? Doesn't that indicate our will is still intact (even after we negate it)? [After all, if it wasn't, there would be nothing left for G-d to protect!] In short, what are we supposed to be doing, what are we supposed to want, and how are we supposed to get there?

Rashi has a slightly different version than ours; instead of telling us to "do G-d's will as your will," we are told to "do your will as G-d's will, with Rashi explaining it to mean that even when doings things we want to do, we should keep G-d in mind, doing them for the positive spiritual benefit they bring. [For example, rather than just eating because we are hungry, we should (also) eat because it will give us the energy to fulfill His commandments.] If we do, since even things done for ourselves are also being done for Him, G-d will bestow much good upon us so that His will (i.e. our doing things for Him even though it's what we wanted for ourselves anyway) can continue to be done.

According to this, we aren't being told to change what we want, just why we are doing it. Obviously, though, this only works if what we want isn't problematic, which is why we need the second part, with Rashi (in the more meticulous editions) understanding "negating your will" to mean that when tempted to do something wrong we should negate such urges and do what G-d wants instead.

Rashi completes his explanation of the second part by saying that if we negate any inappropriate urges G-d will "negate the will others," i.e. those who want to harm us. (Had we not negated such urges, on the other hand, we would certainly deserve the consequences of what those others had intended.) According to Rashi, then, the eight times the word "will" is used refers to (1) things we want that are permitted, but not inherently mitzvos (which we should turn into something positive by doing them for G-d's sake); (2) things we do for G-d's sake; (3) things we want, for any reason, as long as they are permitted; (4) things G-d wants us to do; (5) things we want that are not permitted; (6) things G-d wants us not to do; (7) things others want to do to us (that are harmful); and (8) things we don't want others to do to us. In short, we are being given reasons to keep G-d in mind when doing things that aren't inherently done for His sake and to not violate His mitzvos. We are not told how to do mitzvos, but it is unclear whether this is because not every category is being discussed or because it is assumed that if we are involved in doing mitzvos there is no need to tell us how to do them better.

Tiferes Yisroel (who has the same wording we do), flips the first part around; when we are learning Torah, which is what G-d wants us to do, we should be as enthusiastic and focused as we are when we are involved in earning our income (since having a high income is something we obviously want). The same concept applies to other mitzvos (see Rabbeinu Yonah, Rivash and Rabbeinu Bachye) in contrast with other personal interests. Do we discuss Torah concepts (and how they impact us) with the same passion that we discuss the economy (and how it impacts us)? Do we break down mitzvah observance and how we can best improve it with the same gusto we discuss sports and how our teams can improve? (I've heard that there are sports talk shows; how may Torah talk shows are there?) Based on how he explains the first line, Tiferes Yisroel explains "so that He will do your will as His will" along the same lines, with G-d helping us earn our income without too much trouble. [The rest is explained similar to Rashi's approach.] According to this, we are being given reasons to do mitzvos zealously and to not let our physical urges side-track us.

It might be assumed that everything falls into one of those two categories, as doing things that are not forbidden but not mitzvos either can be considered something that side-tracks us from mitzvah observance. However, even though it is certainly important to work on ourselves to become as excited about what G-d wants as we are for what we want, and the message could in fact be to do just that (although "negating our will" referring to moments when our physical make-up is battling our spiritual make-up indicates otherwise), until we get there it is difficult to get as excited for something we don't yet want as we are for something we already want.

Bartenura explains the first part as referring to our monetary outlay; we should spend on doing things that are His will as freely as we do on things that we want. (The rest is explained similar to Rashi.) This approach doesn't impose any emotions upon us; it is just telling us how to do something in a more ideal way. There are numerous other explanations given by the commentators; I would like to suggest one more (incorporating ideas mentioned by others).

Ideally, the things we want and the things G-d "wants" would always be the same. However, as human beings, this is not really possible (although on a "b'di'eved" level it might be, as G-d wants us to take into account our human wants/needs, even as we try to minimize them, rather than pretending they don't exist, since ignoring them completely is often detrimental in the long run). Nevertheless, we are supposed to try to make our will and His will coincide as often (and for as long) as we can; this Mishna is telling us how we can close that gap. Therefore, it only addresses those times when our will is not the same as G-d's, providing us with a game plan to deal with such occasions.

"Do G-d's will," even if you don't really want to, "as if it were your will," i.e. what you wanted to do, because doing so will lead to really wanting to do it ("mi'toch she'lo lishma, ba lishma," when we do the right thing even when without having the best motivation, we will eventually do it for the right reason, see Midrash Sh'muel). [In this "b'di'eved" situation, doing it in order to get to the level of "lishma" actually would be the right reason.] But it's more than just doing it so that we can eventually get to the point of doing it "lishma," as if we do the right thing even when we aren't fully motivated to do so, "He will make your will like His will," i.e. there will be divine help to close that gap, getting us to the point where our will mirrors His will.

This advice is helpful when we should be doing something that we are not fully motivated to do. What about when we want to do something wrong (see Tosfos Yom Tov) or if we have the opportunity to do a mitzvah but are preoccupied with mundane matters (see Ra'avan)? In those situations, we should "negate our will from before His," and do the mitzvah/refrain from sinning. When we have to "negate our will" in order to "do His will," the concept of "mi'toch she'lo lishma, ba lishma," whereby our will comes closer to being the same as His will, doesn't really apply; overcoming temptation prevents a further separation

between what our will is and what His will is from developing rather than making the difference between them smaller. Therefore, a different motivation is given, "so that G-d will (similarly) negate the will of others from before our will," i.e. just as we prevented ourselves from violating His will, G-d will prevent others from violating our will -- preventing our will from being violated.

We are supposed to have our own will, but we are also supposed to work on getting it to mirror G-d's as much as possible. Since we cannot always succeed in doing so, we are given advice as to how to (try to) get there. When our will is not the same as G-d's, we should do what G-d wants us to do anyway, and then He will help our will more closely resemble His. In situations where having our will and G-d's will coincode requires subjugating our will to His, we should do just that, knowing that G-d will repay us in kind. *© 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer*

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "When you arrive in the land of Canaan... and I will place a tzora'as affliction upon a house in the land of your possession, the one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the Kohen, 'Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house' " (Lev. 14:34-35).

Why should the owner say, "'Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house"? Why not say, "An affliction has appeared to me in the house"? The Divine statement, "I will place an affliction upon a house in the land of your possession" appears to be a statement of fact rather than a punishment for improper speech.

Rashi explains that the Canaanites used to hide their treasures in the thick walls of their houses. The affliction in the house resulted in the walls being demolished, which would expose the hidden treasure. Thus, the affliction in the house was a blessing rather than a punishment.

This is why the owner should not say, "An affliction has appeared to me in the house." An affliction is a punishment, whereas the lesion in the wall of the house was a blessing leading to discovery of hidden treasure. Therefore, all he may say is, "Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house."

This has a far-reaching application. We all experience unpleasant things which at the moment are distressing and appear to be bad. In many instances, we realize much later that what we had assumed to be bad was really something good in disguise.

The Baal Shem Tov said that when an adversity occurs, one should not say, "It is bad." G-d does not do bad things. Rather, we may say, "This is a bitter happening." Some life-saving medications may have a bitter taste. Remembering this should help us keep our bearing in times of adversity. *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. © 2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI CHANAN MORRISON

Rav Kook Torah

Is there more to Israel Independence Day than just fireworks and flagwaving? Is Yom Ha'Atzmaut just a secular holiday commemorating our political independence, or does it hold a deeper meaning for us?

Rav Kook passed away in 1935, thirteen years before the State of Israel was established, but his son Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook interpreted the historic events of 1948 in light of his father's teachings. In an article entitled "Affirming the Sanctity of the Day of Our Independence," Rav Tzvi Yehudah analyzed the religious significance of Yom Ha'Atzmaut.

In general, our connection to sanctity and holiness is through the mitzvot of the Torah. Thus before performing a mitzvah we say, 'Who sanctified us with His mitzvot.' The holiness of Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Rav Tzvi Yehudah explained, is anchored in the holiness of mitzvot. But which particular mitzvah is connected to this historical occasion?

The Ramban defined the mitzvah of yishuv ha'aretz, settling the land of Israel, as "we will not abandon it to another nation, or leave it desolate." This definition makes it clear that the mitzvah is first and foremost an obligation of the nation; the Jewish people are commanded to take possession of the land of Israel and rule over it. On the basis of that national mitzvah, there is a mitzvah for each individual to live in Eretz Yisrael.

The Ramban emphasized that this mitzvah is in effect at all times. This view is upheld in the Shulchan Aruch (Even Ha'ezer 75:6, Pitchei Teshuvah ad loc).

This then is the significance of Yom Ha'Atzmaut: that we have finally merited, after centuries of exile, to once again fulfill this lofty mitzvah, valued by the Sages as 'equal to all the other mitzvot' (Sifre Re'eih), 'to return and possess the land that G-d promised to our fathers' (Ramban). We should be full of gratitude to live here, in Eretz Yisrael, 'the place that Moses and Aaron did not merit' (Ketubot 112a). We should be grateful to be alive at this time in history, to witness the hour of redemption that so many great and holy leaders of our people did not merit to see.

And yet one may ask: why should the fifth day of Iyyar be chosen for celebrating this event? Perhaps a different date, such as the date of the ceasefire after the War of Independence, would be a more appropriate choice?

While the military victory of a fledgling state over the armies of five enemy countries was certainly miraculous, that was not the greatest miracle of the establishment of the State of Israel. The true miracle

was the remarkable courage displayed on the fifth of Iyyar in making the fateful decision and announcing the establishment of an independent state. This decision, in the face of heavy pressure from the U.S. State Department not to declare a state, and belligerent threats of the surrounding Arab countries to attack and destroy the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael, was by no means a trivial matter. The motion to declare a state passed by only a thin majority in Ben-Gurion's cabinet.

(One of the signers to the Declaration of Independence, Moshe Sharett, later recalled in his diary how he had signed with 'a sense of excitement together with a clear premonition of danger, such as one might feel while standing on a cliff, ready to leap into a yawning chasm. We felt as though we stood on a very high crest, where roaring winds were brewing about us, and that we had to stand fast.')

This courageous decision was the true miracle of Yom Ha'Atzmaut. The Talmud in Baba Metzia 106a states that a shepherd's rescue of his flock from a lion or a bear may be considered a miracle. Where exactly is the miracle in this act? The Tosafists explained that the miracle is to be found in the shepherd's "spirit of courage and willingness to fight." This spirit of valor is a miracle from above, an inspired inner greatness spurring one to rise to the needs of the hour. This is the significance of Ezekiel's prophetic description of the redemption:

"I will place My spirit in you and you shall live. I will set you on your land, and you will know that I, the Eternal, have spoken and performed it." (Ezekiel 37:14)

Nevertheless, many people have difficulty reconciling the current moral and spiritual state of Israel with the vision of the redemption as portrayed by the prophets and the sages. Is this the Messianic Era for which we prayed two thousand years?

The Sages determined that 'The only difference between the current reality and the Messianic Era is [independence from] the rule of foreign powers' (Berachot 34b; Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 12:2). While we have certainly not yet merited the final phase of redemption, we have achieved this criterion of redemption — independence and self-rule over our geographical area.

Many Torah scholars fought against the Zionist movement because they envisioned redemption as a future era that arrives complete from the very start, and not an ongoing process. But the import of the Talmudic statement (Jer. Berachot 1:1) that the redemption will appear "little by little," like the spreading light of dawn in the morning sky, is exactly this: that the redemption is a process that advances in stages.

We need to examine history with a perspective of faith in G-d. We need to recognize that the Master of the universe controls and governs all events. The Sages taught:

"What is the meaning of the verse, 'For who has scorned the day of smallness' (Zecharia 4:10)? What causes the table of the righteous to be scorned in the future era? Their smallness of faith, that they failed to believe in the Holy One." (Sotah 48b)

Why is the future portion (the 'table') of the tzaddikim marred? Because they are tzaddikim who lack faith in G-d. They view the world with a narrow outlook, and fail to see G-d's hand in the events of history. The redemption does not have to come through great miracles; G-d can also bring the redemption using natural forces and events.

The various stages of redemption are clearly described in the order of events in Ezekiel's prophecy. The prophecy first speaks of the initial stage of redemption, the ingathering of the exiles:

"I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the lands and I will bring you to your land" (36:24).

Only after this initial redemption does the prophet describe the spiritual return and teshuvah of the people:

"I will sprinkle over you purifying water and you will be purified from all of your impurities.... I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will place in you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My spirit within you so that you will walk in My statutes.... And you will be My people, and I will be your G-d. "(36:25–28)

This narrative of the redemption concurs with the opinion of Rabbi Joshua in Sanhedrin 97b, that the redemption will come regardless of the merits of the Jewish people — 'even if they do not repent.'

This description of redemption matches the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua in Sanhedrin 97b, that the redemption will come regardless of the merits of the Jewish people, 'even if they do not repent.' (See LeNetivot Yisrael, pp. 195-196, where Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook demonstrates that the Halachah follows this opinion.) (Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 191-195. Adapted from LeNetivot Yisrael vol I, pp. 181-184, 192-200; "Sichot HaRav Tzvi Yehudah" 19.)