



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY



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ISRAEL Parsha Picture

וְאֶת־חֲנֹן אֱלֹהֵי' בָּעֵת הַהוּא... וְקִשְׁרֵתָם
לְאוֹת עַל יָדָהּ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפוֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ....

דברים ג:כג, ו:ח

INSIDE

TORAT MIZRACHI

-  Rabbi Doron Perez 2
-  Rabbi Reuven Taragin 4
-  Rabbanit Shani Taragin 5
-  Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon 6
-  Rabbanit Sharon Rimon 7
-  Sivan Rahav Meir & Yedidya Meir 8
-  Rabbi Danny Mirvis 9

PARSHAT HASHAVUA

-  Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l 10
-  Rabbi Hershel Schachter shlit"a 12
-  Rabbi Yisroel Reisman shlit"a 13
-  Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein 14
-  Rabbi Shalom Rosner 15
-  Michal Horowitz 16
-  Rabbi Menachem Leibtag 17
-  Rabbi Eli Mansour 18

INSPIRATION

-  Rabbi Moshe Weinberger 19
-  Rabbi YY Jacobson 20
-  Rabbi Judah Mischel 21
-  Mrs. Shira Smiles 22
-  Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi 23

ISRAEL CONTENT

-  Hebrew Language: David Curwin 24
-  Riddles: Reb Leor Broh 24

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrahi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrahi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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Shema

The Lost Art of Listening



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrahi

In many ways, the Torah is all about one word – “שמע” – the ability to truly listen to what is being said to us. It captures the essence of what Hashem wants from us and contains the secret to success in both our relationship with Hashem and with other people.

It is the opening word of arguably the most famous verse in all of Torah, the passuk and mitzva from this week's Parasha simply known as the ‘*Shema*’.

‘שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד

Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One’ (Devarim 6,4)

Amazingly, the second paragraph of the *Shema* that we will encounter in next week's Parasha also begins with the same word:

‘והיה אם שמע תשמעו אל מצותי...’

‘And it will be if you surely hearken to My commandments...’ (Devarim 11,13)

שמע is not by chance the defining word about our relationship to Hashem and His commandments.

There is more. The first verse of the *Shema* is the very first one that we teach to a young Jewish child as well as the one, G-d forbid, that a person is to say before dying. In short, they are the first and last words a Jew utters in our lifetime. The same is essentially true every day with the Torah commandment of *Shema* said twice a day- beginning our Service of G-d in the morning and in the evening – to be said ideally at dawnbreak and nightfall respectively.¹

Additionally, it has become the custom to say the *Shema* not only at nightfall during the evening prayer but also as we go to

sleep. So, we begin and end every day with these words and we initiate and complete our very lives with these words .

This pivotal commandment begins with a sharp and succinct requirement to be listen – לשמוע .

What then is the meaning of the Divine requirement to listen to whatever it is Hashem wants from us? What does it mean to truly listen? What is the secret of the word ‘*Shema*’?

A Cryptic Word

The word “*Shema*” is one of the most complex words in all of biblical Hebrew. It is almost impossible to translate into other languages as it can mean so many things at the same time. It means to physically **hear** something (the voice or noise is physically audible to our eardrums), to **listen** to what is being said (implying concentration), to **understand** it (intellectually), to **internalize** it (emotionally connecting to the words), **empathizing** with what's being said. In the context of a command or action request it also means being prepared to **accept** what is being said, **obey** it and **implement** the action. Wow! Many words within one word.

How can all these multiple meanings be woven into one coherent concept?

Connection

It revolves around **connection**. לשמוע, to truly hear what someone is saying to us means to connect deeply with what they are trying to communicate – **heart to heart understanding and connection**. To genuinely give the person trying to communicate a sense that we are totally

present in the relationship and with them in their experience – understanding, feeling and empathizing with them.²

The only way to achieve this is by being בטל ourselves – being totally self deprecating when someone is trying to communicate. Transforming ourselves into a כלי קיבור – an open hearted receptacle which is fully present and interested in understanding and connection.

Seek First To Understand

Professor Stephen Covey maintains that this state of being as a genuine empathic listener means totally absorbing ourselves with the other and not engaging in what he terms ‘autobiographical responses’. If we find ourselves evaluating (or judging), probing, advising (or fixing) or interpreting, we are no longer truly listening.³

It's now become about us and not them. This is undoubtedly one of the hardest human qualities to master. Covey opines that this critical life skill of communication is never adequately taught to us. The other important skills are taught at school – speaking, reading but perhaps the most important – the art of listening is not. We are taught more about how to express ourselves and less about through talking and writing but less about listening, understanding and empathizing with others .

Professor Daniel Goleman takes this even further in his groundbreaking book Emotional Intelligence where he argues that amongst the most important character traits and personal qualities is the ability to empathize with others. He highlights the centrality of our emotional world to success in all areas of life and just how critical emotional self awareness (detecting and expressing our emotions) and recognizing them in others is. Empathic listening and identifying and understanding what others are feeling is indispensable to success in society and connection with others. This is the key to relationship building.

Spiritual Listening – The Essence of Torah

Rav Kook's great student Rav David HaKochin , the famous Nazirite of Yerushalyim



Empathic listening and identifying and understanding what others are feeling is indispensable to success in society and connection with others. This is the key to relationship building.

wrote that essence of the Jewish perspective of reality is what he terms הגיון שמעי, a logic of internal listening. (Kol Hanevuah pg 3). Over and above learning this from the *Shema*, he draws our attention to the ubiquitous phrase (ibid 25-26) תא שמע – come and listen – used in the Talmud when citing ancient rabbinic sources. The way to relate to the Mesorah-Torah tradition is through listening.

There is more. I noticed that the word *Shema*, is also the key word of this week's Parasha. The focal point of the Parasha is the recounting the 10 Commandments and the Revelation at Sinai. The word which reoccurs consistently is the root word *shema*. Before the recounting of the Giving of the Torah, the verse emphasizes (Devarim, 4, 12):

“וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלֵיכֶם מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּבָרִים אֲתֶם שֹׁמְעִים וְתַמּוּנָה אֵינְכֶם רֹאִים זוּלָתֵי קוֹל.”

“G-d spoke to you out of the fire; you **heard** the sound of words but perceive no shape – nothing but a voice.”

The verse emphasizes that what ultimately transpired at Mount Sinai was an acoustic experience. Not seeing G-dly images but rather hearing the Divine voice. Remarkably after the Ten Commandments are repeated, I noticed that the following thirteen verses leading up to the *Shema*, the root word “שמע” is mentioned ten times – emphasizing time and time again the hearing of Hashem's voice at Sinai. The message is clear – the essence of Revelation is about hearing the word of G-d.

A Final Word

The very first mitzva that we begin the Jewish year with on Rosh Hashana is one of listening.⁴ The only Torah commandment of the day and the centerpiece of the festival is listening to the shofar. There is a debate in halacha whether the text of the blessing should be about blowing the shofar or hearing the notes of the Shofar . The halachic ruling is “*lishmoa kol shofar*”⁵. We are required during the two days of our new year to engage in the seminal activity of proactive listening. The first days of the year set the tone and mission for the whole year – constantly aiming to hear what Hashem wants from us in order to arouse us to תשובה – re-establishing our closeness, connection and relationship with Hashem.

So too in all interpersonal relationships-our spouses, children, family, friends, business associates and indeed all people we interact with in society. To constantly strive to build our relationships through understanding, empathy and connection.

1. As per the halachic requirement based on the verse from this week's Parasha regarding the timing of the *Shema* בשכבך וּבקמך – at the time when you sleep and when you get up in the morning. This is interpreted by our sages as ‘the time that we get up in the morning’ as the first three hours of the day and ‘at the time when people are generally sleeping’ interpreted as nighttime.
2. In relationships whose very essence requires fulfilling commands and implementing actions (such as of course with Hashem who commands us to fulfill the *mitzvot*) then part and parcel of the שמיעה in the relationship is hearing, internalizing, obeying and implementing.
3. See Covey's bestseller *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. In particular Habit 5 – Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood and specifically the section about Four Autobiographical Responses.
4. There are two Jewish calendar years - One beginning in Nissan as the lunar calendar of months and the other in Tishrei and Rosh Hashana as the solar calendar of years . Here we are referring to the latter.
5. Rabbeinu Tam says it is the blessing should be לשמוע קול שופר whereas Rambam says לשמוע קול שופר. The Shulchan Aruch and all major codifiers rule according to the Rambam.

Action!



Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Educational Director, World Mizrahi
Dean of Overseas Students, Yeshivat Hakotel

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רבי חנינא בן דוסא אומר... כל שמעשיו מרבין מחכמתו, חכמתו מתקיימת. וכל שחכמתו מרבה ממעשיו, אין חכמתו מתקיימת (אבות ג:ט):

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר... כל שחכמתו מרבה ממעשיו, למה הוא דומה, לאילו שענפיו מרבין ושרשיו מעטין, והרוח באה ועוקרתו והופכתו על פניו, שנאמר (ירמיה יז) והיה כערער בערבה ולא יראה כי יבוא טוב ושכן חררים במדבר ארץ מלחה ולא תשב. אבל כל שמעשיו מרבין מחכמתו, למה הוא דומה, לאילו שענפיו מעטין ושרשיו מרבין, שאפילו כל הרוחות שבועלים באות ונושבות בו אין מזיזין אותו ממקומו, שנאמר (שם) והיה כעץ שתול על מים ועל יבול ישלח שרשיו ולא יראה כי יבא חם, והיה עלהו רענו, ובשנת בצורת לא ידאג, ולא ימיש מעשות פרי (אבות ג:ז):

The Need for Deed

Over the past weeks, we saw how Rebbi Chanina ben Dosa and Rebbi Elazar ben Azarya condition *chochmah* on *yirah*. These *tannaim* also link *chochmah* to *ma'asim* (actions/deeds). Wisdom should reflect faith and be rooted in action.

Rebbi Chanina ben Dosa not only taught the importance of *ma'asim* — he lived it as well. The Gemara (Sotah 40a) tells us that when Rebbe Chanina passed away, the world lost its “*anshei ma'aseh* – people of action.” Rebbi Chanina was an exceptional person of deeds.¹

An Ultimate Practical Goal

Though Judaism attributes great value to Torah learning and accumulating wisdom (...*v'talmud Torah k'neged kulam*), actions are more important. As Rebbi Shimon the son of Rabban Gamliel taught in the first perek of Avot: “*Lo hamidrash hu ha'ikar, ella hama'aseh.*”

In fact, *ma'asim* are learning's ultimate aim. Later in Avot (4:5), Rabbi Yishmael ben Beroka defines ideal learning as that which is done in order to act. Rava then opined that “*teshuvah* and *ma'asim tovim* are the *tachlis* (goal) of *chochmah*.”² Ultimately, it is the *ma'asim* learning inspires that make learning of supreme importance. In the words of the Gemara (Kiddushin 40b), “Learning is great(est) because it facilitates *ma'aseh*.”

Torah coupled with good deeds is the ideal form of life. Later in Avot (6:10), Rebbi Yossi ben Kisma identifies them as the two things we take with us from this world. In a similar vein, the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18a) explains that Abaye was granted twenty more years of life than Rava because of the good deeds he performed in addition to his learning of Torah.

For this reason, our blessings and prayers for children focus on both Torah and *ma'asim tovim*. At a *brit*, we bless that “just as the child entered the *brit*, so should he enter a world of Torah and *ma'asim tovim*.” When lighting candles on Friday nights, we pray that our children should use the Torah and good deeds to enlighten the world.

A Critical Condition

Ma'asim tovim are not only ideal but also a critical complement to Torah learning. Rebbi Yossi taught that someone who says he has **only** Torah, lacks **even** Torah (Yevamot 109b). Rav Pappa added that anyone involved in learning needs to also do good deeds; anyone who does not, is considered to not be involved in learning either.

This is why (the aforementioned) Rebbi Yossi ben Kisma told Rebbi Chanina ben Teradyon that it was (only) his good deeds that merited him a place in Olam Haba. Though Rebbi Chanina ben Teradyon was known for his *limud HaTorah* and was killed

al kiddush Hashem, his entry into the next world hinged on his good deeds (*ma'asim*.)

Many contemporary mefarshim use this idea to explain the halachah that we only adorn *tefillin* on our heads after we have placed them on our arms. We focus on the mind and the wisdom it can accumulate only once we have committed ourselves to the actions symbolized by the *tefillin* on our arms.

More Ma'asim

Beyond the importance of *ma'asim* in general and to *chochmah* in particular, Rebbi Chanina ben Dosa and Rebbi Elazar ben Azariyah emphasize the importance of performing *ma'asim* that exceed the amount of one's *chochmah*. Why do we need more *ma'asim* than wisdom?

I believe that there are two answers to this question and that they connect to the two lines of the Mishnah (Avot 3:17). The first part of the Mishnah speaks about a situation where one's *chochmah* exceeds their *ma'asim*. Rashi sees this as describing a situation where one is not translating their wisdom into action. Obviously, this is a problem.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel MiVitebsk connects this to the Gemara's expectation that one who sees what happens to a *sotah* should commit himself to being a *nazir* and separate from wine (Sotah 2a). In order for our learning to be meaningful, we need to translate the lessons we learn from Torah and life experience into

Continued on page 11

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Prophecy of Perspective and Prospecion



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Educational Director, World Mizrahi

“From Parshat Bereshit through the 17th of Tammuz, the Haftarah is chosen to correspond to the Parshah topic by topic; but from there on – the choice of Haftarah is determined entirely by the time of year and the corresponding historical events” (Rabbi Avraham ben David of Lunel, “Sefer HaManhig,” Hilchot Taanit, Din 16).

The custom based on the *Pesikta* is to read three *haftarot* of rebuke before *Tisha Be-Av*, i.e., *Divrei Yirmiyahu*, *Shimu devar Hashem* and *Chazon Yeshayahu*, and after *Tisha Be-Av* seven *haftarot* of consolation and two *haftarot* of repentance, i.e., *Nachamu nachamu*, *Vatomer Tziyon*, *Aniya so'ara levada*, *Anokhi anokhi*, *Roni akara*, *Kumi ori*, *Sos asis*, *Dirshu* and *Shuva*. *Tosafot* noted (*Megilla* 31b, s.v. *Rosh Chodesh*), that we are dealing with a very old custom, one that is rooted in the ancient rite observed in Eretz Israel!

Based on the above, it seems fruitless to seek any relationship between these *haftarot* and the *parashot haShavua* which they accompany, since they were all chosen for their common theme of consolation. We will attempt to understand why these specific chapters of prophecy were chosen and the reason for the aforementioned order in which they are read. One could argue that the *haftarot* of consolation follow the textual order as they appear in the *Sefer Yeshayahu*, the prophet of consolation; though there are cases where this order is not followed.

(A) R. Simcha of Vitri, in his *Machzor Vitri*, explains that the order of consolation is strategically developed to console the personal and national mourners in stages:

“Therefore, [the first haftara begins,] “Comfort you, comfort you, My people.” [The people’s response:] “And Zion shall say, G-d has abandoned me...” – although Zion is destroyed, do not say that she is abandoned. Since God has comforted her already in His mercy, He does not call for mercy again. Up until this point the prophets console her; from

here onwards He consoles her. And once she has received consolation, we follow with: “Sing, O barren one,” “Arise and shine,” “I shall rejoice.”

(B) A different explanation is offered by a midrash quoted by the Avudraham in his comments on the order of the *parashiot* and *haftarot*:

The Midrash suggests... that the Sages established that the first of these haftarot would be “Comfort, comfort My people” – as though God were commanding the prophets to console His nation. To this, Knesset Yisrael responds: “And Zion says, God has abandoned me” – i.e., she is not consoled by the consolation of the prophets... Thereafter, we see that the Jewish people is still “a stormy ship that will not be consoled;” it is as if the prophets once again declare before the Holy One: See, Knesset Yisrael is not appeased with our consolations. Therefore the Holy One Himself again speaks: “I, even I am your consoler,” and then He says, “Rejoice, O barren one who has not given birth,” and also, “Arise and shine, for your light has come.” To this, Knesset Yisrael responds: “I shall surely rejoice in God” – as if to say, now I have reason to rejoice and to be joyful, “My soul will rejoice in my God for He has dressed me in garments of salvation...”

(C) Although these *haftarot* were selected for their theme of consolation, there may still be *parshanut* (exegesis) on the respective *parshiyot*, e.g. this week’s *parashah* – *Va’etchanan* and *Yeshayahu*’s prophecy of *Nachamu* (40:1-26)

A few verses in the *haftarah* speak of the unique Oneness of God, (e.g. 13,17,18,25), parallel to the famous *pasuk* in this week’s *parashah* – “*Shema Yisrael*” – “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God – the Lord is One” (6:4).

(2) In the *Asseret haDibrot* recorded in *Va’etchanan*, we find several prohibitions concerning idolatry: (4:16, 23, 5:7-8). In the *haftarah*, the prophet mocks “the idol – a craftsman casts it, and a refiner covers it

with silver... he seeks a wise craftsman to make an idol that will not be moved” (19-20).

(3) The process of *Nechama* provides for a changed perspective as one looks back on the past and projects a trajectory for the future. This week’s *parasha* is replete with events revisited from the past (Moshe’s pleas, Divine revelation at Sinai and transmission of laws) which create national responsibility for the future. This week’s *haftarah* of “*Nachamu, Nachamu*” underscores the need to change perspective post-destruction; to look at the past with sorrow and simultaneously to remember the rebuke. It therefore serves as the perfect response of the Sages to Rabbi Akiva’s laughter upon seeing jackals by the *Kodesh Kodashim* (*Makkot* 24b). He explained to them that as he reflects not only on the current destruction of the Second Temple but on the previous destruction of the First Temple, he is also reminded of the resettlement and rebuilding of *Yehuda* at the time of *Shivat Tzion*. Those experiences imbue him with hope to channel sorrow to laughter, towards the eventual redemption. His colleagues understand his changed perspective – looking at the past and future – *Nachamu* #1 – they recognize the past with greater clarity, *Nachamu* #2 – they have been consoled, by reflecting differently towards the future.

Rabbi Akiva’s “*nechama*” is rooted in this week’s *parasha* – as we read the verse of *yichud Hashem* – “*Shema Yisrael, Hashem is our God, Hashem is the One and Only!*” Rabbi Akiva understands that *Hashem is echad* – in the past, present and future, and therefore one may already anticipate the future in the present as we reflect on our past – a true change in perspective – a double consolation !

As we *Baruch Hashem* merit to witness redemption unfolding before our eyes today, we will be all the more consoled if we reflect upon over two thousand years of *galut*, and appreciate *Hashem*’s continued salvation – “*Nachamu, Nachamu!*”

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot

Question: Could one melt cheese in their soup (that is in a kli shlishi) on Shabbat? Is there an issue of molid (creating a new form)?

Answer: The Rema (OC 318:16) paskins like the Sefer Haterumah and assumes that changing forms of food can be an issue of molid on Shabbat. The Rema writes that one can be lenient when there is a need (b'makom tzorech). The Shulchan Aruch paskins like most rishonim that this is not an issue of molid altogether.

The Mishna Berurah writes (318:105) that molid is only problematic if the new liquid created is noticeable on its own (nikar). Therefore, one can melt cheese in this case because the cheese dissolves into the soup and the new form created is not nikar. Additionally, in any cases of a safek (doubt) in this matter, we can also take into account the fact that most rishonim are meikel as well as the Rema in a makom tzorech.

Question: If a ball gets stuck in a tree on Shabbat, what should be done?

Answer: The Gemara in Eiruvim (30b) says that one who placed the eiruv techumin on a tree before Shabbat cannot remove it on Shabbat because he is using the tree. We see from this Gemara that the problem of using trees on Shabbat includes taking objects off of them. According to Rashi, the act of taking the object constitutes using the tree. According to the Rosh, the act itself is not using the tree, but rather, we are concerned you will come to use the tree when getting the object.

The Rema (OC 336:1) paskins that one should not remove items from the tree on Shabbat. Therefore, if a ball or different object falls on a tree or bush above three

tefachim, you may not remove it. This applies whether you are removing it by hand or using something else.

However, if the ball falls on a plant with leaves that are soft, there is no prohibition to remove it on Shabbat. Additionally, if the ball falls from the tree on its own, you can use it. (Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata quoting Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach).

Question: Can I wipe my mouth with a napkin on Shabbat?

Answer: According to the Yeraim, one cannot wipe his mouth with a napkin on Shabbat because this constitutes the melacha of tzoveh (dying). According to him, even though the dying does not improve the napkin in any form and constitutes a destructive act, it is still assur miderbanan. The Shulchan Aruch paskins like the Yeraim in OC 320:20. The Radbaz paskins that it is permitted, and seemingly assumes that the melacha of tzoveh only applies when the material is improved. The Mishna Brurah (320:59) writes that lechatchila we should be machmir, but we can be lenient in cases when there is no way to be careful.

It seems to be that nowadays there is another reason we can allow this. The Mishna Berurah (320:58) explains that although strawberries make your hands red, it is permissible to hold them because tzoveh only applies on materials which are normally colored on. According to him, anything which is not normally dyed is not part of the prohibition. Therefore, because today we use paper napkins which are not considered valuable and are thrown out after one time use, we can be lenient even lechatchila to clean our mouths at the Shabbat table.

Question: For those who are stringent on Shabbat not to mix a pot that is fully cooked and off the source of heat (kli rishon shehusar min ha'esh), would one be allowed to mix it if the contents were poured into a kli sheni?

Answer: Since the issur of stirring in a kli rishon shehusar min ha'esh is a stringency, it seems that in a kli sheni this would be permitted.

Question: Should a single man who does not wear a tallit make a bracha if he uses a shul tallit when receiving an aliyah or leading? Does it matter if he is in his own shul or visiting a different shul?

Answer: There is a machloket whether we assume that the public shul tallit is given as a gift to whoever uses it (with the condition of it being returned), or whether we view it as a sharedly owned tallit by all members of the shul. Based on the second understanding, one would only make a bracha in his own shul.

However, in practice, there is good reason to make a bracha in both cases, but you should only do so when you are chazzan. You should check that the tzitzit are complete and then make a bracha. If you are only getting up to get an aliyah, or you are chazzan but do not have time to check the tallit, you should intend not to be zoche in the tallit and you should put it on without a bracha.

● Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

תקציר פרשת ואתחנן

הרבנית שרון רימון



לאחר שמיעת קול ה', המתוארת בספר דברים, הם אמנם מרגישים את היראה הגדולה וחוששים שאם ישמעו שוב את קול ה' ימותו, אך כעת הם כבר לא רק יראים ומפחדים, אלא גם מרגישים מקורבים. הם נדהמים לגלות שהם שמעו את קול ה' מדבר אליהם, ובכל זאת הם חיים. הם מתרגשים מקרבת ה', הנקרא כעת בפיהם "ה' א-להינו", ומצהירים "ושמענו ועשינו". בהתאם לכך, גם התייחסות ה' אליהם היא התייחסות אוהבת: ה' שומע את דבריהם ומתייחס אליהם בחיוב, ומביע תקווה שתמיד היחסים ביניהם יהיו כל כך טובים: "מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם ליראה אותי ולשמור את כל מצוותי כל הימים למען ייטב להם..." (פס' כו).

לפני דיבור ה', בני ישראל חשו בעיקר את היראה, עד כדי כך שהיו מוכנים לוותר על המעמד, ולא לשמוע כלל את דברי ה'. ואילו לאחר דיבור ה', חל שינוי מהותי: יחד עם היראה חשו גם קרבה גדולה, קלטו את הזכות העצומה שנפלה בחלקם לשמוע את קול ה' ולהישאר בחיים, דבר המחבר אותם בעבודתו אהבה אל ה'.

אותם; וכיצד בכל דיבר ודיבר הם נסוגו אחור, והמלאכים חיזקו אותם לשוב ולהתקרב. מדרשים אלה מבטאים את השפעת ההתגלות האלקית על בני האדם, שקשה להכיל אותה.

כאשר מעיינים בשתי הפרשיות המתארות את מעמד הר סיני, ניתן להבחין שבפרשת יתרו מתוארת בעיקר תחושת היראה מפני ההתגלות, והריחוק. ואילו בפרשת ואתחנן, עולה רגש של אהבה וקרבה.

רמב"ן מחבר בין שני התיאורים ומפרש שבפרשת יתרו מתוארים הרגשות שלפני שמיעת קול ה', ואילו בספר דברים מתוארים הרגשות וההתרחשויות שעלו בעקבות שמיעת דבר ה'.

פרשת יתרו מתארת את היראה הגדולה שהעם מרגיש עוד לפני שמיעת קול ה'. הם ראו את ירידת כבוד ה' על הר סיני, חוו את הזדעזעות העולם כולו, וחששו ששמיעת קול ה' תגרום לזעזוע גדול עוד יותר, שבו הם לא יוכלו לעמוד. אך ה' לא וויתר להם: הם חייבים לשמוע את קול ה', ולחוות את ההתגלות הא-להית בכל עוצמתה. הם אמנם עומדים מרחוק, אך הם שומעים את קול ה'.

מעמד הר סיני היה מעמד ייחודי, בו כל עם ישראל חווה התגלות אלקית. מעמד זה מתואר בתורה פעמיים: בפרשת יתרו, ובפרשת ואתחנן.

בשני התיאורים, ניכר שעוצמת ההתגלות מפחידה את בני ישראל והם חוששים שאם הקב"ה יוסיף לדבר אליהם ישירות הם ימותו, ומשום כך הם מבקשים ממה שיתווך בינם לבין ה' ויביא לעם את דבר הא-לוהים. ישנן דעות שונות לגבי העיתוי של בקשת העם, אך רוב המפרשים נוקטים כשיטת ר' יהושע בן לוי, לפיה לאחר שתי דיברות ביקשו העם שלא לשמוע עוד ישירות את דברי ה', ולכן שמונה הדברות האחרונות הועברו לעם בתיווכו של משה.

מדוע ישראל מבקשים תיווך ואינם רוצים לחוות את ההתגלות האלקית הישירה?

ההתגלות האלקית היא חוויה עצמתית מאד. חלק מהנביאים תיארו נפילה מעצמת חווית הנבואה. והנה, במעמד הר סיני, כל עם ישראל חווה התגלות אלקית עצמתית, למרות שאינם נמצאים במדרגת נבואה, והם מרגישים שאינם מסוגלים לעמוד בכך. המדרשים מתארים כיצד פרחו נשמתם, וה' החיה

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Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

This coming Shabbat is called Shabbat Nachamu (Shabbat of Consolation). Every year, we read about consolation on the Shabbat after Tisha B'Av in the haftarah, which begins: "Nachamu, nachamu ami." [Be consoled, be consoled, my people] (Isaiah 40:1). This week's Torah portion of Va'etchanan has a most consoling aspect as well.

This is the farewell speech of Moshe Rabbeinu to the people, and to us as well. He does not continue with us to the Land of Israel, but he teaches us about the privilege of living in it, "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 6:3).

Moshe repeats the Ten Commandments and reminds us that no matter how much the world is shaken up, there is still a human conscience and fundamental values: honor your father and mother, do not steal, do not commit adultery, keep Shabbat, do not worship idols. Countless times throughout the generations, other nations and ideologies will try to erode these basic principles, but on Shabbat we will read them again.

Other seminal verses appear. Chief among them is the Shema: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). This verse has been repeated billions of times throughout the millennia, but this is the first time it appears in our nation's history.

Amidst the coronavirus, politics, and the oppressive heat, we will take advantage of our annual invitation to open the last will and testament of Moshe Rabbeinu and to find consolation and comfort there.



Even in the heat of an argument, we must pay attention to what we say and how

we say it. The language which we use is important and powerful and might exacerbate the situation. This week's Portion (Va'Etchanan) describes the giving of the Tablets of the Law for the second time. The first time - the People made a golden calf after the giving of the Torah, and Moshe broke the Tablets. What happened there, in those moments? How did Moshe Rabbeinu hear up there, on the summit of Mt. Sinai, that the People below made a calf? In this Portion, Moshe recreates that time in the ears of the People: "And the LORD said unto me: 'Arise, get thee down quickly from hence; for thy people that thou hast brought forth out of Egypt have dealt corruptly; they are quickly turned aside out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten image.'" Why does G-d say only here "they have made them a molten image"? Indeed, they made a molten calf, and prostrated themselves before it and worshiped it. Why choose a minimalist, gentle, distant wording like this? In the wonderful book, "Sha'arei Aharon", I found the following explanation:

"It is said 'they have made them a molten image', and the reason that He did not say 'a molten calf' - was that He spared their honor because this thing was very shameful for them."

That is, G-d did not say explicitly what the grave sin was but rather chose a gentler way of saying it. If there is a connection, a covenant and a shared future, and if we want to forgive and keep going together, we must not mention all the sins and detail all the mistakes. On the contrary. It is better to blur and minimize them, not to humiliate and bring up long forgotten things. Here, even when we talk about the famous golden calf, we see that G-d

renounced using the central word, "calf", to spare the honor of those who sinned.



כותב אהרונני ברנשטיין: "תסתכל רגע על העץ שממול, באיזה מרחק הוא? מה פתאום 20 מטר? למה אתה מודד את כל העולם יחסית אליך? עבור הבחור שעומד ליד העץ, הוא ממש במרחק נגיעה. מגיל אפס, ממש כמוכם, גם אני בטוח שאני ניצב במרכז האירוע, במרכז האנושות כולה. בני משפחה, חברים וכמובן נהג האוטובוס או השומר - נמדדים תמיד ביחס אליי. מפתיע לחשוב שכך בדיוק אחרים רואים אותי, כעוד דמות ברקע של חייהם, כשהם כמובן במרכז."

יהושע בן נון מקבל בפרשת השבוע את התואר 'איש אשר רוח בו'. הוא נבחר להיות היורש של משה רבנו כיוון שהוא הצליח להכיל את הרוח של כל אחד ואחת. הייתה לו יכולת כניסה מדהימה ללב ולעיניים של כל אדם, כדי לראות את העולם מנקודת המבט שלהם. הוא לא מדד אנשים ביחס אליו, אלא הבין אותם מבפנים, כפי שהם. לא בדק מה הם יכולים לתת לו או איך הם משפיעים על מעמדו, אלא הצליח להיכנס לעולמם ומשם - להרים אותם למעלה. זה לא קל, אבל כל אחד יכול להתחיל לפתח תרגילי גמישות שיעזרו לנו לפנות את עצמנו מהמרכז. מילימטר של תזוזה בתוך הבטון היצוק ששמו האגו שלנו, יחולל רעידת אדמה של ממש. כל ההסתכלות שלנו על אנשים, וגם הקשר שלנו אל מי שראו אותם - ישתדרגו. גם אנחנו נוכל להיות אנשים אשר רוח בם."



כשהיינו ילדים, הדמות הדתית המשמעותית בחיינו הייתה ה"באבא בובה". בתכנית "זהו זה", בזמן מלחמת המפרץ, מוני מושונוב שיחק דמות של רב מבולבל שמשתולל באולפן עם נבואות מצחיקות על סדאם חוסיין. בדורנו התחלפה ההנהגה הרוחנית - אסתי וראובן מ"ארץ נהדרת" היו לדתיים הכי מפורסמים, שלועגים לערבוב בין אמונות טפלות ושטויות פרימיטיביות לבין קדושה ואמת. בפרשת השבוע משה ממש מתחנן בפנינו לזכור מה המודל, בפסוק היפה הבא שהוא אומר לעם:

"וְשָׂמְתֶם וְעִשִּׂיתֶם כִּי הִיא חֻמַּתְכֶם וּבִינְתְּכֶם לְעִינֵי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁמְעוּ אֶת כָּל הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה וְאָמְרוּ יַקַּע עִמְּכֶם וַיְבָנוּ הַגּוֹי הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה."

Continued on next page

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis
Deputy CEO, World Mizrahi
Rabbi at Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**S**hema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad” (Devarim 6:4).

The opening verse of the Shema is one of the most famous in the Torah and one of the most fundamental in our Faith. Nearly all the commentators on this verse are troubled by the same problem – the seemingly unnecessary repetition of Hashem's name. Why does it not just say, “Hashem Elokeinu Echad” – “Hashem, our G-d is one”?

Rashi (Devarim 6:4) explains that the two appearances of Hashem's name refer to two separate periods in history. At this point in time, “Hashem Elokeinu” – Hashem is our G-d but not recognized by all. In time to come, after the final redemption, “Hashem Echad” – Hashem will be one, recognized by all the nations of the world, as it is written in Zecharia, “And Hashem will be King over all the world. On that day, Hashem will be one and His name will be one” (Zecharia 14:9).

The Kli Yakar (Devarim 6:4) takes a similar route to Rashi and quotes the Gemara in

Pesachim, which is concerned with the notion that only “on that day” Hashem will be one: “Is that to say that He is not one now? Rabbi Acha bar Chanini answered, “The world to come is not like this world. In this world, upon hearing good news one says, ‘Blessed is He who is good and performs good’ (Baruch HaTov v’HaMeitiv) and upon hearing bad news one says, ‘Blessed is the true judge’ (Baruch Dayan HaEmet). The world to come is entirely ‘Blessed is He who is good and performs good’ (i.e. there will only be good news)” (Pesachim 50a).

The Kli Yakar connects this Gemara with the different names used for Hashem in this verse. Whereas “Hashem” (Yud followed by Heh followed by Vav followed by Heh) is the name associated with mercy (rachamim), “Elokeinu” is the name of judgement (din).

In this world, “Hashem Elokeinu” – we experience both “Hashem” (mercy) and “Elokeinu” (judgement) and therefore need the blessings of “Baruch HaTov v’HaMeitiv” for good news and “Baruch Dayan HaEmet” for bad news. However, the perceived conflict between Hashem's

mercy and judgment makes it difficult for some to acknowledge His unity. In this world, Hashem remains “our G-d” but is not recognized by all. In the world to come, “Hashem Echad” – we will only know Hashem's name of mercy, we will only bless, “Baruch HaTov v’HaMeitiv” and with all suffering and conflict forgotten, all will recognize that Hashem is one.

The verse first of the Shema is therefore filled with meaning beyond the basic notion of the unity of Hashem. It is about the unity of Hashem for all time, both at this point in history and to be recognized by all at the time of the ultimate redemption. It is about the unity of Hashem both in this world and in the world to come. It is about one of the great theological challenges of this world – to recognise and believe in the unity of Hashem, even if sometimes confused by the apparent conflict between His mercy and His judgment.

May we merit to witness the day when “Hashem will be King over all the world. On that day, Hashem will be one and His name will be one”.

Shabbat Shalom!

Continued from previous page

במה שרואים. יש רבדים רוחניים שלמים שלא נגלים לעין, אסור לרדד את כל העומק והתוכן למשהו חיצוני ולהשתעבד לו. הרי מה שחשוב באמת, מסביר משה רבנו, נמצא מעל ומעבר למציאות הוויזואלית שאנחנו רואים:

”נְשַׁמְרְתֶּם מֵאֵד לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם כִּי לֹא רְאִיתֶם כָּל תְּמוּנָה בְּיּוֹם דְּבַר ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּחָרֵב מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ.”

טובה, ולא שמו לב לתהום/כריש/מכונת. בהודו הציבו לפני כמה ימים תמרורים מיוחדים של “אזור אסור לסלפי”, באתרי תיירות שבהם נהרגו עד היום עשרות אנשים רק עבור תמונה יותר נוצצת שתביא להם יותר לייקים. זה סוג של עבודה זרה מודרנית. הם נהרגו על קדושת הצילום העצמי.

המילה “תמונה” מופיעה בתורה 8 פעמים. 6 מתוכן בפרשת השבוע. רגע לפני הפרידה, משה רבנו מתחנן לעם פעם אחר פעם: “לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָךְ פֶּסֶל כָּל תְּמוּנָה”. למה? כי המציאות החיצונית מושכת, מתעתעת, מזויפת, וקל להשתעבד לה. זה מסוכן להאמין רק

שווה לקרוא את המשפט הזה שוב. משה מסביר מהי הדרך להפוך למה שאנחנו אמורים להיות. גם רש"י מדגיש את הנקודה הזו לפחות פעמיים לאורך הפרשה: “בזאת תחשבו חכמים ונבונים לעיני העמים”, הוא אומר לנו על דברי התורה, ואחר כך מוסיף: “כשלא תשכחו אותם ותעשו על אמיתתם – תחשבו חכמים ונבונים. ואם תעוותו אותם מתוך שכחה – תחשבו שוטים.”



לפחות 379 בני אדם מתו עד היום ברחבי העולם במהלך צילום סלפי. הם הסתכנו כדי לתפוס זווית

The Right and the Good



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Buried among the epic passages in Va'etchanan – among them the Shema and the Ten Commandments – is a brief passage with large implications for the moral life in Judaism. Here it is together with the preceding verse:

Be very vigilant to keep the commandments of the Lord your G-d, and the testimonies and decrees with which He has charged you. *Do what is right and what is good in the Lord's eyes*, so that it may go well with you, and you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you. (Deut. 6:17-18)

The difficulty is obvious. The preceding verse makes reference to commandments, testimonies, and decrees. This, on the face of it, is the whole of Judaism as far as conduct is concerned. What then is meant by the phrase “the right and the good” that is not already included within the previous verse?

Rashi says it refers to “compromise (that is, not strictly insisting on your rights) and action within or beyond the letter of the law (*lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*).” The law, as it were, lays down a minimum threshold: this we must do. But the moral life aspires to more than simply doing what we must.¹ The people who most impress us with their goodness and rightness are not merely people who keep the law. The saints and heroes of the moral life go beyond. They do more than they are commanded. They go the extra mile. That, according to Rashi, is what the Torah means by “the right and the good.”

Ramban, while citing Rashi and agreeing with him, goes on to say something slightly different:



The saints and heroes of the moral life go beyond. They do more than they are commanded. They go the extra mile.

At first Moses said that you are to keep His statutes and his testimonies which He commanded you, and now he is stating that even where He has not commanded you, give thought as well to do what is good and right in his eyes, for He loves the good and the right.

Now this is a great principle, for it is impossible to mention in the Torah all aspects of man's conduct with his neighbours and friends, all his various transactions and the ordinances of all societies and countries. But since He mentioned many of them, such as, “You shall not go around as a talebearer,” “You shall not take vengeance nor bear a grudge,” “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbour,” “You shall not curse the deaf,” “You shall not rise before the hoary head,” and the like, He went on to state in a general way that in all matters one should do what is good and right, including even compromise and going beyond the strict requirement of the law... Thus one should behave in every sphere of activity, until he is worthy of being called “good and upright.”

Ramban is going beyond Rashi's point, that the right and the good refer to a higher standard than the law strictly requires. It seems as if Ramban is telling us that there are aspects of the moral life

that are not caught by the concept of law at all. That is what he means by saying “It is impossible to mention in the Torah all aspects of man's conduct with his neighbours and friends.”

Law is about universals, principles that apply in all places and times: Do not murder. Do not rob. Do not steal. Do not lie. Yet there are important features of the moral life that are not universal at all. They have to do with specific circumstances and the way we respond to them. What is it to be a good husband or wife, a good parent, a good teacher, a good friend? What is it to be a great leader, or follower, or member of a team? When is it right to praise, and when is it appropriate to say, “You could have done better”? There are aspects of the moral life that cannot be reduced to rules of conduct, because what matters is not only what we do, but the way in which we do it: with humility or gentleness or sensitivity or tact.

Morality is about persons, and no two persons are alike. When Moses asked G-d to appoint his successor, he began his request with the words, “Lord, G-d of the spirit of all flesh.” (Numbers 27:16) On this the Rabbis commented: what Moses was saying was that each person is different, so he asked G-d to appoint a leader who would relate to each individual as an individual, knowing that what is helpful to one person may be harmful to another.² This ability to judge the right response to the right person at the right time is a feature not only of leadership, but of human goodness in general.

Rashi begins his commentary to Bereishit with the question: If the Torah is a book of law, why does it not start with the first law given to the people of Israel as a whole, which does not appear until

Exodus 12? Why does it include the narratives about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the patriarchs and matriarchs and their children? Rashi gives an answer that has nothing to do with morality – he says it has to do with the Jewish people's right to their land. But the Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin; 1816-1893) writes that the stories of Genesis are there to teach us how the patriarchs were upright in their dealings, even with people who were strangers and idolaters. That, he says, is why Genesis is called by the Sages “the book of the upright.”³

Morality is not just a set of rules, even a code as elaborate as the 613 commands and their rabbinic extensions. It is also about the way we respond to people as individuals. The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is at least in part about what went wrong in their relationship when the man referred to his wife as *Ishah*, ‘woman,’ a generic description, a type. Only when he gave her a proper name, *Chavah*, Eve, did he relate to her as an individual in her individuality, and only then did G-d make “garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.” (Gen. 3:21)

This too is the difference between the G-d of Aristotle and the G-d of Abraham. Aristotle thought that G-d knew only universals not particulars. This is the G-d of science, of the Enlightenment, of Spinoza. The G-d of Abraham is the G-d who relates to us in our singularity, in what makes us different from others as well as what makes us the same.

This ultimately is the difference between the two great principles of Judaic ethics:



Morality is not just a set of rules, even a code as elaborate as the 613 commands and their rabbinic extensions. It is also about the way we respond to people as individuals.

justice and love. Justice is universal. It treats all people alike, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, making no distinctions on the basis of colour or class. But love is particular. A parent loves their children for what makes them each unique. The moral life is a combination of both. That is why it cannot be reduced solely to universal laws. That is what the Torah means when it speaks of “the right and the good” over and above the commandments, statutes, and testimonies.

A good teacher knows what to say to a struggling student who, through great effort, has done better than expected, and to a gifted student who has come top of the class but is still performing below their potential. A good employer knows when to praise and when to challenge. We all need to know when to insist on justice and when to exercise forgiveness. The people who have had a decisive influence on our lives are almost always those we feel understood us in our singularity. We were not, for them, a mere face in the crowd. That is why, though morality involves universal rules and cannot exist without them, it also involves interactions that cannot be reduced to rules.

Rabbi Israel of Rizhin (1796-1850) once asked a student how many sections there were in the Shulchan Aruch. The student replied, “Four.” “What,” asked the Rizhiner, “do you know about the fifth section?” “But there is no fifth section,” said the student. “There is,” said the Rizhiner. “It says: always treat a person like a mensch.”

The fifth section of the code of law is the conduct that cannot be reduced to law. That is what it takes to do the right and the good.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be a good friend, beyond the obvious rules of ethics?
- Which day-to-day interactions cannot be reduced to rules, although you feel there is a right and good way to approach them?
- How can we work on our interactions with others, to ensure we always treat a person like a mensch?

1. See Lon Fuller, *The Morality of Law* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein's much reprinted article, “Does Jewish Tradition Recognize an Ethic Independent of the Halakhah?” in *Modern Jewish Ethics*, ed. Marvin Fox (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), pp. 62-88.
2. Sifre Zuta, Midrash Tanhuma and Rashi to Numbers ad loc.
3. *Ha-amek Davar* to Genesis, Introduction.

Continued from page 4

action. The Ramban conveyed this in his famous letter to his son: “When you get up from the *sefer* that you are learning, make sure to consider how to translate what you've learned into action.”

If non-actualization were the only concern, an amount of *ma'asim equal* to one's *chochmah* would suffice. However, the second line of the mishnah requires our

actions to surpass our wisdom. Why is this necessary? How is this necessary?

Next week, we will *iy”H* work on appreciating why our *ma'asim* need to surpass our *chochmah* and how this is critical to *chochmah's* sustainability.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis.

1. Tosafot (Masechet Chagigah 14a D”H Rebbe) explain that he was the greatest “*ish ma'aseh*” of his generation.
2. Masechet Berachot 17a, based on the *passuk* “*Reishit chochmah yirat Hashem, sechel tov l'chol oseihem*” (Tehillim 111:10).

Love of Hashem



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

ואהבת את ד' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך.

And you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your resources. (Devarim 6:5)

What is the connotation of “with all your heart and with all your soul”? It means that a Jew’s love for Hashem must be primary compared to his love for others. Therefore, if one is married and his wife does not want to observe taharas hamishpachah, he cannot view himself as being unable to observe this mitzvah of the Torah. He must love Hashem more than his beloved wife. The institution of ben sorer umoreh (the rebellious son) also conveys this idea. If the son is a transgressor of aveiros, the parents should not cover this up and protect him, but should bring him to the beis din for punishment.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (71a), according to one opinion, teaches that ben sorer umoreh never actually happened, but it is still written “on the books” to teach its moral lesson. The theoretical possibility of the fulfillment of this mitzvah teaches the lesson that parents are obligated to have more love for Hashem than for their own son. The incident of the Akeidah also teaches this lesson; although we have love for our children, our spouses, and others, we must have more love for Hashem than any other being. Midrashim say that on the occasion of the Akeidah, Avraham was trembling, conflicted due to his natural paternal human emotions. Yet, he knew he had to do the will of Hashem; his intellect dictated to him that he must perform the Akeidah.

Though extremely difficult, Jews throughout the generations have followed in the footsteps of Avraham, being willing to demonstrate that their love for Hashem

is greater than the love they had for their own lives, sacrificing themselves al kiddush Hashem. During the period of the Ba’alei HaTosfos, the Crusaders traveling through France and Germany pressured many Jews to convert to Christianity on the pain of death. The Da’as Zekeinim MiBa’alei HaTosfos (Bereishis 9:5) refers to the very common practice of parents slaughtering their own children, first reciting the berachah, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על השחיטה, because of the fear that they might convert to save themselves.

The practice of the Ba’alei HaTosfos was based on the Akeidah, from which we see that we are obligated to make this ultimate sacrifice out of love for Hashem. One is obligated to love all his fellow Jews, based on ואהבת לרעך כמוך (Vayikra 19:18), but not all to the same extent. One must love his own family more than he loves his neighbor’s family. Nevertheless, one’s commitment to Hashem must take precedence even over his love for his own wife and children, because one must love Hashem “with all your heart.”

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (78a) discusses a case in which ten people beat someone, one after the other, causing his death. The majority opinion among the Tanna'im holds that they are not subject to the death penalty, while Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseira rules that the last one is liable because he hastened the person’s death. The Gemara explains that both opinions expounded the same passuk, ואיש כי יכה כל נפש אדם, – “And if a man strikes all human life, he shall be put to death” (Vayikra 24:17). The

disagreement revolves about how to translate the words כל נפש – “all life.” According to the Chachamim, it means “entire life,” so that the assailant is not liable unless he kills someone who otherwise would have lived. According to Rabbi Yehudah, this phrase implies “anything that is life.” Thus, if ten people hit the victim sequentially, it is the final assailant who is culpable for shortening his life, even though the victim would have died anyway from the previous assaults.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner (Nefesh HaChayim, sha’ar 2, perek 15) sees a connection between this Gemara’s understanding of כל נפש and the similar phrase in the passuk, “to love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart [an allusion to tefillah, the avodah of the heart] and – with all your soul” (Devarim 11:13). One should strive to cleave to Hashem with “all his soul,” but at the very least, to see to it that “part of his soul” connects itself to Hashem with every word of tefillah. According to the view that כל נפש means “anything that is life,” when the passuk taught, “And you shall love Hashem, your G-d, ובכל נפשך” does that not imply that one needs to love Hashem only with “a part of his soul”? The explanation is that in the passuk, ואיש כי יכה כל נפש אדם, the word כל refers to the last “anything that is life,” not the first. Even according to this view, then, it is with this “last part of his soul” that one must express his love for Hashem.

Given the mitzvah to love Hashem with literally “all our soul,” or, according to the other opinion, with the “last part

Continued on next page

We Stood at Har Sinai



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
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Rav Schwab, in his Sefer called *Avnei Avraham*, has a beautiful explanation on a Pasuk in this week's Parsha. The Pasuk refers to the obligation for us to remember the events of Har Sinai, and says

”רק השמר לה... והודעתם לפניך, ולבני בניך. יום אשר עמדת לפני יְרוּר אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּחַרְבֶּךָ...”

We are told to remember that we stood at Har Sinai. Rav Schwab points out that the Torah constantly reminds us that we stood at Har Sinai, that we were actually standing. It is not enough that we remember getting the Torah at Har Sinai, but that we were standing in the process. And in Parshat Yitro, in the first recounting of *Matan Torah*, it follows this same theme. There we find many Pesukim, all referring specifically to the act of standing. “וַיִּתְיַצְּבוּ, בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר” or “וַיִּרְא הָעָם וַיִּנְעוּ, וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ מֵרָחֹק” We even refer to the event of giving of the Torah as specifically *standing of Har Sinai*. Thus, the question is why is there a need for all these “standings.” Why is the detail of us standing an integral part in our appreciation of getting the Torah, such that the Torah commands us to specifically remember that detail?

Furthermore, this question becomes is more significant when we contrast it with many other times in Tanach that we find



Why is the detail of us standing an integral part in our appreciation of getting the Torah, such that the Torah commands us to specifically remember that detail?

a *giluy shechinah*, a revelation of the Shechinah. Usually in Tanach, when Hashem appears to a Navi, the Navi falls on his face. We find that when *Shaul* becomes a Navi, he falls on to the ground. Or in the famous story of *Har Haraigel*, when the entire Jewish people see the great fire, they fell on their faces. And even in Chumash, after the completion of the Mishkan, the entire Jewish nation saw the fire come down and fell on their faces. So why were the Jews by *Har Sinai* able to continue to stand?

Rav Schwab explains that in general, when there is a revelation of Shechinah, the people around have no power to stand. However, when a person is involved in Torah learning, that gives him the power to stand. Therefore, despite the fact that in all other places we find that the people watching fell on their faces, by *Har Sinai* we were receiving the Torah, and through

that power of *limud* we were able to continue standing. For this reason, the Torah wants to specifically mention that we were standing during *Matan Torah*, to remind us of this powerful lesson. The *Matan Torah*, and the power of being involved in Torah, is what allows a person to stand up, both literally and figuratively. By connecting us to Hashem, and elevating ourselves to such a high level, learning Torah allows us to accept a *giluy shechinah* properly, and not become overtaken and therefore fall down.

We find in *Pirkei Avot* an allusion to this same idea. There, the first Mishna says “והעמידו תלמידים הרבה”. The idea from this Mishna is the same that we have spoken about until now. The job of a teacher is not just to teach a student Torah. Rather, it is to instill within the student the power of Torah, and the power of learning Torah, such that the student is now able to “stand up” on his own, and even accept a *giluy shechinah* properly.

● Edited by Jay Eisenstadt and Ari Levine.

Continued from previous page

of our soul,” where is there room for *to love our wives, our children, and other Jews?* The answer, as the *Chovos HaLevavos* (Sh’ar Ahavas Hashem, perek 2) explains, is that the love we have for them

should be viewed as part of *אהבת ד’*: “If you love anything else, it should be [love] wherein you find favor before Him, so that [this love] is actually a branch of your love [for Hashem].” Hashem wants us to feel that we are all part of one large

family, and so we demonstrate our love for Hashem by showing love to all our fellow Jews.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha.

How Do We Love G-d?



Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

Love is one of the most powerful of all human emotions. It drives both personal and social change and can transform the world. It is the active ingredient in our most important relationships - the relationship between husband and wife, between parent and child, between siblings, between friends, and of course, our relationship with G-d.

But the big question is - can love be cultivated? We usually think of love as a feeling. But what if it's something less abstract? What if love is not just something we feel, but something we do?

The question is especially significant when it comes to the love of G-d. In this week's Torah portion, Va'etchanan, we read of the mitzvah to "love G-d": "And you shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." The verse also appears in the first paragraph of the Shema, which we recite every morning and evening.

And yet, how can we be commanded to love G-d? Isn't love an emotion - something we either feel or we don't? The Rambam has one approach to answering it: "When a person reflects on His [G-d's] deeds, and wondrous and great creations, and sees from them His wisdom which is beyond assessment and without end, this will bring him to love and to praise and to glorify and to be filled with a great desire to know His great name. As David said: 'My soul thirsts for the living G-d.'" The Rambam is teaching us that when we contemplate the sheer beauty and brilliance and perfection of the natural universe, our hearts will be filled with overwhelming love and wonderment for the One who created it.

As Jews, we take nothing for granted. To attune our consciousness to the wondrous

things going on around us, our sages enacted numerous blessings for us to recite. There are blessings on witnessing lightning, hearing thunder, seeing the oceans or an awesome mountain range, noticing a rainbow with its brilliant colours, or the first blossoms of spring. There are blessings on more "mundane" natural wonders as well - a blessing before eating a piece of fruit or a vegetable, or a slice of bread. Of course, it's all equally wondrous.

Gemara actually compares the seemingly commonplace occurrence of rain to the revival of the dead, which is why both are mentioned together in the same blessing in the Amidah. The only difference between miracles and laws of nature is the frequency with which they occur. But the point is, the more we perceive and recognise the love and energy and effort that G-d pours into creating this world, the more we are filled with love. Rabbeinu Yona has an approach that's subtly different. He says we can cultivate a love of G-d by recognising all of the personal kindnesses He has done for us. Starting with the mere fact that we are alive - the Talmud teaches that we are meant to give thanks for every breath of air. But, by meditating on the fact that everything we have - the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the roof over our head, the people in our lives, the knowledge and wisdom we've accumulated - is a gift from our Creator, we can develop a deep appreciation and love for Him.

Rabbeinu Yona says another pathway to loving G-d is to contemplate his greatness and grandeur - and the fact that, despite his unimaginable and ungraspable loftiness, He is nevertheless interested and involved in the goings on of our lives.

Rashi offers a third path to the love of G-d. Citing the abovementioned verse from this week's Torah portion: "And you shall love the Lord your G-d..." he notes that in the very next verse, it says: "And behold these things which I command you today shall be on your heart." Says Rashi, according to the interpretation of Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi, the verse is teaching us the formula for loving G-d, which is through the commandments of the Torah. How do the mitzvot bring us to love G-d? Love is predicated on knowledge, and through the mitzvot we come to know G-d. Just as you can come to know a person by what he or she stands for, and by the outcomes they want to be realised in the world, so too we can gain some understanding of G-d through the 613 mitzvot He gave to us, which are the revealed expressions of His will.

But, perhaps performing the Torah's commandments isn't just about knowing G-d. Perhaps in some sense we are also giving to G-d. By living in accordance with the commandments, we are dedicating our lives to G-d's will; we are doing what He wishes us to do, what He created us to do. And this act of "giving" itself can generate love. Rav Eliyahu Dessler explains that giving is more than an expression of love, it's also what activates love. The more one gives, says Rav Dessler, the more one loves. He explains this is why parents tend to love their children more than children love their parents. Most of the giving goes in that direction - from parent to child - therefore the love also flows more powerfully in that direction. That giving and loving are two sides of the same coin is expressed in the Hebrew language by the fact that the root of the Hebrew word for love, ahava, is the word hav, which means to give. We see that

Continued on next page

Love Isn't Just Emotion



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In *Parshat Va'etchanan* we encounter the famous *pasuk* that we recite daily – *Vea'havta et Hashem Elokecha* – the imperative to love G-d will all our heart and soul. How can Hashem demand that we “love” Him? One can force another to act in a certain manner, but cannot demand one to experience an emotion that is detached from one’s volition or will. How then, can the love of G-d be included as a positive commandment?

Rav Baruch Halevi Epstein in *Tosefet Bracha* offers an explanation based on a gemara in *Yoma 86a*. Perhaps for this very reason that one cannot force an emotional response, the gemara interprets this mitzvah as requiring action. The gemara derives from this *pasuk* that we are to act in a way that would make Hashem **beloved** in the eyes of others עשה דברים שיתאהב שם שמים על ידך. If one conducts himself in an honest and straightforward manner, others will recognize that such a pious person is acting in accordance with the precepts of the Torah and it will increase their respect for, and admiration of, Hashem.

In a similar manner, we are instructed to respect and fear our parents



When the simple formulation in the Torah relates to an emotion, it is often “converted” into actions that are to be taken.

(כבוד את אביך ואת אמך... איש אמו ואביו תיראו), rather than to merely love our parents. The command is formulated so as to instruct us how to *act* (provide with food, don't sit in their seat), rather than how to *feel*.

Perhaps that is why Hillel interprets the *pasuk* of “love your neighbor” (ואהבת לרעך כמוך), as don't **act** towards others in a way that you would despise others acting towards you.

מה ששנוא עליך אל תעשה לחברך. When the simple formulation in the Torah relates to an emotion, it is often “converted” into actions that are to be taken.

Rabbi Norman Lamm offers an alternative explanation in his sefer *Drashot L'Dorot*. Citing the *Sefat Emet*, Rabbi Lamm posits that if the Torah commands one to “love”

G-d – then there must be ingrained in every Jewish heart a deep and abiding love for G-d and for Torah. Sometimes that emotion needs a spark to ignite it, but it is present, albeit dormant at times.

A story is told of the famous sculptor Michelangelo, who created a statue of Moses. A bystander, amazed at the work of art, commented on how amazing it was that he created an image of Moses from a solid piece of stone. Michelangelo replied that his task was simple. He saw the image of Moses beneath the stone and all he did was chip away at the stone to disclose the figure. Similarly, at times, we need to spark or uncover our inner feelings and emotions. Today psychologists adopt a similar technique. Rather than force an idea on a child, they encourage educators to empower the child to arrive at the conclusion from within.

As we celebrate *Shabbat Nachamu*, being comforted after mourning the destruction of our *Beit Hamikdash*, may we be able to internalize these messages. First, to always conduct ourselves in a manner that is *mekadesh shem shamayim*, and to be able for ourselves and others to uncover the inner emotion of love of our creator!

Continued from previous page

any loving relationship must be rooted in giving; we can't speak meaningfully of loving another without giving to them. And so it is with G-d. We can't speak about loving G-d without giving to Him, which we do through the mitzvot.

The important thing to remember is that loving G-d is our natural state of being. The *Dubna Maggid* captures this with a beautiful parable. He says just like when

rescuing a trapped bird, one doesn't have to actively return it to its nest - one only needs to release it and it will find its way back there instinctively; so too, to return to - or rediscover - our innate love for G-d, all we need to do is release ourselves from whatever is impeding us. The strategies we've outlined here are ways of doing exactly that, catalysts for revealing what is already deep inside us.

The Torah says we are created in G-d's image; that our souls are in some way a reflection of the Divine. And it is this reflection of G-d within each one of us that naturally draws us close to Him. Like a bird flying home to its nest. The place that's warm and safe and comfortable. The place we belong. The place we love.

One Day at a Time



Michal Horowitz
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In this week's *parsha*, *Parshas V'Eschanan*, Moshe exhorts the *Bnei Yisrael* to go in the ways of Hashem and Torah, and the *pasuk* tells us: וְאַתֶּם, הַדְּבִקִים, בַּה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם, הַיּוֹם, *you who cleave unto your G-d, you are all alive today* (Devarim 4:4).

Why does Moshe *Rabbeinu* add the word 'today'? Is it not sufficient for him to say: *you who cleave unto your G-d, you are all alive?*

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski *zt'l* writes, "In my work treating alcoholics, I have found that the greatest success for sustained abstinence from alcohol is through participation in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. One of the fundamentals of this program is taking 'one day at a time.' The addicted alcoholic cannot conceive never again being able to drink. Inasmuch as he has relied on alcohol to feel good, he sees a lifetime of sobriety as being completely unrealistic. There is no point in even trying to do the impossible. Therefore, he is taught a new philosophy, 'Take one day at a time. There is nothing that you can do today about tomorrow's drinking, so there is no point in thinking about it. It is not impossible for you to stay sober just for today. That is certainly within your ability. So stay sober today, and when tomorrow comes, you can deal with its challenges then.'

"One of my friends would write down each day how many days he had been sober. When he died at age eighty-three, it was found that the night before he had written the number 16,472. He had been sober for forty-six years because he took it *one day at a time*.

"...More than one hundred and fifty years ago, Rav Moshe Sofer, the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (d.1839) cited the verse in our *parsha* as teaching this concept.

וְאַתֶּם, הַדְּבִקִים, בַּה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם, הַיּוֹם,

you who cleave unto your G-d, you are all alive today.

"The Talmud quotes ben Sira, 'Do not agonize about tomorrow's problems, because you have no way of predicting tomorrow' (Sanhedrin 100b). The Chasam Sofer says that this is the way one can vanquish the *yetzer harah*. If a person thinks that he must resist the *yetzer harah's* temptations throughout his entire lifetime, he might consider it impossible and may give up without trying. Therefore, the Chasam Sofer says, think about resisting the *yetzer harah* only *today*. That is certainly within everyone's abilities.

"This is what Moshe told the Israelites. 'You can cleave to G-d and observe all His *mitzvos* if you think only about living הַיּוֹם, *this day*. Don't take on tomorrow's challenges today.'

"... It is standard operating procedure for people to make 'New Year resolutions,' and it is common knowledge that they invariably fail. The reason is that they say to themselves, 'I will not smoke this entire year!' or 'I will not eat excessively this entire year.' This is far too great an undertaking and one fails because one cannot conceive of ever being able to succeed. The correct thing to do, as the Chasam Sofer teaches, is to tackle only today's problems and challenges today. Breaking a resolution down to bite-size pieces makes it feasible to keep over the long term" (Twerski on Chumash, p.367-368).

You who cleave unto your G-d, you are all alive today. Sometimes, with the challenges and life situations we all face, *avodas Hashem* may seem daunting. We may want to change, we *desire* to improve ourselves and come closer to Hashem, but when we think of the work that needs to be done, it may be so overwhelming, we might just want to give up before we even try! Hence, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, in his profound, eternal and prophetic wisdom, gives us the secret to success in all realms of life: Just focus on

today. Today, surely, you can be successful in your quest for greatness. We will worry about tomorrow, tomorrow.

R' Binaymin Finkel pointed out that the *yetzer harah* is really just a two trick pony. When he sees that someone has decided to improve himself, he says: "What are you making yourself crazy about? You are still young, and you have your whole life still ahead of you! No need to get caught up with these things at your age. Of course, they are important and of course you must learn more and improve your character traits, but when you are older. Now, you still have plenty of time left for these things!"

Then one day, it suddenly changes. You decide to embark on some course of improvement, and sure enough, right on cue, the *yetzer harah* shows up. This time, however, the message is different. "Now you decide to work on improving your character traits!? Now you decide to complete a tractate of Gemara!? Now!? At your age! Don't be foolish; it is too late! You are too old to accomplish something like that!"

That is his entire ploy. At first, he tells you that you are young and you still have plenty of time to accomplish. No need to rush things, all in due time. Then, one day, it just changes. You are too old! It is too late to change! Nobody knows exactly when this happens, the switch from 'You are still young, you have plenty of time,' to 'You are too old already, it is too late to begin working on such projects!'" (Portraits of Prayer, p.299).

As we look ahead to *Chodesh Elul*, the final month of the year, and a time of *cheshbon ha'nefesh* (introspection) and *teshuva*, repentance, let us remember that the Torah is our guidebook for life. If we but focus on overcoming the battles of *today*, then we will reach success today, and every day going forward.

Moshe's View from the Mountain



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

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On his final day, why is Moshe Rabbeinu eager to see Lebanon? And when he ascends the mountain for a final view, why does G-d show him a view of Saudi Arabia? And why do Chazal interpret all of this as Jerusalem?

In the opening psukim of this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu begs G-d to allow him to cross into the Holy Land. However, note how the manner in which he states his request is rather peculiar: "Let me pass over and see this good land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain **and the Lebanon**".

We can understand why Moshe wants to see the 'good land', for that seems to imply the Land of Israel – as it was described in 'spy-report' by Yehoshua and Kalev: "The land that we have passed to scout it, the land is very **good**".

But why does Moshe express interest to see Lebanon as well? True, Lebanon is located on the northern border of Eretz Canaan, but Moshe doesn't ask to see any of the other borders. Furthermore, why is Moshe only interested in seeing mountain ranges? What about the Negev, the Shefeila, and the coastal plain?

G-d does not grant Moshe's request. Instead, he instructs Moshe to climb to the top of a mountain to get a glimpse of the land that he is not permitted to enter. However, here we find yet another difficulty: "Climb to the top of the mountain, and **lift up** your eyes to the **west, north, south and east** – and see with your eyes, for you will not cross the Jordan".

Moshe now stands on Mount Nevo in the Moabite Mountains, directly east of Eretz Canaan. Hence, it makes sense that he should look towards the west, and even to the north and south, for that could be understood as northwest and southwest; but why would he look to **east**? After all,

to the east, the only area in sight would be the wide plains and desert areas of modern-day Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

So why does G-d tell Moshe to look to the East?

Avraham Avinu's arrival in Canaan from Aram climaxed with his building of a **mizbeiach** in Bet El, where he called out in G-d's Name. Similarly, upon Avraham's return to Canaan from Egypt, he ascended once again to his **mizbeiach** in Bet El – to call out in the Name of G-d.

At that same time, Lot had decided to leave him, choosing instead the Jordan valley. After Lot's departure, G-d appeared to Avraham once again in Bet El, and reiterated His promise that this Land will one day become the homeland of his offspring.

However, note the special preface that G-d adds to this promise, and its similarity to our pasuk in Sefer Devarim: "And G-d said to Avram after Lot had left him: **Lift up your eyes** and **SEE** from the place where you are – to the **north and south, east and west**, for this land that you see I will give to you and your offspring".

G-d tells Avraham to lift up his eyes and look in all **four** directions from Bet El, just as He later tells Moshe Rabbeinu to look in all four directions from Har Nevo.

Of course, this parallel could simply be incidental, for this is usually the direction that one looks at when he is in a high place. However, we find one additional instance where these four directions are mentioned, and once again in relation to Bet El.

When Yaakov Avinu was running away from Esav on his way to Aram, he stopped overnight at Bet El. There, G-d appeared to him in a dream, confirming that Yaakov would be the inheritor of His covenant with Avraham. In that blessing, note how we find once again all four directions: "... And your offspring will [numerous] be like

the dust of the earth, and you spread out to the **west** and **east, north** and **south**, and through you will be a blessing to all the nations on the earth".

Here once again we find all four directions, and in fact, these three sources are the only times in Chumash where these 'four directions' are found. However, this source concerning Yaakov is most significant, for when he awakes from his dream Yaakov makes a special promise concerning this site. "And Yaakov awoke in the morning and took the rock that was by his head and erected it as a monument and anointed it with oil. Then he named this spot **Bet El**... and he vowed that when he returns... this monument will become a **Bet- Elokim** [House for G-d]..."

These psukim establish a connection between this special site of Bet El and a House for G-d – a **Bet Elokim**.

Surely, Moshe wants to see the land, but not simply as a tourist; rather Moshe wants to see the achievement of the ultimate goal for Am Yisrael, as reflected in Yaakov's dream at Bet El and Avraham's vision from Bet El. When Moshe requests to see 'ha-har ha-tov' – the **good mountain** (3:25), one could suggest that he wants to 'see' the Temple Mount and when he requests to see Ha-**Levanon** – he may be hinting not only at that northern mountain range but to the bet-ha-mikdash that will one day be constructed from the wood of the cedars of Lebanon.

In a similar manner, we can now understand G-d's response to Moshe. He instructs Moshe to climb to the highest mountain and to look out in all four directions, just as Avraham Avinu had done at the dawn of Jewish History. Moshe wishes to see the dream of G-d's promise to Avraham Avinu fulfilled, and G-d allows Moshe an experience that would reflect its fulfillment.

It's All Good



Rabbi Eli Mansour

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Parashat Va'ethanan contains the first paragraph of the Shema, which we recite each day, and this paragraph includes the command, "You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." The Mishna in Masechet Berachot (54) understands this command to mean that one is obligated to bless Hashem for bad fortune just as one is obligated to thank Him for good fortune. We must love Hashem and feel grateful to Him under all circumstances, even when our situation seems bad.

Why must we thank Hashem for misfortune?

Rabbenu Yona, in his commentary to Masechet Berachot, writes that misfortune brings us atonement for our misdeeds. Nobody is perfect, and even the most righteous among us make mistakes for which we need to atone. Achieving atonement through misfortune here in this world is far preferable to having to earn atonement through suffering in the next world. A flat tire, a stock that nosedives, the flu, and even, Heaven forbid, more serious misfortunes are "pennies on the dollar" with which we pay the "debt" we owe for our wrongdoing.

The Rambam, in his commentary to the Mishna, gives another reason for why we need to be thankful for misfortune, citing the famous Rabbinic adage, "Kol Ma D'abid Rahamana Le'tab Abid" – "Everything Hashem does is done for the best." Very often, we experience events which seem disastrous, but later turn out to have been great blessings in disguise. I know personally of several individuals who lost their jobs and were heartbroken and devastated, but then landed other positions which were far more profitable.



In order to truly believe that "Hashem Ehad," we need to "close our eyes," to remind ourselves that the misfortune we see is only a mirage, and one day it will become clear that everything Hashem does is for the best.

The Shema begins with the famous Pasuk, "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokenu Hashem Ehad" – "Hear, O Israel, Hashem our G-d – Hashem is one." This verse makes mention of both Names of G-d – "Hashem" (the Name of "Havaya"), and "Elokim." The Name of "Havaya" signifies G-d's kindness and compassion, whereas "Elokim" represents the aspect of strict justice, Hashem's punishing us and bringing upon us hardship. In this Pasuk we declare that "Hashem" and "Elokenu" are actually one and the same – "Hashem Ehad." Even "Elokenu" is really "Hashem." The difference is only in our perception; we perceive some things as good and others as bad, but the truth is that "Hashem Ehad" – there is only one G-d, who does only goodness.

This is why it is customary to close our eyes when we recite this verse. The world is very misleading. When we look around us, we see a great deal of misfortune and suffering. In order to truly believe that "Hashem Ehad," we need to "close our eyes," to remind ourselves that the misfortune we see is only a mirage, and one day it will become clear that everything Hashem does is for the best.

There is a well-known story of a Hasid who asked his Rabbi to help him build this belief, that everything Hashem does is good. It is so difficult to live with this faith, that even the seemingly unfortunate events that we experience are actually for our benefit, and so this Hasid turned to his Rabbi for help. The Rabbi told the Hasid that there is only one man who can teach him how to reach this level of faith, and that is the famous Reb Zushe of Anapoli.

And so, the Hasid embarked on a trip to visit Reb Zushe. When he arrived at Reb Zushe's home, he was startled to see that the great Sadik lived in a dilapidated residence, in a state of abject poverty. He knocked on the door, and explained to Reb Zushe that his Rabbi sent him there to learn how to develop the belief that everything Hashem does is good, even when one endures hardship and suffering.

"I'm afraid I cannot help you with that," Reb Zushe apologetically replied. "I've never experienced any misfortune in my life. Everything in my life is wonderful."

Of course, this is a very high level which takes many, many years of hard work to achieve. But this is something that we must all work on, each on his or her level. It starts with appreciating everything we have, by focusing on all that is good rather than on what is not, and by recognizing that even that which seems bad will, one day, turn out to have been for the best.

This is the message of the daily Shema – the daily proclamation we make affirming that ultimately there is no distinction between "Hashem" and "Elokenu," because it is all one, and it is all good.

When Everything Else is Stripped Away



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger

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This week, I was thinking about a beautiful *Midrash* on the *parshah* (*Sifri, Devarim* 36). In it, *Chazal* say, “The Jewish people are so precious that the Torah surrounded them with *mitzvos*: *tefillin* on their heads, *tefillin* on their arms, *mezuzos* on their doors, and *tzitzis* on their garments. Regarding them Dovid said, ‘Seven in a day I praise You for Your righteous statutes’ (*Tehillim* 119:164).” The *passuk* quoted by the *Midrash* refers to the fact that Dovid HaMelech was inspired to praise Hashem seven times a day for the seven *mitzvos* that surround His children as a sign of how precious they are to Him: four *tzitzis* on their garments, *tefillin* on their heads and arms, and a *mezuzah* on their doors.

The *Midrash* then continues with a well-known story about Dovid HaMelech, “He entered the bath house and saw himself naked. He said, ‘Woe that I am naked of *mitzvos*!’ He then gazed at the sign of the covenant on his flesh and began to arrange his praise [after leaving the *mikvah*], as the *passuk* (*Tehillim* 12:1) says, ‘For the conductor, on the eighth, a song of Dovid,’” a hint at *bris milah*, which is done on a baby’s eighth day of life.

What exactly happened to Dovid HaMelech in the *mikvah*? What was the nature of the epiphany he had there? He certainly wasn’t embarrassed by the fact that the other people in the *mikvah* “caught” him without his *tefillin* and *tzitzis* on. First, that is the nature of the place and what everyone would expect. Second, as he was the king of the Jewish people, when he entered the *mikvah*, everyone else certainly left as soon as he arrived!

Besides the fact that Hashem told us to, why do we wear *tefillin* and *tzitzis* and put *mezuzos* on our doors? We bind *tefillin* on

our heads and our arms to remind us to bind our minds and actions to Hashem’s will. Wearing *tzitzis* remind us, wherever we go, of the *mitzvos*. And the *mezuzah* reminds us, before we leave the house, to remember Hashem’s will in all the choices we make as we journey out into the world. They stand as reminders to awaken our minds to remember our connection to Hashem and His will – “Seven in a day I praise You.”

But Dovid HaMelech was bothered by the question: What happens if all of the reminders that keep my actions and thoughts in the right place are removed? What is left of me? Do I still have a connection with Hashem? Is it all external? Do I have an essential connection with G-d? How have all of these reminders affected my essence, if at all? Perhaps this question is what caused Dovid to cry out, “Woe that I am naked of *mitzvos*!”

It is so easy for us to allow *Yiddishkeit* to be reduced to one long string of reminders and signs without any change in the nature of who we are, what we want, or the nature of our consciousness. One’s entire Jewish life may only be defined by one’s *rebbe*, *morah*, family, *shul*, *yeshivah*, and the checklist of Jewish activities one engages in on a daily, weekly, or yearly basis. These signs of Hashem’s love surround us on all sides and are wonderful. But does the way we rely on them make us into empty shells? What are we without them? Have they changed us on the *inside*? How does one act when he is naked of *mitzvos*? When all the reminders are somewhere else and something pops up on the screen on a person’s phone, even unintentionally, what does he do? What is left when he is stripped of every external reminder and motivator to keep him or

her on the straight and narrow? Is he still connected to Hashem and his *Yiddishkeit*? Perhaps Dovid HaMelech’s fear at that moment in the *mikvah* was about what happens when one takes away all of his external badges of Divine service, when he was truly naked of *mitzvos*, disconnected from everything outside of himself. He was worried whether, after removing all of the “means” in his life, whether the “ends” had become part of his essence.

What was his epiphany? He realized that the part of him which was always covered, which was most private, the part of him so internal that it was part of his very flesh, had never left him. “This is My covenant which you shall observe, between Me, you, and your children after you: circumcise for yourselves every male.” (*Bereishis* 17:10). This hidden sign of “My covenant” is the symbol of the relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem because it is invisible. It cannot serve to jog the memory. It only exists as part of our essence. That was his comfort and the subject a new chapter of *Tehillim*.

Each of us is surrounded by a myriad of *mitzvos* and positive Jewish role models, environments, and lessons. But if they remain as external reminders which, if removed, would leave us naked of *mitzvos*, then they will not have ever fulfilled their purpose. Let us merit not to be satisfied with the external marks of *Yiddishkeit* alone. May we succeed in driving these reminders of our relationship with Hashem deep into our minds and hearts so that when we enter our version of Dovid HaMelech’s *mikvah*, we too will rejoice in our own internalization of our covenant with Hashem.

Joseph Vs. Moses



Rabbi YY Jacobson
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G-d refuses the pleading of His faithful servant, Moses, to be allowed entry into the Promised Land. Instead, G-d tells Moses: “Ascend to the top of the cliff and raise your eyes westward, northward, southward, and eastward, and see with your eyes, for you shall not cross this Jordan.

The Midrash presents a moving dialogue between Moses and G-d: Moses said to G-d, “Master of the universe, the bones of Joseph will enter the land, and I will not?!”

Joseph the viceroy of Egypt, just before his death, adjured the children of Israel, that they take his bones with them when they leave Egypt. More than a century later, when the Jewish slaves embarked on their path to freedom, “Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he [Joseph] had firmly adjured the children of Israel saying, ‘G-d will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you.’”

Joseph’s casket wandered with the Jews during their forty-year sojourn in the desert. When Joshua led the people into the land, Joseph’s bones were interred in the city of Shchem. This was the irony hinted in Moses’ plea to G-d: I was the one who carried Joseph’s bones for forty years; yet these bones that I carried all this way will enter into the Holy Land, while I will remain behind!

What perturbed Moses, according to this Midrash, was not so much that he wouldn’t be allowed to enter the Land alive. The brunt of Moses’ hurt was that G-d would not allow even his body to be interred in the soil of the Holy Land! The remains of Joseph, who died 180 years earlier, can enter the land, while the body of

Moses, who led the Jews all the way to the border, cannot enter?

G-d’s response is nothing less than astounding: He who acknowledged his land, will be buried in the land; he who did not acknowledge his land, will not be buried in the land. Joseph acknowledged the land; Moses did not.

The Midrash quotes two episodes demonstrating Joseph’s loyalty to the land.

How did Potiphar’s wife describe Joseph? As a “Hebrew man” (“Look, he brought us a Hebrew man to sport with us.”) This was a most obvious and conspicuous characteristic of Joseph’s. Clearly, he never disguised his origin; everybody was aware that he was a member of the Hebrew tribe, coming from the Land of Israel.

The second episode occurs ten years later, while in the Egyptian dungeon. Joseph proclaims his connection to the Holy Land. “I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews.”

Indeed, when the butler does present Joseph’s case to Pharaoh, two years later, that is exactly how he describes Joseph: “There [in the dungeon] with us was a Hebrew youth, a slave....The first characteristic by which he defines Joseph is his being “a Hebrew youth.”

In Egyptian society, to be a Hebrew was a badge of shame. But Joseph made it known that he was a Hebrew, a resident of Israel. Disguising it would perhaps allow him to integrate into Egyptian society, but that would mean lying to himself and to the world. What type of life is that?

What is the connection between the Jewish people and the Holy Land, both in the past and in the present? Is it merely a national one: Jews reside in Israel they

are citizens of the country, so they are naturally connected to it. No! For the last 2000 years, Jews have been exiled and dispersed all over the globe, yet they still spoke of Eretz Israel as their home; they cried for it as their spiritual epicenter. It was the core of their longings, dreams, and aspirations.

Why? If it were merely a nationalistic obsession, it should have diminished with the two millennia of living elsewhere.

The answer to this enigma has been articulated in countless works of Jewish philosophy and mysticism: Each and every Jew—secular and observant alike—is organically linked to the land of Israel. Israel for the Jew is not merely a nationality; it is the home of the Jewish inner consciousness: The Jewish soul is rooted in the energy vibrating in the atmosphere of Eretz Israel.

Joseph was a slave, then a prisoner. He was living in Egypt and was powerless to change that. Ultimately he would become the prime minister of the country. But that was only his body; his soul was still living in Eretz Israel. Thus he was never ashamed to remain loyal to himself and declare the truth: I am residing in Egypt, but a part of me has never left the Holy Land. I may one day come to love Egypt, but Eretz Yisroel will always remain my home. Because it is home.

Following his escape from Pharaoh’s sword, Moses spent time at the well of Midyan. There, the Jewish boy who grew up in the Egyptian palace rescued Jethro’s seven daughters from the shepherds who were harassing them. When the daughters came home and their father asked them how they managed to make it home so quickly, they replied, “An Egyptian man

Continued on page 22

Va'eschanan / Nachamu



Rabbi Judah Mischel

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Rebbe Moshe Yechiel Epstein, zy'a, was a *masmid* and brilliant Torah scholar who authored the 20 volume encyclopedic work on Jewish thought, *Sefer Aish Dos*, as well as the Torah commentary *Be'er Moshe*. Reb Moshe Yechiel relocated from Poland to New York in mid 1920's, while his relatives who remained in Europe were all murdered in the Holocaust. He lived on the Lower East Side and then the Bronx for some time before moving to Eretz Yisrael. There, as the sole surviving remnant of his grandfather's Chasidic dynasty, Reb Moshe Yechiel was asked to take up the mantle of leadership, and became known as the Ozherov Rebbe.

The great author and teacher Rav Yechiel Spero relates:

Long-time Menahel of Yeshiva Ketana of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, Rav Asher Sabo, once shared a memory from his youth. As a child of Holocaust survivors, little Asher became accustomed to his parents' nightmares; often, in the middle of the night, they would cry out in pain, reliving the horrors they had experienced during the Shoah. He remembers being three years old, waking up frightened and shaken. His father would rush to him, gather him in his arms and lovingly carry him to the window.

The Sabos lived in New York City, in the same housing development as Rebbe Moshe Yechiel. In the darkness, a light shone from the apartment just across the way, where the Rebbe sat learning Torah and writing seforim throughout the night. Asher's father would point toward the dining room window of the Rebbe, where they could see him deeply immersed in his *avodah*, and rocking back and forth. *Kuk vi der Rebbe lernnt*, "Look how the Rebbe is learning!" his father would

tell him, warmly. In the loving embrace of his father, Asher was comforted and stabilized by focusing on the serene, holy form of the *tzadik* immersed in the eternal words of Torah...



"Shabbos Nachamu" is named after this week's haftarah from the prophecies of Yeshayahu. In it, Hashem instructs the Navi to deliver a message of consolation and comfort and herald a new era of hope and *tikun*: forgiveness for Am Yisrael, the beginning of restoration for the holy city, and the approach of a future redemption.

קול אמר קרא ואמר מה אקרא כל-הבשר
חציר וכל-חסדו כציר השדה:

A voice says, "Proclaim!" and it says, "What shall I proclaim?"

"All flesh is grass, and all its kindness is like the blossom of the field;

יבש חציר נבל ציר כי רוח ה'
נשבה בו אגון חציר העם:

The grass shall dry out, the blossom shall wilt, for a wind from Hashem has blown upon it; behold the people is grass.

יבש חציר נבל ציר ודבר אלהינו יקום לעולם:

The grass shall dry out, the blossom shall wilt, but the word of Hashem shall last forever."

(*Yeshaya*, 40:6-8)

The question of the Prophet Yeshayahu, "What shall I proclaim," demands that we take pause and consider the purpose of our lives, what is essential to us. "What does my lifestyle, my choices, my mode of existence, proclaim about me? Do my choices reflect an awareness that "the grass shall dry out, the blossom shall wilt," that everything in this world is temporal and fleeting? Am I living with eternal values?

Rav Yisroel Belsky, zt'l, the Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Vodaas, shares an insight. Following the tragedy of *Churban Bayis* and the transient experience of exile, the Navi is reminding us that everything physical in this world has an expiration date; there is no structure, building or institution that will stand the test of time. It is only דבר אלקינו, "the word of Hashem", the eternal *Torah haKedoshah*, that has any lasting power. The more we strive to attach and immerse ourselves in learning and living with Torah, the more this truth of this prophecy is 'proclaimed' and amplified in the world.

On Shabbos Nachamu we are invited to join the prophet's proclamation and ask of ourselves and our fellow Jews, מה אקרא, "What shall I proclaim?" "What does my life stand for, fleeting appearances or eternal realities? In the face of the spiritual chaos, confusion and horrors of our generation, and the unstable, shifting sands of today's cultural and political scenes, our timeless moral standards could seem to be washed away. Yet Hashem's promise and guarantee that we will be sheltered and redeemed finds expression in our eternal bond with Torah.

May we awaken from the nightmare of *galus*, and be healed from our collective trauma, in our Heavenly Father's comforting embrace. May we focus on the soothing, stabilizing promise of our holy Torah: a bright future awaits us! *Nachamu Nachamu Ami*...



לולי תורתך שעשעתי אז אבדתי בעניי
"Were not Your Torah my occupation, then I would have perished in my affliction."

(*Tehillim*, 119:92)

Multiplicity of Meod

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

The Shema is our quintessential tfilah of connection and belief in Hashem. In it, we declare that we will love Hashem with all our heart, soul and meod. What can possibly be greater than one's heart and soul? What does meod even mean?

Rashi (Devarim 6;5) offers two explanations. One should love Hashem with all of one's money and possessions. Be'er Mayim Chayim explains that meod means very much; one desires to acquire many of the physical items and substances available in this world. Meod is mentioned last, signifying those who treasure their money more than their lives. Rav Schorr in Halekach Vehalebuv adds a further dimension. He writes that a person's possessions are imbued with his/her spiritual essence. One's material belongings are in a sense an extension of the self since everything we possess should be used to

further our relationship with Hashem. Thus, this passuk is a directive to serve Hashem with every inner resource, heart and soul, as well as all external resources and possessions that have been acquired. Honest introspection vis a vis all that we have can ensure that our priorities are authentic and that we are using our earthly assets to bring greater kedushah to this world.

Rashi's second idea relates the word meod to middah, measure. The Slonimer Rebbe in Netivot Shalom points out that Hashem customizes every person's experience and circumstance to most beneficially develop his full potential. Thus, we can appreciate all that transpires as measured out precisely and be prepared to serve Hashem with acceptance. The Shema includes a call to relate with equanimity to all of life's travails and triumphs with the intention to grow from these experiences.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe offers a deep chasidic insight into these words. Meod means very or more so. There is a level beyond serving Hashem with all one's desires and one's complete soul. This is a level of transcendence, serving Hashem beyond the limitations of self. It is easy to be satisfied with a more-or-less approach to developing one's potential. Often, we ourselves even block our inherent potential, believing this state to be out of reach. The Torah however urges us to yearn for an even higher level, to go beyond and discover the deeper self. Indeed, this very beyond-ness is what meod is all about. Strikingly, the word adam and meod are composed of the same three Hebrew letters. When one accesses the meod within, he becomes the adam Hashem envisioned upon his creation. He will thus discover that this is really his true self.

Continued from page 20

saved us from the shepherds and he even draw water for us and for the sheep."

"An Egyptian man" was the way they described Moses. In other words, Moses allowed them to get the impression that he was Egyptian.

Joseph, concludes the Midrash, embraced his land, hence he was interred there; Moses did not, hence he remained outside of it.

This was not a punishment. Moses, we can be sure, had good reason for his behavior. Nevertheless, to be worthy of the Land of Israel, you need to be one with it.

In recent years, some of our brothers have lost touch with this innate sense etched in the hearts of our people for

four millennia. We began to question our right to that small territory in the Middle East, surrounded by hundreds of millions of Muslims. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the UN resolution of 1947 became for many the sole basis for our right to establish the State of Israel.

At this defining moment, we must reclaim our inner sense of unity and purpose, embedded in the depth of every Jewish heart. The Land of Israel is really the land of the Jewish people. It is not about occupation; it is about reality: The Jewish soul is linked with a million chords to the territory of Eretz Yisroel; it is an inherent connection, coded into the very DNA of the universe.

Over the past 4000 years, the Torah never let us down. Not once. We can trust it in this truth, too: The land is G-d's gift to the Jewish people.

Joseph was a man of the world. He walked the corridors of the United Nations and the State Department. He was a loyal and faithful citizen of Egypt, contributing immensely to its economic growth and rescuing it from famine. But he never hesitated to say the truth: that Israel was the eternal home of the Jewish people, given to them as a gift from the Creator of heaven and earth.

Today we all need to be Josephs.

You Shall Love!



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

In no other religion in the world is there a commandment to fall in love with the Lawgiver, to swear allegiance to Him daily, and to kiss His Book of Laws! In Parashat Vaetchanan, the commandment of love (“You shall love”) stands next to the summary of the Book of Laws (the Ten Commandments). What is this love? What need should it fulfill? How do you put it into practice?

One of the most painful difficulties of those who seek a partner is the pain of loneliness of the body. There is no one who does not want to be saved, saved for the right place, for the right time, and for the right and holy pairing, but how can you not fall down this long road?

And Jeroboam will say, “That is true. The aspiration is for the great and holy house, but even on the way there it is permissible to stop for a temporary encounter.” To divide the kingdom in half, he places

calves on the way to the temple and tells the people, “This is not the holiness of the house, but it is possible here too!” The Sages explain that on Tu B'Av Hosea ben Ella removes this obstacle on the way home. No more comforting stops along the way. We ask for a home!

And how? We tried again and again – and fell?

And Rabbi Nachman would say that the words in our parasha, the words of Shema Yisrael, are a miraculous preservation. Not because they rise above the body and deny its needs, but because they acknowledge it: “Therefore, when one recites the first verse of the Shema, he should close his eyes, and it is a reparation for fornication.” What does this mean?

“Imagination creates a thought of seconds and therefore there is a desire to break through human loneliness with the help of connection and closeness. The desire is

a longing for oneness. The substitutes can distract us for a limited time, but cannot quench our thirst... Accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven does not directly counteract this desire, but it does directly enable man to fulfill his longing for harmony and oneness... Rabbi Nachman's basic assumption is that I experience loyalty when I return to this belonging to G-d, and in each case this inclination also receives its rightful place and becomes subordinate to holiness...” (Rabbi Shager, Lessons on Likoti Moharan, Torah 36).

And how should one love? “Take these instructions to heart.”

This speech, this call to our ears, “Shema Yisrael!” holds our hands on the long road home. It is the embrace and the kiss, it does not let us fall.



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Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
balashon.com

In Parashat VaEtchanan, we find a prohibition against idolatry:

וְשִׁמְרֶתֶם מְאֹד לִנְפְשֵׁיכֶם כִּי לֹא רָאִיתֶם
כָּל-תְּמוּנָה בְּיוֹם דִּבְרֵי ה' אֲלֵיכֶם בְּחַרְבַּ
מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ: פְּרֹ-תִשְׁחַתּוּן וְעִשִׂיתֶם לָכֶם
פֶּסֶל תְּמוּנֹת כָּל-סֶמֶל תְּבַנִּית זָכָר אוֹ נְקֻבָּה:

“For your own sake, therefore, be most careful — since you saw no shape when the LORD your God spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire — not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or a woman.” (Devarim 4:15-16)

This in itself is not so remarkable – the Torah is replete with admonitions against idol worship. What is interesting from a linguistic perspective is the use of the

word סֶמֶל – “image.” This is the only occurrence of the word in the Torah, and in the rest of the Tanakh we only find it in four other verses (Yechezkel 8:3,5; Divrei HaYamim II 33:7,15).

The origin of the word סֶמֶל is unclear. It has a parallel in Phoenician and may also have cognates in Akkadian. In addition to “image,” the word is sometimes rendered as “statue,” and in all cases refers to an idol.

However, in modern Hebrew סֶמֶל has a different meaning: “symbol.” One can see how “image” could become “likeness” and from there to “symbol.” And while words like “symbol” and “similar” are unrelated to סֶמֶל (despite their resemblance to it), it’s likely that those English words did influence the usage of סֶמֶל in Hebrew today.

A homograph of סֶמֶל in Hebrew is סַמָּל meaning “sergeant.” Some thought that it derived from סֶמֶל, in the same way that the English word “ensign” (a parallel rank in the navy to sergeant) derives from a French word meaning “symbol.” But actually, סַמָּל was at first an acronym: סַגָּן מְחֹרֵץ לְמַנְיִין – a “non-commissioned officer.”

The 20th century linguist Yechezkel Kutscher finds an important lesson here. He notes that if we have such a hard time figuring out the etymology of words that were coined in our generation, we should be cautious about guessing the etymology of words that were first used thousands of years ago.

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

Five senses have we indeed
Not all appear in the parsha we read.
But in one verse you’ll find four
The missing one you’ll know for sure

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

In the following verse (4:28), of the 5 senses, only ‘touch’ does not appear: וְהָיָה לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְלֹא תֵשֵׁב אִתְּךָ וְלֹא תֵשֵׁב אִתְּךָ וְלֹא תֵשֵׁב אִתְּךָ וְלֹא תֵשֵׁב אִתְּךָ וְלֹא תֵשֵׁב אִתְּךָ. There you will serve man-made gods of wood and stone, that cannot see or hear or smell. See Rabbenu Bechayeh who explains that touch and taste are so closely related that, at times, one will appear without the other, as they are included in each other. Refer eg, Tehillim 115 where touch appears rather than taste. See further his enlightening comments on the 5 senses.



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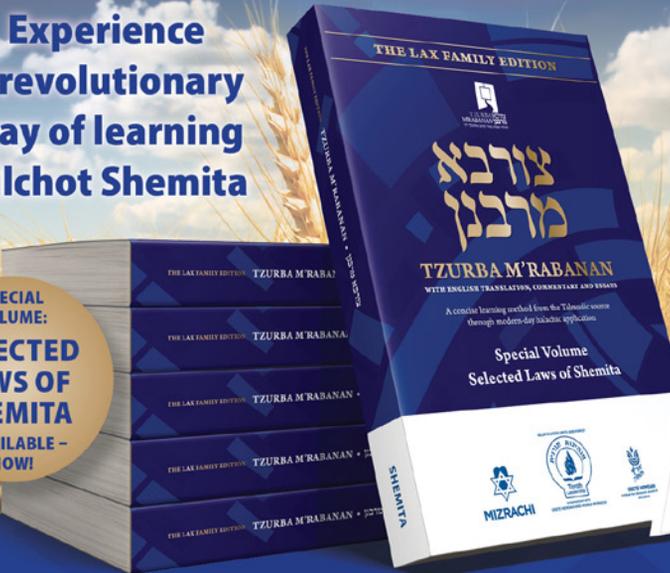
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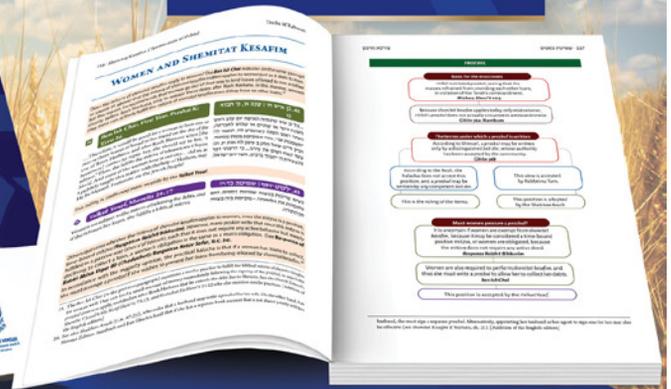
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