

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Here's an experiment. Walk around the great monuments of Washington. There at the far end is the figure of Abraham Lincoln, four times life size. Around him on the walls of the memorial are the texts of two of the greatest speeches of history, the Gettysburg address and Lincoln's second inaugural: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as G-d gives us to see the right..."

A little way away is the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial with its quotations from each period of the president's life as leader, most famously "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Keep walking along the Potomac and you come to the Jefferson Memorial, modelled on the Pantheon at Rome. There too you will find, around the dome and on the interior walls, quotations from the great man, most famously from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident..."

Now visit London. You will find many memorials and statues of great people. But you will find no quotations. The base of the statue will tell you who it represents, when he or she lived, and the position they occupied or the work they did, but no narrative, no quotation, no memorable phrases or defining words.

Take the statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square. Churchill was one of the greatest orators of all time. His wartime speeches and broadcasts are part of British history. But no words of his are inscribed on the monument, and the same applies to almost everyone else publicly memorialized.

It's a striking difference. One society-the United States of America- tells a story on its monuments, a story woven out of the speeches of its greatest leaders. The other, England, does not. It builds memorials but it doesn't tell a story. This is one of the deep differences between a covenant society and a tradition-based society.

In a tradition-based society like England things are as they are because that is how they were. England, writes Roger Scruton, "was not a nation or a creed or a language or a state but a home. Things at home don't need an explanation. They are there because they are there." Covenant societies are

different. They don't worship tradition for tradition's sake. They do not value the past because it's old. They remember the past because it was events in the past that led to the collective determination that moved people to create the society in the first place. The Pilgrim Fathers of America were fleeing religious persecution in search of religious freedom.

Their society was born in an act of moral commitment, handed on to successive generations. Covenant societies exist, not because they have been there a long time, nor because of some act of conquest, nor for the sake of some economic or military advantage. They exist to honour a pledge, a moral bond, an ethical undertaking. That is why telling the story is essential to a covenant society. It reminds all citizens of why they are there.

The classic example of telling the story occurs in this week's parsha, in the context of bringing firstfruits to Jerusalem.

The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your G-d. Then you shall declare before the Lord your G-d: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous.... So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me." (Deut. 26:4-10)

We all know the passage. Instead of saying it on Shavuot when bringing firstfruits, we now say it on Pesach as the central part of the Haggadah. What remains remarkable is that, even in biblical times, every member of the nation was expected to know the story of the nation, and recite it annually, and make it part of his or her personal memory and identity-"My father... so the Lord brought us out."

A covenant is more than a myth of origin-like the Roman story of Romulus and Remus or the English story of King Arthur and his knights. Unlike a myth, which merely claims to say what happened, a covenant always contains a specific set of undertakings that bind its citizens in the present and into the future.

Here for example is Lyndon Baines Johnson talking about the American covenant: "They came here-the exile and the stranger --...They made a

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covenant with this land. Conceived in justice, written in liberty, bound in union, it was meant one day to inspire the hopes of all mankind; and it binds us still. If we keep its terms, we shall flourish."

Covenant societies-of which the USA is the supreme contemporary example- are moral societies, meaning not that their members are more righteous than others but that they see themselves as publicly accountable to certain moral standards that are part of the text and texture of their national identity. They are honouring the obligations imposed upon them by the founders.

Indeed, as the Johnson quotation makes clear, covenant societies see their very fate as tied up with the way they meet or fail to meet those obligations. "If we keep its terms, we shall flourish"-implying that if we don't, we won't. This is a way of thinking the West owes entirely to the book of Devarim, most famously in the second paragraph of the Shema: "If you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today... then I will send rain on your land in its season... I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Be careful, lest you are enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you." (Deut. 11:13-17)

Covenant societies are not ethnic nations bound by common racial origin. They make room for outsiders-immigrants, asylum seekers, resident aliens-who become part of the society by taking its story and making it their own, as Ruth did in the biblical book that bears her name ("Your people will be my people and your G-d my G-d") or as successive waves of immigrants did when they came to the United States. Indeed conversion in Judaism is best understood not on the model of conversion to another religion such as Christianity or Islam, but as the acquisition of citizenship in a nation like the USA.

It is utterly astonishing that the mere act of telling the story, regularly, as a religious duty, sustained Jewish identity across the centuries, even in the absence of all the normal accompaniments of nationhood-land, geographical proximity, independence, self determination-and never allowed

the people to forget its ideals, its aspirations, its collective project of building a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, a place of freedom and justice and human dignity, in which no human being is sovereign; in which G-d alone is king.

One of the most profound truths about the politics of covenant-the message of the firstfruits' declaration in this weeks parsha-is: If you want to sustain freedom never stop telling the story. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"My father (Jacob) was a wandering Aramean and he descended into Egypt and they (the Egyptians) afflicted us ... And we called out to the Lord of our fathers ... And the Lord took us out of Egypt and brought us to this place" (Deut. 26:5, 11) .

This week's biblical portion opens with the commandment for every landowner to bring his first fruits to the Temple. This ordinance can only be honored after the Israelites have settled their Promised Land and built G-d's Temple in Jerusalem. The Mishna (Bikkurim) describes the ceremony: the glorious decorations, the musical accompaniment, the dancing and colorful fruits which adorned the marketplaces of Jerusalem.

Each individual would set down his basket of fruit at the Temple altar and give a brief synopsis of Jewish history - from the exile of Jacob until the return of his descendants to the Land of Israel. And this short expression of thanksgiving - which comprises the centerpiece of our retelling during the Pessah Seder - is said in the first person ("My father," "afflicted us," "we called out," "the Lord took us out"). Each Jew must see himself as the embodiment of his history, and feel responsible for the succeeding generations.

The Mishna, however, places a striking limitation on the identity of the spokesman: "These are the individuals who are responsible to bring [the first fruits], but do not declaim [the narrative]: the convert brings but does not declaim, since he cannot refer to 'the land which the Lord swore to our forebears to give to us.' If, however, his mother was an Israelite (from birth), he does bring and declaim, since the religious status of the child follows the religious status of the mother."

And then the Mishna makes a similar point regarding converts and the language of their prayers: "And when [the convert] prays the Amida by himself, he says 'Blessed art thou O Lord, our G-d and the G-d of the forefathers of Israel' [rather than 'and the G-d of our forefathers']; when [the convert] is praying in the synagogue, he says 'and the G-d of your forefathers.'" And if his mother was an Israelite, he says [with everyone else] 'and the G-d of our fathers'" (Bikkurim 1:4).

The normative law does not follow this Mishna; the convert has the same legal status as the born Jew, using the same speech when bringing his first fruits to the Temple and the same liturgy in daily prayers.

The Jerusalem Talmud disagrees with the Mishna in the Babylonian Talmud (which only cites the view of R. Meir), citing an alternative view of Rabbi Yehuda: "The convert himself must bring and declaim! What is the reason? Because G-d made Abraham the father of a multitude of nations so that Abraham [metaphysically] becomes the father of everyone in the world who enters under the wings of the Divine Presence..."

In the Jerusalem Talmud, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi declares that the normative law is to be in accordance with Rabbi Yehuda. Rabbi Abahu actually decided a practical case, determining that a convert bring and declaim in the manner of every born Israelite. Maimonides decides similarly (Mishne Torah, Book of Seeds 4:3), and even penned a poignant response to Ovadiah the Proselyte (Mekitzei Nirdamim, Siman 293) which includes the converts' praying to "the G-d of our forefathers" as well!

This is why every convert becomes the son/daughter of Abraham and Sarah, with the ritual immersion at the time signifying their being "born again" into the Jewish family/nation. This does not take anything from the biological parents who nurtured them, and so deserve heartfelt gratitude and sensitive consideration. Hence, the convert too has Jewish history and even Abrahamic "blood" in his/her veins - and Judaism has nothing to do with race!

I would conclude this commentary with one additional point from an opposite direction: The Jew begins his declamation with the words, "My father was a wandering Aramean..." Yes, we have seen from the Mishna in Bikkurim (as well as Kiddushin 3:12) that the religious status of the child is determined by the mother, probably because the fetus is inextricably intertwined with the mother as long as it is in the womb. Nevertheless, the DNA contribution from the father cannot be denied. This gives rise to a special halachic category for a child born to a gentile mother and a Jewish father, known as *zera yisrael*, or "Israelite seed."

Such a child would require a conversion to become a Jew. However, most decisors throughout the generations have felt it incumbent on the Jewish community to encourage conversion of such individuals, and to be as lenient as possible to effectuate these conversions. Last year, Rabbi Haim Amsalem published an important and even monumental work called *Zera Yisrael*. In the book, he documents the relevant responsa which suggest that "the religious court is duty-bound to convert" an individual with *zera yisrael*. These leniencies are

limited to Israel, and are especially germane to the Russian-speaking immigrant population among us.

The blessing over the tallit is the blessing over the marriage relationship; one must define the other. And therefore, the biblical connection between the commandment of ritual fringes and the commandment to marry finds a most worthy expression. © 2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The main part of the parsha is concerned with the description of the woes that will befall the Jewish people in their long years of exile and persecution. The Torah sees this as being a form of redemptive punishment for the Chosen People who chose to imitate the idolatrous and immoral ways of the general society.

However, as the exile of Israel stretched into centuries and then into millennia, the Jews began to feel that somehow the punishment was rather excessive relative to the crime. Therefore other explanations for the length and bitterness of the exile of Israel were advanced.

The Talmud itself, hundreds of years after the destruction of the Second Temple, offered that the scattering of the Jewish people throughout the world was to allow non-Jews who wished to convert to Judaism be afforded the opportunity to do so. Others suggested that the dispersal of the Jewish Diaspora was to allow Judaic values and attitudes to penetrate the non-Jewish world as well.

It was through the bitter exile itself that the Jewish people would fulfill its mission of being a light unto the nations of the world. The survival of the Jewish people under the oppressive conditions of its exile also raised questions and problems for the Christian world. The concept of the "Witness People" gained currency in the Christian world - that somehow Jews had to survive to "witness" the eventual reappearance of the Christian savior and finally convert to Christianity.

Thus the Church established the institution of the "Pope's Jews" who were protected from harm since they had to survive to be the "Witness People." Be all of this as it may, what is clear is that every word of the Torah regarding the fate of the Jews in exile has come true - true literally and not allegorically. As the Ramban phrased it, it is astounding that a book written thousands of years before the events occurred should record those events so truthfully and faithfully.

It is of comfort that since the tragedies recited in the parsha that would befall Israel have all come true literally that we can be certain that the blessings and redemption similarly told to us in the parsha shall also undoubtedly be fulfilled literally. Some of them have already been realized in our time with the ingathering

of the exiles of Israel to the nascent Jewish state. Others are still developing and coming.

The Torah never placed any time limits either on Jewish exile or redemption. The Lord has His own reckoning that no human can be privy to. The rabbis, therefore, strongly discouraged prognostications of dates for the arrival of the redemption and the messianic era.

Over the many centuries of Jewish exile, many dates were forecast to be the ones of redemption, but all of them have come and gone and the redemption is yet unfulfilled in actuality or completeness. Yet our hope and belief in our eventual redemption has never waned. "Next year in Jerusalem" has been fulfilled. Next year in a fully rebuilt and peaceful Jerusalem is in the wings of the drama that unfolds now before our very eyes ©2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd G-d will disperse you among all the nations, from [one] end of the land till the [other] end of the land, and there you will serve other deities" (Devarim 28:64). Lest we think that the verse means that we will literally serve other deities, Rashi tells us that it means "not literally serving the deities, but paying taxes and fees to the clergy of the deities." This explanation leaves us with the following two questions: The simplest and most straightforward way to understand this verse is that we will serve the idols themselves, not those who worship the idols. Why does Rashi explain it differently? Secondly, there is a similar verse a bit earlier (28:36), where Rashi does not make any comment, leaving the impression that the verse should be understood literally (that we will serve other deities). Why should the two verses be understood differently? If They shouldn't, why did Rashi wait for the second verse before telling us how to understand them rather than telling us this on the first one?

In our editions of Rashi, his comments are preceded by the word "k'targumo" ("as is explained by the translation"), an expression that refers to how Unkoles explains the verse in Aramaic. My translation of Unkoles's translation would be: "and there you will serve nations that serve idols." This is not exactly the same as Rashi's explanation; the explanation of Targum Yonatan ("and you will have to pay tax to worshippers of idols") is more similar to Rashi's than that of Targum Unkoles. Sefer Yosef Hallel points out that the original editions of Rashi do not contain the word "k'targumo," so it seems likely that it was added by a student or publisher (probably as a gloss which

was then mistakenly incorporated into the text) who wanted to note that Rashi's explanation was similar to Unkoles', and/or precisely like the Targum attributed to Yonasan. Whether or not Rashi was basing his commentary on the (or a) Targum, the issues raised above still apply. What is relevant to this discussion is that both Targumim are consistent in the way they explain the two verses, making it all the more puzzling if Rashi understood them to be different. To add to our puzzlement, much earlier (4:28) Rashi had explained "serving deities" to mean "serving those who serve deities," consistent with Targum Unkoles. Why does Rashi explain "serving deities" differently in two places, and offer no explanation in the third?

Kesef Nivchar, quoted in Sefer Gan Raveh, differentiates between when our host countries accept us and when they don't. In situations where we are always on the run (28:65), i.e. being persecuted by those whose lands we have been exiled to, there is little danger of assimilation and no real concern that we will actually worship the local deities. When we are not being persecuted, though, there is a real danger of our literally serving other deities. Therefore, when no hint of persecution appears in the verse, Rashi allowed the straightforward meaning to be understood (by not commenting on it), but when there is persecution mentioned, the "serving" must mean "paying taxes to the clergy of the other deities." [How to understand Rashi's comment about serving people who serve deities (4:28), or whether being "distressed" (4:30) is enough to prevent us from assimilating, is not addressed. See Divray Chanoch for another explanation for why Rashi could understand 28:36 literally but not 28:64.]

Sifsay Chachamim (on 28:64) says that Rashi had to explain the verse differently than its plain meaning because G-d couldn't be informing them that they would worship idols. Although some commentators (e.g. Abarbanel) do understand these verses literally, Sifsay Chachamim makes a very valid point. After all, these verses are telling us the punishment we will get if we sin, and the verses under discussion (28:36 and 28:64) are meant to convey an additional aspect of our punishment, in order to motivate us not to abandon G-d. Informing us that we will serve other nations, and/or be forced to pay taxes to them, fits very well within this context; informing us that we will serve other deities does not.

There's another anomaly that needs to be understood as well. The punishments start with what will happen if we don't "listen to G-d's voice, to keep all of His commandments" (28:15) while we are still living in the Promised Land. After those curses are mentioned, "G-d will exile you, and your king, to a nation that neither you or your fathers knew, and there you will serve other deities" (28:36). However, if we have been exiled from the Promised Land, why would

we care that it would "produce much, but little would be gathered, because the locusts ate it up" (28:38), and why do the verses refer to what happens "within your boundaries" (28:40), and to "your trees and the fruit of your land" (28:42), or warn us that "the stranger within your midst will move up while we move down" (28:43) if we aren't there anymore? Why is a "chutzpadik, foreign nation" being "sent to us, in our land, from afar" to "eat all of our produce" and cause us distress within our gates" (see 28:49-52) if we were already exiled from "our gates?" It would therefore seem that 28:36 is referring to our king being led away in exile (along with his inner circle), while most of the people remained in the Land of Israel. (This happened when Nevuchadnetzar exiled Yehoyakim, and then Yehoyachin, to Bavel before the First Temple was destroyed, and when Agrifas the King was taken to Rome before the Second Temple was destroyed, see Ramban on 28:42.) With this in mind, we can try to explain Rashi's comments.

When Moshe warns us what would happen if we sin (4:25-31), he can't be telling us that we will start to serve idols, as this isn't consistent with a punishment, and wouldn't cause us to return to G-d (4:29). Therefore, Rashi explains that "serving deities" is not to be taken literally; all it means is that we will serve those who worship idols. What form this service takes isn't relevant, the point is that we will become subservient to others, others who worship false deities. [When warning us what we might do if we start to sin, worshipping idols is a possibility (see Rashi on 11:16), but it is not part of any divinely-ordained punishment, since G-d will not force us to sin.] When Moshe goes into more detail of the punishment (in our Parasha), the "others" that we first serve (28:36) could very well be the same "others" Rashi mentioned earlier (4:28). We are still in our land, but now subservient to "a people that we do not know," who "serve other deities." Since the "service" can be the same as it was earlier (in 4:28), there was no need for Rashi to explain what it was again. As the punishments get worse, and we are exiled among many nations (28:64), the "service" becomes worse too, and not only will we be subservient to another nation, but we will be forced to pay taxes that go to the government-sanctioned religion. When we were still living in the Promised Land, the objective of the nation we served was to control us. Any religious discrimination was meant to enhance our subservience to them; it was primarily a power issue. After we were spread out over many kingdoms, it wasn't as much a power issue (as we were no longer a threat as a nation), but a cultural issue. They wanted us to assimilate into their culture, including paying the local taxes for the religious institutions of each kingdom. (This may have occurred on some level before we were exiled too, which may be

why Rashi doesn't specify how we served the nation that ruled over us.)

Because the main point of this aspect of the punishment was our serving another nation, this is how Rashi initially describes it (4:28). Since this applied when our king was exiled (while we were still in the Promised Land) Rashi didn't need to explain it again (and may not have wanted to limit it to that). After we were exiled, and threatened with/by assimilation, Rashi was more specific about how we "served" the nation that "served other deities." © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah brings us to the concluding dimensions of Hashem's encompassing efforts to comfort the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya shares with us a glimpse of the glorious era of Mashiach and reveals Hashem's unbelievable sensitivity and concern for His chosen nation. Yeshaya begins, "Rise and project your light because the radiance of Hashem shines upon you." (60:1) The prophet's message is that in the days of Mashiach the Jewish people will serve as a reflection of Hashem's light unto the nations of the world. Yeshaya continues, "Lift your eyes and see them coming; your sons coming from afar and your daughters accompanied by the kings of the world." (60:3-5)

The cloud of darkness and confusion which continuously plagues society will finally be lifted and the entire world will flow into Jerusalem in streams to discover the truths of Hashem and His Torah. Instead of the all too familiar scene of the Jewish people flowing out of their homeland into exile, a new flow will occur. Not only will our oppressors permit us to return to Israel, they will even personally escort us back to our homeland. And to complete this picture, nations will display sincere interest in the Jewish people's traditions and will flock to our homeland to discover our Jewish values and systems. The influx will be so overwhelming that we will wonder in amazement if we are merely imagining these sights, or if, in truth, history has made a full turnaround.

The prophet continues, "All the choice sheep of Kedar will gather to you.... to be offered on My altar and accepted with desire." (60: 7) The nations of the world will appreciate in sincerity the value of service to Hashem through sacrifice and will continuously offer Him an abundance of sacrifices. In place of their cruel campaign for thousands of years to destroy and never allow the reconstruction of the Bais Hamikdash they will finally comprehend spiritual values and utilize the Bais Hamikdash to capacity. The prophet adds, "And foreign nations will build your walls and their kings will contribute the funds." (60:10) Even the demolished walls of Israel's cities will be rebuilt by her oppressors,

nations who previously acted so harshly toward the Jewish people.

Hashem explains the reason for this unexpected reversal and says, "Because in My time of anger I smote you and in My time of desire for you, I will show you My compassion." (60:10) The Metzudos Dovid explains this passage in the following manner. Needless to say, the experiences of the Jewish people are unparalleled by any other nation. Their extent of shame, persecution and tragedy covers the pages of world history in awesome proportions. This is because they, and only they, are the direct subject of Hashem's disturbance and anger. Unlike the nations of the world who are generally ignored by Hashem the Jewish people are always in His direct focus. Hashem responds to our every turn and reprimands us accordingly with the constant severe beatings we suffer. But all of this is an outgrowth of His unconditional love for us and His determination to keep us on the right path. And when the moment arrives for Hashem to display His kindness to His people it will be done in these very same proportions. Being the direct subject of Hashem's concern and compassion Hashem will shower His love upon His people in a most encompassing way. Hashem pledges to reverse the unpleasant experiences of the Jewish people's past and replace them with a glorious future. He therefore commits Himself to undoing the darkness of our past with the indescribable brightness of our future.

The Jewish nation finds it quite difficult to forget the pain and shame of their exile and to this Hashem responds in a most magnificent way. Hashem informs them that their return from exile will be through none other than those very same nations who were responsible for the exile. They will personally escort the Jews back to their homeland with dignity and respect and will actually crave to be amongst those who are privileged to reside in the land of Israel. Regarding this, Yeshaya says, "And the sons of your past oppressors shall humbly walk to you and all of your previous scorners shall prostrate themselves before you." (60:14) And as we cited earlier, these very same nations and sovereigns who labored so diligently to tear down the walls of Israel will now personally rebuild them.

The prophet completes the picture and states in the name of Hashem, "In place of copper I will bring gold and in place of steel I will bring silver. I will convert your previous tax collectors into peaceful acquaintances and your oppressors into charitable associates." (60:17) Hashem's compassion for His people knows no bounds and demands that even their financial oppression must be rectified. Therefore in place of the oppressors' unwarranted tax collections from the Jewish people, these same oppressors will offer the Jews an abundance of personal monetary gifts. All the stolen Jewish wealth will be graciously

returned ten-fold and in addition these same collectors will generously contribute considerable financial resources to the Jewish people. (see Radak, Malbim, ad loc.)

The sum total of Hashem's restoration plan for the Jewish people is best described in the following words of the prophet. "In place of your previous status, forsaken and despised I shall establish you the majesty of the world, the joy for all generations." (60:15) Oh, if we could only see this now! © 2011 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

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“**V**'ra'ooh kol amei ha'aretz ki shem Hashem nikra alecha v'ya'ooh mimeka- and the nations of the land will see that the Name of Hashem will be upon you and they will fear you." (Devraim 28:10). Chazal (Menachos 35b) interpret this passuk as referring to the tefillin shel rosh which contain the Name of Hashem. The Rambam (Hilchos Tefillin 4:25) writes that wearing tefillin enables a person to become a yarei Shomayim-one who fears Hashem. What is unique about this mitzva that it is a catalyst for yiras Shomayim for both the one who wears tefillin and for the one who sees the tefillin being worn?

There are several halachos that pertain to tefillin that may help us understand the relationship between tefillin and yiras Shomayim. Hilchos Tefillin contains includes details that resemble halachos relating to the Beis Hamikdash. Unlike other objects used for mitzva purposes such as tzitzis or a lulav, tefillin have kedusha similar to objects used in the Beis Hamikdash and cannot simply be discarded when no longer usable. Tefillin must be made from the parts of a kosher animal, and this halacha also governed the construction of the Mishkan (see Shabbos 28a), whereas concerning other mitzvos this may not apply (See Ran in Rosh Hashana 6a on the Rif for why shofar may also be included in this rule). The Rosh in (Hilchos Tefillin siman 18) derives the halacha that one cannot have a separation between one's body and the tefillin from the halacha that invalidates such a separation between the clothing worn by the kohein in the Beis Hamikdash and the body of the kohein. The requirements to concentrate on tefillin while they are worn is derived from a similar obligation incumbent upon the kohein gadol when he wears the tzitz-the ornament worn by the kohein gadol which has Hashem's Name engraved on it (see Yoma 7b).

Even the shape of the tefillin indicates a connection to the Beis Hamikdash, as both Tefillin and the mizbeach in the Beis Hamikdash must be square. Not only do the halachos that govern tefillin highlight the similarities between tefillin and the Beis Hamikdash, but the very name given to part of the tefillin reinforces this connection. The box of the tefillin

which enclose the parshiyos is called a bayis-a house. The imagery of a house built around the words of Torah is clearly reminiscent of the Mishkan and later the Beis Hamikdash constructed around the aron hakodesh which contained the words of Torah inscribed on the luchos.

It is this component of mikdash that endows the tefillin with the ability to instill yiras Shamayim. The Beis Hamikdash is a place of awe. Yaakov Avinu, upon realizing that he had slept in the makom hamikdash declared, "ma norah hamakom hazeh-How awe inspiring is this place." The halacha obligates us to be in a state of mora-awe upon entering the Beis Hamikdash. Similarly as we wear our bayis of kedusha-our tefillin-we and all those around us should be inspired by the awe of Hashem's words that we carry with us.

In the Parsha of "v'haya im shamo'ah" the mitzva of tefillin is written immediately following the pesukim that describe our being exiled from Eretz Yisrael. The Torah is teaching us that even in galus in the absence of the real Beis Hamikdash we still have our batim of tefillin. This special role tefillin have specifically at a time of churban is highlighted by our practice of wearing tefillin during Mincha on Tisha B'Av. After having spent the entire morning focusing on the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the first mitzvah that we perform to begin the process of comfort is putting on our tefillin. We realize that even in galus we can still attain yiras Shomayim by learning the lesson of tefillin. As we come close to the end of the seven weeks of comfort following Tisha B'Av, we turn to the parshiyos and the batim of our tefillin. May we merit attaining the yiras Shomayim they can induce, thereby meriting the construction of the ultimate bayis which will once again house the words of Hashem. © 2011

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RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Time was running out for Moses, and as the Jewish people massed on the east bank of the Jordan River on the threshold of the Promised Land, he issued his final instructions. Immediately after crossing the river under the leadership of Joshua, there was to be a solemn gathering of all the people in the valley bordered by Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival, which formed a natural amphitheater. Half the tribes were to take positions on one slope and half on the other. The tribe of Levi was to deploy in the lowlands in the center around the Holy Ark. The Levites were to pronounce the twelve cardinal tenets which determine blessing and accursedness, and the people massed on the mountainsides were to respond with a resounding, "Amen!"

Forty years had passed since the Jewish people had received the Torah at Mount Sinai, forty

years under the guidance of Moses, the greatest prophet who ever lived. Why then wasn't this special pledge of allegiance to the Creator and His Torah taken at some time during Moses's tenure as the leader of the Jewish people? Why leave it to his successor? Furthermore, why was the pledge encapsulated in the single word "Amen"? Why wasn't each and every individual required to make an explicit statement of allegiance of his own?

Let us reflect for a moment on this mysterious word-Amen. What exactly does it mean and what does it signify? The Talmud tells us that the one who answers Amen is greater than the one who makes the blessing. Why is this so? What gives this one word its extraordinary power?

The commentators explain that the word Amen is related to the word emunah, faith. The person who makes a blessing over a delicious fruit, for instance, is poised to enjoy this wonderful pleasure, and naturally, he expresses his gratitude to the Creator of all things. A person who makes a blessing under other circumstances, such as the performance of a mitzvah, expresses an intellectual appreciation for the capacity of a mitzvah to reinforce the relationship between a human being and his Creator.

The one who answers Amen, however, is not acknowledging the bounty of the Creator out of gratitude, nor is he communicating his appreciation on an intellectual level. Rather, he is grasping the occasions that warrant blessing to express himself to Hashem in terms of a pure faith unrestricted by the limits of his gratitude or the boundaries of his intellect. His connection with the Almighty transcends the human condition entirely and derives directly from the absolute spirituality of the divine spark in the human soul. It is a total sublimation of the self in the Infinite. This connection as expressed by the single word Amen, explains the Talmud, is far greater than the blessing itself.

With this in mind, we can gain new insight into the purpose and tone of the solemn gathering on Mount Eival and Mount Gerizim. During their years in the desert, the Jewish people had existed in a celestial oasis, fed by manna from heaven and guarded by pillars of cloud and fire. Their faith, instead of being much tested, was continuously reinforced by the miracles which characterized their everyday lives. But now the situation was about to change drastically. Once they crossed into the Promised Land, they would have to engage the physical world in the conventional manner. They would till the soil, ply the seas and frequent the marketplaces. No longer would they walk on a cushion of miracles.

In this new environment, they would need a new and powerful infusion of faith and allegiance. And the most effective, powerful, soulcharging expression of faith would be the thunderous declaration of "Amen!"

A king wanted to test the loyalty of two of his ministers. "What will you do for me?" he asked the first minister.

"For you, your majesty," said the first minister, "I would move heaven and earth. I would battle your enemies and bring you vast riches. I would build you palaces in every city and I would provide food and entertainment from morning until night."

"And you?" said the king to the second minister. "What would you do for me?"

"Absolutely anything you wish," he replied.

The king beamed. "You, my good minister, are a truly loyal servant."

In our own lives, we also find ourselves between a spiritual oasis and the teeming world of affairs. On the Sabbath, we enjoy the wonderful tranquillity of being totally removed from the cares and concerns of mundane living, the soul-satisfying rewards of Torah study, meditation, introspection and uninterrupted family time. But when these sylvan hours pass, we once again face the challenges of the workplace and the world, and we must once again fortify ourselves with a reaffirmation of our faith. The formula is not complex. It is simple, short and powerful. One word. Amen. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As the Jews prepare to enter Israel after 40 years of desert migration, Moshe (Moses) reminds them of the miracles they have seen. He then proclaims "But the Lord has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear until this day." (Deuteronomy 29:3) What is the meaning of "until this day?" Can it be that prior to that moment, the Jews did not believe?

Rashi quotes the classic Midrash that on that day, Moshe gave the actual scroll of the Torah to the Levites. The rest of the Jewish people felt excluded and protested. Impressed by their love of the Torah, Moshe proclaims that it was on that day that the Jews showed how deeply they believe.

Other thoughts come to mind related to the upcoming High Holidays. Perhaps only after living through the miracles of the Egyptian exodus and the desert wanderings, could the Jewish people finally look back and recognize the magnitude of what they had experienced. It often occurs that one can only appreciate a miraculous moment long after it happens. So too, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur teach us all to look back over the year and with the distance of time, recognize what G-d has done for us.

A contrary thought can be suggested. Rather than emphasizing miracles as the key to faith, it is the everyday that leads to true belief. In fact, the test of people is not how they believe when experiencing a supernatural moment, but how they commit

themselves when living a normal everyday existence. Only now, after 40 years, when miracles were no longer as overt, would the Jews really show their faith in G-d. One can similarly argue that it is easy to make a commitment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when one is experiencing the awesome power of the spirit of the holiday. The test is one's preparedness to follow through; remaining committed even after the dust has settled.

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk in his Meshekh Hohmah offers an alternative idea. He suggests that throughout Moshe's life, the Jews may have blurred his role, sensing that Moshe was more than an emissary of G-d - believing perhaps that he was G-d Himself. This is a common mistake made in many other religions-the turning of the lead prophet into a G-d. Only on the day that Moshe died, would the Jews unequivocally declare their absolute belief that no human can be G-d. This, in fact, is a central message of the Days of Awe. Hence, the morning service on Rosh Hashanah begins with the coronation of G-d alone as we emphatically cry out "Ha-Melekh-The King." Yom Kippur brings this thought to a crescendo as we conclude the service with the refrain, "Hashem hu Ha-Elokim - The Lord is The G-d."

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, much like this week's portion, are a renewal of that final day in the desert, when we reflect on the miracles in our lives, find the Divine in the everyday and assert the rulership of G-d alone. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.



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