

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

During the three weeks between 17 Tammuz and Tisha b'Av, as we recall the destruction of the Temples, we read three of the most searing passages in the prophetic literature, the first two from the opening of the book of Jeremiah, the third, next week, from the first chapter of Isaiah.

At perhaps no other time of the year are we so acutely aware of the enduring force of ancient Israel's great visionaries. The prophets had no power. They were not kings or members of the royal court. They were (usually) not priests or members of the religious establishment. They held no office. They were not elected. Often they were deeply unpopular, none more so than the author of this week's haftara, Jeremiah, who was arrested, flogged, abused, put on trial and only narrowly escaped with his life. Only rarely were the prophets heeded in their lifetimes: the one clear exception was Jonah, and he spoke to non-Jews, the citizens of Nineveh. Yet their words were recorded for posterity and became a major feature of Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. They were the world's first social critics and their message continues through the centuries. As Kierkegaard almost said: when a king dies, his power ends; when a prophet dies his influence begins. (Kierkegaard actually said: "The tyrant dies and his rule is over; the martyr dies and his rule begins." Kierkegaard, Papers and Journals, 352.)

What was distinctive about the prophet was not that he foretold the future. The ancient world was full of such people: soothsayers, oracles, readers of runes, shamans and other diviners, each of whom claimed inside track with the forces that govern fate and "shape our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Judaism has no time for such people. The Torah bans one "who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead" (Deut. 18:10-11). It disbelieves such practices because it believes in human freedom. The future is not pre-scripted. It depends on us and the choices we make. If a prediction comes true it has succeeded; if a prophecy comes true it has failed. The prophet tells of the future that will happen if we do not heed the danger and mend our ways. He (or she-there were seven biblical prophetesses) does not predict; he warns.

Nor was the prophet distinctive in blessing or cursing the people. That was Bilaam's gift, not Isaiah's or Jeremiah's. In Judaism, blessing comes through priests not prophets.

Several things made the prophets unique. The first was his or her sense of history. The prophets were the first people to see G-d in history. We tend to take our sense of time for granted. Time happens. Time flows. As the saying goes, time is G-d's way of keeping everything from happening at once. But actually there are several ways of relating to time and different civilizations have perceived it differently.

There is cyclical time: time as the slow turning of the seasons, or the cycle of birth, growth, decline and death. Cyclical time is time as it occurs in nature. Some trees have long lives; most fruit flies have short ones; but all that lives, dies. The species endures, individual members 'do not. Kohelet contains the most famous expression of cyclical time in Judaism: "The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course... What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

Then there is linear time: time as an inexorable sequence of cause and effect. The French astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace gave this idea its most famous expression in 1814 when he said that if you "know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed," together with all the laws of physics and chemistry, then "nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present" before your eyes. Karl Marx applied this idea to society and history. It is known as historical inevitability, and when transferred to the affairs of humankind it amounts to a massive denial of personal freedom.

Finally there is time as a mere sequence of events with no underlying plot or theme. This leads to the kind of historical writing pioneered by the scholars of ancient Greece, Herodotus and Thucydides.

Each of these has its place, the first in biology, the second in physics, the third in secular history, but none was time as the prophets understood it. The prophets saw time as the arena in which the great drama between G-d and humanity was played out, especially in the history of Israel. If Israel was faithful to its mission, its covenant, then it would flourish. If it was unfaithful it would fail. It would suffer defeat and exile.

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That is what Jeremiah never tired of telling his contemporaries.

The second prophetic insight was the unbreakable connection between monotheism and morality. Somehow the prophets sensed-it is implicit in all their words, though they do not explain it explicitly-that idolatry was not just false. It was also corrupting. It saw the universe as a multiplicity of powers that often clashed. The battle went to the strong. Might defeated right. The fittest survived while the weak perished. Nietzsche believed this, as did the social Darwinists.

The prophets opposed this with all their force. For them the power of G-d was secondary; what mattered was the righteousness of G-d. Precisely because G-d loved and had redeemed Israel, Israel owed Him loyalty as their sole ultimate sovereign, and if they were unfaithful to G-d they would also be unfaithful to their fellow humans. They would lie, rob, cheat: Jeremiah doubts whether there was one honest person in the whole of Jerusalem (Jer. 5:1). They would become sexually adulterous and promiscuous: "I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife" (Jer. 5:7-8).

Their third great insight was the primacy of ethics over politics. The prophets have surprisingly little to say about politics. Yes, Samuel was wary of monarchy but we find almost nothing in Isaiah or Jeremiah about the way Israel/Judah should be governed. Instead we hear a constant insistence that the strength of a nation-certainly of Israel/Judah-is not military or demographic but moral and spiritual. If the people keep faith with G-d and one another, no force on earth can defeat them. If they do not, no force can save them. As Jeremiah says in this week's haftara, they will discover too late that their false gods offered false comfort: "They say to wood, 'You are my father,' and to stone, 'You gave me birth.' They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, 'Come and save us!' Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah." (Jer. 2:27-28)

Jeremiah, the most passionate and tormented of all the prophets, has gone down in history as the

prophet of doom. Yet this is unfair. He was also supremely a prophet of hope. He is the man who said that the people of Israel will be as eternal as the sun, moon and stars (Jer. 31). He is the man who, while the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem, bought a field as a public gesture of faith that Jews would return from exile: "For this is what the Lord Almighty, the G-d of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land" (Jer. 32).

Jeremiah's feelings of doom and hope were not in conflict: there were two sides of the same coin. The G-d who sentenced His people to exile would be the G-d who brought them back, for though His people might forsake Him, He would never forsake them. Jeremiah may have lost faith in people; he never lost faith in G-d.

Prophecy ceased in Israel with Haggai, Zekharia and Malachi in the Second Temple era. But the prophetic truths have not ceased to be true. Only by being faithful to G-d do people stay faithful to one another. Only by being open to a power greater than themselves do people become greater than themselves. Only by understanding the deep forces that shape history can a people defeat the ravages of history. It took a long time for biblical Israel to learn these truths, and a very long time indeed before they returned to their land, re-entering the arena of history. We must never forget them again. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The narrative of the experiences of the people of Israel in the desert of Sinai concludes with the parshiyot of this week. All of the occurrences, successes and failures that marked this forty year trek in a wasteland wilderness are alluded to in the count of Israel in last week's parsha- and in the listing of all of the way stations of that excursion.

The Torah seems to be determined to remind all later generations of Jews of the experiences in the desert. Moshe, in his final oration in the book of Dvarim, will once again review the events of the desert for a new generation of Jews distanced in time and circumstance from Egyptian bondage. The Torah is aware of human forgetfulness.

It will take only one generation to forget Egypt and even Mount Sinai. History is boring and quite irrelevant to new generations. Yet forgetting the Jewish past is the ultimate betrayal of Judaism and Jewish hopes. All of us, as we become older, begin to feel a psychological and spiritual need growing within us to be remembered.

The Baal Shem Tov is reputed to have said: "Forgetting is the true exile." Of course it is obvious that ignorance is the true partner of forgetfulness. In fact, if one never knew anything then one cannot be accused

of having forgotten it. The Torah emphasizes the repetition of all the facts and experiences of Jewish life in the desert of Sinai so that this knowledge will enable and strengthen the powers of national remembrance.

Much of the Jewish world today suffers from a severe case of, hopefully temporary but nevertheless intense, amnesia. In spite of all of the efforts of the survivors, the museums, the academic courses and books relating to the Holocaust, this event is rapidly disappearing from world and even Jewish memory.

Religious Jewry has found no way, as of yet, to ritually remember the Holocaust. Without ritual and holiness, it tragically will continue to fade from the memory of the coming generation. In distributing films and audio lectures about the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel to Jewish schools worldwide I am already encountering apathy if not sometimes even outright opposition to the insertion of the subject into the curriculum of schools.

One principal asked me: "Will it help my students to be admitted to Harvard or Yale?" And on the other end of the spectrum of Jewish education another principal told me: "Will it increase their ability to study Talmud properly?" I responded that the Torah listed all of the desert way stations even though knowing them would also not guarantee Talmudic proficiency or admission to Harvard or Yale.

It is not only the amnesia regarding even our very recent past that afflicts us. It is our inability to grasp that the knowledge of this immediate past is vitally essential to our present and to our future. Without knowledge of the events of the past, dating back all of the way to the events of the desert of Sinai, we are creating for our descendants a new desert, a wasteland of ignorance, falsehoods and disillusion. It is not too late to correct this. If our schools won't do so, let our homes and families, our grandparents attempt to do so.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd they (the Israelites) set their legions against Midian as the Lord had commanded Moses and they killed every male.” (Numbers 31:7) Our Biblical portion of Matot opens with G-d's vengeance against Midian, an avowed enemy of the Israelites who had joined Balak the King of Moab in the hiring of Balaam to curse Israel. The Midianites also seduced Israel to have sex with their women and to engage in idolatrous orgiastic worship of the Midianite gods. Israel was therefore enjoined to make a pre-emptive strike against a nation which had demonstrated their desire to see Israel vanquished.

The Bible goes on to record Moses' insistence that the young Midianite women fit to engage in sexual relations be killed and along with the young male Midianite children. How difficult is all of this carnage to the modern ear? How can we possibly justify such action, even if it was against a nation which had already lifted its banner for Israel's disappearance from the face of the earth?!

What we must remember as we read the Bible is that we are studying a text from the earliest times of recorded history, a text which we believe to have been written more than 4,000 years ago. Yes, we also believe that the Biblical text is G-d given, but it was never intended that every verse of it be applied to every generation.

Our tradition insists that alongside the written Torah, there is an Oral Torah, a vibrant and still developing legal system which determines which Biblical laws only applied to the ancient world, which were open to limitation, re-interpretation and even expansion in different generations, and which were deemed unchanging and immutable for all times. The traditional orthodoxy which survives today is the heir to those who fought valiantly against the Sadducees in the second commonwealth and the Karaites of the middle ages.

Our ideological ancestors regarded these sects as heresies because they believed in a literal interpretation of the written law for all generations.

The arena of warfare is probably the one in which sweeping change from Biblical law is most evident. The Bible commands "But in waging war against the people from the cities which the Lord G-d has given you for an inheritance you shall not allow any person to live. Rather you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizite, the Hivvite and the Jebusite as the Lord your G-d commanded you. This is so that they may not teach you to act according to all their abominations that they performed for their gods and sin before the Lord your G-d." (Deut 20:16-18)

Apparently, at that juncture in history, there was no other way to wage and win a war- and unless we had a national homeland, the nation of Israel never would have emerged. Our historic mission would have been still-born. It would seem that these particular nations were especially evil and heinous, addicted to inhuman and sexual acts of violence in their idolatrous orgies. They had to be extirpated if a moral society was to emerge and influence the world.

The Talmud, therefore, insists that the command to "utterly destroy" every one of our enemies only applied to the specific nations singled out by the Bible during the early Biblical period. During the first commonwealth, King Sennacherib of Assyria conquered the lands of the Middle East and confounded the indigenous people by forcing them to re-settle in different areas and to intermarry with their new

neighbors. Hence the ethnic nations identified by the Bible no longer exist and so the law demanding their total destruction no longer applies. (B.T. Berakhot 28a)

Moreover, Maimonides and Nachmanides agree that it is forbidden for a Jew to wage war against any nation or individual - whether of the seven indigenous nations, Midian, or even Amalek- unless he be given the option of making peace and accepting the seven Noahide laws of morality (Maimonides, Laws of Kings 6,1). Once they agree to become moral individuals, we dare not harm them. And according to this view, this was the case even in the Biblical period!

There is also a fascinating interpretation of Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the famed Dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva, in HaAmeik Davar, ad loc). He argues that the Biblical command to kill women and children only applies to those who were acting in the service of the enemy. We could never have been commanded to harm perfectly innocent human beings, created in G-d's image!

And when we think of the women and children who are being encouraged and trained by al Qaeda, Hamas and Fatah to become suicide bombers, when we realize how Hamas terrorists used innocent Palestinians as their protective human shields so that they can continue their evil murders, then we understand how Israelis are sometimes compelled to fire at women and children for our own self-protection and the protection of the free world.

The portion of Masei includes the sentence that speaks to the commandment of living in Israel. The key phrase is "and you shall take possession of the land and dwell therein." (Numbers 33:53)

Rashi is of the opinion that this sentence does not constitute a command to live in Israel. It is rather good advice. Take possession of the land from its inhabitants, otherwise you will not be able to safely live there.

Ramban (Nahmanides) disagrees. In his addendum to Rambam's (Maimonides) Book of Commandments, Ramban notes that Rambam failed to mention living in Israel as a distinct mitzvah. Ramban writes: "We have been commanded in the Torah to take possession of the land which G-d gave to the patriarchs and not leave it in the hands of others or allow it to remain desolate, as it says 'and you shall take possession of the land and dwell therein.'" (Addendum, Mitzvat Aseh 4)

Some commentators argue that implicit in Rambam is the commandment to live in Israel. So basic is the mitzvah, writes the late former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, that it need not be mentioned, as it is the basis for all of Torah.

But whether or not one maintains that Rambam believes it is a mitzvah to live in Israel, doesn't this commandment, as certainly understood by Ramban, fly in the face of our mission to be an or la'goyim? How can

we be a light to the nations of the world if we don't live amongst Gentiles and are ensconced in our own homeland?

One could argue however, that the mandate to live in the chosen land of Israel is crucial to the chosen people idea. Being the chosen people doesn't mean that our souls are superior. Rather it suggests that our mission to spread a system of ethical monotheism, of G-d ethics to the world, is of a higher purpose. And that can only be accomplished in the land of Israel.

From this perspective, the significance of the modern state of Israel is not only as the place of guaranteed political refuge for Jews; or as the place where more mitzvot can be performed or where our continuity as a Jewish nation is assured. Rather it is the only place where we have the potential to carry out the chosen people mandate.

In exile, we can develop communities that can be a "light" to others. But the destiny of the Jewish people lies in the State of Israel. Israel is the only place where we as a nation can become an or la'goyim. In the Diaspora, we are not in control of our destiny; we cannot create the society envisioned by the Torah. Only in a Jewish state do we have the political sovereignty and judicial autonomy to potentially establish the society from which other nations can learn the basic ethical ideals of Torah.

As we near Tisha B'av, the fast commemorating our exile from the land, this position reminds us of our obligation to think about Israel, to visit Israel, and, most important, to constantly yearn to join the millions who have already returned home. Only there do we have the potential to be the true am ha-nivhar (chosen people). © 2012 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Moshe and Elazar the Kohain and all the leaders of the congregation went out to greet them, to the [area] outside the camp" (Bamidbar 31:13). It would seem from this verse that the returning soldiers had not yet entered the camp when they were met by the nation's leaders. However, the previous verse (31:12) tells us that they brought all of the spoils back "to Moshe and to Elazar the Kohain and to the congregation of the Children of Israel to the camp, to the Plains of Moav which is by the Jordan [River, across from] Yericho," implying that they had already entered the camp before they were greeted by these leaders. How can these verses be reconciled?

A simple approach would be that the first verse doesn't mean that they brought everything literally "to the camp." Rather, they reached just outside of it, where they were met by the nation's leaders. However, it would seem strange for the Torah to describe the same exact spot as "the camp" in one verse and "outside the

camp" in the very next one. If the Torah didn't want to add the additional word "outside," relying on our ability to deduce from the next verse that they didn't really enter the camp, why mention "the camp" at all? Just tell us that they were bringing the spoils back to the nation when they were met outside the camp by its leaders. Additionally, if the word "to" means "to the edge of," i.e. without crossing "into," then Moshe and Elazar and the Tribal leaders going "to" the outside of the camp would also mean that they got to the boundary without leaving the camp. Did the conversation between Moshe and Pinachas occur right "on the line," with Moshe (et al) inside the camp and the returning soldiers just outside it? Aside from the oddity of the term "camp" being associated with those who weren't in the camp and the term "outside the camp" being associated with those who actually were, we would need to find a reason why Moshe made sure to specifically have this meeting right on the camp's boundary, and/or why the Torah wanted us to be aware that it did.

Da'as Sofrim suggests that due to the sheer volume of the spoils, it was impossible to bring everything into the camp. Even though they eventually did, the livestock would have gone into the "corners" (each of the four "degolim" were parallel to one of the four sides of the sanctuary complex; if a box was drawn around the entire encampment, there would be "empty" spaces in each of the four corners, which is where the animals were kept), but couldn't be put into their proper "corner" until the spoils were divided up and specific ownership was determined. There were also fewer captives to be brought into the camp after Moshe insisted that those who had caused the sinning needed to be executed. Da'as Sofrim presents it as if "to the camp" really means "until the camp," a definition that raises the previously mentioned issues. It is possible that the spoils were left outside the camp (for practical reasons, as Da'as Sofrim suggests), while the soldiers themselves entered the camp. When Moshe and the other leaders came to meet them, they all went outside the camp to inspect the spoils (at which point Moshe saw that the adult women had been taken captive, causing him to get upset). Nevertheless, the implication of the verse is that the soldiers brought the spoils into the camp with them, not that they entered by themselves and left the spoils outside the camp.

Another approach could be to change the meaning of the word "and they brought" to "and they intended to bring;" they meant to bring everything inside the camp, but were met by the leaders before they were able to enter the camp, and were prevented from entering. Aside from the word used usually meaning that they already had brought (not that they intended to), we would need to figure out why the leaders would prevent them from entering.

The term "outside the camp" is used later in this narrative as well (31:19 and 31:24), regarding when those who were ritually impure can re-enter the camp.

Since the type of ritual impurity under discussion was the result of contact with a corpse, the "camp" that is off limits would be the sanctuary compound; they were allowed to enter the area where the rest of the nation lived and even where the Levi'im lived (see Rashi). If the term "outside the camp" meant "outside the sanctuary complex" while the term "camp" referred to where the nation lived, it could be suggested that the soldiers did enter the camp, but were met by Moshe and the leaders who had left the sanctuary complex in order to greet them. Even if we assume that the leaders usually remained in the sanctuary complex (thus making it necessary for the Torah to tell us that they left it), it still seems awkward for the word "camp" to refer to one thing (the main camp) in one verse (31:12) and another thing (the sanctuary) in the very next verse. Additionally, as Maysiach Ilmim points out, if "outside the camp" (when describing where Moshe and the other leaders went) meant outside the sanctuary compound, there would be no reason for Rashi (or the Sifre, which he is based on) to give a different reason why they left the camp; they had to go out in order to prevent those who were ritually impure from entering.

Either way, it is awkward for the term "outside the camp" to mean "outside the main camp" in one part of the narrative (31:13) and "outside the sanctuary compound" elsewhere (31:19/24) in the same narrative. This may be why some commentaries (e.g. B'chor Shor and Chizkuni) understand the term to mean "outside the main camp" throughout the narrative. Even though under normal circumstances one who comes in contact with a corpse can enter the main camp (with only the sanctuary compound being off-limits), since there were so many who were ritually impure (the 12,000 soldiers), Moshe was concerned that the ritual impurity could not be easily contained, and others (and other things) would become ritually impure as well. Therefore, he had them stay outside of the main camp, where they wouldn't come in contact with others. It could be suggested that the soldiers had already entered the camp (as implied in 31:12), but Moshe made them go back out so that they didn't inadvertently make others ritually impure, and that is where he met them. (It should be noted that according to Midrash Lekach Tov, Moshe and the other leaders had to leave the camp because the returning soldiers had camped outside due to their ritual impurity.)

There are other reasons given to explain why Moshe (et al) went out to greet the returning soldiers. In the Sifre (quoted by Rashi), Abba Chanin said in the name of Rabbi Elazar that they went because young lads had gone out to try to grab the spoils; the presence of the leadership was meant to prevent them from taking anything before it was properly divided up. Midrash HaGadol says that they went out to bless the returning soldiers. Eitz Yosef (in his commentary on Bamidbar Rabbah 22:4 and on Tanchuma 3, see also Torah Sh'laima 31:63 and Netziv's commentary on the Sifre) says that they went out to honor the returning

soldiers. I would like to suggest another reason why Moshe might have gone out to greet them.

Even though Moshe became angry right away (31:14), the first words the Torah quotes (31:15) were "have you kept alive all the females?" The Sifre explains that Pinachas had told Moshe that they had fulfilled everything they had been commanded, to which Moshe responded "have you kept alive all the females?" Moshe must have thought that his instructions to "take vengeance against Midyan" would be understood to include executing all the adult females, since they had been involved in causing the Children of Israel to sin (see K'sav Sofer for a possible reason why Pinachas didn't understand it that way). Perhaps Moshe realized that his instructions may not have been clear enough, or perhaps he was told that adult females had been taken captive. Would it have been appropriate to allow them into the camp, to be seen by those who had been previously enticed? If one of the reasons they had to be executed was so that no one could point to any Midyanite women and say "so-and-so sinned with her," how could they be brought into the camp? If Moshe had wanted them to be executed as part of the war against Midyan, would it be better to execute them in the camp, or before they entered it? Even though executing them was justified because of what they had done, and what they would continue to try to do if they had the chance (see <http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-ki-seitzei-5771>), was it more appropriate to do so in full view of the rest of the nation, or to execute them outside the camp, thereby shielding young and innocent eyes from such violence? Therefore, in order to avoid all of these issues, Moshe went out to greet them, to get them to finish their mission outside the camp.

What if Moshe didn't realize that the adult women had been spared until the soldiers had already entered the camp? Would he have them executed inside the camp, or brought back out before executing them? Wouldn't he want them away from the rest of the nation ASAP? (I almost wonder if this is what Chazal really meant by "young lads going out to the spoils.") If the soldiers had entered the camp with the spoils, but Moshe made them go back out, which is where he met them, we can certainly understand why one verse says they had entered the camp while the next one says that Moshe met them outside the camp. ©2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

*by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne*

The Torah portions at this time of year deal with Eretz Yisrael. Near the end we are told about the daughters of Tzlofchad. When discussing this affair, the Talmud declares that the land is in our possession after having been taken over by our

ancestors (Bava Batra 119). But this is referring not only to the element of time - it also implies that the land belongs to us through a mechanism that was passed down to us through our ancestors.

This is important for us in our generation, for we must remember that Eretz Yisrael is not a private purchase by an individual in a specific generation but rather a general possession of the entire nation. Every Jew has a share in the "co-op" which is called "the community of Yisrael." This was expressed very well by Rabbi Y.D. Soloveitchik, as follows: "Eretz Yisrael does not belong to each and every individual Jew but rather to the community of Yisrael as an independent and free entity... The link between Eretz Yisrael and the Jews is not in a private and individual way but is the privilege of the entire community of Yisrael. I myself, as a private person, have no specific claim or merits on the land. My personal rights stem from the fact that I am a member of the community of Yisrael, and since the land belongs to the entire community, it also belongs to me."

The conclusion is that no specific generation has the right to surrender this possession to others. This idea was also clear to the early Zionist leaders. Here is what David Ben Gurion, the chairman of the Jewish Agency, said in a speech at the Twentieth Zionist Congress in Basel: "No individual Jew is able to give up his rights to the existence of the Jewish nation and to Eretz Yisrael. No Jewish entity has the authority to do this. Even all the Jews living today do not have the authority to surrender any specific portion of the land. This is a right that has been preserved for the Jewish nation, throughout its generations... The Jewish nation is not obligated or bound by any such surrender. Our right to this land, in its entirety, is valid for eternity, and until the complete redemption we will not abandon this historic right."

This was echoed in the papers of the Mandate that the League of Nations entrusted to the government of Great Britain at the San Remo Conference: "The Mandate authority is responsible that no land in Eretz Yisrael will be given permanently or leased to any foreign power... Together with the Jewish Agency, it will encourage... dense settlement of Jews on government land and on desolate land which is not required for public projects."

It is true that we must not impinge on the private property rights of individuals. This was emphasized by Rav Kook in a speech in honor of the Jewish National Fund, when he quoted the verse, "A righteous nation will come, which keeps the faith" [Yeshayahu 26:2]. We give charity to every individual, including people from other nations, as we also want our possession of the land to be on a charitable basis. Therefore:

"We pay the full price for every piece of property in our own land, even though our rights to the holy land never cease d... As much as possible, our taking possession is only through peaceful means and

purchase... so that the nations of the world will have no claims against us." [Ma'amarei Ha'Re'iya 252]. © 2012 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the double parsha of Mattos-Massai and thus conclude the Sefer (Book) of Bamidbar. Anger is an issue that the Sages discuss quite thoroughly. The Talmud [Nedarim 22 A,B] offers a number of varied teachings about anger: The Shchinah (Divine Presence) is of no importance to those who get angry; one who gets angry forgets that which he has learned; all types of Gehinnom (Hell) rule over a person who gets angry.

Elsewhere in the Talmud [Pesachim 66B], Raish Lakish taught that if a chacham (wise person) gets angry, his wisdom will leave him. This idea is proven from an event that occurred in our parsha.

Back in Parshas Balak we learned that the daughters of Midyan had seduced some men of Bnei Yisroel (The Children of Israel), leading them to serve their idolatry. This led to the death of twenty four thousand members of Bnei Yisroel. In our parsha, Bnei Yisroel are commanded to wage a retributive war against the nation of Midyan.

After the victory, Moshe met with the officers. "And Moshe became angry with the officers: You have kept the women alive??? They (the women), following the instructions of Bilaam, caused Bnei Yisroel to transgress against Hashem in the matter of P'or (their idolatry), thus causing a plague amongst the congregation of Hashem! [31:14-16]"

A few passukim (verses) later, the Torah discusses the laws of kashering (making kosher) a vessel that was used for unkosher items. This was immediately applicable to the spoils of war taken from Midyan. These laws are introduced in a very unusual manner. "And Elazar the Kohen said to the men of the army: This is the law that Hashem commanded Moshe...[31:21]" Elazar then tells them the specific laws of kashering different types of vessels.

Moshe was standing right there! Why did Elazar speak out and teach them these laws that he himself had learned from Moshe?

Rashi explains that because Moshe became angry, he couldn't recall those laws of kashering the vessels. The nation was standing in front of Moshe waiting to hear from him the laws that he heard from Hashem Himself. But Moshe remained silent. He didn't know how to instruct them. He needed Elazar to step forward and teach the nation these laws. He had gotten angry and as a result, his wisdom left him.

Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz zt"l writes that we all know that anger is counterproductive and harmful. Yet we still allow ourselves to get angry. We resolve this apparent contradiction by justifying our anger. They

really did a terrible thing and therefore I was correct in getting angry.

From the case of Moshe we see how incorrect this attitude really is. Moshe's anger at the officers was completely justified! This war was a payback to Midyan because of the harm they caused Bnei Yisroel. It was through the women that this harm was caused. How could they avenge Midyan and at the same time keep the women alive?

Nevertheless, although Moshe's anger was totally justified, he forgot the laws. It is not a punishment for wrongful use of anger but rather the nature of anger itself. One loses wisdom. Simple and automatic.

Ideally a person's focus should be that if things haven't gone one's way, not only won't anger help but it will only serve to exacerbate the situation.

The story is told of a certain tzaddik (righteous individual) who was extremely poor. On the day before the holiday of Succos the opportunity came before him to purchase a stunningly beautiful esrog (citron fruit used on Succos). His yearning to fulfill the mitzvah (commandment) with that esrog was incredible but he didn't have money for the usual holiday expenses and certainly not for the esrog.

His pure desire to fulfill the mitzvah brought an idea to his mind. He had a beautiful and expensive pair of tefillin (phylacteries) that he had inherited. "I've already fulfilled today the mitzvah of tefillin and that mitzvah won't return for another eight days," he reasoned. "On the other hand, the mitzvah of esrog starts tomorrow and if I won't buy one now, I won't be able to fulfill it. The mitzvah of esrog should therefore take precedence over the mitzvah of tefillin!"

He immediately ran, sold his tefillin and used the money to buy this beautiful esrog. The exuberant and pure happiness that this tzaddik felt was incredible.

With this glow of pleasure and bliss emanating from his face he came home with his prize. His wife, curious to know what was making him so happy, asked where he had been and he told her the entire story.

"You sold your beautiful pair of tefillin???" she asked him with pain in her voice. "And you didn't save any money for food for the holiday???" she demanded with her pain turning into anger. In a fit of rage, she grabbed the esrog and threw it hard to the ground, rendering it passul {unfit for use}.

The tzaddik looked at this esrog, with which he could have fulfilled the mitzvah in such a beautiful way, lying broken and worthless on the ground. How did he react? "My tefillin-I no longer have the merit of that mitzvah. My esrog-I no longer have the merit of that mitzvah. Should I therefore 'merit' in the tremendous sin of anger? Should I allow my mitzvah to lead to an aveirah (sin)?" He then walked away as if nothing had happened.

Though the level of this tzaddik might be unattainable to us, I think the story might be helpful

when we feel our blood-pressure rising...© 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The portion of Masei includes the sentence that speaks to the commandment of living in Israel. The key phrase is "and you shall take possession of the land and dwell therein." (Numbers 33:53)

Rashi is of the opinion that this sentence does not constitute a command to live in Israel. It is rather good advice. Take possession of the land from its inhabitants, otherwise you will not be able to safely live there.

Ramban (Nahmanides) disagrees. In his addendum to Rambam's (Maimonides) Book of Commandments, Ramban notes that Rambam failed to mention living in Israel as a distinct mitzvah. Ramban writes: "We have been commanded in the Torah to take possession of the land which G-d gave to the patriarchs and not leave it in the hands of others or allow it to remain desolate, as it says 'and you shall take possession of the land and dwell therein.'" (Addendum, Mitzvat Aseh 4)

Some commentators argue that implicit in Rambam is the commandment to live in Israel. So basic is the mitzvah, writes the late former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, that it need not be mentioned, as it is the basis for all of Torah.

But whether or not one maintains that Rambam believes it is a mitzvah to live in Israel, doesn't this commandment, as certainly understood by Ramban, fly in the face of our mission to be an or la'goyim? How can we be a light to the nations of the world if we don't live amongst Gentiles and are ensconced in our own homeland?

One could argue however, that the mandate to live in the chosen land of Israel is crucial to the chosen people idea. Being the chosen people doesn't mean that our souls are superior. Rather it suggests that our mission to spread a system of ethical monotheism, of G-d ethics to the world, is of a higher purpose. And that can only be accomplished in the land of Israel.

From this perspective, the significance of the modern state of Israel is not only as the place of guaranteed political refuge for Jews; or as the place where more mitzvot can be performed or where our continuity as a Jewish nation is assured. Rather it is the only place where we have the potential to carry out the chosen people mandate.

In exile, we can develop communities that can be a "light" to others. But the destiny of the Jewish people lies in the State of Israel. Israel is the only place where we as a nation can become an or la'goyim. In the Diaspora, we are not in control of our destiny; we cannot create the society envisioned by the Torah. Only in a Jewish state do we have the political sovereignty

and judicial autonomy to potentially establish the society from which other nations can learn the basic ethical ideals of Torah.

As we near Tisha B'av, the fast commemorating our exile from the land, this position reminds us of our obligation to think about Israel, to visit Israel, and, most important, to constantly yearn to join the millions who have already returned home. Only there do we have the potential to be the true am ha-nivhar (chosen people). © 2012 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Talk about scary deja vu's. After Moshe lost an entire generation of Jews because they resisted entering the land of Israel, in Parshat Matot they seem to be doing the exact same thing. As they prepare to enter the land, the shevatim (tribes) of Reuven and Gad approach Moshe with a similar request. This time they claim to want to "build for their flocks and cities for the small children" (32:16). After warning them not to make the same mistake as the previous generation, Moshe agrees to let them live outside of the Promised Land, but appears to bargain with them by getting them to agree to help the others fight for the land first. Why did Moshe agree to let them live outside of the promised land, and what did he bargain from them?

A closer inspection of the dialogue helps us answer these questions, and can help us understand the importance of setting priorities. When Moshe responds to them (32:24), he tells them to "build for yourselves cities for your small children and pens for your flocks", exactly the opposite order of the way they asked him. What Moshe was really telling them was that if they're really looking out for the well-being of their children, then look after them (i.e. their perspectives) first, BEFORE you build yourselves buildings and flocks. The can also be why he allowed them to settle outside the Land altogether: Moshe understood that it wasn't that the tribes lacked faith in their destiny because they were willing to fight for it with everyone else, but rather that from their perspective living right outside the Land would be better for THEM. Being able to accept other perspectives, despite initial fears and uncertainties, is the true test of being a thoughtful Jew and an understanding person. © 2012 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.



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