

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV MOSHE LIPMAN

On the Same Team

A timely Tisha B'Av message from the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team

I settled in to watch the movie "Miracle" with the campers of Sportstar Academy where I work in the summers, expecting to see a typical sports movie. One scene in this movie, which tells the true story about the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team, grabbed my attention.

Herb Brooks was charged with coaching this team. He faces the daunting task of preparing college-aged players to play against experienced, professional teams from other countries.

Throughout the early practices with his team, Brooks asks players to introduce themselves to the rest of the team. The dialogue always follows the same pattern of the first introduction sequence.

The coach turns to a player and says, "What's your name?"

"Mark Johnson."

"Where you from, Mark?"

"Madison, Wisconsin"

"Who do you play for?"

"University of Wisconsin, Coach."

Every player introduces himself the same way. Name, hometown, and in response to the question of what team they play for, they answer with their college name.

Five months before the Olympics, the team plays a practice game against Norway. The final score is 3-3 and Coach Brooks feels his team has not put forth their maximum effort.

As the team skates off the ice, Coach Brooks makes them stay on the ice to skate "suicides"-skating from the goal line to 1/4 of the rink and then back, to 1/2 and then back, 3/4 and then back, and then the full rink and then back. This continues over and over again, with the coach repeating, "Again," dashing their hopes that this would be their last sequence.

The drill continues even after the arena manager turns off the arena lights and the medical trainer issues his warning. But the coach again barks out, "Again."

Hours pass with the team being forced to skate back and forth, over and over again. Players collapse, coughing and spitting up, but the coach insists, "Again!"

Suddenly, a voice from the line of players near the goal line calls out: "Mike Eruzione!"

The hockey player is gasping for breaths and barely gathers the strength to continue.... "Winthrop, Massachusetts!"

Coach Brooks immediately asks: "Who do you play for?"

The player, eventual team captain, Mike Eruzione, struggles and says: "I play for...the United States of America!"

Coach Brooks softly replies, "That's all gentlemen." They could go back to the locker room.

He succeeded in making them identify as a unified team and not as individuals coming from their separate backgrounds and universities.

This sets them on their way to eventually beat the unbeatable Soviets in the Olympic semi-finals and ultimately win the gold medal.

This conveys a critical message to us as Jews, especially during this time of year as we lead up to Tisha B'Av. The Jewish people have been persecuted for thousands of years. After each round of murder and torture, all we have wanted is a respite and the knowledge that it is over. But then, just like the coach barking out "Again!" we are forced to go through our next round of suffering. We survive, assume it is over, and then we hear the pounding "Again."

The ninth of Av is a date in the Jewish calendar in which we reflect on all of our suffering through the past 2,000 years. We attempt to correct our flaws and pray for salvation. In our time, this includes a respite for our brothers and sisters in bombarded Sderot and other Negev towns, for people who live daily with the threat of terrorist attacks, for soldiers who risk their lives for us daily, and for Jews around the world who live with the fear of anti-Semitism and what could come next.

As we experience Tisha B'Av and reflect on what it will take to get us out of this cycle of persecution called "exile," perhaps we should take Mike Eruzione's insight to heart. Our Sages of the Talmud teach us that we are in exile because of the hatred of one Jew to another. The only way to correct that flaw is to repair ourselves in that realm.

Perhaps each time God puts us through another round of suffering, His proclamation of "Again," He is waiting for us to stop identifying ourselves as an individual Jew coming from his separate background and upbringing. "I'm modern Orthodox." "I'm Reform."

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"I'm a Hasid." "I'm secular." "I'm Conservative." "I'm yeshivishe."

Those characterizations polarize the nation and make it impossible for us to function together as one team. As individual groups, we cannot accomplish what we can accomplish as one team. We are held back by that same baseless hatred which creeps in when we are not one unit.

Perhaps God is waiting for all of us to proclaim in unison, "I am a Jew." Plain and simple.

Even more importantly, perhaps God is waiting for us to stop seeing others as "He's modern Orthodox." "He's Reform." "He's a Hasid." "He's secular." "He's Conservative." "He's yeshivishe."

Perhaps the answer to our suffering and long exile is reaching the point where we see other Jews as members of the same team and family. Jews and nothing else. © 2012 Rabbi D.M. Lipman and aish.com

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The month of Av is the saddest in the Jewish year, and Tisha b'Av the saddest day. On it the two Temples were destroyed, the first in 586 BCE by the Babylonians, the second in 70 CE by the Romans. It is also the day on which Betar – the last stronghold of the Bar Kochba rebellion – fell in 135 CE, and on which, one year later, the Roman emperor Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem as a pagan city, Aelia Capitolina. In 1492, Tisha b'Av was the day on which Jews were finally exiled from Spain.

How did Jews survive these tragedies? That is one of the most enthralling questions about Judaism. It is an iron law of history that civilizations rise, achieve greatness and appear indestructible, but in the end they fail and fall. Only Jews and Judaism have experienced catastrophe after catastrophe, exile after exile, but have endured. Each new defeat inspired resilience. Jews wept, but then rebuilt their lives, often in new and strange places. More remarkably still, each tragedy inspired a new burst of creativity.

After the destruction of the first Temple came the renewal of Torah under Ezra and the returning exiles. After the loss of the second Temple came the great literature of the sages: Midrash, Mishnah and the two Talmuds. The Crusades gave birth to the spirituality

of the Hassidei Ashkenaz; the Spanish expulsion to the mysticism of Sfat. The greatest tragedy of all in human terms, the Holocaust, was followed a mere three years later by the single greatest collective affirmation of life in 2000 years – the rebirth of the State of Israel. There is something remarkable about this story, unparalleled in the history of any other nation.

I remember the moment when I first stood on Mount Scopus – today the site of the Hebrew University – looking down on the old city of Jerusalem, and realised that it was here that Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues stood, contemplating the ruins of what had been Judaism's holiest place. While the others wept, Rabbi Akiva smiled.

"Why do you weep?" asked Rabbi Akiva. They replied "How can we not weep, when we see a fox walking through the Holy of Holies. The question is, how can you smile?" Rabbi Akiva replied: "The prophets foresaw Jerusalem's destruction and they also foresaw its rebuilding. I have seen the first prophecy come true. Now I know the second will also come true."

Rabbi Akiva shared with the prophets the courage to hope. Hope is not a mere instinct. It is born in faith – the faith that G-d exists, that He keeps His promises and that He forgives. That hope is contained in the very name tradition gave to this month: Menachem Av, the month of consolation as well as tragedy. A people that never loses hope cannot be defeated. The Jewish people kept hope alive. Hope kept the Jewish people alive. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Haftorah which is read immediately before the ninth of Av provides deep insight into why the Temple was destroyed. Isaiah mercilessly berates the Jewish people: "Hear the word of the Lord, rulers of Sodom, give ear to the Torah of our G-d, you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifice to me? I'm sated with the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of sated beasts... Bring no more vain offerings, incense of abomination they are to me. As for the New Moons, the Sabbaths and the Festivals, I cannot bear iniquity along with your solemn convocations. Your hands are full of blood... Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil. Learn to do well; seek justice; relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow..." (Isaiah 1:10-17)

I have quoted at length because these verses capture the essence of prophetic sensibility. The prophets raged against the sins of people, especially when the sins took on a veneer of religious respectability which only served to hide the rot within. The hypocrisy of the Israelite callousness towards the

oppressed coupled with concern about punctilious religious performance made a mockery out of ritual and an abomination out of the Temple.

Sacrificial offerings ought to bring us closer to the G-d of "compassion and freely-given love, patience, loving-kindness and truth." If the aftermath of the sacrifice is not a more sensitive human being, then the offering becomes a bribe and the offerer a hypocritical scoundrel attempting to manipulate G-d to serve his selfish and nefarious purposes. The purpose of ritual is not merely to bring us closer to G-d; its purpose is also to help us understand that our G-d is a G-d of love and compassion who wants us to act lovingly and compassionately towards every human being!

Of course, we need ritual in every aspect of our lives. The nuances of ritual are the grammatical rules of the language with which man communicates with G-d. Rituals give a people its identity in the world, its colors and sounds and haunting melodies. Rituals give people an ethnic identity, without it, the Jews would blend into the overall landscape of humanity and disappear as an identifiable people. But the purpose of Jewish, separate ethnic identity is not merely to be separate; it is rather to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priest-teachers who will communicate the will of a G-d of ethics and morality, love and peace, to the entire world.

When the Second Temple was built, the question arose whether to continue keeping fast days that were instituted after the destruction of the first Temple or whether to abandon them. We hear G-d's answer in the words of the prophet: "...When you fasted and mourned, in the fifth month and the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for Me you fasted?" After all, when you ate and when you drank, it was you who did the eating and you who did the drinking... This is what the Lord G-d of Hosts declares: True judgments shall you judge, loving-kindness and compassion shall you do to your sibling humans. Do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the stranger and the indigent..." (Zehariah 7: 5-10)

G-d doesn't need our fast days, nor does He need our sacrifices. Ritual is a means to the end of developing a more sensitive and compassionate human being. When the ritual – or Temple – didn't do its job – or, even worse, became an impediment to the goal, served as a cover-up for iniquity – then the Temple had to be destroyed.

Hence, what must be done to bring back the Holy Temple? Demonstrations, petitions, tanks? Isaiah makes no bones about it. The Haftorah ends with the verse: "Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and those that return to her with righteousness" (1:27). Yes, "The fast days ... will be turned into days of gladness and rejoicing, but only when you learn to love truth and peace." (Zechariah 7).

A story post-script: Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev tells of two townsmen, one the scholarly son-in-law of the wealthiest man in Berditchev and the

other a poor, ignorant porter. They were of the same age – but the one had nothing to do with the other. They were literally worlds apart. There was however one daily interchange between the two. The porter had to rush his prayers at the earliest prayer service each morning in order to be one of the first at his post near the train station; the scholar, who studied late into the night, went to the second, later service. As the porter was hurrying out of shul, and the scholar was entering shul, their eyes would meet as they brushed past each other. The porter's eyes were filled with humble yearning, and even apologetic embarrassment; how much he would have liked some time for leisurely prayer and even elementary Torah study. 'The scholar's eyes were filled with a condescending, supercilious sneer; how grateful and even superior he felt to have the privilege to spend his days in Divine Service.'

Both men died on the same day. When the porter was judged before the heavenly throne, his sins were placed on one side of the scale (he had often missed the afternoon prayers and he sometimes slept through the Sabbath morning prayers due to physical exhaustion) and his daily humble and yearning glance was placed on the other side of the scale; the glance outweighed the sins, and he was escorted to heaven. Then, the scholar's good deeds were placed on one side of a scale (and they were quite numerous), with his daily sneer placed on the second side. The sneer outweighed the good deeds, and he was taken straight down to hell...© 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The repetition of the aseret hadvarim - the Ten Commandments - is one of the highlights of this week's parsha. Why does Moshe feel impelled to repeat the Decalogue? Some commentators are of the opinion that the repetition is in order to highlight the nuances of difference in the text of this version of the aseret hadvarim from the text that appears in parshat Yitro. Since both texts are from Sinai and were uttered, so to speak, simultaneously, something which is not possible to convey in writing, Moshe was impelled therefore to repeat the Decalogue in order to inform us of the differences in the text - differences that the Oral Law will explain and expand upon.

The repetition of the text emphasizes for us the basic principle of Judaism throughout the ages, that the Written Torah is not understandable nor truly instructive without the traditions and teachings of the Oral Law that accompany and elucidate it. The Torah purposely presents us with a different text to make us aware of the necessity of understanding and reconciling the texts according to the explanations of Sinai - the Oral Law. The discrepancies and apparent "mistakes" in the text are the keys to understanding the Torah through the

study and appreciation of the Oral Law. This is an understanding of Torah that has somehow escaped all of the Bible critics and other "scientific" studies of the biblical text. It is the Oral Law that differentiates the Jewish bible from the Christian bible and from the biblical study courses of those who do not know nor appreciate that Oral Law.

The major difference between the texts that is most noticeable in its halachic conclusions refers to the commandment regarding the observance of Shabat. The text in Yitro reads zachor - remember the Shabat to keep it holy - while the text here in Vaetchanan reads shamor - guard, watch, observe the Shabat to keep it holy. Zachor indicates the positive, attractive side of Shabat. It is accomplished through delicious meals, Kiddush on wine, rest and sleep, companionship and hospitality. Shamor represents the more restrictive aspect of Shabat. It is the commandment that forbids thirty-nine types of "work" and circumscribes our activities on that holy day.

Over the long run of Jewish history many individuals and groups have attempted to retain the beauty of the zachor of Shabat while disregarding the seeming stringencies imposed by shamor. All such efforts and formulae have proven to be worthless and disastrous. In our time, the Shabat of Conservative Jews was not enhanced when they were allowed to drive their automobiles on Shabat, ostensibly only to synagogue services. The laity did not understand the difference between driving to the synagogue and driving to the golf course. And thus the long descent of Conservative synagogues into the pool of non-observance of Torah, intermarriage and loss of Jewish values proved itself to be inexorable.

The rabbis taught us that shamor and zachor were uttered, so to speak, as one word, simultaneously. The Oral Law teaches us how that impossibility is truly the reality and the means of preservation of Shabat and of the Jewish people. © 2006 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

“Shamor veZachor beDibur Echad," the commandment to keep the Sabbath and to remember the Sabbath were said simultaneously. This statement, part of the Friday night prayers welcoming in the Sabbath, is taken from a number of Talmudic-era sources, and is usually used to explain the "10 Commandments" not being exactly the same in Shemos and Devarim. Indeed, since G-d is non-corporeal, any sound waves He initiates are not made with a mouth or vocal chords, and He can just as easily cause multiple sound waves to emanate as He

can a single sound wave. However, it seems pretty clear from many of these sources (e.g. Mechilta Yisro 7, Sifri Ki Saytzay 23, Shemos Rabbah 28:4, Yerushalmi Nedarim 3:2) that the concept of G-d saying more than one thing at the same time is not limited to the "10 Commandments."

Another example given of two "statements" that were actually said simultaneously is: "those that violate [the Sabbath] shall surely die" (Shemos 31:14) and "on the Sabbath two sheep [shall be brought as an offering]" (Bamidbar 28:9); even though the latter done in any other context than the public offering would be a violation of the Sabbath, they were said simultaneously because it is not. Also, the prohibition against marrying a brother's wife was said simultaneously with the commandment to marry a brother's wife if he died without any children, as was the prohibition against swearing needlessly ("shav") and falsely ("sheker") and the qualification that a daughter that has no brothers who inherits her father must marry within the same tribe. In other words, whenever a law was given, all of the details, qualifications, exceptions, etc. were given with it simultaneously – and said in the same "utterance."

Besides explaining how G-d could have said the words in Shemos 20 at the same exact moment as those in Devarim 5, and how both could be an exact quote, it occurred to me that it can also explain why it was only the first two of the "10 Commandments" that we were able to hear (and understand) directly from G-d (Makos 24a), while for the other eight we needed Moshe to tell us what G-d was saying. If every nuance of each commandment was being said simultaneously, there would be so many "voices" that it would be impossible to discern any single one of them by itself. But this would only be true for the last eight of the commandments we heard directly from G-d. The commandment regarding G-d's existence has no qualifications; no exceptions or details needed to be taught along with it to fully explain it. G-d exists, period. And so when He said "I am G-d," since this was the only "voice" that spoke, we were able to hear it loud and clear. Similarly, the second commandment, that there are no other powers or forces besides the One True G-d, has no ifs, ands, or buts. It's only G-d, nobody or nothing else. We were therefore able to hear G-d clearly on that one too. The rest of them, on the other hand, have multiple facets, and therefore multiple "voices" in the same utterance, and were indiscernible to all but Moshe.

As the Ramban put it (Shemos 20:7), "explain[ing] to [us] the tradition of our rabbis," "it is certain that all ten statements (i.e. the "10 Commandments") were heard by all of Israel from the 'mouth' of G-d, as the plain sense of the verses indicate. However, by the first two statements they heard the statements and understood them from Him just as Moshe understood them. From that point

forward, by the rest of the statements, they heard the voice (sound) of the statement but did not understand it, and needed Moshe to translate/explain to them each and every statement." Based on the above, we can understand why. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion - according to many commentators, including Rashi - makes it clear that G-d's words to the Jewish people were not all recorded in the ones found in the Torah. We are told in this parsha, "and you shall slaughter as I've commanded you" (Deuteronomy 12:21). One would expect the details of how to slaughter to be spelled out-after all G-d says "as I've commanded you." Yet, nowhere in the Torah are the specifics of how to ritually slaughter mentioned. It follows then that the details, as our text indicates, were spelled out by G-d, although they're not found anywhere in the Torah text.

This is not the only place where this phenomenon occurs. The Torah, for example, states "observe the Sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:12). Yet, the specifics of how to observe the Shabbat are not found in the Torah.

All this points to a divine aspect of the Torah that was given alongside the written text, this is known as the Torah she-be'al peh, the Oral Law. Additionally, not only were many of G-d's words transmitted orally, but also the words of our sages were designated to be passed through the oral tradition.

This begs a fundamental question: Why was there a need to have an oral transmission - why wasn't it all written down? Several answers come to mind.

Ironically, transmission of ideas through the generations is more exact through the oral legacy. Once written, especially in ancient times when very few copies existed, it was easy for one scribe to tinker with texts and change them, whether purposefully or not. For this reason, many forms of contemporary law, are not written down.

Another possibility: Had everything been written down, it would have sent the message that rabbinic law is closed and that the process of interpretation had come to a halt. The oral transmission sent the message that rabbis in each generation, basing themselves on the earlier text and principles of developing the law, could continue to evaluate and contribute to an understanding in their own particular times.

One last thought. Had everything been written down, a rebbe, a teacher of Torah would have been unnecessary-after all, it's all in the book. The oral transmission made a rebbe, a living person who could teach and lead by example, indispensable. Ultimately, such personalities are necessary for Torah to be sustained. In time, however, the Jewish community was no longer capable of remembering the oral dictates, and

hence, we were left with no choice but to commit the oral law to writing. The challenge, even as we study the oral law from a written text, is to recognize why it was, at first, not put to paper-to remember the precision of the law, that it is ongoing, and it requires a rebbe, a living role model, to teach it. Through both avenues; through the oral and the written, the Torah of G-d remains dynamic and alive. © 2008 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 YEHUDAH PRERO

Project Genesis

We are now in the final days of the Three Weeks, the period of time between the fasts of the 17th of Tamuz and the 9th of Av. These three weeks are spent in a state of mourning. We do not conduct weddings, we do not cut our hair, and we refrain from enjoying music. During the last nine days, we do not eat meat, drink wine, nor do we bathe. The sorrow of our exile surrounds us at every moment during this time of the year. While we are to mourn the loss of the Holy Temple, the Bais HaMikdosh and the destruction of Jerusalem, and pray for the end of this lengthy exile, we must remember that Hashem is with us, watching us, ready to lift the burden of exile from upon us at the proper time.

R' Avrohom Pam writes that we see in the Torah how G-d watches out for us. In Bereshis, we read how the sons of Yaakov disliked their brother Yosef. When the opportunity presented itself, the brothers took Yosef and sold him as a slave to peddlers, who eventually sold him into slavery in Egypt. Before the Torah continues relating the travails of Yosef, the Torah tells us how Yehudah left his brothers, married, and had children. Yehudah's wife died, and subsequent to that, his oldest son died as well. Yehudah's second son married his brother's widow, and he died as well. Yehudah was worried that if his third son married this woman (as the laws of Yibum [Devarim 25:5] dictate) he might perish as well, and therefore Yehudah did not permit the marriage to occur. Tamar, Yehudah's daughter-in-law, devised a plan that resulted in her bearing the children of Yehudah himself. The dynasty of kings beginning with David came from this union, and therefore Moshiach, the Messiah, was descended from this union as well.

The question that arises upon beginning this relation of events is its position in the Torah. Why was this "story" juxtaposed with the sale of Yosef as a slave? The Medrash Rabbah (85:1) writes: " 'And it came to pass at that time,' R. Shmuel b. Nachman commenced with this: 'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the L-rd, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.' (Yirmiyah 29: 11). The tribes were engaged in selling Yosef,

Yaakov was taken up with his sackcloth and fasting, and Yehudah was busy taking a wife, while the Holy One, blessed be He, was creating the light of Messiah: thus, 'And it came to pass at that time...' 'Before she labored, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a son. (Yishaya 66: 7). Before the last who shall enslave [Israel] was born, the first redeemer was born."

Yosef's sale as a slave in Egypt was the first link in a long chain of events that culminated with the entire nation of Israel being enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Yet, even as the seeds of our exile were planted, the seeds of redemption were being sowed. The ancestor of Moshiach was born. The Torah wanted to illustrate that even at the moment when we believe we are beginning our downfall, that we will suffer, Hashem is preparing our redemption and salvation. Therefore, the story of Yehudah and Tamar was placed amidst the relation of the events surrounding Yosef's enslavement.

Rav Pam notes that we see another instance of G-d's preparing for redemption even before the exile occurs. Before his death, Yaakov called for his son Yosef. Before blessing the children of Yosef, Yaakov explained something to Yosef (Bereshis 48:7): "And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath; which is Beth-Lechem." The commentator Rashi explains that Yaakov wanted Yosef to understand why Rachel was buried where she was. Yaakov wanted Yosef to know that even though he wanted Rachel to be buried in a more fitting location. However, Hashem decreed that Rachel be buried along the road to Bais Lechem so that she could come to the aid of her children. When the nation would be exiled in the time of Nevuzradan, trudging along the path near her grave, Rachel would see the pain of her people. She would cry and plead to G-d for mercy for her children. Therefore, Yaakov explained, Rachel had to be buried where she was, so that she would later come to the effective aid of her children.

G-d knew that the nation of Israel would be exiled. Yet, he prepared for Rachel to be there to intercede on behalf of the nation of Israel during their time of need. G-d remembers His children at all times. Even prior to the plan for our exile being set in motion, G-d prepared for redemption and salvation. G-d is truly with us always. Yaakov had to be sure that before he died, Yosef understood that Rachel's burial place carried with it long standing significance.

We have been in exile for a long time. Our families have been subject to spiritual and physical persecution. During the Three Weeks, our behavior reflects the sadness of this time period, the recognition of the great suffering which we still endure. Although we mourn and lament, we must still keep in mind that Hashem is watching over us. He has already put in place the mechanisms for our redemption. We cannot

allow that spark of hope within us to be extinguished. We must recognize that the exile will end. That end has been planned for and provided for by G-d. With our striving to be better people, with our repenting, our studying of the Torah, the redemption, our light at the end of the tunnel, is clearly within sight. © 2000 Rabbi Y. Prero and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira

Rosh Yeshiva, Ramat Gan

In the last article, we discussed the spirit? "ruach"? and its place in the national conscience. We wrote that the ruach represents the culture of a nation, and that in Yisrael this culture is centered on the Oral Torah and the creativity involved in being occupied with it.

This discussion might have seemed to imply that we are not related in depth to secular culture. But this is not so. Our nation is linked to all the elements of human life and happiness, as long as it is not an expression of the lowest levels of human life. We are part of every intellectual movement, we are related to the roots of scientific innovations, and we are certainly linked to every moral demand? even if it does not stem directly from the Torah.

Many points of contact link us to the entire population of the earth: The shared bodily needs of all mankind, and the various realms of living, such as commerce, economics, industry, agriculture, and the army. In these realms we operate in parallel with the other nations, and we cooperate with them. However, the existence of this cooperative element does not blur the sharp line between being "a nation that dwells alone" [Bamidbar 23:9] and our joining together with other nations. Rather, because of the division, our cooperation with the other nations takes on a different appearance.

Our special culture is what makes us unique with respect to every other nation. We have something that no other nation has, and this is our glory. All of the universal matters that we listed above are not our natural habitat. Our innermost link is reserved for the point of holiness, and this is in its very essence at a higher level than the realms of the other nations. The gap between the holy and the secular is immeasurably greater than the gap between man and beast. But the command for us to be holy is based on the properties of the underlying secular layer. In the light of the Torah which was given to us all the different parts of our lives become infused with glory when they are used as the basis for creating a "kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation" [Shemot 19:6]. And that is the basis for insisting that the only culture of Bnei Yisrael is the Torah, even if they are interested in and have a need for the various segments of secular life.

I often find the need to address this issue in various different frameworks where I have the privilege of being a teacher. I have developed a standard response to the matter. I bring to the lesson a copy of "Mamarei Ha'Reiya", the collected works of Rabbi A.Y. Kook, and open it on page 502 to read from an article about literature: "My demand from Hebrew literature is very different from my demand from general literature. When I turn to general literature, I am interested in such matters as politics, sociology, and all the other elements that drive the spirit of mankind. With respect to this material, I am a human being just like every other human being, and I am not missing any human trait. But when I enter the realms of our own literature, I remove my shoes, because I am about to enter a holy realm..."

After I have read this passage, I tell my listeners that these are not the words of Rabbi Kook but that they were written by another author? Azar (Alexander Ziskind Rabinowitz). His letter to a newspaper is quoted in the book because Rabbi Kook reacted to it very harshly. Rabbi Kook wrote: "You have gone too far, sir. You have overstepped the bounds by demanding that our literature should only be concerned with questions of eternity. I find it hard to believe that these words, which are totally removed from real life, were written by an educated man who knows the world and is familiar with life as you are. I can only put the blame for this negative approach on the unclear nature of the exile, which continues to twitch within your soul."

Rabbi Kook wrote harsh words. He was certainly aware that this question is one of the key elements which arise before us on the path to rejuvenation of Yisrael and full national revival. The link to holiness is an integral part of our souls, and it is absolutely necessary to maintain the purity of this link and its supremacy. The goal of sanctity is not to curtail the flow of life, but rather to enhance and glorify it. The meaning of a full life is to take care of every element, without leaving any corner behind.

Let us end with the continued words of Rabbi Kook: "We must not restrict our literature to the halls of the holy, as you wrote, rather we must broaden the limits of the holy to encompass all of the secular life and all of its requirements, including all the science that is needed? 'On that day, on the bells of the horses will be written the words, Holy to G-d' [Zecharia 14:20]." © 2007 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Don't Forget

In Parshas Voeschanan we find the very famous portions of the Torah that are imbedded in the soul of the nation: The Ten Commandments and the Shema Yisrael. Although every word of the Omnipotent carries equal force, these commanding portions are better known, if not better observed, by the nation.

But powerful as they are, they were not given in a vacuum. Moshe forewarns the nation not to forget the message of Sinai and to impart its message and its relevance to future generations. "Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:9). In order to comprehend the posuk, it must be separated into two distinct parts. "Beware not to forget the things that your eyes have beheld from your heart all your days." In addition, the Torah adds, "you shall teach the Torah to your children and children's children."

Nevertheless, the grammar is surely questionable, "lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children." In its simplest form, the verse seems at best contradictory. Look at the words. Beware that you do not remove the teachings from your heart and make them known to your children. How is that possible? If one removes the teaching from his own heart, how can he pass it to his children? The Torah should have overtly inserted some phrase or word clarifying the transition. The perplexing composition in its simplest form surely leaves for a creative interpretation, perhaps the omission of the transitional word lends itself to a drash that deviates from the obvious meaning.

Thousands of people receive this weekly D'var Torah. In return, I receive many stories for possible use as anecdotal parables. Here is one from the archives.

Junior came home from day camp one day without towel. "Where is your towel?" asked his mom.

"I don't know," he sighed. "I could not find it after swimming. Maybe someone took it."

The mother was irate. "Who could have taken your towel? It was a great towel! Junior you would never take someone else's towel. You know I raised you differently than that. Right?"

A few moments later, she was on the phone with the day camp director. "Hello. There is a young thief in your camp!"

"How so?"

"My son had a towel stolen from camp! He brought it in today and it was nowhere"

"Calm down," came the voice on the line. "I am sure that no one stole it. Please describe the towel to me."

"Sure I can! It was white and big. You could not miss it. It had the words Holiday Inn emblazoned on it!"

The Leket Amarim interprets the verse in its purest and most simplistic form, revealing a deeper meaning that belies the simplicity of the verse.

"Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children."

Often when it comes to our actions, we forget the principles that we were taught as youngsters, but we remember them when chiding our children and pontificating. We may give our children a speech about honesty and integrity, and only minutes later command them to tell a caller on the telephone that, "my father is not home." We may give speeches about integrity and corporate greed only to have pushed our own portfolios in a certain direction through creative manipulation.

And so, the Torah warns us not to forget its principles for ourselves yet to teach them to our children. Consistency is the message of the moment. For yourself. For your children. For eternity. © 2002 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

RABBI ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

They sinned doubly, as it says, "Jerusalem has sinned a sin." And they were stricken doubly, as it says, "She has received double for her sins." And she will be comforted doubly, as it says, "Be comforted, be comforted, my people." (Yalkut Eichah 1118)

This Midrash can be understood in light of the comments of Ibn Ezra and Sforno on the concluding verses of our parsha: "When your son will ask you in the future-What are the testimonies and statutes and judgments, which G-d our G-d has commanded you? -- and you shall tell your son we were slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out of Egypt with a strong hand... and G-d commanded us to do all these statutes for our good all the days, to give us life as this day" (Deut. 6:20-24).

Ibn Ezra explains that the son's question is not what the mitzvot are, but why we were given a yoke different than all other peoples. The Torah's answer is that we must have trust that the mitzvot are for our own good, because G-d saved us from slavery by taking us out of Egypt. Sforno elaborates that while the benefit of mitzvot is predominantly in the World to Come, they also bring us life in this world.

G-d introduces Himself at the beginning of the Ten Commandments as the G-d Who took us out of Egypt, and not as the G-d Who created heaven and earth. This reminds us that just as the redemption from Egypt was for our benefit, so too, the mitzvot are for our good, and not for G-d's sake. Though, as the Sages say, mitzvot were not given to us to enjoy, but rather as a yoke around our necks; the purpose of that yoke is, in the final analysis, our good.

The Haggadah attributes the Torah's question here to the wise son. The answer given to him in the Haggadah is that we do not eat after the Korban Pesach is all that is in our mouths at the moment of redemption. In the end, it is the benefit from mitzvot, such as eating the Korban Pesach, that remains with us. The Torah begins with G-d's loving kindness-His clothing Adam and Eve- and ends with His loving

kindness-burying Moses. The entire foundation of Torah is chesed-G-d's total giving to those who serve Him. The Torah is, in its entirety, an expression of G-d's desire to do good for us. It is not an imposition on our life, but rather a framework within to earn eternal reward for our own good.

Delving deeper, Torah begins with the kindness of covering man's humiliation, his physical body. It gives us the means to utilize that body in G-d's service and thereby purify and elevate it. Moses was the culmination of this process of elevation to being G-d-like. He transformed his physical body into something so holy that only G-d could bury it and put it away until the resurrection of the dead. That is the very essence of Torah- to remove the shame of pure physicality by elevating the physical to G-dliness.

When one sins, he actually commits a double crime: the first is rebellion against G-d; the second against himself in his disregard of the benefit from the mitzvah. Hence the punishment is also double. Not only does G-d punish him for his rebellion, just as a parent punishes a child to discipline him and guide him back to the right path. He also robs himself of the great benefit G-d so much desired to bestow upon him.

Consequently the comfort will also be double. The ultimate benefit will finally be realized, and, in addition, we will understand that the punishment itself was for our own good to prevent us from losing our eternal reward. © 2008 Rabbi Z. Leff and aish.com

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The most famous sentence in the Torah is found in this week's Torah portion, Va'etchanan: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is One." (Deuteronomy 6:4) The last letter (Ayin) of the Hebrew word for "Hear" (Shema) is written large, as is the last letter (Daled) of the Hebrew word for "One" (Echad). What's the significance of these changes?

Rabbi Avi Weiss proposes a unique explanation: Maybe the letters are large to teach us that the smallest of changes could pervert the meaning of a text. For example, if one would read the Shema as having an Aleph as its last letter (after all the Aleph and Ayin are both silent letters), the word Shema would mean "perhaps" (sheh-mah). This would change a firm declaration of belief into an expression of doubt! And if the Daled would be mistaken for a Reish (after all, there is only a slight difference in the writing of a Daled and Reish), the word echad (One) would be read acher (other). This would change belief in One G-d into a belief in two gods!

As we move towards Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, all of us ought be careful with every word, every gesture and every action. Because in life, the smallest differences makes all the difference in the world. © 2004 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.