

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

I want, in this study, to look at one of Judaism's most distinctive and least understood characteristics - the chronological imagination.

The modern world was shaped by four revolutions: the English, the American, the French and the Russian. Two - the English and American - were inspired by the Hebrew Bible which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, because of the Reformation and the invention of printing, became widely available for the first time. The French and Russian revolutions, by contrast, were inspired by philosophy: the French by the work of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Russian by the writings of Karl Marx.

Their histories are markedly different. In England and America, revolution brought war, but led to a gradual growth of civil liberties, human rights, representative government and eventually democracy. The French and Russian revolutions began with dreams of utopia and ended in a nightmare of hell. Both gave rise to terror and bloodshed and the repression of human rights.

What is the difference between philosophy and the political vision at the heart of Tenakh? The answer lies in their different understandings of time.

The sedra of Behar sets out a revolutionary template for a society of justice, freedom and human dignity. At its core is the idea of the Jubilee, whose words ("Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof") are engraved on one of the great symbols of freedom, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. One of its provisions is the release of slaves: If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you, do not work him like a slave. He shall be with you like an employee or a resident. He shall serve you only until the jubilee year and then he and his children shall be free to leave you and return to their family and to the hereditary land of their ancestors. For they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of

Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. Do not subjugate them through hard labour - you shall fear your G-d . . . For the children of Israel are servants to Me: they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt - I am the Lord your G-d.

The terms of the passage are clear. Slavery is wrong. It is an assault on the human condition. To be "in the image of G-d" is to be summoned to a life of freedom. The very idea of the sovereignty of G-d means that He alone has claim to the service of mankind. Those who are G-d's servants may not be slaves to anyone else. At this distance of time it is hard to recapture the radicalism of this idea, overturning as it did the very foundations of religion in ancient times. The early civilizations - Mesopotamia, Egypt - were based on hierarchies of power which were seen to inhere in the very nature of the cosmos. Just as there were (so it was believed) ranks and gradations among the heavenly bodies, so there were on earth. The great religious rituals and monuments were designed to mirror and endorse these hierarchies. In this respect Karl Marx was right. Religion in antiquity was the robe of sanctity concealing the naked brutality of power. It canonized the status quo.

At the heart of Israel was an idea almost unthinkable to the ancient mind: that G-d intervenes in history to liberate slaves - that the supreme Power is on the side of the powerless. It is no accident that Israel was born as a nation under conditions of slavery. It has carried throughout history the memory of those years - the bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of servitude - because the people of Israel serves as an eternal reminder to itself and the world of the moral necessity of liberty and the vigilance needed to protect it. The free G-d desires the free worship of free human beings.

Yet the Torah does not abolish slavery. That is the paradox at the heart of Behar. To be sure it was limited and humanized. Every seventh day, slaves were granted rest and a taste of freedom. In the seventh year Israelite slaves were set free. If they chose otherwise they were released in the Jubilee year. During their years of service they were to be treated like employees. They were not to be subjected to back-breaking or spirit-crushing labour. Everything dehumanizing about slavery was forbidden. Yet slavery itself was not banned. Why not? If it was wrong, it should have been annulled. Why did the Torah allow a fundamentally flawed institution to continue?

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in memory of

Shari Tokarski, ל"ז

And in honor of the Tokarski family
המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבילי ציון וירושלים
May your happy memories be a comfort

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It was Moses Maimonides in *The Guide for the Perplexed* who explained the need for time in social transformation. All processes in nature, he argued, are gradual. The foetus develops slowly in the womb. Stage by stage a child becomes mature. And what applies to individuals applies to nations and civilizations: It is impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other. It is therefore, according to the nature of man, impossible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed.

Accordingly, G-d did not ask of the Israelites that they suddenly abandon everything they had become used to in Egypt. "G-d refrained from prescribing what the people by their natural disposition would be incapable of obeying." But surely G-d can do anything, including changing human nature. Why then did He not simply transform the Israelites, making them capable immediately of the highest virtue? Maimonides' answer is simple:

I do not say this because I believe that it is difficult for G-d to change the nature of every individual person. On the contrary, it is possible and it is in His power . . . but it has never been His will to do it, and it never will be. If it were part of His will to change the nature of any person, the mission of the prophets and the giving of the Torah would have been superfluous.

In miracles, G-d changes nature but never human nature. Were He to do so, the entire project of the Torah - the free worship of free human beings - would have been rendered null and void. There is no greatness in programming a million computers to obey instructions. G-d's greatness lay in taking the risk of creating a being, homo sapiens, capable of choice and responsibility - of obeying G-d freely.

G-d wanted mankind to abolish slavery but by their own choice, and that takes time. Ancient economies were dependent on slavery. The particular form dealt with in Behar (slavery through poverty) was the functional equivalent of what is today called "workfare", i.e. welfare benefit in return for work. Slavery as such was not abolished in Britain and America until the nineteenth century, and in America not without a civil war. The challenge to which Torah legislation was an answer is: how can one create a social structure in which, of their own accord, people will eventually come to see slavery as wrong and freely choose to abandon it?

The answer lay in a single deft stroke: to change slavery from an ontological condition ("what am I?") to a temporary circumstance. No Israelite was allowed to be or see himself as a slave. He or she might be reduced to slavery for a period of time, but this was a passing plight, not an identity. Compare the account given by Aristotle: By analogy, must necessarily apply to mankind as a whole. Therefore all men who differ from one another by as much as the soul differs from the body or man from a wild beast . . . these people are slaves by nature, and it is better for them to be subject to this kind of control, as it is better for the other creatures I have mentioned. For a man who is able to belong to another person is by nature a slave . . . (Politics 1.5)

For Aristotle, slavery is an ontological condition, a fact of birth. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled. This is precisely the worldview to which Torah is opposed. The entire complex of biblical legislation is designed to ensure that neither the slave nor his owner should ever see slavery as a permanent condition. A slave should be treated "like an employee or a resident," in other words, with the respect due to a free human being. In this way the Torah ensured that, although slavery could not be abolished overnight, it would eventually be. And so it happened.

There are profound differences between philosophy and Judaism, and one lies in their respective understandings of time. For Plato and his heirs, philosophy is about the truth that is timeless (or for Hegel and Marx, about "historical inevitability"). Judaism is about truths (like human freedom) that are realised in and through time. That is the difference between what I call the logical and chronological imaginations. The logical imagination yields truth as system. The chronological imagination yields truth as story (a story is a sequence of events extended through time). Revolutions based on philosophical systems fail - because change in human affairs takes time, and philosophy is incapable of understanding the human dimension of time. The inevitable result is that (in Rousseau's famous phrase) they "force men to be free" - a contradiction in terms, and the reality of life under Soviet Communism. Revolutions based on Tenakh succeed, because they go with the grain of human nature, recognizing that it takes time for people to change. The Torah did not abolish slavery but it set in motion a process that would lead people to come of their own accord to the conclusion that it was wrong. How it did so is one of the wonders of history. © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“If your brother becomes impoverished and his support is faltering when he is with you, you must strengthen him, the stranger and resident [ger

vetoshav], so that his life may be preserved with you." (Leviticus 25:35)

Now that after 2,000 years of exile, we have returned to our homeland and become a nation-state, we are faced with new challenges for which we must find solutions. These solutions must accord with the compassionate righteousness and moral justice which it is Israel's mission to teach to the world, without compromising our security. One of these new challenges is our relationship to the Arab minority that lives in our midst. Our millennia-old Biblical and Talmudic traditions certainly contain meaningful directions for meeting this challenge.

There are many places in the Bible where the term *ger*, usually translated either as "stranger" or "convert," appears. The key to the most proper translation of this word is the directive that emerged directly from the Exodus: "You shall love the *ger*, because you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt." (Leviticus 19:34) We were total strangers to the Egyptians, who therefore dehumanized us and enslaved us. We are enjoined to treat the "other" or the stranger-clearly in this context the non-Jew-with love rather than discrimination and persecution.

Undoubtedly, there are biblical verses in which *ger* means "convert," and there are cases in which *ger* means "stranger." In the context cited above, the verse enjoins us to help the "*ger vetoshav*," the stranger who is also a resident, thereby creating a new category, the resident-alien. Maimonides defines this category in his great Jewish law compendium *Mishneh Torah* as follows: "Who is a *ger toshav*? He is an idolater who accepts upon himself no longer to serve idols and to keep the other commandments which were commanded to the Noahides [not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to eat the blood or limb of a living animal, not to blaspheme G-d and to establish law courts]. This individual is not circumcised and has not ritually immersed, but he is accepted as one of the pious of the nations of the world. And why is he called a resident *ger*? Because he is permitted to live among us in the Land of Israel." (Laws of Forbidden Relationships 14:7-8)

Since the rabbis were speaking of a situation like today, when the majority of Israel's residents are Jews, this discussion refers to a minority group of non-Jewish residents. We may allow them residence here as long as they keep the fundamental laws of ethics and morality which protect the inviolability of every human being and certainly of the Jewish majority among whom they are living. It is interesting to note that Maimonides grants them permission to live "among us." This is based on the verses (Deuteronomy 23:16-17): "You may not return a runaway slave [clearly a gentile] to his master if he has sought refuge with you. He must dwell with you, in your midst, in the place of his choice, in any of your gates which is good for him; you shall not

oppress him." These verses were written 4,000 years ago.

The 1896 American Supreme Court case of *Plessy vs Ferguson* decided that Blacks in America could be forced to live separately as long as they lived equally. This meant they could be barred from White schools, White neighborhoods, and White sections of the bus. It was not until 1954, in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, that the Supreme Court overturned its earlier decision and ruled that separate was not equal. Our Torah understood 4,000 years ago that not entitling a resident to live anywhere he chooses (as long as he can afford it) constitutes an act of oppression.

The verses cited above from this week's biblical portion go even further. The Ramban (Nahmanides), in his comments on Maimonides's Book of Commandments, writes the following: "We are commanded to preserve the life of a resident alien, and to save him from evil. If he is drowning in a river or a heap of stones has fallen on him, we must labor with all our strength in order to save him, and if he is sick, we must engage in his healing... and this is considered to be for them [the resident aliens] a matter of preserving a life, which pushes aside Shabbat restrictions. And this is what the Bible teaches: 'If your brother becomes impoverished and his support is faltering when he is with you, you must strengthen him, the stranger and resident (*ger vetoshav*), so that his life may be preserved with you.'" (Positive Commandment 16)

What is most significant about these biblical verses is that the resident alien, who is uncircumcised and has not ritually immersed-and is therefore not at all Jewish, in fact or in potential-is nevertheless referred to as "our brother." I believe this is an excellent start to the way we must treat minorities who are completely moral, ethical residents of the State of Israel. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The book of Vayikra concludes with a description of Jewish destiny and a foretelling of dire events that that will befall the Jewish people. The clear message in this parsha, and as repeated later in the book of Dvarim and in the words of the prophets of Israel over the next millennium, is that the Jewish people and its behavior and society are held to a high standard of loyalty and piety.

The consequences of backsliding from these Torah standards are major and painful. G-d's relationship with the Jewish people is serious business and the unbreakable covenant between the Jewish people and the Creator is eternally present and binding.

Ramban and others ascribe the events portrayed in Vayikra to the times and destruction of the First Temple. The descriptions in Dvarim - which are

longer and more intense - refer to the times and destruction of the Second Temple and its millennia long aftermath in the exile of the Jewish people.

Also present and implicit in the difficult message communicated in this parsha, and in Dvarim as well, is the ultimate promise of G-d to preserve us and not completely forsake us. All of Jewish history, even until our very day, has lived up to these forecasts and events as recorded for us in the parsha.

The Ramban counts as one of the proofs of Torah's divinity the fact that words written and taught so many centuries earlier than the actual event would eventually take place are accurate, detailed and cogent.

The book of Vayikra is replete with laws, ritual commandments, sacrificial service, purity and impurity and the technical details of being a Jew. It has very little narrative to it and it is the most scholarly difficult of all of the books of the Torah. If the Torah's objective was to induce people to a so-called user friendly faith, then this is not the book that should have been presented.

But the Torah is integrity itself. Therefore, in Jewish tradition the law demands that those who apply for conversion to Judaism should initially be discouraged and not enticed into thinking that somehow becoming Jewish guarantees paradise in this world or even the next. The rewards of Judaism are great but there are costs, responsibilities and sacrifices that accompany those rewards.

And, an awareness of those costs is necessary for true Jewish commitment. Jewish history is not to be seen as a random occurrence of events. It is rather part of the actual results of the covenant entered into between Israel and the Creator at Sinai. Everything that was foretold in such detail and exactness in the Torah, as to what would befall Israel in its long journey through history and civilization, has in effect occurred and happened.

It is at once sobering to see how this has unfolded in Jewish life. But it is also encouraging, for it guarantees the fulfillment of the blessings of the Torah upon Israel as formulated in this week's parsha. The covenant in all of its parts reigns forever. © 2013 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 YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

“**A**nd you will count seven Shmitah {Sabbatical} cycles -- seven years, seven times -- forty-nine years... and you will sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom in the land for all of its inhabitants. [25:8-10]”

The Yovel {Jubilee} year heralded the freeing of all slaves. The standard six year term of slavery would be prematurely terminated with the advent of Yovel.

Even those who had voluntarily committed themselves to continued slavery upon the conclusion of their six year term were slaves no longer once Yovel arrived.

Over the course of time, many family fields would be sold. Yovel would automatically return the land to the original owners.

We see that Yovel was certainly a proclamation of freedom for many but why is it described as a proclamation of freedom for all of its inhabitants?

Our lines get blurred when it comes to ownership. That's mine. I've earned it. I've got to earn more. Life gets so busy; we find that we never have a free moment. Time is money.

According to Rav Moshe Shternbuch, Yovel grants a person a clear perspective. I'm the master over no one and no thing. Hashem appoints me for a stint and then it passes on to someone else. I got a great deal on that field, now it goes back to its owner. This servant really had my home running smoothly, he now returns to his home. The soul had become subservient to the physical needs being over-filled -- it is now freed.

On the fiftieth year, freedom is proclaimed in the land for all of its inhabitants. Each and every individual prioritizes. There's a sense of freedom.

The famed Rav Aryeh Levin lived in the Old City of Yerushalayim in a one room home. When asked by a journalist how he could possibly be comfortable living in such a way, he responded with his view of his accommodations. "The room is higher than I am; I do not have to bend down to move about. I never run to a third room to get something that I need. Everything is at hand right here in this room. I live like a king!"

The proverbial half-filled glass. Yovel revealing that freedom and shaping our attitude to recognize and appreciate that reality. The ex-owners gain a freedom. Perhaps, a freedom even more profound than that of the ex-slaves. © 2013 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg,

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The Rambam rules that the sanctity of both Jerusalem and the Temple itself will never be cancelled. "However, it is written, 'And I will make your Temples desolate' [Vayikra 26:31]. The sages explained that even when they are desolate they maintain their sanctity." [Hilchot Beit Habechira 6:16].

The book "Doresh Tzion" -- a collection of sermons by the founders of the settlements in Eretz Yisrael who were disciples of the GRA -- includes a sermon by Rabbi Yosef Hasofer from the year 5626 (1866). In his talk he links the counting of the Omer and the holiday of giving the Torah to the sanctity of Jerusalem.

The counting of the Omer begins right after Pesach, when Bnei Yisrael were extricated from forty-

nine levels of impurity. Every day they left behind one impurity and in parallel they entered into a higher level of purity. On Shavuot they reached the fiftieth gate, at the highest level of purity. Thus mitzva of counting was given to the later generations because these days between Pesach and Shavuot are unique days in which impurity can be replaced by holiness. And that is the reason that we begin the days of the count with a sacrifice of barley, a food for animals, and end with wheat. "Go out and declare in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, This is what G-d said: I remember for you the kindness of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the desert..." [Yirmiyahu 2:2]. Jerusalem (above) followed G-d through the desert. And Jerusalem down below is in touch with Jerusalem above, "as a city which has been joined together" [Tehillim 122:3]. That explains why we say after the counting of the Omer every night that we want to be "purified and sanctified by a holiness from above" -- the sanctity of Jerusalem in heaven.

(Experts in hidden meanings have counted the letters, and they find that the numerical values of "Kneset Yisrael," "Yerushalayim shel Maala," and "Sefirat Ha'Omer" are all the same, a value equal to 1071.)

Thus, the days of the counting of the Omer have a potential for a great uplifting, and for the highest level of holiness. However, they can also be a time of a great downfall, and this means that during this time a person must be very careful.

We note that there are two special days during the Omer which are not under the control of "evil shells" -- these are the twentieth and the forty-second days of the Omer, and that this is well known by those with knowledge of mysticism. Because of this, when the disciples of the GRA began their activities in Eretz Yisrael and in settling in Jerusalem in the year 5572 (1812), they made sure to do their activities on those two days. What is even more amazing is that these two days correspond to the fifth of Iyar, the date of Yom Haatzmaut, and the twenty-seventh of Iyar, the day when the main capture of Jerusalem took place in the Six Day War.

Based on the concept noted above that Jerusalem accompanied Yisrael in the desert, Rabbi Neventzal developed a remarkable thought. In the war against Amalek, Moshe stood "on the top of the hill" [Shemot 17:10]. The use of the word "the" implies a specific identifiable hill. This refers to Jerusalem, as is written, "To the mountain of Mor and to the hill of Levona" [Shir Hashirim 4:6]. And "rosh hagiv'ah," the top of the hill, is the same in numerical value as Yerushalayim. We know that as long as Amalek continues to exist the Throne of G-d is not complete, as is written, "for there is a hand on the Throne of G-d" [Shemot 17:16], where the word "kess" is a throne, but is written without the letter aleph. The Throne of G-d is Jerusalem, as is written, "At that time Jerusalem will be

called the Throne of G-d" [Yirmiyahu 3:17]. This explains why the war centered on Jerusalem. Rabbi Neventzal quotes from his teacher, Rabbi Perchovitz, who calculated that the day when Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael in the desert was the twenty-eighth of Iyar. "The conclusion could not be more startling than this. The war of Bnei Yisrael against Amalek took place on Mount Moriah, on the twenty-eighth day of Iyar!" © 2013 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

RABBI AVI HELLER

Weekly Dose of Torah

Counting is a major part of the Jewish tradition. The very first section of the Torah enumerates the seven days of creation, counting out each day and culminating in Shabbat. The Torah repeatedly counts the children of Israel, the years of the slavery in Egypt, the life spans of Biblical figures, the 40 years in the desert and the ten devarim, or declarations. The Rabbis extended this, counting the 613 mitzvot, the 10 utterances with which the world was created, the four categories of damagers, the seven traits of a wise person, the four children of the seder and a hundred others.

The Hebrew word for scribe, "sofer", literally means one who counts, or measures. Some of the scribes who were so essential to transmitting the Torah text through the centuries wrote marginal notes (which can still be found in some versions of the Bible) called the Massora, in which they counted the words and letters of the text, including how many times and where each word in the Tanach occurred.¹

Our tradition is constantly seeking to plumb the depths of meaning from the Torah, which is the meaning of "midrash", delving, or seeking into, the text. One of these techniques is called gematria. In Hebrew, letters can stand for either themselves (as parts of a word) or as numbers. Thus, any given word in Hebrew is not only a collection of letters, but also a collection of numbers. The word Torah, for instance, means not only "the way" or "teaching" but also has the numeric value of 611. According to our tradition, the first 2 of the 10 commandments were given directly by G-d to the Israelites. Thus, Torah (611) plus the first 2 commandments equal 613, the familiar number that is the grand total of all the Torah commandments.²

Even letters can be 'counted.' The letter "aleph", when written by a scribe, is made of three smaller letters joined together, two yuds and a diagonal vav. The gematria of these letters is 26, which is also the gematria of G-d's four-letter name (the one usually

¹ It can still be found in some versions. This Massora is different than the word "mesora", which usually refers to our tradition as it is handed down from generation to generation.

² This is sometimes called "Taryag" mitzvot, because taryag is the acronym for 613, i.e. tav-resch-yud-gimel.

mispronounced as Yahweh or Jehova.) Thus, the answer to the question "who knows one?" (the answer is G-d, the One and Only One and the gematria of the letter aleph is one) is also the gematria of the Holy one, the Eternal one, who was, is and always will be.

There are a number of times during the year when we count time in particular. There are the 10 Days of Repentance and the three weeks of mourning in the summer, when both Temples were destroyed. We also count the days of Chanuka by adding a candle each day to our chanukiot. However, our most sustained and intense counting is the counting of the days of the omer, the 49 days between the beginning of Passover and Shavuot. The Torah commands us to actually make a blessing on the counting of the omer each day and to enumerate both the days and weeks of the omer count. (This Shabbat, for instance, is 39 days, which is five weeks and four days, of the omer.) The total count of 49 days culminates in the Shavuot festival on the 50th day, which corresponds conceptually with the Jubilee year, as is explained in the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Behar. (Lev. 25)

It has frequently been noted that we count the days of the omer in ascending order, not descending. Rather than having a ball drop into Times Square while we count down from 49 to 1, we count up from 1 to 49. A number of explanations have been offered for counting up, having to do with our building excitement (the closer we get, the more excited we are) or our optimism (it's not how many days are left in the cup, but how full of days the cup is). I don't disagree with any of these.

But it led me to observe that this is exactly the opposite of the ways in which we usually count in America and very consistent with the way the Torah always counts. Most of the ways we count time in America are counting down. We count down to the new year, down the days until our next vacation and down the minutes until our work day is over. The only time we count up is for an event that has already happened, i.e. how old we are or what number anniversary we are at.³ We might round up to the dollar, but this is usually done to avoid counting, rather than for counting itself.⁴

The opposite is true in Judaism. In fact, I can hardly think of an example where we count down. On the holiday of Sukkot, the sacrifices diminish (each day we sacrifice one fewer lamb) which led Shamai to suggest that we light Chanuka candles by starting with

eight candles and taking one away each night. Needless to say, we embrace Hillel's view instead, in which we count up and add a candle each night. A friend suggested one other example: that Avraham - in negotiating with Hashem to save the cities of Sodom and 'Amorah, counted down from 50 righteous people to ten. (see Gen. 18) But this was hardly a positive thing; counting down was a desperate negotiation for their lives.

This leads me to believe that it is not only the omer, but a Jewish value in general to count up rather than down. It could be that we prefer to evaluate what we have gained rather than we have lost (a variation on the optimism theme) or perhaps that we count up to redemption. As we count up, we consider what we have gained and hope that it will lead to completion. Rather than counting down to when we can leave Egypt, we count the years of servitude as valuable (if painful) experiences that helped us appreciate our freedom. Rather than count down to when we can be done with the omer, we proudly display each day of our counting, like a merit badge. Perhaps this accords with one other way in which we tend to count up, when we are fundraising and put up one of those big thermometers to show how much we have raised already and how far we still have to go. Perhaps our Jewish approach to time and experience is similarly precious. "If you seek it like silver, and like treasure your pursue it, then you will understand awe of G-d and the knowledge of G-d you will find." (Proverbs 2:4)

I think the application to our own lives is clear. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers 4:1) advises us that the one who is "rich" is the one who rejoices in his portion, in what he has. Rather than viewing our time and or days as items to be leaped over and forgotten, pages of the calendar to be ripped off and discarded, we view our time as something that has enriched us, that we can call our own. May we follow the words of King David in Psalm 90, "limnot yameinu, kein hoda, v'ani l'av chochma", "by the count of our days, so may You teach us, that we may acquire a wise heart." © 2010 Rabbi A. Heller & The Manhattan Jewish Experience

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah in this week's reading proclaims that a house in a walled city may be sold in perpetuity, but the owner has the right of repurchase during the first year of the sale. (Leviticus 25:29,30--see commentary of Dr. J.H. Hertz)

Interestingly, the phrase "in a walled city" (lo—with a vav—homah) is written in the Torah "in an unwalled city" (lo—with an aleph—homah). Rashi explains this to indicate that the law applies to a city that has no walls today, as long as it had walls when Joshua conquered Israel.

³ But we may still count down the days until our next birthday or anniversary.

⁴ One large bank has an Add It Up feature, where they will take the amount of change up to the next dollar on any debit card purchase and automatically add it to your savings account. This would be a nice way to set aside tzedaka. Also, in the Nike plus pedometer, they count up (you have run 1 mile) until you have reached your halfway point, but then switch and count down until the end (you have 1 mile to go.) I'm not sure where to go with that, though.

A thought related to Jerusalem come to mind. After all, for 19 years Jerusalem was split in two with a wall dividing the new city from the old. Could it be that the Torah here hints to events of contemporary times when Jerusalem with its dividing wall (lo with a vav) will become a city without walls (lo with an aleph), forever one, forever united.

Rabbi Duschensky takes it a step further. The Torah may be suggesting that while the fortification of Jerusalem symbolized by walls is necessary for its defense, G-d's help is at least as important to protect the city. To paraphrase Rabbi Duschensky, only if we realize that Jerusalem has no walls (lo with an aleph)—in the sense that we cannot only rely on ourselves but on our Father in Heaven who gives us the power to defend ourselves—will the city have true walls (lo with a vav). (Be-Ikvei Parshiot)

And perhaps it can be added, that only when the inhabitants of Jerusalem remove the walls surrounding themselves, i.e., when the religious and irreligious come to love each other, will there be a city that is secure, at peace, whole—walled.

So the deflection from "walled city" to "unwalled city" has contemporary meaning especially during the week when we celebrate the reunification of Jerusalem (Yom Yerushalaim). It remains our challenge to see to it that Jerusalem never again be divided. And it remains our challenge to forever recognize that it is the spirit of G-d that makes Jerusalem the "City of Gold" (Yerushalaim Shel Zahav). Indeed, this will happen when we shed the barriers between ourselves.

Then Jerusalem will be what its name means—Yeru, Aramaic for city, of Shalom, eternally undivided (shalem), G-dly (Shalom is one of G-d's names) and at peace (shalom). Only then will Jerusalem without walls become a walled city. © 1998 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

After detailing the horrible things that will happen if we don't keep G-d's laws, we are reassured that things will never reach a point of no return. "And they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers, regarding the disloyalty they showed me, and even for having acted with me contrarily (or with casualness)" (26:40). One would expect the next verses to continue with G-d returning to them as well (as it eventually does); instead we are told that G-d will still "act contrarily (or with casualness) towards them," and "bring them into the land of their enemy" (26:41). Why is G-d still punishing us if we have already started the t'shuvah (repentance) process?

S'fornu suggests that different people are being referring to; those who confess (and repent) will no

longer be punished, while those who don't will be. Similarly, Abarbanel says that the leaders will confess (S'fornu implies it will be the leaders who confess), while the general populace continues to sin. However, the use of similar pronouns in the two verses seems to indicate that the same individuals who confessed will be the ones subject to punishment.

Ibn Ezra explains the punishments described after the confession to have previously occurred. He doesn't explain why it was written afterwards, or why being punished has to be mentioned again. Alshich points out that the punishment described after the confession is less severe than the punishment described earlier, as the casualness (or contrariness) had been "with fury" (26:28), and instead of being "dispersed among the nations" (26:33) they will be in exile in a single land. [I'm not convinced that "the land of their enemies" indicates fewer lands than "the land of your enemies" (26:34) does.] Or Hachayim is among those who say that the punishment mentioned after the confession is part of the confession itself, with the nation acknowledging that they had been experiencing G-d's punishment. However, the context and tense indicate that it G-d talking about what He will do, not those confessing discussing what He had done.

Others (e.g. Chizkuni) suggest that confession is not enough, and until a full repentance is undertaken, they will still be punished. Nevertheless, if this confession was not the start of a full t'shuvah process, why bother mentioning it? Was it just to teach us that confession without real change wouldn't suffice? Would confession prevent "melting in their sins" (26:39) even if it wouldn't prevent further punishment? A straightforward reading of the text indicates that the confession and subsequent punishment followed the "melting," not that they affected different people; otherwise the words "or then" should have been inserted to separate them, as they were between those who confess/get punished and those whose hearts become humbled (26:41). Rabbi Peretz Steinberg, shlita (Pri Eitz HaChayim) quotes the Talmud (Yuma 85b) and Rambam (Hilchos T'shuvah 1:4 and 2:4), which talk about attaining forgiveness, and that for some sins repentance alone isn't enough (see Tzror Hamor's second answer). If suffering and/or exile was necessary before the nation could be forgiven, we can understand why they had to happen even after repentance. However, there was plenty of suffering (and exile) already; why was more necessary?

One of the cornerstones of our faith is that G-d is still involved with His creations. Ramban (Sh'mos 13:16) says that the reason the Torah places such importance on remembering G-d taking us out of Egypt is because the miracles He performed prove that He did not just create the world and abandon it. However, G-d being active in the world He created does not necessarily mean that He intervenes on behalf of every creation, or even with every person, in every situation.

As Rabbeinu Bachye writes (B'raishis 18:19), "And His supervision of it (the world) to [the extent of] saving him (a person) from happenstance ("mikre") does not include every person, not even every "Yisrael," but rather the righteous among them. For the Holy One, Blessed is He, saves the righteous from the happenstances that the rest of humanity is given over to." In other words, one must attain a high spiritual level in order to qualify for personalized divine intervention. There is divine involvement with every individual vis-à-vis determining who deserves divine intervention and when, but that does not automatically translate into G-d directly affecting things on behalf of that individual.

This concept is not limited to people on an individual basis either, as the entire nation can be left to suffer the consequences of happenstance, or, if they merit G-d's attention, be protected from any potential danger. When Achan took some of the property from Y'richo despite the public ban against doing so (Y'hoshua 7:1), G-d was angry with the entire nation, not just Achan. As a result, their first attempt to conquer the city of Ai was unsuccessful, with 36 soldiers dying in the battle. Ralbag and Malbim ask how 36 individuals, who had no part in Achan's transgression, could be punished, and explain that Achan's sin caused the divine presence to leave the nation. Once we were no longer under G-d's divine protection, war casualties became possible. Had the entire nation still been deserving of G-d's intervention, these deaths would not have occurred. Similarly, when the verse in Eicha laments that "the young ones were taken captive" (1:5), Rabbi Yaakov of Lisa (a.k.a. the Nesivos), in Palgei Mayim, explains that since children are not yet accountable for their actions, punishment cannot be directed at them. The fact that these sin-less ones are being taken captive proves that the nation was no longer being protected by G-d.

While one must earn the privilege of divine intervention, because we have the ability to attain that level, Meiri (Sotah 2a, d"h mi'pinos) refers to being left to the consequences of happenstance as a punishment. It seems that by not attaching oneself to G-d (and thereby not qualifying for His protection), the individual "deserves" whatever happens. Ramban (Eyov 36:7) says that this "punishment" can even include loss of life despite there being no transgression that, in its own right, warrants the death penalty.

When a person has not attained (or no longer merits) divine intervention, does the suffering he endures subtract from the amount of suffering deserved for sins committed (besides deserving to be "thrown to the wolves")? This issue was addressed by Rabbi Y'honasan Eibeshitz (Y'aros D'vash 1:11): "There is no person who is [part of the nation of] Israel who is subject to [pure] happenstance. Rather, everything is either punishment or reward. However, the punishment is divided into two categories... The first category is when punishment is purposely sent by G-d in order to

punish him for his sin and to benefit him in the end. The second category is when he has bad "mazel," and according to the zodiac he will experience bad things, except that G-d protects him and defeats the heavenly hosts. And when he sins, G-d removes His supervision and leaves him to the norms of the world (e.g. the natural laws and the effects of human actions)... The difference between these two categories is that under the first category his sin will be cleansed and he will have received the full result of his sin (i.e. his full punishment), and then it will be good for him in the next world. However, under the second category there is no [direct] punishment, only the removal of G-d's supervision, and what happened to him was because of his "mazel" and the happenstances of his nature (genetics?), and his punishment is still completely intact for the day of reckoning." In other words, any consequence suffered because one is not worthy of divine protection is besides (not instead of) the eventual punishment to be received for any misdeeds. (This fits with Meiri considering the consequences of being subject to happenstance a punishment for not meriting divine protection; if these consequences are a punishment for that, how can they be the punishment for other, specific, sins too?)

If we apply this concept on a national level, the punishments received during the periods of expulsion and abandonment were designed to send a message to the nation, a spiritual wake up call. Once we heed the call, we can start the process of returning to G-d. However, the suffering experienced until then would not count towards the punishment due for the sins themselves, since that suffering was the result of "abandonment," being left unprotected and subject to happenstance, and "furious abandonment," being put in a situation where horrific things will occur as a result of being abandoned. Therefore, it is only after the t'shuvah process is underway that we can atone for our sins. First, we will confess (26:40), then the actual punishment comes, which will lead to our "sins being negated" (26:41).

It may be a little disconcerting that those not attached to G-d (and this applies to almost everybody, see S'fornu on Vayikra 13:47; make sure to see the unedited version, not the slightly sanitized standard edition) are vulnerable to anything and everything. It seems that G-d set up the world this way in order to motivate us to become closer to Him, so that we can merit His divine protection. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

