

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

One of the gifts of great leaders, and one from which each of us can learn, is that they frame reality for the group. They define its situation. They specify its aims. They articulate its choices. They tell us where we are and where we are going in a way no satellite navigation system could. They show us the map and the destination, and help us see why we should choose this route not that. That is one of their most magisterial roles, and no one did it more powerfully than did Moses in the book of Deuteronomy.

Here is how he does it at the beginning of this week's parsha: "See, I am setting before you today the blessing and the curse -- the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your G-d that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your G-d and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known." (Deut. 11:26-28)

Here, in even more powerful words, is how he puts it later in the book: "See, I set before you today life and the good, death and the bad... This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life so you and your children after you may live." (Deut. 30:15, 19)

What Moses is doing here is defining reality for the next generation and for all generations. He is doing so as a preface to what is about to follow in the next many chapters, namely a systematic restatement of Jewish law covering all aspects of life for the new nation in its land.

Moses does not want the people to lose the big picture by being overwhelmed by the details. Jewish law with its 613 commands is detailed. It aims at the sanctification of all aspects of life, from daily ritual to the very structure of society and its institutions. Its aim is to shape a social world in which we turn even seemingly secular occasions into encounters with the Divine presence. Despite the details, says Moses, the choice I set before you is really quite simple.

We, he tells the next generation, are unique. We are a small nation. We have not the numbers, the wealth nor the sophisticated weaponry of the great empires. We are smaller even than many of our neighbouring nations. As of now we do not even have a

land. But we are different, and that difference defines once-and-for-all who we are and why. G-d has chosen to make us His stake in history. He set us free from slavery and took us as His own covenantal partner.

This is not because of our merits. "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land" (Deut. 9:5). We are not more righteous than others, said Moses. It is because our ancestors -- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah -- were the first people to heed the call of the one G-d and follow him, worshipping not nature but the Creator of nature, not power but justice and compassion, not hierarchy but a society of equal dignity that includes within its ambit of concern the widow, the orphan and the stranger.

Do not think, says Moses, that we can survive as a nation among nations, worshipping what they worship and living as they live. If we do, we will be subject to the universal law that has governed the fate of nations from the dawn of civilization to today. Nations are born, they grow, they flourish, they become complacent, then corrupt, then divided, then defeated, then they die, to be remembered only in history books and museums. In the case of Israel, small and intensely vulnerable, that fate will happen sooner rather than later. That is what Moses calls "the curse."

The alternative is simple -- even though it is demanding and detailed. It means taking G-d as our sovereign, judge of our deeds, framer of our laws, author of our liberty, defender of our destiny, object of our worship and our love. If we predicate our existence on something -- some One -- vastly greater than ourselves then we will be lifted higher than we could reach by ourselves. But that needs total loyalty to G-d and His law. That is the only way we will avoid decay, decline and defeat.

There is nothing puritanical about this vision. Two of the key words of Deuteronomy are love and joy. The word "love" (the root a-h-v) appears twice in Exodus, twice in Leviticus, not all in Numbers, but 23 times in Deuteronomy. The word "joy" (root s-m-ch) appears only once in Genesis, once in Exodus, once in Leviticus, once in Numbers but twelve times in Deuteronomy. Moses does not hide the fact, though, that life under the covenant will be demanding. Neither love nor joy come on a social scale without codes of self-restraint and commitment to the common good.

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Moses knows that people often think and act in short-term ways, preferring today's pleasure to tomorrow's happiness, personal advantage to the good of society as a whole. They do foolish things, individually and collectively. So throughout Devarim he insists time and again that the road to long-term flourishing -- the 'good,' the 'blessing,' life itself -- consists in making one simple choice: accept G-d as your sovereign, do His will, and blessings will follow. If not, sooner or later you will be conquered and dispersed and you will suffer more than you can imagine. Thus Moses defined reality for the Israelites of his time and all time.

What has this to do with leadership? The answer is that the meaning of events is never self-evident. It is always subject to interpretation. Sometimes, out of folly or fear or failure of imagination, leaders get it wrong. Neville Chamberlain defined the challenge of the rise to power of Nazi Germany as the search for "peace in our time." It took a Churchill to realise that this was wrong, and that the real challenge was the defence of liberty against tyranny.

In Lincoln's day there were any number of people for and against slavery but it took Lincoln to define the abolition of slavery as the necessary step to the preservation of the union. It was that larger vision that allowed him to say, in the Second Inaugural, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as G-d gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds..." He allowed neither abolition itself, nor the end of the Civil War, to be seen as a victory for one side over the other but instead defined it as a victory for the nation as a whole.

I explained in my book on religion and science, The Great Partnership, that there is a difference between the cause of something and its meaning. The search for causes is the task of explanation. The search for meaning is the work of interpretation. Science can explain but it cannot interpret. Were the ten plagues in Egypt a natural sequence of events, or Divine punishment, or both? There is no scientific experiment that could resolve this question. Was the division of the Red Sea a Divine intervention in history or a freak easterly wind exposing a submerged and

ancient river bank? Was the Exodus an act of Divine liberation or a series of lucky coincidences that allowed a group of fugitive slaves to escape? When all the causal explanations have been given, the quality of miracle -- an epoch-changing event in which we see the hand of G-d -- remains. Culture is not nature. There are causes in nature, but only in culture are there meanings. Homo sapiens is uniquely the culture-creating, meaning-seeking animal, and this affects all we do.

Viktor Frankl, the psychotherapist who survived Auschwitz, used to emphasize that our lives are determined not by what happens to us but by how we respond to what happens to us -- and how we respond depends on how we interpret events. Is this disaster the end of my world or is it life calling on me to exercise heroic strength so that I can survive and help others to survive? The same circumstances may be interpreted differently by two people, leading one to despair, the other to heroic endurance. The facts may be the same but the meanings are diametrically different. How we interpret the world affects how we respond to the world, and it is our responses that shape our lives, individually and collectively.

That is why, in the famous words of Max De Pree, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality." (Leadership is an Art, New York, Doubleday, 1989.)

Within every family, every community, and every organisation, there are trials, tests and tribulations. Do these lead to arguments, blame and recrimination? Or does the group see them providentially, as a route to some future good (a "descent that leads to an ascent" as the Lubavitcher Rebbe always used to say)? Does it work together to meet the challenge? Much, perhaps all, will depend on how the group defines its reality. This in turn will depend on the leadership or absence of leadership that it has had until now. Strong families and communities have a clear sense of what their ideals are, and they are not blown off-course by the winds of change.

No one did this more powerfully than Moses in the way he monumentally framed the choice: between good and bad, life and death, the blessing and the curse, following G-d on the one hand, or choosing the values of neighbouring civilizations on the other. That clarity is why the Hittites, Canaanites, Perizzites and Jebusites are no more, while the people of Israel still lives, despite an unparalleled history of circumstantial change.

Who are we? Where are we? What are we trying to achieve and what kind of people do we aspire to be? These are the questions leaders help the group ask and answer, and when a group does so together it is blessed with exceptional resilience and strength.

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**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"B**ut the place which the Lord your G-d shall choose from among all of your tribes to place His Name there, for His dwelling place, shall you seek and shall you come there. And you shall bring there your whole burnt offerings and your sacrifices..." (Deuteronomy 12:5-6).

Apparently the Torah is here speaking of our Holy City of Jerusalem, because it appears in the context of Israel's entry into the Promised Land and the necessity to destroy the altars of idolatry before establishing our Temple to G-d. But why is Jerusalem not named?

The Bible has already identified Malki-Zedek as the King of Salem (Jeru-Salem the City of Peace) as far back as the period of Abraham (Genesis 14:18), and Mount Moriah had been designated as the place where the Almighty "would be seen" right after the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22:14). Moreover, the Bible has no hesitation in identifying places; witness the specific geographic description of Mount Gerizim and Mount Eyval (Deuteronomy 11:29, 30). So why the reluctance to name Jerusalem in this particular context of the Bible?

Maimonides deals with this question in his great philosophic masterpiece, *Guide for the Perplexed* (part 3, chapter 45). He establishes the principle that Divine Service in the Temple was mainly directed against idolatry. Mount Moriah was the highest mountain in the region, so it was specifically chosen by G-d for the Holy Temple in order to attest to the superiority of G-d over all other idols! And this Divine intent had previously been revealed to Abraham, as we have seen. If so, why does Moses here hide the precise identity of the City of G-d?

Maimonides offers three reasons. First of all, he felt that publication of the name of the unique city would only incite the other nations to make war against Israel in order to acquire Jerusalem for themselves. Second, the other nations might even attempt to destroy the city - if only in order that the Israelites not acquire it. And finally, Moses feared lest all the tribes would fight over it, each desirous of having Jerusalem within its own borders!

I believe that in addition to Maimonides prophetic insights, there is even further significance behind Moses' reluctance to reveal the precise name of the city. In the ancient world, every nation-state had its own god - whom the citizens believed lived within the boundaries of that nation-state. Jerusalem was to be the city which would house the Holy Temple of G-d - but G-d would exclusively dwell neither within the Temple nor within that city; G-d was the Lord of the entire universe, who could not be encompassed even by the heaven of the heavens, by the entire cosmos, so

certainly not by a single structure or even a single city.

One of the most difficult messages Moses had to convey to his people was that G-d is not limited by physical dimensions. Yes, Maimonides sets down in his *Mishneh Torah* that the sanctity of Jerusalem is the sanctity of the Divine Presence (Shekhinah), and just as the Divine Presence is eternal and can never be destroyed, so the sanctity of Jerusalem is eternal and can never be made obsolete (*Laws of the Chosen Temple*, 6:14). The great Sage's point is that the Divine Presence can never be physically destroyed because the Divine Presence is not a physical entity, it is not in any way subject to creation or destruction.

There is one place in the world, teaches Moses, where G-d has consistently been recognized as the Creator of the world and foundation of ethical monotheism for all of humanity. One's name is not one's physical being, but one's name is the medium by which one is recognized and called upon. Malki-Zedek, ancient King of Jerusalem and identified with Shem the son of Noah, recognized G-d as the power who enabled Abraham to emerge victorious in his battle against the four despotic Kings and thereby rescue Lot from captivity; Abraham himself recognized G-d as the ultimate arbiter over life and death, the one to whom we must commit ourselves and our future, when he brought his beloved son Isaac to the akedah on Mount Moriah (Jerusalem). G-d's name is on Jerusalem; it is the city in which the G-d of ethical monotheism is to be recognized and served!

Finally, the name Jerusalem is not specifically mentioned because this recognition of G-d as the guardian of justice and compassion, loving-kindness and truth is necessary not only for the people of Jerusalem, not only for all the tribes of Israel, but rather for the entire world. When G-d initially elects Abraham, the Almighty charges him and his descendants with a universal mission: "Through you all the families of earth shall be blessed". (Genesis 12:3). The prophet Isaiah speaks of our vision of the end of the days, when the Holy Temple will rise from the top of the mountains, and all nations will rush to it to learn from our ways: "From Zion shall come forth Torah and the word of G-d from Jerusalem... so that nation shall not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:3-4).

May the G-d who cannot be confined to any physical place reveal His teaching of peace and security from Jerusalem His City to every human being throughout the world. ©2014 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he use of the verb re'eih by the Torah to begin this week's Torah reading indicates that the seemingly complicated and abstract choices in life regarding

faith and doubt, good and evil, right and wrong and life and death are really simple ones. The word re'eh denotes something that can be seen with the naked eye and needs no great thought or judgment to identify it.

The Torah implies here that life can indeed be a matter of simple correct choices that in reality are not difficult to make. But how can these simple choices truly be seen and discerned? We are witness to the fact that a great deal of humanity, if not even the majority, makes very wrong choices in personal and national life.

War, strife, angst and disputes govern human life and have done so for millennia. All of these are undoubtedly wrong choices but if it is so simple and clear as to what the correct choice should be, then why do humans continue to make wrong and harmful choices? So it is difficult for us to completely understand why the Torah should, almost cavalierly, say that if one but sees with one's own vision, one will unerringly make a correct choice in life.

The Torah seems to indicate that the choices in life are stark and clear and that there is very little if any grey area surrounding or encompassing these issues. Would that this would be true. But all of us are aware that there are great complications in life and that easy choices are rare and not very forthcoming.

I think that the "seeing" part of decision-making that the Torah envisions here extends to a knowledge and view of past events and of history generally. The Torah in essence tells us to look at what has gone before us, to see what decisions were made then and what the results of those decisions were, before making any current choices or decisions.

Not knowing the past always blinds the present and dims the future. Look at what happened to millions of Jews who abandoned their faith and observances, with their absent generations and the misfortune that they brought upon themselves and the Jewish people generally. Be aware of those who placed their faith in Western civilization and not in the G-d of Israel or the destiny of the Jewish people.

See how unforgiving history is of wrong decisions and of the pursuit of vanity, the lure of passing political correctness and of the faddish culture of the time. See and understand the fate of those Jews who no longer considered themselves Jewish but were destined to nevertheless be Jewish by the definition of a hateful anti-Semitic society.

In the eyes of history and of non-Jewish society there are no liberal or conservative, wealthy or poor, observant or less observant Jews. There are only Jews. This is a clear lesson of history that literally shouts at us and waves itself in front of our eyes. The Torah is therefore completely correct in using the verb re'eh in dealing with the pivotal decisions of life that Jews and Jewish society are always faced with. Good vision and knowledge of the past will always help us find the right

path for us and for all of Israel. ©2014 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he first word in our portion re-eh is one of the most powerful terms found in the Torah. In fact, G-d is described as a ro-eh on three different levels.

The first time the word is found in the Torah, the Torah states that after creating light or energy, "vayar Elokim ki tov, G-d saw it was good." (Genesis 1:4) Obviously an anthropomorphism. Still, as G-d saw, so do we have the power to see.

On a deeper level, re-eh means to see in the sense of empathizing for the other. Note the description just prior to the deluge in the time of Noah. There the Torah states, "and the Lord saw (vayar Hashem) that the wickedness of man was great on the earth." (Genesis 6:5) This could mean that G-d saw with the sense of feeling the pain and horror which was unfolding-the wickedness of man whom he had created. As G-d felt the pain of humankind, so too should all people created in G-d's image empathize with the other.

There is yet another understanding of ra-ah. Ra-ah could have covenantal connotations-that is G-d seen with an eye on establishing and fulfilling His covenant with His people. Indeed, the first time ra-ah appears after Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah were chosen, the Torah states "and the Lord appeared (veyera) to Avraham and said 'to your seed I will give this land.'" (Genesis 12:7)

Re-eh as used in our portion seems to echo the covenantal approach. Note that when G-d covenantally chooses Avraham, the Torah states, "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you." (Genesis 12:3) Similarly in our portion, the Torah states-"see (re-eh), I have placed before you a blessing and a curse." (Deuteronomy 11:26)

And just as Avraham first built an altar to G-d in Shechem-Elon Moreh (Genesis 12:6) and his rendezvous with G-d reaches a crescendo in Yerushalayim, (Genesis 12:9) so in our parsha is there discussion of how the blessing and curse would be put forth on Har Gerizim and Har Eyval which are in the area of Shechem. (Deuteronomy 11:29) Not coincidentally, the parsha proceeds to discuss our obligations once we enter the land and come to Yerushalayim. (Deuteronomy 12:1-19)

Thus, ra-ah has a threefold meaning. To see, to empathize, to covenantalize. However, when Avraham and Sarah were chosen, ra-ah was in the context of the promised covenant. G-d was the ro-eh. Here, in our

portion, as the Jews prepare to enter Israel, it is in the context of the covenant for the first time soon being realized. Re-eh, therefore, refers to the Jewish people achieving their covenantal mission.

No matter what political leaning, this has been possibly one of the most challenging chapters in the progression of this covenant. However, we must continue to remember that we are fortunate to live in the era of the establishment of the State of Israel, when we are all a bit closer to the covenant's ultimate fulfillment. © 2009 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

**Y**ou are not able to eat the tithes of your grain, wine or [olive] oil within your gates" (D'varim 12:17). "Rather, before Hashem your G-d shall you eat it, in the place that Hashem your G-d chooses" (15:18). Which tithe can only be eaten in Yerushalayim? The verse can't mean the "tenth animal," even though it must be eaten (by Kohanim) in the "chosen place" and was included in the tithes mentioned earlier (12:6 and 12:11), since "grain, wine and oil" are specified, to the exclusion of animals. It can't mean the "first tithe" which is given to the Levi'im, since that can be eaten anywhere (see Bamidbar 18:30-31). It must be referring to the "second tithe," which, in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the seven-year "sh'mita" cycle, must either be brought to "the place G-d has chosen" to be eaten, or their sanctity transferred onto coins which are subsequently brought there and food bought with them to be consumed there. (In the third and sixth years, this "tithe" is called "the tithe of the poor, and is given to the needy.) Yet, Ibn Ezra explains the verse to be "talking to the Levi'im [regarding the first tithe], also to Yisra'el regarding the second tithe." How could the verse be referring to the "first tithe" if that tithe can be eaten anywhere, not just in Yerushalayim?

Chizkuni, whose commentary is built on the commentaries of Ibn Ezra, Rashbam and B'chor Shor, quotes Ibn Ezra, adding the words "regarding the first tithe" where they are missing (but implied). However, in the manuscript of his commentary, the words "he is speaking with the Levi'im regarding the first tithe" are crossed out, indicating that after quoting Ibn Ezra he realized that this part is problematic, so removed it. Later in his commentary on this verse, Chizkuni says explicitly that "this verse is written regarding Yisra'el," supporting the idea that he recanted his earlier words that the "tithe" also referred to the Levi'im's "first tithe." But we have no indication that Ibn Ezra himself recanted this part of his commentary.

Throughout the chapter (and in other places in

D'varim as well), Moshe is addressing the nation as a whole, even though some of his points seem to apply only to one segment of the population (to the exclusion of others). Ramban (12:6), discussing why Moshe instructed the nation to bring their t'rumah (which is given to a Kohain) and ma'aser (which he says could refer to the first tithe that goes to a Levi) to "G-d's chosen place" if they can be eaten (by the appropriate people) anywhere, says they should be brought there so that everyone can celebrate together. The thrice yearly pilgrimages to the Temple were joyous occasions, with the produce and/or money from the second tithe complementing the meals centered around the meat of the holiday offerings and voluntary offerings. Besides inviting the less fortunate, including those from the Tribe of Levi who do not have ancestral land to help them attain riches, to share in their bounty, giving the Kohanim and Levi'im their portions at this time allowed them to celebrate with their own food, not just with the food of others. Ramban then provides a proof-text (Nechemya 10:38) that this was done in the Second Temple.

While this might explain why these things were brought to the Temple even if they could be eaten anywhere, it would not explain why the verse (12:17) says they shouldn't be eaten "within your gates" if the Kohanim and Levi'im were allowed to do just that. Therefore, later in his commentary (on 12:6), Ramban adds that these instructions were not directed towards the Kohanim and Levi'im after they were given their portions, but to the Yisra'eilim, telling them that they shouldn't eat these things before bringing them to Yerushalayim (because they're either not allowed to eat them at all or not allowed to eat them outside the holy city). Once there, those things they are allowed to eat could be eaten, while those things that could only be eaten by others are given to them (some which are only eaten in Yerushalayim while others could be brought elsewhere to eat). Nevertheless, this cannot explain Ibn Ezra's saying that the verse was directed at the Levi'im regarding the first tithe, since they could eat that wherever they wanted.

The thrust of Ibn Ezra's commentary on this verse is that Moshe could be addressing only a segment of the population regarding some details even though he was speaking to the entire nation at the time. He proves this from a few places, including when Moshe specifically addressed the Tribes who received their portion on the eastern side of the Jordan River (3:18), even though the speech was obviously being said to everyone (see 3:12-17, which refers in third person to the same people he addresses in first person in 3:18). In this context, it is tempting to say that Ibn Ezra explained the first part of the verse in the same way (Moshe addressing multiple groups simultaneously), with the issue of Levi'im being allowed to eat the first tithe anywhere negating this from being

the intent of the first part of the verse simply being an oversight. Nevertheless, bear with me as I attempt a possible explanation of Ibn Ezra's comment.

The prohibition against eating the "tithes of your grain, wine and oil" anywhere but "in the place G-d has chosen" is worded in a peculiar way. Rather than saying "don't do it," it says "you are not able to do it," implying that you really can do it (in some circumstances), but are prevented from doing so here (see Malbim). This can easily apply to the "second tithe," as it can be eaten anywhere after its sanctity has been properly transferred onto coins. From a linguistic standpoint, though (which Ibn Ezra often works from), the expression implies a reason not to do something aside from it being prohibited (or it would just be worded as a prohibition).

Throughout history, many have unfortunately been lax in fulfilling the requirement to separate the first tithe and give it to a Levi. Because of this, even though most of the general populace do tithe, enough did not to warrant a rabbinical requirement to tithe any produce purchased from anyone not known to be meticulous in his tithing. (The details of this requirement and when it applies are discussed in M'seches D'mai). For someone reluctant to part with a significant percentage (10%) of the produce he worked hard to grow and harvest, it can be very tempting to just not give this tithe to a Levi. There is a way, though, to minimize the amount of tithes lost to those who give in to this temptation: if the only time a Levi would accept this tithe was in "the place that G-d chooses," this produce would have to be brought there in order to fulfill the commandment. And it would be obvious to all that anyone who didn't bring his tithes to Yerushalayim was not fulfilling his commitment. In order to avoid such embarrassment/suspicion, even those who would have otherwise not tithed will. A Levi is therefore faced with a dilemma when offered a tithe anywhere else; should he take the produce now so that he definitely gets it, or would he be better off in the long run if he refused to take it, as if all Levi'im refuse to accept any tithes outside Yerushalayim, there would end up being much more produce available for all Levi'im. The Torah never prohibited a Levi from accepting a tithe outside of Yerushalayim, nor did it forbid the farmer from giving it to him anywhere. In the end, though, by accepting tithes near the farm, human nature dictates that Levi'im will end up with less produce.

When Moshe discussed all the things relevant to having a central place of worship (in contrast to the previous inhabitants of Canaan), minimizing "tithe fraud" was included. By telling everyone to "bring their tithes to the place where G-d chooses" (12:6) rather than giving it out near the farm, and advising the Levi'im not to eat any tithes unless they were first brought to this central place of worship by the farmer (after which they can eat it wherever they want to),

Moshe was providing a framework that minimized such fraud and therefore maximized the amount of produce the Levi'im would receive. (Even though the burden of carrying the "second tithe" all the way to Yerushalayim led to it being allowed to be transferred to coins, it could be that having to carry both tithes required one of them to be able to be transferred, carrying just one was doable. Bear in mind that being able to transfer the first tithe onto coins would defeat the purpose of making it obvious who was separating this tithe.)

Although we might have expected Ibn Ezra to speak this out explicitly, doing so would make it seem as if it was "normal" to avoid giving Levi'im their tithe if they didn't insist on only accepting it in Yerushalayim. As with numerous other things which he determined would be detrimental if known by the masses, he only hints to this concept by including the Levi'im in those whom Moshe addressed regarding tithes. "If you (referring to the Levi'im) want to receive all of the tithes that are coming to, you will not be able to eat them until they were brought (by the farmer) to the place G-d will choose." True, those same words also mean that "you (the rest of the population) are not able to eat the second tithe except in the place that G-d will choose" (because of the prohibition against eating it elsewhere), but Moshe embedded both meanings into his words, addressing both groups simultaneously. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**T**he Torah uses some mighty strong language this week that really needs some understanding: "See I am placing before you this day a blessing and a curse. The blessing, if you will listen to the commandments of the Almighty which I am commanding you this day. And the curse, if you do not listen to the Almighty's commandments."

On top of this, the Sforno, a renowned 15th century Italian commentator, adds "There is no middle way. If a person follows the Torah, his life will be a blessed life. If a person fails to live by the commandments, he will live a cursed life."

This seems to be a rather extreme statement. However, if we understand that life is either purposeful and meaningful or not, then we can understand that a life of meaning is a blessed life. And a life without meaning is a life devoid of satisfaction and imbued with a sense that nothing makes a difference when life is over anyway (and what could be a greater curse than that?).

Understanding that there is a G-d Who created the world, sustains it and supervises it -- gives life intrinsic meaning. One can always create a sense of meaning in a diversion -- acquiring wealth, following baseball or even in something as noble as helping others. However, unless there is a G-d and there are

absolute responsibilities and values, then there is no inherent meaning to life. It gnaws at one's psyche.

A person needs to have purpose in life, to know that life is meaningful. To be aware of the Creator and to fulfill His will enables a person to experience the greatest of blessings in this world. Each day will be an exciting adventure full of the joy of doing the Almighty's will. The choice is yours to make. Choose life! *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org*

### RABBI HERSCHEL SHACHTER

## TorahWeb

**T**he Torah mentions several times that Bnei Yisroel are the am hanivchar. What exactly does that mean? Does it mean that just like parents sometimes favor one child over the others Hashem favors Klal Yisroel, and therefore we can get away with all kinds of mischief? This is clearly not the intention! First of all, the Gemorah points out (in the first perek of Messechet Shabbos) that the chumash clearly teaches us that it is improper for parents to have a favorite child, and the Torah clearly implies that all of the trouble surrounding mechiras Yosef and galus Mitzrayim came about because Yaakov Avinu treated Yosef differently than the other brothers.

Furthermore, our tradition has it that Bnei Yisroel are held to a higher standard than the umos ha'olam (see the midrash quoted by Rashi in Parshas Toldos on the possuk, "v'yitain lecho Elokim"). In general, one who is closer to Hashem has a greater degree of hashgocha protis both l'tav and l'mutov (good and bad); on the one hand the possuk tells us "raglei chassidov yishmor", i.e. that Hashem will protect one who is closer to Him in an unusual fashion; and on the other hand Hashem is m'dakdek im tzaddikov k'chut ha'saarah. For example, even with the ten explanations quoted by the Ohr Hachaim Hakaddosh we still don't know the exact nature of Moshe Rabbeinu's aveira which prevented him from entering Eretz Yisroel; all we know is that if anyone else would have done the same thing that Moshe Rabbeinu did, it probably would not have even been considered an aveira; but since he was so much closer to Hashem he was held to a much higher standard.

So what does it actually mean when the Torah tells us that Am Yisroel is the am hanivchar? The simple understanding seems to be that Bnei Yisroel are obligated to serve as an ohr lagoyim -- a light unto the nations, as the novi Yeshaya mentioned on several occasions. Even before yetzias Mitzrayim Hashem referred to Bnei Yisroel as "beni bechori -- my first born child". Does that possuk mean to say that all the nations of the world are bonim lamokom and Bnei Yisroel is the first born? The mishna in Pirkei Avos clearly rejects this understanding and states that only Bnei Yisroel have the cherished status of bonim

lamokom. Only the neshomos of Bnei Yisroel carry in their "spiritual DNA" the middos of elokus in a manner similar to children carrying the physical DNA of their parents. The neshomos of umos ha'olam are fundamentally different, and as such the Zohar teaches us that when a nochri is misgayer it is literally true that ger sh'nisgayer k'koton sh'nolad domi because his old neshoma is replaced with a new one.

The notion of Bnei Yisroel being the first born, the bechor, means that just as a first born child is expected to help his parents raise their younger children, so too Bnei Yisroel are called upon to influence the other nations of the world. The avos, Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, were proactive in publicly preaching the lessons of monotheism. Apparently this charge was conveyed to Avrohom Avinu by Hashem when he told Avrohom, "V'nivrichu becha kol mishpichos ho'adoma" that all of the other families of the world should join along with you, just as one would graft a branch from one tree onto another (See Rashbam that the root of the word "v'nivrichu" is the word havracha, grafting).

After all of the shevotim were born, Yaakov Avinu understood that his responsibility to serve as an ohr lagoyim no longer required him to be proactive but should be fulfilled in a more passive fashion. Specifically, we can succeed in impressing upon all the nations of the world the values of honesty, integrity, and decency by acting properly ourselves and thus serving as a good example.

The Torah tells us in Parshas Ki Savo, "v'holachta bid'rachav" that we should preserve our tzelem Elokim by going in the ways of Hashem and then "when all of the nations of the world will see that you have succeeded in preserving your tzelem Elokim, they will learn from you how to act with yiras Shomayim" (see Aderes Eliyahu). The umos ha'olam also have tzelem Elokim and they can preserve that tzelem Elokim by following the ways of Hashem.

Hashem selected one nation to serve as a role model for all the others regarding how to go in His ways. The novi Yeshaya says, "am zu yotzarti", i.e. that the am ha'nivchar was a distinct creation of Hashem. According to nature, Klal Yisroel really should not exist, since the Chumash tells us that the imahos were akoros (unable to bear children), and the Talmud tells us (in Yevomos perek He'oreil) that Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov were akorim as well. As such, the whole existence of Klal Yisroel is l'maaleh min hatevah.

This probably explains the mysterious phenomenon of anti-Semitism which persists throughout all generations. A body naturally rejects foreign objects (and therefore when surgeons do an organ transplant they have to be concerned about the organ being rejected), and Klal Yisroel does not fit in to the natural system which makes up the rest of the world; Klal Yisroel was created as a separate yitzira

which is l'maaleh min ha'teva. Thus we can understand quite well why all of the nations of the world, which are all part of teva, would naturally reject the "foreign body" of Klal Yisroel which does not fit in with the natural scheme of things!

We ought to cherish and appreciate the responsibility of being the am hanivchar, i.e. serving as the ohr lagoyim -- the role model for all other nations.  
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### SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**"F**or you departed from the land of Egypt b'chipazon / in haste..." (16:3) R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania) writes: Hashem interacts with His creation in two ways. In one, which we call "nature," Hashem's abundance flows through emissaries or filters, much as a human king uses the entire government to carry out his will and does not interact directly with his subjects. When G-d acts in this manner, He is also called "Elokim," a term which the Torah and prophets use to refer to any form of authority [e.g., judges-see Shmot 21:6].

In the second, Hashem interacts directly with the world. This latter relationship, which is called "chipazon" ["haste," as opposed to an orderly, methodical progression], began at the time of the Exodus. Another term for chipazon is "hashgachah pratit." By reflecting on the chipazon relationship, R' Chaver writes, we clarify and solidify the basis for our belief in Hashem. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim: Potei'ach Yad p.1)

R' Tzaddok Hakohen Rabinowitz z"l (1823-1900; chassidic rebbe in Lublin) focuses on the literal meaning of chipazon, i.e., "haste," and comments: Man's entry into the service of Hashem must be with chipazon, just as the korban Pesach in Egypt, the first ever, was eaten. The reason is that, at the beginning, one must seize the moment and forcibly detach himself from the desires of this world. Afterward, one can

progress with greater deliberateness. (Tzidkat Ha'tzaddik No. 1)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes similarly: Man's attainments follow a process of revelation, followed by toil, i.e., a sudden inspiration followed by a period of "work," during which one refines the details that are contained within the momentary inspiration. One can never exhaust all of the details contained within one flash of inspiration.

The ultimate revelation, R' Kook continues, was the Giving of the Torah, which all subsequent generations mine to reveal its light. All subsequent flashes of inspiration that one experiences when studying Torah are offshoots of that revelation. (Shemonah Kevatzim I, No. 423)

R' Yehuda Halevi z"l (Spain; died 1141, in Eretz Yisrael) writes: Only man-made laws and ideas go through a process of development. That which comes from the Divine is sudden, just as Creation did not exist one moment and did exist the next. (Kuzari I:81)©2012 S. Katz & torah.org

### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Re'eh tells us that "no prophet may advocate idol worship no matter the circumstances. If he does he is considered a false prophet, even if he's able to perform miracles" (Deuteronomy 13:2-6). The obvious question is: How can a false prophet have the ability to perform miracles?

Rabbi Akiva (in Talmud Sanhedrin 90a) contends that when the Torah speaks of this prophet performing miracles, the prophet was then a true prophet, and only later did he deflect to the wrong path. Once becoming a false prophet he is no longer able to perform miracles. As Rabbi Avi Weiss extracts, this answer underscores a critical concept in Judaism, especially as the month of Elul, the thirty days of introspection before the High Holidays begin: notwithstanding one's achievement or spiritual level there is always the possibility of failing (i.e. false prophet), and an equal possibility of improvement (i.e. Teshuva -- repentance -- before Rosh Hashana). While the Parsha depicts a prophet that has fallen from grace, rising to grace is just as viable. Just like the prophet, we are judged based on where we are now, and how much we've improved, not on where we once were. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.



### Parsha Puns!

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