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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV LERNER

Two Miracles: Faith and Hope

[This dvar torah was delivered last week, Parshas Shoftim, at KINS in West Rogers Park - Editor]

Pirkei Avot (5:5) plainly states that the Temple exhibited ten consistent miracles, one of which as follows: עומדים צפופים ומשתחווים רווחים - "They stood congested but bowed with ease."[1]

Jerusalem somehow gave way to immense pilgrimage crowds—despite the crush of dense streets and competing feet, rows of prodding elbows and echoed sighs of irritation, when kneeling down each face had space, each leg had room, each soul prostrated in relief. This miracle is something of which we'll read in the coming weeks in connection with the prostrations of the עשרת ימי תשובה. Beyond the convenience and spatial necessity, what can we make of such a miracle?

To unpack its spiritual import we first plunge into the imagination of a Nobel laureate, a fellow Chicagoan, Saul Bellow. In his novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet* we meet Arthur Sammler, a one eyed holocaust survivor, who lives grumpily on Manhattan's West Side in a time before Trump Towers and Starbucks. He lives in constant pain, immersed in the smells of a polluted and grimy city; he faces daily robbery and continual discomfort; Mr Sammler lives in an age of ideological bankruptcy and moral decay. Bellow describes, early in the book, a ride on one of the New York city buses:

> Mr. Sammler was intensely hot and sweaty; hanging on his strap, sealed in by bodies, receiving their weight and laying his own on them as the fat tires took the giant curve at 72nd street with a growl of flabby power.

In a scene with which some of us may empathize, Bellow superbly captures the squeeze of city life, the nausea of New York's summer humidity, and the way in which the self fades into a colossal specter of inseparable bodies. Life's commotion can cramp our freedoms, its bustle can congest our airways—the pace and bulk of the human cluster can cloud the clear vistas of our best intentions—it can leave us 'עומדים צפופים'—crowded, crushed, and confused; gasping for air, desperate for room.

And according to our sages, it is the act of surrender that miraculously creates a clearing. This miracle reveals far more than extraordinary topography, it touches on the deep truth that faith—as expressed in a bow—affords a calm often absent in ordinary life; 'משתחווים רווחים'—many commentaries described the four cubits square each person would have to themselves. Yielding to G-d's supremacy does not bind or constrain, it creates space to think, to aspire, to breathe and to hope—it provides what Virginia Woolf touted as central to human flourishing, 'room of one's own.'

This is the miracle of the Temple—the structural metaphor for spiritual surrender—a place divested of human possession; it cultivated conditions which do not cramp our lives but expands them. Based on a verse in קהלת, one Midrash teaches as follows:

"כָּל-הַנְּחָלִים הֹלְכִים אֶל-הַיָּם, וְהַיָּם אֵינֶנּוּ מָלֵא(א:ז)"
כל ישראל אינם מתכנסין אלא לירושלים...
וירושלים אינה מתמלאת לעולם(קה"ר א:ח)

As we mirror the meandering of rivers and rapids, Jerusalem swells to comprise every soul that flows, every mind that wanders, ever heart that beats to the pace of the divine presence. We all have our own tributaries—we weave our own spiritual paths, but our final repository and collective destination is Jerusalem—the city of peace that, when we bow, frees us all.

But this is not all—the Mishna in Pirkei Avot continues and lists what appears to be a conflicting miracle.

"לא אמר אדם לחברו צר לי המקום שאלין בירושלים."

We've just learnt that עומדים צפופים—they were cramped together—so how can our sages now claim that there was plenty of space?

Rav Baruch Epstein—the son of the Arukh HaShulchan—was a Lithuanian Rabbi of the late 19th Century. In his commentary to Pirkei Avot—Baruch She'amar—he suggests what may seem a humorous interpretation. According to him, our sages do not claim there was plenty of space—there was צר , discomfort; what is important to this formulation is not Divine intervention but an altogether human feat. This miracle was that despite standing צפופים no one *said* that there

[1] יומא כא. regarding the 3 רגלים .

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was no room—the miracle was that Jews didn't complain.

This may sound sarcastic, but there is something profound at play. Two weeks ago we read ישעיה 's promise in the הפטרה that, despite calamity, someday things will improve—

"עוד יאמרו באזניך בני שכליך צר לי המקום(מט:כ)

Against the backdrop of destruction Isaiah hails an age of Jewish vibrancy where Israel's cities will bulge from the mass of pilgrims. Of course aware of this prophetic passage, our sages claim that despite the force of Isaiah's predictive capacity—no Jew ever complained about lack of space in Jerusalem—there wasn't room, it did bulge and swell, but no one whined. This second miracle, where human impulse is repressed and foretold fault-finding is stifled, completes the picture of spiritual freedom.

Complaining can give us voice, position—it allows us to report our mistreatment and neglect. And of course positive protest can change the world, but gloom invades the room to improve, dejection and empty dissent, crowds out the very possibility of advance. Complaint will crush our spirits and leave us, like Mr. Sammler, hot and sweaty, on a bus to nowhere.

Three weeks ago we expressed our pain and complaint—on Tisha B'Av we protested against the catastrophes of Jewish history. We performed a public hunger strike and refused comfort, we sat on the floor and relived dreadful memories. We moaned and we groaned—we echoed ירמיהו 's words— איכה!—How could it be? We have much to lament, a history so stained with blood and tears, but our sages instituted the שבעה דנחמתא — the seven weeks of consolation. We have read

"נחמו נחמו עמי" ", וישם מדברה כעדן" ", ורב שלום בניך ",

and this morning we continue

"אנכי אנכי הוא מנחמכם"—" עורי עורי...התנערי מעפר קומי".

We have still a way to go, not yet half way there—but we must alter our poise, persist in acquiescence, build equanimity. With the now daily blasts of the shofar—the sound that freed slaves—we liberate a little of our soul.

It is these two things—the ability to bow and repress pessimism, in other words, faith and hope—that will set us free. If we are to strive we must have faith, we must surrender to our responsibilities—some have a practice to *daven* bowed throughout the coming weeks to physically embody that surrender. And if we are to strive we must equally have hope; the daily news can depress, but there is much we can be grateful for and look forward to.

We must chase out the demons of rusted dreams, the pessimism that rises from past misdeeds; *Ellul* has begun, and it is time to attune ourselves, to cement our commitments, to repress cynicism and self-pride; it is time to surrender to our better angels.

Over the coming weeks let us come together, pray together, and hope together—and, please G-d, next year we shall all be together in the city that never ends—ירושלים . *© 2014 Rabbi D. Lerner*

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Ki Tetzei contains more laws than any other parsha in the Torah, and it is possible to be overwhelmed by this embarrass de richesse of detail. One verse, however, stands out by its sheer counter-intuitiveness: "Do not despise an Edomite, because he is your brother.

"Do not despise the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." (Deut. 23:8)

These are very unexpected commands. Understanding them will teach us an important lesson about leadership.

First, a general point. Jews have been subjected to racism more and longer than any other nation on earth. Therefore we should be doubly careful never to be guilty of it ourselves. We believe that G-d created each of us, regardless of colour, class, culture or creed, in His image. If we look down on other people because of their race, then we are demeaning G-d's image and failing to respect kavod ha-briyot, human dignity.

If we think less of a person because of the colour of his or her skin, we are repeating the sin of Aaron and Miriam -- "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman" (Num. 12:1). There are midrashic interpretations that read this passage differently but the plain sense is that they looked down on Moses' wife because, like Cushite women generally, she had dark skin, making this one of the first recorded instances of colour prejudice. For this sin Miriam was struck with leprosy.

Instead we should remember the lovely line from The Song of Songs: "I am black but beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me" (Song 1:5).

Jews cannot complain that others have racist attitudes toward them if they hold racist attitudes toward others. "First correct yourself then [seek to] correct others," says the Talmud. (Baba Metsia 107b) Tanakh contains negative evaluations of some other nations, but always and only because of their moral failures, never because of ethnicity or skin colour.

(Whenever I refer, here and elsewhere, to "Moses' commands," I mean, of course, to imply that these were given by Divine instruction and revelation. This, in a deep sense, is why G-d chose Moses, a man who said repeatedly of himself that he was not a man of words. The words he spoke were those of G-d. That, and that alone, is what gives them timeless authority for the people of the covenant.)

Now to Moses' two commands against hate, both of which are surprising. "Do not despise the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." This is extraordinary. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites, planned a programme against them of slow genocide, and then refused to let them go despite the plagues that were devastating the land. Are these reasons not to hate?

True: but the Egyptians had initially provided a refuge for the Israelites at a time of famine. They had honoured Joseph and made him second-in-command. The evils they committed against them under "a new king who did not know of Joseph" (Ex. 1:8) were at the instigation of Pharaoh himself, not the people as a whole. Besides which it was the daughter of that Pharaoh who had rescued Moses and adopted him.

The Torah makes a clear distinction between the Egyptians and the Amalekites. The latter were destined to be perennial enemies of Israel, but not the former. In a later age Isaiah would make a remarkable prophecy, that a day would come when the Egyptians would suffer their own oppression. They would cry out to G-d, who would rescue them just as he had rescued the Israelites:

When they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, he will send them a saviour and defender, and he will rescue them. So the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord. (Isaiah 19:20-21)

The wisdom of Moses' command not to despise Egyptians still shines through today. If the people continued to hate their erstwhile oppressors, Moses would have taken the Israelites out of Egypt but would have failed to take Egypt out of the Israelites. They would still be slaves, not physically but psychologically. They would be slaves to the past, held captive by the chains of resentment, unable to build the future. To be free, you have to let go of hate. That is a difficult truth but a necessary one.

No less surprising is Moses' insistence: "Do not despise an Edomite, because he is your brother." Edom was, of course, the other name of Esau. There was a time when Esau hated Jacob and vowed to kill him. Besides which, before the twins were born, Rebecca received an oracle telling her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the elder will serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). Whatever these words mean, they seem to imply that there will be eternal conflict between the two brothers and their descendants.

At a much later age, during the Second Temple period, the prophet Malachi said: '"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' declares the Lord. 'Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated..." (Malachi 1:2-3). Centuries later still, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "It is a halakhah [rule, law, inescapable truth] that Esau hates Jacob." (Sifri, Bamidbar, Behaalotecha, 69) Why then does Moses tell us not to despise Esau's descendants?

The answer is simple. Esau may hate Jacob. It does not follow that Jacob should hate Esau. To answer hate with hate is to be dragged down to the level of your opponent. When, in the course of a television programme, I asked Judea Pearl, father of the murdered journalist Daniel Pearl, why he was working for reconciliation between Jews and Muslims, he replied with heartbreaking lucidity, "Hate killed my son. Therefore I am determined to fight hate." As Martin Luther King said: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Or as Kohelet said, there is "a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace" (Eccl. 3:8).

It was none other than Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who said that when Esau met Jacob for the last time, he kissed and embraced him "with a full heart." (Sifri ad loc) Hate, especially between brothers, is not eternal and inexorable. Always be ready, Moses seems to have implied, for reconciliation between enemies.

Contemporary Games Theory suggests the same. Martin Nowak's programme "Generous Tit-for-Tat" is a winning strategy in the scenario known as the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma. Tit-for-tat says: start by being nice to your opponent, then do to him what he does to you (in Hebrew, middah kneged middah). Generous Tit-for-Tat says, don't always do to him what he does to you or you may found yourself locked into a mutually destructive cycle of retaliation. Every so often ignore (i.e. forgive) your opponent's last harmful move. That, roughly speaking, is what the sages meant when they said that G-d originally created the world under the attribute of strict justice but saw that it could not survive. Therefore He built into it the principle of compassion. (See Rashi to Genesis 1:1, s.v. bara.)

Moses' two commands against hate are testimony to his greatness as a leader. It is the easiest thing in the world to become a leader by mobilising the forces of hate. That is what Radovan Karadzic and

Slobodan Milosevic did in the former Yugoslavia and it less to mass murder and ethnic cleansing. It is what the state controlled media did -- describing Tutsis as inyenzi, "cockroaches" -- before the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. It is what dozens of preachers of hate are doing today, often using the Internet to communicate paranoia and incite acts of terror.

This was the technique mastered by Hitler as a prelude to the worst-ever crime of man against man. The language of hate is capable of creating enmity between people of different faiths and ethnicities who have lived peaceably together for centuries. It has consistently been the most destructive force in history, and even knowledge of the Holocaust has not put an end to it, even in Europe. It is the unmistakable mark of toxic leadership.

In his classic work, Leadership, James MacGregor Burns distinguishes between transactional and transformational leaders. The former address people's interests. The latter attempt to raise their sights. "Transforming leadership is elevating. It is moral but not moralistic. Leaders engage with followers, but from higher levels of morality; in the enmeshing of goals and values both leaders and followers are raised to more principled levels of judgement." (James MacGregor Burns, Leadership, Harper Perennial, 2010, pg. 455)

Leadership at its highest transforms those who exercise it and those who are influenced by it. The great leaders make people better, kinder, nobler than they would otherwise be. That was the achievement of Washington, Lincoln, Churchill, Gandhi and Mandela. The paradigm case was Moses, the man who had more lasting influence than any other leader in history.

He did it by teaching the Israelites not to hate. Hate the sin but not the sinner. Do not forget the past but do not be held captive by it. Be willing to fight your enemies but never allow yourself to be defined by them or become like them. Learn to love and forgive. Acknowledge the evil men do, but stay focused on the good that is in our power to do. Only thus do we raise the moral sights of humankind and help redeem the world we share.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"When a man takes a woman and has relations with her..." (Deuteronomy 24:1) As a very young Rabbi I had the privilege of visiting one of the most revered halakhic scholars; Rav Henkin, already near-blind but still possessed of a razor-sharp mind. I shall never forget the last words he said to me, gently but firmly: "I told Rav Moshe that after a civil marriage the woman still needs a get (religious divorce)" - he repeated this several times.

I left Rav Henkin profoundly inspired; it was amazing how this elderly sage, remained so preoccupied with a point in Jewish law. The issue he raised related to a dispute between himself and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein as to whether the parties to a common-law, civil or any other non-halakhic marriage, who wished to separate required a religious divorce (get). Rav Henkin maintained that they would since they had presumptively consummated their union; they were living together, and were publicly considered to be husband and wife. One of his proof-texts was our Torah reading of Ki Tetze, which defines marriage; "When a man shall take (Ki Yikah) a woman and have sexual relations with her..." (Deuteronomy 24:1).

Rav Moshe disagreed, claiming they would not require a get. His logic was that a get is a necessity only for a halakhic marriage; the very concept of marriage is unique to the halakhic context - and therefore the halakhic obligation of a get applies only within the unique rubric of a halakhic marriage.

Rav Moshe Feinstein's ruling has been widely accepted - and this has greatly minimized the problem of mamzerut, or children considered to be the offspring of an adulterous relationship and who themselves are Biblically prohibited from marrying regular Jews. Before Rav Moshe's path-breaking decision, a woman who received a civil but not a religious divorce and then re-married would still be considered "married" to her first husband - any children she might conceive with her second husband would be considered mamzerim. Given the high divorce and re-marriage rate of Jews throughout the world, and the relatively small amount of gittin (halakhically validated divorces) which are issued, the number of potential mamzerim would have become staggering. Rav Moshe's ruling frees the overwhelming majority of those offspring from any stigma or taint.

It may well now behoove the Israeli religious establishment to welcome civil marriages: given the great dissatisfaction with the way the religious court system treats women in need of a religious divorce; the fewer women who require religious divorces, the fewer cases of women chained to impossible marital situations which the Israeli courts will have to adjudicate.

The Talmudic Tractate Kiddushin explains the Biblical word kiha by two different but complementary terms: kinyan and kiddushin. Kinyan is usually translated as acquisition, but in this context it clearly means commitment. In the Book of Exodus, the Bible outlines the responsibility for guards, "When a man gives his friend money or vessels to guard" (Exodus 22:6), and the Talmud stipulates that from the moment of his acceptance (taking) of the object, commitment and responsibility (kinyan) devolve upon the guardian even though he is clearly not the owner. (B.T. Bava Metzia, Chapter Hamafkid). Now this commitment or responsibility does not include any kind of ownership;

indeed, if the guardian claims that the object in his trust was stolen, he will only be freed of culpability if he takes an oath that "he did not extend his hand to use the object in any way" (Exodus 22:7). In this context, as well as in the context of betrothal-marriage, the kinyan (acquisition) is one of commitment-responsibility and not ownership.

Even more to the point, the second interpretive term for kinyan in the context of betrothal-marriage is kiddushin, which literally means sanctification. The Talmudic discussion links this to hekdesh, that which belongs to G-d (B.T. Kidushin 2a,b). From a Rabbinic perspective, this means that one's spouse belongs to G-d; it also means that G-d is a partner in every Jewish marriage. Indeed, the laws of family purity express this truth when they mandate that physical contact between the couple can only be enjoyed when both marriage partners desire it and only during those times in the month when Divine Law gives permission for sexual relations. The groom verbally declares his acceptance of the Divine Partnership in his betrothal formula: "Behold, you are consecrated to me in accordance with the laws of Moses and of Israel"; Talmudic law invokes this principle by insisting that "whoever consecrates his bride does so in accordance with the conditions established by the Torah Sages" (B.T. Gittin 33a).

G-d as well as the religious-judicial establishment are partners in every religious marriage; it is precisely this partnership which clears the way for rabbinic judges to abrogate (annul) a marriage if a husband is acting as a scoundrel, a measure which was taken five times in the Talmud by Religious Courts.

Rav Moshe Feinstein argues that a halakhic divorce is necessary only when the marriage ritual expressed a union which had initially been accepted as a menage a trois - the husband, the wife, and the Almighty G-d or his faithful deputies.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The love between G-d and His people is often compared to the marital relationship. So the prophet Hoshea describes G-d, declaring: "And I will betroth you to Me forever." (Hoshea 2:21) The Song of Songs is similarly viewed as an allegory for the relationship between G-d and Am Yisrael (the Jewish people).

Indeed, throughout the year this imagery prevails. For example, every Friday evening we recite the Lekha Dodi-Come my Beloved (referring to G-d), let us greet the Sabbath bride.

And the holidays of the Jewish year evoke the picture of G-d's love for us. On Passover we recall walking through the sea with the help of G-d, much like bride and groom walking to the huppa (wedding canopy). On Shavuot (the festival commemorating receiving the torah), we reenact our hearing the Aseret Ha'Dibrot (Ten Declarations) which can be viewed as the ketubah, the marital contract between G-d and His people. On Sukkot (the feast of booths) we eat and some try to live in a sukkah, beneath the skhakh (Sukkah roof), which can be seen as a kind of bridal canopy.

But, of course, this comparison has its limits. This week's parsha records the right of husband and wife to divorce. And if following the divorce the wife marries another, she may never remarry her first husband. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) Taking the analogy to its fullest, does this mean that we, the Jewish people, can permanently separate from G-d? Doesn't it mean that if we separate from G-d, and, if you will, "wed" to another albeit false G-d, that we can never return to G-d Himself.

It is here during the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that a new picture of love between G-d and His people emerges. It is the idea that we are G-d's children and G-d is a parent figure. Thus, we recite Avinu Malkeinu - referring to G-d as our Father. So, too, do we speak of G-d as Hashem Hashem Keil rahum (the Lord is a G-d of mercy). The word rahum comes from the word rehem which means womb, conveying the idea of a mother's infinite and endless love for her young.

The difference is obvious. A husband and wife relationship can be terminated. But no matter what happens in life a parent always remains a parent. Similarly, G-d's love for us is limitless. Even if we separate from Him, even if we "marry another," we can always return- and G-d will always embrace us.

One last thought. Even the parental relationship has its limits since no one lives forever. G-d is however, the Eternal Parent. Hence during these days we recite Psalm twenty-seven, in which we proclaim, "Even if my father and mother have left me, G-d will gather me in."(Psalms 27:10)

Our relationship to G-d parallels the deep love between husband and wife. It intersects with a parent's love for a child. In fact, it transcends all. It is as deep and deeper than a spousal encounter, and it is beyond the endlessness of a parent's love for a child-it is eternal.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's parsha, the Torah portrays for us an accurate and unforgiving view of war and its personal consequences. No one who participates in a war escapes unscathed from these consequences. The ones who are killed or wounded have suffered these consequences on their very physical bodies. But even

those who have survived the battle whole are affected by the consequences of that struggle.

That is the supremely important, albeit subliminal message of the beginning of this week's parsha. A Jewish soldier, who according to the ritual requirements of becoming such a soldier and being accepted for the battle as outlined in last week's parsha, a G-d-fearing patriotic and observant person, somehow enters into a sexual relationship with a non-Jewish woman, a relationship which Rashi points out to us will only bring him future grief and regret.

The heat and passions that war and combat engender within a person cannot be limited to the actual battlefield alone. They carry on within the psyche and body of the combatant and find different ways of expression in all other areas of human life and experience.

The observant Jew, who under ordinary and usual non-combat circumstances is scrupulously pious and moral in one's behavior, now becomes a sexual predator and enters into a physical relationship with a non-Jewish stranger. Is this not the strongest message possible that the Torah wishes to communicate to us about the consequences and effects of war!?

War requires the abandonment of personal inhibitions. That will help explain the scenario portrayed for us by this opening parsha of this week's Torah reading. Without inhibitions there can be no morality or piety.

But as all of us living here in Israel are well aware of, war is a constant state of affairs in our national and personal life. The Jewish people have been at war here in the Land of Israel for almost all of the years of the past century. These wars may not be of our choosing or our initiative but they are omnipresent in our lives and society.

And because of this difficult state of affairs, Israeli society has been affected and even shaped by the presence of constant combat and warfare. Much of the rough spots that still exist in our society – the divisiveness, the absence of mannered courtesy, the unnecessary assertiveness, etc. – are all consequences of our being in a constant state of war. Inhibitions and piety are hard to maintain under such conditions and consequences.

Peace is not merely an absence of a hot war. It is a state of mind that induces tranquility, rationality and all around general goodness. That is why peace is so exalted in the works of the prophets and throughout the Talmud and Jewish tradition. And that is why we pray three times daily that its presence should be felt amongst us. With peace – both inner and outer – such events as portrayed for us at the beginning of this week's parsha simply do not occur.

There is no people that longs for peace as greatly as do the people of Israel. May the Lord somehow bless us with the achievement of peace and thereby restore us to normalcy, piety and eternal goodness.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"No Amonite or Moavite may enter the congregation of G-d" because "they did not offer you bread and water, on the road when you left Egypt" (D'varim 23:4-5). In "Iyun HaParasha" (#13), the expression "on the road when you left Egypt" is questioned, since this occurred during the 40th year in the desert, after the "desert generation" (actually the generation that left Egypt) had already died. Why mention leaving Egypt now? What relevance does what happened almost 40 earlier have with Amon and Moav's lack of hospitality?

There are actually three times in this week's Parasha that the expression "on the road when you left Egypt" is used. We are supposed to "remember that which Hashem your G-d did to Miriam on the road when you left Egypt" (24:9) and "remember that which Amalek did to you on the road when you left Egypt" (25:17), both of which happened in the first two years after the exodus from Egypt. Since they were so soon (relatively speaking) after leaving Egypt, this expression is not out of place in either of these verses. Nevertheless, by seeing what it adds to "remembering" those occurrences, we may be able to apply it to what happened in the 40th year as well.

Explaining the commandment to remember what happened to Miriam, that she was punished for speaking about her brother Moshe by contracting a skin disease, Rashbam tells us that "even though she was a prophetess and was Moshe's sister, she was not given any special treatment and had to be shut in (out of contact with others) for seven days." He then says that the words "on the road when you left Egypt" are meant to teach us "that even though they were busy getting ready to travel (from Chatzeiros, see Bamidbar 12:17), the nation did not leave until after [her seven days of defilement had ended]; certainly this is true of every other person." In other words, this expression provides added context, that the need for someone who contracts this skin disease to be "closed in" for a week is so important that even when it caused the entire nation to be delayed for a week, it had to be implemented (and on nobility, no less).

Explaining why the Torah adds "on the road when you left Egypt" regarding Amalek's attack, Malbim references what he wrote in Parashas B'shalach, that none of the usual reasons for waging war applied, two of which are negated by adding "on the road when you left Egypt." The Children of Israel had no land (yet) to

conquer, as they were "on the road," so the attack couldn't have been in order to capture land from them. They were not approaching Amalek's boundary either, as they had just "left Egypt," so there was no reason for Amalek to stage a pre-emptive attack to prevent being attacked. (Malbim then shows how the next verse negates the three other reasons why a war is waged.) In other words, the expression "on the road when you left Egypt" provides context showing how wicked Amalek was, explaining why G-d declared war on them (see Sh'mos 17:16).

It could therefore be suggested that the expression "on the road when you left Egypt" regarding Amon and Moav was meant to provide context indicating how grievous their sin was, or why it was considered a sin. After all, if a foreign nation passes near a country's boundary, they would understandably be concerned that the foreigners' motives weren't friendly; not providing them with sustenance would be understandable as well. However, in this case, the Children of Israel had asked Amon and Moav permission to pass through their land peacefully (see Shoftim 11:17). When they refused, rather than attacking, Israel moved on, past their land (11:18) and asked Sichon permission to pass through his land instead (11:19), at which point Sichon attacked Israel (11:20, see also Bamidbar 21:21-23 and D'varim 2:26-32). There was therefore no reason for Amon or Moav to be concerned that the Children of Israel were going to attack them. (They might have even been aware that G-d had expressly forbidden Israel from attacking them, see D'varim 2:9 and 2: 19, see also http://tinyurl.com/q6a2w4x.)

Without any concern of being attacked by the nation passing near them through the desert, one whose ancestor (Avraham) had treated their ancestor (Lot) so well, Amon and Moav should have shown them some hospitality, but didn't. By adding "on the road when you left Egypt," Moshe was providing the context indicating that this was the case. The Children of Israel hadn't reached their "homeland" yet, even when they reached the boundaries of Amon and Moav, as they were still "on the road." And even though it was close to 40 years since they had left Egypt, since they hadn't reached their destination yet, it was still considered part of their trip from Egypt to the Promised Land. Yet, even though there was no danger of being attacked, Amon and Moav still didn't offer any sustenance.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Benevolent Association

In this week's portion, the Torah commands us with quite a tall order. Because of flagrant ingratitude, in which Ammonites and Moabites forgot the kindness ofour father Avraham toward their forebear Lot, we are commanded not to allow them to join in marriage into our nation. The directive does not preclude Ammonites and Moabites from converting or marrying other Jewish converts. It also does not prohibit Ammonite women converts from marrying into the fold. It does prohibit the direct descendants of Avraham, who epitomized kindness and gratitude, from marrying Lot's male descendants who were so cruel to the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us in the exact way their ungraciousness manifested itself. "Because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt, and because he hired against you Bilaam son of Beor, of Pethor, Aram Naharaim, to curse you" (Deuteronomy 23:5). But in an atypical deviation from the initial narrative, the Torah inserts the following verse: But Hashem, your G-d, refused to listen to Balaam, and Hashem, your G-d, reversed the curse to a blessing for you, because Hashem, your G-d, loved you" (Ibid v.6).

The Torah then continues to conclude the directive: "You shall not seek their peace or welfare, all your days, forever" (ibid v. 7).

Why does Hashem interject the story of His compassionate intervention into the prohibition? The Torah previously detailed the story of the talking donkey, the interceding angel and Balak's subsequent failure to curse the Jews. Why interject G-d's love in halting Bilaam's plans when the Torah is presenting a reason not to marry Moabites? It has no bearing on the prohibition.

A classic story of a new immigrant's encounter with the American judicial system involved an old Jew who was called to testify.

"Mr. Goldstein," asked the judge, "how old are you?"

"Keyn ayin horah, eighty three."

"Just answer the question, Mr. Goldberg. I repeat. How old are you?"

Goldberg did not flinch. "Keyn ayin horah, eighty-three."

"Mr. Goldberg," repeated the judge, "I do not want any prefixes or suffixes. Just answer the question."

But Goldberg did not change his response.

Suddenly Goldberg's lawyer jumped up. "Your honor," he interjected. "Please allow me to ask the question. The Judge approved and the lawyer turned to Goldberg.

"Mr. Goldberg. How old are you, Keyn ayin Horah?"

Goldberg smiled. "Eighty three."

In what has become a tradition of the Jewish vernacular, perhaps originating with the above verses, no potential calamity is ever mentioned without mentioning or interjecting a preventative utterance of caution.

"I could have slipped and chas v'sholom (mercy and peace) hurt my leg."

"They say he is, rachmana nitzlan, (Heaven save us) not well."

"My grandfather tzo langa yohrin (to longevity) is eighty-three years old," of course, suffixed with the ubiquitous "kayn ayin horah!"

An ever present cognizance of Hashem's hand in our lives has become integrated into traditional Jewish speech patterns. Thank G-d, please G-d, and G-d willing pepper the vernacular of every Jew who understands that all his careful plans can change in the millisecond of a heavenly whim. And so, beginning with Biblical times, there are no reference to occurrences of daily life found in a vacuum. They are always surrounded with our sincere wishes for Hashem's perpetual protection and continuous blessing.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

At the very end of Parshat Ki Tetzei we encounter one of the more famous commandments, instructing us to remember what Amalek did to us as we left Egypt. While the whole world saw the Jews as untouchables, Amalek decided to kill us by attacking the weak people lagging behind, thus proclaiming to the world that they weren't afraid of G-d by attacking His nation. However, they WERE scared of the Jews themselves, which is why they attacked the weak ones. Strangely, though, the next few Pesukim (verses) tell us to wipe out the memory of Amalek from this world. So which is it? Should we remember what they did to us, or should we wipe out their memory and forget? To top it all, the Torah then tells us AGAIN to not forget!?

To help us understand the issues involved here, Chazal (our Rabbis) have explained, using an analogy, that it's as if Amalek jumped into scolding hot water, and although they were burned, they cooled the water, and everyone around them was a little bit more comfortable with the hot water. As the book "Majesty of Man" elaborates, human nature dictates that the more we see of something, the less sensitive we are to it. So what's the solution?

Well, the

Torah tells us to remember, erase, and yet remember: Remember the elements in this world that would pick on the weak and defy G-d and authority, but only so that you could erase them, thereby erasing their influence. The final step is to never forget what happens when we surround ourselves with negative influences. As human nature dictates, and as the history books (following this battle) record, we are influenced by our society, neighborhood, and by our friends. Just as we must be careful not to let ourselves be affected by anything negative, we must also remember that we can have a positive or negative effect on those around us. May we have the strength to control ourselves and inspire others!

Parsha Puns!

AMONly gonna say it once so get MOAVing! U can HEAP PILLOWs & make a NEST 2 relax in, eat some KEY LIME pie & make it a Shabbos to REMEMBER!

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RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: When you go out to war against your enemies, and the Almighty, your G-d, will give him into your hand..." (Deut. 21:10).

The Arizal, a great Kabbalist, noted that the verse refers to the Jewish people in the singular. However, regarding our enemies, it starts out in the plural ("enemies") and the verse ends refering to them in the singular ("give him" -- instead of writing "give them"). Since this is not a case of poor editorship, what is the lesson that the Torah is coming to teach us?

The Arizal elucidates: The Torah is telling us that if we have unity and are as one when we go out against our enemies, then even though our enemies are very numerous, you will be victorious as easily as if they were just one.

The importance of unity for accomplishment applies not only during times of war against an enemy. It is just as necessary during times of peace. When a group of people will work on any project with a spirit of togetherness, they will accomplish much more than if they would each be doing things as separate individuals. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*