

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

On 14 October 1663 the famous diarist Samuel Pepys paid a visit to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Creechurch Lane in the city of London. Jews had been exiled from England in 1290 but in 1656, following an intercession by Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam, Oliver Cromwell concluded that there was in fact no legal barrier to Jews living there. So for the first time since the thirteenth century Jews were able to worship openly.

The first synagogue, the one Pepys visited, was simply a private house belonging to a successful Portuguese Jewish merchant, Antonio Fernandez Carvajal, that had been extended to house the congregation. Pepys had been in the synagogue once before, at the memorial service for Carvajal who died in 1659. That occasion had been sombre and decorous. What he saw on his second visit was something else altogether, a scene of celebration that left him scandalised. This is what he wrote in his diary:

"... after dinner my wife and I, by Mr. Rawlinson's conduct, to the Jewish Synagogue: where the men and boys in their vayles (i.e. tallitot), and the women behind a lattice out of sight; and some things stand up, which I believe is their Law, in a press (i.e. the Aron) to which all coming in do bow; and at the putting on their vayles do say something, to which others that hear him do cry Amen, and the party do kiss his vayle. Their service all in a singing way, and in Hebrew. And anon their Laws that they take out of the press are carried by several men, four or five several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that every one desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing... But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true G-d, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this."

Poor Pepys. No one told him that the day he chose to come to the synagogue was Simchat Torah, nor had he ever seen in a house of worship anything like the exuberant joy of the day when we dance with

the Torah scroll as if the world was a wedding and the book a bride, with the same abandon as King David when he brought the holy ark into Jerusalem.

Joy is not the first word that naturally comes to mind when we think of the severity of Judaism as a moral code or the tear-stained pages of Jewish history. As Jews we have degrees in misery, postgraduate qualifications in guilt, and gold-medal performances in wailing and lamentation. Someone once summed up the Jewish festivals in three sentences: "They tried to kill us. We survived. Let's eat." Yet in truth what shines through so many of the psalms is pure, radiant joy. And joy is one of the keywords of the book of Devarim. The root s-m-kh appears once each in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, but twelve times in Devarim, seven of them in our parsha.

What Moses says again and again is that joy is what we should feel in the land of Israel, the land given to us by G-d, the place to which the whole of Jewish life since the days of Abraham and Sarah has been a journey. The vast universe with its myriad galaxies and stars is G-d's work of art, but within it planet earth, and within that the land of Israel, and the sacred city of Jerusalem, is where He is closest, where His presence lingers in the air, where the sky is the blue of heaven and the stones are a golden throne. There, said Moses, in "the place the Lord your G-d will choose... to place His Name there for His dwelling" (Deut. 12:5), you will celebrate the love between a small and otherwise insignificant people and the G-d who, taking them as His own, lifted them to greatness.

It will be there, said Moses, that the entire tangled narrative of Jewish history would become lucid, where a whole people -- "you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no hereditary portion with you" -- will sing together, worship together and celebrate the festivals together, knowing that history is not about empire or conquest, nor society about hierarchy and power, that commoner and king, Israelite and priest are all equal in the sight of G-d, all



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voices in his holy choir, all dancers in the circle at whose centre is the radiance of the Divine. This is what the covenant is about: the transformation of the human condition through what Wordsworth called "the deep power of joy." ("Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798.")

Happiness (in Greek eudaemonia), Aristotle said, is the ultimate purpose of human existence. We desire many things, but usually as a means to something else. Only one thing is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else, namely happiness. (Nicomachean Ethics, 1097a 30-34)

There is such a sentiment in Judaism. The biblical word for happiness, Ashrei, is the first word of the book of Psalms and a key word of our daily prayers. But far more often, Tanakh speaks about simcha, joy -- and they are different things. Happiness is something you can feel alone, but joy, in Tanakh, is something you share with others. For the first year of marriage, rules Devarim (24:5) a husband must "stay at home and bring joy to the wife he has married." Bringing first-fruits to the Temple, "You and the Levite and the stranger living among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your G-d has given to you and your household" (26:11). In one of the most extraordinary lines in the Torah, Moses says that curses will befall the nation not because they served idols or abandoned G-d but "Because you did not serve the Lord your G-d with joy and gladness out of the abundance of all things" (28:47). A failure to rejoice is the first sign of decadence and decay.

There are other differences. Happiness is about a lifetime but joy lives in the moment. Happiness tends to be a cool emotion, but joy makes you want to dance and sing. It's hard to feel happy in the midst of uncertainty. But you can still feel joy. King David in the Psalms spoke of danger, fear, dejection, sometimes even despair, but his songs usually end in the major key:

"For His anger lasts only a moment, / but His favour lasts a lifetime; / weeping may stay for the night, / but rejoicing comes in the morning...

"You turned my wailing into dancing; / you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, / that

my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. / Lord my G-d, I will praise you forever." (Psalm 30:6-13)

In Judaism joy is the supreme religious emotion. Here we are, in a world filled with beauty. Every breath we breathe is the spirit of G-d within us. Around us is the love that moves the sun and all the stars. We are here because someone wanted us to be. The soul that celebrates, sings.

And yes, life is full of grief and disappointments, problems and pains, but beneath it all is the wonder that we are here, in a universe filled with beauty, among people each of whom carries within them a trace of the face of G-d. Robert Louis Stevenson rightly said: "Find out where joy resides and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all."

In Judaism, faith is not a rival to science, an attempt to explain the universe. It's a sense of wonder, born in a feeling of gratitude. Judaism is about taking life in both hands and making a blessing over it. It is as if G-d had said to us: I made all this for you. This is my gift. Enjoy it and help others to enjoy it also. Wherever you can, heal some of the pain that people inflict on one another, or the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Because pain, sadness, fear, anger, envy, resentment, these are things that cloud your vision and separate you from others and from Me.

Kierkegaard once wrote: "It takes moral courage to grieve. It takes religious courage to rejoice." (Journals and Papers, 2179) I believe that with all my heart. So I am moved by the way Jews, who know what it is to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, still see joy as the supreme religious emotion. Every day we begin our morning prayers with a litany of thanks, that we are here, with a world to live in, family and friends to love and be loved by, about to start a day full of possibilities, in which, by acts of loving kindness, we allow G-d's presence to flow through us into the lives of others. Joy helps heal some of the wounds of our injured, troubled world. © 2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"If there will arise in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and he gives you a sign or a convincing manifestation, and this sign or convincing manifestation which he had announced to you occurred; (And he utilized what appeared to be this miraculous occurrence) to say 'Let us follow after other gods...', you must not hearken to the words of that "prophet"... After your G-d shall you walk, Him shall you revere, keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him and cleave unto Him..." (Deuteronomy 13:2-5)

From the earliest Biblical times, Judaism – a moral and enlightened religion based upon an ethical monotheism which taught justice, compassion and

peace – was forced to struggle against idolatrous voodoo and magic. Apparently the more mysterious, uncertain and fragile life appeared to be, the greater the attraction wonder – working, prophecy – speaking individuals who claimed a “local telephone” relationship to the Divine or the various divinities in which they believed and claimed the power to read the future and thereby move aside the curtain of uncertainty.

Fascinatingly enough, the twelfth century Commentary Ramban (Nachmanides) admits of the possibility that there do exist gifted individuals with what we would consider to be prophetic powers: “Possibly the Biblical text is hinting at a true phenomenon, that souls of several individuals have the prophetic power to know the future, and not one really knows the source of that power... an inner spirit comes to that individual saying that such and such will occur in the future to a certain object... and the matter proves to be true to those who see it happen...” (Ramban, ad loc). Nevertheless, if such a prophecy is used to turn someone away from the laws of Torah, the soothsayer is considered to be a malevolent idolater. Indeed, the entire introduction to this description of a false prophet is the Biblical insistence upon the ultimate truth of our Torah, “a Judicial code which dare not be compromised, not even by abilities to predict future events on the basis of heavenly voices: “Every word which I have commanded you, you must observe to perform; do not add to it and do not distract from it” (Deut 13:1). No one, not even the most gifted oracle, can rise above the authority and supremacy of our Torah!

Maimonides is likewise very stringent in defining all forms of idolatry. Our Bible insists that “there shall not be found among you... any soothsayer (Kosem), astrologer, enchanter or sorcerer” (Deut 18:10), and our great Spanish legalist – philosopher explains a Kosem as “one who does an act in order to free his mind from all distractions so that he can predict future events, and he says that something will occur or will not occur” (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry, 11,6). Indeed, there may be individuals with such abilities, but that does not necessarily mean that such soothsayers have proper moral judgment or give wise halakhic counsel.

From this perspective we can readily understand why our tradition insists that “the Torah is no longer in heaven,” so we do not listen to heavenly voices (B.T. Bava Metzia 59b) and “the Sage is to be preferred over the prophet” (Bava Batra 12b); our religio-legal system, albeit based upon a law which we believe to be the word of the Living G-d, nevertheless is interpreted and developed in each generation predicated upon logically sound principles and analytically sound explications. Reasoned Responsa are open to scholarly debate, and no one can claim the forensic edge because he heard a voice from Heaven.

Hence the continuity of our tradition remains insured, with advance based upon traditionally ordained logic and with no one having the ability to undermine our sacred texts by a newly revealed addendum or substitute.

I believe that there is an even more profound reason for our rejection of fortune tellers, even deeply religious fortune tellers who do not use their “gifts” to undermine our tradition. The Bible itself teaches “the secrets are for the Lord our G-d and that which is revealed is for us and our descendants forever to perform all the words of this Torah” (Deut. 29:28). Our task is not to second-guess G-d, or to use our religion or our religious leaders to make our lives easier or more certain, to remove human doubt or vulnerability. The commandments are here for us to serve G-d, not in order to attempt to have G-d serve us. Hence the Mishnah teaches that “we are to serve our Master not in order to receive a reward” (Avot 1), but because it is right to serve Him and will ultimately make for a better world – not necessarily an easier individual life. Faith is not a guarantee that my life will be comfortable and cancer – free, if I do what the Torah commands; faith rather demands faithfulness to G-d’s desired life-style no matter how difficult or challenging my individual life may be. As Yossile Rakover, supposed victim of the Warsaw Ghetto poignantly writes in his last Will and Testament: “You have done everything possible to make me stop believing You and maintaining your commandments. But, my wrathful G-d, it will not avail You in the least. I will never stop believing you, never stop loving You. Who then shall I believe in, the cruel G-d (or non-god) of my enemies? Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokenu, Hashem Ehad.”

Similar to this must be our attitude to Prayer. We believe in a Higher Being who can certainly make the miraculous occur, but who only guaranteed that the Jewish people would never be completely destroyed, and that eventually the world will accept a G-d of peace through a message emanating from Jerusalem. Otherwise in large measure, the world operates according to its natural design. Yes, “even if a sword is dangling at your throat, do not despair of G-d’s compassion,” but – at that same time – “do not rely on miracles.” Pray for the best, but prepare for the worst.

The very practical Talmudic passage in Berachot (B.T. 32b.) teaches us that “one who prays too long and intensively will come to a pained heart,” and the Tosafot commentary interprets this to apply to an individual who expects his prayer to be answered. What is the repair for such a broken heart?, queries the Talmud. Occupy yourself in the performance of the commandments to serve G-d and try to improve society.

Our religious community must close its ears to future predictions of all sorts, no matter how pious the source. Ultimately we have but one Source, and He

teaches us that "the secrets are for the Lord our G-d alone, and that which is revealed – to perform all the words of this Torah – is for us and our children. © 2016 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Thomas Jefferson wrote in the American Declaration of Independence that certain truths are self-evident. His inspiration for this idea came from our great teacher Moshe who points out clearly in this week's reading that one's choices in life are clearly evident. King Solomon in Kohelet points out that the Lord created human beings and imbued them with simple righteousness, but that they constantly search for devious means to fulfill unjust desires. The Torah, by using the verb re'eh, clearly implies that the choice between eternal life and death, between right and wrong, between good and evil is not that complicated.

One can see and sense the correct path in life and follow it. As an aid to this self evident truth, one need only review past history and contemplate what has gone before us, both personally and nationally. In all of its ritual complexities and technical rules, Judaism is, in its essence, a clear and simple faith. This point is hammered home over and over again by Moshe in his grand final oration to the Jewish people.

What made the founders of the Jewish people and the protagonists of monotheism in the world so unique was their innate ability to recognize what is self-evident in this world. Namely, that the world was created, that there is a Creator and that human beings have the ability and necessity to connect somehow with that Creator. Once these self-evident truths are acknowledged and firmly entrenched in our minds and hearts, then the laws and customs of Israel logically follow and complete the pattern of our service to the Creator and to those that He created.

Swept along by the tide of events and the wearying details of everyday life, we are often unable to stop and think about these truths that form the basis of our existence and purpose here in the world. The great Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto begins his epic masterpiece Mesilat Yesharim, with the basic question of life: "What is our purpose and goal in life?"

That question has haunted human beings throughout all of the ages and eras of human existence on this planet. This has been the issue that has been the driving force of human civilizations in all times and under all circumstances. Many have been the answers given to this question. Almost all of them have led humans away from the straight path and caused rational thinking people to deny the truths that daily remind us of who and why we are.

The powers of greed, desire, physical pleasure and unrealistic and utopian do-goodedness have overwhelmed our clear eyesight and instinctive rational

thought processes. Having tasted forbidden fruit, it is extremely difficult to rid one's self of the aftertaste.

Moshe attempts to forewarn us of the consequences of not seeing and thinking correctly and clearly. Therefore before discussing any of the commandments or ritual complexities of the Torah, he first demands from his listeners and students, down through the ages, that they harken to the truths that lie before them on a constant and everyday basis. This is really the key to Judaism and Jewish survival. © 2016 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

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

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

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

Another possibility: Had everything been written down, it would have sent the message that rabbinic law is closed and that the process of interpretation had come to a halt. The oral transmission sent the message that rabbis in each generation, basing themselves on the earlier text and principles of

developing the law, could continue to evaluate and contribute to an understanding in their own particular times.

One last thought. Had everything been written down, a rebbe, a teacher of Torah would have been unnecessary – after all, it's all in the book. The oral transmission made a rebbe, a living person who could teach and lead by example, indispensable. Ultimately, such personalities are necessary for Torah to be sustained.

In time, however, the Jewish community was no longer capable of remembering the oral dictates, and hence, we were left with no choice but to commit the oral law to writing. The challenge, even as we study the oral law from a written text, is to recognize why it was, at first, not put to paper-to remember the precision of the law, that it is ongoing, and it requires a rebbe, a living role model, to teach it. Through both avenues; through the oral and the written, the Torah of G-d remains dynamic and alive. © 2016 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

“**A**ll first born males of your cattle and of your flocks shall be sanctified to Hashem your G-d” (D'varim 15:19). This requirement obviously applies to every member of the Children of Israel, no matter which Tribe they are from, whether they are a Kohain, Levi or Yisrael (or convert). However, the very next verse (15:20) continues by saying “before Hashem your G-d shall you eat it, year by year, in the place that G-d chooses,” instructions that can only apply to Kohanim (see Rashi), since only they are allowed to eat the first born animal. This is evident from the explicit instructions given only to Kohanim (Bamidbar 18:8-19) about which foods must be given to them (by the rest of the nation) that only they can eat, a list that includes first born animals (18:15-18). How could the Torah use the same word (“you”) in consecutive verses if they do not refer to the exact same people? Why leave the impression that anyone can eat the first-born animals if only the Kohanim can?

This issue is not limited to these verses. Earlier (D'varim 12:17), we are told “you are not able to eat the tithes of your grain, wine or olive oil, and (or) the first born of your cattle and sheep, and (or) your voluntary offerings, and (or) that which is elevated by your hand, within your gates; rather, before Hashem your G-d shall you eat it, in the place that Hashem your G-d chooses.” Here, several categories are grouped together, with the same word (“you”) referring to those who can eat these things. But can the same people eat all the things in all the categories listed?

Sorting out what each of the categories are is not straightforward. “The tithes of your grain, wine and oil” would seem to refer to “ma'aser sheini,” the “second tithe” (taken after the “first tithe” is set aside for the Levi'im) that, 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” (Jerusalem after the Temple was built; the Mishkan before that) to be eaten, or their sanctity transferred onto coins which are subsequently brought there where food is bought with them and consumed there. After all, the “first tithe” can be eaten anywhere (Bamidbar 18:30-31), and these verses are referring to foods that must be eaten “in the place where G-d chose.” [Ibn Ezra does say it refers to both the first tithe and the second tithe; I addressed this issue a couple of years ago, see <http://tinyurl.com/z2lw9ur>. The “second tithe” can be eaten by anyone, not just Kohanim or Levi'im. “The first-born of your cattle and sheep,” on the other hand, as mentioned above, can only be eaten by Kohanim. “All of your voluntary offerings” is pretty straightforward, as one can commit to bringing an offering that is not required (see Vayikra 1:1-3:16), while “that which is elevated by your hand” refers specifically to Bikurim (the first fruits, see Rashi here and on 12:6), but could be expanded to other produce that must be given to Kohanim and Levi'im (see Ramban on 12:6). But the first born animal can only be eaten by Kohanim, so this part of the verse must be being addressed only to them, while the rest apply to everyone. How could Moshe include the same pronoun “you” to refer to two distinct segments of the population?

Chizkuni (on 12:17) suggests several possibilities to explain how the “second tithe” and first-born animals can be put in the same category even though the latter can only be eaten by Kohanim. (1) The first born isn't a real first-born, but the second-born, which non-Kohanim treated as special (since it was the first one that they could eat), and, in order to give thanks to G-d for it, ate it in “the place that G-d chose” as if it was a real first-born (although he compares how it was treated to the “second tithe”). [This approach is difficult to fit into the verse, since one is not required to do so.] (2) It refers to when the first-born is a female, which doesn't go to a Kohain, but was nevertheless eaten in “the place that G-d chose.” [Also not a requirement, so difficult to say it is the verse's intent.] (3) It does refer to a male first-born animal, which only Kohanim can eat, but since Moshe was addressing the entire nation, and the Kohanim are part of the nation, it is not problematic to include specifics that only apply to part of the nation. [This approach is based on Ibn Ezra, who provides other examples of the entire nation being addressed even though some specifics only apply to specific segments of the nation.] Chizkuni then brings a textual support for this approach; 15:20, which only applies to Kohanim even though the entire nation is

being addressed. However, it's one thing to use a plural "you" when addressing everybody, with some aspects applying to some while other aspects apply to others, but quite another for the "you" in one verse (15:19) to refer to one group (those who must give their first-born animals to a Kohain) while in the next verse of a continuing thought, referring specifically and exclusively to others.

It can be suggested that after the list of things to be brought and/or eaten in "the place G-d chose" is given several times (D'varim 12:6, 12:11 and 12:17), with "you" referring to everyone even though the items on the list applies to different segments, the stage was set to allow for the dual-meaning of "you" in 15:19-20. Nevertheless, since it is several chapters later, a separate thought/conversation, with many unrelated paragraphs in-between them, it still seems out of place.

The Talmud (Makos 17-18, see also Sifre 72), expounding upon D'varim 12:17, applies the prohibition against eating a first-born animal outside "the place G-d has chosen" to non-Kohanim as well (so that they would be violating two prohibitions; one for eating the first-born, and the other for eating it outside of G-d's "chosen place"). If the prohibition against eating the first-born animal outside the prescribed boundaries applies to non-Kohanim as well, it is not so strange for the word "you" to apply to them for everything, including the first-born animals. However, the verse the Talmud (and Sifre) is expounding upon (12:17) is the prohibition against eating these things where they shouldn't be eaten, whereas 15:20 is an exhortation that the first-born animals must be eaten "before G-d." Since non-Kohanim are not allowed to eat them anywhere (even "before G-d"), this verse cannot include non-Kohanim on any level.

Although this is not the issue he is trying to address, N'tziv says that the commandment to "sanctify" the first-born animal (15:19) is being said to the Kohain, who must treat the first-born animals given to him with sanctity even before being brought as an offering (including not putting it to work nor shearing it, which are mentioned explicitly). Even if "your cattle" and "your sheep" refer to (or at least applies to) the entire nation, since the focus of 15:19 is what the Kohain must do (and not do) with the first-born animals after they are given to him, continuing to speak to the Kohain (exclusively) in 15:20, telling him where to eat it, is not problematic (certainly not to the same extent as if 15:19 was said to non-Kohanim while 15:20 was said only to Kohanim).

Non-verbal communication (email, texting, etc.), and even verbal communication not done face-to-face, can be easily misunderstood (even when accompanied by emoticons). Reading the text of Moshe's address to the nation has a similar limitation, as all we see are the words he said, written down for us. Just as there is no comparison between reading a

transcription of a speech and seeing the speech live, there are non-verbal cues that Moshe likely used that cannot be easily ascertained by just reading the text of what he said. He was addressing the entire nation, but (as we have seen) there were certain details that applied only to specific segments of the nation. The issue we are trying to resolve is how he could have addressed two different segments (Kohanim and non-Kohanim) without any indication that he switched audiences mid-thought. But this issue only arises because we can't see Moshe as he (still) speaks to us; we can only read a transcript of what he said. For all we know, when he addressed each specific group, he spoke to them directly, turning to face that segment, so that it was clear who he was speaking to (and not just from the context of the words).

For example (one provided by Ibn Ezra on 12:17), even though Moshe was recapping the conquest of Sichone and Og to the entire nation (2:31-3:17), including giving the land to R'uvein and Gad (said in third person, so it was obviously not said exclusively to them), when he told those Tribes (and only those Tribes, to the exclusion of the other 10, who would inherit the land on the other side of the Jordan River) that they were getting the land conquered from Sichone and Og, and that they would have to lead the war on the western side of the river while leaving their families on the eastern side (3:18-20), he likely turned to them, and faced them while he addressed them directly.

Similarly, even though the requirement to sanctify every male first-born animal from "your cattle" and "your sheep" (15:19) was said to the entire nation, when Moshe was telling the Kohanim (and only the Kohanim) where to eat these animals, he turned to them and said it to them directly. Therefore, even though reading the text alone allows for some confusion between the "you" in 15:19 and the "you" in 15:20, when it was said "live" by Moshe, there was no confusion, as everyone could see that Moshe was only addressing the Kohanim in 15:20. We can figure this out because of the context (as Rashi points out), but it still is harder to discern when reading the text than it was when seen live, when it was apparent who Moshe was facing (and therefore talking to) as he made each point. © 2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

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Baal Tosif

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

One is forbidden to add on to the Mitzvot whether in relation to time (as in the case of adding an extra day to a holiday), or relating to an object (as in adding a fifth species in the Lulav, or another portion in the Tefillin), or adding any new Mitzvah. The question arises; how can our sages add for example

the prohibition of eating chicken with milk when the Torah does not?

Some say that the prohibition of "Baal Tosif" is only if our Rabbis state that this is the law dictated in the Torah. However if they state that the prohibition is derived from the Rabbis it is permitted.

Others state that this law of "Baal Tosif" only applies to adding positive commandments ("Aseh") but negative commandments ("Lo Taaseh") are permissible for our sages to add. However this reasoning would present the question how our sages were able to enact the positive laws of Purim and Chanukah.

With regard to the adding of a day (as in the eighth day of the holiday of Succot) if one was to openly announce that he is not adding this day as an extra day of the holiday, in such a case it would be permitted. Thus Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook states, that if one made a "Heker" (a specific identification) to exclude it from the laws in the Torah it would be permissible. Thus in the case of Chanukah and Purim , since in each of the two holidays there is a specific identification ("Heker")that separates it from the other holidays, it would be permissible to establish these laws(in the case of Purim there is a differentiation between those who live in a city surrounded by walls from the time of Joshua, and those who not, and with Chanukah there are three distinct ways of lighting the Menorah).

On the other hand, one who performs a Mitzvah numerous times during the day, or a woman who performs Mitzvot that are not obligatory for her to perform, do not transgress the prohibition of "Baal Tosif". However according to one view, if they perform these Mitzvot because they believe it is dictated from the Torah, they would indeed transgress the prohibition of "Baal Tosif". © 2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat 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. © 2016 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The 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 God 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 God 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! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin* © 2014 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com



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OMG, I'm running a freakin' marathon

by Adina Ciment

Well, a half-marathon.

For anyone who knows me, you know that the extent of my exercise involves standing up to change the channels on the TV instead of using the remote. I like elevators and escalators. I know I owned a bike once, but I'm not quite sure what happened to it after that first ride.

So running in a half-marathon might seem a little crazy.

But so is finding out your kid has a brain tumor. So is watching him recover from a craniotomy and deal with medications, and side-effects, and new challenges that inevitably come up whenever someone has to take a peek into your skull. Crazy is knowing that there is so little research into pediatric brain tumors. Crazy is knowing too many people who have lost children, who have watched children suffer, and who have run more significant, excruciating marathons that last years and lifetimes.

But Chai Lifeline puts the crazy aside and focuses on the kids that need to be reminded how to be kids again, even in the face of pain and suffering. They provide year-round emotional, social, and financial support to more than 4,500 children and their families every year. Chai Lifeline's programs and activities change their lives forever, returning joy and hope and enabling them to live full and happy lives despite the presence of illness. I have seen this first hand when Chai Lifeline stepped in and quite literally saved us from the chaos and heartache surrounding my son's diagnosis.

Its most famous program is Camp Simcha and its sister camp, Camp Simcha Special. Every year these two camps offer 450 kids a chance to forget about illness and just be kids again. My son was invited to be a camper this past summer and his experience was nothing short of transformative. You can read about just one of his experiences here: <http://tinyurl.com/binny09>

After his experience and seeing what Chai Lifeline did to help my family and my son, I knew I had to do something to help them.

Because not helping this organization, well, that would really be crazy.

Training is not easy, but neither is dealing with illness. Every step I take during my 5 AM runs reminds me of the kids I have met through my son and through Chai Lifeline. I'm running for them. I'm running for my son.

I'm running for Chai Lifeline.

And omg, I'm running a freakin marathon. Half-marathon.

I can't do this without your support. I need your help to raise as much money as possible for these kids. So please, push the donate button and help me put smiles on the faces of sick children. Let's do this together! Let's make dreams come true.

Best - Adina



Please donate at <http://tinyurl.com/binny10>