

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Haazinu 5773

In My Opinion :: YOM KIPPUR AND SUCCOT :: Rabbi Berel Wein

At first glance one may think that these two special days on the Jewish calendar stand in stark contradistinction one from the other. Yom Kippur is a day of awe and solemnity, of fasting and abstinence while Succot is the holiday of joy and beauty, of good and plentiful food and friendly camaraderie. And yet there is an underlying theme that binds together all of the special days of the Jewish calendar.

It is not only one of observance of the halacha regarding every special day as detailed for us in Jewish law, important and vital as this is, but there is also a far deeper connection, one that touches our souls and hearts. That value is that we somehow appreciate that our purpose in life is to serve our Creator, to fulfill the mission of creation itself, to justify our existence so that we will not toil for emptiness and not be born to be confused and purposeless.

And the service of God takes on many different forms and nuances – it is never only one way exclusively. Thus eating on Erev Yom Kippur is considered to be somehow equal to the day of fasting on Yom Kippur itself. And therefore it is obvious that rejoicing, physically and spiritually on Succot also in service of the Creator is also a way to serve that Creator just as fasting and solemnity on Yom Kippur is done in service of the Creator.

This is an important lesson in life for all occasions. The rabbis stated that “Just as one must make a blessing of thanksgiving over good tidings so too must one make a blessing over tidings that are painful and even tragic. “ All of the occurrences in life are directed towards the service of God.

The fact of Divine forgiveness on Yom Kippur certainly enhances our feelings of joy and contentment on Succot. It is difficult for one’s soul to be content and joyful if it is burdened down with sin. The knowledge that we serve a forgiving God, One who is gentle with human foibles and errors, and that we are always given another chance to improve and grow spiritually and emotionally, is in itself a cause for inner happiness and joyful outlook.

The Torah provided us with freedom from the everyday bonds of our homes on Succot. It provided us with an appreciation of the beauty of God’s natural world, with commandments that enhance our eyes and fill our souls. Succot releases us from the ordinary and allows a peek into the surreal and extraordinary, into a world removed from our ordinary mundane existence.

Simply knowing and realizing that such a world exists is in itself a cause for contentment, happiness and joy. The realization that there is something greater than us that exists and that we can somehow relate to it, even if only for a week, is a source of optimism and inspiration. The open sky that protects us is symbolic of the Creator Who ultimately controls our destinies and directs us to eternal and safe harbors in our life’s journey.

The Succot festival was one of the three times a year that Jews were required to appear before the Lord our God in Jerusalem. It was a command performance, so to speak. Since it immediately followed Yom Kippur, all appeared before the Lord, so to speak, cleansed of sin and joyful at the opportunity of serving God and man – the *raison d’être* of the Jewish people.

The Torah admonishes us not to appear before God empty-handed. It is discourteous to do so. But each person brings one’s own particular gifts – talents, wealth, abilities, personality and outlook – to this grand occasion. No two people bring the same gift for no two human beings are exactly alike. But the gift has to be sincere and generous, whole-hearted and not perfunctory or stingy.

Succot is therefore a test of our good intentions and generosity of spirit. God should not be shortchanged, neither in attitude nor in deed. Succot is the opportunity to show our open heartedness and generosity of spirit to

our Creator and to our fellow creatures. The rabbis phrased it succinctly when they stated that “All of Israel sits in one succah!” Being joined together is also a source of joy and happiness.

Solidarity amongst Jews evinces not only strength but also happiness as well, a feeling of security and accomplishment. But only by leaving the confines of our individual houses and coming out into the openness of sky and Heavenly protection can such a feeling truly be absorbed and appreciated.

An easy and meaningful fast day and a Chag Sameach

Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: HAAZINU :: Rabbi Berel Wein

This song of Moshe is the song of the Jewish story. It accurately portrays the arc of Jewish history in its glorious as well as its dolorous moments. The Ramban’s comment as to the proof of the holiness and accuracy of Moshe’s prophetic words – “If someone stood and accurately foretold what would happen many centuries later, would not one in hindsight be forced to admit to the truth of that prophet and his words upon seeing the minute fulfillment of that prophecy” – certainly carries even more weight in our age, a further eight centuries removed from Ramban’s time.

Moshe calls forth the heaven and earth to bear witness to his words of prophecy, for he is aware that human logic and memory can never really be trusted. Unfortunately, memory can be dimmed and lost, and logic distorted and/or ignored. In fact it is these factors – lost memory and flawed logic – that Moshe identifies as the cause of the sins of the Jewish people and of much of the predicted travail that will accompany them throughout their history.

It is not so much that there is a rebellion against God and Torah in our current society as it is that God and Torah have simply been forgotten, erased from the Jewish consciousness – for many Jews they simply do not exist. And in such a climate of almost willful forgetfulness, certainly any attempt to convince others of the errors of their ways by the use of logic is doomed to frustrating failure.

Moshe concludes his visionary song/poem on an optimistic note. Somehow the covenantal relationship between God and Israel will remain binding and unbroken even unto the end of days. There will always be a core group of Jews who will not allow themselves – as well as others – to forget.

Events will constantly jog the Jewish memory and new generations will arise and ask: “Who are we and why are we here?” And the response to those questions can only be found in the eternal memory bank of the Jewish people and their history.

It is a very difficult task to restore memory but the fact that Moshe promises us that God and Torah will never be completely forgotten by all of the Jewish people reassures us that somehow the restoration of Jewish memory is possible and even guaranteed. And our logic will eventually not fail us as well.

We will survey our world and our situation and come to logical and holy conclusion as to what our policy and path in life should be. A nation of wisdom and insight, creativity and scholarship will not always remain illogical and foolish.

Moshe also encourages us by promising that eventually our enemies will be vanquished and shamed. Their nefarious ambitions will be thwarted and the Lord will balance all accounts with those who attempted to destroy the Jewish people. Good sense, accurate memory, strength of purpose and clarity of ideals will prevail and rule the Jewish world. Moshe’s song will continue to be heard throughout eternity.

Shabat shalom

Chag Sameach

Insights

A Word in Your Ear

“Give ear, O heavens!” (32:1)

A word in the ear is always more effective than a shout from a distance.

When G-d wants to get His message across to us, He “speaks quietly” in the “ear” of our neshama (soul) and then the neshama dictates His Will to the body. That’s the meaning of the line in this week’s Torah portion “Ha’azinu: Give ear, O heavens and I will speak. Listen O earth, to the words of My mouth.” The heavens represent the soul. The body is represented by the earth. If the heavens “Give ear” (the root of the word “Ha’azinu” is “ozen”, meaning “ear”), if the soul heeds the softly spoken command of its Creator, then the earth will follow the “words of my Mouth” — meaning that the body will respond to G-d’s bidding.

However, if the soul turns a “deaf ear” to the Voice of the Eternal, then G-d has to speak in the “ear” of the body directly – and that communication can be painful.

The intention, however, is never vindictive. Everything that G-d does is for our good. When the soul fails to respond to G-d’s communication, He uses the body as a way of getting the soul’s attention.

Which is why in the haftara of the Torah portion of Devarim the Navi Yishayahu says “Ha’azini - Give ear – O earth!” Here, in contradistinction to this week’s Torah portion, the prophet is speaking in the “ear” of the body. Yishayahu is warning the Jewish People to where their sins will lead. The ears of their souls are closed to G-d’s warnings, and thus the body will have to “give ear”. And that message is relayed in the language that the body understands.

The name of this Shabbat is Shabbat Shuva – a name taken from the opening lines of the haftara. Shuva means return. We are in the midst of a week in which G-d is waiting for us to return to Him. If we open up the ears of our soul, we will hear the Voice. If we don’t, G-d has many other ways of grabbing our attention, which are not as subtle as the word in our ear.

•Sources: The Ovstovtzer Gaon as heard from Rabbi C. Z. Senter
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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

PARSHAS HAAZINU

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and may the earth hear the words of my mouth. (32:1)

There seems to be a disparity between the Torah’s description of Moshe Rabbeinu’s oratory to the Heaven and the way he addressed the earth. He says haazinu, “Give ear, “pay attention, as if he was speaking directly to Heaven. Also, he uses the word, adabeirah, “I will speak,” which is a stronger, more direct form of communication. In contrast, Moshe tells the earth v’sishma, “and hear,” listen in, as I convey imrei fi, words of my mouth. It is almost as if Moshe is talking directly to Heaven, and he is requesting earth to listen in on the conversation. How are we to understand this?

In his Ben Ish Chai, Horav Yosef Chaim Mi’Bagdad, zl, explains that Mussar, rebuke, given directly to the offender, often falls on deaf ears. The guilty party does not want to hear that he did something wrong. He is not interested in listening to a litany of complaints against him. Thus, one who wants to give effective rebuke should direct it to someone who is innocent, in such a manner that the guilty party is privy to “listening in.” Overhearing a conversation which really was supposed to be directed to him, the true offender will begin to think. After all, it was not a personal

attack. He will take the message at face value, listen to the implications which concern him and hopefully change his less-than laudatory habits.

Shomayim, heaven, is a metaphor for tzaddikim, the righteous, whose lives are Himmeldik, Heavenly. Their focus on spiritual pursuit removes them from the realm of the physical dimension. Eretz, earth, are those people who are unable to extricate themselves from their earthliness. Moshe spoke to the tzaddikim with the hope that the average person, whose earthliness caused him to sin, would take the hint and listen to his words. Moshe spoke harsh words to the sky, because he wanted the earth to listen and get the message.

Let My teachings descend like the rain, may My utterance flow like the dew. (32:1)

The Torah is compared to rain which descends from the heavens, reviving the seeds buried within the earth. The Sefas Emes notes a relationship between adamah, earth, and rain vis-à-vis Adam HaRishon, primordial man, his offspring, and the Torah which is compared to rain. The earth filled with seed is potential vegetation, grass, etc. It is only when rain descends on the adamah that this potential is released and the seeds begin to sprout and produce. Likewise, adam, man, created from adamah, is filled with tremendous potential. Will he realize his potential, or will it continue to lay dormant? Torah She’Baal Peh, the Oral Torah, represents the concept of Chayei Olam nota b’socheinu, “Eternal life ‘planted’ in our midst.” With the proper rain - the pure teachings of the Torah - new spiritual life can emerge. The word “pure” prefaces teachings, because, while there is a lot of Torah out there, unless it is pure and unadulterated Torah, taught by a bonafide Torah teacher who exemplifies the Torah’s perspective, it is regrettably missing its life-sustaining properties.

Yeshayah HaNavi says, Ki kaasher yeireid ha’geshem v’ha’sheleg, min ha’Shomayim, v’shamah lo yashuv, ki im hirvah es ha’aretz v’holiday v’hitzmichah... kein yiheyeh Devari, “Like the rain and the snow that come down from the heavens and will not return until they have soaked the earth and brought forth its bounty and made it grow... so will be My words” (Yeshayah 55:10,11). Hashem’s word descends to the Jewish People like rain and snow, benefitting the people just as its counterparts enhance the earth’s ability to produce its bounty.

In Moshe Rabbeinu’s homily to the people, he compares the Torah to various forms of rain: rain, dew, storm winds, light rain drops, drizzle. Sefas Emes explains the connotation to Torah. Some types of rain soften the earth; other rains, such as drizzle, are particularly good for the grass, since they soak the ground and slowly seep into the earth; heavy showers improve certain types of grass. Likewise, there are parts of the Torah which, like hard rain, address the heart of man, softening it, transforming “stone” into a soft, putty-like substance which allows it to absorb the Torah’s teachings and lessons. Other parts of the Torah are similar to drizzle, which slowly penetrates the heart’s core. There is Torah which is geared to the entire collective of the Jewish People, and there is Torah which addresses the life of the individual. In conclusion, at each and every stage of a person’s life, there is a portion or passage of the Torah that is specifically designed to attend to and treat his problem.

In Sefer Tehillim 19:8, David HaMelech says, Toras Hashem temimah, “Hashem’s Torah is complete/perfect.” This pasuk describes the all-encompassing nature of the Torah. The Sefas Emes quotes the pasuk in Shiras Haazinu (Devarim 32:4), Hatzur tamim paalo, “The Rock, Whose works are complete.” He interprets the Rock as a reference to Hashem Who used the Torah, which is referred to as complete (tamim - temimah) to culminate His word of (paalo) Creation. Since the Torah preceded the Creation of the world, and, in effect, is the source for Creation, every facet of the world - both physical and spiritual - has its origins in the Torah. The Torah also goes by the term aish, fire, and is known as Toras chesed, Torah of kindness, and Toras emes, Torah of truth. Thus, each character trait of man in some way finds its corresponding part in the Torah.

Torah is also compared to water. Chazal teach that the rain designated for the world - which is determined on Rosh Hashanah - will fall in

consonance with man's actions during the year: If they are righteous and, thus, deserving, the rain will fall where it is needed at a propitious time and engender prosperity in the world. If not, the rain will fall in the desert where it is not needed, where it brings no benefit. The same idea holds true with regard to the spiritual shefah, flow, of Torah. In accordance with its recipient's preparation, the Torah will come at a time and place where it can be of greatest spiritual benefit. Regrettably, one who is undeserving will see the spiritual flow in others. He will just stand there and wonder, "Why not me too?"

With the above idea in place, I think we can now explain why the Torah is referred to as a shirah, song. In Parashas Vayeilech (Devarim 31:19), the Torah commands us with mitzvah 613: the mitzvah of writing a Sefer Torah. V'atah kisvu lachem es haShirah ha'zos, v'lamdah es Bnei Yisrael, simah b'fihem. "So now, write this song for yourselves, teach it to Bnei Yisrael, and place it in their mouth." Chazal derive from here that every Jew is commanded to write a Torah scroll - a mitzvah that can be fulfilled by writing a single letter. Since the lack of even one letter invalidates the Torah, writing or correcting one letter is tantamount to completing the entire scroll. Why is the Torah called a song?

A song is a musical score of high and low notes perfectly coordinated in harmony with one another. Each individual note in its own right may seem inconsistent with the next, but in context of the greater song, it all meshes together, with the "highs" and "lows," all becoming "straight" in a perfect blend of harmony. The word shirah may be derived from yashar, which means straight. A song reflects the coalescing of various notes in such a manner that they become a perfect score. Shirah is the expression of seeing the "straight" in what appears misshapen. This can only be done through the lens of Torah. A Jew who enjoys such a relationship with the Torah "sings" through life. Regardless of how it might appear to the uninitiated, he is acutely aware and believes with all his heart that his life is a perfect score.

Corruption is not His - the blemish is His children's. (32:5)

Teshuvah is a wonderful thing, but sometimes it comes too late to prevent the damage that has already been done. There is no time limit to teshuvah. It is always accepted, thus allowing for a person who has lived a life of abandon to die and leave this world as a tzaddik, righteous person. There is, however, a collateral damage with regard to his children. This is a damage that is irreparable. When parents go along their merry way, living a life of abandon, a lifestyle that is antithetical to Torah, they must remember that their children are watching. When impressionable minds observe, they become influenced and it becomes part and parcel of their psyche. The parents, at one point in their lives, may decide that enough is enough. There is more to life than living for "today", with a total disregard for the consequences. One of these consequences is their children, who have sadly learned a lifestyle that is wasteful and self-destructive.

This, explains Melitzi Aish, is the Torah's message. Shicheis lo - lo, "Corruption, not him, banav human - his children, however, remain blemished." Self-corruption may be repaired through teshuvah, but the children are lost - until they also come to their senses.

Remember the days of old, consider the years of each generation. (Devarim 32:7)

Remembrance is a major part of Jewish service to Hashem. Much of our tradition is based upon remembering what once was, our highs and lows, joys and travails. Most important, however, is the ability to see the Yad Hashem, guiding Hand of G-d, throughout all that occurs. The Bostoner Rebbe, zl, put remembrance into perspective when he said, "Remembrance is important, but we must know what to remember. Even concerning those tragedies closest to our own time, such as the Holocaust, are we to remember the pain - or the self-sacrifice - what its victims died for - or what they lived for?"

It is almost as if we make a conscious effort to ignore the "role" Hashem plays in every event that takes place. Perhaps the following anecdote will

lend some meaning to this idea. There was once an ignorant villager who was very into the Pesach Seder. Regrettably, he was not much of a scholar, and even the simple basics of the Seder eluded him. Every year, he went searching for a guest who would help him conduct the Seder. One year, despite tremendous effort, he was unsuccessful in finding someone to assist him with the Seder. As far as he was concerned, he was facing catastrophe. A Seder with no guest, just was not a Seder.

In Heaven, his efforts were not going unnoticed. Indeed, the Heavens were in an uproar. How could this man's annual expression of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice and devotion, go without consideration? It just was not fair. After much deliberation, messengers were dispatched to the highest Heavens to summon Eliyahu HaNavi to descend to this world and be this simple farmer's Pesach Seder guest.

During this time, the farmer was not sleeping. He came up with an idea, a way to solve his guest issue. He went to the barn and placed a hat and coat on his favorite horse and led the horse-turned-man into his house. The farmer seated his dressed-up horse at the Seder table, looked at his wife, and exclaimed, "See, now we have a Pesach guest!"

When the angels in Heaven looked down and saw the spectacle before them, they laughed. The Baal Shem Tov explained the reason behind their laughter. The villager had toiled for years to establish something. Whatever it would take, he would have a Pesach guest. He succeeded, but look what he had given up! He could have had Eliyahu HaNavi. Instead, he had a horse! How foolish! The Bostoner Rebbe added that they laughed because all too often we give up the Heavenly within ourselves, that lofty spiritual dimension to which we are all privy - exchanging it for what? A brute beast! Is there anything more ridiculous than exchanging the Heavenly for the earthly?

This is our greatest problem: We ignore the spiritual and settle for the material. Success is measured in physical terms, with spiritual achievement playing a distant second. We no longer know what is truly important, what has value, what will endure. If we would only see G-d's guiding Hand in our lives, we would realize the critical role spirituality plays. One can only see, however, if he looks. One who is sightless, either by affliction or by choice, will not see. Those who have alienated themselves from Judaism have become sightless as a result of the affliction called "assimilation." Those who are blind by choice simply refuse to look. They are afraid of what they might see. Nowhere is selective sight more glaring than in the study of history. We choose to remember what we want. We conveniently forget those events that might bother us. What can be more traumatizing than the "discovery" of G-d in our lives, the revelation that all of the events that we have relegated to the forces of "nature" were really orchestrated by Hashem? Imagine, finding out that everything we have denied has really been true.

The early secularists were acutely aware that, in order to extirpate Jewish belief and observance, they had to divorce G-d from history, thereby transforming the past into events that "just happened." Divine Providence, Hashem's guiding Hand, reward and punishment, cause and effect, were terms they refused to acknowledge, because it implied the notion that there was purpose in this world. Purpose begets religion. If life has a reason, why are we not living it to fulfill its purpose? Essentially, we have traded Eliyahu HaNavi for a horse in a suit and hat. Is that not ridiculous?

Universal history is about Jewish destiny and the place it has in shaping world events. Whatever takes place anywhere in the world is for a reason. We should study its lessons and apply it to our lives. Jewish history examines world events through the ages and how they affected our destiny. Even the most isolated event does not occur in a vacuum. There is a reason for it, and we should learn its lesson and apply it to our lives. The ups and downs, the fortunes and travails, are all lessons in reward and punishment; lessons which should help us navigate the proper course of life. Horav Moshe Sternbuch, Shlita, says that Jewish history is not merely about times and places, various cultures and customs. It is meant to be a lesson in emunah, faith and bitachon, trust. All the nations that controlled the world in centuries past have all disappeared, their power dissipated. They are no

longer of any value to Hashem. Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, observes the conclusion of Megillas Esther, where it says that the entire story and miracle of Purim is written in the annals of Paras u'Madai. Who cares? Why does the Megillah find it necessary to inform us of another source for the miracle of Purim?

Rav Abramsky explains that at first blush, the cursory reader might think that the Megillah is relating the Purim story to its readers. To dispel this error, the Megillah cautions us that if we want nothing more than the "Purim story," we are welcome to read about it in the Persian history books. The sensation, excitement and drama that unfold in the Purim story are best related in the secular Persian chronicles. The details are there; the players, heroes, heroines, and villains are clearly depicted. Indeed, all the makings of a great novel are available for the reader's delight. The Megillah, however, is not a history book. It was written al pi Ruach HaKodesh, through Divine Inspiration, with the sole purpose of teaching about Divine Providence and the chesed, kindness, that Hashem displayed for Klal Yisrael. If one seeks to understand the Yad Hashem, guiding Hand of Hashem; if he wants to discern Hashem's role in shaping Jewish destiny, then the Megillah is for him. If, however, he simply wants a good story, a historical appreciation of the development of the Persian Jewish community, then he should read the history books. One must remember that it is not enough just to know history. One must understand it and see the guiding Hand of Hashem as He crystallizes Jewish destiny.

For they are a nation bereft of counsel, and there is no discernment in them. (32:28)

One would think that an individual who is unable to render sound advice lacks discernment. There is a reason we refer to it as "sage" advice. One who "can" renders advice. One who is unable to determine, make distinction, perceive, is not one whom we seek out for advice. If so, the pasuk is redundant. "For they are a nation bereft of counsel" - means that they are too foolish for their indiscretions. Why does the Torah add that "there is no discernment in them"? Obviously, they are not rocket scientists if they cannot figure out the course of events.

Nachal Kedumim explains that indeed there are situations in which a wise man does not render advice, specifically because of his acuity. On the contrary, in such an instance, it would be foolish to say anything, for fear it would backfire on him. He supports this with Chazal's citation of the dialogue that ensued between Achashveirosh and the Chachmei Yisrael, wise men of Yisrael. The Talmud Megillah 12b relates that following Vashti's audacious behavior, the king was in a state of fury. Something had to be done. He had been embarrassed in front of the entire populace. No one shames the king and gets away with it - not even the queen. Being the wisest men in the country, the king turned to Chachmei Yisrael for their sage advice on how to deal with the Vashti problem.

They understood that, at present, the king was inconsolable. His outrage fueled by humiliation was bristling. The wrong answer would be the end of them. They also realized that an angry person, over time, calms down. Today, the king was out of control. He sought revenge for his bruised ego, but, what if tomorrow he were to wake up in a better mood and "missed" his "beloved" Vashti? The Jews who said, "Kill her!" would be next in line. On the other hand, to say, "Forgive her!" was inconsistent with the respect in which one should behold royalty. After all, she did disgrace the king. Such an infraction could not be tolerated.

The wise Jews were in a quandary. What does a truly wise man do when he is firmly implanted between a rock and a hard place? He feigns ineptitude. This is exactly what these wise men did, by responding to Achashveirosh that ever since the destruction of the Temple and their exile from the Holy Land, they were no longer able to cogently render decisions regarding life and death issues. Perhaps the king should entertain the notion of seeking advice from Amon or Moav, two nations that were living quite comfortably on their land. They were able to think through all aspects of the issue. Thus, the Chachmei Yisrael brilliantly thwarted any danger to

themselves by presenting themselves as inept. Only an arrogant fool renders advice when it might backfire on them.

With regard to our original question, we see that the pasuk is far from redundant. On the contrary, it is due to his astuteness that he feigns an inability to offer advice. In certain circumstances, keeping one's mouth shut and shying away from offering advice is actually a sign of a sagacious mind.

If I sharpen My flashing sword and my hand grasps judgment I shall return vengeance upon my enemies and upon those that hate Me shall I bring retribution. (32:41)

In the Midrash, Chazal derive from the words, v'socheiz ba'mishpat Yadi, "and My hand grasps judgment," that Hashem's meting out of punishment is unlike that of human judges. A human being who lets the arrow leave the bow, or allows the bullet to exit the chamber, knows that there is no turning back. Once the arrow/bullet is released it is "deadset" on reaching its target. There is no pulling back, no reprieve. It is too late. For Hashem, it is never too late. The Almighty can retrieve His arrows, call back His bullets at any time. Hashem is always in control.

Horav Yosef Zundel Salant, zl, asks a practical question and employs the above pasuk with its accompanying Rabbinic commentary to elucidate and resolve his query. In the Talmud Taanis 29a, Chazal record the process leading up to and including the Churban Bais HaMikdash, destruction of the Temple. On the seventh day of Av, the Romans entered the Heichal and proceeded to desecrate it for the next two days. On Tisha B'Av, shortly before sunset, they set fire to the edifice. It continued to burn throughout the next day. Rabbi Yochanan said, "Had I been alive during that time, I would have declared that the fast take place on the tenth of Av, since that is when the majority of the Temple was destroyed."

Rav Yosef Zundel points out that Rabbi Yochanan's statement is not consistent with his opinion in Meseches Bava Kamma, that isho mishum chitzo, the fire set by a man which continues to burn, is considered the work of his own hands. Although the fire burns on its own, the one who ignited it with his hands is considered as if he is directly involved every moment that it burns. It is not merely something for which he is responsible. It is something that he is actually doing. The Nimukei Yosef questions this halachah. How is one permitted to light candles Erev Shabbos? According to the opinion that isho mi'shum chitzo, the candles which are burning on Shabbos are considered the direct action of the one who lit them Erev Shabbos. He explains that isho mi'shum chitzo means that the moment he lit the fire it is considered as if he completed the entire fire. It is like one who shoots an arrow. The moment it leaves the bow, the action is complete and attributed to the archer.

If this is the case, how could Rabbi Yochanan have established the fast on the tenth of Av? When the fire was lit on Tishah B'Av, it was considered done. The entire process which would continue on for the next 26 hours was complete on Tishah B'Av! The explanation quoted by a number of commentaries is that the Nimukei Yosef attributes the resulting conflagration to the person who started the original flame. This does not mean that the object which is destroyed was immediately consumed. We blame what will happen on the one who ignited the fire. The Bais HaMikdash was ignited on Tishah B'Av. The destruction, however, did not take place until the next day. This is why Rabbi Yochanan would have declared that the fast take place on the tenth of Av.

In an alternative explanation, Rav Yosef Zundel quotes the above pasuk, which intimates Hashem's ability to halt a punishment at the very last moment. This would give rise to an interesting difference between the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash, which is the work of Hashem, and a fire started by a human being. Hashem can stop the arrow/fire at any time; a person cannot. Once the fire is ignited, it will burn on until the structure is consumed. Hashem "set" the fire that destroyed the Temple using the Romans as His agents. At any given moment, if it would so be the will of Hashem, the fire would end. In such an instance, Rabbi Yochanan would not hold isho mishum chitzo. Until the very last moment, there remained

hope that the fire would not destroy the Temple. With Hashem on our side, we always have hope.

Va'ani Tefillah

V'sein b'libeinu l'havin u'lhaskil lishmoa, lilmod, u'le'lameid, lishmor, laasos u'l'kayeim

Instill in our hearts a depth of perception, to understand, to hear, to learn, and to teach, to safeguard, to observe and to uphold the mitzvos

This clearly has to be one of the most moving and inspiring tefillos in the daily davening. We supplicate Hashem for what is important to us. The mere fact that what we ask for is a perceptive and penetrating understanding of His Torah-- so that we can impart it to others and so that our own observance will intensify--is in itself a meaningful commentary on core Jewish values and mindset. This is what a Jew prays for! This is what concerns him. In his commentary to the tefillah, Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, defines these terms from a practical vantage point. L'havin means to understand, to look deeply into a matter, eschewing any superficial observation. L'haskil, means to act with seichel, practical commonsensical wisdom. These two requests include the entire Torah, so that: A) we understand profoundly, and we are able to be meivin davar mitoch davar, deduce one thing from another based upon our understanding; B) we maintain this level of comprehension in our minds always, so that everything we think, say, and do, will be the result of "hearing, learning, teaching, guarding doing and upholding." All success in Torah learning is contingent upon the fulfillment of these two requests. In other words, for one to truly uphold the Torah he must have common sense, and depth of understanding and be true to daas Torah. Only then do the above words carry their intended impact.

'zechar nishmas Rochel Leah bas R' Noach a'h Freida bas R' Noach a'h Sora Eshter bas R' Noach By their family

PARSHAS V'ZOS HABRACHA

Hashem came from Sinai having shone forth to them from Seir, having appeared from Har Paran. (33:2)

Sifri teaches that, prior to giving the Torah to Klal Yisrael, Hashem offered it to the nations of the world. "Are you willing to accept the Torah?" Hashem asked, "What is written in it?" was the immediate reply. No gentile nation was willing to accept a legal system and guide which they thought would be incompatible with its chosen lifestyle. Thus, once the citizens of the three dominant nations of the world heard that moral deviation, theft and murder were prohibited forms of activity, they wanted no part of the Torah. These sins constituted a way of life for them. They could not possibly exist on a diet that excluded such morally repugnant behavior. The Torah did not coincide with their character.

To explain this better, Horav Aryeh Leib Bakst, zl, observes that the Torah is given from the Melameid Torah, the One who teaches Torah to Klal Yisrael. Hashem does not just drop off a Torah scroll and say, "Read". He "teaches" the Torah to the lomeid, one who studies it. Under such circumstances, it is essential that the student of the Torah be appropriately suited to be a vessel for Hashroas HaShechinah, the resting of the Divine Presence on him. This is the underlying idea behind the command, V'yikchu Li, "And they shall take for Me." A Jew does not just study Torah. He gives himself over totally to Hashem. The gentiles are unable to cope with such a relationship, since it is contrary to their basic character.

This, explains Rav Bakst, is why Chazal in the Talmud Sanhedrin 29 say that an akum, idol-worshipper, who studies Torah is liable for death. Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morashah kehillas Yaakov, "The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov" (Ibid. 33:4). It is ours by right. It is our inheritance, bequeathed to us by its Divine Author. Thus, even if by some quirk their wise men - and they do have many brilliant scholars - would attempt to study Torah, they will not succeed in plumbing its depths. In order to achieve knowledge in Torah, it must be given to the student by Hashem. Otherwise, it simply does not take hold. Torah study is not a discipline; it is the tangible representation of the relationship between the student and Hashem. If the student is not on the

proper plateau - spiritually and ethically - he will achieve no success. He may amass wisdom, but not Torah!

In the Selichos for Asarah b'Teves, the payton writes, Diachani b'shemonah bo smalis v'yeminis, halo shlashton kavaati taanis, "He surrounded me on the eighth day with darkness left and right, for these three events I instituted a fast." This is a reference to the time that the Greek King Ptolemy compelled 72 Jewish scholars to render the Torah into Greek. He placed the 72 scholars in separate chambers without revealing to any of them why they had been summoned. He entered each room and said, "Write for me the Torah of Moshe, your teacher." Miraculously, Hashem put in each one's heart an identical translation, so that Ptolemy could find no variations whatsoever among them. Even in those places when the Sages purposely altered the translation, the results were identical. This constituted a neis galui, revealed miracle, and created an incredible kavod Shomayim, glory of Heaven.

Yet, Chazal consider this day, the eighth of Teves, a sorrowful day for the Jewish People, comparing it to the day that the Golden Calf was made. Megillas Taanis explains this in the following manner. "On the eighth day of Teves, the Torah was rendered into Greek during the days of King Ptolemy, and darkness descended to the world for three days. To what may the matter be likened? To a lion captured and imprisoned. Prior to his imprisonment all feared him and fled from his presence. Now, all come to gaze at him and ask, "Where is this one's strength?"

Likewise, as long as the Torah was only in Hebrew and could only be interpreted by our Sages, it evoked awe and reverence. As such, many feared casting aspersion on it. For a non-Jew to study Torah, he first had to become proficient in lashon kodesh, Hebrew/Holy tongue, and the various ways for understanding the Torah. Learning Torah required much preparation.

Once the Torah was "imprisoned" in the Greek translation, it was almost as if the Torah had become bereft of its reverence. Whoever wished could now gaze at the Torah; find fault and cast aspersion on its mitzvos, and eschew further understanding of its commandments. Herein lies its similarity to the sin of the Golden Calf. A graven image has no reality and no substance. Likewise, the Greek translation is nothing more than that - a translation. It is devoid of the reality and true substance of Torah. Now, the members of the non-Jewish world could imagine that they, too, were privy to the Torah's secrets.

The Rosh Yeshivah concludes with one caveat. While limud haTorah remains beyond the gentile's purview, tefillah, prayer, does not. Yes, a non-Jew may pray, and his prayer has meaning and efficacy. Torah is Hashem's conversation with man, thus requiring man to be on an appropriate spiritual plateau in order to be a part of the dialogue, to understand what is being said, and to accept and incorporate its lessons into his psyche. Prayer is man's conversation with G-d. Man can present his innermost emotions and requests to Hashem, Who understands their origin and responds accordingly.

The Torah that Moshe commanded to us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov. (33:4)

The Torah does not belong to a select few, to a spiritual elite who acknowledge, appreciate and value everything that it has to offer. The Torah belongs to Kehillas Yaakov, the entire congregation of Yaakov. All Jews have a portion in this inheritance. What are we doing about it? The story is told that one Simchas Torah, the venerable sage, founder of the mussar, ethical/character refinement, movement, Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, was engrossed in lively dancing with his students. The mood was electrifying. Suddenly, for what seemed to be no reason, Rav Yisrael stopped dancing, and his mood turned pensive and somber. This transformation in their revered rebbe brought his students to extreme incredulity. One of them, not given to being shy, came forward and asked Rav Yisrael what was wrong.

Rav Yisrael replied, "As I was dancing with the Torah, I realized that in this town alone there are many Jewish boys who will not go to a Torah

school. They have no chance of tasting its sweetness, of dancing with the Torah as we do. They neither have a clue that today is Simchas Torah, nor do they have any idea what this means. How can we rejoice with the Torah while being fully aware that there are so many Jews who are deprived of their rightful heritage?"

Rav Yisrael's anguish was expressed over a century ago. Since then the situation has far from improved. He was witnessing the early effects of the Haskalah, Enlightenment movement, and the way it tore young people away from their Jewish roots, creating animosity between their generation and that of their parents and grandparents. What should we say when we see the products of generations of Jews severed from a life of Torah, alienated from their heritage, who have embraced the gentile way of life with its perversions and moral/spiritual bankruptcy? Yet, we tout the success of the Torah world, which is truly mind-boggling. Veritably, we have come so far. Just to have witnessed the recent Siyum HaShas is testament to the incredible growth of Torah. What does one say, however, to a father who has a sick child, a child that, lo aleinu, is hovering between life and death? Do we tell him to forget about this one, because, after all, look how well the others are? Certainly, such a statement would be not only insensitive - it would be ludicrous. Well, what do we say to our Father in Heaven Above: "There were almost 100,000 of your children at the Siyum HaShas." What about the majority of His children who have no idea what a Talmud is - let alone a Siyum HaShas. How can we not empathize with the Ribono Shel Olam when so many of His children have deviated - and in many cases not due to their own fault - from the rich path of Torah? So, as we read these words on Simchas Torah, let us think about Our Father in Heaven and make every attempt to see to it that next year more of His children will experience the meaning of v'chayei olam nota b'socheinu.

The one who said of his father and mother, "I have not favored him"; his brothers he did not give recognition and his children he did not know; for they (the Leviim) have observed Your word and Your covenant they preserved. (33:9)

As Moshe Rabbeinu prepared to bless Shevet Levi, he characterized it according to the unusual qualities and virtues of the people. He related their unwavering devotion to the Almighty, their consummate ability to withstand and triumph over the most difficult challenges - all because of their intense fealty to Hashem. Nothing stood in their way - not even their most personal commitments. Their commitment to Hashem transcended everything. This quality was evinced during the sin of the Golden Calf when Moshe declared, Mi l'Hashem elai - "Whoever is for Hashem, join me!" (Shemos 32:26). Shevet Levi came forth in unison, ready to perform their leader's bidding. His every request was their command. Indeed, it was Torah. They were told to rid the congregation of those who had sinned with the Golden Calf. For some, this meant taking the lives of a maternal grandfather, brother by the same mother, or even a daughter's son. Undoubtedly, the filial love was there, but the dedication to Hashem was stronger.

These actions clearly indicated the spiritual mettle which distinguished the members of Shevet Levi. They never thought of themselves; their personal lives and loves had no bearing if it was incongruous with Hashem's word. They were prepared to divorce themselves from normal human emotion. It is for this reason that part of Moshe's blessing appears incredulous, almost misplaced. Moshe says, Ki shamru imrasecha u'brischa yintzoru, "For they (the Leviim) have observed Your word and Your covenant they persevered." Is this not what every single Jew must do? Is this a reason for singling out Shevet Levi?

Horav Avraham Zelmens, zl, derives an important lesson from here. The most distinguished Jew, regardless of his extreme level of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice and devotion to Hashem and his Torah, must still be cognizant and ever-vigilant of the most simple mitzvah. Commitment to the most high, the loftiest, most demanding, emotionally trying mitzvot does not excuse him one iota from his total responsibility to the other mitzvot! A Jew must be committed across the board - to everything. Doing

the "big stuff" does not excuse any form of unbecoming behavior. Davening a long Shemoneh Esrai does not allow for one to act inappropriately towards his friend. One should not say, "I am cut out for the 'exotic' mitzvot."

We can underscore an even deeper lesson. We observe that there are two extremes in religious observance. There are those who are unable to get over the "hump," to obligate themselves to perform the more difficult mitzvot, settling instead for those mitzvot which represent less of a challenge. There are also those Jews who undertake the most difficult, challenging mitzvot, yet are unable to daven properly, to be meticulous concerning krias haTorah, the reading of the Torah, etc. They will battle against any infringement upon Torah law; they will withstand the most trying challenges, yet are unable to do so, or do not "apply" themselves properly to the daily endeavor of being an observant Jew.

An adam ha'shaleim, complete/perfect Jew, is one who does it all, who rises above filial emotion when necessary, yet is meticulous in carrying out each and every mitzvah to its fullest extent. Thus, the blessing to Shevet Levi concludes: Yoru mishpatecha l'Yaakov v'Sorascha l'Yisrael; "They shall teach Your ordinances to Yaakov, and Your Torah to Yisrael." Only one who has achieved shleimus as a Jew, complete devotion under all circumstances, is slated and suited to teach others.

Perhaps we may take this a bit further. The members of Shevet Levi were destined to be the nation's teachers due to their overall commitment to Hashem and His Torah. While this does not preclude their level of Torah scholarship, it does bring into question why the nation's Torah teachers were not selected from the tribe that had produced the greatest scholars. Since when does the manner of a person's avodas Hashem determine his ability to teach? The members of Shevet Yissachar did not budge from their commitment to intense Torah study. Should they not have been the nation's pedagogues? Imagine a university seeking a professor of math; certainly their choice would be based upon erudition - not devotion to and passion for math.

Apparently, Torah study is different. Authored by the Divine, it is much more than a compendium of knowledge and wisdom. Torah is a way of life - our way of life. Other forms of study are mastered by understanding, with excellence being achieved through scholarship. Not so Torah. Only one who lives the Torah to the fullest, who achieves shleimus, can truly impact the Torah experience to his students. A great rebbe certainly must be knowledgeable, but if he does not exemplify Torah living to its zenith, his ability to teach becomes substandard.

Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest Navi, prophet. Indeed, in the Torah's epithet to him, it writes V'lo kam navi od b'Yisrael k'Moshe, "Never again has there arisen in Yisrael a prophet like Moshe" (Devarim 34:10). Yet, when we refer to Moshe, we say Rabbeinu, our Teacher, or Rabban shel kol Yisrael, the Teacher of all Yisrael. His distinction as the greatest prophet seem secondary to his leadership as Klal Yisrael's quintessential Rebbe.

Perhaps this is because Moshe, the Navi, did not reach the entire Jewish People individually as did Moshe, the Teacher. Rabban shel kol Yisrael means that Moshe was rebbe to every Jew. Each and every Jew felt a personal affinity to Moshe Rabbeinu. After all, he was his rebbe. In addition, every rebbe throughout the millennia steps into Moshe's shoes. We cannot become Neviim, but the ability to mentor another Jew is available to us all.

There is no dearth of rebbe stories. Many people have had a mentor who impacted his life in some special way. In searching for that special story, I came upon an episode which occurred with Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, Rosh Yeshivah of Grodno, and one of the greatest Torah mentors of the last century. This story was related by a student of Grodno long after he had left the yeshivah and had suffered the travails of the Holocaust. He explained how, despite the many tragedies that had been a part of his life, he still maintained his unwavering commitment to Yiddishkeit. This is his story:

"I was a young boy when my parents sent me to study in the mechinah (high school) of Yeshivas Grodno. My parents were very poor and could not even afford the rail ticket to send me there. The decision was made for me to walk to Grodno - a distance of about three days. They gave me a little food to take along and instructed me that when I ran out of food, to ask for food from members of the Jewish communities which I would pass. This was mesiras nefesh, devotion to Torah, in those days - both on the part of the parents, and the youngster who left home by foot with little food, with no money and no contacts.

"I slept on the shul benches or on the floor wherever I found one. I was constantly worried whether I would find some food. More importantly, I was anxious about my bechinah, entrance exam. I was concerned that if I fail, I would humiliate my parents. I would have to return home, humiliated and dejected. These thoughts traversed my mind as I devoted every available moment to preparing for my test.

"I finally arrived at the yeshivah, hungry and tired, totally spent from my difficult trip, but I was ready for the farther, test. The students whom I met directed me to the Rosh Yeshivah's "office," which was actually the kitchen in his home. I was about to meet one of the preeminent Roshei Yeshivah in the world - in his kitchen which also served as his office.

"The Rosh Yeshivah welcomed me with an endearing smile which immediately made me at ease. Now, for the bechinah. After asking me concerning my basic family history, my origins and where I had previously studied, Rav Shimon said, 'I have only two questions to ask of you. That is it.' I thought to myself, 'This was it; I was about to take my entrance exam based upon two questions.'

"My first question is," Rav Shimon began, "When did you last have a warm meal?" I was shocked by his 'first' question, although I do not think he was as taken aback with my reply, 'I last had a warm meal three weeks ago!' The Rosh Yeshivah immediately rose from his chair and apologized for his lack of culinary proficiency. Regrettably, his rebbetzin was not home. I would have to suffice with whatever he could put together for me! I was shocked beyond belief; I had never before seen a man prepare a meal - not even my father, and here was Rav Shimon Shkop bustling around the kitchen - for me, a youngster from a small village, who was not even his student!

"As soon as the meal was prepared, Rav Shimon placed it before me and waited to see that I had enough. Indeed, he filled my plate a second time, until he could tell that I was satiated. I benched; the table was cleared off and now it was time for the second question: "Now we will continue with the next question." I assumed that now that I had eaten, the bechinah would begin in earnest. 'Tell me,' Rav Shimon asked, "when did you last sleep in a bed?" I did not believe his question, but it was as I am telling you. He wanted to know when I had last slept in a bed. I told him the truth, 'I do not remember, it has been so long.' Rav Shimon took me by the hand and led me to a bed. He 'tucked' me in, and I slept that night like I had never slept before. The next morning I discovered, to my chagrin, that I had slept in the Rosh Yeshivah's own bed!

"This was my entrance exam to Yeshivas Grodno. My life has not been easy. I survived the horrors of the Holocaust, watched most of my family and friends perish al Kiddush Hashem. Yet, I never faltered; I never wavered in my devotion to Yiddishkeit and my commitment to Torah and mitzvos. Why? What kept me going? What gave me the strength to overcome? It was the 'two questions' that comprised my entrance exam to Grodno."

We now have an idea what it is that characterizes a rebbe and the everlasting impact he can have on the life of his student.

Rejoice, O' Zevullun, in your excursions, and Yissachar in your tent. (33:18)

The definition of a good life is relative. Clearly, there are those who have very few material comforts, yet they never complain. After all, they do not sense a need for anything more than what they have. In contrast, there are those who seem to have everything, but it is never enough. Yissachar and

Zevullun characterize a utopian approach to Torah living. Yissachar devotes all of his time to Torah study. His material needs are addressed by his devoted brother, Zevullun, whose day is spent toiling in the world of commerce. Why is this considered utopia? Zevullun understands the need for supporting his brother. Yissachar is prepared to give it all up just to learn. Zevullun does not make Yissachar feel like a shnorrer. Indeed, Zevullun feels honored, in fact privileged, to share in some part in Yissachar's learning. When the ben Torah is treated royally, and the one who toils in the field of commerce feels privileged, this is utopia!

A student of the Rosh Yeshivah of Beth Medrash Govohah, Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, informed his rebbe that he was leaving the yeshivah to try his luck in the outside world. Apparently, it was not a cut and dry issue of "no money." It was more than that. The student felt that it was "enough;" it was now time to leave and "do something". When the Rosh Yeshivah expressed his disappointment with the student's decision, the young man explained that the Rosh Yeshivah need not worry. He would heartily support Torah scholars. Thus, he would share in their Olam Habba, portion in the World to Come. He was doing a good thing.

Rav Aharon countered that it was not his Olam Habba which concerned him, but rather, his Olam hazeh, This World, that worried him. True, he would be rewarded in the World to Come for his efforts on behalf of Torah, but what about a geshmak, feeling of satisfaction, in this world? How can one enjoy a life that is devoid of Torah learning?

This was the perspective of the man who spearheaded the development of Torah in America post World War II. He was acutely aware of the sense of satisfaction, the feeling of "having it all," that accompanies toiling in the field of Torah. Zevullun, on the other hand, was exposed to a business world with its often moral and ethical bankruptcy. It would be a constant battle to circumvent and transcend the indecorous "opportunities" which avail themselves. The allure of success and easy money can be quite overwhelming.

S'mach Zevullun b'tzeitsecha, "Rejoice, O' Zevullun, in your excursions." Zevullun, when you leave this world on your final excursion, you can rest assured that you will finally reap your well-earned reward. Yissachar b'ohalecha, "Your brother Yissachar has enjoyed his life in Olam Hazeh," because his Olam Hazeh consists of toiling in Torah.

Dear Readers:

Chasdei Hashem ki lo samnu, ki lo chalu rachamav. "Hashem's kindness surely has not ended; nor are His mercies exhausted" (Eichah 3:22). With this edition of V'zos HaBrachah, I have the z'chus of completing twenty-two years of writing Peninim. It began as an intrepid idea and has grown into a widely-accepted commentary on the Torah. The siyata d'Shmaya which I have been granted is overwhelming. The responsibility to continue is equally compelling.

The number 22 has a compelling connotation, being the sum of letters that comprise the Hebrew alphabet and the number of books in Tanach. Twenty-two represents completion - a totality - a milestone. I will view this number as a milestone of achievement which spurs continued growth. In Torah nothing comes to an end; we just celebrate milestones. Thus, after the Siyum, completion of a meseches in Talmud, we say Hadran Alach, we will return to you. We have finished. Now, we begin once again.

I have made it a point in the previous issues of V'zos HaBrachah to thank those who play critical roles in seeing that Peninim is produced from concept to reality. This issue is no different. While it might seem redundant, it is something which should be repeated, due to the significant role they play in the success of Peninim. I have the privilege of once again thanking: Mrs. Sharon Weimer and Mrs. Tova Scheinerman, who prepare the manuscript on a weekly basis; Mrs. Marilyn Berger, who continues to edit the copy in an effort to make it presentable and readable to the wider spectrum of the Jewish community; My dear friend, Rabbi Malkiel Hefter, who sees to it that the final copy is completed, printed, and distributed in a timely and orderly fashion.

Over the years, Peninim has developed its own network of distribution. While the constraints of space do not permit me to mention each and every person who sees to it that Peninim is distributed in his or her individual community, I will highlight a few. It was Baruch Berger?" of Brooklyn, New York, who came to me originally, requesting that he be able to distribute Peninim in his community. He later became ill, slightly hindering his ability to continue his Avodas ha'Kodesh. As his illness progressed, Baruch was compelled to halt his activities, but the z'chus is all his. Last year, just before Rosh Hashanah, Baruch's pure neshamah returned to its rightful place b'ginzei meromim. May the limud ha'Torah which he initiated be for him an eternal z'chus. Avi Hershkowitz of Queens, New York, and Asher Groundland of Detroit, Michigan, distribute in their respective communities. Shema Yisrael network provides the electronic edition for the worldwide distribution. A number of years ago, Eliyahu Goldberg of London, England, began a "World" edition. Through his efforts and that of Pinchas Brandeis of Manchester, Peninim receives extensive coverage in England, France, Switzerland, South Africa, Hong Kong, South America and Australia. Rabbi Moshe Peleg, Rav of Shaarei Zedek Medical Center, prints and distributes Peninim throughout the English speaking community in Eretz Yisrael. Kudos to Meir Winter of Monsey, NY, and Moshe Davidovici of Antwerp, Belgium, for including Peninim in their electronic edition of Divrei Torah. May the mitzvah of harbotzas Torah serve as a z'chus for them to be blessed b'chol mili d'meitav.

My wife, Neny, has supported me in more ways than I can enumerate. Peninim is no different. She avails me the opportunity and peace of mind to write, regardless of the time and place, whether convenient or not; and her weekly "early morning" last word editing of the manuscript prior to its printing is the final word. She has been - and always is - there. To this end, and for so many other favors too numerous to mention, I offer her my heartfelt gratitude. I pray that: we both be blessed with good health; we merit that Torah and chesed continue to be the hallmarks of our home; and we continue to derive much nachas from all of our children and grandchildren.

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

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Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Moses the Man

That very day the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain which you go up, and be gathered to your people ... For you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel."

With these words there draws to a close the life of the greatest hero the Jewish people has ever known: Moses, the leader, the liberator, the lawgiver, the man who brought a group of slaves to freedom, turned a fractious collection of individuals into a nation, and so transformed them that they became the people of eternity.

It was Moses who mediated with God, performed signs and wonders, gave the people its laws, fought with them when they sinned, fought for them when praying for Divine forgiveness, gave his life to them and had his heart broken by them when repeatedly they failed to live up to his great expectations.

Each age has had its own image of Moses. For the more mystically inclined sages Moses was the man who ascended to heaven at the time of the giving of the Torah, where he had to contend with the angels who opposed the idea that this precious gift be given to mere mortals. God told Moses to answer them, which he did decisively. "Do angels work that they

need a day of rest? Do they have parents that they need to be commanded to honour them? Do they have an evil inclination that they need to be told, "Do not commit adultery?" (Shabbat 88a). Moses the man out-argues the angels.

Other sages were more radical still. For them Moses was Rabbenu, "our rabbi" – not a king, a political or military leader, but a scholar and master of the law, a role which they invested with astonishing authority. They went so far as to say that when Moses prayed for God to forgive the people for the Golden Calf, God replied, "I cannot, for I have already vowed, One who sacrifices to any God shall be destroyed (Ex. 22:19), and I cannot revoke My vow." Moses replied, "Master of the universe, have You not taught me the laws of annulling vows? One may not annul his own vow, but a sage may do so." Moses thereupon annulled God's vow (Shemot Rabbah 43:4).

For Philo, the 1st century Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Moses was a philosopher-king of the type depicted in Plato's Republic. He governs the nation, organizes its laws, institutes its rites and conducts himself with dignity and honour; he is wise, stoical and self-controlled. This is, as it were, a Greek Moses, looking not unlike Michelangelo's famous sculpture. For Maimonides, Moses was radically different from all other prophets in four ways. First, others received their prophecies in dreams or visions, while Moses received his awake. Second, to the others God spoke in parables obliquely, but to Moses directly and lucidly. Third, the other prophets were terrified when God appeared to them but of Moses it says, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33: 11). Fourth, other prophets needed to undergo lengthy preparations to hear the Divine word; Moses spoke to God whenever he wanted or needed to. He was "always prepared, like one of the ministering angels" (Laws of the Foundations of Torah 7: 6).

Yet what is so moving about the portrayal of Moses in the Torah is that he appears before us as quintessentially human. No religion has more deeply and systemically insisted on the absolute otherness of God and man, heaven and earth, the infinite and the finite. Other cultures have blurred the boundary, making some human beings seem godlike, perfect, infallible. There is such a tendency – marginal to be sure, but never entirely absent – within Jewish life itself: to see sages as saints, great scholars as angels, to gloss over their doubts and shortcomings and turn them into superhuman emblems of perfection. Tanakh, however, is greater than that. It tells us that God, who is never less than God, never asks us to be more than simply human.

Moses is a human being. We see him despair and want to die. We see him lose his temper. We see him on the brink of losing his faith in the people he has been called on to lead. We see him beg to be allowed to cross the Jordan and enter the land he has spend his life as a leader travelling toward. Moses is the hero of those who wrestle with the world as it is and with people as they are, knowing that "It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to stand aside from it."

The Torah insists that "to this day no one knows where his grave is" (Deut. 34: 6), to avoid his grave being made a place of pilgrimage or worship. It is all too easy to turn human beings, after their death, into saints and demigods. That is precisely what the Torah opposes. "Every human being" writes Maimonides in his Laws of Repentance (5: 2), "can be as righteous as Moses or as wicked as Jeroboam."

Moses does not exist in Judaism as an object of worship but as a role model for each of us to aspire to. He is the eternal symbol of a human being made great by what he strove for, not by what he actually achieved. The titles conferred by him in the Torah, "the man Moses," "God's servant," "a man of God," are all the more impressive for their modesty. Moses continues to inspire.

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On 3 April 1968, Martin Luther King delivered a sermon in a church in Memphis, Tennessee. At the end of his address, he turned to the last day of

Moses' life, when the man who had led his people to freedom was taken by God to a mountain-top from which he could see in the distance the land he was not destined to enter. That, said King, was how he felt that night:

I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.

That night was the last of his life. The next day he was assassinated. At the end, the still young Christian preacher – he was not yet forty – who had led the civil rights movement in the United States, identified not with a Christian figure but with Moses.

In the end the power of Moses' story is precisely that it affirms our mortality. There are many explanations of why Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. I have argued that it was simply because "each generation has its leaders" (Avodah Zarah 5a) and the person who has the ability to lead a people out of slavery is not necessarily the one who has the requisite skills to lead the next generation into its own and very different challenges. There is no one ideal form of leadership that is right for all times and situations.

Franz Kafka gave voice to a different and no less compelling truth:

He is on the track of Canaan all his life; it is incredible that he should see the land only when on the verge of death. This dying vision of it can only be intended to illustrate how incomplete a moment is human life; incomplete because a life like this could last for ever and still be nothing but a moment. Moses fails to enter Canaan not because his life was too short but because it is a human life.[1]

What then does the story of Moses tell us? That it is right to fight for justice even against regimes that seem indestructible. That God is with us when we take our stand against oppression. That we must have faith in those we lead, and when we cease to have faith in them we can no longer lead them. That change, though slow, is real, and that people are transformed by high ideals even though it may take centuries.

In one of its most powerful statements about Moses, the Torah states that he was "a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his strength unabated" (34: 8). I used to think that these were merely two sequential phrases, until I realised that the first was the explanation for the second. Why was Moses' strength unabated? Because his eyes were undimmed – because he never lost the ideals of his youth. Though he sometimes lost faith in himself and his ability to lead, he never lost faith in the cause: in God, service, freedom, the right, the good and the holy. His words at the end of his life were as impassioned as they had been at the beginning.

That is Moses, the man who refused to "go gently into that dark night", the eternal symbol of how a human being, without ever ceasing to be human, can become a giant of the moral life. That is the greatness and the humility of aspiring to be "a servant of God."

1. Franz Kafka, *Diaries 1914 – 1923*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Martin Greenberg and Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken, 1965, 195-96.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Ha'azinu: The Source of Rabbinic Authority

The Sages instituted numerous rabbinic decrees in order to prevent violations of Torah law. For example, the Sages extended the Torah's prohibition of eating milk and meat together to include fowl, since it confused people who failed to distinguish between fowl and 'real' meat.

There are, however, a few cases in which the Sages went even further, and authored new positive mitzvot. The mitzvot to light Chanukah lights, to read Megillat Esther on Purim, to wash hands before eating bread - these are rabbinic enactments with no direct basis in Torah law. They are not extensions of Torah legislation or protective measures, but brand-new mitzvot. By what right could the Sages create them?

Even more audacious, the rabbis decreed that one recites a blessing when performing these rabbinic innovations: "Blessed are You, the Eternal our God... Who has commanded us to..." When did God command us to light Chanukah candles, or read the Megillah on Purim?

The Talmud in Shabbat 23a responds to this question. There are in fact two sources in the Torah for the rabbinic authority to establish new mitzvot:

"Do not stray to the right or left from the word that [the high court] will declare to you." (Deut. 17:10)

"Ask your father and he will tell you; question your elders, and they will respond." (Deut. 32:7)

Why two sources?

Rav Kook explained that God-given commandments will naturally lead towards the goal of absolute good. This is understandable, as God knows the future and is aware of all implications of any decree. Man-made laws, on the other hand, even those designed by the most prescient legal scholars, will never be able to achieve the same results as a Divinely-decreed mitzvah.

Of course, the Talmudic Sages were blessed with ruach hakodesh, Divine inspiration, in addition to the logic and reasoning that are an integral aspect of the Oral Law. They used these gifts in order to attain results similar to God-given mitzvot, to further the cause of the Jewish people's perfection in both spiritual and material realms.

The Sages examined two aspects when formulating a new law:

The people's current religious and physical needs;

The desire to maintain continuity with the Jewish people's lofty spiritual heritage.

It is insufficient to take into account only immediate needs. If the people becomes estranged from its spiritual foundation, it has in fact become a different nation. Its unity and continuity are no longer assured.

Regarding the need to address the current needs of society, the Torah commands, "Do not stray to the right or left from the word that [the high court] will declare to you." This refers to decrees of the high court, which institutes legislation determined by the present state of the people.

But other rabbinic enactments are new mitzvot, designed to maintain our ties with our spiritual heritage - such as lights on Chanukah, reading the Megillah on Purim, or washing hands before a meal, like the kohanim before they ate Terumah. Regarding the authority to enact these new mitzvot, the Torah states, "Ask your father... question your elders." Israel's past was elevated and holy, and is the source of our success. "For His own nation remained God's portion; Jacob is the lot of His heritage" (Deut. 32:9).

(Adapted from Ein Ayah on Shabbat 23a, vol. III, p. 73)

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