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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON NITZAVIM VAYELECH - 5773

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from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com> via madmimi.com date:
Fri, Aug 30, 2013 at 12:05 AM subject: Aish.com Daily - 24-25 Elul
24 Elul Yahrzeit of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838-1933), popularly
known as the **Chafetz Chaim**, the title of his groundbreaking book on
the laws of proper speech. The **Chafetz Chaim** lived in Radin, a small
town in Poland that became a center of attention for world Jewry, given
the **Chafetz Chaim's** saintly stature and active involvement in Jewish
affairs. The **Chafetz Chaim** published over 20 books, including
Mishnah Berurah, a monumental commentary on the daily living section
of the Code of Jewish Law. The six volumes of Mishnah Berurah took
25 years to complete, and it has achieved universal acceptance as the
definitive guide to Jewish law for Ashkenazic Jewry. The **Chafetz
Chaim** was equally revered for his sterling character. The **Chafetz
Chaim** passed away in 1933 at age 95, and is buried in Radin.

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Nitzavim Vayelech- September 2, 2010 // Posted in Weekly Parsha
Divrei Torah לזכות רפואה שלימה ל-אברהם בייניש בן גאלדה שפרינצה

Prior to the Bnei Yisroel entering Eretz Cana'an, Moshe Rabbeinu
states that Hashem wants to sign a covenant with klal Yisroel - just like
he did with the Avos - to reinforce their acceptance of the Torah. Why
did Hashem insist on klal Yisroel signing a treaty? The pasuk says that it
is because when they left Egypt, they passed through a number of
different nations. The pasuk continues, 'you saw their avoda zarah and
their despicable idols-of wood and stone, of silver and gold that were
with them.' Since they were exposed to these sights, Hashem wanted to
ensure that it wouldn't have an affect on them; he therefore wanted them
to reinforce their commitment to his Torah through a covenant.

When the pasuk mentions "their despicable idols-of wood and stone, of
silver and gold that were with them", what exactly does this mean?
According to the simple translation, it means that in those days there
were various different types of idols. There were idols of wood, gold,
silver, and stone. Being that they saw so many different types of avodah
zara, the Ribono Shel Olam was concerned that it had an affect and some
of klal Yisroel would start having some doubts.

Rav Sholom Schwadron offers a unique explanation of this pasuk, in
the name of his Rebbi - Reb Leib Chasman Zt"l.

He explains that although the pasuk mentions many different forms of
avodah zara, in reality they were all the same. If so, why does the Torah
use four different names and forms of idols? The answer is that the Torah
is teaching us an important lesson. The first time klal Yisroel saw an
avodah zara, it was disgusting to them. It was something that they had
never seen before. They couldn't imagine anyone serving such a god. It
was so despicable to them, that they didn't concentrate on its form. The
second time they saw it, they were not as disgusted but they already

discerned a form. The third time they saw an idol, they were already desensitized and it didn't bother them as much. Already by the fourth time, they saw it clearly and might have been slightly attracted to it.

The powerful lesson is that people unfortunately do aveiros, no one is perfect. The problem that evolves is that a person gets accustomed to doing that aveira. The more one becomes accustomed to doing or seeing something wrong, the more desensitized he is to that particular aveira. If you look at an aveira as disgusting then you won't even consider doing it. Once a person is exposed to an aveira again and again, it enters the realm of possibility.

The **Chofetz Chaim** once walked out of a shul (outside of Radin) and he saw a Jew being mechalel Shabbos. He sat there and he cried for a full hour. The next Shabbos, he walked out of the same shul and saw another Jew being mechalel Shabbos. He cried for an hour and a half. The talmidim asked, Rabbi - why did you cry longer than you did last week? The **Chofetz Chaim** responded that when he saw this Jew being mechalel Shabbos, he cried for forty five minutes and he felt that it was enough. He then realized that he had cried shorter than last time, and that he must have lost his sensitivity to chilul Shabbos! He therefore cried for another forty five minutes for that loss.

The more accustomed a person becomes to something, the less important it becomes to him. This goes for anything. A mitzvah, an aveira (chas v'shalom), or even a mundane act. May we all be zoche to be sensitive to the Torah's values, and not to chas v'shalom lose our sensitivity towards any mitzvah or our disgust towards any aveira. In this zechus Hashem will be sensitive towards each of us on this upcoming Yom HaDin.

from: [Rabbi] **Ozer Alport** <oalport@optonline.net> date: Thu, Aug 29, 2013 at 4:41 PM subject: Parsha Potpourri - Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech

Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech - Vol. 8, Issue 47 Compiled by Oizer Alport

Hanistaros L'Hashem Elokeinu v'haniglos lanu ul'vaneinu ad olam la'asos es kol Divrei haTorah hazos (29:28) One afternoon in Jerusalem, Rabbi Yakov Vann was on his way to the synagogue for the afternoon prayers when somebody called out from a doorway asking him to complete a minyan in a house of mourning. He gladly agreed to pray with the mourners, but upon entering the apartment, he was surprised to observe that although it was full of seforim (sacred Jewish books), the mourners themselves did not appear to be religiously observant.

After the prayer service had concluded, Rabbi Vann took out a Mishnah Berurah to examine it, and he was even more taken aback to see that its margins were full of astute insights and comments. He inquired about the owner of the seforim, and one of the mourners replied that they all belonged to the deceased, his father. Rabbi Vann probed further, asking whether any of the other family members used the books. Sadly, the son responded that although his father had been a very pious and learned Torah scholar, none of his children had followed in his ways. He explained that when his father came home each night, he would lock himself in his study and spend hours poring over his beloved tomes. However, because his Torah study only occurred behind closed doors and not in the presence of his family, his children never observed him learning and therefore did not absorb his passion for Torah and mitzvos.

As Rabbi Vann wistfully left the mourners, he realized that this encounter gave him a newfound appreciation of a novel Torah thought that he had recently heard. In Parshas Nitzavim, Moshe told the Jewish people Hanistaros L'Hashem Elokeinu v'haniglos lanu ul'vaneinu ad olam. Literally, this means that hidden things belong to Hashem our G-d, while those that are revealed are forever for us and our children. However, Rav Aharon Rokeach, the fourth Belzer Rebbe and uncle of

the present Belzer Rebbe, suggested that the verse can be interpreted as follows: Hanistaros L'Hashem Elokeinu - if we hide our mitzvos by doing them privately, then only Hashem will know about our righteous ways. On the other hand, v'haniglos lanu ul'vaneinu - if we take a different approach and reveal our good deeds to our children, then our religious priorities and values will remain ad olam - for all eternity, as they will be carried on by our children and descendants for all generations, a lesson which Rabbi Vann understood all too well after his painful visit to the house of mourners.

Ki karov eilecha hadavar me'od b'ficha uvilvavcha la'asoso (30:14) The Ponovezher Rav once traveled to South Africa to strengthen and encourage the Lithuanian Jews who had relocated there in their religious observance. Prior to his journey, he asked his teacher, the illustrious **Chofetz Chaim**, what message he should relate to the Jews there in the name of the leader of the generation.

The **Chofetz Chaim** replied that he should tell them that it is actually quite easy to do the mitzvah of teshuvah - repentance. The minimum requirements to fulfill this obligation are few and are within the reach of every Jew: ceasing to sin, confessing one's past actions and expressing regret over them, and accepting upon oneself not to transgress again. Unfortunately, the evil inclination attempts to convince a person that proper repentance is so difficult and involves so many complex components that he will never succeed in correctly doing so, thereby causing him to give up the effort without even trying.

In this vein, Rav Nosson Wachtfogel notes that in our verse, Moshe describes one of the commandments as not being hidden or distant from a person. It isn't in the heavens or across the sea as one might have thought, but rather it is very close - in one's mouth and heart. What is this commandment which a person might mistakenly conclude is so far beyond him that its observance requires him to travel thousands or millions of miles, yet in reality the keys to its performance lie inside of him? Not surprisingly, the Ramban writes that the mitzvah to which Moshe is referring is the mitzvah of teshuvah.

The Gemora in Kiddushin (49b) discusses a case in which a wicked man betroths a woman on the condition that he is completely righteous. Surprisingly, the Gemora rules that she may be legally engaged, explaining that perhaps he had thoughts of repentance in the moment prior to his proposal. We may derive from here that a person can literally transform himself from one extreme to the other in a mere moment of sincere reflection and regret, a lesson which should inspire and motivate us during the approaching Yamim Noraim.

Hachaim v'hamaves nasati l'fanecha habrachta v'haklala u'bacharta bachaim l'ma'an tichyeh atah v'zarecha (30:19) Moshe exhorts the Jewish people: "I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse. You shall choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring." These instructions seem redundant. Since Moshe already mentioned that the alternative to life is death, wouldn't it have been sufficient to merely command us to choose life? Why was it necessary to add the phrase, "so that you will live, you and your offspring," which seems superfluous after we were already told to choose life?

Rav Moshe Feinstein suggests that Moshe's intention wasn't to explain why a person should choose life or to spell out the self-evident consequences of doing so. Rather, he was adding critical information: the type of life that we should choose, namely one that will result in our children electing to follow in our footsteps.

Rav Moshe writes that the financial situation for many European immigrants was grim. Their refusal to work on Shabbos made it very difficult to find and keep a reliable paycheck. When they came home, they complained constantly about how hard it is to be an observant Jew. Although they remained committed to their religious ideals, they unintentionally educated their children to believe that Judaism is painful and requires great sacrifice. Not surprisingly, many of these children

chose to abandon their family traditions. On the other hand, if parents stress the warmth and happiness which our faith offers, their children will naturally want to follow in their footsteps, and it is precisely this kind of life which Moshe commands us to choose.

<http://www.theyeshivaworld.com/article.php?p=139974>

Rabbi Ozer Alport

Parsha Potpourri: Parshas Nitzavim (Thursday, September 13th, 2012)
Ki Karov Eilecha Hadavar Mi'od ... (30:14)

The Ponovezher Rav once traveled to South Africa to strengthen and encourage the Lithuanian Jews who had relocated there in their religious observance. Prior to his journey, he asked his teacher, the illustrious **Chofetz Chaim**, what message he should relate to the Jews there in the name of the leader of the generation.

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http://koltorah.org/Volume_15/4_Nitzavim_-_Rosh_Hashanah.htm
Slow and Steady Wins the Race

by **Rabbi Josh Kahn**

“Deadline,” “due date,” and “finals” are all terms we associate with “all-nighters,” frantic attempts to pull together all of our work. The approaching Rosh Hashanah has similar symbolism. Rosh Hashanah is the big day. It is the day on which our closing arguments are being made, as well as our moment of opportunity to impress Hashem as He sits in judgment. This may seem like a time for desperation or for attempts to show Hashem how different we are going to be. Actually, a more effective recipe calls for patient steps of gradual self-improvement. When Richard Simmons was asked how he is able to infuse hope and encouragement in people to lose tens or even hundreds of pounds on diet, he responded by saying that he has never convinced anyone to lose hundreds of pounds. Instead, he convinces people to lose a few pounds by concentrating on one meal at a time. If the goals are realistic, the diet will be successful. One of the first “Baalei Teshuva” in history is Kayin. After killing his brother Hevel and accepting rebuke and punishment from Hashem, Kayin exclaims, “Gadol Avoni MiNeso,” “My iniquity is too great to bear” (Bereishit 4:13). Kayin initially reacts with

desperation, unable to shoulder responsibility for his wrongdoing. However, the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 22:13) continues this story. After Kayin's initial despair, he meets his father, Adam, who asks: what was Hashem's verdict? Kayin responds that he has done Teshuva, “VeNitpasharti.” What does this word “VeNitpasharti” mean? Rav Yissocher Frand suggests that the word comes from the root Pesharah, which means compromise. Kayin is describing his Teshuva as one of compromise. When faced with the daunting task of recovering from a seemingly unbearable judgment, Kayin describes his approach as compromise. Kayin realizes he can not do Teshuva in one desperate prayer, or through an extreme and immediate reversal of his inherent nature. In contrast, he chooses an approach of gradual, realistic change. The **Chafetz Chaim** illustrates this idea with a story. A merchant once placed an order with a wholesaler. After the wholesaler completed the order and presented the bill to the merchant, the merchant asked to put the bill on credit. After looking over the merchant's troubling record, the wholesaler regrettably had to tell the merchant that he couldn't continue adding to the already large debt he owed the wholesaler. The merchant begged and pleaded, but with a heavy heart, the wholesaler was compelled to say no. Finally, the merchant began bawling and crying hysterically that this was the last time he would ask for his credit to be extended and he would begin paying back very soon. Another customer who overheard this conversation interrupted. Hearing both sides of the story, he offered a very practical solution. The merchant should place a small order with the wholesaler and pay for it in cash. The wholesaler, who normally wouldn't sell this small amount of merchandise for the wholesale price, would make an exception for this merchant and sell the merchandise at the discounted price. Then, the merchant would sell his goods and return, cash in hand, and begin paying off his debt, while still continuing to buy small amounts of the merchandise with the remaining money. While certainly not a glamorous business plan, this approach proved very successful in paying off the merchant's debt. Teshuva is not so different from business practices or diets. Small, gradual steps towards self-improvement works! Harold B. Melchart once said, “Live life each day as you would climb a mountain. An occasional glance towards the summit keeps the goal in mind. . .Climb slowly, steadily enjoying each passing moment; and the view from the summit will serve as a fitting climax for the journey.” We don't need to come out of Rosh Hashanah with New Year's propositions which will be overly challenging. Instead we might pick one or two small items we wish to improve and a vision of the ultimate goal. After successfully reaching these goals, we will be confident and determined to continue this process. LeShana Tova Tikatevu VeTeichateimu.

<http://www.phillykollel.com/Archives/MVS%20Parsha%20Sheet/MVS%205771/MVS%20Nitzavim%20Vayelech%205771.pdf>

Philadelphia Community Kollel
Parshas Nitzavim Vayelech 5771

By: **Rabbi Yaakov Deutscher**
Connecting Dots and Jews

“The hidden sins are for Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed sins are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of his Torah.” (Devarim 29:28) Rashi explains that when dots appear over a word in the Torah they are interpreted as a limitation of the extent of that written word. Here the dots appear over the words Lanu Ulivaneinu, “for us and for our children.” This is to teach us that the joint responsibility for the revealed sins of an individual was not effective immediately upon the acceptance of the Torah; it only initiated after Klal Yisroel crossed the Jordan and became guarantors for one another at Har Gerizim and Har Ebel. Since that time, almost three thousand years ago, we have been required to take responsibility for one another and face judgment as a single unified nation. Based on this understanding,

the **Chofetz Chaim** explains that it is incumbent on each member of Klal Yisroel to help fellow Jews perform the positive mitzvos and abstain from transgressing the negative mitzvos. When even one Jew is lacking in performing a single mitzvah it is considered, to a certain extent, as though each and every Jew is lacking in that same mitzvah as well. The gemarah in Shabbos (54a) tells us, “Whoever has the ability to protest against the members of his household but does not protest is punished for the transgressions of the members of his household... further, one who can protest against the entire world (i.e. someone of high stature) but does not is punished for the transgressions for the entire world! The **Chofetz Chaim** illustrates this point with a parable: Shimon borrows a large sum of money from Reuven to start up a new business. Shortly thereafter, Reuven is informed that Shimon plans to use the borrowed money to venture into a risky business. Fearing Shimon would lose all the money and ultimately default on the loan, Reuven quickly does his best to contest Shimon’s poor investment. Although Reuven does care for his friend Shimon, the primary reason for his involvement is not to shield Shimon from a bad investment but rather to ensure that he will eventually be repaid. The same can be said when it comes to ensuring the fulfillment of mitzvos by fellow Jews. If one sees a fellow Jew transgressing or abstaining from doing a mitzvah he must recognize that the loss of performing a mitzvah is not only his friend’s, but his as well. It is imperative that we take upon ourselves the responsibility to help Jews of all walks of life return to the path of our ancestors and walk hand in hand in our quest to serve Hakodesh Baruch Hu

Parsha Perspectives 2007
 by OZER ALPORT Hanistaros LaShem Elokeinu Vihaniglos Lanu Ulivaneinu.. (29:28)

“The hidden sins are for Hashem our G-d, but the revealed sins are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah.” (Deuteronomy 29:28)

In discussing the difference between sins performed privately and those which are public knowledge, the Torah writes the words Lanu Ulivaneinu – for us and for our children – with dots on top of each letter, something which is done quite rarely. Although there are complex legal rules for interpreting the meaning of these dots whenever they occur (see Rashi), the **Chofetz Chaim**, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan finds a beautiful symbolic message in this anomaly. The **Chofetz Chaim** notes that when writing a book or a letter, an author who wants to stress or draw attention to a certain phrase or point will draw attention to it by underlining the salient words. Similarly, when discussing the importance of educating our children and raising them with proper values and outlooks, the Torah saw no more fitting way to do so than to place dots on the words referring to us and our children, essentially “underlining” these words. Hashem did this to emphasize the unparalleled significance in Judaism of teaching our children to be proper G-d-fearing Jews. The following story shows just how far this lesson can be taken. One year on the night of Kol Nidrei, the most awe-inspiring night in the Jewish calendar, the Jews of Grodna, a large community then part of the Russian empire, were all assembled in the town’s great synagogue, ready to begin the solemn services. Only one critical element was conspicuously absent: Rabbi Binyomin Diskin, renowned for his punctuality, was nowhere to be seen. After waiting several tense minutes, a delegation was dispatched to his house to find out what the delay was. Upon arriving at the house of their beloved Rabbi fearing for the worst, they were shocked when they peered through the window and observed him calmly seated by the table, studying together with his young son, seemingly oblivious to the date and to the entire congregation that was anxiously awaiting him in the synagogue. Seizing up his courage, one of the elders of the community knocked and gently explained that the congregation was concerned about

his uncharacteristic delay. Understanding that they were seeking an explanation for his behavior, the elderly Rabbi explained that with the arrival of the day on which a person’s fate for the upcoming year is sealed, he found himself nervous about his lack of merits. Desperately seeking to accrue mitzvos which could tip the scale in his favor, he could think of no greater merit than teaching Torah to his young son, who (not surprisingly) grew up to become the saintly Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin! The lesson for us is clear. Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech is read annually close to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. At the time when the entire world passes before Hashem in judgment, the Torah goes out of its way to uncharacteristically “underline” a phrase to emphasize to us the importance of looking after our children and raising them properly. Indeed, our Rabbis teach that a person is judged and held responsible not only for his own actions, but also for those of his descendants (to the extent that he could have influenced them to behave otherwise). At this critical time, let us remember the **Chofetz Chaim**’s message. Return to top Parsha Talking Points

<http://matzav.com/the-chofetz-chaim-ztl-on-his-yahrtzeit-today-24-elul-2>
 The **Chofetz Chaim** ז”ל, On His Yahrtzeit, Today, 24 Elul Friday September 3, 2010

By Rabbi Nosson Scherman

A little more than one hundred years ago, an unknown author was arranging for the publication of an anonymous work on a much-ignored topic. Reb Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, Lithuania, had spent two winters, 5630 and 5631 (1870 and 1871), writing **Chofetz Chaim**, a compilation of the laws regarding slander and defamation. During 5632, he was engaged in getting pre-publication orders from the general public and securing testimonials from outstanding rabbinic authorities. In those days, when he was a young man in his thirties, Reb Yisrael Meir still thought he could retain his anonymity. He introduced himself as the publisher, rather than the author, of the novel Shulchan Aruch. In this guise he succeeded in evading recognition by the masses, but the spiritual giants of the age - men like Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin (Salanter) - saw that they were dealing with one of those rare figures who would leave his imprint on a nation. More than sixty tireless years, twenty-four additional volumes, and countless public letters and appeals lay ahead of the young “publisher,” but the pattern of his long and busy life was already apparent when he was still unknown by circumstance as much as by choice.

A major reason for the enormous influence and acceptance won by the **Chofetz Chaim** was his utter and complete integrity. Statements and actions that would have seemed unctuously pretentious in ordinary humans were natural and unaffected coming from him. A case in point is the very topic of his “**Chofetz Chaim**” - gossip and witty character assassination are not twentieth century phenomena; human tongues have always been loose and hard to control. The Talmud says, “Most people are guilty of dishonesty, few of vice, but all of lashon hara” (Baba Basra 165). Anyone presenting a book codifying the sins of slander could expect to be greeted with much scorn - private if not public. Yet, when Reb Yisrael Meir mounted pulpits in town after town to discuss the forthcoming **Chofetz Chaim**, he was listened to with respect. The people sensed that he was no salesman hawking a product, but one of those rare finds - an honest man whose love for his fellow Jews was expressed by trying to bring them closer to Torah, and who truly believed in the ability and obligation of people to pursue perfection. They were convinced that he wrote **Chofetz Chaim** not for recognition and for library shelves, but - as advertised - because he expected working men as well as scholars to form study groups to learn and put into practice what he had gleaned and compiled, and what was forged into his personality.

Many of the rabbis whom he approached for endorsements were skeptical of the first person to so systematically attack a sin that the Talmud considers universal. To avoid bringing ridicule not only upon himself but upon his stated purpose - and thus, paradoxically, provide yet another topic for gossip mongering - the personal credentials of the author as one who “withholds his tongue from evil” had to be unimpeachable. Some went so far as to assign students or colleagues to engage Reb Yisrael Meir in conversation to try to trap him into lashon hara, thus revealing him as no less mortal than the next man. The ruses invariably revealed the greatness of the author, and the endorsements were forthcoming.

No one knows for sure what prompted Reb Yisrael Meir to write **Chofetz Chaim**, but it was certainly not his finding an unexplored, fertile field for research, for the **Chofetz Chaim** never took pen in hand, except in response to a concrete need. To reveal his reason for compiling his Shulchan Aruch on lashon hara would have

involved dredging up sordid stories of the very type he was trying to still. His son, Reb Aryeh Leib, conjectured that his father's first masterpiece grew out of a bitter controversy in the town of Radin during his youth. Acrimony had swirled about the town and all efforts to bring peace had failed. The town became divided into factions and its rabbi was forced to leave. He died after a few years in a new position and many blamed his early death on the anguish he suffered during Radin's little war. Reb Yisrael Meir, then a young man, had seen his fellow townspeople turn their tongues into ugly lethal weapons. As long as he lived, he never discussed the dispute, saying simply, "I have a self-imposed restriction against speaking of it," but it may very well be that the **Chofetz Chaim** was his response in the form of an appeal that there be no more such incidents in Radin - or elsewhere.

A New Need / A New Book

Whenever he wrote, it was to answer a need. Russia's conscription policies forced many Jewish boys into the army for periods of at least six years, cutting them off from religious teaching and influence. They needed encouragement and answers to basic questions of halachah in layman's language. The result was *Machneh Yisrael*, a book that became the link to Judaism for many a Jewish soldier.

o Heartbreaking tales of the breakdown of religion among Jewish immigrants to America led to his *Nidchei Yisrael*. In providing practical answers to the halachic problems peculiar to the immigrant, Reb Yisrael Meir often rendered lenient decisions that took into account the emergency conditions of the immigrants, but which were inappropriate to the thriving religious life of Eastern Europe. Because of this, he had hoped that *Nidchei Yisrael* would not be distributed in Eastern Europe, but inevitably some copies were seen. This led to criticism of the **Chofetz Chaim** - something he regretted, but considered unimportant in view of his primary goal of aiding the uprooted Jews in America.

o Reb Yisrael Meir felt that the practical laws of kindness and charity were too often ignored. His reaction was to do for gemilas chessed what he had done for *shmiras halashon* (guarding one's tongue) - codify its laws, and actively campaign for Jews to join study groups to learn and to act upon them. As a result of his slim classic *Ahavas Chessed*, literally hundreds of free loan societies, shelters for the homeless, and *bikur cholim* societies sprang into being. Many of them sent requests to the **Chofetz Chaim** for letters of greeting and blessing that would be bound as the first page of a new organization's ledger book.

o Weakening of adherence to the laws of family purity and of personal modesty led to pamphlets in both Hebrew and Yiddish addressed to Jewish women.

o There were booklets in both languages urging men to pursue Torah study in their homes . . . and the list goes on and on.

The personal attention Reb Yisrael Meir devoted to the publication of his ethical works did not end when the volumes were printed and distributed. He did not write his books to be purchased; he wrote them to be used. His frequent lecture tours in behalf of one or another of his *sefarim* were devoted primarily to encouraging people to set up groups for the study of the sefer. In later years, when he was too old or too busy to go on personal tours, he hired "field representatives" to carry on his work. But they were firmly instructed that they must sell the message of the books by personal example and persuasive lectures.

Fire-and-brimstone preaching was not his approach; he was a firm believer in the superior efficacy of a spoonful of honey to a gallon of vinegar. Once a traveling preacher complained to him that no matter how much he thundered and reprimanded his audiences, they seemed to ignore his calls to repent. The **Chofetz Chaim** replied, "Who told you that the way to perform the mitzvah of correcting sinners is by shouting and storming? Putting on tefillin is also a mitzvah - do you holler and shout when you perform that mitzvah?"

An Imminent Need / A New Syllabus

In addition to salvaging neglected mitzvos, the **Chofetz Chaim** assumed responsibility for reviving interest in a long neglected area of the Torah. For centuries, *Kadoshim*, the section of the Talmud dealing with the laws of the Sanctuary and sacrificial offerings, had been virtually excluded from the curricula of major Torah centers. Rare were the scholars who had more than a passing familiarity with its intricacies. Reb Yisrael Meir saw this as a far more serious matter than a lack of knowledge among Torah intelligentsia. With the deceptive simplicity that masked his penetrating insight, he would ask, "We believe that Mashiach can arrive today. If he does, are we ready to bring our offerings to the Bais Hamikdosh? Do the Kohanim know the laws of sacrifices? Do the scholars know enough to train the Kohanim?"

Obviously, the answer to all these questions was a shameful "No."

"Then are we not somewhat lacking in our prayers, hopes, and beliefs in the imminent coming of Mashiach?" The solution was simple: organize groups to study *Kadoshim*. Thus was born a trend that continues to this day. Far from being

neglected, the study of *Kadoshim* is now a mark of prestige; the endeavor of the most advanced group in nearly all *yeshivos*.

Typically, the **Chofetz Chaim** showed the way by practical example as well as by exhortation. He published *Toras Kohanim*, a compilation of the Tannaic interpretations of Chumash Vayikra, with an amended, completely accurate text; and an original commentary that ranks as a model of conciseness and clarity. He also composed *Likutei Halachos* modeled after the Alfasi, which is a compilation of halachic sections of the Talmud dealing with *Kadoshim* topics; and included an elucidating original commentary.

Magnum Opus: "Mishnah Berurah"

Of all his literary efforts, his acknowledged masterpiece and the one which continues to have the greatest influence is *Mishnah Berurah*, a work that was twenty-five years in the making.

The **Chofetz Chaim** was concerned by a serious gap in halachic literature. There was no modern commentary on *Orach Chaim* (the section of the *Shulchan Aruch* dealing with daily and festival rituals) that summed up the centuries of comment and responsa, and rendered authoritative decisions in areas of dispute. Clearly such a work was much needed, but it could be undertaken only by a giant in Torah scholarship. The mantle was not sought by the **Chofetz Chaim**. He urged it upon others, but finding no one willing to assume the responsibility, he finally accepted it upon himself. The breadth, conciseness, clarity, and genius of *Mishnah Berurah* speak for themselves, as does the almost universal acceptance it has attained. This is the supreme testimonial to its author's stature as a sage.

He did not write the *Mishnah Berurah* simply because he wanted to, but because he saw it as a task that had to be done by someone, and his inability to find that someone left the responsibility at his doorstep. This is testimonial to his greatness as a person.

II. The Man of the Legends

The **Chofetz Chaim** was surely a scholar's scholar. More than this, however, he was also a genuine folk-hero. Scholars respected him, but the common people loved him with a rare passion. The reasons are many and no doubt complex. But the most compelling one is simply that he considered himself as one with them and their problems. Even his books, despite the great scholarship they represent, were written to be used by ordinary men - and in many instances, by ordinary women, too. Sensing that he identified with them, people did not hesitate to seek his advice and assistance.

Although he never accepted the position of rabbi in Radin, he was in fact its spiritual and temporal leader. When some townspeople unfairly criticized and embarrassed their rabbi for the deficiencies of the town's mikvah, it was the **Chofetz Chaim** who guaranteed the funding and supervised the building of a new one. When Radin was devastated by fires that, in successive years, destroyed first one half and then the other half of the Jewish section, it was he who organized emergency relief, fund-raising, and the rebuilding of the town.

A poor workingman was not ashamed to ask him, as author of *Ahavas Chessed*, how a laborer living hand-to-mouth could be expected to perform the mitzvah of lending money to others. And he did not feel patronized when he was told to save a few pennies a week, eventually building it up to a fund of several rubles, for loaning to fellow workers short of pocket money. That was down-to-earth advice that was followed by thousands, and it was typical of the pragmatic idealism of a man who never took a penny offered to him by people who had the notion that his greatness entitled him to gifts.

The **Chofetz Chaim's** awesome care in maintaining the strictest possible standards in his financial dealings has become legendary. No doubt many of the stories attributed to him are apocryphal - but, for most of them, there is more than ample first-hand testimony . . . He insisted that his son reprint hundreds of sections of *Mishnah Berurah* to replace originals where pages had inadvertently been put in the wrong order. . . . The **Chofetz Chaim** himself once went dashing through the Jewish quarter of Warsaw shortly before Shabbos seeking to pay printers who had left work early without getting their pay for the week . . . When a non-Jewish railroad employee put parcels of his books on board a train for free delivery, the **Chofetz Chaim** tore up an amount of postage stamps sufficient to defray the loss of revenue to the government . . . In his first speaking tour on behalf of the book **Chofetz Chaim**, he accepted orders, but not deposits, because of the possibility that he might not be able to make delivery to some pre-paying customers, thus becoming guilty of improperly taking their money . . . The stories are legion.

Saint and Pragmatist

It is commonplace for people to believe that the **Chofetz Chaim**, as a saintly personality, could not have been terribly practical and certainly could not have coped with the rough and tumble of the world - especially today when so many accept as axiomatic that "you cannot make an omelette without breaking a few eggs," and that "nice guys finish last." Nothing could be further from the truth. It

was this same saint who once remarked that one fool can do more damage than ten villains. Men like Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky of Vilna greatly valued his wise counsel when searching for practical solutions to the knottiest of problems. Indeed, in the crisis-laden years following World War I, when Reb Chaim Ozer was the undisputed leader of Lithuanian Jewry, he and the **Chofetz Chaim** were in constant consultation on all major issues. Their names appeared side-by-side on scores of proclamations and appeals in behalf of all the major causes in Jewish life.

The **Chofetz Chaim** was one of the first to realize that Torah Jewry must up-date its tactics to counter the onslaught of its enemies. Organized activities for the Torah community and its educational needs could succeed where efforts on the individual scale could scarcely cope with the juggernauts of Haskalah and secularism. Thus he took the lead in organizing and supporting Agudath Israel as the international organizational arm of traditional Jewry. As usual, he saw this as more than a matter of strategy, but as a religious obligation: "In a time when our values are under attack as never before, even small acts in defense of Torah are multiplied many times over in the Divine scales for ultimate reward."

Though he was the senior of the two by nearly thirty years, the **Chofetz Chaim** considered Reb Chaim Ozer to be the gadol hador and deferred to his authority as a matter of course, despite the fact that Reb Chaim Ozer held him in awe. During the 1920's, pressure was brought to bear on Reb Chaim Ozer to travel to America to raise money for the European yeshivos, which were on the brink of financial ruin. He was told that only his own presence in America could assure contributions in the millions. Reb Chaim Ozer answered that his health was too precarious to permit such a trip. Though the other Torah luminaries at the meeting continued to exert pressure upon him, the **Chofetz Chaim** ended the debate by saying very simply, "The well-being of Reb Chaim Ozer is synonymous with that of Klal Yisrael. We dare not jeopardize it."

Storm Over Vilna

The prestige of Reb Chaim Ozer was responsible for an unheard-of departure by the **Chofetz Chaim** - an open attack upon adversaries of Torah Judaism. His general policy had been always to avoid engaging Torah's enemies in debate. To reply to the virulent attacks made by maskillim, yevsekes (Jewish Communists) and others, he felt, would be self-defeating because it would grant them unearned recognition, and merely provide them with fuel for vituperation and ridicule. Better to isolate them from the mainstream of religious life, while devoting the available talent and resources to the more productive course of strengthening Judaism by upgrading education and observance within yeshivos and communities. Then came the storm over the Vilna rabbinate.

The government required that Vilna have a Chief Rabbi. Although Reb Chaim Ozer was a recognized leader of religious European Jewry, Vilna's official Chief Rabbi was to be elected by the entire Jewish population, which included a large secular contingent. Agudath Israel doubted that Reb Chaim Ozer would be able to command a majority of the total votes, so they joined a coalition of the Mizrachi, Socialists, and Reformers to "elect" a Rabbi Rubinstein as a pro-forma head of the Jewish Community, with the understanding that he would not assert any authority without Reb Chaim Ozer's approval. After his election, Rabbi Rubinstein's secularist supporters used this consensus as a pretext for treating him as the actual Chief Rabbi of Vilna, and Reb Chaim Ozer, the man who was revered the world over, found the ground cut out from under him in his own city. Strangely enough, the only important Torah figure whose serenity was not shattered was Reb Chaim Ozer himself. That did not prevent his adherents, led by the Chazon Ish and guided by the **Chofetz Chaim**, from doing battle to defend the honor of Torah. The **Chofetz Chaim** published a blistering letter attacking the perpetrators of the coup as enemies of Torah. Though disciples of Reb Chaim Ozer attempted to negotiate a face-saving compromise, the **Chofetz Chaim** torpedoed these efforts as going against the inviolable principle of Torah supremacy.

The secularists' reaction to his bold position was one of those human spectacles that must be greeted with laughter or rage. The non-religious Jewish press in Vilna vilified the **Chofetz Chaim** for stooping to lashon hara against the liberal Jews! His reply was simple and to the point: "When Torah values are being destroyed, Torah Law permits their defense."

His deference to Reb Chaim Ozer, however, did not prevent the **Chofetz Chaim** from arguing his own causes in the humorous, self-deprecating manner that he used so effectively. In 1923, the **Chofetz Chaim** felt that the community must be organized to provide kosher meals for Jewish soldiers. He called his new project Kessel Kosher (Kosher Kettle) and, naturally, his first move was to travel to Vilna to secure the endorsement and support of Reb Chaim Ozer. The endorsement was not forthcoming. Reb Chaim Ozer replied that there were many overriding considerations making such a campaign inopportune at that time.

The **Chofetz Chaim** shrugged and replied, "What can I do? People consider me to be a God-fearing Jew. When I am called to the world-to-come, they will ask me

why I did nothing to provide kosher food for Jewish conscripts. What will I say? Perhaps I'll tell them that I was not lazy or indifferent; I made the hard trip to Vilna even though I was weak and past eighty. But the Rabbi of Vilna was the gadol hador and he said I was wrong. Who knows better than the gadol hador what is right or wrong?"

Reb Chaim Ozer knew he had been bested. He called a public meeting in the central synagogue to be addressed by the **Chofetz Chaim**. At that meeting Kessel Kosher was born.

III. As the **Chofetz Chaim** Would Say . . .

Precisely because he had such a keen feel for the pulse of the people and the needs of the time, it is fascinating - and useful - to wonder what the **Chofetz Chaim** would have said to today's problems. Indeed, we should go a step further and wonder how he would have defined the real problems of today. After all, **Chofetz Chaim** and Ahavas Chessed were effective replies to problems not even recognized by most. It would be a mistake to take the sizeable collection of his major and minor writings, apply them to each era, and assume that the **Chofetz Chaim** would have had nothing more to say.

How would he have diagnosed today's ills? This question should be answered by the few survivors of his era who knew him well, but perhaps we can hazard some guesses.

o There is little doubt that he would be appalled at the sharp and shady business practices that are so much a part of modern life, Orthodoxy not excluded. We live in an age when ethics have not kept pace with sophistication, and Jews have not escaped contamination. How would he have prodded our con- science?

o Picture the **Chofetz Chaim** entering a typical middle-class home today with its emphasis on "creature comforts," and recreational pursuits rather than a Torah atmosphere . . . Would he have smiled tolerantly? Or would he have considered his surroundings more appropriate to the House of Romanoff than to the House of Israel, and told us so?

o What would he say to the growing gap that divides yeshiva, rabbinate, and laity from one another?

o And what about the organizational weakness of Orthodoxy? He was one of the founders of Agudath Israel, long aware that modern times required modern tactics - and organizational unity was one of them. Surely he would work to end today's factionalism.

o In this time of turbulence when the values of centuries are being discarded, we may be certain that the **Chofetz Chaim** would have found our attitude wanting and far too complacent. We are content to condemn the drug culture, but are ill prepared for our own acid test. Indicative of this is a memoir of one his students, Rabbi Avrohom Hillel Goldberg, later rabbi of Kfar Pinnes in Israel:

It was near the end of his life and the **Chofetz Chaim** was in a summer cottage near Radin. He was heart-broken over the persecutions of Jews in Russia. He saw their situation as the severing of an entire limb of the Jewish body from its life-sources of Torah and mitzvos. "There is only one real hope," he said - "Mashiach must come soon. The Final Redemption must come sooner or later, but it is up to us to hasten its arrival. We must demonstrate our overpowering desire for Mashiach. How many of us religious Jews who say 'Ani Maamin' every day truly long for his coming? Why don't we cry out to Hashem to help us? This is no time for silence!

"Even in the Egyptian exile the Torah says that only when B'nei Yisrael cried out for help - then did their outcry go up to Hashem. We must do the same now! I must go to Vilna to Reb Chaim Ozer - without him nothing can be done!"

His family and students were aghast. He was over ninety years old and he could scarcely leave his armchair for the length of a day. He might not survive the difficult trip to Vilna. They pleaded with him to abandon his plan, but he would not be dissuaded. The goal was worthy of even mesiras nefesh. They told him that Reb Chaim Ozer was a man of halachah and action; such ideas as the **Chofetz Chaim's** were out of his domain. He smiled as if to say, What do you know of Reb Chaim Ozer?

To his deep regret, the journey to Reb Chaim Ozer never took place. Had they met, who knows?

This article originally appeared in the Jewish Observer and is also available in book form in the ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications Judaiscope Series. {Matzav.com Newscenter}

From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** ravfrand-owner@torah.org on behalf of Rabbi Yissocher Frand [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Thursday, September 29, 2005 9:11 PM To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: **Rabbi Frand on Parshas Nitzavim**

"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frاند on Parshas Nitzavim -

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 561, Lo Bashamayim He. Good Shabbos!

Taking Stock Of The Nation When The Time Comes For Transfer Of Power

Parshas Nitzavim begins with the words: "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G-d: Your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your officers -- all the men of Israel" [Devorim 29:9]. Rashi comments (in his second interpretation): "Since Israel was going out from leader to leader, from Moshe to Yehoshua, therefore he made a standing assembly (matzeivah) of them in order to exhort them. And so did Yehoshua do (before he died). And so too, Shmuel, who said 'Stand and I shall contest with you', when Israel left his hand and entered the hand of Shaul."

In other words, whenever a leader would prepare for the handing over of the nation, so to speak, to the next generation of leadership, he would make them into a "standing assembly" (matzeivah).

What does it mean to make the people into a 'matzeivah'? Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his published thoughts on Chumash, introduces an interesting concept. The thought is based on a somewhat homiletic idea. The Torah commands elsewhere: "Do not set up for yourselves a pillar ('matzeivah') that the L-rd your G-d despises" [Devorim 16:22]. Many masters of 'derush' (homiletics) interpret this pasuk [verse] to mean that a person should never make HIMSELF into a 'matzeivah'.

A 'matzeivah' is an altar made of one piece of stone as opposed to a 'mizbeach' that is an altar made of many stones. The symbolism of a one-piece stone is: This is where the person is now and this is where he is always going to be. A person is not a 'matzeivah'. A person should never make himself into a 'matzeivah' saying: "this is all that I am." A person must try to grow. Either we grow or we regress. Spiritually, there is no such thing as standing still.

A person should never say: "What do you want from me? I have my wife. I have my kids. I learn my daf. I daven three times a day. I am a good guy. Leave me alone!" A person must never stagnate spiritually and thereby make himself into a 'matzeivah'.

Our Sages comment on the words "Vayelech Moshe" [And Moshe went] at the beginning of next week's parsha that the word "Vayelech" indicates chastisement (tochacha). We understand that there is plenty of tochacha in Parshas Ki Savo and so too in Parshas Nitzavim. But where is the tochacha in the word "Vayelech" at the beginning of Parshas Vayelech?

The answer is that Parshas Vayelech was written on the last day of Moshe Rabbeinu's life (the Seventh day of Adar). The Torah is indicating to us that even at the age of 120, Moshe Rabbeinu was still a 'holech' (a mover). There are two types of beings in this word -- a stationary being (an 'omed') and a dynamic being (a 'holech') -- someone who is always on the move.

Moshe Rabbeinu did not walk into his retirement party dressed casually, without a tie, looking forward to giving up the tremendous burden of leadership that he bore on his shoulders all these years. Even to the very end, Moshe was a 'holech'. This is the chastisement -- to the rest of us!

The Vilna Gaon comments on a pasuk in Zecharia [3:7]: "And I will place before you movers (mechalchim) between these stationary people (haOmdim haEleh)". The Gaon states that the only being that should be spiritually stationary is an angel. The pasuk is teaching that a person -- sometimes -- can even be a mover after his death, moving amongst the 'omedim', i.e. -- the angels!

If a person works and accomplishes something while in this world and leaves a legacy, then even after death, he can be a 'holech'. However, the time when a person is on this planet is certainly not the time to relax. There will be plenty of time to relax... in the next world.

As we get older, we look ahead to the generation older than us. I am strengthened by the fact that I see many people older than I, past retirement age, who remain dynamic and creative. They are still 'holchim' well into their seventies and eighties. They never allow themselves to become merely "omedim" (stationary). Some people go on to even greater life accomplishments after they "retire" from their professional careers than during that "productive period". This is the way it should be with all of us. We must remain 'holchim.'

To return to our point of departure, Rav Moshe interprets "Atem Nitzavim" [You are standing] as "he made them into a 'matzeivah'." As he is about to hand the nation over to Yehoshua, Moshe gives his disciple a status report on the nation. "Yehoshua, this is where they are spiritually right now. It is your responsibility to take them to the next level." It is necessary to have such a measure, a snapshot in time, against which future progress can be compared and calibrated.

This is why, throughout Biblical history, every leader would make the people into a 'matzeivah' at the time when he was about to hand over the nation to the next generation's leadership. This was to create a sort of snapshot, as if to say, "Where do they stand at this moment in time?" The past leader "took stock of the nation" before handing them over to the next leader. This is the meaning of "he made them into a 'matzeivah.'"

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. RavFrاند, Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

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from: Shabbat Shalom <ShabbatShalom@ounetwork.org> date:
Thu, Aug 29, 2013 at 7:03 PM subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU

The Torah as God's Song

Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
At the end of his life, having given the Israelites at God's behest 612 commands, Moses is instructed to give them the last; command 613: Now therefore write down for yourselves this song, and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be my witness within the people of Israel. (Deut. 31: 19)

According to the plain sense of the verse, God is speaking to Moses and Joshua and is referring to the song in the following chapter, "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; Hear, O earth, the words of My mouth." Oral tradition, however, gave it a different and much wider interpretation, understanding it as a command for every Jew to write -- or at least take some part in writing -- a Sefer Torah, a scroll of the law: Said Rabbah: even though our ancestors have left us a scroll of the Torah, it is our religious duty to write one for ourselves, as it is said: "Now therefore write this song, and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel." (Sanhedrin 21b).

The logic of the interpretation seems to be, first, that the phrase “write down for yourselves” could be construed as referring to every Israelite (Ibn Ezra), not just Moses and Joshua. Secondly, the passage goes on to say (31: 24): “Moses finished writing in the book the words of this law from beginning to end.” The Talmud (Nedarim 38a) offers a third reason. The verse goes on to say: “that this song may be My witness within the people” – implying the Torah as a whole, not just the song in chapter 32.

There is something poetic about this being the last of the commands. It is as if God were saying to the Israelites: “It is not enough that you have received the Torah from Moses. You must make it new again in every generation.” The covenant was not to grow old. It had to be periodically renewed.

So it is to this day, that Torah scrolls are still written as in ancient times, by hand, on parchment, using a quill – as were the Dead Sea Scrolls two thousand years ago. In a religion almost devoid of sacred objects (icons, relics), the Torah scroll is the nearest Judaism comes to endowing a physical entity with sanctity – and this is an understatement. The Torah is less like an object than a person. In its presence we stand as if it were a king. On Simchat Torah we dance with it as if it were a bride. If one is, God forbid, damaged or destroyed we bury it as if it were a human; we mourn as if we had lost a relative. Judaism is the story of a love affair between a people and a book, the Book of Books.

What though – if we take the command to refer to the whole Torah and not just one chapter – is the significance of the word “song” [shirah]: “Now therefore write down for yourselves this song”? The word shirah appears five times in this passage. It is clearly a key-word. Why? On this, two nineteenth century scholars offered striking explanations.

Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin) interprets it to mean that the whole Torah should be read as poetry, not prose (the word shirah in Hebrew means both a song and a poem). To be sure, most of the Torah is written in prose, but it has, argues Netziv, two characteristics of poetry. First, it is allusive rather than explicit. It leaves unsaid more than is said. Secondly, like poetry, it hints at deeper reservoirs of meaning, sometimes by the use of an unusual word or sentence construction. Descriptive prose carries its meaning on the surface. The Torah, like poetry, does not. (Kidmat Davar, preface to Ha’amek Davar, 3).

In this brilliant insight, Netziv anticipates one of the great twentieth century essays on biblical prose, Erich Auerbach’s ‘Odysseus’ Scar’. Auerbach contrasts the narrative style of Genesis with that of Homer. Homer uses dazzlingly detailed descriptions so that each scene is set out pictorially as if bathed in sunlight. By contrast, biblical narrative is spare and understated. In the example Auerbach cites – the story of the binding of Isaac – we do not know what the main characters look like, what they are feeling, what they are wearing, what landscapes they are passing through: The decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is non-existent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal . . . remains mysterious and “fraught with background”.

A completely different aspect is alluded to by R. Yechiel Michal Epstein, author of the halakhic code Arukh ha-Shulchan (Choshen Mishpat, introduction). Epstein points out that the rabbinic literature is full of arguments, about which the sages said: “These and those are the words of the living God.” This, says Epstein, is one of the reasons the Torah is called “a song” – because a song becomes more beautiful when scored for many voices interwoven in complex harmonies.

I would suggest a third dimension. The 613th command is not simply about the Torah, but about the duty to make the Torah new in each generation. To make the Torah live anew, it is not enough to hand it on cognitively – as mere history and law. It must speak to us affectively, emotionally.

Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it breaks into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. There is something about melody that intimates a reality beyond our grasp, what William Wordsworth called the “sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns / And the round ocean and the living air.” Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul.

Music is central to the Judaic experience. We do not pray; we davven, meaning we sing the words we direct toward heaven. Nor do we read the Torah; instead we chant the weekly portion, each word with its own cantillation. Even rabbinical texts are never merely studied; we chant them with the particular sing-song known to all students of Talmud. Each time and text has its specific melodies. The same prayer may be sung to half-a-dozen different tunes depending on whether it is part of the morning, afternoon or evening service, and whether the day is a weekday, a Sabbath, a festival or one of the High Holy Days. There are different cantillations for biblical readings, depending on whether the text comes from the Mosaic books, the prophetic literature, or the Ketuvim, ‘the writings.’ Music is the map of the Jewish spirit, and each spiritual experience has its own distinctive melodic tonality.

The 613th command – to make the Torah new in every generation – symbolizes the fact that though the Torah was given once, it must be received many times, as each of us, through our study and practice, strives to recapture the pristine voice heard at Mount Sinai. That requires emotion, not just intellect. It means treating Torah not just as words read, but also as a melody sung. The Torah is God’s libretto, and we, the Jewish people, are His choir, the performers of His choral symphony. And though, when Jews speak they often argue, when they sing, they sing in harmony, as the Israelites did at the Red Sea, because music is the language of the soul, and at the level of the soul Jews enter the unity of the Divine which transcends the oppositions of lower worlds. The Torah is God’s song, and we collectively are its singers.

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Rabbi Berel Wein

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Parshas Netzavim-Vayeilech The Covenant and Remembrance
These final parshiyot of the Torah always coincide with the approaching end of the old year and the beginning of the new year. This is in line with the contents of these parshiyot which contain the review of Moshe’s career as the leader of Israel and of his life and its achievements. So too does the end of the year demand of us a review, if not of our entire past life at least a review and accounting of our actions during the past year.

Moshe’s review is really the main contents of the book of Dvarim itself. Though it recalls historical and national events, there is no doubt that Moshe himself is the central figure of the book. He records for us his personal feelings and candidly admits as to his disappointments and frustrations. But he never departs from his central mission of reminding the people of Israel of the unbreakable covenant that has been formed between them and their Creator.

That covenant is renewed again in this week’s parsha. It is no exaggeration to assert that it is constantly renewed and at the year’s end we are reminded of this automatic renewal. That is the essential essence of remembrance that characterizes this special season of the year. For

remembrance brings forth judgment and accountability and leads to an eventual renewal of spirit and faith.

Moshe reminds the people that the future is also contained in their remembrance and observance of the covenant. All the generations past, present and future are bound together in this covenant of accountability. And through this process, the mortal Moshe gains immortality, as all of us can acquire this immortality through our loyalty to the covenant.

Moshe at the end of his life has in no way lost his acumen, strength or vision. He leaves this world in perfect health and free of bodily ailments and restraints. Yet he tells us in this week's parsha that he "can no longer go forth and return." For humans exist by the will of God and when that will decrees the end of life then the human being will cease to function on this earth. Who can claim greater merits in this world than Moshe had? Yet the hand of human mortality struck him down.

Part of the great lesson of Torah is that life continues without us necessarily being present. Moshe sees far into the distant future but knows that he will not be present to see those events actually unfold. He harkens back to the covenant of remembrance as being the instrument of his continuing presence throughout all of Jewish history. As long as the covenant is remembered and observed, Moshe is still present with Israel.

It is this covenant that defines us as a people and even as individuals. Our relationship to it is under constant heavenly review. It should be self-evident that for our part we should enthusiastically renew our allegiance to it at this fateful part of our life and year.

Shabat shalom

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from: Shlomo Katz <skatz@torah.org> via capalon-newmail.capalon.com reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: hamaayan@torah.org date: Wed, Aug 28, 2013 at 5:05 PM subject: HaMaayan / The Torah Spring - Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilechch

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Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilechch Not Hiding, But Seek

Volume 27, No. 46 25 Elul 5773 August 31, 2013

Sponsored by the Greengart and Lerman families in memory of father Zvi ben Ben Zion a"h (Harry Greengart)

Mr. and Mrs. Menachem Simcha Katz in honor of the marriage of their daughter Sara Rivky

Today's Learning: Mishnah: Shevuot 4:1-2 Tanach: Divrei Ha'yamim I 15-16 Daf Yomi (Bavli): Pesachim 72 Halachah: Mishnah Berurah 301:19-21

The Midrash Rabbah on this week's parashah asks: When one wants to read from the Torah, how does he recite a blessing? Our Sages teach: He should recite a berachah before and after. Before--because we read (Tehilim 119:12), "Baruch attah Hashem, teach me Your laws." First, "Baruch attah Hashem"--a blessing, then, "teach me Your laws." After--because Moshe Rabbeinu uttered a blessing at the end of the Torah. [According to the commentary Tiferet Zion, this refers to Devarim 33:2.]

The midrash continues: If you recite a berachah on the Torah, I too will bless you, as it is written (Shmot 20:21), "In every place where I will mention My Name, I will come to you and bless you." [Tiferet Zion explains: This refers to a person who is called for an aliyah, so that he is reciting the berachah involuntarily. Because this circumstance was not brought about by the person himself, but by G-d, who caused him to be called, the verse refers to it as "every place where I will mention My Name.]

The midrash continues: The angels desired the Torah, but it was hidden from them. But from you it is not hidden, as it is written (in our parashah--30:11), "For this commandment that I command you today--it is not hidden from you." [Until here from the midrash]

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) explains: The midrash was bothered by the verse's reference to the entire Torah as a single commandment. Therefore the midrash explains that while the Torah has many separate mitzvot--the purpose of each of which is to subdue or purify a different trait or attribute of a person--their inner significance is only one thing--to raise mankind above the level of the angels where they can appreciate what the Zohar refers to as the Oneness of G-d and the Torah. (Tiferet Zion)

"It will be when all these things come upon you--the blessing and the curse that I have presented before you--then you will take it to your heart among all the nations where Hashem, your Elokim, has dispersed you. You will return to Hashem, your Elokim, and listen to His voice . . ." (30:1-2)

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (approx. 1838-1933; the **Chafetz Chaim**) asks: It seems from these verses that the generation in which mashiach comes will have done teshuvah. In contrast, there are many statements of our Sages which imply that the generation in which mashiach comes will be a very lowly one!

He answers: Both are true. The generation in which mashiach comes will be a generation of extreme opposites. On the one hand, there will be Jews who will make every possible sacrifice to ensure their children's Torah educations. Among that part of the nation, there will be a thirst for knowledge, and their hearts will be pained by their own ignorance and lack of mitzvah performance. On the other hand, there will be Jews who will do whatever seems right in their eyes, so far removed from Judaism that any rebuke would be hopeless.

One might ask, continues the **Chafetz Chaim**, why would mashiach come in such a generation, when he did not come to redeem past generations that were entirely religious and seemingly more worthy? He answers: In early generations, the redemption was less necessary, since their faith was strong and there was no question that Judaism would be preserved. Indeed, the longer mashiach delayed, the more merits the Jewish People as a whole accumulated because of their adherence to the Torah. Now, however, when a significant part of the Jewish People is becoming lost, further delay is counter-productive. Thus, mashiach's arrival is closer. (Kuntreis Tzipita Li'shuah ch.1)

"You will return unto Hashem, your Elokim, and listen to His voice . . ." (30:1-2)

Why, in this verse which speaks of teshuvah, is Hashem referred to as "your" Elokim? Similarly, we read in the haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah (Hoshea 14:2), "Return, Yisrael to Hashem, your Elokim, for you have stumbled through your iniquity." Why?

R' Moshe ben Yosef M'Trani z"l (the Mabit; Greece and Eretz Yisrael; 1505-1585) explains: Why has Hashem promised to accept our teshuvah, a promise that was not made to any other nation in the world? Because, as our Elokim, He has placed so many mitzvot upon us that it is inevitable that a person will stumble now and then. Thus, it is only fair that we be allowed to repent. (Beit Elokim: Sha'ar Ha'teshuvah ch.1)

“For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you and it is not distant . . . Rather, the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to perform it.” (30:11-14)

R’ Yehoshua Rokeach z”l (1825-1894; Belzer Rebbe) asks: Why does the verse say, “in your mouth and [then] in your heart, to perform it”? Usually, thought (“in your heart”) precedes action (“in your mouth”)! He explains: The ideal way to perform a mitzvah is to combine the required action with the proper intent. Having the proper concentration and focus are not always easy, however, and one might think that he should not perform a mitzvah if he cannot have the proper thoughts. Therefore our verse comes to teach: Place the action before the thought, if necessary. Perform the mitzvah to the best of your ability now, and the proper thoughts will come later. (Quoted in Mesilot B’ohr Ha’chassidut p.20)

“I have placed chaim / life and death before you, blessing and curse; and you shall choose chaim.” (30:19)

R’ Aharon Roth z”l (1894-1947; the Toldos Aharon Rebbe) asks: Why does the verse say, “Choose life,” rather than, “Choose good”? He answers:

The Torah cannot command us to choose good because one can never be sure that the choices he makes are good. Instead, the Torah commands us to follow in the path that is blazed by those whom our Sages call “chaim / living,” i.e., the righteous, about whom it is said, “Even in death, they are called living.” (In contrast, our Sages say that the wicked are called “dead” even when they are alive.)

This verse contains another lesson as well. Life is made up of one challenge after another, but no one is given a challenge that he cannot overcome. Were this not so, i.e., were a person faced with a challenge that was beyond his ability to manage, his free will would effectively have been taken from him. The Torah assures us that this cannot happen; we will always have the option to *choose*. (Shomer Emunim p. 225b)

“Hashem, your Elokim--He will cross before you; He will destroy these nations from before you . . .” (31:3)

In light of this promise, why did Bnei Yisrael carry weapons in their war against the Seven Canaanite Nation? R’ Dov Berish Gottlieb z”l (Sieniawa, Poland; died 1801) explains:

Sometimes there is a state of “hester panim” (literally, “concealing of the face”) in which, because of a sin, man is abandoned to the forces of nature and chance. Therefore, one who goes to battle without weapons is endangering his life and is called a fool. We find similarly that Yaakov Avinu was afraid lest a sin cause him to fall into the hands of Esav (see Rashi to Bereishit 32:10). Accordingly, one must guard himself against accidental injury lest at that moment G-d is hiding from him because of some sin. Even the smallest sin can cause Hashem to hide Himself and, if at the moment that a person is distant from G-d, some misfortune occurs, a person can be in danger. The remedy is that in every time of trouble, a person should repent to remove the hester panim from himself. (Quoted in Shomer Ha’pardes: Yesodei Ha’Torah V’ikarei Ha’dat p.113)

Selichot

According to the Ashkenazic custom, the recitation of selichot will begin this motzei Shabbat. (According to the Sephardic custom, it began on Rosh Chodesh Elul.) Poskim / halachic authorities state that one should devote extra time to prayer during Elul even at the expense of one’s Torah study (see Sha’arei Teshuvah 581:1).

This requires explanation, for isn’t Torah study at the very top in the hierarchy of mitzvot? R’ Yaakov Yerucham Wreschner shlita (Bnei Brak, Israel) suggests the following answer:

We learn in Pirkei Avot (1:2), “The world stands on three things: on Torah, on avodah / the Temple service and prayer, and on gemilut chassadim / acts of kindness.” R’ Eliyahu z”l (the Vilna Gaon; 1720-

1797) writes in his Torah commentary Aderet Eliyahu (Parashat Ha’azinu) that each of these three stands in opposition to one of the three cardinal sins: idolatry, adultery and murder. He explains that there are three types of perfection for which a person must strive: 1) perfection of his soul; 2) perfection of his relationship with G-d; and 3) perfection of his relationship with his fellow men. These correspond respectively to: 1) Torah, 2) prayer, and 3) acts of kindness. Likewise, they correspond to: 1) not committing adultery; 2) not worshipping idols; and 3) not committing murder.

R’ Wreschner continues: The month of Elul is noted in Jewish history as the time when Bnei Yisrael repented for the sin of the golden calf. This is one reason why we blow the shofar all month--because our ancestors blew the shofar as a reminder that Moshe would return from Har Sinai and they should not give up hope and make an idol as they had the first time. [Moshe ascended to Har Sinai for the third time on Rosh Chodesh Elul and returned with the second Tablets on Yom Kippur.] Therefore, since prayer stands in contrast to idolatry (and related sins, such as anger), we recite extra prayers during this month, even at the expense of Torah study. (Seder Yaakov: Introduction) To Support Project Genesis- Torah.org

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Parshas Netzavim - Vayeilech

Youthful Discretion Children play a major role in this week's double portion. In Nitzavim, Moshe tells the nation, "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem." He enumerates the different categories of people, from elders to water-carriers, and he makes sure to include everyone, even the small children (cf. Deuteronomy 28:9-10).

In Vayeilech as well, the Torah is cognizant of the youth. Moshe commands that every seven years "the men, the women, and the small children, and your stranger who is in your cities shall gather in Jerusalem to hear the king read the Book of Devarim" (ibid 31:12). Commentaries expound that the aforementioned children are those who are too young to understand. But Moshe also talks about youngsters who have a basic grasp as well: "And their children ? they shall hear and they shall learn to fear Hashem, your G-d, all the days that you live on the land to which you are crossing the Jordan, to possess it." The Ohr HaChaim explains that this verse refers not to toddlers, but rather to children who are old enough to learn the fear of Hashem. What troubles me is the end of the posuk, " they shall learn to fear Hashem, your G-d, all the days that you live on the land to which you are crossing the Jordan, to possess it."

Shouldn't the Torah say "all the days that they live on the land to which they are crossing the Jordan"? After all, we are teaching them, not the adults! Why does the Torah tell us to teach the children, for all the days that their parents live on the land to which you are crossing the Jordan, to possess it?

Lieutenant Meyer Birnbaum was one of the only Orthodox US army officers commissioned during World War II. Last year, he spoke at our yeshiva, and though I was enraptured by the harrowing tales of his war-time activities, one small incident that occurred to him as a young boy growing up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn during the Depression did not escape me.

In those days, few young men attended yeshiva or were committed to vigorous Torah observance. Meyer went to public school as well, but his parents wanted to raise him as an observant Jew. His friends would often make fun of his yarmulka, and few attended his bar-mitzvah. But that did not deter him. In fact, from the time he was old enough his mother would make sure that he attended the mincha service.

Imagine the sight. A young boy coming to pray together with a group of elderly men who were hanging on to their tradition while their inheritors looked for newfound freedoms outside the decaying walls of the synagogue. Even the men who came to pray were only there to say kaddish for a dearly departed. So when young Meyer entered the portals of the shul for the very first time their eyes widened in amazement. Their shock turned to pity as they assumed the young boy came to shul for the same reason that most of them came, and for the very reason that they prayed their children would one day come the sole purpose of saying kaddish.

The moment came when the kaddish yossum, the mourner's kaddish, was to be recited, and the congregation began in a cacophonous unison the hallowed words, "Yisgadal V'Yiskadash." Meyer just stared up into space, waiting to answer the first responsive Amen. He was startled by the jab in the ribs by a crooked finger, which left his searing side and began pointing to the correct place in the prayer book.

"Nu!" shouted the man, "They are saying kaddish!?"

"I know that they are saying kaddish!" answered Meyer.

"So, what are you waiting for? Say along!"

Meyer did not understand where the conversation was heading. But he had no time to think when another old man looked his way, motioning for him to join the mourners in the kaddish recitation!

"But I don't have to say kaddish!" answered Meyer tearfully, "my parents are alive!"

"Your parents are alive?" asked the old-timer incredulously.

"Yes, thank G-d, they are both alive! Why do you think that they are dead and that I should say kaddish?"

They gathered around him as the final Amen was said and explained their actions. "We could not imagine someone your age coming to shul for any other reason!"

The Torah tells us that children must be trained and taught not for post-parental existence, but rather it tells the parents "all the days that you live on the land to which you are crossing the Jordan." You must teach them to practice while you can enjoy the nachas as well! Torah is a living entity, not only to pass from dying embers to rekindle new flames, but rather to pass a vibrant torch with leaping flames onto the youth whose boundless energy will inspire new generations, when even you live on the land that Hashem has given you! To Support Project Genesis-Torah.org

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series.

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