

BS"D



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON VAESCHANAN - 5764

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From: TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org]
Sent: Thursday, July 29, 2004 Subject: Rabbi Mordechai Willig - Double Consolation To subscribe, email weekly@torahweb.org For anything else, email: torahweb@torahweb.org <http://www.torahweb.org/thisWeek.html>

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG
DOUBLE CONSOLATION

"Nachamu Nachamu Ami" (Yeshayahu 40:1). Am Yisroel sinned doubly (Eicah 1:8), was punished

doubly, and is consoled doubly (Psikta, Nachamu). What is the nature of the double sin and consolation? Yeshayahu said "for she has received double [punishment] for all her sins from the hand of Hashem (Yeshayahu 40:2)" - what is the justification for Am Yisroel being punished doubly for its sins?

Am Yisroel is fortunate! When we comply with Hashem's will, no nation can rule over us; when we don't comply, He places us in the hands of "lowly nations and even its animals" (Kesubos 66b). The Maharal explains that our lowliness when we sin is also part of our being fortunate, in that it emphasizes that we cannot be average - either we rise above others, or we sink beneath them (Netzach Yisroel ch. 14). If our descent starting at the churban Beis Hamikdosh merely equated us with other nations, this would indicate that our status in Hashem's eyes is no different than theirs, and that the Torah is merely a tangential, not fundamental, dimension of our existence. Our inability to be on par with other nations indicates that Torah is an intrinsic, indispensable part of our very existence. Torah and Yisroel are one, and thus we are very fortunate (Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldwicht zt"l).

Perhaps, then, the double sin is that we sank two levels: from above the other nations, to below them; from a lofty roof to a deep pit (Chagiga 5b, based on Eicha 2:1). While the inability of Am Yisroel to be on the level of other nations is in fact a sign of Hashem's love, it also results in our sins being doubled, as we sink two levels, not just one, when we falter. We are thus punished doubly, for the two descents, but we are also consoled because Hashem created us uniquely, and the double punishment is a sign of His love.

This lesson provides a measure of consolation even when we are in galus. One who mourns over Yerushalayim is privileged to see its joy (Ta'anis 30b). Mourning over our double descent reminds us that we can and will rise from the pit to great heights, and this consoles us with a vision of a joyous future. When that future arrives, there will be a double consolation, "nachamu nachamu".

Yirmiyahu foresaw the destruction of the second Beis Hamikdosh (Rashi, Eicha 4:21), and declared: "Hashem will not exile you again" (4:22) after the galus of Edom (Rashi). The cities of Eretz Yisroel are in a state of destruction when other nations rule over them (Magen

Avraham 561:1). Today, when Am Yisroel rules over the Eretz Yisroel, we are promised that there will be no future exiles (B'ikvei Hatzon, p. 214, 215, based on Ramban Vayikra 26:16).

The promise that we will not have any more exiles enhances for us the consolation that mourners over Yerushalayim experienced throughout the generations. May this consolation give us strength to endure the difficult situation of Am Yisroel in Eretz Yisroel and in the galus, and may it soon be joined by the consolation of the ultimate redemption, when the navi's double expression, "nachamu nachamu ami", will be fulfilled.

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From: Shlomo Katz [skatz@torah.org] Sent: July 29, 2004 To: hamaayan@torah.org Subject: HaMaayan / The Torah Spring - Parashat Va'etchanan

Edited by SHLOMO KATZ

Va'etchanan: Nachamu

Sponsored by Harvey and Betty Kramer in honor of the aufruf of their son Yaakov

The haftarah, which gives this Shabbat its name "Shabbat Nachamu," opens: "Nachamu, nachamu" / "Comfort, comfort My people - says your G-d. Speak to the heart of Yerushalayim and proclaim to her that her time [of exile] has been fulfilled, that her iniquity has been conciliated, for she has received from the hand of Hashem double for all her sins."

R' Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Herzog z"l (first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel; died 1959) commented on these verses as follows in a 1948 address: How are these verses different when we read them today from when they were read in the past? In the past, the fulfillment of these verses was in the distant future. Today, these verses relate all at once to the present, the near term, and the distant future. How so?

Chazal comment on these verses, "She [i.e., Yerushalayim] sinned doubly, she was doubly punished, and she was doubly consoled." Yisrael / The People of Israel has a double nature. On the one hand, it is a nation; anyone who says that Judaism is only a religion is mistaken. On the other hand, anyone who thinks that Yisrael is a nation like any other nation is mistaken, and is misleading others. Yisrael is a holy nation, with the loftiest mission, given from G-d, of any nation. Therefore, when Yisrael sins, its sin is a double sin.

Yisrael is not the only nation that has been exiled from its land; many nations, large and small, have experienced this fate. However, those nations, once they are destroyed, disappear. They assimilate and no memory remains of them, and, at the same time, their suffering ends. Such is not the lot of Yisrael. An invisible "hand" forced Yisrael not to assimilate, but rather to remain apart and dispersed, and to suffer without end. Why? Because Yisrael is a nation destined for greatness, specifically, for moral greatness - for that greatness which in the awesome future will be the lot of all of mankind. Therefore, they were doubly consoled: In the future, there will be open miracles. For now, the time for open miracles has not yet come, but certainly miracles have taken place and will continue to take place . . . (Ha'techukah Le'Yisrael Al Pi Ha'torah III p.258)

"Ve'shinantam / You shall teach them thoroughly . . ." (6:7)

The word "ve'shinantam" also can mean "you shall sharpen." Thus, our Sages teach that one must study Torah until its words are "sharp in your mouth," i.e., until one knows the material thoroughly and clearly.

R' Avraham Yaakov Hakohen Pam z"l (rosh yeshiva of Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn; died 2001) writes: The work Birkat Shmuel [by R' Boruch Ber Leibowitz z"l; died 1940] notes that a person's obligation to study

Torah has two components, one qualitative and the other quantitative. Our verse alludes to the quality of one's Torah learning. As for quantity, we read (Yehoshua 1:8), "You shall contemplate it day and night."

However, R' Pam continues, one is exempt from studying Torah at any moment in which he must work for a living. One should not think that earning a living merely mitigates the prohibition of bittul Torah / wasting time from Torah study. To the contrary, at a time when one must work, that is his mitzvah, not studying Torah. After all, we are commanded (Devarim 11:14), "You shall gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil." (See Berachot 35b.)

Of course, writes R' Pam, the opposite side of the coin is that one must be honest with himself. One who is working more than he must to attain luxuries is not exempt from Torah study. One should remember that "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread" (Bereishit 3:19) was a curse.

The story is told of a chance meeting in approximately 1916 between R' Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (rabbi in Russia and later on New York's Lower East Side; died 1973) and R' Avraham Yishayahu Karelitz z"l (the Chazon Ish; 1878-1953) in the waiting room of the rabbi of Stuyepitz, R' Yoel Sorotzkin z"l. Although older than R' Henkin, the Chazon Ish was unknown to most people at that time. While both men waited for the Stuyepitz Rabbi, R' Henkin said to his fellow visitor, "Shalom aleichem! What is your name?" "Avraham Yishayahu Karelitz," came the answer. "What do you do?" "I am a storekeeper." (In fact, Mrs. Karelitz kept a store while her husband learned full time.) "And when does a Jew learn?" R' Henkin prodded. "When there is time, one learns," the unknown visitor responded. "And what brings you here?" "The rabbi has sent for me."

R' Henkin imagined that his fellow visitor had been sent for because one of his customers or suppliers had lodged a complaint against him with the rabbi. How great was R' Henkin's surprise when he learned why R' Sorotzkin has sent for R' Karelitz - he wished to ask R' Karelitz to serve as rabbi of Stuyepitz while R' Sorotzkin had to travel away from the town for several months.

Was the Chazon Ish being flippant when he said, "When there is time, one learns"? No, says R' Pam. That is in fact one's obligation! (Atarah La'melech p. 156)

"You shall be greatly beware for your lives." (4:15)

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l ("Ramchal") writes: Among the deterrents to serving Hashem with zeal is excessive trepidation and fear of what time may bring, of heat and cold, of accidents, of illness, of winds, etc. As King Shlomo wrote (Mishlei 26:13), "The lazy person says, 'There is a lion on the road.'" Chazal condemned this trait, attributing it to sinners. Rather, the proper rule of conduct is (in the words of Tehilim 37:3), "Trust in Hashem and do good, dwell in the land and cultivate faith."

One might ask: Chazal have instructed that a person be especially attentive to his well-being and not place himself in danger, even if he is righteous. In line with this, the Gemara (Ketubot 30a) says, "Everything is in the hands of Heaven except chills and fevers." The Torah [in the verse quoted above] commands the same thing, all of which indicates that a person should not place his trust in G-d in this area! Does this teaching not contradict what was stated in the first paragraph?

Ramchal answers: Know that there is fear and there is fear. There is appropriate fear and there is foolish fear. On the other hand, there is confidence and there is recklessness. Hashem has invested man with intelligence and judgment so that he may follow the right path and protect himself from the instruments of injury that have been created to punish evildoers. One who chooses not to be guided by wisdom and exposes himself to dangers is displaying not trust, but recklessness.

The type of fear and self-protection which is appropriate is that which grows out of wisdom and intelligence. It is the type about which it is said (Mishlei 22:3), "The wise man sees evil and hides, but the fools pass

on and are punished." "Foolish fear" is a person's desire to have multiple levels of protection, such that he devotes himself to building up these layers of protection and neglects Torah and Divine service. The criterion by which to distinguish between the two types of fear is implied in Chazal's statement (Pesachim 8b), "Where there is a likelihood of danger, it is different." Where there is an identifiable risk of injury, one must be careful, but where there is no apparent danger, one should not be afraid. (Mesilat Yesharim, ch. 9)

On a related theme, R' Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz z"l (see above) writes: There is a deep-rooted misconception in people's minds regarding bitachon / trust in Hashem. To many people, bitachon implies an obligation to believe that, when a person stands at a crossroads where there are two roads before him with an uncertain future ahead and with a possibility of a good outcome or an outcome which is not good, the good outcome is inevitable. These people think that if they doubt this at all, they are lacking bitachon.

That is not a correct understanding of bitachon at all. Unless it has been prophetically foretold, the future is never certain, for who can know Hashem's judgment or how He repays men for their deeds. Rather, bitachon is the belief that nothing in the world is left to chance, that everything that happens under the sun has been ordered by Hashem. When a person encounters a situation in which, according to the laws of nature, he is in danger, and that person strengthens himself and remembers that nothing is left to chance and that nothing in the world can prevent Hashem from coming to the rescue, that person is practicing bitachon. (Emunah U'bitachon, ch.2)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives are available starting with Rosh HaShanah 5758 (1997) at <http://www.torah.org/learning/hamaayan/> . Text archives from 1990 through the present are available at <http://www.acoast.com/~seh/hamaayan/> . Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible. Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> Project Genesis, Inc. learn@torah.org



From: Rafael Salasnik [rafi@brijnet.org] Sent: July 28, 2004 To: daf-hashavua@shamash.org

Subject: DAF-HASHAVUA Vaetchanan 5764/2004

Vaetchanan-5764

United Synagogue - London (O) Vaetchanan Shabbat Ends In London At 9.47pm

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Sidra Lite * Moses' plea to Hashem to allow him to enter the Promised Land is turned down. * The people are urged not to forget what they saw and heard at Mount Sinai. * Three Cities of Refuge are established east of the Jordan. * The Ten Commandments are repeated with some variations. * The first paragraph of the Shema is taught to the people. * The people are commanded to possess the Land and not to marry outside of their faith.

SIDRA INSIGHTS

Rabbi Yaakov Grunwald, Pinner Synagogue
TO CHANGE OR NOT TO CHANGE?

In today's Sidrah, Moses continues his farewell speech to the new generation of the Israelites. As he turns his attention to the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, he begins with this important warning: 'Do not

add to the commandment which I am commanding you and do not take away from it.'

In this mitzvah, Moses affirms a concept which later became one of the thirteen fundamental principles of the Jewish faith. It states that the Torah will not be changed under any circumstances. It comes to emphasise the idea that, because the Torah is Divine, it is perfect and all the mitzvot which it contains are tailored precisely to our needs. Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz (1695-1764) used to explain that the mitzvot are to be compared to medicines. He explained that the Holy One Blessed be He, wanted to purify us. Therefore, He gave us many teachings and mitzvot which are designed to achieve this goal. But just as medicines are effective only when they are administered according to medical advice and measured precisely, so the mitzvot are only effective when they are observed exactly in the way they are written in the Torah and interpreted by our Rabbis.

The Torah says: 'Do not add to the commandments and do not subtract from them, lishmor - to keep.' Why does the Torah say 'to keep'? What is the significance of this word? The story is told that once Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer, who was the leader of German Jewry at the beginning of the last century, had a conversation with a Reform minister. The latter argued that it was very important to change the laws in order to make them easier and more attractive to the masses. Rabbi Hildesheimer pointed to this word 'lishmor'. He explained that it signifies that even when we are motivated by our desire to keep the Torah, we must not whittle away any of its principles or water down its practices. In all our relationships, we must learn to make compromises and give in on some of our long-held and cherished desires and convictions. However, in religious matters, we must remain firm and stick to our principles.

In his commentary 'The Call of the Torah', Rabbi Elie Munk says that 'this apparent rigidity is precisely what gives Judaism its distinctiveness and originality - to achieve the goals of its teachings through a meticulously established set of practices, from which any basic change would take away both effectiveness and value.'

Our commentators discuss extensively the question as to when this mitzvah applies. After all, it is self-evident that Judaism has changed and that today we observe many laws that are not stated in the Torah. The Rabbis in ancient times added many restrictions and enactments. There are two festivals, Chanukah and Purim, which were added after the period of the Torah and others, such as Yom Ha'atzma'ut and Yom Yerushalayim, which are of very modern origin.

There are two basic explanations which complement each other. Maimonides and Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi explain that the Rabbis of the Sanhedrin had the power to legislate new laws or abolish some. But they had to make it clear that whatever measures they introduced, these were Rabbinic laws which did not enjoy equal status with Torah laws. For example, when the Rabbis forbade eating chicken with milk, they had the duty to explain that this was only a protective measure, a 'fence round the Torah law'.

Rashi, basing himself on earlier Rabbinic interpretations, explains that the Torah forbids adding to or removing basic characteristics from any mitzvah. Thus, we must not add a fifth portion inside the tefillin, or reduce their number to three.

The beauty of our Torah lies in its integrity and totality. We have a sacred duty to observe and interpret it meticulously so that we can pass it on to the countless generations yet unborn in the same condition as we received it.

A Halachic Guide to Life Cycle Events

BY RABBI DANIEL ROSELAAR, Belmont United Synagogue
BAT MITZVAH

Whereas a boy reaches religious adulthood at the age of thirteen, a girl attains her religious majority when she is twelve. From this point onwards she is called a bat mitzvah since she is now a woman who is

independently obligated to observe the mitzvot. (Biblically, she is a bat mitzvah only if she has also reached the first stages of puberty.)

A girl automatically becomes a bat mitzvah irrespective of whether or not there was any ceremony or celebration to mark the occasion, and until fairly recent times nothing formal was done to mark this juncture in a girl's life. However, several halachists have observed that it is proper to host a seudat mitzvah (festive meal) to celebrate the fact that the girl now has an enhanced obligation to keep the mitzvot. The Seridei Aish (a prominent 20th century halachist who headed the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin) actively encouraged this practice. He noted that modern women reap the benefits of political, social and educational emancipation in many different contexts, and to deny them the opportunity to mark the milestone of becoming a bat mitzvah would convey a negative religious message.

It should be noted that many contemporary halachic authorities have not endorsed a formal Synagogue bat mitzvah ceremony. Their halachic objections include the rules of Chukkat Hagoy - the prohibition against copying gentile religious practices - since a bat mitzvah ceremony may be somewhat akin to a Christian confirmation ceremony, as well as the illegitimacy of using the Synagogue sanctuary for non-statutory rituals. However, not all poskim concur that Chukkat Hagoy applies in this instance, and if the bat mitzvah ceremony is appended to a regular prayer service the latter objection can possibly be dismissed.

IT HAPPENED TODAY

by RABBI YISROEL FINE, Cockfosters & N.Southgate Synagogue
13th Av

Today marks the Yahrzeit of SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE, the most famous Anglo-Jew of the nineteenth century, who died on July 25th 1885. Merchant, politician and defender of Jewish rights, his life story personified the new freedom and dignity that Jews acquired in his time.

Appointed Sheriff of London in 1836 and knighted by Queen Victoria the following year, he used his position as President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews to fearlessly campaign against the remaining disabilities affecting Jewish subjects worldwide.

Together with his wife Judy he travelled the world to defend individual and national rights of his fellow Jews, accompanied by his own Shochet. With the blessing of Queen Victoria he travelled to Damascus in 1840 and gained "honourable liberation" for six Jews falsely accused of a blood libel. He returned to England as a hero.

In 1846 he was received by Czar Nicholas I of Russia whom he persuaded to revoke the decree of expulsion for one hundred thousand Jews from the German and Austrian border. Upon his return Queen Victoria made him a Baronet. However, as with Judah Halevi before him, his heart lay firmly in the East in the Holy Land to which he paid seven visits commencing in 1827. He distributed charity lavishly, building hospitals, schools and Synagogues.

However, his greatest contribution was the building of the first houses outside the walls of old Jerusalem, thus laying the foundation for the new city. Bearing his name, Yemin Moshe together with its landmark windmill stands today as a testament to his philanthropy and vision. Even the Kotel bears his imprint through the stones perched at its top.

His hundredth birthday was celebrated by Jews throughout the world and by a procession miles in length past his home. He died at the age of one hundred and one and was buried in Ramsgate.

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

by Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Last week's questions:

1) How many of these can you explain?

I. the 9 days II. the 3 weeks III. the 7 weeks IV. the 24 weeks V. the 4 Shabbatot VI. the 7 Shabbatot VII. the 28 years VIII. the 50 years

Answer:

I. 1-9 Av II. 17 Tammuz - 9 Av III. Pesach - Shavuot IV. The cycle of the Mishmarot and Ma'amadot in Temple times V. Prior to Pesach VI. Between 9 Av and Rosh Hashanah VII. The Solar Cycle, hence the recitation of the Blessing of the Sun every 28 years VIII. The Jubilee Cycle.

2) EXTRA CHALLENGE

In what circumstances would an entire congregation (made up of more than a minyan of obligated, healthy men) during a regular daily service, not say a single Amen except for responses to the Mourner's and Rabbonan Kaddishes?

Answer: The Rema in the Shulchan Aruch states that, when a person "hijacks" the bimah and leads the service against the will of the congregation, the congregation should not say Amen to his blessings (O.C.53:22).

This week's question:

1) Shabbat Chazon, Shabbat Nachamu and Shabbat Shuvah have something in common which is not shared by any of our other special Shabbatot.

2) EXTRA CHALLENGE

In today's Sidra we read the first paragraph of the Shema. There is a connection between the number of words in the opening verse and in the whole paragraph on the one hand, and the Levitical cities on the other hand.

What is the connection and what is its significance?

[Please note that the verse "Baruch Shem.." is not part of the Shema in the Torah.]

Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue.

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Parashah Talk

Parashas Vaeschanan

EXCERPT FROM LIVING EACH WEEK,

BY RABBI ABRAHAM J. TWERSKI, M.D.

I pleaded before G-d at that time, saying . . . "Let me go over and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan" . . . and G-d said "Speak no more to Me of this matter" (Deuteronomy 3:23-26).

The Midrash relates a long dialogue between

Moses and G-d, with Moses invoking various arguments to revoke the Divine decree that he may not enter the Promised Land. G-d told Moses that each generation has its leader, and the period of leadership is preordained. The predestined time had arrived for Joshua to assume the leadership, and there was no way that this could be delayed for even a single moment. To this Moses responded, "Well, then, let Joshua be the leader, and I will be his disciple," and G-d agreed to this.

Joshua then entered the Sanctuary, and Moses remained outside and observed the Divine cloud descending upon the Sanctuary as it had so often done when G-d had spoken with him. When the cloud lifted and Joshua emerged, Moses asked him, "What did G-d say to you?" Joshua responded, "All those years when G-d spoke privately to you, did I ever ask you what G-d had said to you?" Whereupon Moses exclaimed, "I will die a hundred deaths rather than experience one moment of envy!" and surrendered his soul to G-d.

Of all the negative traits which can afflict the human being, envy is perhaps among the most abhorrent. Solomon refers to envy as something which "rots the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). Although the Talmud finds a redeeming value in it when envy of another's knowledge stimulates one to learning (Bava Basra 21a), Rabbeinu Yonah feels that this is a rather undesirable motive for acquiring wisdom, and that it would be far preferable for one to desire wisdom for its own sake rather than out of envy.

Moses was ready to make whatever sacrifices G-d would request of him, in order that he be granted this single wish to set foot on the holy earth of Israel. Yet the awareness that he could continue to live only under

circumstances that would arouse envy within him was enough to cause him to forgo the most fervent wish of his life.

The ethical work *Orchos Tzaddikim* states that the envious person, one who desires that which others have, is essentially in disagreement with how G-d has distributed His bounty among people. The envy that Moses experienced when he witnessed Joshua in communion with G-d made Moses realize that he could harbor a feeling that differed with the Divine will, and Moses felt that a life wherein one's will deviated from the will of G-d was not worth living, regardless of what other rewards might be reaped.

The ideal goal in life is described in *Ethics of the Fathers* (2:4): "Make His will your will." A true awareness that one was created for the specific purpose of doing the will of G-d would make a person dedicate his entire life to fulfilling that purpose. Although we may not be able to reach the degree of perfection achieved by Moses, we must nevertheless strive for this goal.

Envy is both futile and deplorable. Envy will not result in one's getting the coveted object, and accomplishes nothing except tormenting a person. Moses welcomed death rather than the harboring of so abhorrent a trait. Even if one does not have this level of spirituality, one's desire to live may actually be diminished by the anguish of envy. In order to achieve even a modicum of happiness, one must rid oneself of envy.



www.vbm-torah.org/salt.htm SALT!!
("Surf A Little Torah")

RABBI DAVID SILVERBERG

Yom Revi'i, tenth day of the fifth month of the year [3]316 Wednesday, 10 Av 5764 – July 28, 2004

Amidst his admonition to Benei Yisrael in Parashat Vaetchanan, Moshe warns, "But take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes..." (4:9). Though the straightforward reading of this verse indicates that Moshe refers to the need to remember Ma'amad Har Sinai, Chazal, in a famous mishna in *Masekhet Avot* (3:8, or, in other versions, 3:10), read this verse as referring to Torah in general. Based on Moshe's warning that Benei Yisrael not forget the Torah, the mishna establishes that "whoever forgets a single item from his studies is considered as risking his life." The mishna claims that when Moshe admonishes, "watch yourselves scrupulously" ("shemor nafshekha me'od"), he refers to the risk to one's life that presents itself when a person forgets any of his Torah learning. The mishna then immediately qualifies this statement: "Perhaps this applies even if one's learning becomes overwhelming for him? The verse thus states, 'lest they are removed from your heart' – one is liable only if he sits and removes them from his heart."

When exactly does this prohibition against forgetting apply? To what exactly does "removing them from his heart" refer?

The Etz Yosef (a commentary on *Pirkei Avot*) adopts perhaps the most literal interpretation of this mishna, claiming that it indeed forbids one to allow any of his Torah knowledge slip out of memory. Only if "one's learning becomes overwhelming for him" – meaning, if his memory simply cannot contain anymore knowledge, and so any new information that enters his mind necessitates the loss of old information, is he not liable to punishment. Generally, however, a person who forgets even a single piece of Torah knowledge is deserving of punishment, even if this results from his busy work schedule and efforts to make a living.

Needless to say, as the "*Lechem Shamayim*" (a different commentary on *Pirkei Avot*) points out, it is difficult to imagine that the mishna condemns people who work for a living and thus by necessity cannot possibly review all the Torah knowledge they had accumulated. The "*Lechem Shamayim*" cites several passages in which Chazal emphasize the obligation to earn a livelihood through work, which for most people precludes the possibility of retaining all their Torah knowledge. For this

reason, the "Lechem Shamayim" rejects the literal interpretation of the mishna.

On the opposite extreme, Rav Chayim of Volozhin is cited as explaining that the warning of this mishna no longer bears practical relevance nowadays. According to Rav Chayim of Volozhin, this mishna refers to the time when the Oral Law was indeed transmitted orally, before the chatimat ha-Talmud (the final redaction of the Talmud). In order to ensure the proper transmission of halakha, it was incumbent upon students to constantly review the information they learned and ensure it would not be forgotten. Only this emphasis on review and memorization would guarantee the successful transmission of the Oral Law from one generation to the next. Once, however, the Talmud was written, there is no longer any prohibition against forgetting one's Torah knowledge.

The Netziv, in his "Herchev Davar" to this verse, explains differently. Unlike Rav Chayim, the Netziv maintains that this mishna indeed applies for all time, but it forbids only forgetting "mishnato" – one's personal Torah, the chiddushim (novel interpretations) at which he has arrived. A scholar who over the course of his learning develops his own chiddushim must make point of remembering them, for these ideas exist only in his mind. If they are lost from his memory, then they are lost from the world. Rav Eliyahu Ha-kohen of Izmir, in his work, "Shevet Musar" (22:15), explains similarly, and urges yeshiva students to record all their chiddushim immediately, so as to ensure that they are not lost.

An entirely different approach to this mishna is taken by Rav Yehoshua Falk, in his work on Pirkei Avot, "Avnei Yehoshua" (the first sefer ever written in the United States – New York, 1860). Rav Falk suggests that "forgetting" in this context refers to the intentional dismissal of information, rather than its loss from memory. The mishna here speaks of a person who finds a certain law in the Torah objectionable according to his own intuitive reasoning and preconceptions, and thus discards it. We are not expected to fully understand the rationale behind every halakha, and from time to time we might, indeed, encounter a law that appears difficult to grasp and even to accept. But the Torah demands our obedience to G-d and loyal acceptance of every detail of the Torah, and we may not conveniently "forget" and dismiss even a single law.

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[from last year]

Vaetchanan

R. JACOB LEINER (1814-1878), leader of the Hassidic community in Radzyn, was the son of the Ishbitzer Rebbe, R. Mordechai Joseph Leiner, whose Torah commentary Mei ha-Shiloach has become popular in recent years. R. Jacob wrote a commentary of his own, called Bet Yaakov, and in the course of a sermon on the month of Av, made a profound point about the differences between the senses:

From a human perspective it often seems as if seeing is a more precise form of knowledge than hearing. In fact, however, hearing has a greater power than seeing. Sight discloses the external aspect of things, but hearing reveals their inwardness. The aspect of G-d which prevails [in the month of Av, during which we sense the 'hiddenness' of G-d] is haskes u-shema Yisrael hayom, 'Be silent, O Israel, and listen' [Deut. 27:9 - the initial letters of these words spell out the four-letter name of G-d]. The idea of haskes ['being silent, paying focussed attention'] is that the person practices a self-imposed limitation on his senses, no longer looking at the events in this [external] world and he is then able clearly to understand that 'You have now become the people of the Lord your G-d' [the concluding part of Deut. 27:9] - something one can hear during

this month [more than at other times of the year]. When G-d cannot be seen, argues the Bet Yaakov, He can still be heard, and hearing represents a depth-encounter more intimate and transformational than seeing.

Perhaps without intending to, the Bet Yaakov has provided us with a point of entry into one of the most important and least understood differences between the two great civilizations of the West. Matthew Arnold, in his Culture and Anarchy, called them Hellenism and Hebraism. The political philosopher Leo Strauss spoke of Athens and Jerusalem. We know them best as ancient Greece and ancient Israel.

Greece of the fifth to third centuries b.c.e. was in many respects the greatest culture of antiquity. It excelled in art, architecture, sculpture and the theatre - the visual arts. In these it achieved a greatness never surpassed. The most glittering subsequent artistic flowering of Europe, in Renaissance Italy, was essentially a rediscovery of the world and skills of ancient Greece.

Jews excelled at none of these things, yet their contribution to the West was no less great. The reason is that their interest lay altogether elsewhere, not in sight but in sound, not in seeing but hearing. Judaism is the supreme example of a culture not of the eye but of the ear. A great nineteenth century historian explained the difference:

The pagan perceives the Divine in nature through the medium of the eye, and he becomes conscious of it as something to be looked at. On the other hand, to the Jew who conceives G-d as being outside of nature and prior to it, the Divine manifests itself through the will and through the medium of the ear. He becomes conscious of it as something to be heeded and listened to. The pagan beholds his G-d, the Jew hears Him, that is, apprehends His will. Jewish and Greek ideas came together in the religion we know as Christianity. It began as a sect within Judaism, but early on, having failed to make headway among Jews, Paul took its message to Rome and the world of Hellenistic culture. That gave rise to a fact fateful to the course of Western civilization. The first Christian texts were written and published in Greek. The result was that, though Christianity brought many Jewish ideas to the non-Jewish world (as Maimonides states in a passage in the Mishneh Torah censored during the Middle Ages), it did so in translation, and the deepest Jewish concepts are untranslatable into Greek. For almost two thousand years, Judaism has been known to the West through the filter of languages and cultures, Hellenistic in inspiration, which simply could not express its message in its pristine form.

To this day, when we speak about knowledge, we use metaphors overwhelmingly drawn from the world of the eye. We talk of insight, foresight and hindsight; of making an observation; of people of vision. When we understand something we say, "I see". The very word "idea" comes from the same Latin root as the word "video". These are linguistic vestiges of a culture essentially Greek. In the Hebrew Bible, by contrast, instead of saying that someone thinks, the verse will say that he "said in his or her heart." Thought is not a form of sight but of speech. In rabbinic Hebrew, when we say that a certain conclusion can be drawn, we say mashma or shema mina or ta shema. When we want to say that we understand, we use the phrase shomea ani, and when someone did not accept an idea, we say lo shemia leh. Tradition is called mipi hashemua. All of these are verbs of hearing. For the Greeks, truth is what we see. For Jews, it is what we hear.

The reason could not be more profound. Pagan cultures saw G-d - or rather, the gods - in the visible: the sun, the storm, the earth, the sea, the great forces that surround us and reduce us to a sense of insignificance. The gods have changed in the twenty-first century. Today, when we think of the fate that lies in store for us, we are more likely to talk about the environment, the march of technology, the global market and the international political arena. But today's secular city is as polytheistic as its predecessors.

The polytheistic imagination, ancient or modern, sees reality as the clash of powerful forces, each of which is fundamentally indifferent to the fate of mankind. A tidal wave does not stop to think whom it will drown. The free market makes no moral distinctions. Global warming affects the innocent and guilty alike. A world confined to the visible is an impersonal world, deaf to our prayers, blind to our hopes, a world without overarching meaning, in which we are temporary interlopers who must protect ourselves as best we can against the random cruelties of fate. Today's secular culture - dominated by television, video, the Internet and the computer screen - is a visual culture, a world of images and icons.

Judaism, by contrast, is the supreme example of a person-centred civilization - and persons communicate by words, language, speech, what we hear rather than see. It is so because the patriarchs and prophets of ancient Israel were the first to understand that G-d is not part of the visible world but beyond. Hence its prohibition against graven images, visual representations and icons. Nowhere is this more profoundly spelled out than in the great encounter between G-d and the prophet Elijah at Mount Horeb:

The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper [kol demamah dakah, 'a still small voice']. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. G-d reveals himself in speech, from the reverberating echoes of Sinai to the still small voice heard by Elijah. That is why the central doctrine of Judaism is Torah min hashamayim, 'Torah from heaven', meaning that what is ultimately holy are not sacred sites or the wonders of nature but words. G-d created the world with words ('And G-d said . . . and there was') and His greatest gift is Torah, His word to mankind.

This fact had huge consequences for Judaism, the greatest of which is that, at the heart of reality is a personal presence, not a concept, power or theoretical construct, the prime mover, necessary being, the first cause -- the G-d of the philosophers -- but a person, one to whom we can say Thou, who speaks to us in revelation, and to whom we speak in prayer. Hence the unique intimacy Jews feel with G-d. In terms of power, there is no comparison, no possible relationship, between an infinite Creator and his finite creations. But in terms of speech, there is. G-d asks us, as He asked Adam and Eve in the Garden, ayeka, 'Where are you?' and at times we ask Him, 'Where are you'. Because there is speech, there is relationship. Between two beings who can communicate with one another, there is connection, communion, even if the One is infinitely great and the other infinitely small. Words bridge the metaphysical abyss between soul and soul.

There is much to be said about the non-visual character of the biblical imagination, more than can be mentioned here. To take just three examples: the Torah tells us many things about Abraham, Moses, Aaron and Samuel, but we have not the slightest idea of what they looked like. Unlike the prose of Homer (as Erich Auerbach pointed out in a famous essay, 'Odysseus' Scar'), the Torah gives us almost no visual descriptions. When it does so, it is always for a moral purpose. So, for example, we hear that Sarah is a beautiful woman only when she and Abraham go down to Egypt, and for the first time Abraham looks at his wife through Egyptian eyes. We read that Saul, Israel's first king, was a tall man, head and shoulders above his contemporaries. But this physical description is meant ironically, for Saul turns out to be an essentially small man, more led by the people than leading them.

Similarly when it comes to the description of the mishkan, the sanctuary. This is given in immense detail in the second half of the book of Shemot. However it is almost impossible to visualise it. The description is written

as a series of instructions as to how to make the various components. It is more a construction manual than a pictorial description. Even here the emphasis is not on seeing but on hearing and doing.

Perhaps the most remarkable phenomenon is that the Bible, though it contains 613 commands, does not have a word that means obey. Instead, it uses the word shema, which means, 'to hear, to listen, to contemplate, to understand, to internalise and to respond.' The King James Bible, published in 1611, was able to use an English word that conveyed some of this rich range of senses, namely to hearken. Now that the word 'hearken' has passed out of everyday usage, there is no way of adequately translating the complex word shema into English.

Once we understand this, the significance of many biblical passages becomes clear. G-d's greatness is that He hears the unheard. As Ishmael lay dying of thirst, "G-d heard the boy crying, and the angel of G-d called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; G-d has heard the boy crying, there where he lies.'" The very name, Ishmael, means "G-d hears." One of the tasks of a leader, according to Moses, is to "hear between your brothers" (to this day, a court case is called "a hearing"). The great social legislation in Shemot states that "If you take your neighbour's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate." Hearing is the basis of both justice and compassion.

When Joseph's brothers are accused of being spies, they say -- not knowing that Joseph is there and can understand them - "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we did not listen; that is why this distress has come upon us." They saw but did not hear - and not to be able to hear someone's distress is a deep moral failure. When the Torah wants to convey the degradation suffered by the Israelites in Egypt, it says, "They did not listen to him [Moses] because of their broken spirit and cruel bondage." They could no longer hear the good news of their impending liberation. When Solomon asked G-d for the greatest gift He can bestow on him, he says, "Grant your servant a listening heart [lev shomea] to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong."

We can now also understand one of the strangest sayings of the rabbis: "If a person is taking a walk while reciting Mishnaic teachings, and interrupts his studies to say, How beautiful is that tree, or How fine is that field, it is as if he had committed a mortal sin." It is not that Judaism does not wish us to enjoy the beauties of nature. In fact, in the prayer-book there is a special blessing to be said on seeing trees in blossom. The sin is that such a person abandons the world of sound (Mishnah, i.e. "oral Torah") in favour of the world of sight.

Listening is an art, a skill, a religious discipline, the deepest reflex of the human spirit. One who truly listens can sometimes hear, beneath the noise of the world, the deep speech of the universe, the song creation sings to its Creator:

The heavens declare the glory of G-d, The skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day pours forth speech to day, Night communicates knowledge to night. There is no speech or language Where their voice is not heard.

In the silence of the desert (midbar) the Israelites were able to hear the word (davar). And one trained in the art of listening can hear not only the voice of G-d but also the silent cry of the lonely, the distressed, the afflicted, the poor, the needy, the neglected, the unheard. For speech is the most personal of all gestures, and listening the most human - and at the same time, the most divine - of all gifts. G-d listens, and asks us to listen.

That is why the greatest of all commands - the one we read in this week's sedra, the first Jewish words we learned as children, the last words spoken by Jewish martyrs as they went to their deaths, words engraved on the Jewish soul, are Shema Yisrael, "Listen, O Israel." And now too

we understand why, as we say those words, we cover our eyes - to shut out, if only for a moment, the world of sight, so that we can more fully enter the world of sound, the world not of Creation but of Revelation, not of G-d's work but of His word -- the world we cannot see but which, if we create an open, attentive silence in the soul, we can hear.

From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com]
Sent: Thursday, July 29, 2004 4:09 PM To: Peninim Parsha:
PENINIM ON THE TORAH
BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM -
Parshas Vaeschanan

And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying. (3:23) Moshe Rabbeinu relates how he entreated Hashem to permit him to enter Eretz Yisrael. Chazal underscore the power of Tefillah. Because no one exemplified the performance of maasim tovim, good deeds, more than Moshe, Hashem listened to his pleas and allowed him to ascend to the top of the cliff and gaze at Eretz Yisrael. His prayers catalyzed the fulfillment of part of his request. What is there about prayer that is so effective? In his Nesivos Olam, the Maharal writes that when one prays to the Almighty, he indicates that he is totally dependent, unable to exist without Him. This is the attitude one should manifest when he prays.

Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl, taught that an essential component of the prayer service is the prior preparation. While one's external behavior demonstrates who is an earnest Torah scholar, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to Tefillah. The length of his prayer service is no indication that the petitioner takes his prayer any more seriously than one who prays quickly. It is all in the preparation. Rav Shraga Feivel would compare one who is praying to a mountain climber, who exerts great effort to make it to the summit. Once he is there, however, he strolls around with ease. So, too, is it with prayer. When a person prepares diligently for his encounter with the Almighty, his prayer will then spring forth unimpeded from his heart. No foreign thoughts will enter his mind. Indeed, one's alacrity in prayer might even be an indication of his devotion.

Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, was well known for his impassioned prayer. >From deep within the recesses of his heart, he would supplicate the Almighty like a humble servant looking up to his master for salvation. He meticulously enunciated every word. When he would recite those sections of the prayer that praised Hashem, his enthusiasm was palpable. His focus was consummate; his worship was sincere and fervent.

He was particular to daven with a minyan. If he could not find a minyan, he still felt that one should pray in a shul, rather than pray at home. The synagogue is a place specifically designated for prayer, and its ambience is conducive to prayer. This environment stimulates greater devotion and concentration. Rav Moshe Aharon would cite the following incident which he heard from the Chazon Ish, zl. A young couple, who were about to be married in a week, met for the last time prior to the customary seven-day separation before the wedding. They met before shkiah, sunset, and did not part until late into the night. Before taking leave, the bride reminded the groom to remember to daven Maariv. He responded that he had already davened. This struck the girl as odd, since they had been together for the entire evening, and it is improper to daven before sunset. Disturbed, she told her father about the incident when she came home that night. Her father decided to consult the Chazon Ish in regard to the matter. The Chazon Ish advised him to break the engagement. This was no simple matter, especially in light of the fact that it was a week before the wedding, but how can one marry someone who does not pray?

When it was pointed out to Rav Moshe Aharon that one cannot compare not praying with simply not praying with a minyan, his response was unequivocal, "You are right. If my daughter was engaged to a boy, and

we discovered one week before the wedding that he does not daven with a minyan, I would not break the engagement. Would I have known ahead of time that such was the case, however, I would never have agreed to the match in the first place. A boy who does not daven with a minyan is not serious about davening!"

Horav Elya Lopian, zl, frequently urged his students to pray with devotion. "Heartfelt prayer," he said, "can rend the Heavens, especially if accompanied by tears." He would quote the Sefer Chassidim who writes, "The Almighty answers the requests of some individuals solely due to the intensity of their entreaties and the copious tears they shed. Even though they might possess neither merit nor good deeds, Hashem accepts their prayers and fulfills their desires."

We often think that prayer is connected to a specific time and place. Undoubtedly, it is more propitious to pray the specific prayers outlined by Chazal and to do so in a proper shul. Yet, Tefillah is not bound by time or place. One may pour out his heart to Hashem with devotion and fervor whenever he chooses, wherever he is. Horav Simchah Bunim, zl, m'Peshicha writes that one is mistaken if he thinks that in order to pray one must wrap himself in a Tallis and seclude himself. It is not so. Wherever a person might find himself, providing it is a clean place, he may pour out his heart to Hashem, because He is always there and He always listens.

I recently saw a poignant story on Tefillah in Rabbi Yechiel Spero's Touched by a Story, which is well worth reading. It is about a survivor of World War II's ravages. Hitler, Stalin, the persecution in the camps, and the loneliness and bitterness filled with deprivation and pain had all taken their toll. His name was Siberiate, and he was speaking to a group of survivors who, like himself, had suffered and were now prepared to go on. He began his short speech in the following manner:

"I always thought that the most valuable commodity was money, until I came to Siberia and worked eighteen hours a day mining gold. I figured that I could always smuggle a little bit into my pocket, and in a short while I would be rich. What a fool I was to think that my gold had value in Siberia. In the cold misery of the slave labor camp, money was worthless. It was food that we needed. What good was gold if there was nothing to buy!

"As the hunger pangs gnawed within me, my focus turned to food. No longer did gold hold any significance. I needed food if I were to survive. The bitter hunger overwhelmed me until, one day, a passing guard walked by smoking a cigarette. The aroma of the cigarette filled the air and captivated me. Suddenly, my hunger pains became secondary to my cravings for a cigarette. The feeling of calm and relaxation that permeated my body after a cigarette lasted much longer than whatever food I would be able to scrounge.

"A cigarette became increasingly difficult to procure. While tobacco was not an elusive commodity, the paper in which it needed to be wrapped was very scarce. Even the guards were hard-pressed to find paper in which to wrap their tobacco. Now, it was no longer gold, food, or cigarettes that were of great value. It was plain paper which became my focus.

"I would yearn for days for that elusive cigarette, and the pleasure that I derived from it lasted me for the next few days until I could obtain my next cigarette. One day, my good fortune changed. An elderly peasant approached me and asked me if I knew how to read. His son was a soldier in the Soviet Union's Army; stationed hundreds of kilometers away. He would periodically write a letter to convey his personal news to his father. The father, an itinerant peasant, could not read, so he made a deal with me: I would read him his son's letter and, in return, he would give me the envelope to use as a wrapper for my cigarettes.

"I was overjoyed. This envelope had enough paper to roll at least three cigarettes! As I was preparing the envelope, however, I noticed that there was some lettering on the envelope. After closer perusal, I realized that it was Hebrew lettering! Reading the letters carefully, I saw that the writing

was from davening. It had been years since I had davened, but I knew what I was reading. I picked up the envelope, folded it and put it in my pocket.

"One of the men in our labor group was learned. When I showed him my discovery, he exclaimed excitedly that this was a page from a Siddur. He was overjoyed. Hashem had not forgotten about us. How could we forget about Him? So we started a Minyan. Three times a day, the shliach tzibbur, reader, stood up and read from the envelope. Our one-page Siddur served as the primer for a group of depressed inmates to find solace and strength through the medium of Tefillah.

"This prayer meeting created a transformation that was incredible. The wretched souls who previously had nothing left for which to live, now had hope. Their lives now had meaning and purpose, and they looked forward longingly to daven together every day. It suddenly dawned on me that I had now discovered the most valuable thing in the world. It was not gold, nor was it food or cigarettes. It was prayer. The ability to connect with Hashem, to reach out and speak to Him, gave us hope. Without hope, we had nothing. With hope, we had everything.

"There was another aspect of this discovery, however, that was mind-boggling. The page of the Siddur contained a message that was both compelling and timely. The page began with the declaration in Az Yashir of, Hashem yimloch l'olam v'aed, "Hashem will rule forever!" With the small lettering on the page, the heartfelt plea of Ahavah rabah, Avinu! Av HaRachamim Ha'Meracheim racheim aleinu, "Our Father, our Compassionate Father, Who is merciful, have mercy on us!"

Do not add to the word which I command you and do no subtract from it. (4:2) The sequence of these commands is enigmatic. One would think that the admonition against subtraction should precede the one against adding to the Torah. First, we should be taught not to remove anything from the Torah that Hashem has given us. Then, we should be exhorted against attempting to be more pious than the Creator by adding mitzvos to His Torah. Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, explains that the command against subtracting from the Torah is actually an explanation of why we are not permitted to add to the Torah. Whenever one attempts to add to the Torah, he is really subtracting from it, because, in effect, he is disputing the Torah's completeness. He indicates that it needs more. By taking the liberty to add, one is detracting from the Torah's perfection.

It is not uncommon for members of the Torah community to be questioned concerning their ability to compromise. We are called intractable and inflexible, because we are not willing to concede our position on Torah and mitzvos. There is a famous incident that occurred with the Bais HaLevi that is compelling. It took place during a rabbinical assembly in Russia when a number of Torah's greatest leaders were gathered to discuss the pressing issues of the day. One of the free-thinking, wealthy, lay people posed a question: "Rabbis! There are gathered here some of Judaism's greatest leaders. It would be only proper that you convene to discuss the possibility of "easing" the load of mitzvos on contemporary society. As you know fully well, many of the mitzvos of the Torah are outdated and not in tune with modern society."

The Bais HaLevi rose, responding to this contemptuous individual with the following mashal, analogy. "There was once a businessman who succeeded in only one thing: amassing large debts. He purchased large amounts of merchandise on credit and could not pay his bills. Understandably, his reputation waned as his debts rose. One night, shortly after midnight, he knocked on the door of one of his biggest creditors, someone whom he owed 100,000 ruble. He told the creditor that, given that it had been a number of years since he had last given him any payment on his debt, he wanted to make an exact accounting of the debt.

"The creditor was not really interested in meeting with the man at that time of the night, but the hope of collecting his debt motivated him to

pull out his ledgers and go through the entire bill. They haggled back and forth, perusing every bill, every detail, until the debtor was able to adjust the debt to 50,000 ruble. The creditor was understandably upset, but he realized that even at fifty cents on the dollar, he was doing better than nothing at all. So he agreed to the compromise, expecting to receive a check immediately for the balance. We can only imagine his dejection and disgust when the debtor bid him good-night as he sauntered towards the door.

"You are not paying me?" the creditor exclaimed.

"No, of course not," the debtor replied, "you know I have no money."

"Why did you bother to go through the entire bill, inferring that you were going to do something about it?" the creditor screamed.

"You do not seem to understand," the debtor responded. "Every time I borrowed money, I felt bad that I was taking someone else's money, when I knew I would not be able to repay. This feeling lay like a stone on my heart. I knew I had to do something about it. That is why I came here tonight to go over the bills. At least now I feel better. I no longer owe you 100,000 ruble. I only owe you 50,000 ruble. This brings joy to my heart, since I feel that I have at least placated you somewhat."

This Bais HaLevi concluded the analogy, as he looked with piercing eyes at the arrogant skeptic, "You do not seek compromise for the purpose of strengthening your service to Hashem. Even if you only had the Ten Commandments to observe, you would find a way out of it. For people like you, no compromise will suffice; you seek one thing and only one thing: to abolish the Torah - totally and unequivocally. You have no desire to pay your debt. You only want to alleviate your conscience. The Torah is immutable and unalterable. It is perfect and complete. Accept it in its totality, with devotion and self-sacrifice, as your ancestors have done. You will never receive from us a dispensation to diminish your holy debt to Hashem."

Arthur & Sora Pollak and Family in loving memory of our mother & grandmother Mrs. Goldie Jundef Peninim mailing list Peninim@shemayisrael.com http://mail.shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim_shemayisrael.com

From: ohr@ohr.edu Sent: July 29, 2004 To: parasha-qa@ohr.edu
Subject: Parsha Q&A - Parshat Va'etchanan
PARSHA Q&A - For the week ending 31 July 2004 / 13 Av 5764 -
from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu

<http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/1797> Questions & Answers

1. "And I prayed to Hashem at that time." Why "at that time"?
 - * 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of Eretz Canaan, Moshe thought perhaps Hashem had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
2. What characteristic trait is represented by Hashem's "strong hand"?
 - * 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
3. What is ha'levanon?
 - * 3:25 - Ha'levanon means the Beit Hamikdash, which makes "white" (lavan), i.e., atones for, the Jewish People.
4. What did Hashem tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
 - * 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the mitzvot properly?
 - * 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
 - * 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
7. What is hinted by the word v'noshantem?
 - * 4:25 - The gematria of v'noshantem, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
 - * 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.

9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
 * 4:28 - No. It means you'll serve others who serve idols.
10. Why is east called mizrach?
 * 4:41 - It's the direction from which the sun shines (mizrach means shining).
11. "Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had Hashem previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
 * 5:13 - Before Matan Torah, at Marah. (Shmot 15:25)
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
 * 5:16 - At Marah. (Shmot 15:25).
13. What is meant by "Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One"?
 * 6:4 - Hashem, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
14. What are two meanings of loving Hashem "with all your might"?
 * 6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether Hashem treats you with kindness or harshness.
15. How well-versed must one be in Torah?
 * 6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
16. Where does the word totafot come from?
 * 6:8 - Tot means two in Caspi. Fot means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
17. Who is fit to swear in Hashem's name?
 * 6:13 - One who serves Hashem and reveres His name.
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
 * 7:7 - B'nei Yisrael are the humblest nation.
19. When someone serves Hashem with love, how many generations receive reward?
 * 7:9 - 2,000.
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?
 * 7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.
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treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.

INSIGHTS

Nickel 'n' Dime

"...for you shall not cross this Jordan" (3:27)

A dark night. A passenger jumps down from a bus. As he jumps some small change falls from his pocket.

Too embarrassed to ask the driver to wait so he can use the headlights of the bus to collect his nickels and dimes from the sidewalk, the passenger quickly reaches into his pocket and places a twenty-dollar bill on the ground in the vicinity of his small change. He shouts to the driver "Hold the bus! There's a twenty dollar bill of mine somewhere down here on the ground!"

In the bright headlamps the passenger sees not only the twenty-dollar bill but the scattered small change as well, and he quickly scoops them both up and is on his way.

G-d was adamant that Moshe should not enter the Land of Israel. One reason was that Moshe should be buried in the desert along with his generation so that his personal merit would ensure that they would be arise at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead.

G-d wanted Moshe to be the twenty-dollar bill amongst the small change to make sure that not a nickel would get lost.

- Source: based on Devarim Rabba 2:5

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From: ohr@ohr.edu Sent: July 29, 2004 To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Va'etchanan
 TORAH WEEKLY - For the week ending 31 July 2004 / 13 Av 5764 - from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
 Written and compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR
 Parshat Va'etchanan <http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/1796>
 OVERVIEW

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special mitzvot. Hashem refuses. Moshe reminds Bnei Yisrael of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah - that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on Bnei Yisrael that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jews will ever claim that Hashem spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins Bnei Yisrael to "pass over" the Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when Bnei Yisrael dwell in Eretz Yisrael they will sin and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but will eventually return to Hashem.

Moshe designates three "refuge cities" to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the 10 Commandments and then teaches the Shema, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and thus forget their purpose as a spiritual nation. The parsha ends with Moshe exhorting Bnei Yisrael not to intermarry when they enter Eretz Yisrael, as they cannot be a