



MIZRACHI

# הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

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PARSHA WEEKLY

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## WORLD MIZRACHI Picture of the Week

HaMizrachi Parsha Weekly thanks Rav Yaakov Panitch for 5 years of compiling and translating Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon's Q&As.

Pictured are Rav Yaakov with Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon, Nasi of World Mizrachi, and Rav Reuven Taragin, Editor of HaMizrachi Parsha Weekly.

Thank you in advance to R' Elan Finkelstein who will be taking over this position starting next week.

## INSIDE

### TORAT MIZRACHI

-  Rabbi Doron Perez 2
-  Rabbi Reuven Taragin 4
-  Rabbanit Shani Taragin 5
-  Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon 6
-  Rabbanit Sharon Rimon 7
-  Sivan Rahav Meir 8
-  Rabbi Danny Mirvis 9
-  Riddles: Reb Leor Broh 9

### PARSHAT HASHAVUA

-  Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l 10
-  Rabbi Hershel Schachter shlit"a 12
-  Rabbi Yisroel Reisman shlit"a 13
-  Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein 14
-  Rabbi Shalom Rosner 15
-  Michal Horowitz 16
-  Rabbi Menachem Leibtag 17
-  Rabbi Eli Mansour 18

### INSPIRATION

-  Rabbi Moshe Weinberger 19
-  Rabbi YY Jacobson 20
-  Rabbi Judah Mischel 21
-  Mrs. Shira Smiles 22
-  Rabbanit Yemima Mizrahi 23

### ISRAEL CONTENT

-  Hebrew Language: David Curwin 24





www.mizrachi.org  
 office@mizrachi.org  
 +972 (0)2 620 9000



NASI  
 Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon  
 CO-PRESIDENT  
 Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman  
 CHAIRMAN  
 Mr. Harvey Blitz  
 EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN  
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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.



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# Everyone and Every One Judaism's Greatest Gift



Rabbi Doron Perez  
 Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks once asked renowned historian Paul Johnson what he most admired about the Jews. After all, Professor Johnson is one of the most prolific researchers and writers on history in general, as well as authoring the seminal comprehensive book about Jewish history, *The History of the Jews*.

What indeed was it that he most admired about the Jewish people? The answer he gave to Rabbi Sacks, I believe, is one of the most remarkable moral balancing acts, and highlights to my mind one of the Jewish people's greatest contributions to the challenge of human life.

Johnson responded that he felt that the Jewish people, more than any other culture and civilization, had managed to balance the needs of the individual with those of the collective, between the particular person and the People.

I have often thought to myself that this is the greatest idea that I learned from the writings of Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, the founder of the Chief Rabbinate of pre-state Israel, whose 90th anniversary of his passing we marked last week. His writings have impacted my life more than any other in trying to navigate our mission as Jews. Rav Kook helped me to understand the absolute importance of both the פּרָט and the כָּלל – the primacy of every individual, as well as the self-sacrifice necessary for the collective – the Jewish people as a whole, and the greater good.

Every society since time immemorial has struggled with this balance. Indeed, Johnson, as a great and prolific historian, understands better than almost anyone: over emphasizing one over the other can have drastic consequences.

## Radical Individualism

Societies who prioritize the individual can become selfishly materialistic and self-absorbed. They can place such a high premium on individual opportunity, achievement, and focus that societies decay into selfishness and extreme consumerism and decadence. Every individual does what is good for themselves with little concern for the overall good of society. The self absorbed individual does not ask what they can do for society, but rather only what society can do for them. Others are a conduit to help the individual person for their needs and not the other way around. Radical individualism and personal responsibility begets gross self interest which often has little regard for any collective responsibility. Many societies have fallen when self-indulgence, self-overindulgence, takes primacy over all else.

Of course, there is a kernel of critical truth at the heart of this ideology – that every individual does have infinite value. Indeed, it was the Jewish people who taught at the dawn of human history, in the very beginning of the book of Bereishit, that every human being is created in the image of G-d. I know of no other teaching in all of human literature which highlights the absolute importance of human life more

than this teaching. Every individual human life has infinite spiritual value.

The challenge is that the paramount importance of every human life cannot erase and disqualify the equally paramount importance of the greater good – society at large. The פּרָט cannot invalidate the כָּלל – the good of the collective, the entire people and society at large.

The general good is something every individual should be deeply committed to. Rav Kook used to sign his letters that he was “a servant of the holy people on the holy land” – seeing himself as every leader should: as a public servant. Leadership should never be about the personal interest of the leader but about the greater good.

The ideal model of leadership is certainly servant leadership – where the individual's absolute focus is on serving the people and not using the public to serve and promote themselves and everything they do is for the good of the community. The general good of the people the כָּלל – has is a great focus of Torah Judaism. Judaism aspires that every individual aims to be as altruistic as they can – not to be self-focused and self-indulgent but to have mesirut nefesh, self-sacrifice for the greater good, for *Klal Yisrael*.

## Stalin and Hamas – Radical Collectivism

The greater good, though, when devoid of genuine care for the individual can become an extreme force of destruction. History is littered with totalitarian regimes which highlight this painful reality. The most extreme example in recent memory is Communism. As its name clearly suggests, Communism was all about the commune – the collective. It was based on the principle that all are equal and since everyone is equal, the focus needs to be on the greater good. The vehicle to implement that greater good is the representative of the people – the State – who as such has the jurisdiction and authority to do what is good for all. Unfortunately, history has borne out that regimes purporting to look out for everyone tend not to care for almost anyone – destroying the lives of the very people they're supposed to protect. Everyone is so important, that no one has any intrinsic

importance – only the amorphous community. Individuals are sacrificed in the process.

Stalin of the repressive and oppressive Soviet regime stands out for infamy. He cruelly starved tens of millions of his own people for what he deemed was the greater good. It was he who infamously said that “one death is a tragedy, a million is a statistic.” For him and those who focus entirely on the collective, the individual person is valueless and dispensable. Each person is but a nameless and expendable cog in the machinations of a broader system.

I have come to believe in life, that when you claim to care vociferously about everyone, you care really about no one – often only oneself. When all you can speak about is everybody and everyone, people forget that every one person, every individual body has indispensable significance.

Hamas in their murderous ideology with relentless commitment to their greater cause have absolutely no concern for individual human life. They care not for the innocent civilians of their enemy nor for their own civilians. They constantly endanger their defenseless civilians – young children and grandparents on the ideological altar of the greater good. Firing from kindergartens and hospitals and being prepared to kill and be killed – they have little moral compunction to sacrifice their own lives, the lives of tens if not hundreds of thousands of their own for a hateful “holy” cause which could be avoided if they chose to live and let live. Both in the ancient and modern world of religious extremism – people who have no care for individual human life, have been and are prepared to sacrifice their children for an overwhelming and destructive “greater good.” Murder their own to sacrifice hideously to the god of Molech.

## The Balancing Act

In short, balance can only be struck when one has it both ways – seeing infinite value in both the life of every individual as well as sacrifice for the greater good. The Torah teaches us from its very inception that every human being is created in the Image of G-d. No human being is

expendable. At the same time, Abraham is told that his mission at the very outset is to be a blessing for all. Focus on everyone while concurrently focusing on every one.

Where the individual is at the exclusive focus, society bends towards materialism, overindulgence and social and moral decay. When the collective is exclusively prioritized at the expense of the individual, totalitarianism and despotism ensues.

It is this uncanny balance that Johnson believed that the Jewish people have got right more than any other people. For me, one of the greatest privileges to be part of the Jewish people is to be part of a people who give primacy to both the individual and the collective.

## Hostage Deal

I believe that was the very tension which was at the heart of the hostage deal dilemma which Israeli and Jewish society faced. Those who prioritized the centrality of the individual placed more of a premium on bringing back every individual hostage, even if it means paying risky and exorbitant prices. What price can one place on saving a life? According to this view, this ought to trump other considerations, even what may be good going forward for Israel in terms of its deterrence and security deterrence in the future.

Those who believed in total victory in dismantling Hamas before everything else were giving primacy to the need of the collective – to ensure that Hamas is never able to undertake such an attack again. Since they saw the general needs of the people and Israel's security going forward as primary, they were not prepared to risk this collective consideration for the sake of a hostage deal. Hamas knew the great value the Jewish people place on human life, as opposed to others who place little value, and therefore were using it to create a wedge within Jewish society between these two primary values – the infinite value of every individual as well as the greater good.

## One For All , All For One

It was this balance that Hillel the Elder famously mentions in *Pirkei Avot* – Ethics

Continued on page 13

# The Model and First Principle For Character Development



**Rabbi Reuven Taragin**  
 Educational Director, World Mizrachi  
 Dean of Overseas Students, Yeshivat Hakotel

When we speak of character development, we generally sense a difference between refined versus crude or inappropriate behaviors. Where does this sense come from? How are we to determine the ideal forms of behavior?

## Model: Imitatio Dei

The Torah addresses these questions in *Sefer Devarim*. After presenting numerous specific *mitzvot* in *sifrei Shemot, Vayikra, and Bamidbar, Sefer Devarim* commands the emulation of Hashem<sup>1</sup> and the ways in which He interacts with the world.<sup>2</sup> Chazal explain that these “ways” encompass both Hashem’s acts of kindness<sup>3</sup> and emotions such as mercy and compassion.<sup>4</sup> Philosophers use the Latin term *imitatio Dei* (imitation of G-d) to describe this foundational aspect of character development. We are all created in Hashem’s image<sup>5</sup> and should therefore use His interaction with us as the model for relating to and interacting with others. Because we are fashioned in His image and imbued with a G-dly soul,<sup>6</sup> our emulation of Hashem’s ways helps us realize our true essential selves.<sup>7</sup>

Which character traits are we meant to learn from Hashem?

Chazal focus on the traits listed in the Thirteen Principles of Mercy,<sup>8</sup> such as mercy and compassion, as well as those mentioned by other *pesukim*,<sup>9</sup> such as righteousness and holiness.

The Rambam and other Rishonim expand the concept of emulating Hashem, using it as a foundation for comprehensive character development. Although many aspects of character development lack

explicit Divine precedent, Rishonim use Hashem as an approximate model.

One example is the Rambam’s Middle Path principle. After addressing the problem of character traits taken to extremes and emphasizing the need for a balanced, nuanced approach, the Rambam identifies Hashem as the model.<sup>10</sup> Hashem’s interactions with the world are varied; different situations require different responses. Similarly, individuals are encouraged to interact with others in ways that reflect this adaptability.

For this reason, we use the term ‘*midot*,’ which means measurements, to describe character traits. The question is not what *midot* to embrace and which to reject, but, rather, the properly measured amount of each.<sup>11</sup> *Midot* are not entirely good or completely bad. The appropriate *midah* depends on the time and place.

## First Principle: Staying in the World

Although much can be learned from Hashem’s model, Chazal also formulate additional principles regarding character development. The most significant of these are those behaviors necessary to “stay in our world.” *Pirkei Avot* includes two lists of three traits that “remove man from the world.”<sup>12</sup> Although these traits are not capital crimes, they divert us from life’s intended path.<sup>13</sup>

The lists address two basic aspects of our behavior: our interaction with others and our personal ambitions and aspirations.

The first list, presented by Rebbe Yehoshua, addresses negativity, particularly when directed toward others.<sup>14</sup> Life is intended to include positive and constructive interactions with all of Hashem’s creations. When we become consumed

by negativity, we fall out of sync with the world that Hashem infused with goodness<sup>15</sup> and miss a significant aspect of life’s purpose. Furthermore, rather than experiencing positive, meaningful interactions, we become frustrated by the perceived negativity of our environment.

The second list, attributed to Rebbe Elazar HaKapar, includes jealousy, desire, and the need for respect.<sup>16</sup> Even when directed toward permissible pleasures and pursuits, the emotions of jealousy and desire, as well as the pursuit of honor, divert us from our intended life purpose.

Both negativity and desires “remove us from the world” by leading us to interact with it inappropriately. Our upcoming pieces will take a further look at each of the lists.

1. Devarim 13:5.
2. Devarim 8:6, 10:12, 11:22, 19:9, 26:17, 28:9, and 30:16. See also Rambam, *Sefer HaMitzvot*, Aseh 8 and *Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Dei’ot* 1:5. See also *Sefer HaChinuch* 611 who follows the Rambam’s approach.
3. Sotah 14a. See also Yirmiyah 9:23 and the explanation in the *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:54 and the Ramban to Devarim 11:1.
4. Shabbat 133b. Note that this gemara derives the need to emulate emotionally on the *pasuk* of *zeh keili v’anveihu* (*Shemot* 15:2). Many link the need to follow Hashem’s acts to the *pesukim* that commandment to follow His ways (see, for example, *Behag Mitzvah* 32 and *Semag Aseh* 7) and the need to learn emotions from Him to *zeh keili v’anveihu*. The *Sifri* (*Eikev* 13), though, links both to the command to follow His ways. As we have seen, the Rambam links emotions to the mandate to follow Hashem’s ways. See *Hilchot Avel* 14:1 where he derives the need to perform acts of *chesed* from *Vayikra* 19:18. For more on this topic, see *V’halachta B’derechav, Minchat Asher, Parshat Ki Tavo*.
5. *Bereishit* 1:26-27.
6. *Bereishit* 2:7.
7. See *Kohelet* 7:29 with *Rashi* (ad loc.) and *Ramban* to *Bereishit* 2:9 and *Devarim* 30:6.

Continued on page 7

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# Ki-Tetze: Between Two Wars The Torah’s Rules of Engagement



**Rabbanit Shani Taragin**  
 Educational Director, World Mizrachi  
 Educational Director, Mizrachi Lapidot and Matan Eshkolot Programs for Educators  
 Rosh Beit Midrash of Mizrachi-Tzemach David Women’s Learning Hub, Mizrachi Lapidot, and Yeshiva University in Israel Women’s Torah Studies Program

*Parshat Ki Tetze* opens with the words “כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אֹיְבֶיךָ” – “When you go out to war against your enemies” (*Devarim* 21:10). Yet the Ba’al HaTurim, in his characteristically penetrating way, directs our attention not only to what the *parsha* says, but to *where it stands*. He reveals a fascinating literary architecture: the final section of last week’s *parsha* – i.e., *Eglah Arufah*, is deliberately sandwiched between two sections of war.

The Baal HaTurim writes:

“למה כתיב פרשת עגלה ערופה בין שתי מלחמות? הקדים לה מלחמה, שאל יאמר השונא ‘אהרוג כי עת מלחמה הוא,’ ויאמרו האויבים ‘הרגוהו במלחמה.’ וכתיב מלחמה אחריה לומר תבער דם הנקי להרוג הרוצח, ואחר כך תלך במלחמה ותנצח.”

Prior to the *mitzvah* of *Eglah Arufah*, the Torah had presented the laws of war “כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אֹיְבֶיךָ” (*Devarim* 20:1). Following it, the Torah returns to war with the closely parallel formulation “כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אֹיְבֶיךָ” (*Devarim* 21:10). Two war sections, both opening with the cadence “כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה,” form a literary frame around the *Eglah Arufah* – the ritual performed when a murdered body is found in an open field and the killer is unknown (*Devarim* 21:1–9). Why this striking literary bracketing?

The Ba’al HaTurim explains with searing moral clarity. The Torah feared that a personal enemy might exploit the chaos of wartime to commit murder, confident that the death would be dismissed as a casualty of battle, “הרגוהו במלחמה,” they will say, “he was killed in the war.” The placement of the *Eglah Arufah* between

two war sections declares that even in the fog of war, every individual life is accounted for. No death can hide behind the excuse of “it was wartime.” The Torah demands that every missing soul be pursued and reckoned with, no matter the surrounding circumstances.

But the Ba’al HaTurim deepens this further. The word “מלחמה” after the *Eglah Arufah* teaches a profound moral sequence: “תבער דם הנקי להרוג הרוצח ואחר” – first the innocent blood must be avenged and the murderer held accountable, and only afterward can *Am Yisrael* go to war and emerge victorious. Moral accounting is not an obstacle to military success; it is its *precondition*. We do not win despite our ethics. We win because of them.

In a world that routinely questions the morality of Israel’s military actions, the Ba’al HaTurim reminds us that the Torah itself places the pursuit of justice for a single individual at the heart of the national war effort. The IDF’s extraordinary measures to avoid civilian casualties – e.g., its warning systems, its code of ethics, its willingness to accept operational risk to protect innocent life, are not concessions to international opinion. They are the very DNA of *Am Yisrael* at war, embedded in the structure of the Torah itself.

The Baal HaTurim then adds a military-ethical detail: “ולא היו מניחים לילך” – “they would not permit personal enemies to serve in the same unit, lest one use the cover of battle to kill the

other. The Torah anticipates the moral hazards of war with startling precision. It is not enough to fight a just war; the internal moral fabric of the army must be safeguarded at every level. The battlefield does not suspend interpersonal ethics – it demands their reinforcement.

The Ba’al HaTurim then turns to the junction between the conclusion of the *Eglah Arufah* and the opening of our *parsha*. The *Eglah Arufah* closes with the words: “וְיָאֵתָה תִּבְעֵר הַדָּם הַנָּקִי מִקֶּרְבְּךָ כִּי תַעֲשֶׂה הַיֵּשֶׁר בְּעֵינֶיךָ” (*Devarim* 21:9) – “And you shall purge the innocent blood from your midst, for you shall do what is right in the eyes of Hashem.” Immediately follows: “כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה.” The Ba’al HaTurim reads this proximity as a defining statement about who goes to war: “שאינ יוצאין למלחמה אלא” – “only the righteous go out to war.

This is not mere moralism. It is a theological claim about the nature of *Am Yisrael*’s army. The soldiers who go out to battle are those who have first done “what is right in the eyes of Hashem.” The moral caliber of the fighter is not incidental to the war effort; it is its spiritual engine. In our day, when soldiers learn Torah in *mechinot* before deployment, when hesder yeshiva students alternate between the *beit midrash* and the battlefield, when soldiers pause to *daven* and to recite *Tehillim* on the front lines, we witness the living actualization of the Ba’al HaTurim’s teaching. The army of *Am Yisrael* is not merely an army of citizens. It is an army called to embody the ideal of צדיקים.

The final word of the *Eglah Arufah* passage is נ; juxtaposed immediately with

Continued on page 11

# Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Nasi, World Mizrachi | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council

Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

A bride and groom were unable to catch their flight, and the group that planned the Sheva Berakhot wishes to continue with the celebratory meal in their honor while the couple participates via Zoom. May Sheva Berakhot be recited in such a manner?

It is difficult to permit this. Even if this were the actual location of the wedding and the *chatan* and *kallah* had departed, we are strict regarding that scenario as well – though in Responsa *Imrei Dovid*, *Even HaEzer* 2:41, he is lenient about it.

However, in this case, this is not even the location of the wedding, and Zoom is insufficient to establish an obligation for *Sheva Berakhot*. This is particularly true according to the Rambam, who holds that *Sheva Berakhot* is an extension of *Birkat HaMazon*; if so, only when the *chatan* and *kallah* are physically present in the space is a *Birkat HaMazon* with *Sheva Berakhot* generated.

Much success with G-d’s help, and Mazal Tov.

We placed an order for a delivery from Rami Levy. A few items arrived by mistake that we did not order, such as fish, chicken, milk, and pasta. We reported this to them, and they said someone would come to pick them up, but that they would throw away the fish, chicken, etc. I asked them what would have happened if we hadn’t reported it, and they said, “Nothing.” Then I asked her, “Why should I call next time?” and they told me, “Because stealing is forbidden.” If this happens again, what is the Rabbi’s opinion? Do I need to report?

As a general rule, there is an obligation of *hashavat aveidah* (returning lost items) on products delivered by mistake, and using them without permission constitutes *gezel* (theft).

On the other hand, we must discuss whether products that will clearly be thrown into the trash are perhaps already considered *hefker* (ownerless) making them permissible to use.

Supposedly, this case depends on the dispute between the *Shulchan Arukh* and the Rema regarding honey that is about to spill (*Choshen Mishpat* 264:5):

“If two were traveling along the road, one with a barrel of wine and the other with a jug of honey... if the honey spilled onto the ground, it is *hefker*, and whoever saves it for himself saves it.”

Gloss of the Rema: “And some say that even if the honey has not yet spilled, but the jug broke to such an extent that it would spill if this person had not saved it, it is *hefker* (the Tur and Beit Yosef in the name of Rashi).”

However, it stands to reason that here the products are not considered *hefker* even according to the opinion of the Rema. Since the owners take the trouble to send a courier to retrieve even the products they state will be discarded, it indicates that they have some necessity to collect and discard the items themselves; therefore, they are not *hefker*.

Therefore, in practice, there is a requirement to report items that were delivered in error which the store insists on collecting, even if the owners state that immediately following collection they will be thrown in the trash. That is their decision to make, not the finder’s.

Years ago, when he was less observant of the mitzvot, one of the members of our community lived in Japan for several years. While there, he purchased a clay figurine of a “Laughing Buddha” at an art gallery. From his perspective, it was always merely a decorative item, primarily due to the beautiful,

hand-painted robe wrapped around the figurine.

Over the years, he began learning more Torah and grew in his observance of mitzvot. After studying Tractate Avodah Zarah, he no longer felt comfortable keeping the figurine on display, so he placed it into storage.

Currently, he has a non-Jewish friend who is getting married and loves everything related to Asian culture. He would be happy to give him this figurine as a wedding gift, if permissible.

Is he permitted to do so? And if not, must he destroy the figurine?

It appears that Buddhism incorporates elements of *avodah zarah* (idolatry), as the statue of the founder of their religion is actively used by them for worship (see Responsa *B'Mareh HaBazak* 6:61 in the name of Rabbi Kermaier, who served as a rabbi in Hong Kong; see Responsa *Devar Chevron* 3, 19:5).

However, if it becomes clear that the artisan who created the statue made it for decorative purposes and not for worship, there is no prohibition of *avodah zarah* according to the letter of the law (*Gemara Avodah Zarah* 41a; Rambam, *Hilkhhot Avodah Zarah* 7:6; *Shulchan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 141:1 and Rema *ibid.* 141:3). Nevertheless, a Jew should not retain such a statue. However, regarding a gift to a non-Jew – certainly in a case where the statue is already in the Jew’s possession – it is permitted if the statue was created for decorative purposes.

In summary, practical *halakha*: If it becomes clear that the statue was manufactured for decorative purposes and not for worship, it does not carry the status of *avodah zarah*, and it may be given to a non-Jew.

● Compiled and Translated by Yaakov Panitch.

אם עתיד העולם היה תלוי במעשי בני האדם, והגאולה היתה נקבעת על פי מידת הזכאות של האנושות, לא היתה אפשרות להבטיח שלא יהיה עוד מבול, ולא ניתן היה להבטיח שתהיה גאולה, שהרי יש לאדם בחירה חופשית ואין בטחון שיבחר בדרך הטוב ולא יסטה ממנה. אולם, החלטתו של הקב"ה לקיים את המין האנושי למרות חטאיו ושלא להחריב עוד את העולם – פירושה רצון לקיים את העולם בכל מקרה, אפילו כאשר יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו, וכל מחשבות לבו רק רע כל היום.

כך גם הבטחת הגאולה של עם ישראל, המהווה בסיס לגאולת העולם כולו, איננה תלויה במידת הזכאות של עם ישראל או של האנושות כולה, אלא בהחלטת א-לקית לקיים את העולם.

כשם שנח 'מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי ה'“, כך ה' 'מָצָא חֵן בְּמִדְבָּר' (ירמיהו ל"א, א) – בחר בעם ישראל, שמצאו חן בעיניו. נח הוא גרעין האנושות שנשאר כדי להמשיך לקיים את העולם, ועם ישראל הוא גרעין האנושות שנבחר כדי לגאול את העולם ולהמשיך את קיומו.

הבטחון שהגאולה תגיע (שהעקרה תלד), נובע מן ההבטחה הנצחית העקרונית, שמעוגנת בברית "מי נח", ואיננה תלויה במעשי בני האדם.

וממשיך הנביא וטוען שהברית בין ישראל לקב"ה חזקה אפילו יותר מהברית עם האנושות שנכרתה אחרי המבול: "כִּי הָהָרִים יִמוּשׁוּ וְהַגְּבוּעוֹת תִּמְוָטְנָה וְחִסְדֵּי מִאֲתָנָה לֹא יִמוּשׁ וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תִמּוּט" (י).

לכן, הגאולה היא "חֶסֶד עוֹלָם", ואילו הגלות היא רק "רָגַע קָטָן" של "עֲזָבְתִּיךָ" – רגע חולף, שאיננו המהות האמתית של יחסי העם עמו ישראל ועם עולמו. הקשר המהותי יותר של העם עולמו הוא "רַחֲמִים גְּדֹלִים" ושפע חסד הנובע עלינו ומביא לגאולת ישראל והעולם כולו.

לעומת גדלות הרחמים של כלפי ישראל – הגלות מוגדרת כ"רגע קטן", כעזיבה רגעית ואילו הגאולה מתוארת כ"רחמים גדולים" וכ"חסד עולם", נצחי. ומוסיף רד"ק: "אף-על-פי שארכו ימי הגלות, כולם יהיו נחשבים כרגע קטן כנגד הרחמים שיהיו גדולים כשאקבצן... אותם הימים הם רגע כנגד ימי הטובה".

וממשיך הנביא ומתאר את ההבטחה העומדת לעם ישראל: "כִּי מִן נַח זֹאת לִי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מֵעַבְרֵי מִי נַח עוֹד עַל הָאָרֶץ כִּן נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מִקֶּצֶף עֲלֶיךָ" (ט) – הפסוק מחזיר אותנו לתקופת המבול, הנקראת כאן "מי נח", ומזכיר לנו שלאחר המבול ה נשבע לנח ולאנושות כולה שלא יהיה עוד מבול:

"לֹא אֶסָּף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת הָאָדָמָה בְּעַבְרֵי הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֵר לִב הָאָדָם רָע מִנְּעֻרָיו וְלֹא אֶסָּף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת כָּל חַי פֶּאֶשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתִי" (בראשית ח', כא). אחרי המבול מגיעה ההכרה שבבני האדם יש כוח להרע, ובכל זאת ה' מחליט שלא להחריב את העולם בשל כך, אלא לקיימו בכל מקרה. ללא תלות במעשי האדם. החלטה זו מעוגנת בברית הקשת, הנכרתת בין האנושות לקב"ה: "וַהֲקִמְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם... וְלֹא יְהִי עוֹד מַבּוּל לְשַׁחַת הָאָרֶץ" (ט', יא).

הנביא משתמש בברית של "מי נח", כדי להסביר את העקרון של הבטחת הגאולה:

ברית כרותה בין ה' לעם ישראל – כשם שה נשבע שלא יחריב את עולמו, אפילו במקרה שבני האדם ישחיתו את דרכם לחלוטין, כך ה נשבע שלא יעזוב את ישראל ולא יפר את בריתו איתם לעולם.

עקרון "מי נח" הוא יסוד חשוב בהבטחת הגאולה. עקרון זה קובע שלעולם לא יהיה חורבן נוסף, והגאולה תגיע לא בזכות צדקת בני האדם אלא בגלל ההחלטה הא-לקית להמשיך לקיים את העולם. הגאולה תגיע בגלל ההחלטה הא-לקית לבחור בעם ישראל ה למלא תפקיד הכרחי בקיום העולם.

## הפטרת פרשת כי תצא

# “רַנִּי עֶקְרָה”



הרבנית שרון רימון

Tanach teacher and author

הפטרה פותחת בציווי: "רַנִּי עֶקְרָה לֹא יִלְדָּה פֶּצְחִי רָנָה וְצִהְלִי לֹא חָלָה כִּי רַבִּים בְּנֵי שׁוֹמְמָה מִבְּנֵי בְּעוֹלָה" (ישעיהו נ"ד, א). הנביא פונה אל האשה העקרה, ואומר לה "רַנִּי" – תשמחי כעת, עוד בזמן העקרות, מפני שמובטח לך שבעתיד יהיו לך בנים רבים. כיצד יכולה האשה העקרה לשמוח תוך כדי הקשיים שהיא חווה? השמחה יכולה להגיע כאשר היא בטוחה (מסיבה כלשהי – רפואית, אמונית או רגשית) שלמסע יהיה סוף טוב, שבעתיד היא תצליח להרות וללדת.

במשל זה פונה הנביא אל העם הנמצא בגלות, המרגיש סוג של עקרות – חוסר יכולת להביא לידי ממש כחות לאומיים בסיסיים. הנביא פונה אל העם ומבקש מהם לשמוח בעודם בגלות, מתוך הכרה ואמונה ברורה שבעתיד הם ייגאלו, ויהיו מבורכים ב"בנים", יוכלו לממש את כל הכחות הלאומיים. היכולת לשמוח בהווה הקשה נובעת מאמונה ובטחון מלא בגאולה העתידית. כך הצליח ר עקיבא לשחוק כאשר ראה שועל יוצא מבית קדשי הקדשים, מתוך אמונה שאם התקיימה נבואת החורבן, תתקיים גם נבואת הגאולה.

מאין נובע הבטחון שהעקרה תלד? שאכן תהיה גאולה?

נעניין בהמשך דברי הנבואה:

"בְּרָגַע קָטָן עֲזָבְתִּיךָ – בְּרַחֲמִים גְּדֹלִים אֶקְבָּצֶךָ: בְּשֻׁצְף קֶצֶף הַסִּתְרִיתִי כִּנִּי רָגַע מִמָּוָה וּבְחֶסֶד עוֹלָם רַחֲמִתִּיךָ" (ז-ח). הגלות או הצרות והאסונות הם תוצאה של עזיבת ה'; כעס (שצף-קצף) והסתר פנים. אם הקב"ה עוזב אותנו אפילו לרגע אחד קטן, הכל עלול להיחרב. אולם, המיקוד של הפסוק איננו בתחושה הקשה של הקלות הבלתי נסבלת של החורבן וההרס, אלא להפך – הפסוק מתמקד בשפע הטוב. הפסוק מדגיש את הפער העצום שבין קטנות הרגע של עזיבת ה'

Continued from page 4

8. Shemot 34:6.  
 9. See, for example, Vayikra 19:2 and Tehillim 145:17.  
 10. Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Dei'ot 1:5.  
 11. See Orchard HaTzaddikim, Introduction.  
 12. The lists appear in Avot 2:11 and 4:21. Note that the phrase "remove man from the world" also appears in Avot 3:10, but regarding specific behaviors, not general character traits.

13. See Tiferet Yisrael, Pirkei Moshe, and Ne'edar BaKodesh to Avot 4:21. See also Rabbeinu Yonah and Rebbe Yosef MiToledo (ad loc.), who explain how these traits can cause actual death, and Rambam and Meiri (ad loc.), who see the impact as being on life in the next world. Rabbeinu Bechayei (Kad HaKemach, Kinah) gives Kayin and Hevel as

examples of people whose jealousy caused them to actually exit this world.  
 14. Avot 2:11.  
 15. Derech Chayim, Avot 2:11. See also Mili D'Avot and Tikun Moshe, ad loc.  
 16. Avot 4:21.



# The Parameters of Justice



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l

In Deuteronomy 24, we encounter - for the first time - the explicit statement of a law of far-reaching significance:

“Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for parents. A person shall be put to death only for his own sin.”

Deut. 24:16

We have strong historical evidence as to what this law was excluding, namely vicarious punishment, the idea that someone else may be punished for my crime:

For example, in the Middle Assyrian Laws, the rape of an unbetrothed virgin who lives in her father's house is punished by the ravishing of the rapist's wife, who also remains thereafter with the father of the victim. Hammurabi decrees that if a man struck a pregnant woman, thereby causing her to miscarry and die, it is the assailant's daughter who is put to death. If a builder erected a house which collapsed, killing the owner's son, then the builder's son, not the builder, is put to death.

Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 176

We also have inner-biblical evidence of how the Mosaic law was applied. Joash, one of the righteous kings of Judah, attempted to stamp out corruption among the priests, and was assassinated by two of his officials. He was succeeded by his son Amaziah, about whom we read the following:

After the kingdom was firmly in his grasp, he [Amaziah] executed the officials who had murdered his father the king. Yet he did not put the sons of the assassins to death, in accordance with

what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, where the Lord commanded: “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sins.”

II Kings: 14:5-6

The obvious question, however, is: how is this principle compatible with the idea, enunciated four times in the Mosaic books, that children may suffer for the sins of their parents? “The Lord, the Lord, G-d compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and truth, extending kindness for thousands of generations, forgiving sin, rebellion, and error, but who does not acquit the guilty, holding descendants to account for the sins of the fathers, children, and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.” Ex. 34:7; see also Ex. 20:5; Numbers 14:18; Deut. 5:8)

The short answer is simple: It is the difference between human justice and Divine justice. We are not G-d. We can neither look into the hearts of wrongdoers nor assess the full consequences of their deeds. It is not given to us to execute perfect justice, matching the evil a person suffers to the evil he causes. We would not even know where to begin. How do you punish a dictator responsible for the deaths of millions of people? How do you weigh the full extent of a devastating injury caused by drunken driving, where not only the victim but his entire family are affected for the rest of their lives? How do we assess the degree of culpability of, say, those Germans who knew what was happening during the Holocaust but did or said nothing to help? Moral guilt is a far more difficult concept to apply than legal guilt.

Human justice must work within the pa-

rameters of human understanding and regulation. Hence the straightforward rule: no vicarious punishment. Only the wrongdoer is to suffer, and only after his guilt has been established by fair and impartial judicial procedures. That is the foundational principle set out, for the first time in Deuteronomy 24:16.

However, the issue did not end there. In two later prophets - Jeremiah and Ezekiel - we find an explicit renunciation of the idea that children might suffer for the sins of their parents, even when applied to Divine justice. Here is Jeremiah, speaking in the name of G-d:

In those days, people will no longer say, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.” Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes - his own teeth will be set on edge.

Jeremiah 31:29-30

And this, from Ezekiel:

The word of the Lord came to me: “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ‘The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge’? “As surely as I live,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to Me, the father as well as the son - both alike belong to Me. The soul that sins is the one who will die.”

Ezekiel 18:1-3

The Talmud (Makkot 24a) raises the obvious question. If Ezekiel is correct, what then happens to the idea of children being punished to the third and fourth generation?

Its answer is astonishing:

Said R. Jose ben Hanina: Our master Moses pronounced four [adverse] sentences on Israel, but four prophets came and revoked them ... Moses said, “He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” Ezekiel came and declared: “The soul that sins is the one who will die.”

Moses decreed: Ezekiel came and annulled the decree! Clearly the matter cannot be that simple. After all, it was not Moses who decreed this, but G-d Himself. What do the Sages mean?

They mean - I think - this: the concept of perfect justice is beyond human understanding, for the reasons already given. We can never fully know the degree of guilt. Nor can we know the full extent of responsibility. The Mishnah in Sanhedrin (4:5), says that a witness in capital cases was solemnly warned that if, by false testimony, a person was wrongly sentenced to death, then he, the witness, “is held responsible for his [the accused's] blood and the blood of his [potential] descendants until the end of time.” Nor, when we speak of Provi-

Continued from page 5

“כִּי תֵצֵא לִמְלָחָה” The Ba'al HaTurim hears in this adjacency a promise: “שהשם יוצא” - when *Am Yisrael* goes to battle, Hashem goes out with you, as prophetically declared: “וְיֵצֵא ה' וְנִלָּחַם בְּגוֹיִם הָהֵם” (Zechariah 14:3) - “And Hashem will go out and fight against those nations.” This echoes the Torah's promise in the preceding chapter of war laws: “כִּי ה' אֶלֶּיְכֶם לִקְרֹא” “הִהְיֶה עִמָּכֶם לְהִלָּחֵם לָכֵם עִם אֹיְבֵיכֶם לְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם” (Devarim 20:4) - “For Hashem your G-d is the One who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.” The Ba'al HaTurim does not merely repeat this idea; he demonstrates that it is encoded in the very structure of the *parsha*.

Finally, the Ba'al HaTurim offers a strategic reading of the opening word itself: “כִּי תֵצֵא - צֵא אֲלֵיהֶם וְאֵל תִּנָּחֵם לְבֹא עֲלֵיךְ, כֵּן” “Go out to them” - do not

dence, is it always possible to distinguish punishment from natural consequence. A drug-addicted mother gives birth to a drug-addicted child. A violent father is assaulted by his violent son. Is this retribution or genetics or environmental influence? When it comes to Divine, as opposed to human justice, we can never reach beyond the most rudimentary understanding, if that.

Two things are clear from G-d's words to Moses. First, He is a G-d of compassion but also of justice, for without justice there is anarchy, but without compassion, there is neither humanity nor hope. Second, in the tension between these two values, G-d's compassion vastly exceeds His justice. The former is forever (“to thousands [of generations]”). The latter is confined to the lifetime of the sinner: the “third and fourth generation” (grandchildren and great-grandchildren) are the limits of posterity one can expect to see in a human lifetime.

What Jeremiah and Ezekiel are talking about is something else. They were speaking about the fate of the nation. Both lived and worked at the time of the Babylonian exile. They were fight-

ing a mood of despair among the people. “What can we do? We are being punished for the sins of our forefathers.” Not so, said the prophets. Each generation holds its destiny in its own hands. Repent, and you will be forgiven, whatever the sins of the past - yours or those who came before you.

Justice is a complex phenomenon, Divine justice infinitely more so. One thing, however, is clear. When it comes to human justice, Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all agree: children may not be punished for the sins of their parents. Vicarious punishment is simply unjust.

## AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Can justice ever be completely fair? Is perfect justice beyond human understanding?
- How can we balance justice and compassion when deciding how someone should be treated?
- Can people truly escape the mistakes of previous generations? When, if ever, should a person be held responsible for the actions of their parents?

wait for the enemy to come to you. Do not allow them to reach your borders, your homes, your communities. The Torah commands proactive defense. For *Am Yisrael*, passivity is not a strategy; it is an invitation to destruction. “פֶּן יִשְׁחִיתוּ הָאָרֶץ” - lest other nations destroy the land. Thousands of years ago, the Torah anticipated the moral imperative of confronting evil before it arrives at your doorstep.

In this remarkable series of literary *remazim*, the Ba'al HaTurim weaves a coherent and inspiring vision of *Am Yisrael* at war: The placement of *mitzvat Eglah Arufah* between “two wars” underscores that every life is precious and must be accounted for, even amid the chaos of battle. Moral accountability is the precondition for victory - “וְאָחֵר” “תָּבֵעַר דָּם הַנֶּקִי... וְאָחֵר” “כִּךְ תֵּלֵךְ בְּמִלְחָמָה וְתִנָּצַח” The internal ethics

of the army are safeguarded by ensuring that enemies do not fight in the same unit. Only the righteous go to war - “אֵין יוֹצֵאִין” “לְמִלְחָמָה אֲלֵא צְדִיקִים” G-d Himself goes out with us - “הַשֵּׁם יוֹצֵא עִמָּךְ” And we must confront evil proactively, before it reaches us - “צֵא אֲלֵיהֶם... פֶּן יִשְׁחִיתוּ הָאָרֶץ”

As we read *Parshat Ki Tetze* while our children, siblings and spouses are fighting in the battlefields of Gaza and Lebanon, the Ba'al HaTurim's words are not merely ancient literary observations. They are a blueprint for understanding who we are at war, why we fight, and why - with our righteous soldiers and Hashem going out before us - we will prevail.

# The Sixth Sedrah



**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**  
 Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

The official anthology of readings from the works of the Gaon of Vilna is entitled “*Even Shleima*.” The choice of the title is based on the acronym of the phrase: the word “*even*” representing “Eliyahu ben,” and the word “*shleima*” being read as “Shlomo,” which was the name of the Gaon: Eliyahu ben Shlomo. The background for the acronym is not that well known.

In the late 1930’s Rabbi Shmuel Maltzahn published a manuscript written by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (a well-known student of the Gaon) where he related the following story: the Gaon was fond of stating that if we look carefully into the *Chumash*, we will discover allusions to anything and everything that happened, both to the Jewish nation as well as to individuals, even in the centuries following the time of Moshe Rabbeinu. On one occasion Reb Chaim asked of the Gra, “Where is there an allusion to the rebbe?” The Gaon immediately opened a *Chumash* to *parshat Ki Tetzei* and reviewed it a bit until he noticed that the phrase “*even shleima*” was an allusion to his name. Reb Chaim asked the Gra why he chose to search specifically in *Chumash*? Whereupon the Gra responded that in *Chumash D’vorim* there are ten *sedrot*, and even though we usually count eleven *sedrot* in *D’vorim*, *Nitzavim* and *Vayelech* they are really one *sedrah*, “as is known.” Each of these ten *sedrot* corresponds to each of the ten centuries of the “sixth millennium.”

The rabbis of the Talmud had a tradition that the world would last (in its present state) for six thousand years, and then Shabbos would occur. The tradition further relays the historical break-down of

these six thousand years. The first two thousand years are labeled as “*Tohu*,” since the notion of monotheism was not being popularized. According to the records in *Chumash B’reishit*, Avrohom Avinu was born in the year 1948 (after the creation), and according to the tradition he began preaching monotheism at the age of 52, which would correspond to the year 2000. This introduced the second unit of 2000 years which represented the two millennia of “Torah development,” which ended in the year 4000, which corresponds to the year 240 in the common calendar. Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi, who edited the *Mishnayot*, passed away in the year 220, so this cut-off point of 240 seems to correspond to the end of the period of the *Tanaim*. The next 2000-year unit is labeled as “the days of *mashiach*,” as *Mashiach* may come at any date following the year 240. Rabbi Akiva, who thought that Bar Kochva might turn out to be the messiah, was not aware of this oral tradition, and his contemporaries argued with him saying, that he (R. Akiva) would be dead and buried, and grass would be growing on his grave, and the time for *Mashiach* will not have arrived, because their tradition had it that the *Mashiach* must arrive at some time during the last 2000 years of the 6000-year program for the world.

So according to the Talmudic tradition, the sixth millennium began with the year 1240. At the time Reb Chaim asked of the Gra for an allusion to him, it was after 1740. So the Gra explained that whatever occurred in the first century of the sixth millennium (between the years 1240 - 1340) should be alluded to in *parshat D’vorim*; and whatever occurred during

the second century (between the years of 1340 - 1440) should be alluded to in *parshat Va’etchanan*, etc. Since the Gra was then in the sixth century (of the sixth millennium), he opened right away to *parshat Ki Tetzei*, the sixth *sedra* in *Chumash D’vorim*.

Rabbi Maltzahn who printed this manuscript of R. Chaim of Volozhin in his *sefer “Emmunah V’Hashgachaon”* added the following comment: *Parshat Ki Tavo* is the seventh *sedrah*, and should contain allusions to things that would occur between the years 1840 - 1940. At the end of the 1930’s the Nazis had already begun their extermination of the Jews, and he suggested that perhaps the bitter “*Tochacha*” that appears in *Ki Tavo* was not only an allusion to the many years of suffering of the *galut*, but also specifically alluding to the Nazi persecutions at the end of the 1930’s.

In later years, others pointed out that in the next – the eighth – *sedra*, *parshat Nit-zavim-Vayelech*, which really is only “one *sedra*” “as is known”; we read of the return of the Jewish people to *Eretz Yisroel*, the great *teshuvah* movement, and the *mitzvah* of writing a *sefer Torah*. All of these were witnessed following the year 1940, through the establishment of *Medinat Yisrael*, the great world-wide *baal teshuvah* movement, and the popularity of the *mitzvah* of writing a *sefer Torah*.

We hope that Hashem will be “*mosif machol al hakodesh*” and will be “*mekabel Shabbos*,” and hasten the coming of the *Mashiach* before the end of the sixth millennium.

# Hilchos Kiddushin



**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman**  
 Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

This week’s *Parshah* is the source of the *halachos* of marriage: *Ki Yikach Ish Isha*. *Ki Yikach*, of course, refers to marriage. *Ki Yikach Ish Isha* – we derive from there that it’s the man who is active in the *Maisei Kiddushin*. The man gives the ring to the woman, he’s the one who’s active.

Not only that, the *Gemara* says he’s the one who has to say, *Harei At Mekudshes Li*. Of course, she has to agree; without her *Daas*, they’re not married. However, the *Gemara* says, *Nasan Hu V’amra Hi*. If she does the speaking, that’s not a *Kiddushin*. *Nasan Hu* has to be: he says *Harei At*, he gives it to her, and then it’s a good *Kiddushin*.

There’s a *Biur Halacha* in *Hilchos Krias Shema*, in *Siman* 62, the first *Biur Halacha*. In *Hilchos Krias Shema* it says that *Krias Shema* can be said in any language you understand. The *Mishnah Berurah* says in *Biur Halacha*, the same thing is true about benching, *Shemoneh Esrei*, and *Kiddush*. All of these, preferably, of course, should be said in *Lashon HaKodesh*. However, if someone doesn’t know Hebrew, they can say any of these *Tefillos* in any language. That’s a *Halacha Pesukah*.

Zagt the *Biur Halacha* a *chiddush*: Other languages are only good in a country

Continued from page 3

of the Fathers: “If I am not for myself then who is for me? But If I am only for myself then what am I?” We have to have absolute responsibility for our own lives, but also have an unequivocal commitment to the lives of others. They have to go together.

The very beginning of the week’s *parasha*, *Ki Teitzei*, also captures this tension. The simple meaning of the verse talks about laws facing the Jewish people’s army as a collective when they go out to war. The focus is *Klal Yisrael*. Our sages in

where that language is spoken. A language, even if you know it and understand the language, but you’re in a country where that language is not spoken – there, *Krias Shema*, *Shemoneh Esrei*, *Birchas Hamazon*, and *Kiddush* cannot be said in that other language. In New York, for example, almost every language is spoken, but not in every area. Japanese is not spoken in Liberty, New York. So there, even though you’re a Japanese person, you can’t daven in Japanese; when you find yourself in a location where nobody speaks that language, then you’re not eligible to say it in that language. So this *chiddush* has nothing to do with marriage. You can say it in other languages, but only if it’s a language spoken in that place.

The Raya, the proof to this, he says is brought by the *Biur Halacha*, incredibly, from *Hilchos Kiddushin*. In *Hilchos Kiddushin*, he refers to *siman* 27, *seif Aleph*, in *Even HaEzer*. It says that you can say *Kiddushin* in any language, but only if it’s spoken in that area. And from there, he says the same thing is true here.

That comparison is a very big *chiddush*. By benching, *Krias Shema*, *Shemoneh Esrei*, and *Kiddush*, there is a *din amira*. There is a *din* that you have to speak, either *Lashon*

*HaKodesh* in every country, or any other language where it’s spoken.

Regarding *Kiddushin*, however, why does a man have to say something when he gives his wife a ring? It’s a *gilui daas*. He’s showing what his intention is. He’s showing his wife, he’s showing the witnesses. The *dibur* is not a *halacha*, rather a practical item – that you have to let her know what’s going on, let the witnesses know what’s going through your mind.

In this *Biur Halacha*, this comparison, he says where there is a *din amira*, the *din amira* has to be in a language spoken in that *medina*, or *Lashon HaKodesh* – Raya from *Kiddushin*. Wow, that’s a *chiddush*.

This *Biur Halacha* seems to be going in line with the *Birchas Shmuel* in *Kiddushin*, *siman aleph*, in the name of Rabbi Chaim Brisker, who says there is what he calls the *cheftza* of *amira*. That *amira* is a *din* in *Kiddushin*. It’s not just to show what you’re thinking, but it’s what he calls a *cheftza d’amira*. That’s a very big *chiddush*.

So here we have, in *Hilchos Krias Shema*, a *makor* to a *chiddush gadol*. In *halacha*, we all do *Harei At*. We all say it in *Lashon Kodesh*, but the *yesod* in *kiddushin*, the *yesod* in *din amira* – wow, what a *chiddush*.

We are indeed one for all. Each individual exists for something much bigger than themselves. Never selfish, always selfless. But at the same time we are all for one. We all have responsibility for each and every individual which has infinite life value.

This is the balance that Judaism aspires to live by as we all attempt to navigate the tempestuous challenges of life. To enlighten by example – to deeply care about everyone and at the same time, about every one.

# Long Life and Honoring Parents



**Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein**  
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

**I**n 1964, Arno Penzias and Robert Woodrow Wilson, two young astronomers, stumbled on the origins of the universe completely by accident. Sitting at their desks at Bell Labs, New Jersey, they suddenly picked up a strange buzzing sound from their telescope. The noise was emanating from all parts of the sky at all times. Puzzled by the odd signal, Penzias and Wilson did their best to eliminate all possible sources of interference, even removing some pigeons that were nesting in the antenna.

A year later, it was confirmed – this inexplicable hum was in fact Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB), the radiation left over from the birth of the universe, providing the strongest possible evidence that the universe expanded from an initial violent explosion, known as The Big Bang. The CMB remains one of the most important scientific discoveries in history. In one fell swoop, the Big Bang theory – the theory that the universe had a beginning – displaced the dominant Steady State Model – that the universe had no beginning, that it simply always was.

Of course, this idea that the universe had a beginning, that it was created anew, is what Jews have maintained for thousands of years.

The subject of the origins of life comes up in this week's *parsha*, *Ki Tetzei*, via a surprising route. In the *parsha*, we read about the *mitzvah* of *Shiluach HaKen* – sending away the mother bird before taking the eggs or fledglings from the nest. The reward the Torah promises for this seemingly minor action is startling "...so that it will be good for you and your days will be lengthened" (Deuteronomy 22:7).

There is, in fact, only one other *mitzvah* in the Torah for which the reward is long life: the commandment to honour one's parents (Deuteronomy 5:16). The Talmud says this refers to life in the next world, which

is truly eternal. Why is long life associated with these two commandments?

The *Kli Yakar* draws the connection between sending away the mother bird and honouring one's parents --they are both *mitzvot* which involve honouring parents, whether human or avian.

But the *Kli Yakar* takes it one step further. He says the great reward promised for the fulfilment of these two *mitzvot* is because they touch on one of the foundational Jewish beliefs – that G-d is the Creator of all existence.

Both *mitzvot* encourage a person to think about origins. When we show respect to our parents, we acknowledge them as the source of our very existence. When we send away the mother bird, we are likewise showing sensitivity to the plight of the mother, the source of life for these eggs or fledglings. Reflecting deeply on this should eventually lead us to reflect on the source of all life – the Creator Himself.

The Talmud says there are three partners in the creation of a child – a father, a mother and G-d. By respecting our parents, we are acknowledging those who gave birth to us. But our parents were also the product of their own parents. And that set of parents, our grandparents, were, in turn, the product of their parents, our great-grandparents, and so on, going all the way back to the beginning of time, to the first set of parents, Adam and Eve, who were brought into existence by G-d Himself. So by implication, by honouring our parents, we are also acknowledging our Father in Heaven, the Creator of the universe, the One who brought everything into being.

And that's why, explains the *Kli Yakar*, Shabbos and the *mitzvah* of honouring our parents are juxtaposed in various places in the Torah, including the Ten Commandments. Shabbos is an even more explicit

acknowledgement of G-d as the Creator of the universe. When we keep Shabbos, we are testifying to the fact that G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. When we say *Kiddush* on Friday night, we refer to Shabbos as “a remembrance of the acts of Creation.” This is why Shabbos is not just something we do or observe, it’s something we believe.

The *Kli Yakar* calls this foundational idea – that G-d created the universe anew, from nothing – *Chidush HaOlam*, literally “the newness of the world.” Of course, this “newness of the world” stands in direct contrast to what was, as we have said, the accepted scientific wisdom from the time of Aristotle until deep into the twentieth century: that the physical universe had always simply existed. Only with the acceptance of the Big Bang theory has science taken the tentative first steps towards Jewish belief. Today, science endorses the newness of the world – but obviously what lies at the heart of Jewish belief is that G-d created everything in the universe, and it is this article of faith that animates these three *mitzvot* of honouring parents, sending away the mother bird and Shabbos.

To know G-d is to live with an acute awareness of all the miracles around us. It is to view the world with fresh eyes, with a sense of wonder and appreciation. It is to see G-d's presence in everything; to feel close to G-d in good times and difficult times. To know G-d is not an intellectual pursuit, it is an experiential reality that colours the way we live, that animates life itself.

What's remarkable is that these big ideas, these foundational truths that lie at the very heart of Judaism, are opened up for us by something as seemingly small as the *mitzvah* of *Shiluach HaKen* – sending away the mother bird.

# Recalling Our Faith While in Egypt



**Rabbi Shalom Rosner**  
Rosh Beit Midrash, Machon Lev International program

The Torah dictates in no less than four distinct locations, using the same exact phrase, that we are to recall that we were slaves in Egypt. Two of these *pesukim* appear in this week's *parsha*. Why is it so important to repeat this statement and is there any connection between the different iterations?

1. In *Parshat Ki Teitze* (*Devarim* 24:17-18) with respect to the manner in which to behave to a widow and orphan the Torah states:  
**לֹא תִטָּה מִשְׁפַּט גֵּר יְתוֹם... וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם**
2. Later in the *parsha* (*Devarim* 24:21-22), with respect to charity to be given to widows and orphans the Torah states:  
**כִּי תִבְצָר כִּרְמָךְ לֹא תַעֲוִלֵּל אַחֲרָיִךְ לְגֵר לִיתוֹם וְלֹאֲלִמְנָה... וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם ...**
3. In *Parshat Ve'etchanan* (*Devarim* 5:13-14) in connection with Shabbat the Torah dictates:

לֹא תִטָּה מִשְׁפָּט גֵּר יָתוֹם... וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ  
בְּמִצְרַיִם

וְלֹא לִמְנָה... וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי-עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם ...

וַיֹּם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת... לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלָאכָה אַתָּה  
| וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ.....לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ  
וְאִמָּתְךָ כְּמוֹךָ. וּזְכַרְתָּ כִּי עַבְדְּ הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

4. Lastly, in *Parshat Re'eh* (*Devarim* 15:14-15), in connection with setting a servant free, we are instructed not to let him go empty-handed (העניקה):

הַעֲבִיק תַּעֲבִיק לוֹ מִצֹּאנָהּ וּמִגִּרְנָהּ וּמִיִּקְבָּהּ אֲשֶׁר בִּרְכָּהּ  
ה'... וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

Rabbi Schwab (*Maayan Bet Hashoeva*) offers an insightful explanation as to the connection between these four statements. When we recall what transpired in Egypt, the intention is not just to remember the bitterness and back-breaking labor that we experienced. The *midrashim* shed light on the fact that we never gave up hope. Women would encourage their husbands to continue to procreate irrespective of Pharaoh's decree to throw all male babies into the Nile. We were able to get one day off – on Shabbat (*Shemot Raba* 1:24) pursuant to Moshe's request. When we recall the enslavement in Egypt, we are also to recall the **positive attitude** that many had and the ability to **accept the challenges** with love and faith (סורים מאהבה).

The four *pesukim* highlighted above deal with widows and orphans, a newly freed servant and Shabbat. It is specifically in these areas that we need to offer our

encouragement. Having experienced poverty and helplessness in *Mitzrayim*, we ought to reach out to those in need. Just as we had faith that Hashem would redeem us in *Mitzrayim*, so too we must assist and strengthen the underprivileged. They, too, should enjoy some rest and peacefulness, as we experienced on Shabbat in *Mitzrayim*.

Perhaps that is why when we eat the *marror* at the *Seder* we mix it with the haroset – to recall that all was not strictly bitter in Egypt – but rather it was bittersweet! Through faith and belief in Hashem, we were able to persevere, lift ourselves up and merit the redemption. **When we recall our experience in Egypt we should recollect not just the enslavement, but the faith and courage that facilitated survival.**

As we experience challenges on a personal and national level, may we be able to recognize the hand of G-d in the many miracles that we are witnessing, strengthen our *emunah* and *bitachon* and merit a *geula shelema bemihera b'yamenu!*



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# An Honest Remembrance



Michal Horowitz

Teacher, Lecturer & Author of “Abled: Living With A Disability, A Torah View”

This week’s *parsha*, *Parshas Ki Seitzei*, commands us regarding many *mitzvos*. According to the *Sefer HaChinuch*, the *parsha* delineates a total of seventy-four *mitzvos*; twenty-seven *mitzvos asei* and forty-seven *mitzvos lo ta’aseh*. Two important *mitzvos* – which are recorded one after another – concern *neggah tzaraas* and *zechiras Miriam*. The Torah commands us regarding the affliction of a *negah tzaraas*, which can be defined as a physical manifestation of a spiritual malady (see *Parshios Tazria-Metzora* in the book of *Vayikra*). Due to sins of (including but not limited to) *lashon harah*, haughtiness and stinginess of eye (*Arachin* 16a), one is afflicted with the illness of *tzaraas*, whose treatment, and subsequent habilitation, are under the watchful eye of the *kohen*.

The *pasuk* states: *Beware of the tzaraas affliction, to be very careful and to act; according to everything that the Kohanim, the Leviim, shall teach you – as I have commanded them – you shall be careful to perform (Devarim 24:8).*

Commenting on this verse, Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky writes, “According to our sages, this verse comes to teach us the prohibition of trying to conceal, remove or otherwise tamper with the *negah tzaraas*.” It is a warning to an afflicted person might truly desire – and attempt – to remove the blemish so as not to have to go through the humiliating ordeal of isolation, banishment from all three camps, and the subsequent purification process (*Parsha Parables, Devarim*, p.665).

The very next verse in the Torah states one of the *shesh zechiros* (Six Remembrances): *Remember what Hashem your G-d did to Miriam on the way, when you went out of Egypt (Devarim 24:9)*. Writes Rabbi Kamenetzky, “Indeed Miriam was afflicted with *tzaraas*. She did speak *lashon harah* about her brother Moshe, to her brother Aharon. The *pasuk* therefore exhorts us

to remember not to speak gossip, lest we suffer the same fate she did.”

While this is all true and well, Rabbi Kamenetzky posits a compelling question: “Why mention *zechiras Miriam* here? There are other portions in the Torah that teach us about *negah tzaraas*. Why not use the example of Miriam in context of those portions? Better yet, after the incident of Miriam’s *lashon harah (Bamidbar 12)*, why didn’t the Torah exhort the people to remember what happened to her? Would that not be the most appropriate place to remind us not to forget her sin and subsequent punishment? “Why mention it right after warning us not to remove or try to hide a *tzaraas* affliction?” (*Parsha Parables, Devarim*, p.665)

With great insight and relevance, Rabbi Kamenetzky proposes as follows: “Perhaps the juxtaposition of these two verses bears tremendous relevance. First, the Torah tells us to heed the *tzaraas negah*. We must not attempt to remove or tamper with the affliction in any way, nor may we attempt to alter – or cover up – its appearance.

“Then the Torah tells us to remember Miriam. If we analyze the two directives, we will find a very powerful connection. Miriam had what we might call ‘friends in high places.’ Her brother Moshe was the supreme leader of the nation and her brother Aharon was the *kohen gadol* (the high priest). If anyone could cover up the affliction of *tzaraas*, it was these three siblings. Her brothers could certainly have swept her blemish ‘under the rug,’ and carted her off for fourteen days to a secret location outside of the camp, perhaps saying she was taking an extended vacation for personal reasons.

“However, they did not. Moshe prayed openly for her healing while the entire nation was informed that they were waiting to journey forward until she was recovered. There was no cover-up... Miriam spoke incorrectly about Moshe

and she was duly punished. And the greatest powers in government, her brothers Moshe and Aharon, informed the nation of her affliction and taught them the lessons that we ought to learn from this incident.

“Instead of whitewashing the incident, Moshe, Aharon and Miriam candidly confronted, and dealt appropriately with, the situation. Thus, the Torah first tells each and every one of us to beware of the *tzaraas* plague and not to cover it up (24:8). It then reminds us to remember what happened to Miriam (24:9) – the sister of our great leaders who was indeed afflicted, but whose experience, honesty and integrity taught endless generations of descendants” (*Parsha Parables, Devarim*, p.666-667).

What a powerful insight into human nature, into the honesty and integrity that the Torah expects and demands of us, and the greatness of our leaders, who set an example through the *yoshrus* (straight path) and *emes* (truth) of their lives.

This is also an especially relevant lesson for *Chodesh Elul*, as we quickly approach the *yimei ha’din* (Days of Judgement). It is easy to stand before the RS”O and attempt to “cover up” and “whitewash” our sins. It is easy to be *melamed zechus* upon ourselves, even as we *klap an al cheit*. And yet, when we stand before The Judge of Truth and King of all kings, we must present ourselves as we really are – the good and bad; the *zechuyos* and *chovos* that we all have (for a full essay on this topic, see *The Rav Thinking Aloud Shemos*, p.155-158). Remember, the Torah warns us, that when you are spiritually blemished, healing is always possible through the gift of teshuva. Just don’t stand before Me, G-d says, attempting to cover up your sins. Stand as you are, and your repentance will surely be accepted.

*Peace, peace to the far and the near, says Hashem, and I will heal him (Yeshayahu 57:19).*

# The Message of Tzara’at



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

Although most of the laws in *Parshat Ki Teitzei* deal with “*mitzvot Bein adam le-chavero*,” one exception calls our attention: “*Be very careful with regard to [the laws concerning] a ‘nega tzara’at’ (a type of skin disease) – do exactly as the levitical priests instruct you.*” (24:8)

This juxtaposition of the commandment to **remember** how Miriam was punished with *tzara’at* for speaking “*lashon ha-ra*” against her brother, leads many commentators to the obvious conclusion that the Torah’s “reminder” concerning *tzara’at* is, in essence, a reminder not to slander.

For example, Rashi’s opening commentary to this *pasuk* seems to make exactly this point: “[*Remember what G-d did to Miriam*] (24:9): “*If one wants to be careful not to contract tzara’at at all – then don’t speak lashon ha-ra [in the first place]. Remember what happened to Miriam when she spoke against her brother...*”

The laws of *tzara’at* are mentioned in *Parshat Ki Teitzei* specifically because they, in fact, **do** relate to *Bein adam le-chavero*!

Despite the simplicity and beauty of this interpretation, several serious questions emerge. First of all, why doesn’t the Torah just tell us “don’t speak *lashon ha-ra*?” Furthermore, does it make sense for the Torah to recall a “bad story” concerning Miriam in order to teach us not to tell “bad stories” about other people?!

Due to these difficulties, Rashbam and Chizkuni will explain these two *pesukim* in a radically different manner. In contrast to the approach of Rashi and Ibn Ezra that the primary purpose of these *pesukim* is to prohibit *lashon ha-ra*, Rashbam points us in a totally different direction: “**Be careful to keep the laws of tzara’at**: [This comes to teach us that] even with regard to [an

**important person**] like King Uziyahu – do not honor him (should he become a *metzora* / see *Divrei Hayamim II* 26:11-22). Instead, send him outside the camp [as Miriam was sent]... for remember what happened to Miriam: **Even though** she was a prophetess and Moshe’s sister, they did not honor her; instead, they sent her outside the camp...”

According to Rashbam, the primary focus of these *pesukim* relates indeed to the laws of leprosy and “*protektzia*” – and hence has nothing to do with *lashon hara*.

Note how this interpretation resolves almost all our questions. Although the technical details of *tzara’at* have already been recorded in *Sefer Vayikra, Sefer Devarim* commands us **not** to make any exceptions for special people – i.e., **no “protektzia!”**

Chizkuni (on 24:8-9) explains these *pesukim* in a similar fashion: “Keep the laws of tzara’at: Do not grant special honor to important people by exempting them from banishment from the camp. Remember what G-d did to Miriam – even though she was sister to the king and high priest, she was nevertheless banished outside the camp for the entire seven-day period.”

Rashbam and Chizkuni agree that the primary purpose of these *pesukim* is to teach us that everyone is equal under the law, and hence, not to make exceptions for VIPs. Note that this approach, as well, provides us with a good reason for including this law in *Parshat Ki Teitzei*, as it falls into the category of *Bein adam le-chavero*, and it reflects G-d’s expectation that *Am Yisrael* live by a higher moral standard.

Ramban begins by quoting Rashi’s explanation that guarding one’s tongue against *lashon hara* prevents the onset of *tzara’at*; However, Ramban takes Rashi’s approach one step further, demonstrating that what

Rashi considers “*drash*” may be not only “*pshat*,” but should even be counted as one of the 613 *mitzvot*!

To our amazement, Ramban considers *zachor* – what appeared to be simply a “reminder” – as a positive commandment to daily remember (or possibly even recite) the incident involving how Miriam contracted *tzara’at* after speaking about her brother.

Like an artist, Ramban beautifully “puts all the pieces together,” explaining this seemingly enigmatic *pasuk* in light of our earlier questions. Like Rashi and Ibn Ezra, he points to *lashon hara* as the central topic of these *pesukim*. This is why the incident of Miriam is introduced and why the issue of *tzara’at* is mentioned altogether in *Parshat Ki Teitzei*, in the context of *mitzvot Bein adam le-chavero*.

However, Ramban’s interpretation also explains the advantage of employing Miriam to present this *mitzva* (rather than stating it explicitly): “...Hence, this is a warning (of the Torah) not to speak lashon hara, commanding us to remember the terrible punishment that Miriam received [even though she was] a righteous prophetess, and she spoke only about her brother (not someone outside the family) and only privately with her brother (Aharon), not in public, so that Moshe himself would not be embarrassed... But despite these good intentions, she was punished. How much more so must we be careful never to speak lashon hara...” (see Ramban 24:9)

According to Ramban, the Torah doesn’t mention Miriam to tell us how bad her sin was. On the contrary, the incident of Miriam emphasizes how **careful** we must all be in all matters which may involve even the slightest degree of **lashon hara**. This *pasuk* reminds us that punishment was administered **even** in the case of Miriam’s mild *lashon hara*.

Continued on page 23

# Parashat Ki Teseh: Teaching Children Right From Right



## Rabbi Eli Mansour

Edmond J. Safra Synagogue, Brooklyn

**P**arashat Ki-Teseh begins with the exceptional law of “*Eshet Yefat Toar*,” which deals with the case of a soldier who encounters an attractive foreign woman while fighting a war, and desires her. The Torah allows the soldier in such a case to marry the woman after fulfilling certain conditions. The commentators explain that the Torah enacted this provision because the soldier would otherwise be likely to engage in forbidden relations with the woman. Human nature being as it is, G-d determined that it would be preferable to permit marrying an “*Eshet Yefat Toar*” so that soldiers would not be tempted to cohabit with women in violation of the law.

This section is followed by another exceptional law – the law of the “*Ben Sorer U'moreh*,” the rebellious son. The Torah commands that under certain very rare and unusual circumstances, a child who ignores his parents’ authority and conducts himself in an unrestrained manner is put to death. One of the requirements for a child to be considered a “*Ben Sorer U'moreh*” is “*Zolel Ve’sobeh*” – that he is a glutton, indulging in meat and wine. The Sages explained that if a boy displays an uncontrolled lust for meat and wine, he will reach the point where he robs and murders in order to obtain the money he needs to satisfy this lust. Therefore, he must be put to death already now, in his youth, to prevent his future criminal behavior.

Our Sages offered an explanation for why the Torah juxtaposed these two subjects – the “*Eshet Yefat Toar*” and the “*Ben Sorer U'moreh*.” Namely, the Torah here warns that if a person marries an “*Eshet Yefat Toar*,” he will end up having a son who is a “*Ben Sorer U'moreh*.” Although marrying such a woman is technically permissible, it

will likely result in the disastrous outcome of a “*Ben Sorer U’moreh*.”

The obvious question arises as to why this is the case. True, the *Mishna* teaches us that “*Abera Goreret Abera*” – one sin leads to another. But in this case, the man did not commit a sin; he married a non-Jewish woman in a permissible fashion, as the Torah prescribed. Why will this result in a wayward, rebellious son?

The answer, as some have suggested, relates to the well-known comments of the Ramban in explaining the Torah's command in the Book of *Vayikra*, "*Kedoshim Tiheyu*" – "You shall be holy." This command does not require us to immerse in the *Mivkeh* several times a day or engage in deep mystical activities. Rather, the Ramban explains, it refers to moderation and avoiding excess in our mundane activities. Technically speaking, a person can go to a casino without violating any law in the *Shulhan Aruch*. He can order strictly *glatt kosher* food, drink *kosher* wine that is "*Mebushal*," make sure to pray at the proper times, and keep his *Kippa* and *Sisit* on. Nevertheless, he has failed to fulfill the *Misva* of "*Kedoshim Tiheyu*." A person can meet the highest standards of *Kashrut* but live a very unholy life if his life revolves around food and indulgence. Living a "holy" life means setting reasonable limits on our physical indulgence so we can pursue loftier ideals.

This is the problem with the man who marries an “*Eshet Yefat Toar*.” He has not violated any particular law, but it cannot be considered a “holy” thing to do. And such conduct has a profound effect on his children.

There are two ways to educate children, one of which is very effective, and one of which is very ineffective. The ineffective – but generally more intuitive – way is to

tell children what they should do. More often than not, this only triggers resentment and pushback. The effective way to educate children is to model the desired behavior, to show them the right way to act. Children learn far more effectively with their eyes than with their ears. They learn from watching us, not by being told what to do. The expression goes, “Practice what you preach.” I would suggest modifying this expression to read, “Practice, and then you don’t have to preach.” Actions speak louder than words, and so our greatest asset in influencing our children is the personal example we set, exhibiting the kind of behavior we want our children to emulate.

This is why marrying an “*Eshet Yefat Toar*” can lead to a “*Ben Sorer U'moreh*.” It sets an example to children of what the Ramban calls, “*Nabal Bi'rshut Ha'Torah*” – acting improperly within the limits of Torah law. Such a thing is technically permissible, but an inappropriate surrender to desire. A child who grows up in such an environment, where the parents strictly adhere to the nitty gritty of Torah law but overindulge and place too much focus on the physical pleasures of life, can easily become a glutton, and may eventually reach the point where he resorts to criminal behavior to satisfy his lusts.

We need to teach our children not just right from wrong, but also “right from right.” Even within “right” behavior, children must be taught to distinguish between what’s appropriate and what’s not. And the way they learn this distinction is by observing us, their parents, exercising appropriate restraint and maintaining a healthy balance between acceptable enjoyment and excessive indulgence.

# Take the Battle to the Enemy



## Rabbi Moshe Weinberger

Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

**A**s it says in the *pasuk* at the beginning of the *Parsha* (*Devarim* 21:10), “כִּי-תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל-אֹיְבֶיךָ, וְ”...“תִּנָּתֵן הַ אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּיָדְךָ” “When you go out to war against your enemy and Hashem your G-d delivers them into your hand...” This *pasuk* promises us absolute victory. This differs markedly from the description of war found in *Parshas Beha’alosecha* (*Bamidbar* 10:9), where it says, “וְכִי-תָבֹאוּ מִלְחָמָה בְּאֹרְצְכֶם עַל-הָעָר, “...”הַ הָעִיר אֲתֶכֶם וְהָרְעִיתֶם בְּחִצְצֹרֹת”...,” “when war comes to your land against an enemy who oppresses you, you shall blow the trumpets...” The *psukim* there describe desperate pleas to Hashem for salvation in the war. Why are we assured a smooth victory here in *Parshas Ki Seitzei* but the victory seems so hard-fought in *Parshas Beha’alosecha*?

The Kotzker explains that the difference is that the war described in *Parshas Beha'alosecha* is one where “כִּי־תִבְאוּ מִלְחָמָה” (בְּאַרְצְכֶם). We have waited passively for the enemy to enter our land. That is why we have to blow the shofar and beg and plead for victory. But in our *parsha*, where we bring the battle to the enemy, we do not allow them to enter *Eretz Yisroel*. Instead, we initiate a preemptive strike. Therefore, “וַתִּתֵּן ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּיָדְךָ,” Hashem delivers the enemy (relatively) easily into our hands.

The *mussar seforim*, and particularly *Mich-tav Me'Eliyahu*, speak of three territories in any war. Those territories are (i) the enemy territory, which is completely in the enemy's hands, (ii) the territory which is completely under one's own control, and (iii) the battleground which is up for grabs by both sides. The goal with respect to the battleground is first, not to let the enemy's forces increase their territory and second, to push forward deeper and

deeper behind enemy lines to increase one's own territory.

Similarly, in our war with the evil inclination, there are certain areas which are completely under our control and over which the evil inclination does not even attempt to fight, such as keeping Shabbos, putting on *Tefilin*, and fasting on Yom Kippur, etc. Such matters are completely within our domain. On the other hand, there are matters which, although they are part of *halacha*, seem totally within the domain of the evil inclination and over which we feel that we are not yet ready to fight, such as, for many of us, שו"ת הנגיד תמיד, constant awareness of Hashem's presence, saying every *bracha* with intense concentration, etc. While we hope to master these areas one day, for all practical purposes, these areas are completely in enemy hands for now.

We also have the “battlefield,” the aspects of our service of Hashem which are challenging but attainable. This area is called the נקודת הבחירה, the point where our ability to choose is most pronounced. If one is honest with himself about the matters in this battlefield, he knows that if he pushes himself a bit, he can conquer more of this territory from his evil inclination. This is the battleground into which we can “כִּי-תֵצֵא לִמְלַחְמָה עַל-אֹיְבֶיךָ” go out of our comfort zone, into enemy lines and push the enemy further from the home front. When one takes the initiative and fights those big battles, it automatically brings a number of smaller matters in the conquered territory safely into one’s own dominion as well. The main thing is to bring the battle to the enemy and not wait passively for the inevitable onslaught of the evil inclination.

The *Gemara* in *Shabbos* 88b teaches that when the Jewish people stood ready to accept the Torah, “כפה הקב”ה עליהם את ההר” כפה הקב”ה ואמר להם אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב ואם לאו, “Hashem turned the mountain over their heads like a barrel and said, ‘If you accept the Torah, it is well. And if not, there will be your grave.’” The *tzadikim* ask why it says your grave will be “there.” It should have said your grave will be “here.” They explain that the greatest grave in the world is “over there.” When a person says, “I can’t really serve Hashem here, where I am right now. Such a person says, “over there,” one day, when I make *Aliyah*/when I get married/when I get a new job/when I can go to that *yeshiva*, then I can be a real Jew. The *pasuk* is teaching us that the attitude of “over there” is death, it is our grave.

The *Medrash Tanchuma* (*Beshalach* 15) explains that the *pasuk* in *Devarim* 10:12, “ועתה ישראל מה' א-לקיך שאל מעריך,” “And now, Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you...” by noting that “ועתה,” “and now” implies *teshuva*. Why? Because the secret of doing *teshuva* is recognizing that the time is “now!”

The secret to truly living and not descending to the grave of “over there” in this world, is taking the initiative in those areas of life that are within our grasp to conquer and not being afraid of the battle, but bravely taking the battle to the enemy’s territory. When we do that, then *“וַיִּתְּנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לָנוּ”*, Hashem will help us conquer that enemy territory. In the merit of our bravery in battle, may we merit complete victory in the battle against the evil inclination and the coming of *Moshiach* soon in our days, Amen.

# A Tale of Two Spouses



Rabbi YY Jacobson  
 TheYeshiva.net

“Does marriage change one’s personality?” Greg asked his buddy Mike. “In a way,” says Mike. “You see, when I was engaged, I did most of the talking and she did most of the listening. When we just got married she did most of the talking and I did most of the listening. Now we both do most of the talking and the neighbors do all of the listening.”

This week’s Torah portion (*Ki Seitzei*) states the following law: “If a man will have two wives, one beloved and one unloved, and both the loved and unloved wives have sons, and the firstborn son is that of the hated one; on the day that this man wills his property to his sons, he cannot give the son of the beloved wife birthright preference above the son of the hated wife, the firstborn.

“Rather, he must recognize the firstborn, the son of the hated one, to give him the double portion in all his property.”

On the most literal level, these biblical verses mandate that a firstborn son shall inherit a double portion of his father’s estate, while each subsequent son shall inherit an equal portion of the property. A father does not have the power to bequeath the double portion reserved for the firstborn to one of the other sons he loves, and any attempt to do so is ignored by Judaic law. As the *Talmud* makes clear, a person is certainly empowered to distribute his entire estate to one of the other sons (or to any other individual for that matter), as long as he conveys it as a gift.

But if he chooses to bequeath the estate to one of the sons as an inheritance and so deny his firstborn son’s rights as a natural heir, then the father’s attempt has no legal validity in the Jewish judicial system.

What is disturbing, however, is the Torah’s need to state the point via a shameful

example of a man who loves one of his wives and loathes the other. Why was it necessary to use a crude and offensive illustration in order to make the simple point that the firstborn son is entitled to a double portion of the inheritance regardless of the father’s preferences?

One of the most essential factors to bear in mind during biblical study is the idea that each *mitzvah*, law and episode described in the Torah contains – in addition to its physical and concrete interpretation – a psychological and spiritual dimension as well. Nachmanides writes: “The Torah discusses the physical reality, but it alludes to the world of the spirit.” Another great Kabbalist went even further. 17th century mystic Rabbi Menachem Azaryah of Fanu (in Italy) states that “The Torah discusses the spiritual reality, and it alludes to the physical world.”

This means that stories and laws in the Torah ought to be understood first and foremost as events and laws in the spiritual realm, and this is actually the primary method of Torah interpretation. But in its communication of spiritual truths, the Torah also lends itself to be interpreted from a physical and concrete vantage point.

What then is the spiritual meaning of the seemingly coarse description in this week’s portion, of “a man who will have two wives, one beloved and one hated, and both the loved and unloved wives have sons, and the firstborn son is that of the hated one”? How are we to understand this verse in the universe of the spirit?

Judaism teaches that the relationship between each husband and wife in this world reflects the cosmic relationship between G-d (the Groom) and the Jewish people (the Bride). The entire book of “Song of Songs” by King Solomon is based

on the notion that our human and flawed relationships are capable of reflecting the Divine marriage with Israel.

There are two types of human beings who enter into a marriage with G-d: the “beloved spouse” and the “despised spouse.” The “beloved spouse” represents those unique individuals who enjoy a continuous romance with G-d. Their souls are overflowing with spiritual ecstasy, selfless idealism and fiery inspiration. They cannot stop loving G-d, and G-d cannot stop loving them. On the other end of the spectrum stand the “despised spouses,” all those human beings possessing numerous qualities that ought to be spurned and hated: immoral urges, vulgar passions and ugly temptations.

These are the people whose hearts are not always ablaze with love toward G-d; rather, they struggle each and every day to remain married to their Divine soul and not fall prey to the lure of their animalistic tendencies and the array of confusing paradoxes filling their psyches. Throughout their life they must battle not to become a victim of many a natural instinct and craving. Egotism, fear, selfishness, arrogance, corruption, short-sightedness, guilt, shame, threaten to overcome their daily living patterns and they must constantly stand on guard to preserve their integrity and innocence.

The Torah teaches us that G-d’s “firstborn son” may very well come not from His union with the beloved spouse but rather from His relationship with the despised spouse.

This means that the spiritual harvest that a struggling human being produces as a result of his or her grueling and stormy relationship with G-d, may often be far deeper and more powerful than that of the spiritually serene person.

Continued on page 22

# Ki Teitze: Not a Laughing Matter



Rabbi Judah Mischel  
 Executive Director, Camp HASC; Founder, Tzama Nafshi  
 Author of the *Baderech* series

An American *yeshiva* student learning in the *Gerrer Yeshivah* Sefas Emes in Yerushalayim was set to return home, and wanting to make the most of his last hours in *Eretz Yisrael*, decided to spend the night *davening* at the Kotel. To his amazement, in the moments before dawn, Rebbe Yisrael Alter, the “Beis Yisrael” of Gur, arrived to *daven* there as well. Thrilled at his good fortune, the young man approached the Beis Yisrael and requested a *bracha*.

The Rebbe looked deeply into the young man’s eyes. “Tell me, what is the greatest praise a person can say about the *Ribono Shel Olam*?” Overwhelmed and intimidated, the young man could hardly speak as the Rebbe answered his own question: “There is no greater praise of Him than extolling the fact that the *Ribono Shel Olam* doesn’t laugh at a *Yid*.”

As the Rebbe continued on his way, the young man, speechless and confused headed back to the *yeshiva* on his way to the airport, where he noticed that the light was still on the office of the *Rosh Yeshiva*, the “Pnei Menachem,” Reb Pinchas Menachem, *zt”l*. He knocked on the door, and as he was welcomed in he asked the Pnei Menachem if he could shed light on the Rebbe’s cryptic statement. Smiling knowingly, the Pnei Menachem explained:

“Imagine if a student were to act inappropriately and violate the rules of the *yeshiva*. Brought before me, he asks to be forgiven, declares that he regrets his

actions, and that he’ll never ever repeat the same poor choices. Of course, I will believe his sincerity and give him another chance. Now imagine that this person breaks the rules not once or twice, but again and again, and each time, he comes into the office and tearfully regrets his indiscretion, begging for forgiveness. How would a *Rosh Yeshiva* react? What could I say? ‘Are you not making a mockery of the program, the rules, of me, of yourself?’ His act of piety and sincerity is all a show, one big joke.

“This is how *basar v’dam*, a human being, might respond. However, when it comes to the *Ribono Shel Olam*, even if someone has fallen over and over, repeating the same mistakes again and again, his *teshuvah* is accepted as if it is the first time he is seeking to change. This is *gevaldik* praise of the *Ribono Shel Olam*, who takes our efforts in *teshuvah* and our *retzonos* to change seriously. For *Hashem Yisborach* there are no jokes and the sincere efforts of a *Yid* are no laughing matter.”

■ ■ ■

“*Ki Seitze l’milchamah* – When you go out to engage your enemy....” *Chazal* interpret this opening *pasuk* of our *sedra* to be a description of our eternal struggle with our lower self and *yeitzer hara*, our evil inclination. In this *parshah* of the month of Elul, we are instructed to “go out” and adopt a proactive stance in our efforts to draw close to Hashem and make good choices. While sometimes we may get

discouraged, and we may need to begin again countless times, we must, nonetheless, “go out” and re-engage, over and over again.

As we approach the end of another year, we are looking forward to new beginnings, a year of health and stability. All too often this past calendar year we heard the old Yiddish aphorism quoted: *A mentch tracht, un Gott lacht*, “Man plans, G-d laughs.” Though this saying never sat well with me, this year it stung. It was as if the *Ribono Shel Olam* were insensitive and deaf to our suffering and disappointment, snickering over our canceled plans and misfortunes, *chas v’Shalom*. How could it be?

The truth is, however, man plans and sometimes Hashem sees fit to rearrange those plans for the best. If one thing is important to remember during this season of *teshuvah*, it is that the desires of a Jew to draw close and fulfill Hashem’s will are no joke – and no laughing matter. May we have the *bitachon* to “go out” as many times as it takes, no matter what obstacles or “enemies” may arise. And may *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* always see the good of our inner intentions, for the sincere efforts of a *Yid* are no laughing matter!

■ ■ ■

Excerpt from *Baderech: Along the Path of the Torah*, forthcoming (Mosaica Press, Elul 5786)

# Mitzvah Mindset

Mrs. Shira Smiles  
International lecturer and curriculum developer

“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of Hashem; even the tenth generation shall never enter the assembly of Hashem.” (Devarim 23:4)

The Torah forbids members of these nations from marrying into the Jewish people, as they did not greet the Jews with water and bread when they left Egypt and moreover, they hired Bilam to curse the Jewish people. What is puzzling here is that the Torah was given in its entirety at Har Sinai, yet these particular events had not even occurred!

The Beis Halevi offers a fundamental approach to the way we relate Torah and mitzvot. Truth be told, all mitzvot are Divine in origin and are beyond our mortal comprehension. As Hashem’s chosen nation, we are obligated to fulfill His Will for no other reason than that He commanded it. Thus, we are forbidden to

include Ammonites and Moabites, irrespective of the reason. However, the Torah does record a reason so as to emphasize the negative qualities these nations exhibited. In doing so, we are cautioned to act differently, adhering to the values and morals set out by Torah law and spirit. In effect, Hashem caused the Amonites and Moavites to behave this way, so we have a clear definition between us. Living Torah positively impacts our nature and forms our identity.

Rav Lopian, zt”l, in Lev Eliyahu expounds on this idea. Hashem created the world for the sake of Torah, and not the opposite. We are not warned against theft because people tend to steal. Rather, since Hashem wanted to give us the opportunity to learn Torah and keep His mitzvot, He created within us a desire to steal.

When viewing the Torah, and indeed, the entire world in this light, we are led to reassess our conventional paradigms. At

the beginning of the parashah, Rav Gedalya Schorr, zt”l, notes in Ohr Gedalyahu, that wherever we go we encounter opportunities to do mitzvot. Often, we look at mitzvot as something that we happen to do, or something we need to do to get on with our day. Instead, we must try to view mitzvot as the essence of our lives. The Zohar Hakadosh defines mitzvot as 613 mediums through which we can connect with Hashem. Although we do ascribe reasons for mitzvot to make them more understandable and relatable, we cannot forget that it is the mitzvah itself that we are after.

When we understand this dynamic, we will search out opportunities to do mitzvot, as they are the purpose and intention of creation. Connecting with the Will of Hashem and accessing the core of creation is the greatest reason to do a mitzvah.

Continued from page 20

For it is precisely in our daily struggle against the forces of darkness within ourselves and the world around us that we generate a powerful explosion of G-dliness

and holiness in the world, unparalleled in the tranquil life of G-d’s “beloved spouse.” The morality and the integrity that emerges from the midst of a battle

between good and evil contain a unique depth and splendor not possessed by the straightforward spirituality of the saint.

# Despair of the Owners

 Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi  
Popular Torah teacher and author

The last year showed us again and again, how lost things can return: hostages that we did not dream of seeing in the land of the living, a four-year-old boy who was lost for two whole days on the seashore and was found, a mother and daughter who only dreamed of getting lost and against their will we chased after them as a great lost object, and this week – the bones of Yehuda that were returned for burial, finally, after dozens of years.

This week I was in Uman, at the grave of Rabbi Nachman, the one who said about himself that he returns lost things, and the one who wrote that “the matter of repentance is, to return the thing to the place from which it was thrown.” Every thought of repentance that you will feel, so he will say, is a type of returning lost parts to their place, this place from which they were once thrown.

What is the condition for returning a lost object to its place? In Jewish law there is a rule according to which when there exists with high probability “despair of the owners (be’alim),” there is no obligation to

return the lost object. Thus, for example, when there is no distinctive identifying mark for what was lost, like unbundled banknotes that were found, it is reasonable to assume that the one who lost them has despaired, and therefore, the finder is exempt from returning the lost object.

What a strange rule! What does the despair of the one who lost something have to do with the efforts of the finder? In what legal code in the world is there such a command?!

How fitting for Rabbi Nachman, the one who coined the rule: “There is no despair in the world at all,” to say that he returns lost souls to their place. With him, despair is the cause of the loss in the first place. For a person who hopes, so he will teach, fewer things will be lost because the objects, as if, tie themselves to him by virtue of his hope and lose themselves from him when he is in despair.

I meet so many women in despair of livelihood, in despair of children and yes, also in “despair of husbands (be’alim):” the love that was will no longer return, so they

will think, and then the love, the one they stopped hoping for, will go on its way like a man who goes and gets lost...

Rabbi Nachman did not stop hoping for us that we would return and perhaps this is the reason that to Uman come the lost and those who lose. Young people who feel that they’ve been given up on, who were told: “How ugly you are!” and they will travel to their creator (oman), and will ask to see in his eyes his great hope regarding them.<sup>1</sup> And Breslov Hasidim interpret this week: “Ki Teitzei l’milchamah al oyvecha – When you go out to your war against your enemies,” oyvecha (your enemies) are the initial letters of: Ein ye’ush ba’olam klal – There is no despair in the world at all...

1. Taanit 20b

Continued from page 17

Ramban’s closing remarks are most significant, as they reflect another important aspect of his exegetical approach: “For how could it be that lashon hara – which is equivalent in its severity to murder – would not be considered a [full fledged] mitzva in the Torah!...”

Rather, this pasuk serves as a serious warning to refrain [from lashon hara], be it in public or in private, intentional

or unintentional...and it should be considered one of the 613 mitzvot...” (see Ramban 24:9).

Ramban here employs “conceptual logic” – the very essence of his pshat approach – to support his comprehensive interpretation of these pesukim. Because logically there must be a mitzva in the Torah against speaking lashon hara, Ramban prefers to interpret this pasuk as one of the 613 mitzvot.

In this manner, Ramban utilizes a wider perspective of pshat to reach a conclusion not only similar to the Midrash, but also more poignant.

Recall how the mitzvot of the main speech form the guidelines for the establishment of G-d’s model nation in the land of Israel. Imagine an entire nation, where each individual reminded himself daily of these stringent guidelines concerning lashon ha-ra!

# Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin

balashon.com

Author of the book *Kohelet: A Map to Eden* (Maggid)

In *Parashat Ki Tetze*, the Torah forbids turning away from another person's lost animal.

לא־תִרְאֶה אֶת־שׁוֹר אָחִיךָ אוֹ  
אֶת־שִׂי נִדְחִים וְהִתְעַלְמָתָּ מֵהֶם

“If you see your fellow’s ox or sheep gone astray, do not ignore it; you must take it back to your fellow.” (*Devarim* 22:1)

The term “ignore” is a common translation for *וְהִתְעַלְמָתָּ*. A more literal one, offered by some translations, is “hide yourself.” That gets closer to the root’s basic meaning of *עלם*, “to hide” or “to conceal.” The same sense appears in the forms *נִעְלַם*, “to be hidden, concealed, disappeared,” and in *הִעְלִים*, “to hide, conceal.” The reflexive form *הִתְעַלַּם*, “to hide oneself,” can also mean “to ignore” or “to disregard.”

Linguists generally connect *עולם* to the root *עלם*. For most people, the word *עולם* would be immediately translated as “world.” But its earlier meaning was “forever” or “eternity.” In that reading, *עולם* originally meant something like “hidden

time” or “unknown time.” That fits how the word behaves in *Tanakh*, where it typically means a very long duration, antiquity, or eternity. Many scholars, therefore, argue that in Biblical Hebrew it does not yet mean “world,” or at most only in a few disputed places.<sup>1</sup> The usual Biblical sense is still a word of time, not a word of space.

Between “forever” and “world,” there seems to be an intermediate sense like “age” or “era.” That middle stage makes the development easier to follow: from endless or hidden time, to a long age, to a realm or domain, and then to the world. You can still see this in the phrases *עולם הזה* and *עולם הבא*. Usually they are translated as “this world” and “the world to come.” But rendering them as “this age” and “the age to come” may preserve the earlier history of the word better than the more common translations.

The same shift appears in older formulas that continue into later Hebrew. In the *Tanakh*, *מֶלֶךְ עוֹלָם* means “everlasting King.”

In the blessing formulas, the same phrase means “King of the World.”

In *Divrei HaYamim I* 16:36, *מִן הָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם* means “from eternity to eternity.” A *mishna* in *Berakhot* (9:5) captures the changing meanings:

חֻתְמֵי בְרָכוֹת שֶׁהָיוּ בִּמְקוֹדֶשׁ, הָיוּ אוֹמְרִים מִן הָעוֹלָם. מִשְׁקַלְקְלֵי הַמִּינִיּוֹ, וְאָמְרוּ, אֵין עוֹלָם אֶלָּא אַחֲד, הִתְקִינוּ שֶׁיְהוּ אוֹמְרִים, מִן הָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם.

“At the conclusion of all blessings said in the Temple they used at first to say simply, ‘forever.’ When the heretics corrupted their ways and asserted that there was only one world [i.e., no world to come], it was ordained that the response should be: from forever to forever.”

This revised phrasing could work with either meaning of *עולם*. If it means “eternity,” then it fits the biblical sense. And if it means “world,” then it supports the rabbinic concept of two worlds, this world and the world to come.

1. Perhaps in *Tehillim* 89:3, *Mishlei* 10:25, *Kohelet* 3:11.

## Answer to the Parsha Riddle (from page 9)

There are three verses each of which begin with the words: כִּי־יִנָּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה – When a man marries a woman.”

They are found in the following locations: 22:13, 24:1 and 24:5.

What is the significance of the three mentions of this phrase?

1. Whilst the accepted custom in most Ashkenazic communities is for the *kallah* to circle the *chatan* seven times under the *chuppah*, there are certain communities that follow the *Siddur*

*Derech Hachaim*, the *Yaavetz*, the *Mateh Moshe* and others who have the *kallah* circling the *chatan* only three times. *Shulchan HaEzer* notes that this was the prevailing custom in Hungary.

The *Tashbetz* in *Siman* 465 and others note that this custom is hinted to by the above phrase appearing three times in the *parshah*.

*Minhagei Yeshurun* (*Siman* 176) adds two more reasons for circling around the *chatan* three times:

2. The word “וְאֶרְשִׁתִּיךָ – And I will betroth you” appears three times in *Tanach*, all three in *Hoshea* 2:21-22.

וְאֶרְשִׁתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם וְאֶרְשִׁתִּיךָ לִי  
בְצִדְקָה וּבְמִשְׁפָּט וּבְחֶסֶד...

וְאֶרְשִׁתִּיךָ לִי בְּאֵם מוֹנָה:

3. There are three ways in which a husband can acquire a wife as the first *Mishna* in *Kiddushin* (2a) states:

הָאִשָּׁה נִקְנִית בְּשֵׁלֶשׁ דְּרָכִים, וְקוּנָה אֶת עַצְמָהּ  
בְּשֵׁתִי דְרָכִים. נִקְנִית בְּכֶסֶף, בְּשֵׁטֶר, וּבְבִיאָהּ.

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