

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

Netzavim/Vayelech

### THE HIDDEN FACE

*"My anger will flare against him on that day and I will forsake them; and I will hide My face from them and they will become prey.. He will say on that day 'Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?'" (31:17)*

When tragedy befalls the Jewish People, we may think that Hashem has abandoned us to our enemies. When we are beset by those who wish to destroy us and they seem to be unstoppable while we are powerless, and they slay us from morning till evening, let us remember this verse.

Hashem will never desert us; rather we *feel* that He has forsaken us because He has 'hidden His face.' When Hashem 'hides His face' it means that we cannot see Him controlling events. It seems to us that chaos rules. Of course, nothing happens that He does not decree. The decree for every event that has happened this year was sealed last Yom Kippur: "Who will live and who will die..."

And if we look carefully at events, even though we cannot see Hashem's 'face,' we can, at least, discern His 'back.' We can see the telltale footprints in the snow of History.

We sometimes feel that we have failed Hashem so totally that there is no way we can find our way back to Him. We should remember that He is always there behind the mask of the world, waiting for us to return through prayer and *teshuva* (repentance).

### ROOT AND BRANCH

*"Not with you alone do I seal this covenant... and with whomever is not here" (29:13-14)*

When the Jewish People accepted the Torah at Sinai, they accepted it not only for themselves, but on behalf of all their descendants till the end of time.

One might ask "What right did they have to obligate me to keep the Torah? If they wanted to keep it, fine! But why should I have to keep it!"

Take a look at a young tree which has yet to grow branch-

es. Every branch which will grow from this tree is part of the tree itself. The branches cannot secede from the tree. If it were not for the tree there would be no branches, and even though the branches have not yet appeared, they are part of the tree now. Similarly every Jew is a branch of the tree which is the Jewish People. We are all bound by the acceptance of Torah because our potential to exist was already rooted in our forefathers.

Thus, since our forefathers accepted the Torah, it is as though we accepted it ourselves.

There is also a mystical concept that every Jewish soul that would ever live "stood" at Sinai in an incorporeal form and accepted the Torah. So, in reality, each individual was there as well.

### THE SPEED OF THOUGHT

*"For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you... it is not in Heaven... nor is it over the sea... for it is very near to you, in your mouth and your heart to do it." (30:11-14)*

The Torah tells us that this commandment is not over the sea; it is in your mouth and your heart to do it. In other words, one *might* have thought that it is over the sea.

How is it possible that something as close as the mouth and the heart could ever be confused with being as distant as the heavens or over the sea?

Man consists of two opposing elements, body and soul. If we put our *neshama*, our soul, in charge of our body we can reach a level greater than the angels. If, on the other hand, we allow our body to dominate our spiritual side we become like animals.

For just as an animal has no taste for wisdom and intellectual discernment, preferring hay, straw and the like, so too a person who centers himself on physicality finds things of the spirit without taste. Thus, man is an amalgam of two elements as disparate as *heaven and earth*.

This is what the Torah is teaching us here. When a person turns his back on the great worth of the spiritual world, that world is indeed extremely distant from him - literally "in the

*continued on page twelve*

## Netzavim

**O**n the last day of his life, Moshe gathers together all the people, both young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will be a result of the failure to heed Hashem's *mitzvos*. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all - the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them, in favor of idols which can do nothing. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have

become among the nations, eventually Hashem will bring them back to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility; rather its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. The Parsha concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

## Vayelech

**O**n this, the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent throughout the camp, bidding farewell to his beloved people, encouraging them to "keep the faith." Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, Hashem is with them, and will vanquish their enemies. Then he summons Yehoshua, and in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as the leader of the Jewish People. In this manner, he strengthens Yehoshua's status as the new leader. Moshe teaches them the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel*: That every seven years on the first day of the intermediate days of Succos, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather together at the Temple to hear the King read from the Book of *Devarim*. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to Hashem, the covenant, and reward and punishment. Hashem tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should therefore summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the *Mishkan*, where Hashem will teach Yehoshua. Hashem then tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful to Him, and begin to worship other gods. Hashem will then completely "hide his face," so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, and that they will be hunted by all. Hashem instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song - *Ha'azinu* - which will serve as a "witness" against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to Bnei Yisrael. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah, and instructs the *Levi'im* to place it to the side of the *Aron* (Holy

Ark), so that no one will ever write a new Torah Scroll that is different from the original - for there will always be a reference copy.

## Ha'azinu

**A**lmost all of *Ha'azinu* is a song, written in the Torah in two parallel columns. Moshe summons the heavens and the earth to stand as eternal witnesses to what will happen if the Jewish People sin and do not obey the Torah. He reminds the people to examine the history of the world, and note how the Jewish People are rescued from obliteration in each generation - that Hashem "pulls the strings" of world events so that Bnei Yisrael can fulfill their destiny as His messengers in the world. Hashem's kindness is such that Israel should be eternally grateful, not just for sustaining them in the wilderness, but for bringing them to a land of amazing abundance, and for defeating their enemies. But, this physical bounty leads the people to become self-satisfied and over-indulged. Physical pleasures corrupt the morals of the people. They worship empty idols and powerless gods, and indulge in all kinds of depravity. Hashem will then let nations with no moral worth subjugate Israel and scatter them across the world. However, their only purpose is as a rod to chastise the Jewish People. When these nations think that it is through their own power that they have dominated Israel, Hashem will remind them that they are no more than a tool to do His will. The purpose of the Jewish People is fundamental - that man should know his Creator. Neither exile nor suffering can sever the bond between Hashem and His people, and eventually in the final redemption this closeness will be restored. Hashem will then turn His anger against the enemies of Israel, as though they were *His* enemies, showing no mercy to the tormentors of His people. Hashem then gives His last commandment to Moshe: That he should ascend Mount Nevo and be gathered there to his people.

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## SYMPATHETIC VIBRATION

“Ha’azinu....” (32:1)

Just as all the notes in a chord and all the voices and instruments in an orchestra blend together to form a single sound, so all creation sings in harmony to proclaim Hashem’s Unity. The Parsha of Ha’azinu is written in the form of a song to remind the Jewish People that all Creation resonates in harmony with their actions.

## A WORD IN YOUR EAR

“Give ear, O heavens..!” (32:1)

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

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

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

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

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

Sources:

- *The Ovstovtzer Gaon as heard from Rabbi C. Z. Senter*

## HA’AZINU

This is the first Shabbat of the year. It is the prototype, the blueprint for the whole year. Because of this, we must be especially careful to guard its sanctity. The Talmud tells us that if the Jewish People had kept the first Shabbat properly, no nation could have ruled over them.

On Rosh Hashana a new order is created for all the days of the year. Thus if the first Shabbat of the year is correctly observed, then the whole year follows suit.

Man was created on *Erev Shabbat*, on Friday afternoon, in order that he could immediately enter

straight into Shabbat. But before Shabbat came, Man had already sinned.

Shabbat is an aid to *teshuva*. As our Sages teach (*Berachot 37*), a *tzaddik gamur* (completely righteous person) cannot stand in the place of a *ba’al teshuva* (someone who returns to Judaism).

*Tzaddikim* uphold the world, as it says in Proverbs “The *tzaddik* is the foundation of the world,” but “*teshuva* preceded the world” (*Pesachim 54*) so the level of the *ba’al teshuva* is before the world and above the world.

Just as the *ba’al teshuva* is before the world, and thus above it, so too Shabbat has a radiance which is higher than the seven days of the week - a reflection of the world to come.

## THISTLES IN THE VINEYARD

When Rabbi Elazar was presented with a challenge to his ruling regarding a dying person's oral distribution of his property from a ruling of the Sages involving the sons of Roichel, he countered that no proof could be brought from them. They were sinners, he declared, who deserved to be buried by their mother and the ruling against them by the Sages was a penalty for their misdeeds.

What was so terrible about these people to deserve such a condemnation?

They maintained thistles in their vineyard, and it is the position of Rabbi Elazar that one who does so is guilty of violating the Torah command against *kilayim* (growing different species together).

Two problems exist in understanding why this was considered a transgression. First of all, the Torah (*Vayikra 19:19*) explicitly states "You shall not sow your field *kilyaim*" which seems to limit the ban to actually sowing the foreign species in the field. The sons of Roichel did not sow the thistles in their vineyard, reports Rabbi Yehuda in the name of the Sage Shmuel. They only hesitated to remove them once they grew by themselves. The second problem is that only something customary for people to maintain is considered *kilyaim* if it grows in the vineyard or wheat field, and thistles hardly fit into this category.

Rashbam provides a solution to both problems. In regard to the issue of maintaining versus sowing, he cites a *gemara* (*Mesechta Moel Katan 2b*) which states that maintaining *kilayim* which grew by itself is also forbidden. This is based on reading the last word in that aforementioned passage's phrase banning the crossbreeding of animals as the first word of the next three-word phrase. This produces the phrase "*kilayim* in your field shall not be" which serves as a prohibition on maintenance as well as sowing.

On the question of thistles being something which people do not maintain for any purpose, Rashbam reminds us that plants grown even for animal food also create *kilayim* in a vineyard. Thistles, Rabbi Elazar points out, were grown in Arabia as food for camels. Although his position is challenged by the other Sages who held that only in the place where it is so commonly grown will thistles create *kilayim* it was Rabbi Elazar's position that thistles create *kilayim* everywhere, which convinced him that the sons of Roichel were sinners and that the ruling of the court against them in a financial matter was a penalty for their transgression.

• Bava Batra 156b

## INHERITING A BLESSING

"In the place of your fathers will be your sons. You (*Hashem*) will appoint them princes throughout the land." (*Tehillim 45:17*)

This passage is cited in our *gemara* as a blessing. But who are the fathers that it is referring to?

Maharsha takes issue with the explanations of Rashbam and other commentaries who view this as a blessing that the children of a righteous man will inherit his glory. The use of the plural term "fathers" rather than the singular "father" indicates that this is not a reference to the individual father – or inheritance – but rather to the fathers of our people and their collective descendants.

"And you shall be blessed" said Hashem to Avraham (*Bereishet 12:2*)

"And G-d blessed Yitzchak." (*ibid. 25:11*)

"And G-d appeared to Yaakov... and He blessed him." (*ibid. 35:9*)

All three of our forefathers were blessed by *Hashem*. The blessing cited above in *Tehillim* is an assurance that the blessing given to them in regard to all matters will be inherited by their descendants. The concluding part of the passage which speaks of being appointed princes refers to the promise which Hashem gave to these forefathers that He would give their descendants *Eretz Yisrael*.

(In the texts of Maharsha that we have, the passage quoted regarding the blessing of Yaakov is "He blessed him *there*" which is in *Bereishet 32:30*. The problem with this is that the blessing there was not given by Hashem, but was, as Rashi explains, a concession on the part of the patron angel of Esav that the blessings Yaakov received from his father were not the illegitimate products of deceit but rightfully belongs to him. If this is not a printing error the only reason for Maharsha preferring this source to the one in *Bereishet 35:9* is that the interpretation of that passage cited by Rashi is that it was not an ordinary blessing but rather an expression of condolence on the loss of his mother. This explanation is problematic, however, because the blessing of Yitzchak cited by Maharsha is also interpreted by Rashi as a condolence call.)

• Bava Batra 159a

## THE ONE AND ONLY

"*Hein* (behold) the fear of Hashem; that is wisdom." (*Iyov 28:28*) This word *hein* appears in our *gemara* in regard to one who makes a vow to be a *nazir* for the duration of *heina*. The Sage Sumchus

rules that he is obligated to one thirty-day period of abstinence from wine and observance of all the other laws relation to a *nazir*. Should he use the term *digon* he must be a *nazir* for sixty days -two *nazir* terms – and if he said *trigon* he took upon himself three thirty-day periods. These, explains *Tosefos*, are all Greek terms used for the numbers one, two and three.

As a source for *heina* meaning one in Greek, a *gemara* in *Masechta Shabbat* (31b) is cited by *Tosafot*. (Rashbam suggests that in the text of the early commentator Rabbeinu Chananel this section of *Masechta Shabbat* actually appears in our own *gemara*.)

There we find Rabbi Yochanan stating in the name of Rabbi Elazar that “The Sacred One, Blessed be He, has nothing in His world except for fear of Heaven”. He bases this on the above passage in *lyov* which describes the fear of Hashem as *hein*, thus indicating that this fear stands alone as Hashem’s possession in this world.

Maharsha in *Masechta Shabbat* explains this on the basis of a *gemara* in *Masechta Berachot* (33b) where Rabbi Chanina declares that “Everything is determined by Heaven except for the fear of Heaven”. Rashi there explains that everything in the human condition, whether he will be tall or short, poor or rich, wise or foolish, black or white, is all Heavenly predestined. Whether he will be righteous or a sinner, however, is not determined by Heaven but placed in his power to choose which path to follow and it is up to him to choose fear of Heaven.

This, then, is the meaning of fear of Heaven being all that Hashem possesses in His world. Of course the entire world belongs to its Creator but all that Hashem has from man, which He has left to his free choice, is the decision to live according to his fear of Heaven.

• *Bava Batra 164b*

## WHO PAYS THE BILL?

“**A**nd he shall write her a document of divorce and give it to her in her hand.” (*Devarim 24:1*) When a man wishes to divorce his wife he must write a *get* document and give it to her. Should a scribe be hired to write this *get*, it is the husband who must pay his fee. This is based on the above passage which stipulates that it is he who has the responsibility of seeing that the *get* is written.

The Sages, however, feared that a woman might sometimes be in the situation of an *agunah* (a woman who is not living with her husband but is unable to marry another because of the lack of a *get*) because of the husband’s reluctance to pay the scribe’s fee. They therefore instituted that the woman could pay the fee instead and the *get* would be a

valid one.

But how does this comply with the Torah’s insistence on the husband’s writing the *get* or paying a scribe for its writing?

This question was raised in *Masechta Gittin* (20a) in a discussion between Rabbi Chisda and the Sage Rava. The answer given was that the Sages have the power of eminent domain known as *hefker beit din hefker*. This is the power to expropriate the money or possessions of one person and transfer it to another. (The source in *Tanach* for this power is elaborately discussed in *Masechta Gittin* 36b). They employed this power in transferring to the husband ownership of the money designated by the wife for the scribe’s fee. It is therefore considered as if the husband paid the fee and satisfied the Torah’s requirement that he be responsible for the writing of the *get*.

• *Bava Batra 168a*

## A SOURCE FOR GUARANTEES

**W**hen the brothers of Yosef tried to convince their father Yaakov to let them take Binyamin with them to Egypt as they had been ordered to do by the Egyptian potentate (who, unbeknownst to them, was really Yosef), they allayed his fears for the safety of this youngest son by guaranteeing his return.

“Reuven said to his father: ‘...give him into my hand and I shall return him to you.’” (*Bereishet 42:37*)

“Yehuda said to his father Yisrael (Yaakov) ‘Send the youth with me... I shall be a guarantor for him; you can demand from me his return.’” (*ibid. 43:8-9*)

Rabbi Huna attempted to find in Yehuda’s statement a Torah source for someone verbally guaranteeing the payment of a loan extended to a borrower becoming responsible for such payment even though no formal transaction was made to finalize his commitment. This was challenged by Rabbi Chisda who pointed out that Yehuda was not an ordinary guarantor, but rather one who had taken upon himself a contractual obligation by asking for Binyamin to be *given* into his custody, which is much more binding than an ordinary guarantee. It is therefore left to Rabbi Yitzchak to cite sources from *Mishlei* as a basis for even an ordinary guarantee to be binding.

The problem which arises in regard to Rabbi Chisda’s challenge is that we do not find in the statement of Yehuda any mention of a request that Binyamin be *given* into his custody. This term appears only in the earlier statement of Reuven.

Maharsha resolves this by pointing out that it is unlikely that after Yaakov refused Reuven’s offer of a contractual

guarantee that Yehuda would dare to offer only an ordinary guarantee. Although the Torah does not explicitly mention the term “give him into my hand” by Yehuda we must infer that it was included in his guarantee just as it was in that of Reuven.

The *Sheiltot* on *Parshat Miketz*, quoted in the *Mesorat Hashas* footnotes of Rabbi Yeshaya Pik, quotes a different text for our *gemara*. Rabbi Chisda’s challenge was from the opening words of Yehuda “Send the youth with me”, which established him as the borrower of Binyamin rather than a mere guarantor, and no proof can be drawn from the obligation he thus incurred to the rule of an ordinary guarantor.

• *Bava Batra 173b*

## A SOURCE FOR MORTGAGES

When a man borrows money his property becomes mortgaged to the lender, and if he fails to repay the loan this property can be confiscated as payment. If the borrower sold the mortgaged property it can only be confiscated from the buyer if the loan was recorded in a document but not if it was merely a verbal commitment to repay.

Although there is a consensus between the Sages Ulla and Rabbah on this point – in contrast to the opinion of other Sages that the mortgage can be exercised on sold land even on a verbal loan – their reasons are not the same. Ulla’s view is that according to Torah law the mortgage applies to both documented and verbal loans. The Sages, however, decreed that it does not apply to verbal loans, in order to protect buyers who have no way of knowing that the property is mortgaged, something they are capable of hearing about once it was documented. Rabbah’s position is that according to Torah law there is never any mortgage on property that has been sold. The Sages, however, decreed that the lender can confiscate property to pay a documented loan in order not to discourage people from lending money for fear that they will have no property to collect from.

The dispute of these two Sages revolves around the interpretation of a passage in the Torah dealing with the lender’s attempt to acquire property from the borrower to secure the loan.

“When you have any sort of monetary claim against another do not enter his home to take your security. Stand outside and the man who owes you money will bring this security out to you.” (*Devarim 24:10-11*)

Ulla interpreted this as a description of the collection process, and the term *avot* literally translated as security here refers to property collected for payment on the basis of it being mortgaged. Rabbah, however, interprets it, as Rashbam points out, to mean the property seized by an agent of the court when the borrower refuses to repay his loan as a means of coercing him to honor his commitment. The Torah prohibits

both the lender and the court’s agent to enter the home of the borrower to seize an item for security. Both of them must wait outside but the court’s agent can forcibly seize the security and transfer it to the lender while the lender himself can only acquire the security from the borrower with his consent.

• *Bava Batra 175b*

## WHO WILL BE KING

The relative authority of the high rabbinical courts in *Eretz Yisrael* and Babylon in Talmudic times has its roots in the deathbed blessing which Yaakov gave to his son Yehuda.

A judge who made an honest mistake in rendering a decision in a financial lawsuit is exempt from compensating the victim of his error only if he was certified as a judge by the head of the high court. But while a judge in *Eretz Yisrael* could receive such certification from the Exilarch in Babylon or the Nassi who headed the Sanhedrin in his own country, a judge in Babylon could be certified only by the Exilarch and not by the Nassi. The reason for this is that the Exilarch in Babylon was granted authority by the Persian rulers of that country to enforce their rulings with a strong hand, including confiscation of property, a power that the Nassi did not enjoy under Roman rule.

The difference between the two was prophesied by Yaakov when he declared: (*Bereishet 49:10*) “The staff shall not depart from Yehuda nor the legislator from between his feet.”

“Staff”, say our Sages, refers to the greater power of the Exilarchs in Babylon, and “legislator” applies to the descendants of Hillel who, in the role of Nassi, taught Torah to the public but enjoyed lesser power than their Babylonian counterparts. Both Exilarch and Nassi, however, were from the Tribe of Yehuda for it was designated by the patriarch as the source of royalty.

In his commentary on Torah, Ramban points out that Yaakov’s blessing was no guarantee that there would always be rulers from the Tribe of Yehuda, even in the limited form of Exilarch and Nassi. It was only a directive that whenever Jews enjoy power that it be vested in the hands of that tribe. The first Jewish king, Saul, was not from the Tribe of Yehuda because Hashem looked unfavorably upon the request of the people for a king during the lifetime of the Prophet Shmuel who amply filled the role of leader and therefore provided them with a king from another tribe whose reign was short-lived. Those who ruled over the breakaway Kingdom of Yisrael violated Yaakov’s directive and were punished for it. Even the Hasmoneans, whom Ramban describes as “supreme saints who were responsible for the perpetuation of Torah and Mitzvot in Israel”, were wiped out by Herod as punishment for holding on to the throne and not restoring it to the Tribe of Yehuda.

• *Sanhedrin 5a*

## BLENDING JUSTICE AND CHARITY

King David is praised (*Shmuel II* 8:15) for his administration of “justice and charity for all of his people”. How do we reconcile justice and charity? ask our Sages, for it is obvious that where strict justice is executed there is no room for charity and vice versa. Several approaches are offered, explaining this apparent paradox.

Rabbi Yehosua ben Korcho saw in this passage a support for his position that in dealing with a financial lawsuit it is proper for the judge to attempt reaching a compromise between the litigants. In this way justice was done by David with no one suffering a total loss, an action which can be viewed as charity as well.

The son of Rabbi Yossi Hagalili, who opposed the idea of a judge seeking compromise rather than strict justice, offered an alternative approach. When David judged a case in which the loser was a poor man he reimbursed him from his own money.

Rebbie (Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi) had a problem with this explanation. The passage states that the charity of David was in regard to “all of his people” and not to the poor alone. He therefore suggests that even without reimbursement David was capable of effecting both justice and charity while judging a case according to the strict rules of judgment. Justice was performed in awarding the money involved to its rightful owner and it was an act of charity to the loser who was relieved of the guilt of holding on to money which did not belong to him.

In regard to this last approach Maharsha notes that although this description of David’s administration of justice was no different than that of any judge, the passage calls attention to it as the merit which enabled David’s general, Yoav ben Tzeruya, to lead his army in triumph as Rabbi Abba bar Kahana (*Sanhedrin* 49a) points out on the basis of this passage’s concluding words.

• *Sanhedrin 6b*

## CORPORAL AS CAPITAL

The four categories of capital punishment assigned for violations of Torah prohibitions occupy a major part of the *mesechta* we are now learning. In order to decide on a capital case a court of twenty-three judges is required.

Not every violation of a Torah prohibition, however, is punishable by death. A large number of prohibitions carry with them only a penalty of lashes.

In regard to the number of judges required for ruling on a case of corporal punishment there is a difference of opinion between Rabbi Yishmael and the other Talmudic Sages. Whereas only three judges are required by these Sages it is Rabbi Yishmael’s position that twenty-three are required just as in capital cases.

While the Sage Abaye explains Rabbi Yishmael’s position on the use of the word *rasha* (sinner) both in regard to lashes (*Devarim* 25:2) and death penalty (*Bamidbar* 35:31), the Sage Rava offers a logical explanation. “The penalty of lashes,” he

says, “stands in place of the death penalty.”

One understanding of this cryptic explanation is that in the administering of lashes there is the possibility of the sinner dying from the blows despite the fact that a medical examination was required to determine how many lashes he can endure and survive. This is the possibility referred to in *Mesechta Makkot* (22b) which exempts the lasher from exile if he unwittingly causes the sinner to die.

This approach is difficult, however, to reconcile with the flow of the *gemara*. The one favored by Rashi and Tosefot is that Rabbi Yishmael viewed a sinner’s crime as deserving of death because he violated the prohibition of his Creator. Lashes must therefore be viewed as a fifth, but milder, category of capital punishment which, due to the lesser severity of the sin, still allows the sinner to remain alive.

• *Sanhedrin 10a*

## “SHALL I BE YOUR INFORMER!”

After his miraculous triumph over the mighty fortress city of Jericho, Yehoshua sent a force to attack the much smaller city of Ai. This time the Israelites were shamefully repulsed, suffering a loss of three dozen soldiers.

Upon receiving the report on this totally unexpected setback Yehoshua and the elders prostrated themselves, rent their garments and placed dust upon their heads as they cried out to Heaven. Only after Yehoshua expressed his fear that this defeat would encourage the Canaanites and the other nations in *Eretz Yisrael* to wipe out the invading Israelites and thus bring dishonor to Hashem who had promised them the land did Hashem reveal the reason for the setback.

“Israel has sinned” (*Yehoshua* 7:11), came the revelation. They had been guilty of appropriating some of the spoils of Jericho which Yehoshua had consecrated for the exclusive use of the Sanctuary, and Hashem declared that He would not assist the people in their battles until this sin was rectified.

“Who was the sinner?” asked Yehoshua.

“Shall I be your informer?” was Hashem’s response, which was accompanied by a directive to cast lots among all the tribes in order to determine who the culprit was. The lots were cast and Achan was identified as the sinner who had brought tragedy upon his people and duly executed.

An important lesson was conveyed by Hashem in his refusal to divulge the identity of the sinner. It was a foregone conclusion that a heaven-directed casting of lots would inevitably reveal his identity. Nevertheless, Hashem preferred to give the initial impression of collective responsibility by declaring “Israel has sinned” rather than embarrass the actual sinner by directly informing upon him. This example guided saintly men and sages in later generations in risking their own reputations in order to avoid shaming the sinner within their company. It also served as the source for our people’s revulsion to informers.

• *Sanhedrin 11a*

## PARSHA Q&A?

### **Nitzavim**

1. What is the connection between the verse “*atem nitzavim*” and the curses in the previous *parsha*?
2. Who were the wood-choppers and water-carriers?
3. Why can Hashem never “swap” the Jewish people for another nation?
4. One who ignores the Torah’s warnings “adds drunkenness to thirst.” What does this mean?
5. What two cities were destroyed along with Sedom and Amarah?
6. “The hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d, and the revealed things are for us...” What does this mean?
7. According to Rashi, how will the day of the ingathering of the exiles be “great and difficult?”
8. Where is the Torah not to be found? Where is it to be found?
9. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other’s sins?
10. How do the earth and sky remind us to keep the mitzvot?

### **Vayelech**

1. Moshe said, “I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in...” How do we know this does not refer to physical inability?
2. Which of Moshe’s statements to Yehoshua was later contradicted by Hashem’s command?
3. Why does the Torah refer to Succot of the eighth year as though it occurred during the *shemita* year?
4. Why does the Torah command that babies be brought to the Torah reading?
5. What does it mean that Hashem “hides His face?”
6. What function does the song *Ha’azinu* serve?
7. Which verse promises that the Torah will never be totally forgotten?
8. What is the difference of opinion regarding the placing of the Torah scroll which Moshe gave the *levi’im*?
9. On the day of Moshe’s death, why didn’t Moshe gather the people by blowing trumpets as he normally would have?
10. Moshe said, “For I know that after my death you will act corruptly,” but, in fact, this didn’t occur until after Yehoshua’s death. What does this teach us?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Nitzavim/Vayelech’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

### **Nitzavim**

1. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, “Who can survive such curses?” Moshe responded, “You’ve done a lot to anger Hashem, and yet — “*atem nitzavim*” — you’re still standing before Him.”
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who joined the Jewish People under false pretenses.
3. 29:12 - Because Hashem swore to their ancestors that He would never do so.
4. 29:18 - He causes Hashem to reckon his unintentional sins alongside his intentional ones, punishing him for all.
5. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
6. 29:28 - There is collective culpability only for “open” sins, but not for “hidden” ones.
7. 30: 3 - It will be as if Hashem needs to take each individual by the hand and lead him out of exile.
8. 30:12-15 - The Torah is not found in heaven nor across the ocean. Rather, it is “very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart.”
9. 30:28 - When they crossed the Jordan and accepted the oath on Mt. Eval and Mt. Grizim.
10. 30:19 - The earth and heavenly bodies, although receiving neither reward nor punishment, always obey Hashem’s will. How much more should we, who stand to receive reward or punishment, obey Hashem.

### **Vayelech**

1. 31:2 - Because verse 34:7 says “His (Moshe’s) eye never dimmed, and his (youthful) moisture never departed.”
2. 31:7 - Moshe told Yehoshua to share his leadership with the Elders. Hashem later commanded Yehoshua to rule alone.
3. 31:10 - Because the laws of the seventh year still apply to the harvest.
4. 31:12 - To give reward to those who bring them.
5. 31:17 - He ignores their distress.
6. 31:21 - It warns what will befall the Jewish People if they abandon Torah.
7. 31:21 - “For (the Torah) will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring.”
8. 31:26 - Whether it was placed outside but adjacent to the Ark, or inside next to the Tablets.
9. 31:28 - Blowing the trumpets expressed Moshe’s dominion, and “there is no dominion on the day of death.” (*Kohelet* 8)
10. 31:29 - That a person’s student is as dear to him as himself — As long as Yehoshua was alive, it was as though Moshe himself were alive.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

### Ha'azinu

1. Why were heaven and earth specifically chosen as witnesses?
2. How is the Torah like rain?
3. How is Hashem "faithful without injustice"?
4. Why is Hashem called "tzaddik"?
5. How many major floods did Hashem bring upon the world?
6. What group of people does the Torah call "fathers"? Cite an example.
7. Why did Hashem separate the world's nations into exactly 70?
8. Why is the merit of the Jewish People's ancestry called a "rope"?
9. How is Hashem's behavior toward the Jewish People like an eagle's behavior toward its offspring?
10. Regarding the Jewish People's punishment, Hashem says "I will spend my arrows on them." What is the positive aspect of this phrase?
11. How does the idea of "chillul Hashem" prevent the nations from destroying the Jewish People?
12. What will happen to the nations that conquer the Jewish People?
13. When Hashem overturns a nation that persecutes the Jewish People, His attribute of Mercy is "replaced" by which attribute?
14. When Hashem punishes the heathen nations, for whose sins does He exact punishment?
15. How will Hashem's punishment change the way the nations view the Jewish People?
16. On what day was *Ha'azinu* taught to the Jewish People?
17. Verse 32:44 calls Yehoshua "Hoshea." Why?
18. In verse 32:47, what does "it is not empty from you" mean?
19. Why did Hashem tell Moshe that he would die a similar death to that of Aharon?
20. If Moshe had spoken to the rock rather than striking it, what would the Jewish People have learned?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Ha'azinu's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 32:1 - They endure forever.
2. 32:2 - The Torah gives life and promotes growth like rain.
3. 32:4 - He is "faithful" by rewarding the righteous, and "without injustice" by rewarding even the wicked for any good deeds.
4. 32:4 - All will agree that His judgments are righteous.
5. 32:7 - Two. One in the time of Adam's grandson Enosh and one in the time of Noach.
6. 32:7 - The Prophets. Elisha called the Prophet Eliyahu "My Father." (*Melachim II 2:12*).
7. 32:8 - To correspond to the 70 *Bnei Yisrael* who entered Egypt.
8. 32:9 - Their merit is "woven from" the merits of the *Avot*.
9. 32:12 - He mercifully wakes them gently, hovering over them, and carrying them on His "wings."
10. 32:23 - "The arrows will be spent" implies that the afflictions will cease but the Jewish People will not.
11. 32:27 - The nations would attribute their success to their might and the might of their gods. Hashem would not let His name be desecrated like this.
12. 32:35 - They will eventually be punished.
13. 32:41 - His attribute of Justice.
14. 32:42 - For their sins and the sins of their ancestors.
15. 32:43 - They will view the Jewish People as praiseworthy for cleaving to Hashem.
16. 32:44 - The Shabbat upon which Moshe died.
17. 32:44 - To indicate that although he was the Jewish People's leader, he still maintained a humble bearing.
18. 32:47 - That you will receive reward for studying Torah and that there is nothing meaningless in the Torah.
19. 32:50 - Because Moshe wanted this.
20. 32:51 - The Jewish People would have reasoned as follows: If a rock, which receives neither reward nor punishment, obeys Hashem's commands, all the more so should they.

## AWE-FULL MARRIAGE

**Amy wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Why are marriages not encouraged during the Days of Awe between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?*

Dear Amy,

While there is no prohibition against marrying between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, it is customary to refrain from doing so. Because these are days of judgment, we want to direct our primary energies towards repentance: Reflecting on our performance during the past year, and taking steps to improve.

Once, before Yom Kippur, the famed Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer saw one of his students buying an etrog, one of the four species needed for the Succot festival occurring shortly after Yom Kippur.

"Repentance you have achieved already?" Rabbi Blazer asked him.

His point was that, unless you have attained perfection of character, you should direct your primary focus towards repentance during these days, and leave other matters for after Yom Kippur.

## ROSH HASHANA IN A SCHNAPPS GLASS

**David from Pittsburgh, PA wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Could you email me a brief description of Rosh Hashana? I would like to use it for my web page.*

Dear David,

The first day of Tishrei is called "a day of shofar blasting" (Numbers 29:1). Our oral tradition tells us that this day marks the anniversary of the creation of the world. Hence it is the day when, every year, G-d "takes stock" of Creation, judging our actions. Thus, we call it Rosh Hashana, the "Head" of the Year; for just as the head directs the body, so too, G-d's judgment on Rosh Hashana directs the events of the coming year.

Rosh Hashana is a two-day festival which we honor and enjoy with special (new) clothing and festive meals. There is a prohibition against certain types of work. We light holiday candles and recite kiddush over wine. We eat sweet apples dipped in honey, in prayer that we merit a good, sweet year. The highlight of the daily prayer service is the sounding of the shofar, the ram's horn.

For more, see Ohr Somayach Interactive, our web site, particularly the following: <http://www.ohr.edu/special/roshhash>. There's lot's there. Feel free to link your site to as many articles and features as you like.

## PHYSICAL FITNESS

**Anon from Australia wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*What is the rationale behind the prohibition of not wearing*

*leather shoes on Yom Kippur?*

Dear Anon,

The shoe symbolizes the physical body. Just as the shoe encases the lowest part of the body and allows it to ambulate in the world, so too the body encases the lowest level of the soul and allows it to ambulate and relate to the physical world.

Therefore, whenever G-d wants a person to relate on a totally spiritual level, ignoring the body, He commands him to remove his shoes. This was true when G-d spoke to Moses and to Joshua; it was true for the kohanim in the Temple in Jerusalem, and it is true for every Jew on Yom Kippur. We ignore the physical for one day a year, and to symbolize this we remove our leather shoes. Leather specifically, because it came from a living creature and hence symbolizes the body in a much more graphic way than other materials.

The shoe is also removed in a ceremony called "chalitzah," as follows: If one of two brothers dies childless, it is a mitzvah for the widow and the surviving brother to marry each other. If the brother refuses, then the widow is to remove his shoe, signifying that he does not deserve physical comfort or even a body, because he refuses to give a physical form to his deceased brother's soul.

## RING AROUND THE SHOFAR

**Jeffery Gold from Stamford, CT wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*There is a practice I have seen in many synagogues during the High Holidays for children to come up to the bimah for the blowing of the shofar. Where does this come from?*

Dear Jeffrey Gold,

It is an expansion of the custom to bring the children to the synagogue in order to educate them in the practicing of mitzvot. They come closer so they can more easily see and hear the shofar. However, if this practice causes a disturbance it should be abolished.

## PAYING FOR PRAYING

**John from Sweden wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Synagogue fees: Is it in accordance with Jewish law to take fees from local Jews just to attend the synagogue?*

Dear John,

It is certainly the accepted norm to pay a membership fee to the synagogue in which one prays.

First of all, paying fosters a stronger sense of communal spirit; when a person pays for something, he comes to value it more than had he received it for free. Paying a synagogue fee tends to make a person feel more a part of the community.

But on a practical note, synagogues have tremendous

expenses: Books, rent or mortgage, electricity, heat, water, furniture, cleaning supplies, structural maintenance, salaries, social services, etc. Who is supposed to pay for it all, if not the people who avail themselves of the synagogue's services? Even if charitable donors pay for many of these costs, why shouldn't each participant also contribute to the remaining costs according to his/her ability?

(Note: The above is a general description of the appropriateness of paying synagogue fees; it isn't a definitive ruling regarding any specific case. Rulings in such matters should be sought from a rabbi or adjudicating body (beit din) personally familiar with the claims of both parties.)

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 163:1

## THE CIRCLE DANCE

Matthew from Silver Spring, Maryland wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why do we have the custom of dancing round and round in a circle on Simchat Torah? Why not a "square dance" for a change? (Just kidding.)

Dear Matthew,

The mystics teach us that G-d's Unity is revealed in this world to the extent that there is unity amongst His ambassadors in this world, the Jewish People. When His ambassadors are united, G-d's presence is detected unmistakably.

One of Judaism's great gifts to mankind is the verse in the Torah — "And you will love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) When we love each other and we are gen-

uinely happy for our friends' successes, this causes a greater perception of G-d in the world. When we do the reverse — when we see ourselves in a dog-eat-dog world — we take a step down towards the canine world. We lose that G-dly radiance which shows that He made us in His image.

On *Simchat Torah* we complete the annual reading of the Torah. As soon as we finish the last verse, we start again at the beginning. Without a break. We read the Torah in a continuous cycle because the circle is a symbol of eternity. It goes on forever. It is eternal, just as the One who gave us the Torah is Eternal.

The circle symbolizes eternity. It starts nowhere and it finishes nowhere. The circle is also a symbol of equality. Every point in the circle is equidistant from its center.

There is an ancient Jewish custom to dance for hours around the *bima* (lectern) on *Simchat Torah* — the festival on which we celebrate the completion of the yearly Torah cycle. This circle of dancing symbolizes the eternity of the Torah and its Author.

The mystics tell us that in the next world the righteous will make a circle around G-d. And they will dance around and around Him just like we do around the *bima* on *Simchat Torah*. There will be many different kinds of Jews represented there: Jews from Iran and Jews from Indianapolis. There will be Jews of all colors and from all walks of life. There will be those who, while keeping faith with unbroken tradition, strongly differ in the emphasis in their service of the Creator. There will be *Chassidim* and *Litvaks*, *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim*. As they dance in that circle they will all realize that you can be 180° away from your neighbor and yet you can still be equidistant from the center, from G-d.

Sources:

- Rabbi Zev Leff and others

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

## DAVID - THE DIGNITY OF CLOTHES

“King David grew old and the garments which covered him failed to give him warmth.” (*Melachim I, 1:1*)

Thus begins *Sefer Melachim*, the first Book of Kings.

An interesting explanation is provided by our Talmudic Sages as to why heavenly intervention denied David the material warmth which clothes supply. Anyone who shows a lack of respect for clothes, they state, will in the end not benefit from them.

This is a reference to an incident preceding



David's reign as king. Fleeing from King Saul, who saw him as a rival, David found refuge in a cave in the wilderness area of Ein Gedi. When Saul entered that very cave alone for relaxation, David had an opportunity to slay his royal adversary. He contented himself instead with secretly snipping off the edge of the king's coat in order to later prove that such an opportunity had been waived out of loyalty.

It was this lack of respect for the dignity of clothes which boomeranged against him at the end of his days.

continued from page one

heavens.” However the Torah tells him that really “it is very near to you.” If you just give the spiritual dominion over the physical, then “it is in your mouth and your heart to do it.”

These words illustrate the enormous potential of man. In one second, he can rise to the heights by bringing Torah into his mouth and his heart, by bringing the furthest thing in the world close to him: In a split second, a thought can transport him from languishing in shadow to basking in great light; to being elevated to the loftiest heights. Surely - “it is not hidden from you.”

## RESTING IN THE HEART

“And Moshe went and spoke these words to all Yisrael” (31:1)

Why doesn't the Torah tell us where Moshe went? In every Jew throughout the ages, there is a little spark of Moshe Rabbeinu. That's where Moshe went. That was his resting place. Thus the end of the verse: “And Moshe went (and spoke these words) to all Yisrael.”

Maybe that is one of the reasons that no one knows where Moshe is buried, because Moshe's final resting place is in the heart of every Jew.

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

### Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

When the Creator judges all Mankind on Rosh Hashana we stand in awe. Do we also stand in awe when it comes to judging others as in the following story sent to Ohrnet?

### A FAIR MESS

A friend related the following story to me. A number of details have been changed, but the message still comes through strong.

“A young, foreign couple lived in our neighborhood, and it was obvious that the family was experiencing financial difficulty. The children were dressed in well worn clothing, clearly hand-me-downs. The mother's sheitel looked like it had lived well past its usefulness. No one understood how the family coped.

Though the father seemed to have a regular and full schedule, he was the model husband that all other frustrated wives pointed at. Since they did not have a car, he took care of all the shopping and errands on foot. His wife probably did not know where the garbage dumpster was, because he was always the one carting down heaps and piles of bags.

He was embarrassed to be seen in the laundry room, especially with the other young women who sat and discussed home, children and work as they sorted and folded laundry. The neighbors who lived on the first floor told of nocturnal visits he made to the basement late at night, armed with a Torah book, to sit

out the laundry vigil in peace and solitude.

Now it is very commendable when spouses cooperate in home management, but he seemed to be shouldering an unfair measure. His wife obviously did not work, since she had no work papers. However, as we sometimes wondered to ourselves, there were ways to earn a little money on the side; for instance by babysitting, which was always in demand.

We sometimes considered broaching the matter with her as we sat outside watching the children play. Seeing her easygoing nature, our questions as to why she didn't shoulder more of the home and the financial burden grew.

Personally, I was upset at her for blithely allowing her family to live in semi-squalor and hardship, when a solution was so easy to find. However, I never said anything to her, and in hindsight, I was very grateful for my ability to control my curiosity.

All questions were answered when the pharmacy mistakenly delivered a prescription to my house, intended for hers. It was an innocent mistake, made by a replacement delivery boy. I noticed the drug on the label even before I realized that it was not for me. It was a strong anti-depressant, and very expensive to boot. The name rang a bell from the years I worked as a medical secretary. I gulped at the knowledge because no one had taken such a scenario into account.

Never judge anyone, because you never know all the circumstances.”

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# STRATEGIC TESHUVA

## Creative Ways to Make Yourself Do the “Right Thing”

BY RABBI DOVID GOTTLIEB

**W**e all have some bad *midot* (character traits) and some bad habits. When we consider doing *teshuvah* for them, we are apt to think as follows: “I am really out of control. Why do I do those terrible things? I should be stronger! How can I increase my self-control so that I can overcome those strains, temptations, etc.?”

That sort of thinking can be useful. But it is not the only helpful approach. Another attack is this: “When do I fail like this? What is there in the environment? What else has happened that day? Under which *specific circumstances* do I fail? And, ...what can I do to *change those circumstances*?” The technique of changing the circumstances in which we generally fail is what I call “Strategic Teshuva.”

*Midot* and habits generally have “triggers.” For example, certain people provoke an angry, aggressive response. Other people may not pose a problem. Or the “trigger” might be specific activities, such as driving in heavy traffic (“road rage”), caring for fighting siblings, waiting in lines at the bus terminal, filling out government forms, and so on.

The same is true for other temptations. Laziness comes naturally when one is surrounded by computer games, bad literature, inviting beaches and - most important - other lazy people. (A boy from Los Angeles told me it took him six years to get his bachelor’s degree because certain courses interfered with his beach schedule!) Illicit pleasures attract most strongly when they are readily available and when others in the neighborhood indulge.

Our first responsibility is for our *actions*. When the “triggers” of the bad habits and *midot* occur, it is extremely difficult to stop the habits and *midot* from acting. One solution is to try to

*avoid the triggers*. Change the environment. Move your residence if you can. If you can’t, spend as much time in another environment which will provide respite from the temptation. (The most effective positive environment is doing *mitzvot* with other people: Learn *in a beit midrash*, visit the hospital *with others*, plan a *chesed* project *with others*, teach Torah *in a school*, etc.) Certain activities cause tension which triggers anger. If you cannot avoid those activities, alternate with relaxing activities.

A second solution is to *add* something to the environment which will make it easier to do the right thing. If you have trouble getting up for *davening* in shul, make a study partner for ten minutes before *davening*. Then, when the alarm rings and you reach over to push the snooze button, you will think: “But what if my study partner comes and I’m not there?! How embarrassing!” - and you will get up!

In many cases you can make a contract with yourself: If I succeed in overcoming the temptation (enough times) then I will allow myself something I very much enjoy. This is what psychologists call a “behavior contract.” Thus I have a personal incentive to do the right thing. For example: “If I get through the meeting without getting angry, I will allow myself to buy that picture for the wall/go to that restaurant/etc.”

*The key is to control the environment by avoiding some things and creatively adding others so that it will be easier to do the right thing.*

Now, some people think that this cannot be right. This means that we are only running away from our problems, not solving them! The problem is precisely this: I am not able to *overcome* those temptations. How do I solve that problem? By *avoiding* them, or by

adding extra incentives?

There are two answers. First, who says that the only problem is to overcome the desire? On the contrary: Our first responsibility is for our *actions*. Suppose someone cannot control a desire to steal from Macy’s. If he shops only in Bloomingdale’s, or he rewards himself for not stealing from Macy’s, he has not overcome the desire - but at least he is not stealing!

Second, often we can only overcome the desire if we have a respite from the wrong actions. As long as the bad habits and *midot* are active it is very difficult to gain control.

Therefore, avoiding the triggers and adding payoffs may be the only way to gain control. Yes, the *ultimate* goal is to become immune to the temptations. But this may require two stages: First avoiding the triggers and adding payoffs; and then developing the psychological strength to resist. Trying to do without the first stage may make the second stage impossible.

Think of addictions. You cannot simply tell the addict: “Stop using that stuff!” He can’t stop, and all the therapy in the world will not help *while he is still on the drug*. But if he enters a sanitarium where the drug is unavailable, then the therapy can help him become immune to the temptation to use drugs.

Strategic *teshuvah* may thus be the necessary first step to complete *teshuvah*. But it is more than that. If that is all that you can manage at the moment, then strategic *teshuvah* is enough to gain *kappara* (atonement). Hashem does not ask more of us than we can do. If you avoid the triggers, add incentives and start to work on immunity, then in the meantime you have *kappara* for all the past mistakes even before you achieve immunity. Isn’t that worth it?

# NINE ELEVEN AND SEVEN TEN

## Reflections on Twin Towers and Twin Dates

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

9/11, '01 is a date which entered history alongside July 4, '76 and Dec. 7, '41 as milestones in the long struggle of the American people to achieve independence and freedom from tyranny for themselves and the rest of the world.

7/10, '49 is an even more important date for the Jewish People. It refers to the tenth day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar and designates the first Yom Kippur in the 2,449th year of the world since creation.

What do these two dates, more than three millennia apart, have in common?

9/11 woke up the free world to the awful threat posed by the axis of evil and the need to eradicate that evil even if it meant going to war.

7/10 was the day when the battle of the Jewish People against another sort of evil was crowned with victory as G-d declared that He had forgiven them for their betrayal in worshipping the golden calf.

This day was divinely determined as the Yom Kippur Day of Atonement on which Jews would each year fast, repent their sins and pray for forgiveness. In the time of the Holy Temple it was also a day of special sacrifices and rituals for the purpose of achieving such atonement.

There is an important parallel between these two dates and the battles they represent. As Jews who view all of history as a divinely directed scenario, we perceive every event – the “days of infamy” from Pearl Harbor to Twin Towers and religious terrorism from Inquisition to Intifada – as heavenly alarms to arouse us from our slumbers and eradicate the evil that lurks within our hearts. The awful form which that alarm takes is a reflection of our own shortcomings so that we may be aware of where we have gone wrong. The great thinkers

of the Torah world have applied this theme to the broad scope of Jewish history and the experience of all mankind.

It may therefore be fair to speculate that the terror which shocked America and the world on 9/11 is a magnified reflection of the terror which exists in the civilized world and the universal indifference which individuals and governments display towards it. There is no need to seek this terror only in the robberies and murders which form a blot on all societies. Is the rampant abuse of spouses and children not a form of terror? Is drunken and reckless driving which claim more lives than the attacks of terrorists not a form of terror?

And is condemning the self-defense actions of a Jewish State fighting for survival against the worst kind of terror not a form of complicity with terror?

Yom Kippur – 7/10 – is the climax of a ten-day period of soul-searching and self-improvement which begins with the Rosh Hashana New Year. On that day the sound of the Shofar ram horn is heard in synagogues throughout the world. As Maimonides points out, the Shofar sound is a siren to wake us up to the need to take stock of our lives and improve our ways.

Of course those who perpetrate evil must be battled, and President Bush is to be commend-

ed for his staunch commitment to this cause. But each of us must strive to eliminate the evil within our own lives and our own societies. We all pray for the victory of the forces of freedom in the war against terror launched by the tragedy of 9/11. But we also pray that our efforts to eliminate the terror within us will result in the divine declaration made on the first 7/10 and echoed every Yom Kippur:

“I have forgiven you as you requested.”

■

**“We pray that our efforts to eliminate the terror within us will result in the divine declaration made on the first 7/10 and echoed every Yom Kippur.”**

■

# When Less is More

BY RABBI REUVEN LAUFFER

Last year after some home improvements, I set out to buy some new boards to build the walls of my *Succah* (the temporary hut that Jews live in for seven days during the Festival of *Sukkot*). Not only had my *Succah* area doubled but, due to the way the construction had been done, the original boards that I had always used in the past were now too tall. So off I went to look for some new ones. Living in Jerusalem there was no problem finding cheap *Succah* boards for sale. In fact, the area that I ended up in seemed to consist of one carpentry shop after another, each storefront graced with a huge pile of boards ready to be carted away and built into someone's *Succah*.

And that is when the trouble began.

Every board was exactly the same height. One of the reasons that they were so cheap is because they were all of uniform dimensions, mass produced by a machine. Each one cut in exactly the same way and completely indistinguishable from the next. Which meant that for my needs they were all too tall.

At this point it really didn't occur to me that this might end up being a particularly difficult exercise. I approached one of the stores and asked the owner if he could cut boards for me according to my specifications. Nothing seemed to be a problem so I excitedly started explaining to him how many boards I needed and how tall they had to be. At first I rather naively thought that my boards, being about a third shorter than the ones being sold, were going to cost a third less than the going rate for the standard size, so you can imagine my amazement when the storekeeper quoted me a price that was almost double the regular price! Not wanting to pay any more than I had to I asked around in some of the other stores and, more or less, I got the same answer everywhere. It transpires that in the mysterious world of *Succah* boards less is actually more!

Not having any real alternative, I went back to the first store and made my order. A few days later I returned to collect my newly shortened boards, bring them home and begin putting them all together.

It was, in my humble opinion, a very beautiful and spacious *Succah*. We enjoyed every moment that we spent

in it. We ate all our meals in it, learned Torah in it, had lots of guests in it and we slept in it each night. My children especially enjoyed lying down on their camp beds in the darkness looking at the twinkling stars that peeked through the "holey" covering serving as a roof.

Late one night while I was sitting in the *Succah* it suddenly occurred to me that sometimes the world of *Mitzvot* (Commandments) and the world of *Succah* boards coincide with each other. We are commanded every year to leave our permanent homes and spend a week in a temporary abode. What is the reason? Among other things it is to instill in us an appreciation that ultimately almost everything in this physical world of ours is transient. That the only commodities that have eternal value are G-d's commandments. We pick ourselves up and leave the comfort and the safety of our homes to spend a week living that concept in its entirety so that when we finally move back into our homes at the end of *Sukkot* we are supposed to have absorbed that lesson.

Who doesn't want a beautiful residence? The Torah's description of such a dwelling is a house dedicated to fulfilling G-d's commandments. A home to invite guests to and introduce them to the indescribable grandeur of Shabbat and the Festivals. A place that is permeated with *gemilut chasadim* (kind deeds). That rings with the sound of Torah. Somewhere that serves as a magnet for those who want to taste and experience what it means to truly live the commandments.

What *Sukkot* and the *Succah* are teaching us is that to build such a palace requires that we take a "time out" from the physical world so that we can remember where all our blessings really come from. We divest ourselves of some of our material trappings so that we can recognize just how close we really are to G-d. For the whole week of *Sukkot* we leave the creature comforts behind for the "Spartan wilds" of our *Succah* and we bask in the knowledge that G-d is watching over us. Why bother? So that when we finally return to our homes it will be with the knowledge that G-d watches over us there as well.

What that means is that in the long run – less really does become more!

# The Curse of Happiness

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

On Succot you will hold the four species. . . “And you will rejoice before Hashem .”

**N**apoleon wasn't a great sleeper. He would make do on a couple of hours a day. Not that he was an insomniac, he just didn't like sleeping. Someone once asked him why it was that he slept so little. He replied “When I'm awake, I'm the king of the world. When I'm asleep, I'm no different from any other foot soldier.”

One of the great tyrannies of the “me generation” is the curse of happiness. Don't get me wrong. I'm not against happiness. I like being happy as much as anyone. However, happiness, or the necessity to be happy, can be a tyranny of frightening proportions.

If we believe in an all-merciful G-d who is involved with the smallest detail of the creation, then our lack of happiness is not a world-shaking event. G-d knows why I'm feeling the way I'm feeling. He knows why I broke my leg. He knows why my stocks had to plummet. But if I'm all that there is, if the knowledge of existence ends with the knowledge of *only* my existence, then this world is a very lonely place indeed.

There's an old joke that goes something like this: “Everyone in this world is crazy except you and me. And sometimes I'm not so sure about you.” If the cognition of existence, “*Cogito ergo sum*” (“*I think therefore I am*”), as Descartes put it, leads me to exclude an existence higher than my myself, then my happiness becomes an event on which the world turns or falls. In other words, if I am not happy and fulfilled right now, this world just became a pointless wasteland.

Of all the *mitzvot* which one would you think the most difficult? Probably giving up your life to sanctify G-d's name. In fact, the Vilna Gaon said that the most difficult of the *mitzvot* is the mitzva of *simchat Yom Tov*, the Torah obligation be happy on the festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. With most *mitzvot* we fulfill our obligation by doing an action. We put on tefilin, we eat matza on the first night of Pesach, we refrain from eating of Yom Kippur. The mitzva of *simchat Yom Tov*, however, requires us to be *constantly* happy during Yom Tov. There should not be a single moment when we are not filled with the joy of the

festival. Now, I ask you, was there ever a time when you were *constantly* happy for one whole week? How about a day? An hour? Maybe. And in that hour, wasn't there a single second that you couldn't find the correct change in your pocket, or you felt a little tired for a second or two? Or maybe for a split second you felt a little blue? *Constant* happiness? That's a very difficult thing to achieve.

However, the Torah wasn't given to the angels. It was given to flesh and blood. If the Torah mandates this constant happiness from us, it must be achievable.

The mitzva of *simchat Yom Tov* is derived from Succot. “*And you will rejoice on your festival and you will be only happy.*” Our sages describe Succot as “the time of our happiness.” Succot is “*the* time of our happiness.” What is the particular essence of Succot that makes it *the* time of happiness?

Most of our lives we think we're running the show. We may acknowledge there's a G-d in the world. But do we really live in accordance with that acknowledgment? Acknowledgment doesn't translate into knowledge. Once in a while something can happen to jolt our self-satisfaction. Someone is critically ill. We escape a car crash. A terrorist aims a gun at us and it doesn't fire. The word miracle leaps to our lips. We suddenly find ourselves very close to G-d. The little selfish universe that we have built for ourselves seems now somehow pathetic and childish. We know Who is running things. And how much we are beholden to Him.

This is the essence of Succa. Dwelling in the shade of faith. Realizing Who is protecting us. For seven days we emerge from our World Trade Towers of delusion and dwell in huts and booths and we realize how fragile we really are.

That feeling that only G-d is running the world is the only true and lasting happiness. When we realize that we are not the be-all and end-all of existence, that we are loved and highly-prized cogs in an infinite plan, we can relax and acknowledge Who is running things in this world. That's the true joy and happiness of the Jewish Festivals.

Have a good Yom Tov!