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Individualism vs. Collectivism

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

If given the choice, would you sacrifice your own goals, dreams, and desires for the sake of your family or the welfare of your group? Dutch social psychologist, Geert Hofstede, conducted pioneering work in the field of cross-cultural psychology, analyzing the differences between different types of cultures. Two essential elements of his work include characterizing individualist versus collectivist cultures. Individualist cultures—such as the United States and Western Europe—tend to value independence, autonomy, and uniqueness. In contrast, collectivist cultures—typified by East Asian countries—value group membership and harmony over the expression of one’s personal values or opinions.

Does the Jewish tradition fit into an individualist or a collectivist framework?

One of the classical sources that suggests a collectivist trend within Jewish thought is rooted in the passage of rebuke found in Parshat Bechukotai. In what was meant as a haunting description of destruction, the Torah states that even with no one pursuing them, Am Yisrael will run away in such a panic that they will stumble over one another (Vayikra 26:37). In this imagery of people stumbling over each other, the Sages find an allusion to the idea that all of Israel is responsible for one another: “kol Yisrael areivim ze bazeh.” This principle has ramifications for several laws, but also serves as a deeper ethical, spiritual, and metaphysical message of collective responsibility. Through the challenges and the celebrations, we are in this together. That notion generates moral and religious responsibilities towards one another.

Yet, despite this and other indications tending towards categorizing Torah as a collectivist system, we find several individualistic notions within Torah, as well. As an example, every individual is obligated to say, “the world was created for me.” In addition, an individual is not allowed to be sacrificed for the sake of saving the community, and one is obligated to

save oneself before saving somebody else.

Not fitting well into either paradigm, it becomes clear that Jewish thought contains both collectivist and individualist impulses. As Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik explains in his essay, *The Community*: “The greatness of man manifests itself in his inner contradiction, in his dialectical nature, in his being single and unrelated to anyone, as well as in his being thou-related and belonging to a community structure.” The different sources that push and pull in different directions reflect this tension that requires us to balance the individual and collective components of our natures.

This blended balance of individualism and collectivism is further reflected in the concept of counting, as related to counting the 50 years until the Yovel (Jubilee) and the counting of the weeks and days of the Omer. While discussing the laws of Yovel in Parshat Behar, the verse states in the singular tense, “you should count” – “ve-safarta lecha” (Vayikra 25:8). The Sages understand this as a directive towards the court. There should be one singular count for the entire population done by the Beit Din. When discussing the counting of the Omer, there are two different verses, with two distinct tenses used. On the one hand it states that you should count in the singular “tispor lach,” (Devarim 16:9) but it also states the same idea in the plural “u-sefartem lachem” (Vayikra 23:15). The Sages learn from this that there is both an obligation for the individual to count as well as a directive for the courts to count on a communal level.

The counting of the Omer, rabbinically symbolic of our preparation for receiving the Torah, incorporates the dual elements of individual and communal responsibility. We are both an individualistic and collectivist culture and it is our job to use the guidelines and framework of the Torah to strike a balance between prioritizing ourselves and serving our community.

Empty Cemeteries and Jewish Sovereignty

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

In the modern industrialized world the mitzvah of Shemittah may seem a bit remote with little relevance for our daily urbanized lives. Interestingly, life in Israel has restored the practical relevance of Shemittah. In latter part of the 19th century when Jewish communities first organized in Israel, Shemittah presented an almost unconquerable challenge. Nascent Jewish communities in Israel, lacking a financial cushion, faced tremendous struggles in attempting Shemittah observance. Over the past 150 years, the economic situation in Israel has dramatically improved and thank G-d Shemittah adherence has become more manageable. For Israeli Jews Shemittah carries deep resonance and even excitement; outside of the land of Israel it remains more theoretical – a part of Messianic future which has yet to be fully realized.

This year, though, our thoughts about Shemittah feel more relevant. During the past few months, our confined lifestyles have resembled the “retreat” of Shemittah. Our professional lives have receded and we have retreated into very personal and private worlds. A few striking comparisons between Corona and Shemittah immediately spring to mind:

1. Beyond Our control

Obviously, the most noticeable shared message of both Shemittah and Corona surrounds the limits of human achievement. By imposing forced agricultural contraction, Shemittah highlights the limits of human industry and creativity. Every seven years our economy and human innovation are each suspended to deliver a stark message: the land itself, as well as all human development is the province of G-d. Corona brought humanity to its heels and has showcased a very similar message about the limits of modern medical care, sophisticated economies and of course democratic societies.

2. Turning Inward Toward the Spiritual

The one-year Shemittah hiatus from work also enabled a year of spiritual activity and religious introspection. Liberated from the pressures of a busy agricultural schedule, we were free to ponder the deeper questions of existence as well as to forge a deeper conversation with

G-d. The past two months have afforded us similar quiet and introspective space to contemplate our identity, improve our family relationships and pursue interests of the spirit. As Israelis slowly re-enter normal life I am personally concerned that my own frenetic schedule will deprive me of this internal dialogue.

3. A Duet Between Man and Nature

We have all witnessed pictures of dolphins swimming through the canals of Venice and sheep convening around a Macdonalds in Wales. The retreat of humans has beckoned a reassertion of Nature. These scenes carry metaphoric meaning: Without question, Man is the pinnacle of G-d’s creation and is empowered to harness Nature and her abundance in the service of human welfare. Judaism completely rejects the environmentalist-infused assertion of equivalence between Man and Nature and the related claim that humans aren’t entitled to exploit the forces of Nature. However, as we continue to push back the frontiers of science we are bumping into some important questions about the limits of human exploitation of Nature. The shifting boundaries between Man and Nature- so characteristic of Shemittah- seem to be on display during our current crisis.

4. Reordering Social Hierarchies

In addition to the theological and agricultural adjustments enabled by Shemittah, the year-long cessation from commercial activity served as a social “equalizer” diminishing the differences between the wealthy and the impoverished. At a societal level, Shemittah redistributed wealth and at a personal level, it guarded against the hubris and callousness which wealth can induce. Our modern global economy has been plunged into a generational crisis whose challenges will likely surpass those of the Great Depression. How will this crisis affect our conception of wealth? The internet revolution introduced a gilded age of concentrated wealth within the hands of the ‘few’. Mega-corporations such as Google and Amazon have amassed more wealth than many countries, It is not inconceivable that inevitable economic instability will raise important questions about how we aim to distribute wealth.

5. Time Awareness

In addition to the “Shemittah effect” and the cessation of industry, the experience of counting seven years instructs us about time management and time awareness. Counting toward the seventh year created awareness of each year’s positioning within the cycle. Time awareness lends structure and clarity to our lives. Shabbat assures that we are aware of a day’s position within the week just as Rosh Chodesh punctuates the passage of a month. The Corona shutdown has reminded us all how vital time awareness and the structure of a schedule can be toward our healthy functioning. G-d provided time awareness and time-based schedules to brace and stabilize human experience; as these schedules have faded, our experiences have become destabilized.

6. Short Term and Long Term Milestones

A final overlap between Shemittah and Corona concerns our ability to count toward immediate milestones while still realizing that the larger process will occur more gradually. Typically, when we await a milestone we often raise inflated hopes which can obscure longer-term objectives. It is easier to revel in the success of short-term accomplishments than it is to concede that more persistent

challenges are still unfolding. Life frequently embeds short-term struggles within longer-term challenges. Even after achieving a once-in-seven year Shemittah experience we still busily count toward the more unique and formative once-in-fifty year Yovel experience. Arrival of the much-hyped Shemittah doesn’t distract us from the longer project of counting toward Yovel.

We have all been counting the days and weeks of our quarantine. Every Shabbat I ask my family: “How many Shabbatot have we been at home”. Somehow, quantifying the experience, allows us to better appreciate its magnitude. We are eagerly awaiting the lifting of the quarantine, and the return to our normal routines. However, it is likely that even as these short-term milestones are attained we will still be struggling with a longer-term project- the complete eradication of this pandemic. This achievement will probably be more delayed and until we achieve that success we will all be forced to make serious adjustments to our lifestyles. Whatever excitement the opening of society causes, shouldn’t obscure the longer term project. The dual counting of Shemittah and Yovel reminds us that, sometimes, even as we reach short-term milestones we must still focus on more long-term projects.

Israel: Motherland and Mother

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Focus of the biblical universe, cradle of our nation, throne of King David’s theocentric empire, haven from our foes, coordinate at which our mitzvot are most practical and practicable, host of our most palpable connection to the world of the spirit, terraced hills across which the plangent Divine declaration, “Here I will dwell, for I have desired her (Tehillim 132:14)” still echoes –Israel has been all of these for the genetic and spiritual heirs of Avraham and Sarah.

In the vision of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook and Rabbi Yissachar Teichtel, though, Israel plays a more active role. Earth, stone, river and sea are anthropomorphized as limbs controlled by a humanesque consciousness, and the space formerly known as Canaan is identified as a living being, an independent spiritual entity to whom we are bonded.

Rabbi Kook stated this explicitly, writing, “The

Land of Israel is not an external thing, an external prize acquired by the nation, a means toward the end of national unification and reinforcement of the nation’s physical or even spiritual survival. The Land of Israel is an independent entity, bound to the nation in the bond of life...” (Orot Eretz Yisrael 1)

Description of land as a thinking, feeling entity did not originate with the Land of Israel; a midrash places this concept at the start of the Torah, when G-d charged the land to create both fruit tree and fruit-producing tree, but it only produced the latter. (Bereishit Rabbah 5:9) The concept of territorial consciousness continued as the sages envisioned stones desiring to serve righteous Yaakov. (Talmud, Chullin 91b) Many more classic sources ascribe consciousness to a range of inanimates. Certainly, at least some of these texts are meant to provide moral instruction rather than to describe ex-cerebrum thought processes.

Nonetheless, the identity of Israel as **thinking and feeling mother to the Jewish people**, adds depth of meaning to our exile, and intensifies the imperative for our return.

Of course, numerous nations describe their homelands in maternal terms, depicting these spaces as environments which passively provide nourishment, security and familiar comfort. As Professor Rosemary Marangoly George wrote, “Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. Home is the desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few.” (The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction) Our concept of Israel as Mother transcends this role, though; we envision the Land of Israel as an active matriarch, like Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Batsheva, protecting her children. As noted by Rabbi Teichtel, Eretz Yisrael evicts unworthy tenants and invokes her own merit on behalf of her longed-for children.

This vision of the Land begins in our parshah, when G-d promises to remember Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and “The Land”. Rabbi Teichtel commented, “It is written (Vayikra 26:42), ‘And I will remember My covenant with

Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham I will remember, and the land I will remember.’... Rashi there wrote, ‘Why are they listed in reverse? As if to say: Yaakov the youngest is worthy of this, and if he is not worthy then Yitzchak is with him, and if he is not worthy then Avraham is with him.’ Based on this, one may add that even if all of them are unworthy, meaning that the merit of our ancestors has ended, still, ‘The land I will remember,’ for the merit of the Land of Israel itself will save them from trouble... She will protect us, to free us whenever we are placed in trouble, Heaven forbid.” (Eim haBanim Semeichah, First Prologue)

Like Queen Esther approaching Achashverosh and offering herself on behalf of her people, the Land of Israel approaches Hashem and offers her own merit on our behalf.

This personification of Israel as mother and protector should add a dimension to our longing for aliyah. Our impulse to return is not only a selfish desire to live in the land of our ancestors, or to use the land and products for our rituals. We are not only walking the Bible and laying claim to the once and future home of the Beit haMikdash. We are returning to our mother, who longs to have her children restored.

Defying Logic, Trusting in Hashem

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

The first of this week’s double parshios (Behar-Bechukosai), Parshas Behar, begins with the words: *and Hashem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai, saying: דבר אל-בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם כי - Speak to the Bnei Yisrael and say to them, When you come to the land that I am giving to you, the land shall have a cessation, a rest, to Hashem. (Vayikra 25:1-2).*

The Torah then continues to command us regarding the Shemitta cycle; for six years the land may be worked, and in the seventh year, it is a Shemitta - Sabbatical - year, a year of rest for the land, when no agricultural work may be done.

Rashi asks: Why does the first pasuk of the parsha tell us that Hashem transmitted the laws of the Shemitta year to Moshe at Har Sinai? *וְהָיָה כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת נִאֲמָרוּ מִסִּינַי - Were not all the laws of Torah transmitted to Moshe at Sinai?* Rashi answers cryptically, by noting: *אֵלֶּא מֵה שְׁמִטָּה נִאֲמָרוּ כָּל־לְוִיָּהּ - וּפְרִטוּתֶיהָ וְדִקְדוּקֶיהָ מִסִּינַי אַף כֵּן נִאֲמָרוּ כָּל־לְוִיָּהּ וְדִקְדוּקֶיהָ מִסִּינַי*

- just like the laws of Shemitta, its principles, details and fine points, were given at Sinai, so too, all the mitzvos - their principles and details, were given at Sinai.

This answer of Rashi seems not to answer the question, and it has led to much discussion by other commentators, as to its meaning.

R’ Yitzchok Zilberstein explains, in the name of the Chasam Sofer, “The reason Shemitta and Mount Sinai are juxtaposed is because Shemitta is a clear proof that the Torah was given by Hashem, and not fabricated by Moshe Rabbeinu. For what human being would dare to make the promise that I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for a three year period (25:21)? Only Hashem, Who is omnipotent, can guarantee such a thing. Shemitta, therefore, serves as a proof of the revelation at Sinai” (Aleinu L’Shabei’ach, Vayikra, p.394).

Hence, we can understand the connection between Shemitta and Har Sinai. The promise that the land will

provide for the sixth year (the final year in the seven year cycle when work may be done), the seventh year (when the land lies fallow), and the eighth year (when nothing has been planted since the sixth year!) clearly proves the truth of the Revelation at Sinai. Only Hashem - the Kol Yachol (All Able) - can provide in this fashion.

The Chidushei HaRim (Founder of the Ger Chassidus, d.1866) would say: The Psalmist tells us, 'The Heavens are G-d's, and the earth He gave to man' (Ps.115:16) - He gave the earth to man so that man should make it heavenly (Quoted in Great Jewish Wisdom, Artscroll, p.27).

When we recognize and live with the reality that all the bounty we have is from Hashem, and that only He can provide for all of our needs, we are making the earth heavenly, and reminding ourselves of the eternity of the revelation at Sinai.

R' Zilberstein writes that, therefore, "Shemitta is also a reflection of a person's belief in Hashem and in the Torah, because only if he has tremendous emunah (faith) can a person keep Shemitta and let his fields lie fallow for an entire year" (Aleinu L'Shabei'ach, Vayikra, p.394).

Shemitta further proves our emunah, faith, in G-d, for only a nation of believers would allow their land to lie fallow and know that the Almighty will provide enough food for three years! According to logic and reason, this is absurd. Yet, our nation is a people of believers, sons of believers.

In regard to faith, R' Soloveitchik zt'l remarked (1973), "Faith means an absolute act which results in complete reliance without any reservations, conditions, or qualifications. Faith means complete trust... Faith in G-d requires that the faithful suspend judgement from time to time. It is not only the surrender of the body but of the mind. Emunah confronts man with the challenge to suspend his intuitive judgment and to act irrationally and illogically. At times man must act in a certain fashion

even though he does not understand why he is required to conduct himself in such a manner" (The Rav, v.2, Rakeffet-Rothkoff, p.1).

Only when we suspend judgement of ration and reason, "farming will yield bounty, not farming will lead to starvation," can we keep the Shemitta year and recognize, with pure faith, that Hashem, the Master of all, will continue to provide.

And finally, R' Zilberstein writes, "The Imrei Shefer (13th C., Spain) offers another explanation of the connection between Shemitta and Mount Sinai. Shemitta, he says, is called Shabbos, for just as Shabbos is the source of blessing for the other six days of the week, Shemitta is the source of blessing for the other six years of the Shemitta cycle. If a person allows his fields to lie fallow during Shemitta, that is what will bring him success during the years when he does work the land.

"Har Sinai serves as an embodiment of this concept. When Hashem came to give the Torah, all of the mountains presented their credentials, as it were, in the hopes that the Torah would be given on them. Mount Sinai, however, was modest and reticent, standing at the side and not touting its own qualifications for having the Torah given upon it. That was why Mount Sinai merited to become greater than all of the other mountains.

"This is the connection between Shemitta and Mount Sinai; just as Mount Sinai's inactivity was what led to its eventual distinction, our inactivity during Shemitta is what leads to our receiving Hashem's blessing" (Aleinu L'Shabei'ach, Vayikra, p.395).

May we merit to make all of our earthly actions elevated, holy and heavenly; may we merit to place our faith and trust in G-d, the Provider of all, for all; and may we humble ourselves before the All-Powerful One, thereby transforming ourselves into a conduit for His blessing.

Slavery of Oppression, Service of Dignity

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

For it is to Me that the Israelites are servants: they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I the LORD your God. (Vayikra 25:55)

In God's justification for the prohibition for Jews to enslave other Jews on a permanent basis, He claims that Jews cannot be slaves to other human beings, for they

are slaves to him. As Rashi notes, by taking the Jews out of Egypt, his writ of ownership precedes, and therefore overrides, any other claims to the bodies of Jews. Yet, this formulation raises a fundamental question: A central theme of Torah is that the Jews are thankful to God for taking us out of the slavery of Egypt. Yet, as is clear in

these verses, we traded in slavery to Pharaoh for slavery to God. Is this positive simply because God's service is worthwhile? Is it because there is reward in the world to come? Or is there a more fundamental distinction between the two slaveries?

The opening of Bechukotai provides a hint: I the LORD am your God who brought you out from the land of the Egyptians to be their slaves no more, who broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. (Vayikra 26:13). What does it mean for God to break the yoke of our slavery to Egypt, if he then replaced it with a new one? Does that qualify as "breaking the yoke"? It would seem the key is that the two servitudes are fundamentally different in kind.

The Seforno in two places notes this. The slavery of Egypt was fundamentally meant to destroy human dignity, to engender obsequiousness and crush the spirit. Citing a verse in Yeshayahu (51:23), he notes that the Jews' tormentors at time literally forced the Jews to lie on the ground so that others could walk on them: "I will put it in the hands of your tormentors, Who have commanded you, "Get down, that we may walk over you"— So that you made your back like the ground, Like a street for passersby." In God's revelation to Avraham that his children would one day be slaves, he uses this verse to describe the nature of the servitude the Jews would face in Egypt (Seforno to Bereshit 28:14). Then, the Jews would break free of this and burst out of this crushing indignity.

The Dawning of a New Brit

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

The Torah portion of Behar begins with a seemingly benign introduction (Vayikra 25:1):

"And the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying,"

What could be the possible problem with this verse? The commentaries jump on the addition of "Mount Sinai". As is clear from the Torah, the commandments were all given at Mount Sinai. Why would the Torah then reiterate the location?

There is also a significant debate concerning how the timeline is presented in the Torah. Often, events take place that seem to defy the historical order. An explanation often given is that the Torah does not, in fact, always follow a past to future order. In this instance, we are not to think that there was a return to Mount Sinai and new

In the Torah description of God breaking the yoke of the Egyptian slavery and making us walk erect, the Seforno notes that this is the fulfillment of that promise.

From this, we see that the Jews did not simply trade in one slavery for another. We traded in a slavery of oppression for a servitude of dignity. The slavery in Egypt made us subhuman, or at least attempted to. Service to God is honorable – to be called to actualize the divine is ennobling and makes us walk with our heads held high. By choosing the Jewish people as His servants, God raised us up. As Tehillim describes this, referring to all of humanity:

What is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him, that You have made him little less than divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty; You have made him master over Your handiwork, laying the world at his feet, sheep and oxen, all of them, and wild beasts, too; the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the paths of the seas. (Tehillim Chapter 8)

By being mindful of human beings, by charging all humans, and the Jews in particular with responsibilities, He has given out life meaning. While we serve Him, we become masters, rather than servants.

It is striking that part of God's promise in these same verses is that God will walk among us (Vayikra 26:12), as if we were at some level coequals, rather than merely slaves of a master. What could make us walk with more pride than that?

commandments given. As well, we cannot conclude that there was an incomplete transmission of all the commandments at Mount Sinai.

This is all fine and good. However, one must still wonder what exactly is the significance of mentioning Mount Sinai.

Ramban, in his commentary on this verse, offers a unique view on the objective. He begins with setting the historical stage:

"In my opinion, however, [our section] was written here in the proper order, for the explanation of 'on Mount Sinai' is when [Moses] ascended there (referring to second time he went up) to receive the second Tablets."

To help clarify the context, we know that Moshe was at the top of Mount Sinai for a forty-day period,

where he received the original Tablets, along with the commandments. Upon his descent, he found the Jewish people engaged in worship of the Golden Calf. He then broke those Tablets. With the fate of the Jewish nation in the balance, Moshe pleads the case for saving them. God responds with a directive to ascend Mount Sinai again for another forty day period, where Moshe would receive the second set of Tablets.

Ramban then refers to an important episode that took place prior to Moshe's first ascent to Mount Sinai. During a ceremony described at the end of the Torah portion of Mishpatim, Moshe wrote in the "Book of the Covenant" all that God had commanded. After, there were sacrifices offered, and blood was thrown onto the Jewish people. Moshe then ascends, descends, and breaks the Tablets. Ramban notes that there was a covenant in place prior to the breaking of the Tablets:

"And when [the people] sinned with the Calf and the Tablets were shattered, it was as if this covenant had been annulled as far as the Holy One, blessed be He, was concerned."

With the first covenant ceasing to exist, a new covenant was now mandated:

"And when the Holy One, blessed be He, showed reconciliation to Moshe by the second Tablets, He commanded him about a new covenant... Moshe descended and commanded them regarding everything that God had commanded him on Mount Sinai."

Ramban then explains that Moshe at first only gave them the commandments concerning the building of the Tabernacle, which caused the Jewish nation to recognize that even though they sinned, the Divine Providence would still be present. The construction then took place. Once this was completed, the commandments for the sacrifices were given, along with the laws pertaining the Kohanim. The next stage brings us to this week's Torah portion:

"And when he had completed, he said to them 'God commanded me further upon Mount Sinai to elaborate for you the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee, and to forge a new covenant with you over all the commandments and ordinances, under [penalty of] an imprecation and oath.'"

Why didn't Moshe then redo the ceremony with the sacrifices and blood?

"And it was not necessary at this time for [Moshe] to slaughter sacrifices and throw half the blood upon the people and half the blood upon the Altar as he had done initially. Rather, they accepted the original covenant upon themselves under penalty of these imprecations and curses"

What made this second covenant markedly different? The inclusion of the curses. The covenant (third one) completed in Moab was also completed with this inclusion of curses (let's not forget the blessings). Thus, we find the description of the curses taking place at the end of the Book of Vayikra, as well as at the end of the Torah portion of Ki Tavo.

Ramban successfully interprets the timeline to fit the order as written in the Torah. However, his idea of a new set of covenants requires further elaboration. Ramban emphasizes how the curses take center stage in this covenant, evident consequences to abandonment of the Torah and its commandments. Are we to conclude that there were no consequences to speak of had there been only one covenant? What would happen if the Jewish people committed sin? Why did there need to be an entirely new covenant?

In order to understand this new covenant, we must first understand the nature of the sin of the Golden Calf. After Moshe did not descend from Mount Sinai, based on the faulty calculation of the Jewish people, the turn to idolatry took place. When we study that tragic event, it becomes evident that the nature of the flaw was not an outright rejection of God. The great challenge of belief in God, where God is not expressed in any physical matter whatsoever, was something they could not overcome. God is removed, qualitatively distinct, not able to be studied through empirical methods. There was a constant sense of insecurity; Moshe was the temporary salve. Moshe became the "stand-in" for God, allowing for that void to be filled. When Moshe did not return, the Jewish people did not abandon God outright; rather, they turned to Moshe's replacement, manifest in the Golden Calf.

This should not be understood as an attempt to minimize the absolute devastating reality of the flawed relationship between the Jewish people and God. However, it does help understand the transition from the first to second covenant. Of course, there would be consequences in the first iteration. However, the structure of that covenant was predicated on the correct view of God, specifically in the ability to worship God and place their entire security in Him. There would be a Tabernacle, a centralized form of worship. The commandments would contain the potential for Divine reward and punishment. But their role would be secondary, as the desire of the Jewish people to worship God properly and follow the ideal path for life would be the essential driving force.

If the relationship was incorrect from the start, as

evidenced by the sin of the Golden Calf, the first covenant was a flawed enterprise. In fact, the failure to abide by the covenant should have resulted in the annihilation of the Jewish people. Moshe's pleas to God change that result, but necessitated a whole new covenant. In this version, Divine Providence now takes center stage. The Jewish people needed to be able to point to something, to be given that empirical evidence of Divine Providence they state as demonstrative evidence. In the ideal covenant, the importance of this evidence would be minimized (but still present). Now, with the reality of this inherent flaw in the Jewish nation, bringing with it a significant change in the relationship between God and the Jewish people, a new covenant was necessary. The key difference will be a reorientation of those aspects that reflect Divine Providence. Whereas before these components were more ancillary, they would now come to the forefront.

Moshe thus begins with implementing the

commandments surrounding the Tabernacle, its construction pivotal to ensure that flaw was being handled properly. The Tabernacle was where the Divine Presence would reside. As well, immense detail is now placed concerning the blessings and curses, particularly the negative consequences. It is possible before the second covenant, a mere mention of the abstract concept of punishment would have been sufficient. However, with the new covenant, the specifics were necessary, allowing the Jewish people to observe clear indication of Divine Providence.

The second covenant, per Ramban, was a new opportunity to re-forged our relationship with God. It ensured that the Jewish people would never be destroyed. Sadly, it also incorporated a reality of the immense challenge we could not overcome. We should always be aware to work on overcoming the flaw and trying to place all of our security in the true idea of God.

Yaakov's Symbolic Vav and Eliyahu HaNavi's Symbolic Vow

Yonatan Kurz

Towards the end of the Tochacha in this week's parsha, Hashem says the following line to Bnei Yisroel: "זכרתי את־בריתי יעקוב ואף את־בריתי יצחק" There are many fascinating questions about this pasuk, especially surrounding Yaakov Avinu.

This Yaakov has a ׀ in it, which only occurs five times in the Chumash. Rashi explains that Yaakov took the ׀ from Eliyahu Hanavi's name as a security that he will come and bring the Geula of his children. The Gur Aryeh says that the fact that the "ו" pops up in Yaakov's name is symbolic of the five fingers of the hand shaken in Yaakov and Eliyahu's agreement. He elaborates further, saying that this also serves as a remez to the Geula. Of the three Avos, only Yaakov had the zechus of the Geula, as there were those from Bnei Avraham and Yitzchak who didn't merit redemption. Furthermore, Rav Chaim Palagi says that the ׀ is a remez to the 12 shevatim, which is ׀ times two, as well as all the number of Yaakov's sons.

Why is Yaakov mentioned first of the 3 Avos, when he's seemingly the smallest of the Avos. Vayikra Rabba says that it's to prove that without the actions of Yaakov, the actions of Yitzchak would have been enough; without the actions

of Yitzchak, the actions of Avraham would've been enough. It's a mini-Dayeinu of sorts, and shows that every single person's actions count and are important in contributing towards the construction of the world. The Kli Yakar says that in every generation, we eat from the zechus of the previous generations (the Avos), and over the course of time, the zechuyos of Avraham and Yitzchak run out. Since Yaakov has a "fresher" zechus, his name is mentioned first, but Hashem put all of the covenants together to acknowledge the fact that the merits of all of the Avos are eternal, and will continue to stand the test of time.

The recurring themes in all of these answers are the importance of actions, remembrance of the past, as well as a future redemption. The Tzror Hamor says that each of the Avos correspond to a different type of Galus. Since Yaakov had the hardest torments of all the Avos, he corresponds to our Galus, which is worse than any of the other exiles. That is why Yaakov's name is written first - to show us that ה' will remember our yesurim and the difficult times we've had to endure in this Galus. We should have the zechus to be the generation where ה' publicly shows how much He remembers the tremendous actions of the Avos, and finally brings the Geula.