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Prisons of Public Perception

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

It never ends!! If it's not one thing, it's another. At the tail end of his life, having weathered forty years of complaints, rebellions, and near-disasters, Moshe had every reason to expect a tranquil conclusion to his legendary career. Having appointed his successor and eased the Jewish people to the border of Israel, he can now focus on writing the final book of the Torah. The new generation, which would ultimately inherit the land of Israel had been counted, the 'lottery' mechanism for land allocation had been established and, finally, the order of family inheritance had been institutionalized. Everything was ready for the final and long-awaited entry into the promised land ... until it wasn't!!

Two and a half tribes approach Moshe proposing settlement on the East bank of the Jordan river. Moshe is initially troubled, fearing a sequel to the meraglim rebellion when Jews balked at entering Israel, forever wrecking history. Ultimately, though, Moshe is reassured of the sincerity of these tribes and he relents- authorizing their plan under very detailed conditions. The two and a half tribes can only settle the East bank after they first assist the rest of the nation in conquering Israel proper. Though these terms are agreeable to all parties, Moshe stipulates them explicitly and unambiguously. His detailed wording of these conditions serves as the template for all halachik contractual contingencies. Halacha only allows a "tenai" or a halachik stipulation if it is worded exactly as Moshe formulated his own pre-conditions. Moshe was determined to prevent any future misunderstandings- especially those which may arise after his death when he could no longer personally mediate.

When issuing these stipulations and urging compliance, Moshe encourages these tribes to satisfy their obligations both to "G-d and to man (v'heyitem neki'im mei'Hashem U'mi'Yisrael)". It is insufficient to merely act properly and honestly in a purely legal sense, if their behavior arouses

social suspicion or strife. The question of their allegiance to the Jewish people or to the land of Israel, is a potentially charged issue and these tribes must placate any concerns through squeaky clean, morally transparent behavior.

This demand serves as the basis for an intriguing halachik category known as the laws of "marit ayin", which mandate that a person avoid any suspicion of halachikally unlawful behavior. Actions which are legal in a strict sense are banned if they provide the appearance of halachik violation. For example, coconut milk cannot be consumed along with meat (even though it isn't included in the classic prohibition of meat and milk), since it provides the appearances of halachik violation.

The value underlying marit ayin provides a delicate and complex challenge for religious people. Authentic religious growth and experience can best be achieved when liberated from suffocating social pressures. Religious excellence and passion can best be achieved when a person releases himself from the strangulating limitations of public perception. Sometimes social pressures are antagonistic to religion; other times they cap religious growth by setting certain tolerable limits of religious growth while frowning upon more surpassing levels of religious excellence. Either way, social attitudes can sometimes impede passionate and authentic religious growth.

Many of the celebrated mussar movements in Europe selected a 'primary' middah or trait as the baseline for moral and religious development. The school of "Novhardak" was renowned for its emphasis upon breaking human will, and in particular, its aim to build resistance to social pressure. Talmidim of the yeshiva were encouraged to behave in bizarre fashion to elicit scorn and ridicule; rebuffing this derision would train these students to brace themselves against hostile social pressures. By ignoring social contempt,

these students would develop greater devotion and piety.

Beyond the potential throttling of religious passion, excessive sensitivity to public opinion can corrupt the caliber of our religious experiences. Sadly, religious performance is sometimes driven by a desire for public approval. My Rebbe, Rav Amital – whose 10th *yahrzeit* is this week- once remarked: Imagine a situation in which marmor was eaten in shul while an etrog was hoisted at home. People would spend hundreds of dollars upon marmor, aiming to receive better “grading” of their lettuce in shul. People would brag about their beautiful stalks and would boast about the veiny leaf of lettuce. Exhibitionism of any type is morally troubling and severely degrades human dignity. Ostentatiousness in religion is particularly repulsive as it employs religion for personal aggrandizement and pretentiousness. Dissociation from public opinion preserves the purity of mitzvot and of Torah learning. The quiet moments of religious devotion – shared by none other than G-d- resonate with spiritual depth and soulful authenticity.

Thirdly, preoccupation with public opinion can create a general imbalance between our investment in the public arena and our focus upon the private domain. The public arena is a showground of adulation and admiration; it showers us with approval and thereby inflates our ego. By contrast, our private worlds offer little veneration and ego augmentation. However, these private realms do challenge us to be real and authentic, to admit our flaws and to work toward substantive improvement. Too much concern with public perception can distract us from the pursuit of real identity, placing us at great risk of becoming mannequins.

Yet, despite the dangers of excess sensitivity and

vulnerability to social opinion, we are none the less, commanded to behave in a manner which doesn't directly arouse suspicion of halachik wrongdoing. As much as we seek to liberate ourselves from the confines of social convention, we are still obligated to shape our behavior toward social perceptions. Social expectations can be stifling but they can also nurture and foster religious growth. Social expectations can also provide moral barriers which shouldn't be breached and can silently police against errant behavior. A few years ago I discussed the “*agunah*” issue with a friend who lived in a relatively small Jewish community. Surprised that there was even a crisis, he assured me that no man in his own community would ever dare refuse his wife a ‘get’. The community was so tightly woven that this person would be ashamed to show his face in public.

Ideally, communities built upon religious passion can provide guidance, orientation and religious aspiration. By behaving in halachikally suspicious fashion, a person may be unwittingly assisting or even tacitly condoning halachik violation. People who witness suspicious behavior may errantly assume that a halachikally forbidden action was violated and may engage in similar behavior. Other people may fraudulently justify their own religious weakness based on perceived weaknesses in others.

We all possess mutual responsibility to avoid transmitting messages which erode halachik authority. The principle of *marit ayin* challenges us to balance between autonomous religious growth which is disinterested in public perception, alongside our responsibility to fashion an environment of religious seriousness, halachik fidelity and moral integrity.?

It's All in the Details

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Often, the Torah seems to focus on what we, as modern readers, would consider ancillary to the story and run through what we find to be central.

The war with Midian, including the draft, Moshe's directions for the battle, the taking of spoils, Moshe's critique of how the war was handled and his new instructions are detailed in a total of eighteen verses. (Bamidbar 31:1-18) On the other hand, the counting and division of the spoils takes thirty verses. (Bamidbar 31:25-54) (The intervening verses discuss how to deal with the

impurity issues for the soldiers and the spoils, as well as the kashrut issues that related to the spoils.] While one could understand that 31:25-54 is part of the victory celebration, detailing the success as represented by the material gains, there must be more to justify the extent of the discussion.

Moshe instructs the Jews to divide the spoils, half to be divided among the warriors and half among the rest of the nation. Rabbi Ovadia Seforno (31:27) suggests that this division among the entire nation was because the war was waged in response to a crime committed against

positive commandment (and is counted amongst one of the 613 mitzvos in the Torah). Hashem is commanding the people that they should settle in the Land and take possession of it, for He gave it to them, and they should not reject the heritage of G-d! And if it should enter their minds to go and conquer the land of Shinar or Ashur (Assyria) or some other land and settle there instead, they would be in violation of a commandment of G-d... Because this verse is in fact a positive commandment, and the Torah reiterates this mitzvah in many places.

R' Dr. Abraham J. Twerski writes, "The love that tzaddikim had for the Holy Land was boundless. An example of this is R' Nosson Zvi Finkel zt'l (1849, Lithuania -1927, J'lem), known far and wide as the Alter of Slabodka, who settled in Hebron. When he found stones on the road he would remove them, citing the Talmud, 'R' Chanina removed obstacles (from the paths of Eretz Yisrael)', and Rashi comments: מתקן מתקליה - משה ומתקן מכשולי העיר מחמת חובת הארץ שהיתה חביבה עליו ומחזר שלא יצא שם רע על הדרכים - Because of his love for the Land, he removed possible obstacles so that one should not have any grounds for making critical remarks about the Land (Kesubos 112a).

"R' Nosson Zvi said that Eretz Yisrael was one large aron kodesh (holy ark), and all who lived in it were in an atmosphere of holiness. Of those who did not observe the Torah, he would say that they nevertheless have the merit of being in a holy environment. 'We find a redeeming feature in a Jew who comes to Shul only on Yom Kippur. How much more so should we value Jews who live not only in a Shul, but even in the aron kodesh all year round!'

"During his last illness, when his frail health made it impossible to study Torah, he consoled himself with the knowledge that with every breath he was absorbing the air of the Holy Land, bringing kedusha into his body" (Twerski on Chumash, p.350-351).

An American Jew once came to the home of R' Avraham Yitzchak Ha'Kohen Kook (1865-1935) zt'l, to receive a farewell blessing before returning to the United States.

Precommitment Devices

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

Parshat Mattot begins by introducing the laws of vows and oaths. "When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything

"Did you do anything to help rebuild the Land?" R' Kook asked the visitor. "Unfortunately," the man replied, "I did nothing for the cause, nor do I want to. I visited a number of the new settlements and failed to find even one pioneer who lays tefillin on his arm and head."

R' Kook let out a deep sigh, and said, "You are right; it hurts so much to see Jews who do not lay tefillin. But how can you complain about them when you yourself do not lay?" The man was so taken aback that his face turned colors. Trying to hold back tears, he replied, "Does Your Honor suspect that I, too, fail to lay tefillin!?"

"G-d forbid!" replied the Rav. "However, just like these pioneers do not lay tefillin, you do not lay any bricks for the settlement of the Land, a mitzvah that is equal to the entire Torah" (An Angel Among Men, p.430-431).

Today, the words of the Ramban ring loud and clear... If it would enter our minds to settle in "Shinar" or "Ashur", and to make these lands our "home land," R"L, we would be in grave transgression of the mitzvas asef of yeshivas Eretz Yisrael. If conditions necessitate that, for the time being, we dwell outside of the Land, let us be sure that the return to our Land - our ONLY Land - is always our end goal.

Standing on the grounds of Auschwitz, March of the Living 2016, R' Yisrael Meir Lau shlita concluded his annual speech with the following words: "Knowing that this (the Land of Israel) is our place - that we have no other place, we have no other country, no other state, no other homeland, no other feeling of a home but הביתה, הביית שלנו.

"אֶתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי ה' בְּאֶרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים, I will walk before G-d in the land of the living (Ps.116:9). This is my desire, this is my wish, this is my promise, what I want you to feel together with me, אֶתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי ה' בְּאֶרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים, to walk in the land of the living, אֶרֶץ מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל."

אֶתְהָרִים וְתִקוּם, תִּרְחַם צִיּוֹן: כִּי-עַתָּה לְחֻנָּה, כִּי-בָא מוֹעֵד rise up and comfort Zion, for it is time to be gracious to her, for the appointed time has come (Ps.102:14).

May we merit it speedily and in our days, amen v'amen.

he said" (Bemidbar 30:3). Oaths function to up the ante on commitment. By taking an oath, a person raises the stakes if he or she does not follow through. A person can even decide, the Talmud notes, to take an oath to perform

or not to violate a commandment (Nedarim 8a). This is so even though the person is already obligated by the Torah commandment. The oath functions as an even more intense motivator than the original Biblical law.

In his classic work *Michtav Me-Eliyahu*, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler elucidates the psychology behind taking an oath to comply with a mitzvah (4:237). At times, he writes, we become aware of our own laxness in Torah observance and we want to self-correct. Often, we try to fight this desire or weakness head on, but in the moment the yetzer hara is too powerful and we fail. The fix for this circumstance is to force our hand and avoid the self-control battle in the first place. We need to construct the situation in such a way where we are forced to comply. The classic Biblical way to accomplish this is through an oath. People viewed oaths with such awe and trepidation that adding an oath to a desirous behavior was generally a strong enough intervention to force self-compliance.

Already in times of Chazal, the reverence extended to oaths diminished, so their usage was frowned upon. People would make oaths but still fall short. As a consequence, not only would they violate a regular commandment, but on top of that they would also violate the oath. Yet, even though we generally abstain from taking oaths, figuring out other ways to up the ante and solidify our commitment is essential. We need to think of ways, Rabbi Dessler suggests, to in effect bind ourselves to our commitments without taking an oath. As an example, if someone is struggling to learn Torah, he or she could

commit to giving a shiur on a topic that requires further research. The pressure to give a powerful presentation will force the person to study.

In the psychological literature on self-control, this concept is called a precommitment device. In a 2002 research article, Israeli-born psychologist Dan Ariely and Klaus Wertenbroch define such a strategy as the “voluntary imposition of constraints (that are costly to overcome) on one’s future choices in a strategic attempt to resist future temptations.” The oft-cited paradigm of this technique in Greek mythology is Ulysses, who tied himself to a mast so that he could not be lured by the song of the Sirens.

Precommitment devices can potentially help with many self-control battles including procrastination, eating unhealthily, drinking too much alcohol, and over-spending. If we spend too much time scrolling through social media instead of working on that important project, we can explore various software programs that would block our internet or social media access for a set period of time. If we know that every time we go to a certain restaurant we end up choosing an unhealthy option, we could precommit to a better choice by going to a restaurant with a less tempting menu.

Whether the goal is to improve our self-control, increase the amount of mitzvot we accomplish, or decrease the amount of aveirot we violate, we can look to the message behind oaths, and conceive of different ways to bind ourselves to improvement by precommitting to progress.

Hearing the Right Voice

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

The formula seems quite simple. God teaches Moshe the commandments, and then Moshe, and only Moshe, transmits the contents to the Jewish nation. When looking through the Torah, without exception this is the system God chose to ensure a clear stream of communication from Him to the Jews. In this week’s Torah portion, there is a brief solitary interruption in this method, with some serious consequences.

To get a complete picture, one must look at the entire sequence of events leading to the new voice. Moshe asks for an army to avenge the plot of the Midianites. This army of twelve thousand, led by Pinchas, heads out to heed Moshe’s request. However, they do not kill the remaining

Midianite women and children. Moshe becomes angry, questioning why the women and children were not killed as well. He then commands them to complete the task.

Immediately afterwards, the Torah turns to a very relevant commandment for that specific situation (Bamidbar 31:21-23):

“Eleazar the kohen said to the soldiers returning from battle, “This is the statute that the Lord commanded Moses. Only the gold, the silver, the copper, the iron, the tin, and the lead, whatever is used in fire you shall pass through fire and then it will be clean; it must, however, [also] be cleansed with sprinkling water, and whatever is not used in fire you shall pass through water.”

What stands out in these verses is not necessarily the command itself; rather, the person giving over the command. Elazar, not Moshe, delivers this new directive to the Jewish people. While he does reference God's initial transmission of the command to Moshe, we do not hear Moshe speaking.

The Talmud criticizes the decision of Elazar to take the reins (Eiruvin 63a). It begins by stating an important halacha, whereby a student is not permitted to render decisions of Halacha (horaa – in this context, it will refer to a new idea, rather than a reference to an existing work) in front of his rabbi. The violation of this prohibition is considered quite serious. The Talmud proceeds to offer a litany of incidents and violators, including the following:

“R. Eliezer said: He [Elazar the Kohen] is deprived of his greatness — For it is said: And Eleazar the priest said unto the men of war . . . This is the statute of the law which the Lord hath commanded Moses; although he thus said to them, ‘He commanded my father’s brother and not me’ he was nevertheless punished,’ as it is written: And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest and yet we do not find that Joshua ever needed his guidance”

It is quite the damning indictment of Elazar.

Many of the commentators struggle with how to resolve the issue. Malbim offers one defense for the actions of Elazar. The prohibition of halachic innovation before one's rabbi is not absolute. If there is a potential act that people would violate without knowing the new idea, the student must give over the information, regardless of the presence of the rabbi. Therefore, one could posit that Elazar's action were justified, as he was ensuring there would be no error committed by the Jewish nation. Another defense is offered by Rashi and others. This was one of the three times Moshe got angry, leading to an inability to recall a specific commandment (characterized as a punishment to Moshe). The time to give the directive was right now. Elazar, noting this problem, stepped in to fill the void.

While these defenses are reasonable, one cannot ignore the words of the Talmud. Clearly, there was some flaw in Elazar's actions, leading to a reduction in his greatness. What did he do wrong?

One could expand the question a bit. What is the problem in general of a student engaging in horaa in front of his rabbi? If the student studies an area and develops an innovative idea, why not pass it along? After all, both student and rabbi are pursuing the understanding of Torah and its applications. They are both pursuing truth, so what

harm could come from the student teaching people his idea?

Obviously, there must be an issue here beyond the mere transmission of information. The position of a rabbi, especially in the realm of being a decider and innovator, is complex. On one level, he is an individual dedicated to a life of learning Torah and unearthing its wisdom. Yet, on another level, he is a participant in the chain of the mesora, the tradition of Jewish halacha and concepts that can be traced back to the Revelation at Sinai. His ideas and insights impact that tradition in a weighty manner. The rabbi must approach every area of Torah with fear and trepidation, as the effects of his words are incalculable. The people, when interacting with the rabbi, envision more than the individual. They see this person as the authentic representative of that very mesora they are beholden to. The relationship between the people and the rabbi is beyond practical; it is sacrosanct. When a student enters the scene and offers his own insights, the ideas themselves might be excellent. However, the student has now introduced a competing tradition, a parallel stream of mesora. The student must reflect the rabbi as much as possible. For the people to see a new path would harm their relationship to the rabbi, and that distortion would mean a compromise in the ability to transmit the ideas properly.

The situation with Moshe and Elazar reflects the above idea, and why it is being used as a paradigm example. Elazar's motivations, based on the above interpretations, were not misguided. He saw a serious problem with the void in leadership, and stepped forward. As we see in the verse, he did not begin to introduce the halacha until he made it clear it came from Moshe via God. Moshe's name was intimately associated with the giving of the commandment. However, it was not the voice of Moshe. This was the first instance of this (and all other) commandments being given to the Jewish people in the wilderness. The initial transmission meant more than the specific commandment in question; there was also the fact that the mesora was being established for the first time. To have a potential competing mesora, even with the original source being quoted, could be very damaging in this initial transmission. Elazar was the Kohen Gadol, and he occupied an important position of authority. He was quoting Moshe to ensure everyone knew who the source was. All of these factors pointed to a minimization of any potential distortion. Ultimately, all of his efforts could

not have prevented the problem that emerged due to his replacement of Moshe.

One critical issue we can derive from this incident is the overall impact a rabbi's ideas and concepts can have to others. A rabbi is not merely presenting his own thinking. The reality is he is a reflection of the mesora, and therefore he must weigh his words carefully. Unfortunately, this calculated type of thinking often is missing. Inflammatory

statements and propositions whose logical consequences are patently absurd have been all too common. Rabbis at times use their position of authority as a battering ram rather than merely being a conduit of God's infinite wisdom. The personal overtakes the objective. The drive for humility must be at the forefront of the rabbi's mind, with it a true understanding of his role and his relationship to the rest of the Jewish people.

Jeremiah's Prophecy: An Ancient Message for Contemporary Times

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This Shabbat, when parashiot Matot and Masei will both be read, the Torah reader will call out: **יָזֶק יָזֶק וְנִתְחַזַּק**, "Let us be strong, let us be strong, and let us be strengthened!"

One week ago, the Fast of the 17th of Tammuz was observed by Jews worldwide to commemorate the day when the besieged walls of Jerusalem were first breached by the Babylonians and the Romans. This fast marks the beginning of the 21 day period known as the "Three Weeks," the tragic days which precede the Ninth of Av, that commemorates the destruction of the two Temples. During these three weeks, it is customary for synagogues throughout the world to read what has come to be known as **שְׁלֹשַׁת דְּרָפְרָעוֹנְהוּא**, the three Haftarot (prophetic messages) of destruction, from the Books of Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Since this will be the second Shabbat of the Three Weeks, selections from Jeremiah 2:4-28, 3:4 and 4:1-2 are read. The prophet Jeremiah lived both before and after the destruction of the Temple. Approximately two thirds of his prophecies concern destruction, while one third contain words of consolation.

The ringing messages of Jeremiah contain many contemporary implications. Jeremiah is distraught over the fact that the people have forsaken G-d and gone after "nothingness." In Jeremiah 2, the prophet, in the name of G-d, calls out to the Jewish people, saying: "What unrighteousness have your fathers found in Me that they have gone far from Me, and have walked after things of naught, and are become naught?"

As a result of abandoning G-d, the prophet declares, the people themselves have become nothingness, and their lives have been rendered meaningless. Furthermore, continues Jeremiah, "Neither said they: Where is the L-rd Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through

the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought, and the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man has dwelt?" How, the prophet asks, can the Jews have forgotten so quickly the miraculous exodus from Egypt, and the unprecedented survival of the Jewish people during their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness?

"And I [G-d] brought you into the land of fruitful fields, to eat the fruit thereof and of the good thereof." G-d says, I gave you this wonderful land, and what did you do to it? "When you entered," says the prophet, "you defiled My land, and made My heritage an abomination." The Jews quickly forgot G-d, says Jeremiah. "The priest said not: 'Where is the L-rd?' and those who handle the Torah, knew Me not." Even those involved in Torah learning, says the prophet, only held on to the Torah, they didn't truly imbibe it, and allow the message of the Torah to penetrate and impact on them.

"And the shepherds transgressed against Me, the prophets also prophesied in the name of Baal, and walked after things that do not profit." When the shepherds are lost, asks the prophet, what can we expect of the flock? When the leaders, who lead the people, go astray, can there be any hope?

G-d therefore implores, "Wherefore will I yet plead with you, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over to the isles of the Kittites, and see, and send to Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, which are yet no G-ds? But My people have changed its glory, for that which does not profit."

The prophet is dismayed by the fact that, in the entire history of humankind, nations have been praying to the most senseless and meaningless "gods," and yet the people

remain loyal to them, but Israel, who worships the true G-d, switches its G-d.

The prophet continues, “Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be exceedingly amazed, says the L-rd. For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” Says G-d, I know that you have switched Me. But, if you’re going to switch, at least switch Me for something that appears to be useful. Instead, you have switched quality cisterns that hold water, for broken cisterns that leak and hold no water. You Jewish people, when you stray from G-d, you pick the most irrational, most senseless, most distant ideas to replace G-d.

Asks the prophet, “Is Israel a servant? Is he a home-born slave? Why is he become a prey?” How could the Jewish people have strayed so far? Do they come from an ignoble background that has led them astray?

Declares the Al-mighty, “For from old time have I broken your yoke, and burst your bands, and you [Israel] said: ‘I will not transgress.’ Yet, upon every high hill and under every leafy tree you did recline, playing the harlot.” I was always there for you, says G-d. I was always there to rescue you. You promised to be loyal to Me, but I always find you unfaithful.

How can it be? says G-d. “Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a wholly righteous seed. How then did you turn into a degenerate plant of a strange vine to Me?” You come from the most noble of origins. You are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the offspring of King David and Elijah the Prophet, a kingdom of Priests and a Holy People, how could you have gone so far astray, how could you forsake Me?

Continues the prophet: “Who says to a tree: ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone: ‘You have brought us forth.’ For they have turned their backs unto Me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble they return to Me and say: ‘Arise, and save us!’ But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can, and save you in the time of trouble. For according to the number of

your cities are your gods, O Judah.” Since you have so many substitute gods, why not just call on them to help you in your time of need? Suddenly, in the foxhole, you rediscover G-d? It doesn’t work that way!

These are the words that G-d conveyed to the great prophet Jeremiah over 2500 years ago. Could these prophesies possibly have relevance to our generation as well? Could Jeremiah be directing his words to us, the most successful and most highly educated generation of Jews in history? To us, the generation of opportunity, the Jews of the Golden Era, of the 20th and 21st centuries... and, yet, a generation that has perhaps become the generation of the greatest Jewish apostasy in all of Jewish history, one of the most illiterate generations in all of Jewish history. How could this be?

The message of Jeremiah is loud and clear. The words may have been spoken yesterday, but they resonate directly with us today. We must heed the words of the prophet Jeremiah, and take his message to heart. Let us give G-d a chance.

In Jeremiah 4, Jeremiah concludes his message to the Jewish people on an upbeat note, pleading with them, beseeching them: “If you will return O Israel says the L-rd, return unto Me, and if you will put your detestable things out of My sight, and will not waver, and will swear as the L-rd lives in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then shall the nations bless themselves by Him and in Him shall they glory.” If only the Jewish people recognize G-d as their Father and Guide, then all humanity will recognize G-d, and this recognition will bring about the ultimate spiritual redemption for all.

It is in our hands now. Let us, during these special and propitious times, the “Three Weeks,” reaffirm our commitment to G-d. Let us spare the world and ourselves the experiences of sorrow and mourning. Let us embrace Jeremiah’s message, and bring much happiness to the world.