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Vayeilech 5782

What It Means To Live

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered September 6, 1969)

At the end of the second Sidra we read today, we learned of Moses giving Israel the law relating to the Sefer Torah. He commanded them to place the scroll of the Law in the Ark, at the side of the tablets, and he declared: *veThayah sham bekha l'ed*, "and it shall be there as a witness against you."

What he means by this, as the verse is usually interpreted, is that the Torah will be a witness for Israel in those times when our people will have forgotten its spiritual mission, and, as in the days of King Josiah, will search for its purpose in history. At that time the Torah will reveal the nature of Jewish existence and the goals of Jewish life. Furthermore, the word *bekha* means "against you," that is, if Israel will begin to wonder at its fortunes or misfortunes, at the nature of its destiny and its fate, it will be able to search in the Torah which will testify to the purpose of Jewish living, and therefore reveal the reasons for the success or failure of the people of Israel.

However, when Maimonides codified this Law, he introduced one small change that is rather perplexing. In the end of the Laws of Sefer Torah, he describes the reverence that is required in the presence of the Sefer Torah, and he adds the words: *sheThu ha-ed ha-ne'eman le'hol baei olam*, for it is the trustworthy witness to all "who come in the world," that is, to all human beings. Now the difficulty is this: The Torah says it will be a witness *bekha*, for or against Israel, whereas Maimonides has the Torah being a witness *le'khol baei olam*, for all mankind. By what right did Maimonides universalize the function of Torah as a witness, and extend it from Israel to all humanity?

I heartily recommend a solution offered by my revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Solevitchik, who, in the Jewish manner, answers this question with another question. At the time of the giving of the Torah, Israel heard only the first two of the Ten Commandments *mi-pi ha-gevurah*,

from God Himself, as it were.

Afterwards they asked Moses to be the intermediary and relay the Divine Word to them. Thus we read: *Va-yanu'u ha-am va-yaamdu mi-rahok*, the people trembled and stayed at a distance, *va-yomru el Mosheh*, and they said to Moses: *daber ata imanu veyishmaah*, you speak with us and we shall listen, *v'al yedaber imanu Elohim, pen namut*, for we are afraid that if God speaks directly to us we may die.

What a strange thing to say! People wait all their lives for that brief moment of ecstasy when they will hear the clear word of God, when all their inner doubts and anxieties will be stilled by that over-arching certainty of a direct revelation of God. We pine away our entire lives, if we are religiously sensitive, for that precious moment of an encounter with God as the greatest experience known to humankind. Yet, here is an entire people privileged to hear two commandments directly from God -- and pleading that they've had enough!

The answer suggested by Rabbi Solevitchik is this: The people of Israel feared disembodied commandments, philosophical principles, abstract ideals. A code of law or book of philosophy is simply too remote, too distant for ordinary human beings: *Va-yaamdu mi-rahok*, they were repelled and stood at a great distance from this sort of possibility. They were afraid that Torah is not realizable in life, that it was too sacred, too sublime, and that therefore they would never be able to observe it properly and hence, *pen namut* -- the Torah would become a source of punishment and death. What they wanted was a living example that the Torah was indeed realizable and practical in every day life. They asked Moses, therefore, that he should demonstrate the feasibility of Torah by living the Commandments before their eyes, rather than merely transmitting them abstractly.

This, then, is what they said to Moses: *Daber ata imanu*,

you speak it with us, you translate the ideals of Torah into practical life, you exemplify the ideas and ideals of Torah in our midst, *veTnishmaah* -- then indeed will we observe and obey, for then we will have living proof that the Torah is not too remote and distant, but it is part and parcel of our lives and realizable in the turmoil of everyday life.

Now we understand the words of the Sidra. When Moses says to his people about the Sefer Torah that *veThayah sham bekha l'ed*, it shall be a witness, it does not mean “for” or “against” the people of Israel. Rather, as the great author of “Bekhor Shor” said, the word *bekha* in this context means “through you,” that is, Israel must become the agent and the instrument through whom Torah is revealed to mankind. All of mankind must listen to the testimony of Torah about a living God, but they have no direct access to the Torah except through the way it is lived and realized by the people of Israel.

VeThayah sham, bekha, l'ed: and the Torah shall become, through the agency of Israel, a witness of God to all mankind. As the “Kingdom of Priests” we must teach not by lecturing but by living, not by preaching but by practicing, not by didactic telling but by demonstrating. Thus shall we be the true and loyal edim, witnesses, to Torah and to God. This, indeed, is what Maimonides said: *SheThu ha-ed ha-ne'eman le'khol baei olam*, the Torah is a loyal witness of God to all mankind. It is unnecessary to add, of course, Israel is the agency of that sacred and eternal testimony.

What a marvelous introduction to the great High Holiday season we are about to enter! Torah must be lived, not merely lectured. If we want our children to continue in the path of Judaism, it is not enough to send them to school; we have to be for them an example. If we

want them to be knowledgeable Jews, not ignorant semi-literate Jews, we have got to study ourselves -- and not only must we study about Judaism, but we must immerse ourselves in studies in Judaism. It is simply not enough to read Bellow and Malamud, not even “Commentary,” but we must plumb the genuine Jewish sources if we are to exemplify the study of Torah for our children. It was the late Ludwig Lewisohn, himself an eminent man of letters in our century, who bemoaned the fact that Jews had been transformed, in our days, from the “the People of the Book” to “the People of the Book-of-the-Month!”

If, indeed, we are determined that we shall allow our own children as well as ourselves to bear the witness of Torah to the existence of the living God amongst us, we have got to undertake the study of Torah in all seriousness this year. That is why I ask you at this time, at the eve of the great High Holidays, to determine and resolve that this year will be a year of study -- for the men, the study of Talmud and Rambam in the classes provided for them in The Jewish Center; and for the ladies, who have in our day rightfully experienced the emancipation of their intellects and talents, the study of the courses we provide for them as well. To be a witness means to testify through living, through example.

It is appropriate to conclude these remarks with the words we shall begin to recite tonight, at the Selihot services: *mi she'anah leTMosheh be'Horev hu yaanenu*, may the Lord who answered Moses at Sinai, and taught him how to teach by example, answer us as well and give us the courage, the fortitude, and the insight to emulate our teacher Moses.

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Something's Missing

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

In this week's parsha, God tells Moshe that after he dies, the nation will stray after the gods worshipped by the people in the land that they will enter, and forsake Him and annul the covenant He made with them. God then says that His anger will flare against them when that happens, and “I will forsake them, and I will conceal My face from them and they will become prey, and many evils and distresses will encounter it. It will say on that day, ‘Is it not because My God is not in my midst that these evils have encountered me? And I will surely conceal my face

on that day because of all the evil that it did, for it had turned to the gods of others.” (Devorim 31: 17-18). Many commentators find difficulty with these verses, because they seem to say that God will punish the people even after they have acknowledged their sin, which would seem to constitute some degree of repentance. Why, then, does God continue to conceal His presence from them after this acknowledgment?

Ramban, in his Torah commentary, explains that although the people admitted that they had sinned

when they said the reason all these evils befell them was because God was not in their midst, it was not a complete act of repentance. God's further concealment of His presence among them, he says, was actually part of a process of redemption carried out in a concealed manner. This measured response was designed to lead the nation to complete repentance through which they would merit a revealed redemption, and thereby more clearly experience God's presence in their lives. This explanation of the Ramban has often been invoked as a means of encouragement to the Jewish people in the face of suffering, to try to discern God's presence behind His concealment. However, other commentators have pointed out that the simple reading of these verses does not seem to indicate a reduction of the suffering coming as a result of the admission of the people. Rather, it seems to imply a continuation of divine concealment coming either despite of, or even as a result of this admission. Why should this be so?

Rabbi Reuven Katz, in his *Degel Reuven*, explains these verses on the basis of the Rambam's remarks in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (Laws of Repentance), chapter six, that it is possible to commit a sin that is so great, that part of the punishment for it is that teshuvah will be rejected. This is what the Torah means when it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Here too, says Rabbi Katz, in the verses we are examining, God is saying that the sin of the people in rejecting Him and straying after the gods of the people in their land was so great that He will not accept their repentance. Based on this understanding, continues Rabbi Katz, we can understand the Torah's assurance to us, in *parshas Nitzovim*, that the nation ultimately will do teshuvah. After all, he asks, doesn't man have free will? How can there be an assurance that the people will eventually repent, if their repentance depends on their own decision to correct their ways? The answer, says Rabbi Katz, is that God will, at some point in the future, remove the hindrance to teshuvah described in our verse as His refusal to accept the people's teshuvah. At that time, the redemption, which is dependent on that teshuvah, will come. Following this explanation, God's further concealment of His presence from the people, described in verse 18, comes despite their efforts to do teshuvah. However, the flow of the verses seems to suggest that this

concealment comes as a result of their attempt at teshuvah. How can this be explained?

Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in his commentary *Meshech Chochmoh*, explains that the statement of the people that God is not in their midst was in itself a sin. Even when God hides His presence from us, He is still among us. The rabbis tell us that this was the message God was conveying to Moshe when He appeared to him from within a burning bush. God was thereby saying, "I am with you in your distress." In truth, Rav Meir Simcha writes, the distress suffered by the nation is brought about by God in order to arouse them from their spiritual slumber and bring them back to Him. Because the people denied this fundamental principle, then, God further concealed Himself, as a punishment for this denial. However, I believe that the verse immediately following this description of divine concealment contains an assurance that even within this further concealment of His presence, God is still among us. In this verse, God says, "And now write this poem for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel, place it in their mouth, so that this song will be for me a witness against the children of Israel" (*Devorim* 31:19). Which poem is being referred to here? Some commentators explain it to refer to *parshas Ha'azinu*, which is written in the form of a poem, but the Rambam, based on the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 21b), says it is a reference to the entire Torah, and says it is the source of the obligation of every Jew to write a *sefer Torah*. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, in his *responsa Tuv Ta'am VeDa'as* (volume one, no. 263, as cited in volume eight of *Torah LaDa'as*, pages 236-237), albeit in a different context, notes that a Torah scroll only attains its status as a holy object when a Jew writes God's name in it with proper intent. The fact that every Jew is obligated to write a *sefer Torah* thus tells us that every Jew has a spark of divine holiness within him which he is able to transfer on to the Torah scroll. This commandment, therefore, serves as a refutation of the people's conclusion, from their suffering, that God is not in their midst, and a call to them to reactivate the divine spark within them, achieve complete teshuvah, and thereby merit redemption.

Hashem is Always on Our Side

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Sep 14, 2017)

There is a big mystery in the flow of the pesukim in Parshas Vayeilech. Predicting what will happen in the future, Hashem says: The Jews will sin: *ve-zana acharei elohei neichar ha'aretz asher hu ba shama bikirbo, ve-azavani, ve-heifer es brisi, etc.*—we will worship Avoda Zara. *Ve-chara api bo ba-yom ha-hu va-azvtim*—and Hashem will punish us. And then it says: *ve-amar ba-yom ha-hu, ha-lo al ki ein Elokai be-kirbi mitza'uni ha-ra'os ha-eileh*—we will have charata and do teshuva. We will say: It's because Hashem wasn't with us that all these bad things happened. That sounds like a good thing. We will say that we did the wrong thing, that we know it, and that we were punished for it. It is strange, then, that the very next pasuk says: *ve-Anochi hastir astir panai bayom ha-hu al kol ha-raah asher asah, ki fana el Elohim acheirim*. Hashem says: I will hide my face, and I will punish them for all their wrongdoing. It's very peculiar. If we said the right thing—*al ki ein Elokai be-kirbi mitza'uni ha-ra'os ha-eileh*—then it shows that we had charata. We said: It's our fault. Then why would Hashem hide His face and punish us more? Hashem should forgive us at that point. There are many different pshatim to answer this. However, I think that Seforno has a very deep explanation for this. He says: There is a problem with what they said. It was not productive. That's not teshuva. Teshuva would be, saying that because I did aveiros, these punishments happened to me, and now I am going to change my ways. That's teshuva. But what did they say? *Ha-lo al ki ein Elokai be-kirbi mitza'uni ha-ra'os ha-eileh*. We did aveiros, and therefore, Hashem wasn't with us. Hashem left us, *kaveyachol*. Says Seforno: For someone to feel guilty about their aveiros, that's healthy—especially this season of the year. To feel that Hashem is waiting for you to improve a little, that's great. But to feel that Hashem doesn't love you because of your aveiros; to feel that Hashem is not on your side; to feel that Hashem stopped loving you because of your aveiros—that, he says, is terrible. That's not teshuva. That just leads to depression, giving up, and never fixing anything. Hashem doesn't like me anyway, so what's the point? That, he says, is exactly the problem. If their reaction was a healthy way of rectifying their mistakes—I did something wrong, and I have to fix it—that would be great. But if the reaction is

just giving up—Hashem hates me now—then that is not theologically true. Hashem never hates. He always loves everyone! No matter how low you sink, Hashem still loves you. He might chastise you to make you do better, but He always loves you. And it's not healthy, psychologically, to think that Hashem hates you, because it just leads to more aveiros. Seforno also has a similar pshat earlier, in the very beginning of Sefer Devarim. The Jews say there: *ki be-sinas Hashem osanu hotzianu me-eretz Mitzrayim, laseis osanu beyad ha-Emori le-hashmideinu*. Part of the Chet ha-Meraglim was that they said: Hashem hated us, and that's why He took us out of Mitzrayim. He just wants us to get killed by the Emorim. What do you mean, Hashem hated us? He says: They weren't just being stupid when saying that. They were saying: We worshiped Avoda Zara in Mitzrayim, we were on the forty-ninth level of tumah, and Hashem hates us because of all our aveiros, and He will punish us. Sounds like they were saying something theologically correct. But Seforno says, No! That's the worst aveira in the world. It's healthy to say that I did aveiros, and now Hashem is upset. He chastises me; He demands that I improve. But to say that I did aveiros, and now Hashem hates me, that's not teshuva, and it's not Hakaras ha-Cheit. That's just denying the chesed of Hashem and denying the possibility of teshuva, and it leads you to get worse and worse.

I think that this is a very important message, especially for this time of the year. We are not liberals who see everything as being ok. That's not our hashkafa. If someone does something wrong, they should feel guilty and feel that what they did was wrong—that it's necessary in order to fix it. But that doesn't mean to stop feeling Hashem's love. That doesn't mean to stop feeling that Hashem believes in us. That just means that we have what to fix. We should never forget that no matter what we do, Hashem is always on our side. And He will never abandon us. And He will always be with us, urging us to come back. And that will give us koach to do teshuva and improve. Shabbat Shalom.

Fortunate Are You, O Israel!

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Vayelech, the Torah informs us of Hester Panim, the Concealment of the Divine Face, when Hashem hides His face (keviyachol) from His world and, specifically, from His people. The pasukim (Devarim 31:17-18) tell us:

וְהָרָה אִפִּי בּוֹ בַיּוֹם-הַהוּא וְעִזְבוּתִים וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פְנֵי מַהֵם, וְהָיָה לְאָכְלִי, וּמִצָּאָהוּ רַעוּת רַבּוֹת, וְצָרוֹת; וְאָמַר, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, הֲלֹא עַל-כֵּי אֵין אֵלָיךְ בְּקִרְבִּי, מִצָּאוֹנֵי הָרְעוּת הָאֵלֶּה

And My fury will rage against them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will befall them, and they will say on that day, 'Is it not because our G-d is no longer in my midst, that these evils have befallen me?'

וְאָנֹכִי, הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא, עַל כָּל-הָרָעָה, אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: כִּי פָנָה, אֶל-אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים

And I will hide My face on that day, because of all the evil they have committed, when they turned to gods of others.

Of all the punishments listed in the Torah (such as the klalos of Bechukosai and Ki Savo), the condition of Hester Panim is the worst condition that may potentially befall our nation, R"L.

This Shabbos, when Parshas Vayelech is read, is also Shabbos Shuva - the Sabbath of Repentance between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. It is a Shabbos of soul searching, when the pure neshama of each and every Jew yearns to return to Hashem in repentance. The depth of our deveikus is that even in the most terrible times, a Jew knows the RS"O is always there for him - even when He is hidden, and we always turn to Him for salvation, come what may.

Rabbi Yehuda Amital z'l (1924-2010, Holocaust survivor and Rosh Yeshiva Yeshivat Har Etzion) teaches, "Yet I have to ask - and I pray that I am not crossing a line - does the fear of divine punishment (yiras ha'onesh) really lead to fear of Heaven (yiras Shomayim)? ... On Yom Kippur we seek to attain fear of Heaven, but it is not certain that fear of punishment, thinking about the Books of the Living and of the Dead that are opened, is the right way to go about it.

"My friends, during the darkest time in Jewish history, the Holocaust, Jews saw with their own eyes that וְיָשׁוּ בְּסִפָּהּ - בְּלֹא מִשְׁפָּט - *some die without judgement*' (Mishlei 13:23).

Not only individuals but millions died, as it were, without judgement. But something extraordinary happened:

Jews who saw with their own eyes the murder of innocent babies, men, and women, whose children were snatched out of their arms, Jews who lost all hope of ever emerging alive from that hell - they all came together on Yom Kippur in the bunkers and prayed! What inspired them? Was it fear of judgement? These Jews experienced the worst concealment of G-d's face in history, yet they stood and cried out, as Iyov did: 'הוּ יִקְטְלֵנִי לוֹ אֵיחָל - *though He may slay me, yet I will trust in Him*' (Iyov 13:15).

"Whatever else is true, for those Jews on that Yom Kippur, their fate in this world was of no concern. What, then, were they feeling and thinking as they prayed? The answer is to be found in the concluding words of Maseches Yoma, where the Mishna teaches:

Says R' Akiva: אֲשֶׁרֵיכֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל, Happy are you, O Israel! Before Whom are you purified; Who purifies you? Your Father in heaven, as it is written, 'Then I shall sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be pure' (Ez.36:25), and it is written, 'The hope of Israel is Hashem' (Jer.17:13). Just as the mikvah purifies those who are defiled, so the Holy One, blessed be He, purifies Israel (Mishnah Yoma 8:9).

"R' Akiva was killed during a very dark time in Jewish history (in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple). For that very reason his words - אֲשֶׁרֵיכֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל, *Happy are you, O Israel!* - are a source of inspiration for the entire Jewish people, even during the most difficult periods.

"During the Holocaust, no one felt the fear of 'who will live and who will die,' but rather the exaltation of 'Happy are you, O Israel.' It was this feeling that made Jews declare, 'May His great name be magnified and sanctified.' I was fortunate that when I prayed on Yom Kippur, there was already hope of being saved. [Ed. note - On Yom Kippur 5707/1944, R' Amital hid in a cellar in the city of Grosswardein while the Hungarian army was already preparing for the coming invasion by the Russian army. He was liberated from the labor camp on Simchas Torah 5705.] But even those who had no such hope stood on Yom Kippur and prayed together with all of Israel, 'And so place the fear of You, L-rd our G-d, over all that You have made... And so grant honor, L-rd, to Your people.'

"What about us, will our entire experience of Yom Kippur be limited to the fear of judgement? Will we not feel the holy message that the Jews in the Holocaust left

for us? That message demands that we pray for G-d's sovereignty. Our fear of judgment should not be based on fear of punishment, but on the fear that, Heaven forbid, we will be considered wicked before G-d. We must hear the call, 'לִפְנֵי מִי אֶתֶם מְשֻׁרָרִין' - Before Whom are you purified?' and be proud that it is G-d Himself Who purifies us" (*When G-d is Near on the High Holidays*, Maggid Books,

The Living Tradition

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

As the Torah comes to a close, an era ends. Moshe finishes his month-long lesson, and our parshah pivots to the practical – appointing a new leader, Yehoshua. Despite Yehoshua's greatness, the Jews are hardly comforted. As the Talmud (Bava Batra 75a) records, the sages react to Yehoshua's appointment with despair: "The elders of that generation said: The face of Moses was as bright as the face of the sun; the face of Joshua was like the face of the moon. Woe for this embarrassment, woe for this disgrace." (Koren translation)

However, Yehoshua seems to share their hopelessness. After Moshe encourages the people to have courage in their upcoming battles (Devarim 31:6), he immediately provides a second inspirational speech directly to Yehoshua, using many of the same words, and then repeats it for a third time only a few verses later. (ibid. 7, 23) [In one place it seems that G-d is talking and in the other it is Moshe talking on behalf of himself.] In fact, G-d and the people each repeat similar sentiments to Yehoshua immediately upon Moshe's death. (Yehoshua 1:6-7, 9, 18)

Part of the plan to counter these feelings was the assurance that G-d would be with the Jewish people (Devarim 31:3-4) and with Yehoshua (ibid. 31:8, 23). However, as Rabbi Eli Chadad notes, there seems to be a second element – the commitment that even after Moshe's death, Moshe will accompany Yehoshua and the Jewish people. He notes that throughout the short parshah of Vayeilech, there are three stages at which Moshe seems to highlight his continued presence with the Jews.

Moshe's Presence in Hakhel

Immediately after the instructions to appoint Yehoshua in front of the people (31:1-8), Moshe writes a Torah that will be read every seven years as part of the Hakhel process, in which the king inspires the nation with a public recita-

p.231-232).

As we contemplate the awesome power of these Ten Days of Repentance, as we ponder our own fallibility and G-d's Infinity, as we consider the judgement of the coming new year for the entire world, let us remember that the path of repentance is to be found in רבא ויתקדש שמה רבא - May His great name be magnified and sanctified.

tion of the Torah in the Beit HaMik-dash. (31:9-13) Thus, Moshe's stamp is placed upon the Torah that the Jews will learn after his passing.

Moshe's Presence in a Song

In the next verses (31:14-16), G-d appoints Yehoshua in the presence of Moshe. This is followed by G-d's warning that once Moshe dies, the Jewish people will begin to go astray. In an attempt to forestall this, Moshe is instructed to write a song (Parshat Haazinu) that admonishes the Jews to follow the Torah and outlines what will happen if they do not. (31:16-22) This song is to be placed "in their mouths." (31:19)

Moshe's Presence in the Torah

This is followed by another statement of encouragement to Yehoshua, (31:23) which is then followed by a description of Moshe writing the Torah, this time "until the end", the placing of the Torah in the ark, and a gathering of the elders of the nation to direct his rebuke at them. (31:24-29) Both the song and the Torah are referred to as eid, as testimony for the Jewish people. Thus, both orally in the song, and in writing in the Torah, Moshe's message is given to the Jews to carry on.

Thus, central to Moshe's goal as he departs is to assure that he, or at least the inspiration he offers, will last forever. Simply knowing that G-d is with the people or Yehoshua is not enough. The Torah is part of a lived tradition, and internalizing that we are part of a connection, familial and relational, to human beings who were part of that tradition, is integral to feeling that we are not alone in the journey. Indeed, in the song of Haazinu, Moshe instructs the Jews to "Ask your father, he will inform you, your elders, they will tell you." (Devarim 32:7) The living chain is essential to understanding Torah.

During the Yamim Noraim, when we consistently invoke the merit of our forefathers, recall their commitment and struggles and model ourselves in their images, we take

strength in linking our-selves to the chain of tradition, and ensuring that we are worthy to be the next links.

Appreciating our own Inner Worth

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week's parasha, parashat Vayeilech, is almost always read together with the preceding parasha, Nitzavim. They are read separately only when there are two Shababatot between Rosh Hashana and Sukkot, neither of which coincide with a holiday.

On this Shabbat, which is known as "Shabbat Shuva," the Shabbat of Repentance, we read, in Deuteronomy 31:10-13, of the mitzvah of הַקְהַל --Hak'hayl. The Torah reports, that after the people of Israel settle in the Land of Israel, once every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot, all the people are to be called together, men, women and children to study Torah from the mouth of the king.

Hak'hayl was an extraordinary event, underscoring the fact that during the Sabbatical year, when the land lay fallow, citizens of Israel must enhance themselves religiously and spiritually by studying Torah. The king of Israel is expected to serve as the paradigm for all of Israel by leading the studies personally, teaching and learning Torah with the people.

The specific portion of the parasha in which Moses gives the people the directive concerning hak'hayl is introduced with the following words. The Torah, in Deuteronomy 31:9 states: וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת, וַיִּתְּנָהּ אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְוִי, הַנֹּשְׂאִים אֶת אֲרוֹן בְּרִית הַשֵּׁם, וְאֶל כָּל זְקֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, that Moses wrote down the Torah and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the Covenant of G-d, and to all the elders of Israel.

While the text relates that Moses wrote down the Torah and specifically delivered it to the hands of the priests and the elders, it is clear that religion in Judaism was not only intended to be of the concern of the priests, or to be the province of a small esoteric circle of leaders. The priests are merely the guardians and teachers of the Torah. The religious truths found in the Torah were intended to be the everlasting possession of the entire people. This is what is clearly indicated in the verse in Deuteronomy 33:4: תּוֹרָה תּוֹרָה לְנוּ מֹשֶׁה, מִוֶּרְשֵׁה קְהֵלָת יִעֲקֹב, Moses commanded us the Torah, it is an inheritance to the entire congregation of Jacob.

As is often true in Judaism, we encounter an antinomy,

a contradiction between the primacy of two reasonable principles: finding the proper and necessary balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of the congregation. So, for instance, while it is the Jewish people's custom to pray with a congregation, as part of a minyan--a quorum, the most significant prayer--the Amidah, is always recited silently, as if we are praying alone, as individuals. And while the community has certain powers, the powers that the community have, really derive from the individuals within the community. It is this balance of the needs of the individual and the needs of the community that Judaism does so well.

This delicate balance, is also reflected in the role played by the festival of Rosh Hashana (which begins on Monday evening, September 6th) and that introduces a 10 day period of collective repentance. But we dare not lose sight of the key role that the individual plays in achieving collective forgiveness. Each person must see him or herself as the key element in the successful achievement of forgiveness, not only on a personal level, but for the entire Jewish people.

When it comes to seeking forgiveness, those who are truly contrite often view themselves as unworthy, not only unworthy of G-d's forgiveness, but unworthy of participating in the communal contrition of the Jewish people. Not so, says Judaism. Each and every soul is precious to G-d. Each and every soul can qualify for Divine forgiveness, and each and every soul has the power to become the determining factor to achieve successful Teshuva--repentance for the entire Jewish people.

I would like to share a meaningful parable which I believe conveys a powerful message regarding an individual's true worth.

A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of the pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, the other pot was perfect. And while the perfect pot always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For two full years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering

only one-and-a-half pots full of water to his master's house.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, the cracked pot spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." "Why?," asked the bearer. "Of what are you ashamed?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house," the pot said. "Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you do not get full value from your efforts."

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old, cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But, at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because as usual, it had leaked out half its load. And so again, it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day, while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have had this beauty to grace his house."

The moral of course is that each of us has our own unique flaws. We're all "cracked pots" (some more cracked than others). But it's the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding. We must take each person for what they are and look for the good in them.

And there is much good out there. There is a lot of good in each one of us. Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape. We must remember to appreciate all the different people we encounter in life!

Each of us has the power to change the world. In order to accomplish this, we all need to focus on our own self worth, and learn to appreciate the abundant good that is to be found in others.