



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Va'etchanan 5782

### No Admittance

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

In the beginning of this week's parsha, Moshe pleads with God to let him enter the Holy Land, but God does not grant his request. The Midrash Rabbah notes that not only did Moshe not merit to enter the Holy Land, he did not merit to be buried there, either, in contrast to Yosef, who was buried there. Although the midrash does not mention this, there is a certain irony here, because Moshe, as the Torah tells us in parshas Beshalach, was the one who took Yosef's bones out of Egypt in order to bury them in the Holy Land, and, still, Yosef's remains were buried there while Moshe's were not. What was the reason for this difference? The midrash explains that God said, let the bones of Yosef, who admitted to his origins in the Holy Land, be buried there, and let not Moshe, who did not admit to his connection to the land, be buried there. When Yosef was taken from his prison cell and brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams, he said that he had been kidnapped from the land of the Ivrim, or Hebrews, whereas when Yisro asked his daughters to identify the man who had saved them from the shepherds, they said that an Egyptian man saved them. Rabbi Mordechai Rogov, in his Ateres Mordechai, explains that Yosef, in arguing his innocence of the charges brought against him by the wife of Potiphar, said that his place of origin and family roots testify that he could not have been involved in the abomination of violating his master's wife. However, when Moshe heard Yisro's daughters say that an Egyptian man saved them, he did not protest and say that only a Hebrew, with roots in the Holy land, and not an Egyptian, could have intervened to save people's lives.

Although Rabbi Rogov's explanation of the midrash carries an important message in Jewish pride, it is somewhat problematic, because Moshe was not present when Yisro's daughters referred to him as an Egyptian man

! Of course, Yisro may have told Moshe what they said when he did arrive at his tent, and at that time Moshe did not protest what they said, but that is not really what the midrash says. Rather, the midrash seems to be saying that it was the reaction of Yisro's daughters to Moshe for which he was called to task. When Moshe saved them from their attackers, apparently, they perceived him to be an Egyptian, and that is why they referred to him as an Egyptian in response to their father's question. We need to understand, then, why, in fact, Moshe appeared this way to them, and why it was the reason for his not being buried in Eretz Yisroel.

I believe that this midrash needs to be understood as being in accordance with another midrash, which we have mentioned in the past (see Netvort to parshas Emor, 5760, available at [Torahheights.com](http://Torahheights.com)). The midrash I am referring to (discussed at length by Avigdor Shinan in a volume entitled *Kedushas HaChaim Ve Cheiruf HaNefesh*, edited by Gafni and Ravitzki, Jerusalem, 1993) says that the ultimate reason for God's refusing Moshe admittance to Eretz Yisroel was the fact that he killed the Egyptian who he saw attacking a Hebrew slave. Although one could argue that this midrash is in conflict with the more popular midrash, which says that Moshe killed the Egyptian through use of the 'shem hamefurash,' or God's name, we have argued (in Netvort to parshas Emor, 5760) that the two midrashim can, in fact, be reconciled. Moreover, although the Torah tells us that God denied Moshe entrance to Eretz Yisroel because of the incident at the waters of Merivah, in which he struck the rock instead of speaking to it, Rambam explained that Moshe's sin consisted in becoming angry at an inappropriate time. This character fault is arguably the same character fault that was behind what the midrash refers to as Moshe's inappropriate

killing of the Egyptian slavemaster.

When Moshe fled Egypt because he heard that Pharaoh learned of his killing the Egyptian, he must, in fact, have had the appearance of an Egyptian. When Yisro's daughters saw him beat back their attackers, they very likely thought that only an Egyptian would have an aggressive-enough nature to take them on in battle. They may have also remembered the reports of someone who was wanted by the authorities for killing a slavemaster. It never occurred to them that someone from the Hebrew nation, with roots in the land of Canaan, could have had done such an act, and, therefore they assumed that he was an Egyptian. If Moshe did hear Yisro's daughters refer to him in this way, he could not have protested that only a Hebrew would be involved in saving a life, because he had, in fact, killed someone himself. Although he had killed the Egyptian in order to save his fellow Jew, he could have used different means to do so, as the midrash seems to indicate by saying that God would not forgive him for killing the Egyptian. It was, thus, not simply the lack of national pride that prevented Moshe from being buried in Egypt, but the fact that, by killing the Egyptian he had committed an act that belied the character of his nation.

Based on our explanation of the midrash, we can, perhaps, understand why Moshe was so eager to set aside the three cities of refuge on the western side of the Jordan,

to protect the life of the inadvertent murderer from the 'goel ha-dam,' bent on avenging the blood of his deceased relative (Devorim 4:41-43). He designated these cities even though they would not become operative until the three such cities on the eastern side of the Jordan would be designated, after he died and the nation entered the land. Moshe understood, through his punishment for killing the Egyptian, how important the preservation of human life is for the maintenance of society. The Rambam, in his Laws of Murder and the Preservation of Life, 4:9, in fact, writes that although there are worse crimes than bloodshed, none causes such destruction to civilized society as bloodshed. It was, in fact, the assassination of Gedaliah, the governor of Yehudah after the destruction of the first Temple, that, in the Rambam's words, in his Laws of Fasts, 5: 2, constituted the extinguishing of the last remaining ember of Yisroel's independence, thus making their exile complete. Perhaps, then, Moshe understood that despite the fact that he had killed the Egyptian in order to save an innocent life, he, as the leader of the nation, had to project the notion of the paramount ideal of the preservation of the human life, and could therefore not lead the nation into the land. By designating the three cities of refuge on the western side of the Jordan, he was teaching this message to the nation before he died.

## Was Moshe Rabbeinu A Success?

*Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given in the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on July 21, 2021)*

In this week's Parsha—in the third aliya—we have a series of three strange pesukim. *Az yavdil Moshe shalosh arim be-eiver ha-Yarden mizracha shamesh*. Moshe designated three cities on the Eastern side of the Jordan River. *La-nus shama rotze'ach*, etc.—for Arei Miklat. Ok. That doesn't seem like a strange thing. We expect Moshe to do what it says in the Torah—to designate the Arei Miklat. But the placement of this topic is seemingly peculiar. This comes right after divrei mussar that he delivered in Parshas Devarim, up to the time of going into Eretz Yisroel. And Parshas Va-eschanan starts with Moshe's tefilla to allow him to enter the land. So he gives a whole mussar shmues on listening to Hashem when you go into Eretz Yisroel. Like when we read on Tisha be-Av: *Ki solid banim u-vnei banim*—when we go into Eretz Yisroel, we should worship

Hashem and not Avodah Zarah, etc. And now—immediately following these three pesukim—after he gave us the mussar shmues about going into Eretz Yisroel, Moshe says: *Ve-zos ha-Torah asher sam Moshe lifnei Bnei Yisroel*. Here is the Torah! All the eidus, the chukim, and the mishpatim—all the halachos of the Torah. Ok. How did he start? He tells them the Aseres ha-Dibros, discusses the lessons learned from the Chet ha-Eigel, and eventually gets to all the mitzvos. But why does the Torah tell us, between Moshe's mussar about going into Eretz Yisroel and serving Hashem there—*Zos ha-Torah; Eile ha-Eidos; and Aseres ha-Dibros*—the fact that Moshe designated three cities for Arei Miklat? It seems utterly irrelevant to the flow of Moshe's speech. The meforshim were somewhat mystified by this. There are numerous pshatim. Ibn Ezra

says, for example: Oh. It so happened that on the same day he gave the speech, Moshe also designated the Arei Miklat. It's possible to say this, but it's a little dachuk. Why was it davka on that same day? And why is that important? Rashbam offers another technical interpretation. Since Moshe is about to tell us the mitzvot, and he will not tell us to set aside three cities of refuge in Eiver ha-Yarden. So the Torah prefaces this by saying: Why didn't Moshe need to command us to do this? Because he already took care of it. That's why it's missing from the list of the mitzvot that he tells us. However, many of the meforshim—such as Ramban, Rabbeinu Bachya, Rav Yosef Bechor Shor, and others—take a different approach based on Rashi. Rashi thinks there's something perplexing about the phrase *yavdil Moshe shalosh arim be-Eiver ha-Yardein*. Says Rashi: *Ve-af al api she-einan koltos ad she-yuvdelu osan she-be- Eretz Kenaan, Amar Moshe: mitzvah she-efshar le-kaymah akaymenah*. Even though they don't work yet—his setting them aside was not halchically effective. They would not provide refuge for the murderers until many years later when Yehoshua would designate another three on the western bank of the Jordan river—in Eretz Yisroel proper. So even though Moshe wasn't mekayem the mitzvah yet, he really wanted to do it. He said: Let me do what I can now—even though they did not come into effect yet. But what does this have to do with anything? Says Seforno very nicely: Moshe is about to tell them Zos ha-Torah; Eile ha-Mitzvos; etc. We all know how to teach people. You give them a shmuess. You hit them over the head. You say it again and again. You yell and scream. Alternatively, you could set an example—role modeling. That really teaches. Moshe says: Let me show you what it means to keep a mitzvah. But what's unique about this mitzvah? Explains Rabbeinu Bachya: Moshe says, I am not even going to be able to complete the mitzvah. Nonetheless, I am showing you how much I love mitzvot, even if I will not be able to do it 100% *be-shleimus*—even if it's not effective yet. If I am doing ratzon Hashem, I am doing the right thing. I care even about a half of a mitzvah. And I think there is something much deeper to this. What is going on here? Why can Moshe only set aside the three cities in Eiver ha-Yarden but not the three in Eretz Yisroel proper? We learn at the beginning of the Parsha that Moshe's whole goal in life was to bring the Jews from Mitzrayim to the Promised Land of Eretz Yisroel. He brought them out of Mitzrayim. He got them through the Midbar. But he didn't accomplish what he wanted to do. That frustration, this tremendous

disappointment, is what this Parsha is all about. How do you react to disappointment? We all have goals in life—both in gashmius and in ruchnius. But the important ones are in ruchnius. We all want to do things. Hopefully, we are idealistic enough people that we have ambitions and want to accomplish a lot. But even Moshe failed and did not get to do everything he set out to accomplish. Kal va-chomer people like us. What happens when everything doesn't work out the way you want, and you are frustrated and disappointed? A regular person would say: I give up. There is no point—it's useless. Why should I do this if it's not going to work? In contrast, Moshe Rabbeinu said: I'll do whatever I can. Ok. I couldn't accomplish all I wanted, so I'll do whatever I can and serve Hashem the best I can under the circumstances. Whether it's his fault or mine. Maybe I sinned, but I will not beat myself up and say: I may as well not try. I will say that it's my fault that I failed. But my reaction is going to be that I will do the best I can under the circumstances. It's not effective yet? So I can do three out of six now, and they will be ready whenever it's time to take effect later. Moshe is telling us such a tremendous mussar. We are about to learn a lot of mitzvot. Doing all these mitzvot, *be-shleimus*, and rising to the spiritual heights is really hard. Hopefully, we will strive to do them. What if it doesn't work out? Moshe says: Before I tell you what the mitzvot are, I must teach you a yesod. I will model for you how to approach the mitzvot. It's not all or nothing. It's not like if you fail, you are a failure. You do the best you can under the circumstances. And if the part you do doesn't count yet, still do what you can. Don't worry whether you achieved success. Worry whether you are doing the right thing and moving in the right direction. That, Moshe tells us, should come before Zos ha-Torah asher sam Moshe lifnei Bnei Yisroel. Before you do the mitzvot, you need to have a right attitude. The Klei Yakar says something beautiful. What does the previous pasuk say? *Ve-shamarta es chukav ve-es mitzvotav asher anochi mitzav'cha ha-yom asher yitav lecha u-levanecha acharecha*. He says: Sometimes everything works out. And sometimes it doesn't. And you know what? You should still do the mitzvot. Maybe you didn't accomplish, but because you tried so hard, your kids will take it one step further, and they will accomplish what you wanted to achieve, or someone else will take the baton and bring the world to a better place. You never know the long-term effects of your hishtadlus in doing mitzvot, even if you don't see the short-term fruits of your labors. And I think it's a really

beautiful lesson that Moshe put here in the Torah. We don't know exactly what Moshe knew and what he didn't. It's hard to know whether he was aware that we would read this passage on Shabbos Nachamu in Parshas Va'eschanan. Nevertheless, it's a powerful lesson this time of the year. Imagine how you felt after the Churban. You could ask: What's the point? There is no Bais ha-Mikdash. So I will be saying Korbanos every morning—to remind myself what it was really like! You know, it's so easy to give up and say: It happened because we failed. Our Sinas Chinam destroyed the Beis ha-Mikdash, and we are worthless and might as well give up because we will never be spiritually great. And the nechama is if someone says: Az yavdil Moshe shalosh arim. No. Whatever situation you are in—even if it's your fault—you can make the best of it. Because all Hashem wants from you is to do the best you can under the

circumstances—lema'an yitav lach. Maybe in the end, it will work out better than you thought. And if it does not, you will see your fruits that will change the course of history and all Klal Yisroel. Baruch Hashem, some of us have a brachah that Moshe didn't have—to be in the Promised Land. Nonetheless, in our personal life, maybe we will achieve everything we want, but the odds are that being the ambitious people we are—if we really cared to strive—we will not achieve everything we want. But maybe we should heed the wisdom that Moshe Rabbeinu is teaching us. Even if things don't work out—even if we fail or mess up—assess the situation and do the best you can. And know that *Zos ha-Torah asher sam Moshe lifnei Bnei Yisroel*. Whether you succeed or not is not important. What's important is if you are moving in the right direction and doing ratzon Hashem. Shabbat Shalom.

## The Sanctity & Beauty of Shabbos

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Va'Eschanan, Moshe Rabbeinu reviews the Aseres ha'Dibros, the Ten Commandments (lit. 'the Ten Declarations'), with the nation. The Aseres ha'Dibros, which were given to the first generation at the foothills of Sinai forty years prior, are now repeated for the sake of their children, who would hear the truisms of the law from Moshe, prior to his demise, and prior to their entry into the Holy Land.

In the fourth commandment, we are commanded regarding Shabbos. In Yisro (Shemos 20:8), the pasuk says: *זָכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.*

Rashi tells us: *תְּנוּ לֵב לְזִכֹּר תְּמִיד אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת, שָׂאם נִדְמַן לָךְ - pay attention always to remember the Sabbath day, for if a special item of food comes your way during the week, prepare it and set it aside for Shabbos (ibid).*

When Moshe repeats the Aseres ha'Dibros in our parsha, the lashon is amended slightly and the pasuk reads: *שָׁמֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ - guard the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Devarim 5:12).*

Here Rashi teaches: *וּבְרֵאשׁוֹנוֹת הוּא אוֹמֵר "זָכוֹר", שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּדָבָר - and in the first set, the pasuk says 'zachor' (remember), for both zachor and shamor were said in one declaration and as one word, and were heard simultaneously (ibid).*

This comes to teach us that both the zachor (remember)

aspect of Shabbos and the shamor (guard) aspect of Shabbos are of equal importance and relevance.

Furthermore: zachor - we must remember and keep the mitzvos asey in regard to Shabbos, and shamor - we must be on guard not to transgress the mitzvos lo sa'asey in regard to hilchos Shabbos.

An additional insight of the Ohr HaChaim ha'Kadosh into the meaning of *שָׁמֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ* teaches us of the importance of longing and waiting for Shabbos. The Ohr HaChaim writes that Shabbos should not be viewed as a burden, but rather, we must rejoice in Shabbos and desire it, and to be "shomer Shabbos" means that one must constantly wait and anticipate the arrival of Shabbos, longing for it and wondering "when will it come?" so that the mitzvos of Shabbos can be fulfilled (Ohr HaChaim to Shemos 31:16-17).

Perhaps we can also derive another lesson from the duality of zachor - remember the Sabbath - and shamor - guard the Sabbath.

Zachor, we as shmorei Shabbos Jews, must remember the Shabbos day to keep it holy. And furthermore, Shamor - we have to guard Shabbos and try to ensure that other Jews appreciate her beauty and holiness as well.

Rav Yisrael Meir Lau shlita records the following narrative in his masterful book, *Out of the Depths*. In the early days of the State, Ha-Shahar bus company (which

later merged with Egged) decided that its buses would drive through Kiryat Motzkin en route to the Galia beach.

“The bus route was to begin operation on the first Shabbat after the opening of the swimming season. On that day, following the Torah reading in the main beit kneset in Kiryat Motzkin, Rabbi Vogelman (Rav Lau’s uncle) led the congregants into the streets. The rabbi announced that they would pray the Mussaf service outside.

“I was about twelve years old, and I stood in prayer along with the crowd that had gathered from synagogues all around. Ashkenazic and Sephardic, new immigrants and old timers, elderly and youth, we all gathered in the neighborhood streets. Bus #52 approached from Kiryat Bialik going west. My sensitive uncle did not dare stand in its path, but he removed his (talit) prayer shawl from his shoulders and spread it over the road. I remember his lovely prayer shawl with the silver border, spread in all its glory on the black asphalt. Then the rest of the crowd followed his lead, carpeting Ha-Shoftim Avenue with prayer shawls until not an inch of asphalt was visible. With a screech of brakes, the bus stopped beside the rabbi, just in front of the prayer shawls. The driver got off, shaking all over, and pleaded to my uncle:

## A Mountain of Red and White

*Rabbi Moshe Taragin*

**M**oshe desperately pleads with Hashem for entry into Israel. Realizing that he will not reside in Israel, he yearns to caress its stones or even breathe its air. Sadly, he is banned, and can only survey the landscape from atop his mountain perch. He specifically covets the “great mountain” or as he refers to it, the “*har hatov*”. Oddly he employs the strange nickname of “Levanon” to describe this good mountain. What does the nickname of Levanon connote about the mikdash, and why does Moshe employ it this stage?

### The White Mountain

Firstly, the term Levanon evokes the phrase *lavan*, which refers to the color white. The mikdash enabled a *chatat-korban* or a sin-sacrifice, which, effectively whitened human virtue, which had been stained red by sin. Though the whitening effect refers specifically to sin-sacrifices, it alludes, more generally, to the full sweep of sacrifices and ceremonies of the mikdash. In addition to ritual

“Why is your Honor, the rabbi, doing this to me? Am I not a Jew? How can I run over a prayer shawl?”

“The rabbi answered, ‘My son, just as it is forbidden to trample a prayer shawl, so is it forbidden to trample the holiness of the Shabbat! We are all Jews standing here around you. We have come to live as Jews here in this neighborhood, in which Shabbat has never been desecrated in public. Please, do not break the tradition of Shabbat in Kiryat Motzkin, and do not break the chain of generations.’

“The driver listened silently. Then he got back onto his bus, put it into reverse, made a U-turn, and went back the way he came. I do not know what the situation is in Kiryat Motzkin today, but as long as I lived there, public transportation never again ran on Shabbat or on Jewish holidays” (Out of the Depths, p.126-127).

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt”l, teaches, “While we have survived almost 2,000 years without the Beis HaMikdash, we would not have survived one week without Shabbos” (Darosh Darash Yosef).

May we merit to “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy”, as we all “to guard the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” for us, our families, and all of Klal Yisrael.

and sacrifice, the mikdash was also a hub of prayer. All human prayer – both Jewish and Gentile- streamed up this mountain, on its way through the gates of Heaven. Finally, the mikdash was a core of Torah knowledge, as the *luchot* were housed in the aron and the great Sanhedrin was hosted in an adjacent lobby. This mountain was the consummate “building of Hashem”, housing religion, ritual, and prayer. It was majestic white.

### The red mountain

Additionally, the term Levanon evokes the term *lev* or heart, and this mountain both fastened and fascinated every Jewish heart. Three times a year, when the mikdash stood, an entire population of men women and children would pilgrimage en masse to this national complex. Even during the rest of the year, when the mountain was quieter, it was still the one location which captivated and unified the entire nation.

After the mikdash was demolished, the mountain

played an even greater role in capturing Jewish hearts. For thousands of years, it magnetized scattered Jewish hearts across the globe. Lost in distant wastelands, we all dreamed about this mountain, inserting it into prayers, longed for it at weddings, and collectively prayed for our national return to Zion.

This mountain is both white and red. It whitens human virtue but also pulses with the heartbeat of every Jew. White and Red. One mountain with two colors.

### **The paradox**

These two colors clash and the two meanings of Levanon are also paradoxical. For the mikdash to serve as a site of ritual it must be carefully protected and guarded. Halachikally impure people must be turned away and those who do enter, must carefully respect the guidelines and protocols of this heavenly mountain. For this mountain to remain white it must be exclusive. Not all behavior is accepted and not every person can always be invited.

However, for the mikdash to serve as the epicenter of every Jewish heart and the unifier of the Jewish imagination, every type of Jew must be invited, and all levels of observance must be welcomed. How can a broad population be included while still maintaining the religious integrity of the mountain?

In the past, halacha carved out carefully calibrated rules which restricted entry but still enabled inclusiveness. The outer precincts of the mikdash were accessible to all, save those with extreme rare and severe halachik impurity. Most people were allowed to visit some part of the mountain, even if they couldn't enter the inner chambers.

Even without actual presence, broad inclusion was achieved by allocating broad participation in mikdash ceremonies. For example, every week a different delegation of Jews would assemble in local towns, performing the mikdash-related ritual of ma'amdot. The delegates fasted and prayed so that the korbanot of the mikdash would be received in heaven. Though they stood afar from the mikdash, their ceremony was absolutely vital for mikdash success.

Interestingly, even though year-round entrance was carefully restricted, there were significant concessions implemented during the festival pilgrimage. The gemara in Chagiga describes leniencies which accounted for the increased foot traffic atop the mountain. The barriers to full scale entry remained in place, but various leniencies were accepted along the margins allowing for a more freely

accessible experience.

In the past it was relatively easy to calibrate between the two colors. Actual visitation was strictly regulated year-round, with slight concessions during festivals. Additionally, inclusion was realized even without actual presence on this mountain.

### **A complex equation**

In the modern state of Israel this challenge is not as easily navigated. The mountain and the Kotel are perhaps the last symbol of national unity in a badly fractured Israeli society. In 1967, the liberation of the Kotel unleashed an the type of national unity which seems unattainable in today's splintered reality. What price would we be willing to pay for the Kotel-centered national solidarity of 1967, or even for a glimmer of that harmony? It is hard to imagine a location which more deeply and broadly unites Jews, both across the religious spectrum and across the globe.

Yet the Kotel is also a site of prayer and the laws of beit kneset must be strictly applied. Beyond its formal status as a site of prayer, it is also the last-standing wall of our lost mikdash, behind which Hashem waits patiently for our redemption. Even if prayer were not conducted at the Kotel, we would still demand the decorum and gravitas reflective of the divine presence. How can the Kotel serve both functions of Levanon? How can it at once serve as a holy site of prayer and ritual, while also beckoning a broad range of Jews- many of whom do not subscribe to strict Orthodox standards of prayer? How can this mountain be both white and red?

### **No easy answers**

It is a good question, and one which doesn't yield an easy or immediate answer. Equally important to finding a solution, is acknowledging the paradox and exhibiting sensitivity to each color and to each function of this mountain. We cannot forfeit either function of this mountain. We must protect its holiness just as we include every Jewish heart in its experience.

Not every quandary in modern Israel can be simply or easily solved. Returning our people back to their ancient homeland is a fraught process which will probably unfold over multiple generations. It will take us some time to iron out the wrinkles of Jewish history. We imagine that redemption will be an immediate shift and we devotedly pray for that form of "electric" divine overhaul. More likely though, the process will occur in stages, and miracle solutions to unwieldy dilemmas, will be rare.

For the first time in thousands of years, we not only attend to our personal religious code but also to the religious experiences of a broad population—many of whom are not strictly observant of our standards. We are no longer living in Jewish “communities”, but in a Jewish state. Policies which exclude those whose standards fall short of our own, may be suitable in a community setting. However, there is only one land of Israel and only one

## Why the Sh'ma?

*Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald*

In this week's parasha, parashat Va'etchanan, we encounter, in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, one of the central prayers of Jewish life—the Sh'ma, the famed declaration of Jewish faith: “Hear O' Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one.”

There are four, possibly five, prominent mitzvot that are found in the first paragraph of the Sh'ma prayer: 1) Tefillin—the black leather boxes that are strapped to the hand and head as a sign of giving over one's strength, one's heart and one's mind to G-d 2) Mezuzah—the amulet, containing two selections from the Torah, that is affixed to the doorposts of the Jewish home, confirming G-d's presence in the house 3) teaching one's children Torah 4) reciting the Sh'ma prayer morning and evening 5) the mitzvah of loving G-d with all one's heart, one's soul and one's might.

This final mitzvah is the subject of controversy due to the fact that according to many Jewish philosophers and theologians, G-d can do everything, except make a person believe in Him, because that would constitute coercion, not belief. Some authorities say that although belief in G-d may indeed be a formal mitzvah, the human being is still left with free choice. Others say that “loving G-d” is a statement, not a commandment.

In any case, all agree that the Sh'ma prayer is the central statement of belief of the Jewish people by which Jews affirm the dominion of G-d in their lives. In fact, the rabbis refer to the Sh'ma as the prayer in which Jews accept upon themselves על מלכות שמים, “the yoke of Heaven.”

This terminology, “yoke of Heaven,” is rather intimidating and appears even menacing. However, upon further exploration of the terminology, we discover an intriguing insight. When an animal, such as an ox, is tethered to a plow without a yoke—the harder the animal

Kotel, and we want every Jew to feel a part of each.

In the past, Jewish communities often faced religious questions. In Israel we face quotients not questions. How can we balance between two competing values? Religious challenges in Israel are more complex and more nuanced than they may be in Jewish communities.

Life in Israel is three-dimensional -many, many colors.

pulls the more it hurts itself. In fact, the animal might even choke itself to death! The yoke, for all its weight and discomfort, is, in effect, a liberating device, allowing the animal to accomplish far more than it normally could without the yoke. So too, the “Yoke of Heaven” is liberating, allowing the human being to follow a divinely inspired lifestyle and make moral decisions, despite the numerous blandishments to do otherwise.

But if the Sh'ma prayer is indeed the statement in which Jews accept upon themselves the dominion of G-d, then should not the opening line of the Sh'ma read “and you shall believe in the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might”? Why does it read instead, and you shall “love” the L-rd your G-d?

The philosophers explain that “love” is a most powerful emotion. Love has the ability to reveal truths that are otherwise hidden. For instance, to the untrained musical ear, the voice of a renowned opera singer may sound like a large man making unpleasant bellowing sounds. To the opera aficionado however, every note is transformational, every trill sends shivers up and down the opera-devotee's spine. A committed opera buff may even be able to compare the singer's current rendition of Aida with an obscure recording of a performance in Milan, Italy, from the early 1920s. In other words, love opens vistas that may otherwise be obscured. A slightly misshapen nose, or a space between a person's teeth, may be quite a turn-off to some, but a source of a great attraction and beauty to one who is in love. That is why it is often said, “Love is blind.”

Love, in fact, is perhaps the most efficacious avenue to belief. That is most likely the reason why The Kotzker Rebbe once responded to the question “Where do we find G-d?” by saying: “Wherever we allow Him to enter!”

By opening our hearts to love G-d and allowing Him

to enter, we enable ourselves to see and appreciate things about G-d that others, who have more casual attitudes, would never perceive or appreciate.

No wonder the Sh'ma prayer is usually one of the first

## The Lesson of Arei Miklat

*Rabbi Avraham Gordimer*

**A**fter presenting B'nei Yisroel with an admonition about the future exile, which would be followed by teshuva and geula (repentance and redemption), Moshe Rabbeinu appears to unexpectedly halt his monologue and radically “switch gears”, as we read: “Then Moshe designated three cities (of refuge) on the east side of the Yarden (Jordan River), for an unwitting killer to flee...” (Devarim 4:41-42) Following Moshe’s designation of these Arei Miklat (Cities of Refuge), he resumes his monologue about heeding Hashem’s mitzvos.

Why does Moshe suddenly designate Arei Miklat at a juncture which seems to be totally unrelated to the context, smack in the middle of his messages of admonishment and inspiration? This question appears to have bothered the Commentators (v. Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra and S’forno); I’d like to suggest an alternative approach.

Parshas Va’eschanan is unique in that its tochacha (admonition) contains the concept of teshuva. Whereas previous admonitions warned about the consequences of sin, the tochacha of Va’eschanan introduces teshuva as the

## Protecting Our Souls

*Rabbi Efreim Goldberg*

**M**oshe recalls the event of Ma’amad Har Sinai (the Revelation at Mount Sinai), and he warns the people, וּנְשַׁמְרְתֶם מְאֹד לְנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם – “Guard your souls very carefully” (4:15), ensuring not to think that Hashem has any image or form. Although they beheld a revelation of God at that time, they must not take this to mean that He has physical properties.

The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz offers a deeper reading of the words וּנְשַׁמְרְתֶם מְאֹד לְנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם. He writes that the way to protect our נַפְשׁוֹת, our souls, is to preserve our מְאֹד. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (4:4) exhorts, מְאֹד מְאֹד הוּא שְׂפֵל רוּחַ – “Be very, very humble of spirit.” As the Rambam writes, Chazal here teach that whereas generally we are to exercise moderation, and avoid veering to extreme conduct of any

utterances on our lips in the morning, and one of the last words pronounced before going to sleep, and before we depart from this world.

key to reverse these consequences.

Teshuva is a very difficult concept for the human mind to process and accept, for teshuva precipitates atonement and can even erase sin, defying our sense of logic.

This is precisely why Moshe designated Arei Miklat in the course of delivering his admonition. Killing another person is among the most severe sins in the Torah, and it is surely irreversible. For this very reason did Moshe elect to designate Arei Miklat during his tochacha, in order to illustrate the potency of teshuva; for the unwitting killer, who committed a severe, irreversible sin, is granted atonement upon the completion of his term in Arei Miklat (v. Rambam - Hil. Rotze’ach 7:14), powerfully demonstrative of the great and challenging concept of teshuva.

If one who unwittingly takes a human life can obtain atonement for his deed, all the more so should we be inspired to engage in teshuva with the confidence that its transformative qualities can enable us to change our spiritual path and direction for the better.

kind, humility marks an exception. When it comes to this particular character trait, we are instructed מְאֹד מְאֹד – to be humble in the extreme. (The other exception, the Rambam writes, is anger, from which we must distance ourselves to an extreme.) The Imrei Chaim thus explains וּנְשַׁמְרְתֶם מְאֹד לְנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם to mean that in order to protect our souls, we must follow the exhortation of מְאֹד מְאֹד הוּא שְׂפֵל רוּחַ – to be exceedingly humble. The Gemara in Maseches Megila (29a) teaches, מֵאֵן דִּיהִיר בְּעַל מוֹם הוּא – an arrogant person is considered “blemished.” Nothing is more damaging to a person than arrogance. Therefore, we are urged to protect ourselves by fulfilling the dictum, מְאֹד מְאֹד הוּא שְׂפֵל רוּחַ.

The Imrei Chaim proceeds to add a second

interpretation. Later in this parsha (6:5), we find the first paragraph of the daily Shema recitation, in which we are commanded to love Hashem *מאדך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך* – “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your *מאד*.” One of the translations of *מאדך*, as Rashi brings, is “your money.” Accordingly, the Imrei Chaim writes that

*כחם ונשמרתם מאד לנפשותיכם* could be read to mean that we protect ourselves by maintaining a healthy perspective on money. Greed, stinginess, dishonesty, and obsession with wealth is terribly corrosive to a person’s being. Thus, in order to protect our souls, we must ensure to avoid arrogance and an unhealthy preoccupation with money.

## Moshe’s Prayer to Enter the Land

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

In the beginning of our parsha, Moshe relates to the people how he implored Hashem to be able to enter the land of Israel together with them, but Hashem denied his request. When considering this opening section, two basic questions come to mind:

1. On what basis did Moshe feel that Hashem might allow him to enter the land?
2. Why, in the event, was his request not granted?

### No Entry – As a Leader, or Even as a Private Citizen?

In order to answer these two questions, we must first consider the basis of Moshe being denied entry into the land. In Parshas Chukas (Bamidbar 20:12), Hashem informed Moshe that this was a punishment for the episode of Mei Meriva, where Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to it. On a simple level, therefore, we might say that Moshe was praying that this decree be revoked, but was informed by Hashem that it was final and not subject to reversal.

However, if we look closer at those verses, we will discover that it is possible that Moshe’s prayer and the decree against him were not directly antithetical one to the other. Hashem’s words to Moshe in the aftermath of the Mei Meriva were:

וְעַן לֹא הֵאֱמַנְתָּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֹן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם.

*Because you did not promote faith in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation to the land that I have given them.*

We see that the decree was that Moshe would not “bring the congregation to the land,” i.e. as their leader, rather, it would be Yehoshua who would bring them in. Coming back to our parsha we note that Moshe did not ask to bring the people in. He rather asked that he should be allowed to “enter the land,” i.e. as a private citizen. Perhaps this, then, was the reason Moshe felt his prayer would be granted, as it did not actually contravene the decree at Mei Meriva.

Indeed, the final two verses of Parshas Devarim (Devarim 3:21-22), which immediately precede Moshe’s prayer, describe him charging Yehoshua with leadership of the people. In this way, by handing over the reins of leadership, Moshe felt that he was paving the way for his request to enter together with the rest of the people, as mentioned in the opening of our parsha. (Abarbanel to verse 25)

However, if this is the case, we must then ask: Why was his request to enter the land, even not as the leader, not granted to him?

To answer this question, we may need to consider that there were other reasons behind Moshe not entering the land, aside from the decree at Mei Meriva...

### An Additional Element? The Sin of the Spies

In last week’s parsha, in the course of his rebuke over the episode of the spies, resulting in that generation not being allowed to enter the land, Moshe says:

גַּם בִּי הִתְאַפְּנִי ה' בְּגַלְלֶיכֶם לְאֹמֹר גַּם אֶתָּה לֹא תָבִיאוּ שָׁמָּה

*Also with me Hashem became angry because of you, saying: “You too shall not come there.”* (Devarim 1:37)

Needless to say, this verse requires understanding, as it implies that Moshe’s inability to enter the land was a result of the sin with the spies. Why should that episode be the cause of punishment for Moshe? Additionally, how is this to be reconciled with the verses that state explicitly that the cause for all this was the episode of Mei Meriva, thirty-eight years later?

The Midrash (Tanchuma, Parshas Va’eschanan sec. 6) states that when it was decreed upon the generation of the spies that they die in the wilderness, it was likewise ordained that Moshe die there, so that in future times when the dead are revived, he could then bring them into the land together with him.

However, it seems that this initial decree concerning Moshe was not irrevocable; the matter assumed finality only in the later episode of Mei Meriva, and hence the

verse ascribes his punishment to that occurrence.

At any rate, we can now understand why, when the decree was finalized, it precluded the possibility of Moshe entering the land in any capacity – even not as a leader – since he needed to be buried in the wilderness together with his generation. Hence, his request to be allowed to cross over the Jordan even as a private citizen was denied.

### **With an Eye on Exile**

This is another approach taken by numerous commentators regarding the connection between the episode of the spies and Moshe being barred from entering the land. In contrast to the Midrash, this approach focusses, not on the generation that stayed on the wilderness, but on the generation that entered the land.

One of the repercussions of the sin of the spies is that exile was decreed for the Jewish people at a later point. A trademark of Moshe Rabbeinu was that whatever he was instrumental in bequeathing to the people had the quality of permanence. Thus, for example, our freedom from Egypt, becoming Hashem's people and the Torah we received at Sinai were never taken away from us. As such, if Moshe were to bring us into the land of Israel, exile from the land would likewise become an untenable option. Putting these two ideas together thus explains how the sin of the spies had negative repercussions for Moshe as well regarding entering the land: Since exile had been decreed, Moshe could not bring the people in, as that would negate exile as a possibility.

In this light, too, we can understand Moshe's prayer to enter the land. Moshe understood that the problem he would engender in rendering exile untenable was only if he brought the people in to the land as their leader. Therefore, he asked to be allowed to enter as a private citizen such that he would have no such complicating effect. However, Hashem informed him that his entering the land in any capacity – even a private one – would preclude the option of subsequent exile and hence his request was denied. (Malbim)

### **“Let me please cross and see the land”**

Thus far, we have considered the question of whether Moshe was requesting to be able to settle in the land as a leader or simply as part of the people. However, it is possible to consider that Moshe's request was more modest than either of these two options. This simple reading of his prayer, “let me cross and see the land,” implies that he was not asking to be allowed to live in the land in any capacity,

either public or private. Rather, he was simply asking to be able to cross the Jordan and see the land – after which he would come back. We may ask: what could Moshe have hoped to achieve in such a brief visit? Of course, we could respond simply that even to be in the land of Israel for short while is of great spiritual benefit; after all, the Gemara (Kesuvos 111a) extolls the virtues of one who even walks four cubits in the land of Israel. However, it is possible that Moshe had an additional intention with this request. To understand this matter, let us consult a well-known passage of the Gemara regarding Moshe's prayer on this occasion:

דרש רבי שמלאי מפני מה נתאוה משה רבינו ליכנס לארץ ישראל? וכי לאכול מפריה הוא צריך או לשבוע מטובה הוא צריך? אלא כך אמר משה, הרבה מצוות נצטוו ישראל ואין מתקיימות אלא בארץ ישראל, אכנס אני לארץ כדי שיתקיימו כולן על ידי.

*Rav Samlai expounded: Why did Moshe desire to enter the land of Israel? Did he need to eat from its fruit or be satisfied from its goodness? Rather, thus said Moshe: Israel has been commanded with many mitzvos that can only be performed in the land of Israel. I will enter the land so that they will all be fulfilled by me. (Sotah 14a)*

If we consider this passage carefully, a number of questions will arise:

1. Why does Moshe say הרבה מצוות נצטוו ישראל, Israel has been commanded with many mitzvos, – referring to the people as an entity distinct from himself? Why not simply say, “We have been commanded with many mitzvos,” or simpler still, “There are many mitzvos”?

2. Why does he use the somewhat wordy phraseology of יתקיימו כולן על ידי, they will all be fulfilled by me, and not more directly כולן אקיים, and I will fulfill all of them?

3. Beyond this, a more fundamental question is raised by the commentators: Why is the Gemara even pondering and investigating the basis of Moshe's desire to enter the land? Is there not a mitzvah to live in the land of Israel? That should be the answer to our question! In fact, there shouldn't even be a question in the first place!

It appears that the Gemara, too, understood Moshe's request of “let me cross” in its literal sense. He knew that settling in the land in any permanent capacity was being withheld from him and was requesting only to cross the Jordan and see the land for a brief while. Hence, his motivation in his request could not have been the mitzvah to live in the land of Israel. Indeed, as the Gemara expresses it, seemingly all he would have time in such a visit for is to partake of some of its fruit! What then, was his goal?

To this the Gemara answers, although Moshe knew that

he himself would not be able to fulfill any of the mitzvos that pertain to the land of Israel, nevertheless, he wanted to have a hand in establishing conditions for those mitzvos to apply. As we know, the sanctity which generates the land-based mitzvos is itself “activated” by the entry and presence of the Jewish people in their land. Moshe wanted to enter the land and thereby make his unique contribution to the sanctity of the land. In this way, the mitzvos that “Israel was commanded to perform in the land,” while not being performed by him, could at least be “fulfilled through him” as the one who enabled conditions for their obligation.

This third approach is, in a sense, the most devastating of all, for it emerges that even crossing the Jordan into the land of Israel for just a few hours – or even moments – was denied Moshe. Perhaps his presence even for a short duration would also have caused the sanctity of the land to be activated to a degree that would preclude the exile of the people, as discussed earlier.

### **Seeing the Land**

In the event, as Moshe relates, his request to enter the land was not granted in any capacity. However, this is not to say that his prayer was entirely without result. Moshe’s prayer consisted of two requests: 1) To enter the land, 2) To see the land. Although the first request was denied, the second was granted, as verse 27 relates that Hashem told Moshe to ascend the peak of the mountain and to see the land. (Berachos 32b)

What was the purpose of Moshe seeing the land? The commentators explain that this was not merely a compensatory act for Moshe who would not be allowed to enter the land, that he at least be allowed to see it. Rather, in the same way that his wish to enter the land was in order to help activate its sanctity for the Jewish people, so too, his desire to see the land was to bestow blessing on it through visual contact. (Seforno to Devarim 3:25)

Indeed, for this reason, he was told to ascend the mountain and look around in all four directions – including east. Seemingly, Moshe should have no need to see the east side of the Jordan, as that was where he currently was! Rather, his surveying the land was to bestow blessing upon it, and in this context, the east side of the Jordan, which was also an extension of the Jewish presence in the land of Israel, was also included in that blessing.

### **Conclusion: Experience and Exhortation**

Having discussed the events described in the opening verses of our parsha, the somewhat disarming question

that remains is: Why are they in our parsha? The beginning of Chumash Devarim contains Moshe words of rebuke and exhortation to the people. What room is there to include within such a framework an account of Moshe’s own personal experiences, deeply significant though they obviously were for him? The simple answer, presumably, is that this is part of Moshe’s rebuke, since his inability to enter the land was precipitated by the negative actions of the people – either with the spies or the Mei Meriva.

The Ibn Ezra, however, has a different approach. The goal of Moshe’s exhortations in Chumash Devarim is to prepare the people as best he can to enter the land of Israel and fulfill their national destiny there.

To this end, he both reviews their past mistakes and also warns them concerning challenges and potential pitfalls that may be waiting for them there. As part of this goal, Moshe seeks to make the land beloved to them, to which end he relates how much he himself prayed to be able to enter it but was denied this request. Thus, Moshe is saying to the people: “Know that I would have done anything to cross the river that you are about to cross, if only for a few moments. In the end I was only able to ascend a mountain and see the land from afar. You who will be entering the land, please be sure to appreciate it, cherish it and take care of it.”