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Devarim 5783

The Veil of God

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered on August 7, 1965)

Tisha B'av is more than the commemoration of the five specific historic events mentioned in the Talmud, foremost among them the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem six centuries apart. It is even more than the national threnody for a string of tragedies, beginning from the earliest times, and extending through the ninth of Av, 1492--the expulsion of Jews from Spain--and the same date in 1942: the signing of the extermination order against Polish Jewry by the unmentionable leader of Nazi Germany. More than these alone, Tisha B'av is a condition of the divine human dialogue, it is a quality of the relations of God and the people of Israel.

Man does not always perceive God uniformly. Sometimes He appears close to us, nearby, concerned, sympathetic, involved in our destiny, a loving and forgiving Father. "The Lord is near all who call upon Him" (Ps. 145:18). It is a source of joy and comfort to man when he perceives God in this fashion. But sometimes God appears infinitely remote, distant, faraway. It seems almost as if He has vanished from the world, without leaving a trace. God appears aloof, unapproachable, forbidding, uninterested, and ready to abandon man to eternal solitude. There is no greater agony for man than when God thus veils His presence, when He performs hester panim, the "hiding of His face" from mankind. When God, as it were, withdraws from the world and leaves man to his own resources, forsaken and at the mercy of the impersonal and brutal forces of nature and history, man's life is worse than meaningless.

It is this latter condition that is described in Tisha B'av. That black day was the beginning of the long, ages-old epoch in which God and Israel disengaged from each other, when a seemingly impenetrable veil cruelly separated them. The culmination of Jeremiah's Lamentations sounds this very note: לממה לנצח תעזבונו לאורך ימים--why do You forget us for an eternity, forsake us for so long a time?

But if so many generations were born and died under the heavy cloud of this veil, this hester panim, since that disaster 1,895 years ago initiated this agonizingly long separation, then we are faced with two questions: First, how is it that we have not disappeared as a people? According to all laws of historical determinism we should have disappeared long ago. If there is no longer any relation between God and Israel, how can we account for the mystery and miracle of Israel's persistence? And second, how can we pray? Is it not futile to try to arouse One who in advance resists any communication? Moreover, how can we speak of such matters as אהבה רבה אהבתנו, of God's great love for Israel?

For an answer to these questions, and a solution to the whole problem of hester panim and Tisha B'av, we may turn to a remarkable insight offered by two of the earliest giants of the Hasidic movement. The Hasidic classic, the "בני יששכר," records two questions asked of R. Pinhas of Koretz, the disciple-colleague of the Baal Shem Tov, and the one answer that both gave to the two questions.

The first question concerns the well-known tradition, recorded in the Talmud, that the Messiah was born on Tisha B'av. Is it not unreasonable to assert that the purest of all souls, the exalted agent of the Almighty in the long awaited redemption of Israel, would come into this world on the very day distinguished for infamy and grief? Is not this the single most inappropriate day for such an historic event? Second, the Talmud records a most marvelous tale. It relates that when the enemy broke into the sacred precincts of the Temple and laid low its walls, they entered the inner sanctum wherein there stood the two Cherubim, the statuettes resembling the faces of young, innocent children, and from between which the voice of God would issue forth. When the enemy beheld these Cherubim, the Talmud related, they found that the two figurines were facing each other. Now this is most unexpected, because

according to Jewish tradition, the Cherubim faced each other only when Israel was obedient to God (עוֹשֵׂין רְצוֹנוֹ (של מקום); when Jews did not perform the will of God, the Cherubim turned away from each other. The destruction of the Temple was certainly the result of Israel's disobedience and rebellion. One would expect, therefore, that they turn their faces away from each other. Why, then, were they facing one another, the sign of mutual love between God and His people?

The answer is a profound insight into the nature of love and friendship. The attachment between two people is always strongest just before they part from each other. Two friends may continue their friendship with each other on an even keel for many years. Their loyalty requires of them no outward expression, even if they do not take each other for granted. Then, one of the two prepares to leave on a long, long journey. How poignant does their friendship suddenly become! With what longing do they view each other! Similarly, husband and wife are involved in the daily struggles and trivialities that cloud their true feelings for each other. But when one is about to leave for a protracted vacation or sick leave or business trip, and they know they will not be near and with each other for a painfully long period, then they suddenly rise to the very heights of mutual love and dedication, and they behold each other with new warmth and yearning and sweet sorrow. Indeed the Halakhah declares this as a mandatory expression of the right relationship between husband and wife: הַיּוֹצֵא לְדֶרֶךְ צָרִיךְ לִפְקֹד אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ--when one is about to take leave for a long journey, he must be especially tender and loving towards his wife.

Now the love between God and Israel follows the same pattern as genuine human love. Tisha B'av was the beginning of the hester panim, the parting of the lovers. God and Israel turned away from each other, and the great, exciting, and immensely complicated relationship between the two companions, begun in the days of Abraham, was coming to an end. But before this tragic and heartbreaking moment, there took place a last, long, lingering look, the fervent embrace of the two lovers as they were about to part. At the threshold of separation they both experienced a great outpouring of mutual love, an intense אהבה as they suddenly realized the long absence from each other that lay ahead of them; in so brief a time they tried to crowd all the affection the opportunities for which they ignored in the past, and all the love which would remain unrequited in the course of the future absence. That is why the

Cherubim were facing each other. Certainly the Israelites were rebellious and in contempt of the will of God. But they were facing each other; God and Israel looked towards each other longingly and in lingering affection before they were pulled apart. And from this high spiritual union of God and Israel was created the soul of the Messiah! משיח was conceived in intense and rapturous love!

From this exquisitely intensified relationship before the long separation, we may gain a new insight into the relationship of God and Israel during this prolonged period of hester panim initiated by the destruction of the Temple. True and devoted friends never forget each other--even if anger and offense have caused them to separate from one another. Of genuine friends it may never be said that "out of sight, out of mind." Where there was once deep and profound love between husband and wife, some spark of it will always remain no matter how sorely their marriage has been tried. Absence, indeed, may make the heart grow fonder and the old love may well be reawakened. Those who deal with marital problems have observed that often a couple will undergo legal separation, and that very absence from each other will make them realize how they need and yearn for each other--and thus lead to reunion. A father may be angry with his son, so angry that they no longer speak with each other. But the father's heart aches, his sleep is disturbed, and his heart lies awake at night waiting for his son to call, to write, to make some small gesture towards reconciliation. All these are instances of separation tense with love striving for reunion.

Such indeed is the hester panim that separates us from our Father in heaven. We are exiled from Him--but not alienated. We are so far--yet so close. We are separated--but not divorced. God's face is hidden--but His heart is awake. Of course the divine love for Israel has not expired. It is that and that alone that accounts for our continued existence to this day. Certainly "with a great love has Thou loved us"--for though we are banished, we need but call to Him and He will answer. Like a wise parent, the Almighty may punish, even expel, but never ceases to love His child!

Have we any evidence of this phenomenon in the history of Israel in our own times? I believe we do, but I approach the subject בְּדַחֲלִילוֹ וּרְחִימוֹ, with trepidation. If one were to ask: was it worth experiencing a holocaust which decimated one third of our people in order to attain a State of Israel?, then not only an affirmative answer but even the very question is a blasphemy. Only a cruel, heartless jingoist could ever allow such thoughts to poison his mind.

Yet the past is done and cannot be undone. History is irrevocable. We may protest it and bemoan it and regret it, but it is there despite us. A tremendous paradox emerged from the paroxysms of our times, and we must strive to understand it: during one lifetime we witnessed the nadir of Jewish history, the descent into the very pit--and the rebirth of Jewish independence in pride and glory.

The Holocaust was the most intense, the most dismal *hester panim* we have ever experienced. God abandoned us to the vilest scorpions that ever assumed the shape of man. From our agony and our dishonor we cried to heaven, but our cries could not pierce the meta veil, which only reflected our shrieking back upon us to mock us in our terrible loneliness and torment. Auschwitz was the device of human genius as God turned aside. Buchenwald was built by human toil and intellect as God closed His eye.

Yet we survived the experience: crippled, maimed, decimated, disgraced, we yet trudged back from the depth camps and displaced persons camps, from the fury and wrath, and from the shameful silence of the onlookers, to a land promised us 3500 years ago. Providence did not allow us to be utterly destroyed. The veil of God ensconced us in misery; but through it, mysteriously, there shone a vision

Leadership Stars

Dr. Erica Brown

Many years ago, I was invited to teach a leadership class in a large tech firm on the topic of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. At some point, one department head commented, "I don't have to praise people who work for me. I pay them." The others in the room looked uncomfortable. It wasn't hard to understand why his department was shrinking.

In this week's sedra, Devarim, Moses praised his people, even as he criticized them. He began his farewell speech to the nation about to enter the land of Israel. He had to prepare them to live without him. Succession is one of the hardest leadership transitions, both for the leaders who are coming and going and for those who have to adapt to new models of governance. Moses was their faithful guide, who freed them from slavery, brought their laws down from Sinai, and escorted them through the desert. All of these formative national experiences were associated with one person.

In his remarks, Moses sandwiched praise of the Israelites with criticism of them. It's hard to know what we as readers should feel when we read this contradictory summation:

of love. In retrospect, right before the *hurban* of European Jewry, the State of Israel was being providentially prepared so that the survivors might emerge into new dignity. God too followed the Halakhah: *היוצא לדרך צריך לפקוד את אשתו*. Before He "walked out on us," before He forsook us and turned away from us, He provided for our perpetuation, for a new generation and a new life and a new spirit.

Job taught us a long time ago that there are no easy answers to the mystery of suffering. Certainly the unspeakable agonies of a whole people cannot be easily explained, much less explained away. But from the hints left to us by our Sages in the folios of the Talmud about the birth of Messiah and the position of the Cherubim, we may begin to search for direction and understanding and meaning of the history of our times and the mysterious relationship between God and Israel.

Even while intoning the sorrowful lament of Jeremiah, *למה לנצח תשכחנו תעזבנו לאורך ימים*, bemoaning God's aloofness and our forlornness, we recite the same Prophet's words in the same Book of Lamentations as he senses intuitively that *ה' לא חסדיה*--the love of the Lord has not come to an end, His compassion has not ceased.

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

Thereupon I said to you, "I cannot bear the burden of you by myself. Your God has multiplied you until you are today as numerous as the stars in the sky. May God, the God of your ancestors, increase your numbers a thousandfold, and bless you as promised.

How can I bear unaided the trouble of you, and the burden, and the bickering! (Deut. 1:9-12)

First Moses complained that he could not handle the people. Then he commented that the people were numerous as stars and should be blessed, which was then followed by how difficult the people were; they were argumentative and burdensome. It's a confusing, inconsistent message. If we take a longer, retrospective view, however, it's easier to understand the order of these baffling words.

"You are today as numerous as the stars in the sky" in the first chapter of Deuteronomy is a majestic culmination of a vision from the first chapter of Genesis. God blessed Adam and Eve, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it" (Gen. 1:28). But the blessing was a struggle. Everything

having to do with children was difficult. Eve was cursed with pain in childbirth. Her first son killed her second, and she disappeared after the first verse in Genesis 4.

Abraham and Sarah, too, were given national aspirations, but, as a couple, they struggled with infertility and how to make sense of God's mandate. They tried a variety of options, including adopting Lot as an heir and suggesting Eliezer as a successor. When the first two options did not work out, God took Abraham outside each time to count that which could not be counted, first the dust of the earth and then the stars in the sky: "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them, so shall your offspring be" (Gen. 15:5). Eventually, Sarah and Abraham had Isaac. Only one grain of earth. Only one star in the sky.

When stuck in a difficult place, with no options before you look above, God advised Abraham. Look far off into a future unseen. Look up rather than ahead. That is what vision is: seeing the impossible, even the improbable, and making it so. God used the image of the twinkling stars set in a dark night to ask Abraham for a little more faith.

The book of Genesis is filled with painful stories of infertility, making it difficult, story after story, to see a nation emerging. But by the time we begin the book of Exodus, the blessing first given to Adam and Eve to propagate and fill the earth had borne fruit: "The Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1:7). The aerial view of the stars that sustained our ancestors for generations carried them across the chasm of barrenness. But when they finally experienced a population growth, they were in someone else's land. Their numbers were a threat and a cause for punishment and oppression.

Only when we arrive in Deuteronomy, on the cusp of a homeland, did Moses note the historic realization of the dream in Genesis 1, the mystery of Genesis 15, and the anguish of Exodus 1. Finally, we became a nation beyond count with autonomy beyond measure. Numerous and free, we shined like Abraham's stars.

Moses did what leaders must always do. He told the

people they had actualized and fulfilled a long-term dream of their ancestors. They achieved a great objective in their history. He named it and celebrated it. He also acknowledged that this growth had consequences for leadership. He was proudly outnumbered. But with growth came other challenges that would need to be addressed by future leaders, like the unwieldy quarrels and demands of the masses. Moses tried to remind them of the larger, grander picture, but they could only see the mess right in front of them.

Sometimes leaders, when they reach an impasse, need to name the special moments, revel in the milestones, and remind people how far they've come and what new challenges they must tackle.

A Forbes panel discussion, "How Leaders Can Get More Comfortable Praising Employees," opens with the observation that many leaders find it easy to make requests but hard to give praise. Instead, these leaders recommend praising often, sincerely, and specifically. As worshippers, we are asked to relate to God first and primarily through praise, not because God needs praise but because we are changed when we name and acknowledge the good in the world that God has created.

A corporate leader interviewed in the article commented that, "Giving praise, when deserved, can help balance out one-sided developmental feedback." Employees and volunteers need a balance of positive and productive feedback to grow. If giving praise liberally is difficult, one leader suggests that it may be time to do some deep and reflective work about "their own relationship with praise and authenticity and articulate better what the fear is about." Sometimes when leaders don't need praise themselves, they forget that others thrive on it.

But Moses did more than praise. He began his farewell by offering the Israelites a lesson in perspective. When what you see on the ground looks problematic and you cannot see a way forward, don't get stuck. Look up.

When in your leadership did a long-term vision get you through a short-term problem?

Setting the Tone

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

Parshas Devorim begins with a list of places where Moshe spoke to the people in the months before he died. According to the midrash, as cited by Rashi, these names did not, in a number of cases, actually

refer to locations, but were, rather, allusions to sinful acts done by the people over the course of their years in the wilderness. Moshe mentioned them in this way in order to avoid shaming the people by explicitly mentioning these

sins. The manner in which Moshe rebuked the people is, in fact, viewed, by the midrash, as a guide to the proper way to deliver rebuke. Moshe then tells the people of the preparations that had been made, in the second year after the redemption from Egypt, to end their encampment at Mt. Sinai and enter the Holy Land and take possession of it. He then recounts that those efforts were frustrated as a result of the sin of the spies. Between his account of the preparations and his account of their frustration, Moshe interrupts his remarks with a seemingly unrelated matter. He tells the people, "I said to you at that time saying ; "I cannot carry you alone.." (Devorim 1:9). He then proceeds to recount the command to appoint judges to assist him in dealing with their litigations.

There is a dispute in the midrash regarding what the words 'at that time' refer to. However, Rabbi Shmuel Bornstein, in his *Shem MiShemuel*, points out that whether they refer to the time when Yisro advised Moshe to appoint these judges, or to the later incident of the 'misonenim,' or complainers, (Bamidbar 10:1), the account is out of chronological order at this point in parshas Devorim. Why, then, was it placed here? Last year, we presented and elaborated upon the approach of Rav Yehudah Shaviv to this question in his commentary *MiSinai Ba*. The interested reader is directed to last year's message (available at Torahheights.com) for that perspective. I would now like to offer a different approach to answering this question, as a follow-up to our remarks on last week's Torah reading of parshas Masei.

We noted last week that the laws of the cities of refuge were presented after a listing of the boundaries of Eretz Yisroel and the cities apportioned to the Levites as a means of emphasizing the need to prevent the development of a militaristic atmosphere in the land after it was conquered from its earlier inhabitants. As we pointed out, before the soldiers went out to war, they were addressed by the kohein, who alluded to the mitzvoh of the daily recitation of the Shema in his remarks. This was done, according to Rav Yehudah Leib Ginzburg, in order to remind the soldiers, before they embarked on their war of conquest, of the purpose behind these wars, so that they would not be influenced in a negative way by the actions they would carry out during their battles. This was necessary so that, once the land was conquered, the people would settle down to a peaceful existence, which would serve as a framework for the accomplishment of the nation's goal of becoming a kingdom of priests and

a holy nation, and ultimately influencing all of mankind to worship the One God. From this perspective, we can better understand the reason that Moshe mentioned, at the beginning of his remarks to the people before he died, the appointment of judges that he had ordered at an earlier point in time.

Moshe's addresses to the people before he died provided a perspective on the events that had occurred since they left Egypt, and were meant to prepare them for their life in Eretz Yisroel. The first thing he told them, after his initial words of rebuke, was to prepare themselves to conquer the land and take possession of it. Conquering the land involved waging war, and, as we have seen, the atmosphere generated by war, has the potential of generating a militaristic, coarse attitude to life in general. Therefore, Moshe made sure, at the very beginning of his remarks, to remind the people that their life in the land had to be based on the system of justice dictated by the Torah, as carried out by the judges appointed to administer these laws.

Viewing Moshe's mention of setting up a system of judges from the perspective of the military conquest of the land may have an additional, although related, dimension, as well. Rabbi Yissochor Frand, in an address he recently delivered in Flatbush, explained why people are so prone to become involved in machlokes, or controversy. He said that the Hebrew word for victory, 'nitzachon,' comes from the word *netzach*, or eternity. As descendants of primordial Adam, who was originally meant to live forever, we all have a desire to attach ourselves to eternity. By achieving some kind of victory, we feel that we have attained eternity, to some extent. This desire for victory may, as well, find its expression in military victory, if the military effort is not carried out with the proper perspective. That penchant for victory may then, in turn, carry over into everyday life as well, and, therefore, a system of justice is needed to assure that everyone's rights are protected.

From this viewpoint, we can perhaps understand the connection between Moshe's initial rebuke of the people and his following remarks about the conquest of the land and the setting up of a judicial system, as well. The rabbis tell us that Yerusholayim was destroyed because people did not know how to rebuke each other. Although there is a mitzvoh to rebuke someone for his wrongdoings, often, the person delivering the rebuke views himself as superior to the person he is rebuking, and actually thinks of the rebuke as a kind of moral victory over his fellow.

Moshe, however, rebuked the people out of his love for them, as witness the profuse blessings he bestowed upon them immediately after the rebuke. Perhaps, then, Moshe's rebuke is followed by his mention of the conquest of the land and the setting up of a judicial system as a means of preventing the natural penchant for the achievement of

victory to effect the manner in which the people pursued their wars of conquest and their adjudication of legal rights. All of these efforts were meant, ultimately, to guide the people in becoming the nation that would represent God in this world.

The 14th Ani Ma'amin

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed from a private recording by Cockatoo Inc. Corrected and adopted by a talmid. A slightly different version appears on YUTorah, dated July 20, 2023)

The fifth pasuk of this week's Parsha says: *Be-eiver ha-Yardein, be-Eretz Moav, ho'il Moshe be'er es ha-Torah ha-zos lei-mor*. And Rashi says: What does it mean, *be'er es ha-Torah ha-zos*? It means *be-shivim lashon*—Moshe translated and explained the Torah in 70 languages. And the mefarshim wonder how this makes sense. In a parallel pasuk in Parshas Ki Savo, it says: *ve-katavta al ha-avanim es kol divrei ha-Torah ha-zos ba'er heitev*—when you go into Israel, you should take stones and write on them the entire Torah. And Chazal darshen: you should write the Torah in seventy languages—and that's what to explain it means. In that context, it makes sense, because all the nations might pass through Israel and be able to read the Torah written on the stones in their own language. But here, Moshe was saying it over ba'al peh to the Jews in Arvos Moav. Why would he have to tell them the Torah in 70 languages? Why isn't Hebrew good enough? In fact, a number of Acharonim rejected Rashi's pshat here because there's no purpose in saying it in 70 languages. The Levush, in his supercommentary on Rashi—*Levush ha-Orah*—suggests that some people among Klal Yisroel, such as geirim, etc., might have spoken other languages. And that is why Moshe had to explain it in all 70 languages.

But Rav Shteinman points out in his sefer, *Ayeles Ha-Shachar*, that this is very peculiar. Where would foreigners come from who didn't speak at least either Hebrew or Egyptian? Two languages would have been enough. Additionally, it has been 40 years since they left Mitzrayim. Even the erev-rav must have picked up Hebrew by now. So why would Moshe need to say it in 70 languages?

So the Chidushei ha-Rim gives a more mystical explanation, which we will say over a little less mystically. He says: The reason for the 70 languages is not because they didn't understand Hebrew. At this time and place, Hebrew was good enough. They were an insular

Jewish, Torah, Lashon ha-Kodesh community who lived in a Jewish society with Jewish culture, Jewish values, and a Jewish language. And for this context, Hebrew would have been fine. But Moshe knew that he had to give them more than that. This was his farewell address not only to his generation, but to the Jews of eternity, Jews in Bavel, Europe, North Africa, America, and Australia—to the Jews wherever they would be over the next thousands of years. And he knew that they would be in galus amidst each one of these 70 languages. They will be in a variety of social settings and cultures, a variety of socioeconomic circumstances. They will be all over the world in all different centuries and millennia. And each of those 70 lashonos will present a unique challenge they did not have when they were an insular community in and of themselves—or when they lived amongst the other 69 gentile cultures and languages. Moshe said: I'm not only telling you the Torah in Hebrew. It doesn't only work if you stay ensconced within the ghetto walls. I'm telling you the Torah in 70 languages. Wherever you go; no matter what the challenges are; no matter what the culture is; no matter what the values of the people who live next door to you are; no matter what they say at work; no matter what the media believes; no matter what they teach you in college; wherever you go, you can remain true to the Torah; you can serve Hashem; you can fulfill the Torah to the best of your ability. You can be shomer all the mitzvos. In every place not only you can be a frum Jew, but you can be an oved Hashem in the deepest and most ambitious sense. And that's why he taught it to them *be-shivim lashon*.

We have a mesorah from the Rav. What was the difference between the Rav and many (but not all) other Gedolim who came to America in his days? Most Gedolei Torah and tremendous Talmidei Chachamim who came to America, whom we've never heard of nowadays, said:

America is hopeless. In 20th-century America, you can't be frum. I'll try my best to make my kids frum. I'll stay a tzadik and a talmid chacham, but I can't save other Jews here. It's impossible for a frum community to survive in a treife medina. And the Rav came to America and said: No. If we could build lives of Torah and Avodas Hashem in Europe, we can do the exact same in America. There's no place which the koach of Torah can't conquer, because Moshe gave us that Torah in all shivim lashon. And we know what the Rav created an America—the legacy that he left. He proved himself correct, and by now, there are many Torah communitites that are flourishing and growing in America.

The Rav went so far as to say that if he could, he would make a 14th Ani Ma'amin stating that the Torah is relevant,

Pursuit of Truth

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In this parsha, Moshe speaks of the forty years the Jews spent in the desert. He refers back to Sinai and describes the sin of the meraglim. Hashem instructed the Jews to leave Sinai and go to the Land of Israel to inherit it, telling them not to fear the seven powerful nations who lived there at that time. Then Moshe describes in detail how the people sent spies to scout out the land, but who returned with a frightening negative report. The people rebelled against God and their entry to Israel. Hashem punished them and the whole generation died in the desert. Almost forty years later, Moshe is addressing the next generation, who is about to enter Eretz Yisrael under the new leadership of Yehoshua bin Nun.

However, Moshe takes a puzzling detour while recounting the episode of the meraglim. In the middle of this dramatic and tragic story, in what seems to be a side comment, Moshe complains that he was unable to carry the burden of caring for the people all by himself. Therefore, he set up a system of local judges: *sarei asaros*, *sarei chamishim*, *sarei mei'os*, *sarei alafim*, and *shoftim*. "I told them," he says, "to be honest and fair judges, to carry out the law of Hashem in the proper way." The placement of this statement is difficult to understand. In the chronology of events as recorded in Shemos and Bamidbar, we don't see the issue of judges related to the meraglim in any way.

In Parshas Yisro, Yisro saw Moshe judging hordes of people. He told his son-in-law, "You will not be able to handle this strain long term. There are too many disputes

practical, and achievable in any time and place in the entire history of humankind. And says Chidushei ha-Rim, that it all goes back to this yesod—it goes back to the fifth pasuk of Sefer Devarim. *Ho'il Moshe be'er es ha-Torah ha-zos*. Before Moshe said a single word of the Mishneh Torah, he explained this yesod. That Torah is not only for Eretz Yisrael, for a yeshiva setting, for the Beis ha-Medrash in Washington Heights, etc. Wherever you go, the Torah can go with you. Wherever you go, you can be a Ben Torah. Wherever you go, you can grow in Yiras Shomayim. Wherever you go, you can be Oved Hashem on the deepest and the highest levels—if only you believe that the Torah is with you, be-shivim lashon, and no place is too difficult or foreign to fully realize its values. Shabbat Shalom.

for you to handle all alone. You need to set up a system of courts to handle the many claims instead of you." This had nothing to do with the meraglim.

According to the mefarshim, this occurred either right before or right after the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai in the month of Sivan. The episode with the meraglim occurred in the month of Av the following year. Why did Moshe insert the issue of the courts into this discussion of the meraglim?

The Midrash (Devarim Rabba 1:10) already asked this question. Moshe said, "*Ba'es hahi leimor*." At which time did this occur? Rabbi Yochanan says this happened in the time of Yisro. Additionally, Moshe asked for help in the separate event of the *mis'onenim*, at which point he received seventy people to help him out. But that, too, had nothing to do with the question of the meraglim.

Why does Moshe include the question of the judges with the story of the spies?

In order to answer this question, Shem Mishmuel first develops a philosophical discussion, circling back to answer this question at the end.

Conquering the Angels

Chassidus emphasizes an important point based on Chazal: The physical reality we see in front of us is only an expression of a concept or energy in the upper spiritual worlds. This is a major theme in Kabbala, Zohar, and Nefesh Hachaim, among others; it is an idea found in

non-Jewish mysticism as well. This world is a reflection of and parallel to other worlds, as spiritual energy and power make their way into this world's physical matter.

Thus, our Sages say that the Jewish people must conquer the Land of Israel on two levels. The most obvious level occurs in this world, as we overpower our enemies and settle the Holy Land. Yet Eretz Yisrael also exists *l'maala*—above in heaven—and must be conquered by the Jewish people there as well.

Regarding the Jewish conquest of the Land of Israel, the pasuk in Tehillim 159 says, "*le'esor malcheihem b'zikim, v'nichbedeihem b'chavlei barzel*. (Hashem gives Am Yisrael the strength) to tie up their enemies in chains, and the honored ones among the enemies will be tied up with iron shackles." Why does the pasuk repeat the idea twice?

Chazal explain that "*le'esor malcheihem b'zikim*" refers to the regular kings who fight the Jews, especially in Eretz Yisrael. Hashem gives the Jewish people the power and blessing to conquer our enemies and to put their kings into chains. The end of the pasuk says, "*v'nichbedeihem b'chavlei barzel*, their honored ones will be shackled." Who are these honored ones? The national guardian angels.

The concept of guardian angels for nations is a Jewish one, written about by the prophet Daniel. When the Jewish people experiences a confrontation in this world, it is a reflection of a higher and exalted conflict in the spiritual world between what we stand for and what another nation stands for. It is very interesting to think of the various spiritual energies that are clashing when the Jewish people confront their enemies. We've spoken before about the special energies possessed by different kingdoms that have attempted to destroy or subjugate the Jewish people in this world. These energies have the potential to be good, but the evil kingdoms twist them. This, then, is the nature of the spiritual clash—a clash between the way we do it and the way they do it.

The Spiritual Clash

Shem Mishmuel asks a question and gives a remarkable answer. How can we physical people fight spiritual battles against the guardian angels of our enemies? We are busy enough fighting against our physical enemies. How are we supposed to fight angels?

Yaakov Avinu, who established the twelve tribes and founded our nation, fought against an angel. It could have been a battle to the death, but it ended with Yaakov limping and receiving a blessing from that angel. What does a fight

with an angel entail? How are we supposed to fight our archenemy's angel, a completely spiritual being, if we are physical?

When an enemy nation or group of nations organizes itself to fight the Jews, we have to understand that the confrontation is not only a physical confrontation and battle. It is a reflection of a greater and more exalted spiritual fight. Our enemies represent a spiritual koach, energy, that they embody in their culture. This energy is a distortion of a midda that the Jewish people is supposed to express properly.

The Torah tells us how to develop and express these energies in a proper way. For example, we must express kindness the way the Torah instructs. In the world today, the idea of kindness and love is tremendously distorted. Unfortunately, many of our non-Jewish neighbors have a completely twisted view of love. It is a crass and shallow sexual excitement. It is not the meeting of hearts and minds that the Torah speaks about. The Torah teaches a view of justice. Unfortunately, there is a distorted view of that, too. Many people mistakenly think it is just and right for criminals to be free from their due punishment. People have sympathy and think that cruel Palestinian terrorists have a just cause. They don't want to even think of the Jewish claims to Eretz Yisrael. These two basic traits, *chesed* and *emes*—kindness and justice—are very important. They should be expressed properly, not distorted.

When we have a confrontation with Islamic terrorists, it is not only a question of the physical city of Jerusalem and of the Land of Israel, but one of mishpat and chesed, justice and kindness. What is true chesed? What is true mishpat? The crux of the conflict is the following question: Is their view or the Jewish Torah view correct? The real confrontation is between Am Yisrael and their angel, their spiritual power, their *raison d'être*. We have to defeat the distorted idea that our enemies represent.

The Enemy Knows Our Yeitzer Hara

Shem Mishmuel states it simply. This is the battle against the yeitzer hara. These conflicts present another way for the Jewish people to fight our own evil urges. This is a profound idea. Consider, for example, an enemy who distorts justice. Let's say they think that the Jewish claim to Eretz Yisrael is unjust and that the Palestinian claim is just. I am taking for granted that the readers agree we have a just claim to Eretz Yisrael. We have a confrontation with an enemy who repeatedly claims that what he does is just and

that we act unjustly. This, says the Shem Mishmuel, is the yeitzer hara, epitomized by the enemy's claims. It is indeed a reflection of our own inner weaknesses. It must be that in our own culture we are failing to act with proper justice. Since we fail in our own lives, Hashem engineers a midda kneged midda conflict. "If you, My Jewish people, will distort mishpat in your own society, then your most basic claim to justice will be denied. You will be denied the right to live in your own homeland. This is only because you yourselves have not defeated the yeitzer hara of injustice."

The Jewish people want to win this battle against the unjust claim that we stole the land that God Almighty gave to us thousands of years ago. However, millions of people believe false stories about us. They even deny that we had a Beis Hamikdash, a building that stood for more than 800 years. It only means that we have our own yeitzer hara, our own wicked weakness of falsehood and twisted justice. We have to defeat that evil. The enemy is merely conveying this message to us from the outside. It is supposed to make us wake up to fight against the enemy inside us. The great fight is not the external physical fight. That fight is only a reflection of the great internal war against the yeitzer hara within us.

How to Defeat Powerful Evil Angels

How do we defeat the angels above who support and give life to our enemies? The angles of people like the jihadists and those who make claims against the Jews in Israel? How can a physical people defeat a spiritual power? We can triumph over a spiritual power by defeating the yeitzer hara within us. If that external enemy is pushing distortions of history, it must mean that we are doing that in our own lives. We have to find the falsehood and distortions of justice in our lives and correct them.

Shem Mishmuel explains based on the Zohar that the enemy angel is the Satan himself. Even the worst spiritual power that comes to destroy the Jews only gets its power from our sins. When we sin, when we twist the truth, then the perspective of falsehood gains power. If we act as a people of truth and chesed, then the distortion wrought by the yeitzer hara would simply wither away in the face of the powerful truth, beauty, and purity of the Torah and mitzvos of Am Yisrael.

Two Types of Yeitzer Hara

Shem Mishmuel speaks about two different kinds of evil tendencies within us. Sometimes the yeitzer hara is clearly perceived by us as evil. "I know I can cheat on my taxes

and it is wrong, but the urge is there nonetheless." The thirst to own and to gain more is a very powerful one to overcome. We have desires for lust, power, and honor. They shamelessly attack us and tell us to do something wrong. "I know it is wrong, but I still have a problem, because these instincts are so strong." We have to fight this open, brazen, and forthcoming yeitzer hara. It presents itself as wrong, yet it claims many victims.

However, it is the very fact that this evil urge is so open that enables us to combat and to defeat it. There is another level of the evil urge referred to by Shem Mishmuel as the seventh level of evil. Just as in holiness the seventh level has a special power, as we see in Shabbos and shmitta, in evil the seventh level also has a unique power. This is the worst evil of all, because it is secret. It is insidious; it doesn't identify itself. It is an evil that steals into my heart and is left at peace there, as I don't even recognize it for what it is. I think it is harmless, or worse yet, I may even think it is good. This evil seventh level of the yeitzer hara is terribly difficult to combat. Sometimes, it is even so hard to discover that we don't discover it until it is too late.

In Parshas Masei we spoke about our great teacher the Rav zt"l, who related the story of the mistake of the parents who sent their daughter to a college dormitory. They experienced the seventh level of evil. The parents had no idea it was wrong; it looked harmless to them. In fact, it even looked good and attractive. But it turned out to be a disaster when their beloved daughter intermarried a fellow she met in the dorm.

How many times has this happened to us? We think it is harmless to do something, but then we are caught in the trap of secret evil. Shem Mishmuel compares this to the pig, which has split hooves. When you see the pig, it appears to be a kosher animal. Only later, when it is eating and doesn't chew its cud, do you realize that it is treif.

The Gemara in Sukka gives the yeitzer hara seven names: *ra*, *areil*, *tamei*, *sonei*, *michshol*, *even*, and *tzfoni*. The first six names are clearly bad. Translated into English, these names mean: evil, defiled, enemy, stumbling block, etc. The last name means hidden.

It is the one that I don't think of as evil, the seventh level. The tzfoni can go deep into a person's soul and he would have no idea that there's anything wrong with it. However, one day, he becomes its unfortunate victim.

The Roman Sin of Choice

According to Jewish tradition, the Jewish people will be

subjugated by four kingdoms. The most common list of the kingdoms includes Bavel, Paras, Yavan, and Edom. The Babylonians destroyed the first holy Temple. The Persians took over from them, then came the Greeks and, finally, Rome. The first three kingdoms have three evil dispositions, each centered around one of the three major sins: *avoda zara*, *giluy arayos*, and *shfichus damim*. The Babylonian's sin of choice was *avoda zara*, idol worship. The Persians liked licentiousness and the Greeks killing.

What was the evil of Rome? The hidden *yeitzer hara*. On the surface Rome was beautiful: coliseum, highways, beautiful architecture, statues, art, music, philosophy, and literature. Until today the Western world idolizes the grandeur of Rome, seen in the many streets and people named after Roman entities. As great a civilization as Rome may have been externally, inside it was totally corrupt, threaded with evil. One could easily be fooled and entrapped by Roman culture, so attractive and harmless did it seem. In fact, it had a pantheon, a collection of all the gods together. Why couldn't there be a place for our Jewish God, Hashem, there as well? It is because we Jews say, "*Hashem echad*." Hashem is one of a kind. He doesn't belong to any association of gods! We also say, "*Yisrael echad*." We are unique among nations, with a special relationship with Hashem. They call us supercilious and egotistic, and maybe even racist. Rome, on the other hand, promoted an attractive ideology: equality of all the gods and of all the nations. "No one is chosen," they said. "Come be a part of us, come join us."

Unfortunately, many Jews accepted their invitation, and many Jews in today's Western world still do. They fall prey to this beautiful and attractive idea, only to find out too late that it is the end of our Jewish people. Unfortunately, many people buy into this nonsense that God is one of many, as if you could put anything at all on the same pedestal as Him. Many people mistakenly believe that the Jewish people, to whom Hashem chose to give His Torah, could be compared to any other nation. It is tempting to believe in the equal brotherhood of all mankind. However, this is a falsehood, a denial of the truth. Yet its danger is so subtle; it fools people easily. This is the seventh *yeitzer hara*, the *tzfoni*.

Fighting the Secret Enemy

The battle against the first *yeitzer hara* requires great strength. What is the main tool to fight the second *yeitzer*, the poison packaged in sugar?

Shem Mishmuel says we must fight it with the power of *din*—justice and truth. You cannot be emotional. If you are, you will be sucked in by the allure, by the dazzling and shining lights of this wonderful culture around you.

At this point I must insert the following story, because it breaks my heart. A few years ago, I met a nice religious young man at a Shabbos meal in my home. He was an artistic person and was studying music in graduate school. His focus was on traditional Jewish music and Jewish song. He was doing nice work.

He expressed an interest in Broadway, because the arts and theater of it appealed to him. Many of the shows on Broadway are on Shabbos. I said, "You should have a blessing to be able to succeed and keep Shabbos, kosher, and all of halacha." He said, "Of course, Rabbi."

I didn't see him much after that Shabbos. Two years later, I heard that this young man was no longer *shomer Shabbos*. He got involved in theater. It was alluring. It seemed harmless to him. He had gone through more than twelve years of *yeshiva* education before then. Of course he said he would keep Shabbos. Tragically, though, he failed and stopped his observance. This is the attraction of Rome, the fourth *malchus*. This is the seemingly harmless *yeitzer*, which comes in quietly and then devours us. It is so sad when we come across as heartbreaking a story as this one. How does one identify this difficult, sleeping *yeitzer hara*? Shem Mishmuel says the power of *mishpat*—justice and truth—will help us see through the deception. We have to wake up and realize what it is. This ability comes from a constant commitment to truth and justice. If we are committed to this, then nothing will be able to deceive us.

Truth—the Great Weapon

This is why Moshe took a detour and mentioned the judges during the story of the *mergalim*. The *mergalim* were victims of their own sleeping, deceptive *yeitzer*. They thought they were saving the Jewish people from disaster. They did not realize that they themselves were creating the disaster! They were afraid because they didn't think the Jewish people had enough physical strength to defeat the enemies in the Land of Israel. But they themselves created that fear.

The *meraglim* didn't understand that Jewish victory is not based on the power of Jewish arms, but rather on the power of Jewish spirit. They didn't understand that with the faith that the Bnei Yisrael had in Hashem and in Moshe, they would be able to defeat the

seven nations. That would give them the spiritual and physical energy to emerge victorious in the war. Their faith would power them to victory. The Sages say that had Bnei Yisrael had enough faith not to listen to the meraglim, the seven nations would have simply gotten up and run away. The Bnei Yisrael wouldn't have even needed to fight. The spiritual victory would have cleared the battlefield of all physical enemies.

The meraglim didn't understand this, though, because they were not committed enough to truth. They were frightened by what they saw in Eretz Yisrael and didn't have the strength of mind to realize the truth of the matter, that physical might wasn't needed in this case. This explains Moshe's seemingly unrelated comment about the judges in the middle of the story of the spies. Moshe means, "I gave you judges, but they failed." During the period between Sinai and the meraglim, the judges failed, since they produced the spies, who were not committed enough to the truth. Moshe then encourages the second generation, "Be committed to din, mishpat, and emes. You will see our enemies will flee on their own. You won't even have to fight them. You will be successful in conquering the land of Canaan and all the enemies, even **JCommitment to Truth**. This message resonates with us today. Many of our enemies

weave incredible distortions together with their hatred of us. They deny thousands of years of real history so they can advance their own cause. They have millions of people who believe them. How are

they able to promote outright lies and still convince so many? It must be a function of the fact that we ourselves are not committed enough to truth.

Let us hope and pray that we take the message of this Chassidus shiur to fight our spiritual battles and defeat our own spiritual enemies. Whether they are open and revealed or hidden and secret, we can win with a personal commitment to emes and mishpat, justice and truth. This way we will defeat our own personal yeitzer, and even more we will defeat the angels above who

represent the secret distortion. This period of the nine days is a time to do teshuva. May we return to Hashem to do the mitzvos in truth. The navi proclaimed, "*Tziyon b'mishpat ti'padeh*. Tziyon will be redeemed with the power of justice." We should act with fairness and honesty, and without deception, in our speech, actions, and financial affairs. Tziyon will indeed be redeemed through justice. The Jewish people will do teshuva and we will be redeemed to see the building of the third Beis Hamikdash.

Don't Jump to Conclusions

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Moshe Rabbeinu recalls the time when he appointed judges and gave them instructions for how to preside over cases. He commanded them, שמוע בין אחיכם – that they should listen to the litigants when they present their arguments (1:16).

The Gemara in Maseches Sanhedrin (7b) infers from this pasuk אזהרה לבית דין שלא ישמע דברי בעל דין קודם שיבא בעל דין חבירו – that it is forbidden for a Beis Din to hear one litigant's arguments before the other litigant arrives. This halacha is binding even today. I once participated in a din Torah (having been asked to speak on behalf of a litigant), and the dayanim refused to begin the proceedings when the first litigant was present, before the other arrived. Of course, this is very inefficient. It would save everybody time if Beis Din began hearing a litigant's argument while they wait for the other litigant. But the Torah commands שמוע בין אחיכם – that the Beis Din must hear the case when both parties are present in the room.

The Maharal of Prague, in Nesivos Olam, explains that

the Torah introduced this law because first impressions are exceedingly powerful. When the dayanim hear one person's version of the story, it leaves an imprint in their minds, which the other party now has the challenge of erasing. Of course, the dayanim cannot hear both parties simultaneously, and one needs to speak first. The Torah therefore demanded that the first litigant speak only when the other litigant is present, as a litigant is less likely to lie and deceive in the presence of the other party. This helps ensure the judges' objectivity and prevent unfair bias toward the first litigant.

The vast majority of us, of course, are not formal judges, but we quite frequently sit in judgment. We are always making assessments in our minds about people, organizations, institutions, and all kinds of things. And so the Torah's command of שמוע בין אחיכם is directly relevant to all of us. We must be careful not to rush to judgment, not to blindly follow our first impression, not to assume we see the whole picture and have a clear understanding

of what's happening before carefully and objectively considering both sides.

The great Rabbi Akiva Eiger, the legendary late 18th-early 19th-century sage, whose teshuvos and chiddushim are studied in all yeshivos throughout the world, said that whenever he disagreed with somebody, he first assumed that the person was correct. Whether he dealt with a Torah matter or a general life question, he first assumed the other party's viewpoint, and then thought if there was a compelling argument to challenge it. Before dismissing an opinion, he first thought about it honestly, seeing its merits, and only then proceeded to refute it.

The academies of Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel had numerous arguments regarding important halachic

matters. The Gemara teaches in Maseches Eiruvim (13b) that halacha follows Beis Hillel despite the fact that the scholars of Beis Shammai were sharper, because the scholars of Beis Hillel would first cite and analyze Beis Shammai's opinions, before their own. Our opinion about anything is more informed when we objectively consider the other side, when we approach the subject with an open mind, when we try to see the issue from the other's person's perspective. This is the right way to "judge."

שמעו בין אחיכם. Whatever it is that we're "judging" or forming an opinion about, we need to have both "parties" present, we need to hear both sides, so we can reach the most correct conclusion.

The Art of Rebuke

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Devarim, the fifth book of Torah opens with the following words:

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים, אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעֵבֶר, הַיַּרְדֵּן: אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים, אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה מִזֶּה הַיַּרְדֵּן, בֵּין-פָּאָרָן וּבֵין-תְּפֵל וְלִבְּנֵי וְחִצְרֹת--וְדֵי זָהָב - *these are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel on the other side of the Jordan, in the wilderness, in the plain, opposite the Reed Sea, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzeros and Di Zahav (Devarim 1:1).*

Though it sounds like these are all places in the desert where the nation traveled, Rashi teaches us that each name alludes to a different sin of the Israelites in the desert. Because Hashem had mercy on their dignity, Moshe here rebukes the nation by alluding to their sins, and not saying them outright.

To what sins does the verse allude? Arava refers to the sin of Ba'al Peor (see Bamidbar 25); Mol Suf alludes to their rebelling at the Sea of Reeds, when they complained "are there not enough graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the desert?"; Tofel and Lavan allude to their sins of slandering the manna; Paran alludes to the sin of the spies; and Chatzeros alludes to the rebellion of Korach.

What about וְדֵי זָהָב, literally 'more than enough gold'? Rashi teaches: וְדֵי זָהָב. הוֹכִיחוֹן עַל הָעֵגֶל שֶׁעָשׂוּ בְּשָׂבִיל רֵב זָהָב שֶׁהָיָה: *he rebuked them over the calf that they made, because of the abundance of gold that they had (Rashi to Devarim 1:1).* As the nation had an excess of gold that they collected, which washed ashore after the Egyptians, their horses, chariots and riders sunk in the Reed Sea (see Rashi to Shemos 15:22), it was this gold that they used to construct

the golden calf, which led to the tragic sin of national idol worship.

Rabbi Shalom Rosner teaches, "The Gemara (Brachos 32a) interprets the allusion of Di Zahav a bit differently: 'Moshe said to Hashem: The riches you gave to Bnei Yisrael until they said 'enough' (די, dai) is what caused them to erect the golden (זָהָב) calf.'"

It seems from the Gemara that Moshe blames Hashem for the sin of the golden calf. And yet, Rashi teaches us that this verse is tochacha, a rebuke by Moshe of the people, where he blames the nation for the sins! Was it the nation's fault, or was it G-d's fault (keviyachol)? How are we to understand this seeming contradiction?

Rabbi Rosner explains, "After hundreds of years of slavery, He took them out of Egypt with great miracles and gave them vast riches. What can be expected of someone who becomes a millionaire overnight? It is hard to deal with so much good fortune so quickly. It is Your fault, Hashem, for having spoiled them!

"Rav Asher Weiss asks what was transpiring here. Was Moshe Rabbeinu rebuking Am Yisrael, or was he directing the rebuke vis-a-vis the RS"O (*keviyachol*)? Actually, it was both. On the one hand, Moshe was giving the Bnei Yisrael mussar (chastisement), but at the same time, he was defending us."

It's as if he was saying - Hashem, what did You expect of them? Having been deprived of riches for hundreds of years, they simply could not properly handle the great wealth you gave them with the Exodus.

Rabbi Rosner points out that there is a very important lesson to be learned from this. “Whenever we are trying to improve someone else, as a parent, as a teacher, as a friend, at the same time that we are putting them down, we have to be raising them up. At the same time that we are accusing them of wrongdoing, we have to be excusing them for their sinful behavior. As the Gemara (Sotah 47a) states: לְעוֹלָם לְיָמִין מִקְרָבָה - תְּהֵא שְׂמָאל דְּוִחָה דְּוִחָה וְיָמִין מִקְרָבָה - *always (a person shall) push away with the left hand (be harsh in rebuke when necessary), and with the right hand, draw close and embrace.*”

We must always display love for the child and/or talmid, and attempt in some way to defend their behavior, or see another angle of the transgression, even when rebuke is in order. Moshe Rabbeinu is the messenger of Hashem and our messenger as well. He is the go-between in both directions. From Hashem’s point of view, Moshe was giving us mussar. But from our point of view, he was defending us before Hashem.

“May we take this lesson with us and carefully balance rebuking and defending our children and our students” (Shalom Rav, v.II, p.348-349).

“On one occasion, Rav Pam zt”l offered a homiletic interpretation of the saying: כְּבָדוֹ וְחֻשְׁדוֹ, “*Honor him but*

suspect him”. Said Rav Pam: If you must suspect him, do it in an honorable manner. He illustrated this with a personal recollection: ‘One year, when I taught at the mesivta level, I was asked to proctor a test. I sat at my desk with a sefer but at the same time, I kept an eye on the talmidim. At one point, I noticed one student copying from his neighbor’s paper. Now I could have told him, ‘I will tear up your paper for cheating!’ or ‘I’m going to give you a zero!’ Instead, I walked over to him and whispered, ‘If you don’t understand the question, please come up to my desk and I will explain it to you.’

“Many years later, the talmid came over to me somewhere and said ‘What I learned by the Rebbi I have long forgotten, but this [what happened that day when I cheated on the test] I will never forget” (Rav Pam, Artscroll, p.145-146).

What an incredible and beautiful lesson as we open Sefer Devarim, the final words that Moshe spoke to the nation he loved, and led, for forty years. A parent/teacher has many roles. Even when rebuke must be given to the child/student, we must look for ways to simultaneously defend them, thereby building up the person, even while criticizing the behavior.

Building a ‘New’ Sanctuary

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s parasha, parashat Devarim, is always read on the Shabbat that precedes the Fast of the Ninth of Av (Tisha b’Av), which commemorates the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem and a host of other major calamities that occurred throughout the annals of Jewish history.

As we have indicated in a previous parasha study (see Devarim 5761-2001), there is an uncanny relationship between the theme of Tisha b’Av and parashat Devarim. The word אַיְיָחָה—“Ay’chah,” “How,” the opening word of the book of Lamentations, is found in this week’s parasha as well (Deuteronomy 1:12), as Moses exclaims to the Jewish people: “Ay’chah,”—How can I alone bear your contentiousness, your burdens and your quarrels?

Truth is, that a significant part of the Book of Deuteronomy features Moses recounting the stubbornness of the people since the time of the Exodus and records his ongoing reproofs of the Jewish people. And yet, as the commentators point out, Moses’ reproof begins with a

blessing. G-d says to His people, Deuteronomy 1:8, רָאָה וְנָתַתִּי לְפָנֵיכֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ, “Behold, I have given you the land. Come and possess the land that the L-rd swore to your forebears, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, to give them and their children after them.” What greater blessing could there be? In fact, it is likely that Moses begins with this blessing in order to make his subsequent reproof more palatable.

It is far more than coincidental that the word “reproof” in the English language and the Hebrew word תּוֹכַחָה, mean the same thing—to prove, to show logically or emotionally that a person is headed on the wrong path. Just as no one likes to be the object of reproof, few find pleasure in giving reproof, especially since reproof often falls on deaf ears, and simply breeds animosity. The Chazon Ish has stated that there is no room for reproof in our age, because no one knows how to properly give reproof. Perhaps, it is also because so very few are worthy of giving reproof to others. After all, who is free of guilt?

When I first wrote this commentary almost twenty years ago, I noted that the Hebrew year 5764/2004 had been a most challenging year in a series of difficult years for the Jewish people: The terror attacks in Israel, the world-wide rise of anti-Semitic incidents, increasing assimilation and intermarriage—these are things that we can almost count on as *de rigeur*. If anything, things have only gotten worse. I also noted that, as if to add insult to injury, there had been, of late (in 2004), a spate of uncomfortable and embarrassing issues faced by the observant Jewish community.

I noted then how difficult it is for non-observant Jews, and certainly for non-Jews, to appreciate the depth of commitment it takes for an observant Jewish woman to wear her hair covered, or for observant Jews to maintain a kosher diet given popular contemporary practices. One big issue that year was that it was discovered that the very costly wigs (*shaitels*) worn by observant women that came from India were apparently manufactured with human hair that had been used for idolatrous practices, and had to be destroyed. A second unsettling issue concerned little crustaceans, known as copepods, that were unexpectedly found floating in the New York water supply, making it necessary for observant Jews to filter their water at home and to start checking whether the cup of coffee that they buy is made with acceptable water.

Today, the issues keep piling up for those Jews who wish to live observant lives. The costs of religious education, preschool, elementary, secondary, religious colleges seminaries and advanced yeshivas have gone through the roof. The costs of kosher food, and the expense related to maintaining a kosher home have exploded. The ethical, moral and cultural challenges of the secular society, and the blandishments of secular society are impossible to resist, and many formerly-committed Jews are being lost.

So as the *poskim*, the religious legal decisors, debate the fine points of Indian hair and NY water, and Jewish leaders seek relief for the prohibitively expensive lifestyle and the modern blandishments, the issue of finding sanctuary in one's faith becomes increasingly problematic. Indeed, we all pray for the restoration of the physical Temple in Jerusalem. But, what we really need to do during this period of mourning for the Temple, is to ask G-d to grant us the ability to spiritually chill out, to calm down, to find tranquility in our remarkable faith, and to find a Sanctuary in our precious belief system. In essence, we need to rebuild the Temple—that is, the spiritual and emotional

Sanctuary that resides within each of us. After all, the spiritual Temple is as important, if not more important, to the healthful condition of the Jewish people as the physical rebuilding of the Sanctuary in Jerusalem.

This call to rebuild the Sanctuary is particularly pertinent during the “Nine Days” that begin this week and culminate on Tisha b’Av. It is a challenge, not so much to reprove others, but to improve ourselves. Not so much to chastise the sinners, as to eliminate sinfulness, so that there will be no more sinners.

The words of King David (Psalms 119:165), are particularly relevant to us in this quest: “For the sake of my brothers and friends, let me speak peace for you. For the sake of the house of the L-rd our G-d, I will seek your good.” And, as the prayer on Shabbat morning concludes, (Psalms 122:7-9 and 29:11): “May G-d give strength to His people ... May G-d bless His people with peace.”

May you be blessed.