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Ki Teitzei 5783

Is The Family Finished?

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered September 8, 1973)

With dull regularity, almost every two weeks, we are informed by newspapers, magazines, and journals that the family is finished. New social structures are emerging from our contemporary chaos which will replace the family and make it obsolete.

Many avant-garde sociologists, echoing variations on the theme of Portnoy's complaint, not only predict the dissolution of the family, but welcome it warmly and even urge it.

The idea of the end of the family issued from a variety of sources. Most important among them are the radical counter-culture, with its rejection of all restraints in the name of an absolute individual autonomy and freedom; the exaggerated individualism endemic to Western Protestantism, albeit in a distorted form; and the militant homosexuals. This past winter or spring, the New York Times Book Review carried the pronouncement of such one priestess of pederasty that the family is an oppressive institution, and that this form of tyranny must be overthrown.

It is my thesis that this is not true, that this assessment of the end of the family is a propagandist exaggeration which issues from ideological reasons, and that we must not permit it to become true – for ideological along with other reasons.

Almost a thousand years ago, one of the greatest Jews of all ages, Sa'adia Gaon, taught that the rational basis of the entire biblical moral code was the protection of the family. Family and morality are intertwined in the life of the Jewish people.

Of course there are problems of the family in modern times. I need not repeat all the sorry statistics about the divorce rate and the frequency of unhappiness in marriage, and the obvious fact that many more young people nowadays are delaying or rejecting marriage. But fashion is not the final word, and style is too ephemeral to be accepted as

the permanent state of things. Furthermore, to destroy the institution of the family because it raises problems is like throwing out the baby with the bath water, or killing the patient because he is sick. No amount of chic rhetoric can disguise what is an act of irresponsible immaturity.

In the last Sidra, Shoftim, the key word was *sha'ar* – in Hebrew, the gates of the city. The Sidra dealt with the community, with the judge and the king and the prophet and the priest, with social problems and with war. This morning's Sidra has as its key word *bayit*, the home or the family. The Torah is teaching us the Jews, and all people, need not only a community but a home, not only a *sha'ar* but a *bayit*, not only a city but a family.

Just as in the development of character, Judaism instructs us to imitate God, so with regard to a *Bayit*, a house or a home, man must imitate God: even as God, as it were, dwells in a Tabernacle (*Mishkan*, *Mikdash*), so man must dwell in a *Bayit*, in a home. The angelic hosts of God are called *pamalia shel ma'lah*, the heavenly "family," as it were.

Of course, I do not mean to say that the family is the ultimate value or institution. I am not preaching a kind of Jewish theology of Mafiaism. David, in the psalm we read during the month of Elul says: *כי אבי ואמי יעזבוני וה' יאספני*, "though father and mother leave me, the Lord will gather me in." There are values that transcend the family. But it remains crucial, central, indispensable. The home and not the synagogue, the family and not the community, is the center of Jewish life.

Even the Hebrew vocabulary manifests this notion. The words "clergy" and "layman" have no real counter-parts in Hebrew. What we do have for "layman" is: *ba'al habayit*, "the master of the home," as if the true mark of a distinguished member of the community is that he have a home, that he build a family.

One cannot speak of a family or home without a woman. The rabbis laid down the principle: ביתו זו אשתו; when a man refers to his *bayit* or home, that means his wife. Eleanor Roosevelt once said that society is the family writ large. Judaism agrees, and adds that the family is the wife writ large. The Jewish tradition teaches that the woman is the *Bayit*, because that is her life's center.

The source of this teaching is attributed to the dialogue between Abraham and the angels who came to visit him. They said to him: אייה שרה אשתך, "where is Sarah thy wife?" And he answered immediately: הנה באהל, "behold, she is in the tent." Abraham always knew where he could find Sarah: she is at home. (The imagination is staggered by what Abraham would have answered had he lived in 1973: behold, she is in the graduate classroom, the office, the factory, the club, shopping, the tennis courts...)

Now, I am not saying that a woman must have her life circumscribed by Kochen, Kirche, and Kinder. I do not believe that she must be incarcerated in the home like a bird in a gilded cage. The conditions of our society do not permit such an attitude, and I frankly do not believe it is even desirable, certainly not today. The idea of *hineh ba'ohel* is not a Halakhic prescription. It is a general principle which varies in application from age to age and place to place. We must remember what the Rabbis said, "*beito zu ishto*," the home is the wife, not "*ishto zu beito*," the wife is the home, that she must have no other interests beyond the family. But the basic idea remains true: there is no Judaism without a Jewish people, no Jewish people without a family, and no family without a Jewish woman in charge. And she must be at home enough to nourish and nurture the family, and her presence must always be felt in it even if she is in school or the office, the laboratory or the charitable enterprise.

With all the anthropological rhetoric of Margaret Mead, and the strident feminism of Gloria Steinem, our teaching remains firm: *beito zu ishto*, and even if a woman's interests are broader, and we certainly ought to encourage any broadening of horizons, the *Bayit* must remain central, her *makom*, her *locus*. I am dismayed at the extent to which the fanatic version of Women's lib has been exported from the United States throughout the world. This past summer in Melbourne, Australia (where it was the middle of winter), I was interviewed on a TV show which, I was told, was the most popular woman's show in the country. Immediately before me there appeared in the panel an interviewer

with two people: the city's most distinguished Protestant minister, and an advocate of Women's Lib. She was so extreme, so reckless, so vituperative, that the poor minister in his outrage was reduced to meaningless babble. The gist of her message was that marriage is tyranny, the family is oppressive, and the home is a prison. All three are to be abolished. Yet this was her third marriage – apparently she enjoyed prison-hopping. And a most discordant note was struck by the fact that she looked like the stereotype of a hausfrau and was well into her 60's. I confess that I lost my composure, and when both the minister and the woman waited for me until my interview was over, and we walked together returning to the make-up room, I held the door open for her. She objected and said this was an instance of male chauvinism. To which I replied, irreverently, "well, I am a gentleman, although I don't know what you are..."

I am aware of the criticism of the family today. I am also aware that a great deal of it is just, especially in many individual instances. But the alternatives to the family are most unappealing.

This past year at least two national magazines featured articles on the phenomenon called "swinging singles," the new buildings and complexes made to house them, their "new life-style," and the huge numbers of people which they attract. Yet a careful reading of the articles did not lead one to the conclusion that this was an ideal, happy, desirable way of life. On the contrary, one gets the feeling that they are not so much depraved as deprived, that they are a miserable and depressed lot. There are people who do not build families for their own personal reasons, whether economic or psychological or circumstantial or whatever might be. But that is a far cry from the canonization of bachelorhood and the militant animosity toward the idea of the family.

Dr. Israel Eldad writes with insight, that if Adam had not only a garden, The Garden of Eden, in which he and Eve lived as two "singles," but also a *Bayit* for his wife, perhaps the serpent would never have succeeded in tempting him. Then he would have both – a home and a garden.

The family may be in trouble, but it always was, because it is only a human institution, and all human institutions are faulty. It always was in trouble because we as individuals were always in trouble, and far from perfection. And if the family is in more trouble today than ever before, that is because we as individuals are in more trouble today than we ever were.

Perhaps the problem is not that the family as such has failed as an institution, and therefore young people want out, but that individual parents have failed to build and provide a proper *Bayit*, and enough family, and therefore what is left is caricature of a family that is unattractive, dysfunctional, and counter-productive.

So, is the family finished? Only if we are – as individuals, as a community, as a civilization. Because the end of a family means the end of all of those, even as the end of all of those means the end of the family.

The city, in the biblical idiom, had a *sha'ar* or gate. The *bayit* (house) had a *petah*, an entrance. The *sha'ar* closes and excludes. The *petah* opens and welcomes. These very words give the lie to the radical criticism of the “nuclear”

Leadership and Favoritism

Dr. Erica Brown

Many sensitive interrelationships are mentioned in the opening chapter of this week's sedra, Ki Teitzei. The first is the status of the captive woman who was taken in battle and captured the fancy of a soldier in that war. She was completely vulnerable and, in principle, unprotected. The Torah understood that the situation was one of natural exploitation and thus placed parameters around her care. The captive woman's hair and nails were to be trimmed, and she was to exchange her old clothes for new ones, presumably resembling those worn by other Israelite women. The exoticism associated with foreign women was to be tempered to measure whether or not the soldier had true feelings for this woman.

This concern was not only about externalities; it was also about the emotional weather in the relationship: “She shall spend a month's time in your household lamenting her father and mother; after that you may come to her and thus become her husband, and she shall be your wife. Then, should you no longer want her, you must release her outright...” (Deut. 21:13-14). This poor woman, ripped from the bosom of her family, no doubt suffered greatly. She was to be given time to grieve, at which time the soldier must decide if he had the patience and tenderness to commit to this woman in earnest.

If not, he was forbidden to sell her into slavery, as if she were owned by him. The way she was to be treated is discussed in the first person, as if the reader is the one in this unenviable position. It's as if the Torah wanted us

family as a kind of closed shop, exclusivist, and anti-community. That is not so! In the Jewish scheme, the family is a source of blessing and security and warmth that radiates outward, to the whole community, to society, to the world. For the family is a *bayit*, and the *bayit* has a *petah*.

We are the descendants of Abraham, of whom it is told that his door had four entrances, one on each corner, to welcome outsiders.

And we are Jews who were instructed by the Sages, in the first chapter of Avot, יהי ביתך פתוח לרווחה, build a family, for a family is a home, and the home must always be wide open.

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to be in the heart of this casualty of war, understand its complexities, and feel the captive woman's shame and loss. The case provokes us to ask if there are limits to love.

The second situation in chapter 21 of Deuteronomy brings sensitivity to bear to another human tangle not commonly experienced today. A man had two wives. He loved one, but the other was unloved. Both women had sons, but the first child born was the son of the unloved one. Here, too, love is the commodity, and here, too, love, is overshadowed by fairness: “He may not treat as first-born the son of the loved one in disregard of the son of the unloved one who is older” (Deut. 21:16).

Normally, the first son would inherit a double portion. Some believe that this is because the oldest child either had more household responsibilities within the family or would one day assume more responsibility in managing the estate than any of the other siblings. One interpretation I came across suggests that the first-born receives twice what other children inherit because parents make the most mistakes with their first-borns! In our situation, justice trumps partiality in Jewish law, even though, with our first Jewish families in Genesis, this was usually not the case. Maybe the law in the last of our five books of the Torah is there as a future corrective. Favoritism can do permanent damage within a family dynamic.

This unfortunate reality does not stop our children and, I suspect, many other people's children from asking that fateful question: “Who's your favorite child?” Worse still

is this assumption: “Your favorite is…” Current research in psychology suggests that even when parents show no visible preference for a child, children still assume a preference. Dr. Tracy Asamoah’s radically titled article in *Psychology Today* states that we try as parents to cover up our partiality out of shame for the psychic costs to a child in “Why Most Parents Really Do Have a Favorite Child” (Sept. 14, 2018). She discusses many factors that lead parents not to disclose this information. The silence may be related to guilt, to the perceived damage this can do to this unfavored child/children, or to the damage that preferential treatment may do to the family dynamic or to the favored child. She also suggests that parents explore their own feelings; in their effort to deny favoritism, they may not be examining their own feelings and how these are reflected in subconscious behaviors.

Asamoah concludes that “favoritism has little to do with loving one child more. It is more about how your personality resonates with one child’s personality more than the other’s. Essentially, it’s a question of like.” One person explained it to me this way, “It’s not that you have favorites. It’s that you have allies.” Relationships, Asamoah writes, have deep roots. Some children trigger what we might call ancient feelings and associations both positive and negative that we have with our own parents or grandparents. We might respond lovingly or apprehensively to traits in our children that mirror our own biases and preferences. Asamoah also states that our feelings for our children are ‘seasonal.’ Different times and situations in our lives may bring us closer or distance us from one child than another. Nevertheless, Asamoah

All Is Not Fair

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z”l

This week’s parsha has more mitzvos than any other parsha at the Torah. At first blush, there seems to be no sweeping connection among all of these mitzvos, although clusters of them have already been shown to be related by our Sages, using the principle of ‘mitzvah goreres mitzvah, aveirah goreres aveirah’—one mitzvah drags another along, and one sin drags another along. Thus, for example, as Rashi cites from the rabbis, if one performs the mitzvah of sending the mother bird away before taking its young, he will merit to build a house and thus have the opportunity to perform the mitzvah

concludes that while we might like our children differently, they must all “receive equal love and nurturance.”

While favoritism can have tragic consequences in families, as the Torah and modern research suggest, it can contribute in positive and significant developments in leadership when kept in check. Those chosen or appointed for leadership roles are most often those who demonstrate a higher degree of responsibility, obligation, and drive to action than others. Their selection for leadership roles validates this and generates more leadership possibilities as leaders assume more responsibility. They then get selected for more authoritative roles. This leadership cycle of selection can create higher and higher aspirations. This, I believe, is why favoritism is a repeated trope in the families of Genesis. Genesis is not a family manual. It’s a leadership manual. The same favoritism that is devastating in families can be generative in identifying and growing talent in organizational cultures.

But, as with all partiality, it must be tempered and leavened by fairness. In our Torah reading, we encounter two situations where love can be damaging rather than nurturing. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes this explicitly in *Studies in Spirituality*: “You cannot build a society on love alone. Love unites, but it also divides. It leaves the less-loved feeling abandoned, neglected, disregarded, ‘hated.’ It can leave in its wake strife, envy, and a vortex of violence and revenge… We must learn to love; but we must also know the limits of love, and the importance of justice-as-fairness in families and in society.”

So, when has being selected had both beneficial and detrimental outcomes in your leadership?

of making a fence around its roof. On the other hand, if parents fail to implement the laws of the rebellious son when appropriate, their son will grow up to commit sins that will warrant the death penalty. Moreover, Rabbi Aharon Soloveichik has pointed out that the mitzvos in this parsha that reflect this process of causation fluctuate between those that are between man and God, and those that are between man and man, thus showing the interdependence of these two categories. I believe, however, that a closer look at the mitzvos in the parsha reveals that there is an overriding theme that connects

them, beyond the natural connection reflected in the principle of causation.

One of the most striking features of our parsha is that it begins with an instance of war, ends with an instance of war, and, almost precisely in the middle, has a discussion of how soldiers should deport themselves while out on the battlefield. In wartime, soldiers, being subjected to a tremendous amount of tension, both inner and outer, have a tendency to forget any sense of morality that they have in normal civilian life. This attitude is encapsulated in the popular expression 'all is fair in love and war'. Just as matters of the heart are very difficult to deal with and often cause people to lose their moral equilibrium, so, too, soldiers in the army often act in ways they would never act in civilian life and garb. The Torah, in fact, takes note of this phenomenon, and even makes certain allowances for it. This is part of the theory underlying the laws of the captive woman as set out in the beginning of the parsha. The Torah tells us that if a soldier captures a beautiful, non-Jewish woman in a war and becomes enamored of her, he is allowed to marry her provided that he puts her through a preliminary process, leading eventually to conversion, but designed, according to many opinions, to discourage him from going ahead with the marriage. The idea behind this process, as Rashi points out from the rabbis, is that the Torah understood human nature in wartime, and knew that a blanket prohibition of this woman to the soldier would not be heeded. Therefore, the Torah, in recognition of human nature, devised a means of allowing the soldier to take her into his house and, if he persists in his desire, eventually marry her.

The process which the Torah prescribes for the beautiful captive woman is, thus, generally looked at from the point of view of the soldier himself, and the urges he has during wartime that the Torah attempts to control. We tend to forget that there is another character involved in this drama, namely, the captive woman herself. She is, of course, a prisoner of war, having been sent to war to advance the cause of Israel's enemy. Exactly what role she played in the war is unclear, although Rabbi Naphtali Tzevi Yehudah Berlin, the Netziv, suggests, in his Torah commentary Ha'amek Davar, that they were sent as an inducement to the young soldiers to fight valiantly and win one of these women as a prize. Whatever the reason, they weren't there to benefit the Jewish people and, in that sense, one can perhaps understand that the process she

is made to go through is not unreasonable. On the other hand, we must realize that she is a woman who is now in a vulnerable situation, who is apt to be taken advantage of. Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer, one of the three major students of Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, explained a further mitzvah mentioned in the section on the captive woman in the light of this vulnerability. The Torah tells us, "But it shall be that if you do not desire her, then you shall send her on her own, but you may not sell her for money; you shall not enslave her, because you have afflicted her" (Devorim, 21,10). True, says Rabbi Blazer, the Torah wants to help the soldier control his desires, but there is a limit to what we will subject the captive woman to for this purpose. If he does not want to marry her as a converted Jew, then he no longer has any license to deal with her, and must set her free. The captive woman, while subject to a conversion process because of the circumstances she chose to expose herself to, is not the chattel of the soldier to do with as he pleases. The captive woman too, then, as a vulnerable target of the soldier's desires, is given due consideration by the Torah.

At the end of the parsha, we are told to remember the deeds of Amalek, and blot out any trace of the nation. We are commanded to wage a war against this nation that attempted to destroy us as we left Egypt, taking advantage of the vulnerable position we were in at the time. However, it is interesting to note that there are limits placed on this war, as well. Rabbi Aharon Soloveichik has pointed out, based on comments of the Rambam in his commentary to the Mishnah, that war cannot be waged against Amalek unless a prophet has first informed us that we may indeed wage it (see his book 'The Warmth and the Light'). There is a need to determine whether the current actions and consequent status of Amalek is commensurate with that of its wicked ancestors and therefore deserving of destruction. The parsha ends with the words "... you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens- you shall not forget." Rav Kook has pointed out that the words "from under the heaven" are taken by the Zohar to mean that only under the heavens, from our point of view on this earth, is Amalek to be totally wiped out, serving no purpose. However, above heaven, from God's point of view, there is a purpose for Amalek. As part of the reality existent in God's creation, Amalek's existence is not meaningless. True, we are bidden to destroy them in battle, but that battle, too, has its own guidelines.

Our parsha, thus, begins and ends with scenarios of battle situations in which the rights of certain people are compromised, and, yet, there is a limit to which their vulnerability can be exploited. I believe it can be demonstrated that the rest of the mitzvos in the parsha radiate out of these two points, and most, if not all, deal with cases that occur within everyday society in which certain people are exposed to vulnerability and we are told to protect their interests and not exploit them. Thus, we are told that the body of someone who performs a crime for which he receives the death penalty, although it is hanged after death on order to serve as an example and deterrent to others, is not allowed to remain in that state for a sustained period. Why? Rashi explains because he, too, is made in God's image. The punishment of lashes administered to someone who has transgressed a certain category of the laws of the Torah is phrased in a negative way: "Forty shall he strike him, he shall not add; lest he strike him an additional blow beyond these" (Devorim, 24,3). The limitations of time and space do not allow me to demonstrate how this factor of protecting the rights of the vulnerable applies throughout the parsha, but I believe that a perusal of the various mitzvos presented therein will reveal that it does hold true.

In the middle of the parsha, the Torah tells "When a camp goes against your enemies, you shall guard against anything evil." (Devorim, 23,10.) The Torah then goes on to describe the precautionary measures one must take while in a military camp to maintain the purity of the site. Someone who has a nocturnal emission must leave the camp overnight, a place for the soldiers to relieve themselves must be set aside, and each soldier must carry

a spade in order to be able to dig a place for his waste and cover it up. The Torah then says, "For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you: so your camp shall be holy, so that He will not see a shameful thing among you and turn away from behind you." (23, 15). The rabbis explain that the ark of the covenant was carried along with the camp when it went out to war, and therefore special care had to be taken to maintain the sanctity of the camp. It is interesting to note that a number of laws of proper and improper speech, as well as the requirement for a separation between men and women during prayer, are derived from these verses. For example, in the phrase "and you shall guard against anything evil," the word for 'anything,' -davar-is read by the rabbis as 'dibur'-speech. Thus, in the very situation of wartime, which is notorious for its laxity in the control of speech, we are told to control our speech. Speech is our bridge between the physical and the spiritual, and a major means of communication with God, through the medium of prayer. Precisely within the context of wartime, when man is prone to let his guard down and compromise the principles he would normally follow in civilian life, we are taught the laws of proper speech and prayer, to remind us that precisely in such situations it is important to maintain our connection to God in order to prevent a total collapse of standards. Radiating out from the lesson of wartime is the rest of life, which, as we argued in our message to parshas Shoftim, is a battlefield in a broader sense of the term. By maintaining our connection with God in all of life's situations, we will become sensitive to the rights and needs of all sectors of society, recognizing them all as creations of God.

Jewish Unity, the Secret Battle Plan

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Kotzker Rebbe, grandfather of Shem Mishmuel, asked a question. The parsha starts, "*Ki seitzei la'milchama al oyvecha un'sano Hashem Elokecha b'yadecha v'shavisa shivyo*. When you will go to war against your enemies, Hashem will deliver them into your hands." The Torah makes no mention of special prayers or of a difficult war. It seems that Hashem will simply deliver the enemies to you on a silver platter.

However, in Parshas Beha'aloscha, we read a different discussion concerning war. "*V'chi savo'u milchamh*

b'artzechem al hatzar hatzorer eschem, va'hareioseme ba'chatzotzros, v'nizkartem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem v'noshatem mei'oyveichem. When there is a war in your land against enemies who are attacking you, you should blow the trumpets (which signal a time for everyone to pray and fast). Then God will remember you and you will be saved from your enemies." In this discussion, the Jewish people is in terrible danger. It has to pray using trumpets and shofar. The Gemara and Rambam describe how Jewish soldiers used to fast on the day of war and would beseech Hashem

for assistance. Only then would Hashem save them. This kind of war is not such a simple one.

In our parsha, though, the Torah says simply, “Hashem will deliver the enemy into your hands.” In Beha’aloscha it is a complicated spiritual struggle. The people need the Almighty’s mercy, they pray and blow trumpets, and then they receive salvation from Hashem. Why are these two descriptions of war and the spiritual preparation for it so different?

Shem Mishmuel notices another intriguing difference between the two parshiyos. In our parsha, the Torah says “*Ki seitzei lamilchama*, When you—a single entity, a single people—go against *oyvecha*—meaning your many enemies.” In Beha’aloscha, though, the Torah says, “*V’chi savo’u milchama...al hatzar hatzorer eschem*. When you (in the plural form) fight a war in your land, against the enemy (singular) who is attacking you.” Why the difference in singular and plural form between the two uses of the word enemy?

Strength of Spirit

Shem Mishmuel explains the fundamental principle of Jewish military victory. The success of the Jewish people in war over our enemies is not a function of our superiority in battle. Many times, our enemies are more numerous and physically powerful. They may have advantages over us in terms of the material aspects of war. Instead, the Jewish people’s physical success is a function of our spiritual success in preparing for and in fighting the war. Shem Mishmuel calls this the *tzelem Elokim*, the Godly image of man. In Bereishis the Torah says, “*B’tzelem Elokim bara es ha’adam*.” Since we Jews received the Torah, we have an extra obligation to develop our Godliness, our *tzelem Elokim*. To the level that the Jewish people and Jewish soldiers develop their Godliness and spirituality, to that extent the Jewish army will succeed in war.

Even in battle, the Jewish army camp must be a place of holiness, as the pasuk says, “*V’haya machanecha kadosh*. Your camp should be holy.” Wartime usually turns people into animals. The Torah, though, emphasizes that the Jewish soldier must retain his sanctity.

In the earlier times of Moshe and Yehoshua bin Nun, the soldiers would wear tefillin on their hand and head while they were actually in war. Tefillin requires great spiritual focus. Tefillin is *asur b’hesech hada’as*. Someone wearing tefillin can’t be distracted. Someone wearing tefillin must feel Hashem’s presence. This is the source of the old

custom to wear tefillin during war time, as spirituality is the power that gives Israel its strength in battle.

A famous incident that illustrates this principle is recorded in Sefer Shmuel 1 chapter 14. Yehonasan son of Shaul went on a scouting mission together with his servant into the enemy camp of the Plishtim. He felt that he saw a heavenly sign, so he and his aide attacked alone and succeeded in driving away thousands of soldiers. This was not because of his great strength, but due to a spiritual level that he had developed.

The power of the Jew is not in his physical strength. It is his spiritual strength that gives him the power to defeat his enemy in war. This is the *tzelem Elokim* of the Jewish soldier. His Godly image elicits a fear in the enemy to make them flee.

Perfecting Your Godly Image

How does someone achieve perfection of his *tzelem Elokim*? According to Chassidus, this occurs when a person performs the mitzvos. We have 365 negative commandments and 248 positive commandments, for a total of 613. The soul also has 613 aspects.

The 248 positive mitzvos are very important for the 248 positive sides of the *tzelem Elokim* in the human being. If a person is able to perfect all 248 positive aspects of his soul and avoid the 365 blemishes that those negative sins would incur, he will perfect his *tzelem Elokim* as Hashem wants him to. If a person has not fulfilled even one positive mitzva, his soul will have a certain blemish. How is it possible for any individual Jewish soldier to achieve total perfection of his Godly image?

Some of these 248 mitzvos *asei* are restricted to very specific people. For example, only a king can fulfill the mitzva for a king to write a second sefer Torah. Every Jew has to write one sefer Torah, but the king has a special mitzva to write a second. Only a kohen can do the mitzva of *avoda* in the Beis Hamikdash. Only a thief can do the mitzva of returning an object that he stole. There is no person in the world who can possibly do all 248 mitzvos. Any one Jew cannot be both king, kohen, and levi etc. How, then, can any Jew even dream of perfecting his *tzelem Elokim*?

How can we expect a Jewish soldier in battle to develop this Godliness that will give him the key to victory? He can’t possibly fulfill all the mitzvos. He can’t possibly attain spiritual perfection!

Shem Mishmuel explains that, according to Chassidus,

at one level all the Jewish people share a common universal soul. This soul is called *yechida*. There are three basic levels to the soul: *nefesh*, the biological level; *ruach*, the emotional level; and *neshama*, the intellectual power. More elevated than these three, the *chaya* surrounds the previous levels. Finally comes *yechida*, where all of Israel is united in a single soul. This is the highest level, in which all of us are united in the collective soul of Israel.

Yechida—Growing Together

Therefore, when the king or the kohen do a *mitzva*, all the individuals of Klal Yisrael benefit from its spiritual perfection. When the king writes his second *sefer Torah*, you and I also write that second *sefer Torah*. This is because we are united at the level of *yechida*. The key, then, to the success of the Jewish soldier begins at a different locus. The question is not whether the individual soldier has done all 248 *mitzvos*. On a collective level, we share each other's *mitzvos* and the resulting perfection.

If a person put *tefillin* on his hand, could we say that only his hand did that *mitzva*, but his feet did not? The person's whole identity is in the *mitzva*! So even though his foot did not put on *tefillin*, that foot is part of the person who so.

At the national Klal Yisrael level, this is true about all of us together. We all share in a single *mitzva*. This turns each individual *mitzva* into a national event. Therefore, all Jews will share in the perfection of soul brought about by any one *mitzva*.

Yechida is even more than a collective of all living Jews. It includes every Jew who ever lived, does live, and will live. You and I share this soul together with Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon Hakohen, and Dovid Hamelech. We all can in some way achieve perfection.

This is a function of our identity as a single national soul, as a living people.

It is possible to put pieces of *mitzvos* together to create a single perfect *mitzva*. I might do a *mitzva*, but in an incomplete fashion. I may say only ten words out of the whole *kriyas shema* with proper intention. But one of you said another ten words correctly.

A third person recited another ten words. Bit by bit we put together a perfect *kriyas shema*. It doesn't matter what country each person is in. Eventually, it all comes together to create a national treasure, a perfectly recited *kriyas shema*.

The United Yechida—Collective Soul Strength

Fundamentally, the Jewish people need a perfected *tzelem Elokim* in order for them to succeed in war and defeat their enemies. This in turn is a function of perfect *mitzva* performance, which itself is a function of the unity of the Jews across the world and across history. To the extent that we identify as Klal Yisrael, we all share in that common Godliness. This is the common perfection and Godliness we achieve together through performance and fulfillment of *mitzvos*. This *achdus*, unity of Israel, is the deciding factor in Jewish victory in battle.

We are united to the level that we feel emotionally, socially, and culturally united. That level is how we share our *mitzvos*. That is the level at which we activate our common universal national soul.

We all feel our *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*—our physical, emotional, and intellectual sensations. How many of us though actually feel the *yechida*, the national universal sensation? The *yechida* lies dormant, not accessed. Its power has not been released or turned on. This is because we keep ourselves separate from one another. Only when we decide that we will unite with one another will we actually become one. This is how we can activate the dormant *yechida*, the dormant national identity of Israel. For the Jew, this is the key to success in war.

Fierce Jewish Individuality

The Maharal explains that the Jewish people, paradoxically and tragically, have a very strong inclination and tendency to be individualists, split apart from one another. This is a function of the greatness of the Jewish soul. The Jewish soul is very special; we are children of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, and Aharon.

We have been endowed with amazing individual prowess. The superior intellect and our acute sense of emotion and spirituality emphasizes our individuality. Every Jewish person is his or her own individual. Sometimes, this can unfortunately lead to the development of a self-centered person, and a bravado and self-righteousness that many of us walk around with.

These feelings then create the antithesis of unity. Jews are very argumentative concerning their individual opinions. Jews are simply independent thinkers. The New York Times once wrote about a group of Jews who met with the Dalai Lama. Since he had just gone into exile himself, he asked them for the secret to Jewish survival in exile. One of the Jews half-jokingly said, "We are always

fighting with each other. If you pick that up from us, maybe that will help you survive.”

We have an individuality which is a function of our individual abilities. However, this also interferes with Jewish unity. Jewish unity is extremely important because it enables us to access our *yechida*, our universal shared soul. No one can achieve perfection without that.

How does one conquer this Jewish tendency for individualism, separateness, and conceit and instead develop this feeling of the universal tzelem Elokim?

Clinging to One Source

Shem Mishmuel offers several ideas. The first idea is based on “*Kedoshim tihyu*.” The pasuk says we should be a holy nation. The Ramban says this means, “*kadesh atzmecha b’mutar lach*. Stay away even from things that the Torah doesn’t command you to avoid.” Add extra practices to the requirements of the Torah in order to achieve personal holiness. In the pursuit of kedusha, the goal is to achieve *deveikus*, to become close to the Almighty.

When we become close and attached to Hashem, His holiness will spread and pour into us. When a person focuses on attaining kedusha through attaching himself to Hashem, then in a sense he relinquishes his personal identity. Obviously, the Almighty is infinite and limitless. When a person truly attaches to Hashem, he realizes that truly his own identity is nothing in relation to the vastness of Hashem, the creator and master of this universe.

Any time a Jew truly says, “I will cling to the Creator of the world,” he gives up his personal agendas. He replaces his agenda with God’s. If every one of us does that, then we are clinging to the same inner point: Hashem. Then we can achieve unity of Israel, the perfect tzelem Elokim. We do this when clinging to God in any affair—not just in mitzvot, but in all of our activities. We should try to surmise what He would want us to do in non-mitzva situations as well as in mitzva situations.

The Torah is a blueprint. It gives us 613 do’s and don’t’s. The goal, though, extends beyond these basic rules. We should be able to generalize it into every area of our lives, to act in a holy, Godly, Torah way. God has confidence in us that we will learn this method.

We will be able to intuit with spiritual and emotional awareness the proper ways of kedusha. If a Jew will be careful in every area of his or her personal life to try to act in the holy Torah way, even in things that are not mandated by Torah (*divrei r’shus*), then one can achieve holiness

and fulfill kedoshim tihyu. He can lose the part of the personality that is pushing himself to the detriment of the people around him. If we all act *l’shem shamayim*, for God’s sake, then clearly our selves don’t matter as much, and there will be less dispute among us.

If we all truly act *l’shem shamayim*, then we can understand the words, “*eilu v’eilu divrei Elokim chayim*.” There are varied approaches to Torah and life. We understand that Torah, especially in voluntary areas, doesn’t prescribe a single solution. We all must fulfill the 613 mitzvot. We all wear the same tallis and tefillin, eat the same matza, and don’t eat non-kosher food. However, in areas of *reshus*, we choose different ways. Some people are very generous, some fight for justice in the world, others are studious, and others are emotional. Part of unity is to realize that everyone has his or her own way of expressing his or her personal goal of closeness to the Almighty. If we respect the way others do things, since they are doing so because it is their way, we can develop strong feelings of unity. “*V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*, respect your friend and his individual way.” The respect for his or her individuality provides the bonding that leads to unity, the *yechida*, the oneness of Israel.

By focusing on doing everything *l’shem shamayim*, even optional matters, we ultimately produce Jewish unity. This develops the tzelem Elokim, the way to perfect the Jewish collective to help us earn victories in war.

Indeed, the Jewish people have a long history of victory in war as function of our unity. It wasn’t because we were more numerous or stronger. Many times, we weren’t, but when we united it gave us a unique power that made our enemies flee. This is the story of the Chashmonaim. The Maccabees were united in their devotion to Hashem and to Am Yisrael. This is the key for victory in Jewish wars.

The Power of Unity

Shem Mishmuel says when Jews confront our enemies we find a true historical phenomenon. If the Jews are united, then the enemies are disunited. When the Jews are not united, then the enemies unite. In the times of the Greeks, when the Jews were not united, the Greeks banded together and defeated the Jews. The Romans, too, took soldiers from countries all over the world and united them to fight against the Jews. When Jews today are disunited, then all sorts of soldiers connect to fight against us. Sunni and Shiite Moslems, Lebanese and Syrians, Iranians, Gazans, and Egyptians. These people often fight wars

among themselves. But because the Jews are not united, these people unite and fight against the Jews. When we take the power of unity, though, our enemies will disunite. But when we are disunited, they take the power of unity and use it against us.

When the Jews stood at Yam Suf, they saw the Egyptians coming to attack them and they were frightened. Hashem had told Klal Yisrael to expect an Egyptian attack. They panicked, even though they knew that this would happen and Hashem would smite the Egyptians at the sea. Why were they frightened?

Shem Mishmuel explains this based on a careful reading of the psukim. “*Va’yisu Bnei Yisrael es eineihem v’hinei Mitzrayim nosea achareihem.*” There is a dramatic difference in the nouns in this verse. The verse refers to Bnei Yisrael in plural form, *rabim*. “They raised their eyes,” and “They were afraid.” But Mitzrayim, referred to in the singular construct, was following them.

The Egyptians were united as a single entity. Rashi there actually says, “*k’lev echad b’ish echad*, with one heart as one person.” The Egyptians were united by their shared goal to recapture the Bnei Yisrael. This is why the Jews were afraid. They realized the disunity among themselves, fragmentation into factions, and they saw a united enemy. (In World War II the Nazis had allies, but the Jews tragically were not united.)

This is why Bnei Yisrael felt they couldn’t rely on God’s promise. They thought God’s promise was a function of their unity. They didn’t know how God would save them. He did, nonetheless. Hashem knew that shortly thereafter the Jewish people would be totally united at Har Sinai to accept the Torah. He used that merit to split the Red Sea for them. The key to victory in wars is Jewish unity.

Teshuva Together

Now we can understand our original question. Why in our parsha, Ki Seitzei, does the Torah present the war as a simple process? “God will give the enemy into your hand.” After all, in Beha’aloscha the Torah describes a difficult time of war. “You will blow trumpets and pray, God will remember you and He will save you from your enemies.” What is the source of the difference between these two scenarios?

In our parsha, the singular *teitzei*—“you”—our *yechida*

identity, is going out to fight. Our enemies will be many, *oyvecha*. God will give the enemy into our hands. We will win; it will be easy. You, as an individual united nation with a singular identity, will win the war. You are united in purpose in service to Hashem. You are imbued with love of your fellow Jew, *v’ahavta*. You realize that this world is only for you to serve Hashem and that your individuality is not a reason to pull you apart from fellow Jews, especially as its importance fades in contrast to the reality of Hashem’s existence. You have become a holy nation with a Godly image. Therefore, God simply gives those enemies into your hands.

However, in Beha’aloscha, the Torah writes *Ki savo’u*, “When you (plural) enter a war *b’artzechem*, in your (plural) land.” The enemy in this war, *hatzar*, is singular. He fights against you, *eschem*, in the plural form. In this war, the Jews are divided, and the enemies are united. It will be a difficult situation. The Torah provides a solution to this discord: “*va’hareioseem bachatzotzros.*” You divided Jews should blow the trumpets and pray. God will remember you, you will repent, and He will save you.

When the Jews are united, we easily win wars. When the Jews are disunited, our enemies are united, and then we have a long and arduous struggle.

How appropriate and exactly the Shem Mishmuel speaks to our situation today. We are surrounded by enemies who split us and carry out their plans to attack and to destroy. We desperately need unity. The unity of Israel is a function of how much we cling to Hashem. To what level do we give up our personal agendas for the agenda of holiness? “*B’chol derachecha da’eihu.*” We will grow in holiness when we know God in every way, when we give up our personal agendas for the sake of His, to make us more like Him. Then, without doubt, we will be able to win all the wars that come against us.

The month of Elul is a time of preparation for Rosh Hashana. On that great day at the beginning of the new year, we must reconcile ourselves with all fellow Jews. We have to feel love for Klal Yisrael, the *yechida*, the single nation-soul of Israel. When we come to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, may we, as a united people, hear God’s voice calling us, caressing us, consoling us, and blessing us with a happy, healthy, and holy new year.

Religion and the New Scientific Frontiers

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Judaism reveres the divine gift of human life. In our efforts to preserve life we adopt every possible measure to prevent senseless or accidental death. For this reason, the Torah obligates us to construct fences upon the flat roofs of our homes so that “you should not situate blood in your homes”.

Surprisingly, in parshat Ki Tezey, the mitzvah to maintain safe home environments is juxtaposed to a seemingly unrelated aveirah of mixing seeds and grapes, mandating that these dissimilar species be planted at a distance from one another. The instruction to erect a fence upon a flat roof and the violation of mixing different agricultural groups appear to share little in common.

The Price of Progress

The mitzvah to construct a fence on a roof has broader metaphoric implications. Fences are only necessary in multi-storied homes. When humans lived in modest, single-story thatch huts, fences weren't necessary. Rickety roofs couldn't support human weight and the heights weren't substantial enough for a fall to be lethal. Fences on roofs only become necessary as humans acquired the skills to construct solid and tall edifices. The need for fences only emerged with the advance of technology.

Constructing taller buildings is crucial for human development. Living in straw huts or mud homes exposed humanity to the violent forces of Nature. Additionally, in the absence of multi-storied structures, populations were scattered across broad regions. Achieving the ability to manufacture bricks and mortar enabled the generation of the Migdal Bavel to condense the population and to inaugurate the first recorded city, effectively eliminating the curse of Kayin to nomadically wander the earth. Building tall structures with high roofs was a major milestone of architectural achievement.

But it also presented new perils. Solid roofs expanded human living space but also introduced the deadly hazard of falling off those roofs. By cautioning us to build a fence, the Torah signals a broader message: pay attention not just to the benefits of human innovation, but also to the undisclosed dangers which new technologies create. As the human spirit advances, we must not allow technology to endanger life or to harm human welfare.

The First Revolutionary Phase

We have all experienced a dizzying 300 years of industrial and technological revolutions, each of which has dramatically advanced the human condition. However, each revolution introduced new threats to human well-being.

The industrial revolution revolutionized human labor, relocating industry from the farmlands and local shops into massive factories. But it also stationed workers in cramped conditions with poor ventilation and toxic exposure to hazardous materials. These dark and inhuman caverns often callously exploited child and immigrant labor. Furthermore, industrialization polluted our environment, and accelerated global warming, the effects of which we are first beginning to suffer.

The industrial revolution also created a demographic shift, rapidly accelerating urbanization and creating overcrowded concrete jungles of crime and urban blight.

For its part, the technological revolution and the internet have radically diminished human interaction creating more loneliness and less communal belonging. Every technology advances human progress, but also introduces new and unspoken menaces to human welfare. By charging us to build fences upon our tall homes, the Torah is, effectively cautioning us to be sensitive to the dangers which accompany new technologies.

Changing Nature

The adjacent prohibition to the commandment to build walls bans the mixing of grains and grapes. Unlike the instruction to build a fence upon a roof, the Torah doesn't rationalize this prohibition based upon its potential negative impact. It states the prohibition without any explanation or reasoning. Evidently, mixing different agricultural species and manipulating Nature is banned even if they don't harm the human condition. Hashem fixed inviolate boundaries in Nature which are not to be crossed, even in the pursuit of science and progress.

We are currently standing at an important threshold of human innovation and technology. We are not just developing the ability to build taller homes, but are beginning to reengineer Nature herself. We have passed from the stage of building tall homes to the stage of mixing grains and grapes.

Past industrial or technological revolutions didn't alter the basic chemistry of Nature, but merely harnessed her potential more efficiently. For example, successive revolutions in energy empowered us to draw more energy from our natural world. Initially we sailed the oceans on wind powered ships, aided by human muscle. We soon discovered that heating water would release steam energy and that burning coal would release heat energy. Each of these discoveries allowed us to mechanize labor and production and to revolutionize travel. Ultimately, we discovered that natural gas and fossil fuels contained even greater energy capacity which could be released by controlled burning. At no point though, did our manipulation of energy sources alter the basic configuration of Nature.

All this changed, however, over the past century, as quantum physics and Einstein's discoveries allowed us to peer into the sub-atomic level of our world. We soon discovered that by splitting atoms we could unleash enough energy to destroy the world. We are now discovering that by fusing atoms we can release even more energy. By splitting atoms and by combining atoms we are reengineering the basic model of Nature.

Another example of technological advance changing the basic design of Nature are the advances in the field of medicine. Over the past 500 years the progress of Western medicine has dramatically improved human health and significantly expanded life expectancy. These inventions didn't alter Nature, but equipped us with the skills and the tools to better understand human physiology and to provide both preventional and interventional procedures. These revolutions didn't mix grains and grapes, but merely built taller homes.

Medical science is now entering a bold new era. Having mapped the human genome, we can reengineer human DNA and, potentially, alter human identity. We can clone

new life and we can 3D manufacture artificial limbs and organs. Artificial Intelligence will, ultimately, enable the creation of enhanced human beings by fusing technology with human biology. We are toying with the building blocks of the world Hashem created. This is a very different type of technology and poses a very different religious question.

As with everything else, the Torah provides direction. Technology itself should never be vilified. For a religious Jew, the march of science and progress is driven by a religious impulse. Hashem is kind and compassionate and desires that we improve our condition and welfare. Greek mythology depicted Prometheus stealing fire from the gods and being eternally punished for his crime. By stark contrast, the gemara describes Hashem delivering fire to Adam immediately after the first week of creation. This passing of fire from God to Man, is effectively a passing of the baton. Hashem signaled that His creation was completed and that now, he expected humanity to improve the world He intentionally left imperfect.

Yet there are limits to human creativity. There are basic boundaries of Nature we aren't meant to encroach upon. Or, as Hashem instructed Adam, it is his world "to develop, but also to preserve". We must develop but must also preserve. Balancing the two divine mandates will never be easy.

We do not possess any clear masorah or tradition about larger issues such as global warming, genetic engineering, or quantum physics. The best we can do is to maintain a delicate balance. In our pursuit of science and innovation we must respect the boundaries Hashem installed in nature. When we sense that we are crossing those boundaries, we must pause and consider whether we are developing Hashem's world as he desires, or are mixing grapes and grains.

Memory vs. History

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

At the very end of this week's parsha, Parshas Ki Seitzei, the Torah records the mitzvah of zechiras Amalek:

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֶק, בְּדַרְךְ, בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם; - *You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt;*

וְהָיָה בְּהֵנִיחַ; - *That he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the weak ones at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear G-d;*
 ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ מִכָּל אִיבֵיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאַרְצְךָ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה - *And it will be, when Hashem your G-d grants you respite from all your*

enemies around [you] in the land which Hashem, your G-d, gives to you as an inheritance to possess, that you shall erase the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget (Devarim 25:17-19).

These verses, and the mitzvah of zechiras Amalek, refer to an event that occurred forty years prior, a few weeks after the nation left Egypt. As the newly born nation was journeying on its way, having just crossed the Reed Sea, and not yet having arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai, the nation of Amalek (descendants of Eisav, see Bereishis 36:12) chanced upon them and viciously attacked them, specifically targeting the weak and defenseless amongst them. This attack, its audaciousness and viciousness, is meant to become part of our national memory.

Times of Israel, Tuesday August 22, 2023:

Hundreds of mourners attended the funeral on Monday night of Batsheva Nigri, a 42-year-old mother of three who was killed in a terror shooting attack close to Hebron on Monday morning (8/21/23). Family and friends of Nigri, a resident of Beit Hagai who worked as a kindergarten teacher in nearby Efrat, paid their last respects to her at the Gush Etzion Regional Cemetery in Kfar Etzion on Monday night.

In her eulogy, Nigri's sister, Eliya, said she was "the most special sister I could have. This is an unimaginable loss," said Nigri's mother-in-law. "You were always facing forward, with a smile and with endless hope."

Nigri was killed when a vehicle she was in with her 12-year-old daughter, who was in the backseat and was physically unharmed in the attack, and a driver, came under fire from a passing car while driving on the Route 60 highway. Gottlieb (the driver of the vehicle) was seriously wounded in the attack and was rushed to Beersheba's Soroka Hospital where he was stabilized after undergoing surgery. Gottlieb is a father of six who had been en route to buy books for his children.

In her eulogy to her mother, Nigri's daughter, Shirel, recounted the attack: "Today we went out shopping in Jerusalem, and suddenly we heard gunshots. The windows were broken, and you were no longer awake. Ima, I want to give you a hug one last time. I miss you. You were the happiest person I know. I ask that you watch over us and don't leave me. My children will know what an amazing mother I had," she said. Nigri's brother hailed her as an "amazing wife, a wonderful mother and an aunt like no other. You were also amazing to the children in all the

kindergartens where you worked — hundreds of children learned what Judaism is from you. I refuse to accept what the mind already knows," he said.

Nigri's neighbor Hannah Zarichon related, "Batsheva was a fun, happy woman" who was very active in the Efrat community, including as its volunteer youth coordinator, organizing many events for local residents. "She had an infectious laugh... and always volunteered with a huge smile." Nigri and her husband also served as foster parents to two young children, Zarichon said (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/you-were-all-light-funeral-held-for-israeli-woman-killed-in-hebron-terror-shooting/>).

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק - "Remember what Amalek did to you". R' Lord J. Sacks z'l writes, "It is remarkable that biblical Hebrew (lashon ha'kodesh) has no word for history. Modern Hebrew had to borrow a word: historia. The key word in the Hebrew Bible is not history but memory. Zakhor, the command to remember, occurs time and again in the Torah... The word zakhor in one or other of its forms occurs no fewer than one hundred and sixty-nine times in the Hebrew Bible. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes, 'Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people.' This was Moses' injunction to future generations... Jews were to become a people of memory.

"The Hebrew verb *zakhor* signifies more than a consciousness of the past. My predecessor, Lord Jakobovits, pointed out that the word *yizkor*, the name given to the traditional Jewish prayer for the deceased, is associated in the Torah with the future (Gen.8:1, 19:29, 30:22). We remember the past for the sake of the future, and for life.

"There is a profound difference between history and memory. History is his story - an event that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is my story - something that happened to me and is part of who I am. History is information. Memory is part of identity. I can study the history of other peoples, cultures and civilizations... but they do not make a claim on me. They are the past as past. Memory, zakhor, is past as present, and it lives on in me. Without memory there can be no identity. Our nation has continuing identity to the extent that it can remember where it came from and who its ancestors were.... To be a Jew is to know that over and above history is the task of memory. More than any other faith, Judaism made memory a matter of religious

obligation” (The Jonathan Sacks Haggada, p.37-41).

May we merit that great day when we shall witness the fulfillment of Hashem’s promise, a promise related to our remembrance of an ancient enemy that lives on throughout the millennia: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, כְּתֹב זֹאת זִכְרוֹן בַּסֵּפֶר, וְשִׂים, בְּאָזְנִי

יהושע: - and Hashem said to Moshe, Inscribe this [as] a memorial in the book, and recite it into Yehoshua’s ears, that I will surely obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens (Shemos 17:14).

The Torah’s ‘Secret’ for Longevity

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

As we have previously noted, this week’s parasha, parashat Kee Teitzei, contains more mitzvot than any other parasha in the Torah. With 27 positive and the 47 negative commandments, the total of 74 mitzvot represents more than 10% of the 613 mitzvot that are contained in the Torah. This remarkable assortment of statutes, includes the fascinating formula for lengthening a person’s life.

Even casual students of the Bible are aware that the Torah speaks of the lengthening of a person’s days as a reward for the proper performance of mitzvot. The most famous instance, of course, is that by honoring and revering parents, a person’s days may be lengthened. Hence, the promise of extended years is affirmed in both versions of the Ten Commandments that are found in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16.

Our parasha, Kee Teitzei, however, contains two other references where the lengthening of days is promised.

While one is generally known, the other is rather obscure.

In Deuteronomy 22:6 we read: *בִּי יִקְרָא קוֹן צִפּוֹר לְפִנֵּיךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ, If, along the road, you chance upon a bird’s nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs, and the mother is sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs—do not take the mother together with her young.* The following verse (Deuteronomy 22:7), instructs the Jewish finder to let the mother go, and to take only the young, *לִמְעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ, וְהִאֲרַכְתָּ יָמִים, in order that you may fare well, and have a long life.*

There is, as we have noted, a third, less well-known, instance that is also found in our parasha where the lengthening of a person’s days is cited as a reward. In Deuteronomy 25:13-16, we find a series of laws concerning honesty in business, *לֹא יִהְיֶה לָךְ בְּכִיסֶּךָ, אָבֹן וְאָבֹן, גְּדוֹלָה וְקִטְנָה, You shall not have in your pocket alternate weights, larger and smaller (Deuteronomy 25:13).* You shall not have in your home alternate measures, a larger and a smaller (Deuteronomy 25:14). You must have completely honest weights, and completely honest measures if you are to

endure long on the soil that the Lord, your G-d, is giving you (Deuteronomy 25:15). For everyone who does those things, and everyone who deals dishonestly, is abhorrent to the L-rd, your G-d (Deuteronomy 25:16). The expression used in Deuteronomy 25:15, *עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר, לְמַעַן יֵאָרִיכוּ יָמֶיךָ, is virtually identical to the expression concerning the lengthening of days that is found in the Torah’s teaching regarding honoring and revering parents.*

The Talmud (Shabbat 31a), cites Rava as saying, that on Judgment Day, the very first question that the Heavenly tribunal will ask the soul of every recently deceased person, *is הֲנִשְׂאֵת וְנִתְתָּ בְּאֲמוּנָה? Did you conduct your business honestly?* Amazingly, the question about business is asked even before the question concerning establishing fixed times for learning Torah, believing in redemption, or perpetuating the Jewish people through procreation.

The British scholar, Louis Jacobs points out in his essay on Jewish business ethics that this statement was made by Rava, who was the spiritual leader of the Babylonian town of Ma’chozen (aka Mechuza), where he had moved the Talmudic academy from Pumpedita. Adjacent to the Tigris River and near the capital of a Persian empire, Ctesiphin, Ma’chozen was one of the most renowned ancient commercial centers. This emphasis on honesty in business, was Rava’s way of reminding the numerous successful local Jewish merchants to be scrupulously honest in their business dealings.

The Mishnah in Baba Metziah 4:2, cites an imprecation formula known as *מֵי שֶׁפָּרָה—“Me Sheh’para,”* that served as a formal and solemn warning from the courts for those who attempted to avail themselves of loopholes in business laws. The formula stated: “He [G-d] who exacted punishment from the generation of the flood (Genesis 6:13) and the generation of the dispersion (Genesis 11:9), will exact punishment from he/she who does not abide by His spoken word.”

Louis Jacobs shares examples from the life of the

legendary Chofetz Chaim. He relates that when the Chofetz Chaim was a young man, he opened a general store together with his wife. The Chofetz Chaim was extremely concerned about not keeping any goods that were not perfectly fresh, and in order to guarantee that he was giving the proper value to the customer, he would also always make certain to add a little extra to whatever was bought.

Afraid that the many customers were patronizing his store because of his renown as a Torah scholar, and possibly depriving other shopkeepers of their revenue, he would close his store daily at midday. Once, a non-Jewish customer left behind a herring that he had bought from the Chofetz Chaim. Try as he may, the rabbi was unable to discover the identity of that gentile. To make certain that he was not guilty of theft, on the next market day, the Chofetz Chaim distributed a fresh herring to each one of his non-Jewish customers.

The Prerequisite for Change

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

The Torah speaks of the *בן סורר ומורה*, the “wayward son” who disobeys his parents, indulges in meat and wine, and must be put to death. The Gemara teaches that such a situation will never actually arise, because of the numerous conditions that must be met for a youngster to qualify as a *בן סורר ומורה*. The Torah presented this hypothetical case for the purpose of *שכר* – so that we can learn the subject and receive reward. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, among others, explained this to mean that by delving into this topic, we are “rewarded” with important insights and concepts that help us as parents and educators, as they instruct us how to educate and influence those under our charge.

The Mishna in *Maseches Sanhedrin* (71b) teaches, *בן סורר ומורה נידון על שם סופו* – this child is punished not because of what he had done, but because of what he will do in the future. As the Gemara explains, the Torah determines with certainty that such a child, who steals money from his parents to satisfy his lust for meat and wine, will eventually become a violent criminal, killing and seizing people’s money. Therefore, the youngster is put to death already now, before having the opportunity to grow and become a murderer.

Many have noted what appears to be a contradiction

In our own day, when one of the partners of a major real estate syndicate that was controlled by a punctilious observant Jew, went bankrupt, the observant Jew took pains to pay back every penny to all investors of his bankrupt partner, despite the fact that there was no legal obligation to do so.

In truth, many of the examples cited above represent behavior generally regarded as *לפנים משורת הדין*, beyond the letter of the law. But the fact that the Torah rewards the honest shopkeeper with length of days, indicates how dearly the Al-mighty cherishes honesty and integrity in business, underscoring that proper conduct in business must not be compromised.

Indeed, it is the Torah’s way to set ethical standards extremely high, and to expect all to make the utmost efforts to meet those standards.

May we all live up to those exalted standards and, in this manner, serve to sanctify the name of G-d!

between the Mishna’s teaching and the Gemara’s comments elsewhere, in *Maseches Rosh Hashanah* (16b). The Gemara states, *אין דנין את האדם אלא לפי מעשיו של אותה שעה* – a person is judged based on his present condition, and not based on the future (or, for that matter, the past). The basis for this concept, the Gemara continues, is the pasuk in *Sefer Bereishis* (21:17) that says about Yishmael, *כי שמע אלוקים את קול הנער באשר הוא שם* – God heard Yishmael’s cries, and had compassion on him, because of who he was at that time. Rashi explains that, as the Midrash relates, the angels argued that God should not rescue Yishmael from thirst by showing his mother a fountain of water, because Yishmael’s descendants would, in the future, kill large number of Jews by denying them water. But Hashem nevertheless saved Yishmael’s life *באשר הוא שם*, because He judged him based on his current state, without consideration of the future.

If, indeed, God judges only *באשר הוא שם*, based on a person’s current level of worthiness, regardless of what will happen in the future, then why is a *בן סורר ומורה* put to death *על שם סופו*, because of what he is destined to become later in life?

One reason, suggested by the Chizkuni, is that unlike Yishmael, the *בן סורר ומורה* had already placed himself on a

downward spiral. Yishmael, at that point, as he nearly died of thirst, had not done anything wrong; he was pure and innocent, and so he was judged *באשר הוא שם*, based on his spiritual standing in those moments. But the *בן סורר ומורה* had already put himself on the trajectory leading toward criminal behavior, and so he is already held accountable for the end result, for the consequences of his bad choices.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in *Eish Tamid*, notes an additional distinction between Yishmael and the *בן סורר ומורה*. The Torah states repeatedly in the context of the *בן סורר ומורה* that he does not listen to his parents: *איננו שומע בקול אביו ובקול אמו...ולא ישמע אליהם...איננו שומע בקולנו*. Rabbenu Yona writes that the primary prerequisite for teshuva is a willingness to listen, an open mind. If a person is too stubborn or too rigid to listen to what people have to say to him, to consider the possibility that his ideas or his conduct might be wrong, then he will never change. If no rebbe, friend, family member, shiur, article or other source can penetrate a person's heart, if he rejects out of hand the notion that he has what to learn, that he has room for improvement, then he will never change. This is why

A Jew is never truly lost

Rabbi Johnny Solomon

This Shabbat we read Parshat Ki Tetze which includes the mitzvah of hashavat aveidah – the returning of lost property (see Devarim 22:1-3). But even though this is a biblical commandment, it is noteworthy that no bracha is recited prior to returning a lost item. The question that I would like to consider is: why?

Admittedly, a range of suggestions have been offered in answer to this question (see *Sefer Likutei Shoshanim* pp. 499-506). However, I am particularly struck by one answer which Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank suggests (see *Har Tzvi* commentary to Devarim 22:1), which is that no bracha is recited prior to fulfilling the mitzvah of returning a lost item given the possibility that the person who lost the item has already given up hope of finding it again.

And why is this relevant to the mitzvah of hashavat aveidah? It is because once someone gives up hope of finding an object (nb. the word for giving up hope is *y'iush*), the object is then rendered ownerless, and it may be kept by someone who finds it (see *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 262:5*). As a result, once *y'iush* occurs,

the *בן סורר ומורה*, who refuses to listen, is *שם סופו*, condemned because of his future. If somebody refuses to listen, then he will continue along his downward spiral. He will never change course. He will never make the adjustments to his life that he needs to make.

This insight brings to mind the Ramchal's comments in *Mesilas Yesharim* about the *לץ*, the cynic. A cynical person, who finds what to ridicule about everything and anything, cannot ever be moved or inspired. The Ramchal draws an analogy to a soldier holding a shield smeared with oil. Any arrow hurled at him that strikes the shield just falls off. Similarly, any words of otherwise constructive criticism spoken to the cynic just "fall off." They will never penetrate his heart, because he does not allow them to. Somebody who finds fault in everything, and refuses to take anything seriously, cannot change.

Teshuva requires listening, opening our minds, humbly hearing what other people have to say, and considering the possibility that we are mistaken. This is the key to personal growth, without which we will never improve.

there is no obligation of hashavat aveidah because the object is no longer considered to be the possession of the one who lost it.

Thinking this through, what this means is that while the mitzvah of returning a lost object is rooted in the premise that, at the moment when one finds something, the owner still maintains some hope (*tikvah*) that they will be reunited with whatever they have lost, we must also accept the possibility at that moment that the owner might have already given up hope (*y'iush*) of being reunited with the object. And precisely given this possibility this is why, at least according to Rabbi Frank, no bracha is recited.

I believe that there is a huge lesson which we can learn from here about many different areas of life that we need to act with a sense of urgency that hope (*tikvah*) still exists while, at the same time, we must also accommodate the possibility that the very people whom we are trying to assist might have transitioned into a state of hopelessness (*y'iush*).

Of course, there are many realms where this principle can be applied, but I would like to reference just one as

explored by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, otherwise known as the Chafetz Chaim.

According to the Chafetz Chaim, the duty to help Jews who are ebbing away from tradition or who have assimilated find their way back to Jewish belief or worship stems from the mitzvah of hashavat aveidah. On this basis, this would mean that all those who are involved in outreach should act with a sense of urgency to assist those Jews who still hope (tikvah) to return to Jewish belief or worship, while they must also be honest and accommodate the possibility that some Jews have transitioned into a state of hopelessness (y'iush) in terms of their Jewish belief and worship.

However, the above interpretation is flawed, and this is because there is a huge difference between the physical mitzvah of hashavat aveidah (i.e. returning lost objects) and the spiritual application of hashavat aveidah (i.e. helping disconnected Jews reconnect to their heritage). And though we believe that people experience y'iush (hopelessness) when it comes to reuniting with a lost object, we believe that no Jew truly experiences y'iush

when it comes to their Jewish identity.

Clearly, this point is fundamental in terms of its application to Jewish outreach to others. However, it is equally relevant when it comes to Jewish outreach to ourselves because, as Rav Kook beautifully explains, teshuvah is itself a form of returning our spiritual identity to ourselves. As he writes, “the primary teshuva, which immediately provides illumination to those grappling in the darkness, is when a person returns to themselves, to the root of their soul. At that moment, they immediately return to God, to the soul of all souls” (Orot HaTeshuvah 15:10). Accordingly, unlike the returning of a physical object where there is a concern for y'iush, Jewish teachings emphasise the perpetual possibility of teshuvah, and thus, the perpetual possibility of tikvah.

In conclusion, while some people give up hope of being reunited with a lost object, a Jew never gives up hope of being reunited with their spiritual self. And given this possibility, we must always act with a sense of tikvah both when it comes to outreach to others, and outreach to ourselves.