

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE**VAET'HANAN****Haftarah: Yeshayahu 40:1-26****JULY 27-28, 2018 16 AB 5778****Welcome Mikhayla and Baby Choux !**

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EDITORS NOTES

At the beginning of Va'etchanan, Moses recounts how he pleaded with Hashem to let him enter the Land of Israel: And I implored (va'etchanan) Hashem at that time. As Moses relates in the very next verse, Hashem while not accepting his plea, did allow him to see the Promised Land from afar. The numerical value of "va'etchanan," 515, is a remez, a hint to the 515 different prayers of supplication Moses prayed (Devarim Rabbah 11:6). Rashi adds that the word "va'etchanan" is one of ten Hebrew words for praying. Amazingly the generic Hebrew word for prayer (tefillah) also has the numerical value of 515. The Rabbis tell us that Hashem in fact stopped Moses from saying a 516th prayer (That's three times a day for 172 days), because had Moses said that additional prayer, Hashem would have accepted the prayer and that might have messed things up, so Hashem begged him to stop. It sounds very strange.

Some years back, I heard a story. I recalled parts of it, but was looking for it in full so I turned to professor Google for help. I found a version posted on the Yeshiva Bet El website by Rabbi Stewart Weiss.

He writes: Moshe's greatest wish was to enter Eretz Yisrael to live - or at least to be buried there. He prayed 515 times, until Hashem finally said, "Stop praying!" What a strange thing for G-d to say, to tell a Jew not to pray?! What gives?

So hear this story: An elderly Jewish lady living in a nursing home passed away. Her children, who always visited her and took care of her, were notified. They immediately phoned the burial society and arranged for a proper burial. The woman was buried in the presence of her beloved family; Kaddish was recited and Shiva began.

On the 5th day of the shiva, the phone rang and the daughter answered. On the other end of the phone was.....her mother, whom she had just buried! The daughter, in shock, immediately fainted. The phone

rang again; it was her mother complaining that no one had come to see her that entire week. The family rushed to the nursing home to see their "dead" mother alive and well! It turned out there was a mix-up at the nursing home; it was her roommate that had passed away, not their mother. The home had mixed up the names and phoned the wrong family, and so the wrong person was buried! Imagine how terrible everyone felt about such a mistake.

But now, the nursing home had the grim job of informing the children of the OTHER lady that their mother had died 5 days ago and was already buried. They called, the son answered, and as soon as they broke the sad news to him that his mother had died, the son interrupted, "Just have her cremated; we're not interested in anything else." The nursing home explained that it was too late; she'd already had a proper Jewish burial! When the son heard this, he was awestruck, and related the following story:

"We long debated with our mother about what to do about her burial when she died. She is observant, and wanted a proper Jewish burial. But we told her that we plan to cremate her, as we don't believe in an afterlife. Besides, cremation is much cheaper and definitely more ecologically correct. Our mother's response to us was: 'I will pray to G-d that I receive a Jewish burial.' Every day, our mother prayed. We told her it was a waste of time, that when she was gone, WE would be in charge of things, and do what we thought was right, but she kept right on praying anyway. And now, amazingly, it seems that her prayer was answered!"

The Rabbi comments: Prayer has an awesome power. So great, so powerful that Hashem knew that if Moshe prayed just one more time – Tefila #516 - even He, the Almighty, the Shomaya Tefila, would simply have to give in! So He asked Moshe to stop right there. The lesson for all of us: never give up, never stop praying. The answer to our prayer may be just around the bend; the next bend of the knee may finally do the trick!

Does prayer really work?

Let's look back at the last month or so of Torah readings.

Remember Korach who challenges Moshe and

contests the selection of Aharon. He throws the commandment of sissit and of mezuzah into Moses' face suggesting that Moses is acting on his own and is simply making things up. Korach could have destroyed Judaism.

Korach is willing to risk his life in his desire for greater honor. We see that he will be punished with a unique and horrible punishment.

Yet we see Moshe ask Hashem, "please don't accept their offering". Why would Moshe even imagine Hashem will accept anything from Korach?

We see when Balak sends men to entice Bilaam to curse the children of Israel, Hashem tells him not to go. But after additional visits and please, Hashem tells Bilaam that since he will suffer a financial loss if he does not go, he can. Why is Hashem worried about Bilaam's finances? When did he become Bilaam's agent?

We read about all of the holidays at the end of Parshat Pinchas including the portion which discussed Yom Kippur. Even today, we can imagine the scene of Yom Kippur as we read the seder HaAvodah, the work of the day. Think of your synagogue on Kippur and multiply it by a thousand. All the people are coming to the Mikdash pleading for forgiveness. They witness the Kohen Gadol, the Holiest Guy in the world going into the Holy of Holies to pray for the people. He has Hashem's ear at that moment. So what would you ask for? His plea towards Heaven is as follows: Don't listen to prayer of Traveler. What, has to be a mistake, sound too strange !!!

And finally as we closed the book of Bamidbar with Matot Masai we mentioned the cities of refuge, the Arey Miklat. Someone who kills BeShogeg, without intention, but with some negligence, must run to one of these cities or else the Goel HaDam, a relative of the deceased can kill him.

So the accidental killer must remain in the city with no possibility to visit home, his family or his friends. He can't leave. He is in essence a prisoner in the city. So when does he get out? Its only when the Kohen Gadol dies? Whether the High Priest is young or old, the accidental murderer must wait. And after death, it's over. They can't touch him and he can finally return home to live out his days in peace.

So what does the accidental murderer dream about all day every day while living in this little town in Iowa? He must be envisioning the funeral of Kohen Gadol.

He prays for it daily.

What's supposed to stop him? We are told that the mother of the Kohen Gadol sends cookies to all the residents of the cities of refuge.

Do we think that these cookies will make him pray less?

All of these stories help us understand the Power of Prayer. Hashem created Tefilah and it works. Its real. Hashem created this world with natural laws. There are physical laws of nature and there are spiritual laws of nature, Hashem is Ne'Eman - Faithful to the system which He created.

We are told that Hashem would rather not interfere, rather not do miracles and rather let nature run its course.

Rabbi Abittan gave us an example. He suggested that we take a piece of wood, a very dry piece of wood and we light it. What will happen? It will burn. For dry wood not to burn would be a miracle.

The rabbi would explain that in the same way there are natural laws of the spiritual world. Hashem created Tefilah and it is the nature of Tefilah if done correctly to work. In fact we might suggest that it would take a miracle for tefilah not to work!

Consider what that means. If a person prays and does so in the correct way, then it would be a miracle for Hashem not to listen.

Look at Korach coming against Moshe. Even this Rasha, because what else do we call him? If he brings a Mincha with the proper thoughts and tefilah would be accepted. Moshe has to counter this act, because Moshe is aware of this power, and this law of nature. Hashem created Prayer as a way for us to connect with Hashem

Consider the world until a few hundred years ago and consider the ancient world. Perhaps ninety percent of people lived agriculturally based lives. There were farmers and there were shepherds and your livelihood depended on the bounty of the earth. Whatever effort the farmer contributes, no matter the backbreaking labor, at the end of the day, he depends on rain. One can exert all the effort in the world and still there is nothing. In a time of drought, it's over. So the world needs rain. Everyone prays for rain.

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Look at the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. He pleads with Hashem not to listen to prayer of traveler. Who is the traveler? Before a few hundred years, he traveled by foot or donkey or maybe camel and he was a nervous wreck. There is danger in terrain, wildlife and thieves and above all the fear of rain. So he pleads.

Please Hashem delay rain for two weeks while I go and come back. And imagine if every salesman did this? So the Kohen Gadol, begs Hashem not to listen to that guy. Should we be concerned with selfish guy? Should we be concerned with someone who wants to deny farmers rain for his own needs or his own trip?

But we are afraid. That just as a match lights and burns wood, so it is that the nature of prayer is that prayers work. And we need to fight it with an atomic weapon, the Kohen Gadol of Yom Kippur must offer a heartfelt prayer. He begs please Hashem, don't listen! How powerful is prayer!

But the prayer must be done correctly. What messes up the prayer? Why does mother of Kohen Gadol go around giving gifts, cookies, and kind words? The Gemarah explains the accidental murderer is praying to please get rid of this Kohen Gadol. He has nothing against him, but there is only so much one can take of Idaho. Want to go home and not die there.

Should we worry about the prayer of a murderer? The answer is, yes. His prayer if done with Kavana can work. And how do the cookies help? Are they magical? Don't tell me cookie will stop him from praying. He wants out.

The answer is that his Tefilah becomes imperfect. He sees the old lady. He feels bad, he prays a little less and is not fully sincere. And thus the prayer loses its power.

In same vein, Bilaam was very powerful and his words had power, but once they are tainted with money, the prayer loses its power and its sincerity. This is why Hashem tells him if its for the money, then go. If its for the money, they have nothing to fear.

Prayer works, but only if we put everything into it. Prayer works if we pray with all our heart. This is Kavanah.

May we all pray with Kavanah and may all our prayers be answered.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

This week's parasha has in it the Shema and Ve'ahavta. The first pasook of Ve'ahavta says "ve'ahavta eht Hashem be'kol le'babcha, be'kol nafshecha, oo'bekol me'odecha". The pasook teaches us how far we should go to love Hashem. Be'kol lebabcha is with all our heart (the Gemara explains that the way to love Hashem with our heart is to pray to Hashem). Be'kol nafshecha is with all our life (i.e., to be willing to give up our life for Hashem). And be'kol me'odecha I've always learned means to love Hashem with all our money (even if loving Hashem causes us to lose money). But more recently I saw that Rashi in the parasha also brings a second interpretation for the words be'kol me'odecha (based on the Gemara in Berachot daf 54). He explains be'kol me'odecha is telling us to love Hashem be'kol mida oo'mida she'modeh lecha (love Hashem with every measure that he gives us). Love Hashem regardless of if he gives us good or if he gives us what appears to be bad. And I thought this was a beautiful explanation. The pasook is telling us to love Hashem unconditionally. And this is a beautiful kavana that we can have when we say the Shema. That we are working on loving Hashem regardless of how our business is going or regardless of what we are experiencing in our lives. We are expressing that we trust Hashem is taking care of us and we love him regardless of how things seem to be going. This is what it means to love Hashem be'kol me'odecha!

Va'etchanan - Moshe tells Benei Israel how to behave once they get into Israel. The 10 Commandments and Shema.

1- Moshe recounts how he prayed to Hashem but was not allowed to enter Eretz Israel. Moshe tells Benei Israel of the mitsvot they will need to keep in order to merit staying in the land.

2-Moshe tells Benei Israel to remember and tell future generations how Hashem spoke to us at Sinai and did miracles in Mitsrayim so that we keep the laws and not stray after other Gods.

3- Moshe sets up cities of refuge in Jordan (where Reuben, Gad and half Menashe were to live).

4- Moshe reminds Benei Israel how they all heard Hashem speak directly to them at Sinai. The ten commandments are repeated here.

5- Moshe recounts how Hashem then related the hukim and mishpatim to him as an intermediary upon the request Benei Israel who was unable to withstand hearing from Hashem directly.

6- The parasha of Shema and Ve'ahavta is said here. Moshe then warns Benei Israel not to succumb to sin as a result of the prosperity they will experience in Israel.

7- Moshe says that when we get to the land we should destroy the 7 nations living there and take care not to show favor to them and inter-marry with them. Moshe tells again how Hashem loves us and warns us to follow in the ways of Hashem.

Le'refua shelema Elisheva bat Esther and Eliyahu ben Yvonne Chava

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

“I am Hashem, your G-d” (Debarim 5:6)

In our perashah, we read about the Ten Commandments. The first commandment says that we must believe in Hashem, our G-d. Included in this great misvah is the fact that one may not deny his Jewishness. Rabbi Aharon Pollack of Manchester tells a true story about a young woman who would not deny her roots. Her name was Pearl Hoff. Her father was Rabbi Shemuel Unsderfer. Pearl was 16 years old when the terrible events of the Holocaust began. Her family paid a sum of money to hide Pearl for a certain amount of time. When the time ran out, no other member of her family remained alive to renew the payment. The gentile promptly threw her out into the street. The street was crawling with Nazis looking for Jews to kill on the spot. Her only chance was to find a hideout where Jews were taking refuge. She heard people talking about a certain bunker where she could go, but when she arrived there, it turned out to be a trap. The bunker was filled with Nazis. They had let the word out that this was a safe hideout only to ensnare unsuspecting Jews and kill them when they arrived.

She realized that she was already trapped and it was a waste to try to escape. She prayed to Hashem to save her. The Nazi commander yelled, “Are you Jewish?” Young Pearl remembered her great father and would not deny her Jewishness. She merely did not answer. Her silence intrigued her questioner. “What is your name?” he yelled. In a gentile dialect, she answered, “My name is Yorishka.” “Where do you live?” he demanded. Pearl gave him a fake address in a completely gentile neighborhood. The Nazi was sure he had captured a Jew but decided to follow her claim anyway. He sent one of his men with her to go to the address and see if she truly lived there. Pearl tells how she was walking in the street with a Nazi following her with a rifle pointing into her back. She knew her minutes were numbered; she would be shot as soon as he realized she was lying. Suddenly a nearby peddler called out her name, “Yorishka, what are you doing here?” Pearl, in complete shock, answered, “I am going home!” The soldier was now convinced that her name is Yorishka so he asked the peddler her address. Lo and behold, the peddler recited the

exact number and street. The Nazi left Pearl alone, and Pearl turned around to see who this savior was. However, it was to no avail. The man was nowhere to be found!

Pearl always told this story to her children and grandchildren, and was ready to swear to its truth. She told this story to teach them that a Jew who doesn't deny his Jewishness will not lose out. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“You shall know today, and you shall take it to heart that Hashem is G-d” (Debarim 4:39)

This pasuk from our parashah is recited three times a day in our prayers, in Alenu Leshabe'ah. It teaches us that we should think about everything that happens in our lives, and recognize that it is all from Hashem. All of our success and our failures are decreed from Above. If someone hurts us in any way, we must know that he would not be able to do anything to us if Hashem did not want it to be so. There is a story about King David, who was cursed by a man named Shimi ben Gera. King David's generals were about to punish Shimi, but King David stopped them and said, “What he said came straight from Hashem. Do not punish him.”

If we could take this lesson to heart, as the pasuk instructs us to do, we would lead much calmer, tranquil lives. If someone cuts us off on the road, or makes a sarcastic remark, or even if he causes us tremendous harm, we would be able to endure it and move on. True, the person might be guilty of committing a sin against you, but that is between him and Hashem, and he will be held accountable for his actions. But as far as we are concerned, he is just acting as a messenger of Hashem.

This is such a fundamental concept of our religion that the Sages inserted it at the end of every single one of our tefillot. In this way, the thought will hopefully linger in our mind as we leave the shul and go back to our daily routine. Let's work on internalizing this idea, and recognizing Hashem's Hand in every aspect of our lives. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Small Details

“The process of making bread is very complex. It entails, knowing how to plow the earth, plant the seeds, water the ground, remove the weeds, reap the grain, thresh the grain to separate the kernels, and winnow it to remove the chaff. After that, it is necessary to grind the grain to produce flour, sift the flour to remove impurities, mix it with water to make dough, knead the dough, then bake it.”

Hashem's creation process is flawless and with faith we can to live a successful life by appreciating the small details involved in creating an

item or an idea. (Norman D. Levy; Based on Rabbi Miller's, Duties of the Mind)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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Every Prayer is Effective

Parashat Vaethanan begins with Moshe recalling his impassioned prayer to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. Our Sages teach that Moshe recited 515 prayers at this time, alluded to by the word "Vaethanan" ("I pleaded"), which has the numerical value of 515. Finally, after reciting 515 prayers, G-d told Moshe to stop praying, because he was not being allowed entry into Eretz Yisrael.

The question naturally arises, why didn't G-d stop Moshe earlier? If G-d was determined to forbid Moshe from entering the land, why did He wait until Moshe recited 515 prayers before stopping him? If the prayers were going to be unanswered, would it not have been preferable for Moshe to do something more productive? Didn't he have work to do that was more valuable than prayers which were destined from the outset to be unanswered?

The Gemara speaks of prayer as "something which stands at the height of the world, but people belittle it" ("Omed Be'rumo Shel Olam U'beneh Adam Mezalzelin Bo"). In other words, prayer is underrated. People do not afford it the importance and value that it deserves. Too often we treat prayer as just an obligatory ritual, or as an optional religious activity, without recognizing its immense value and power.

There are several reasons why people belittle the importance of prayer. First, because we do it so often, it becomes routine and monotonous, and we thus fail to invest the time and emotional energy it deserves. Secondly, the daily prayers require a strict, regimented schedule that is difficult for many people to follow, and thus they give it up.

But the main reason why people do not afford prayer the importance and attention it deserves is because they have grown up with a fundamentally flawed perspective on prayer. Many of us are always told that if we want something we should pray for it, and continue praying until our prayers are unanswered. We were thus trained to perceive prayer as nothing more but a means of achieving what we want.

And thus when we do not get what we pray for, we give up. This causes us to "belittle" prayer. We see that our prayers don't work, and thus conclude that it's not useful.

But this is not what prayer is about. Prayer is inherently valuable, and every single prayer has some positive effect. It might not be the effect we had in mind, but it is effective. We might compare prayer to rainclouds. There is plenty of moisture in the sky, but we do not know precisely when or where any given drop will fall. Our prayers enter the heavenly "prayer bank," as it were, and form a "prayer cloud." G-d, in His infinite wisdom, decides when and how each prayer will be used. We do not have access to this information, but we do know that each and every word of prayer that we recite is inherently valuable and will have some effect at some point.

There was once a boy who fervently prayed for an ill patient named Yosef Ben Shimon. He recited his prayers tearfully and with genuine emotion, and was devastated when Yosef Ben Shimon passed away, figuring that his prayers were recited for naught. He did not know that across the country, in California, there was another ill patient named Yosef Ben Shimon. He fully recovered from his illness, and after his recovery he had a daughter. That girl grew up and married the fellow who had recited for the other Yosef Ben Shimon.

His prayers were answered, but not in the way he thought. Because of his prayers, his future wife came into the world.

Prayer is "Omed Be'rumo Shel Olam." Every single prayer hovers in the sky, waiting until the moment when Hashem determines it should have its effect. We must therefore cherish prayer and utilize this great gift, without ever belittling it. We must rest assured that our prayers will have an effect, and this should motivate us to approach Tefilla with the seriousness and emotion that it deserves.

VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA

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Rabbi Wein
RESILIENCE

Challenges, difficulties and even tragedies in personal and national life are, to a very great extent, unavoidable and in many cases not even preventable. Because of this, the test in life becomes not only how did one deal with the problem but rather how did one recover after the problem proved so devastating. The key to recovery from sad occurrences is therefore resilience – the ability to bounce back even after loss and defeat.

King Solomon in Proverbs defines the righteous person as someone who, even though he or she has fallen seven times, is still capable of rising again. In a sense he is describing evil and bad behavior in terms of an addiction from which one is unable to free one's self and remains hopelessly mired in the pit of one's misery and evil.

In our modern world we have devised a vocabulary for such resilience. We call it rehabilitation, remission or recovery. All these words describe the ability to rebound from defeats and depression, bad behavior and destructive habits, and to attempt to build a new and better life for one's self. Modern society has invested a great deal of effort, and money to help aid people to recover and rehabilitate themselves physically, mentally and emotionally.

Yet, it is obvious to all that unless the person himself or herself really intends to get better and stronger, much of this expenditure will be of little avail. The old joke was that it only takes one psychiatrist to change a light bulb but that light bulb has to want to be changed. I believe the truth of this adage is fairly self-evident.

The Jewish people are currently engaged in a time of rehabilitation and recovery both in terms of the calendar year and in the current stage of our long and often difficult history. After the fast day of mourning on the ninth day of Av come seven weeks of resilience and rehabilitation. One of the great aspects of Jewish history has been that the characteristic of resilience which has always existed amongst us as a people and as individuals.

We always wanted to rise out of the pits of despair and persecution and become a strong and vibrant people, faithful to the Torah and Jewish values. This power of resilience has, perhaps, never been exhibited as clearly as it has been over the past century of Jewish experience. After the Holocaust we were literally left for dead in the eyes of much of the world and even in the eyes of many Jews as well.

And what was true regarding the Jewish people generally was doubly true regarding the fate of

religious observance and Torah study within Jewish society. The power of resilience, which has rebuilt the Jewish people over the past 75 years, has also enabled us to rebuild ourselves spiritually and create a scholarly observant and self-confident mass of Jews that look forward to a strong future and better times.

There is no question that we have received heavenly aid in accomplishing and achieving the grandeur that we see before our eyes today, in the Jewish state and in the Jewish world.

Again, one must acknowledge that the light bulb wanted to be changed. Without that desire it could not have happened. Judaism always views life in society as a partnership, so to speak, between the Creator and humans. The rabbis in the Talmud phrased it correctly: "In the path that one wishes to go, that is the path that Heaven guides him upon." If we wish to be resilient and strong, then God, so to speak, will help us to be that way.

If we feel powerless to help ourselves and always wait for others to somehow save us from ourselves and our problems then we are doomed to remain weak and impotent. The Torah community after World War II was rebuilt by the efforts and sacrifices of individuals who were committed, body and soul, to the realization of that task.

The state of Israel was created, defended, stabilized and developed by the dint of total commitment and great sacrifice. On the part of many viewing our Jewish world today, it is obvious that what has been achieved – and a great deal has been achieved – is due to the help of Heaven as well as the efforts of humans. It is the prime example of this eternal partnership that guarantees the future of the Jewish people and, with it, all of humanity

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Making Love Last

Over the past few months I've been having conversations with leading thinkers, intellectuals, innovators and philanthropists for a BBC series on moral challenges of the 21st century. Among those I spoke to was David Brooks, one of the most insightful moralists of our time. His conversation is always scintillating, but one remark of his was particularly beautiful. It is a key that helps us unlock the entire project outlined by Moses in Sefer Devarim, the fifth and final book of the Torah.

We had been talking about covenants and commitments. I suggested that many people in the

West today are commitment-averse, reluctant to bind themselves unconditionally and open-endedly to something or someone. The market mindset that predominates today encourages us to try this, sample that, experiment and keep our options open for the latest version or the better deal. Pledges of loyalty are few and far between.

Brooks agreed and noted that nowadays freedom is usually understood as freedom-from, meaning the absence of restraint. We don't like to be tied down. But the real freedom worth having, in his view, is freedom-to, meaning the ability to do something that's difficult and requires effort and expertise.[1] So, for example, if you want to have the freedom to play the piano, you have to chain yourself to it and practise every day.

Freedom in this sense does not mean the absence of restraint, but rather, choosing the right restraint. That involves commitment, which involves a choice to forego certain choices. Then he said: "My favourite definition of commitment is falling in love with something and then building a structure of behaviour around it for the moment when love falters."

That struck me as a beautiful way into one of the fundamental features of Sefer Devarim specifically, and Judaism generally. The book of Deuteronomy is more than simply Moses' speeches in the last months of his life, his tzava'ah or ethical will to the future generations. It is more, also, than Mishneh Torah,[2] a recapitulation of the rest of the Torah, a restatement of the laws and history of the people since their time in Egypt.

It is a fundamental theological statement of what Judaism is about. It is an attempt to integrate law and narrative into a single coherent vision of what it would be like to create a society of law-governed liberty under the sovereignty of God: a society of justice, compassion, respect for human dignity and the sanctity of human life. And it is built around an act of mutual commitment, by God to a people and by the people to God.

The commitment itself is an act of love. At the heart of it are the famous words from the Shema in this week's parsha: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). The Torah is the foundational narrative of the fraught, sometimes tempestuous, marriage between God and an often obstinate people. It is a story of love.

We can see how central love is to the book of Deuteronomy by noting how often the root a-h-v, "to

love," appears in each of the five books of the Torah. It occurs 15 times in Genesis, but none of these is about the relationship between God and a human being. They are about the feelings of husbands for wives or parents for children. This is how often the verb appears in the other 4 books:

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Exodus | 2 |
| Leviticus | 2 |
| Numbers | 0 |
| Deuteronomy | 23 |

Again and again we hear of love, in both directions, from the Israelites to God and from God to the Israelites. It is the latter that are particularly striking. Here are some examples:

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you ... (Deut. 7:7-8)

To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set His affection on your ancestors and loved them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. (Deut. 10:14-15)

The Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. (Deut 23:5)

The real question is how this vision is connected to the legal, halakhic content of much of Devarim. On the one hand we have this passionate declaration of love by God for a people; on the other we have a detailed code of law covering most aspects of life for individuals and the nation as a whole once it enters the land. Law and love are not two things that go obviously together. What has the one to do with the other?

That is what David Brooks' remark suggests: commitment is falling in love with something and then building a structure of behaviour around it to sustain that love over time. Law, the mitzvot, halakhah, is that structure of behaviour. Love is a passion, an emotion, a heightened state, a peak experience. But an emotional state cannot be guaranteed forever. We wed in poetry but we stay married in prose.

Which is why we need laws, rituals, habits of deed. Rituals are the framework that keeps love alive. I once knew a wonderfully happy married couple. The husband, with great devotion, brought his wife breakfast in bed every morning. I am not entirely sure

she needed or even wanted breakfast in bed every morning, but she graciously accepted it because she knew it was the homage he wished to pay her, and it did indeed keep their love alive. After decades of marriage, they still seemed to be on their honeymoon.

Without intending any precise comparison, that is what the vast multiplicity of rituals in Judaism, many of them spelled out in the book of Deuteronomy, actually achieved. They sustained the love between God and a people. You hear the cadences of that love throughout the generations. It is there in the book of Psalms: "You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water" (Ps. 63:1). It is there in Isaiah: "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed" (Is. 54:10). It is there in the siddur, in the blessing before the Shema: "You have loved us with great love / with everlasting love." It is there, passionately, in the song, Yedid Nefesh, composed in the sixteenth century by Safed kabbalist Elazar Azikri. It remains there in the songs composed year after year in present-day Israel. Whether they speak of God's love for us or ours for Him, the love remains strong after 33 centuries. That is a long time for love to last, and we believe it will do so forever.

Could it have done so without the rituals, the 613 commands, that fill our days with reminders of God's presence? I think not. Whenever Jews abandoned the life of the commands, within a few generations they lost their identity. Without the rituals, eventually love dies. With them, the glowing embers remain, and still have the power to burst into flame. Not every day in a long and happy marriage feels like a wedding, but even love grown old will still be strong, if the choreography of fond devotion, the ritual courtesies and kindnesses, are sustained.

In the vast literature of halakhah we find the 'how' and 'what' of Jewish life, but not always the 'why.' The special place of Sefer Devarim in Judaism as a whole is that here, more clearly than almost anywhere else, we find the 'why.' Jewish law is the structure of behaviour built around the love between God and His people, so that the love remains long after the first feelings of passion have grown old.

Hence the life-change idea: if you seek to make love undying, build around it a structure of rituals – small acts of kindness, little gestures of self-sacrifice for the sake of the beloved – and you will be rewarded with a quiet joy, an inner light, that will last a lifetime.

[1] This is similar to, though not identical with, Isaiah Berlin's distinction between negative and positive freedom, in his famous essay, 'Two Concepts of Liberty,' reprinted in Isaiah Berlin, Liberty, ed. Henry Hardy, Oxford University Press, 2002, 166-217.

[2] This was the original rabbinical name for the book. The name Deuteronomy, from the Latin meaning "second law," was an attempt to capture the sense of the book as a restatement of the laws.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"For who is such a great people that has G-d near to him as Hashem our G-d whenever we call out to Him?" (4:7)

These two verses (4:7, 8) declare that Israel is unequalled in greatness of two kinds:

- 1) they are unequalled in their privilege of calling to Hashem whenever they are in need
- 2) and they are without equal in the world because of the righteous laws that Hashem has bestowed upon them

Because of these two reasons, Israel is therefore the most important ("greatest") nation.

Two unequalled privileges are here pointed out. In the daily Shemoneh Esreh we say: "For You listen with compassion to the prayer of Your people Israel". And here we see the source of this statement. "Who is such a great people that has G-d near to him as Hashem our G-d whenever we call out to Him". We are informed of a most exceptional status, that Hashem is most close to us and therefore grants His especial attention to the prayers of Israel.

In the following verse, we are informed of another unique privilege: "this Torah that I put before you today."

Although they are mentioned as two separate privileges ('For who is such a great people', And who is such a great people"). Yet fundamentally they both stem from the fact that G-d is near to Israel.

But this nearness is due to the Torah that they accepted, and which they loyally study and fulfill.

Thus the Torah study is declared as the chief service of Hashem:

"The study of the Torah equals all of them" (Peah 1:1). The greatest nearness is to Think the same thoughts, And by learning His Torah one Thinks Hashem's thoughts. Quoted from "Fortunate Nation" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L