

Overview of Sefer Devarim

Sefer Devarim is the spiritual preparation for Bnei Yisroel to conquer and to settle the Land of Israel. It therefore summarizes the previous books - Klal Yisroel are to be reminded of everything that they were taught and clarify anything that was not yet clear in the Torah. For, without the merit of the Torah, they have no right to the land of Israel to begin with.

Nevertheless there are over 70 new mitzvos contained in Sefer Devarim. Many are mentioned only now, on the eve of the Jewish People's entry into Israel, because they would first become relevant in the land. Others are repeated here for chizuk and emphasis.

Moshe Rabbeinu now rebukes and strengthens the people in general, providing them with a vision not only for the immediate future but also the future redemption. In fact, at a deeper level, all of Sefer Devarim is really a prophetic anticipation of the אֵלֶּף הַשִּׁישִׁי, the 6th and last of the millennia in the world as we know it, before heralding the Moshiach. Just as Sefer Devarim prepared Klal Yisroel to enter the land from the desert, so it also prepares us to re-enter the land at the end of days.

Moshe Rabbeinu now begins to talk in the second person, "I" instead of "he". This is because the giving of the Torah has two dimensions: that of the Giver (G-d), and that of the recipient (man). The covenant of the Torah requires that both these sides be connected to the Torah, that the Torah reflect both the giver and the receiver, for it is the very essence of a covenant that it connect between the two parties.

The first four books are the Torah reflected in the Giver. סֵפֶר דְּבָרִים, however, reflects the receiver. This is because it is the end of the Torah, the opposite end to the Giver, and is therefore closer to the Jewish people, the recipients of the Torah. This is why Sefer Devarim is given at the end of the 40 years in the desert, whereas the rest of the Torah was given at the beginning. And this is also why the Jewish people heard Sefer Devarim from Moshe Rabbeinu in the first person, as Moshe was close to the ones who received the Torah, the Bnei Yisrael. Now, Moshe is no longer just an instrument through which G-d chooses to talk; he receives a prophecy and passes it on.

This explains the many repetitions in Sefer Devarim, for we are no longer dealing with the pure intellect of the Torah. Rather, Sefer Devarim comes to ensure that the recipients grasp what is being said. For example, the Ten Commandments are repeated in the Mishnah Torah with some significant changes.

The result of Sefer Devarim is that the Torah can begin to connect to each and every Jew: all are united by this common connection. Hence, Devarim is said in singular form to reflect this unity of the Jewish people. In a sense, Sefer Devarim is the transition between the Written Law and the Oral Law. The Written Law is an objective reality outside of us, written in the third person. The Oral Law is the mechanism through which we bring the Written Law into ourselves so that we and the Torah become one. Sefer Devarim is still a part of the Written Law, but Moshe begins the process of bringing the Torah into us by speaking to us in the second person. He also talks in the singular to connect to each one of us.

Sefer Devarim is the book of transition from being the generation of the desert to a nation living on the land. It is on the land that we would be required to apply the Torah in day-to-day life. In Sefer Devarim many Mitzvos begin to be

clarified, which is just the role of the Oral Law, and the connection of the Jews to G-d through the Torah is greatly enhanced. This is why Devarim is said right at the end of the nation's sojourn in the desert, rather than at the beginning.

One other aspect of this is the transition from Moshe Rabbeinu to Yehoshua as the leader of the Jewish people. Yehoshua, as the leader bringing the people into the land, is the one who completes the last eight verses of Sefer Devarim. Devarim ends with the transition complete. Although there would be more Kisvei Kodesh, no other work was to add a single drop of new Torah from Shamayim. Moshe, G-d's emissary, ensured that he would bring all of this Torah down in his life-time and that he would set up the all the necessary elements to guarantee its future.

Overview of Devarim

The most perplexing of the Five Books is **ספר דברים**. It repeats much of the previous books and therefore is called **משנה תורה** – the second Torah. On the other hand it contains over 70 new Mitzvos. The book is a preparation for the Jews to enter the land. In the land, many Mitzvos will become relevant and are therefore mentioned now or repeated for Chizuk.

The book also comes to provide a vision to the Jewish people, giving them chizuk and allowing them to focus on our ultimate purpose. The underlying message of Sefer Devarim is the Geula Asida.

The Gra divides Sefer Devarim into three parts: From the beginning of the Sefer until just before the 10 Commandments speaks of matters pertaining to Mussar. From the beginning of the 10 Commandments until just before the blessings and the curses speaks of Mitzos. From there on Sefer Devarim deals with blessing and curses and other, related matters. These three aspects really cover all that the Torah deals with. The Torah really comprises three books – Shemos, Vayikra and Bamidbar. Bereishis is really an introduction to these books, the root of all the Torah. And Devarim comes to summarize each one of these books.

The Mitzvos that were repeated by Moshe Rabbeinu, were done so of his own initiative. The fact that there seems to be more human connection to Sefer Devarim, even though it is a part of the G-d given Torah, is a great clue to understanding its essence.

The giving of the Torah has two dimensions, that of the Giver (G-d) and that of the recipient (man), and the Torah perforce must reflect both. For the Torah is a covenant, and it is the very essence of a covenant that it be a connection between the two parties. So too with the two tablets, **לוחות הברית**. The first tablet has five commandments which relate more to G-d, the giver, while the second tablet has five commandments which relate more to man.

Hence, the first four books relate to G-d while Sefer Devarim relates to man. Each has a repetition of the 10 Commandments. This is why the people heard Devarim from Moshe in the first person, for Moshe is close to Bnei Yisrael, the recipients of the Torah.

This explains the many repetitions in Sefer Devarim, for we are not longer dealing with the pure intellect of the Torah; rather Devarim is coming to ensure that the recipients grasp what is being said.

Another difference is the Shabbos. In the first **דברות**, we are asked to remember the Sabbath (**זכור**), whereas in the second we are told to keep it (**שמור**). Remembering the Shabbat is the primary focus of the Shabbat, keeping it is the framework, for abstinence alone cannot show that G-d is the creator. The reason for remembering is because G-d created the world, whereas the reason for not working is because we were once slaves.

The result of Sefer Devarim is that the Torah can now begin to connect to each and every Jew, who are all united by this common connection. Hence Devarim is said in a singular form to reflect this unity of the Jewish people. In a sense, Sefer Devarim is the transition between the Written Law and the Oral Law. The Written law is an objective reality, outside of ourselves, written in the third person. The Oral Law is the mechanism through which we bring the written law into ourselves, so that we and the Torah become one. Sefer Devarim is still a part of the written law, but Moshe begins

the process of bringing this Torah into us by talking to us in the second person. He also talks in the singular, to connect to each one of us.

דברים

1. Skepticism

In this week's parsha, Moshe Rabeinu announces that he had enough: He can no longer carry the burden of the Jewish people alone. In the eyes of the Jewish people, Moshe seemingly could do nothing right. If he went out early, the people said, "How come Ben Amram went out early. Maybe he is not happy at home." If, on the other hand, Moshe was late to leave the house the people would say that he was busy scheming against them. The people were overly critical and suspicious, taking nothing on faith, and this was burning Moshe Rabeinu out.

Every time that there was a challenge, the people responded by accusing Moshe of laying a trap to destroy them in the desert.

In fact, the people related to all other issues in the same way. This was not anti-Moshe Rabbeinu bias. Incredibly, they went so far as to accuse G-d of the same thing.

Surprisingly, the commentators see all this doubting and skepticism as a great asset, not a failure. As the Rashba puts it:

And Israel - inheritors of the true religion, sons of Yaakov, the man of truth, all are the progeny of truth – they would prefer to suffer the yoke of exile with all its consequences than to simply believe something prior to making a thorough and repeated investigation to remove all dross from the things that were said to them and even that which was shown to them with a sign and a wonder ... they even doubted the authenticity of Moshe that were ... for they were suffering under harsh labor when Moshe was sent to announce that they would be redeemed and despite this Moshe announced, "They will not believe me" and he required the backup of several signs. And this is the sign of truth that our nation is with G-d that it is not seduced into accepting anything until they are convinced of its truth subsequent to a massive and complete investigation.

Nothing was taken for granted by this clear-minded people, not even the possibility of prophecy itself. Right up to Maamad Har Sinai, this nation questioned whether in fact G-d was really revealing Himself to His prophets. Only when they heard G-d speaking to them directly, without any intermediary, even the visual senses, did they finally come around.

Doubting and demanding proof was their greatest guarantee that they would not be fooled into accepting a false claim to G-d's revelation.

Jewish leaders modeled this rigorous honesty. No attempt is made to paint a rosy picture of the greatness of this nation. Factual accuracy is portrayed, even where it is highly uncomfortable. History is most often changed by the desire of the national scribes to present the best face of his country. Even in our own time, we have witnessed Communist, African, Arab, Nazi and other countries manipulate and distort history to place themselves in the best light. Not so the תורה.

2. Judges & Their Judgements

So central is the idea of justice in Judaism that, at the very outset of Devarim, Moshe deals with the appointment and conduct of judges.

“At that time” ((ט) ואמר לכם בעת ההיא (ההיא), at the time which you were to go conquer the land from people well versed in war, I did not drill you in weapons, nor make you study plans of war and strategy, but rather dealt with your moral perfection in justice.

So too, we are expected to become impartial judges over ourselves, being honest and impartial about what we have to work on and improve. Hence, הברו לכם (א יג) – prepare yourselves; And: שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך – in the singular, i.e. each of you should place a judge – borders and parameters, בכלל שערך – around his personality.

Moshe introduces this issue by using the word איכה - alas, woe - that terrible word used by Yirmiyahu to talk about the destruction. He warns that the beginning of destruction will lie in the small breakdowns in law and order, in the unpunished theft of pennies and the overlooked little acts of cheating.

The Torah demands an extraordinary set of qualifications to make it as a Jewish Judge, a Dayan. There is to be no privileged status here. The Dayan is chosen is purely on merit.

The Dayan is not just a honorable man of robes, but a leader of the nation, willing to take responsibility for a difficult nation. The must be righteous, modest (אנשים), G-d fearing, non-materialistic and unbribable.

They should love people and be liked by them in turn.

They have to be חכמים - but also נבונים , people who understand the underlying principles of the law so deeply that they can apply them to any new situation. They have to be able to identify the precise variables of each situation,

Moshe could not find people who fully filled this criterion and had to settle for less. Our parsha brings three criteria (אנשים חכמים וידיעים), and Parshas Yisro brings another four (אנשי חיל יראי אלוקים אנשי אמת שונאי בצע) for a total of seven. The criteria are not all brought together, to teach us that we should take judges who may have even only one of these qualities.

Once appointed, a judge has to be fearless in rendering the right decision, although he may excuse himself from judging a case because he is frightened of one of the parties. However, once he has an idea of which way the judgment is going to go, he may no longer withdraw.

A judge may not play Robin Hood (ויז): i.e. he may not award a judgment which is not strictly according to the law, but which seems fairer, given the circumstances of the two parties. He may not award a poor man a financial judgment in his favor against a wealthy man. He may not take a position in court to save someone's honor, even if he know that he can sort things out out-of-court.

The moment a judge does any of these things he is playing G-d. Really, we humans shouldn't be judging at all. A man steals from a second man. As far as the victim is concerned, he will get all that he deserves. If he is meant to have that extra amount of money, he will make it back on the stock exchange tomorrow, or the price of his apartment will go up. If he is not meant to have that money, there are thousands of other ways in which he might have lost it. As for the thief, G-d will take care of him. What need then of human judges?

Human judges are a special dispensation by G-d to dispense with justice on earth, avoiding more painful judgments in the afterworld. As such we are G-d's emissaries (Shlichim). But our mandate is limited to the precise instructions He has given us. We must take care of our little part. The rest is up to Him.

It is for this reason that the judges are ordered to consider a case involving one cent with the same care, and with the same priority as a multi-billion dollar suit, hearing it first if it came first. Our job is to take care of whatever part of the truth comes our way. To ensure truth emerges from that little prutah is just as important, in terms of human spirituality as ensuring truth in a case that rocks the nation.

Don't ever let up, the Torah warns. Even if you think you have come across this case 1,000 times, go through it now point by point – perhaps you will find a tiny difference, or perhaps you will see things in a new light.

Having said that, G-d's mandate to man is quite broad. G-d makes man a partner in this undertaking – בקרב אלהים ישפוט. As implementers of G-d's will they are actually given the same name as one of the names of G-d Himself.

G-d assures the judges that He will be there, with them in every judgement, guiding them and putting into their heads the right judgment. בקרב אלהים ישפוט means, says the Ramban, בקרב עדת אלהים ישפוט, that G-d will judge in the midst of the gathering of Judges, i.e. it is He who is judging through them by bringing His Shechina down to rest in their midst during the judgment.

In a world of absolute values, the justice of any situation is contained intrinsically within that situation. G-d exists by very necessity, and since justice appears to be demanded as an essential attribute of each situation - by necessity - it seems to be something most associated with G-d, something emerging from G-d's Will. This is why G-d gives justice especially to the Jewish people. For, are they not a most essential and necessary ingredient to this world, without which the world would not fulfill its purpose and be destroyed. Being that they are essential to the world, the Jews are naturally more in harmony with Justice.

And yet, on the other hand, this Heavenly help does not mean that the human condition can be ignored. A judge is required to take time out to deliberate carefully on the issues and weighing up each side before making a final decision. For no man of flesh and blood can claim to be operating at a level of pure intellect, and therefore of pure justice. It would only be an arrogant person who would judge hastily, and such a person lacks all wisdom.

The Maharal develops this theme further. The great Sanhedrin was placed in the Temple grounds next to the Alter. The Alter had a ramp leading up to it, so that the Cohanim would not climb stairs in accessing the Alter, thereby revealing even parts of their legs. This was akin to licentiousness, for erva is nothing other than an expression of the more physical side of a person. This very same prohibition (**לא תעלה**) **(במעלות על מזבחי**) is the source of prohibiting a judge from walking rough-shod on the head of the people by arrogantly judging in haste. Such arrogance is tantamount to abandoning his intellect and becoming a mere physical imitation of the great human a judge is supposed to be. There is no difference between such a person and someone engaged in licentiousness – both are expressing pure body. “There is no doubt,” concludes the Maharal, “that it is forbidden to appoint an arrogant person as a judge.”

3. Conquering Lands – Destroying Whole Peoples

G-d promises us our land. But, He assures us, we will get nothing of the land of three of our sworn enemies: Eisav, Amon and Moav. We may cross their land and to offer to pay for food and water as we go along, but that is all. All three were unresponsive to Klal Yisroel's request to sell them food. As a result, male Maovim and Amonim, even after they convert to Judaism, are never allowed to marry a normal Jew.

This is surprising: Much worse was done to us by the Egyptians, who enslaved and killed many of us. Yet they are welcome to marry a fellow-Jew three generations after conversion. Similarly, the Edomim – despite the long history of Western anti-Semitism – are allowed to marry fellow-Jews after conversion.

It seems that the Moabites and Amonites developed certain, very serious spiritual defects which cannot be fully rectified.

The Egyptians and the Edomites were evil. They were passionate about their evil. They had spiritual, intellectual and emotional energy invested in their beliefs. This passion was, ironically, their saving. Take that energy and channel it in the right direction, and we will see a great positive force. The object of attachment (to evil) was wrong, but the underlying human qualities had great potential.

But the Amonites and Moabites were just apathetic - evil by default. They couldn't have cared less whether a hungry and tired people, who had guaranteed their peaceful intentions, were passing by. They had no special energy that could be re-directed into Torah. They could convert, but that is as far as they could ever go.

There is another quality which prevents the channeling of negative to positive energies and that is *leitzanus*. The *Leitz* lacks any sense of importance or profundity. This is the case of Amalek. Amalek had the energy, but their *leitzanus* made them the anti-Torah, if not anti-life itself.

Another nation permanently excluded from the Jewish people is the Canaanite nation. Any Canaanite nation who chose to fight the Jews would be killed, men, women and children. Similarly, the Emori under Sichon and Og suffered total annihilation by the Jewish people.

But the Torah is most extreme with respect to the Amalekites. We are told to kill them whenever they are encountered and to wage an eternal war against them. We need to nurse our memories and fight the Amalekites until we have killed them all and wiped their memory off the face of the earth.

When the Jews had just left Egypt, the Amalekites attacked the Jews because of their pure hatred of what the Jews stood for – Monotheists in the deepest sense. To make clear that their intention was as a spiritual protest they cut off the circumcisions of the Jewish males and threw them into the air. Had they been victorious, their plan was to commit total genocide on the Jews.

The original עמלק received this hatred from his grandfather, עשו. Since then, their survival only led to further corruption and to further attempts at Jewish genocide, most famously by Haman.

עמלק is that force which, more than anything else, gives people reason to believe that G-d, as we know him, does not exist. עמלק's existence, therefore, is in contradiction to the ultimate reality and purpose of this world. At a time when that reality will be manifestly apparent, to the exclusion of anything else, עמלק will perform, have no place. As בלעם put it, (במדבר כד: כ), ראשית גוים עמלק ואחריתו עדי אבד (במדבר כד: כ).

Amalek's whole philosophy was to undermine any sense that anything in this world is of value. Other nations that had false ideologies could be challenged to

transfer their beliefs and commitments to the right source; עמלק had no sense of the importance of anything that could be channeled in the right direction.

As with Amalek, the case of the Canaanites is explained by the Torah itself. Again, the Torah itself gives us the reasons. If we do not kill them all, we will land out intermarrying with them and assimilating into their powerful and perverse society. We will become idolaters like them for these Canaanites have been on this land for centuries – their culture is very deep and well established. We were too new to Monotheism in a world which has always been primarily non-Monotheistic.

For Jews to introduce the idea of Monotheism, our single greatest contribution to the civilization ever, we needed a total commitment to this idea. Given any clash between Jewish and Canaanite culture, there was every chance that Canaanite culture would have won out. We would have inherited a value system which would have included laws prohibiting kindness to the stranger and many other values which would have made the Nazis look tame.

כנען spent the best years of his life walking up and down אברהם's tent, trying to reform these nations and, as time went on, he attracted an increasing entourage of followers. But in the end, the mighty culture of כנען eroded all his successes. By the very next generation, they had re-assimilated. אברהם's tens of thousands of converts were nowhere to be seen. יצחק

The Maharal describes how the spiritual heirs of some nations were so committed to sensuality and materialism (הומר) that they became the forefathers of nations bearing these forces. Thus Avraham Avinu tells the two youths following him to the Akeidas Yitzchak - שבו פה עם החומר, which the Sages interpret as עם הדומה¹. One of those two youths was Eliezer, Avraham's servant and a Canaanite. Such nations can yet attach themselves to spirituality by associating with those who radiate that spirituality, in a way that a material vessel holds the shape imposed on it by its form. This is the principle of opposites, that really make up one whole, just like black and white are really a part of, and complete the color spectrum². Potentially, the Jews and the Egyptians have this relationship and therefore the Egyptians are allowed, after three generations, to marry a normal Jew³. The Canaanites however, represent their own form, imprinting this, in turn, on the world around them. This then becomes a

¹ מהר"ל, גבורות השם, פ"ד: והכל נרמז בענין אברהם והחומר אשר רכב עליו ונעריו עמו, אשר אמר להם שבו פה עם החומר עם הדומה לחומר. כי אברהם דומה לצורה הנבדלת, והחומר הוא החומר, ושתי נעריו אשר אמר להם שבו פה עם החומר והם הכחות אשר הם חומר והם מוטבעות בחומר, ולפיכך אמר להם שבו פה עם החומר עם הדומה לחומר.

² מהר"ל, שם: ומכל מקום יש להם יחוס וחבור מצד שהחומר והצורה מתייחסים, עם שהם הפכים ביחד יש קצת התייחסות והתאחדות בין הצורה ובין החומר. כי ההפכים כמו אלו בודאי מתייחסים, כמו לובן והשחורות אף על גב שהם הפכים מתייחסים זה לזה, כי שניהם הם נכללים במראה והם כוללים המראה שזה נוטה לקצה הלובן וזה נוטה לקצה השחורות. וכל הפכים בעולם הם תחת מין אחד, ואם לא כן לא היו הפכים, כמו המתיקות והשחורות שאינם הפכים ואינם תחת מין אחד.

³ מהר"ל, שם: כן ישראל ומצרים אף על גב שהם הפכים, כי ישראל הצורה הנבדלת ומצריים הם החומר, מכל מקום שייך יחוס ביניהם כי החומר והצורה משלימים מציאות אחד ודבר זה התייחסות בודאי ... מכל מקום לא היו גרים ביניהם. כי לא יפעל המתיקות במה שהוא מתיקות בשחורות ולא יפעל החמימות בשחורות, רק יפעל החמימות בקרירות שהם תחת איכות אחד, וכן יפעל המתיקות בחמימות שהם תחת איכות אחד, ואי אפשר רק שיהיה כאן שתוף. לכך אמרה תורה לא תתעב מצרי כי גר היית בארצו דור שלישי וגו' (דברים כ"ג) כלומר אף על גב שודאי מצרים היו הפכים לישראל כמו שנתבאר למעלה, הפכים אלו אינם נבדלים לגמרי ולכך דור שלישי יבא להם, וזה הענין הוא במצרים, ולקמן יתבאר עוד מזה.

destructive, competing form to the Jews and can only be used if subdued rather than sublimated⁴. However, the Canaanites were then living independently in Israel – expressing their own culture⁵.

We are required to go against our natural instincts and to destroy the כנענים because they are considered *rodfim*. Their culture was so permeated with idolatry and the immorality that stemmed from this that, rather than the Jews attracting them to Monotheism, they would almost certainly infect the Jews with their decadent ideology.

Even if he is not to blame, such a Kenaani would unwittingly contribute to the corruption of the Jews and would be considered a *rodef*, just like an unborn baby threatening his mother's life would be killed. Of course the baby is not to blame for the situation – he is entirely innocent - but still he is a רודף.

Things did not have to be this way. But the collective commitment to evil by the entire nation over many generations ultimately led to this tragic state of affairs.

Jews have a proud record of sensitivity to the basic rights of all human beings. Jewish law requires that we allow גרי תושב to live in the land and we are required to guarantee their well-being. We are required to respect the territoriality of other nations. A non-defensive war against any nation was never permitted without the express permission of הקב"ה through the אורים ותומים. Therefore, the injunctions against these two groups are clearly very specific and for very specific reasons. Certainly it is difficult for us to relate to such a commandment. Even the great King Saul was not able to bring himself to fulfill this commandment by killing all the Amalekites and their flocks. "How could it be," he said to himself, "that that same Torah which commands that the whole procedure of Eglah Arufah be brought for a single unaccounted murder, how can a whole nation be destroyed? And if the people sinned, what did the animals do? And if the adults sinned, what did the minors do?"

Although there are opinions that the Nazis, and any nation which wished to kill the Jews, is considered Amalek, in practice, we do not know who the Amalakites, or any of the other nations are today. From the time that Sanheriv came and mixed up the nations, these laws do not apply today. They never could apply unless clearly mandated by G-d – man could never make such a decision on his own and, with the slightest doubt, we may not apply them at all.

⁴ מהר"ל, שם: אבל הכנענים הארורים דומים אל הצורה המוטבעת בחומר, וזאת הצורה הפחותה הארוכה אינה מתאחדת ומתיחסת כלל עם הצורה הקדושה הנבדלת. כי מה יהיה היחוס בין צורה לצורה אם לא שהצורה המוטבעת היא משועבדת תחת צורה הנבדלת, ובודאי זה ענין עבד כנעני.

⁵ מהר"ל, שם: אבל בבואם ישראל לארץ לא היו עבדים להם לכך נאמר (דברים כ') לא תחיה כל נשמה, ונאמר (במדבר ל"ג) ואם לא תורישו יושבי הארץ מפניכם והיה אשר תותירו מהם לשכים וצררו אתכם על הארץ, הרי שביאר בזה כי הצורה הפחותה מצירה הפחותה את הצורה השלימה, כי הצורות מעיקות זו את זו בודאי ואינם מתאחדים ביחד.

1. The Torah unchanging forever

If G-d has a plan for the world then he has to have a mechanism for revealing this plan. This mechanism has to lend itself to clear and convincing proof that this is His word. The mechanism turned out to be the Revelation of the Torah at Sinai. In our parsha, the Torah declares that the entire nation witnessed the events at Sinai at a level of face to face prophecy, unfiltered by any imaginative faculty and that this is the primary source of our trust that the Revelation did indeed take place. The Jews could not handle any more of such intense prophecy and therefore requested that Moshe continue the Revelation.

There are many secondary proofs to the authenticity of Torah. For one this Torah, as a system of living, works and has worked across time and place. Secondly, the Torah makes very specific predictions. Thirdly, there was a complete consensus amongst the nation in the first 1000 years after Sinai that it took place.

If the Torah were a fabrication, it would be impossible that, amongst a nation with a track record for skepticism, there would not have been a huge number who declared it a fraud. In addition, differing versions of what happened would have developed. Further, the miracles in Egypt and during the desert were given under conditions where they could be examined closely, by everyone (including non-Jews) and without the element of surprise. The מן fell for 40 years and most of the plagues happened with clear warning, Moses announcing exactly what was going to happen.

Other proofs for the Torah include archaeology and the fact that both Christianity and Islam confirm the Sinai account.

But all of these things are secondary to the primary claim. This is the fact that there was a national revelation to the whole nation. Moses did not emerge from a cave - Mohammed-like - and proclaim he heard a prophecy. The ever weary Jews, the most skeptical nation on earth, would have had his head. Rather the entire nation stood at Sinai, spoke to G-d face to face and was able to authenticate all the rest of Moses' prophecy.

One cannot fabricate a claim of national revelation. All religions would have loved to have made such a claim, but no-one has ever dared to claim such a thing. A claim of national revelation can never be made unless it is true. All claims to new religions are made by individual people who made private claims to personal revelation.

What would happen if they did make a claim of national revelation? Let us take an example provided by Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb. Have you ever noticed that UFO claims are always about a spacecraft landing in a deserted field? Imagine that your friend tells you one day that he has just seen a space-craft landing in Time Square, during morning rush hour. You phone a friend whose offices overlook Time Square and ask him whether he sees anything. Negative. You turn on the radio – no mention of such an event. You turn to all those around you and ask whether they heard of such a thing. No-one has. At which point you grab the person and walk them off to the nearest mental institution.

Now let us say that a person tells you that they did not see the event, but that all of our ancestors saw this event 250 years ago. Our first reaction is to go to our parents and say, "Mom, did your parents ever tell you about a spacecraft landing in Times Square?" I ask my friends and anyone I know to ask the same. No-one was ever told such a thing by their parents or by anyone of the previous generation. Only, apparently, has our claimant. Well this still isn't going to get him out of the loony bin.

Judaism not only makes such a claim, but our Torah-keeping parents have all heard of this claim from their parents, and so on back for as 1000's of years. As the Kuzari states, that claim, is watertight. You simply cannot make it up.

According to the Ramban, our verse now brings a prohibition against forgetting the Sinai experience. Should a false prophets come and claim that the Torah has changed, we will know that he is wrong. Had we received the Torah only from a prophet, even if his prophecy had been authenticated, there would always have been the risk that another prophet would come along and command us to do differently. He may back this up with all kinds of signs and, at the very least, cause us to doubt the authenticity or applicability of the original prophecy.

But, once we have heard the Torah directly from G-d, and we saw all the events at Sinai with our own eyes, without any intermediary, we are in a position to reject all who dispute this even should he bring signs and wonders as a back up. The Jewish People is able to give evidence on Sinai and all its events. They witnessed the authentication of Moses' prophecy; they are our direct ancestors who have told us about this generation after generation.

All the miracles that led up to the Exodus, especially the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea, are a part of the package of proofs that support the Sinai experience.

To facilitate remembering the Exodus, the תורה introduces many מצוות which are זכר ליציאת מצרים or which include mention of that experience (e.g. Tefilin, Mezuzah, Kiddush). In addition, the תורה introduces Chagim which remind us of specific aspects of that entire period of history. Most dramatically, the דברות שניות in in דברות שניות mentions יציאת מצרים as the reason for keeping the Shabbos.

Through this, it is the whole nation, and not just one group, who is charged with keeping this historical reality alive and accurate. Ultimately, it is parents who are charged with communicating this information to the people for whom they care the most, their children, further ensuring that distortions do not enter.

2. Changes in the Ten Commandments

In this week's Parsha, the 10 Commandments are repeated. In Luchos Rishonos we are asked to remember the Sabbath, (זכור), whereas in the second we are told to keep it (שמור). The Sages tell us that שמור וזכור בדבור אחד. Yet we still have to understand why these two ideas are written in the order that they appear.

The reason is because of the difference between the Sefer Devarim and the other Five Books. The giving of the Torah has two dimensions. There is the dimension of the Torah as reflected in The Giver. And there is the dimension of the Torah as reflected in the recipient. This is because of the vast difference between the Giver (G-d) and the receiver (Man). The covenant of the Torah requires that both these sides be connected to the Torah, that the Torah reflects both the giver and the receiver. For it is the very essence of a covenant that it be a connection between the two parties. And it is then natural that the two ends of the Bris relate to each one of the parties. The first four books then, are the Torah reflected in the Giver. ספר דברים, however, reflects the receiver.

Shamor and Zachor are negative and positive Mitzvos respectively. The מצוות שמור and זכור are the basic parameters of life in which we operate the vessel or material which will serve to hold the Kedusha. The מעשה, on the other hand, reflect, קנין המעלה, the exalted levels of holiness which we are able to achieve, the content which fills up the vessel. Therefore, our starting point in Avoda is to enter into the framework, the negative commandments. Once within that framework, we are ready for to climb the levels of holiness through the positive commandments.

In a Torah which begins with G-d's side of the covenant therefore begins with Zachor, whereas the Torah which begins with man's part of the covenant begins with Shamor. In an ideal world, it would be enough for us to focus on זכור, the positive aspects of the Shabbos. We would be in natural harmony with the שמור, with the framework or negative aspects of the Shabbos.

The Luchos Shniyos contain the word טוב - ולמען יטב לך. The First Luchos do not have the word טוב mentioned at all.

The first Dibros (Luchos Rishonos), because they were said from the side of the giver (G-d), required the recipient to be at an unusually high level. In fact, at that time the Jewish people reached the level of the Angels and the whole event was at a spiritual level above that of this world. The word טוב was therefore not mentioned because such a word reflects completion of a process, as in each creation day. The very word implies that the particular reality at hand starts out incomplete. Hence the word טוב does not appear by the first Tablets since, being above this world, they start out complete to begin with.

The second Dibros (Luchos Shniyos), however, start from the perspective of mortal man, still unfulfilled in his future potential. It was to reflect this reality that the word טוב was said by these Dibros.

According to this, Zachor and Shamor are really just two faces, two different levels of the same thing. Of course they were said בדבור אחד, for each contains within it the other.

The Jews live a mortal life. They start by becoming Shabbos observant – שמור. But, having entered the framework of Shabbos, they are capable of soaring with the holiness of the day. Here is a day מעין עולם הבא – when the Jews can again be like the Angels as they were at Sinai. They never lost the Zachor, they were only given a new portal, שמור – to achieve it.

3. Torah Study

It order to keep the Torah, one must study it, until the day one dies. However, the study of Torah has independent value, beyond knowing what G-d wants of us. The Torah is the blueprint of the world. Therefore, everything in the world was created through the Torah. Someone who wants to be in harmony with the spiritual underpinnings of the world, to really understand what makes the world tick, has to take out the original plans and to study them. When we learn Torah, it is as if G-d, the designer of the world, has invited us, his close ministers, to share the inside story behind the world.

One who is connecting with the Torah though its study is therefore connecting with G-d on one of the most profound of levels. Torah can be contrasted with Tefila. Tefila is our talking to G-d as a servant would with a King. Torah is G-d talking to us, as a King would with a nobleman. The servant on the one hand, has easier access to the chambers of the King. He comes in to clean a dust and can have a quick word with the King. The nobleman, on the other hand, has access only by appointment – but his conversations are likely to be more profound.

The great Amora, אב"י, sought to combine these two forces by only praying in the place where he studied, and our prayers all include Torah in their midst; the Shema, Shiras Hayam and others.

Each generation has a special relationship with the Torah and each place will develop its own unique understanding of the Torah. In fact each individual נשמה has his own unique חלק in תורה. Hence we doven - ותן חלקינו בתורתך - that G-d should reveal to us our own unique understanding of the Torah. The word ישראל stands for יש שישים ריבוא אותיות לתורה - for each one of the 600 000 Jews who stood at Sinai.

For this reason, Torah study is the most democratic of Mitzvos. One needs no pedigree to become the greatest of Torah scholars. Unlike the crown of Kings and the crown of the Priests, the crown of the Torah, which is the greatest of them all, is open to all.

The Torah is divided between the Written and the Oral Laws. This allows everyone to study Torah. The Written Law can even be understood by a small child. The Oral Law is more difficult and is open ended.

The history of the Jews is full of stories of great sacrifice for the sake of the Torah:

Our Rabbis taught: The poor, the rich, the sensual come before the [heavenly] court — They say to the poor: Why have you not occupied yourself with the Torah? If he says: I was poor and worried about my sustenance, they would say to him: Were you poorer than Hillel? ... To the rich man they said: Why have you not occupied yourself with the Torah? If he said: I was rich and occupied with my possessions, they would say to him: Were you perchance richer than R. Eliezar?....

There was a whole tribe, the Levites, whose task was to become masters of Torah. They were given no land, only cities, for they were not meant to work in the usual sense. However, any Jew can be like the Levites. Anyone who accepts the yoke of Torah study, the Sages declare, will find himself freed of the yoke of making a living. And indeed, it is one of the enduring mysteries that those who learn in Kollel to this day are able, month in and month out, to put food on the table, and pay their expenses on the sparsest of incomes.

Jews are the inheritors of the most fabulous tradition of thousands of years of wisdom. We are proud of our Torah scholars, and are privileged to support them.

Jewish scholarship is not just about poring over ancient documents. The texts are holy and uplifting. Secondly, our wisdom should never run ahead of our conviction to implement that wisdom. A non-observant scholar of the Torah is a contradiction in terms. It is forbidden to teach someone who has no commitment to keeping what he has learned just as it is forbidden to learn from a Rabbi who is not setting the right example.

The Torah does not belong to you or me; it is a (דברים לג ד) מורשה קהילת יעקב, an inheritance for the entire congregation of Jacob. Every fellow Jew has a right to all of the *Torah*, including the *chiddushim*, the new insights into any part of the *Torah* which any individual may have. We are therefore not simply being generous when we teach *Torah*, we are simply returning that which belongs to the people we are teaching.

Every morning, we ask HaSh-m to place in our hearts the understanding to be able, among other things, to teach *Torah* to others. One who ensures Torah continuity, connects that generation all the way back to Sinai and it is as if he has taught Torah to all future generations, to the end of days.

There is also a communal obligation to set up Torah institutions for the education of the next generation.

Many *Torah*-observant people feel that they simply do not have enough time to both do their own learning and to teach or tutor as well. However, the Sages make it clear that a teacher will in the end learn more *Torah* than he would have done simply by studying the Torah for himself.

While one could certainly fulfill the *Mitzvah* of teaching others by teaching anyone, even a relatively knowledgeable Jew, there is a special obligation toward teaching those who are most ignorant and therefore in greatest need of being taught. The Chofetz Chaim felt that in our ignorant generation, there was a special 'עת לעשות לך' to teach Torah to those most alienated from the Torah.

4. The Shema

The first mitzvah that a bar mitzvah boy is obligated in after he turns 13 is the Shema, the declaration of the unity of HaSh-m. The idea that the original source of everything and the ongoing sustenance of reality are one is a fundamental on which the whole Torah stands or falls.

The Shomeneh Esreh is the completion of the עול מלכות שמים of Shema - עול מלכות שמים שלמה. I.e. when one stands and speaks to HaSh-m directly, there is not greater indication that one accepts that He rules everything. But there are plenty of people who pray to G-d but do not do His will. There are those who accept the yoke of Heaven on all of creation but themselves. Therefore, it is only when the שמונה עשרה follows the שמע, that a true acceptance is achieved.

The Shema is an expression of love, whereas the Shmoneh Esreh is an expression of awe. We juxtapose the two, to join the love with awe. The first verse of the Shema is also said with awe. But the second verse begins ואהבת – it already reflects the love that is built on the awe.

Yirah is a time which more naturally lends itself to inward directedness. Hence, a person when he says the first verse of the Shema should stand and not walk. But love leads to expansiveness – an expression outwards. Hence a person may walk if he needs to from ואהבת onwards.

The 3 paragraphs of the Shema answer the three questions of the origin of Torah law, its demands and its purpose. The first paragraph, which is קבלת עול מלכות שמים, tells us of the origin of the law. The second paragraph, which is קבלת עול מצוות, tells us what its demands are. And the third paragraph, which talks of personal sanctification – והייתם קדושים – tells of its purpose.

The first paragraph demands that we love G-d not only with all our heart and soul, but also with all our מאד, which means with all our wealth or with all our strength. The word literally means ‘very much’ i.e. a situation actualizing more and more of our human potential dedicated to this idea. מאד has the same letters as אדם. Adam is that being which be more and more, to be “very much”. We are asked to serve G-d with that potential.

The first paragraph is written in the singular – it is appealing to the highest aspirations of unusually great people. The second verse is the plural – referring to everyman. A normative level cannot demand that every morsel we eat, every object we use, be totally enthused with a love of G-d, however worthy an aspiration this is. Hence בכל מאדך is missing in the second verse.

Another approach is to say that the first verse is talking about loving G-d (ואהבת את ד' אלוהיך) whereas the second verse is talking about serving Him (ולעבדו בכל) (לבבכם ובכל נפשכם). We are supposed to love G-d with all our מאד, i.e unambiguously, but we do not have to serve Him with all our מאד.

We also have to serve G-d בכל נפשך, with all of our souls - for each and every breath we take. We are never to take life for granted. Every breath is a new praise for G-d. If need be we should be prepared to give our lives for G-d. We should always prepare ourselves for this possibility, so that if it ever happens, we will have the inner strength to go through with this.

When R. Akiba was taken out for execution, ... while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was [saying the Shema]. ... He said to [his disciples]: All my days I have been troubled by this verse, ‘with all thy soul’, ... I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged the word ‘Echad’ until he expired while saying it.

Every Jew, and not only exceptional Jews, are capable of giving their lives for G-d and His Torah (and hence *בכל נפשכם* is in the second Parsha), even if we are not all capable of dedicating or giving up every last penny for His sake. The ability to die as an act of Kidush HaSh-m is in our spiritual genes – a gift and an inheritance from Avraham Avinu and in particular his son, Yitzchak, who reached perfection in this area.

A third approach understands that one is required to give up everything for G-d prior to finding his specific *Avodah* in life (the first verse). After that, one should only sacrifice all for that special area (the second verse). Hence Daniel was Moser Nefesh for Tefila and Mordechai would not bow to Haman. The first verse of Shema was given when Bnei Yisrael was still in the desert, and the specific *Avodah* of each one was yet to be understood. But the second verse clearly talks about Klal Yisrael in the land, when each was given not only his portion of land, but an insight into his specific *Avodah*. Hence, from then onwards, his sacrifices should only be as a part of his *Avodah* package.

The order of שמע:

The order of the parshios of the שמע as we say them is not in the same order as they appear in the Torah. Shema comes first because it is Kabalas Ol Malchus Shamyim. The second and third paragraphs is acceptance of the yoke of the Mitzvos, which perforce result in accepting the yoke of G-d. The second precedes the third however, because the third focuses on Tzitzis which is only obligatory during the day. In addition, each paragraph has more elements than the next. The first paragraph has the elements of studying, teaching and observing; the second only talks about teach and observing while the third only talks about observing.

שמע ישראל ... ד' אחד

The two last letters of the words שמע and אחד are written larger to form the word עד witness. We are witness that G-d's Oneness means that nothing else has any reality other than as desired by His Will. It is true that the real meaning of G-d's Oneness is a deep Kabbalistic idea – but we can all achieve a basic concept of this idea.

ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד:

These words do not appear in the Torah. They were said by Yaakov on his death bed. *Jacob wished to reveal to his sons the 'end of the days', whereupon the Shechinah departed from him. Said he, 'Perhaps, Heaven forbid! there is one unfit among my children, like Abraham, from whom there issued Ishmael, or like my father Isaac, from whom there issued Esau.' [But] his sons answered him, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is One: ... Jacob [responded] ..., 'Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.' Said the Rabbis, How shall we act? Shall we recite it, — but our Teacher Moses did not say it. Shall we not say it — but Jacob said it! [Hence] they enacted that it should be recited quietly.*

The Sages also tell us that when Moshe Rabbeinu went up to receive the Torah, he heard the angels saying *בשכמל"ו*. Moshe subsequently told this to the Jewish people. Why do the Jewish people not say it aloud? It is like a person who stole some crown jewels. He gave them to his wife but warned her not to wear them in public, but

only in the privacy of their home. However, on Yom Kippur, when we are as pure as the ministering Angels, the Jewish people say בשכמל"ו aloud.

Shema at Night and in the Day.

The obligation to say Shema in the morning can only be fulfilled in the first three hours after daylight, whereas one has the whole night to fulfill the night-obligation. Day-time is a time of clarity, and therefore action (להגיד בבקר חסדיך). Nights, which are dark, are for withdrawal, consolidation and faith (ואמונתך בלילות).

עקב

1. Arrogance, Faith and Fear

In this week's Parsha G-d tells us to trust Him to deliver the Canaanite nations in battle to the Jews. The Jews should not fear these people – any fear of them should be submerged in their greater fear for G-d. "Trust me to save you," G-d tells them, "as I saved you in Egypt. For it is I, not you, who will provide the victory."

The entire desert experience, when they were completely helpless and yet totally taken care of was to teach them that in the end it all comes from G-d. And even this they did not deserve. They sinned and rebelled, this stiff-necked nation again and again. "From the day you left Egypt until you came here, you have been rebelling against G-d," Moses tells them. "Even at Horeb you provoked G-d! And G-d was ready to display anger and destroy you." "G-d then said to me, *"I see that this is a very stubborn nation. Just leave Me alone and I will destroy them, obliterating their name from under the heavens."* "You have been rebelling against G-d since the day I knew you!"

So not only are they helpless, but they are also undeserving. Therefore, to earn merit, this trust in G-d must translate into observing his commandments and walking in His ways.

But it is so easy to forget. Ironically it is easier to feel close to G-d when He is not so kind. For you will eat and be satisfied, you will build fine houses and become rich. And then you will become arrogant and think that you did all this yourself.

Our parsha identifies arrogance as the central trait which causes someone to forget his Creator - ורם לבבך ושכחת את יהוה אלהיך (יד). Taming this arrogance is a great key to achieving spirituality.

This is the Golden Calf. Man worshiped the Calf not so much as a worship of other G-d's but in order to worship themselves. For the arrogant, even G-d becomes an instrument for their own ideas. His gods are his own arrogance and materialism.

The temptation to take credit for one's own achievements carries over even to someone who is ostensibly wise in the Torah. This will lead to his Torah understanding emerging distorted. His need for others to recognize his achievements leads him to rejoice when his friends are ignorant or stumble.

It is success which leads to this. The truly arrogant person is almost always arrogant about something which he is objectively good at. The weakling does not stand in front of the mirror priding himself in his muscles. However, when pride exists in a man's heart it rules over him from the top of his head to the bottom of his foot. Once one's eyes become haughty, one's ears stop listening. One's speech changes and one dresses differently. In short, one begins to look ugly, permeated by arrogance.

So, although the arrogant person builds on something real, he ends with an illusion. Korach's rebellion was rooted in his seeing the great people who would come from him. Korach had wanted to be the leader and found this reason to support his desire.

The irony in all of this is that, by taking his life into his own hands, the arrogant man loses his *Siyata Dishmaya*, and becomes a victim of his own weakness.

To the outsider, the arrogant person looks so confident and self-contained. But the real story is different. Such a person is always looking over his shoulder, always fretting over someone else bettering him, always bitter and unfulfilled – a pathetic relic of the greatness of man.

How does one fight arrogance? True humility requires that one not only recognizes the gap between one's own weakness and G-d's greatness, but it requires that one first be totally filled up by a sense of worth just by following His Will. Any need for outside confirmation, for validation from one's fellow humans, for ego-stroking in the slightest, will interfere with one's humility.

The start of humility is a deep faith and understanding that G-d runs everything. Our primary choice in life is whether we will choose G-d or not: הכל בידי שמים חוץ מי"ש - *Everything is in the hands of G-d except fro the fear of Heaven*. From this awe, we will come to keep to serve Him, despite our egocentric cry that we should be serving ourselves instead. Only then will we be ready for real change:

י (טז) ומלחם את ערלת לבבכם וערפכם לא תקשו עוד:

And you will remove the barriers from your heart (lit circumcise the foreskin of your heart) and (you will) not remain so stubborn anymore.

Now, momentum of spirituality is achieved. You fear of G-d leads to obeying Him which helps with your humility. Now, you can move even higher – *So love G-d your Lord* - ספר דברים פרק יא (א) ואהבת את יהוה אלהיך -

2. To Walk in His Ways

Like our relationship with other people, our relationship with HaSh-m can be expressed in many different ways. One way is to harmonize ourselves with His actions, i.e. to walk in His way (והלכת בדרכיו): Just as He is merciful so should you be; Just as He clothes the naked, visits the sick and buries the dead so should you; Just as He is holy and righteous, so should you be.

These imitations basically divide into two major themes: We have to develop our character to be more G-d like; and we should become a giving person just like He is: He clothes the naked (the first Man and Woman), visits the sick (Abraham), consoles the mourners (Yitzchak over the loss of Avraham) and buries the dead (Moses). In short G-d's actions in this world are acts of giving.

Imitating G-d reveals a great secret of the universe – that man can be a partner with G-d in running the world. We imitate Him not only in character traits and actions, but also in engaging in what is called תקון עולם – literally in fixing this world. We are His creation partners in completing the world.

We see that we harmonize ourselves with G-d's actions not by meditating or by celibacy. We imitate Him by doing things which we might have thought have to do with being a nice guy – but have nothing to do with holiness. But we are dead wrong.

This was Avraham's great discovery. Avraham's culminating act of holiness, one which the Sages describe as greater than prophecy itself, was to run out to meet a bunch of heathen idolaters, wash their feet, serve them food and drink – hardly the stuff of high spiritual trips we might think. Prior to this, there had been great kabbalists, high and spiritual people – models which Avraham rejected. "G-d has enough Angels in Shamayim," he reasoned. Can I possibly add to the world by being angel one million and one, leaving the rest of the world to despair and alienation? He did not create me as a human in order to be an Angel; but to be something greater than that." And how right he was! It was Avraham, his hand dirtied by the dust of idolatry, who became the Forefather of the Jewish people, not the holy Shem or Chanoch or Ever.

When Avraham Avinu ran out to meet the 3 Angels whom he mistook as people, he was in the middle of a prophetic conversation with G-d. Faced with a choice between a prophetic revelation and an act of hospitality to 3 idolaters, Avraham chose the latter. Amazingly, G-d, told to hang on line while something more important gets done, patiently waits to continue His talk with Avraham Avinu. From this the Sages learn that: *Greater is the act of hospitality than receiving the face of the Shechina* (i.e. a conversation with G-d).

When we help to perfect and complete the world by giving, we perfect ourselves as well. This is why we see that second expression of "walking in His Ways" is to correct our character traits. Having good character so permeates a Jewish way of living, that it is implicit in every Mitzvah we do.

The average human being is such that it is difficult for us to each work on the whole range of human qualities we have. Each one of us tends to focus on our strengths and maybe on our biggest weaknesses. But we are likely to leave out the whole gamut of human character in-between. Probably most of us could say what our 5 greatest strengths are. If pressed we come up with our 5 greatest weaknesses. But very few would be able to tell us what their ten traits in the middle are. How are we supposed to work on ourselves if we cannot even come up with a list of our qualities?

To this, the Torah has an answer. The Mitzvah of "Walking in his Ways" guides us to a balanced life, getting us to work on all aspects of ourselves. Judaism

does not believe in being normal: normal is a term of comparison. It means being in the middle of the bell curve – a kind of average. In that sense, Jews are anything but normal. We are the mad nation of survival; the people who never feared breaking norms in order to set new standards. עם לבדד תשכון. Judaism may not believe in the normal, but it does believe in being balanced, in the Golden Mean. Such balance is not an attempt at mediocrity – it is a result of a passionate pursuit of spirituality – of imitating G-d himself.

When G-d explains to Avraham Avinu why he was choosing him and his descendants, he stated: For I have known him that he would command his children and his household after him that they would keep the Way of G-d ... (Genesis 18)

If we will follow the whole Torah system, then some of the Mitzvos will direct us toward giving and some of them will direct us towards self-restraint, some toward the right and some towards the left, (with a slight emphasis towards chesed). We ought not to be angry people, but we have should not become totally unresponsive. We ought to live simply, but we need to know how to look after ourselves. The overall effect is to avoid the unhealthy extremes, and to become well-rounded and holy Torah personalities. The Rambam calls this the *midah beinonis* not in any way to be confused with mediocrity or compromise, and it is this which leads to completion of the person.

We are all different and we all have different personalities. It had to be that way – for there are different types of Tikunim which the world needs to be perfected. We therefore have different spiritual starting points, and we continue to develop differences as a result of social and environmental factors, as a result of natural maturation and the way we develop ourselves. The genius of the Torah system is to maintain and nurture our uniqueness without it becoming egocentric and without our losing a sense of balance.

The TARYAG Mitzvos overall demand that we focus on different things at different times. Rosh Hashana is a time for an overview evaluation of ourselves and our basic relationship with G-d, Yom Kippur is a time for Teshuva – for reconnection and reinvigoration, Sukkos is a time of trust and joy; (Chanukah causes us to focus on wisdom), Pesach allows us to reflect on what real freedom means and Shavuot reconnects us with the Torah itself. So too some mitzvos focus us on the environment, others on our fellow man, others on G-d and still others on ourselves.

Weaving all these peaces together is the Mitzvah of והלכת בדרכיו. This Mitzvah is a principle underlying the total scope of the Torah. It is an implicit thread made explicit by directing us to fulfill the Golden Mean – *and you should walk in His ways.*

3. Geirus

A non-Jew becomes Jewish by conversion. In a male this involves three elements, Circumcision, *Kabalas Mitzvos* and Tevilah in front of a kosher Beis Din of 3 people. A woman converts by accepting the Mitzvos and Tevila. This process has to take place in front of a Kosher Beis Din of 3 people (ככם כגר במדברטו טו)

After conversion, the Ger is regarded as 100% Jewish. Therefore, he is included in the מצוות of כמורך and of ואהבת לרעך כמוך. Nevertheless, the Torah repeated these prohibitions with specific reference to a Ger, for: *since he entered our Torah, G-d added (His) love to (the) love (of the Ger), and allocated him additional Mitzvot.*

So concerned is the תורה to ensure that we relate to the גר as an equal, that, while his legal status may be 100% Jewish, there may yet be attitudinal biases on our part. For a Ger to suffer such biases would be particularly painful, for he has given up all his previous social and national connections – his entire past – to join the Jewish nation and to be closer to G-d. Therefore, the Torah stresses that “in the Jewish nation .. pure character ... gives him that which, in other circles, riches and origins acquire for him.” We Jews, after all know what it is to be a stranger in someone else’s land – כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים. And having come from such lowly beginnings ourselves there is certainly no room for condescension on our parts. The Ger is simultaneously lowly and great: He is lowly because he is exposed and because he has to fight the natural attraction to reconnect with his own non-Jewish roots, but his very act of conversion is an act of greatness. After all, we Jews converted at Sinai with the aid of the thunder and the lightning and the convulsions of nature. The Convert does so unaided.

The Neshama of the Ger has inherited a spark of spiritual greatness. In the case of the Ruth the Moabitess, this had come all the way down from Lot. Through his long years with Avraham Avinu, Lot had imbibed some pure sparks of Chesed which lay dormant through the generations. Ruth finally accessed that greatness in the recesses of her soul and gave everything up to bring that holiness home. Other souls may be from Jews whose ancestors long ago assimilated – Jews all along. We can only imagine what spiritual heritage the conversion of Onkelus, or those great Tenaim, Shmaya and Avtalyon brought with them.

The convert should become כאזרה מכם - like one of you, which can also be translated “*just like you were*”, coming after the verse כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים. If you want to understand how these Neshamos got lost amongst the nations, just look how the entire Jewish people got absorbed into the 49th level of impurity of Egypt.

The Yafes Toar is also such a soul. The words Yafes Toar refers to their souls, not their bodies.

All converts show greatness in their act of conversion. Many become great leaders in the Jewish people. The sincere convert as a reluctant concession which the Torah makes: It is a way of providing an opportunity to the enormous spiritual power of the convert to find expression.

It is true that we do not encourage converts. But this is only as a test of sincerity, rather than reflecting any position on whether we want them or not. Nor does the court does not first try to persuade potential converts to be Noachides rather than Jews. The Yerushalmi (Brachos) states: *At the time when the Jewish people, He surveys the whole world in search of a Righteous Gentile, and brings him to attach him to the Jewish people (i.e. to convert).* The Sma, in admonishing us not to deal fraudulently with non-Jews says, that if we do not behave in an exemplary fashion,

who would join the Jewish nation as converts, implying that this is what we want them to do.

Negative statements made by the Sages about converts refer to insincere converts. Yehoshua accepted Rachav, the harlot, as a convert and Naomi accepted Ruth the Moabite. Hillel converted a non-Jew who made a condition that he will only convert if he could become the High Priest (an impossibility) and another convert demanded that he be taught all of the Torah on one foot. But, Hillel saw that both these converts would be completely sincere by the time of their conversions.

The only time we see a limitation on converts is at the time of Moshiach. For, at that time it will be so in to be Jewish that it will no longer be possible to test for sincerity. A similar situation existed during the time of Shlomo HaMelech.

The acceptance of the stranger, his physical and spiritual presence requires adjustments on our part – but that is all part of the kindness which G-d is asking of us.

We are supposed to develop this special sensitivity to the Ger and then generalize to all who find themselves strangers, such as those who move to a new city. Although certainly the obligation is only to actual גרים, the Mitzvos come to develop our character so that new applications of the idea will be expressed naturally by us.

4. Prayer

Prayer completes our relationship with G-d. In so doing it not only nourishes us, but all the universes which G-d created. It seems strange, then, that the core of our prayers are requests (the middle 13 blessings of the Shmonesh Esreh), a seeming indulgence of our own needs.

Asking our needs from G-d reminds us that we are dependent solely on Him. This is the starting point of a relationship with G-d. Prayer is about trust. It's about knowing that there is a higher power that is watching, waiting, listening, caring, helping, loving, and guiding. It's about knowing that I can do nothing by myself, with the reassurance that I am not alone.

The world is mysteriously constructed so that the greater the created being, the more dependent it appears to be. The stone is completely independent. Plant life has certain needs, but not as great as the needs of an animal, which has a less readily available supply of food and often must search for it; it requires shelter; and in the higher order of the species it may even manifest a limited psychological dependence. The human being experiences the greatest needs.

So we don't pray because we need things; rather, the order is the reverse. In order to increase our awareness of G-d's involvement with our lives, we pray for our needs, for that heightens our awareness. If we do not turn to G-d, at least when we are in trouble, we are denying His Providence in this world. Our involvement in this world lures us into thinking that we run the whole show. Prayer is the antidote to balancing active engagement with a clear understanding that ultimately we control nothing.

G-d set things up in such a way that we will always have needs causing us to turn to Him. Often, the whole purpose of the need is to get us to *daven*. From the outset He wanted to give the *Imahos* children, but kept this back from them to get them to daven for children first.

The world was set up in such a way that the arousal of every blessing arouses with it its opposite. The curse and the blessing are mirror images, and it is our davening which guides that force to the side of blessing. We can have an anxiety-provoking premonition that something bad is going to happen, and our prayers turn it into something positive.

Once our prayers remind us that G-d is looking after us, we use this as a springboard to recognize His Providence throughout the world. This is what we achieve whenever we say a blessing over some food or aspect of the creation. This in turn enhances our pleasure of the world by recognizing that HaShem created this thing with exquisite detail and perfection for our benefit. By tying the pleasure back to Hashem, we create kedusha out of the object of the pleasure, of the pleasure itself, and of ourselves. We leave the world a better place.

We cannot and do not bless G-d, in the sense of bestowing upon Him something. G-d is perfect; we cannot add anything to Him. Therefore, when we say "Baruch", we do not mean "May He be blessed." Rather we mean, "He is intrinsically blessed." Baruch is a statement of fact – He who is Blessed. Since He is totally blessed, His blessing overflows to us like a fountain (ברכה מלשון בריכה) – therefore ברוך is an expression of additional Hashpaah.

Therefore, the real test of whether a person is having a true relationship with G-d during his davening is what happens afterwards. The very עבודה we are supposed to do in the world to get close to השם predisposes us to alienation from Him, by making us think that it is us who controls the process. Prayer is the antidote to this and is therefore just the beginning of a comprehensive relationship with השם. Prayer is but one of a multiple of relationships with HaSh-m and cannot be seen in isolation. The type of relationship prayer is, is not merely to relate but to transform ourselves.

God wants us to pray, He asks us to pray, but He doesn't need us to pray. He doesn't need His ego stroked. Nor do we *daven* to remind Him—we pray to remind ourselves. Prayer is for our benefit, to remind us that there is a Creator, who cares about us and is listening when we speak to Him. Every prayer removes a barrier

between ourselves and the Almighty, giving me clarity and understanding so that I can draw closer to Him.

A person who sees prayer as an opportunity for a relationship with G-d will not be disappointed if the things he requests from Him do not get answered. For by asking he will have achieved the main object of prayer, the relationship itself. In the culminating act of prayer, we stand facing Him directly, and speak to Him in the second person. Thus the awareness that we are עומד לפני השכינה is of the very essence of what defines prayer.

In some sense, prayer is an art, and like all great arts, requires practice. Davening is not an intellectual process; it's about feeling the pleasure of a relationship with G-d. The sages call prayer עבודה שבלב: service, or work, of the heart, because it is an experiential process, and it is literally work, something difficult which requires effort. All relationships require work and a relationship with God is no different: it requires time, energy, and commitment.

All relationships require that we get more in touch with ourselves, understand what in ourselves is preventing a deepening of the relationship, as well as what is connecting. Prayer is no different. The word פלל means to judge, a focusing of one's thoughts and gaining clarity; to judge oneself and, because one wants honesty in the relationship, asking G-d to judge us too. The ultimate clarity is to understand that everything leads back to the ultimate Unity which is HaShem. Just as we can grow in a relationship, and just as relationships have their ups and downs, so it is in our prayer-relationship with G-d. The important thing is to see prayer as an ongoing growth process. Rav Hirsch explains that the words לעבדו ב as always meaning to work on something. Therefore לעבדו בכל לבבכם means to work on our hearts, i.e. on ourselves, to see through our prayers, new meaning and a new relevance to our lives.

The Kuzari says prayer is to the soul as food is to the body. After a while, we begin to get hungrier and hungrier for the next time we will be able to nourish our souls with another prayer.

Prayer is a lost art—it has been neglected because society has not been educated *how* to pray. However, prayer can be activated on many levels—on the physical level: my words; the emotional level: my heart, and the mental level, my awareness of what I'm saying. I go to shul and just sit—that's a prayer! As I walk to shul—that's a prayer too.

God is not like a human being—He does not turn us away because we come only in times of need. In fact he waits to hear from us.

5. The Disputed Land of the Jews

The Torah begins with a message that G-d created the world, owns it all, and would give the land of Israel to whoever would accept his Torah and dedicate themselves to spirituality. In the meantime, the land was placed in the custodianship of the Canaanites. Since the Canaanites were cursed to be slaves, their trusteeship could be revoked when the Jews would be ready to enter.

G-d first promised Avraham Avinu that the land of Israel would belong to the Jewish people. In a series of promises, G-d unfolded the specifics of that plan – the exact borders, the nations that would be conquered, and the covenant that it would remain ours even if, through our sins, we would be exiled from the land. Avraham walked the length and breadth of the land to ease the claim of his descendents.

from that time onwards, jews through the ages have always had an extraordinary love for the land of Israel, yearning to return, for it is here that we achieved our greatest spiritual heights.

But it is not only the Jews who have wanted this land – it has been coveted and fought for by the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Moslems, the Turks, the Crusaders and many more. Clearly, these nations have not been fighting for something of exceptional material value – here was a land whose water supply was uncertain, and whose borders were exposed; rather, they have sensed its underlying spiritual value.

Despite all these coveters, G-d promises us that if we do His will - *וְחָרַב לָא - תַעֲבֹר בְּאַרְצְכֶם* - *no sword will pass through your land*. You can leave your cities unprotected three times a year, ascend to Jerusalem, and no-one will dare attack you, knowing that here G-d protects his people. It is here that G-d's ownership of everything is more clearly expressed by His direct Hashgacha. It is therefore here that the Mitzvah of Shemittah, which reflects this idea, be applied.

Repeatedly, the sojourn by the Jews on the land would be linked with their Torah observance. The Jewish people were vomited out of Israel when their behavior was incompatible with the demands of the land. The Spies saw that the land of Israel was an *אֶרֶץ אוֹכֵלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ* - its spiritual demands could wreak havoc on those who fell short (and they, as a result, hoped to avoid the entire challenge altogether). Others looked at this awesome place and had just the opposite reaction: they decided that they would give up everything: comfort, money, and sometimes their own lives and those of their children, to merit living the rest of their lives on Holy soil. It is only in Israel that Torah, soul and place can all truly come together in one symphony of praise to the Almighty

For thousands of years millions of Jews prayed (and still pray) three times a day for the restoration of Jerusalem. The level of Israel-consciousness amongst the Jewish nation is astonishing. We re-ignite our longing at weddings, mourning houses, on our walls and in our prayers. We long for the land because we long to transform ourselves and, subsequently, all of mankind. We dwell but temporarily in other lands, until the day that we can return.

All Monotheistic faiths have recognized the holiness of this land but also have understood that it was uniquely the Jews. despite the holiness of this land in the eyes of other religions, none of them ever expressed any national aspirations to have Israel as their homeland. Their attempts to make the land productive were totally unsuccessful, for the land will only yield it blessing to Torah-keeping Jews.

Part of their desire to control it is rooted in hatred of the Jews. Since the Jewish people and the land are one the dispute for the land and anti-Semitism have always been combined.

That disagreement stretches back to the beginning of history. It was over this land that Yitzchak and Yishmael had their disagreement, a conflict that continues to this very day. The holier the place in Israel, the greater the desire of the Moslems to possess it. Jerusalem is the most disputed of all; the Temple Mount, even in the modern and powerful State of Israel, is out of Jewish hands. The Moslems are not short of other land, that they need this tiny patch as well.

Rather, the dispute over the land is bound up with the inherent tension which exists between the Jewish People and its status as a nation in spiritual exile, whose very presence challenges the Edomite forces, the ruling civilization. Yishmael has joined with Edom in fighting the Jewish people and their right to the land. Therefore, this conflict will only be resolved in the Messianic era.

In the mean time, we continue live a miraculous existence in the land. Our enemies, who vastly outnumber us, attack us, have sent tens of thousands of missiles towards us, have even been willing to self-destruct if, in the process they can rid the land of the Jews. But G-d's watchful Providence ensures that we not only survive, but flourish.

1. Money –a Holy Trust for Charity, Loans & Shemitas Kesafim

Judaism requires that everyone give to charity. Even the poor, provided that they are not totally dependent on charity themselves, are required to give something to charity on an annual basis. This is because the act of giving is a core Jewish trait.

One cannot meet the needs of the person in front of him if he does not feel his pain. And he cannot apply his own standards to define this. A millionaire without his check book is in pain. A person used to living in a mansion, and now living in the same-size cramped apartment that you do is in pain. You cannot think, “Let this person find a job.” Unless you are willing to actively help the person find a job, or empower him to invest in what he is lacking to become qualified for one, you may not hold back your charity for this reason.

A true Jewish giver understands that No-one will ever become poor from giving to charity. He feels that he gains more from the giving than the poor person. After all, G-d could, if He wanted, take care of the poor person Himself. Was not the giver privileged to receive his money from G-d and not from the hands of someone else and with enough to give to the poor person as well? Was he not privileged to do a holy Mitzvah? Did he not imitate G-d himself? Is he not now a better receptacle to receive the good which G-d wishes to give to him? A person with this perspective will not wait for the poor to embarrass themselves by asking. He will find ways of giving, even to those who could not bring themselves to ask.

Money is a powerful force put by G-d into the world. It is one of the basic passions of man. Money is not just wealth – it is a source of power and of honor. We never seem to be able to quench our thirst for it. Why it is such a force is mysterious. On Mt Sinai, Moshe Rabbeinu could not understand the nature of the half Shekel. In response, G-d showed him a coin of fire – fire to show that money is one of the primary passions of this world.

Money is such an overarching Taavah because people see it as the means to obtaining all their other Taavos. In the Shema, money is referred to as **בכל מאדך**, literally “all of our very much”. The word **מאד** has the same letters as the word **אדם**, but the letters are in the wrong order. (**אדם** is an ascending order, **מאד** is in no order.) Money, like man himself, lends itself to more and more, without end. But whereas man’s infinite potential is rooted in spirituality, money pulls him into increasing materialism. In fact, the Sages tell us, there are people who love their money more than their lives!

Having said that, money is a part of the world that G-d gave man with which to serve Him. Man must take ‘all of his very much’ and use it to get closer to G-d.

The most obvious expression of this is charity. Tzedaka comes from the word Tzedek – rightness or righteousness. We were given not only the money we need for ourselves and our family, but the money which belongs to the poor as well. We are but custodians of that money. Failing to give to charity is not just an act of miserliness; it is a type of theft, and can actually be redressed in a court of law. In any case, what is not ours we will not be able to keep.

G-d could have just as easily taken care of the poor person Himself, giving his money directly to him instead of through us. G-d didn’t do it that way, to give us the

benefits of giving. Ultimately, it is to us that He is giving, and we are given this incredible opportunity to be His partner in looking after the world.

Charity is an art, and giving in a way that avoids embarrassment, and which gives the recipient his dignity is all part of that art. Giving a loan though seemingly safer for the giver, also lends greater dignity to the recipient and is therefore a more noble act than charity. Investing in a business with a poor person is best of all, for an investment avoids embarrassment altogether.

In a sense the charity receiver has already resigned himself to his lot, reducing his embarrassment a little. But someone who has not yet reached that stage, who is trying desperately to maintain his dignity, would surely suffer more. There is the worry of where the money is coming from, there is the pressure of having to pay the bills and put food on the table, there is the embarrassment of seeing your kids being different and ashamed. Poverty is a great source of marital strife, of health problems due to inadequate care and of many other problems beside.

In addition, the Torah considers it an added Mitzvah to make a timely loan to someone, preventing bankruptcy or other circumstances which would turn the person into a charity case.

But loans create debt and loans are often repaid by borrowing other loans, often on worse terms. Two remarkable Torah laws come to correct this: The first is a prohibition on interest; the second is a moratorium on debts at the end of the Shmittah year. Not only is the lender required to forgive the debt, but he transgresses a Torah prohibition if he fails to give the previous year, in anticipation of not being able to reclaim his loan.

Some understand G-d in His Torah as saying “And don’t say to yourself, ‘Next year is a Shmittah year, and the fellow can get all he needs anyway. So why should I help him now?’ The poor man needs your money today, not next year: You have no right to make ‘good business’ calculations when someone is in pain or distress. You will always have good reasons not to give, not least of all by saying the poor man is a lazy no good for nothing and deserves his fate. Your job is to overcome this and to help the person in need, and when he needs it. I, in turn, will look after you.”

The punishment for the person who does not give when he could is contained within his own personality. A selfish person will always be unhappy. The material can never fully satisfy the person – leading to an insatiable need to be ever more self-centered and taking. A giver, by contrast, finds that the more he gives the more filled up he feels and elevated he becomes.

Loans, charity and all kinds of giving are the way, of imitating G-d’s ways on earth. They reflect as much a relationship with our Maker as they do with our fellow man. This is why the past, present and future physical and spiritual well being of the Jewish nation seems to be dependent on our giving to charity. G-d made His *bris* with Avraham Avinu based on his doing chesed. From then until the Moshiach this will remain a sign of our essential Jewishness until we will finally be redeemed through the merit of doing charity.

The paragon of giving is אב רם who is אב רם – the Father of Elevation. He was elevated because he showed by his giving that he is spiritually full and therefore not in need of material fixes to fill him up.

Perhaps a built in seventh year debt cancellation make no sense on purely human terms – compassionate, economic or other. But a world left just to human logic is not a pretty place. We have seen what the Godless attempts to run the world in the last century led to. This is a mitzvah which clearly requires trust in G-d, just as he trusted us with His money to begin with.

2. The Corruptor

In this week's Parsha, the Torah brings three kinds of people who corrupt others. The first is the false prophet, claiming to speak in the name of G-d and bringing all the necessary signs and proofs, telling us that something in the Torah has changed or that we should serve idols (maybe in addition to serving G-d); the second is the *Meisis*, someone who actively entices us to serve idols through argument and persuasion; and the third is the *Ir Hanidachas*, where an entire city turns to idolatry. In all cases, the consequences are severe – the person or people concerned get put to death. The *Ir Hanidachas* gets reduced to ashes, never to be built again.

Because of the severity of these punishments, the Torah introduces here procedures of evidence for all judicial procedures which bear the death penalty, and prohibits the taking of the law into ones' own hands.

G-d introduces these laws by commanding us not add or subtract to the Torah. The Torah is the perfect means to our fulfillment – any idea by man that he can somehow improve on this will lead down a slippery slope: We will begin to judge each commandment deciding whether it is good, still relevant or can be improved upon. By the time we are finished, it will no longer be Judaism that we are practicing – it will be some human religion of our own making. It is this which leads to the moral and spiritual cesspool of the false prophet, the *Meisis* and the *Ir Hanidachas*.

The Torah leaves plenty of room for freedom of expression and human creativity; but not here. For this would undermine the very foundations of the Torah, creating a world devoid of its moral and spiritual purpose. After the Revelation, what was to stop another prophet from coming and saying that the Torah had changed, or added to? Or what was to stop someone from re-interpreting the Torah in a radically new way? What happens if he predicts miracles which come about to back up his plan? What if he is known to us as a genuine prophet? Or what was to stop someone saying that the whole Torah was true, and G-d given, but that there were also other gods worthy of service? In other words, how does one maintain the integrity of the Torah and of Judaism, and prevent all kinds of splinters and new-age variants?

To this the Torah answers that the entire Torah was given at Sinai and that it will now never change. It was given with the utmost clarity, so that no-one would become confused, neither about G-d as the source of this revelation, nor its content. All the principles we need to apply to any new situation are already contained within the Torah, and any new situation can be understood by those principles. These principles were not given based on any miracles, but rather a clear and undisputable national revelation, and therefore miracles cannot be the basis of any future claim to change the Torah. From now on, no prophet can ever innovate anything new in the Torah. A prophet can temporarily suspend the laws of the Torah, as Eliyahu did on Mt. Carmel, but any prophet, even a genuine one, or even one who draws on signs and predictions, who will call for a permanent change in the Torah, is ipso facto wrong. It is one of the 13 Principles of Our Faith that the Torah will never change, and anyone challenging this principle, is challenging the very foundations on which the Torah is based.

Idolatry undermines the Torah just as thoroughly as a false prophecy, and this is what the *Meisis* and the people of the *Ir HaNidachas* are guilty of.

The punishment for all of this is the death penalty. The challenge is that we, in imposing this penalty, are in danger of becoming monsters, imposing a Taliban-like regime and terrorizing the people. The Torah however makes a remarkable promise: our act of seeming cruelty will have the opposite effect of making us more merciful.

We are to act not because we are filled with the fiery passion of fundamentalism, but because we are constrained by the Torah to follow its dictates.

But why would the Torah act with such severity to acts of idolatry? Surely, the Monotheistic idea is powerful enough to stand on its own two feet and capture the minds of thinking people? To this, the Chinuch has an interesting response. The Sinai experience provided us with a clear and factual empirical base to our belief in G-d and His Torah. An entire nation reached the highest levels of prophecy, speaking to G-d face to face. Now it is time to move on, and build on what we have achieved. Civilization cannot move forward if every generation has to spend their lives questioning the basics. Perhaps a brilliant mind, an Abraham, may discover the truth on his own. But even he would spend most of his life just figuring out what it is that he ought to be doing. And when he finally does, his efforts will be for naught, for his children will demand the right to start all over again and discover the truth for themselves.

The false prophet and the *Meisis* come to corrupt others, and destroy the Sinai idea. The *Ir Hanidachas* is an entire city whose inhabitants have mutually corrupted each other, and which now stands as an example of defiance to the entire Jewish community. All Jews now know that they can go and visit this “sin city” and check it out for themselves.

The Torah takes a harsh view of these cases both because they deny the entire purpose of creation and because they actively pursue the entrapment of others. Hence, in an unusual detailing of its reasoning, the Torah makes it clear that the deterrent value to others is part of the logic of the punishment.

Those implementing the punishment do so knowing that, by saving others from being led away from the Torah, they are saving their lives. This is greater than saving his life physically.

Our Torah is a Torah of peace – דרכיה דרכי שלום. The stress is on gentleness, kindness and harmony. Our Parsha also deals with laws of charity and loans, showing an unprecedented level of sensitivity required of a Jew towards his fellow man. It is totally out of character for the Torah to then provide such a chapter of harshness. Clearly, root of this is the fact that everything is at stake here. The lesson is that to be merciful to the evil will lead to being cruel to the righteous – to denying them for one thing, the one tool they have, the Torah, for attaining the World to Come.

שופטים

1. Requirement to Listen to Chachamim

It is a positive command to listen the Sages' interpretation of the oral law, as the verse states, *according to that which they will teach you, you should do*. There is also a negative command not to dispute the Sages' final determination of halacha as the verse states, *do not go away from that which they will tell you left or right*.

The Sanhedrin was the original arbiter of the Halacha. But the broader implications of this verse are to follow Torah authorities in each and every generation *הם כיהיה כימים ההם* means that even the Sages of a particular generation are not as great as a previous generation, they still have as much binding authority on their generation - *יפתח בדורו כשמואל בדורו [ראש השנה כ"ה ע"ב]*.

Underlying the need for this command is the fact that the Torah was given in such a way that it required the Sages to interpret it. Most of the laws of the Torah cannot be understood from the words of the Torah alone. Thus the interpretation of the Sages of any generation becomes the Torah which G-d commanded us to keep at Sinai. Even if, by the highest standards of our own human logic the Sages appear to be as wrong as confusing left with right, G-d testifies through this Mitzvah that this is not so. For if we were all left to make our own interpretations of the Torah, a thousand individual religions would bloom, and none would be Judaism.

A Sage who refused to accept the final decision of the Sanhedrin, and continued to pasken for people according to his original position is called a *Zaken Mamreh*. By doing this, the *Zaken Mamreh* threatened G-d's entire plan for the world. Such a person got the death penalty, not as a deterrence, for most people were not knowledgeable enough to become a *Zaken Mamreh*. Rather, the purpose was to show people the immense importance of the tradition of Torah she'Ba'al Peh.

The Sages were also instructed to make Rabbinic decrees, as the verse states *ועשו משמרת למשמרתי*, which means *ויקרא יח ל: ושמרתם את משמרתי*. Since G-d tells us to listen to the Sages, it is as if every Rabbinic decree is commanded by G-d Himself. The Sages, in a sense, are but fleshing out the details of the Torah command. G-d Himself would have commanded us to keep these Rabbinic commands, but He preferred to delegate to mankind this dimension of spiritual creativity. These dimensions of the Torah are not pure *seichel* like those written in the Torah itself. Just as there are laws not written in the Torah, but delegated to the realm of nature, so there are laws delegated to man to reveal and promulgate.

There are many different levels of *דרבנן*. In addition, there are certain *Deoraisas* which were given to the Sages to define. All *מצוות דרבנן* are an integral part of the *תורה*, part of the intended scope of the Torah to begin with. Therefore, disobeying Rabbinic decrees tends to undermine the whole chain of continuity and viability of the *תורה* on earth.

The Sages were critically aware of the fact that they were making legislation for times and circumstances in the future when things might be different. They were profoundly careful not to make any legislation which might become dated or which might not apply to any set of circumstances. They therefore looked very deeply at universals in human psychology and makeup and drew on deep principles that would be applicable for all time. In this, they were operating at a level called *רוח הקודש*, a phenomenally high spiritual level, which allows access to a much higher plane of understanding than normal *seichel*.

Part of this understanding comes from the unusual mastery of the תורה which the Sages had. This mastery gave them an understanding of the deep structure of the world. It is this same understanding which allows contemporary Halachik authorities to draw on תורה principles to answer questions about genetics, or the stock exchange or the internet.

Despite all their qualifications, the Sages were very wary of making any decree. Many hundreds and often thousands of Sages would discuss each and every point, before a decree would be made. Sometimes, such discussion would continue for decades, sometimes over many generations.

There were several qualifications to be a member of the Sanhedrin, many of them applicable to a great sage of any generation: The Sages had to be masters of Torah knowledge. They had to be able to use their Torah mastery to understand all new and relevant applications of the Torah, identifying all the relevant variables that would allow the underlying principles of Torah law to apply to this new situation.

Their whole thinking had to be in harmony with that of the Torah's so that every insight they had and every advice they gave on any issue would be pure Torah. דעת תורה is an extension of this to other, non-Halachic areas of life normally defined as דברי רשות. These may involve personal issues relating to self, marriage or children; medical and legal issues; political and financial issues. דעת תורה is as its name implies – the extension of that דעת which emanates from pure תורה, into areas which are not clearly labeled as תורה.

To be a member of the Sanhedrin, the Sages had to speak a majority of the languages of the world. The reason for this was that they had to hear testimony directly and not rely on translators. In addition, since halacha both impacts on worldly wisdom and takes into consideration current scientific and medical opinion, the Sages had to have a basic knowledge of astrology, and medicine. They had to be familiar with the multiple idolatrous practices of the time, to assess them and decide their status.

Members of the Sanhedrin had to be lovers of people, well liked and in good standing in the community. They had to be outraged by oppression and all manner of untruth and moral perversion, feel themselves accountable to G-d rather than man, and use their wisdom to wend their way through the complications that, as servants of G-d, they would then face.

In order to command maximum respect, these Sages even had to be physically attractive, trustworthy, wealthy enough not to be dependent on favors, yet not materialistic and money hungry.

We do not listen to a Sage who is not righteous, no matter how much he knows. This is because there is a relationship between truth and good character. For example, someone who gets angry will want to impose his opinion only because he is angry.

This is why the halacha is like Beis Hillel and not Beis Shammai in almost every case. Beis Hillel were concerned to hear what Beis Shammai had to say. They thereby showed patience, humility and an appreciation of others and their opinions, and therefore ultimately more sensitive to the truth. Similarly, the Bnei Beseira, seeing that Hillel was a superior Talmid Chacham to themselves, immediately stepped down as heads of the Sanhedrin and appointed Hillel in their stead.

A Sage with all these qualities could expect to be blessed with Ruach

HaKodesh, which insured that his decisions would be true. Human logic is such that it

lends itself to seeing different possibilities. But the final choice of the Sages was not only logical, but Divinely assisted.

2. Prophecy:

It is a positive mitzvah and one of the 13 Principles of Faith to believe in prophecy. G-d would not want us to obey His Will without providing a way of revealing that Will. This mechanism is prophecy. Without it mankind would lack the means to achieving spiritual completion. The ultimate expression to be able to achieve this was the giving of the Torah, through prophecy, at Sinai.

All other mechanisms to understand G-d's will proved to be unreliable. Even Avraham Avinu, though he was able to understand on his own that some Higher Being had to have created this world, could not grasp what G-d was all about until HaSh-m appeared to him in a prophecy. From that time on, Jews knew of and believed in prophecy. At the time of the Exodus, their doubts were only whether Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy was authentic. Thus it was necessary for Moshe to do Nisim in order to authenticate his prophecy.

At Sinai, all the Jews had prophecy together with Moses. There were myriads, of prophets after that, though only 48 prophets and seven prophetesses are recorded with a lasting message to the Jewish nation.

After the revelation of the Torah, no subsequent prophet could ever contradict or even add to the contents of the original prophecy (i.e. the Torah). However, prophecy still continued. Sometimes, this was a purely personal experience. Since prophecy is the highest and purest form of knowledge imaginable, this provided the prophet with a great sense of spiritual self-satisfaction. Public prophets came to clarify the Torah and strengthen its observance through Tochacha to the Jewish nation. Sometimes, such rebuke involved prophesizing the future as a way of warning the Jewish people what would happen if they did not do Teshuva. It was also necessary as a way of verifying the authenticity of a prophecy to begin with. Finally, a prophet could implement a Horaas Shaah, a temporary suspension of a Mitzvah, as Eliyahu HaNavi did on Mt. Carmel when he built Bamos as a one time exception to the prohibition.

Prophecy as a special type of knowledge which emerges as a result of the prophet's *Dveykus* to HaSh-m. As a result of understanding and appreciating what he is cleaving to, he is bestowed with a higher level of understanding. This higher understanding allows the prophet to get closer to the origin of the various mechanisms through which HaSh-m delivers His Hasgacha. By understanding these higher realms, the prophet can perceive some of the underlying principles which govern this world, allowing him to accurately see what human actions will lead to what kind of consequences. Sometimes the Navi is able to see something which has already happened in a higher realm, but which has not yet come down into our realm.

Prophecy is, in fact, the highest form of intellectual clarity which is possible. The prophet cannot understand this pure knowledge until he has processed it through his power of imagination and from there to his normal intellectual and conceptual tools.

The act of prophecy is a totally absorbing process. It requires that the person's physical control be completely released so that he can enter the realm of the pure intellect. The result is for the prophet's body to shake for all but the highest prophets. Prophecy usually takes place at night, in a dream or a vision though Moshe Rabbeinu had his prophecies during the day.

Prophecies must first take place in the land of Israel, because the link to G-d is so much stronger there.

A prophet will always know for certain whether he is having a prophetic experience or not. So too, the meaning of the prophecy will always be clear.

A prophet must either be vouched for by an established prophet or provide certain signs which provide us with the basis of accepting him. These are not miracles or changes in nature. Rather he has to make a detailed prediction of certain things that will happen in the future. If the slightest detail of the positive aspects of his prediction does not come true, we reject him. A prophet has to do this many times, though not an unreasonable amount.

We can never be sure that we are not being fooled though. However, Torah that such proof is sufficient. A similar case is that of two witnesses, sufficient to give someone the death penalty. The two witnesses may be lying. But the Torah tells us that we can proceed as if what they are telling us is true.

In addition, a prophet must have certain personal qualities. He had to be righteous, humble and completely focused on spiritual issues. He must be totally healthy of mind and body, for otherwise his mind will not be able to achieve the necessary clarity; he must be exceptionally wise and intelligent, for G-d does not turn the simpleton of yesterday into the wise and inspired genius, the man of G-d of today, wise enough to grasp the meaning of the word of G-d, and hand it on.

He had to be socially and financially self-contained, because only one who seeks nothing for himself can look on and understand things in complete objectivity. There were many different levels of prophecy. Lower levels might see G-d in the image of a sage or a warrior and have prophecy in allegories. However, the solution to the allegory or image was a part of the prophetic experience. The highest level of prophecy would be purely auditory, without any visual images.

When the First Temple was destroyed, prophecy stopped. We remained with "the prophecy of the Sages", i.e the clarity of insight which the Sages achieve with the help of Ruach HaKodesh. Prophecy is advantageous over wisdom in that it is a clear message from heaven. Wisdom on the other hand, lends itself to error, for it is Torah that comes from man and works its way up. However, its advantage over prophecy is that it can go much higher and further than prophecy.

In the generations of prophecy, there was a tremendous Yetzer Hara for idolatry. The latter was the mistaken application of bringing earthwards forces from above, and therefore paralleled the prophetic process. But the Sages prayed that this Yezer Hara should be annulled, in part because of the plague of false prophecy, and when it was, prophecy also stopped. This provided an opportunity to now develop the Oral law to its full glory. Concomitantly, the Yetzer Hara was now similar, Greek wisdom flourished, and the era of Hellenism descended upon the Jews.

Both Moshe and Bilam prophesized that, in the Messianic era, prophecies will return to the Jewish people. The Mashiach will be a great prophet, second only Moses, and he will have certain prophecies that even Moshe Rabbeinu did not have.

3. Kings

According to most commentators, it is a positive commandment for the Jewish people to request and appoint a king (שׁוֹם תְּשִׁים עֲלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ), and in fact was the first of three things which Bnei Yisrael were required to do upon entering the Holy Land.

Like a judge, a king was appointed by the Sanhedrin and had power to judge the nation. However, their missions were radically different. The king was not primarily there to judge the nation, but rather to run the affairs of state and ensure that society was set on a correct path. As kings they would declare war and create emergency decrees, and they had a clear responsibility for the physical and not only the spiritual welfare of the nation.

If we contrast kings to ordinary judges, the differences become starker still. The primary role of a judge is to render Halchakially pure decisions while the role of the king was to determine alternative regimens of sanctions. What would happen if for example, a murderer roamed the streets at night, killing people without two witnesses to the crime. Judges would be powerless to try him, while the king would be able to take care of the problem.

The kings of Israel, like the judges before them, came as Heads of State, *to unite all your national forces for the well-being of your State.*

From Shmuel's criticism of the people's request for a king we see that the motives for wanting a king have to be correct. Through Shaul, the people wanted to normalize their existence - *Give us a king, like all the other nations* – and this was their error. They were looking for primarily someone who was more general than sage, more fighter than a moral and spiritual figure. They said תְּנֵה לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ rather than תְּנֵה עֲלֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ as a sign that they were hoping to get out of Shmuel incessant rebuking of the nation and take upon themselves a milder form of authority. The Sages even encouraged us to see non-Jewish kings in order to better contrast pure temporal power with the Jewish idea of a king.

Does this mean that Judaism believes in a monarchy as the ideal way of ruling? Firstly, we see that the stress is on the King acting as a conduit for Torah law. He is not an independent authority. To stress this he is expected to carry around a Sefer Torah wherever he goes. He is expected to painstakingly write this Sefer Torah himself, and to copy it specifically from the Sefer Torah of the Sanhedrin themselves. We require a special verse to tell us that he is exempt from taking it into the shower and the bathroom with him! The logic is that he should see every moment of his life through Torah eyes. All of this is a reminder that the king rules, but first he is ruled – by G-d through His Torah.

Secondly, his powers are significantly counter-balanced by the Sages of the Sanhedrin, who constitute the parliament and the senate all in one. It is the Sanhedrin and the leading prophet who to appoint him to begin with. The King in turn, is expected to follow laws of the highest moral standards. Should the King act inappropriately he is hauled in front of the court of law like any other citizen.

In some respects, the King is all powerful, for he is there to redress temporary moral imbalances which may occur in society and to break the back of mafias or any other emerging evil. Although he had no power in monetary cases, he could order the death sentence based on looser standards of evidence than an ordinary court could. He could appropriate lands for the state, especially during war, decree taxes and issue

military call ups wherever needed. He could exact free labor for public works projects.

Disrespect to the King incurred a death sentence. Yet, despite this, a person could safely defy the orders of the King if he was busy doing a Mitzvah instead. The concentration of these powers in the hands of one individual, given the checks and balances described above, was a great unifying element in the society. This was dependent in turn on his loving all Jews, and this was a condition of him being appointed in the first place. David Hamelech is chosen in part because he showed such care and mercy to his sheep, revealing his deep concern for all of G-d's creatures.

There is no one who seems to have more power in the Jewish People, yet there is no other whose choice is more limited. לב מלכים ביד ד' – A king's heart is guided by G-d Himself.

But there was another check on his power. A candidate for King who was not clearly G-d-fearing, got nixed by the Rabbis. And once he was King, there were many rules to help him maintain his Yiras Shamayim and his humility. He was not allowed to have any horses beyond fully justifiable military needs. Nor was he allowed to accumulate any wealth beyond what was needed for the public need and the maintenance of the military. Personal wealth could cause him to laude it over others and away from feeling close and dependent on G-d, just as the expansion of his fleet of horses will lead to him feeling all powerful and less trusting in HaSh-m. The King is the best candidate for arrogance, and the Torah warns him against feeling superior to his fellow Jew - לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו – hardly an attribute that is looked for in the modern day leader and sometimes even seen as a weakness. In fact, although the public honor of the king has to be maintained, in private he is encouraged to stand before the High Priest and to honor Talmidei Chachamim. Yehoshofat, King of Judah, would get up for Talmidei Chachamim, kiss them and call them, “My rabbi, my teacher”.

G-d assures any King who is tempted to take personal advantage of his rule that his rule if not his life will be short. Shaul failed to listen to the prophetic instruction to kill Agag and all the cattle, and he is immediately told by Shmuel that his rule is going to be ended. It is a privilege to be a king as much as it is a privilege for the nation to receive one. Both sides have to earn, and keep on earning, the privilege.

A person who would see a Jewish King would pronounce the blessing - ברוך - שחלק מכבודו ליראיו – blessed is He who shared of His Glory with those who fear Him. The king was but a way for us to understand and appreciate G-d better. The Messianic Era will again bring back this noble idea to the Jewish people. The Messianic Era will again bring back this noble idea to the Jewish people. Mashiach himself will be the king of Israel, and at that time we will all know that the real King is G-d Himself.

4. WAR

The natural state of humankind is a state of dispute. This is a world of separate identities, where truth and the commitment to truth are not strong enough to overcome the unique perspectives and inclinations which each of us brings to different situations. Were it not for G-d Himself the world would lack any semblance of unity.

War is extreme machlokes, group machlokes, organized on tribal, national or religious lines. Wars are sometimes a necessary evil, but more often they are pure evil. Just because of this we cannot initiate a war unless it is Divinely Sanctioned through the Urim VeTumim. The Urim VeTumim, representing justice, was used to drive home the point that during war we are being judged. We are in moral danger just as we are in physical danger. In fact, the two are intertwined.

Judaism distinguishes between different types of wars – and the distinctions are crucial. In the broadest terms, there is Milchemes Mitzvah and Milchemes Reshus. The difference influences both the nature of the call up and the exemptions as well as how the enemy is to be treated.

The Rambam defines three types of Milchemes Mitzvah: The war against the Seven Canaanite Nations, the war against Amalek and a defensive war. But the scope and glory of Judaism is that it defines every scenario – pre-emptive strikes, war of territorial aggrandizement, etc. War is a great leveler of distinctions. “War is war” they say. To this Judaism responds with a resounding “no”. The details, and the distinctions are crucial.

The subject and laws of war are so intricate, because they really reflect a kind of microcosm of all of human endeavor, under much more intense conditions. The lessons from these laws apply to all the other “wars” – the disputes and interpersonal conflicts - we wage. Ultimately, **כי תצא למלחמה**, is the “battle” our evil inclinations – a very private form of war with oneself and one’s baser instincts.

The Torah is a book of peace, not war. It is the same Judaism which tells us that Shaul HaMelech’s mercy was misplaced when he saved Agag which instructs us to end every Shemoneh Esreh with a brocha about peace, every Kadish with the words Oseh Shalom, every benching to include the same blessings of peace. It was in reward for his pursuit of peace that Aharon was awarded the **כהונה** for all generations. The Torah is called peace as it states “It’s ways are pleasant ways and all its paths are peace.” And Shalom is one of G-d’s names.

Peace between us and Shamayim is of transcendent value to peace between us and our fellow man and this sometimes requires that we fight for truth.

Pinchas was a classic example of this. At first the people were convinced that this barbaric person must have been a bastard of some sort, and even the Beis Din had decided to excommunicate him. G-d Himself had to intervene and tell us just how badly mistaken we all were. Pinchas, it turns out, had saved the whole nation. He had brought peace between the Almighty and His people.

Defining and achieving peace can be awfully complex. Shaul HaMelech’s saving of Agag shows us that a false peace will lead simply to more suffering and destruction later on. Pinchas’s act of “murder” demonstrates that sometimes the road to peace is through war.

And so the Jews go to every war calling for peace. - **כי תקרב** : **כי תצא**: דברים כ י (כי תצא): כי תקרב - . לעיר להלחם עליה וקראת אליה לשלום Peace, flee or war. “Peace” is the ultimatum demanding that the opposing nation abide the Seven Noachide Mitzvos and agree to a role of public service and tributary taxation and public works as commanded by the

king. The Jews are warned against any trickery – once a deal has been reached it would be a Chillul HaShem to breach it.

We make this deal even with people whose moral perversity has permeated their entire society, people whose degradation has totally dehumanized them. We do this not because they deserve peace, but rather because we need to reinforce our own moral sensitivity to such a precise degree. At a time like this, despite the need to focus on preparing for a fearless fight, perhaps even death, we challenge and expand our mercy and reach out. And we benefit, are the better for it, even more than the enemy.

Military exemptions from the Jewish army begin first and foremost with those lacking faith and who are therefore frightened, and those who have not been scrupulously observant of all the מצוות, effectively turning the Jewish army into a volunteer citizens' army. The exemptions continue with those who are in their first year of marriage, for we need to remind ourselves that it is just for those family units, and the privilege of building future generations that we have turned ourselves into unmerciful fighters in the first place. Those who had just bought a house or planted a vineyard – those who are building up the infrastructure of the nation – are similarly exempted. All these exemptions require faith on our part that although each and every fighting soldier counts, our trust in G-d, expressed by doing the right thing, counts far more.

After all this, victory is not assured. We have to do our bit – G-d will do His. Victory is His business, not ours.

Overseeing these exemptions, and providing the send-off speech, is no general or politician – the vice chief-Cohen himself was entrusted with this job. Moreover, he was to speak in Hebrew, in the very words provided by the Torah – for only the precision, down to the very words of the Torah can protect us at a time like this.

We are told at the outset - - not to act overly hastily, despite the need to be decisive and innovative.

And so, having sent anyone fearsome or tainted by sin or newly married (etc.) home, and making it known that the Cohanim and the Leviim will not be able to touch so much as a cent's worth of the spoils of war, this army of the righteous was ready to go out on its way. Finally, they can get down to maneuver drills and war plans. But no! There is yet another prerequisite command: וּנְשַׁמְרֶתֶם מִכָּל דְּבַר רַע – do not weaken your resolve - אַל יֵרֶךְ לְבַבְכֶם – and do the wrong thing once the enemy falls into your hands. And so, the Jewish army exits with the Aron in their midst, a constant reminder to maintain their standards.

Should the enemy choose to fight, the next phase of the laws of war kick in. The Jewish army marches into battle warned against any unnecessary damage to the environment. Not a single fruit tree is to be unnecessarily uprooted – and certainly no scorched earth policy is to be tolerated.

Furthermore, one of the most striking 'humanitarian' laws we are commanded is the prohibition of besieging the enemy cities on all four sides. We are told, amazingly, to leave one side of the city open. This is to allow the enemy to flee.

Regarding the treatment of the enemy we are also told: If your enemy is hungry give him bread to eat and if he is thirsty give him water to drink (משלי: כה: כא).

Many of these laws or every more pertinent in our times. We have seen the horrors of a century of war – and we are grateful for G-d's Divine code.

1. Eishes Yafes Toar & Moral Conduct in War

War is a time when normal rules of society break down, a time when each side is committed to defeating the other, if necessary, by killing as many of the other side as the situation demands. An army has to be singularly focused on victory, the very opposite goals we normally strive for in balanced living. Soldiers find themselves under huge stress, physical and emotional and are drilled to squelch feelings of mercy for the enemy. Though a necessary component of effective warfare, this kind of thinking causes morality to break down. Massacres, rapes and pillages often occur. Once a moral standard in war is breached, it is difficult to stop the downward moral spiral. Gentlemen in peace may become monsters in war. It is in this context that the Torah, Talmud and codifiers bring down a phenomenal and brilliant set of laws, laws that anticipate and come to prevent much of the horror of the ages.

Between these laws, appears the Parsha of Eglu Arufa. The killing fields of battle are to be seen in the context of a Torah attitude that if one unnecessary life was lost, even through the negligence of not providing adequate לוייה, the Torah demands of the wisest of the city to take responsibility.

War is an experience of life at its extremity and it is here where our trust in G-d is truly going to be tested. "Don't fear", says the Torah, not because war is not a scary thing, but because you are fighting G-d's war. Or rather, take your natural fear of war (and of danger and death) and channel it to express your fear of G-d. This is also an opportunity to publicly and collectively give honor to G-d, knowing that in the end it is only He that will determine the outcome. We Jews are inevitably hugely outnumbered, with little chance of winning purely on military grounds. (Woe betides a Jewish army, which begins to think that its own might is the cause of its victory.) True, G-d requires that we fight with all our might, that each soldier feels that the life of the whole Jewish nation is in his hands. But with this he should feel that G-d's way is to do hidden miracles, through the efforts of man.

We are exhorted over and over again to understand that it will be our collective and overall moral and spiritual level, rather than our physical prowess, that will determine the outcome of our wars.

To enable one to stand up to the moral challenges of war, the Jewish soldier must start with a sterling moral character. Each Jew was therefore to firstly arm himself with the קבלת עול מלכות שמים and each battle was armed by the presence of the Holy Ark which traveled out with the warriors.

Perhaps the most unusual and brilliant of the Torah laws of war are those that take into account the type of moral breakdown that occurs in the heat of the battle. The soldier is extremely tired, hungry and dirty. His life is constantly in danger. He loathes the enemy and his job is to kill him. There is but one objective here: Win at all costs.

Under such circumstances, soldiers are often led to breach their usual boundaries of ethical behavior. Once crossed judgment breaks down and red lines are crossed. A dilemma arises: setting high ethical and legal barriers, that numerous soldiers will ultimately break and subsequently stoop too far; or set the barrier low, and condone absolutely unacceptable behavior. The Torah, in its incredible Divine wisdom, gives us the solution – set the barrier high but create a back-up morality

standard, a second set of rules to govern those who have fallen. The Parsha of Yefas Toar deals with possibly the most likely of such scenarios. A soldier goes to war. He yields a gun. He has power. He is away from his wife, family and society. He sees a beautiful woman. The most likely human outcome of these conditions is rape.

The Torah tells us that the ethical thing to do would be to control your passions and move on. But the wisdom of the Torah understands that inevitably some soldier will succumb.

לא דברה תורה אלא כנגד יצר הרע

Having broken his moral boundaries, he is in danger of falling completely and losing all his moral grounding. He needs a 'back up' standard of morality to break and halt his fall. This is the Sugyah of Yefas Toar, a law that brought into the world Avshalom and his sister Tamar. Three of our 613 commandments deal with this troubling issue.

Many Meforshim allow the first sexual act while the woman is still a non-Jew. The act must be private, in a house and not on the battlefield. So great is the Yetzer Hora that if we do not allow this, he may go ahead, regardless, and rape her. Other Meforshim do not see this as allowed. They hold that the fact that we allow him a permissible way to fulfill his desire eventually will be enough to enable him to control himself for a while. All agree that you may take but one woman.

This woman was then brought home, and must convert to Judaism of her own choice or is sent back to her home-country. In the mean time, she is to present herself in a way designed to cool one's passions and de-romanticize the situation. Once she converts, she is no different to any other Jewess, requiring a proper marriage.

1. Yefas Toar is part of a broader package of concessions to the military at war: Soldiers were exempt from the prohibition of דמאי, from נטילת ידים before eating, from making Eiruvei Chazeiros and even permission to eat treif amongs others. All of these make sense – they have to do with food, movement – man's most basic needs.

Having made concessions to the realities and challenges of war, the Torah requires certain standards of the army must remain very high indeed. The Torah demands that a bathroom area be set separate from the camp, and each soldier is obligated to carry a spade. Should he find himself in the field, there too he is commanded to ensure that he covers up his toiletries. The Torah, the Abarbernel stresses, is not a book of health or esthetic laws. The Torah gives us these guidelines because it is just these kinds of "minor" things – toiletries – that can start the process of desensitization.

As if this was not enough, the Torah commands us with a general prohibition during war – ונשמרתם מכל דבר רע – you should keep away from all manner of evil. The Sages understood as a matter of course that the reason for the prohibition is not to cause the Shechinah to depart from the military camp. War, like any other area of our lives is a holy undertaking, from beginning to end.

2. The Purpose of the Mitzvos

Every mitzvah has its own unique taam, The word Ta'am has a dual meaning, reason and taste. Ta'amei ha'Mitzvos provide for us the "taste" of Mitzvos. We provide ta'am to our Mitzvos as we do to our food, providing energy and excitement that allow our entire beings to be energized for Mitzvos.

The reasons for the Mitzvos can never be fully understood for G-d's wisdom is too deep for man to fully fathom. Ultimately, they remain a mystery for us and therefore have to be related to as decrees, not acts of mercy or anything else.

Hence: *He who says, "May His Mercy fall upon a bird's nest, should be silenced."*

This is not to say that the Mitzvos do not have logic; they follow a deep form of שכל which underlies their great purifying effect on us. They improve our Midos or purify ourselves in some way.

However, even if we could access some of the reasons, there may be other reasons we do not know about; and even those reasons we know about may go much deeper than any logic we can see in the natural world around us.

Therefore, when doing the mitzvah, our intention should be that of a commitment to doing HaSh-m's Will and not because of any reason. The action itself achieves what we need, rather than any intellectual rationalization. At the simplest of level, a man is conditioned by his actions, and the actions of the Mitzvos produce effects, and therefore understanding (טעמו וראו), that he could never anticipate.

Take for example the Korbanos. Korbanos involved slaughter, which was messy and bloody. Yet, the Korbanos are G-d's Will – and doing His Will gives us an element of spirituality which intellect alone could never anticipate. There were giants of the spirit – from the First man through to the many prophets at the time of the Temple who testified to the deep spiritual value of the sacrifices – a testimony arising out of their actually sacrificing rather than any discussion or ideas.

The Kuzari brings other examples of thing we do, like the act of child-rearing, which pure human intellect alone could never have come up with.

In addition, the Mitzvos all form one composite whole – no one Mitzvah can be understood in isolation. Therefore, there are those who attempt to do all the Mitzvos they can, helping others, through ערבות, fulfill Mitzvos that he is not commanded in or studying about the Mitzvah if it is not applicable today.

There is a further reason why טעמים are limited. The real טעם of the מצוה is the taste and understanding one gains from doing the מצוה. It is impossible to explain to anyone what Shabbos is about unless they actually keep it. Trying to explain the מצוות in a purely intellectual way is like trying to explain to someone who has never tasted ice-cream what the ingredients are and then expecting him to understand how they all combine to make the taste.

For all these reasons, the Torah itself did not reveal the reasons for most of the Mitzvos. For, since we could not understand the full scope of any Mitzvah, we may have been tempted to apply the reasons to decide that the mitzvah is not relevant to us in certain situations. As great a person as Shlomo HaMelech was נכשל on this.

This does not mean that we are not allowed to search for reasons, as long as we understand the limitations of doing so. First, however, we need to accept the mitzvah as a חוק – as something beyond our understanding; only then can one give a טעם. The difference between a חוק and a משפט in this regard is only a question of depth. The reasons for both are ultimately inaccessible; the former just more so that

the latter. But both yield some of their secrets (Even the *mitzvah* of *parah adumah* has many aspects about which can be understood.), the latter more so than the former. Hence the wise son on the Seder night asks מה העדות והחוקים – asking for the reason for the Chukim as well.

The Kuzari states that it may be more praiseworthy, at least in the case of the Chukim, to be committed to the Mitzvot without the *taamim* than to look for them, though certainly one is allowed to search for Taamim if one needs the chizuk. However, the Rambam and the Chovos Halevavos hold that, so long as a person is not making his commitment to doing the מצוות nor his belief in their ultimate perfection dependent on his understanding, it is praiseworthy to look for Taamim.

3. Taamei HaMitzvos – Specifics

It is the eleventh of the 13 principles of faith that G-d rewards us for doing the Mitzvos. This is true also of doing the negative Mitzvos, even though the achievement here is inaction. Certainly, where the temptation to transgress is great, one would get שכר for having fulfilled the מצוה of תירא את ד' אלוהיך תירא מצוה. But even a person who puts themselves into a situation where they are automatically observing the negative commands is rewarded for all the negative commands that are thereby kept. A person who is served glatt kosher meals a day is doing exactly what he is supposed to be doing to keep glatt kosher – i.e. to put himself in an environment which facilitates this.

But doing a mitzvah in order to get reward is not the highest of motivations. It is in a sense an act of spiritual egocentricity. Although legitimate, such a motive really amounts to the person taking care of himself, all be it in a spiritual way. Therefore, we are encouraged to go beyond this.

Certainly, one should be aware of the fact that there is reward for doing the mitzvos. To deny this is to deny a fundamental principle in the Torah. But, there is a much higher motive, and that is to do a mitzvah purely because this is what G-d wants. The result is a closeness to G-d, a natural Kedusha which is generated that is automatically going to enhance a person's relationship with Olam Haba.

Part of our motives in keeping to His commands is gratitude. By listening to Him, we show that we want to pay Him back for the good which He bestows upon us. However, G-d doesn't need our repayment. He is self-sufficient and not lacking in anything. His reason for giving us the Mitzvos is in order to be able to give to us. By doing the Mitzvos, we prepare ourselves to receive his blessing. Almost all Mitzvos involve actions, and these actions impact on our internal selves, purifying us and harmonizing ourselves with His Will.

Mitzvos are therefore a way to connect to G-d through doing something He wants of us. It doesn't matter what the commandment is. Judaism's path to G-d is different from other religions in that to experience G-d, we must take action. We cannot truly integrate our thoughts and ideas until we express them in actions. The mitzvos are an expression of our commitment to G-d and His Torah.

One way of connecting with G-d through Mitzvos is the strengthening of our belief in His Providence. There are many Mitzvos which express this idea specifically, those that mention יציאת מצרים, G-d's act of Hasgacha par excellence. We remember going out of Egypt on our Tefillin and our Mezuzos, in our Kiddush on Shabbos and Yom Tov, and in many other situations.

Therefore, we don't have to wait until we get to the World to Come to feel the effects of a Mitzvah. Every Mitzvah generates its Tikun and Shleimus in this world as well. It also creates a spiritual momentum - שכר מצוה מצוה as well as מצוה גוררת מצוה. He is given the spiritual energy and the opportunity to doing another Mitzvah. The word גרירה literally means to drag. The good angel which is produced by his action

dwells close to him, and in turn influences him to have a good thought. Therefore, the good thought is dragged back to him, hence the word גרירה.

What emerges is that the Mitzvos are designed to fit perfectly the realities of our situation in this world – דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום. This has to be, because הסתכל באורייתא וברא עלמא.

There are Mitzvos which have פירותיהם בעולם הזה –they generate goodwill and the well being of society. G-d wants Torah-keeping Jews to be loved by all those around them. This is a 'קדוש ד'; it makes fellow-Jews want to keep the Torah – but it is also G-d's Will that the Torah reflect “ways of pleasantness”. By doing so, the person himself will feel fulfilled - he will inherit this world as well as the next.

Amongst other things, the mitzvos come to improve our midos. As the Sages put it: *And what does it matter to G-d if we Shecht from the throat or from the neck? But the Mitzvos were given to purify man. “For I, HaSh-m am your healer,”* i.e. I give you the Mitzvos to heal some aspect of your character or to correct a mistaken thought, etc.

This too makes the world a more pleasant place to be. Clearly with better midos we enjoy ourselves and our world more, and others enjoy us more. The world is a better place. This is true not only of the מצוות בין אדם להבירו where the whole purpose of the מצוה is to benefit someone (improve the world) but also of the מצוות בין אדם למקום where the תקון to our מדות benefits everyone.

Take the example of the mitzvah of שלוח הקן. G-d did not give us this mitzvah because he has mercy on the bird's nest, but because it will improve your attributes. In this particular case it is in order to arouse mercy in us, and to prevent us from becoming heartless and cruel. Once we have developed that level of sensitivity, we will transfer it to all new situations. A person who is truly merciful does not have to be instructed in every act of mercy. The Mitzvos preventing cruelty to animals come to activate the original trait, to permeate our personalities with this trait, and to have us apply it in every new situation.

Or take the case of charity. If G-d really did not want the עני to be poor, He could have taken care of this Himself. In a way, G-d wanted the עני to be poor because He wanted us to help him to our great benefit. In that aspect the עני serves the עשיר and not the other way around. (But, because he is also someone with an independent purpose, G-d will ensure that his poverty is also the perfect challenge for his own development.)

This, according to the Ramban, is also the reason for many of the Kashrus laws. We are commanded not to eat birds of prey because they are cruel. Eating them predisposes us to being cruel as well.

But the Torah cannot exhaust all the possibilities in every category. After we act out Mitzvos of being honest and kind, of not oppressing others verbally or financially, our character is developed in such a way that we are able to apply ourselves to all new cases.

The improvement of our midos turns us into receptacles capable of receiving G-d's blessings, which is the whole purpose of the creation to begin with.

Improving our midos is but one aspect of doing the Mitzvos, which are intrinsically spiritually purifying events. The mitzvos strengthen the spiritual side of man, energizing the soul to overcome the natural inclinations of the body towards the material.

4. Cruelty to Animals

There are many Mitzvos in the Torah demanding that we be sensitive to the suffering and pain of animal. In Emor we read of the prohibition to slaughter a mother and its child on the same day, while in Mishpatim we read of the Mitzvah to relieve an animal of its load. Non-Jews are commanded against eating the limb of a living creature (as are Jews), which is also rooted in the prohibition of cruelty to animals. If we understand that the 7 Noachide Mitzvos are basic, minimum standards of civilization, then we can understand that sensitivity to animals is not a soaring lofty ideal – it is something which every member of the human race is required to have.

Both the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird and the prohibition to slaughter a mother and its child on the same day, are rooted in feelings of mercy not to be seen to be wiping out a whole species of animal. More simply the pain a mother animal has in seeing her child slaughtered is an act of cruelty on our part.

Having said that, Judaism is quite clear that the animals, like the rest of the world, are here to serve man. On their own, animals have no purpose, and in, fact owe, in a very literal sense, their existence to man. Animals cannot grow spiritually. They may grow in sophistication, learn tricks, and even develop relationships – but they die as spiritually impoverished as they were born. Animals are capable of making basic choices, whether to communicate or whether to sleep, whether to hunt or whether to flee – but they are incapable of moral choice.

Now, because of this, animals are always starting over again. In the spiritual world of humans, there is the possibility to pass on one's achievements from one generation to the next. Civilization grows because nothing need get lost. Even a generation of spiritual midgets is considered to be sitting on the shoulders of giants. This concept of spiritual continuity is called יְהוּס. It comes from the word יָהַס, i.e. the relationship between things or people.

Animals have no יְהוּס, because they have no יָהַס, no ability to take the achievements of others and build on them. Animals never recognize their grandparents; most only recognize their parents for as long as they are dependent on them.

And so, animals need humans in order to have spiritual purpose. An animal that is used by a person in order to further that person's spirituality is also elevated in the process. Sometimes the animal serves as a challenge to man's compassion and mercy. But, sometimes the use of the animal can be to eaten or for labor or for making leather goods. A really sensitive Jew will understand the specific potential of each animal reflecting some parallel potential in man.

But this does not mean that all human usage of animals is good. A man eats meat. If he uses the strength he gains thereby to do good then he has sanctified himself and the animal. If uses the strength to do evil, he has denied his own purpose and the purpose of the animal. For this reason the Sages told Am Haratzim not to eat meat, for they cannot be relied upon to apply the right intentions to their eating and are better off, therefore as vegetarians. There is no such thing as an act of neutral (neither holy nor unholy) eating. Unless a person harnesses the energy of eating for good, the very act of eating will naturally promote certain negative thoughts and fantasies. However, with the extra Neshama we all receive on Shabbos, and the extra holiness of the festivals, even an Am HaAretz is able to turn meat-eating into a positive and sanctifying experience.

Once we understand, however that the animal is there to serve man and not the other way around, many Mitzvos gain a new perspective. Let us take two examples. People who own animals as pets or as livestock are expected to feed them before they feed themselves. Our second example is Shechita, which the Sages clearly understood as the most painless way of killing an animal. Both however, seem to be examples of man serving the animals and not the other way around. We need, however, to go a little deeper.

The presumption is that shechita minimizes pain but does not get rid of it entirely. Yet, if shechita had really been for the sake of the animal, then would not G-d have created the animal in such a way that it died without pain. Or he would have prohibited eating the animal, requiring us to use it in other ways. The question is, why did G-d created a pain-feeling creature and then tell us to minimize the pain even though we cannot get rid of it altogether. The answer to this is that the pain of the animal is for our sakes – in order that we should feel the pain of the animal and respond with mercy to it. This develops our character traits. As the Sages put it: *And what does it matter to G-d if we Shecht from the throat or from the neck? But the Mitzvos were given to purify man. "For I, HaSh-m am your healer,"* i.e. I give you the Mitzvos to heal some aspect of your character or to correct a mistaken thought, etc.

This is what the Sages meant when they said that the reason we silence someone who prays to G-d that He should place His mercy on the birds nest is because we make G-d's Attributes to be sourced in mercy whereas they are decrees. This means, he says, that G-d did not give us this mitzvah because he has mercy on the bird's nest, but because He has decreed upon you something which will improve your attributes. In this particular case it is in order to arouse mercy in us, and to prevent us from becoming heartless and cruel. Once we have developed that level of sensitivity, we will transfer it to all new situations. A person who is truly merciful does not have to be instructed in every act of mercy. The Mitzvos preventing cruelty to animals come to activate the original trait, to permeate our personalities with this trait, and to have us apply it in every new situation.

כי תבוא

1. Bikurim - Hakaras HaTov

The Bikurim declaration is G-d's way of teaching man the idea of gratitude.

To understand the impact that the מעשה בכורים made on people, imagine that you have fruit trees. You care for them and their fruit, tie a ribbon on the first fruit, pick them and travel all the way to the awesome Temple. There, you finally drive home to yourself the good that G-d has given you:

And you should come to the Cohen of that time and you should say to him: I have stated today to the Lord your G-d that I have come to the land which G-d swore to our forefathers that He would give to us.

Recognizing G-d's good to man was not done as a quick thank you. It was an elaborate journey, physically and spiritually. It was a mass demonstration declaring G-d's mastery over everything, a tribute of the first fruits by the tenant farmer, man, to the real owner, G-d. It was also an enormous expression of trust that a farmer would happily part of the first fruits of his labor.

But we go further than just relating to the own good which we immediately experience: In the Bikkurim declaration, we say: *And you shall answer and say in front of the Lord your G-d: An Arami tried to destroy my father. Our Forefather was not born in Israel and had no rights to the land. He had to consider it an act of grace if a piece of ground was offered to him as a grave to bury his wife. His grandchild, Yaakov, tramped back as a refugee to his Aromite homeland. ... Again the Aramite homeland would not tolerate him. Threatened with ruin ... he [again] sought Canaan's soil, again as a refugee, only there to find no piece. Finally [he] escaped famine, always still an ארמי, always still homeless. ... Added to that he was אבד, according to human judgment, without any hope of a future of independence ...*

The Bikkurim declaration then goes through our Egyptian slavery, the Exodus and finally states: (26: 9): *And He brought us to this place and He gave us a land flowing with milk and honey.* Even the Chesed done for our ancestors of the earliest times requires our gratitude.

But *hakaras hatov* is no mere gratitude. Gratitude has the sense of a payment: You owe someone an expression of thanks because of what he did for you. You pay the obligation by saying thank you, or buying a present or doing something and you move on. This is not yet a full expression of *hakaras hatov*. *Hakaras hatov* means what it says – recognizing the good that was done. This is not a one time payment – it is, to the best of our fading memory – a life-time recognition.

The Almighty does myriad acts of kindness for us, day in and day out. Our job is to express our recognition and appreciation of all His Chesed to us from the time that we were born.

The Bikkurim declaration gives us a big secret of how to do this: Start with something tangible in the here and now, and spread your awareness outwards. An example of this is the benching after meals. We start by thanking G-d for the food we have just eaten (1st *brocha*), spread that to thanking him for the land, and the covenant which goes with it (2nd *brocha*), widen the circle to include Jerusalem and the Beis Hamikdash (3rd *brocha*), and from there to all the miracles he keeps on doing for us (4th *brocha*).

When we express our *hakaras hatov* to the Almighty, we are connecting ourselves back to the source. And by doing so, we are enabling ourselves to receive again G-d's goodness. This is why the Torah specifically commands that we dedicate the *first* fruits, and the first of everything to Him or his workers, the Cohanim. We thereby dedicate the very beginnings of everything to the source. And we do that with our very selves by remembering our own beginnings, and relating this to back to Him.

This is why there is a twice daily mitzvah to remember our exodus from Egypt. We are all continuously going out of our personal Egypts, and we connect all this to the beginning and source of everything. *Hakaras Hatov* turns out to be more than just a nice attribute. It is a vital life-line which connects us with the source of all our blessings!

We thank G-d by going to the enormous efforts of bringing the Bikkurim. What about when a fellow human does us a good turn ? The Torah position is that no response is considered too big for even the slightest good someone does for us.

Reuven saved Yosef from being killed by his other brothers. The verse says וישמע ראובן ויצילהו מידם which the Midrash interprets as: And Reuven *reflected* and he save him from their hand. On what did he reflect? Reuven remembered that, at one stage, he had thought himself banished from the holy circle of the brothers for the ruffling Bilhah's bed. However, Yosef negated this by dreaming of 11 stars for eleven brothers, which perforce must have included Reuven. Yosef was only telling over what he dreamt. He had no intention of benefiting Reuven. If anything, his intention was to elevate himself. Yet, Reuven benefited from what Yosef said and this was enough for him to save Yosef's life.

The point is that if I happen to have been a *shaliach* for some benefit to me, then it is not for me to start making calculations: Did they really mean it? What kind of a sacrifice was it really to them? They are only it for themselves. All of that is of absolutely no consequence. I received good – I ought to feel that I am willing to put myself out for the rest of my life for that person.

Let's return to Yosef. Yosef is asked by his father to travel alone for days, to search out his brothers and to ask after their health *and the well being of their sheep*, despite the fact that the brothers hated him and it was therefore a very difficult mission for him. Now the Midrash asks: It is understandable that Yaakov should subject his son to a difficult journey for the sake of his brothers. But why such an undertaking for the sake of the sheep? The answer is that both Yaakov and Yosef had benefited from the sheep, the midrash says, and therefore they also deserved the effort of insuring that they were ok.

It is clear from these examples that, in the expression of *Hakaras HaTov*, the principle of proportionality is violated. There is no attempt to repay the favor, to add up the points and tit for tat. Rather, the slightest good is cause for an extra and unusual effort for the other, without consideration to the relative sizes of each one's kindness. With G-d it is just the opposite. G-d needs nothing from us and there is therefore nothing we can ever do for Him. But G-d did set up the world where He is, in a sense, dependent on our actions to achieve the purpose of the world. And so G-d wants our gratitude, for it allows us to get close to Him and allow Him to give to us. That is the greatest giving we could give to G-d.

The Torah section on Bikurim mentions the words ה' אלהיך no less than nine times. From the Bikurim and its declaration we benefit from an enormous range and depth of G-d's bounty.

2. Joy and the Challenge of Wealth:

Our Parsha deals with blessing and curses. The blessing which most people naturally want is happiness.

But happiness cannot be pursued. Happiness is a result, a consequence not a goal. Simcha comes when a person feels filled up and content, without counter feelings that he is lacking in something. But Simcha is also a driving force. It can and must be used to achieve closeness to G-d. This is one of the vital messages of our Parsha.

At the end of the list of Kelalos, there is a surprising verse. G-d tells the Jewish people that all these curses come, not so much because of the failure to keep the Mitzvos, but rather *'since, when you had everything, you did not serve G-d in joy with goodness of heart'*. Or, as the Ari Zal understands it: *You did not serve G-d more than you served the plenty that you had.* You failed to take all the joy of your blessing and to subjugate it to your joy of G-d. For a man is expected to serve G-d with every attribute that he has.

This is the challenge of wealth – There is no other way of giving meaning to one's money. So, we hope for blessing, but we live in fear that perhaps we cannot handle that blessing. Perhaps, we will grow more in poverty and affliction. G-d from His side believes in us. He has told us never to go back to Egypt – the narrow and confined straights (מצרים) of מצרים. He begs us not to have to return to poverty, not to fail the challenge.

If we don't have G-d, all the wealth in the world will not make us happy. Lacking joy, we are likely to turn inwards, undermining our desire to share our resources with others. This in turns destroys our sense of higher unity.

Joy connects – a truly happy person finds it easier to reach out to others. The Torah was designed to bring such joy for one who truly connects to it through study and observance. Since the Torah reflects the higher spiritual realities of man, one who keeps its precepts will feel a sense of completion.

However, in order to reach that completion, one needs to keep all of the Mitzvos in their entirety. Each positive mitzvah completes one of the limbs of the body for these limbs are the vessels for the spiritual parts of man in turn. But, in practice, no one individual can achieve this. Some mitzvot are only for specific situations, some are for Cohanim, some for Kings, etc. The way we can fulfill all of them is only by tuning into the collective spirituality of the whole Jewish nation, past, present and future

But there is another criteria – a person has not only to do all the Mitzvos, but do them to completion. There is no surer way of knowing that he does this than the joy he will feel after completion.

Finally, joy is so powerful that it can bring the redemption. This is clear from the verses themselves. For the Torah had just finished talking about the exile of the Jews and our verse then said that this was through a lack of joy. Joy – G-d directed joy - will then return us to our former state.

נצבים

1. Teshuva

דברים ד: ושבת עד ד' אלוֹקִיךָ ושמעת בקוֹלוֹ - Although Rashi tells us that what is being referred to is the entire Torah, many Meforshim learn that what is being talked of here is the mitzvah of Teshuva. Later we will show that these two interpretations are really one message, and we actually need both to complete our understanding of how Teshuva works.

That our parsha would be talking about Teshuva would make sense, for Parshas Netzavim is always read the last Shabbos before Rosh HaShannah. It would have been natural to think that once we have messed up the road back would be fraught with difficulty. Indeed, it would have been worth climbing to the very Heavens if that was where the solution was to be found. It is just this which the Torah comes to correct: The Mitzvah of Teshuva is neither hidden nor distant from you. You need not be an exceptional genius, nor will you need unusual access to a hidden tradition to access it. Rather, it is one of the easiest and most accessible of Mitzvos. It is neither above our natural and normal intellectual abilities (and not in the Heavens).

The Tanchuma tells us that after the *Klalos* of the previous *Parsha*, Klal Yisroel were in a state of despair. How could they always keep to a standard of perfect observance which would allow them to avoid this sword that was hanging over their heads. Our Parsha brings G-d's answer - *Teshuva*, which will allow us to get back on track in our relationship with G-d whenever it is needed. Even without *Teshuva*, we are *always* in a relationship with HaSh-m, even at our worst. What *Teshuva* is coming to do is to turn the relationship from a negative into a positive one.

Not only will we all do Teshuva in the Messianic era, but the Moshiach himself can only come from the lineage of Teshuva – from Yehuda – and not from the lineage of those who were always righteous – of Yosef. Yehuda, the archetype *baal teshuva*, through David HaMelech, who perfected Teshuvah and not through Yosef HaZadik, his competitor for this crown. For, in the end it is he who has stumbled along the way, picked himself up and moved upwards than can truly relate to and gather in all Neshamos.

The Torah is not so much commanding us to do this Mitzvah, says the Ramban, as it is promising us that there will come a day, the Messianic era, when everyone will do Teshuva. The power for anyone of us to do Teshuva in any generation draws on the fact that, during that era, we will all do Teshuva. Indeed, we, in the pre-Messianic era, are witnessing some of the overflow of that Teshuva. The Teshuva of the Messianic era has seeped through into our era to provide us with the Baal Teshuva movement.

It was not so much the superior wisdom of the Jews, but rather their natural harmony with the Torah which caused them to accept it. The Torah and the Jews are Bnei Mazla, The very core of the souls of the Jews is rooted in the soul of the Torah. They are made up of the same spiritual-genetic material. It is just this harmony which allows the Jews such access to Teshuva. Teshuva is a chiddush of the Torah. Without the Torah we would have known that we have to cease repeating our sins, but we would not have known that it we can actually fix the past. But once we understand our natural harmony and connection to the Torah, things look a lot different.

But we need to go a step further. The purpose of the Teshuva is not just to correct the sin. It is rather, to reestablish a connection with G-d. Sin separates us from G-d – that is easy to understand - and Teshuva reconnects us – that is not so easy to understand. But the Torah gives us a guarantee that we can do it, and that is enough.

But the purpose of Teshuva is not just to correct a sin. It is, rather, to re-establish a connection with G-d, to return right up to G-d, as the Torah expresses it. Our ability to do Teshuva draws on our harmony with the Torah. That Torah is G-d-given in turn. And so, we are really showing by our Teshuva that we are drawn to G-d, as He does with us, that there is a natural bond just as there is between a parent with a child.

The natural connection between a parent and child bridges any gap that may exist between them. The bond between parent and child is easily repaired and can never be permanently broken. What we observe among a flesh and blood parent and child is also true of the reunion (Teshuvah) between our Father in Heaven and His wayward children. Despite the fact that I haven't had anything to do with Him for decades, He is our Father and we are His children. Therefore it is "within the power of your mouth and the power of your heart to achieve it."

2. Eternal Bris with the Chosen Nation

In our Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu creates a final, binding covenant between G-d and the Jewish people. Moshe gathers all the people down to the babies, and includes them and all future generations in the covenant.

From a covenantal perspective, what happened here was no less than another Maamad Har Sinai. In fact, since the covenant at Har Sinai was broken by the sin of the Golden Calf, this latter covenant is the one which sustains us to this day.

The Abarbanel asks the obvious question: how could those who witnessed the Sinai events have obligated all future generations? He answers by saying that a man who takes a loan creates an obligation on his inheritors to pay it. Similarly, the Jewish nation was redeemed by G-d from Egypt, and by so doing, He acquired our bodies from our previous masters. We also committed our souls to G-d through the several covenants we made with Him at Sinai, including this one, which makes our inheritance of the land conditional upon keeping His Torah.

So, there is a combination of factors creating an obligation, a loan, so to speak, that needs to be repaid in future generations. The obligation has been strengthened from every angle. It has been made in the form of a slave to a master, in the form of covenants, and in the form of the inheritance of the land. All three factors are inheritable, and therefore the obligation to keep the Torah is inherited.

G-d made an eternal covenant with us. But this is mysterious. Why would G-d make a covenant that is binding even when we rebel against Him? Why would He not allow for the possibility that another nation may arise in the future that would be more willing to be committed to the Torah than the Jews?

The answer to this lies firstly in the way our nation was born. Our forefathers were root souls. We are branches of those roots. We really are an extension of the same soul, and we are not a new spiritual reality. The root soul was completely purified by our ancestors, and therefore this core is unchangeable, for whatever reaches perfection lasts forever.

The collective body of the Jewish people inherits this core and the covenant was made with this core. The Bris was made with the collective body of the Jewish people rather than with a group of individuals. This permanent covenant cannot be broken by any individual or any generation, for the Jewish people of the covenant lives on in ways not fully explicable by laws of history or sociology.

What history tells us is that our survival despite our small size is in and of itself a miracle. The Torah calls us an עַם סְגוּלָה. The word Segula means something whose underlying laws are mysterious.

The Babylonians, ancient Persian, Greeks and Romans are all gone. The Jews survived under much more difficult circumstances. Anti-Semitism alone should have wiped out the Jews. Not only was the Jewish nation spread around the world, but the Jews kept on having to move again and again, all the time maintaining their identity. Each time there was a new exodus there was a new testimony by the Jews that G-d exists.

Anti-Semitism itself remains a mystery without explanation. No other hatred is as intense, spread over so many countries (even ones where Jews do not live), over so many centuries and with such persistent dedication.

At other times, such as on American soil, the opportunity to assimilate should have done to the Jews what it did to the Italians, the British and every other nation –

absorbed them to the point where the most they can say is that they are of Italian or British descent. And it almost did. But almost means that our remnant is here and will always be here as long as this earth exists.

The Jews did not merely survive; they survived for the purpose of revealing G-d's Oneness in the world. The Jews' very survival proves this to some extent. As Dr. Isaac Breuer put it: "And one who sees this ancient people today ... and does not fall on his face and exclaim 'G-d, the L-rd of Israel, He is G-d,' then no other miracle will help him." In fact, the moment a Jew lost that sense of mission, he lost with it his gene for survival. Most Jews intermarried, assimilated, converted or were killed. Others, like the Karaites, survived in small numbers, but only by completely denying that they were Jewish.

So, not only did the Jews survive, but, throughout this time, they have been enormously productive. Rather than survive as a shattered remnant, they have had such a powerful impact on the world that all great historians have felt a need to comment on this remarkable phenomenon. More than anything else, the Jews have contributed the idea of Monotheism, a fact that changed everything about the world. The Jews contributed the Torah, the idea of universal education, the concept of the dignity of man. They also gave the basic notions of equality of opportunity, democracy, and the basic notions of justice. They introduced the idea that this world has a purpose, and that every individual has a role to play in this. Theirs was the genius of the soul that introduced concepts such as Providence, redemption, responsibility and the parallel between man's inner reality and the outside world.

This contribution, so disproportionate with our size, was made under the most difficult of circumstances when the Jews were under siege, spread out, being hounded and expelled. Other nations would have been pleased to just survive while the Jews did more for the world than any nation on earth. Our secret was the Torah which provided an exceptional system of internal vigor and spiritual energy. Most important, it provided an attachment to our Maker.

Part of our survival gene has to do with the fact that the birth of our nation was not natural. The Imahos were all barren, and Sarah did not even have a womb. This meant that the Jewish people should have completely died out. Unlike other nations, our existence is a function of G-d's sustenance alone. In Egypt, again, we were reduced to a situation where we were totally absorbed by the Egyptians. We were, as the Sages describe it, like a fetus in the womb of the mother – totally dependent on the Mother for all forms of sustenance, and totally identified with the body of the mother. The nature of the slave work we did was totally purposeless – the cities we built were destroyed again, so we did not even have the achievement of slaves. There was no part of human kind of which we could be said to be a part. We left 'naked'; without any mitzvos and without any independent identity, plucked out by G-d into a new reality with its own set of laws. This is why everything had to be בחפזון, i.e., as total a negation of the existing מערכת הזמן as possible. This is also why the first מצוה of ישראל כלל ישראל was החדש הזה לכם: it represented our ability to create this new מערכת הזמן akin to creation of the first מערכת הזמן at the beginning of creation.

The barrenness of the אמהות showed that they were not merely a continuation of previous דורות. Their children were born of a new מערכת. Therefore, since we exist on a totally different plane of reality from the nations, they cannot destroy us.

The נצחיות of ישראל כלל was further entrenched by the כור הברזל of גלות מצרים. Having purified our essence, it would now be easy for ד' to continue to correct any backsliding, since it would only be an expression of some surface phenomenon. Finally, our attachment to the Torah means that we were now connected to the

sustaining Source behind the world. The תורה was essential for the survival of the world, and therefore, although כלל ישראל wanted to accept the תורה, at some level they *had* to accept the Torah (כפה עליהם הר כגיגית). Having initiated a relationship with G-d, there was a level of attachment that was then imposed on them by G-d, something which then became fundamental, inevitable and eternal. The נצחיות of כלל ישראל is also guaranteed by the fact that their destruction would mean the destruction of the world.

1. Moshe to Yehoshua – Succession from a Unique Leader

In this weeks Parsha, Moshe prepares for the future of the Jewish people after his death by appointing Yehoshua in his stead. Moshe was the leader of the desert, of the דור דעה who lived an abnormal, spiritual existence. Yehoshua took them into Israel where they would defeat the enemy and live off the land. Each leader was perfectly suited for his role.

Moshe Rabbeinu shows us that succession is an issue which has to be taken care of, modeling the behavior necessary for future cases of leadership succession. Not only does he appoint someone in his stead, but he is at pains to make sure that Yehosua is fully accepted by the people. Though still with all his old strength and faculties, he begins to lower his profile. “I am old”, he tells them, “and there is now someone more suitable than me.”

He assures the Jewish People that the *Shechina* will remain with them after he is gone. “Don’t yearn for the good old days, for the new ones will be even better. You will go into your own land under a great leader.” Understand that in the end, G-d is your leader, not I or any other mortal. And if Yehoshua heads the nation, this is also only because G-d, your true leader is appointing him.

Yehoshua is the ultimate all-rounder: He is both the quiet, dedicated scholar who never budged from the Ohel Moed as well as the general who fought against Amalek. He is the loyal student, waiting patiently for Moshe Rabbeinu at the bottom of the Sinai, but also the decisive leader, who takes the Jewish people through 14 long years of conquering the mighty Canaanites and settling the land. He is the fiery *kenai*, jealous for Moshe Rabbeinu’s honor, but also the man of inner strength and fortitude, able to withstand the enormous group pressure of the great sages – the spies – and the whole nation - who were ready to go back to Egypt. He is sharp and on the ball, immediately recognizing from far what kind of rejoicing was taking place by the sinning citizens during the Golden Calf, yet he is also holy and removed – the man who has a spirit resting on him.

Yet, despite all this greatness, Yehoshua was taking the mantle of leadership from someone whom he could not hope to emulate. Only one person would ever bring the Torah down and no other prophet would ever be as great as Moshe R’. Chazal compare Yehosua to the moon, whose light is merely reflecting that of the original great, Moshe R. Yehoshua, the dedicated student was indisputably a great man, but how could the nation have looked upon as anything but a consolation prize.

It often happens that a leader starts an organization or a new movement. Succession is always a problem. The leader and the movement are one – it is impossible to imagine the one without the other. And should he leave, we naturally look for someone as close as possible. At first blush, it would seem that Yehoshua really is the consolation prize. No-one could be as great as Moshe Rabbeinu, but we were very lucky to nevertheless get someone as great as Yehoshua.

However, a deeper look will show us that this is not so – that it was specifically Yehoshua, and not Moshe Rabbeinu, who was uniquely suited to taking us into the land of Israel. He became “the sun” in his own right, and not just a

reflective moon. The Moshe-Yehoshua lesson teaches us that it often requires a completely different kind of personality to consolidate what was started. .

Yehoshua turns out to be the right man at the right time, perfect for leading the Jewish people during their specific transition stage of conquering and settling the land. Chazal tell us that if we had not sinned we would not have needed anything but the Torah itself. All of the Prophets and the Sages were just an attempt to get us back to the greatness that was ours during the Generation of Knowledge who received the Torah. Yet, the Sages tell us that even without sin, we would have still required Sefer Yehoshua. Yehoshua had something to contribute in his own right. He was not there because of some deficiency in the nation.

A good entrée to understanding Yehoshua's legacy to the Jewish people is to understand the two prayers he left us: the second blessing of the benching and the Aleinu Prayer.

The second blessing of the benching mentions the land and the *Bris* we make with G-d, essential components of the benching. This follows Moshe Rabbeinu's first blessing in gratitude for the Manner which the Jews received in the desert. It is relatively easy to recognize G-d's Providence and to sanctify the material when one's food is so obviously coming from Heaven. It is a much greater challenge when living on the land. (*And you will eat and be satisfied ... on the land.*) Yehoshua's blessing therefore represents the growth and maturity of the nation.

Yehoshua was therefore the bridge which took Moshe Rabbeinu's Torah of the desert and transmitted it to the people who would settle in the Land of Israel. *Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua. Yehoshua transmitted it in turn to the Sages.*

Yehoshua was a descendent of Yosef, and that was the source of his leadership. Just as Yosef was the person who transmitted the Torah of the Avos to the Shevatim, and without Yosef, the Shevatim would not have been able to access that Torah, so too, Yehoshua was the transmitter of the Torah of Moshe to the Sages and the Jewish nation. Yehoshua brings Moshe's Torah of the desert and brings it into the land, sanctifying the material world through the Torah. Hence in conquering Jericho, the number seven is mentioned repeatedly – they walked around the city seven times – one each day; seven Cohanim blew seven shofars; on the seventh day they walked around the city seven times. Seven is a level of the highest sanctity in this world – Shabbos, Sefiras HaOmer, Shemittah and Yovel are all cycles of seven. Yehoshua was the great conqueror and nothing could seem more a function of earthly power than fighting bloody wars. Yet it just at this point of greatest human effort that he is able to connect it all back up to G-d, to show that in fact G-d controls it all. All this effort – all these marches around the city; all these Shofar blasts and in the end, the walls simply sink into the ground, miraculously and mysteriously.

With the Aleinu prayer, Yehoshua takes this further. The Aleinu was composed by Yehoshua when he conquered Yericho. In it Yehoshua articulates the Messianic vision which was driving him. In the first paragraph, the Jews are described as the Chosen nation, whose destiny is determined by their recognition that there is no other being than G-d.; no force, no reality can be without His creative Will infusing it with existence. In the second paragraph we extend our vision to include all the nations of the world. At that time, the Messianic era, our passion for G-d will be shared by others. The whole world will be rectified –evil will be destroyed, good will reign, and all will serve G-d., there will be a perfect harmony between all the manifestations of G-d in this world (שמך) with each other and with their Source.

Yehoshua initiates the historical path toward the Meshiach. Just as his ancestor, Yosef, extended his tremendous self-control into ruling over the Egyptians, controlled their sensuality by enforcing Milah, and began a process where the nations of the earth will realize that their very source of life is through the Jews, so Yehoshua now extends that by conquering the nations around him, and envisioning a time when all nations will recognize G-d as their source of life, and hence understand the central spiritual role of the Jews in turn.

2. Moshe's final instructions: Preservation of the Torah, Hakhel and Writing a Sefer Torah.

In this week's Parsha, Moshe reaches the end of his life, a full 120 years, with all his strength and energy intact until his very last moment. At this point, Moshe says – לא אוכל עוד לצאת ולבא – “I can no longer go out and come in.” As long as person has not achieved Shleimus, he can continue to grow (לבא), but he can also lose what he already has (לצאת). After achieving Shleimus however, G-d stamps His name on the person and he can now neither grow nor lose what he had gained. Essentially, he no longer belongs in this world any more and it is time to move on.

Moshe Rabbeinu had a lot to take care of at the end of his life. Moshe assures the people that G-d will safely deliver them into the Holy Land against their enemies. He appoints Yehoshua as his successor. To ensure continuity of the Torah, he instructs Yehoshua, to command the entire nation to gather once every seven years for a dramatic public reading of the Torah (Hakhel) and to instruct each individual to write and keep a Sefer Torah. The former effects the community; the latter the individual. Moshe writes an entire Sefer Torah, all on the same day, and gives it to the Kohanim.

The Torah which we have in our hand was shown by G-d to Moshe, ‘written in black fire over white fire.’ From that Torah, Moshe Rabeinu made a copy on parchment. He also heard by ear, directly from G-d, all the words which he was transcribing. Moshe R. wrote in the 3rd person for, since the Torah preceded the creation of the world, Moshe was like a scribe copying from an original book.

Moshe Rabeinu further transcribed twelve scrolls of the Torah, of which he gave one Sefer Torah to each tribe. All subsequent Torah scrolls were transcribed from these scrolls in turn. In later generations, there were always some scrolls of the Torah which had been thoroughly examined, and were acknowledged as perfect, to which all other scrolls were compared for correction.

Moshe R. now goes out to the Jewish people – וילך משה - to each individual family, to bid each one farewell and to charge each individual with his own unique fulfillment of that Torah. Moshe Rabbeinu lived on through the people. Hence our Torah is forever called Toras Moshe.

The Mitzvah of Hakhel comes directly after the events described above. Thematically, it is a continuation of the deep commitment to ensure the authenticity of the Torah transmission throughout the generations. Men, women and children gathered at the end of a seven year cycle in a re-enactment of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Even the wisest of men would approach this reading awe-struck, and converts would see it as a chance to make up for the Sinai-experience their ancestors missed. The Rambam describes the grandeur of the occasion, with the Chazozros blaring accompanying the Regal leader of the nation who mounted a stage with due humility and awe to read from a precious scroll.

The nation had just had a year of Shemittah to reflect about the priorities of life, and were now about to plunge back into a normal farming year. Hakhel built on the spiritual momentum of Shemittah. It prepared the nation to face the next six years as an opportunity to spiritually uplift the material world. And it deepened their convictions that the Torah was G-d's truth revealed to man.

All of Klal Yisroel were commanded in this Mitzvah which drove home the lesson that the Torah is our life blood. Although this was a time based mitzvah,

women were commanded to come, as were even children who were too young to understand what was being said. The children would absorb the impression of the events more deeply than the adults, who would gain more from the intellectual content. Surprisingly, the Torah tells us to encourage non-Jews to attend as well. According to the Ibn Ezra this is to encourage them to convert. We normally do not encourage Geirim for fear that we will encourage bogus conversions, but at this Sinai-experience the revelation was so clear, so inspiring, that the normal concerns were discarded.

Clearly, G-d's intention for now revealing this mitzvah was to ensure the ongoing vibrancy of the Torah and its learning. Hakhel produced a flourish of questions about and interest in the Torah. It reenergized the passion for and belief in the Torah by His people chosen to be its guardian. There was one other such Mitzvah, which immediately follows. It is the Mitzvah of writing a Sefer Torah.

The idea that every Jew should write, or commission the writing of a Sefer Torah, is great testimony to the Jewish people's claim to being 'the people of the book.' Since the purpose of this mitzvah is to know the Torah, we can also fulfill this mitzvah by buying Torah books and studying them. Ideally we should write a Torah scroll as well as buy a Torah library. Even though women are not commanded in the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah, this Mitzvah applies to women as well. For the Torah was given to all Jews.

The command is given in the plural - כתבו לכם. Verse 16 makes it clear that G-d was speaking to Moshe at that stage. The plural is to include Yehoshua. Ramban explains that the intention was to show that Yehoshua was now a full prophet, and that he shared in the last part of the Torah being brought down to earth.

The verse then switches to the singular - ולמדו את בני ישראל. Chizkuni goes so far as to say that it was already Yehoshua who now started teaching the Jewish people. Ramban says that it refers to Moshe, who was still the primary transmitter, but Yehoshua taught together with him. Either way the message is clear – continuity of the Torah is assured in part by continuity of its leadership.

The verses seem to tell us only to write the Shira of Haazinu. However, since we are not allowed to write only a part of the Torah in a separate scroll, the command to write the Shira is tantamount to the command is as if it said, "Write a Sefer Torah which has this Shira in it."

We need to understand why the Mitzvah of writing a Torah scroll was given in this form. It seems that G-d wanted us to understand that the whole Torah is really a song. All of creation is comes together to produce a beautiful song in praise of G-d, and we tune into that when certain events raise us to the level where we feel that we are actually standing opposite G-d. Since the Torah is the blueprint for the creation, it is the book of song, the book which reveals the inner harmony of the universe.

And so the fourth peg of Torah continuity is put in place by Moshe Rabbeinu. (the appointment of Yehoshua, Moshe's writing of a Sefer Torah, Hakhel, and the Mitzvah to write a Sefer Torah).

The Sages compare someone who has a Sefer Torah commissioned (or better, writes it himself), to someone who received the Torah on Mt. Sinai. In fact, one has to write one even if his parents left him one as an inheritance. For bringing in a new scroll will invigorate our enthusiasm for the Torah, and lead to our studying it with renewed vigor. All of this is contained in the very last of the 613 Mitzvos which Moshe taught the children of Israel. These would be the final ringing words in their ears, at least as far as commandments go.

1. The Sins and Death of Moshe Rabbeinu

Moshe Rabbeinu was a man who was almost never born. Amram, his father, felt that it would be highly irresponsible to bring children into the world during the Egyptian slavery. But his daughter accused him of being worse than Pharaoh. 'Pharaoh only killed the males', she claimed. 'You are killing also the females.' Amram remarried his wife and had Moshe.

Several times while growing up, Moshe narrowly escaped with his life. Brought up in Pharaoh's palace, he might easily have landed up not recognizing his Jewishness and growing up an enemy of the Jews. Yet Moshe's life is a story of hope, of the ability of the Jewish soul to shine through the darkest hour, of man's capacity to grow to greatness in any hour.

Moshe achieved his incredible greatness as a mortal human. Moshe made mistakes in his life, which disqualified him from being counted as one of those few great people who are considered to have added no extra impurity to their lives while on earth.

When the 'well of Miriam' dried up after Miriam's death, Moshe Rabbeinu hits the rock twice instead of speaking to it as instructed and water does indeed pour fourth. G-d then informs both Moshe and Aaron that because they failed to do a public Kiddush HaSh-m neither will enter the land. The sin is considered so serious that the punishment is made in the form of an oath, discouraging prayer or appeal from Moshe and Aaron. Aaron in fact, dies soon after.

The exact nature of the sin remains a mystery. It is recorded only to avoid confusing it with the sin of the spies. This was not Moshe Rabbeinu's first slip up. Earlier he had lapses of faith in the Jewish people (they won't believe that I am a messenger from G-d) and lapses of faith in G-d himself – 'Oh Lord, why do You mistreat your people? Why did You send me?' which some commentators understand contributed to Moshe's punishment.

G-d's decrees come in various strengths. There is a level called עלה במהשבה which can easily be annulled by prayer. There is a stronger level called גזירה בלי גזירה עם שבועה which can be overturned with difficulty. Finally, there is a גזירה עם שבועה which is quite final. Even when Moshe Rabbeinu understood that he was dealing with an irreversible Gezeirah, he never gave up hope, thinking that even this can be overcome and continued to plead with G-d on every possible occasion..

He appeals for two things, to see the land (and understand all its mysteries) and to enter it. The former request was granted. His viewing the land was not just to give him some emotional outlet to his longings. The land was to be earned in the merit of the Torah. Moshe Rabbeinu represented that Torah. Seeing the land, he was able to bestow a blessing on the Jewish people that they should have the strength to conquer it.

Three times, Moshe tells the Jewish people that it was their initial folly which trapped him into his anger. Moshe was not trying to remove responsibility for his own actions. Rather, he was showing how the sin of the spies led to a weakening of the faith of the Jewish people which now required a particular level of strengthening. Therefore G-d had designed a special act of Kiddush HaSh-m by Moshe and Aaron whose failure was now particularly problematic. The lesson is clear – we are

responsible for our own actions even where others seem to have 'forced' us into our negative responses.

And so Moshe dies, his greatest dream unfulfilled, his ability to educate his children to imitate his greatness limited. The Torah mantle passes to Yehoshua, not Moshe's children. Yet, despite this, there is no-one whom we hold as a symbol of success more than Moshe. That, for most of his life, the greatest man ever to live failed to reach perfection is a source of encouragement for us, not of despair. Moshe is seen to struggle like we do, sometimes failing; every inch of his greatness hard-earned. He dies as we are all destined to do. His is an unmarked grave, to prevent any cult of worship. He lives to the full until his very last second: **דברים לד ז: ... לא כהתה עינו וְלֹא נָס לַחַה**

The moment he has fulfilled all of his potential, he dies. He blesses the people and without further instruction, climbs the mountain to his death. The Sages tell us that there were twelve levels (מעלות), representing completion in this world, and he took them all in one step. (Moshe is referred to as **זֶה הָאִישׁ זֶה** has a Gematriah of 12.) Moshe showed that he now encompassed all of these levels – he took them all in one step, for his wholeness joined all of reality.

The Jewish nation also achieves this wholeness – hence they are comprised of twelve tribes. Moshe Rabbeinu now sees the whole of the land in which these tribes are to settle, including their entire future history, until the Messianic era. He sees this, not so much as a special dispensation, but as a natural consequence of the level that he has reached.

At this moment it seemed that Moshe was going to live on after all: His own personal greatness was now such that the Malach HaMaves no longer had power over him. But G-d performs a miracle to take him anyhow – **בַּעֲצַם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה**.

Moshe Rabbeinu lives a full 120 years to the day. His punishment was that he would be denied entry into the land, not that he would lead a shortened life. Had Moshe not sinned, G-d would have speeded history up so that the children of Israel would have entered the Land during Moshe's 120 years.

Alternatively, Moshe would have lived on, long enough to enter the land. Moshe's died **בַּעֲצַם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה** meaning **כִּאִילוּ בְּאַמְצַע יָמָיו** – he died in the middle of his life and would have lived on. At a higher level, Moshe stood to correct the **חַטָּא** of **אָדָם** הראשון, thereby overcoming the death that was introduced by the original sin, and lived on forever. Death was not so much a punishment for the sin as it was that which denied Moshe perfection and overcoming the death inherent in the world.

Moshe now longed for the same death as his brother Aaron, who died with a kiss from G-d – **בְּנִשְׁקָה**, a painless death without any wrenching when his soul left his body (= a kiss). He finally gets called **עֶבֶד ד'**, all his senses fully engaged in serving G-d until the last moment. Buried by G-d Himself, His transition to the World to Come, where he lived on, was smooth and sweet; his holy body suffered no decomposition in the ground.

Moshe's grave was opposite Baal Peor where it served as a Kaparah for the horrible sins committed there. And yet the Torah testifies that "No man knows his burial place to this day." This is because those above (the angels) think that his grave is below, whereas those below feel that it seems to be above. For Moshe was at this time half-man, half-spiritual being, no longer fully existing in the special dimensions of a specific grave.

Moshe, author of the Torah, writes about his own death; but with the letters so organized that the words appeared as names of G-d. Yehoshua then came and sorted out the letters as they appear in the Torah today.

(See also under Parshas Shemos – “ The Making of Moshe”)

3. Zevulun – Yisascher – A Business-Torah Partnership

Moshe joins Yisachar & Zevulun in one brocha. This is because they forged a strategic partnership Yisachar as the scholar of Torah, while Zevulun supported him financially. Normally, one would not wish that someone be happy purely from his material wealth (שמח זבולן בצאתך), but in this case, his wealth was used for the holiness of supporting Torah.

The Yissachar-Zevulun relationship was more than simply a wealthy person supporting Torah institutions, as worthy as that might be. A real two-way partnership was invested here. Each is an equal partner in both the material wealth of the business partner as well in the spiritual rewards of the Torah studied.

Some contemporary authorities understand this quite literally, that the Torah learning partner gets 50% of whatever the Zevulun partner earns on his business. Others understand that the money-partner has to ensure that his scholar-partner live at the standard of living which he, the scholar-partner needs to live, even if this is much simpler than the money-partner is used to for himself.

While it is clear that this is a great thing for the businessman to do, it is not so clear that this such a worthy undertaking for the Torah scholar. The issue of taking money for one's Torah learning extends even to teaching. In fact, the Gemorrah in Nedarim says that one should not take money for teaching Torah. The Sages learn this from the verse:

ואותי צוה ה' בעת ההיא ללמד אתכם וכתיב ראה למדתי אתכם חוקים ומשפטים כאשר צוני

Moshe commands the Jewish people to teach Torah exactly as he taught them. Since Moshe took no payment for teaching Torah, so we are not to take payment.

מה אני בחנם אף אתם נמי בחנם

The Gemorrah concludes that this is talking only about teaching the Oral Law. However, a teacher may take payment for teaching the Written Torah. Two reasons are given for this. Rav says that since Chumash is normally taught to children, one draws a salary on the supervision involved in looking after the children, and keeping them out of mischief. This certainly applies to smaller children, but applies to any age where classroom and playground or classroom management is integral to the teacher's job. Rebbe Yochanan is of the opinion one may take money for teaching פיסוק הטעמים – cantillations - how the words are enunciated (sung) and broken up when the Torah is read for the public. Since these are not Deoraasia, they are not included in the prohibition. Rav would still prohibit teaching Chumash to adults for any remuneration, since there is presumably no class-room or play ground management with adults. Rebbe Yochanan would allow drawing a salary even for teaching adults, for one could just as well be paid for teaching טעמים on adults as on children.

The halacha goes like Rav Yochanan, that one may receive reward for teaching both children and adults. The Yerushalmi considerably broadens the heter by stating that a teacher can take sechar betala, the equivalent of unemployment wages. Since the person is teaching Torah at the expense of working in a profession, he may receive wages for the loss of work that he endures as a result of teaching. He is not taking money for the teaching, but for not working. This heter applies also to the Oral Law and, in practice many impoverished teachers relied on this heter.

The Rishonim went further, allowing one who has no other source of income may receive a wage for teaching. The Rishonim seem to be referring not only to sechar betala but to a real salary. The SHulachan Aruch states that for those who have no other source of income, it is permissible to follow the dominant custom today to always teach for pay. And even those who have other sources of income, it is permissible for someone who is giving up all other financial pursuits to accept Sechar Betalah.

Despite this, there were questions whether a person receiving such pay could be considered as fulfilling the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah. The Rambam speaks sharply against those who do not earn a living from an independent profession. However, already for many centuries, paying for learning was the only way of keeping the Torah alive. We are simply too weak a generation to work and still achieve greatness in learning.

So, the issue of accepting money for teaching has been well-established. However, the Yisachar-Zevulun relationship is different to the case of teaching. For, the relationship is not dependent on Yisachar teaching Zevulun – there is no payment in return for services, so to speak. The question return as to why, then, is this considered such a wonderful relationship?

A closer look at the text provide an answer. Moshe blesses Yisachar and Zevulun in one verse -

לג יח: ולזבולן אמר שמח זבולן בצאתך ויששכר באהלך

for theirs is, in fact, one blessing. In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu seems to be talking to Zevulun when he says: *And Yissachar in your tents*. For Yisachar and Zevulun are really two sides of one whole – the need for a solid, successful parnasa to provide the back up for a Torah existence. They are truly partners in both endeavors and have simply broken up the partnership to fit what each one does best. Both Yaakov and Moshe come to stress this by including both in the same blessing.

Despite the fact that Zevulun is the younger of the two Zevulun is, in fact, mentioned first, because he is the one who allows for Yisachar's learning. He therefore gets to *rejoice in his going out* – a reference to Olam Haba.

But Zevulun is no ordinary businessmen. He is infused by the Torah of Yisachar. He gives value to Yisachar's Torah by putting the holiness of that Torah into the very pebbles of the earth. Connected as he is to Yissachar, Zevulun becomes a walking Kiddush HaSh-m.

The very next verse states:

יט: עמים הר יקראו שם יזבחו זבחי צדק לג

They shall summon nations to the mountain and there they shall offer righteous sacrifice

Rashi tells us that what this means is that nations who will come to do business with Zevulun will be inspired to continue onto Jerusalem where they will be so amazed at seeing the incredible unity of the people around G-d, they will convert to Judaism.

ראש השנה

1. Rosh Hashanah – Day of Judgment for the Future not the Past

Rosh Hashana is a day of opportunity – a day on which G-d decides what we need in order to actualize our potential in the coming year. This is because Rosh Hashanah is the birthday of the creation of Man. Since the world was meaningless until then, we regard Rosh Hashanah as the day on which the world was created. Many subsequent historic beginnings also began on Rosh Hashanah such as the birth of Avraham and Yaakov Avinu, and the falling pregnant of Sarah, Rochel and Channah (which is why the Torah reading of the first day refers to Sarah's falling pregnant and the Haftorah to Channah). These holy women were able to get right back to the Source, and thereby to merit the creation energies that went into making the first man and which now created a person in their womb.

Since this is the birthday of Mankind, G-d therefore uses this day to review His creation, and to set up all the spiritual and physical endowments for the coming year. Since it is a time of creation, it is a time not only for renewal, but of spiritual creativity and new horizons. The source of this creativity is Teshuva.

Every Rosh Hashanah we can aspire to the spiritual levels of the First Man. We can re-create the First Man through ourselves. The blowing of the shofar parallels the blowing by G-d of the soul of life into the first man. (A blow of a shofar is called a *Neshima* – the soul of man is called a *Neshama*.) To do this, we must take a step back and look at ourselves and the totality of our relationship with G-d, the Torah and Judaism, an act of *Bechira Clalis*.

Rosh Hashanah is not the end of the previous year – a mere accounting and judging of what we have done. Rather it is called the 'head of the year', a time when the whole year ahead is laid out in front of us. All the blessings of the year are contained in a concentrated form on Rosh Hashanah and will flow from this day into the rest of the year. Rosh Hashanah is then, a day of the future, not of the past. The past is judged only to determine the blessing of the future to bless him accordingly with the perfect tools for fulfilling his task in the coming year. Moreover, the-Teshuva factor allows us to take this the entire year and turn into something that is beneficial, something that reflects our new commitment as we stand in front of G-d right then.

Rosh Hashanah is therefore essentially a joyous day. We bathe, put on our best clothes, eat large Yom Tov meals, and show our confidence that, even on the Day of Judgment, G-d will bless us appropriately.

Make no mistake. We have to earn that joy. We say selchios, the righteous fast on Erev Rosh Hashanah and we blow the shofar right through Ellul. On Rosh Hashanah we spend half the day declaring in our prayers that G-d is our King, listening to the Shofar and refrainin from saying Hallel. Still, after all that, the dominant mood of the day is optimism and joy. Nechemiah sent the people home to rejoice because they were sad on Rosh Hashanah.

But this is not to say that Rosh HaShanah is not a day of serious introspection. G-d's review is the catalyst for us to review ourselves. Yet there is no Viduy on Rosh Hashanah. The nature of our self-review on Rosh Hashanah is at a more fundamental level than any individual Sin. It is at a level of our basic identity: On this day we ask

ourselves who we are in essence. We determine whether we are unambiguously Jewish, passionately committed to the Almighty without any other loves.

Seeing ourselves in terms of our basic commitments is not only a prerequisite to the Teshuva process but is a part of it. This is why Rosh Hashanah is the first 2 of the Ten Days of Penitence. For, if we cannot first sort out our essential identity, we will never be able to do an unambiguous Teshuva.

Therefore, Rosh Hashanah produces its own definition of who is a *Tzadik*, a *Beinoni* and a *Rasha*. The *Tzadikim* of Rosh Hashanah are those who are clear about their commitment, in all its details, to the Torah's G-d-given way of life. They may not be perfect in all their actions, but they are now clear where it is they belong and where they want to go to, spiritually speaking.

Beinonim are those who are still conflicted. These Jews like Torah, but they are also attracted to materialism, honor or power.

Reshaim are people who do not have a real Torah-identity. Intellectually they may understand that it would be nice to be a *Tzaddik*. But they have no emotional or spiritual connection to the Torah, and do not really feel shamed by their negative actions. They may even admire someone who is holy and righteous, but they feel that this is not for them. Perhaps they even keep Shabbos and other Mitzvos – but this is not how they see their essence.

However, the day which is so pregnant with holiness that we it is easy for us to do a Teshuvah Klalis a create a new Tzadik identity. The holiness of the day allows us to see things clearly, to understand that spiritual commitment is where it is at, even if our everyday actions for the year thus far have been far from that level.

This does not mean that it does not matter what we have done on the rest of the year. It cannot be that the Din for the year is wiped out entirely, and that the day is activate only by Rachamim . A world without Din would lack all standards, and defy any framework. Each person would be judged according to his/her own extenuating circumstances – this one because he was tired, this one because he did not know, this one because of his emotional baggage. There would have to be a billion moralities – for each human is totally unique - and each of these, in turn would change by the hour. This would destroy the idea of an absolute morality, right for all times and places.

Therefore, the world was first created with *מדת הדין* and *דין* continues to give us the absolute standards both in the physical and the spiritual-moral plane. Without *Din*, we could simply not exist at all. There would be no laws of nature (laws that operate in the same way over time and palce), and there would be no morals or laws of spirituality. *Din* is therefore as much an expression of G-d's Chesed as is His Rachamim. It is a kindness for us to know which way we are going to fall when we jump (physical laws of nature) just as it is a kindness to tell us which way we and the world will go depending on whether we do good or evil (spiritual laws of nature).

So G-d gives us the kindness of a *Din* on Rosh Hashanah, of connecting us back to the moral purpose of the world without any fuzziness, and with a clear understanding that the Torah is the only way for us to fulfill that purpose. G-d cares enough about us and this message to us that He spends two days with us in this fashion. In a sense, He lowers Himself to come down to earth and to be with us, to reconnect with us. He thereby invites us to renew our relationship with Him in a most fundamental way. This is a source of great joy. Therefore, through the very frightening *Din*, we find ourselves in the midst of a day of happiness.

Even the *Din* itself, however, is not pure *דין*. The *Din* is ameliorated in several ways. The judgment is not final. G-d's *רחמים* allows for *תשובה* and the *כפרה* of a *יום*

כפור. Rosh Hashanah is a day of רהמים שבדין. Furthermore, the day is a judgment for the future, as we have explained.

2. Rosh HaShana – Teshuva MeAhava

On Rosh HaShana, we do not do Viduy. Yet, it is certainly a day of *Teshuva*, as is clear in many parts of the dovening. For example, on Rosh HaShana, we repeatedly say: ותשובה, ותפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזירה

The blowing of the shofar also comes specifically to arouse us to do *Teshuva*; moreover, Rosh Hashana is the first two of the 10 days of repentance, ending with Yom Kippur. The question is, what kind of *Teshuva* do we do on Rosh Hashana?

Rosh HaShana is a day of Bechira Klalis, of general *Teshuva* not on any specific act or deed, but on our overall commitment to G-d. This is a day not of discreet choices, to do this or that, but of fundamental choice – reflecting the very nature of what we intend to be.

The theme of the day is accepting G-d as the King. Why, however, do we need to do *Teshuva* to do this? Or put differently, is there something about declaring G-d King which is intrinsic to a certain type of *Teshuva*?

One answer to this is that Teshuvah draws from a part of ourselves that was never involved in sin – a part that is above the level at which sins happen. By accessing parts of our soul which are pure, and using that as a starting point to purify those parts which have sinned we are able to put ourselves out of the quick sand, so to speak.

This Teshuvah has to be 'עד ל' – to G-d. Rosh Hashana comes to bring us closer to G-d in a very fundamental way. It is not good enough to do *Teshuva* on each and every sin unless we understand that all of this is coming to improve our relationship with the Almighty. It is easy to get caught up in saying that one has done *Teshuva* on Loshon Hora or not dovening – and to leave things as an accounting of our relationship with all the Mitzvos. But that would still be missing the big picture, of where doing all these Mitzvos is supposed to get us. This is the *Teshuva* of Rosh Hashana - *Teshuva* Klalis – a fundamental *Teshuva* on general identity and love for G-d.

Such a clear and radical establishment of identity is a revolutionary thing, and is normally fraught with explosive side-effects. The birth of a baby produces a state of temporary impurity in the Mother. The Exodus eft in its wake 80% of the Jewish people dead – left behind in the great destruction of Egypt. The birth of a new person or nation leaves a certain destructive path, it seems. This World is a messy, imperfect place and each act creates its reaction. But the alternative is sterility – a purity begot of lack of productivity and creativity, a gradual descent into increasing routine and sleepiness.

The baal teshuvah is the creative being par excellence. By his *Teshuva*, he comes to create himself anew, to start afresh. In this worldly terms, the Tzadik is greater and more holy than the Baal Teshuvah. But he lacks the creative force of the latter:

מקום שבעלי תשובה עומדים צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדים

But the destruction of the Baal Teshuva is not created by his Teshuvah. Remarkably, G-d created a protective environment – Rosh Hashanah – which allows him to return in a radical and fundamental way without the normal disruptions that accompany spiritual creativity. The source of the Baal Teshuvah's impurity is the sin he committed in the first place.

The Baal Teshuvah has created a mess – he has transgressed. But therein lies an opportunity. His Teshuvah creates a whole new world, a world not available to the Tzadik – for we are not allowed to sin. After sinning, the baal teshuvah breaks the boundaries of his situation, seemingly achieving the impossible by turning sins into merits. The Tzadik, on the other hand, relates to the given Torah within its boundaries.

In order to achieve what he does, the Tzadik has to rely on subduing his Will to that of the Almighty – a level called אכפייא. What we see the Baal Teshuva being able to do is not only control himself, but actually take his past and turn it into something quite different, a level of אהפכא. But to do this the Baal Teshuvah has to do Teshuvah with his whole heart, a תשובה מאהבה.

Someone who does *Teshuva MeYirah* is considered as if he was healed from an illness, i.e. his new health begins from now, but doesn't change the fact that he has been ill until now. He is called a healed person, a reminder that he was once sick, or, as Rashi puts it, that he still bears some of his original name.

This is the level of a convert. A convert is considered as if he was just born on the day of his conversion. He has a clean slate. Yet, on the other hand, we are not allowed to remind a convert of his past, apparently because it still has relevance to him. Now, just as there is a prohibition to remind a convert of his non-Jewish past, there is a prohibition of reminding a baal *Teshuva* of his past, for he may have only done *Teshuva* at this level. At best, in the case of *Teshuva MeYirah*, our deliberate sins are considered as if they were unintended - נעשות כשגגות.

Teshuva MeAhava does not so much destroy the negative act, but actually takes it and turns it into a force for good (לאתהפכא), into Zechyos. This is what is meant that the Torah is spice for the Yetzer Horah – for it flavors it to be good, turning over the bitterness of the Yetzer Horah and turning it into sweetness. When G-d created man, the Chumash tells us: *And G-d saw all that He had created and behold it was very good.* (טוב מאד). The Sages tell us that טוב מאד is referring to the Yetzer Hara. (Zohar). The extra measure of goodness of the Yetzer Hora is that, through *Teshuva*, even our bad deeds get used for good.

All of this is part of G-d's kindness to us. He set up the world in such a way that all of our own actions can ultimately come out to our benefit. David HeMelech said, *For even if I will walk in the valley of the shadow of death, etc, for You are always with me.* This means: Even at the moment when we sin, G-d is still with us.

Teshuva MiAhava is a generalized Teshuvah relating to all the sins one might have done as a whole, as opposed to the *Teshuva* of yirah where one needs to do *Teshuva* on each one individually. *Teshuva* from love covers and infuses all actions, for it is a generalized response which covers every bad thing which one might have done. It works through the clear recognition of G-d's love for us, and that this love never gets disconnected and that everything comes from Him and is for our good, even the yetzer hora. Therefore, when on Rosh Hashana we declare G-d our King and our Father, we are recognizing His love for us, and that He wants a connection to us. By feeling reconnected to Him, we are, in fact, fulfilling *Teshuva MeAhava*, achieving all that we need to that comes out of that exalted state.

Together with this message of joy is another vital message – we should not be frightened of change. Rather we should embrace it and look forward to it. For it will enrich our lives and allow us to move forward.

See further essays on Teshuvah under Parshas Netzavim and Haazinu

3. Malchuyos, Zichronos and Shofros

ראש השנה טז. – אמר הקב"ה ... אמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות. מלכיות: כדי שתמליכוני עליכם. זכרונות: כדי שיעלה זכרוכם לפני. ובמה בשופר

Te Rosh Hashanah Mussaf prayer has three middle blessings & זכרונות, שופרות. This makes for nine blessings in all, paralleling the nine times Chanah mentioned G-d's name in praising Him for granting her a child which she conceived on Rosh Hashanah.

In each blessing, we say 10 verses relating to the theme of that blessing – 3 from the Torah, 3 from the Kesuvim, 3 from Nach and then a final verse from the Torah again.

Malchuyos

Accepting G-d as our King is a central part of the Rosh HaShana dovening throughout. We are יהודים, which contains G-d's name – people that are defined only by our commitment to G-d.

Firstly, such acceptance implies our unambiguous commitment to doing His will. Rejecting any law would be tantamount to saying that all the other laws we only accept because we choose to do so making us the arbiters of what we will and will not do. Whatever He wants for us is what we want for ourselves - we no longer feel that His Will is a sharp imposition – rather we become enthusiastic receivers of whatever G-d decides is best for us. We read the Parsha of the Akeidas Yitzchak on the second day, when both Avraham and Yitzchak demonstrated their willingness to do anything for the G-d they loved.

In Hebrew there are two words for ruler: מושל and מלך. The former is a ruler by force, imposed upon his subjects; the latter is a voluntary acceptance of G-d's rule. To all plants, animals, even celestial beings, G-d is a מושל. Lacking any choice, these beings are programmed to obey G-d's Will. Only humans are in a position to reject G-d (and be imposed upon in the end) and therefore only humans are capable of turning God into a מלך. Therefore, G-d's Malchus only came into being with the creation of the Man. It is for this reason that the שיר של היום of Friday, the day on which man was created, is "השם מלך", for it was only after the creation of man, when he accepted upon himself עול מלכות שמים, that G-d can be מולך.

For those nations who do not choose to believe in G-d and accept Him, G-d remains a מושל בכל הגוים – He rules over all those nations anyhow. But, with those nations who choose to turn Him into a מלך, He has a special relationship.

Rosh Hashana is the day on which we were created, i.e. the very first day when we could turn G-d into a מלך. In a sense, G-d needs us – each and every one of us - for it is only we who can turn Him into a מלך.

And why does G-d need that recognition? Because without it, He cannot give to us. The joyous meals, singing in the dovening, simanim, etc. all point to the fact that it is only love not fear, which is the great tool that we must use on this day. For, beyond a certain point, that fear or awe is counter-productive for it cannot raise us to the level of G-d-recognition which the day requires. It is a day of תשובה מאהבה, of accepting our King with love.

Zichronos

זכרון is G-d's response to our accepting Him in מלכויות. The idea of remembering is the connecting of the past to the present – of providing continuity. If I cannot remember my past, I have no connection with it – I lose my personal history.

Per force our memories are incomplete. But G-d is different. He is above time and therefore past, present and future are all the same for Him. His remembering means His taking all of history into account, all of the hidden patterns of the past, present and future. He has a perfect grasp of the context and influence of every event, every thought feeling and action which we might have had, understanding all its ramifications not only on us but on our environment around us.

All of this G-d understands at every moment of the year, and conditions his Hashgacha upon this. He connects all that is hidden to the revealed world, bringing the deep and hidden mystery of our connection with Him out into the open. But on Rosh Hashana, He uses His perfect “memory” to factor in our past in order to allot us our portion for the year to come.

Shofros

The Shofar helps us to do this. Firstly, the Shofar's shrill cry wakes us up. But there is much more. The שופרות is that which connects to the deepest part of us, linking us up to the goodness of G-d's remembering, bringing it into our lives, through our התעוררות to do תשובה.

The shofar strikes a cord deep into our Neshama – it resonates with a very high level of our souls – a part of our souls which remained pure and was never involved with sin. In fact each shofar blast is referred to as a Neshima, a soul cry.

We mentioned under Malchuyos that only man can turn G-d into a Melech. It was at the point that G-d blew the Neshama into man – ויפה באפיו נשמת חיים – that man became a king. At the point of G-d's נשימה (ויפה) which translated into the נשמה of man – at that point, the possibility of G-d's Malchus began. The root of the Shofar sounds of Rosh Hashanah go back to that point – they are the נשימות that reenact the creation of G-d's Malchus through the soul of man.

The very high, clear notes of the תקיעות represent this השפעה at a very high, abstract level. This needs to be broken up into our מדות, represented by the שברים and further broken down into our actions, represented by the תרועות. In practice, we absorb this Kedusha in different ways – sometimes from intellect into actions without yet managing to affect our character (תקיעות-תרועות-תקיעות) and sometimes by beginning to work on our מדות, with a delay before we begin implementing this in practice (תקיעות-שברים-תקיעות).

The Shofar helps us to access the higher levels of our soul, which were not involved in the sin, in order that we can use these levels of purity to filter down to the impure aspects of ourselves as well. This is the idea of the Shofar mixing up מערבבין - the Satan. מערבבין means to mix the negative parts of ourselves (the Satan) with those that are pure, negating the evil with the higher, more powerful good. This power of the shofar is effected because it combines with the day itself, which, being the day on which man was created, elicits the potential of the First Man as he was before the sin, and before good and evil were mixed together.

יום כפור

A Guide to Teshuva

Because it is extremely unlikely that anyone will go through life without sinning, Teshuva was made the easiest thing in the world to do. The Mitzva of Teshuva can be done anywhere in any place. Although there are levels of purity, any motive to do teshuva is ok. Unlike other Mitzvos, even if we do part of the mitzvah of Teshuva it has value. No matter how evil one has been, Teshuva is still accessible.

We do Teshuva not only on bad actions, but also on underlying character traits (midos) and inappropriate thoughts. Since Teshuva really means to return to our source, even a Tzadik Gamur needs to do Teshuva. Did he not once know, in the womb, all of the Torah, with a perfect and unblemished soul? He too, has to return to these exalted levels.

Teshuvah is best done straight after sinning, and not to wait for the Yamim Noraim. Besides, a person never knows how long he is going to live. However, it is particularly easy to do Teshuva during this time.

The process of Teshuva should take place in 3 phases:

1. Re-Establish a relationship with HaSh-m (= Rosh Hashana). Teshuva must be done to HaSh-m.
2. Strengthen ones overall Avodas HaSh-m.
3. Teshuva on specific aveiros.

Teshuva on specific aveiros has 5 primary components:

- a. Regret of the Past
- b. Separation from the Sin
- c. Commitment to the future
- d. Viduy
- e. Asking Mechila of ones fellow-Jew

The Past – Regret - *Charata al HaAvar:*

A person should not feel about his transgression: ‘It was good while it lasted, but now it is over.’ Rather, he should regret what he has done, both because the sin is despicable and because he has been ungrateful to G-d.

The Present – Separation from the Sin - *Prisha min HaChet:*

One should try to stop even thinking about the sin.

The Future – Commitment not to Repeat the Sin - *Kabala LeHaba*

Even if the person does not believe that he is really capable of sustaining this commitment fully, he should commit fully to this – for G-d will help him to go beyond his normal abilities. Should he make such a commitment and later revert to his

previous behavior, he still gets a full Mitzvah of Teshuva, provided that he sincerely intended to do Teshuva at the time. However, he is obliged to look deeper into himself, into the source of what weakness it was that allowed that sin to happen in the first place. Someone who says that he will sin in order to do Teshuva will not be allowed to do so.

In our day, we stress Kabala Lehaba more than Charata al Haavar.

Viduy

A person can do Teshuva in his thoughts and be considered a צדיק גמור. However, in order to have fulfilled the mitzvah properly, one needs also to say viduy. His verbal articulation makes ones much clearer.

On Yom Kippur, the custom is to say Viduy 6 times, beginning with Mincha on Erev Yom Kippur. Four of these are repeated by the Chazan and the community, making for a total of ten times.

Each person should add his own list within the formal Viduy or added to it.

Bein Adam Lechaveiro

If one wronged one's fellow-man, one must first gain his Mechila in order to gain the Kapara of Yom Kippur. The latter should be generous and forgive with a whole heart, as Jews are wont to do. If his friend won't forgive him he has to bring three people with him and attempt three more times (though he can make these further requests, on the spot, with the same witnesses). The sinner then becomes the aggrieved party.

There are other elements of Teshuva as well, but they do not prevent one doing a basic Teshuva:

Atonement – Kapara:

Kaparah comes after Teshuva, but does not prevent Teshuva from happening. Whereas Teshuvah provides immediate Kaparah for the lightest sins, others require the extra atonement of Yom Kippur. More serious sins require suffering. The full Kaparah for Chillul HaSh-m can only be achieved by death.

However, Tzedakah and general acts of kindness stave of the יסורין. If a person does many acts of Kiddush HaSh-m, this can atone for the act of Chillul HaSh-m. Similarly, a person who does many mitzvahs with a limb which has done a seemingly irreversible sin, like murder, can gain Kaparah in this way.

b. Prayer

Prayer is a component of the Teshuva process itself – we pray that G-d will have mercy on us, forgive us and give us atonement, thereby stopping the downward spiral of *aveira goreres aveira* and allow the positive things we have done to kick in, protect us and provide us with spiritual momentum. And, we pray that having done so, G-d will once again be pleased to have us as His children.

c. Bringing yourself to the point of Teshuva

Preparation for Teshuvah is achieved by the following things:

- a. Hakaras Hatov for all the good which HaSh-m has done for us. We ought to respond by doing what He wants from us (which is also for our good and therefore part of the chesed he does for us.)
- b. Teshuva inspired by learning the Torah, or by receiving rebuke from any significant other.
- c. Fear of punishment.
- d. Pain and suffering.

Teshuva during the Ten Days

Teshuva is best done as soon after the Cheit as possible, with every delay a serious wasted opportunity. Nevertheless, for those sins which we still have not done Teshuva on, it is easiest to do Teshuvah during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* and, in particular, on Yom Kippur itself.

Therefore, during this time, a person must make time to go through his life and see what needs to be corrected. He must take special note of things which are blurry, because those things are less likely to be corrected as well as things he did to his fellow man, because there is no Kapara on those things until you have made it up to that person. In general, this should be a time of greater investment in spirituality.

Erev Yom Kippur

Erev Yom Kippur is a happy time, for, having done Teshuvah we look forward to the final atonement of Yom Kippur. There is no tachanun and it is a Mitzvah to eat and drink. Whoever does so is considered to be doing something of the same value as fasting on Yom Kippur. For Mincha, we dress in Shabbos clothes and say Viduy, in case something happens to us and we don't get to say it later. We bless our children for the special holiness of Yom Kippur already flows over into Erev Yom HaKippur.

Yom Kippur

On Yom Kippur itself we wear white, which shows both humility and purity. We also put a white paroches on the Aaron HaKodesh. We completely remove ourselves from this world through the five Inuyim, approaching G-d like Angels.

There is a special Torah mitzvah to do Teshuva on Yom Kippur, and the day itself atones for many things. Therefore, it is not a day of mourning – we cry out of regret for our sins, but are simultaneously happy that we are in the process of correcting the situation.

סוכות

1. The Chag of Bitachon

What moves us to go to all this trouble of building the Sukkah and living in it for seven days is *הכרת הטוב*, a deep appreciation and gratitude to G-d of the myriads of things He did for us in the desert, and ever since, both as a nation and as individuals.

For Jews, gratitude is a deep obligation, and Sukkos is no different. Even venerable and aged Sages participate in joyously in the building, adding to their own honor by honoring G-d in this way.

However, there were many great Nisim for which we do not have a Chag: *מן*, *מרי*, *בארה של מרים*, *ענני הכבוד* or for the *מלחמת עמלק*. If Sukkas is a chag it is because the original historical event were linked to the very rhythm of the universe. Hence we see the idea of Sukka mentioned prior to the time of Klal Yisrael in the desert, and many times after all the way through to the post-messianic era. The historical event took place at this time because of the appropriate Kedusha which already existed and not the other way round. The historical event served to bring that kedusha into the world and actualize as a permanently accessible reality for all generations.

After Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur purifies us, our desire to connect to G-d is aroused anew. Sukkos provides the opportunity for this expression. Sukkos translates the spirituality and commitment we produced during the Yamim Noraim, into the permanent reality of our day to day lives. Yom Kippur is, after all, an artificial day – it is easy to be an Angel when we are totally removed from this world. But how do we sustain such a level – taking our material blessings of *חיים טובים* and channeling them into holiness. This is the opportunity of Sukkos. Sukkos consolidates all our holiness into some permanence by taking a nurturing Ark-like environment to allow for completion of a process.

The word *סוכה* means protection, as in *סכותה לראשי ביום נשק* ('מ"ח') – *a protection for my head on the day of arms*. After Yaakov escapes from Lavan, the Torah says *ויעקב נסע סוכותה* – and Yaakov traveled to Sukkot. Yaakov Avinu, through his arrangement with Lavan, had gained a lot of sheep which he took with him. In these sheep lay any holiness that may still have resided in Lavan's household, still in need of redemption - hence Yaakov makes Sukkos for the sheep. The Zohar tells us that this is a hint to the Jewish people who consolidate their Yom Kippur atonement by going to sit in Sukkos. The Sukka protects the Baal Teshuva from backsliding –it gives him the ongoing strength to be able to maintain his new standards. It is the answer to the mystery of how one stays the course, not only regarding one time Aveiros but also those that were so entrenched and addictive that the person no longer fully controlled his actions? Sukkos restores a person choice, gives him the power to stay the course, should he so commit. Sukkos is thus *ראשון להשבון עוונות* – the beginning of a new accountability after Yom Kippur wiped the slates clean.

Sukkos is the Chag of Bitachon and sitting in the Sukkah is referred to by the Zohar as sitting in the *דמהימנותא* – *צלא* – literally in the shadow of faith. We go out of our houses - at a time that we would normally be going inside - under His roof; we eat meals at His instruction - at a time when we have the most food, are happily secure and the least need of Him, (so it would seem) and we harness all of this materialism back to Him. For in the Sukkah, everything we do, all our eating and sleeping become

a part of His Mitzvah. We go right inside the Mitzvah, so to speak, and are surrounded by it (the Sukka). We read Koheles – in which the world's wisest man ever tells us that our future lies not with the materialism of this world – in this world everything is but a דירת עראי like the Sukkah - but with Him in the Next World.

Seven times does Shlomo HaMelech use the word *Hevel* in *Koheles*, for each one of the weekdays. The world without G-d is one big act of futility. The Sechach is the symbol of the transitoriness of this world. The world we live is too messy, too volatile, its pleasures too transitory for us to find haven, let alone to build futures. Our dreams and visions are but empty illusions. The only haven becomes the bosom of the Almighty – ופרוש עלינו סוכת שלימיק – This is the lesson of the Sukkah. But this דירת עראי must have secure walls. For the protection that comes from G-d (the sechach) provides us with permanence and stability.

To maintain our clarity we say Hoshanos every day of Sukkos – “save us”. Save us from a loss of clarity; save us from being drawn into a trance of action that will cause us to lose perspective as we did until Yom Kippur restored this to us.

Therefore, the festival is called Chag HaSukkos and not Chag Halulav, even though the Midrash counts the 4 species as 4 separate Mitzvos. Because it is the Sukkah and not the Lulav which protects our pure Yom Kippur vision.

Only after a relationship has these two elements of trust (Sukkos), built on respect (Yamim Naraim), can love blossom. This is Shmini Atzeres. At this level, the Sukkah - the protection – is no longer necessary.

Sukkah and Lulav are the only two Mitzvos where there is a specific prohibition of גזילה. For in general there is a moral imperative against theft and against doing a Mitzvah with stolen goods (מצוה הבאה בעבירה). But on Sukkos, it would totally contradict the trust we express that G-d is the source of all our security and well-being. All year round I should not steal; on Sukkos I should not want to steal. For I now see materialism as but a puff of smoke - hardly worth the object of my desires.

To steal for the material gain of the Sukkah is to throw away the entire lesson which the Sukkah provides us with, that G-d and not earthly goods provide our real wealth. Materialism is a source of great conflict between men. For materialism is limited – if I have it something, then you don't – and therefore I need to conquer, to steal, to plunder if I am to have this and not you.

The Sukkah by contrast, is intrinsically a uniting, peace-making force: ופרוש עלינו סוכת שלומיק. When I realize that my trust in G-d is my only real possession – and when you do too – then we no longer feel the tension of limited material supplies, and we can all live in peace and harmony. This is why we shake the 7 מינים, representing all of Klal Yisroel, on Sukkos. And this why the Sages envisage the Messianic era as a time when we will all sit under a giant Sukkah. The oneness of the Jewish people is all about revealing a higher oneness, גילוי יחוד, which, in turn, is the whole purpose of this world. So Sukkos is really about achieving the highest purposes for which we dedicate our lives.

We start with gratitude, extend this to trust and through this find peace and unity. This is a source of great joy. It is the joy of the freshness of the Baal Teshuva of Yom Kippur, it is the joy of not feeling we have to put ourselves first, aggressively project our personality and stand out with our own display of material aggrandizement; it is the joy of Simchas Beis Hashoeva, of lowering oneself to rejoice in the service of the grandest vision and belief of them all – the underlying Unity of G-d in all of creation.

2. 4 Minim

Immediately after Yom Kippur the Jews, instead of celebrating the fact that they have completed the judgment process, busy themselves with buying the four species and building the Sukkah. These four species take the beautiful ideas of Sukkos and turn them into tangible actions to help us integrate and consolidate all that we have committed ourselves to. Because integration is the key here, the beauty of the idea has to be tangibly expressed in the species themselves. Normally, the הִידוּר of the Mitzvah is something which goes beyond the Mitzvah – an extra dimension not strictly required for fulfillment of the Mitzvah. Not so with the four species – here the הִידוּר is a part of the Mitzvah itself.

The entire nation then turns out on Sukkos to shake these species and praise their King during Hallel. We take them again and cry, “save us, G-d”.

The four species together make one Mitzvah. The four species symbolize each one of our primary limbs and is therefore a symbol of our entire being. וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם – take all of yourselves – your entire potential and serve your G-d.

But, the four species are also a symbol of the different kinds of Jews in this world and therefore together they represent the entire Jewish people, united in on grand symphony of holiness, each one encouraging the other, each one providing a strength that compensates for the weakness of his neighbor. The Mitzvah is to tie these species together, to show that they are one (אֵיגוּר). For it is only when we unite with the entire Jewish people that any one of us can fulfill our own private potential. Only through and with the Jewish people can we feel a real closeness to G-d.

In the Hallel, we wave these four species in every direction (בְּעוֹנֵי) to show that this new resolve involves everything we have. Then we take the Lulav and walk around a Torah scroll (הַקְפוּת) to show that it is this Torah which will reveal to us this higher purpose.

But in the end, it is with the lowly Aravah that was say the Hoshanas on Hoshanah Rabah. The Aravah has neither taste nor smell – all it has to offer is its humble, bent shape – yet this is what saves us in the end. The Aravah is the shape of our mouths, for this is the real source of Jewish power – our ability to speak in words of prayer and Torah. We should never think that we could be saved without the lowly Arava, without every single last Jew.

While Moshe Rabbeinu represents the מוֹד and the דַּעַת of the Jewish people – the wise Torah-giver, Aharon represents the לֵב – the Service in the Temple, and the service in our heart.

Rosh Hashanah is בּוֹזְכוֹת מֹשֶׁה, representing the intellectual clarity of our new commitments and the new spiritual endowment of our ability to understand G-d’s Torah. This is followed by Yom Kippur, whose central element is Avodah, both the Avodah of the Temple and of Teshuva. Only the descendants of Aaron, the Cohen Gadol, could fulfill the Yom Kippur Avodah. After that comes Sukkos, which reflects a synthesis of both Moshe and Aharon. Since the עֲנֵנֵי הַכְּבוֹד were בּוֹזְכוֹת אֶהְרֹן, therefore the Sukkah is in the merit of Aharon. The Lulav, on the other hand, represents the דַּעַת of Moshe. Therefore, the Ari ZAL tell us that one should try and shake the Lulav in the Sukkah, to show the integration of these two ideas.

Learning Moshe’s Torah is like a prince that enters the palace of the King to take out His blueprint for the world and to study it together with Him. So too, the Sages liken the Lulav to a royal scepter, showing that we have found favor in the eyes

of the King on the judgment of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and are now being invited to spend time with Him.

1. SHMINI ATZERES – SIMCHAS HATORAH

Whereas Sukkos relates to the nations of the world, Shmini Atzeres reflects the unique relationship which G-d has with His people. G-d says to the Jews: “Stay with Me another day.” Gather together (the meaning of Atzeres) and rejoice in my Torah. For all of Sukkos, you prayed for all the nations of the world and brought 70 calves for each on of these nations. Now it is time to ask something for yourselves – to bring but one calf (unprecedented in all the festivals) for yourselves.

On Shmini Atzeres we move a level higher than Sukkos. The eighth day, above nature, relates to the pure levels of the Torah-energy which sustain us. We no longer need a physical Sukkah - the day itself is intrinsically a dimension of Sukkah, in the protection and sustenance that it represents. Nor do we need the ארבעה מינים to create and channel our Simcha – the day itself is one of pure dedication to G-d, needing no other reminders.

Sukkos tells us how to serve HaSh-m with all our material possessions – we have reaped our grain and we direct our gratitude for all our material possession and wealth to G-d. The joy of Shmini Atzeres is more purely spiritual – we rejoice in G-d’s Torah.

We can now achieve through our Simcha anything we failed to achieve through our awe and respect of the Yamim Noraim, and our trust on Sukkos. Shmini Atzeres – the day when we stop (עצרת מלשון עצור) and gather up all the holiness that began on Rosh HaShana.

This cycle – Yamim Noraim – Sukkos – Shmini Atzeres - is but one of two cycles which Shmini Atzeres comes to complete. The other cycle is the completion of the Torah and is reflected in a second name for the day, Simchas Torah. It is not the fact that we complete the Torah that leads to a Simchas Torah. Rather, it is the other way round. It is the joy of this love for G-d and His Torah, which lead the Sages to decreeing that the Torah should be finished and started on this day.

Our happiness is not so much on the completion of the Torah, for who can say that they truly learned the Torah with all its depth. Rather, we are rejoicing at the opportunity to study it anew.

Shmini Atzeres is the eighth day of Sukkos in a similar way to that Shavuos is like the eighth day of Pesach, and in fact Shavuos is also called Atzeres. On Shavuos we received the Torah, on Shmini Atzeres we complete the reading of the Torah and we start from the beginning again.

After the first Luchos were destroyed as a result of the Sin of the Golden Calf, Bnei Yisrael were forgiven on Yom Kippur and received Luchos Shniyos. This led to a new Simchas HaTorah, which the Geonim formalized as the Simchas HaTorah we have today, with its seven Hakafos. And so every year we celebrate the first Luchos on Shavuos and the second Luchos on Shmini Atzeres.

Before the Cheit, people were able to understand the Torah without Ameilos and anything they learned would never be forgotten. They were at such a high level that there was no need for a Torah she Baal Peh. After the Cheit, things were no longer so clear. There was now a need for a Torah she Baal Peh, which involved great effort, Ameilos beTorah.

Luchos Shniyos were now fashioned by man, not G-d, as was the case with the Luchos Rishonos. Luchos Shniyos, reflecting the lower spiritual level of the nation, were given be’tznius, with the stillness of nature. For this reason Simchas Torah is not even mentioned in the Torah. (only Shmini Atzeres is mentioned.)

The end of the Torah reflects all of this from the perspective of Moshe Rabbeinu. The very last verse of the Torah praises Moshe for breaking the Luchos. On the surface this seems like a strange way of ending the Torah. Moshe understood that only by breaking the Luchos could the Jews receive the Torah. This is why this last verse is now a part of the Torah reading for Simchas HaTorah.

The intention is not to remind us of the Cheit HaEigel. Rather, the intention is to communicate the vital harmony between the Torah and its recipients, the Jewish people, a harmony that was achieved finally through the second tablets.

On this day we renew our covenant with the Torah. At Sinai, the first Luchos were given together with convulsions of nature, with fear and with trembling. But we renew our covenant with song and dancing. Similarly, on Sukkos we go around the Bimah seven times (one hakafah per day), to achieve protection from sins – סוּר מִרַע – On Simchas Torah we again do 7 hakafos, this time to achieve, in love and joy, the active doing of G-d's Will – עֲשֵׂה טוֹב.

Shavuos is like a wedding ceremony when we are happy but also full of fear and trembling, not really sure how our relationship with the Torah would work out. But six months later, we began to see the real beauty and depth of the Torah. No longer fearful of what we had, we were ready for a second celebration, one of pure joy.

Both celebrations, Shavuos out of awe and Simchas Torah out of joy, reflect the Bris, the commitment we made to G-d and His Torah. They approach that commitment from different starting points within ourselves. And therein lies the reason why Shavuos requires seven weeks after Pesach whereas Simchas HaTorah comes immediately after Sukkos. This is the difference between the awe of Shavuos and the love of Simchas HaTorah, the difference between the freeing of the body on Shavuos and the freeing of the soul on Shmini Atzeres. Kabbalas HaTorah is not complete until there are both dimensions of awe and love.

The love for G-d and His Torah on Simchas Torah not only ties into the Shavuos- Shmini Atzeres cycle, but also the Yamim Noraim- Sukkos-Shmini Atzeres cycle. Hoshana Rabah, the last day of Sukkos is also the final opportunity to do Teshuva. The Teshuva that gets done on this day is through joy, and is therefore a Teshuva Me'Ahava. The final decree of the Yamim Noraim only gets implemented on Shmini Atzeres and can therefore be changed by a final Teshuva on this very day. Since we are overflowing with love through this day already, it is relatively easy to achieve this Teshuva, what would normally be considered a very high level.

What emerges from all of this is an exceptional clarity, a clarity that must guide us through the long winter months, when there are relatively few festivals. We see this clarity expressed in the first words we say before beginning the hakafos –

אתה הראת לדעת כי ד' הוא האלוקים אין עוד מלבדו

We state the vision that we will actualize in the Messianic era, when we will realize that the revelation of G-d's Oneness – גילוי ייחודו – אין עוד מלבדו. This theme repeats itself in the songs we sing during the hakafos.

2. Sukkos-Shmini Atzeres: From Universalism to Particularism

On Sukkos, we bring the 70 Parei HaChag for all the nations of the world. The seven days of Sukkos reflect the seventy nations, a universalistic idea. But we end with Shmini Atzeres, dedicated only to the Jewish nation.

The Jew begins a journey on Sukkos which leads him to grow daily until the pure spirituality of Shmini Atzeres. He is now above the normal spiritual level of this world, not subject to any of its negative influences, and is left on a spiritual stage of his own.

Sukkos is the Chag of Bitachon – of moving out into Sukkos where we have but flimsy branches as our roofs, for our real roof is the trust we have in G-d. The first result of this is Simcha, always the natural consequence of feeling secure that, no matter what, HaSh-m is doing everything in our best interest.

The second is unity. The 4 minim represent the parts of our body, the different types of people in Klal Yisroel. A Sukkah over 20 Amos high, is not kosher. A Sukkah, which is so large that it holds the whole Jewish nation, is kosher. In Messianic times we will all sit under one large Sukkah of the Livyatan.

The corollary of unity is peace. The **ענני הכבוד** are **בזכות אהרון**; and Aaron was an **אווהב שלום ורודף שלום**.

Unity and peace, in turn flow from the first idea, the idea of Sukkah being a Chag of Bitachon. The Sukkah tells us that this world is **הבל הבלים** and that the only desires worth having are spiritual. Bitachon - that I have everything that I need. We no longer feel we are in competition with our fellow-man for limited material resources. Spiritual fullness is such that when I share it, I still have what I have given, and I even gain more by the giving. All of this allows me to stop competing and start sharing, which leads to feelings of love, peace and unity. Hence **הפורש סוכת שלום עלינו**.

The unity theme of Sukkos extends even to non-Jews, for even they can relate to the nothingness of the material world. Zecharia, in fact, talks of how, in the Messianic era, the non-Jews will come to Jerusalem every year to celebrate Sukkos and will be punished by G-d with drought for not doing so. The non-Jews are capable of appreciating the **פרי החג** are the source of their blessing and protection from Yesurin for the coming year. Hence during the time of King Solomon, many were accustomed to come to the Temple during Sukkos. King Solomon instituted the custom to read Koheles to them.

This makes Sukkos the international chag: The Jews sacrifice a cow for each nation, giving a Kaparah to each one and showing our concern that they too should have the means to fulfill their potential in G-d's great plan. At the moment of our greatest Simcha, **זמן שמחתינו**, we turn outwards and include the entire world in our desire for blessing.

This is in contrast to Shmini Atzeres, the eighth day, a level with which the nations have no spiritual relationship.

This does not mean that the non-Jews can relate to Sukkos at the same level as we can. In fact, the *Ananei haKavod* of Sukkos separate us and elevate us from the world. The actual **סוכת** represents the **נגלה**, whereas the **ענני הכבוד** represent the **סוכת**. The **גרים** can only relate to the **נגלה** but not to the **נסתר**.

The Sages tell us that, in the future time the non-Jews will claim that, had they been given the Torah, they would have kept it like the Jews did. They therefore

want the same reward that the Jews would be granted. G-d therefore gives them the Mitzvah of Sukkah to prove their intentions. For Sukkah is both a Mitzvah that reflects the entire Torah in its underlying principles, intentions and achievements, and yet it is quite accessible – even the greatest pauper can find a few hefker branches to place over 10 tefachim and fulfill this Mitzvah. G-d then makes the sun shine so that it is unbearably hot, exempting the non-Jews from the Mitzvah.

The non-Jews will then leave the Sukkah, kicking the door on their way out, showing that there is something conditional about serving G-d. If G-d is perceived as a good G-d, offering them an easy Mitzvah in return for reward, then they will serve Him. But, if His kindness will not be clear or at the first time they are faced with some kind of test, then they will no longer commit themselves to accepting His yoke. This is the “where was G-d during ...” syndrome, the idea that everything must have a happy ending right now, in front of our eyes, or else. Jewish greatness is reflected in our unconditional commitment to doing G-d’s Will. And, even when there are good reasons to be exempt for a Mitzvah, we continue to seek ways to fulfill it. For we see Mitzvos not as a way of gaining reward, but rather of getting close to G-d. And hence Sukkah was chosen as the test Mitzvah – for it reflects going out and sitting in G-d’s shade.

The Sukkah is like the Ark – providing sanctuary and therefore spiritual satisfaction to those who are worthy of it. Hence the Jews, who are in essential harmony with this Mitzvah, feel an acute pain when forced to leave it. For the non-Jews, however, the Sukkah had no special significance other than proving to G-d that they are deserving of reward. The moment the Mitzvah was not necessary, it was just a nuisance – a structure worthy of being kicked.

So, certainly, every human on this earth can relate to the basic ideas of Sukkos – that material pursuit provides a poor mechanism for achieving happiness; that spirituality is a much safer and nobler goal. But the extension of this idea – of בטול היש – is one that only the Jews can tune into to.

It is only if בטול היש can be achieved on Sukkos that the higher level of Shmini Atzeres on the eighth day can be achieved.