

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS SHOFTIM**

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS SHOFTIM

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS SHOFTIM**

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Ki Sisa* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Shoftim discusses all the aspects of leadership that will be reestablished with the final Redemption. It will include the Sanhedrin-Judiciary, prophets, Kohanim doing the service in the third Bais Hamikdash, and Moshiach-the monarchy.

ESSAY ONE

OFFICERS OR ADVISORS?

Officers are needed to enforce the law.

Counsellors are needed to make everyone receptive to the
law.

ESSAY ONE

OFFICERS OR ADVISORS?

Appoint Judges and Officers

This week's Torah portion *Shoftim* begins with the commandment to "appoint judges and officers in all of your cities.."

A judge, in Jewish law, is one whose task it is to render decisions in areas where there is conflict or uncertainty as to what the law should be. In addition a judge in Jewish tradition is charged with the responsibility to teach the law to others and motivate the people to abide by the law. An officer, on the other hand, is charged with the responsibility to enforce the law. In some cases he might have to resort to force and even corporal punishment to compel the defendant to comply with the judge's decision.

Restoring Judges and Counselors

In the prophetic book of Isaiah (1:26) a reference is made to the future Messianic Age at which time:

"I shall restore your judges as in former times and your counselors as of yore."

This phrase is echoed in our most important daily prayer, the Amidah, where we ask of G-d:

"Restore our judges as in former times, and our counselors as of yore."

It does not say that G-d will restore the Judges and the officers. Are not these two functions intertwined? One must have a judge to teach, instruct and render legal decisions and the officer is needed to make sure the laws are implemented and the criminals punished. Why then, in the prophetic description of the future, does Isaiah omit the "officers?"

Difference between Past and Future

The Rebbe explains that the answer lies in the fundamental difference between the past and the future. From the beginning of time until the present, the world is anything but perfect. The mere statement that the law says one must do such and such is insufficient to guarantee compliance. Judges cannot carry out their responsibilities effectively without the aid of the officers who see to it that the laws are observed.

In the future Messianic Era, however, the world will be "filled with the knowledge of G-d." This means that we will be imbued with a sense of purpose and direction at all

times. The lack of awareness, insensitivity and indifference which is responsible for all of our indiscretions now will no longer be the norm. When a judge will issue a directive based on the Torah, there will be no need for an officer, a policeman, to enforce the law, because there will be no desire to flout the law.

Judges and Counsellors: General and Specific

There will, however, be a need for advisors and counselors.

The Rebbe explains that the judge issues directives from “on high.” Their “job” requires that they stand aloof. Advisors, on the other hand, are like the prophets who convey G-d’s words to the people on their level.

Perhaps, one may add that the division of roles between a judge and a counsellor is similar to the function of Moshiach and the teachers of Torah in the future.

On the one hand, the prophet tells us that there will be no need for teachers, for everyone will know G-d.

On the other hand, it is hard to imagine that Moses and the simplest Jew will be on the same level of understanding. Surely, there will be different levels which calls for the more knowledgeable to tutor the less informed. Teachers will surely still exist.

The answer is based on the Hassidic teaching that Moshiach’s transmission of Torah will be visual wherein

everybody sees the entire picture simultaneously. No one sees more or less than the other. Everyone gets a panoramic view of the totality of Moshiach's teachings.

It may be compared to a piece of art. Everyone who gazes at it, from the artist himself to the average person who has not appreciation for art, sees the same painting.

Yet, not everyone could digest and internalize the information equally. Not everyone could appreciate equally what they have seen.

To bring the information that one had seen to their level of understanding and appreciation there will still be a need for teachers.

The same is true about the judges and counsellors. While the judges will render decisions that will be addressed to everyone equally, the counsellors will take the directives and make them understandable to each and every individual according to his or her capacity.

Now is the Time for Sensitization

The Rebbe has declared that we are now standing on the threshold of the age of Redemption. In spite of the existence of evil today, we should attempt to prepare ourselves for the time when there will be no need for the officers, by enhancing our sensitivity to spiritual matters.

One of the ways to accomplish this heightened sense of sensitivity is to study the Torah, particularly the more spiritual and mystical dimension of Torah. This has the capacity to reorient us from the material to the spiritual.

ESSAY TWO

WHAT ARE EYES AND EARS FOR?

If we would realize the power of our five senses (“gates”) we would posts guards to secure them all the time.

Guarded human “gates” would cause all the world’s ills to disappear.

ESSAY TWO

WHAT ARE EYES AND EARS FOR?

Posting Guards at the Gates

This week's parsha is about Jewish leadership. It begins with the judiciary, and continues with the monarchy, priesthood and the institution of prophecy. Each "branch off government," discussed in this parsha, was a co-equal partner in leading, shaping and molding the Jewish nation.

In light of the emphasis on leadership in this week's parsha, and in light of the dearth of good leaders in modern society, it is appropriate to focus on what the Jewish people look for in a leader. It is also important for us to look for the qualities of leadership and incorporate them into our own lives.

We can gain some insight into this matter when we examine the introductory verse of this parsha:

"Judges and officers you shall appoint in all of your gates, which G-d your G-d has given you, tribe by tribe, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment."

What does the Torah mean when it says “gates?” The simple explanation is that it refers to cities that were usually surrounded by walls and had gates at their entrance.

The question is why doesn't the Torah simply state, “in all of your cities?” What symbolism is there in the term “gates?”

Personal Gates

One classic answer is that it also refers, metaphorically, to each and every one of us. We must “appoint” judges at the seven entry points of our bodies. We must guard our two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and our mouth that only the proper things enter into and come from them. It is crucial that we filter out the undesirable stimuli from our system.

We can take this message a step further. A good leader is one who has mastered this feat and has absorbed only the positive influences so that his decisions are not tainted by ideas and mindsets that are alien and anathema to Jewish values.

How does one know whether an idea that asks to be allowed entry into our consciousness if it is kosher? To be sure, there are obvious thoughts that any sane and civilized person knows that they should be rejected without an argument. But there are so many grey areas that are extremely difficult to ascertain as to whether they come

from the realm of holiness or perhaps from the “other side.”

This is where true leadership can be tested. While the appointment of “judges” is a necessity for all, it is even more crucial for a leader.

Seeing the Future

A leader needs vision to see the consequences of decisions and actions taken today. The Talmud (Tractate *Tamid*) records how Alexander the Great asked of the Sages, “who is a wise person?” Their response was, “One who sees the future.” The Talmud (*Bava Basra*) also states that a wise person is preferable to a prophet. Both see into the future; the former by using his own capabilities with the assistance of Divine inspiration, the latter by Divine revelation. The ability to see the future utilizing one’s own efforts is a hallmark of leadership.

Seeing With Both Eyes

A leader—and indeed every person, but particularly a leader—must have two eyes.

This need for two eyes can be understood in at least three ways:

First, while a leader needs to see into the future, he also has to have the other eye focused on the here and now.

It is said that Korach—the rebel who fought Moses and Aaron and sought to become the leader in their place—was “deceived by his own eye.” While he had one healthy eye, which enabled him to look into the future to see the glorious destiny of his descendent, the prophet Samuel, he could not see in front of his face and realize how his rebellious actions were ill conceived and catastrophic.

Second, a leader has to perceive G-d’s greatness with one eye, and realize his own insignificance with the other eye. It does not suffice to have a sophisticated spiritual view. It must be balanced by a healthy dose of humility.

It is said of Bilam, the heathen prophet, that he was blind in one eye. While he was endowed with the power of prophecy to have a higher spiritual consciousness and see G-d’s greatness, he was incapable of seeing his own limits. He was completely blind to his own flaws and lowly character.

Third, there are two different ways to look at the things around us. As the Rebbe Rashab (the fifth leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement) told his young child (who later succeeded him as the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe): “look at another Jew with your right eye and use your left eye to view a candy.” In other words, see the positive in others and use your critical eye primarily for worldly pleasures.

Put yet in other terms: We must utilize our power of penetrating analysis to see beneath the surface to see the

hidden qualities of the other person, while viewing the material aspects of life with a superficial eye.

Hearing the Inaudible

The same can be said for hearing.

A good leader hears more than what is audible to others.

A good leader hears the pain and true emotions of others. He hears much more than the story the audible words tell.

In addition, the Talmud tells us that every day there are heavenly voices that emerge from Mount Sinai that are intended to inspire and uplift us. Yet only the most spiritually sophisticated hear these celestial messages.

The ideal Jewish leader hears the voice that gives direction for his particular generation.

While the Torah teachings never change, the focus and emphasis may and often do change from one period to another. For example, in certain times the need for Tzedakah might be greater than in other times. The sensitive leader picks up the voice that comes from Sinai that informs him what message he should transmit to the Jewish people and indeed to the entire world at that particular time.

Indeed, every Jew, the Baal Shem Tov taught, hears the voices from Sinai subliminally. We must learn how to listen for these Divine messages that are embedded in our

subconscious and that inspire us to aspire to greater fidelity to the teachings of Sinai.

Smelling Righteousness

The sense of smell is even more crucial and sensitive for a good leader. The Talmud, based on a verse in Isaiah (Chapter Eleven), describes Moshiach—the ultimate Jewish leader—as one who can “smell righteousness.” This talent will render him the ultimate judge.

Commentators explain that the sense of smell is more difficult to deceive. While one can imagine seeing or hearing something that isn't there, it is harder to imagine smelling something that doesn't exist. The sense of smell is less susceptible to deception.

Applying the sense of smell to Moshiach then indicates that Moshiach will have an intuitive and innate sense of right and wrong. No one will be able to pull the proverbial wool over his eyes.

Guarding Our Mouths

The “guard” that one must place at the mouth—particularly the mouth of a leader—is to ensure that nothing untoward is uttered. The power of speech is phenomenal. And it must be protected.

More importantly a leader (and every Jew must aspire to leadership) must guard his mouth so that it **does not** remain closed when it should be open. He should not play safe and be silent for fear that he might slip and say something improper. The mouth—especially of a leader—must always be open to teach and guide others. The leader leads primarily by the power of speech.

It is also crucial to guard what comes into the mouth. Ingesting kosher food, our Sages teach, has the power to refine one's sensibilities and speech.

The challenge to safeguard all of our portals is easier said than done. How does a person know how to focus their vision, hone their sense of hearing, smell and speech so that we are governed properly? What gave the great leaders of the past—and Moshiach in the future—the power to transform the world through their leadership?

Seeing and Hearing Yourself or Seeing and Hearing G-d?

One answer was provided for by the Chassidic Master, Rabbi Meir of Zhitomer, (known for his work, *Or Hameir*), based on a verse in the Book of Psalms:

“They have eyes but they cannot see; they have ears but cannot hear; they have a nose and cannot smell.”

He retranslates the words “They have eyes...” as “their eyes are **for themselves**, therefore they cannot see; they have

ears **for themselves**, therefore they cannot hear; their nose is **for themselves** and therefore they cannot smell.”

When all of our senses are directed to enhance our own selfish interests, they lose their ability to connect us to reality. All of our senses when they are tainted with self-centeredness provide us with a warped sense of reality.

When, however, we seek to see, hear etc. things from G-d's perspective, our senses then become sharp and they do not give us a false reading as to what is going on. We see the Divine and good in everything and everyone; we hear the sounds of Sinai and we develop an intuitive sense of right and wrong.

These are the characteristics of Moshiach, the ultimate leader. But they also pose a challenge for all of us to change the focus of our lives. By doing so we reveal the spark of Moshiach within us, which, in the aggregate will turn into a major conflagration, that will burn the remnants of *Galus* and empower Moshiach to unleash all his G-d given abilities to take us out of exile and usher in the final Redemption, at which time the blind will see and the deaf will hear. May this be imminently!

ESSAY THREE

JUSTICE OF THE FUTURE

There are two forms of justice: relative and ideal.
Even in the time of exile, we must endeavor to anticipate
and incorporate ultimate Messianic justice

ESSAY THREE

JUSTICE OF THE FUTURE

Repetition

In its admonition to judges to judge with integrity, the Torah, in the beginning of this week's parsha, states: "Righteousness (*Tzedek*), righteousness (*tzedek*) shall you pursue, so that you will live and possess the Land that G-d, your G-d, gives you."

The juxtaposition of righteous judgment with possession of the land will be better understood in light of an analysis of the nature of true justice, which itself emerges from an understanding of why the Torah repeats the word *tzedek*.

Much has been written about the Torah's repetition of the word righteousness.

One Tier Justice

According to Rashi this admonition is addressed to litigants rather than to judges and interprets this to mean that although one may go to any competent court, the litigants must make an effort to take their dispute to a court of the highest caliber. According to this approach, the repetition

of the word serves to enhance the degree of righteousness one must pursue.

An important lesson can be derived from this interpretation. It is well understood that every Mitzvah of the Torah can be performed one of two levels. One can fulfill the basic requirements of the Mitzvah or one can enhance and embellish the same Mitzvah. In Jewish legal parlance the second level is referred to as *hiddur* Mitzvah – the beautification of the Mitzvah.

We are given the discretion to decide whether we are ready to proceed to the second tier. It is certainly desirable and praiseworthy to continually grow in one's observance. However, the essential thing is to follow the basic and minimum requirements. One who does so can be considered a righteous person. One who goes to the next tier is given an even more honorific title: "*chosid*."

However, with respect to judgment there is only one tier. It is the pursuit of unadulterated and unmitigated righteousness. If that means going to a more qualified panel of judges, then so be it. Pursuing the highest standards of justice is neither optional nor a moral luxury!

The End Does *Not* Justify the Means

The Chassidic master, Rabbi Simcha Bunim of P'shischa interpreted the repetition of righteousness in another, but related, fashion:

Even when you pursue righteousness, you must do so with righteousness. One may not apply the misguided and corrupt adage, “the end justifies the means” to the pursuit of justice.

Here too, the idea of unadulterated and uncompromising justice is underscored. In Rashi’s interpretation, the emphasis is on the integrity of the judges. In the Chassidic approach the focus is on the integrity of the judgment.

Allusion to the Future Redemption

The Chassidic work, *Igra d’Kalah*, interprets the repetition of the word righteousness as an allusion to a Midrashic comment concerning five instances in which the Torah repeats a letter/word, all of which relate to a form of liberation.

(These five letters are the only letters in the Hebrew alphabet which have two forms; the regular form and when they are placed at the end of a word.)

The first is the expression “*Lech Lecha*—Go for yourself” (where the letter *chof* is repeated). In this verse, G-d instructs Abraham to leave his home and travel to a new destination. With this repetitive expression, G-d liberated Abraham from the constraints of his birth place and homeland and brought him to the Promised Land of Israel.

The second instance is a repetition of the letter *mem*, addressed to Isaac when G-d saved him from the hands of the Philistines.

The third is the repetition of the letter *nun*, which G-d used in saving Jacob from the hands of his brother, Esau.

The fourth instance of this pattern of repetition is the double expression "*pakod pokaditi*-I have remembered." (Here the Hebrew letter *pei* is repeated), This double expression contains G-d's promise to redeem the Jews from Egyptian bondage.

The fifth is the repetition of the letter *tzadik*-righteous (cognate to the word *tzedek*) in the verse "Behold, the days come, says G-d, that I will raise unto David a righteous shoot (*tzemach tzadik*), and he shall reign as king and prosper, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (Jeremiah 23:5)

This verse repeats the letter *tzadik* and relates it to the promise of the future Redemption through the **righteous** Moshiach.

This verse affirms the general principle established by the Torah in many places that the Messianic Age will be characterized as the ultimate age of righteousness. The prophet Isaiah declares: "Zion will be redeemed through justice and those who return to her through righteousness."

Here too, in the verse "Righteousness (*Tzedek*), righteousness (*tzedek*) shall you pursue," *Igra d'kalah* notes,

the repetition of the word *tzedek* is meant to invoke Moshiach, who is described in the foregoing verse, as well as in many other verses, as the symbol of justice and righteousness.

Building on the above, we can conclude that Messianic justice and righteousness is one of the hallmarks of the Messianic Age and, indeed, describes the very identity and qualifications of Moshiach.

What is it about Moshiach and the Messianic Age that is so closely connected to righteousness?

Messianic Justice

We live in a world beset with injustice. Even the justice systems of the most morally advanced societies are plagued by corruption and injustice. What will distinguish Moshiach's form of justice? And how can we obtain real justice today in the anticipation of and preparation for the Messianic Age?

The answer is provided in the Biblical book of Isaiah (11:3):

“He will be imbued with a spirit of fear of G-d and will not need to judge by the sight of his eyes nor decide by the hearing of his ears.”

The phrase “*V'hericho*-He will be imbued with a **spirit**- of fear of G-d” is translated alternatively by the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 93b) and many Bible commentators as “He will

be imbued with the sense of smell.” The Talmud relates that Bar Cochba was rejected as the Moshiach because he could not “smell and judge;” he could not “smell” righteousness. The real Moshiach who possesses this keen olfactory capability, by contrast, will “sniff” out righteousness and mete out justice accordingly. He will not have to rely on eyewitness or convincing arguments.

Moshiach’s sense of justice will be impeccable, leaving no room for perversion of justice or even a judgment rendered in error.

Pre-Messianic Justice

The salient difference between life today and life in the Messianic Age is the difference between virtual and real, relative and absolute.

When we see an event we may be convinced of its veracity but then again our eyes can fool us. Two eyewitnesses may have conflicting views of what they saw. Certainly when it comes to compelling logic, two people will frequently disagree about what is logical and reasonable. In the pre-Messianic Age, particularly in this period of exile, we try our best to approximate what is right by pursuing the highest standards of justice available within the constraints of exile.

We accomplish this by going to the judges who are, minimally, knowledgeable of Torah law, and guided by the

“fear of G-d.” In this context, the Hebrew word *yirah* used for fear implies a sophisticated awareness of G-d that engenders a sense of awe and reverence for Him.

A judge who is so inspired will be given Divine assistance in arriving at the truth, because his attachment to G-d allows him to tap into the higher level of consciousness that will occasion the Messianic Age.

The above is not just relevant for a judge. It relates to every person because all of our interpersonal relationships involve either seeking justice from others or acting as their judges. We are all judges at one point or another.

The only way we can be confident that our judgment is true and righteous is by pursuing absolute and real justice; by seeking to connect to the Source of justice and righteousness, the one that will punctuate the Messianic Era.

A Novel Translation Emerges

Based on the foregoing premise, we can provide a novel translation to the words, “Righteousness (*Tzedek*), righteousness (*tzedek*) shall you pursue.”

The reason the Torah repeats the word *tzedek* we may suggest is to indicate that there are two dimensions of justice: pre-Messianic and post-Messianic. By placing both modes of righteousness together it underscores the fact that the former depends on the latter.

The only way our judgments can be righteous today is to instill them with the future dimension of justice.

Thus, the Torah's admonition to both litigants and judges is to pursue righteousness (*tzedek*) with the intention of tapping in to the higher, future, dimension of Divine righteousness (*tzedek*).

Conversely, the two mentions of righteousness informs us that the future state of justice depends on the way we prepare for it.

Connection to the Land

We can now understand the juxtaposition of righteous judgment with possession of the land in our verse: Rather than viewing the possession of the land as a reward for righteousness it is also a rationale for it. The Torah is, in effect, telling us that when we integrate the "inheritance of the land", i.e., the dynamic of justice of the future Messianic Age when we will fully inherit the land, we then have some hope of attaining a modicum of true righteousness and justice even today in these last moments of exile.

ESSAY FOUR

THE CHALLENGE OF INTELLECTUALISM

Intellect is a double-edged sword.

It is true, “a mind is a terrible thing to waste.”

**Even worse is to waste our minds on rationalizing our
behavior.**

ESSAY FOUR

THE CHALLENGE OF INTELLECTUALISM

Monarchy and the Judiciary

This week's parsha addresses the Jewish system of governance. The parsha commences with the institution of the judiciary and subsequently discusses the role of the monarchy.

When we compare the way the Torah relates to these two branches of government we can detect an apparent inconsistency.

With respect to the laws that govern the king's life, the Torah admonishes him to not take too many wives, amass too much gold and silver and also not acquire too many horses. The reason given for the restriction against multiple wives the Torah states is "so his heart will not be led astray."

Our Talmudic Sages tell us that King Solomon violated this restriction against many wives with the rationale that the Torah's reason for this prohibition did not apply to him. He was so confident of the strength of his character and faith that he believed that he was convinced that he was an

exception to the general rule; he would be permitted to take many wives.

According to the Talmud, G-d did not therefore provide reasons for most of the commandments because the few areas where He did provide the reason for the commandment, it “backfired”; Solomon maintained that the law did not apply to him precisely because of the reason given in the Torah.

Why Give Reason for Not taking Bribes

Commentators ask, why then does the Torah provide a reason for the prohibition for a judge to take a bribe.

In the beginning of this week’s parsha the Torah prohibits taking a bribe with the rationale:

“For it blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.”

Why did G-d give the reason for bribery? Isn’t giving reasons a recipe for some to take exception to the law, as did Solomon? Wouldn’t that give some judge the pretext to take a bribe thinking that he would not be adversely affected by it?

What distinguishes Solomon’s taking advantage of the reason to justify his own violation of the law from the potential for the judge to rationalize accepting a bribe by saying that the reason does not apply to him?

King and Judge Fundamentally Different

Upon closer examination we can detect a fundamental difference between the two situations of the king and the judge:

King Solomon believed that he was above the law because he felt the law was directed to other monarchs who were not endowed with his heightened spiritual sensitivity. A king of that caliber might very well be adversely influenced by his many wives.

Solomon therefore made the following calculation: He, the wisest of all people, endowed with special G-dly awareness and powers, head and shoulders above the level of virtually all the other Jewish leaders of all times certainly did not have to entertain the possibility of succumbing to the pressures brought to bear by his many wives and the interests they represented.

The more spiritually sophisticated one is, logic dictates, the less he will be unduly swayed by negative influences. In effect, giving the reason for the command against a king taking many wives was the stumbling block that led to its violation.

The Smarter, the More Vulnerable

By contrast, a judge who thinks he is so spiritually and intellectually advanced is far more vulnerable than the simple judge in terms of allowing a bribe to influence him.

A person who is relatively simple will not be as influenced by the bribe because his mind is not as capable of intellectual manipulation as the more intellectually astute judge. The greater the mind, the greater the opportunity to distort, obfuscate, and pervert justice.

This is essentially what the Torah means when it says that bribery will “blind the eyes of the wise.” The wise can see things from so many different angles and nuances that even the slightest inordinate amount of pressure that comes from the bribe can make a subtle change in the mindset of the judge. Those who are not as wise will not be as blinded because they essentially lack the ability to split hairs and cleverly manipulate the mind.

This might be analogous to a slight misstep in a surgical process that involves a finger as compared with a similar error in brain surgery. The former will cause pain; the latter will likely prove catastrophic.

Another analogy: If a car were to veer a few inches off course going 20 miles per hour, it would make an infinitely less significant difference than a similar deviation off course of a rocket ship speeding at 25,000 miles per hour through space!

Thus, the Torah did not have to worry that the reason given for not accepting a bribe might be used by the judge to rationalize his acceptance of a bribe. He would be hard pressed to employ the argument that he is above that law because he is so smart; on the contrary, it is precisely because he is so brilliant that he is much more likely to dangerously veer off course. And while Solomon's rationalization had merit—that he was so inspired that no one could entice him away from the right path—no intelligent judge can use his higher level of wisdom as a justification to take a bribe, for the wiser one is the greater the potential for perversion and the miscarriage of justice.

Beware of the Elite!

The obvious lesson from this analysis is the danger that exists with the intellectual elite.

The damage of intellectuals going off course is far more serious than for those who are of an inferior intellectual station in life.

In Nazi Germany, for example, it was the intellectuals that led the unprecedented annihilation of Jews.

(I chose not to use the word Genocide, because this word has been so cheapened and made devoid of meaning. When Israel does something in its own self-defense, many of its critics—among them mass murderers—will charge Israel

with Genocide, with the tacit acquiescence of the international community.)

Indeed, in most societies, the misguided intellectuals were the ones who posed the greatest threat to society. The intellectuals provide the grist for the mill of the ignorant masses.

Squaring this with Judaism's Emphasis on Learning

One could possibly take this as a broadside against intellectuals, which, obviously goes counter to Judaism's obsession with learning and knowledge.

In truth, there is no contradiction. Every person has to know his or her strengths and weaknesses, for the reality is that a weakness is actually a challenge. For example, a rich person's challenge is to be honest in his business dealings and to show compassion for those who are needy. The challenge of the poor is not to envy the rich or try to justify petty larceny because of their poverty.

The brilliant judge's challenge is to not allow himself the "luxury" of even the slightest miscarriage of justice, which can generate a ripple effect that can cause irreparable harm.

By all means, the Torah commands us to study and grow intellectually and then harness that knowledge to teach, judge and lead. But, one must also know the pitfalls and challenges that lie in one's path of intellectual growth.

We all need to employ our most advanced intellectual faculties in the service of G-d and humanity (which, of course, is also the service of G-d). We must also use our intellect to judge ourselves—especially in this month of Elul, the month of introspection in preparation for the New Year—and evaluate our behavior.

However, we must be very careful not to allow our self-love to engage in mental gymnastics that can convince us that our vices are virtues and that will prevent us from having an honest self-evaluation.

Expansion of the Land of Israel

The challenge posed by the intellect is exemplified by the words of our Sages that in the Messianic Age the Land of Israel will expand to include three other areas that were originally promised to Abraham. However, when Joshua conquered the Land of Israel he only conquered the land occupied by the Seven Canaanite nations; leaving the remaining three for Moshiach to incorporate into Israel.

In Chassidic thought, the seven nations represent the seven emotional faculties we possess, and the three yet unconquered provinces allude to the three intellectual faculties of our soul.

This implies that while we presently have a handle on the emotional side of our lives—we have a way to ensure that our emotive powers are in check—the ultimate challenge

that we have to wait for the Messianic Age to meet is the conquest and refinement of the intellectual sphere.

We must however prepare for that goal. We have to learn to think straight and not allow any political or social pressures to compromise our intellect. To aid us in this process is the study of Torah—particularly the parts of Torah that deal with the world in an age of Redemption—that will keep our intellect from veering off course.

ESSAY FIVE

CHANUKAH IN THE SUMMER

Rebellion against authority is embedded in our soul's genes.

Don't try to stifle it.

Channel it to tear down the walls of exile!

ESSAY FIVE

CHANUKAH IN THE SUMMER

Right and Left

The Torah, our Sages tell us, is the blueprint of creation. Therefore everything that exists can be found hinted at in the Torah. Even events that transpired after the Torah was written—or will transpire in the future—are all alluded to in some fashion in the Torah. In some cases the hint is glaring while in other cases one must probe to find it.

The story of Chanukah has been “discovered” in this week’s parsha of Shoftim. Chanukah, we know, occurred in the days of the Second Temple, hundreds of years after the last Biblical book was completed.

In the beginning of the parsha the Torah addresses the issue of judicial authority. After commanding us to appoint judges and officers, we are told,

“you must obey the words that they will tell you... You should carefully obey everything they instruct you. You should act in accordance with the teachings that they instruct you and according to the judgments they issue to you. You must not

divert from the words they tell you, either to the right or left.”

When the Talmud discusses the text of the blessing we recite when lighting the Chanukah candles it raises the question: How can we recite the words “Blessed are You, G-d our G-d, who has sanctified us with His commandments and **commanded** us to light the Chanukah lights?” Where in the Torah does it command us to observe the laws of Chanukah?

The Talmud answers by citing the aforementioned verse in which the Torah admonishes us to not divert from the words of our Sages, either right or left. In other words, G-d has indeed commanded us indirectly to light the Chanukah candles since He instructed us to heed the words of the Sages, and they in turn commanded us to light the Chanukah candles.

The Hints

Where is Chanukah hinted in this verse?

The Hebrew words for “the words they tell you” are “*yagidu lecha*.” The numerical value of these words is 83, the same number as the word Chanukah (spelled without a *vav*).

There is an additional and more revealing hint to Chanukah in this verse.

In Talmudic times—and even today in many communities, as is the Chabad custom—the Chanukah menorah is placed on the left side of the doorway of our homes opposite the Mezuzah which is affixed to the right doorpost. Hence the Mitzvah of Chanukah is connected to both the right and the left.

What is the deeper meaning of this hint? Why is rabbinical/judicial authority associated with Chanukah specifically, and why is it represented by the right and left?

Questioning Authority

In our day and age the entire world seems to be suffering from the lack of submission to authority. From the sixties onward the leitmotif is “challenge authority”! Initially this challenge to authority was directed against the corruption of powerful leaders and institutions. It ultimately evolved into challenging authority for its own sake. “Authority” became a dirty word. Unfortunately what happens in the secular world infiltrates the most religious of communities as well. Increasingly we see even the most observant individuals ignoring rabbinic instructions and expressing cynicism about heretofore unchallenged aspects of Jewish authority.

From what source did this movement to challenge authority derive? And why has it become so pervasive?

To be sure there were so many grievances that society had against the systems of government as well as other institutions that it is understandable why people began to speak out and revolt. And, from that perspective, it is not a new phenomenon. The real question is why does it appear that we are living in an age where rebellion and revolution have permeated every segment and all strata of society?

Oxymoronic

Furthermore, what we see in society today is self-contradictory. While we find so many people who have become non-conformists that it is interesting, and even amusing, to see how they conform to **their** particular brand of non-conformity. Emblematic of this phenomenon is the image of a group of non-conformists who live together in the same commune, take the same drugs, wear the same ripped jeans, etc.

Where does this oxymoronic approach to life originate? Why are we rebels in our conformity and conformists in our rebellions?

While psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists will certainly find explanations within their respective disciplines for this phenomenon, Kabbalah and Chassidic thought teaches us that the ultimate answer must lie in the spiritual realm, which is the source of everything physical.

All physical phenomena evolve from their spiritual counterparts. Nothing occurs in a vacuum.

When G-d created the world he created it with a system. There are laws and rules that are an integral part of existence. The structure, however, conceals its spiritual energy. But even this is part of a system which the Kabbalists trace to the process of *tzimtum*. This refers to the Divinely generated process where G-dly reality that defies categorization and institutionalization is filtered through various curtains and screens. Some screens are transparent—although they do not allow all the intensity of the light to shine through them—some are translucent and some are opaque with virtually no light shining through them.

Two Soul Dynamics

Our role in this process is to break down these barriers and remove the screens. This we do in two ways. The first is to make the system conform to the Divine will by observing the “positive” or prescriptive commandments.

For example, when a Jew puts on Tefillin, he takes the natural world of leather as well as the human arm and head and makes them conform to G-d’s will so that the screen of nature is not obstructive. When a woman lights the Shabbat and Holiday candles she allows the Divine light to shine through the screen.

The second approach is to negate those aspects of the “system” which are stifling and obstructive. This we accomplish primarily by observing the so-called “negative” or proscriptive commandments. When we shun the negative influences in our world and resist their apparent charm and appeal, we remove many of the barriers.

And this is the true meaning and origin of revolution. It derives from the soul’s desire to break out of the elements of our world that prevent it from fulfilling its G-dly mission of conforming to G-d’s Divine system.

In reality, the soul actually possesses two desires and two ways of expressing itself: The first is to make our world conform to the ultimate Divine plan for this world, and the second is to negate and remove the negative components of the system.

Clearing the Misinterpretations

When a person is not in tune with his or her soul’s interests and passions he or she will still acquire some of the soul’s feelings but without proper direction. As a result, instead of rebelling against the things that frustrate G-d’s plan for the way the world should be structured, they rebel against anything that smacks of order and authority. As a result, instead of conforming to the Divine system, they conform to the whims of their animal soul.

And while this dynamic of misinterpreting the signals from the soul has always been in existence, it has now become much more pronounced.

This can be attributed to the fact that we are in Messianic times when the twin struggle to simultaneously conform and rebel is at its most critical juncture.

Our generation's role is to bring G-d's plan to fruition and to make the world conform to the original Divine plan. It is also in our generation that we will realize the negation of the stifling structures that stunt our soul's ability to break out of the system that confines it. These soul energies are stronger today than in any previous era. However, when these energies become misdirected they translate into indiscriminate rebellion against authority in the pursuit of conforming with the mores of a secular lifestyle and Galus/exile mindset.

Our mission thus is not to repudiate rebellion and conformity but to channel it into rebelling against the exile mentality, against conventions of society that limit our potential even as we conform to the highest Divine order.

Chanukah: The Light of Moshiach

This may explain why the Chanukah Menorah lighting is hinted in the Torah section dealing with conforming to authority and with the "right" and "left" metaphor.

The Talmud states that the “right” should be used to bring someone close, while the “left” should be used to distance someone.

One of the interpretations of this maxim is that the right symbolizes the way we observe the positive commandments to get closer to and conform to G-d’s system. The Mezuzah, which is placed on the right doorpost, exemplifies the idea that this structure/house is in total conformity with G-d’s plan for the world.

Conversely, the left symbolizes the rebellious nature which we must develop to fight against all negative and confining influences. There is no holiday like Chanukah in which this dynamic is so overtly played out. In fact, it is the only Jewish holiday that commemorates and generates the spirit of rebellion, rebellion against the imposition of Greek pagan culture. Chanukah, on the left, represents its ability to banish the greatest darkness by bringing light into the darkest places that exist in the “outside.”

Chanukah is thus the holiday that exemplifies the idea of accepting the proper authority of the Torah and of the Sages in whose hands its teachings have been entrusted, even as we wage war and rebel against the idea of conformity.

By admonishing us to not deviate from their words right or left, the message emphasizes that we should not get our notion of right and left mixed up by rebelling against the

things to which we should conform and conform to those things against which we ought to rebel.

Chanukah, the Midrash tells us, is a holiday which will be prominent even in the Messianic Age because Chanukah epitomizes the synthesizing of the right and the left in the most ideal and harmonious fashion.

We can have Chanukah in the summer when we commit ourselves to conform to the teachings of our Sages and, particularly, to the directives of the Rebbe who told us repeatedly that we must prepare for the Redemption by redoubling our efforts towards doing more goodness and kindness (the right) even as we reject and revolt against the Galus mindset (the left).

ESSAY SIX

THE TWO TIERED CROWN

Jewish law is G-d's crown.

The crown serves two functions.

It evokes greater respect for the king's orders.

It's crown Jewel elicits admiration for the king himself.

ESSAY SIX

THE TWO TIERED CROWN

Prerequisites for the Sanhedrin

This week's parsha discusses the role of the Sanhedrin, the most authoritative body in Jewish life. Any question in any area of Jewish practice could be brought to its attention for resolution. The Sanhedrin's decision was the final word in all matters of Jewish law.

The Torah introduces the types of questions that must be brought to the Sanhedrin for resolution with the words: "If a *davar*-matter of law eludes you."

The word "*Davar*-matter" is translated differently in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds.

In the Babylonian Talmud, it is translated as "matters of Halacha-legal matters." The Jerusalem Talmud it translates it as "matters of Aggadah."

Aggadah refers to the non-legal parts of the Talmud that deal with morality, ethics, history and stories of the great Sages. Aggadah shares the same root as Haggadah, telling

the story of the Exodus. Aggadah is about the stories of the Jewish people and their relationship with G-d.

The Jerusalem Talmud maintains that the Sanhedrin has to be proficient in matters of Aggadah as well as matters of Jewish law.

The question is why? If Aggadah, by definition, is non-legal, why would it matter if the judges of the Sanhedrin were not experts in it? And what is the crux of the dispute between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds?

Telling us Who is the Creator

Our Sages tell us, "If you want to know who said and the world came to be, you must learn Aggadah." Aggadah is the key to appreciating the Torah's Divine authorship. To master Jewish law without believing that it's Divine renders a judge deficient in his ability to render an accurate legal decision.

This would explain why the Jerusalem Talmud emphasizes the need for the members of the Sanhedrin to be versed not only in Halacha but also in Aggadah.

This approach is consistent with what our Sages teach us in the first chapter of Ethics of the Fathers (which we customarily will read and, in fact, study this Shabbos):

“Moses received the Torah from Sinai and handed it over to Joshua, Joshua to the elders and the elders to the prophets.”

The Rebbe asks, why does it refer to them as prophets? What role does prophecy play in the transmission of the Torah? Doesn't the Torah forbid a person from using prophecy to decide matters of Torah?

Since the Torah was given to us on Mount Sinai, it is no longer in heaven, as the famous Rabbi Yehoshua declared when his colleague Rabbi Eliezer sought Divine support for an opinion. Once the Torah was given at Sinai, Rabbi Yehoshua declared, it was exclusively in the hands of the Sages to transmit and interpret it in accordance with rules that were also given at Sinai. In the event of a dispute, the Torah instructs us to follow the majority. Why, then, does the Mishnah mention the prophets as transmitters of Torah?

The Rebbe answers that although prophecy is not the medium through which a matter of law is determined, prophecy, which entails a close connection to G-d, is the inspiration needed to go in the right direction.

When the Talmudic sages decided a matter of law, they were guided by Divine inspiration to look in the right direction. They did not, however, render any decisions based on their prophetic inspiration alone.

We thus learn that although we are not prophets, we must have a connection with G-d, based on a profound awareness of His presence in our lives, as a prerequisite to proper Torah study. A rabbi who provides direction to others must certainly be guided by an awareness of the Divine source of Torah.

The Rebbe's analysis is consistent with the Jerusalem Talmud's assertion that the Sanhedrin had to be proficient in Aggadah, because it is that part of Torah that generates an awareness of and reverence for G-d. And that awareness and reverence, in turn, is what guides the judge to make the proper rulings in matters of law.

Divergent Approaches of Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud

However, this explanation begs another question. The above analysis merely transfers the question to the Babylonian Talmud that defines the "matter" strictly as Halacha and omits the mention of Aggadah. If Aggadah leads to recognition of the Divine authorship of the Torah, which is indispensable for rendering accurate decisions, why does the Babylonian Talmud not require it?

Perhaps the answer lies in the different approaches of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds.

The Babylonian Talmud is the Talmud of exile, while the Jerusalem Talmud is associated with the Land of Israel, where the exile was not as intense.

There is no question that the Babylonian Talmud recognizes the necessity of the study of Aggadah to be qualified as a judge. That is a given and it need not be mentioned. After all, it does not say that the judge cannot be a thief, either. He cannot properly recognize the legal dimension of Torah unless he also appreciates its Divine origin. And if it takes the study of Aggadah to acquire that awareness, then so be it. It need not be mentioned as a separate area of endeavor for the judge for it is subsumed in the knowledge of law that he must possess. Halacha is only Halacha if it is the word of G-d and is seen as G-d's will, not some human system of jurisprudence.

Will and Delight

Indeed, the laws of the Torah (Halacha), are an expression of G-d's will which transcends even His wisdom. In other words, the study of Halacha transcends the study of other theoretical parts of Torah and is compared by the Talmud to a crown. Just as the crown sits above the head of the king, so too the teachings of Halacha transcend even G-d's wisdom or "Head," as it were.

The Jerusalem Talmud, however speaks of the knowledge contained in Aggadah as a separate and independent endeavor beyond its role as a prerequisite and accessory to the study of Halacha.

If we return to the analogy of a crown, the crown itself has two functions. The first is that it literally covers the head and protects it; figuratively, it is an accessory to his mind. When a subject of the king sees the crown, it reinforces his respect for the monarch's royal decrees and his need to submit to them. In other words, the crown is subordinate to the king's orders and the implementation of his ideas and agenda.

But the crown also possesses an independent character that has nothing to do with his role as the one who issues decrees to his nation. The exquisite bejeweled crown evokes the most profound sense of awe, reverence and devotion to the King himself that transcends his orders. It is the ornament that expresses royalty in its unadulterated, pristine and august state and elicits the most profound reaction from his subjects.

In Chassidic parlance, the crown is a metaphor for the faculties of both will and delight. Will influences and controls our intellect, emotions, and all that we think, speak and do. It encompasses our entire personality just as the crown envelops the head, which controls the body.

But the driving force behind will-power is the delight that one experiences from doing the things that one wants to do. In other world, delight is the inner dimension of the crown and will is its outer manifestation.

So it is too with respect to the crown of Torah. The outer manifestation of the crown is G-d's will expressed in

Halacha. We must realize that Halacha is not a human creation, but is G-d's very crown! The last thing a person would want to tamper with is the king's crown!

But beneath the surface of the will is a deeper level of Divine delight that one acquires only through the study of Aggadah and its related study of Jewish mystical texts, particularly the teachings of Chassidus.

Pulverizing the Crown Jewel to Save the Life of the Prince

In the famous exchange between the Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (known as the Alter Rebbe) and Rabbi Pinchas of Korits (a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov), the Alter Rebbe explained the reason for the proliferation of the mystical teachings of Torah. He provided a parable of the king who agreed to pulverize the crown jewel and dilute it in water to save the life of his son, the prince. Similarly, the teachings of Chassidus are like the crown jewel. They are G-d's innermost thoughts that express His innermost essence. And we need to disseminate its teachings to save us, G-d's children, from spiritual death.

These teachings of Chassidus were kept secret for millennia because the crown was off limits to the world. But as we come closer to the time of Redemption, it is time for these teachings to be disseminated to help us cope with exile and prepare us for the imminent arrival of Moshiach, when these teachings will be fully revealed.

Hence, the Babylonian Talmud, that reflects exile in its deepest form, omits the mention of Aggadah because it is the part of the crown that is an accessory to Halacha. It is a part and parcel of Halacha. Without awareness that Halacha is His will, it is not Halacha.

However, the Jerusalem Talmud, which is more closely connected to the future Age of Redemption, highlights the study of Aggadah as an independent area of study for the Sanhedrin. In their role as Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin must impart these teachings to inspire greater fidelity to Halacha, to be sure, but also as an independent domain of study to give the people a taste of the future.

The lesson for us is clear. We have to study the inner dimension of Torah today more than ever before for two reasons: First it is an indispensable part of Judaism, with which our observance of the Mitzvos is permeated with profound respect for the Commander of the Mitzvah. And second, by immersing ourselves in the teachings of Moshiach, we prepare for the final Redemption, when the King's Crown will be exposed to the entire world.

ESSAY SEVEN

BE DELIBERATE IN JUDGMENT

We cannot escape being judgmental.

**We must therefore also judge ourselves, judge the totality
of others and judge fairly.**

ESSAY SEVEN

BE DELIBERATE IN JUDGMENT

Two Axioms of Parsha

There are two axioms that apply to our study of the weekly Torah portion:

First, the name of a Torah portion is not just its opening word. It is the word that speaks to the core subject of the parsha, and should serve as the guide to our lives, particularly during the week in which this portion is read.

Second, when a Torah portion is read at a particular time of the year, it has a message that relates to that specific time. Since we are just weeks away from Rosh Hashanah, this week's parsha—and particularly its name—must teach us how to get ready for that momentous occasion.

Be Judgmental!?

Shoftim-Judges is the name of this week's parsha.

The first lesson is that we should be judges. We are not only to establish courts in our communities to ensure the

proper execution of justice, but we are all to serve in that capacity.

And the second lesson is that the way we prepare for Rosh Hashanah is to be judgmental.

One is entitled to ask the question. Haven't we asserted in so many of these Torah messages that we ought not to be judgmental of others? Why, all of a sudden, are we advocating being judgmental?

Judge Yourself First

There are three answers to this question.

First, one may and must be judgmental of oneself. As the Rebbe Maharsh (the fourth leader of the Chabad movement) once quipped: "You cannot fool G-d, you cannot even fool others indefinitely; you can only fool yourself. Is it a trick to fool a fool..."

We cannot ignore our own shortcomings or sweep them under the carpet.

Judging oneself is a tricky endeavor. Self-love biases us and prevents us from seeing our own shortcomings.

There is a law concerning the laws of *nega'im* skin lesions that render the person ritually unclean. A Kohain must be the one to make that determination. The Mishnah states: "A person cannot see his own lesions."

Chassidus interprets this to mean that a person is incapable of seeing his or her own faults.

To facilitate self-examination and judgment one needs the support and advice of a mentor and friend; one who is both objective and empathetic.

Judge Actions, Not People

Second, one may judgmental of other people's actions, not of the people themselves. This means that when we see a person doing something harmful—either physically or spiritually—we must see that action for what it is and try to influence the person to desist from it.

We do not, however, judge the person as evil, immoral or in any way inferior to ourselves. This attitude is based on the understanding that if we do not know the totality of the person; their virtues and trials how can we possibly judge them?

This approach is rooted in Ethics of the Fathers (Chapter one) that we should judge every person favorably." The phraseology in Hebrew allows for a slightly different translation: "Judge the entire person favorably," suggesting that when we judge the entire person we will see the good in him or her and not color him or her based on an isolated act.

Judging is in Our DNA

Third, the reality is that whether we want to or not, we are, in fact, always judgmental of others. The moment we meet someone, we size them up and put them through the test that determines the nature of our relationship with that individual. And since we are always in the mode of judgment, it is crucial that we know how to judge the person accurately, fairly and compassionately.

The very first ethical lesson listed in the Talmud (Ethics of the Fathers 1:1), is “Be deliberate in judgment.” While it was intended primarily for a judge who sits on the bench, it is relevant to each and every one of us who is a parent, teacher, government official, employer, manager, physician, business partner, bureaucrat, or just anyone who needs the services, favors, attention etc. of anyone else.

Before we decide who that person is and what he or she stands for and the degree to which we will agree to be involved with that person, we must be deliberate in judgment. We should not make hasty decisions.

Balance in Judgment

As we prepare for Rosh Hashanah—the Jewish New Year and Day of Judgment—and we ask of G-d to judge us favorably, we must take the lesson of how to judge our fellow human being favorably and deliberately.

On the other hand, when judging ourselves, we have to be more demanding. Although, we should not be too harsh on ourselves, we must not be a deferential to our own shortcomings as we must be to others. We must be brutally honest in our self-assessment, even as we are willing to overlook the actions of others towards us and be more understanding of their faults in general.

Parallel between Rosh Hashanah and Redemption

And just as the proper balance in justice prepares us for the New Year and the way we are judged by G-d on Rosh Hashanah, similarly, proper judgment is what will assist us in crossing over into the New Age of Redemption that we have been waiting for so many thousands of years.

The parallel between Rosh Hashanah and the Final Redemption is a striking one.

The Alter Rebbe in his classic work, the Tanya, states that every year at Rosh Hashanah a totally new and unprecedented G-dly energy enters the world.

Similarly, the Messianic Age is not just a new age of peace and prosperity. A totally new and unprecedented G-dly light will envelop the entire world.

It follows then that, as we stand on the very cusp of the Messianic Age, we must make our self-appraisal more honest and meaningful.

ESSAY EIGHT

DUAL IDENTITY

We have a public and private persona.

**Torah too has two parallel identities; its revealed and
concealed teachings.**

**To nurture both of our personas we must avail ourselves of
both dimensions of Torah.**

ESSAY EIGHT

DUAL IDENTITY

Four Institutions of Leadership

This week's parsha discusses four institutions of leadership in Israel: The judiciary, the monarchy, the priesthood and the institution of prophecy.

It is interesting and instructive that the first of the institutions to be discussed in this week's parsha is the judiciary (which was responsible for both interpreting the law and legislating new laws). This was to underscore that all the institutions of power were under the jurisdiction of the laws of Torah as they have been transmitted by the rabbis/judges. No position of power exists that can counter the authority vested in the Torah.

A monarch cannot claim that he is above the law. A prophet who communicates G-d's message to the nation may not meddle in matters of Jewish law. He certainly has no right to change them. And if he does change the laws—in the name of G-d—he is guilty of a heinous crime! It goes without saying that the priests who served in the Holy temple were bound by the laws of the Torah. Indeed, the

seat of the Sanhedrin—the Supreme Court—was in the Temple itself. One of their primary functions was to oversee the daily operations of the Temple.

Two Torah Scrolls for the King

This explains why the Torah commands a king to have two Torah Scrolls: one which he stores with his treasures and one that he takes with him wherever he goes. The Torah that he carries with him, wherever he went, was intended for him to be forever cognizant of the subordinate role he played vis a vis the Torah. In the Torah's own words:

“He should read from it all the days of his life so that he may learn to fear G-d, his G-d, to carefully guard the observances of all the words of this Torah and its statutes. And that his heart will not be arrogant over his brothers, and he will never veer away from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, in order that he will reign for a long time over his kingdom—he and his sons—among Israel.”

However, the question that arises here is why did the king need two Torah scrolls? If the other Torah was to be hidden away where it was inaccessible to him, what purpose did it serve? How did the concealed Torah serve to influence the king in his decisions?

Public and Private Persona

The truth is that the king needed two Torah scrolls because the king served two roles; he had two personas:

A king was the most public figure. He was the ultimate role model. His actions were watched by multitudes and he had to conduct himself in a manner that reflected his public position. In his public role he was not permitted to forgo some of the honor he was entitled to by the Torah. For him to denigrate himself was an abrogation of the Torah.

Torah dictates that a king behaves as a king by asserting his power and prestige, even as he follows all of the laws of the Torah as any commoner is required to do. The Torah assigned even more restrictions to the monarch than it did to all of his subjects.

But the king also had a private persona. A king also had a “secret” identity. In the depths of his heart and soul, the king was supposed to be a humble man, who possessed qualities of which nobody was aware.

So while the king had to keep some of his inner spiritual self under wraps to accommodate his public role and persona, he had to always remember that he had another Torah hidden in his treasures. This means he had concealed within him a different and higher standard of devotion to G-d and to His teachings; one that nobody could see.

A Living Paradox

Moshiach is the ultimate king who epitomizes the dual role that a king was supposed to embody. Moshiach is a living paradox.

On the one hand, there is no person on earth that ever lived that has the fame and power that will be possessed by Moshiach.

On the other hand, Moshiach is the most private person whose inner persona is known to none. Moshiach—like his forebear, Moses—is known for his humility even as he is the most honored and acclaimed leaders.

And since we all have a spark of Moshiach in us, it behooves us to develop these two identities: A public identity so that we can serve as role models to inspire others, even as we retain a private identity that involves our intimate relationship with G-d. This relationship we need not share with anyone else.

The message of this week's parsha to us is thus: Both of these personas must be guided by the Torah.

The Two Parallel Dimensions of Torah

Torah itself also possesses two dimensions; the exoteric or revealed aspects of Torah such as the Talmud, and the esoteric or hidden aspects of Torah such as the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus.

Although both dimensions of Torah must serve in concert to affect both of our personas, public and private, there is a difference in focus and emphasis between them.

To nurture our public persona, our emphasis must be on following the laws of the Torah. The most disqualifying factor for a Jewish leader is his lack of fidelity to the practice of the Mitzvos-Commandments.

If this is true of any leader it is even more so for the ultimate leader, the Moshiach. His public role must be adherence to Jewish law. As Maimonides rules that to be presumed Moshiach one must be immersed in Torah and total commitment to its laws.

The rationale behind this notion that he cannot be Moshiach if he does not exemplify total devotion to the commandments is that the Messianic Age is highlighted by the fact that we will be able to observe all the commandments uncompromisingly. How then can the leader who will usher in this age not be known for his fidelity to the Mitzvos?

However, a leader must also cultivate and nurture his private persona. It goes without saying that one cannot nurture the recesses of our soul if we do not adhere to G-d's revealed will.

But, just as importantly, and perhaps more essentially, the inner persona of a leader, particularly Moshiach, has to be

nourished by his mastery of the inner, spiritual dimension of Torah.

Since we are all leaders in our own lives and in addition we all possess a spark of Moshiach, we must dedicate ourselves to enhancing both of our personas, with both dimensions of Torah: the revealed and the hidden.

ESSAY NINE

SENSITIVITY TRAINING

The most difficult person to change is ourself.

We don't truly know who we are in the core of our soul.

**A measure of our lack of moral character is the
unintentional lapses in our behavior.**

ESSAY NINE

SENSITIVITY TRAINING

Cities of Refuge

One of the most enigmatic commandments in the Torah is undoubtedly the one about the “Cities of Refuge.”

On the surface it does not seem that difficult to understand the concept behind this Mitzvah. It goes like this:

If someone were to unintentionally kill another person, the perpetrator would be required to take refuge in one of these six specially designated cities (and another 42 cities designated for the Levites). Once he was there, he was safe from the relatives of the victim who might attempt to avenge the death of their loved one. In addition to providing security for the perpetrator it was also a punishment for his negligence and a form of rehabilitation and atonement.

The Enigma

So where is the enigma?

What is so strange about the institution of Cities of Refuge is that the Torah requires adding three more such cities when, in the future, the boundaries of Israel will be expanded. According to Maimonides, this is a reference to the messianic Age. Then we will have nine such cities rather than six in the past.

And this is what is so strange: Why would we need additional cities to protect criminals in a utopian age? The Messianic Age is characterized by the G-dly light that will shine and be felt by everyone. Why would we need additional places to respond to an increase of crime in our community?

One answer to this question can be provided based on some analysis of the Cities of Refuge phenomenon.

As mentioned earlier, these cities were designated for one who has unintentionally killed another. This begs a question: Why would a person who accidentally killed another have to be banished to one of these cities for life? (More precisely, the Torah states that he must remain “until the High Priest dies,” This can often amount to a life sentence.) After all, as terrible as the consequences of this person’s actions were, why does he have to suffer for so long? It was, after all, only unintentional?

A second question can be raised. Why is it that the Torah prescribed the punishment of forced exile to one of these Cities of Refuge for an unintentional sin only? Why isn’t

there an equivalent punishment for some intentional crimes?

In truth, the “life-sentence” was not intended primarily as a punishment but as a rehabilitation process, which begs a third question, the answer to which provides us with a deeper understanding of the entire institution of Cities of Refuge and will answer the first two questions.

The third question is, why is there only a rehabilitation process for an unintentional sin? Why not have a similar program for intentional transgressions?

Unintentional can be Worse than Intentional Sin

When a person commits an intentional sin, it is a sign that one’s evil impulse has gotten the best of one’s otherwise positive nature. All of life is a struggle between the *Yetzer Tov*-the good impulse and the *Yetzer Hara*-the evil impulse. In every war, there are battles that we win and battles that we lose. The fact that we lose a battle does not necessarily reflect on who we really are.

In addition, there are all sorts of external conditions that can provoke a person into anger that can result in the commission of a violent act against another or other transgressions. As terrible as that action may be, and for which one incurs a punishment, there is no need for a long-term rehabilitation process. One must simply get their punishment, make amends and go on with life.

In the most extreme and rare cases, the crime is so egregious that the punishment is the maximum one. Only a swift and harsh punishment can cleanse this person's soul. There is no room for a protracted rehabilitation process.

Insidious

When, however, a person, kills another not out of malice, but out of negligence, it may be a sign of a much deeper malady. It is not just the one battle that he lost; that could be remedied by the battles he won. Moreover, even conventional Teshuvah-repentance and return that involves a quick admission of guilt, remorse and resolve to avoid allowing it to happen in the future, does not suffice. The reason being is because the unintentional aspect of the crime points to an insidious moral problem.

The fact that a person can allow negligence to cause such harm to others is the ultimate expression of insensitivity that belies the otherwise good nature of this individual who is guilty of killing the other. It may be a sign of sub-conscious disregard for another human being.

In other words, one cannot always measure a person's true nature by what they think, say or do. An otherwise good person can sometimes act in ways that are inconsistent with his or her true nature. Conversely, one whose external appearance and behavior can be impeccable may possess internal and deep-rooted insensitivity.

This insensitivity does not happen spontaneously, it is a product of years of nurturing one's "animal soul," and its selfish and hedonistic interests.

When people are so negligent that their actions result in a tragic loss of life, it is a "sign" that something is wrong with them, internally. It is like a malignancy that grows insidiously, the external symptoms of which only appear at an advanced stage. To treat this problem, one cannot just treat its external manifestations. One must undergo invasive "surgery," followed up with aggressive and protracted treatment, change of diet etc.

This is what a City of Refuge was primarily for. It was not simply a form of punishment, but a venue for revamping the entire internal chemistry of one's "animal soul." It therefore required, in many instances, years of rehabilitative work that changed the person from within.

And though we no longer have these Cities of Refuge and most of us have, thank G-d, not been so negligent to cause the death of a person, nevertheless, the lesson of the Cities of Refuge are for everyone in all times and situations.

It does not suffice for us to be concerned with only the way we appear on the outside. It is crucial that we work on our internal makings as well, reversing the desensitization process that is the hallmark of thousands of years of exile.

Elul: Month of Refuge

This is especially true in the month of Elul that we are in. It is the month of introspection and preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

In addition, it is the version of the Cities of Refuge in the realm of time. It is a month that is dedicated to not only to changing and improving our behavior, but it also the way that we undergo internal transformation.

World War II in Elul

Everything happens by Divine Providence. The fact that history's worst war and destruction of Jews began in the month of Elul (of the year 5699) it must teach us a lesson that links the Holocaust and the month of Elul.

If we think about the dynamic of evil that caused this horrific event, one can trace two factors.

The first is obviously the overt evil and hatred of the German People and their allies, the perpetrators of the Holocaust.

There was a second, and arguably, equal if not worse dynamic, that facilitated the Holocaust. This was the insensitivity of the rest of the world. If the Germans who did not harbor the same hatred as their compatriots would have possessed a shred of sensitivity they would have never allowed their government to carry out these atrocities. The

same goes for the majority of the European countries, their governments and even the Allies who were fighting the Germans. It was a colossal lack of sensitivity that caused the Holocaust.

The month of Elul comes to rectify the source of evil's ability to wreak such havoc.

While unintentional sins do not appear as serious as the intentional ones; they provide the fertile ground and potential for the intentional ones.

Elul with its emphasis on the Cities of Refuge is the antidote to all evil because it reaches deep down to the core and surgically removes the malignancy that is responsible for the destruction of the entire body.

The Final Transformation

The ultimate and final inner transformation will occur in the Messianic Age, when G-d will give us a "new heart," to paraphrase the Prophet.

We will then undergo a process of change that will encompass the external manifestations of evil as well as its internal and hidden form. On an individual level, this means that all the corrosion and insensitivity within will disappear.

To facilitate this additional Cities of Refuge will be constructed. Even if there will not be a need for them in

the literal sense to provide those who killed unintentionally, they are still needed to serve as models for internal change.

In the past we did not have the ability to focus that much on our internal spiritual needs; we had to place greater emphasis on our actions. To repeat the metaphor of the sick individual, we have to first treat the symptoms to be able to cope and survive. Nevertheless, in the Messianic Age, it will be high time for us to deal with internal transformation as well, symbolized by the additional Cities of Refuge that will be designated.

Elul: A Taste of the future

And as we enter into the month of Elul, we are given a taste of the future, and have the capacity to remove the insensitivity within us. This in turn serves as the foretaste and beginning of the Messianic Age, may we see the arrival of Moshiach who will usher in this age of external and internal transformation, imminently.

ESSAY TEN

NO TREES IN TEMPLE

The question: Which comes first, truth or justice?

He answer: It depends whose truth and whose justice.

ESSAY TEN

NO TREES IN TEMPLE

Don't Alter the Altar!

The Altar in the Holy Temple was one of its most important components. According to Maimonides, the Altar, and the sacrifices that were offered upon it, was the focal point of the Temple.

Concerning this Altar, the Torah has given us several commandments:

First, it had to have been made out of stone.

Second, as stated in this week's parsha, we are commanded not to plant a tree next to the Altar. And while the Torah speaks of a specific pagan tree called an *Asheira*, it was understood to include the planting of any tree.

Third, the juxtaposition of the commandment not to plant trees near the Altar and the commandments for a judge to not pervert justice, prompted our Sages to declare: "Whoever appoints a judge who is not worthy, it is as if he placed an idolatrous tree near the Altar."

Justice versus Vegetation

What is the reason the Torah was so opposed to having trees near the Altar? And how does an unscrupulous judge compare to the planting of the tree near the Altar?

Meshech Chochma, an early twentieth century commentary on the Torah, suggests the following analysis:

While sacrifices were a staple of the daily Temple order, it was not for G-d's needs. G-d does not need our sacrifices. They do not and cannot enhance Him or satisfy any need, since that would imply that G-d is somehow dependent on our actions. G-d is ultimate perfection and cannot be needy or dependent on anyone or anything. G-d chooses to "want" our conformance with His will, not because He needs it, but because He desires it.

The sacrifices—as indeed, all of the Mitzvos we were commanded to perform—were intended to make **us** more G-dly, to draw **us** closer to Him, as the Hebrew word for sacrifice-*korban* indicates.

In Kabbalah we are taught how the korban would have all sorts of spiritual and cosmic effects. But the bottom line about sacrifices is that G-d did not truly need them for Himself.

To underscore the fact that sacrifices in Judaism—unlike in other pagan cultures—were not for G-d's benefit, the Torah therefore commanded us not to make the Altar out of anything else but stone. Stone, unlike vegetation, does

not grow from the ground in which it is situated. Nor does stone have to be fed and nurtured.

This was a dramatic way of expressing the notion that just as the stone does not benefit from the earth and its vegetation, so too, G-d Who commanded us to bring the sacrifices on the Altar, does not need or benefit from our sacrifices. They are solely for our benefit.

Hence the Torah's insistence that we do not even plant a tree next to the Altar, to further distance us from any notion that the Altar is in any way, shape or form a symbol of G-d's dependency on us and our efforts.

We can now understand the juxtaposition of the laws concerning the integrity of a judge and the prohibition against planting trees next to the Altar.

Emulating G-d

When a judge rules, he must emulate G-d by not having any vested interests in the outcome of that case. And just as G-d receives no benefit from the world He created, similarly, the judge cannot perceive himself deriving any benefit from the case. His exclusive interest must be the pursuit of truth and that justice be served.

In summary, the Altar made out of stone teaches us how G-d does not need or benefit from our actions.

The flip side of that is that we derive all of our needs from G-d and the performance of His commandments, represented by the sacrifices.

Likewise, a judge who is honest in his judgments contributes to the well-being of society.

We are All Judges

And while very few of us are judges in the literal sense of the word, the way we interact with others involves our sense of judgment.

When we confront a situation that demands our judgment of the person, event, etc., we have to ask ourselves a question: What is our objective? Are we looking out for ourselves, or are we looking to make the world a better place by virtue of the way we respond to the person or situation at hand?

Stabilizing the World in Preparation for Moshiach

The person who chooses the latter, is a judge who emulates G-d, Who does not have a vested interest in His judgment and who therefore makes the world endure, as our Sages declare in Ethics of the Fathers: “The world exists on three things; justice, truth and peace.”

The prophet Isaiah declares that “Zion will be redeemed with justice.” This suggests that the difference between exile and Redemption corresponds to the difference between proper justice and the lack of it.

Exile is not just a geographic phenomenon, it represents

the way we view things and life in general. It is when we see things through the prism of our selfish interests and egos. Redemption is a mindset in which we see things through the G-dly prism of selflessness and service to others.

To emerge from this exile mindset, we must focus on the notion of true justice, which is founded on the relentless pursuit of the truth, and the ability to go beyond our vested interests.

Justice before Truth?

It should be noted that the above citation from the Mishnah places justice before truth and peace. Yet, the Biblical verse (Zecharya 8:16) cited there to support the statement of the Mishnah places truth before justice.

The Rebbe explains that from G-d's perspective truth precedes His laws; His laws are based on Divine truth. However, our sense of truth is not intuitive or absolute. In order to find truth we must consult and follow the judgments of the Torah which are unmitigated truth.

Living in these last moment of exile—a state of mind that conceals truth—the only way we can access truth is through the teachings of the Torah, specifically the practical judgments of the Torah, which embody G-d's will and truth.

Thus our Sages teach that the exiles will be redeemed

through the study of Mishnah, specifically.

Why Mishnah and not Talmud?

Because Talmud is G-d's will as it is cloaked in wisdom. Where does one "find" G-d's unadorned will expressed? In the Mishnah and similar works, such as Maimonides' Mishnah Torah and the Shulchan Aruch) that are restricted to teaching us what G-d wants us to do.

In addition, we can discover ultimate Divine truth in the study of the inner, spiritual dimension of Torah, i.e., the teachings of Chassidus and Kabbalah. Whereas the rest of Torah knowledge expresses G-d's will, these esoteric teachings reveal the hidden dimension of G-d, where His essential truth is most revealed.

Justice: Stone Solid

Based on the above, we can find a more profound understanding of the prohibition against planting trees next to the Altar and the Altar's construction out of stone.

A tree lacks the objective truth of a stone. A tree changes from season to season. Truth never changes.

Since the judges were placed next to the Altar, it could not, in any way, shape or form allow its message of absolute truth to be compromised. It had to be rock solid; laws that will never change.

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE OBSESSION WITH ROYALTY

Someone once said, “Democracy is the worst form of government except all others that have been tried.”

There is one form of government that is truly the best; the Messianic version of the monarchy.

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE OBSESSION WITH ROYALTY

Distasteful but Obsessed

We have been inundated with news reports about the tragic death of a former president's son. Not too long before that we witnessed the entire world community mourn at the loss of the Monarch from Jordan. And we still haven't forgotten the way the world could not stop talking about the tragic death of the Princess in England.

No matter how strong we protest that we find the institution of the monarchy distasteful, we are captivated by it and look for every opportunity to learn more about the few remaining vestiges of this anachronistic institution.

What is it about the monarchy that evokes such contradictory reactions from people?

A Commandment to Appoint a King

The answer to this question can be found in this week's Parsha's treatment of the monarchy. The Torah writes:

“When you will arrive in the land... and you shall say

‘Appoint upon me a king like all the nations that surround me.’ You shall indeed appoint a king whom G-d your G-d shall choose from amongst your brothers, you shall appoint a king.”

The Talmud goes even further. One of the commandments the Jews were commanded to observe upon entering the Land of Israel was to appoint a king. Not only was appointing a king a permissible option the Jews were given, it was a mitzvah, a commandment.

Contradictory Sources

Yet when the Jewish people asked the prophet Samuel to appoint a king, G-d’s response was rather negative. Why would G-d not approve of their request for a king, when G-d Himself had commanded them to do so?

Furthermore, for thousands of years, the Jewish people have been praying and yearning for the Messianic Age, which will be ushered in by Moshiach, who is described in Biblical and Talmudic literature as a king.

How could the institution of the monarchy be so derided by G-d in one place and so extolled in another?

Or the Wrong Reason

There are many answers that have been given by commentators. One answer is that the Jewish people

wanted a king for the wrong reason. Instead of wanting a king to help guarantee the spiritual growth of the nation, they wanted a king who would relax the standards of Jewish practice and allow the Jewish people to be like all other nations.

This and similar explanations, however, will only explain why the Jewish people were commanded to appoint a king in the past. It does not explain, however, why we will still need a king in the Messianic Age, a time when the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d?“

Two Objectives

Chassidic thought explains that there are actually **two** positive objectives for the appointment of a king in Judaism.

The first and most obvious is to prevent anarchy. Even when people recognize that which is morally wrong, they may not be able to control their desires. A king's basic role, therefore, is to ensure compliance with the law. This the king accomplishes by policing the citizens of his country.

In addition, the Jewish king is capable of achieving this more basic objective by helping the people realize their **own** spiritual potential. Once people develop a G-d oriented spiritual consciousness, they are empowered to exercise control over their desires.

But there is a higher function to a king. It is the type of

function that is ascribed to the leadership of Moshiach. Even when society will have developed to the point where the mind exercises control over the desires of the people and there is no fear of anarchy, a king can still play a vital spiritual role.

The ideal king is one whose soul is so aware of G-d's presence that he serves as an inspiration to all of the people to realize much higher levels of G-dly awareness. Our awareness and sensitivity to spiritual matters is limited by our spiritual potential. No matter how sophisticated our spiritual consciousness, we all have our limits.

Ideally, a king is "head and shoulders above the rest of the nation" (a Biblical expression used for King Saul in the Biblical book of 1 Samuel 9:2) in terms of his spiritual sophistication. He therefore is capable of raising the nation to even higher levels than they are capable of reaching on their own.

Disappointed

We can now appreciate why the prophet Samuel was disappointed when the Jewish nation asked for a king. Their need for a king was for the lower and less sophisticated reason. They needed someone to buttress their spiritual sensitivity and awareness of G-d.

Samuel had hoped that they could have achieved the basic level of spirituality without the need for a king and that

they would have requested a king so that they can climb to even higher levels and discover new frontiers of Divine experience. Alas, they were not at that level, and Samuel was truly disappointed.

The Future Institution of the Monarchy

While Samuel did not realize his wish at that time it will ultimately be granted with the ascension of Moshiach to the role of king.

With the advent of Moshiach and the Messianic Age this higher level **will** characterize the consciousness of the world. Then all of humankind will discover new frontiers of wisdom, spiritual awareness and positive energy.

ESSAY TWELVE

TESHUVAH YES, DEPRESSION NO!

The perennial sport is wrestling with our Animal Soul.

To win the match we must match our strength with
positive energy.

ESSAY TWELVE

TESHUVAH YES, DEPRESSION NO!

Fear of Sin; Who is Left?

When fighting a war, the Jewish people were told to release those who fear from the front lines and were to return to their homes.

Rashi cites the Talmudic interpretation of fear in this context. It refers to one who is afraid of the sins that he has committed.

An obvious question arises. If anyone who has sinned is disqualified from serving in the army, who would fight?

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, a Chassidic Master, provides a novel interpretation of one who is afraid of his sins. The Torah here is not talking about someone who has sinned and has not dealt with his sins. It is discussing one who has the fear of G-d in his heart, but is depressed for past sins. This depressed state, in turn, prevents him from doing positive things. This type of a person has nothing to support him in war and is thus prevented from fighting.

The Internal Battle

What the Kotzker Rebbe says about an actual war is likewise true about the internal struggle.

Every day of our lives we have to do battle with the animal nature within us. In order to be qualified to fight this battle it is imperative that we are not depressed or saddened by our past misdeeds.

The Chassidic classic Tanya provides us with an analogy. If two wrestlers were engaged in a wrestling match and one of them is depressed — even if he were the stronger of the two — he cannot win. Depression will cause him to falter.

How Should We Introspect?

As we enter into the introspective month of Elul — the month of preparation for the new year — we must know the proper path to making an honest accounting of the past year. When we come across our misdeeds of the past, it is only natural for us to become depressed. This, however, is not the proper strategy for winning the battle against the evil impulse and animal nature within. On the contrary, a demoralized person is a spiritually weakened person and is certainly no match for the negative forces that lurk within us.

True, the process of *Teshuvah* (repentance or return) that is germane to the month of Elul and the High Holy Days that follow, is usually associated with solemnity and even sadness. Despite the fact that, at times, controlled sadness

that motivates us to turn a new leaf is positive, it is not the ideal approach.

Vulnerable

This is particularly true in the present day and age when we are, as a people, emotionally vulnerable. To wallow in sadness and too much self-examination can be detrimental inasmuch as it can lead to depression. Depression, in turn, has the effect of squeezing out the very last ounce of life and energy from us and aborts any spiritual growth.

Teshuvah: Source of Joy

Besides the dangers that are associated with too much sadness, there is a positive reason to stress joy even with regard to the process of teshuvah. If Teshuvah is a Mitzvah, a Divine commandment, then it is subject to the general rule that was laid down by King David in his Psalms: "Serve G-d with joy." Teshuvah is our way of serving G-d and must therefore be done with Teshuvah.

And although Teshuvah necessitates profound introspection, where we are made aware of our sins and defects, nevertheless there is also a cause for celebration when we embark on the journey of Teshuvah. After all, when we do Teshuvah, we are once more in G-d's good graces.

This situation can be likened to a person who is running away from a threat and racing towards a positive situation. There are two separate dynamics going on that can engender two opposite emotions:

On the one hand, the person is running away from evil because he recognizes its harmful effects and is experiencing a feeling of terror and dread upon reflection on the evil that they are escaping.

On the other hand, he is running towards a positive and happy situation.

With regard to teshuvah, when we dwell on how we will be getting closer to G-d once the Teshuvah is complete, it will generate feelings of joy.

We have a choice to either be overwhelmed and obsessed with our negative past, or to view teshuvah as G-d's way of allowing us to forget our negative past and to get closer to Him. The former way leads to depression and lack of life and enthusiasm. The latter approach is punctuated with joy and excitement at the prospects of getting closer than ever to G-d.

Moshiach=Joy

As we get closer to the Messianic Age, the emphasis on doing Teshuvah with joy is greater. For the Messianic Age is one that will no longer have to deal with running away from things, rather it will be a time of getting closer.

It is no wonder that the word Moshiach, when rearranged, forms the word *yismach*-he will rejoice, joy, or *yisamach*, he will bring joy to others.

The way to prepare for this scenario to anticipate it and introduce it into our own lives.

Even when we do make an honest analysis of our past behavior in the month of Elul, it should be done with a focus on the positive; we are getting closer to G-d and the Era of Redemption.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

JEWISH ECOLOGY

There's more to the world than the world we see.
But the actions that we take in the world that we see
enable us to see beyond our eye's range.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

JEWISH ECOLOGY

No Wanton Destruction

Environmental concerns have been raised in recent years. As Jews we must ask ourselves, what is the Torah's view on the environment? Do we have a responsibility to preserve the world's scarce resources? Should we allow technology to forge ahead, and in doing so plunder the Earth? Or, perhaps, does Judaism advocate returning to the old pre-technological era?

This week's Parsha specifically deals with the prohibition against destroying a fruit bearing tree even in times of war. From this commandment, our sages derive the law of *Bal Taschis*, that enjoins us to not wantonly destroy anything. This is certainly an environmental Mitzvah if ever there was one.

Similarities and Differences

But, while there is much in the environmental philosophy that is consistent with Torah, there are some differences as well. Let's compare some of the similarities and differences.

Firstly, while it is true that Judaism does not give us the right to plunder the Earth and destroy its resources, this is not because Judaism views nature as something sacred or unique. In fact, the prohibition of *Bal Tashchis* applies equally to manmade products. Judaism does not worship nature; it respects G-d's desire in utilizing everything in His creation – natural or manmade – for a positive and productive purpose.

For example: Destroying a tree – a part of nature – to build a house is perfectly permissible.

In reality, the Torah does not consider the chopping down of a tree for that purpose destruction at all, provided the house will be used for good purposes.

Conversely, it can be argued that taking a good, useful chair and pulverizing it for use in a garden, is an unwarranted use of the chair and will violate the *Bal Tashchis* imperative. This is so, despite the fact that we are taking a manmade product and returning it to nature. Jews do not view technological advances as an intrusion into (or an invasion of...) nature. Neither does it glorify nature. Our mission is to take all that exists – both natural and manmade – and use it in the most constructive and positive manner.

Since our mission is to find the positive in every aspect of creation, to ignore the potential good in modern technology would also be considered a form of *Bal Tashchis*. After all, man's intellect and talent also come from G-d – so all

inventions and advancements that come from the human intellect – whether in science or medicine, biology or chemistry – must be viewed as potentially helpful in our service of G-d.

“Think globally, act locally.”

Another important message from the environmentally conscious is that whatever we do in our personal lives has a far-reaching effect around the world. This attitude is summed up in the slogan: “Think globally, act locally.”

This idea is rooted in the Talmudic statement:

“Everyone should view the world as being equally balanced between good and evil. One good deed can tip the scales to the side of merit and save the whole world.”

In other words, one can never underestimate the power of even one solitary act. What we do in our part of the world affects the entire universe.

Jewish Mysticism takes this idea one step further. Not only do our actions affect the entire world, but, moreover, even the spiritual realms are affected by the Mitzvot that we do. When we do a mitzvah, the entire universe – physical and spiritual – becomes holier and more receptive to G-d’s presence, bringing the Redemption that much closer.

Open your Eyes and See the Larger Picture,

A third – closely related – aspect of environmental philosophy is that there is more to the universe than what meets the eye. The fact that we do not see the effects of our actions does not minimize them.

Judaism takes this philosophy one step further. Kabbalah teaches that not only is there more to this world than meets the eye, there are entire worlds of spiritual existence that are entirely beyond the grasp of the physical senses but impact on our world and vice versa. The fact that our physical eyes do not see these “other” dimensions should not detract from the fact that they are real.

And just as the environmental movement asks us to “open our eyes” and see the larger picture, similarly, we have been told by our Torah to “open our eyes” to the spiritual realities that exist alongside the physical. The knowledge that there are spiritual dimensions generates the desire within us to access them. This we can do by study of the mystical teachings of Judaism, Jewish meditation and contemplative prayer.

In this age of enhanced awareness of our surroundings, we should realize that the cumulative goodness of all the past generations have transformed the world to the point that it is ready for the ultimate Redemption through Moshiach. All that we need to do is “open our eyes” and appreciate that reality.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

DOES THE END JUSTIFY THE MEANS?

We can compromise our interests not our principles.

A compromised justice is an injustice.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

DOES THE END JUSTIFY THE MEANS?

Redundant?

Every word in the Torah is pregnant with meaning. As the teaching of G-d, no word or even letter can be superfluous. With this introduction, commentators are puzzled by the repetitive expression employed by the Torah in this week's Parsha, *Shoftim*:

“*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof* Righteousness, righteousness, you shall pursue.”

Why is the word *tzedek*-righteousness repeated?

One answer to this question given by a Chassidic Master is that the repetition of the word “righteousness” was intended to dispel the argument that the end justifies the means. For many people, it is sufficient to pursue righteous goals, even if the method by which they achieve their goals is less than righteous. Thus the Torah exhorts us; even righteousness must be pursued with righteousness.

The Exception

The premise of this answer, while true in many if not most situations, is not necessarily a hard and fast rule. There are

cases where the less than righteous methodology used to achieve a desired goal may be acceptable even according to the high moral standards of the Torah.

For example, one may use some mild forms of deception to help promote peace. One may break the Sabbath to save a life. One may discipline one's child or student to help in their education, even though it would be wrong under different circumstances.

In all of these instances, the Torah does indeed permit the temporary "breaking of the rules" of morality and righteousness that it itself set up, in order to lead to a greater good. There are then times when the end does justify the means. How do we know how to decide these matters?

Who Decides?

The obvious answer is that only the Torah can say when a particular moral course of action may or must be suspended in order to achieve a greater good. All of the above examples, compromising honesty for the sake of peace, breaking the Sabbath to save a life, etc., are clearly indicated by the Torah as being proper courses of action.

Moreover, when the Torah says it is proper to violate the Shabbat to save a life, then it is not a violation of the Shabbat. The end does not really justify the means, for then, the means itself is kosher.

However, absent the Torah's license, we are enjoined against rationalizing our errant behavior by referring to the end result that would be positive. For example, one may not steal in order to give charity. One may not perform illegal experiments on a person in order to obtain vital medical information that might save millions of lives in the future.

Compromised Justice is not Justice

Another distinction between permissible uses of the “end justifies the means” argument and those that should be rejected lies in the context that the Torah uses this lesson here in this Parsha. The context of the words “righteousness, righteousness, you shall pursue” is judgment. The Torah exhorts us to set up a judicial system that will fairly and justly judge the people. In that context, there is never a basis to pervert justice in order to achieve a righteous outcome.

What is the reason for this distinction?

The distinction lies in the very definition of judgment. Judgment in the Torah's system (as opposed to the adversarial system used by contemporary courts), requires that the judges expose the truth. There is no room for compassion or any other consideration that would cloud the pursuit of truth and justice.

For this reason, Jewish courts did not have lawyers whose task it usually is to obscure the truth in the interests of one's client.

Thus, in the context of judgment, the Torah states unequivocally, "Righteousness, righteousness, you shall pursue." The judge has no right to in any way compromise the pursuit of justice and truth, because a compromise of truth and justice is by definition the absence of it. The courtroom, our Sages tell us, is where G-d's presence is palpable. Where G-d, the epitome of truth, is present, there is no room for compromise.

In our daily prayers we ask G-d to bring us Moshiach to restore the judiciary to its original position. Many of the prophetic writings speak of the glorious future where justice will be restored.

Why is this such an important and cherished hope for the future?

In light of the above it is clear that true justice means that the trait of G-dly truth is so dominant as to preclude any injustice. When we ask for the restoration of the judiciary as in the days of old, we are essentially asking G-d for a world in which G-dly truth is always present, precluding any and all injustice.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE SPIRITUAL I.N.S.

Many are worried about keeping out the negative influences.

The Torah is just as concerned, if not more, with keeping in the positive influences.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE SPIRITUAL I.N.S.

Guarding Our Borders

With the national elections approaching, it is likely that we will hear more talk about the issue of protecting our borders from the encroachment of illegal immigrants and illegal substances.. While we are a country of immigrants and we should always remember the fact that immigrants have made this country great, there is still a vital need to determine whose entry would be beneficial to this country and whose would be detrimental.

Appoint Judges to Your Gates

This — in a modified form — is precisely the message conveyed to us in this week's Parsha, according to the interpretation of the *Shaloh*.

Our Parsha begins with the commandment:

“Judges and officers you shall appoint in all of your gates.”

On the simple level of interpretation known as *p'shat*, this commandment is to appoint judges in all of the Land of Israel's cities. Since judges usually presided at the gates of the city, the Torah refers to cities as gates.

On a deeper level, the *Shaloh* explains that each and every one of us is a miniature city. And it is our task to appoint our own internal judges or INS agents, if you will, to insure that no "illegal immigrants," or "forbidden substances," i.e., unsavory influences, enter our little city.

In our society, one can be bombarded with all sorts of influences almost 24 hours of the day in which our radio, TV, newspaper, magazine, book, video, movie, Internet, billboard, neon lights, etc. inundate us with every imaginable message. We must therefore appoint special agents, i.e., our powers of discernment to determine what influences are desirable and which ones are deleterious to our spiritual and even physical health.

Insidious Influences

Very often the nature of the influences are not clear. They may be smuggled in with other neutral or even positive influences. Because of their insidious nature, one must occasionally look beneath the surface; open up the "trunks of cars", search between the "layers of clothing," search for "hidden compartments" in the luggage etc. to detect the hidden contraband.

In the spiritual realm there are also times when innocuous influences may contain hidden and unhealthy material as well. These must be avoided.

What are We Keeping In?

Having made a case for the role of our spiritual INS to keep out the undesirable, the truth, however, is that the primary message is not what we must keep out, but what we have to keep in.

This means, that our so called INS agents, that are to be set up at entry points of our miniature city, are primarily charged with the obligation to search for and allow the healthy and positive influences to enter our system. We must open our minds, ears and eyes to imbibe as much positive information as we can absorb, while, simultaneously, expunging that which is negative.

To underscore the point that the primary role of the judge is to encourage the positive, the Torah follows up the commandment to appoint judges with two statements: First it says: “And they shall judge the people with righteous judgment” — the positive. And only after that does the Torah speak of the role of the judge to avoid the negative: “You shall not pervert justice.”

Similarly, while we must always be mindful of the negative influences that pervade our environment, our focus, however, should be on looking for the right influences and

sources of knowledge and inundate ourselves, our children and our society with them.

The Torah does not call for the end of “immigration,” it calls for increased immigration as a way of strengthening our society.

In spiritual terms this means we must afford ourselves as many opportunities to study all the different levels of Torah, from the simple to the mystical, from Halacha to Aggadah especially now with the proliferation of translations of Torah classics into the English language.

As we approach the imminent redemption, we must realize that when the entire drama of the Messianic Age unfolds, there will be no more evil. Our senses and faculties will savor and imbibe the delightful taste of all the nuances of Torah and G-dly enlightenment without the need to filter out the negative, because, as the Prophet tells us, “the spirit of impurity I will remove from the earth.” Evil will simply cease to exist.

And while evil still exists and we must be ever so vigilant to filter out the evil from our “city,” we must realize that the primary function of the judge is to allow the good and holy to enter, particularly now that we are preparing for the age when goodness and holiness will reign supreme.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TWO WITNESSES

**The test of loyalty is when it manifests itself in two
opposite ways.**

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TWO WITNESSES

No Circumstantial Evidence

One of the salient differences between Jewish criminal law and contemporary secular law is that in a criminal proceeding that follows the laws of the Torah, **two** witnesses are required to testify against the accused. Circumstantial evidence, confession or the testimony of one witness will not result in a conviction.

In cases where ruthless criminals would literally “get away with murder,” Jewish law provided for some exceptions to the rigid rule of two witnesses. A court that sees society crumbling due to rampant violence is empowered to rely on other forms of evidence on an ad hoc basis.

We are All Witnesses

Based on the belief that every law, sentence and even word of the Torah conveys an eternal message that is relevant to all of us at all times and places, we ought to reflect on the message that can be derived from the two witness requirement. How does it relate to a non-criminal? And

how does it relate to us in our day and age when Jewish criminal courts no longer exist?

The prophet Isaiah refers to each and every one of us as G-d's witness. This can be understood on at least two levels: personal and historical.

On an individual level, every time we perform a Mitzvah (which means a Divine commandment), we are actually serving in the capacity of a witness. Because every Mitzvah is a form of emulating G-d, every Mitzvah we perform make us G-dly. In the words of the Talmud:

“Just as He is kind and compassionate, so too you be kind and compassionate.”

All the Mitzvos—i.e., G-dly acts—we do serve as one form of testimony to G-d's presence in our lives.

However, when a person follows in one direction of goodness, it could only be regarded as one witness. For example, if one were to lead an exemplary life devoted to kindness, it would still constitute only one form of testimony. This benevolent individual is testimony to the G-dly spirit of kindness.

But if we apply the analogy of Jewish criminal law's requirement of two witnesses to our personal role as G-d's witnesses, how does one provide two distinct forms of “testimony?”

The answer is that one must strive to express their G-dly spirit in, at least, two diverse ways.

To cite a few examples:

First, the kind—people oriented—person should also endeavor to work on self-refinement and/or the maintaining of high moral standards within his or her community.

Kind people are usually extroverted and focus on their relationships with others, while introspective people are focused primarily on their own refinement.

To maintain the two witness status one must combine these two thrusts.

Second, a communal worker should also focus on the individual.

Communal workers are generally focused on the collective. There some who do well with one on one.

To follow the two witness program one must endeavor to do both. Work with the group and also take the time to focus on individuals.

Third, one must combine love of G-d with reverence for Him.

Love and reverence are two distinct ways of relating to G-d. One must try to incorporate both approaches.

Fourth, one ought to combine the more intellectual exercises of studying Torah with the emotional experience of prayer.

Torah study is cerebral, while prayer is emotional. We must try to master both.

And the list goes on and on.

In short, we must try to be multi-faceted, or eclectic in our approach to Judaism

To be sure, in emergency situations, when there might be a gross deficiency in one area of positive behavior, one must—at least temporarily—focus all of their attention on that one lacuna. However, as a general rule, when one develops a two-pronged approach to being a witness to G-d's existence, it is far more powerful expression of the Divine. It points to the multi-faceted nature of G-d and the person who is imbued with this G-dly spirit.

Two Pronged Testimony of History

Historically, the Jewish people's very existence is also testimony to G-d's existence. Without the special relationship that exists between us and G-d, how was it possible for a nation so small and persecuted to have survived and persevered so long?

Many greater nations and civilizations have come and gone, but we, the Jewish people—notwithstanding the unparalleled suffering and opportunities to assimilate—did not. We outlived our enemies and those who tried to lure us away from our Jewish identities.

One can therefore say that our very survival as a people is testimony to G-d's existence.

But the critic may raise a valid objection. While it is true that the Jewish people have enjoyed immortality as a nation, what about all the pain that we've endured for the past 3,000 years? Where was G-d during all of the suffering?

How can we fulfill our mission as G-d's witnesses when, those who mock us—and our G-d—taunt us with the question “Where was your G-d during the Holocaust?”

Alas, our critics have a point. If G-d wants us to serve in our role as witnesses to His existence, He must keep His promise to us, to bring an end to the painful, bitter and long exile.

It is not blasphemous to implore G-d to bring an end to the suffering; on the contrary, it is G-d's will, as expressed in the Torah, that we implore Him to bring about the final Redemption,

Indeed, it is the basis of most of our daily prayers. When we beseech G-d to change things for the better, we thereby exhibit profound faith in G-d and in His ability to make good on His promises to us.

Only when G-d will send Moshiach and bring about the final redemption, ushering in a world of peace, will we be able to serve in our capacity as witnesses to G-d's existence and providence.

While our survival in exile may constitute one powerful witness, but, only when we will get out of exile, will we be able to be the second witness as well.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE SYMBIOTIC SANHEDRIN

We live in a misaligned world.

**The Holy Temple was a model of a perfect world where all
levels were in perfect alignment.**

**In the Messianic Age the entire world will experience that
measure of synchronicity.**

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE SYMBIOTIC SANHEDRIN

Euphemisms

The Jewish people were governed by four sources of authority: The monarchy, judiciary (the Sanhedrin), priesthood and prophecy, all of which are discussed in this week's parsha. Each of these institutions had specific requirements to qualify as a member. Two institutions, the Sanhedrin and the priesthood, had as a peculiar requirement that their physical bodies should not be blemished or defective.

This requirement flies against every notion modern people have of not discriminating against the physically impaired. Our society has, correctly, shied away from using insensitive terms to describe a person who lacks certain physical attributes. We use terms such as "physically challenged" instead of the crass epithet, "cripple."

Indeed, the Talmud was the first to recognize the need to employ a euphemism to describe a blind person. The term is *sagi nahor*. Literally, it means "great-light." Indeed, in rabbinic, as well as in modern Hebrew, the term used for "euphemism" is *sagi nahor*.

Chassidic thought explains that the term is accurate because blindness is actually the result of a person having too much energy for his physical body to contain. Thus, a person who lacks sight might have more powerful insight. A person who cannot see physically often exhibits greater perception than those who can see.

In addition, Jewish law is strict with regard to the way we speak and think about others. The Talmud discusses how the Torah goes out of its way to avoid writing something disparaging about a non-kosher animal; yet the same Torah excludes physically challenged people from both serving in the Temple and serving on the Sanhedrin!

The Bais Hamikdash: A Model of Perfect Alignment

The explanation regarding the Priesthood and their service in the Holy Temple is that it relates to the uniqueness of the Bais Hamikdash as a place where the physical and spiritual worlds worked in tandem and in perfect alignment. The former was a reflection of the latter. While the rest of the world suffers from a misalignment of the physical and the spiritual, the Holy Temple manifested a world in which the two are mirror images of each other.

By having only Priests who did not possess physical defects Torah was demonstrating what an ideal world is supposed to look like. We are so accustomed to seeing mismatched realities, where the good suffer and the wicked prosper,

that we've accepted that as normal and call that condition "reality." Anything different is suspect.

For example, if a righteous person is rich and prosperous, some people become suspicious. Where did he get the money from? He must have done something illegal or unethical to attain such affluence. We almost revel in the poverty of our sages and wince at great rabbis enjoying the benefits of this world.

In the true reality things match. While reality is distorted in exile, we must recognize that the distortion is an exile phenomenon and never confuse it with the ideal.

Especially now, when we are on the threshold of the Messianic Age, which will begin with the building of an even more glorious Bais Hamikdash than the first two, we must condition ourselves to the reality that true normalcy is the state of the world in the days of Moshiach, particularly, the way things were in the Bais Hamikdash. Normalcy is defined as when the physical and the spiritual are identical twins.

Sanhedrin in the Temple

While this may adequately explain the requirement of the priests' unblemished state for eligibility to work in the Bais Hamikdash—a place of perfection—how do we explain a similar requirement for the members of the Sanhedrin?

The simple answer is that the Sanhedrin too resided in the Bais Hamikdash, in the section called the "*Lishkas Hagazis-Hewn Chamber*."

Moreover, when the Sanhedrin left the Hewn Chamber near the end of the Second Temple era, they lost some of their judicial powers, in particular, the ability to impose capital punishment. It was their connection to the Temple that was their source of empowerment. Since they had an association with the Temple, with its concomitant expression of perfection and harmony, they too needed physical characteristics paralleling and reflecting their spiritual attributes.

However, one can still question the very premise of this answer. Why did the Sanhedrin have to function within the precincts of the Temple? What connection is there between rendering justice and the Holy Temple where one served G-d through the various offerings?

The Divine Imprimatur

To answer this question and to better grasp the emphasis on physical perfection for members of the Sanhedrin it is important that we understand the role of the Sanhedrin and what distinguished it from other lower courts which were not situated in the Temple.

The Sanhedrin served a dual function:

First, it was the ultimate authority on matters of Jewish law. The laws of Judaism were ough the Sanhedrin and when they ruled on a matter of law their decision was final.

Second, they represented the totality of the Jewish nation. The collective erudition and authority of the 71 Sages that constituted the Sanhedrin represented and channeled the entire Jewish people.

With respect to the second function we can understand why the Sanhedrin had to reside in the Bais Hamikdash: The power to channel all of Israel derived from the Bais Hamikdash itself. The Divine presence that rested there had the unifying power to incorporate all of the people under one roof.

However, even with regard to its first function, as the transmitters of Torah knowledge and supreme arbiters of Jewish law they needed to be located in the Temple. It was the Temple that gave the Divine imprimatur to their rulings.

Human Logic and Divine Direction

To be sure, when they ruled on a matter of Jewish law they had to use all of their intellectual acumen. Every decision on their part had to be rooted in Torah precedent, and the analytic tools they applied to interpreting the Torah and applying it to new situations were handed down from G-d at Mount Sinai and transmitted from generation to

generation. They could not, however, rely on prophecy or any extra-logical method at reaching a decision.

When a member of the Sanhedrin, or for that matter a rabbinic authority today, reaches a decision in matters of Jewish law, he is functioning as an integral part of G-d's Torah. The omniscient G-d knew that when He gave the Torah to the Jewish people they would interpret and apply it with the finite powers of the human intellect. Indeed, that was G-d's intention and He knew what the outcome would be. The result was already part of, and implicit in, G-d's original communication at Sinai.

However, even the best of human minds could err. As brilliant as the members of the Sanhedrin were, they were fallible and capable of making mistakes that would not channel G-d's true intention. Indeed, there is a section of the Torah (at the end of parshas *Vayikra*) and an entire tractate of the Talmud (Tractate *Horiyos*) that are devoted precisely to the possibility that the Sanhedrin might err and cause the nation to transgress in reliance on their flawed decision. This tractate discusses how they would need to go about rectifying and atoning for their mistake.

Notwithstanding the possibility of error on their part, the Sanhedrin was usually able to channel G-d's intent in their legal rulings, even to the extent of meting out the death penalty. The license to take a life, an irreversible act, came from their unique ability to have their minds in sync with G-d's "mind."

In other words, their greatest intellectual abilities would not suffice; they needed to be tuned in to a spiritual frequency which connected them to the source of the Torah's knowledge. They could plug in to that frequency only in the place that G-d chose for the two worlds, the heavenly and the earthly, to meet; the Bais Hamikdash.

So, the Torah was given to humans and, as the Talmud states, "Torah is not in Heaven." While the judges had to use their minds and not rely on prophecy, their ability to choose the right direction required close proximity to the Divine. This they acquired by virtue of their presence in the Bais Hamikdash.

The members of the Sanhedrin personified the ideal of the meeting of the two worlds. There was a perfect symmetry between Divine intellect and their corporeal minds. This symbiotic relationship was manifested by the perfection of their physical properties as a mirror reflection of their spiritual properties.

Sniffing Justice!

One of the features of the Final Redemption will be the reconstitution of the Sanhedrin along with the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash. It follows that in these last days of exile we ought to prepare ourselves for the Sanhedrin phenomenon. This demands that we devote ourselves to Torah study in a manner that connects the two worlds.

Frequently, when we study Torah we can be swept up with the brilliance of the ideas and delight in the intellectual feasts it provides. Torah study is exciting and the greatest delight. King David devoted the longest Psalm (Psalm 119) to extol the beauty of Torah and his passion for its knowledge. However, King David also possessed another quality. When King Saul was told about David's virtues he was unimpressed until he was told "and G-d is with him." King Saul understood that to mean that David was not only a towering scholar, but that his views always prevailed. This meant that not only did he possess the requisite intellectual conditions for Torah study, but, in addition, there was a perfect symmetry between his knowledge and the Divine level of knowledge. He was like the Sanhedrin which resided in the Bais Hamikdash.

One of the qualifications of Moshiach is that his power of judgment is his ability to "sniff" righteousness. Moshiach embodies the same fusion of the Higher and lower dimensions of Torah, reminiscent of the Sanhedrin.

Our role in preparing for the Redemption is similar. We must make ourselves receptive to the Divinity of Torah so that our minds work in tandem with G-d's mind.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

ELUL: A MONTH OF REFUGE AND JOY

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

ELUL: A MONTH OF REFUGE AND JOY

Conventional versus Chassidic View of Elul

Elul is the name of the last month of the year. Elul is the month that precedes the Jewish New Year and is therefore regarded as the month in which we take stock of our behavior in the last eleven months of the year.

Conventional Jewish wisdom has always viewed Elul as a month of introspection, crying over past misdeeds, Teshuvah, (repentance or return), getting into the spirit of somberness of the High Holiday Season.

From the Chassidic perspective, Elul is a most exhilarating time.

First of all, Elul is the time of the year when G-d's Thirteen Attributes of Mercy are most pronounced.

Secondly, Elul has been compared to a City of Refuge, discussed in this week's Torah portion. When a person killed someone due to negligence, the Torah required that the killer escape to one of 48 cities in Israel. The purpose of this escape was not only to serve as punishment, but, more importantly, to serve as a means of escape from the

wrath of the relatives of the victim. In addition, the positive atmosphere of these communities enabled the killer to learn to be more sensitive to the needs of others. After all, it was his insensitivity that caused his negligence.

What was true in the realm of space – that the Cities of Refuge – provided for refuge and positive conditioning, is true in time about the month of Elul. During this month, every one of us, has the capacity to “escape “ from the threatening forces of evil that pursue us all year round.

During Elul we are able to change, because there is something special about this month which conditions us to be more spiritually alert and sensitive.

The King is In the Field!

R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, provided us with a parable to help us understand the significance of Elul. Elul, he explained, is when the King is in the field. When a king returns to his palace he travels through the fields. At that time, everyone can approach him and ask for their heart's desire. The king, uncharacteristically greets everyone graciously and with a smiling countenance; granting the requests of all.

This describes the atmosphere of Elul. On the one hand, there are no Holidays during this month; but the King is still accessible to all of us, more so than in any other time

of the year. The King during Elul, furthermore, greets us graciously and with a cheerful countenance.

When we realize the great opportunities that Elul affords us, we will be moved to serve G-d with greater care and joy.

We are now standing on the threshold – the Elul -- of the Messianic Age. The preparations for this era must be like the preparations of Elul permeated with joy.

ESSAY NINETEEN

**DON'T CHANGE THE
SUBJECT!**

ESSAY NINETEEN

DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT!

What is the Subject?

A story is told of a hapless bank robber who approaches the cashier and demands:

“Give me \$10,000 or else you’ll be geography!”

The startled cashier corrects him, “You mean history.”

To which the bandit retorts, “Don’t change the subject!”

Accounting and Jewish (New) Math

While the subjects we will discuss in this essay include accounting, math and chemistry, we are not going to change the subject...

Our subject is ostensibly **accounting** because this is the month of Elul, the month of stock-taking, when we make an honest accounting!

This is also the month of the “Jewish (new) **math**.”

We can find several examples of Jewish creative math:

The Talmud (conclusion of *Makos*) states that there are 613 Mitzvos. However the prophet Chabakuk came and boiled them down to one (commandment): "A righteous person lives with his faith." Indeed, there is a mathematical basis for that equation: $6+1+3=10$; $1+0=1$. The 613 can be reduced to the number 1 and it is the Mitzvah to believe in G-d.

A second example of a more radical mathematical "trick" is the story of the chosid Reb Binyamin Kletzker, (a disciple of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, known as the Alter Rebbe, the founder of Chabad Chassidus) who was a businessman, but a very spiritual one. After a long day's work, he would tally his profits. Instead of writing the total in numbers he wrote the Biblical phrase, "There is nothing besides Him." He reduced all his accounting figures to the oneness of G-d.

The Rebbe (see *Sefer Hasichos* 5751-*R'e'i*) did the same mathematical "trick" when he stated that the sum total of the accounting of the month of Elul is: "*Ad masai*-How much longer" shall we remain in exile?

This is the subject that we cannot change. All of our creative energies have to be rallied around doing our part to bring Redemption. These efforts include coming before G-d and respectfully, but firmly, demanding that He bring an end to exile with all of its suffering and pain.

In truth, this “reduction” is also about the number one. The Final Redemption is when G-d’s unity will be revealed fully to the entire world. So, when we ask for Redemption we are not just expressing our desire for a peaceful world; we are primarily asking for a world that recognizes the truth of one G-d. That recognition will bring in its wake peace and all the other incredible blessings.

Faith, Understanding and Permeating

Returning to the three examples of “creative’ figuring; although they convey similar messages, we can discern three different nuances.

Chabakuk reduced all of Mitzvos to one: *Emunah*-faith, by merely tracing the Mitzvos to their source and root, which is faith. That reduction was a quantitative one, from 613 to 1. In addition, Chabakuk did not transform anything; he just took a larger number of Mitzvos and traced them to their root.

Reb Binyamin Kletzker, the chosid business man, reduced all of his worldly business profits to one G-d. While Chabakuk reduced all Mitzvos to one-faith in G-d, Reb Binyamin took all of his extensive earnings in the material world and reduced them to the recognition of the oneness of G-d. He actually made a qualitative transfer of mundane earnings to one supernal G-d.

The Rebbe took the accounting of Elul for all of our past years' commitments to Torah and Mitzvos and translated them into the cry and song of *ad masai*-how much longer, which calls for Moshiach and Redemption to materialize into our physical reality. He demonstrated that all of our Judaism is focused on making the oneness of G-d a palpable reality.

Chabakuk focused on **believing** in one G-d. Reb Binyamin Kletzker applied his intellect to **understanding** the concept of Divine unity as it related to his material existence. The Rebbe spoke of how the entire world will be permeated with G-d's oneness.

In truth, the Rebbe did not change the subject of Elul. Just as Chabakuk did not truly diminish Judaism by reducing the 613 to 1. Rather he demonstrated to us that if we focus on the one it will facilitate the 613.

Similarly, the Rebbe did not eliminate the all-encompassing accounting of Elul, rather he gave us the inner meaning of all our Elul accountings for all of our observance of Torah and Mitzvos. The Rebbe taught that, in fact, all of Judaism is geared to the future; making this world a G-dly world; a world of Moshiach.

The Root and the End

Some have interpreted the Rebbe's message as a call to strengthen our Emunah-faith just as Chabakuk had preached in his time.

In truth, there is a fundamental difference:

Chabakuk gave the Jewish people of his generation a formula to advance their commitment to the commandments by giving them the foundation of all Mitzvos: Emunah-faith. When we have faith in G-d we will try to be faithful to Him by learning what He wants of us and implementing that in our lives.

Faith is thus the root and foundation of Judaism.

What the Rebbe innovated/revealed, based on many of the earlier teachings of Torah, is actually the sum total of Torah and Mitzvos. All of Judaism revolves around and is directed towards the objective of making the world a dwelling place for G-d, which will come to fruition in the Messianic Age.

While faith is the root and genesis of Judaism, the Messianic Age is its full flowering; its ultimate goal. So if we have to make an evaluation and assessment of our Judaism throughout the year it has to be connected to ultimate goal of bringing about the Final Redemption.

No to Antinomian Views

One should not misconstrue this concept and think that the Messianic Age is separate from the observance of the commandments. On the contrary, Maimonides (Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim; chapter 11) makes it crystal clear that Moshiach's task is to make it possible for us to fulfill all of the commandments in the most comprehensive and perfect fashion.

The primary test to determine whether one is qualified to be the Moshiach is his fidelity to Torah observance. The reason we rejected certain individuals proposed as Moshiach in the past was precisely because they did not meet this criterion. Tellingly, they advanced antinomian views, advocating the abrogation of certain or all of the Mitzvos.

The reason all of Judaism revolves around Moshiach and the Messianic Age is that we will be able to observe the commandments in a most complete fashion in that time.

But, whereas in the past, when we were in the initial or middle stages of our journey towards Redemption, our focus was more on the journey and not so much on the destination, now that focus has changed.

According to the teachings of the greatest Jewish leaders of the past century, particularly the Rebbe, we have completed the journey and the focus must turn to the end result of our collective efforts of commitment to Judaism.

Changing our Chemistry

It is not enough for us to want Moshiach and even ask for the final Redemption. The Rebbe also wants us to develop intolerance for Golus and a passion for Redemption. The Rebbe wants us to change the chemistry of our minds.

The only way to accomplish this change is through the study of Torah, particularly the sections that deal with Moshiach and Redemption.

Connection to Parsha

This is the connection to this week's parsha, which talks about placing judges at all of our gates.

The reference to gates has been understood to include our body's own gateways to the outside world. Our eyes, ears, mouth and nose should be guarded.

In terms of making an honest accounting we must judge ourselves:

Do we cry out with our mouth *Ad Masai*-How much longer? Do we say these words because we were told to say them or do we say them with heartfelt passion?

Do we use our mouth to teach about Moshiach, and publicize to our family, friends and indeed the entire world the Rebbe's prophetic message that Moshiach's coming is imminent?

Do we hear the sound of the shofar blowing to tell us that the Geulah is imminent? Indeed, the Rebbe informed us that from the Six Day War and beyond, the Great Shofar has been sounded to herald the imminent arrival of Moshiach. Have we made an effort to hear the sound of that Shofar?

Do we hear the announcement of Redemption the Rebbe made, quoting the Midrash, “The Time of Your Redemption has Arrived?”

Do we hear the Rebbe’s statement (invoking prophecy) of the imminence of the Redemption?

Do we open our eyes to see the tell-tale miracles that are associated with Moshiach? The Rebbe told us to open our eyes to see that the Redemption is truly right in front of us.

Do we have the keen sense of smell to detect the presence of Moshiach in our midst? Moshiach’s power of justice is described in Isaiah as his ability to **smell** justice. Since the Ba’al Shem Tov taught that each of us has a spark of Moshiach, we should have developed a keen olfactory sense of righteousness and sensed the fragrance of Redemption blowing in the wind.

The **accounting** of Elul is to reduce, **mathematically**, the many aspects of Judaism and life to the one overarching theme of Redemption. We can accomplish this by changing

our mind's **chemistry** by **studying Torah**, particularly the Chassidic teachings that relate to Moshiach.

This will certainly give us a lesson in **geography**, with the ingathering of Jews from all parts of the earth to the Land of Israel. Then **economics** will undergo a major change; as Maimonides writes that there will be an abundance of everything.

Moreover, there will be a convergence of all the nations of the world speaking different languages (so we'll master **linguistics**) to the Bais Hamikdash, the building of which will require our mastery of Temple **architecture**.

Indeed, when all this occurs we will be able to look back and appreciate our **history**.

While, according to Maimonides, the laws of **physics** will not change, the way we view the physical laws will. We will see the Divine in every physical phenomenon.

G-d will reveal his healing powers, advancing the art and science of **medicine** to the point where everyone will be healed.

But, please, don't change the subject!

ESSAY TWENTY

SEPARATION OF POWERS

**Separation of powers is necessary as a prelude for their
unification.**

ESSAY TWENTY

SEPARATION OF POWERS

Whom can You Trust?

Trust is the word that we hear much about lately. Can we trust the CEO's of our corporations? Can we trust our government officials? Can we trust the stock market? Can we trust our banks and trust companies?

From a Jewish standpoint, it is obvious that there is only one entity in whom we can put our trust, and that is G-d. For only G-d has the power to keep all His promises and only G-d represents absolute consistency and reliability.

Nevertheless, G-d did put us in an un-G-dly world. Indeed, the very word for "world" in Hebrew, *Olam*, actually means concealment, because its true Divine nature is not apparent.

How do we bridge the gap between impeccable G-dly integrity and trust and the less than honest world in which we live? Or, perhaps better stated, how do we introduce some of that G-dly truth and trust into our lives?

The Four Branches of Government

The answer to these questions is provided for in this week's parsha-*Shoftim*., which deals with the four branches/institutions of an ideal Jewish government: the monarchy, judiciary, priesthood and prophecy. When these institutions follow the Torah's dictates, society at large is invested with Divine truth and trust.

Why were all these branches needed? On the surface it appears that is was the forerunner of the American separation of powers system. Upon deeper reflection that assessment is partially true. A Kohain/priest was not permitted to become a king. Likewise a king could not be a member of the judiciary. However, the judiciary did comprise Kohanim/priests. The three branches of priesthood, the judiciary and prophecy could all reside in one person. For example: Jeremiah was a prophet, a priest and a member of the Sanhedrin, the Supreme court of ancient Israel.

Monarchy the Exception

What does emerge from this analysis that the essential separation of powers applied to the monarchy. A king, who dealt with the more mundane affairs of running a government—while he must also be a spiritual individual who can inspire and uplift his countrymen—could not serve in the Holy Temple or render justice as a member of the judiciary. There must always be a body of Divinely directed people—the judges of the Sanhedrin—to whom

even a king is accountable. A king must subordinate himself to the Torah. Were he to be a participant in the judicial process, there was always the danger that the august authority vested in him might prejudice the other judges to follow his approach.

Moreover, a monarch's first responsibility was to ensure the security and physical well-being of his country. It is only natural that his mindset will be attuned to the materialistic needs of the people. That mindset is often inconsistent with the Torah mindset that a judge must have. A judge does not look at the facts and then decide how he feels about it. Rather he sees the facts through the prism of Torah and judges them accordingly.

These two world outlooks—viewing the world through the prism of worldly needs and criteria vs. viewing the world through the prism of Torah—could often clash. A king had to know that the word of G-d conveyed to him, either directly by way of a prophet, or, indirectly by way of judicial order, superseded any feeling, attitude or understanding of his own.

Moses, the Exception

Now, though the general rule of the Torah was to “separate the powers” there were notable exceptions to this rule. The most famous of them was Moses. Moses was the ultimate source of law. Moses was the “Chief

Justice” of the Sanhedrin of his time; Moses was also the leader and monarch of the Jewish nation; Moses was the ultimate prophet and Moses also served as High Priest, at least until after Aaron was initiated, and according to another view in the Talmud, until his passing.

What this exception to the rule tells us is that ideally, all of these sources of influence and power should nurture one another. A king should be informed and inspired by the judiciary, priesthood and prophets.

The Heart and Brain of Israel

A king is likened to our heart because it pumps the blood to every organ of our body. The heart also symbolizes our emotions, which control every facet of our being. A king is also compared to the brain that dictates orders to the entire body. However, even a king must be under the direction of the Sanhedrin, the teachings of the Torah. In terms of our own lives, as important as emotions and human intellect is, they must be guided by Torah-oriented intellect. And even that does not suffice. We must always try to connect to G-d by finding the Divine inspiration within our soul-the prophet within us and translate that into heartfelt and sincere prayers to G-d.

Moshiach: Another Exception

Our Sages refer to Moshiach as a king, a teacher of Torah

and a prophet. Moshiach will combine the diverse sources of power in a healthy way, where one power will not only not clash with the other, but actually reinforce and enhance the other.

Our way of preparing for Moshiach is to recognize the need for the “separation of powers,” so as not to compromise their integrity, while, simultaneously allowing for their synthesis.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

RETROACTIVE

If you want something enough, don't just patiently wait for it; anticipate it, yearn for it, incorporate it and live it now!

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

RETROACTIVE

Connection between Entering the Promised Land and the Monarchy

The Torah introduces the office and role of the monarchy with the following statement:

“When you come to the land, G-d your G-d, is giving you, and you take possession of it and settle in it you will eventually say ‘I will set a king over myself...’ you shall always set a king over you, one whom G-d your G-d, chooses...”

Sifri, a Talmudic era compilation of Biblical commentaries, explains that by observing the commandment mentioned here the Jewish people will merit entering into the Promised Land.

[The statement of the Sifri appears to be contradicted by the fact that the prophet Samuel was upset when they asked for a king. This question has been asked by many of the commentators. One classic answer is that while asking for a king was a good thing, they asked for it prematurely.]

The question arises, how could observance of the commandment pertaining to a king who has yet to be appointed help retroactively to provide them with the merit to be able to conquer the land?

Determination and Anticipation

One answer is that when we are determined to fulfill a mitzvah at a later time, G-d gives us the ability to succeed in accomplishing our goal. By desiring to fulfill the commandments associated with entering and conquering the land, they will be awarded the opportunity to succeed in achieving their goal.

The fact that they would ask for a king is a sign that from the very outset their intention of entering the Land was to establish a monarchy; a prerequisite to the building of the Bais Hamikdash-the Holy Temple.

We find a parallel to this in the dialogue between G-d and Moses concerning the worthiness of the Jewish people to be liberated from Egypt. When Moses questioned the worthiness of the people to be liberated, G-d replied: "You will worship G-d on this mountain."

Here too the question has been raised, how can the future event serve as a reason for them to be liberated?

The answer is that the very fact that they will anticipate the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai would make

them worthy to be liberated and serve G-d on that mountain.

When we show keen interest in the future observances, even as we are still in the past, G-d gives makes it possible for us to realize our goal.

Here too, when they demonstrated their willingness to appoint a king, as G-d commanded them, they deserved to enter and inherit the land.

Why the Monarchy and Retroactivity?

A question can still be raised. Why does the Sifri connect the Mitzvah of establishing the monarchy as the specific Mitzvah in whose merit they would enter the Land? Weren't there other commandments that could serve retroactively as their merit?

Perhaps the answer lies in the very nature of the Jewish people inheriting the land and settling it.

There are two ways people can occupy a city or a country. The first way is to physically occupy the space of that particular area. In this scenario, they don't identify with the specific nature of the land; it's just a place like any other place to live in. They can easily move to another location if it seems that it will prove more convenient for them.

The second scenario is where people see this particular location as the only one to live in. With this attitude it is

clear that the people regard this area as their permanent location; they identify with and are wed to it. It is their unique and exclusive home.

What test can there be to determine what approach the Jewish nation had upon their entry into and residency in the Promised Land?

The test was, were they planning to establish a monarchy. If this was the case it would be a sign that their interest was to plant roots in the land. This would be forever the land of the Jewish people; the Land of Israel for the people of Israel.

Thus, when they prepared and yearned for a king it was a sign that they wanted to truly inherit the land permanently. G-d therefore granted them their wish and empowered them to inherit the land.

This also explains why appointing a king was a prerequisite for the building of the Bais Hamikdash.

In order for the permanent structure of the Bais Hamikdash to be built they needed to have reached the point where it was clear that their presence in and their association with the Land of Israel was of a permanent nature. This became manifest (although the intention for this approach was there from the time they entered, albeit not overtly demonstrated) when they actually appointed a king.

The Parallel for Today

The primary focus of the Messianic Age will be our ability to connect with G-d and each other unhindered by all of the obstacles posed by our existence in an imperfect world.

When we show our desire and anticipation for the Redemption so that we can better serve G-d, our aspirations will be realized.

Particularly, when we show our love for the Land of Israel because it is the place where the Bais Hamikdash will be built channeling G-d's presence into the world, G-d will see to it that it will be built, imminently!

ESSAY TWENTY TWO

THREE ARGUMENTS FOR REDEMPTION

**When you want something good from G-d, don't settle for
measured and finite good.**

Ask G-d for His infinite goodness.

ESSAY TWENTY TWO

THREE ARGUMENTS FOR REDEMPTION

Don't Fear Your Enemy!

This week's parsha discusses the prospects of war and how the Jewish people need not fear the outcome of the war:

"If you go out to war against your enemies, and see a horse and chariot, a people (which appears to be) more numerous than you—you should not be afraid of them! For G-d is with you, your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt....For G-d, your G-d is going with you, to fight your enemies for you, to save you."

According to a Chassidic commentary, Ir Chanoch, Moses, in these last few words, was actually suggesting three reasons why the people did not need to fear their enemy. These three reasons also parallel and represent three reasons why we are secure in our belief that G-d will redeem us from this exile as well:

For His Own Sake

First: "For G-d your G-d is going with you."

Even if we would not be deserving of G-d's Redemption, G-d will do it for His own sake. G-d has made an investment in and committed Himself to us from the days of the Patriarchs onwards. G-d made a covenant to Abraham that He would always keep His eye on the Jewish people and ultimately liberate them from the periods of exile they would temporarily have to live through and the oppression they would endure.

Anyone somewhat familiar with the Torah knows that G-d swore that He would never abandon us. The longer we suffer and languish in exile the greater is the degradation of G-d's own reputation, as it were.

In Biblical and Talmudic jargon the entire exile experience where Jews are victimized is the ultimate *Chilul Hashem*, the profanation of G-d's name. No matter how much we may have "irritated" G-d we can be confident that He will ultimately liberate us from exile and bring peace to Israel, the Jewish people and the entire world.

Intolerant of Oppression

Second: "To fight your enemies for you."

Our enemies have subjected us to unprecedented pain. No matter how much we might have sinned, there is no rhyme or reason that we should be so humiliated and tortured, spiritually, emotionally and physically. In all the annals of the world's history, arguably, no nation has been so

undeservedly persecuted. For this reason alone, G-d owes us His protection and salvation.

This is consistent with the Biblical statement that G-d takes up for the oppressed. Even if the oppressed person is not so virtuous and deserving of special privileges, nevertheless, G-d will still take up for the oppressed and liberate them from their predicament.

We are Deserving!

Third: “to save you.”

G-d will save us because we are, indeed, deserving!

Who has heard of a nation that has gone through thousands of years of persecution, dispersion, calumny and enticement, and have still survived, flourished and remained faithful, for better or for worse, to their G-d, despite the appearance that He had abandoned them. Could G-d have asked for a better and holier people?

For this reason we are certainly deserving to be saved and liberated from exile.

Moses Walked Three Steps

This explains the words of the Midrash that when Moses approached the burning bush—where he was given the charge to be the Jewish nation’s first liberator—he walked

three steps. Why is it important to know that Moses walked three steps?

However, the Midrash uses the three steps as a metaphor for the three arguments and approaches that Moses was going to use to get G-d to liberate the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage as well as from all subsequent exiles.

The three approaches are that G-d should save them because: a) they are deserving, b) they were inordinately oppressed and c) that it is for G-d's own sake and glory.

Isn't Deserving Salvation Enough?

At first glance, one can ask why the need for the first and second line of defense if we have the third that we are worthy of being liberated. If we deserve it why do we have to use the persecution argument? And if we doubly deserve it because of who we are and what we've gone through, why do we have to ask G-d to do it for His own sake? Would it make any sense for a hard worker to ask his employer to pay him because the employer would ruin his reputation if he didn't do so?

In truth, these three arguments are not simply used to reinforce our claim for liberation. Each argument elicits a different level of kindness from G-d.

Reward Commensurate with Investment

When we ask G-d to liberate us for our sake, the degree of reward we are entitled to is commensurate with our investment.

When we ask G-d for liberation because we are victims, that elicits G-d's sense of indignation and the added "emotion" on G-d's part leads to a much greater reward and magnitude of Redemption for us.

Just as the enemies of Israel throughout history have gone way beyond the pale in the way they persecuted us, even as persecution goes, so too, the reward we will receive in the world of Redemption with the coming of Moshiach, will go beyond the pale of goodness that we could ever have anticipated based solely on the amount of effort we invested in our pursuit of G-d's will.

But even the enhanced measure of good we will receive in the Era of Redemption is still finite compared to what the truly infinite G-d possesses. When we ask Him for liberation based on G-d's own consideration, we can expect the good to be limitless because it is not based on limited human considerations, but on G-d's expansive and infinite power. May we see the onset of the Redemption, imminently!

ESSAY TWENTY THREE

WHAT'S JEWISH ABOUT LABOR DAY?

ESSAY TWENTY THREE

WHAT'S JEWISH ABOUT LABOR DAY?

Coincidence

Labor Day usually occurs at the beginning of the academic calendar. Labor Day also coincides with the beginning of the Jewish New Year. In many years it occurs in proximity to *Rosh Chodesh* (New Month of) Elul, the month of introspection and preparation for the New Year.

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught us that nothing happens by chance. Even the timing of secular holidays must carry some spiritual significance. The fact that Labor Day – with its message concerning the importance of work – occurs around the beginning of the Jewish New Year, conveys a very important message to us about the significance of work in the Jewish tradition.

Born to Toil

The Biblical Book of Job declares that “a person is born to toil.” When the Torah demands of us to rest on the Sabbath, it prefaces this commandment with the words: “Six days shall you work.” Resting on Shabbos is most meaningful and uplifting when it follows six days of labor.

The Talmud abounds with statements that extol the virtues of work.

What is it about work that is so crucial – within the framework of Judaism? If work would merely be a means to the end of earning a living, our rabbis would not have extolled its virtue. To be sure, idleness can lead to undesirable consequences, but from the many Biblical and Talmudic quotes concerning work, it appears that our tradition considers work to be more than just the negation of idleness and a means to eliminate boredom.

“To be Finished”

The Torah, in the Book of Genesis (2:3) – when it describes the creation of the world and the reason we rest on Shabbos states:

“And G-d blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it G-d ceased from all His work that He had created **to be finished.**”

These last three words are very strange. What does the Torah mean when it says that G-d had created “to be finished?” Indeed, because of the ambiguity of this phrase, many translators struggled to find a more suitable translation, without much success.

Rashi, the “prince of Bible commentator” provides us with a simple, yet profound, explanation:

G-d created the world, an imperfect world, so that we could finish the process of creation and perfect it. By doing so, we become partners with G-d in His creation, not just passive bystanders, or uninvolved recipients of G-d's bounty.

Work, is thus, intrinsically holy, because it is our way of acknowledging our G-d given role in this world. We were created by G-d to be His partners in creation and make the world a better place – in the words of the Midrash: “A dwelling place for G-d.”

Don't let it get to Your Head!

But, a question can be asked: Why does the Torah indicate the importance of work in the context of the Shabbos?

The answer is that work without rest that follows on the Shabbos can also increase our ego and drive for power in our quest of mastering the earth. Employers, for example, because of their G-d given role of enabling others to work, possess immense power, that is subject to abuse.

To prevent the power G-d has given us in perfecting the world, from getting to our heads and destroying anything we might have built, the Torah gave us a Shabbos when we recognize that G-d is truly the only Creator, and that our ability to create was given to us by Him.

Retroactive Artform

On a higher plane and, more importantly, perhaps, the message of Shabbos is that the definition of perfection is not just in the physical sense. During the work week we tame the raw materials of nature and make them usable and functional. On the Sabbath we elevate the work that we did into a higher domain. Our work week is retroactively transformed into a spiritual art form. From that perspective, our work is not really finished until Shabbos.

Connection to Parshas Shoftim

In many years Labor Day coincides with the parsha of Shoftim. Since nothing is by coincidence, especially matters relating to Torah, there must be some connection between the parsha and Labor Day.

The parsha discusses various forms of government, from the judiciary to the monarchy. The common denominator of these institution of government is that they must be the fountain-heads of spiritual and moral guidance to the entire nation. Their role has been compared to the head which controls the entire body.

In terms of time, the Shabbos is the Queen and the rest of the working week is comparable to the common citizens of the queen's domain.

The objective of the Shabbos Queen is to edify, enhance and elevate the preceding days of the week.

Our notion of labor is complete only when we recognize the Shabbos that follows.

The Seventh Millennium: The Future Shabbos

Our sages have told us that the six days of work parallel the six millennia of existence from the time of creation. The seventh millennium – the Messianic Age – is the Shabbos of existence.

Now is the time for us to work and make the world the type of world that G-d can be proud of. But, we also have to remember that our work is not complete until the coming of Moshiach. Then, all the accomplishments of today will be uplifted and made more complete. It will feel like the way we feel after a long hard week of work followed by a blissful Shabbos experience, when we savor that which we had accomplished during the week.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

THREE ROADS TO GEULAH

In our own time, intellectuals formulated the twin evils of Nazism and communism, which unleashed havoc on the world and caused the death of millions.

By contrast, knowledge of Torah does not only edify its students. Torah study also refines them, by providing a refuge from the hostile influences of secular society.

In addition, Torah exposes to each of us the positive influences of our own Divine soul.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

THREE ROADS TO GEULAH

The Three *Tachins*

One of the institutions in the Land of Israel mentioned in the Torah several times is the Cities of Refuge. These cities were intended as refuges for one who committed criminally negligent homicide. In such cases, the victim's relatives had the right to avenge the death by killing the murderer. To prevent these follow-on killings, the murderer was provided with six cities of Refuge where he would be safe.

In this week's parsha, the third time the Cities of Refuge are mentioned in the Torah, there is an added requirement:

"Prepare for yourselves the route."

Rashi explains that this meant that there should be signs posted at the crossroads.

The simple understanding of this requirement is that the Torah wanted to make sure that the fleeing murderer could find his way to these cities. The requirement for signs was

added to the requirement that the roads themselves be wide to facilitate easy access.

The expression used here, “prepare-*tachin*,” commentators say can also be found in two other Biblical verses:

In Psalm 10:17, King David says:

“You heard the wish of the humble, O G-d; guide-*tachin* their heart, lend a listening ear.”

The other occurrence of the word *tachin* is in Psalm 65:10, in which the Psalmist praises G-d for the earth and its produce:

“You attend to the earth and irrigate it; You enrich it greatly with G-d’s streams full of water. You prepare-*tachin* their grain...”

Whenever a word is found several times in Biblical literature it suggests that there is a deeper thematic connection among those verses.

On the surface, how can we see a connection between preparing the roads to the Cities of Refuge and G-d’s guiding our hearts and providing our grain?

Cities of Refuge of the Future

To discover the deeper message we must focus on the connection of the Cities of Refuge with the future Redemption.

In this week's parsha, the Torah says that in the Messianic Age we will add three more cities to the six that were designated before.

In fact, Maimonides cites this Mitzvah, of building the three cities in the future, as one of the primary Biblical sources establishing that there will be a Messianic Age.

The Rebbe explains that these new cities will be for those who, prior to the Final Redemption, may have committed unintentional murder. In the era of Redemption itself, when the world will be rid of envy and conflict, there will no longer be any need for a City of Refuge in its most literal sense.

However, there will still be a spiritual parallel to these Cities.

To understand their significance we must begin our analysis with the commentary of the Tzemach Tzedek (third leader of Chabad) in his Or Hatorah (Bamidbar p. 1015):

The three cities that Moses commanded them to designate in Israel proper correspond to the Torah, which is divided into three parts, Torah, Nevi'im-Prophets and Kesuvim-Writings, which together are known by the acronym "Tanach." The six cities (three in Israel proper and three on the east bank of the Jordan) correspond to the six orders of the Mishnah.

The Talmud concludes from this that Torah study has the capacity to be a refuge for a person who has sinned. The Tzemach Tzedek explains that Torah totally envelops one who studies it even as it becomes totally absorbed within the mind. This unity with Torah, Tanya states, is unparalleled. Torah, therefore, has the capacity to rectify sins and imperfections, metaphorically referred to as bloodshed. One who commits a sin causes the energy of the G-dly soul to be diverted into the "other side." This means that our sins upset the balance of goodness and evil. Torah study, which completely envelops and is absorbed within us, reverses the "bloodletting" by restoring the Divine energy to the realm of holiness.

Not all the vestiges of evil can be erased by Torah study in the present day and age.

The very first sin, the eating of the Tree of Knowledge, can not be rectified until the Final Redemption, through Moshiach.

In order to effect the total erasure of every trace of evil, conventional levels of Torah study will not suffice. For this we need access to a new, higher dimension of Torah.

This, the Tzemach Tzedek says, refers to the cloaked teachings of the Torah that will be revealed in the future.

The Three Intellectual Powers

According to the Mitteler Rebbe (Rabbi Dovber, son and successor of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of the Chabad movement) these three cities will be constructed in the expanded territory of Keini, Knizi and Kadmoni (the three lands promised to Abraham that were never conquered). They allude to three Divine intellectual powers that have never before been manifested in our world.

In the Messianic Age these three lands will become part of the Land of Israel. In the figurative sense, this means that the world finally will be exposed to the deepest understanding of Torah; levels that have never before been revealed. These new levels of knowledge will challenge our minds in ways that will transform the way we think.

We can illustrate this by referring to the radical changes in technology that have affected the way we think and live.

The revolution in technology and information gives us a limited glimpse, by analogy, into the future.

However, the analogy is hardly complete. Technology is a tool that can be harnessed for good or evil. Advances in scientific knowledge do not guarantee advances in morality and goodness.

The future advances in Torah knowledge will change the way we think, the way we behave, and restore the world to the state of perfection that existed before Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

It was the Knowledge that brought the world to its proverbial knees. It started when Adam and Eve ate of the Tree, which endowed them with a form of sensual knowledge. The Egyptians were the most advanced society in their day and used their sophisticated knowledge to enslave the Jews.

Much closer to our own time, intellectuals formulated the twin evils of Nazism and communism, which unleashed havoc on the world and caused the death of millions.

By contrast, knowledge of Torah does not only edify its students. Torah study also refines them, by providing a refuge from the hostile influences of secular society. In

addition, Torah exposes to each of us the positive influences of our own Divine soul.

The Tree of Life

But Torah, as we observed earlier, cannot completely obliterate the vestiges of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge today. For that, we need the total paradigm shift which will come only in the Messianic Age. That is when Moshiach will reveal the most hidden and pristine teachings of Torah. These teachings are metaphorically referred to as the Tree of Life. After Adam's fall he could no longer eat of that Tree. For us to partake of it, we had to go through thousands of years of refinement, culminating with the Messianic Age. Then we will all be able to enjoy the fruit of the Tree of Life.

However, while total revelation eludes us now, we can and must prepare for it. The Torah we study now – particularly its inner dimension revealed in the teachings of Chassidus – prepares us for that time when G-d will pull out all the stops and reveal that which is now beyond us.

The Three Preparations

This, then, may be the key to understanding the deeper meaning of the word *tachin*-prepare in the context of the

three cities. Not only were the People commanded to provide roads and signs to the Cities of Refuge but the Cities of Refuge themselves were roads to and signs of the future.

The Torah we study today prepares us for the Torah of the future.

This insight may help explain the connection to the two other places in Torah where the word *tachin*-prepare is used.

The second occurrence, in Psalm 10:17 as mentioned above, is:

“You heard the wish of the humble, O G-d; guide-
tachin their heart, lend a listening ear.”

Tachin-prepare is used here in connection with our hearts, i.e., our emotions. The Torah we learn today, while it might not bring about the total transformation of our minds, can and will bring us a change of heart. The Torah guides us, inspires us and refines us.

So, how does Torah affect the heart?

Maimonides explains, and Chassidic thought amplifies, that we can generate proper emotions by reflecting on G-d's greatness, and saturating our minds with the Torah's

spiritual teachings. This is what the Torah meant when it stated (Devarim 4:39): “Today you shall know and take to your heart that G-d is G-d in the heavens above, and on the earth below; there is no other.” We first have to know before we can take it to our hearts. These spiritual teachings are a sample of the secrets that will be revealed by Moshiach.

The third occurrence of *tachin*, in Psalm 65:10, is:

“You attend to the earth and irrigate it; You enrich it greatly with G-d’s streams full of water. You prepare-*tachin* their grain...”

Earth is a metaphor for the physical aspects of our lives. Torah, first and foremost, is intended to instruct us concerning our earthly activities. Grain is a metaphor for Torah, but specifically, the part of Torah that is down-to-earth; the part that involves our actions and everyday life.

There are thus two forms of preparation for the future revelation of the deepest aspects of Torah: the part of Torah that “massages” our heart and the part of Torah that affects behavior.

When we live in a manner consonant with G-d’s will in our daily routine we are preparing the world for its final

destiny. By so doing, we help the world fulfill its ultimate purpose, that of becoming a “dwelling place for G-d.”