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**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS
VO'ESCHANAN**

By

Heschel Greenberg

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS VO'ESCHANAN**

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INTRODUCTION

ESSAY ONE

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

Judaism loves paradoxes because they
highlight our ability to unite opposites.

Expect to find light precisely where it is most
dark!

ESSAY ONE

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

Imploring and Singing

This week's parsha continues Moses' recounting of the events of the past forty years. Moses opens his monologue about how he pleaded with G-d to allow him to enter into the Land of Israel with the words: "And I implored G-d."

The Midrash observes that the Hebrew word for implored, *vo'eschanan*, has the numerical value of 515.

Ba'al Haturim adds that the word *vo'eschanan* also shares the numerical value of 515 with the word *shirah*, which means song. It should also be noted that the generic word for prayer in Hebrew is Tefilah, which also has the numerical value of 515.

In matters concerning Torah, every detail has significance. Furthermore, there are no coincidences in life and certainly not in Torah matters. The fact that Moses expressed his request of G-d with the word "*vo'eschanan*-And I implored G-d," which has the same

numerical value of the words “*shira*-song” and “tefillah-prayer,” indicates that Moses prayer involved both imploring as well as singing.

At first glance, imploring and singing have opposite connotations. Imploring connotes begging and pleading. In that state one is humble, vulnerable and constricted. Singing, by contrast, suggests a state of joy, confidence and expansiveness. How can we reconcile these two forms of prayer?

Egotists Cannot be Beggars

When a person's ego is big, they think that the world owes them everything. People with inflated egos cannot beg for anything; it is beneath their dignity. The bigger the ego, the more one expects. And the less the egotists receive the more frustrated they will be. And eventually this frustration leads to anger and depression.

On the other hand, people whose egos are in check and are genuinely humble will think that whatever they have is a gift that is more than what anyone owes them. They will appreciate every bit of good they were

privileged to get. They will never take anything for granted, and will always be grateful for any amount of good they will receive.

It is obvious that this personality type will always be happy and have minimal complaints about his or her own problems (in contradistinction to the problems of others, which we should never feel comfortable about).

A person with a diminished ego will get the most out of life, savoring every bit of it, and will not allow the negative to dampen his or her spirit.

The Paradox

Thus, the two forms of prayer, imploring and singing, are two expressions of the same personality type. Obviously, while one cannot simultaneously express the emotions of supplication and joy, nevertheless, both emotions spring forth from the same well of humility. The person who is humble will not hesitate to plead to G-d for assistance, while also always exhibiting a sense of joy and

contentment for all of G-d's beneficence enjoyed up to the moment of prayer.

These paradoxical emotions that are associated with prayer have been expressed by our Talmudic Sages in the twin statements: "One should not get up to pray unless it is from a state of submission and humility," and "One should not get up to pray unless it is from a state of joy."

Galus Therapy

If humility and joy are necessary to be able to cope with the difficulties in life under normal circumstances, it is even more crucial in times of exile, and particularly in recent times. What makes the recent past so difficult is the phenomenon of good things occurring at the same time that some of the most horrific and troubling events are taking place.

This phenomenon—the mixture of light and darkness—was the way the world existed at its genesis.

The teachers of Kabbalah (*Sefer Yetzirah*) have told us that the "end is wedged in the beginning." This would suggest that the current mixture of good and evil is an

indication that we are at the end of the era of exile and at the dawn of a new age, the Age of Moshiach, when all darkness will be banished forever. Our preparation for that age involves taming our egos and thereby increasing our feelings of joy.

ESSAY TWO

A SINGULAR FIND

Singularity is a virtue in terms of a goal; but the way to reach our goals is best served by authentic diversity.

ESSAY TWO

A SINGULAR FIND

Plural versus Singular

In Moses' last monologue he predicts how the Jewish people will stray from G-d and His commandments, but they will eventually come back. Moses describes how the Jewish people will be scattered amongst the nations where they will worship foreign gods and how they will return:

"You will search from there, G-d your G-d and you will find Him, when you will seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul."

The medieval commentator Ibn Ezra points out the apparent inconsistency in this verse. When Moses speaks to the people he always addresses them in the plural, except when he says "And you will find Him." This phrase is stated in the singular. Why, he asks, does the Torah change from plural to singular form?

Ibn Ezra explains that the singular usage is a reflection of the collective and singular nature of the Jewish people.

The question, however, still remains. Why does the Torah refer to the collective nature of the Jewish people only in reference to the words "And you will find Him?"

One Goal; Multiple Approaches

One explanation of the Ibn Ezra's approach is that while we each seek G-d in our own way, we discover Him in unison.

This does not suggest that any approach that purports to get you to the same goal is legitimate. For as many legitimate approaches there are far more illegitimate ones that do not really lead to the same goal. They may be only expressions of one's desire to be different and to allow one's ego to be in control and not G-d's will.

However, within the framework of authentic Judaism there is room for diverse approaches.

This means that there are some people who search for G-d through prayer, others through the observance of the Mitzvos-Commandments, and still others through Torah study. Each of these three general approaches represents a different and unique way of connecting with G-d.

Prayer is our way of reaching out to G-d from the depths of our heart and soul.

A Mitzvah, which means either commandment or connection, connects our bodies to G-d by having our bodies act in accordance with G-d's will.

Torah study is where our minds absorb G-dly wisdom.

And while we must engage in all three of these Jewish activities, there is usually one area in which each of us "specializes."

Diversity within Prayer, Mitzvos and Torah

And even within each of these three areas there are many sub-divisions. There are different parts of prayer and different emotions that one can express during prayer.

It goes without saying that there is diversity with respect to the observance of the Mitzvos. There are 613 Mitzvos, each representing a different avenue to reach the same goal.

More generally, Mitzvos can be divided into those that deal with our relationship with G-d and those that govern our relationship with

others. While both are necessary, some of us place a greater emphasis on one area of behavior over the other.

Similarly, with regard to Torah study. There is a wide array of subjects within Torah (e.g. Biblical studies, Talmud, law, philosophy, mysticism, ethics, study of customs, grammar, history, gematria, etc.) and there are myriads of levels of understanding and multiple intellectual approaches to the study of Torah. But, no matter what and how one studies Torah, it leads to the same goal: to get closer to G-d and make oneself and the world at large a G-dly place.

This explains why the words "And you shall find Him" is in the singular, while the other words that describe the search for G-d is in the plural. While we all search in our own individualistic way, so that the search of one Jew is different from another, nevertheless what we discover in the end is singular. The goal, which is to make the world a G-dly domain, remains the same.

Surprise!

Our Sages tell us that there are three things that come unexpectedly: "finding an object, Moshiach and a scorpion." These are three things that we do not expect to happen. The question asked is how can Moshiach be listed as one of the things that we will not anticipate when we are commanded to await his coming every day?

Chassidic thought explains that the coming of Moshiach will be so glorious an event that no matter how much we pray and hope for it and no matter how much we eagerly anticipate his coming, it will be so surprising and exhilarating an experience as if we have chanced on a treasure that we could never have imagined. Moshiach's coming will surpass our wildest expectations.

Moshiach: A Singular and Unique Discovery

This then sheds further light why the words "and you will find Him" is phrased in the singular. This experience that we will find in the end of our long and arduous search for G-d in the days of exile, will end in the discovery of Moshiach, a time when we will find G-d in a most incredible and singular way.

Moreover, one of the characteristics of the Messianic Age that will distinguish it from the days of exile is the way we will enjoy true unity. Thus, the reference to finding G-d in the singular is a hint to the day when finding G-d in our lives will go hand in hand with finding peace and true unity.

ESSAY THREE

JUDAISM AND ARITHMETIC: NO ADDING OR SUBTRACTING

Egos are strange.

Our ego can diminish us by ostensibly
getting us to do more.

ESSAY THREE

JUDAISM AND ARITHMETIC: NO ADDING OR SUBTRACTING

Adding, Subtracting and Idol Worship

In this week's parsha, Moses continues his final monologue to the Jewish nation. He exhorts them to follow the commandments so that "they will live, come to and inherit the land that G-d, the G-d of your forefathers, is giving you."

Following this general exhortation, Moses adds the following:

"Do not add to the words of that I am commanding you, nor subtract from it, in order to preserve the commandments of G-d your G-d, which I am commanding you."

This admonition not to add or subtract from the commandments is followed by the following, apparently unrelated words:

“You eyes have seen what G-d did at Ba'al Pe'or, for G-d your G-d has eliminated every man who went after Ba'al Pe'or from among you, but you—who remain attached to G-d, your G-d, are all alive today.”

Even a cursory examination of the above calls for clarification:

What is the connection between the prohibition against adding or subtracting from the commandments to the worshipping of Ba'al Pe'or? When the Torah juxtaposes two subjects there is usually a thematic connection between them.

Moreover, the worshipping of Ba'al Pe'or was outright idolatry, the most serious of offenses. This tragic episode to which Moses refers brought about the deaths of no less than 24,000 Jews. Adding on to or subtracting from a commandment hardly warrants being compared to idol worship!

Does this Belong in an Introduction?

Another question that arises upon reflection:

When one surveys the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy, through most of this week's

parsha, we see that Moses was giving them a “pep talk” to inspire them to observe the commandments. He was not interested, at this point, in discussing the details of the commandments themselves. Only after he concludes his inspirational monologue—later in the parsha—does he proceed to enumerate hundreds of the commandments, beginning with recounting the Ten Commandments and continuing from there for most of the balance of this book.

The question therefore arises: Why did Moses include the specific prohibition of not adding onto or subtracting from the commandments here in his introductory monologue?

Moreover, later in chapter thirteen, when Moses enumerates the specific commandments, Moses repeats this admonition not to add onto or subtract from the commandments. Why then was it necessary for him to mention these admonitions here if he was planning to mention it later?

Another set of questions that can be raised: Why is the Torah so opposed to adding onto the commandments? Isn't the desire to always add in our commitments a noble one?

And why was it necessary for the Torah to tell us that we should not subtract from them? Isn't that quite obvious?

Volunteerism *not* the Ideal!

To answer all these questions we must first preface an enigmatic statement in the Talmud that “one who is commanded to do a mitzvah and does it, is greater than the one who does it voluntarily.” This seems to be counterintuitive. And indeed, the Talmud relates that the great sage, Rav Yosef, initially thought that it was the other way around.

Tosfos (the principal Talmudic commentators who thrived in the 12th through 15th centuries in Germany and France) commentary explains that a person who is obligated to perform the Mitzvah is always anxious lest he or she might forget or neglect to do it, whereas one who does it voluntarily has no pressure or anxiety. Thus, the one who is obligated gets more credit for the anxiety that goes along with the fulfillment of the commandment.

Other commentators provide us with a deeper spiritual explanation. When we are

obligated to do a mitzvah our *yetzer hara*-evil inclination tries to get us not to do it. When there is no outright commandment to perform the Mitzvah, the evil impulse within us has less of a problem if we do good, because the things that we do on our own do not go against our ego. On the contrary, it boosts our ego. The evil inclination is quite happy when our egos are stroked even if it is by doing the right thing. Our *yetzer hara* knows that once the ego is nurtured it will slowly but surely get us to distance ourselves from doing the things that go against our egos.

However, when we fulfill a Mitzvah because we are compelled to do it by dint of a Divine command it does not normally feed our egos. On the contrary, it forces us to acknowledge that there is a Divine Commander whose will we must follow regardless of what we want and what we think is in our self-interest. That sense of acknowledgment and obligation, the evil impulse within us strongly opposes.

Not Just Self-Actualization

This explains why the Torah commands us not to add or subtract from the Mitzvos and

why Moses wanted to introduce us to these admonitions even before he was ready to discuss the particulars of the commandments. Moses wanted to impress upon us that observing the commandments is not an exercise in self-actualization and as a boost to our egos.

To be sure, every Mitzvah helps us to nurture and reveal our inner soul. But, that is a secondary aspect of a Mitzvah, Its primary focus is surrender of our will to the will of G-d.

By adding on to or subtracting from a Mitzvah, we are transforming the Mitzvah from a G-d ordained act designed to express our devotion to Him exclusively into an act that is self-serving and ego driven. By artificially “enhancing” the Mitzvah we are guilty of turning the Mitzvah from an act of devotion to G-d into an act of self-glorification.

Thus by subtracting from a Mitzvah, or even by adding on to it, we are not just undermining that particular Mitzvah that we added on to or subtract from. It represents a far more serious breach of our relationship

with G-d if it is motivated by our egos. It becomes a form of idol worship.

The Good in Doing things for Ulterior Motives

One could argue that the foregoing appears to contradict another statement in the Talmud that we should not desist from doing a mitzvah even if we do it for ulterior motives as long as we do the Mitzvah. That suggests that even if we were to give charity, for example, because we want to be praised and loved, it would still be a good thing. But isn't that expressing one's ego?

One simple answer to this question is that when we add on to the Mitzvah we alter it and transform it into a different act. To illustrate, one who adds a fourth compartment to the Tefillin alters the very character of the Tefillin. So it ceases to be the Mitzvah that G-d has ordained. Instead it becomes a creation of the person. It's like taking flour and baking bread. It is no longer flour. It may be better than flour, but if someone asks you for flour and you bring him bread, you've not done what the other person has asked for.

But when we execute the performance of the mitzvah properly we have fulfilled our obligation to G-d, although we might be lacking the proper intention and mindset.

In other words, the difference between adding on to a mitzvah and doing a mitzvah with ulterior motives even though in both cases our egos are being nurtured is that in the former one's mitzvah is solely an expression of our own feelings and ego, whereas in the latter it is a combination of serving G-d the way He desires, coupled with an expression of our personal interests.

As long as we have subdued our ego by doing the Mitzvah as it was commanded, our ego will be refined, even as we feel that our ego has been stroked because of the ulterior motive we have in doing the Mitzvah. By continuing to do the Mitzvah, our ego will be checked, little by little. Eventually we will perform the Mitzvah for pure motives.

This sheds light on the Talmudic statement: "One should always do a Mitzvah even if it is for ulterior motives, for from doing it for ulterior motives one will eventually come to do it for pure motives." Any proper Mitzvah observance will slowly but surely change us

and ultimately also our motives, because a Mitzvah is objectively a G-dly force that can change a person.

However, when we alter the very character of the Mitzvah as a means of self-expression there is no redeeming and G-dly aspect in its observance. It only serves to enhance our ego, which will ultimately cause us to slide down the “slippery slope” of egotism until we can even worship the idol of Ba'al Pe'or—arguably the most depraved form of idol worship.

A Message for Today

Moses' admonition to them before their entry into the Promised Land conveys a message to us in our own lives as we are poised to enter into the Messianic Age:

Anticipating and preparing for the coming of Moshiach is one of the foundations of Judaism. However, misguided Messianic beliefs can actually distance us from the Jewish view of Moshiach and the Age of Redemption that we so eagerly await.

Messianism in Judaism is not an antinomian ideology. We don't believe that in the

Messianic Age the commandments will be altered, diminished by us, or entirely discarded.

On the contrary. Judaism's belief in the Moshiach is that he will lead the Jewish people to an age when the teachings of the Torah will become more manifest and accessible. Our observance of the Mitzvos will be observed even more meticulously than we can observe them today.

Jewish Messianism is not about expressing our own desires, even if they are of a spiritual nature. It is entirely about a world that conforms to G-d's will, which in the end will be the best and most delightful experience for us as well.

ESSAY FOUR

BODY AND SOUL

Some ideologies glorify the soul.

Some cultures worship the body.

Judaism believes in their synergetic nature.

ESSAY FOUR

BODY AND SOUL

Guarding Our Health and Idolatry

In this week's parsha, where Moses relates some of Judaism's most fundamental doctrines, and practices he states the following:

“And you shall guard your souls for you did not see any image on the day G-d spoke to you.. Lest you do not become corrupted and make an idol for yourselves...”

The simple meaning of the text is that we should guard our soul, our spiritual life and not be led astray by idolatry.

The Talmud, however, cites an interpretation of this verse that understands it as an admonishment to guard our health.

Accordingly, the question must be asked: How does the end of the verse that speaks of idolatry have to do with guarding one's physical health.

One commentator (Moznei Tzedek) explains that with the admonition against idolatry the

Torah wishes to teach us that despite the need to guard our health one may not use idolatrous remedies to cure any of our illnesses.

Indeed, the Talmud writes that even if one's life is danger one may not use idolatrous remedies.

This is not only true because these remedies are usually useless and perhaps even harmful, but, moreover, even if, hypothetically, there was a situation where these idolatrous remedies worked, it would still be forbidden to avail oneself of them.

The prohibition against idolatry is so serious that a Jew is expected to die rather than to benefit in any way from it.

Body Worship

Another way of explaining the juxtaposition of guarding one's health and the warning against idolatry is based on the limits the Torah places on our bodies.

To explain:

When a religion advocates a lifestyle that accentuates the importance of the body there

is also the danger that it can lead to glorifying the body and even worshipping it.

Indeed, the ancient Greeks glorified their bodies and were therefore opposed to, and eventually banned, circumcision because it mutilated the body. Even today we find echoes of this ancient body worship cult in all segments of society, in various subtle and not so subtle forms.

To disabuse us from this notion that Judaism worships the body, the Torah tells us that notwithstanding the need to guard the body's health it should not be misconstrued as a license to be obsessed with the body and its needs.

In short, Judaism maintains a healthy balance between the absolute repudiation of any form of idolatry while firmly advocating an attitude of respect for the body.

The Paradoxical View of the Body

In truth, while in Judaism the rejection of idolatry and body worship is so strong, it does, paradoxically, place an incredible emphasis on the body?

The question arises, why is Judaism, the most strident of all ideologies in its repudiation of idol and body worship of any kind, so deferential to the body? Why does the Torah admonish us to take care of our bodies and lumps it together with the health of our souls?

There are a number of explanations of the importance of the body in Jewish thought:

Temple of the Soul

On a most basic level the body is seen as the “Temple of the soul.”

For 70, 80 or 120 years, the soul leaves its heavenly abode where it enjoyed a relationship with G-d—indeed, the soul itself is a part of G-d—and enters into a physical body. There is no way that the soul does not leave its imprint on the body.

Second, by honoring the body we are vicariously honoring the resident of that body—the soul.

As such, we must not abuse it because by doing that we deny the soul a proper and dignified place in which to reside.

Third, without our physical health, it makes it hard to concentrate on our Torah study and difficult to perform all of the Mitzvos. Not only is the body the location where the soul resides, it is the soul's very instrument to fulfill its mission to study Torah and fulfill the Mitzvos.

The Divine Source of the Body

Jewish mystical thought adds a fourth dimension to our understanding of the role of and attitude to the body based on a fundamental principle stated in the early Kabbalistic work, *Sefer Yetzirah*:

“The end is wedged in the beginning and the beginning is wedged in the end.”

Accordingly, what ends up being lower, Kabbalah teaches us, comes from a higher source. Or, as it is frequently put in Chassidic literature, “the higher something is the lower it falls.”

In simple language this means that the body, because it is physical and lower than spirituality actually belies its higher G-dly source. The body contains hidden Divine energy that can only be accessed when the

body and enjoy a harmonious relationship; so that the soul and body work in tandem and are both going in the same direction.

Teacher and Student Metaphor

There is still a fifth way of viewing the relationship of the body to the soul and our attitude towards the body. This approach will also reconcile the paradoxical attitude that seems to be advocated by the Torah when it tells us to take care of our bodies but not to deify them.

The soul can be likened to a teacher and the body to a student. When an educational institution hires a teacher it is for the purpose of educating the student and not to help provide a teacher with employment.

If we were to ask, who is more educated and sophisticated, the teacher or the student, we would certainly expect the answer to be the teacher. However, if we would rephrase the question to read: who is here for whom? Is the teacher here for the student or is the student here for the teacher? The answer to this version of the question is that the teacher (and the schools administration,

maintenance crew, cook etc.) is here for the students.

Similarly, while it is clear that the soul is far more sophisticated, spiritual and sensitive than the body; the souls' existence in this world is not for itself but for the enrichment of the body; so that the body appreciates its role and true spiritual nature.

To accomplish this, the body must also be healthy.

Reversing Roles in the Messianic Age

If we were to take the analogy of the teacher and the student a step further it would lead us to the conclusion that just as a student can advance beyond the level of the teacher, so too the body can surpass the soul in its Divine essence!

Chassidic thought states that, indeed, in the Messianic Era, the body will have become so refined and sophisticated that it will achieve even greater prominence than the soul.

Another way of putting this is that in the Messianic Age, the body's true G-dly source and potential will be revealed so it will be clear that the body is no less a venue and

vehicle for G-d's expression than that of the soul.

Preparing for the Messianic Era Body-Soul Relationship

One of the ways we prepare for this era when body and soul will enjoy the most harmonious relationship is to involve the body in more and more physical Mitzvah acts. These will cement the relationship between soul (teacher) and body (student) even today in these last moments of Galus-exile.

Every time we put on Tefillin, for example, it gets the body ready for its preeminent role in the Messianic Age.

Likewise, whenever we work to improve the health of our bodies with the express intention of better serving G-d, it will prepare us for the day that both the soul and the body will experience total harmony and bliss.

ESSAY FIVE

HOLD ON TO BOTH “HEADS” OF THE ROPE

**We have been conditioned to see the good
even in adversity.**

**Judaism wants us to use that recognition as a
means to finally eliminate all adversity.**

ESSAY FIVE

HOLD ON TO BOTH “HEADS” OF THE ROPE

No Entry!

When Moses sought to enter the Land of Israel, as recounted in this week's parsha, G-d turned him down. His persistent pleas for G-d to rescind His decree and allow his entry into the land were answered by G-d with a firm negative.

According to a Midrash, found in the collection of enigmatic Midrashic comments, G-d's refusal to let Moses enter the Land of Israel went like this:

“You are holding on to both ends [literally: heads] of the rope. If you want me to fulfill your request of “Please let me cross-over” then nullify “please forgive.” And if you want the fulfillment of “please forgive [this nation” mentioned in the aftermath of

the sin of the spies],” then nullify [the request] “Please let me cross-over”

On the surface the only connection between these two requests by Moses is that in both cases he employed the word “*na*” which means “please.” The obvious question here is why did G-d link Moses’ requests of forgiveness for the Jewish people with his request to enter the Promised Land?

Moses Sacrifice

The “simple” explanation is that when he asked for the forgiveness of the Jewish people for their contempt of the Promised Land, Moses was essentially throwing in his lot with the people G-d wanted to destroy. There is precedent for this in the earlier sin of the golden calf. Moses tells G-d that if He destroys the Jewish people, he too wants to be “erased” from G-d’s book. In other words, Moses was making it clear to G-d that whatever fate awaits the Jewish people he wants for himself as well.

The story is told of the Ba’al Shem Tov, who traveled to a certain town to pray for the annulment of a heavenly decree of

destruction, G-d forbid, that he presciently saw hovering over the Jewish community of that town.

When he was asked why he had to travel there to pray, since he could have accomplished the same thing by praying in his own community, he responded: "If I succeed in annulling the decree that would be great. However, if my prayers are not successful, then I want to share the fate of the Jews of that community."

It may be suggested that not only was the Ba'al Shem Tov showing his love and unity with those Jews, but, moreover, his willingness to share their fate was the catalyst that crowned his prayers with success and averted the catastrophe.

Thus, when Moses pleaded with G-d to forgive the Jewish people, he was not just saying a prayer as an outsider to their fate, but, as he did in the past, and as the story of the Ba'al Shem Tov illustrates, Moses essentially offered to share in whatever fate G-d had in store for the Jewish people. Only because Moses was willing to accept the fate of the people did G-d commute their

sentence of annihilation to the sentence of exile.

Thus, when G-d issued the decree that the entire generation would remain in the desert and perish there and not enter the Promised Land, that fate too awaited Moses. Moses obviously could not argue that while he was willing to die with the Jewish people, he was not willing to remain in exile with them.

The Link

We can now decipher the enigmatic words of the Midrash that linked Moses' request to enter the land with his request for G-d to forgive the Jewish people. If Moses refused to remain with his people in the desert then he was not truly joining his fate with the fate of his people. G-d would then have to withdraw His commutation of their death sentence to one of exile.

While it was too late for G-d to punish them in this world, for they had already perished, their sin would not have been absolved, requiring them to go through a purification process in the next world.

More importantly, G-d was, in effect, telling Moses that since he was not disavowing his previous “throwing in his fortune” with his people, he should not demand entry into the Promised Land. Rather, Moses should stay behind in the desert until, as the Midrash states elsewhere, he will return with his people in the Messianic Age.

It now becomes clear that the real reason Moses could not enter the Promised Land was not punishment for any of his mistakes, as a simple reading of the Biblical text would suggest. Rather, because G-d wanted him to be with his people, He orchestrated Moses’ “sins” as a way of imparting valuable moral lessons to us. We must, however, delve more deeply into the text and follow the interpretation of it by our Sages to detect the subtext of G-d’s denial of Moses’ entry into the land.

Both Connections Now!

We can now also understand the meaning of the Midrash’s expression: “You are holding on to both heads [ends] of the rope.” The rope is a metaphor for a connection. Moses wanted both connections: the connection he had to

his people that engendered their atonement and survival, and the connection to the Land of Israel, because of its optimal level of Mitzvah observance, which is our rope and lifeline to G-d. G-d informed him, you can only have one end of the rope at the present moment.

One may add that the use of the word *na*-please in both the requests he made of G-d is significant. In Hebrew the word *na*, which means please, can also mean the same thing as the similar sounding English word “now.” Moses was not just saying please, he wanted both connections **now**.

Why Did Moses Want to Enter the Land so Forcefully?

One can still ask the question, “Why did Moses plead so forcefully with G-d to enter the land?” Didn’t Moses recognize that his mission was to stay with his people through thick and thin? Indeed, this was the way Moses behaved throughout his leadership. Why would he reverse his position now and “sever” the ties with his people?

Two answers to this question come to mind.

First, we may propose that Moses felt that if he were able to enter the Land of Israel, his presence would hasten, expand and deepen the process of the conquest, and the building of the Temple that would lead to the ultimate, complete and final Redemption. That, in turn, would, prompt a greatly accelerated Resurrection of the Dead. As a result, Moses' entry into the land would hasten the reunion with his flock.

Second, while Moses' place was in the desert with his flock, he nevertheless was not supposed to suppress his yearning to be in the Land of Israel with the Beis Hamikdash.

We Want Moshiach Now!

The lesson we can derive from all this for our own generation is clear:

Our existence in exile is certainly designed by G-d. Although we were initially sent into exile because of our sins, as we recite in the Holiday liturgy: "because of our sins we were exiled from our land," nevertheless, the length of our stay in exile is certainly not just to expiate our sins but for a special mission.

In exile, there are challenges that we could not have in Israel with a Beis Hamikdash. The sacrifices we have made would not have happened had we not been exiled. The very fact that the soul has been sent into the physical world to inhabit a physical body is G-d's way of saying that while the soul is pure in its original state, it cannot grow and develop exponentially without the challenges of inhabiting a physical body and sharing it with an Animal Soul. If that challenge is not enough, G-d then takes the challenge for the soul to a new low/high.

G-d sent us into exile where His presence is concealed, persecution and oppression is rampant, and where all the temptations to assimilate abound. Yet we survive as Jews and even thrive. This challenge can never have been experienced in the Land of Israel prior to the period of exile.

Knowing the incredible accomplishment of exile, one might be lulled into thinking, "vive la exile," G-d forbid! Exile has brought us to such an incredible level of achievement, why pray for the Redemption when we will no longer "enjoy" the challenges that are unique to exile?

To dispel this thought, we learn of how Moses, notwithstanding his noble desire to remain with his people and not enter the Promised Land, taught us that we must never lose sight of where we really ought to be. Exile is not our home. Despite the challenges, virtues and achievements of exile, we must never make peace with it. Rather we must direct our hearts to the Beis Hamikdash and yearn, pray and even demand that we be taken out of exile and returned home with our entire nation; a sentiment encapsulated in the refrain of a popular children's song: "We want Moshiach now!"

There is a guiding principle concerning righteous people. When they want something, they eventually get their way. Sometimes they have to wait, but eventually G-d "gives in" to their request.

Similarly, with respect to Moses' request to enter the Land of Israel, he will soon live to see the realization of his dream. And to paraphrase the old saying, he will not only get his proverbial cake but eat it too; he will see how G-d has forgiven the Jewish people and he will also lead them to the Promised Land. In the nomenclature of the Midrash:

“He will hold on to both heads [ends] of the rope.”

ESSAY SIX

THREE PRAYERS IN ONE

Prayer for a benefit is laudable.

**Prayer for self-expression is both soothing
and exhilarating**

**Prayer to converse with G-d is the most ideal
form of prayer and breaks through all
barriers!**

ESSAY SIX

THREE PRAYERS IN ONE

Standing to Pray

One of the most heart rending sections in the Torah begins this week's parsha, Vo'eschanan. In it Moses recounts how he pleaded with G-d to allow him to enter the Promised Land of Israel, to which G-d's answer was an unequivocal no! Indeed, G-d even asks him to cease praying.

Moses begins his entreaty to G-d with the words: "You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness...

Rashi comments: "[You have begun to show Your servant] an opening to stand in prayer."

What did Rashi have in mind when he wrote "**stand** in prayer?" Does it make a difference if he sat or stood during his prayer?

Moses' Quintessential Prayer

The simple answer is that the tone of Moses' pleadings with G-d suggested that his prayers were anything but casual and perfunctory. Moses was pouring out his heart to G-d. Indeed, according to the Midrash, Moses prayed 515 prayers, the numerical value of the opening word of this week's parsha and its very title "Vo'eschanan- I implored." It is also the numerical value of the word *tefillah*- which means prayer. This may be a suggestion that Moses' prayer incorporated every nuance of prayer; it was a complete and quintessential prayer.

Hence Moses' prayer was the most powerful, heartfelt and persistent one imaginable. All of which can be said to be implicit in the word "standing."

Standing carries within it several connotations:

First, it is a state of *bitul*, total self-abnegation. Thus, Judaism's most significant prayer, the *Amidah* ("Standing" prayer, also known as the *Shemoneh Esrei*) is described as one in which we stand as servants in the presence of the King, in a state of total submission.

Second, it is a symbol of confidence and victory.

Third, it conveys a sense of unyielding persistence, as in one who stands his ground.

Precisely because Moses had reached the zenith of human surrender to G-d he was empowered to feel confident in his ultimate “victory” over G-d’s insistence that he would not enter the Promised Land and not yield in his desire to see the Promised Land.

(In truth, although his prayer was denied, it will ultimately be fulfilled in the Messianic Era when Moses will enter the Land of Israel with all of the resurrected Jews who died in the desert.)

The Three Modes of Prayer

Another way to understand the deeper meaning of the word “stand” in Hebrew (*amad*) is that it is an acronym for *ani*-poor, Moses and David, alluding to three archetypical prayers to which the Zohar refers, all of which are found in the Book of Psalms: The poor man’s prayer (*Tefillah L’Ani*-Psalm 102); Moses’ prayer (*Tefillah L’Moshe*-Psalm 90) and King David’s prayer

(*Tefillah L'Dovid*-Psalm 86). The suggestion here is that Moses' "standing" prayer combined all three dimensions of prayer; that of a rich man, that of the quality of King David and that of a poor person.

To explain further:

The Rich Man's Prayer

Moses was the richest of people. True wealth is not measured by material possessions but rather by the knowledge and good deeds one accumulates over a lifetime. In the words of the Talmud: "There is no poverty except poverty in knowledge." Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights studying Torah directly from the A-mighty. By this measure he was obviously the richest person that has ever lived. The scope of his wealth was not limited to his knowledge and good deeds. No other person before or after him had such a sublime direct line of communication with G-d. Moses was endowed with all of the most significant of spiritual possessions.

In addition, our Sages tell us that Moses also enjoyed abundant material wealth. When G-d asked him to hew the second set of tablets

from stones of sapphire, Moses was enriched by all the chipped off pieces of sapphire.

The Real Value of Wealth

Now, one may ask, living in the desert with all of their physical needs taken care of, what value were the chips of sapphire to Moses? Why would he even care about material wealth? And why do our Sages make such an issue of it? Compared against his spiritual wealth the sapphire chips must have seemed next to worthless for a Torah-steeped man like Moses!

There are two answers to that question, both of which buttress Moses' title as a rich man, in every sense of the word.

The first reason a *tzadik*-righteous person would care for material gain is that it enables him to refine the physical world. Each time a Jew engages the material world and then uses its rewards for a higher spiritual purpose, he or she gains the capacity to refine that physical world.

The Kabbalists speak of the sparks of holiness embedded in each physical object, which devolved from a lofty spiritual source. These

sparks lie dormant until a pious Jew comes in contact with the physical vessels that contain them, through ownership, or the like, and then uses the object to perform a Mitzvah. When that happens, unprecedented G-dly energy is unleashed and the world is suffused with heretofore untapped spiritual power.

Thus, for the righteous person, wealth is an opportunity to change the world, remaking it into one that conforms to G-d's ultimate purpose: a world saturated with G-dly awareness and sensitivity.

There is another reason for the Torah's description of Moses' material wealth. In a perfect world, the physical and spiritual enjoy a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship, wherein the existence of one is a manifestation of the other. In that ideal world, a spiritually wealthy person will also be materially wealthy, not because he or she needs or craves the wealth, but because the physical world is not an independent entity; it draws its sustenance from, and therefore parallels, the spiritual. Thus, unprecedented wealth for Moses was "merely" an expression of his unsurpassed spiritual wealth. It was an expression of his having attaining the highest

level of perfection, where the spiritual and the physical are but two sides of the same coin.

Moses, as the richest person to have ever lived, prayed the prayer of the one who has it all, materially and spiritually. His prayers were therefore not for himself but for the sake of others, for he had no needs of his own. His needs, as a trusted leader, were the needs of the Jewish nation.

King David's Prayer

King David's prayer was also most powerful. King David is described (II Samuel 23:1.) as the "Sweet singer of Israel." Rashi explains that all of the songs sung in the Bais Hamikdash were taken from King David's Psalms. Others explain that King David's songs expressed the songs within the hearts of all the Jewish people. More than any other person, King David was able to tap into their hearts and souls and express their most profound and heartfelt emotions. King David was able to express feelings of profound anguish and galling bitterness because of the terrible suffering the Jewish people experienced. And yet, he could just as easily

express the greatest feelings of gratitude, joy, exultation and every other emotion.

To recite Psalms is the thus the most effective way to rich self-expression. The Divine poetry of the Psalms is unparalleled, not just for its beauty and poignancy but because it has the power to open the heart and soul of everyone who recites those immortal words.

The Poor Man's Prayer

But then there is a third form of prayer, which according to the Zohar is even more powerful than the other two: the prayer of a poor person.

While Moses' prayer is the richest and David's the most expressive, the poor man's prayer is the most powerful. His broken heart carries the greatest of forces that can pierce any barrier. While it might be less sophisticated than the prayer of the rich man, and far less beautiful and poetic than David's prayer, it is one that has no barrier that can contain it.

In the words of the Zohar:

“Come and see: The prayer of all human beings is real prayer, but the prayer of a poor person is a prayer that rises before the Blessed Holy One, breaking through gates and doors, penetrating to be received in His presence.”

In addition to the broken heart aspect of the poor man's prayer, the Ba'al Shem Tov referred to another unique quality in this mode of prayer. In the words of Psalm 102: “A prayer of the poor man when he is faint, and pours out his plea **before G-d.**” The poor or afflicted person is not really asking for any particular need. He just wants to communicate with G-d Himself. While other petitioners seek this or that benefit from G-d, the poor man says “I just want to speak to You.”

The Rebbe explained that this is analogous to the words uttered by the Alter Rebbe in his moments of spiritual ecstasy: “I desire not Your paradise or Your World-to-Come. I want You exclusively!”

While the potent and elegant prayers of the rich man (Moses) and of the “Sweet Singer of Israel” (David) conveyed deep emotions and

struck responsive chords in the Heavenly spheres, they could not compare with the prayer of the poor man, who expresses his essence and who wants nothing in return other than an opportunity to connect with G-d's essence.

When Moses stands before G-d in his final prayer, Moses recognizes that he too needs to acquire the penetrating power of the poor man. He urgently needed to come before G-d not as the rich Moses he was or with the elegant and sweet song of David, but with the simple broken-hearted plea of the poor man who says to G-d, "I want to be with You."

Our Prayers for Moshiach

The application of these thoughts to today is clear.

We plead incessantly for the Final Redemption and we do so with all three forms of prayer. We are the richest generation in history because we have the cumulative spiritual wealth of the past. We have the sweetest and most spiritually uplifting teachings of Chassidus, which are G-d's songs, and that render our prayers sweet

and inspiring. While all of Torah is likened to a song, its spiritual dimension, communicated through the teachings of Chassidus, is a song suffused with endless Divine notes and serves as the key of the soul to unlock its deepest secrets.

Ultimately, the prayer that will break through all the obstacles and bring about the Geulah is the prayer of the poor man, the person who is shattered by the concealment of G-d's presence in exile and who prays sincerely, with a broken heart, and asks for nothing other than the Redemption, when we will stand in the Holy Temple with Moshiach in the presence of G-d.

ESSAY SEVEN

KOSHER CHUTZPAH

Chutzpah is a negative trait when I is for
selfish reasons.

Chutzpah is kosher and even holy when it is
for others.

ESSAY SEVEN

KOSHER CHUTZPAH

Moses the Poor Man?

This week's parsha recounts Moses' heartfelt prayers to G-d to allow him entry into the Promised Land. But to no avail. G-d was insistent that he remain behind.

The Midrash in its inimitable cryptic and enigmatic style characterizes the dialogue or "dispute" between Moses and G-d by quoting a verse from the Book of Proverbs:

"The poor speaks entreatingly, but the rich responds impudently."

The Midrash comments:

"The poor speaks entreatingly" refers to Moses.

"...but the rich responds impudently" refers to G-d.

How can the Midrash speak about G-d in such seemingly irreverent terms? How can

one impute impudence to G-d? It is obvious that the Midrash embeds a deeper meaning in these anomalous words that are intended to teach us an important lesson in these challenging times.

The Two Pronged Approach

The following attempt at deciphering this Midrash is based on the Chassidic work “Imrei Mordechai” by pre-war Polish Rabbi Mordechai Shpalter with some modifications.

There are two ways a *tzadik*—righteous person—can come before G-d with a request: The first is a humble prayer, pleading with G-d to grant him his request. The fact that the *tzadik* is entreating the A-mighty for something suggests that he is “giving G-d the option” to say no. We don’t always get what we ask for. This is known as the poor person’s approach.

There is another approach. The Talmud tells us that a *tzadik* has the power, conferred on him by G-d, to decree that G-d accede to his request. In this mode, G-d has guaranteed that the *tzadik*’s demand will be accepted.

This then is the meaning of the application of the verse in Proverbs contrasting the poor with the rich to Moses and G-d.

When the Midrash states that, “The poor speaks entreatingly” refers to Moses it means to describe Moses’ decision to petition G-d with prayer and supplication. Moses comes before G-d in the most humble fashion.

G-d’s response to Moses was, “why don’t you utilize the power I gave you to decree your entry into the “Land of Israel?” By applying the phrase “but the rich responds impudently” to G-d, it is not suggesting that G-d acts impudently but rather that G-d wanted Moses to act in this fashion. G-d wanted to know why Moses did not act impudently and demand that G-d allow him to enter into the Promised Land.

G-d, was in effect saying to Moses: If you ask me to allow you to enter the Land, my response is an emphatic no”! The Torah, in this week’s parsha, records G-d’s precise response: “Enough of your [requests]! Do not speak to Me any more about this matter!” In other words, G-d was telling Moses that if he insists on approaching this matter as a poor

person who begs and pleads his case, then he will not succeed in achieving his goal.”

If on the other hand, G-d intimated, Moses would approach this matter as a rich man, who employs chutzpah in his demands, and demand entry into the Promised Land, then he would succeed in achieving his desire.

The Midrash is thus not referring to G-d's impudence, G-d forbid, but rather to Moses' ability to use chutzpah in getting what he wanted.

Why Didn't Moses Demand?

This interpretation of the Midrash leaves two basic questions unanswered:

First, if Moses had the ability to demand his right to enter into the Land of Israel, why did he not take G-d up on His offer to do precisely that?

Second, what relevance does this have to us?

The answer to both questions hinges on the difference between the situation that existed in the days of Moses, and the situation as it exists today.

When we were ready to conquer the Land of Canaan, it was at the beginning of our journey. We had just been forged as a nation and entrusted with a mission to transform the world, one step at a time. The first step was to enter the Land of Canaan, conquer it, settle it and make the land a beacon of light that would ultimately transform the entire world into a G-dly world.

We are presently at the end of our historical journey. We are about to leave the period of galus—exile—and enter into the Messianic Age.

Why Did Moses Want to Enter the Promised Land?

When Moses requested to go into the Land of Israel, he knew that if he did not enter, it would not prevent the Jewish nation as a whole from entering the Land and carrying on their mission to transform the world by first transforming the Land of Canaan into a Holy Land. Moses' prayer to enter was a humble request to also be permitted to enjoy the challenge of conquering the land and observing all of the commandments associated with it. Moses loved serving G-d

and he cherished and craved the opportunity to serve Him in ways that were not possible in the desert.

The Talmud seems to support this notion when it states that Moses wanted to enter the Land so he could enjoy the benefits of observing all of the Mitzvos associated with Israel. If he would not enter, he would lose the opportunity but everyone else would go forward and the mission would live on without Moses' physical presence in the Land. To get going on the first legs of the journey, the people could still be inspired with Moses and by his spirit that is imbued both in the Torah and within the leaders of each subsequent generation.

Moses would therefore not utilize his G-d given power to make demands if it was just for his own material and even spiritual benefit.

Had Moses' inability to cross the Jordan prevented the nation from entering as well, Moses would certainly have used holy chutzpah and would have demanded to take the Jewish people with him into the Promised Land.

That, however, was not the case. His disciple Joshua would enjoy the same G-dly support that Moses possessed and the Jewish people would take possession of the Promised Land regardless of Moses' physical absence.

The Lesson

The lesson for our day and age is now becoming clear.

We are now at the very end of the journey. We are at a point where we cannot afford to endure one extra moment of galus-exile. Every day of delay and every additional moment that we tarry in exile with all of its negativity, is taking its toll on us. And we cannot afford to leave one person behind. Every Jew must be liberated from this exile.

We cannot, therefore, afford to be like the poor man who begs for salvation. According to the Midrash, G-d's asking Moses to utilize his chutzpah was actually reserved for the present day and age. Now we must utilize chutzpah to not only implore but demand—as we do incessantly in our daily prayers—an end to galus and all of its attendant ills and we demand that the Redemption be brought

about by Moshiach now! When that will happen, another Midrashic source informs us, Moses will return to Israel with all of the resurrected bodies of the Jews that perished in the desert. Then, Moses prayer will be fully answered by G-d in the affirmative. “Yes, you may enter, with all of the Jewish people, from the present and from the past!

ESSAY EIGHT

MOSES' PRAYER ANSWERED

There are two leadership models we should emulate.

The first is focused on the people of his time.
The other is focused on the future as well.

ESSAY EIGHT

MOSES' PRAYER ANSWERED

Striking the Rock

In this week's parsha, Moses describes how he implored G-d to allow him to enter the Promised Land, but to no avail. He was to die in the desert and was only given the option of seeing the land from atop a mountain.

The reason Moses was not permitted to enter the Land of Israel with the Jewish nation was due to the action he took, described in detail in an earlier parsha, and is alluded to briefly here.

When his sister Miriam died, the miraculous rock that provided millions with water throughout their close to forty year sojourn in the desert, ceased to flow with water. The people clamored for water and Moses was told by G-d to take his staff and **speak** to the rock. Moses gets angry at the rebellious nature of the people and struck the rock.

According to Rashi, his failure to speak to the rock and to instead employ the method of striking it was his subtle form of rebelliousness for which G-d denied him the right to enter the Promised Land.

However, in spite of G-d's decree that he would not enter the land, Moses prayed to G-d that He rescind that decree. According to our Sages, Moses prayed no less than 515 prayers, the numerical equivalent of the word "*Vo' eschanan*—And I prayed," the very word which serves as the name of this week's parsha.

Difference Between Moses and Aaron

Commentators raise the question as to why Aaron—who accompanied Moses when he struck the rock and was therefore also included in G-d's decree that he would not live to enter the Promised Land--did not pray to G-d that he be permitted to enter. Why did Moses pray and not Aaron?

One answer given by commentators is that upon the conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel the obligation of the Jewish nation to provide Aaron and his progeny with

the 24 forms of gifts would commence. If Aaron were to plead with G-d to be allowed to enter the Land, people might have impugned his motives. They would have charged that he wished to enter to reap the benefits of living in Israel.

Moses, on the other hand, who was not destined to receive all of those benefits, had therefore no concern that his motives might be questioned.

“The Buck Stops Here!”

One can offer a deeper answer to the question as to why Aaron seemed resigned to his fate to not cross the Jordan and Moses did not, lies in their different roles.

Moses and Aaron shared many qualities. Among their qualities was their boundless love and concern for the Jewish people. However, a nation can have only one ultimate leader. And although Moses was assisted by Aaron and Miriam and the seventy elders, when it came to the leadership of the Jewish people, only Moses could say, “the buck stops here!”

Another important distinction between Moses and Aaron that is a corollary of the first distinction was that Moses as their “supreme” leader could not get too close to the people. In order to be a responsible leader he had to maintain a healthy distance between himself and his people. Aaron, by contrast, did not have this need and therefore developed a powerful loving bond between himself and the people of his generation. This bond was so strong that he could not separate from them in his lifetime and in his final resting place.

According to the Midrash, the “real” reason Moses was not destined to cross the Jordan was due to the fact that he was the leader of the generation that perished in the desert, and as a faithful leader he had to stay with his flock.

Moses nevertheless implored G-d to allow him to cross the Jordan because Moses was not just the leader of his own generation; he was also the leader of all future generations. To this day we refer to Moses exclusively as “Moses our teacher.” Moses therefore thought that just as he had a responsibility to be

there for his generation so did he have a responsibility for all future generations.

Moreover, Moses knew that if he would succeed in getting G-d to rescind his decree and allow him to enter the Land of Israel the future of the Jewish people would have unfolded in a drastically different fashion. Without Moses to lead them, the people degenerated into idolatry and slowly but surely sowed the seeds of their own expulsion from the land with the destruction of the Temple that occurred over 800 years after its conquest.

Had Moses been the one to lead them into Israel, his towering spiritual influence would have prevented their decline and there would never have been “destruction” and its ensuing exile. Moses’ entry into the land would have represented the beginning of the Messianic Age, which would have prevented thousands of years of travail and misery.

Moses therefore prayed to enter, not for his benefit, but for the benefit of future generations. Aaron, by contrast, who was not the ultimate leader, felt much greater kinship and empathy for his generation and sought to remain with them.

Internalizing Both Models

Although Moses and Aaron were “head and shoulders” above us, we nevertheless can apply their models of leadership to our own lives.

The Aaron component of our soul identifies with every person with whom we come in contact. The Aaron personality does not focus on the future.

The Moses personality, by contrast, focuses on the future as well.

When we do a Mitzvah or learn Torah we must not only focus on their relevancy today. We must also focus on how every Mitzvah we do hastens and prepares us for the Redemption.

Prayers Never Declined

Our Sages tell us that a righteous person's prayers and requests are always heard and granted. Despite the failure of Moses to get G-d to rescind the decree, Moses' soul, we are told, enters into the body of Jewish leaders for all eternity. Even the Moshiach we are told is imbued with and empowered by the

soul of Moses that resides within his own soul.

If we had to characterize Moses' soul's passion it is his obsession for Torah. And this obsession which is always alive is what keeps the Jewish people alive and enables them to survive and flourish even as they go through the painful exile. And it is this same spirit of Moses that will be the driving force to bring Moshiach and the final Redemption, at which time, the Midrash states, Moses himself will arise, return, soul in body, with his entire generation, and he will lead them to the Promised Land.

ESSAY NINE

GOOD, GOOD AND GOOD

Goodness can also be overwhelming.

For us to access and fully appreciate
goodness we must acquire the power of
synthesis

ESSAY NINE

GOOD, GOOD AND GOOD

Another Puzzling Midrash

As mentioned in previous essays, there is a genre of Torah teaching that is referred to as “Midrash *Peliah*-A Puzzling Midrash.” The puzzling nature of these Midrashic commentaries was intended first and foremost to pique our curiosity and impel us to search for the deeper meaning of the Torah’s teachings. It is what inspires us to peel off the various layers of Torah knowledge to uncover some deeper layers of its infinite knowledge.

In addition, one can surmise, when we confront an elusive, mysterious and extraordinarily puzzling Midrash it is a stark reminder that the Torah is Divine and that it contains wonders that will only be fully revealed in the Messianic Age. As soon as we see the word “*peliah*-puzzling or wondrous” it evokes the memory of the wonders of Torah

to which our eyes will be opened imminently by Moshiach, and concerning which King David prayed for in the Psalms “Open my eyes so that I can see the wonders in Your Torah.”

This week's parsha begins with Moses' recounting of how he pleaded with G-d to allow him to enter the Promised Land; but to no avail. Moses—on account of his failure to sanctify G-d's name when G-d told him to speak to the rock to produce water—would be denied access to the land he so craved to enter.

The matter seems to be clear. Moses was being punished for not sanctifying G-d's name in the presence of his people. Yet the Midrash offers an alternate explanation for this denial. In the words of the Midrash *Peliah*:

The Missing Good

“Why did Moses not enter the Land of Israel? Because on the second day [of creation] it does not say “and it was good.”

The reference to “it was good” is related to the fact that on the second day of creation, when G-d created the firmament, He did not say that “it was good.” On all other days, upon completion of that day’s work, G-d observes “And He saw that it was good.” On the third and sixth days of creation, that phrase was actually used twice, but on day two that expression of approval was absent.

What possible connection is there between Moses’ denial of entry into the Promised Land and the fact that G-d did not utter the words “and it was good” on day two of creation? And furthermore, how does this novel explanation of the Midrash reconcile with the reason explicitly given in the Torah that it was due to Moses’ failure to sanctify G-d’s name in the presence of the nation?

A Few Clues

To find a clue to decipher this riddle one must look to the birth of Moses, which is described in the beginning of the book of Shemos/Exodus. When Moses is born, the Torah states, his “mother saw that he was **good**.” That expression “it was good” that the Torah fails to mention on day two of creation

is the very same expression Moses' mother used to characterize Moses himself.

Another clue can be found that will help us solve this riddle. When Moses recounts how he prayed to G-d to allow him to cross the Jordan to enter the Land he states:

“Please let me cross over and see the **good** land that is on the other side of the Jordan.”

Moses wants to see the **good** land. Indeed, the land of Israel is so described in numerous other verses.

So here we have three sets of good. The land that Moses was denied entry into was “good.” Moses is “good.” And the creation of the second day was missing the appellation of “good” accorded to the other days of creation.

The riddle is partially solved: Moses and the Land of Israel seem to be a perfect match. Of all the countries of the world, there is only one country that is described as “good.” Of all people that were born, the only individual who upon birth who is already described as good, even before he had a chance to prove himself, is Moses. There can hardly be a better match. So the question as to why

Moses-the good, was precluded from entering the good-Land is that much stronger. Why would the natural attraction of good to good not materialize?

The Midrash therefore discovers the answer in the domain of “time” where the good that certainly exists—after all it was G-d’s creation—is concealed. This implies that sometimes good does not come to the good because there is a point in time where the glue that cements the other two forms of good to each other is absent. Moses the personification of good could not, at that time, bond with the Land of Israel the good land.

“Where there’s Smoke there’s Fire”

What does all this mean?

Sefer Yetzirah—one of the earliest works of Kabbalah that contains the secrets of creation—states that all of existence comprises three elements: *Olam* (world) or space; *shanah* (year), or time; *nefesh* (soul) or personality. The acronym for these three elements is *ashan*, which means smoke.

Smoke is a paradox. On the one hand, the saying goes, "Where there is smoke there is fire." On the other hand, smoke is a metaphor for that which is concealed, as in the term, "a smokescreen."

Parallel to the smoke-paradox-metaphor is the paradoxical nature of our world. On the one hand there is tremendous G-dly energy—fire—that is the very life force of existence. This fire was very much in evidence at the time the Torah was given as it says in this week's parsha:

"From the heavens, He let you hear
His voice, to educate you. He showed
you His great fire upon the earth, and
you heard His words from the fire."

In a subsequent verse, the Torah relates how the people protested and said to Moses: "If we continue to hear the voice of G-d our G-d any longer this great fire will consume us and we will die!"

As a result of the intense power of G-d's fire, it became necessary for Moses to transmit the word of G-d to them. The fire had to be concealed in the smoke. For G-d's energy to benefit us the fire has to be concealed and filtered.

Separation Between the “Upper” and the “Lower” Waters

When did this filtering process begin?

It actually began at the very beginning of creation. On day number two G-d separated between the “upper waters” and the “lower waters.” Whatever this means in the physical sense, it is clear that on a spiritual level, the power of division between “upper” (unbridled G-dly energy) and the “lower” precincts (our physical universe), was set into motion on day two of creation.

This explains why on day two G-d does not employ the affirmative expression of “and G-d saw that it was good.” Good, in this context, means that it was the way it was intended to be. It was a finished product; or at least, it was the seed that would eventually lead to the finished product. How then can G-d call day two's separation between the upper and the lower good? It was not a finished product. It was not even the introduction of the potential for the world to become a finished product. On the contrary, it represented the introduction of the potential for the world to **not** realize its goal of becoming a finished product.

However, if G-d created the division, it must mean that it contains a hidden dimension of good, since the world can never access the ultimate good without the temporary concealment of it; to help us condition ourselves to such time when we will be ready to absorb the unhampered good without mishap.

Moses was Too Powerful

We can now unravel the mystery of the puzzling Midrash.

Moses was the personification of the most sublime measure of good. Moses was himself a product of the “upper waters.” His very name Moshe means that he was drawn from the water; alluding to the upper waters that are inherently good.

The Land of Israel epitomizes the most sublime place on earth where G-d's goodness can be fully appreciated. It is the ultimate “good land.” But the match between the two was premature. If the people would have been exposed to the uninhibited good of the Land with the unfettered good of Moses, it could have overwhelmed their systems.

That Moses could overwhelm this new generation poised to enter the “good land” was evident in his striking of the rock instead of speaking to it. And while Moses’ intention was wholly positive to break their resistance to the “upper waters” that manifested itself in the miraculous water supply, they were not ready for the removal of that separation. Thus instead of removing the veil that would have exposed them to a much more sophisticated understanding of G-d, they were overwhelmed.

Thus, G-d reprimands him that he failed to sanctify G-d’s name to the people. It’s not that he did not try to do precisely that; but that he failed to accomplish his goal because they still needed the separation between the “upper” and the “lower” to enable them to gradually remove the barrier.

Tail End

We are now at the tail end of that process. The division between the “upper waters” and the “lower” waters have been painstakingly removed by the thousands of years of learning Moses’ (the good) Torah teachings.

This is especially true in our own day and age when the barrier between the mystical, esoteric teachings of the Torah (“upper waters”) and the legal (exoteric) teachings of the Torah (“lower waters”) have been removed. We now have free access to the teachings of Kabbalah, especially as they have been made accessible to the average human intellect, through the teachings of Chassidus.

We are now therefore ready for the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption, when—according to the Midrash—Moses (the good) will arise and take his flock from their resting place in the desert and enter into the Land of Israel (the good land) because Moshiach—who builds the Third Temple—will introduce the double-good synthesis with which the third day of creation is identified.

ESSAY TEN

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Goodness and holiness always manifests itself
in two modes.

Goodness dispels the darkness of evil and
suffering.

Goodness also enables us to climb the
mountains of Divine consciousness

ESSAY TEN

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Two Versions

Among the multifaceted themes of this week's parsha we find the repetition of the Ten Commandments (more accurately: the Ten Statements). Moses recounts the events of the past to the new generation and restates the Ten Commandments to them.

In truth, as the commentator *Ibn Ezra* and others point out, there are some minor variations in the two versions. Among them one finds the added phrase: "As I commanded you" with respect to the fourth and fifth commandments, to observe the Sabbath and to honor one's parents.

The question was asked, when did G-d command us to observe the Sabbath and honor one's parents previously?

Rashi, anticipating this question, explains that the commandment to observe the Sabbath and honor one's parents were

already given in a place called Marah, where the Jews sojourned shortly after they crossed the sea. There the Torah relates that G-d gave them certain commandments. The Torah, however, does not specify which commandments they were.

What Distinguishes Shabbos and Honoring Parents?

Now, the questions that remain are: Why were these two commandments singled out from all the others and were given to us at Marah?

Second, why do we have to wait until Deuteronomy to discover that we had already been commanded to observe these laws previously?

To answer these questions we must preface two scenarios that exist with respect to the observance of these two commandments in particular.

The Two Scenarios of Shabbos

One can observe Shabbos because it is a holy day; a day when we can dwell on the spiritual

and experience a taste of the paradise here on earth. In this mode, one does not look forward to the Sabbath as a means to escape, but as a means to go higher.

For some, however, the Sabbath has a completely different appearance and provides for a different need. It is a day when we can escape the sorrows and anxieties of the past week. The Sabbath is a city of refuge from the toil, pain and negativity of the past week.

Two Scenarios of Honoring Parents

There are also two scenarios in the way we observe the commandment to honor one's parents.

For some, a parent is G-d's representative on earth. As the Talmud puts it: A person has three partners: a father, mother and G-d. When we honor one of the partners we are simultaneously acknowledging and honoring the others as well. We look up to our parents as authority and larger-than-life figures.

For others, their honor of parents assumes a much simpler rationale. Parents are nurturers, first and foremost. They gave us life and continue to support us and provide

us with our basic needs. They provide us with security in an otherwise frightening and precarious world. By honoring them, we show appreciation for what they have done for us.

Both approaches are valid. However, in times of difficulty, crises and “bitterness” (the translation of Marah, the place where they first received this commandment) we are more likely to appreciate the Shabbos for its ability to remove the pain and give us a sense of repose and serenity so that we can cope with life in the future.

Similarly, when we are insecure, or go through bitter experiences, we feel the need to find comfort and solace in the embrace of our parents.

In times of prosperity and joy, we would be more likely to look for the Shabbos and parents as a means to reach higher spiritual goals and not primarily for security and succor.

Thus, when the Jews were in Marah, they were already commanded to observe the Shabbos and honor their parents. This was G-d's way of telling them that these two commandments have the capacity to help us out of the bitterness of life.

Transitioning from Marah to Sinai

This focus, however, changed when they left Marah and arrived at Mount Sinai. When the Jews were in the desert and all their needs for provided for by G-d, they could focus on the higher goals and reaches of the Shabbos and honoring of parents.

Therefore, there was no need to emphasize in the first version of the Ten Commandments that were directed to the generation that spent their lives in the secure environment of the desert at that time, when they were surrounded with clouds of glory and provided with every amenity. For them, the focus must be on the more sublime aspect of the Shabbos and honoring parents.

Reverting to the Marah Mode

When the new generation was poised to enter a new land, a land that would involve battles with enemies and challenges of trying to conquer and tame the land, they had to be told that there was a more down-to-earth approach to these Mitzvos.

The message to them was that there is nothing wrong if a Jew sees the Shabbos as a

means to cope with the challenges of life. Likewise, there is nothing wrong to honor a parent for the service they provide. The Torah therefore stresses in this second version of the Ten Commandments, “As I commanded you at Marah.” That focus on using these Mitzvos as an antidote to Marah-bitterness is completely legitimate. It may be invoked in times of challenge and vulnerability.

Two Focuses on Moshiach and Redemption

The Messianic Age is likened to the Sabbath. G-d is likened and is the ultimate Parent. Our yearning for G-d to take us out of exile and bring us the Redemption, likewise, has two focuses that are both legitimate.

We can be motivated by the desire to get close to G-d, to reach the heights of spiritual attainment. The Messianic Age will get us to that level of spirituality.

This aspect of the Messianic Age is reflected in the person of Moshiach.

Moshiach too has two functions.

First and foremost, Moshiach will be the ultimate teacher of Torah. He will reveal

heretofore hidden knowledge of the Torah to all. These teachings will reveal the hidden dimensions of the Divine.

In the initial stages of the Messianic Age, Moshiach will also have a secondary function. Moshiach will be a king, a supreme leader of the Jewish people and of the entire world. He will use his office to end all of the strife and pain that punctuates life in exile.

Should we wait for Moshiach's role as a teacher or as a liberator and king?

The answer is that while the ideal motivation for Moshiach is to bask in the Divine light that will envelop the world, it is also proper to want Moshiach and the Redemption for the selfish reason of getting away from Marah, from the bitterness, hatred, anti-Semitism, terrorism, insecurity and the depressed state of being in exile.

We have a right to say to our Father in Heaven: "enough is enough. Bring us Moshiach and let us celebrate the Shabbos of existence together!"

ESSAY ELEVEN

A MITZVAH TO APPEAL

When G-d says no, it is not always no.

**When G-d says no to one person it is not
necessarily no to others.**

**G-d wants us to protest His will that we
languish in exile and bring us Moshiach!**

ESSAY ELEVEN

A MITZVAH TO APPEAL

Moses' Craving

The opening verse of this week's *parsha*, *Vo'eschanan*, describes—in Moses' own words—how he pleaded with G-d to let him enter the Promised Land, and how G-d refused to change His decree.

According to the Talmud, G-d tried to assuage Moses' sorrow for not meriting entry into the Land of Israel by saying to him:

“Why do you want to see the promised land? Is it to eat its fruit and to be filled with its bounty? Your reason for wanting to enter the Promised Land is to be able to observe the many Mitzvos that are associated with the Land of Israel. I will consider it as if you had actually observed these Mitzvos.”

In effect, Moses was not interested in Israel for its aesthetic beauty or its bountiful riches;

Moses has only one desire: to be able to perform more of G-d's commandments.

A Mitzvah is a Mitzvah, is a Mitzvah!

However, this raises an obvious question: If Moses was so devoted to following G-d's will—which is, after all, the very meaning of a Mitzvah—why did he not feel content to stay behind in compliance with G-d's directive to him that he would not enter into Israel? Why was the Mitzvah to not enter the Land of Israel not as important to him as the commandments that he would observe in Israel?

After all, the reason for fulfilling a command is not for personal satisfaction but for complying with G-d's will. What difference does it therefore make if he would follow G-d's will by not going to Israel or if he entered into Israel and fulfilled other commandments? In the final analysis a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah, is a Mitzvah!

What's the Connection to Tisha B'Av

Second, the parsha of *Vo'eschanan* is always read the Shabbos after *Tisha B'Av*, the

national day of mourning for the destruction of our two Holy Temples. There must be some connection between the *parsha*—and specifically, its beginning that deals with Moses pleas to enter into the Land of Israel— and *Tisha B'Av*. What is the connection?

Two Categories of Mitzvos

To understand that connection and also explain why Moses was not content with just following G-d's directive, we must discern between two distinct categories of Divine directives.

There are Mitzvos that G-d wants us to do and to strive for, unequivocally. If one missed an opportunity to do a Mitzvah, it should be viewed by the person as a negative. Conversely, every opportunity to do a Mitzvah should be cherished and savored.

In the words of the Talmudic Sage, Rabbi *Chananya ben Akashya*: "G-d wanted to bestow abundant merit upon Israel so He multiplied the amount of Torah teachings and Mitzvos for them." The more Mitzvos we do the more merit it bestows upon us.

Furthermore, the Hebrew word for merit, *zechus*, also possesses the meaning of refinement. Each Mitzvah is another channel to bring about the refinement of our character, and provides us with the ability to express our soul's true feelings. The act of the Mitzvah itself removes the exterior barriers to the soul's inner desires.

There is, however, another category of Mitzvos. To be sure it is also G-d's will that we comply with them, but, they are not Mitzvos that we are supposed to ask for, and when they come, we do not savor their taste.

Included in this category are the times that G-d denies us of an opportunity to get closer to Him. In times of Divine displeasure, G-d distances us from Him. However, the objective of this distancing is for us to try to "change" G-d's will, as it were. Of course, G-d's will cannot be changed by us, rather, G-d's inner will itself is that we implore him to reverse His decision.

Two Examples

The following are but two examples of this category of Divine directives: Aaron was hurt

when he and his tribe were denied a role in dedicating the Mishkan, even though it was G-d's will that he be denied that role. Similarly, those who were told they could not offer the Paschal offering because they were ritually unclean, were not faulted because they complained about it.

Much like a parent who punishes a child, the parent's greatest desire is for the child to plead to get out of the state of punishment. The pain caused by the child's recalcitrance would be magnified if the child did nothing to out of that state of alienation from the parent.

Thus, Moses pleaded with G-d and was persistent in his pleas, because the Divine directive he was given was denial of getting closer to G-d. According to our Sages, he prayed as many prayers as the numerical value of the word "*Vo'eschanan* and I prayed," which is 515! Moses understood well that G-d's directive to him that he would not enter the land was actually a challenge for him and not a Mitzvah that he was to savor.

The Mitzvah we Should Pray Not to Do!

We are in the same predicament as Moses. We have been sent into exile that began with the destruction of the Holy Temple. We are to follow the example of Moses. Obviously, if we are in exile it is because G-d wanted us to be there. If it is G-d's will it would appear to us that we should not try to change it. After all, is it not G-d's will and is that synonymous with a Mitzva which is defined as G-d's will?

In truth, this is the one type of Mitzvah we must resist. We ought not accept the reality of exile as a Divine decree with which we should be happy to comply.

On the contrary!

It is our obligation to emulate Moses and to plead with G-d incessantly to bring the ultimate redemption and deliverance from the state of alienation that we are in. We must never make peace with the idea that there will always be war and strife in the world. We must never stop demanding an end to suffering and the beginning of an age of unmitigated goodness and holiness.

The Connection to Tisha B'Av

Precisely after *Tisha B'av*, when we mourn

and grieve over the loss of the Temples and lost spirituality, we read of Moses stubborn prayers to G-d to be able to get out of his divinely ordained exile. And while Moses was ultimately told no, the Torah wants us to realize that Moses was not wrong for pleading. Indeed, Moses prayer when augmented with our own will bear fruit. We will ultimately succeed in getting G-d to “alter” His mindset, as it were, and usher in the Age of Redemption, with the imminent arrival of Moshiach.

ESSAY TWELVE

POST TISHA B'AV

THERAPY

The worst part of alienation is that we
become alienated from the realization that we
are alienated.

ESSAY TWELVE

POST TISHA B'AV THERAPY

Harsh Words of Rebuke After Tisha B'Av?!

A substantial portion of this week's Parsha, *Vo'eschanan*, deals with Moses' admonition of the Jewish people. In these harsh words of rebuke, Moses specifically warns them of the consequences they will face if they would not comply with G-d's will.

Tragically, all of these dire threats materialized with the destruction of the Two Temples, the anniversary of which we observed, yesterday, *Tisha b'Av*. It is thus no coincidence that the Torah portion of *Vo'eschanan* is always read on the Shabbos that follows *Tisha b'Av*.

A question can be asked. If the harsh words of rebuke are intended to prevent the events that are associated with *Tisha b'Av*, shouldn't the rabbis have instituted the reading of *Vo'eschanan* **before** *Tisha b'av*? What good is it to read about things after the fact?

Why not the Tenth of Av?

To answer this question it would serve us well to answer another basic question concerning the very scheduling of the fast on *Tisha b'Av* (literally, the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av) as the national day of mourning for the destruction of the Holy Temples. The Talmud (Tractate *Ta'anit*) tells us that, in fact, the Temple was actually destroyed on the **tenth** day of the month of Av. The Romans put their torches to the building on the end of the ninth day, while the overwhelming majority of the Temple did not burn and was not destroyed until the next day.

Indeed, the Talmud there quotes Rabbi *Yochanan* who said that had he been alive at the time of the destruction he would have established the fast on the next day, the tenth of Av rather than on the ninth day of the month.

Why then do **we** observe the fast and day of mourning on the ninth?

The Talmud answers that the “beginning of a tragedy is the most difficult part of the tragedy.”

Psychological Explanation

One can explain the Talmud's statement psychologically, as well as from a spiritual perspective.

Human nature is such that even when we are subjected to suffering, we were designed by our Creator with coping mechanisms. One of these mechanisms is the passage of time. The more time that elapses from the beginning of a tragic situation, even if the situation persists, the more acclimated we become to it and we can better “deal” with it.

Thus, we can understand that the beginning of a crises is emotionally the most devastating and shocking. Hence the fast of Tisha B'Av is observed when the Temple structure was first torched and not on the day most if it actually burnt.

The Spiritual Explanation

On a spiritual plane, this phenomenon can be explained in terms of the spiritual energy that must be unleashed to allow for events to occur.

When the Temple was built a surge of Divine energy entered the world. The Torah

documents how at the time of the dedication of the Mishkan (the portable Temple the Jews built in the desert before they entered the Promised Land) a fire descended from Heaven. This fire was a physical expression of a spiritual fire that accompanied the inauguration of a new and dramatic change in the world. Even more dramatic physical manifestations of spiritual events occurred at the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

Similarly, when G-d decided to remove the Temples—and all that they represented—from the world, there was a surge of Divine destructive energy that was unleashed by G-d to make it possible. Once the destructive energy is unleashed, the world experiences the most powerful blow. What follows is only the consequences of that initial surge of energy. Thus the beginning of a tragedy—is more serious than its continuation.

Exile Fatigue

If we needed any additional proof of the Talmudic thesis that the beginning of a crisis is the worst part of it, it is our existence in exile over 1900 years. Despite the continued suffering of the Jewish People that began at

the time of the destruction of the Temple, we have become inured to, and complacent in, our exile existence.

And while it is part of the “coping mechanism” that we were given by G-d, we must realize that this mechanism was not given to us so that we forget that we are in exile. Rather, it was G-d's gift to us so that we do not despair and that we can continue to live as Jews, study Torah, perform Mitzvos and pave the way for the future Redemption at which time we will see the rebuilding of the Third Temple.

Another Connection to Tisha B'Av

We can now understand why the Torah portion of *Vo'eschanan*—with its words of rebuke, follows *Tisha B'Av*.

Figuratively, “**After** *Tisha b'Av*” refers to the mindset that we acquired after having become acclimated to the conditions of exile. We no longer acutely feel the pain of alienation and the loss of closeness with G-d that was epitomized by the existence of the Holy Temples in our midst. To deal with the desensitization process that sets in with the

passage of time, the Torah portion of *Vo'eschanan* with its tough rhetoric was provided for us to read, **after** *Tisha b"Av*. The lesson for us is that we should never make peace with the condition of exile and with all of our energy implore G-d to bring us the Redemption, imminently!

ESSAY THIRTEEN

A CITY OF TWO TALES

Much of life is spent on running away from
pain and negativity.

That is a formidable challenge.

An even greater challenge is when we
confront adversity precisely when we are
ready to embrace unadulterated positivity.

Today, on the cusp of the Messianic Age, we
were entrusted with this greater challenge

ESSAY THIRTEEN

A CITY OF TWO TALES

Shabbos of Consolation: Filling the Vacuum

Tisha B'av, the national day of mourning is followed by seven weeks of consolation. Starting with this Shabbos – known as Shabbos *Nachamu*, which means consolation or comfort – we look for ways to restore the sense of joy and optimism that was marred due to the preceding three weeks of mourning.

Consolation of a mourner, however, is not an exercise in helping the mourner forget or be distracted from his/her loss, but it is a time when we attempt – to the extent that is humanly possible – to fill the void and vacuum created by the loss.

The period of consolation for the loss of the Temple is when we are given the means to fill the void, because it is the most opportune time for G-d to rebuild the Third Temple and restore all that was lost as a result of its past destruction.

Rabbi Akiva and His Colleagues

The Talmud relates two stories about the way in which Rabbi Akiva consoled his colleagues when they expressed great anguish as a result of the sorrowful state of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

The first story discusses how when they were traveling and heard the hustle bustle of Rome from afar they broke down crying. They were moved to tears because of the sorrow they felt when they saw the splendor of Rome after leaving the degradation of Jerusalem,

The second story tells of their horror when they witnessed the desolation of the Temple, seeing a fox emerge from the place where the Holy of Holies once stood.

In both cases, Rabbi Akiva's colleagues cried while Rabbi Akiva laughed. In the first story, Rabbi Akiva explained his bizarre reaction by saying:

“If G-d rewards the evil, how much more so can we be expected to be rewarded in the future.”

In the second narrative story, his response to them was:

“If G-d fulfilled his prophecies of doom so elaborately – how much more so will He fulfill His message of Redemption.” His friends answered, “Akiva, you have comforted us.”

Going Away from or Going Towards Jerusalem

Though the two stories seem identical, there is one salient difference. In the first story, the rabbis were travelling **away from** Jerusalem to Rome. When they got close enough to Rome and beheld its grandeur, that is when they cried and Rabbi Akiva laughed.

By contrast, the second story relates to an incident that occurred when they were going **to** Jerusalem and beheld the utter degradation of the ruins of the Temple.

In a person's life there are two directions that need to be followed. There are times that we must leave the peace and security of “Jerusalem” and journey towards “Rome,” the symbol of the secular precincts of life. The objective, of course, is to refine the secular and make it holy.

There are times, however, when we confront such negativity in our journey towards “Rome” that we become demoralized. We cannot fathom how it is possible to find anything salvageable in “Rome.” This is precisely what happened to Rabbi Akiva’s colleagues. The Rome that they encountered was too formidable an adversary of holiness. It seemed impossible to find any positive value in that encounter. When one sees that their efforts are in vain, it leads one to tears.

Rabbi Akiva, however, was able to see the good even in the most abject forms of evil, light in the most dismal darkness and hope in the most desperate of situations. Rabbi Akiva laughed and was able to meet the challenge of his journey to Rome, as well.

When one has finished the mission in “Rome” and is traveling back to “Jerusalem,” meaning the mission to find holiness in the unholy has been completed, one expects no further frustration. Seemingly, on the road to Jerusalem, the only direction to go is “up,” growing in goodness and holiness. And yet, in Jerusalem itself, the rabbis discovered the worst disgrace of all - they saw with their own eyes a fox emerging from the Holy of

Holies. How could it be? This they could not bear and were moved to tears.

Again Rabbi Akiva laughed. Even in this situation when they were on the road to Jerusalem and expected things to get better, he could see the light in the darkness. He realized that this too was an integral part of the process of rebuilding..

In which Direction are we Going Today?

For the past 2,000 years, since the dispersion of Jews throughout the world, we have been on a mission to be a beacon of light for all the nations. To be sure, this mission was punctuated with trying times, when the insight of Rabbi Akiva was needed to help us find the light in the darkness and see the positive nature of even the worst circumstances.

But then in the last few decades, our greatest Jewish spiritual leaders have told us that we are on our way back to Jerusalem. Particularly the Rebbe has been underscoring the fact that we are at the tail end of the exile. And more recently the Rebbe cited the words of

the Midrash concerning Moshiach's announcement:

"The Time of your Redemption has arrived!"

At this point, we did not expect to see any more suffering and darkness. So when we did confront these negative situations, we begin to despair and we cry out, "How can this be?"

Indeed, the appearance of increased exile negativity should be even more heart rending than the pain we experienced earlier in our history. For there to be a lack of G-dliness in Rome" is to be expected – but to find a fox in the Holy of Holies?!

To derive comfort in this Shabbos of consolation we must allow Rabbi Akiva's message to ring clear, even, nay especially, in this instance.

We must realize that the negativity we experience now is commensurate with the degree of goodness that we will all experience imminently in the forthcoming Redemption.

And while we do not understand why there is need for suffering, we believe with perfect faith that the suffering will not only end but will be a prelude to the time that will be

characterized by the total and pervasive joy
that will envelop the world.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THIRTEEN FROM ONE

Judaism is obsessed with G-d's unity.

Yet there are 13 Principles of Faith.

In truth, all of these 13 emerge from one principle.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THIRTEEN FROM ONE

Connecting the 13 Principles to the Shema

Of all the Parshios (Torah portions) of the Torah, this week's, Vo'eschanan, contains the two most fundamental selections of the entire Torah: The Ten Commandments (which appears here for the second time) and the Shema.

While the Ten Commandments focus primarily on the most basic norms of behavior, the Shema emphasizes the most important tenets of our faith. Maimonides formulated thirteen principles of faith, which form the basis of Judaism.

The Jerusalem Talmud finds all of the Ten Commandments mentioned or alluded to in the Shema. With some effort we can trace many, if not all, of the 13 principles of faith as well in the Shema.

The First Five Principles

“Hear o Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one.” First and foremost the Shema affirms that there is a G-d. Second, the Shema establishes the principle of G-d’s unity:

“G-d is one”—the first two principles of faith.

From the principle that G-d is one, one can derive the third principle that G-d has no physical form, because everything physical is a composite of many parts. If G-d is truly one, then there can be no composition in Him.

The fifth principle that precludes worshipping any other entity besides G-d, is implied in the belief that G-d is one.

Furthermore, even the fourth principle that the universe was created by G-d, whereas G-d was always here, can also be inferred from the belief in G-d’s unity. If the universe were to have shared G-d’s eternal nature, then there would have been two eternal and, therefore, absolute beings.

Thus, the first five principles of Judaism, the existence of G-d, His unity, incorporeality, eternity and the negation of worshipping anything else are all contained in the Shema.

The Sixth and Seventh Principle

The Shema also stresses how G-d is “our G-d, declaring thus that G-d has a special relationship with us. There is no area where this relationship is more obvious than in prophecy—the sixth principle.

But even within the framework of prophecy, Moses enjoyed its most intimate form. G-d communicated to him “face to face.”

This encapsulates the sixth and seventh principle establishing the role of prophecy and the uniqueness of Moses’ form of prophecy.

Eighth and Ninth Principle

The eighth and ninth principles of faith enunciated by Maimonides that the Torah is Divine and that it can never be altered, are alluded to in the latter part of the Shema:

“And these words that I have commanded you today, shall be upon your heart.”

“These words that I have commanded you,” refers to the Divine source of the words of the Torah. Furthermore, the word “today,”

our Sages tell us, teaches us that every day the teachings of the Torah shall be as if they were given that very day — the principle that the words of the Torah are eternal.

The Tenth and Eleventh Principle

The tenth principle of faith is: G-d knows all of our actions and has not divorced Himself from the world.

This principle is implicit in the words: “Our G-d” in the Shema; i.e., G-d is aware of our actions.

But, even more explicitly, this principle, as well as the eleventh one that G-d rewards and punishes us for our actions, is stated in the second, follow up paragraph to the Shema (that appears in next week’s Parsha, but is always recited together with the Shema).

Twelfth Principle

The twelfth principle of faith, the belief in and anticipation for the coming of the Moshiach, according to Rashi, is implied in the very first verse of the Shema. “Hear o

Israel, the L-rd who is presently our G-d, recognized by the Jewish people, will eventually become “one G-d” for all of humankind in the future Messianic Era.

The Thirteenth Principle

One of the sources for the thirteenth principle of faith, that the Dead will come back to life at some point in the Messianic Age, has been traced by the Talmud to the second part of the Shema:

“So that your days and the days of your children shall be multiplied on the land that G-d swore to give to your ancestors...”

Those ancestors did not have possession of the land, and yet the Torah suggests that they will receive their portion. This teaches us that the dead will be brought back to life and will claim their share in the Land of Israel.

If we delve more deeply into the Shema we can find a hint, although remote, to the principle of the Resurrection of the Dead.

The Torah commands us to love G-d with all our soul. The Talmud translates this to mean

that we are to die rather than betray our allegiance to one G-d.

This begs a question.

Why would martyrs, about whom the Talmud states there is no one who can close to them in the afterlife in the spiritual world of Paradise. How could it be that these people will not enjoy the joy and benefits of the Final Redemption?

This is the logical basis for the Resurrection which is when all will return to this physical world, especially the ones whose lives were cut short because of their self-sacrifice for G-d's unity, the very essence of the Shema.

The irony is even more pronounced when we consider the fact that the Shema, according to Rashi cited above, is about how G-d's unity will become pervasive in the future Redemption. How then can we accept that those people who died to uphold G-d's unity will not live to see how G-d's unity will

spread to the entire world?

In light of the above we can see how, in essence, the all of the 13 principles derive from one principle: G-d's unity. All of the principles point to one objective: that the

entire world should witness and experience how G-d's unity is absolute. There will not be even one person who will not know G-d's unity. Every fiber of a person's consciousness will be aware of His absolute oneness. In the words of the prophet, even "every flesh shall see the mouth of G-d that has spoken." Chassidic explains that every being will see the Divine in everything.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

**The first commandment is G-d's declaration
to all individuals:**

"I am your very life.

**And I will ultimately make that reality
manifestly clear to the entire world:**

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Two Major Themes

This week's Torah portion of Vo'eschanan is unique in that it contains both the *Aseres Hadibros* (lit.Ten Statements, mistranslated as the "Ten Commandments."), as well as the Shema. Both contain declarations which represent the very foundation of Judaism. In the Ten Commandments, G-d "introduces" Himself:

"I am the L-rd your G-d, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

And in the Shema, Moses declares:

"Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one" .

Let us analyze the first verse of the *Aseres Hadibros*:

"I am"

The term G-d uses to introduce Himself in the *Aseres Hadibros* is "*Anochi*." According to the Midrash, this word originates in the Egyptian language. It is remarkable that G-d would have chosen a word from a foreign language to reveal Himself to the Jewish people at Sinai.

The lesson we can derive from this is that the Torah that G-d gave us at Sinai was intended to be used as a way of reaching every aspect of life. G-d is not restricted to one area. The same G-d who is situated in a holy place is responsible for – and therefore exists in – even the unholy and the foreign. It is our task to look for and discover the Divinity underlying all of G-d's creations.

"The L-rd"

The Hebrew name for G-d used here is the Tetragrammaton. This name, often referred to as G-d's "essential name," comprises three Hebrew words: *Haya*, *Hoveh*, *Yihyeh*, (was, is, will be).

The fact that these three tenses are consolidated in one word informs us that G-d transcends the limitations of time. He is

simultaneously, in the past, in the present and in the future. At Sinai, the Jewish people were exposed to this transcendent manifestation of G-d.

"your G-d"

In Hebrew, the word "your" is different when addressing a group as opposed to an individual. Although G-d is addressing the entire Jewish nation for all times, He employed the singular Hebrew suffix which denotes that He is speaking to only one person.

The lesson we are to learn from this is that, notwithstanding G-d's transcendence, He nevertheless chose at Sinai – and continues to choose – to connect Himself to each and every one of us as individuals.

Moreover, the term "your G-d (*Elokecha*," the root of which means power or vitality) in this verse implies that G-d becomes our very power and inner force. From Sinai onward, G-d cannot be an abstraction for a Jew; He is an integral part of our lives.

The implication of this notion is that for a Jew, anything that he or she does cannot go

against G-d by his or her nature. True, a Jew can sin but that is because we have free choice and we can go against our nature.

To illustrate, it is against human nature to jump off a roof, but yet a human being has the ability to do just that.

"Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

The great philosopher and poet, R. Yehudah Halevi, raised the question why the Torah did not say, "Who has created heaven and earth," a far greater accomplishment, one would think, than "merely" liberating the Jews from Egypt.

One of the answers to this question is that all of Judaism represents our ongoing effort at liberation. At whatever level we are in our spiritual development, we find ourselves stifled and confined. Every time we do a Mitzvah, our goal, is to "break out" of the land of Mitzrayim, (Egypt, but literally translated as:) confinement.

Our task is to emulate G-d, by continually being involved in the process of liberating ourselves and thereby, the entire world.

Indeed, one of the early codifiers of Jewish law, known as the SeMaK, stated that the first verse of the *Aseres Hadibros* constitutes the commandment to believe and anticipate the future Messianic Redemption – the objective of all of our efforts now.

Why is the commandment to believe in Redemption included in the first Commandment?

It maybe suggested that I is G-d's way of responding to a question about the opening words of this commandment that "I am G-d, your G-d." As was explained above, this means that G-d has invested His very essence into us so that our nature is essentially G-dly.

This assertion raises a question:

Where do we see that G-d is our true identity when we are so materialistic?

The answer is provided in the continuation of the commandment: "Who has taken you out of the Land of Egypt." If one does not see how the essence of the Jew is G-dly it is due to the fact that we are still in exile. However, when G-d will liberate us from exile it will become clear to all that we are a G-dly people.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE ECHO-LESS SOUND OF TORAH

**Torah is unique because it is G-d's only
direct communication with every Jew.**

**Nature, although G-d's creation, can only pick
up an echo of His original voice.**

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE ECHO-LESS SOUND OF TORAH

Why the Miracle?

In this week's Torah portion, Moses describes the voice of G-d at the Revelation at Mount Sinai, saying: "A great voice, which did not continue." One of the explanations that the Midrash offers for this is that G-d's voice did not have an echo .

The Midrash's answer seems to present a few problems. How does the absence of an echo indicate greatness? If the voice was indeed strong, would it not have produced an echo?

Furthermore, why would G-d seemingly alter the laws of nature just so that his voice would not produce an echo?

A Penetrating Sound

The Rebbe explains that an echo is produced when sound waves hit an object. When the sound waves reach a wall, a mountain, or any such obstacle, they are bounced right back. The only condition to produce an echo is that

the object which deflects the sound waves must be strong and rigid. If the object is soft and yielding, the sound will just be absorbed and no echo will result .

When G-d said, "I am G-d your G-d," his voice was so overwhelmingly powerful that there was nothing in the world that was strong enough to deflect the sound. G-d's voice actually penetrated and permeated the physical world. Every object in the world, from the inanimate to the higher forms of life, absorbed the G-dly voice and was affected by it .

The phenomenon of the Revelation at Sinai is akin to what will take place after Moshiach's arrival, which is described in these words: "And the glory of G-d will be revealed, and all flesh will see." Even our very bodies will be able to perceive G-dliness .

This is why G-d's voice had no echo. This was no miracle, and the laws of nature were not at all abrogated. It is, indeed, in keeping with physical law that when a sound is absorbed, no echo is produced. And since the voice was totally integrated into physical reality, there was nothing which can bounce the sound back. Therefore, the absence of an echo

shows the infinite strength of the voice, rather than the opposite .

Whenever a Jew studies Torah, the holy voice of Torah penetrates his physical surroundings and elevates the world.

Our Rabbis say that in the World To Come, "the very beams of the house will bear witness," for they have been absorbing all the holiness produced when a person learns Torah in his home.

This explains why many tzadikim commanded that their coffins be made from the wood of their desks and tables where they learned Torah and gave food to the poor, for the Torah and Mitzvos were "absorbed" by the very planks themselves!

The power of Torah is such that nothing can stand in its way. The world was created in such a manner as to enable the continuing voice of Revelation to penetrate the corporeal world even today .

One may suggest an additional aspect of the echo-less aspect of the communication at Sinai.

Daughter of a Voice!

The term used for an echo in Hebrew *Bas Kol*. This expression translated literally means the “daughter of a voice.” It implies that the voice or sound is not the original but a derivative.

This term is also used for a heavenly voice which is akin to, but not quite the same, as a prophetic measure. The communication from G-d that is described as a *Bas Kol* is one in which the original message comes to the recipient in an indirect fashion.

We can now better understand why the voice of G-d at Sinai had no *Bas-kol*. Not only does this mean that there was no echo because it was absorbed into every fiber of existence. It also depicts the directedness of G-d's message to the world. It did not have to travel from on high and make many stops through various intermediaries to reach us down here on earth. It was G-d's direct communication to us.

Objection

One can raise an objection to this assertion.

Tanya, the classic work of Chabad Chassidus describes (Chapter 5) the way Torah had to journey through hidden steps to descend into our world. This would seem to imply that Torah does indeed come to us in secondary and tertiary intermediate steps and not a direct line from the “mouth of the Almighty.”

Moreover, our Sages teach that only the first two commandments were heard directly from G-d, but the rest we did, in fact, get through Moses and other intermediaries.

Unchanged

Two interconnected answers can be given:

The first is that though the Torah goes through many stages it does not fundamentally change its essential Divine nature. As Tanya itself asserts that the Torah we have down here is G-d's very wisdom and will, and G-d and His wisdom and will are one.”

Although all of existence goes through many contractions and so does Torah, what is the difference between the two ways in which G-d instills His energy?

A simple distinction is that there are two ways something can travel from point a to point b: either stopping at each juncture and experiencing and being affected by the culture of that area or just passing through.

For example, when one writes an idea, the idea passes through one's hand and pen, but it is not tainted or diminished in the least or watered down. The hand and the pen are mere conduits for the idea not teachers. By contrast, a teacher who uses a parable to explain an abstruse subject takes a lofty concept and simplifies it.

When G-d's energy entered our world in the process of Creation the G-dly energy undergoes major contractions and diminutions, referred to in Kabbalah as *tzimtzum*.

But the process through which Torah came into our physical world is comparable to the ideas that flow through the hand and pen. While it makes the idea accessible it has no effect on the idea. Torah down here is not any different than the Torah in the higher spheres; it is just made accessible.

The second answer is that, in fact, it was only the sounds of Sinai that penetrated all of existence. However implicit in those original sounds are all the subsequent teachings of Torah.

We really only had to hear the first two commandments because they comprise all the other commandments much like a seed contains within it all the future plants that come from it.

In effect, every Jew who stood at Mount Sinai heard the entire Torah as it was encapsulated in the first two commandments.

Connection to Moshiach

The above will help us in understanding what the prophet meant when he said that “a new Torah will emerge from Me.”

It certainly does not mean that the Torah will change one iota, G-d forbid. It does, however, mean that new dimensions of Torah understanding will be revealed by Moshiach. But these new teachings were already implicit in the original communication at Sinai.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

NO MORE JEALOUSY

A human being is both a social creature and
a lover of privacy.

Our challenge is to know how to balance
these two opposite traits of creating wall of
separation and doors to get through the
barrier

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

NO MORE JEALOUSY

The Last Commandment

One of the most significant sections of this week's parsha is Moses' repetition of the Ten Commandments (more accurately, the Ten Statements) that were mentioned for the first time in the book of Exodus.

There is a principle of Talmudic interpretation that "everything follows the end." This means, for example, that the very last item on a Torah list captures the essence of that entire list. In our case, the very last commandment repeated in this week's parsha (albeit, with some additional detail) is:

"And you shall not covet your fellows wife, you shall not desire your fellows house, his field, his slave, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to your fellow."

Does the fact that this is the final commandment suggest that it expresses the ultimate goal of Judaism? Our challenge is to

find some way of understanding that it encapsulates all of the commandments.

It is interesting to note that Maimonides concludes his Mishneh Torah by describing the Messianic Age. In his very last paragraph, he describes a world in which there will be no more jealousy.

This placement suggests that Maimonides considers the lack of jealousy to be the ultimate goal of the Messianic Age; furthermore, it will take more time to achieve this milestone than any of the other monumental changes that will occur during the Messianic Age.

Why, we may ask, is this human failure of coveting and jealousy considered so ingrained in our consciousness that its elimination will represent the crowning event of the Age of Redemption?

To underscore the daunting challenge of overcoming envy, we should reflect on the fact that the very first crime committed by one human against another was Cain's murder of Abel. He became enraged with the envy he felt when G-d accepted Abel's offering and not his own. Envy was the first example of the breakdown of human

relationships and it seems destined that it will be the last thing to be rectified.

Respect for Boundaries

Envy demonstrates a lack of appreciation for the boundaries G-d created in this world. It derives from a piercing, primitive feeling that if another person has something desirable, then I am entitled to have it instead. It is a failure to appreciate that, as our Sages put it, "A person cannot encroach upon what I set aside for his fellow." G-d gave each person the resources that were intended for him or her.

The issue of boundaries, in a broader sense, informs all of the commandments. It is G-d Who gave us limits and erected barriers between us and the world around us. He did not intend us to indulge in our every whim. However, the paradigm for all these restrictions is the tenth commandment: do not covet.

The question can be raised why envy has posed such a formidable challenge for us? Why is it so difficult to expunge our covetousness? Why will we have to wait for

the Messianic Age (and perhaps, even for one of its more advanced stages, as one can infer from Maimonides placing this promise at the end of his discussion of the Messianic Age) to see the disappearance of jealousy?

Removing Borders

While this commandment underscores the need for us to respect boundaries, there are at least two other Torah imperatives for us to not be stifled or restricted by them.

Ethics of the Fathers (Chapter 5:10) states:

“One who says... ‘mine is mine and yours is yours,’ this is the average characteristic, and some say this is the characteristic of Sodom.”

As commentators point out, to turn selfishness into a philosophy as they did in Sodom is manifestly evil. On one hand it sounds reasonable and as though it is based on a healthy respect for the integrity of our possessions as well as the other's. On the other hand, it smacks of the inhospitable Sodomite people who could never cross over the fence that separated them from the outsider.

G-d wants us to give freely of our own resources to others. Ideally, we should transcend our sense of ownership to say “mine is yours and yours is yours.” The ideal is not to be boxed in by borders but to transcend them.

Second, the Talmud states that every individual has to say “the world was created for me.” This is intended to teach each individual to feel responsibility for the entire world. Moreover, the Jewish people were directly instructed that each individual is responsible for the other. There is a Biblical commandment to rebuke others who fail to fulfill their responsibilities. “Mind your own business” was never a Jewish slogan. Everyone else’s business is our business!

These two factors – that we must give of our own to others and that we are responsible for others – can be a double-edged sword. While we reach out to help the other we may lose sight of and be insensitive to the other’s privacy. Indeed, once we cross the line and trespass into the other’s territory we might look to see what the other possesses, sparking a feeling of envy. The coveter may feel he or she has license to trespass and encroach on

the private lives of others because of the Torah's insistence that we reach out to them sometimes.

We can easily see how a person who emphasizes one aspect of Jewish life can forget that there are other imperatives that require us to go in an opposite direction. As we cross over into the domain of others in order to help them, we must still respect their privacy.

Even in marriage which, according to the Zohar, is the reunion of two half souls separated at birth, one must allow for the husband and wife to have their own spaces. This is reflected in the law of family purity that mandates periods of physical separation in a marriage. These periods of separation ensure that the partners in life do not violate each others' boundaries.

Balance!

We can now see why envy is the last human failure to be corrected. It simply requires the most powerful form of balance.

Had the Torah not imposed on us the need to remove barriers between people by helping

and taking responsibility for them, it would not be so difficult a challenge to banish envy. People who mind their own business are less likely to be tempted to look into each other's domain and covet their possessions.

It is precisely those people, the ones who are obsessed with reaching out to help others and ignore all the boundaries, who may disregard the borders necessary to guarantee the integrity of each individual.

The power to integrate the two, both to respect the boundaries and be able to transcend them, will be fully operational only in the Messianic Age.

Ten Commandments - Horizontally

The Ten Commandments were given on two tablets. According to the Midrash, they were placed side by side and we can therefore read them either vertically, from one to ten, or horizontally, i.e., the first commandment followed by the sixth, the second followed by the seventh etc. Accordingly, the commandment which precedes the one about coveting is to "honor your father and mother."

What is the connection between filial responsibility and not coveting?

One may suggest that just as there are geographic boundaries there are also chronologic borders. Honoring our parents is our way of respecting their seniority and not treating them as our peers. Honoring our parents is a paradigm for all of the commandments in the Torah that require of us to respect people from an earlier time frame, which includes parents, teachers, senior citizens and authority figures.

Envy and Lack of Respect: Challenge of Modernity

It seems, though, that much like envy, proper respect for elders and authority figures is one of the most elusive challenges of our time. Indeed, the Mishnah declares that in the last days before the coming of Moshiach there will be much chutzpah with the young rebelling against their elders.

What is the cause of this phenomenon?

Here too the answer is that the Torah demands that we remove the barriers between generations even as we,

paradoxically, respect those barriers. We are living in times where the elders have to listen more carefully to the needs and demands of the youth because in many ways they are the more altruistic group.

Even in the distant past, our Sages spoke of how a teacher gets the most knowledge from his students, even more so than from his teachers and colleagues.

In Messianic times, the prophet Malachi predicts, "The hearts of the fathers will be returned to G-d through the children." Because the division between young and old has been partially erased we have therefore witnessed a breakdown in the needed boundaries.

Living the Paradox

The challenge today is not only to find the right balance; the ultimate goal is to introduce a trans-boundary energy within the boundaries.

This was the power vested in the Bais Hamikdash, the most significant part of which was the Ark. While the Ark, our Sages tell us, had precisely prescribed dimensions it

miraculously occupied no **physical** space in the Temple. It introduced a Divine power that transcends space into the very parameters of space.

This is why we focus on rebuilding the Bais Hamikdash-the Holy Temple in these days before and after Tisha B'Av. It will enable us to create the energy that will take us beyond our prescribed borders into a world of precise measurements and boundaries.

Fusion of Revealed and Esoteric Parts of Torah

Another paradox of the co-existence of barriers and barrier transcending power is the division between the revealed teachings of Torah, such as its laws, and the inner dimension and mystical aspects of Torah knowledge. For thousands of years this body of esoteric knowledge was kept secret. There was a clear separation between these two disciplines. But, in the last few hundred years, particularly with the advent of Chassidus, that wall of separation has come down. This mystical knowledge has been publicized and made accessible to countless individuals.

However, these teachings remain in a category of their own and the separation still exists. Here too we can see the Messianic phenomenon materializing: the fusion of two opposite worlds, with the removal of barriers even as we preserve their integrity.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

A JEWISH WORKOUT

Barriers and obstacles were made to be
transcended.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

A JEWISH WORKOUT

The Three Level of Love

This week's parsha, *Vo'eschanan*, is always read on the Shabbos after the national day of mourning, Tisha B'Av, known as *Shabbos Nachamu*, the Shabbos of consolation. Since there are no coincidences, especially not in the Torah, we must conclude that there is a close relationship between the idea of consolation and the Torah portion of *Vo'eschanan*.

One of the highlights of this parsha is the Shema. After declaring: "Hear o Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is one." the Torah continues: "And you shall love G-d your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might."

With All Your Heart

According to the Talmud, the meaning of "with all your heart" is that all your passions, spiritual and material must ultimately be

directed towards G-d. One must inspire one's own "animal nature" to feel that the greatest achievement and pleasure is to follow the path of service to G-d.

With All Your Soul

But, this does not suffice. You must also love G-d "with all your soul."

Here too, the Talmud adds clarification. To love G-d with all your soul is to be prepared to give your life for Him. If one were given the option of either converting to another religion or dying, one should be prepared to die rather than betray one's devotion to the one G-d of Israel.

With All Your Might

But, it seems that this too does not suffice. The Torah continues that you must also love G-d "with all your might." What more can be asked of a person who already ignited the flames of passion of his G-dly soul as well as his animal soul? What more can be demanded of a person who is prepared to give the most precious possession — life itself — for G-d?

The Talmudic explanation is that this command of “with all your might” is directed to a person for whom money is more precious than life. This individual too must be prepared to part with his money rather than betray his allegiance to the one G-d.

A Chassidic Perspective

Chassidic literature, however, provides us with a more profound understanding of what is intended by “with all your might,” that will demonstrate the connection to the Shabbos of Consolation.

To “love G-d with all your might” is to go beyond one’s natural limit. Whatever one imagines is the outer limit to his/her capacity to do something positive and holy, one must learn to transcend that limit. Even if it appears — and that might be the reality — that there is no way that one can scale the wall that separates between a person and a spiritual goal, one must push oneself to surmount that obstacle. By making every effort to do that, we will discover that we possess the G-d given ability to transcend all the parameters that are either self-imposed, imposed by society or even by G-d’s own

system with which He guides the world. Barriers and obstacles were made to be transcended.

Just as in the world of exercise and aerobics, one must constantly break new barriers and push oneself a bit farther in order to grow stronger and continue to have the maximum workout, so too is it in the spiritual realm. The command to “Love G-d with all your might” exhorts and enables us to overcome every and any obstacle.

The Ultimate Obstacle

Of all the obstacles that we experience, there is one that is the most daunting. It is the phenomenon known as Galus, or exile that commenced with the destruction of the Holy temple in Jerusalem. For close to 2,000 years we are making every attempt to overcome this barrier to a world in which G-d's presence is clearly manifest.

To be sure, **every** positive action, **every** minor gesture in the right direction, has the capacity to push us over the top, particularly in this day and age, which has been characterized by the Rebbe as the “Time for

your Redemption.”

But, the most powerful way through which we can jump over the walls of exile, is to jump over all of our own inner obstacles and limitations that inhibit our growth. By transcending ourselves, we will bring about the coming of Moshiach who has been described as Ben Partzi, “one who breaks through barriers.” He will lead us all to the rebuilding of the third Beit Hamikdash-Holy Temple at which time we will experience the true and ultimate consolation.

ESSAY NINETEEN

TWO PLUS TWO = TEFILLIN

There is a perennial conflict between mind
and heart.

The solution to this challenge is by
developing a deeper understanding of the
mind-heart construct.

This is the Mitzvah of Tefillin.

ESSAY NINETEEN

TWO PLUS TWO = TEFILLIN

Four Sections; Four Compartments

The Mitzvah of wearing Tefillin is mentioned in the Torah four times; twice in the book of Exodus and twice in Deuteronomy. These four sections are written out and contained in the Tefillin. In the Hand Tefillin they are all written on one scroll, whereas in the Head Tefillin they are written on four separate scrolls and inserted into four separate compartments.

What is the Biblical source for the requirement that the Head Tefillin contain its scrolls in four separate compartments?

Rashi, citing a Talmudic tradition, explains that the word used by the Torah for the Head Tefillin is *totafos*, a composite of the two words, *tat* and *pas*. *Tat* in the language of Kaspi is two and *pas* in the Afriki language also means two. The Torah here thus hints

that we should create four compartments (2+2) for the Head Tefillin.

Four Compartments; Four Questions

This comment raises some obvious questions:

First, why the need for four compartments in the Head Tefillin? While we need four sections of the Torah, since they each contain a reference to the Mitzvah of wearing Tefillin, why do they have to be placed into four separate compartments in the Head Tefillin?

Second, why doesn't the Torah mention the requirement of four compartments explicitly?

Third, why would the Torah, which was written in the Holy Tongue, teach us something about Tefillin using two different foreign languages?

To be sure, the *Shaloh* (Rabbi Yeshayah Halevi Hurvits, a sixteenth century sage) explains, these "foreign" words are actually Hebrew words that were forgotten and somehow tuned up in other languages. However, the question still remains, why couldn't the Torah have used Hebrew words that had not been forgotten to indicate the need for four compartments?

Fourth, what is the symbolism and hidden message in these two languages, Kaspi and Afriki, and what is their connection to Tefillin?

Action Versus Intellect

One partial answer to these questions (based on the work *Mateh Nefatli*) is that the two elements of the Tefillin represent two aspects of our devotion to G-d. The Hand Tefillin represents action and the Head Tefillin intellect and thought. Of these two, Judaism considers action more important. We therefore put on the Hand Tefillin before the Head Tefillin to indicate that even before we understand why we perform a certain Mitzvah we must do it. Even if we never fathom G-d's rationale for His commandments we still must perform them.

However, throughout our long exile, there have been many instances where tyrannical authorities forbade the practice of Judaism. Concerning Tefillin in particular, the Talmud relates how the Romans expressly banned donning Tefillin and threatened to execute anyone who was found doing it.

During the Holocaust and in the Soviet Gulag there were isolated stories of heroism by Jews who risked their lives to put on Tefillin, but the overwhelming majority of Jews simply could not procure Tefillin even if they had been willing to risk their lives to do so.

What does a Jew do when he can't physically perform a Mitzvah due to circumstances beyond his control?

The answer is to perform the Mitzvah mentally. The Talmud states that when a Jew sincerely wants to do a Mitzvah and is precluded from doing it due to circumstances beyond his control, G-d reckons it as if he had done the Mitzvah. However, the person must make every attempt to do the Mitzvah in whichever manner possible. If one cannot do the Mitzvah physically he should at least do it in his mind and heart.

The Torah alludes to this thought when it says that the four sections and compartments of the Head Tefillin correspond to the number four in **foreign** languages, symbolizing our challenge to observe the Mitzvah in foreign lands in times of persecution. At least, the Torah hints to us, do the Mitzvah cerebrally; put on the virtual

Head Tefillin, and that way you will be able to fulfill the Mitzvah in exile as much as possible.

Tefillin is Symbol of Geulah-Redemption

The fact that the Torah teaches this lesson with regard to Tefillin in particular, although it applies to every Mitzvah we cannot perform because of exile conditions, is because the Mitzvah of Tefillin is particularly suited to get us out of exile. The Torah tells us that Tefillin are reminders of the Exodus, which portends the future Redemption. This is particularly true with regard to the Head Tefillin, which the Zohar states, is a symbol of freedom and royalty much like the crown it resembles.

Wearing Tefillin empowers us to defy the exile conditions symbolized by the two foreign nations of Kafti and Afriki that are combined into the word *totafo's*..

The above still does not explain the significance of the number four with respect to the Head Tefillin, nor does it explain the significance of these two foreign languages (Kaspi and Afriki) in particular.

Mind Over Heart

The Head Tefillin, as stated, symbolizes the intellectual approach to serving G-d, while the Hand Tefillin, placed opposite the heart, symbolize the emotional approach. There is an advantage to each.

Emotions are fickle. This is best seen in children. One minute they can throw a tantrum and the next minute be docile and subdued followed by joyous laughter. There is no telling what will be the catalyst to cause an explosive reaction, and no one can say when it will abruptly pivot into a totally opposite emotion.

Intellect, on the other hand, is stable. While the heart, the symbol of emotion, is constantly pumping blood, the brain keeps its activities under wraps. We cannot feel our brain waves the way we feel the pulsation of the heart. Intellect is cool, calm and collected, while emotion is heated, explosive and all over the place.

One of the messages of Tefillin therefore is placement of mind over heart. We must instill understanding into our emotions to temper and guide them.

However, intellect is subject to its own set of problems that can undermine its ability to influence our emotions properly.

Intellect is impersonal. Emotion is the glue that connects to other events, things or people. Intellect causes us to withdraw into its own sphere. Emotions show up in our facial expressions. We can tell if someone is depressed, happy, kind or cruel, etc., by looking into their face. But, it is virtually impossible to detect a person's intellectual capacity by looking at the face.

However, the above applies only to the external or “backside” or “shoulder” aspect of the intellect. Chassidic philosophy reveals that the internal, or “facial” dimension of the intellect, is closely aligned with the inner sanctum of our heart. The key to a healthy mind-heart relationship thus is to elevate our intellect from its external-“shoulder” mode to its internal-“facial” mode.

This is how Chassidic thought explains why the Ark had to be carried on the shoulders of the priests and not transported in a wagon. When they carried it on their shoulders, their backside, they actually faced one another, This symbolizes the role of the Ark to take

the backside of the spiritual intellectual dimension of the Ark (which contained the Tablet the innermost dimension of Divine wisdom) and have it match the internal, facial aspect of the Ark.

In simpler language, the face of wisdom refers to G-d's wisdom as it is understood by Him and has been transmitted to us in the Torah. When we study Torah we come face to face (pun intended) with G-d's inner wisdom. By contrast, when we study nature or any aspect of G-d's creation, we are only accessing the backside of Divine wisdom.

When we deal with intellect in its “shoulder” or “backside” state it is devoid of connectivity to others. It is cold and detached. Perhaps that is the origin of the expression “he’s giving him the cold shoulder.”

Kaspi: Connecting the Shoulders to the Face

Here then is the connection between the Kaspi language and the Head Tefillin. The word “Kaspi” is related to another Hebrew word which means “shoulders.”

When the shoulder however is connected to the Head Tefillin it imbues the shoulder with

the face of wisdom, with inner purpose and connectivity.

Thus the Head Tefillin contains an allusion to the shoulder to indicate that the intellect that Head Tefillin represents is not cold and detached. Rather, it relates to the inner intellect which is in touch with the inner emotions of the person. It is only when our intellect is in its external mode that it does not relate to emotion and cannot positively influence our emotions.

Hence, the first two sections of the Head Tefillin relate to the two shoulders, which also allude to the two directions all emotions take, to the right (chesed-kindness) or left, (gevurah-harshness). One's kindness and love can be uncouth and stifled when our intellect is just on "shoulder" level. Likewise our judgment and discipline can be uncouth and rough. In short we are in exile.

When we make the "shoulders" a component of the Head Tefillin (which contain the theme of the Exodus), it elevates, edifies and liberates them because the Head Tefillin are a crown worn on the head signifying wisdom in its most exalted and liberated state.

Afriki: Connecting the Head to the Crown

As stated, the second two parts of the Head Tefilin are related to Afriki, which shares a root with the Hebrew word *perek*, chapter, or disconnected. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 99b) criticizes one who only studies Torah intermittently. It uses the word *lifrakim*, which has the same root as Afriki. The Chassidic Sage Rabbi Hillel of Paritch offered a deeper understanding of this lower effort of Torah study. It refers to one who disconnects his knowledge of Torah from its G-dly source.

Hence the second two sections and compartments of Head Tefillin, which discuss G-d's unity, demand of us that we not be content with uniting our external understanding ("shoulders-Kapti") with our internal mind. The Head Tefillin also want us to connect our observance of the two entities, Torah and Mitzvos, to their Divine Source; i.e., to the Divine that resides in Torah that transcends even the inner precincts of wisdom. This is symbolized by the crown which connotes that which is above the mind.

As mentioned, Tefillin are associated with liberation and Divine unity. Putting on Tefillin is one way to prepare for the final

Redemption when we will be fully liberated. This will bring about the full alignment between the external and internal wisdom, as well as the complete connection of our Judaism with its Crown.

ESSAY TWENTY

KISS THE MEZUZAH AND WEAR YOUR TEFILLIN PROUD

To be respected one must do things that are intrinsically worthy of other's admiration.

Objective worth must also be complemented by subjective integrity and love.

These two elements are reflected in the Mitzvah of Mezuzah and Tefillin.

ESSAY TWENTY

KISS THE MEZUZAH AND WEAR YOUR TEFILLIN PROUD

The Presidential Election and the Mezuzah

The entire country, if not the world, was treated to a unique spectacle the last few days. Senator Joseph Lieberman was selected as a vice-presidential candidate. Incredibly, much of the focus of the country is on his commitment to the observance of the Mitzvos. Of the many commandments that could have been highlighted, it is interesting that the TV cameras portrayed his kissing of the Mezuzah when he left his house.

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught us that everything that happens is directed by Divine Providence. The fact that this powerful image was broadcast around the world in the week that we are first introduced to the Mitzvah of Mezuzah in the weekly Parsha is certainly no coincidence. By virtue of this week's Torah reading and its coinciding with the image of a vice-presidential candidate kissing a Mezuzah, we are all asked to focus our attention on

this very fundamental Mitzvah.

Why Kiss the Mezuzah

But, as important as the Mitzvah itself is, what was highlighted was not the performance of the mitzvah, per se, but rather the act of kissing the Mezuzah. Despite the fact that Jewish law does not **require** kissing the Mezuzah when one leaves or enters one's home, it is a custom to do so as a way of showing our affection for the Mitzvah that G-d has given us.

There are some who suggest that the source for this custom is a narrative recorded in the Talmud (Tractate Avodah Zarah 11)

The Roman Emperor's nephew, Onkelus, converted to Judaism. Every time the Emperor sent soldiers to apprehend him, they too converted to Judaism because they were so impressed with Onkelus' arguments for the truth and beauty of Judaism. Finally the Emperor ordered his next group of soldiers to not dialogue whatsoever with him. When they apprehended him and escorted him out of his house, he kissed the Mezuzah and laughed. The soldiers were puzzled by this behavior and they asked him to explain his action.

Onkelus replied:

“The custom of the world is that a king sits inside and his servants stand guard outside. The Holy One Blessed is He, by contrast, allows his servants to sit inside while He guards them on the outside (as represented by the Mezuzah). It is thus written “G-d will guard your goings out and comings in.” Upon hearing this they too converted to Judaism.”

It is noteworthy that despite the fact that Onkeles had a Mezuzah on his doorpost within clear sight of the soldiers, it was the act of kissing the Mezuzah that caught their attention and has now captured the attention of the mass media in our own day and age.

Loving the Mitzvah

A powerful lesson can be derived from this. As important as it is to fulfill G-d's commandments there is a need to show how precious they are to us. We must show that we fulfill them not merely out of habit or out of obedience but out of love and with joy.

This explains Onkelus' response to the

soldiers, when he referred to the Mezuzah as an expression of G-d watching His servants who remain inside the house. The fact that G-d watches over us is His way of showing us love. Our way of reciprocating G-d's outpouring of love for us, is by treating His commandments not only with respect, but also with affection.

Memories

There have been incidents where Jews have returned to Judaism, because of memories of their mother having them kiss the Mezuzah before going to sleep. The love for this Mitzvah of Mezuzah in particular has the capacity to awaken the hidden love that we all possess, just as it had the capacity to inspire even the pagan soldiers of the wicked Empower of Rome in those days, and to generate respect for Judaism and the Jewish people in our own day and age.

Jewish Pride Generates Respect of Nations

Our Sages tell us that in the Messianic Age, the nations of the world will all recognize the special relationship G-d has for the Jewish

people. As a result, all nations will join the Jewish people in worshipping the one G-d.

(This does not mean that all people will convert to Judaism. It means that all people will recognize the authority of the one G-d and serve Him in accordance with the seven Noahide laws that were given to all of humankind.)

One of the ways that we prepare for the coming of Moshiach, is to be proud of our Jewish observances and openly show the love we have for them. This goes a long way in generating respect and affection for the Jewish people and will hasten the fulfillment of the Biblical prophecy that “all nations will serve G-d with one consent.”

Tefillin and Mezuzah: Common Denominator

One may raise the question that there is another Mitzvah that generates respect of the nations for the Jewish people; it is the Mitzvah of Tefillin.

Concerning this Mitzvah the Torah states:

“And the nations of the world will see the name of G-d called upon you and they will fear you.”

The Talmud quotes Rabbi Eliezer who says that this refers to the Mitzvah of Tefillin, specifically the Head Tefillin.

The word fear in this context can also be rendered as respect.

So we have two Mitzvos that generate respect for the Jewish people: Mezuzah and Tefillin.

Tefillin and Mezuzah: Common Denominator

A simple and obvious difference is that the Mezuzah itself did not, in and of itself, generate respect; it was his love and affection that he displayed towards the Mezuzah that caused the positive reaction of the soldiers who witnessed it. Tefillin themselves have the capacity to invoke fear and respect of those who see a Jew wearing his Tefillin.

On a deeper level, the Mezuzah is placed on the doorposts of one's home, whereas the Tefillin are worn on one's body.

A house surrounds the person and creates a positive and holy atmosphere for all those who reside in the house. Tefillin are actually worn, indeed, tied to our bodies.

This reflects the difference between these two

Mitzvos: The Mezuzah provides us with peripheral energy while the Tefillin penetrate into our inner being. The former will generate respect when they see the way we treat the Mezuzah while the latter will be inspired just by looking at the person who has internalized the Tefillin's sanctity.

Tefillin, particularly, the Head Tefillin, are the ultimate symbol of royalty. The non-Jew who sees this cannot help but to be overcome with fear or respect.

Tefillin (and Mezuzah) are thus a very powerful way of preparing for the future Messianic Age, when the nations of the world cherish their relationship with the one G-d and the One nation on Earth!

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

SHEMA MEDITATION

Judaism's most important affirmation sounds deceptively simple. There is one G-d.

The Shema is just as much an affirmation of the uniqueness of the Jewish people.

In truth, the two affirmations are intertwined.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

SHEMA MEDITATION

The Ubiquitous Shema

Which Jew has not heard of the Shema? The Shema, the affirmation of the oneness of G-d, that appears in this week's Torah reading, is one of the first prayers a Jewish child is taught to recite and is often the last words uttered by a dying person. We are Biblically commanded to recite the Shema every morning and evening and the rabbis added on the obligation to recite the Shema before we go to bed.

To better appreciate the Shema let us analyze each of its six Hebrew words.

Shema

The Hebrew word Shema is usually translated as "hear." But, it is odd that Moses would tell the Jews to just hear that G-d is our G-d. A more precise translation would be "understand." This underscore the idea that it does not suffice to believe that G-d is our G-

d and that He is one — we must try to rationally comprehend it, reflect and meditate on it.

O Israel

The word Israel (Yisrael) is one of the many names that are used to identify members of the Jewish people. This name was the second name the Patriarch Jacob was given.

Our sages tell us that the two names, Jacob and Israel, are representative of two modes of spiritual expression. The name Jacob — which derives from the word “heel” — describes our state of being when we are constrained by conditions that were set upon us by the outside world.

The name Israel comprises the words “master” and “head.” It describes the mindset of Jewishness that allows us to be the masters of our environment rather than being led and controlled by it.

Thus, the combined two words “*Shema Yisrael*” (Hear O Israel) can now be reinterpreted to mean that one must reflect on the concepts (contained within the Shema prayer) in order to rise to the level

and mindset of Israel, one who is not a victim of his environment, but a controller of it.

G-d

The word G-d here refers to G-d's essential name, known as the Tetragramaton. Contained within this name are the three words *Haya* (past), *hoveh* (present) and *Yihyeh* (future).

Our sages explain that this name of G-d describes Him as a power that transcends the boundaries of time. From G-d's perspective, past, present and future are experienced simultaneously, because G-d is essentially beyond the limitations of time.

The Shema attunes us to this reality that G-d is absolutely above and beyond the constraints of nature, even the constraints of time.

Elokeinu

This word translates as "our G-d." However, a more precise translation would yield the following: "G-d is our internal force and power." Combined with the preceding words,

this sentence now yields a new meaning:

In order to achieve the status of Israel and gain mastery over one's environment, one must reflect on the notion that G-d's transcendent essence is not detached from us, but is our very strength and power. We must always realize that our life is not a natural one, but one that derives from that aspect of G-d that transcends the bounds of time and space.

By realizing that our power is not just divine but that it is beyond all the parameters that are associated with creation, we will not be intimidated by the natural barriers that sometimes seem to inhibit our spiritual growth.

G-d is One

These last two words go even further. Not only do we have to recognize that the transcendent aspect of G-d is a part of our individual identities as Jews, we must realize that that is the essence of the entire universe.

Even if it is not apparent now, we affirm in the Shema that ultimately G-d will be one. This means that, ultimately the entire

universe will feel that there is nothing else but G-d's transcendent existence that gives life to all.

“G-d is one” in this context means that not only is there no other G-d, but, moreover, there is nothing else but G-d!

Indeed, the Talmud expounds on the fact that the Hebrew word Echad (one) is a composite of three letters, that suggest that G-d's unity pervades all the dimensions of space, the spiritual realms as well as the physical.

And despite the fact that this notion of unity has yet to have entered the consciousness of the Jewish people, Moshiach will be the one to usher in an age when this will be common knowledge.

Indeed, Rashi — the most famous of all the commentators — who focuses on the straightforward meaning of the Biblical text tells us that the following is the simplest meaning of the Shema:

“Hear O Israel, G-d who is presently only **our** G-d (only recognized and appreciated by us), will eventually (through Moshiach) be recognized as the One and only G-d, by all.”

Revised and Expanded Translation of the Shema

Let us now repeat the Shema in its entirety in light of the foregoing exposition:

“For a Jew to attain mastery over the world of nature, he or she must reflect on the transcendent G-dly energy that is the core of his or her existence. By focusing on this we will ultimately hasten the time when the entire world will declare that there is but one G-d who is the essence of **all** that exists.”

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

SHOULD WE LAUGH OR CRY?

Both crying and laughing are responses to
“abnormal” situations.

The Messianic Age will take us from the
abnormal state of pain and crying to the
supra-normal state of laughter and infinite
and unimaginable good.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

SHOULD WE LAUGH OR CRY?

Shabbos of Consolation

The Shabbos that follows Tisha B'Av, the national day of mourning, is known as Shabbos Nachamu, the Sabbath of consolation.

One of the most poignant stories recounted by our Talmudic Sages relates to consolation.

Laughing at the Ruins

The illustrious sage, Rabbi Akiva was traveling with his colleagues.

“When they came to the Temple Mount they saw a fox emerging from the [ruins of the] Holy of Holies [of the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem], they started to weep, but Rabbi Akiva laughed.”

Astonished at Rabbi Akiva's bizarre reaction to a most troubling spectacle, they queried him:

“Why are you laughing?”

Rabbi Akiva's responded by referring to the prophet Isaiah who linked the prophecies of Uriah who prophesied about the destruction of the first Temple, and Zecharya who prophesied during the era of the Second Temple, as if they were contemporaries. What connection is there between these two –historically speaking– remote individuals?

The connection, Rabbi Akiva, explains is that the first prophet spoke of the utter devastation to be visited upon the Temple, while the other spoke of the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

“As long as I didn't see the fulfillment of the first prophecy of doom materialize before my eyes I was not assured of the realization of the second prophecy of hope and rebuilding.. Now that I've seen the prophecy of destruction come to life, I am assured that the second prophecy of hope will likewise come to fruition.”

Upon hearing Rabbi Akiva's response, his colleagues said to him,

“Akiva, you have comforted us, Akiva you have comforted us.” (Talmud, end of Makkos).

An obvious question arises. How is it that a man the caliber of Rabbi Akiva should have harbored doubts as to whether the prophecy concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple would come true? Why did he need confirmation of the “good” prophecies from the fulfillment of the “bad” ones?

Rabbi Akiva's No Doubting Doubt

In truth, the Rebbe explains, Rabbi Akiva, had no doubts about any of the prophecies. He knew that if G-d had said, through his prophet, that the Jews would return to the Land of Israel, they certainly would. If we were told by the prophet that the Temple would be rebuilt, we were confident – and, certainly, Rabbi Akiva was confident – that it would come to pass. Rabbi Akiva's concern was, however, to what extent the prophecy of hope would materialize. How magnificent will be the return to Zion.

In a world of relative values, a little suffering is far better than much suffering. Jews, in returning to the Land of Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital and a rebuilt Holy Temple, would enjoy security, peace and self-

respect. That would certainly be preferable to a life of misery and suffering.

Rabbi Akiva's question, therefore, was: are the Messianic predictions – that will soon come to fruition – going to be good only in contrast to the misery we have experienced throughout our exile. From that vantage point, any good we will have is better than what we have presently.

But, if the Jewish people were to suffer so harshly, to anticipate only the *relative* goodness and happiness in the future, they would hardly feel consoled.

Moreover, the anticipation of only relative good in the future would certainly not call for any expression of joy in the present, while their/our suffering is acute. If all we had to look forward to was some marginal respite from the horrors of the past, no strong, positive emotions could have been evoked.

The Linkage

But, when G-d linked the prophecy of destruction with the prophecy of rebuilding - Rabbi Akiva realized that it was to demonstrate that the magnitude of the good

we will experience will be commensurate with the magnitude of the evil and devastation. He now was assured that the Final Redemption will be extreme in its glory, with pure and unmitigated good, just as the evil and misery was horrific in the extreme.

Now that Rabbi Akiva saw how utterly devastating the destruction of the Temple was, he knew with utmost certainty that the era of Redemption, with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, will, likewise, be so utterly great; the good will be absolute and intrinsic, not just partial and relative.

Meditation for our Generation

Now let us reflect on how Rabbi Akiva's approach should be applied to our generation.

Granted that Rabbi Akiva lived through the destruction of the Holy Temple and the massacre of hundreds and thousands of Jews. Yet, what he experienced was tragically only the beginning of the horrors that the Jewish people would endure through the course of 2,000 years of a bitter exile ending with the Holocaust, Soviet tyranny and Arab terrorism.

We can take Rabbi Akiva's laughter and magnify its tempo exponentially because the utter evil we have been dealt since his time has transcended any measure of normalcy or comprehensibility. Hence the rebuilding will also be unfathomable and beyond all expectations of good.

Many have engaged in a futile exercise to find some rationale for the Holocaust. It is utterly futile because we can never fathom G-d's ways. Indeed, as the Rebbe told us that no human being can fathom the evil of the Holocaust.

Some have tried to "justify" the Holocaust by referring to the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel.

This too is hardly a justification for history's most horrific event no words could adequately describe.

The only thing we can say is that the only thing that could "compensate" for the Holocaust and all previous suffering is the Final Redemption because it will transcend any measure of goodness that we can imagine and will surpass anything any human being can fathom.

Just as the evil was the nadir of depravity that defied every system of logic, so too, and infinitely more so, the Final Redemption that will come through Moshiach will “blow our minds.”

Only then will we be able to recite the words of the prophet Yeshayahu (12:1):

“You will say on that day, “I thank you, G-d, for You were angry with me, and now Your wrath has subsided and You have comforted me.”

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

PSALM 83

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

PSALM 83

Snippet of News Item

I'd like to share a snippet of a recent news item sent to me by a reader of our weekly essays that has particular relevance to events that are now happening in Israel.

"DUBLIN, Ireland - Irish archaeologists Tuesday heralded the discovery of an ancient book of psalms by a construction worker who spotted something while driving the shovel of his backhoe into a bog.

The approximately 20-page book has been dated to the years 800-1000.

'This is really a miracle find,' said Pat Wallace, director of the National Museum of Ireland.

The book was found open to a page describing, in Latin script, Psalm 83, in which G-d hears complaints of other nations' attempts to wipe out the name of Israel.

Relevance to Current Events

We believe in Divine Providence. The fact that this Psalm was discovered in the thick of a war being waged against Israel by a multitude of nations (some directly, some giving tacit support), is no accident. It speaks clearly to Israel and to the nations.

Let me quote some of the key verses from Psalm 83:

"G-d, do not hold Your silence; do not be quiet, do not be still, Al-mighty. For behold, Your enemies rage, and those who hate You have raised their head. Against Your nation they plot deviously, they take counsel against those whom You protect.

They said, 'Come, let us cut them off from nationhood, so Israel's name will be remembered no more.'

For they conspire together with a unanimous heart, against You they make a covenant. The tents of Edom and Ishmaelites, of Moab and Hagarites. Gebal, Ammon and Amalek, Philistia and the inhabitants of Tyre...

My G-d, make them like whirling chaff, like straw before the wind. Like a fire that burns the forest, and a flame that sets mountains ablaze. So pursue them with Your tempest and terrify them with Your storm. Fill their faces with shame, then they will seek Your Name, O G-d. Let them be shamed and terrified forever, let them be humiliated and perish. Then they will know that You, Whose name is G-d, are alone, the Most High over all the earth."

Against Whom are they Waging War?

Several points emerge from this prophetic Psalm, but we will focus on two of them.

First, those who attempt to destroy Israel are actually attempting to wage war against G-d. And even when they speak in the name of G-d, they are actually denying Him.

The difference between a genuine belief in G-d and one that is a mirage can be determined on whether we let G-d impose His will on us, or whether they attempt to impose their will on Him. There are some

people who are murderous and evil, so they create a god that is likewise murderous and evil.

Ten Commandments: Vertical or Horizontal

In this week's parsha we read, once again, of the Ten Commandments. These were etched in stone on two tablets that were carried by Moses side by side. In effect, the commandments can be read either vertically or horizontally. When we read them horizontally, the first commandment to recognize the existence of G-d is followed by the commandment not to commit murder.

In our society there are those who forget about the first commandment to recognize G-d. But, perhaps, even more egregious are those who use G-d to repudiate the commandment not to commit murder. When someone commits a crime, it is usually because one did not think of G-d, or did it in spite of G-d. As bad as that is, it is worse for one to "drag" G-d into his or her own transgression, sinning in His name.

Moreover, when one uses G-d to destroy another human-being, who was created in the

image of G-d, it is even a more serious affront than any other transgression; it amounts to using G-d to destroy the image of G-d!

But, there is something even more egregious. When one uses G-d to attempt to destroy the Jewish Nation, chosen by G-d at Mount Sinai to transmit the awareness of G-d and His ethical message to the world, there is not greater irony and blasphemy.

We are witness today to precisely this phenomenon. Groups of terrorists and terrorist nations are perverting the name of G-d in their pursuit of destroying the Jewish people. The Psalmist calls a spade a spade; they are not only haters of Israel, they are the true haters of G-d!

And thus, the Psalm concludes on a note that all nations will eventually know, "You whose name is G-d, are alone, most high over all the earth." You are the G-d who is above us and controls us, and not a god that we control and to whom we dictate what is right.

Deliverance Comes from Our Pleas

A second observation can be made that the deliverance of the Jewish people from these hostile forces comes from our pleas to G-d. Moreover, as the Midrash states, G-d gives us the right to come before Him and declare: "Do not hold Yourself silent; be not deaf..."

In times like these, G-d is waiting for us to follow an ancient Jewish tradition of prayer, even "arguing" with G-d, as it were, as Moses does in this week's Torah portion.

We must humbly, but firmly, ask of G-d to bring us Moshiach, who will bring an end to the persecution of Israel, once and for all, and usher in the time when all nations will recognize:

"You whose name is G-d, are alone,
the most high over all the earth."