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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
Devarim

Walk, Don't Run

"These are the words..." (1:1)

After years of inactivity, my trusty Martin Acoustic Guitar emerged from its not-so-plush-anymore, lined case, its vintage attested to by the fading stickers saying "Pan Am Airways" and the like on the outside of the case. Decades of inactivity had rendered my finger-picking into finger-plodding, but I plowed on. Someone sent me a video of a world-renowned Australian guitar teacher, and one of his ideas resounded with me as a lesson for life. He was absolutely insistent that when you begin to learn a tune, you should play it at an absurdly slow pace – but you couldn't make *even one mistake*. If you made a mistake, you had to go back and play the piece even slower, until you reached a tempo at which your brain was playing faster than your fingers and your performance was flawless. Only then were you allowed to speed up ever-so-slowly.

The message I took from this was that in life – specifically, in our spiritual lives – it's all too easy to try to run before we can walk, and we end up being able to do neither. Practice make perfect, but if you practice your mistakes, you will also make *them* "perfect." You will inculcate your mistakes to the point where you will have to unlearn vast misplayed sonatas of your life. And *un-learning* is much, much harder than learning.

This week we begin the reading of the Book of Devarim, which literally means "words."

The captivity of the Jewish People in Egypt was more than just physical bondage. On a deeper level, Egypt represents the enslavement of the power of speech, the music of the soul. Egypt not only enslaved the bodies of the Jewish People, it put in chains the major weapon of the Jewish People – speech. Thus, the Torah writes that the Jewish People "cried out" to G-d. It doesn't write that they "*prayed*." For in Egypt, speech itself was bound. In Hebrew, the word for desert is *midbar*, which is from the root-word *mi'dibur* – "from speech." The emptiness of the desert is the ideal place for the rebuilding of the power of speech. Every year, as we emerge from the reading of the Book of Bamidbar to the Book of Devarim, we have the ability to relearn the "notes" of our "song" to Hashem, our relationship with Him, our *emuna* and trust in Him – by learning to play that tune again very slowly. But learning to play it right.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Question: On Tisha B'Av morning, everyone sits on the floor as a sign of mourning. However, one person in the synagogue publicly sits down on a chair. Who is this person? (Answer on page 10)

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Va'etchanan

Why Was I Created?

“Now, O Yisrael, listen to the decrees and to the ordinances that I teach you to perform...” (4:1)

One of the privileges of having been associated with Ohr Somayach for the last thirty is that I’ve met, and in some cases been close to, several human beings who were clearly living on a different level than the rest of mankind. One of them (who will, of course, remain nameless) is a genius in the art of human relationships. He once distilled the essence of one’s relationship with one’s fellow into three principles. I’ll try to present the first of these principles this week, and, G-d willing, the other two in the weeks to come.

His first principle is, “I was created to serve others, and no one was created to serve me.” This may sound a little extreme. What, my entire existence is for other people? Ostensibly, this sounds to be beyond the “letter of the law.”

But Hashem wants us to go beyond the letter of the law. When we keep to the letter of the law, we treat the mitzvahs like a business transaction – you do this for me and I’ll do that for you. Unlike a business transaction, Hashem doesn’t want or need our mitzvahs. What use does He have for them? If we are very righteous, what does that give Him? What Hashem wants is our heart. When you get a present from someone you love, you’re getting the person you love wrapped up inside the present. When you get a present from someone you don’t care about, you’re getting something you like – delivered by a delivery boy.

So, really, to go beyond the letter or the law is the essence of our relationship with Hashem. However, upon deeper examination it could be that, “I was created to serve others and no one was created to serve me” is indeed the letter of the law, and not an exceptional level of righteousness.

The Talmud in Shabbat (31a) says, *“Rava said: After departing from this world, when a person is brought to judgment for the life he lived in this world, they say to him ... Did you conduct business faithfully? Did you designate times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you await salvation? Did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom and understand one matter from another?”*

The *Reishit Chochma*, quoting from *Mesechet Chibut Hakever*, says that in addition to these questions, a person is asked, “Did you crown Hashem as King over you, morning and evening?” Meaning, did you say the *Shema* morning and evening. And, “Did you crown your fellow over you by giving him/her pleasure (*nachat ruach*)?”

“Now, O Yisrael, listen to the decrees and to the ordinances that I teach you to perform...”

And so is it when the Torah speaks of decrees and ordinances. Just as the questions in *mesechet* Shabbat are of the essence, so too, “I was created to serve others and no one was created to serve me” is an essential duty – and not a level of saintliness.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Shabbat 135-141

The Umbrella-Tent

“A folding chair is permitted to open on Shabbat.”

The Torah forbids making an *ohel* – a tent-like structure – that is of a permanent nature (not intended to be taken down that day or very soon). The Rabbis made a decree to prohibit even a temporary *ohel* so as not to come to (mistakenly) transgress the Torah prohibition against making a permanent *ohel*.

Our *gemara* teaches that opening a folding chair on Shabbat is permitted although this act creates a sheltered space underneath the seat part of the folding chair. It follows that in this case the prohibition against making an *ohel* on Shabbat does not apply. Does this mean that it is also permitted to open an umbrella on Shabbat? (Of course, it would not be permitted to carry the umbrella outside on Shabbat in a place where there is no *eiruv*.)

While a few *poskim* have permitted using an umbrella on Shabbat, the vast majority have prohibited opening it on Shabbat. And this is the widespread and accepted halacha. Why is opening an umbrella “worse” than opening a folding chair? One reason is that the *ohel* of the chair is meant to sit upon and not to serve as shelter for underneath it. Another reason is that the folding chair simply slides open and stays that way by its nature, whereas the rods of the umbrella need to be affixed open as an *ohel* by means of a mechanical process. (See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 315:7 and the Bi’ur Halacha there, and Shemirat Shabbat K’Hilchata 24:15 and footnote 53 for a more detailed treatment of this subject.)

Regarding the question of whether one may use on Shabbat an umbrella that was open *before* Shabbat, there are also two main reasons to not allow this. One is the issue of *marit ayin* – that an onlooker may see this act and mistakenly think that it is permitted to open an umbrella on Shabbat. A second reason is that a person is considered as continuously making a new *ohel* as he walks, making a new protected space under the umbrella in any new space he occupies.

Shabbat 138a

Torah Together

Rabbi Nehorai would say, “Exile yourself to a place of Torah study; do not say that it will come to you, that your colleagues

will preserve it for you. Do not rely only on your own understanding.” (Avot 4:14)

This *mishna* is cited on our *daf* in relation to an unfortunate event involving Rabbi Elazar ben Aroch. Our *gemara* tells of a time when he travelled to a part of Eretz Yisrael renowned for its rich wines and relaxing mineral spas. Of course, Hashem created an amazing world filled with unfathomable beauty and pleasure. He created it all for us to enjoy in order to “open our hearts and minds” to grow close to Him and His Torah. However, excess luxury can make a negative impact on a person’s relationship with Hashem. Rabbi Elazar ben Aroch apparently indulged in worldly pleasures *slightly* more than was fit for a great Torah scholar of his stature, and, as a result, forgot his Torah knowledge. Fortunately, his Rabbi colleagues prayed for his spiritual wellbeing, and Hashem returned his vast Torah knowledge to him.

It is in this context that the *mishna* in Pirkei Avot is taught in our *gemara*, with special emphasis on the teaching that, “Your colleagues will preserve it (i.e. the Torah) for you.”

Many other interpretations and lessons have been learned from this *mishna* by the great Torah commentaries. One idea in particular is of great significance for any student of Torah study: The importance of being involved in Torah study together with a *chevruta* (study partner), a Yeshiva with many students, and with a Rabbi to guide each person’s Torah study. In fact, a person who studies Torah without others is in danger of incorrect and improper study, which can lead to thoughts, speech, and actions which are not in accordance with the true way of the Torah. (Elsewhere, in Talmud Tips for Masechet Maccot 10a, I have elaborated on this topic and related a powerful story involving Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld that I have added to my “Recommended Reading List.”)

In this context, Rabbi Nehorai’s statement in Pirkei Avot reflects an explanation taught by Rav Ovadia from Bartenura, “the Rav.” The Rav writes that Rabbi Nehorai is warning every Torah student not to rely on his own intelligence for a true understanding of Torah, no matter how smart he is. Only the give-and-take of studying the Torah with others will lead one to be truly successful in achieving Torah wisdom.

▪ *Shabbat 147b*

Devorim

Questions

1. How do we see from the beginning of *Parshat Devorim* that Moshe was concerned for the Jewish People's honor?
2. How much time elapsed between leaving Mt. Sinai and sending the spies?
3. Moshe rebuked the Jewish People shortly before his death. From whom did he learn this?
4. Why did Moshe wait until he had smitten the Amorite kings before rebuking the Jewish People?
5. What were some of the achievements that resulted from the Jewish People's "dwelling" at Mt. Sinai?
6. Why does the Torah single out the names of the *avot* in connection with the giving of the Land?
7. What did Moshe convey to the Jewish People by saying: "You today are like the stars of the Heavens"?
8. "*Apikorsim*" (those who denigrate Talmud scholars) observed Moshe's every move in order to accuse him. What did they observe, and what did they accuse him of?
9. Moshe was looking for several qualities in the judges he chose. Which quality couldn't he find?
10. Moshe told the judges, "The case that is too hard for you, bring it to me." How was he punished for this statement?
11. Why did Moshe describe the desert as great and frightful?
12. Which tribe was not represented among the spies?
13. Which city did Calev inherit?
14. How many kingdoms was Avraham promised? How many were conquered by Yehoshua?
15. Why were the Jewish People forbidden to provoke Ammon?
16. Why were the Jewish People not permitted to conquer the Philistines?
17. How did Hashem instill dread of the Jewish People into the nations of the world?
18. Why did Moshe fear Og?
19. Who was instrumental in destroying the Refaim?
20. What was the advantage of Reuven and Gad leading the way into battle?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 1:1 Moshe mentions only the names of the places where the Jewish People sinned, but does not mention the sins themselves.
2. 1:2 - 40 days.
3. 1:3 - From Yaakov, who rebuked his sons shortly before his death.
4. 1:4 - So that no one could say, "What right has he to rebuke us; has he brought us into any part of the Land as he promised?"
5. 1:6 - They received the Torah, built the *mishkan* and all its vessels, appointed a Sanhedrin, and appointed officers.
6. 1:8 - Each of the *avot* possessed sufficient merit for the Jewish People to inherit the Land.
7. 1:10 - They are an eternal people, just as the sun, moon and stars are eternal.
8. 1:13 They observed the time he left home in the morning. If Moshe left early, they accused him of having family problems (which drove him from his home). If he left late, they accused him of staying home in order to plot evil against them.
9. 1:15 - Men of understanding.
10. 1:17 - When the daughters of Tzelofchad asked him a *halachic* question, the law was concealed from him.
11. 1:19 - Because the Jewish People saw huge, frightening snakes and scorpions in the desert.
12. 1:23 - Levi.
13. 1:36 - Hebron.
14. 2:5 - Avraham was promised the land of ten kingdoms. Yehoshua conquered seven. The lands of Moav, Ammon and Esav will be received in the time of the *mashiach*.
15. 2:9 - This was a reward for Lot's younger daughter, the mother of Ammon, for concealing her father's improper conduct.
16. 2:23 - Because Avraham had made a peace treaty with Avimelech, King of the Philistines.
17. 2:25 - During the battle against Og, the sun stood still for the sake of the Jewish People, and the whole world saw this.
18. 3:2 - Og possessed merit for having once helped Avraham.
19. 3:11 - Amrafel.
20. 3:18 - They were mighty men, and the enemy would succumb to them.

Va'etchanan

Questions

1. "And I prayed to Hashem at that time." Why "at that time"?
2. What characteristic trait is represented by Hashem's "strong hand"?
3. What is *ha'levanon*?
4. What did Hashem tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the *mitzvot* properly?
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
7. What is hinted by the word *v'noshantem*?
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
10. Why is east called *mizrach*?
11. "Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had Hashem previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
13. What is meant by "Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One"?
14. What are two meanings of loving Hashem "with all your might"?
15. How well versed must one be in Torah?
16. Where does the word *totafot* come from?
17. Who is fit to swear in Hashem's name?
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
19. When someone serves Hashem with love, how many generations receive reward?
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

Answers

1. 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of *Eretz Canaan*, Moshe thought perhaps Hashem had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
2. 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
3. 3:25 - *Ha'levanon* means the *Beit Hamikdash*, which makes "white" (*lavan*), i.e., atones for, the Jewish People.
4. 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
5. 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
6. 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
7. 4:25 - The *gematria* of *v'noshantem*, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
8. 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.
9. 4:28 - No. It means you'll serve others who serve idols.
10. 4:41 - It's the direction from which the sun shines (*mizrach* means shining).
11. 5:13 - Before *Matan Torah*, at Marah. (*Shmot 15:25*)
12. 5:16 - At Marah. (*Shmot 15:25*).
13. 6:4 - Hashem, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
14. 6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether Hashem treats you with kindness or harshness.
15. 6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
16. 6:8 - *Tot* means two in Caspi. *Fot* means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
17. 6:13 - One who serves Hashem and reveres His name.
18. 7:7 - *B'nei Yisrael* are the humblest nation.
19. 7:9 - 2,000.
20. 7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Remembering the Wall

The best way to remember the glory of the Holy Temple is to imagine ourselves reliving those times of old. Imagine walking past the Walls of Jerusalem (*Chomot Yerushalayim*) towards the Temple Mount. We can picture ourselves moving beyond the wall of the rampart (the *Cheil*) and into the Temple building. We can envision ourselves gazing upon the altar and seeing its bloodied walls (*Kir HaMizbeach*). But alas, the only remnant of that magnificent complex that still stands is the Western Wall, the *Kotel HaMaaravi*. In this essay we will explore six Hebrew words that mean “wall” (*chomah*, *kir*, *shur*, *cheil*, *chayitz*, and *kotel*) to better understand the nuances conveyed by each individual word.

As is his wont, Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino (a 16th century Italian scholar) writes in his work *Ohel Moed* (a lexicon of Hebrew synonyms) that the six words in question all mean the exact same thing. However, if we dig deeper into the roots of these words, we will see that there is more to it than that. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the words *cheil*, *chomah*, *kir*, *shur*, and *chayitz* to their respective two-letter roots. In doing so, he helps shed light on the nuances conveyed by these different words.

The word *chomah* appears more than 130 times in the Bible and always refers to a “wall” that surrounds a city or an important/large building. Rabbi Pappenheim (like Menachem Ibn Saruk) traces the word *chomah* to the two-letter root CHET-MEM, which, he explains, refers primarily to “heat.” As a derivative of this meaning, that biliteral root gives way to the word *milchamah* (“war”) – which is the culmination of a heated fight between multiple parties. Based on this, Rabbi Pappenheim suggests that perhaps the word *chomah* is related to *milchamah*, as the main purpose of building a city wall is to protect its inhabitants from enemy warfare. Alternatively, Rabbi Pappenheim proposes that the word *chomah* is related to this two-letter root because the city wall might serve to block cool winds from entering, thus keeping the city warm.

Rabbi Eliezer ben Nosson (1090-1170), also known as the Raavan, notes that *chomah* is also related to “sight,” as the Aramaic root CHET-MEM-HEY refers to “seeing” (for example, see Targum Yonatan to Ex. 14:31). Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 49:22) makes a similar point.

[Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) in *HaKsav VeHaKabbalah* connects *chomah* to *cheimah* (“anger”) and *chamah* (“sun”), focusing on how a city wall sets a city apart from everything beyond its walls. Interestingly, Rabbi Hirsch (to Gen. 21:15) proposes that the word *cheimet* (“flask”) is related to *chomah* because a flask encloses and protect its contents, just like a city wall surrounds and protects a city.]

The word *kir* in the sense of “wall” appears about 74 times in the Bible. Most grammarians trace *kir* to the trilateral KUF-YOD-REISH, but some understand that the letter YOD is not part of the root. Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh of Carpentras (an 18th century grammarian and *dayan*) writes in *Ohalei Yehuda* that *kir* is related to *kor/kar* (“cold”), as it refers to a wall whose purpose is to provide shade and allow people to “cool off.”

Rabbi Pappenheim takes a different approach. He traces *kir* to the two-letter root KUF-REISH, which refers to the “strong impact” that results from extreme weight or velocity. One branch of words derived from this root are *korah* (“wooden beam”) and *tikrah* (“ceiling”), because the weight of the horizontal beams that comprise the ceiling weigh down on a building’s support, thus creating a point of impact. With this in mind, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *kir* (“wall”) refers to a vertically positioned wooden beam that bears the weight of a structure. From that original sense, *kir* was borrowed to refer to any sort of wall (i.e. even of stone or metal).

When Balaam foretells of Jewish ascendancy in Messianic times, he says that the Jews will *karkar* all the other nations of the world (Num. 24:17). Most commentators (Rashi and Ibn Ezra there, Ibn Janach in his *Sefer HaShorashim*) explain that this means that the Jews will “destroy” those nations, but they fail to explain the etymology of the word *karkar* and how it means “destroy.” Nevertheless, Radak in his *Sefer HaShorashim* writes that *karkar* derives from *kir*, explaining that this verb refers to “destroying a wall” (i.e. eliminating their means of protection). He compares *kir* to the noun *shoresh* (“root”), whose verb-form of *misharesh* means “to uproot.” Thus, *kir* can refer both to building a wall and also to tearing down a wall – two polar opposites. (Rabbi Hirsch (to Lev. 19:28, Num. 24:17) and Rabbi Yitzchok of Volozhin’s *Peh Kadosh* (to Num. 24:17) both offer comparable explanations).

The word *shur* in the sense of “wall” appears only in a handful of places in the Bible (Gen. 49:22, II Sam. 22:30, Ps. 18:30, and possibly Jer. 5:10 and Iyov 24:11). *Shur* (or more specifically, *shura*) appears more commonly in the Targumim as an Aramaic rendering of the Hebrew word *chomah* (Lev. 25:29, Joshua 2:15, 6:20, Lam. 2:8).

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *shur* to the two-letter SHIN-REISH, which refers to a “focal point.” He notes that the word *shar/sharir* (see Yechezkel 16:4, Prov. 3:8, and Iyov 40:16), which means “umbilical cord,” is the focal point that connects a fetus to its mother, and *shor* refers to an “ox,” whose main strength lies in its torso, thus placing a focus on its navel area. Based on this, Rabbi Pappenheim writes that the word *shoresh* (“root”) is also derived from this root because a plant’s roots are the focal point of its growth. Rabbi Pappenheim also explains that the word *yashar* (“straight”) derives from this root, as it denotes the fastest and shortest way to reach a specific focal point. To that effect, he notes that the word *shir* (“song”) relates to this root’s core meaning because it denotes a poetic composition that centers around one specific topic (“point”) and does not deviate from that theme.

Rabbi Pappenheim also writes that *shur* in the sense of “seeing” (see Num. 23:8, 24:27, Iyov 35:5) is also derived from SHIN-REISH because, unlike the other senses, the sense of sight can be directed to focus on a specific point and is not forced to take in everything at once. As corollaries to this meaning, *teshurah* (“tribute”) refers to a special gift given to somebody who greets (i.e. “sees”) a dignitary, *neshar* (“eagle”) refers to a bird who can “see” to far distances, and *sheirut* (“service”) refers to one who oversees the fulfillment of his master’s needs. (Alternatively, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *sheirut* refers to “straightening” out the household affairs or remaining “straightforward” and steadfast to one’s boss’s wishes.)

When it comes to *shur* in the sense of “wall,” Rabbi Pappenheim offers two ways of connecting this word back to the primary meaning of SHIN-REISH. First, he proposes connecting *shur* with *yashar*, explaining that it refers specifically to a wall that is built as a straight line (as opposed to a *chomah* that encircles a city). Secondly, he writes that *shur* as “wall” is related to *shur* as “seeing,” because it denotes a tall wall that is used as a lookout post. In line with this latter supposition, Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) notes that both *shur* and *chomah* are words that bear the double meaning of “wall” and “seeing.” (See Rashi to Gen. 49:22 who seems unsure about whether *shur* there means “wall” or “seeing”. Interestingly, Radak writes that the word *shor* in Gen. 49:6 means “wall,” just as *shur* later in that chapter does.)

In discussing the word *cheil*, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that this word derives from the biliteral root CHET-LAMMED, which refers to “circular movement” and the “empty space” within a circumscribed circle. Accordingly, he understands that *cheil* refers to a short wall which surrounds a taller wall. The *cheil* thus creates an “empty” space between the two walls that serves as a sort of no man’s land. Rabbi Pappenheim further adduces his position from the Mishna (*Middos* 2:3) that refers to the space between the walls of the Temple Mount and the actual Temple building (i.e. the Women’s Courtyard) as the *cheil*.

The Talmud (*Pesachim* 86a) characterizes a *chomah* and a *cheil* as “a *shura* and a *bar-shura*” (“a wall and the son of a wall”). According to Rashi this means that *chomah* refers to an exterior wall while *cheil* refers to a shorter wall within the *chomah* (thus resembling a small son overshadowed by his bigger father). Radak seems unsure about whether *cheil* denotes a wall that is outside a *chomah* or inside a *chomah*. He then suggests that perhaps *cheil* does not even mean a “wall”, but rather it refers to a moat dug on the outskirts of a *chomah*.

The Hebrew word *chayitz* is a *hapax legomenon* because it only appears once in the entire Bible (Ezek. 13:10). Ibn Janach writes that the YOD is in place of an additional TZADI, so its root is really CHET-TZADI-TZADI, which means to “partition.” Rabbi Pappenheim similarly understands the word *chayitz* as an offshoot of the root CHET-TZADI, which means “dividing” or “splitting” something into two parts. Other words derived from this root include *chatzi* (“half”), *chazot* (“midday” or “midnight”), *chutz* (“outside/exterior”), and *cheitz* (“arrow”). Rabbi Pappenheim theorizes that *chayitz* specifically refers to a wall that divides one area/domain into two, and is thus synonymous with the Mishnaic Hebrew word *mechitzah* (see *Bava Basra* 1:1). That said, Rabbi Moshe Zacuto (1625-1697) in *Kol HaRamaz* (to *Sheviis* 3:8) writes that *chayitz* specifically denotes a “flimsy partition,” while *mechitzah* can apply to any sort of “partition” or “divider.”

Finally, we have arrived at the word *kotel*. This word appears only three times in the Bible: Once in Hebrew in Song of Songs 2:9, and twice in the Aramaic cognate *ktal* (Dan. 5:5, Ezra 5:8). The word *kotel* more commonly appears in the Targumim as an Aramaic rendering of the Hebrew word *kir* (see Targum to Lev. 1:15, 14:37, Joshua 2:15 and more), and Rabbi Ernest Klein actually connects *kotel* with the Akkadian *kutallu* ("backside").

To summarize: *chomah* = city wall or lookout post, *kir* = generic term for any structural wall, *cheil* = short wall, *chayitz* = flimsy partition, *mehitzah* = any partition, *shur* = Aramaic for *chomah*, *kotel* = Aramaic for *kir*.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Devarim Overview

This Torah portion begins the last of the Five Books of The Torah, Sefer Devarim. This Book is also called *Mishneh Torah*, "Repetition of the Torah" (hence the Greek/English title "Deuteronomy"). Sefer Devarim relates what Moshe told the Jewish People during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan into the Land of Israel. Moshe reviews the mitzvahs, stressing the change of lifestyle they are about to undergo – from the supernatural existence of the desert under Moshe's guidance, to the apparently natural life they will experience under Yehoshua's leadership in the Land.

The central theme this week is the sin of the spies, the *meraglim*. The *parsha* opens with Moshe alluding to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they had not sinned by sending spies into Eretz Yisrael. Hashem would have given them, without a fight, all the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, including the lands of Ammon, Moav and Edom. Moshe details the subtle sins that culminate in the sin of the spies, and reviews at length this incident and its results. The entire generation would die in the desert and Moshe would not enter Eretz Yisrael. He reminds them that their immediate reaction to Hashem's decree was to want to "go up and fight" to redress the sin. He recounts how they would not listen when he told them not to go, and that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They had ignored him and suffered a massive defeat. They were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of Esav, Moav or Ammon. These lands were not to be part of the map of Eretz Yisrael in the meantime.

When the conquest of Canaan will begin with Sichon and Og, it will be via natural warfare.

Va'etchanan Overview

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special mitzvahs. Hashem refuses. Moshe reminds the Jewish People of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah, that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on the Jewish People that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jewish People will ever claim that Hashem spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins the *Bnei Yisrael* to "pass over" the Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when the Jewish People dwell in Eretz Yisrael they will sin and be scattered among all the nations. They will stay few in number – but will eventually return to Hashem.

Moshe designates three "refuge cities" to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the Ten Commandments and then teaches the *Shema*, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism, forgetting their purpose as a spiritual nation. The *parsha* ends with Moshe exhorting *Bnei Yisrael* not to intermarry when they enter Eretz Yisrael, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they would become indistinguishable from the other nations.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSING NINE : THAT SINKING FEELING

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who spreads out the earth upon the waters.”

At first glance, the language used for the ninth blessing is a bit of a mystery. “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who spreads out the earth upon the waters.” There are two immediate questions that spring to mind. First, the most obvious question seems to be: What is the connection between this blessing and the rest of the Morning Blessings? We have seen the way that the blessings have developed up until now, with each blessing leading sequentially and logically to the next one. And now, all of a sudden this blessing seems to be a complete non-sequitur. Secondly, technically speaking, the earth is not spread out upon the waters. If anything, it is the opposite – the waters of the seas and the oceans sit *in* the earth, and not the other way around as the blessing states. What makes it even more puzzling is that the Rabbis teach that this blessing is a watershed (pun intended) moment in the recitation of the Morning Blessings.

Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer, 1720-1797, known as the Vilna Gaon (the Genius from Vilna), explains that the Morning Blessings up until now have taken us from our starting point of nothing more than being aware of the difference between good and evil (the first blessing) – to the point where we are fulfilling the commandments (the eighth blessing). But from here on, the blessings are going to focus on our *connection* to G-d, and the way that this connection has the capability to impact each person in a personal and fundamental fashion. Essentially, the first eight blessings are teaching us how to be *practicing* Jews, whereas the last seven blessings are designed to

convey to us how to become *believing* Jews. But where do we see this concept in the words of our blessing? And in what way do the waters of the world strengthen our belief in G-d?

More than two hundred years ago, the Vilna Gaon taught that at the center of the earth’s core is a liquid mass. This means that the weight of the whole world is supported by “water” (a generic term for any liquid). Only much later, in the twentieth century, did scientists corroborate his understanding, by discovering that the outer core of the earth’s center is a molten mass.

The Vilna Gaon explains that every moment of the world’s existence is dependent upon G-d. Without the Divine desire for its continuity, the enormous weight of the planet would cause the earth to sink in on itself and implode. According to the Vilna Gaon, both questions that we had at the beginning can be resolved with one answer. The peculiarity and the seeming inaccuracy of the language used for the blessing’s composition teach us that the world exists only at the behest of G-d.

Thus, having reached the point where we are certain of our ability to fulfill the *physical* commandments of G-d, we are now ready to embark on a voyage of exploration into our *spiritual commitment* to G-d. And the very first stop in our journey is a blessing which emphasizes that the continued existence of the world rests solely in the Hands of G-d. Every single moment of its being is entirely dependent upon G-d. And, consequently, without G-d’s continual Will that there be a world, the world would cease to exist.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Devarim

You Be the Judge of That

Moshe briefly chronicles the events of the years-long sojourn in the desert. The differences between the way the events are recorded as they occurred and as they are repeated are the subject of much commentary. Often, the versions supplement each other.

When Moshe describes his being overwhelmed at bearing the responsibility of the quarrelsome people, he recounts his instructions on appointing wise men who could also preside over disputes: *Give yourselves men, wise and discerning, and known to your tribes.* But when Yitro initially suggested this to Moshe, his instructions were quite different. The judges were to be *men of substance, G-d fearers, men of truth, who despise improper gain.*

When Yitro made the proposal to Moshe, he emphasized the importance of upright moral character, and only obscurely referenced their intellectual capability as “men of substance.” When Moshe instructed the people, he emphasized the intellectual abilities of the men to be chosen as judges, and encapsulated moral fitness by requiring that they be “known to your tribes” – known to be of upright character. Character is known only from their lives, and only to those who have associated with them. If Moshe were interested only in the

erudition of the candidates, he could have tested them himself. But to test their moral character, he needed the people to nominate them.

Moshe and Yitro did not disagree – both recognized that fearing G-d, loving truth, and hating improper gain were the most essential characteristics of a judge. However, they had different audiences. Yitro spoke to Moshe and could say it straight. Moshe addressed the masses. In the popular mind, the main virtue of a judge is his sharpness, erudition and wisdom. He thus began with that requirement and then added that the judges must also be a paragon of virtue.

In Jewish law, any three simple, honest men are considered fit to judge in ordinary civil matters. Since Torah knowledge was widespread in Israel, the assumption could be made that at least one of the three would be sufficiently versed in the knowledge of the law.

- Source: Commentary, Devarim 1:13

YIDDLE RIDDLE ANSWER FROM PAGE 1

Answer: The person honored with *hagbah* – lifting the Torah after it is read. This person lifts the Torah from the *bima* and sits in a chair. Then the Torah is bound and covered, and the person remains seated until the Torah is returned to the Holy Ark.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Va'etchanan

Living Transmission

The granite foundation of our heritage for all generations is set forth in no uncertain terms. Moshe emphasizes that everything rests on one basic fact: the nation itself witnessed the Divine revelation of Torah. *Only take heed and guard your soul exceedingly, so that you do not forget the facts that your own eyes have seen, and so that they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children.*

The historical fact of the Law Giving, as we experienced it with our own senses, is to remain alive forever in our hearts and minds, and it must be passed down to our children so that they too may take it to heart and pass it on to future generations.

There are two phenomena, each one unparalleled in its own right: A personal *experience*, perceived simultaneously by an entire nation is an unparalleled unique foundation for the historical fact of Revelation. The *transmission* of an entire nation from parents to children is a similarly unique unparalleled preservation of that experience. We are instructed here to “make it known” to our children – through the resoluteness and certainty born of our own personal experience. In this way, the authenticity remains even in the minds of the most remote descendants. Even the written record is authentic only because its contents have been handed down collectively by fathers to sons.

From this verse our Sages deduce a possible obligation to teach one's grandchildren Torah, in addition to one's children. Our Sages go on to praise this practice and declare that one who teaches his grandson Torah is considered as if he received it from Mount Sinai. The antecedent of “he”, however is unclear.

If “he” refers to the receiving grandson, the meaning is that what was received in the first generation shall be kept wholeheartedly by the receivers and then handed down to the next generation. It is as if that child himself stood at Mount Sinai.

If “he” refers to the father or grandfather, the meaning is that they are required to hand down the tradition with the clarity and conviction of people who themselves received the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Something else is also expressed here. When a person transmits the Torah to his children, he senses in his own life the faithfulness of the transmission. When he gives over what he learned from his own father, who learned it from his father, he is aware of the living authenticity of this tradition, reaching all the way back to Mount Sinai.

Notice how the Sages make this observation regarding a child who learns Torah from his grandfather and not a child who learns from his own father. When a child learns the same Torah from his grandfather's mouth which has already learned from his father's, he sees that his father teaches him only what he himself received from his father, and that child draws the conclusion that all of the fathers reaching back for generations handed down only what they received from their fathers. In this way, the transmission itself cloaks the content with authenticity, enabling each generation to be an effective link in the chain beginning at Mount Sinai and continuing until the end of generations.

- Source: Commentary, Devarim 4:9

SEASONS - THEN AND NOW

by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

Harmony of a Nation - Overcoming Baseless Hatred (Part 4)

Ways to Overcome Baseless Hatred

Judging Favorably

One effective means for removing hatred from one's heart and restoring peace is through judging others favorably (see Rashi on Shabbat 127b "*hani nami bhanei shaichi*"). The halacha says that when one sees a G-d-fearing person do an act that can be interpreted as either a sin or not a sin, then it is a mitzvah to judge him favorably and make up in one's mind that the person indeed did not sin. This is true even if the act seems more likely to have been a sin. If there is no way to interpret it in a favorable light, one should make up in his mind that the person surely already regretted his actions and did *teshuva* for it.

If one saw a person who is mediocre in his Torah observance, then, if the act is *equally* likely to be a sin or not a sin, one must judge him favorably. If the act seems more likely to be a sin, then it is considered a good thing to judge him favorably even though one does not have to. If there is no way to interpret his action favorably, then he should think that perhaps the person already regretted his action and did *teshuva* for it (Chafetz Chaim 3:7, 4:4).

Regarding those who are not Torah observant in today's day and age, we mentioned in part two of this series that often it is because he is lacking basic Jewish education – and his sins are usually a result of ignorance and not of rebellion and malicious intent. In such a case, one is not allowed to hate him as a result of seeing him sin (see Rambam, Hilchot Mamrim 3:3, Chazon Ish, Orach Chaim 87:14 and Yoreh Deah 1:6, 2:16, 2:28, Marganita Tava, printed at the end of Sefer Ahavat Chessed). By contemplating on the above, one can remove hatred from one's heart by telling oneself that the person does not know better and does not have bad intent. By doing so, one will come to have compassion on him and hopefully even guide him in the right direction. A halachic authority should be contacted to determine who exactly falls under this category.

The question now is: How can one sincerely judge his fellow favorably and make up in his mind that he didn't sin when he saw him do an action that seems so likely to have been a transgression? One way to do this is by reminding oneself of cases where, even though one seemed sure of the malicious intent of his friend, it turned out that it was just a misunderstanding.

There is a story that I often contemplate when faced with such situations. There was a first grade teacher who was always very punctual for class. One morning, he was held up and came a few minutes late. He was silently regretting his own lateness when, to his chagrin, Shlomo, one of his students, ran over to him immediately, sticking his watch into the embarrassed teacher's face. The teacher reprimanded Shlomo and made a note to call his parents about the chutzpah displayed. On the telephone, Shlomo's mother explained, "Oh no! This was just a misunderstanding. You see, Shlomo just got a new watch and said he wanted you to be the first to see it..." (for more examples, see Shabbat 127a and Ahavat Yisrael, chapter 5). The situation above is actually very common. Often people think that they were wronged by their friend, when, in fact, the whole thing was a big misunderstanding.

Even in rare cases where it is not possible for someone to judge favorably, one can still minimize the hatred in his heart in other ways. For example, if his fellow did not speak to him in a befitting manner, he can think to himself that perhaps the person had a bad day, and, as a result of his angry mood, did not have full control over his actions. One can also consider the fact that his fellow may have wronged him accidentally, or maybe he already regretted his actions and was just too embarrassed to ask for forgiveness, or maybe his intentions were good even though the results were not (see Rashi on Shabbat 127b "*hani nami bhani shaichi*" and Ahavat Yisrael, chapter 5).

More generally, one can remind oneself that everyone has his own tests in life. Perhaps this person is not as sensitive

in one area, just as himself he may be lacking sensitivity in another. After all, everyone has their own unique weaknesses and strong points. With this perspective, one may be more understanding of the other's actions, and thereby reduce, or, even better, eradicate his personal hatred altogether.

As extra motivation to judge one's fellow favorably, it is worth mentioning the Gemara's teaching that judging one's fellow favorably is one of the unique things for which one receives reward both in this world and in the World to Come (see Shabbat 127a-127b).

Reprimanding

If the action of one's fellow was a sin, then one has the mitzvah to let him know that what he did was a transgression and reprimand him for his actions (Rambam, Hilchot De'ot 6:6-7; see also Chut Shani, Yom Hakipurim p. 122 who says that this mitzvah applies today as well). It can very well be that the offender did not know or realize that what he did was a transgression, and, upon knowing, will do *teshuva* for it and not repeat it in the future. Alternatively, perhaps he will explain how his actions were justified or misunderstood. Both of these

results will help to remove the hatred from one's heart (see Ohr Hachaim on Vayikra 19:17).

In cases like the above where one is obligated to judge one's fellow favorably, some hold that one does not have the mitzvah to reprimand him because he is obligated to assume that he didn't transgress or that he did *teshuva* for it already. Others, however, hold that even then one has the mitzvah of reprimanding (see Chafetz Chaim 4:4 and Be'er Mayim Chaim 18 there for a discussion). One should consult a competent halachic authority to judge and rule in each individual case.

When reprimanding, one must be very careful to do it in a sensitive and correct way so that it will be effective and so that one would not commit the serious transgression of embarrassing his fellow or hurting his feelings. In general, the mitzvah of reprimanding has many *halachot*, such as whom to reprimand, when and where to do it, how to do it, etc. In fact, there are cases where one should not reprimand at all. Therefore, before doing it, one must thoroughly learn the *halachot* of reprimanding and discuss the individual case with a competent halachic authority.

Harmony of a Nation - Overcoming Baseless Hatred (Part 5)

Relating One's Feelings

Often when people can't rid themselves of their inner hatred for their fellow, they act outwardly as if nothing happened, even though they are burning with hatred on the inside. There are many reasons why people do this. Sometimes it is because they want to avoid uncomfortable confrontation. At other times it is because they do not want to expose their pettiness by showing that such a small thing hurt them so much. There are also times when they do not want to reveal their true feelings because, then, their friend may apologize, and deep down they are not ready to forgive (see Alei Shor, vol. 2 p. 240). There are even times when people do this with very pure intentions, thinking that they are doing a mitzvah by "putting on a nice face" to the person who did them wrong. However, the halacha says otherwise.

The halacha dictates that after one tries everything mentioned in the previous articles (including reprimanding where the halacha calls for it) and realizes that he cannot rid himself of his hatred, he should let the other person know about his ill feelings towards him. This can often lead to reconciliation through: 1) his fellow

apologizing for what he did, 2) his fellow explaining the rationale behind his actions, 3) his fellow showing how it was all a big misunderstanding. Even if none of those scenarios happen, one still *gains* by letting the other know about his feelings. This is so because there are opinions that teach that if one informs his fellow about his feelings, he is no longer committing the prohibition of hating another person in his heart, because it is no longer in one's heart but rather out in the open (see Rambam, Sefer Hamitzvot, *mitzvot lo taaseh* 302, Hilchot De'ot 6:5, Chafetz Chaim, *Lavin* 7, Be'er Mayim Chaim and Kehillot Yaakov, Erachin 4).

According to these opinions, the Torah specifically warned about hatred in the heart more than revealed hatred, because in many ways hatred that is in the heart is more harmful. One reason is because, as mentioned above, when someone reveals his feelings, it can often lead to reconciliation, either between themselves or through a third party who will try and make peace between them. However, when one keeps it in his heart, others may not even know that there is animosity between them, and, therefore would not even try to make peace between them

(Peleh Yoetz, “*sinah*”). Also, at times his fellow either would not know that he did something wrong, or even if he did, he would think that his friend already forgave him and will therefore not make an effort to appease him.

Another reason why hatred in the heart may be worse is that when hatred is kept in the heart it grows bigger and bigger, while when it is revealed it is therapeutically diminished (see Yad Haketana, Hilchot De’ot 6:4).

Furthermore, when the hatred is not revealed, his fellow will not try to protect himself from possible revenge from him because he does not even know that his friend is angry at him. At times, he may even put his full trust in him, leaving him vulnerable to maltreatment. But when the hatred is revealed, his fellow will have his guard up, which can possibly prevent vengeful harm that may be coming his way (see Rabbeinu Yonah on Mishlei 3:29 and Chafetz Chaim, *lavin* 7, Be’er Mayim Chaim).

Obviously, one must be very careful in how he relates his feelings. Often, the way it is presented makes all the difference in whether it will lead to reconciliation or the opposite. It is therefore worthwhile to seek the advice of a competent halachic authority on how to go about this.

It must also be pointed out that this must only be a last resort, because, firstly, there are opinions that hold that one is committing the transgression of baseless hatred even when he shows it openly (see Ramban on Vayikra 19:17, see also Kehillot Yaakov, Erachin 4, for a discussion of the opinions). Furthermore, even according to the opinions that hold otherwise, one should still try to work on letting go of his hatred, because even though by revealing his feelings he does not transgress the prohibition of hating his fellow in his heart, he still transgresses the mitzvahs to not take revenge, to not bear a grudge, and to love one’s fellow as oneself. But according to these opinions it is still worthwhile to let his fellow know how he feels, because it is better to commit these transgressions than violating the more serious offense against hating one’s fellow in his heart (see Rambam, Sefer Hamitzvot, *lo taaseh* 302).

Personal Considerations

Other than the fact that baseless hatred is a serious transgression, there are also other personal considerations that can push one to rid himself of baseless hatred.

The Gemara says that the sin of baseless hatred causes quarrels to increase in one’s house, it causes one’s wife to have miscarriages and it causes one’s little children to die young (Shabbat 32b). (It is beyond the scope of this article to address why these things happen as a result of baseless hatred. The reader is encouraged to look at the commentaries for explanations of why this is so.)

Elsewhere, the Gemara says that whoever is not exacting with his fellow and does not try to repay him measure for measure for the pain that he caused him, Hashem also acts that way with him and is not exacting with him to repay him measure for measure for his own transgressions (Rosh Hashanah 17a, according to Rashi).

It was mentioned in a previous section that one of the ways to overcome baseless hatred is by judging one’s fellow favorably. With regard to this, the Gemara says that judging one’s fellow favorably is one of the unique things for which one receives reward both in this world and in the World to Come (see Shabbat 127a).

Building the Beit Hamikdash

We *daven* and look forward to the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash all the time. If permission were granted from Hashem to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash, every person would surely offer anything he could to make it happen. The Chafetz Chaim explains that the truth of the matter is that Hashem is offering us the opportunity to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash, through fixing the sin of baseless hatred that caused its destruction (Yoma 9b, Shemirat Halashon vol. 2 *perek* 7, Ahavat Yisrael, Chapter 2, see also Peleh Yoetz, “*sinah*”). As it says in Sefer Yeshayahu: The hand of Hashem is not short from saving, and His ear is not hard of hearing; rather, it is your sins that are separating you from your G-d, and your transgressions have caused Him to hide His face from you and from hearing you (Yeshayahu 59:1-2). Perhaps one big way to push ourselves to overcome baseless hatred is through reflecting on the fact that through removing the hatred we directly contribute to the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash. May we merit doing complete *teshuvah* and thereby contribute to the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash speedily in our days.

*Questions and comments can be sent to the author at chaviwdanesh@gmail.com

The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

Harav Hagaon Rav Avraham Mordechai Isbee, *zt"l*

The Gemara in Rosh Hashana 18b says in regards to *Tzom Gedaliah*:

“The death of *Tzadikim* is equal to the burning of the Temple.”

The death of the great *Tzaddik*, Rav Avraham Mordechai Isbee during the Three Weeks leading up to the commemoration of the destruction of the Holy Temple is certainly an illustration of the *Gemara's* dictum.

The first time I heard of Rav Avraham Mordechai Isbee was in Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland in the 1970s. The Roshei Yeshiva, the *Kollel yungerleit* and the alumni, when telling stories of illustrious *talmidim of the Yeshiva*, mentioned him first. I thought at the time that if someone were to compile a “Hall of Fame” of the Telshe Yeshiva alumni, Rav Isbee would be at or near the top. He entered Telshe at the age of 12 and stayed for 17 years. The stories of his *hasmada* were legendary. It seemed he never slept, except perhaps for the occasional times when he would put his head down on his *shtender* and appear to doze off, and then wake up after a few minutes to resume learning. His finger never left its place on the page so that he never had to search for his exact place.

The next time I heard of him was when I came to Ohr Somayach. He was a *rebbe* here. I was in Rav Moshe Carlebach's *shiur* (may he have a *refuah shleima* very soon), and he mentioned that even as a young boy in Detroit, Rav Isbee was special. They were in the same class in the day school in Detroit. He remembers that in the first grade when they were learning Chumash, the *rebbe* would ask a question and the inevitable answer was, “Morty says that Rashi says...” To his classmates, he was the *Gadol Hador*.

He had been a *magid shiur* in the early years of the Ohr Somayach Yeshiva in Jerusalem. By the time I came in 1986, he was learning in the Beis Midrash in the afternoons and giving weekly *shiurim* in Chumash, Navi and *hashkafa*. One could ask him any question on any *mesechta* in *Shas* – not just the one which the Yeshiva was learning.

Rav Yehuda Samet, an early *chavrusah* of Rav Isbee in Israel, told me that Rav Isbee took the monthly *Mifal HaShas* test every 30 days on 30 *blatt* of *Gemara* since its inception by the Klausenberger Rebbe in 1982. He testified that Rav Isbee knew *Shas* intimately. He also recalls a parlor meeting about 50 years ago in Mattersdorf, where they lived, for a new *kollel* that would be learning halacha. Even though he had little money, Rav Isbee was the largest donor. Rav Samet asked him why he gave so much. His answer was that since he spends all day learning *Gemara*, *Rishonim* and *Achronim*, he had little time for halacha, and that the *kollel* would give him a *chelek* in halacha.

Rav Moshe Newman relates the following story: “Sometimes I had the chutzpah to ask Rav Isbee if he would say a *chabura* to a certain group of *avreichim* who learned together *b'chevrusa* in the afternoons. He always agreed, with much humility. Once, after we planned a hastily arranged *chabura* to start in ten minutes, I told

the other *talmidim* in which room we would meet, and we would get ready to go together. It was on a complex subject, for me at least. I wasn't sure it was a fair request, and I noticed that Rav Isbee had started pacing, in thought, in the Beis Hamidrash, almost immediately after he agreed to teach us. I was concerned I had been out of order and that the request was perhaps "too much" – and that maybe he was trying to think of what he would say to us. I immediately expressed this concern to Rabbi Yisrael Rakovsky, a *magid shiur* at the time who later became Rosh Yeshiva at Ohr Somayach in Monsey. He laughed, saying that Rav Isbee didn't need to think of things to say. He was pacing and carefully deciding about what things to leave out and *not* to say! He could speak to us on that topic for hours and days and weeks, and more, without lacking beautiful *divrei Torah* on that topic – or on any other.

I was once at a *pidyon haben* for the son of a friend of mine, Reb Binyamin Wolpin. Rav Isbee was the Kohen. He was also related to Rabbi Wolpin's wife, so it was a family gathering. Rav Isbee told a story about his grandfather, who was sent to America by the Gerrer Rebbe in Europe, the Sfas Emes. In the 1880s the American Jewish community, especially outside of New York, was becoming rapidly secularized. The influence of the Reform movement was strong and the obstacles to making a living while still keeping Shabbos were almost insurmountable. The Sfas Emes decided to send one his closest *talmidim*, Rav Isbee's grandfather, to Detroit to try to strengthen the *frum* community there. He didn't want to go. How could he leave the holiness of the Rebbe's court in Ger and go to the wasteland that was America, where almost every Jew became *frei* or his children became *frei*? The Rebbe told him not to worry, and gave him a special *beracha*: "Not only will your children and future descendants stay *frum*, but they will all be *talmidei chachamim*." More than one hundred years later, said Rav Isbee, one could see that the *beracha* was still being fulfilled.

Rav Isbee suffered for many years from a debilitating illness, to which he finally succumbed. He fought mightily and with *simchas hachaim*, to overcome its effects. He would give the *Shabbos HaGadol* and *Shabbos Teshuvah drashot* in the Ohr Somayach Beis Midrash during all of the years that I was in the Yeshiva. Watching him speak from the heart with such *hislahavus*, love and *emunah* was a lesson in itself. No one could be in his presence without feeling his holiness. He was an inspiration for all of our staff and *talmidim*. The loss is great, like the burning of our Holy Temple. May his memory be a blessing for all of us, and, as we hope to see the Temple speedily rebuilt in our days, may we also see HaKohen, Rav Isbee, doing its *avoda*.

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu
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OHR SOMAYACH INTERNATIONAL PRESENTS:



A TISHA B'AV EVENT



BUILDING WITH TEARS

WED NIGHT / THURS JULY 29/30

RAV NOTA
SCHILLER

RAV YITZCHAK
BREITOWITZ

RAV MOSHE
SHTERNBUCH

RAV BINYOMIN
CARLEBACH

RABBI NACHSHON
SCHILLER

RABBI DOVID
GOTTLIEB

RABBI AVRAHAM
ROCKMILL

RABBI YAACOV ASHER
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