

The Knesset's Menora Inscription:

"Not by army and not by might, rather by My spirit, says God".
Yet, the Knesset's decisions ignore "God's spirit".

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IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: SHOFTIM	1-4
INTERFAITH MONOLOGUE	4
JEWISH LEADERS	5,6
PALESTINIAN STATE?	7
COMPLAINERS & VICTIMS	8,9
LETTERS	10,11

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Weekly Parsha

Shoftim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

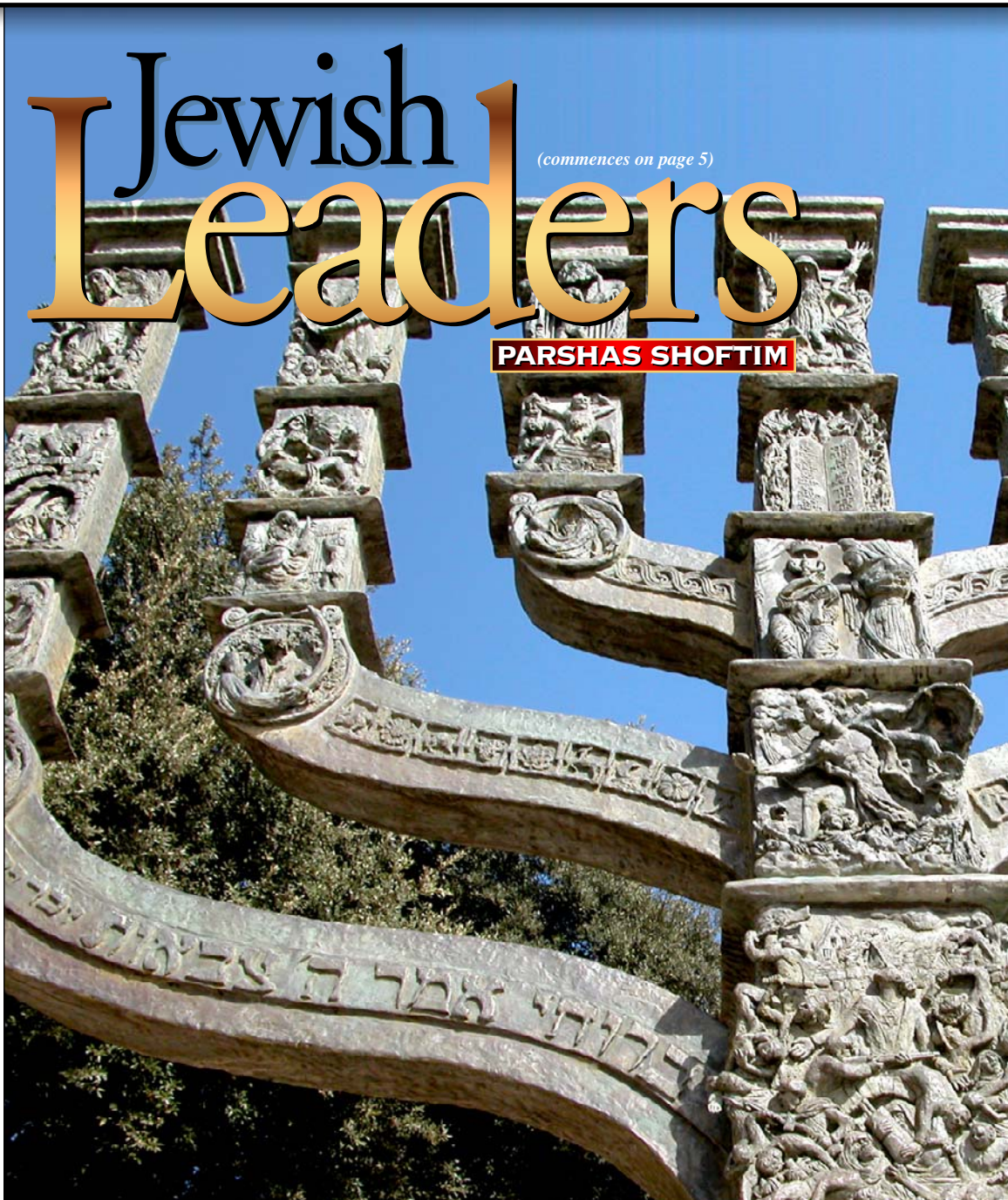
"When you go forth to war against your enemy and you see horses and chariots and a nation that is more numerous than yourself, do not fear them. For Hashem your G-d who brought you up from Egypt is with you." (Devarim 20:1)

(continued on next page)

Jewish Leaders

(commences on page 5)

PARSHAS SHOFTIM



(Shoftim cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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Before going to war a special Kohen is appointed to accompany the nation. This Kohen and the other officers of the nation address the people before they enter into battle. This pasuk introduces the section of the Torah that discusses the address that this Kohen and the officers deliver to the nation. This section can be summarized in three points. First, it is prohibited to be fearful of the enemy. Second, a special Kohen is appointed to accompany and address the nation before battle. Third, the Kohen and the officers instruct the nation to not be fearful but they then enumerate those individuals that are permitted to leave before the battle is joined.

The elements of this section seem disjointed and even contradictory. The section begins with an injunction against fearing the enemy. Maimonides and others maintain that this injunction is one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah.[1] The section then provides the text of the address that the Kohen and the officers deliver to the nation. The address begins with instructions to not be fearful. Next, the people are provided with a list of individuals who are permitted to leave before the battle is joined. There are three individuals included on this list – a person who has recently planted a vineyard, betrothed a woman, or built a home. The address ends by instructing a person who is fearful to leave. This is preferable to fleeing and discouraging those around him.

We would expect the address of the Kohen and the officers to express the initial theme of the section – the prohibition against fearing the enemy. Indeed, the address begins with this theme. But the address continues with a list of individuals who are exempt from battle. How do these exemptions relate to the injunction against being fearful? The address ends with an instruction to those who are fearful. These individuals are told to leave. This seems to directly contradict the requirement to not be fearful!

“And the officers continue to speak to the nation and they say, “Who is afraid and weak-hearted? He should go and return to his home and not weaken the hearts of his brothers – as his heart is weakened.” Devarim (20:8)

The above passage is the text of the final element of the address delivered to the people. The pasuk provides an answer to our last question. We are commanded not to be fearful. But it is inevitable that some individuals will not be capable of

eliminating or suppressing their natural anxiety. These individuals are required to leave in order to not undermine the courage of others. In other words, the very requirement to not be fearful, demands that those who cannot control their anxiety leave. Rather than contradicting the initial theme, this last element of the address reflects the injunction against being fearful. However, the Torah provides no clear indication as to the reason that one who has planted a vineyard, newly betrothed a wife, or recently built a home is exempted from battle.

“And the officers should speak to the nation and say, “Who has built a new home and not initiated it? He should go and return to his home – lest he die in war and another man initiate it.” (Devarim 20:5)

Rabbaynu Avraham Ibn Ezra and many other commentaries discuss this issue. Most conclude that these individuals are most likely to flee the battle. This person is poised to enter an exciting period of his life. He has a promising future before him. He deeply desires to live to enjoy his future. These people are – as a group – the most likely individuals to flee. Of course, in fleeing they will undermine the courage of others. Therefore, they are invited to leave before the battle begins.[2]

This solves an interesting problem in the above passage. The pasuk contains a portion of the text of the address of the Kohen and the officers. This portion of the text outlines the exemption for a person who has recently built a home. The pasuk explains that this person is exempt from participating in the battle. But the pasuk includes an interesting phrase – lest he die in war and another man initiate it. This phrase reflects the reason for the exemption. He is likely to be focused on the home he has not yet enjoyed. He may not be willing to risk his future in this new home. It is preferable for this person to leave before the battle to his fleeing once the battle begins. However, the pasuk adds, “and another man initiate it.” What is the significance of this final consideration? Why is it important that if this person dies, another person will initiate his home?

Rashi provides a response to this question. He explains that this would be source of severe grief.[3] Gur Aryeh explains the meaning of Rashi's comment. He explains that this phrase suggest another reason that for this person's exemption. A person who has built a home and not yet lived in it has two reasons for concern. First,



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his premature death in battle would deprive him of the opportunity to enjoy the home he labored to build. Second, he may die in battle and some stranger will enjoy the home that he labored to build. In other words, someone other than himself will enjoy the benefit of all of his efforts. For some people, this second concern is even greater than the first. This person can accept that he may not enjoy the home he built. But he cannot accept that someone else will enjoy it in his stead![4]

Maimonides offers an additional insight into these exemptions. He begins with a problem. We are commended to not be afraid when we go into battle. How are we to avoid or suppress this fear? Maimonides explains that we must focus on two issues. First, we are to rely on Hashem to save us. Second, we must recognize that in any battle, we are fighting against a nation that opposes Bnai Yisrael and seeks to harm Hashem's nation. In engaging in this battle we are fighting for Hashem to defeat those who seek to oppose Him. In other words, when engaged in battle, we should interpret our role as an act of service to Hashem. Maimonides implies that if a person can succeed in achieving this focus and state on consciousness, he will not be fearful. Maimonides adds that the two areas of focus are related. We hope to be saved through providence. We can only enjoy this providence if our intentions are to serve Hashem and are pure.[5]

Maimonides observes that in order to achieve the state of consciousness that he describes, one cannot be distracted by thoughts or concerns regarding his family. This observation suggests a deeper understanding of the exemptions outlined in our parasha. A person who has built a new home, recently betrothed, or planted a vineyard is easily distracted by anxiety over these new endeavors. This person faces powerful psychological impediments that may prevent achieving the state of consciousness that is required. It follows that these individuals are exempt from participating in the battle.

It is clear from this discussion that this section of the Torah is not disjointed or contradictory. The section is consistent and focuses on a single theme – we are prohibited to fear our enemy. The entire address of the Kohen and the officers is designed to assure the achievement of this goal. They begin with an admonishment against fearing the enemy. They then exempt various categories of individuals that are likely to become distracted from the objectives of the battle or be overcome with anxiety over their own safety. These people are invited to leave, rather than possibly flee and undermine the confidence of their fellow brothers.

Understanding that the entire section expresses a single theme, helps resolve a problem in halacha. There are two types of war in halacha – milchemet

mitzvah and milchemet reshut. A precise delineation of the difference between these two types of wars requires an involved analysis. For the purposes of this discussion a working definition will suffice. Milchemet mitzvah is a war that is required in order to fulfill a mitzvah of the Torah. A milchemet reshut is not specifically required by a commandment in the Torah.

According to many authorities, this section of the Torah only fully applies to a milchemet reshut. These authorities explain that everyone is required to participate in a milchemet mitzvah. There are no exemptions. Therefore, prior to a milchemet mitzvah the Kohen and the officers do not enumerate those that are permitted to decline involvement. No one has such an option. Everyone must participate.[6] Kesef Mishne argues that although the exemptions would not be enumerated prior to a milchemet mitzvah, a Kohen is appointed to address the nation. He does not list exemptions but he does admonish the nation to not fear its enemy.[7]

However, it seems that Maimonides disagrees. He explains that before both types of conflicts – milchemet mitzvah and milchemet reshut – a Kohen is appointed. He describes the address that the Kohen and the officers deliver. The description includes an enumeration of the exemptions. He does not distinguish between a milchemet mitzvah and a milchemet reshut. Clearly, Maimonides is implying – if not openly stating – that the entire section applies to both a milchemet reshut and a milchemet mitzvah. He maintains that in both cases the exemptions are enumerated.[8]

However, Maimonides does agree that the exemptions do not extend to a milchemet mitzvah. Only in the instance of a milchemet reshut do these exemptions apply.[9] Of course, it seems that Maimonides' position is self-contradictory. He maintains that the exemptions only apply to a milchemet reshut. Yet, he asserts that the Kohen and the officers review the exemptions before any battle – even a milchemet mitzvah. Why would the Kohen and the officers review the exemptions prior to a milchemet mitzvah. They do not apply?

“And when they approach the battle, the Kohen should come near and speak to the nation.” (Devarim 20:2)

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Z"L suggests a novel solution to this problem. His solution is based on a requirement outlined in the mishne and quoted by Rashi. According to the mishne, the Kohen is required to address the nation in Lashon HaKodesh – in Hebrew.[10] This is a strange requirement. It seems that the responsibility of the Kohen and officers is to communicate a clear message to the warriors about to enter battle.

They should use the language that will be most easily understood. This seems to be a strange instance in which to require use of Lashon HaKodesh.

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that the Kohen and the officers do not discharge their duty by merely addressing the nation. They are required to read this section of the Torah to the nation. In order to fulfill this obligation, they must read the section in Lashon HaKodesh. If they were to design their own presentation that thematically matched this section, they would not fulfill their obligation of reading this section to the nation. Similarly, if they used a language other than Lashon HaKodesh they would not be reading the nation this section. They would be delivering a translation to the nation.

Based on this observation, Rav Soloveitchik explains Maimonides' position. Before every war the Kohen and the officers are required to address the nation. In the instance of a milchemet reshut all elements of the address described in our section are relevant. It is important to admonish the nation to not be fearful and to communicate the exemptions. In the instance of the milchemet mitzvah the exemptions are not relevant; everyone is required to participate. But the admonition against fearfulness is appropriate. Nonetheless, even in the instance of a milchemet mitzvah, the entire text of the address is presented. Rav Soloveitchik explains that this is because the Kohen and the officers are not permitted to improvise their own address. They are not even permitted to translate the words of the Torah into another language. They are required to address the nation by means of reading the exact text of our section. It is true that in the instance of a milchemet mitzvah, the exemptions are not relevant. But they are a part of the section. The section can only be accurately read to the nation if it is recited accurately and in its entirety.[11]

There are two obvious problems posed by Rav Soloveitchik's solution. First, why must the Kohen and officers address the nation through reading this section of the Torah? Why are they not permitted to use this section as a general outline and construct their own appropriate address? Second, even if we can explain the reason for this restriction against improvising, why read the whole section? It would seem to make more sense to require that only the initial, relevant passage be read!

Let us begin with this last question. According to our analysis above, this section is not composed of separate unrelated elements. The entire section revolves around a single issue. It is prohibited to fear the enemy. The exemptions also reflect this theme. Therefore, although the exemptions are not relevant to a milchemet mitzvah, they are an

(continued on next page)

Weekly Parsha

Failed Leadership

integral part of the message of the section. Therefore, the section can only be accurately read through reading all of the passages.

“For Hashem your G-d goes before you to do battle on your behalf with your enemies and to save you.” (Devarim 20:4)

But why are the Kohen and officers not permitted to improvise? Perhaps, the answer lies in the above passage. The Kohen and the officers do not merely tell the nation to not be fearful. They offer a reason. The nation is not relying on its own strength in this confrontation with its enemy. Hashem battles for His people. Hashem will protect and rescue Bnai Yisrael. This message can only have its full impact if it is read from the Torah. It is not adequate for the Kohen and the officers to deliver their own assurances and admonition to the nation. They are required to communicate to the nation the promise and related admonition of the Torah. They can best communicate the message of the Torah through reading it directly. Therefore, they cannot improvise. An improvised address is not a direct expression of the Torah's promise and related admonition. They must present – in the most direct manner – the message of the Torah. This can only be accomplished through reading the section. And because the section is a single integrated set of passages, it must be read in its entirety – even in the instance of a milchemet mitzvah. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Lo Ta'Aseh 58.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 20:5.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 20:5.

[4] Rav Yehuda Loew of Prague (Maharal), Aryeh Commentary on Sefer Devarim 20:9.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 7:14.

[6] Rabbaynu Avraham ben David of Posquieres (Ra'avad) Critique on Maimonides' Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 7:1.

[7] Rav Yosef Karo, Kesef Mishne, Hilchot Melachim 7:1.

[8] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 7:1-4.

[9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 7:4.

[10] Mesechet Sotah 42:a

[11] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Kobetz Chidushai Torah.

Interfaith Monologue

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



The recent papal edict to include a prayer for the conversion of Jews evoked one response: “How do we now sit and dialogue when the other side believes we are blind and need to be converted?” But this has always been the Christian doctrine. So why are Jews suddenly surprised?

God designated the Jew to teach the world. But many Jews have it backwards: philosophically, religiously, and historically. Jews consistently cave to world recognition, and lately...that of the Church. Jews abandon God's promises: “If only My people would listen to Me; if Israel would follow My ways, in an instant I would subdue their foes; and against their tormentors [I would] turn My hand”. (Psalms 81)

God's Torah also says “Like the ways of the land of Canaan that I bring you there, do not do, and in their statutes do not walk.” (Lev. 18) God knows human insecurities, demanding we follow reason, not social approval, so he warns against our need to copy others and seek their accolades. Ironically, when the Jew caters to others, he gains no respect, but is rejected, just as a star has less respect for fans than for his competition. If we would hold fast to our Judaism, we would benefit from God's preferred lifestyle. We would also offer other religions God's intended example of His perfect Torah system, regarding which God promises this response from the nations: “Certainly, a wise and understanding people is this great nation.” (Deut. 4:6) But when we seek to compromise Judaism for the recognition of others, we misrepresent Judaism: to them, and to our own.

It is historically proven that God revealed Himself to mankind with His singular will only once...upon Sinai. No other religion claims masses witnessed God's revelation, except Judaism. And this truth has been transmitted throughout time, even by other religions, precisely because it did in fact occur. Had Revelation at Sinai been fabricated, Moses would never have been successful telling the Jews, “Guard your souls exceedingly, lest you forget what YOUR eyes saw...God spoke

to you from amidst the fire”. (Deut. 4:9,12) Other religions do not claim mass witnesses of revelation since they would never be accepted at their inception with grandiose lies, or later, since no transmission of such lies would commence.

Since only one mankind exists, there can be only one “best” lifestyle for us all, what we call a “religion”. Judaism alone is a proven religion; explaining why all other religions are based on belief, and not the Sinai proof which provides Judaism its unparalleled status. God granted man a mind to reason between truth and falsehood, between what is proven, and what are merely accepted beliefs. He desires we follow proof, not belief...for belief does not validate what is reality, as does proof. And God desires that man not fool himself.

Judaism is as diametrically opposed to Christianity and others, as truth is to falsehood. Judaism's primary tenets are: God alone retains all focus, God is not physical, nothing else [read “man”] is to be deified, and no other religion is truth. The Church has the opposite opinion on all four tenets. With nothing at all in common, all talk is interfaith “monologue”. The very need to engage other religions in dialogue is a glaring stain on Judaism. We know through intelligence that God's words are true: we need absolutely no human validation, nor do we recognize other religions as God's word. All dialogue is futile, it hurts Judaism, and it teaches our children a false lesson.

But since Jews have sunken to treasure alien accolades over the pursuit of God's truth, there exists a preponderance of Jewish leaders who are suddenly “surprised” at the Church's prayers, and feel the need that they recognize us.

We don't need recognition from anyone except God. Our Jewish leaders simply don't know what Judaism is. They lack the courage which only a true Torah student possesses, as they seek damaging, human acceptance at the forfeiture of God's words and His mandate that we lead others.

For many of today's Jew, sadly, God's word is second to that of the Church. ■

Failed Leadership



Jewish Leaders

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

When you [the Jewish nation] come to the land which Hashem your God gives you, and you inherit it and dwell in it, and you say, 'I will place upon myself a king as all the nations roundabout'. Certainly place upon yourself a king whom Hashem your God selects from among your brothers; place [him] as king. You are not enabled to place upon yourself a foreigner who is not your brother.' (Deut. 17:14,15)

We are warned that when selecting a king "as all other nations roundabout", we must throne only he whom God selects via prophecy. We are not allowed to select a king of our own choice. We must inquire of the prophet or the priest who have

communication with God. They will select whom-ever God determines to be king. This first lesson regarding Jewish leaders is that we must follow God's Torah, not our own agenda. God articulates a phrase that "we" will state: "I will place upon myself a king as all the nations roundabout".

God clearly teaches that the Jew is concerned to follow the ways of "all the other nations". Is the motive to have a king "as all other nations" different than simply wishing to "have a king"? It appears they are one and the same. Meaning, the desire to set up a king occurs in the national mindset "only" when we see "all the other nations roundabout" establishing kings. In this case, the institution of a king is not a Torah mandate, but a concession, or permission to man: Torah life does not demand that a king exist. This is the view of both Rav Saadia Gaon and Ibn Ezra. Both Rabbis termed kings a "rishuss": an "optional" institution. Maimonides is of the opinion that a king is a positive mitzvah, something inherently necessary. Let us better understand Rav Saadia Gaon and Ibn Ezra.

The verses indicate that God selects for us a king, but only once we initiate the request. It is not a preferred situation. Furthermore, our request is to duplicate the other nations. Perhaps this expresses the danger: we desire a king not to secure a Torah lifestyle, but simply to be "as other nations". But if so, why doesn't God simply prohibit kings outright? We must conclude that a king can be a worthwhile institution, provided it adheres to guidelines that restrict the king from arrogance, or misleading the nation. He is limited in his reign, wealth, wives, and must also carry the Torah in all places. These restrictions add to the force of the argument that a king is not preferred. He is only allowed if safeguards are in place. And safeguards apply only to matters that contain risks. However, what is most restricting is the king's very designation: he is king only by God's word. What does this accomplish?

God's very selection of the king indelibly associates a king's identity with God. God obscures the king, at his very inception, in his designation, and throughout his reign.

First, the king recognizes that God gave him the throne. His own identity as king is not based on 'his' merit, but on God's wisdom, which no man fathoms. And he only retains the throne as long as he upholds God's Torah, as seen in Samuel's dethroning of Saul upon his sin. Second, the nation will recognize this man as "appointed by God", so any hero worship is mitigated. Third, the king is always seen carrying God's Torah. Thereby, the king's fame and reputation is overcome with an ever-present recognition of God.

Perhaps this is why a king is not a command according to these two Sages, and not an institution preferred by God. The people should seek to attach themselves 'directly' to God, without a human leader who obscures our focus on Him. The Jews sinned with the Gold Calf to replace the "man" Moses, of whom they had no idea what happened...when they erroneously miscounted the day of his descent. The Jews were too attached to the "man" Moses. God insures we learn their error, by an exact quote of their word "man" in the verses.

The other nations may have very well established kings, since their orientation is not towards God, who they know not. The other nations follow infantile and instinctual drives, as we read again in this week's Parsha, "When you come into the land that Hashem your God gives you do not learn to do as the abominations of those nations". (Deut. 18:9) Their kings are attempts to sustain the infantile relationship to parents: the king leader is a displaced image of a parent. But man need not be subservient to his equal. This is exactly what God said in response to the Hebrew slave, "You are My servants, and not servants to servants".

Most of the nations' prohibited practices are attempts to learn about the future. These nations possess no Torah that weans man away from the infantile dependency on parents, towards complete confidence in God. So firmly attached to the memory of their parent are the other nations, that they create gods in the form of humans who undoubtedly are their parents in some manner. As adults, these peoples forged gods of steel and carved of wood, as a futile path back to the safety of childhood, when parental figures secured their lives and futures. But now, as adults without parents, they perceived a frightening void, and attempt to fill it with stone gods, and human leaders. They cannot face life without security, so they fabricate ways to comfort themselves...they established kings. They follow fortunetellers, horoscopes, enchanters, palm readers and the like...other forms of "leaders", just like kings. And today, sadly, many Jews imitate these practices with amulets, also visiting Kabbalistic liars and crooks who parade as if prophets, just to rob \$100 from insecure Jews. But God sees all and metes out punishments to those stirring up false hopes in the ignorant masses, as well as for their idolatrous sins.

It is interesting that in both Torah cases in today's Parsha – seeking a king, and the warnings of following the nations' abominations – God introduces both with almost identical wording: "When you come to the land..." Perhaps this comparison is intended to equate both as matters God does not prefer, and that do not address Torah needs, but only human insecurities: we wish to be

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(continued from page 5)

Failed Leadership

as the other nations. When we “come to the land” is when we seek to copy our neighbors with kings and abominable practices. Coming to the land has dangers.

Entering the land brought with it the exposure to other nations who follow leaders, when we are to follow God. It also exposed us to abominations. A king is not necessary, when we have the Sages and Rabbis who can teach us the dangers of those abominations, and God’s will for our daily lives. And following the Rabbis is not an option: God commands us to seek out those with wisdom to guide our Torah lives. (Deut. 17:11) In contrast, a king is not to serve this role. Therefore, the king is not essential to the proper life of the Jew, or of the nation. Perhaps, yet, since a king can be used for good, it cannot be a prohibited institution. Provided the safeguards are followed, a king can in fact cause the people to reach God through this alternate route of a leader, closely associated with God. This might answer another problem...

We are puzzled: if God selects our kings (as he must be a superior choice than our own selection) how then can God’s “chosen” king fail? And he must have this option to fail, since God says, “lest his heart grow haughty from his brothers and lest he veer from the commands”. This means that the commands governing the king’s reign are to deter him from falling prey to egotistical emotions that all leaders face...even those selected by God. While it is true that God selects the best option for a king, the very institution is inherently flawed with the elevation of a human being’s ego. These are God’s words: “Lest his heart grow arrogant over his brothers”.

So according to Rav Saadia Gaon and Ibn Ezra, kings are an optional institution. What is a preferred state of affairs is that a Jew inquires from the Rabbis concerning how to live his life.

Even when going to war, the king is not the primary figure. It is the Priest who addresses the people and reminds them of the Torah philosophies, and the absolute security they must have in God who can do all: “And when you draw near to war, the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say, ‘Listen Israel, today you draw close to war on your enemies; let not your hearts be faint, do not fear and do not panic and do not be broken before them. For Hashem your God goes with you, to battle for you with your enemies, to save you.’” (Deut. 20:2-4)

The true leader is the priest: the family who God designated to serve Him in His Temple, to study and disseminate Torah to all Jews. A Jewish leaders’ role is to understand God’s will for Israel

based on Torah study, to teach it, and to uphold it in all of his decisions. His role is not to agree with the masses to retain his office. His role is not to violate God’s Torah principles to gain foreign dollars, or appease others with deadly decisions that allow terrorist to live close by, or to be freed from prisons. They should not be imprisoned in the first place, but executed as all nations who wisely execute terrorists.

It is the deviation from God’s Torah morality that has Israel in such a bind today. Those who deny God’s knowledge and laws addressing terrorists, now run Israel. It is a contradiction: Israel’s leaders claim Israel based on the Torah’s promise, but then close His holy book and read no further. But we have God’s promise if we follow His Torah, “For

Hashem your God goes with you, to battle for you with your enemies, to save you.” This appears to be only the case when we accept “Hashem as our God”. So Israel, do so, and earn God’s promise.

It is historically proven that God was not with Jewish leaders who violated his word. So it is imperative that those in Israel, who have a voice, use it now to insure the nation is run based on God’s Torah morality, not the lethal politics that keeps killing us. History and reason demand this step be made. History and reason prove how we succeeded when we had true Jewish leaders like Moses, Joshua, and Kings David and Solomon. Our leaders have deviate from God. And we need God, more than the support of other nations. ■

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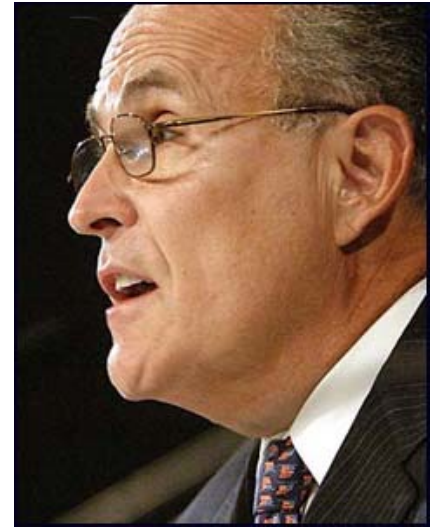
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EZRA HALEVI



American Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani has bucked the party line of successive US administrations and come out against the establishment of a Palestinian state. "Too much emphasis has been placed on brokering negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians — negotiations that bring up the same issues again and again," the former New York City Mayor wrote in a paper published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. "It is not in the interest of the United States, at a time when it is being threatened by Islamist terrorists, to assist the creation of another state that will support terrorism."

Giuliani did not rule out the eventual establishment of such a state, but warned against the push by President George W. Bush and embattled Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to quickly establish a state in Judea and Samaria ruled



by Fatah. "Palestinian statehood will have to be earned through sustained good governance, a clear commitment to fighting terrorism, and a willingness to live in peace with Israel."

Giuliani also took a swipe at the United Nations, saying America should have "realistic" expectations about the effectiveness of an organization he says has made itself "irrelevant" to the resolution of the past half-century's conflicts. "The organization can be useful for some humanitarian and peace-keeping functions, but we should not expect much more of it."

Saying the war with "Islamic fascism" will be a lengthy one, Giuliani explained that: "The Terrorists' War on US was encouraged by unrealistic and inconsistent actions taken in response to terrorist attacks in the past. A realistic peace can only be achieved through strength." ■

Mishle

Complainers & their Victims

MATT SCHNEEWEISS



"The words of a complainer are like blows, descending to the chambers of one's innards" (Mishlei 18:8)

It is reasonable to assume that the subject-matter of this pasuk is complaining. However, there remains one major question: Who is this pasuk for?

There are two possible answers to this question: either King Solomon is giving advice to a complainer, telling him that the act of complaining is harmful to himself; or he is talking to the listener of complaints, telling him that he will be harmed simply by listening.

How do we answer this question on our pasuk? Ordinarily we would look for clues within our pasuk, but in this case, the words of our pasuk seem to be clue-less. In this particular case, the answer comes from an unexpected source.

Our pasuk is in Chapter 18. If we skip a few pages and turn to Mishlei 26:22, we encounter a familiar statement: "The words of a complainer are like blows, descending to the chambers of one's innards." As strange as it may seem, Chapter 26 contains a repetition of the exact same pasuk!

The mere repetition of our pasuk doesn't solve anything. However, if look at the context of the two pesukim, we'll notice something interesting:

Chapter 18:6-8: "The lips of the fool will come forth in contention, and his mouth will invite blows upon himself. The mouth of a fool

brings destruction to himself, and his lips are a stumbling block to his soul. The words of a complainer are like blows, descending to the chambers of one's innards."

Chapter 26:20-23: "Just as when there is no wood the fire goes out, so when no one complains, strife is silenced. Like kindling to coals, and twigs to a fire, so is the contentious man to kindling strife. The words of a complainer are like blows, descending to the chambers of one's innards. Like silver dross coating earthenware, so are hotly pursuing lips above an evil heart."

It appears that the context of our pasuk in Chapter 18 deals with the effect of speech on the self, whereas the context in Chapter 26 deals with the effect of speech on others.

Apparently, the answer to our original question is: both interpretations are valid. King Solomon is advising both the complainer himself and the complainer's audience, and is so intent on making sure that we grasp both ideas that he actually writes this pasuk twice.

This may have solved our problem of interpreting the "facts" of the pasuk, but if we are correct, we are now confronted with a new question: How can King Solomon say that the effects of complaining on the complainer and the effects of complaining on the listener are the same?

I don't know about you, but this strikes me as unusual, especially when we consider other actions. For instance, murdering is bad for the

murderer and bad for the victim, but in completely different ways. The same is true for stealing, raping, lying, cheating, acting like an idiot, slandering, mocking, and so on. Complaining seems to be an exception.

To understand this pasuk we must ask: What is complaining? We all complain, but do we really understand what it is that we are doing?

My definition of complaining is as follows: To complain is to verbally express one's dissatisfaction with reality - not as a means to rectify the situation, but as an end in itself.

According to this definition, the same statement can be uttered as either a complaint or as a constructive communication, depending on the intent. For example, if I say, "These pretzels are making me thirsty" in order to vent my frustration, then I am complaining. On the other hand, if I say, "These pretzels are making me thirsty" in response to my friend's offer to buy me a drink, then I am not complaining, but taking practical measures to alleviate my thirst.

But to fully understand the phenomenon of complaining we must ask: What is the point of complaining? What is accomplished by giving vent to one's dissatisfaction with reality? If complaining about my pretzels doesn't satisfy my thirst, what does it satisfy?

To answer this question we must take a journey back in time - back to infancy and early childhood.

(continued on next page)

(continued from page 8)

Writings

An infant is a helpless creature. Not only is the infant incapable of satisfying his own needs (food, drink, clothing, waste management, etc.), but he can't even articulate them coherently. Unable to actively alter his own circumstances, the infant's only choice is to sit there until reality changes for him - that is, until his parents come to take care of him. When this doesn't happen automatically, the infant has only one option: to cry for mommy and daddy to come and make things better. Unable to satisfy his desires by operating within reality, the infant cries out against reality and waits for the circumstances to change on their own.

The infant's method of dealing with dissatisfaction is not only effective, but it is also psychologically satisfying. Reality is full of pain, discomfort, fear, and uncertainty. What can be more satisfying than to call upon mommy and daddy to banish all the bad things and offer their warm embrace of security and affection?

Unfortunately, this infantile modus operandi is so appealing that we never fully abandon it. Our bodies, minds, and personalities may mature in adulthood, but deep down, we still crave that infantile state of existence, in which all of our needs are taken care of without any effort on our part.

That is where complaining comes in. Complaining is the adult version of an infant's crying. When reality does not conform to our desires and we are too lazy or timid to deal with it like adults (i.e. by assessing our needs, examining our options, and taking action to change reality) we attempt to employ the same strategy that was once so effective: crying out against reality and (unconsciously) expecting it to change for us - just like it did when we are infants. To complain is, quite literally, to act like a baby. Complaining turns the individual away from constructive decision-making in the external world and causes him to withdraw from reality in a futile attempt to derive satisfaction and security from an infantile fantasy.

This is what King Solomon means when he describes the words of the complainer as "descending to the innermost chambers of one's innards." The act of complaining stems from, stirs up, and reinforces unconscious emotions from the innermost depths of the psyche.

What is King Solomon getting at by describing the words of the complainer as "blows"? In my opinion, this metaphor does not describe the nature of the harmful consequences of complaining, but the severity of those consequences.

Complaining is harmful to the complainer because it reinforces a distorted view of the self and of reality. Whenever a person complains, he reinforces the infantile fantasy that "I am the center of reality; therefore, reality ought to conform to my desires." A person who constantly indulges in this fantasy is doomed to disappointment and frustration. He will continually find fault with reality without making an effort to change things. Not only that, but his decisions are likely to fail, since he assumes that reality will conform to his wishes.

Thus, what appears to be nothing but an innocuous venting of frustration is actually as harmful as physical blows. Complaining breeds dissatisfaction (conscious and unconscious) and poor decision-making. Refraining from complaining guarantees a happier and more successful life.

There is one last question we have to answer: How does King Solomon's advice apply to the listener of complaints?

The answer flows from what we said above. Complaining stirs up deeply seated emotions: the fantasy that "I am the center of reality; therefore, reality ought to conform to my desires" and the yearning for mommy and daddy to make reality's problems disappear. Precisely because these unconscious feelings are universal, present in every human being from birth, they will be awakened even in the person who listens to a complainer. Thus, when my friend expresses his dissatisfaction with reality by complaining, "I'm hungry - why don't we have anything to eat?" my identification with him will cause my own deep-seated emotions to be awakened, exposing me to all of the harmful consequences mentioned above.

If we truly seek to avoid a life of dissatisfaction and frustration, we should not only refrain from complaining, but we should distance ourselves from the company of complainers as well. ■

Matt Schneeweiss authors the blog
<http://kankanchadash.blogspot.com>



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Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Follow the Leader

Beth: As all in search of Torah knowledge will not be confused as to where to seek it. This brings up another question.

Considering how the Jewish nation has muddled the waters - with all sorts of Torah conflicts and even whole new movements that oppose one another's halakhah and theology - it is not clear even sometimes to baalei teshuva whom to trust for guidance. Are you able to provide some practical guidelines that a Noachide or a Baal/Baalat Teshuvah should keep in mind, when selecting a Rabbi for guidance? Thank you.

Mesora: The correct means to identify one who accurately teaches Torah, is to first determine that he bases his teachings on the Written Torah (Chumash, Prophets and Writings) and the Oral Torah (Mishna and Talmud). This teacher must comply with the accepted Jewish Fundamentals regarding God, His justice, and His relationship

with man. He must have a well formulated concept of God; what He is and is not. He must deny all expressions of idolatrous notions. And his reasoning must comply with our minds, and not follow what is merely popular. He must comply with the Shulchan Aruch on matters of law, and with the great Sages and Rabbis such as Maimonides, Rashi, Ramban, Radak, Ibn Ezra, Sforno, and all the Rabbis of the Talmud. The Baal Teshuva or Noachide must become fluent with the Torah regarding all philosophical lessons; the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs, and all matters of human perfection. Otherwise, the student may not identify the teacher's deviation. And the student must arrive at reasoning that comply with the Sages and Rabbis above. The student must further reflect upon himself, lest he or she harbor false notions from his or her previous lifestyle. Such notions must be abandoned, and replaced only with the Torah's sensible laws and ideals.

Should one be so fortunate to locate a teacher with these credentials, then he should "sit at the dust of his feet and thirst for his words". ■

God Help You

Beth: Is there textual support for the idea that "God helps those who help themselves?" If yes, what is the text? Thanks.

Mesora: Talmud Avodah Zarah 55a, right before the Mishnah: "One who comes to destroy (contaminate) himself, the way is opened before him; if he comes to purify, he is assisted".

Beth: Thank you, Rabbi. Is there anything in written Torah or NaKH (prophets and writings) that supports this idea? If yes, what is the text? Thanks again.

Mesora: In his Guide for the Perplexed, Maimonides proves based on many verses that the greater one's intellectual perfection is, God is proportionately more involved in that person's life: (Book III; Chapter XVIII)

"Consider how the action of Divine Providence is described in reference to every incident in the lives of the patriarchs, to their occupations, and even to their passions, and how God promised to direct His attention to them. Thus God said to Abraham, "I am thy shield" (Gen. xv. 1): to Isaac,

"I will be with thee, and I will bless thee" (ibid. xxvi. 3); to Jacob, "I am with thee, and will keep thee" (ibid. xxviii. 15); to [Moses] the chief of the Prophets, "Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee" (Exod. iii. 12); to Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I shall be with thee" (Josh. i. 5). It is clear that in all these cases the action of Providence has been proportional to man's perfection."

Beth: Is there anything in the written texts (written Torah, prophets, writings) teaching that if one is warned of an impending flood, one should do all in one's power to get out of the danger zone instead of depending upon Divine intervention?

Mesora: The Torah is replete with such examples; Jacob prepared for war and politically when threatened by his approaching brother. He did not rely on miracles. And even under God's directive to anoint a new king, Samuel feared that the present king Saul would kill him. Samuel did not rely on miracles, even while talking to God. God gave us knowledge so as to learn about how nature works. Nature refers to "constant" laws. We are to study the world, use it for benefit, and avoid harmful situations. Relying on God to save us with miracles is arrogant, and violated God's will that we use the intelligence He gave us.

Requiring scriptural sources are unnecessary to realize this obvious concept, and actually mirror this very lesson: we need no verse when we might discover this truth intellectually. ■

Chicken or the Egg?

Vadim: The Torah says that vegetation was created on day 3 and the sun and the moon on day 4. How is this explained? Obviously it is not in accord with current scientific theories. Thank you for your answer.

Mesora: You are correct. Although others are perplexed and feel that during the creation of an object, that object must function as the object does 'after' creation. They feel without sunlight, plantlife is impossible, and would be confounded by your observation. While this is true for the subsequent behavior of plantlife, it cannot be true for its creation. Another example clarifies this point.

(continued on next page)

(continued from page 10)

Letters

How can the chicken come into existence without first being an egg from a mother? But then you will ask, "From where came the mother?". The answer is that God created the first of each species - plantlife included - NOT by its subsequent regenerative system. The first of each species - by very definition - were not created in the way all subsequent members of that species were "reproduced". The first was not a "reproduction", but rather, the "first" production, without a reproductive process. Therefore, no sunlight was required to produce the first plants; no mother was required to produce the first chicken. The chicken came first. Reprinted below are Maimonides' words on this topic from his Guide: (Book II; Chapter XVII)

"EVERYTHING produced comes into existence from non-existence; even when the substance of a thing has been in existence, and has only changed its form, the thing itself, which has gone through the process of genesis and development, and has arrived at its final state, has now different properties from those which it possessed at the commencement of the transition from potentiality to reality, or before that time. Take, e.g., the human ovum as contained in the female's blood when still included in its vessels: its nature is different from what it was in the moment of conception, when it is met by the semen of the male and begins to develop: the properties of the semen in that moment are different from the properties of the living being after its birth when fully developed. It is therefore quite impossible to infer from the nature which a thing possesses after having passed through all stages of its development, what the condition of the thing has been in the moment when this process commenced: nor does the condition of a thing in this moment show what its previous condition has been. If you make this mistake, and attempt to prove the nature of a thing in potential existence by its properties when actually existing, you will fall into great confusion: you will reject evident truths and admit false opinions. Let us assume, in our above instance, that a man born without defect had after his birth been nursed by his mother only a few months; the mother then died, and the father alone brought him up in a lonely island, till he grew up, became wise, and acquired knowledge. Suppose this man has never seen a woman or any female being: he asks some person how man has come into existence, and how he has developed, and receives the following answer: "Man begins his existence in the womb of an individual of his own class, namely, in the womb of a female, which has a certain form. While in the womb he is very small; yet he has life, moves, receives nourishment, and gradually grows, till he arrives at a certain stage of development. He then

leaves the womb and continues to grow till he is in the condition in which you see him." The orphan will naturally ask: "Did this person, when he lived, moved, and grew in the womb, eat and drink, and breathe with his mouth and his nostrils? Did he excrete any substance?" The answer will be, "No." Undoubtedly he will then attempt to refute the statements of that person, and to prove their impossibility, by referring to the properties of a fully developed person, in the following manner: "When any one of us is deprived of breath for a short time he dies, and cannot move any longer: how then can we imagine that any one of us has been inclosed in a bag in the midst of a body for several months and remained alive, able to move? If any one of us would swallow a living bird, the bird would die immediately when it reached the stomach, much

more so when it came to the lower part of the belly; if we should not take food or drink with our mouth, in a few days we should undoubtedly be dead: how then can man remain alive for months without taking food? If any person would take food and would not be able to excrete it, great pains and death would follow in a short time, and yet I am to believe that man has lived for months without that function! Suppose by accident a hole were formed in the belly of a person, it would prove fatal, and yet we are to believe that the navel of the foetus has been open! Why should the foetus not open the eyes, spread forth the bands and stretch out the legs, if, as you think, the limbs are all whole and perfect." This mode of reasoning would lead to the conclusion that man cannot come into existence and develop in the manner described." ■



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FOR A SAFE MISSION AND RETURN.

**American to save Israeli Solider:
How you can partake in this Mitzvah**



This summer a 19 year-old Israeli Solider will get a new lease on life due to a selfless gift from Yosef Chiger, of Harrisburg Pennsylvania. Ayelet Katz, of Moshav Be'er Tuvia had been stationed in Tel Nof Air Force Base, where she worked as an assistant to the head of human resources, until she was forced to leave the IDF because of kidney failure and begin fulltime dialysis. Often Israelis in need of kidney transplants wait for years because of the shortage of organs; however with the help of the Halachic Organ Donor Society (HODS) Ayelet will be fortunate to receive an altruistic donation that will allow her to resume a healthy life in a matter of months. Chiger, married and the father of a five-year old daughter, will be traveling to Israel to donate his kidney and thereby giving Ayelet the ability to resume a full and healthy life. It was especially significant to Chiger that she is an Israeli and a solider, and that the transplant means that she will have a long productive life ahead of her.

The transplant is being facilitated by the Halachic Organ Donor Society, which facilitates altruistic kidney donations and educates Jews about organ donation and halacha.

HODS is raising \$15,000 to bring Chiger and his family to Israel. Contributions can sent to the HOD Society at 49 West 45th Street, 10th Floor, New York, NY or via their website at **www.hods.org**.