

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

PARASHAT BEHAR-BEHUKOTAI
Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 16:19 - 17:14

MAY 19-20, 2017 24 IYAR 5777

Yom Yerushalayim will be celebrated next Tuesday night and Wednesday May 23/24
Rosh Hodesh Sivan is next Thursday night/Friday May 25/26

DEDICATION: To Chantelle – 32 years – Ivar 21 – Thanks for putting up with me

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Editors Notes

**Faith and Trust in The Face of Adversity – BeHar
BeChukotai 5777**

We read this week two portions and I believe the theme of the double portions of BeHar and BeChukotai is faith. We begin with the command to observe the Sabbatical year. This is certainly one of the most difficult commandments to fathom. Imagine being asked to close your store for one year every seven and not only that, you close the store but leave the doors open and anything which may have remained is available for someone to take. Here, the Torah is asking a farmer to simply let his field sit for the seventh year. The farmer is forbidden to turn the land, he is forbidden to plant, he is forbidden to harvest and everything and anything which does grow on its own, for example in an orchard or a vineyard, must be left for anyone to take. Understanding how difficult this request is, the Torah continues: "And if you will say, what will we eat in the seventh year? ... I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period ." It would be within human nature to ask because I am worried, how will I feed my family, how will I pay my bills, how will we survive? And those who ask will see. But the rabbis seem to agree that the greater person is the one who has so much faith that he doesn't ask and will be blessed in a hidden way as if the world itself will support him (as the world was meant to do prior to the sin of Adam and the curse of the land). The one who asks is at a high level of natural man. The one who does not ask goes beyond nature to Adam before the sin and before the mixture of good and evil caused man to believe he is subject to nature.

When any of us encounters a situation which presents itself as unknown or dangerous, it is natural for us to be afraid of the world's nature. But what can we do? We are human.

The second portion presses our faith even further. Here we encounter a list of blessings in eleven verses perhaps they combine with the eleven spices of the ketoret to battle the eleven forces of evil and then 36 verses of curses or punishments. Perhaps the secret in the number 36 is that they can be overcome when we let in the light of creation symbolized by the number 36; The 36 hours of Adam's Shabbat, the 36 lights of the chanuka menorah and the 36 hidden sadikim which keep the world going.

But why are we threatened with so many punishments? Are hardships a good thing? This troubles me greatly.

I spoke with a rabbi recently who I know has gone through and is going through some of the most difficult hardships imaginable within his family and my heart literally breaks for him. But he only smiles, encourages and pushes through.

He told me that we must understand that the most popular Psalm in the world is the 23rd Psalm of King David - *Mizmor L'David*, "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." He asked me, what does David mean? How are we comforted with a staff and rod which are tools of punishment?

I recalled a story I had heard from Rabbi Abba Wagensburg. He tells us to imagine a scene of children playing ball in the street. The ball is kicked into the gutter and a child runs after it - into the path of an on-coming vehicle traveling at typical speed. Seeing the child dart, the driver slams on his brakes and the car stops a quarter of an inch from the child. We in the distance who observe the event may run over to see if everything is OK and if we can help. Confirming that there is no injury and marveling that the car literally came within millimeters of the frozen child, we walk away with a story to tell.

But imagine the same scene with one difference. You see the children playing and recognize your own child. It's your child who runs into the street. Time freezes as you rush and perhaps imagine the worst. See the miracle and that your child is safe, what do

you do? Most likely you grab the child by the arm and scream repeatedly at the child to "Never, Never do that again". And in my day the the screaming would have come with paddling of the child's posterior with one's hand.

Most likely the child in his immaturity thinks that his parent is being cruel to him. The child certainly wonders, "But I'm OK, why isn't my dad happy?" We all understand that the screaming and even the paddling are part of a lesson we hope to impress to never run in the street again and to avoid putting ourselves in danger.

So the Rabbi turned to me and said that sometimes what we perceive as bad is not only good, its what we need then and there.

The Rabbi then told me, that after the sin in the garden, the snake was cursed to eat the dust of the earth. He asked, Is that a curse? The snake will never go hungry and get his nutrients from the earth. How is that a curse.

I responded that Rabbi Abittan would explain that we often connect with Hashem when we need something. And connecting with Hashem not only helps us, its necessary for us. There are those Hashem never wants to connect with. Hashem gives them no reason to come running or to call home (like the snake). The Rabbi would tell of a king with two sons. One son the king wants nothing to do with. The other son, he loves and wants to be with always. He sends the first to a foreign country with a generous trust fund. The other lives closely and must come to his father each week for lunch where a check is delivered by the purser before the son leaves. The second son complains why he must come to collect each week while the first simply draws on his account as he wishes. The king explains. I want you to have a reason to see me every week so we can spend time together while your brother displeases me so that I would rather he limits his visits to once a decade. The Rabbi would conclude that we bless Hashem with the blessing "*Boreh Nefashot Rabot VeChesronan*" - "Hashem who created numerous living beings with deficiencies. Why bless for deficiencies?

It's the deficiencies which remind us to call home and reconnect each day.

The rabbi explained that it's more than accepting perceived evil with a blessing of Baruch Dayan Emet. It's more than what Rabbi Akiva said when he taught that everything Hashem does must be for our benefit. Its more than the teacher of Rabbi Akiva, Nachum Ish Gamzu said when he taught that all is for good. He

explained that it's not simply good, its having faith and trust that this –whatever Hashem is doing - is what we need now for our own benefit from our Creator who takes pleasure only in our success.

He concluded by explaining that this concept of Bitachon must be better understood. It's certainly not that we have faith that things will come out as we want and more than having faith that in the end it will be good. He explained that when presented with a difficulty, one is challenged. We see a world of nature. We see odds. Unfortunately too often the evil side uses these odds to bring us to a state of depression thinking that chance is our master. Depression separates us from Hashem when the purpose of challenges is to bring us closer. Whatever we see and whatever predicament we face, we must have faith and trust – true Bitachon as he called it – that there is nothing preventing Hashem from changing the situation, from saving us or from preparing causes that will change all the results. It's at these times that we must remember no matter how difficult the situation is, we must know that everything is from Hashem. It matters not whether we perceive this as good or otherwise. We must connect on the highest level and this will defeat the evil side and our deep-rooted belief will dissipate ours fear and give us courage to believe in the possibility of being saved, and that there is no more likelihood for bad than for good, no matter the odds presented. And in the end no matter the results, it must be for our good, it is good and this is what we need now.

Thinking about what this man was going through at that very moment I was moved by his strength and encouragement, his care for others and the fire in his eyes and in his soul.

It's a difficult task to find and locate and develop our inner faith and trust, but it is a task we all must work on.

Shabbat Shalom,
David Bibi

Rav Kook on the Perasha Five Double Letters

Of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, five are called 'double letters,' as they take on a different form when appearing at the end of a word. The five letters are Mem, Nun, Tzadi, Pay, and Chaf. When placed together as one word, they spell M-N-Tz-P-Ch.

מ נ צ פ כ
ם ׀ ץ ף ך

According to Talmudic tradition (Shabbat 104a), the dual form of these letters goes back to the prophets. The abbreviation M-N-Tz-P-Ch can be read as Min Tzophim — ‘from the prophets.’

From the Prophets

This claim — that the special form of these letters originated with the prophets — needs clarification. The Torah of Moses is complete and whole in itself. Even a prophet is not allowed to add or invent a new mitzvah. The Torah explicitly states,

“These are the decrees, laws and codes that God set between Himself and Israel at Mount Sinai, through the hand of Moses” (Lev. 26:46).

The phrase ‘These are the decrees’ indicates that only the decrees that Moses set down in the Torah are in fact between God and Israel. How could the prophets change the Torah by adding new shapes of letters?

The Talmud explains that the prophets did not actually introduce anything new. There always existed two ways to write these five letters. With the passage of time, however, it was forgotten which shape belongs at the end of the word, and which at the beginning and middle. The prophets did not devise the two forms; they merely recovered the lost knowledge of which letterform belongs at the end of the word.

Why Two Forms?

Still, we need to understand: why do these letters have dual forms? What is the significance of their relative position in the word? And why were the prophets (and not the sages or the grammarians) the ones who restored this knowledge?

Letters are more than just elements of speech. They are the building blocks of creation. The Sages taught, “The universe was created with ten utterances” (Avot 5:1). Each letter in the alphabet represents a fundamental force in the world.

Rav Kook explained that the ‘final forms’ — the shape that these letters take at the end of words — are the holiest. The final forms most accurately portray the sublime essence of each letter, fully expressing its ultimate purpose. To better understand this statement, we must analyze the morphological differences between the two forms of these letters.

With four of the letters — Nun, Tzadi, Pay, Chaf — the regular form is smaller and more cramped. The

‘leg’ of the letter is constrained and bent upwards. The form appearing at the end of the word, on the other hand, allows the ‘leg’ to stretch and extend itself fully. It is the final form that truly expresses the full content and power of these letters.

The two shapes of the letter Mem are distinguished in a different fashion. The regular Mem has a small opening at the bottom. It is called the Mem Petuchah, the Open Mem. It is open and revealed to all.

The final Mem is closed off on all sides. It is called the Mem Setumah, the Sealed Mem. Or perhaps — the Esoteric Mem. This form of Mem is more sublime than the regular Open Mem. Thus, the holiest written object, the stone tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments, contained only Sealed Memes, with the center part of the Mem hanging miraculously in place. The final Mem is closed off and concealed. It guards its inner secret, which due to its profound holiness may not be revealed to all.

Why is the more elevated form used at the end of the word? A hidden light appears at the ultimate vision of every noble matter. The hidden light of the M-N-Tz-P-Ch letters belongs to the end. The beginning and middle appearances of these letters are open and revealed. Their light steadily increases, until it brings us to the final, sublime conclusion.

The prophets are called tzofim, visionaries, as they were blessed with prophetic vision. Their greatness was that they could perceive the final outcome while still living in a flawed present. Understandably, it was these tzofim who sensed that the more elevated letterforms belong at the end.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 221-223. Adapted from Rosh Millin, pp. 35-36; Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 247-249.)

Summary of the Perasha

The first pasook in the second aliya of Parashat Emor says “ve’ki timkeru mimkar le’amitecha”. Rashi brings down two explanations. In his second explanation he explains the pasook is teaching us “kiy timkeru” when you go to sell (or buy) something mimkar le’amitecha, you should sell to your fellow (i.e., a fellow Jew). And Rashi explains the next words in the pasook (or kano miyad amitecha) come to include also making purchases from a fellow Jew. Thus the Torah is telling us here that when one does business he should try and give business to his fellow. This is an important lesson; to view our fellow Jews and fellow community members as our brothers. As our family. And once we view them as family it is logical we

should give them the business. If I am going to lease a car and my brother works for a leasing company and could make \$1,000 commission if I lease the car from him why wouldn't I lease it from him. And yes, sometimes it's a hassle. Maybe sometimes it costs us a few extra dollars or this store isn't as convenient for some reason but it's worth it! And it will surely be worth it when we get to shamayim. Hazal tell us the biggest form of sedaka is to enable one to make a living in an honorable way without having to seek charity. What better way to help a fellow Jew than to do business with them!

Behar - Holiness regarding land (shmita and yovel)

- 1- The issur of working the land on the years of shmita and yovel
- 2- Honesty in business, buying and selling land in regards to yovel, don't harass your fellow
- 3- The reward for keeping shmita, the issur of selling land permanently
- 4- Buying back the land of a relative who sold due to poverty
- 5- Buying back land. Preventing poverty by lending one who needs help. The obligation to lend w/o interest.
- 6- Laws regarding one who owns a Jewish slave or a non-Jewish slave
- 7- A Jew who sells himself to a non-Jew. The obligation to redeem him

Behukotai - Blessings for those who do and curses for those who don't keep the mitzvot

- 1- The berachot for keeping Hashem's mitzvot - parnasa
- 2- The berachot for keeping Hashem's mitzvot-peace, proo oorvoo, a renewed covenant
- 3- The curses if we do not keep Hashem's mitzvot - 45 curses
- 4- Items pledged to the Beit Hamikdash - one who pledges the value of a person, one who pledges an animal
- 5- Items pledged to the Beit Hamikdash - one who pledges a field he inherited
- 6- Items pledged to the Beit Hamikdash - one who pledges a field he bought, consecrating property
- 7- Maaser by fruit and by animals, maaser sheni

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"I will make the land desolate and your foes who dwell upon it will be desolate." (Vayikra 26:32)

Rabbi Raymond Beyda explains the above pasuk beautifully. The harsh warnings delivered in this week's parashah are considered more brutal than those presented in Parashat Ki Tabo because there,

the rebuke is a prophecy delivered by Moshe, like all other Torah portions, whereas here the words are spoken by Hashem directly to the people through the throat of Moshe. Yet, there are still words inserted in the rebuke that demonstrate Hashem's constant love for His people even when they do not behave as they should, thereby raising His ire.

When a man divorces his wife, so long as he doesn't marry another, she feels hope that perhaps he will reconsider and remarry her. However, should he take a second wife, all hope of reuniting is extinguished. Our Creator banished us from His land and burned down His House, yet He never replaced us with another nation. This demonstrates to us that He has not forgotten us. In a more physical way, His yearning for our return to Him is demonstrated by the fact that our homeland that we shared with Him in better days, remained desolate. For centuries, the land of Israel remained mostly uninhabitable and undesirable to the nations because they saw an unproductive landscape lacking oil, coal, and diamonds, and bountiful produce as well. Then about seventy years ago the Jewish people returned and the desert began to bloom.

When Ramban arrived in the Holy Land he dropped to the ground and lay crying over the barren sight he confronted. Moments later he stood upright with a happy smile on his face. His traveling companions were perplexed and inquired about his contradictory behavior.

"When I saw a land covered with rocks and thorns I thought, 'Can this be the land of milk and honey we were promised?' and therefore I cried. Then I realized that if the land was fruitful as in the days of old, the nations of the world would inhabit it. This would make our return difficult, if not impossible. So the undesirable physical state of our Homeland made me smile."

In our generation we have seen another instance of this blessing within a curse. When we abandoned the fields and hot-houses of Gush Katif they were flourishing with produce. Once the control passed to others, the land returned to a desolate wasteland. This desolation is a bright spot in an otherwise dismal situation.

Hashem promised, even as he delivered His rebuke, that the Covenant of our Patriarchs will never be forgotten. One day soon, be'ezrat Hashem, He will act upon His Covenant and return us to our Land speedily in our days, Amen.

Rabbi Reuven Semah

"If you will walk in my statutes..." (Vayikra 26:3)

The parashah begins a whole series of blessings promised to the Jewish people if they will "walk" in Hashem's statutes. Rashi tells us this means to toil in Torah study. This is the source of all the berachot,

and conversely, when the section dealing with the curses begins, Rashi tells us it is because there was no toil in Torah study.

The question is asked: Why is this command called a - statute - which means something with no understandable reason? Isn't Torah study something which is logical, and yet the Torah calls this - My statute? The answer is, to learn Torah just to know what to do is not sufficient. There is a misvah to toil in Torah study, to involve ourselves in the wisdom and beauty of Torah, regardless of whether it is relevant at this moment or not. This may not seem comprehensible to some and therefore it is called a . Yet here we see that this is the basis for all of the blessings and vice versa,

We have to ask ourselves truthfully, are we involved in Torah study? Do we have a set time to toil in the understanding of the Torah? Especially now, when the holiday of Shabuot, which reenacts the giving of the Torah to our generation, is right around the corner, we should be prepared to have an answer to this question. As we read the perashah and see how many blessings and, G-d forbid, curses are involved due to toiling in Torah study or the lack of it, we should commit ourselves to a set time of Torah learning, with toil and effort, so that we should merit all these blessings for ourselves and our families. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

**“With ten tests was our father Abraham tested.”
(Abot 5:3)**

The Hebrew word for test is “bechinah.” Why doesn't it say “Asarah bechinot nibchan Abraham”?

The word nes in Hebrew means not only a test, but also a banner, as the Psalmist says, “Natata lere'echa nes lehitnoset – You gave those who fear you a banner to raise themselves” (Tehillim 60:6). A banner is something which is raised high to show its beauty. Similarly, when Hashem tests an individual, the purpose is to lift him into a higher sphere. When the individual passes the test, he is spiritually elevated and exalted.

Hence, the verse can be read: “And Hashem exalted Abraham.” Through the trial, his hidden potential powers of faith were evoked and brought to fruition. (Vebibrata Bam)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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The Effort & The Results

Parashat Behukotai describes the blessings that God promises to bestow upon Beneh Yisrael in reward for their observance of the Torah. The Parasha begins with the verse, “If you follow My statutes, and you observe My commands and perform them...” Much

has been written about this opening verse of the Parasha, and among the famous commentaries is that of Rashi, who explains the phrase, “If you follow My statutes” to mean, “If you toil in Torah” (“She'tiheyu Amelim Ba'Torah”). According to Rashi, the Torah here refers not only to observing the Misvot, but to Torah learning.

Rashi's comments are cited very often in Yeshivot when the Rabbis wish to impress upon their students the importance of hard work and diligence in learning. It is significant that Rashi does not speak simply of “learning” Torah, but rather of “toiling” in Torah – “Amelut.” This means exerting effort, sweating, and breaking our heads to understand the words of Torah to the best of our ability. Rashi's comments are thus often invoked in the context of the unique importance of not just studying, but of putting in time, work and effort.

The importance of “Amelut,” as the Hafetz Haim (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, 1839-1933) explained, lies in a fundamental difference between Torah and all other endeavors. Outside the realm of Torah learning, what matters is the end product. If a salesman travels the world but fails to sell a single piece of merchandise, he won't get paid a dime. Even if he invested Herculean efforts and marketed the item with the highest levels of professional skill, the bottom line is that he failed to produce the desired results, and he will not get rewarded. This is not how it is in Torah. What matters most in the area of learning is the “Amelut” – the work and effort that one invests. A student can come to the yeshiva, spend several days knocking his head against a single piece of Gemara, and leave more confused than when he came in. Still, assuming he genuinely tried and made sincere efforts to understand the material, he will be rewarded no less than the most accomplished scholar. He fulfilled the mandate of “Amelut”, he put in the effort, and this is what is expected of us. As Rashi says, the rewards of Parashat Behukotai are primarily for the “Amelut,” for the hard work invested, regardless of the bottom-line accomplishments.

This is a vital lesson for parents and educators. Unfortunately, many of our Torah education systems place too strong an emphasis on the achievements, rather than the effort. The students who receive prizes, accolades and notoriety are the ones who score in the top percentiles on the exams and who win the contests – but not necessarily those who try the hardest. Parents, too, tend to focus too heavily on exam scores and grades rather than the child's attitude and efforts. We must remember that the goal in education is, ultimately, the “Amelut,” not the

grade. Of course, we want all our children to succeed and to know and understand the material. But this goal is secondary to the goal of producing young men and women who put in the effort, who try, who work hard. This is the message of "Amelut," and this is the message we ought to convey to our children and our students.

Rabbi Meyer Laniado Behar and Spirals

Patterns and habits can be powerful tools for success, through consistency and momentum. Unfortunately, they can be very detrimental as well, locking us into behavior which takes us further and further away from where we really want to go. Ben Azai gives discerning advice when he says we should run to a 'light' misva as we would for a 'stringent' misva, and we should run from sin. We need to know that our actions, even seemingly insignificant, can lead to a pattern of behavior. Ben Azai's next statement crystallizes this point: 'A misva leads to another misva and a sin leads to another sin; the 'reward' for a misva is a misva and the 'reward' for a sin is a sin[1].'

Perashat Behar, as understood by the Hakhamim, shows how one sin can start a person down a negative path[2]. The progression, the negative spiral, starts with this person transgressing by selling the seventh year's produce. This violates the first misva mentioned in our perasha. Every seven years the land of Israel needs to lie fallow and the crops from that year may not be sold. If a person did do business with this produce, the Torah states that he will not have success and then may need to sell his house. Thus this negative spiral begins, leading to him becoming a pagan's slave. This progression was articulated by R' Yose Bar R' Hannina[3]. He expresses that the sequence of misvot for the rest of this parasha articulate a series of events that will occur as a consequence of selling his produce[4]:

1. He will then be unsuccessful and forced to sell his property (Vayiqra 25:25)
2. Then he will have to sell his house (Vayiqra 25:29)
3. Then he will have to borrow at interest (Vayiqra 25:35-38)
4. Then he will need to sell himself as a servant (Vayiqra 25:39, 47)
5. Eventually, he will be the slave of an idolater (Vayiqra 25:47 see Rashi on seder Mishpahat Ger)

One action can take us down a path leading to increasingly detrimental behaviors, events, and situations. We should not say, "Just this time" or "It's not that big of a deal." One action can lead to

another. Once we begin a behavioral pattern, it becomes part of us and is very difficult to change. Even one inappropriate action can take us on a negative path. We not only become accustomed to that behavior and view the transgression more lightly- the consequences of our actions will continually worsen[5].

This same principle can be seen in the positive. Ben Azai said one should run to a 'light' misva as he would for a 'stringent' misva, since one misva will lead to another. When we are heading in the wrong direction, one of the best things we can do is to take even a small step in the right direction.

There is a parable about a man who wants to get rid of the darkness in his room. He tried with all of his might to push away the darkness, but could not make any strides; the room was just as dark as before. The man finally realized that the only way of ridding the room of darkness is to light a candle, thus bringing in the light. It is much harder to try and stop a negative behavior than it is to start a positive behavior. Like the man in the dark room, we cannot push away the darkness; we can only bring the light.

We should try our best not to end up in the dark room through taking the time and effort to think before each action we take. "Is what I'm about to say proper or improper?" "Is there something positive that will come out of this?" "Is it really worth it?" If the person who was selling the seventh years crops would have taken the time to realize the consequence of his actions, he may never have taken them in the first place. It is much harder to rectify a situation than to do it right the first time. It is always easier to not say something harsh to a friend or family member than to make amends after the fact.

Remember, each proper action will lead to another, eventually changing our entire behavior, leading us in the right direction. Let's decide, right now, to create a positive pattern of behavior in ourselves.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Meyer Laniado

[1] Pirqei Abot 4:2

[2] Beraita on Qiddushin 20a

[3] Loosely explained

[4] Assuming the person does not do teshuba

[5] The concept of one action leading to another and eventually taking a person further on a path is not a new one, but is one we need to constantly remember.

**VICTOR BIBI
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**Rabbi Wein
RETURNING HOME**

I recently returned home to my residence in Jerusalem after an extended stay in the United States. Returning home has always been a difficult and challenging exercise for me. It is not only the enormous amount of mail that seemingly awaits my attention or the frantic messages left on my Israeli phone – most of which are unimportant or now irrelevant – as much as it is the necessary readjustment to the realities of life that living on one's own brings.

There is a great deal of difference between being busy at home and busy while on the road traveling. The former is real and pressing while the latter is somehow more ephemeral and dreamlike. Spending money in a foreign country is always easier and less thought out than doing so at home. Though we are never to be thought of as permanent creatures in this world, we nevertheless feel ourselves rooted in our home environment. Being in a strange environment, no matter how hospitable and comfortable it may be, reinforces within us a state of temporary rootlessness and impermanence.

On returning home everything familiar becomes new again and it is not only jet lag that has to be overcome. One has to remember all of the places where certain objects were placed for safekeeping or convenience. Old habits need to be relearned and returning home opens a new chapter in one's life story.

But the old chapter still inhabits the home. One's home is crammed full of memories of varying emotional pleasantness and discomfort. Opening the door to one's home upon returning from a long absence opens the door to all of those memories as well. And one of the great challenges in life is how well one can deal with past memories in present situations.

Memory always associates individuals and events with the places where one was when those events occurred. Returning home is therefore not only a physical challenge but perhaps more importantly a psychological one as well. It takes time and effort to readjust this clock and to place it in proper

perspective regarding current life and actual situations.

Memory will not be denied its appearance in our minds and lives and, to me at least, it remains one of the great challenges of returning home. It is not the restocking of our pantry that troubles us. It is that this pantry is flooded with situations long gone but always residing in our hearts and homes. So, all of the steps that are necessary to be taken to return to normal living when one returns home are part psychological and also emotional.

Realizing this and coping with this challenge represents the true task involved in returning home after a long absence. It is not for naught that the rabbis of the Talmud frowned upon too much travel. It is simply too taxing to have to always return home.

It is especially challenging to return to Israel and Jerusalem. For then, not only are our personal memories revived and strengthened but the religious and national memory of the Jewish people have to be dealt with. There are many tempting places in the world where one can live in relative comfort. But they are devoid and empty of lasting Jewish content. They may have a past but deep down in our hearts and minds we all recognize that any future that they may possess is at best limited and in the eyes of history, only temporary.

So, when one returns to Israel one accepts upon one's self not only the memories of the past but the vision of the Jewish future as well. And for many Jews that is a very daunting task. The little four-year-old girl getting off the EIAI plane asks her mother about those strange letters on the signs. The mother is forced to explain to her, probably for the first time in the lifetime of the child, about the Hebrew language, the Jewish people and that Israel is the Jewish state. Such are the burdens and joys of returning home.

**Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks
Minority Rights**

One of the most striking features of the Torah is its emphasis on love of, and vigilance toward, the ger, the stranger:

Do not oppress a stranger; you yourselves know how it feels to be strangers, because you were strangers in Egypt. (Ex. 23:9)

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He

defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger residing among you, giving them food and clothing. You are to love those who are strangers, for you yourselves were strangers in Egypt. (Deut 10:17-19)

The Sages went so far as to say that the Torah commands us in only one place to love our neighbour but thirty-six times to love the stranger (Baba Metsia 59b).

What is the definition of a stranger? Clearly the reference is to one who is not Jewish by birth. It could mean one of the original inhabitants of the land of Canaan. It could mean one of the "mixed multitude" who left Egypt with the Israelites. It might mean a foreigner who has entered the land seeking safety or a livelihood.

Whatever the case, immense significance is attached to the way the Israelites treat the stranger. This was what they were meant to have learned from their own experience of exile and suffering in Egypt. They were strangers. They were oppressed. Therefore they knew "how it feels to be a stranger." They were not to inflict on others what was once inflicted on them.

The Sages held that the word *ger* might mean one of two things. One was a *ger tzedek*, a convert to Judaism who had accepted all its commands and obligations. The other was the *ger toshav*, the "resident alien", who had not adopted the religion of Israel but who lived in the land of Israel. Behar spells out the rights of such a person. Specifically:

If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a resident alien, so they can continue to live among you. (Lev. 25:35)

There is, in other words, an obligation to support and sustain a resident alien. Not only does he or she have the right to live in the Holy Land, but they have the right to share in its welfare provisions. Recall that this is a very ancient law indeed, long before the Sages formulated such principles as "the ways of peace", obligating Jews to extend charity and care to non-Jews as well as Jews.

What then was a *ger toshav*? There are three views in the Talmud. According to Rabbi Meir it was anyone who took it upon himself not to worship idols. According to the Sages, it was anyone who committed himself to keeping the seven Noahide commandments. A third view, more stringent, held that it was someone who had undertaken to keep all the commands of the Torah except one, the

prohibition of meat not ritually slaughtered (Avodah Zarah 64b). The law follows the Sages. A *ger toshav* is thus a non-Jew living in Israel who accepts the Noahide laws binding on everyone.

Ger toshav legislation is thus one of the earliest extant forms of minority rights. According to the Rambam there is an obligation on Jews in Israel to establish courts of law for resident aliens to allow them to settle their own disputes – or disputes they have with Jews – according to the provisions of Noahide law. The Rambam adds: "One should act towards resident aliens with the same respect and loving kindness as one would to a fellow Jew" (Hilkhot Melachim 10:12).

The difference between this and later "ways of peace" legislation is that the ways of peace apply to non-Jews without regard to their beliefs or religious practice. They date from a time when Jews were a minority in a predominantly non-Jewish, non-monotheistic environment. "Ways of peace" are essentially pragmatic rules of what today we would call good community relations and active citizenship in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. *Ger toshav* legislation cuts deeper. It is based not on pragmatism but religious principle. According to the Torah you don't have to be Jewish in a Jewish society and Jewish land to have many of the rights of citizenship. You simply have to be moral.

One biblical vignette portrays this with enormous power. King David has fallen in love and had an adulterous relationship with Batsheva, wife of a *ger toshav*, Uriah the Hittite. She becomes pregnant. Uriah meanwhile has been away from home as a soldier in Israel's army. David, afraid that Uriah will come home, see that his wife is pregnant, realise that she has committed adultery, and come to discover that the king is the guilty party, has Uriah brought home. His pretext is that he wants to know how the battle is going. He then tells Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife before returning, so that he will later assume that he himself is the father of the child. The plan fails. This is what happens:

When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"

Uriah said to David, "The Ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" (2 Samuel 11:6-11)

Uriah's utter loyalty to the Jewish people, despite the fact that he is not himself Jewish, is contrasted with King David, who has stayed in Jerusalem, not been with the army, and instead had a relationship with another man's wife. The fact that Tanakh can tell such a story in which a resident alien is the moral hero, and David, Israel's greatest king, the wrongdoer, tells us much about the morality of Judaism.

Minority rights are the best test of a free and just society. Since the days of Moses they have been central to the vision of the kind of society God wants us to create in the land of Israel. How vital, therefore, that we take them seriously today.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And you should not cause sorrow, a man to his fellowman, and you shall fear your G-d, for I am Hashem your G-d" (25:17)

Although this is said in the matter of money dealings, as is evident from a foregoing verse, yet the fact that this commandment is a repetition of verse 14 indicates an especial emphasis. You shall not cause sorrow to your fellowman in any instance, even when no money is involved. "The verse speaks of causing sorrow by words" (Baba Metzia 58B). The word "Tonu" (from which we have the expression 'Onaat Devarim') is derived from 'On', as in the verse "I have not eaten thereof in my mourning ('Oni')" (Devarim 26:14). Thus we have a specific 'Lav' (negative Mitzvah) against speaking words that hurt a fellowman's feelings.

In three ways the hurtful words are more severe than wronging a fellowman in money matters.

1) The previous admonition (25:14) which speaks of money matters is not accompanied by the words "You shall fear your G-d" (although indeed even there he should fear Hashem). But this verse which is specifically intended for hurtful words is specifically accompanied by the admonition "You shall fear your G-d".

2) The previous admonition is against a wrong done to your fellowman's money, but this admonition is against hurting your fellowman personally. Because

unkind words cause hurt and sometimes "there is one that speaks like the piercings of a sword" (Mishle 12:18).

3) A money-wrong can be rectified by returning the money, but words cannot be rectified, or the hurt is already done.

The expression "A man to his fellowman" adds to the gravity of this sin,

1) in the sense of the loyalty to your fellow Israelite with whom you should feel a togetherness ('Amito' derived from 'Im', 'with' or 'together').

2) Because of the great love that Hashem has for your fellowman (19:18).

The first of these two considerations, the loyalty to your togetherness (Amito), imposes a greater responsibility toward kin/family, and the closest togetherness is that of a husband and wife. When married persons engage in exchanging hurtful words, "like the piercings (plural) of a sword" and they cause to each other hurt, and even cause harm to the mate's health "like the piercings (again and again) of a sword", they indeed have reason to be afraid of Hashem's retribution.

"The one who is with you in Torah and Mitzvot (Amito), do not cause him any hurt" (Baba Metzia 59A).

And surely "A man should always beware of causing sorrow to his wife: (ibid.), for the above mentioned reasons and also because she is more easily hurt (ibid.) Quoted from "A Kingdom of Cohanim" by Rabbi Miller ZT'L