

SHABBAT PARSHIOT NETZAVIM - VAYELECH - HA'AZINU 5771 -2011 · VOL. 18 NO. 52

S P E C I A L H I G H H O L I D A Y I S S U E

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Nitzavim/Vayelech

How's YOUR STANDING?

"You are standing today, all of you, before G-d..." (29:9)

Parking a car in downtown Jerusalem has become something a nightmare. There was one fellow who had his own ingenious solution. After driving round the block a couple of times, he would pull up to a curb with red stripes. Getting out of the car, he would reach for his trusty can of black spray-paint, and proceed to spray out the red stripes the entire length of his car.

How much of the time do we do just that in our relationship with G-d?

How much of the time do we try and alter the rules to suit ourselves and our own ideas of right and wrong?

Rosh Hashana is a time to come clean, to clean off the spray paint from the sidewalks of our lives.

Before we get more than a ticket.

Fearing G-d is out of fashion right now. It's acceptable to be in awe of His Majesty, to sit on the top of a mountain and commune with Beyond. But fearing? Come on, G-d's a nice G-d. He won't really punish me for speaking *lashon hara* or for *adjusting* my income tax a little. All that punishment stuff is really for kids anyway. Why do I need something so crass

as fear when I have awe?!

There can be no true awe without real fear.

The essence of fearing G-d is to accustom ourselves to be aware that He is watching us all the time; that He knows what we are thinking; that He sees every move we make – every move that we don't make but would like to.

If there is a time in the day when we visualize standing in front of the Creator more than any other, it is during the *Amida* prayer that we say three times daily. (*Amida*, quite literally means, "standing.") If there is a day in the year when we try to visualize standing in front of the Creator more than any other, it is Rosh Hashana.

Rosh Hashana, a day that should strike fear into our hearts, "...who will live, and who will die ...who by water, and who by fire." Who in a bus, and who in a restaurant...

Rosh Hashana is a time to come clean, to clean off the spray paint from the sidewalks of our lives.

Before we get more than a ticket.

Source: Story heard from Rabbi Dov Brezak

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Nitzavim

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers all the people, young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women, in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship because, in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will result from failure to heed G-d's *mitzvot*. Descendants of that generation and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desola-

tion of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all — the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them in favor of powerless idols. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually G-d will bring them back to *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe tells the people to remember that fulfilling the Torah is not an impossibility; rather it's within the grasp of every Jew. The *parsha* dramatically concludes with Moshe comparing the Jewish People's choice to follow the Torah to a choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

continued on page twelve

- Which *chelev* (animal fats) are forbidden for consumption
- Whether butchers can be believed that they removed the *gid hanasheh* and *chelev* from meat they are selling
- Sending a non-Jew meat with the *gid hanasheh* in it
- The prohibition against deception of pretending to do a favor
- Meat that disappeared from view
- Permissible and forbidden decisions based on omens
- Identifying signs or recognition as proof of ownership of a lost item
- How much of the *gid hanasheh* must be removed and what is the penalty for eating it
- If the part of the animal with the *gid hanasheh* was mistakenly cooked with the *gid* intact
- When meat and milk were cooked together
- The status of *kachal*
- How does a forbidden item become nullified when mixed with a large quantity of kosher matter

SUPERSTITION OR LOGIC?

“Do not indulge in the sorcery of *nichush* (determining actions based on omen).” (*Vayikra* 19:26)
This is the Torah prohibition against basing decisions on superstitions like idolaters do. The *gemara*'s example is someone making the decision not to go someplace because food fell from his mouth or his cane fell from his hand. In modern times the more common superstitions have to do with black cats crossing the path or walking under a ladder.

A problem that arises in our *gemara* is that Yonatan, son of King Shaul, is mentioned as having indulged in *nichush*. In the war of Israel against the Pelishtim he undertook a courageous mission to wipe out a strongly defended garrison of the enemy aided only by his armor bearer. He told him that they would determine whether they had a chance for victory by testing the reaction of the enemy defenders to seeing

them approach. “If they say to us, ‘Wait until we come to you’, we will stand in our place. But if they say ‘Come up to us’, then we will go up to them for G-d has delivered them into our hand, and this shall be a sign to us.” (*Shmuel* I 14:9-10)

Why Yonatan's decision, which resulted in a great victory, is not considered forbidden *nichush* is dealt with by Tosefot who explains that Yonatan was merely saying this to instill confidence in his armor bearer but had already made up his mind to attack in any case. The *Kesef Mishneh* in his commentary on Rambam (Laws of Idolatry 11:4) takes a different approach. Yonatan was not basing his decision on the omen of the enemy's reaction. He was rather testing whether the enemy had the courage to resist his attack. Logic, rather than superstition, would dictate that an enemy who is afraid to come towards him was weakened by fear and could easily be overcome. His logic was vindicated by his victory.

• *Chullin* 85b

שמחה

The Ohr Somayach Family wishes you and yours and all of Israel a year filled with happiness, health and peace.

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This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.

- When a piece of forbidden *nevailah* meat is cooked together with kosher pieces
- If *gid hanasheh* prohibition applies to non-kosher animals
- When did the ban on *gid hanasheh* begin
- Is there a prohibition to eat flesh from a live non-kosher animal
- How thought can affect the status of a forbidden food
- Is one guilty of violating a prohibition when eating forbidden food which is already forbidden under another category
- Does forbidden food stuck between the teeth count as part of the amount for which there is a punishment
- The prohibition against mixing meat with milk
- Which meats come under this Torah prohibition
- Chicken and cheese on the same table
- Waiting between meat and milk meals
- Washing hands before and after meals
- Evil spirits and black magic
- Which waters are kosher for mitzvah of washing hands

WASHING HANDS BEFORE & AFTER MEAL

Washing hands before a meal is a mitzvah and washing them at the end of the meal is an obligation. This statement by Rabbi Idi bar Avin in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak bar Ashyan begs an explanation as to the difference between a mitzvah and an obligation since we are commanded by our Sages to do both.

Tosefot cites the explanation of Rabbeinu Tam based on a *gemara* (*Mesechta Eiruvim* 17a) which mentions washing hands as one of the things soldiers engaged in war are exempt from. The Sage Abaye qualifies this exemption by ruling that it applies only to washing before the meal but not to washing them after the meal. The reason for this is that

Rabbi Chiya has pointed out that the need for washing hands after the meal is to cleanse any Sodomite salt which may have clung to the fingers and which can cause blindness. Since this washing is for health protection, it cannot be dispensed with even in time of war.

This, concludes Tosefot, is the distinction between a mitzvah and an obligation. The obligation to protect the eyes is inviolable.

An added dimension to this distinction is provided by the *Sefer Halachot Gedolot*. We are required to make a blessing upon washing the hands before a meal but not before washing afterwards. This is so because the latter washing is not for a religious purpose but rather for human welfare.

• *Chullin* 105a

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- Rules of washing hands before eating
- Keeping meat and dairy separate
- When a drop of milk falls upon meat being cooked
- The milk of *kachal* (the udder) and the blood of the heart
- What permitted food tastes like forbidden meat and milk
- The strange behavior of the visiting Sage from Pumpadita
- How liver may be prepared for consumption

- Separate dishes for meat and dairy
- Whether salted or pickled matter is considered like cooked
- Salting meat together with fish
- Fowl meat and milk
- Forbidden meat cooked with kosher milk and vice versa

PROHIBITION PARADOX

“Everything which the Torah prohibited something similar to it was permitted.” This observation made by the wife of Rabbi Nachman was supported by a number of examples. The first was the prohibition against consuming blood and the permission to eat liver whose taste is similar to that of blood.

Maharsha explains that the message conveyed by this apparent paradox is that the prohibitions contained in the

Torah are Heavenly decrees whose purpose is not always understood by our limited intelligence. One might assume that the ban on blood is based on the disgusting nature of such consumption. If that were true, then liver would also be in the same category. By permitting the consumption of liver with its bloody taste the Torah taught us that this is not so, and the reason we must abstain from blood is simply because we are thus commanded by G-d.

• *Chullin 109b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“I have a master in Babylon!”

• *Rabbi Yochanan (upon recognizing the greatness of the Sage Shmuel) - Chullin 95a*

“In regard to this matter (how long to wait between meat and dairy meals) I compare to my father like vinegar compares to wine.”

• *The Sage Shmuel - Chullin 105a*

“One who feeds another is not required to wash his hands, while the eater is required to do so even if he does not touch the food.”

• *Ruling of the Gemara - Chullin 107b*

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Nine-Eleven and Seven-Ten

Reflections of Twin Towers and Twin Dates

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

9-11, '01 is a date which entered history alongside July 4, '76 and Dec. 7, '41 as milestones in the long struggle of the American people to achieve independence and freedom from tyranny for themselves and the rest of the world.

7-10, '49 is also an extremely important date for the Jewish People. It refers to the tenth day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar and designates the first Yom Kippur in the 2449th year of the world since Creation.

What do these two dates, more than three millennia apart, have in common?

9-11 woke up the free world to the awful threat posed by the axis of evil and the need to eradicate that evil even if it meant going to war.

7-10 was the day when the battle of the Jewish People against another sort of evil was crowned with victory, as G-d declared that He had forgiven them for their betrayal in worshipping the golden calf.

This day was Divinely determined as the Yom Kippur Day of Atonement on which Jews would each year fast, repent their sins and pray for forgiveness. In the time of the Holy Temple it was also a day of special sacrifices and rituals for the purpose of achieving such atonement.

There is an important parallel between these two dates and the battles they represent. As Jews who view all of history as a Divinely directed scenario, we perceive every event – the “days of infamy” from Pearl Harbor to Twin Towers and religious terrorism from Inquisition to Intifada – as Heavenly alarms to arouse us from our slumbers and eradicate the evil that lurks within our hearts. The awful form which that alarm takes is a reflection of our own shortcomings so that we may be aware of where we have gone wrong. The great thinkers of the Torah

world have applied this theme to the broad scope of Jewish history and the experience of all Mankind.

It may therefore be fair to speculate that the terror which shocked America and the world on 9-11 is a magnified reflection of the terror which exists in the civilized world and the universal indifference which individuals and governments display towards it. There is no need to seek this terror only in the robberies and murders which form a blot on all societies. Is the rampant abuse of spouses and children not a form of terror? Is drunken and reckless driving which claim more lives than the attacks of terrorists not a form of terror?

And is condemning the self-defense actions of a Jewish State fighting for survival against the worst kind of terror not a form of complicity with terror?

Yom Kippur – 7-10 – is the climax of a ten-day period of soul-searching and self-improvement which begins with the Rosh Hashana New Year. On that day the sound of the Shofar ram horn is heard in synagogues throughout the world. As Maimonides points out, the Shofar sound is a siren to wake us up to the need to take stock of our lives and improve our ways.

Of course those who perpetrate evil must be battled, and those who are battling it must be commended for their staunch commitment to this cause. But each of us must strive to eliminate the evil within our own lives and our own societies. We all pray for the victory of the forces of freedom in the war against terror launched by the tragedy of 9-11. But we also pray that our efforts to eliminate the terror within us will result in the Divine declaration made on the first 7-10 and echoed every Yom Kippur:

“I have forgiven you as you requested.”

Nitzavim / Vayelech

Nitzavim

1. Why did Moshe gather the Jewish People together on the day of his death?
2. Who are the wood-cutters and water-drawers mentioned in verse 29:10?
3. How do two parties “pass” into a covenant?
4. What is the connection between the verse “*Atem nitzavim*” and the curses in the previous parsha?
5. Why can't G-d disassociate himself from the Jewish People?
6. How many curses were listed in *Parshat Ki Tavo*?
7. Which two leaders followed Moshe's example and assembled the people at the end of their rule?
8. With whom did Moshe make the covenant and oath?
9. Why did the Jewish People see only idols of wood and stone in Egypt?
10. What is meant by the punishment of “adding drunkenness to thirst” (29:18)?

Vayelech

11. How old was Moshe when he died?
12. Why was Moshe unable “to go out and come in” (31:2)?
13. What happened to Moshe's Torah knowledge on the day of his death?
14. How did Moshe foresee the relationship between Yehoshua and the Elders?
15. What did G-d tell Yehoshua concerning his relationship with the Elders?
16. How often does the *hakhel* (assembly of the Jewish People) take place?
17. Why does the Torah call the year of the *hakhel* the “*shemita* year”?
18. What sections of the Torah does the king read at the *hakhel*?
19. In what physical location does the king read at the *hakhel*?
20. Why were the men commanded to come to the gathering?

Nitzavim

1. 29:9 - To initiate them into the covenant with G-d.
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who came to join the Jewish People.
3. 29:11 - The two parties place objects in two parallel lines and pass between them.
4. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, “Who can survive such curses?” Moshe comforted them, saying, “You've done a lot to anger G-d, and yet — ‘*Atem nitzavim*’ — G-d didn't destroy you ...you're still standing before Him.”
5. 29:12 - Because He told them He wouldn't and because He swore to the *Avot* (Patriarchs) that the Jewish People would always remain His nation.
6. 29:12 - Ninety-eight.
7. 29:12 - Yehoshua and Shmuel.
8. 29:14 - With the people standing before him and all future generations.
9. 29:16 - Because these were exposed openly. The idols of gold and silver, however, were locked away by their owners for fear of theft.
10. 29:18 - Even unintentional sins will be considered by G-d as if they were committed intentionally.

Answers to Netzavim Vayelechs Questions!

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

“Drunkenness” refers to sins committed unintentionally. “Thirst” refers to sins committed intentionally.

Vayelech

11. 31:2 - Exactly 120.
12. 31:2 - G-d did not let him because the power of leadership was being transferred to Yehoshua.
13. 31:2 - The well-springs of knowledge were closed up for him.
14. 31:7 - He foresaw that they would work in partnership.
15. 31:7 - That he alone would be the leader — for there can only be one leader in each generation.
16. 31:10 - Once every seven years, in the first year of the new *shemita* period.
17. 31:10 - Because the laws of *shemita* still applied to the harvest.
18. 31:11 - From Devarim: 1:1-6:9; 11:13-21; and 14:22-28:69.
19. 31:11 - On a wooden platform erected in the *azara*.
20. 31:12 - In order to learn.

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING UP

The last Shabbat of the year 5771 is followed in many communities by the recital of the Selichot prayers leading up to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

More than prayers the Selichot service is an appeal to Heaven for forgiveness of the sins committed in the year gone by. It is also a time for Jews to reflect on the spiritual heights they are capable of reaching if they truly repent their errors and resolve not to repeat them.

Perhaps a *mashal* for aspiring to such heights can be seen in the competition between two oil-rich Arab states as to who can build a taller building. Envious of the construction in

Dubai of the world's tallest building (838 meters), the Saudi Arabians decided to build an even taller one (one kilometer) at an estimated cost of 1.23 billion dollars. (How ironic that the company handling this project is headed by the brother of Osama Bin Laden who was responsible for the Twin Towers tragedy!)

As others look upward in terms of towers, we must look upwards to Heaven and aspire to reach greater heights of service to G-d and man in the year to come.

A SONG OF SORROW AND HOPE

“They provoked Me with a non-god, angered Me with their vanities; so shall I provoke them with a non-people, with a vile nation shall I anger them.” (Devarim 32:21)

These words from the Torah portion read on Shabbat Shuvah between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur seem to prophesy the current trouble caused by the recognition granted to the so-called “Palestinian People” by so much of the international community.

The song of *Parshat Ha'azinu* which Moshe spoke to his people just before his death is an encapsulated history of the Jewish people, its sins and its sufferings. It ends, however, on an encouraging note with G-d declaring “I shall return vengeance upon My enemies” and “will avenge the blood of His servants.” (Devarim 32:41, 43)

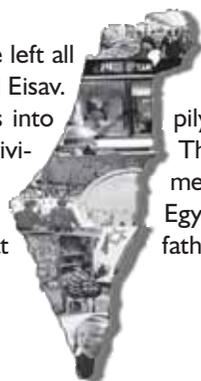
In order to be worthy of this, we must take advantage of the “Days of Awe” by fully returning to G-d and thus securing Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

YAAKOV – A FAIR DIVISION

When the Patriarch Yitzchak passed away he left all his possessions to his two sons, Yaakov and Eisav. Let us divide everything our father left us into two parts, proposed Eisav, and I will exercise my privilege as firstborn to choose the portion I favor. What did Yaakov do? He took all of the wealth that they had inherited from their father and made that



one portion. The other portion was Eretz Yisrael. Eisav, of course, chose the wealth while Yaakov happily took Eretz Yisrael with the Machpela Cave in it. This division was duly recorded and it was this document for which the sons of Yaakov sent a messenger to Egypt when Eisav challenged their right to bury their father in that patriarchal burial cave.

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Ha'azinu

1. Why were heaven and earth specifically chosen as witnesses?
2. How is the Torah like rain?
3. How is G-d "faithful without injustice"?
4. Why is G-d called "tzaddik"?
5. How many major floods did G-d bring upon the world?
6. What group of people does the Torah call "fathers"? Cite an example.
7. Why did G-d separate the world's nations into exactly 70?
8. Why is the merit of the Jewish People's ancestry called a "rope"?
9. How is G-d's behavior toward the Jewish People like an eagle's behavior toward its offspring?
10. Regarding the Jewish People's punishment, G-d says, "I will spend my arrows on them." What is the positive aspect of this phrase?
11. How does the idea of "chillul G-d" prevent the nations from destroying the Jewish People?
12. What will happen to the nations that conquer the Jewish People?
13. When G-d overturns a nation that persecutes the Jewish People, His attribute of Mercy is "replaced" by which attribute?
14. When G-d punishes the heathen nations, for whose sins does He exact punishment?
15. How will G-d's punishment change the way the nations view the Jewish People?
16. On what day was *Ha'azinu* taught to the Jewish People?
17. Verse 32:44 calls Yehoshua "Hoshea." Why?
18. In verse 32:47, what does "it is not empty from you" mean?
19. Why did G-d tell Moshe that he would die a similar death to that of Aharon?
20. If Moshe had spoken to the rock rather than striking it, what would the Jewish People have learned?

Answers to Ha'azinu's Questions!

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

1. 32:1 - They endure forever.
2. 32:2 - The Torah gives life and promotes growth like rain.
3. 32:4 - He is "faithful" by rewarding the righteous, and "without injustice" by rewarding even the wicked for any good deeds.
4. 32:4 - All will agree that His judgments are righteous.
5. 32:7 - Two. One in the time of Adam's grandson Enosh and one in the time of Noach.
6. 32:7 - The Prophets. Elisha called the Prophet Eliyahu "My Father." (*Melachim II 2:12*)
7. 32:8 - To correspond to the 70 *Bnei Yisrael* who entered Egypt.
8. 32:9 - Their merit is "woven from" the merits of the *Avot*.
9. 32:12 - He mercifully wakes them gently, hovering over them, and carrying them on His "wings".
10. 32:23 - "The arrows will be spent" implies that the afflictions will cease but the Jewish People will not.
11. 32:27 - The nations would attribute their success to their might and the might of their gods. G-d would not let His name be desecrated like this.
12. 32:35 - They will eventually be punished.
13. 32:41 - His attribute of Justice.
14. 32:42 - For their sins and the sins of their ancestors.
15. 32:43 - They will view the Jewish People as praise-worthy for cleaving to G-d.
16. 32:44 - The Shabbat upon which Moshe died.
17. 32:44 - To indicate that although he was the Jewish People's leader, he still maintained a humble bearing.
18. 32:47 - That you will receive reward for studying Torah and that there is nothing meaningless in the Torah.
19. 32:50 - Because Moshe wanted this.
20. 32:51 - The Jewish People would have reasoned as follows: If a rock, which receives neither reward nor punishment, obeys G-d's commands, all the more so should we.

ROSH HASHANA JUDGMENT

From: Melanie

Dear Rabbi,

Why is Rosh Hashana considered the Day of Judgment and what exactly is being judged and how?

Dear Melanie,

Rosh Hashana was ordained as a day of judgment for two reasons: The first is that on this day, the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, the creation of the world was completed and it was the Divine intention that the world be ruled by the trait of strict justice. Hence the beginning of the year was marked as the 'Day of Judgment'. The second reason is that on this day Adam was judged, he repented, and he was forgiven.

Rambam teaches that every person has both merits and transgressions. If one's merits outweigh one's transgressions, he or she is considered to be righteous and judged for life and blessing. If the transgressions outweigh the merits, one is considered wicked and judged negatively, as in the verse "I have wounded you...because of the enormity of your sins" (Jer. 30:14). If they are basically equivalent, the judgment hangs in the balance till a person tips the scale in either direction affecting the judgment accordingly.

The same is true regarding an entire country. If the collective merit of all the inhabitants is greater than their sins, the people are considered to be righteous and the country is judged favorably for the coming year. If their collective sins are greater than their merits, they are considered to be collectively wicked and the country is judged for damage and destruction, as the verse states, "For the outcry from Sodom and Amorah is great" (Gen.

18:20). The same is also true of the entire world, as in the verse regarding the Flood, "And G-d saw that man's evil was great" (Gen 6:5).

However, this judgment is not quantitative but rather qualitative. There are individual acts of merit that far outweigh many sins, as in the verse, "Because in him there is found some good" (Kings I 14:13); and, likewise, there are individual sins that outweigh many acts of merit as in the verse, "One sinner can cause much good to be lost" (Eccl. 9:18). The determination of this is dependent solely on the judgment of G-d, Whose knowledge is all-encompassing, for only He can truly evaluate merit and sin.

Therefore, each person should see himself during the entire year as if he were half meritorious in order to be encouraged by the recognition of his goodness, and half guilty in order to be spurred to rectify what's wrong or missing. Likewise, he should consider his country and even the entire world as being in the same state of hanging in the balance. Thus, if he commits one single sin, he is capable of tipping the scale of transgression for himself, his immediate environment, and the entire world toward destruction. Similarly, if he performs one mitzvah, he can tip the scale of merit for himself, others and the world causing salvation and deliverance. This is as in the verse, "And the *tzaddik* is the foundation of the world" (Prov. 10:25). Meaning, because he is a righteous *tzaddik*, he tips the scale of the world to the side of merit and saves it.

Sources:

- Rambam, *Mishna Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 1:1-3*
- *The Book of Our Heritage, 1997 edition, pp. 12-13*

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KEEPING YOUR WORD

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Answer: The *Mishna (Bava Metzia 44a)* rules that although the purchase is not halachically consummated until one takes physical possession of a portable item, the one who backs out after money has been given is reminded that “The One Who punished the people of the Generation of the Flood and Who punished the people of the Generation of the Dispersal (following the construction of the Tower of Bavel) will punish the one who does not keep his word.”

Even if there was no exchange of money there is a moral obligation for one to keep his promise to give a gift or make

a deal unless the loss to the one who wishes to renege is so substantial that we can assume that the other party never took the promise seriously.

There is an even loftier ethical standard mentioned in the Talmud of a Sage who felt committed to sell an item at the first and lowest price offered him while he was reciting the *Shema* and could not respond. Since he had decided in his heart to sell at that price, he was unwilling to accept payment of the higher price mistakenly offered by the buyer who misinterpreted his silence as bargaining.

In conclusion, keeping your word is a serious matter and a competent halachic authority should be consulted when the occasion arises for failing to do so.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

CHARITY SAVES FROM DEATH

“**C**ould you please spare a chicken for me? I have hardly anything to eat!” This was the heartrending appeal a Jerusalem Torah scholar heard from the poor woman who had just knocked on his door. The trouble was that his financial situation was not much better than hers. With great difficulty he had somehow managed to secure two chickens for the sparse holiday meals for his very large family. After a momentary effort to explain his helpless situation, he quickly switched his mental gears and told the lady to wait while he went to fetch one of those chickens from his refrigerator.

The sight that greeted him when he opened the door of the fridge almost caused him to faint. There lay his three-year old son, unconscious and blue from the cold. He had playfully locked himself inside, and his cries were muffled by the locked door. Emergency medical help was immediately summoned and they were able to revive the boy. The attending doctor told the father that had the child been discovered a minute later he would have been beyond saving.

This was a timely reminder that “Charity saves from death” and that someone may give away a chicken and in return receive a child.

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THE END OF THE SONG

“And Moshe spoke the words of this song into the ears of the entire congregation of Yisrael, until their conclusion” (31:30)

If you own a CD player or cassette machine, try the following experiment: Turn up the volume until it won't go any further. (Before you do this, take out the disk - this experiment will not work if you have perforated eardrums.) Nothing is playing on your CD now, right? So what you are hearing is — nothing. Right? I doubt you'll hear nothing. You'll hear noise. A lot of noise. Noise, however, is a subjective term. One man's music is another man's jumbo jet. You could say that you are listening to electrons singing. Every transistor, every resistor, every IC has its own 'song.' When you apply a current to it, it sings.

BLOWUP

There was a famous film in the sixties in which a photographer unwittingly photographs a murder. While analyzing 'proofs' of a park scene, he sees something under a tree that he can't quite make out. He goes back to the darkroom and proceeds to make larger and larger enlargements of this little piece of film. In the end, his trained photographer's eye detects a human body under the tree, but to the audience in the cinema the picture looks like a *pointillist* abstraction filled with dots. Film is made up of silver crystals. If you blow-up a negative enough, the image will yield to the background fabric of the film itself: The 'noise' of the photograph. Or is it its 'song'?

THE SONG BEGINS WITH A BANG

When Bell Labs built a giant antenna in Holmdel, New Jersey, in 1960, it was part of a very early satellite transmission system called *Echo*.

However, two employees of Bell Labs, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson had their eye on the Holmdel antenna for quite a different purpose. They realized that it would make a superb radio telescope.

At first, they were disappointed. When they started their research, they couldn't get rid of a background "noise". It was like trying to tune into your favorite radio program and it being obscured with static. This annoyance was a uniform signal in the microwave range that seemed to come from all directions. Everyone assumed it came from the telescope itself.

They checked out everything, trying to find the source of this excess radiation. They even pointed the antenna right at New York City. There's no bigger urban radio 'noise' than the Big Apple. It wasn't urban interference. It wasn't radiation from our galaxy or extraterrestrial radio sources. It wasn't even the pigeons. Penzias and Wilson kicked them out of the big horn-shaped antenna and swept out all their

droppings.

The source remained constant throughout the four seasons, so it couldn't have come from the solar system. Nor could it be the product of a 1962 above-ground nuclear test, because within a year that fallout would have shown a decrease. They had to conclude it was not the machine and it was not random noise causing the radiation.

What was it then that they were hearing?

Eventually they came to the staggering conclusion that what they were hearing was the very first moments of the creation of the universe.

THE SONG THAT HAS NO BEGINNING

The discovery in 1963 of the cosmic microwave background of the Big Bang was proof that the universe was born at a definite moment.

In the 1950s, there were two theories about the origin of the universe. The first was called the Steady State Theory. It had been put forward by Hermann Bondi, Thomas Gold and Fred Hoyle and held that the universe was homogeneous in space and time and had remained like that forever — in "a steady state." This was essentially what Greek culture had posited: the universe was *kadmon* and had always existed.

The rival, and at the time, more controversial theory, sought to incorporate the expansion of the universe into its framework. Edwin Hubble had shown in 1929 that galaxies are moving away from one another at remarkable speeds, implying that the space between galaxies is constantly expanding. A few physicists led by George Gamow had taken this notion and argued that the separation between galaxies must have been smaller in the past.

If one extrapolated this idea to its logical conclusion it meant that at one point in time the universe had been infinitely dense. Using the laws of physics Gamow and his colleagues were able to show that the point — which was also infinitely hot — corresponded to the moment of Creation. Everything in the universe had emerged from this incredibly dense and hot state in a cataclysmic event astronomers call "the Big Bang."

The conflict between the theories was resolved by Penzias and Wilson in 1965 when they discovered that the mysterious radio signal was cosmic radiation that had survived from the first moments of the universe. It was proof of the 'Big Bang'.

We know when that 'Big Bang' happened. In the Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashana, we find "Says Rabbi Eliezer, the world was created in Tishrei." As we say in the prayers of

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Vayelech

On the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent bidding farewell to his people, encouraging them to “keep the faith.” Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, G-d is with them. He summons Yehoshua, and, in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as leader of the Jewish People. Thus, he strengthens Yehoshua’s status. Moshe teaches the mitzvah of *hakhel*: Every seven years on the first of the intermediate days of Succot, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather at the Temple to hear the king read from the Book of Devarim. The sections read deal with faithfulness to G-d, the covenant and reward and punishment. G-d tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should

summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the *Mishkan*, where G-d will teach Yehoshua. G-d tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land the people will be unfaithful and worship other gods. G-d will then completely “hide His face,” so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, hunted by all. G-d instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song — *Ha’azinu* — which will serve as “witness” against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to *Bnei Yisrael*. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah and instructs the *levi’im* to place it to the side of the Holy Ark, so that no one will ever write a new Torah Scroll different from the original, for there will always be a reference copy.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Rosh Hashana, “*This is the day of the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day.*”

AND THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME

A CD player playing nothing. Electrons singing. A giant blow-up of a photograph. The song of silver crystals. And the most distant and cold whisper of the Song of the world’s creation.

There is no silence at the center of the things. Descend beneath the superficial descriptive level of any medium, be it in sight or sound, or listen to the center of the universe itself and you won’t find silence. You’ll find song. That song is the sound of every rock and bird, of every electron and star doing the bidding of its Creator.

“*And Moshe spoke the words of this song into the ears of the entire congregation of Yisrael, until their conclusion*” (31:30)

In this week’s Torah portion, the penultimate one of the Torah, there is a song, *Ha’azinu*, which marks the completion of the Torah. On a deeper level, the whole Torah is called a song. One of the qualities of a song is that it always returns to the same place. It’s a circle. A circle has no beginning and no end. Wherever you start is the same place where you finish. Its beginning is its end, and its end is its beginning.

The Holy Zohar says that G-d looked into the Torah and created the world — and the world only reaches its completion with the completion of the Torah. The Torah is the beginning of the world and the completion of the world. It’s like a song. The beginning is the end — and the end is the beginning.

OHRNET Special

Of Elul, L’David, and Golems

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

There is near universal¹ custom during the month of Elul as preparation to the *Yamim Noraim*, to recite the Chapter of Tehillim (27) “*L’David Hashem Ori*” during *davening*, both every morning and evening, and all the way up to Shmini Atzeret². This custom is based on the *Midrash Socher Tov*³ that elucidates that various phrases of this chapter allude to the holidays of the repentance period - Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, as well as to the month of Elul itself⁴.

The Malbim offers an alternate explanation. In this chapter, David HaMelech, the author of Tehillim, asked to cleave to G-d and that all obstacles that block coming close to Him be removed. The Malbim⁵ explains that when we strive to do so, G-d will attach Himself to us with a higher level of personalized supervision. It is thus quite apropos to recite “*L’David*” during the month of Elul, whose name hints to the acronym “*Ani L’dodi V’dodi Li*”⁶ - I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me”. Elul

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is a month which symbolizes our relationship to G-d, and one in which proper repentance is more readily accepted⁷.

Where's the source?

Where and when did this *minhag* start? It is not mentioned in the *Gemara* or in the *Rishonim*, and not even referenced in the *Shulchan Aruch* or its commentaries. Much research has been done and many works have been written to try to find the earliest source for this meaningful *minhag*⁸.

Many attribute it to the noted *Kabbalist* and author of "Am'tachas Binyamin", Rabbi Binyamin Beinisch Cohen in his sefer "Shem Tov Katan"⁹, first printed in 1706. He writes that one should be scrupulous to recite "L'David" daily from Rosh Chodesh Elul until after Simchat Torah, as saying it has the potential to avert and even nullify Heavenly decrees. Others erroneously concluded that the earliest source was a controversial sefer called 'Chemdas Yamim' first printed in 1731.

Yet, there is possibly an earlier source. In "Nezer Hakodesh - Minhagei Beis Ropschitz"¹⁰ a story is related about the Ba'al Shem Tov, where he mentioned a *Tzaddik*, known as Rabbi Eliyahu Ba'al Shem, who had saved the Jews of a certain town from eviction by successfully promising the childless mayor a son within a year. The Ba'al Shem Tov mentioned that this *Tzaddik*, who lived in the late 1600's, was the one who estab-

lished the custom of reciting "L'David" during Elul.

History has shown that there were two *Tzaddikim* known by this name¹¹. The better known of the two is Rabbi Eliyahu Ba'al Shem of Chelm, who was of such stature that he was known to have created a Golem¹². His grandchildren, the *Gedolim* known as the Chacham Tzvi, as well as his son the Ya'avetz (Rabbi Yaakov Emden), both have written responsa on the topic of the Golem that their grandfather created¹³. The Chid"ra¹⁴ also attested to its existence. Not only that, there is even a *halachic* debate between the Mishna Brura¹⁵ and the Chazon Ish¹⁶ whether such a Golem can be counted for a *minyan*!

The other Rabbi Eliyahu Ba'al Shem was Rabbi Eliyahu Luentz, who was known as a master *Kabbalist* in the 17th century. He wrote a seminal volume on the Zohar¹⁷, and was a disciple of my namesake, the Maharal m'Prague, (who was rumored to have also created a Golem¹⁸).

In conclusion, although we are left uncertain as to whom the originator of this powerful *minhag* was, we can rest assured that it has a reliable source. We can thus appreciate the significance of saying this chapter of Tehillim during Elul, as it underscores the major goals of the season of repentance¹⁹.

Much of this article is based on *Likutei Eliezer Chapter 1*.

1. There are a few Chassidic communities, including Sanz, who do not however. The Gr"ra also did not approve of this addition to *davening* (*Ma'aseh Rav* 53). See *Shu"t Divrei Moshe* 34, and *Ssefer Minhagei Kamarna*, (printed in the back of *Shulchan HaTahor*) Elul, 381, as well as *Likutei Eliezer* pg. 5, footnotes 30 - 31. The Kamarna Rebbe told me that although in his *shul* "L'David" is recited, as most of his congregation are not his Chassidim and nearly everyone's custom is to recite it, nevertheless, he personally does not.

2. *Mishna Brura* 581:, 2.

3. On said Chapter of Tehillim.

4. See *V'ani BaHashem Atzapeh* pg. 71, footnote 13, quoting Rabbiv Chaim Falag'i.

5. Malbim - in his introduction to said Chapter of Tehillim; quoted in *Awesome Days* pg. 31.

6. *Shir HaShirim* 6:, 3.

7. See the Mishna Brura's introduction to 581.

8. For long list of recent works addressing this see *Likutei Eliezer* pg. 1, footnote 2.

9. See *Likutei Eliezer* pg. 4.

10. Cited in *Likutei Eliezer* pg. 7.

11. *Likutei Eliezer* *ibid*.

12. See *Yeshurun* 17, ppg. 665 - 666, in the article by R' M.D. Chichik on Rabbiv Eliyahu Ba'al Shem from Chelm, for more on this topic. In fact, the story of Rabbiv Eliyahu and his Golem was recently adapted as a hardcover comic book entitled "The Golem of Chelm - *Hayah*

V'Nivra".

13. *Shu"t Chacham Tzvi* 93, *Shu"t She'elas Ya'avetz* vol. 2, 82.

14. *Shem Gedolim* vol. 1, *Ma'areches Gedolim - Ma'areches Alef*, 166.

15. *Mishna Brura* 55:, 4, who does not actually rule, but rather addresses the issue and says it is a *safek*; which is actually the main thrust of the Chacham Tzvi's *teshuvah* - that he personally was undecided as to the proper *halacha*.

16. *Chazon Ish* Y"D I 16:, I, who wrote that a Golem would not be able to count for a *minyan* as it not only would be excluded from the rights and privileges of a Jew, but even from those of a human being. This is also the opinion of the Ya'avetz (quoted above), as well as the Chid"ra (*Birkei Yosef* O.C. 55, 4 s.v. *u'lmai*), the Ikrei HaDat (*Ikrei Dinim* O.C. 3:, 15), and the Kaf HaChaim (O.C. 55:, 12).

17. Titled "Aderes Eliyahu".

18. Although legends about the Maharal's Golem have been in print since 1837, the well known stories that captivated the popular imagination were first published in the early 20th century (*Nifla'os HaMaharal*) by Rabbiv Yudel Rosenberg, author of the *Yados Nedarim*, who also translated the Zohar into Hebrew, and later was the *Av Beis Din* of Montreal, Canada. See *Tradition* 36, I (2002) "R' Yudel Rosenberg and the Golem of Prague", by Prof. S. Z. Leiman.

19. This article was written as a *zchus* for Shira Yaffa bas Rachel Miriam and her children.