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Parshat V'etchanan  
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**DON'T FORGET**

*By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

In Parshas Va'eschanan we find the very famous portions of the Torah that are imbedded in the soul of the nation: The Ten Commandments and the Shema Yisrael.

Although every word of the Omnipotent carries equal force, these commanding portions are better known, if not better observed, by the nation. But powerful as they are, they were not given in a vacuum. Moshe forewarns the nation not to forget the message of Sinai and to impart its message and its relevance to future generations.

*"Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children"* (Deuteronomy 4:9).

In order to comprehend the posuk, it must be separated into two distinct parts. "Beware not to forget the things that your eyes have beheld from your heart all your days." In addition, the Torah adds, "you shall teach the Torah to your children and children's children."

Nevertheless, the grammar is surely questionable, "lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children." In its simplest form, the verse seems at best contradictory. Look at the words. Beware that you do not remove the teachings from your heart and make them known to your children. How is that possible? If one removes the teaching from his own heart, how can he pass it to his children? The Torah should have overtly inserted some phrase or word clarifying the transition.

The perplexing composition in its simplest form surely leaves for a creative interpretation, perhaps the omission of the transitional word lends itself to a drash that deviates from the obvious meaning. Thousands of people receive this weekly D'var Torah. In return, I receive many stories for possible use as anecdotal parables. Here is one from the archives.

*Junior came home from day camp one day without towel. "Where is your towel?" asked his mom.*

*"I don't know," he sighed. "I could not find it after swimming. Maybe someone took it."*

*The mother was irate. "Who could have taken your towel? It was a great towel! Junior you would never take someone else's towel. You know I raised you differently than that. Right?"*

*A few moments later, she was on the phone with the day camp director.*

*"Hello. There is a young thief in your camp!"*

*"How so?" "My son had a towel stolen from camp! He brought it in today and it was nowhere"*

*"Calm down," came the voice on the line. "I am sure that no one stole it. Please describe the towel to me."*

*"Sure I can! It was white and big. You could not miss it. It had the words Holiday Inn emblazoned on it!"*

The Leket Amarim interprets the verse in its purest and most simplistic form, revealing a deeper meaning that belies the simplicity of the verse.

*"Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children."*

Often when it comes to our actions, we forget the principles that we were taught as youngsters, but we remember them when chiding our children and pontificating. We may give our children a speech about honesty and integrity, and only minutes later command them to tell a caller on the telephone that, "my father is not home." We may give speeches about integrity and corporate greed only to have pushed our own portfolios in a certain direction through creative manipulation.

And so, the Torah warns us not to forget its principles for ourselves yet to teach them to our children. Consistency is the message of the moment. For yourself. For your children. For eternity

## **Moshe's Lesson of Acceptance**

By Rabbi Berel Wein

We all believe in the power of prayer. There have been controversial but yet seemingly proven studies that have shown that somehow prayer and being prayed for are of definite physical help to the sick, the bereaved and the troubled. Yet prayer oftentimes leaves us unfulfilled and unanswered. Prayer does not seemingly avert disasters, sadness and even tragedies.

All of us face the challenge of unanswered prayer, when our hopes and requests are apparently ignored and refused by Heaven. Many times this fact of life causes a crisis of faith and belief within a person. King David in his Psalms reflects on this issue many times. The book of Iyov deals with it as well. And to a certain extent it is the main issue raised in this week's parsha.

Moshe's prayers are not answered. In fact the Lord instructs him to stop raising the issue of his entry into the Land of Israel with Heaven. There is finality to Heaven's refusal to answer or even deal with Moshe's prayers any longer. Moshe's prayers, which have saved his people, his brother and sister and others from Heavenly wrath, are now of no effect regarding his own personal request.

The rabbis of the Talmud phrased it succinctly: "The prisoner himself cannot free himself, by himself, from his own confinement." Moshe will not lead his beloved people into the promised Land of Israel. His time has ended and his prayer will forever remain unanswered. There is therefore a note of inevitable sadness that hovers over this parsha.

Over the millennia of Jewish commentary and exposition of the Torah many reasons have been advanced as to why Moshe's prayer was so finally and flatly rebuffed. Among the ideas advanced is that the time for Yehoshua's leadership had arrived and that "the dominion of one ruler cannot overlap the dominion of his successor even by a hair's breadth."

Another thought advanced is that Moshe's generation would not enter the Land of Israel so it would be an apparent unseemly favoritism for Moshe alone to be able to do so. A third idea is that Moshe would appear to the new generation entering the Land of Israel as a supernatural figure, a type of god in a world of pagan belief that regularly deified humans, especially national leaders. Therefore, for the sake of Israel itself, he could not be allowed to lead them into the Land of Israel.

As valid as all of these ideas are, the blunt truth is that we cannot read God's mind, so to speak. Living human beings, the finite, can never grasp the Infinite One. So we must be satisfied to remain unsatisfied in our search for the reasons for unanswered prayers.

Our true refuge lies in faith and acceptance of the unknowable. This in no way weakens the resolve and necessity to continue praying. It merely lowers our levels of expectation and tempers our hubris that somehow Heaven must follow our wishes and dictates. Moshe accepts the fact that his prayers will now go unanswered. His example serves as a lesson for all of us.

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## **The Soul's Toil - Tilling of the Soil**

by Jason Aronson

Parshas Va'eschanan is perennially dominated by both the Ten Commandments and the parsha of Shema. It would therefore not at all be unusual to overlook a somewhat perplexing pasuk which immediately precedes the pasuk of "Sh'ma Yisrael." In D'varim 6:3, the pasuk warns B'nei Yisrael to keep the mitzvos of the Torah so that we may be an abundant people, - "As Hashem the G-d of your fathers has spoken to you, a land flowing with milk and honey." The Meshech Chochma asks: Why doesn't the pasuk read "B'eretz zavas chalav u'd'vash" - "in the land flowing with milk and honey?" After all, it seems that the pasuk's subject concerns where we are to observe the mitzvos.

The Meshech Chochma's answer provides us with a valuable insight to our relationship with Eretz Yisrael. It is not that the land is "flowing with milk and honey" regardless of our conduct in it. Rather, its status as an "eretz zavas chalav u'd'vash" is directly dependent upon our actions within the land. If we keep Hashem's mitzvos, then and only then will the land turn in to an "eretz zavas chalav u'd'vash." However, without our observance of mitzvos, the land does not take on this special quality of "flowing with milk and honey." Indeed, we see this idea clearly manifested through a Rashi in Parshas K'doshim (Vayikra 19:29). The pasuk states, "Al tichalel es bitcha l'haznosa, v'lo sizne ha'aretz" - "Do not violate your daughter in lewdness, so that the land should not become defiled," to which Rashi comments, "Im ata oseh kein, ha'aretz mizaneh es peiroseha" - "If you do this, the land will defile its fruits." Hence, the specialness of the land as being one "flowing with milk and honey" is dependent on the actions of K'lal Yisroel. Let this be an important message to us, in this period following Tisha B'Av, in our quest to hasten the coming of Moshiach and the fulfillment of the words of the Navi, "Nachamu, Nachamu Ami."

## The Easy Commandment

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*Honor your father and mother, as the L-rd your G-d has commanded you, so that you may live long. (Devarim 5:16)*

Why should we honor our fathers and mothers? The Torah gives us one reason in Parashas Shemos (20:12), "So that you may live long." In Parashas Vaes'chanan, however, the Torah gives an additional reason, "As the L-rd your G-d has commanded you." What is the significance of this additional phrase?

The Meshech Chachmah refers to the Talmud Yerushalmi that considers honoring parents an "easy commandment." Every person understands that debts have to be repaid. If someone lends you \$100,000 when you need it, you would be only too happy to repay the money once you have enough of your own. It would not be a hard thing to do.

By the same token, every person also understands that he has a moral obligation to repay his debt of gratitude to his parents. After all, the cost of raising a child must be at least between \$100,000 and \$200,000. Not to mention the time, effort and energy parents invest in their children. Therefore, the least people can do is honor their parents. It is not a hard thing to make such a small payment on such a large debt.

The Torah tells us here that this is not the proper motivation for honoring parents. It is not the self-evident obligation to make at least a small payment on a debt owed the parents. It is an obligation incumbent on us solely because "the L-rd your G-d has commanded you" to do so.

The Torah waited until Parashas Vaes'chanan to make this point, because it becomes most clear after forty years in the desert. During those years, raising children was easier than it ever was, before or since. They did not have to be fed. There was manna from heaven. They did not need to be given to drink. There was water from Miriam's Well. They did not need new shoes and clothing all the time. Nothing ever wore out. Most likely they didn't need orthodontic braces either, because life in the desert was paradise. And still, the Torah demanded that parents be honored. Clearly, the obligation was to obey Hashem's commandment rather than repay a debt of gratitude. By the time the Jewish people had lived through the era of the desert, they could relate to the mitzvah of honoring parents as an independent obligation.

How far does this go? How much do you have to do for your parents? The Talmud responds (Kiddushin 31a) to this question with the famous story about a non-Jew from Ashkelon by the name of Dama bar Nesinah.

The Sages once needed a stone for the Urim v'Tummim, and they heard that Dama had exactly the stone they needed. A delegation came to see him and offer to pay him a princely sum for the stone. The stone was in a strongbox, with the key under his father's pillow. Dama did not disturb him.

"I cannot help you," he told the Sages. "My father is sleeping, and I wouldn't disturb his sleep." The Sages left. A year later, a perfect red heifer, suitable for a parah adumah, was born in Dama's herd. The Sages came to purchase it. "How much do you want for it?" "I know that you would give me any price I ask," he replied. "But I only want the amount of money I lost by not waking my father last year."

This story establishes the parameters of the mitzvah of honoring parents. The Talmud uses this story to establish the parameters of human nature.

As parents get older, they can become querulous and demanding. They can test the patience of their children. Sometimes, honoring parents under such circumstances can take a lot of patience and forbearance. Is there a limit to such patience? How much patience can be expected of a person? Is there a point where a person is allowed to run out of patience and be exempt from this mitzvah?

This is what the story about Dama bar Nesinah teaches us. The Sages were offering him a huge sum of money for the single stone they needed for the Urim v'Tummim. He knew that if he could only get the key, the money would be his. What thoughts must have gone through his mind? Maybe I'll make a little noise and he'll wake up. Maybe I'll slide my hand under the pillow very slowly so that I'll be able to get the key without waking him up. He must have been very tempted. But he didn't give in. He was able to honor his father even under such circumstances. This was the extent of what human nature is capable.

It follows, therefore, that if Dama bar Nesinah could have the forbearance to forgo such a huge sum of money and allow his father to sleep, then certainly a descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov can find it in himself to honor his parents under any and all circumstances.

**“You shall guard and you shall fulfill, for it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations that hear these laws and say: How wise and understanding is this great nation” (4:6)**

Rashi says that guarding means to learn Torah. R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why is guarding called learning? Why doesn't the Torah just command us to learn? He answers that the only way through which a person can keep the Torah properly is to learn Torah and study the mitzvos. Without knowing the laws and studying them, one cannot have a proper understanding of halacha. One guards the Torah and ensures its proper fulfillment by learning.

**“And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and Hashem, your G-d, has taken you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you to make the Sabbath day” (5:15)**

Why are we required to refrain from work on Shabbos? The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 32) writes that refraining from work is a reminder of Yetzias Mitzrayim. As slaves in Egypt, we were unable to rest whenever we wanted. When Hashem took us out of Egypt, He commanded us to rest on Shabbos to remind us how he took us out of slavery. When we refrain from work on Shabbos, we are reminded of the kindness that Hashem did for us and that we owe everything to Him. Another reason given by the Chinuch is that Hashem wants us to refrain from work and all other activities so that we can focus on the fact that Hashem created the world. Because this principle is so important and so basic, it is important to remind ourselves once a week that Hashem created the world in six days and stopped on the seventh day. By mimicking the actions of Hashem in resting on the seventh day, we remember and internalize the fact that Hashem created the world from nothing.

**“Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the One and Only” (6:4)**

The recitation of Shema every morning and evening in its proper time is of utmost importance. The gemara on Sotah 42b quotes a posuk in Shmuel I (17:16) which says that Golias would approach the camp of the Jewish army every morning and evening in order to intimidate the soldiers. The gemara asks: Why did Golias specifically come out at those times? The answer given is that he wanted to prevent them from reciting the Shema. He understood the power of Shema and he thought that if he could prevent them from saying Shema, he would be able to defeat them. The Chofetz Chaim laments that today many people do not even understand what this Philistine knew. We should understand how important it is and be sure to say Shema before the end of the time for its recitation every morning and after nightfall every evening. If one davens Shacharis with a minyan that davens after the time limit, he should be sure to say it on his own beforehand within the prescribed time. If one davens Maariv before nightfall, he should be sure to repeat Shema after night has begun. This is especially important to remember on Friday nights, when most people daven before nightfall. One should be sure not to take the mitzvah of Shema lightly.

**“You shall teach them thoroughly to your children and you shall speak of them while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise” (6:7)**

The Torah obligates a person to learn when sitting at home and when walking on the road. The Chofetz Chaim writes that this was easy to do before the Oral Law was written down because Torah was taught orally and one had to memorize Torah every time that he learned. Therefore, when one was home or on the road, he had Torah memorized in his head that he could review. Today, when our learning is done from sefarim and we no longer memorize Torah, it has become more difficult to fulfill this obligation. Therefore, he recommends that a person have sefarim with him at work to learn from when he has down time and that he memorize a few perakim of mishnayos so that he can learn anytime. Today, it is much easier to do this. Anyone can have shiurim on the go with audio shiurim on tapes, CDs or iPods that one can listen to in the car, on the subway or while walking down the street. We also have small printed sefarim (and Parsha Sheets!) that one can easily take on the road. There is always something to learn. Each person can find some area of learning on which he can focus that piques his interest. The Torah is so vast and covers such a wide range of topics that one's work in the study of Torah is never complete.

*By Rabbi Mayer Friedman*

*"Ascend to the top of the cliff, and raise your eyes westward, northward,..... and see with your eyes, for you shall not cross this Jordan."* (3:27)

Picture the feelings of longing that Moshe must have had as he stood on top of the cliff, gazing out over the land that he given so much to enter. There it was stretched out in front of him like a map. The Land of Israel. So close and yet so far. Hashem knew how much Moshe wanted to go into Eretz Yisrael, so why did He 'tantalize' Moshe by telling him to go up and gaze at this land that he knew he was never going to enter? Furthermore, our Sages tell us that by prophetic insight Hashem showed Moshe every single square inch of Eretz Yisrael - which only must have increased his longing! What was Hashem's purpose?

Each of the Avos, the Patriarchs, represent a specific quality: Avraham embodies Chesed (Kindness); Yitchak personifies Gevurah (Strength/Self- control); Yaakov Emes (truth). The quality that Moshe represents is Netzach - Eternity. Everything that Moshe did was forever. Hashem gave the Torah though Moshe because the Torah is eternal. If Moshe had gone into the land of Israel with the Jewish People, then their entry would have been an 'eternal entry' - everything that Moshe did had that touch of eternity. After such an entry, the Jewish People could never again leave the Land. Hashem knew that the Jewish People would have to go into exile for they would not be able to maintain the high spiritual standards that the Land requires. If they could not leave, and they could not stay, they would be caught, as it were, in a spiritual vise -- the very real danger of annihilation (r"l). Thus, Moshe could not enter the Land of Israel.

However, Hashem made Moshe's non-entry into the Land serve a positive purpose: Hashem wanted to sear the memory of the Land of Israel into the collective psyche of the Jewish People. By showing Moshe every blade of grass, by taking him and showing him every corner of the land he was never to enter, Hashem planted in Moshe's heart a longing for the Land of Israel which would be eternal. Look at our daily prayers. Look at the blessings after eating a meal. Our petitions to Hashem are saturated with the name of the Land to which we long to return to -- as a Holy People. Throughout the long, long night of exile, the Jewish People have never lost that same longing for Eretz Yisrael that Moshe felt when he stood on the top of the cliff and gazed into the Land he would never enter.

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

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Moshe relates to Israel a personal encounter he had with the Almighty: 'I implored HaShem at that time, saying, 'My L-rd, HaShem, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand, for what power is there in the heaven or on the earth that can perform according to Your mighty acts? Let me now cross and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon.' But HaShem became angry with me because of you, and he did not listen to me; HaShem said to me, 'It is too much for you! Do not continue to speak to me further about this matter. Ascend to the top of the cliff and raise your eyes westward, northward, southward, and eastward, and see with your eyes, for you shall not cross the Jordan. But you shall command Yehoshua, and strengthen him and give him resolve, for he shall cross before this people and he shall cause them to inherit the Land that you will see.'" (DEVARIM 3:25-28)

It seems that by sharing this encounter with Israel, Moshe was in some way attributing them blame. His words hint that his prevention from entering *Eretz Yisrael* was somehow their fault. Whenever the Nation had sinned throughout their travels and brought upon themselves G-D's wrath, it was always Moshe who stepped in and prayed on their behalf. Here, however, Moshe was being reprimanded and G-D forbade him from praying for himself any longer. But HaShem did not forbid anyone else from pleading for Moshe. It seems strange that not one Israeli prayed to G-D for Moshe to enter the Land of Israel. They did not come together and cry out to HaShem for the sake of their beloved leader and teacher. Perhaps this is what Moshe was alluding to in blaming the people for his plight. Had even one Israeli loved Moshe on the level that he loved them, one prayer might have annulled the tragic decree against him. Perhaps if Israel had sufficiently appreciated Moshe, they would have argued his case before HaShem as he had done so often for them in the past. But because of the generation's lack of gratitude, Moshe was prohibited from entering the Land.

The numerical value of the word VA'ETCHANAN is five hundred and fifteen. The *Midrash Rabbah* teaches that Moshe prayed five hundred and fifteen times to HaShem that he be permitted to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. G-D commanded him to stop at this point because had Moshe prayed five hundred and sixteen times, he would have been able to enter the Land.

From this one learns that any healthy desire a person has is, in reality, a deep yearning of his soul that he is meant to achieve. In order to attain it, however, one must be on a certain level of closeness to HaShem. This closeness is generally achieved through prayer. G-D commanded Moshe to stop at five hundred and fifteen prayers because it had been decreed according to the Divine plan that Moshe would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*.

Because one can never know how many prayers it takes to receive that which he desires, a person must continue to ask for what he lacks until the aspiration is fulfilled. This, of course, should be accompanied by practical effort. True faith is the understanding that Israel is working together with G-D in improving this world. During these times, as the Redemption is unfolding through all of its ups and downs, all Israel should take care to focus efforts and prayers in assisting the Nation through its difficult challenges. In addition to human endeavors, one must pray with all of his heart and soul for the full Redemption of man, beginning with the ingathering of Israel's exiles, the liberation of *Eretz Yisrael* from foreign rule and the building of G-D's Temple on its prepared site.

by Yehuda HaKohen

## The Consolation of *Shabbos Nachamu*

by Rabbi Mayer Twersky

*Shabbos Nachamu* is an enigma. The theme of the *Shabbos*, as indicated by its *haftorah* and nomenclature, is consolation. But what is the source of our consolation? The *Beis Hamikodsh* has not been rebuilt; things have not changed.

In the case of mourning the death of one of the seven immediate relatives, time alleviates grief, as the mourner becomes reconciled to his lot. The pain of his loss diminishes as time elapses. But with regard to our mourning for the *Beis Hamikodsh*, the lapse of time is not supposed to have a consoling, ameliorating effect. On the contrary, our obligation during the three weeks is to overcome the passage of time and acutely experience the anguish of *churban*. Why then do we feel consoled on *Shabbos Nachamu*?

Mourning for the *Beis Hamikodsh* is redemptive rather than cathartic. The *aveilus* of the three weeks is designed to awaken our emotions and sensitize our hearts to the tragic reality of *churban* and its insidious causes. Accordingly, the *aveilus* of the three weeks is a period of repentance and yearning - repentance for the sins which caused *churban*, yearning for the *Beis Hamikodsh* in its full glory.

Repentance and yearning are also the keys to the restoration of the *Beis Hamikodsh*, to *geulah*. This idea underlies the Gemora in *Ta'anis* 30b which teaches that one who mourns for *Yerushalayim* will merit and participate in its future joy. Thus the *aveilus* of the three weeks, properly observed, brings us closer to the *geulah*. And this provides the consolation that we experience on *Shabbos Nachamu*.

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## Double Consolation

by Rabbi Mordechai Willig

“*Nachamu Nachamu Ami*” (Yeshayahu 40:1). *Am Yisroel* sinned doubly (*Eichah* 1:8), was punished doubly, and is consoled doubly (*Psikta, Nachamu*). What is the nature of the double sin and consolation? Yeshayahu said “for she has received double [punishment] for all her sins from the hand of Hashem (Yeshayahu 40:2)” - what is the justification for *Am Yisroel* being punished doubly for its sins?

*Am Yisroel* is fortunate! When we comply with Hashem's will, no nation can rule over us; when we don't comply, He places us in the hands of “lowly nations and even its animals” (*Kesubos* 66b). The Maharal explains that our lowliness when we sin is also part of our being fortunate, in that it emphasizes that we cannot be average - either we rise above others, or we sink beneath them (*Netzach Yisroel* ch. 14). If our descent starting at the *churban Beis Hamikodsh* merely equated us with other nations, this would indicate that our status in Hashem's eyes is no different than theirs, and that the Torah is merely a tangential, not fundamental, dimension of our existence. Our inability to be on par with other nations indicates that Torah is an intrinsic, indispensable part of our very existence. Torah and *Yisroel* are one, and thus we are very fortunate (Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldwicht *zt"l*).

Perhaps, then, the double sin is that we sank two levels: from above the other nations, to below them; from a lofty roof to a deep pit (*Chagiga* 5b, based on *Eicha* 2:1). While the inability of *Am Yisroel* to be on the level of other nations is in fact a sign of Hashem's love, it also results in our sins being doubled, as we sink two levels, not just one, when we falter. We are thus punished doubly, for the two descents, but we are also consoled because Hashem created us uniquely, and the double punishment is a sign of His love.

This lesson provides a measure of consolation even when we are in *galus*. One who mourns over *Yerushalayim* is privileged to see its joy (*Ta'anis* 30b). Mourning over our double descent reminds us that we can and will rise from the pit to great heights, and this consoles us with a vision of a joyous future. When that future arrives, there will be a double consolation, “*nachamu nachamu*”.

Yirmiyahu foresaw the destruction of the second *Beis Hamikdosh* (Rashi, *Eicha* 4:21), and declared: “Hashem will not exile you again” (4:22) after the *galus* of Edom (Rashi). The cities of *Eretz Yisroel* are in a state of destruction when other nations rule over them (Magen Avraham 561:1). Today, when *Am Yisroel* rules over the *Eretz Yisroel*, we are promised that there will be no future exiles (*Bikvei Hatzon*, p. 214, 215, based on *Ramban Vayikra* 26:16).

The promise that we will not have any more exiles enhances for us the consolation that mourners over *Yerushalayim* experienced throughout the generations. May this consolation give us strength to endure the difficult situation of the *galus*, and may it soon be joined by the consolation of the ultimate redemption, when the navi's double expression, “*nachamu nachamu ami*”, will be fulfilled.