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Weekly Parsha

Vaetchanan

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Honor your father and your mother as Hashem your G-d has commanded you, so that you will lengthen your days and so that it will be good for you on the land that Hashem your G-d has given to you." (Devarim 5:16)

In this week's parasha, Moshe reviews the Decalogue. Our passage states the obligation to honor one's mother and father.

The Talmud in Tractate Kiddushin

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LEBANON Tisha B'Av & Teshuva

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asks an interesting question. In order to understand this question a brief introduction is needed. There are two commandments regarding our basic obligations towards our parents. Our passage is the source for the obligation to honor our parents. However, we are also obligated to fear our parents. The Torah tells us, "Every person must fear his mother and father."^[1] What are the two obligations outlined in these two commandments? How does the obligation to honor our parents differ from the obligation to fear our parents? Maimonides discusses this issue. He explains that the commandment to fear our parents prohibits us from sitting in our parent's place, contradicting our parents, referring to them by their first names and similar behaviors. The commandment to honor our parents obligates us to care for our parents. We are obligated to make sure that our parents are provided with food and clothing. The mitzvah to honor our parents also creates a general obligation to serve our parents.^[2] In short, the obligation to fear our parents requires that we treat our parents with reverence. The mitzvah to honor our parents requires that we care for their needs.

The Talmud's discussion begins with a simple observation. The commandment – in our parasha – to honor our parents places the father before the mother. In contrast, the obligation to fear our parents places the mother before the father. The Talmud asks the obvious question. Why in discussing the commandment to fear our parents is the mother placed before the father but in discussing the commandment to honor our parents the father is placed before the mother?

Before considering the Talmud's response, it is important to acknowledge that the Talmud's comments assume a family in which the father and mother have very specific and different roles. In our society, these roles are not as clearly demarcated. So, the observations of the Sages may need some adaptation for our times. But they are still very relevant. The Talmud comment will be more contemporary if we understand them as reference to parenting models rather than gender specific references. In other words, the role that the Talmud assigns to the mother should be understood as a parenting role which today we may find assumed by the father or shared by each parent. Similarly, the role that the Talmud associates with the father may today be assumed by either parent or shared by both.

The Sages observed that the child – in the family that they envisioned – typically experiences a different relationship with his/her mother and father. They comment that the Creator recognizes that the love that we feel for our mothers comes to us more easily and naturally than the love we should feel for our fathers. After all, it is typical

for the mother to be more demonstrative in expressing affection. The child responds with a reciprocal, deep and enduring love for his/her mother. In turn, the child's love engenders a desire to care for his/her mother. As explained above, the obligation to honor our parents is essentially a requirement to assure that they receive proper care. It is an expression of our love. In short, the child has a natural desire to fulfill the duties that the Torah includes in the mitzvah to honor our parents. The desire to fulfill these duties in regards to one's father is not as natural.

The Sages also observed that the father is responsible to teach his son Torah. Therefore, fear and reverence for one's father is more natural than fear and reverence for one's mother. The reverence that is required by the commandment to fear our parents is a natural expression of our relationship with our fathers.^[3]

In other words, the Torah recognizes a natural tendency for the child to honor his/her mother and to fear his/her father. We do not have the same natural inclinations to honor our fathers and to fear our mothers. However, we are not permitted to follow this natural inclination. We must honor our fathers and fear our mothers.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l was fascinated with the Talmud's contention that the child's feeling of love develop more naturally for one's mother. Does the child not appreciate all of the efforts that his/her father makes on his/her behalf? Why does the child not feel a reciprocal love his/her father?

Rav Soloveitchik observed that this discussion in the Talmud follows a bryta – a teaching of the Sages – that delineates the obligations of a father towards his child. The Sages instruct us that among the father's responsibilities towards his son are the obligations to teach him Torah, to support him in finding a wife, to teach him a trade, and to teach him to swim.^[4] Rav Soloveitchik observed that these elements of the father's obligation have a specific theme. He must teach his son Torah, a trade and to swim. All of these areas of instruction are designed to instill within the child the ability to achieve independence and self-reliance. Certainly, helping a child begin a family is an expression of this same theme. Rav Soloveitchik concluded that the Sages regarded this as the primary role of the father in the raising of the child. It is the father's responsibility to foster in the child independence and self-reliance.

Rav Soloveitchik observed that this relationship between the father and his child inevitably communicates a mixed or confusing message to the child. The child does recognize and acknowledge the love of his/her father. But at the same time, the father's role of fostering independence results in the father making demands and

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(Vaetchanan continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha

establishing expectations. The father often feels he cannot coattail or indulge his child. The child perceives a harshness or distance in his/her father that is difficult to reconcile with the love that the child knows the father feels.

This relationship is very different from the relationship that the child experiences with his/her mother or mother-figure. The mother's role is not to push the child towards adulthood and independence. Instead, the mother is more indulgent. Her love for her child is expressed more demonstratively and intensely. As a result, the child's feelings towards his/her mother are less ambivalent. The love that the child receives from the mother is unambiguous and unconditional. In this relationship, the child does not sense the harshness or demands that characterize the relationship with his/her father or father figure. The child responds to the obvious love communicated by his/her mother with a sense of devotion and affection that is far less ambivalent than the child's feelings towards his/her father.

But, in truth, the father does not love the child less than the mother. Instead, this love finds expression in a different form. The mother's love may be more demonstrably communicated. But it is the father's love that motivates him to take on the difficult task of teaching his child and making demands. It is only because of this love that the father figure is willing to endure the conflicts and friction that are often the result from the demands and the expectations that he places upon his child.

These feelings towards our parents develop during childhood. As we mature, to some extent, our understanding of the roles and efforts of our parents develops and matures. But despite our more mature views and understanding, it is often difficult to completely alter the feelings we developed as children. So, even as we mature into adults, we may tend to more naturally feel affection for our mothers and reverence for our fathers.[5]

Let us reconsider the comments of the Talmud. As explained above, the message of the Torah is that we are not permitted to follow this natural inclination. We must honor our fathers and fear our mothers. It seems that according to Rav Soloveitchik, the Torah is telling us a profound and far-reaching idea. The feelings that we develop towards our parents do not dissipate as we mature into adults. We advance cognitively. But many of the feelings that we develop as children remain with us into adulthood. As a result, as adults, we experience a sort of confusion. We cannot easily outgrow or abandon the feelings that we develop as children. But as we become more mature and become parents ourselves we recognize that these feelings are simplistic and based upon immature perceptions developed in childhood. We are trapped between the feelings

developed in childhood and the cognitive perceptions developed in adulthood.

Essentially, the commandments to honor our fathers – as we do our mothers – and to revere our mothers – as we do our fathers – admonish us to accept that our feelings are not based upon a mature and accurate appraisal of the roles that our parents have played in our development. In other words, we must recognize that although our feelings are intense and very real to us, these feelings do not reflect an accurate mature

appraisal of the reality of our parents' love and concern for our well-being. ■

[1] Sefer VaYikra 19:3.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 6:3.

[3] Mesechet Kiddushin 30b-31a.

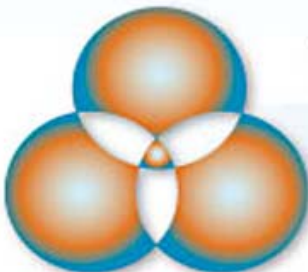
[4] Mesechet Kiddushin 29a.

[5] Rav Solomon Maimon's recollections of the comments of Rav Soloveitchik.

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Tisha B'Av & Teshuva

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In light of our tragic situation in Israel, our loss of life, and the sustained absence of the Temple, it is both mandatory and vital to our national and individual existence that we reflect and consider God's words and our Rabbis' teachings. Those who ignore 'why' Israel is ours, and why God allows and causes our suffering, make inexcusably lethal errors, which doom Judaism and Jews to continued hardships.

Israel became our rightful possession, due exclusively to God's promise to Abraham. And even that promise was due only to Abraham's self-actualized conversion from an idolatrous life, to one where through his mind alone, he became convinced of the One, metaphysical God of heaven and Earth, and his own passion: to teach mankind the truth.

God desired mankind to gain from Abraham's findings, and therefore He granted children and a land to Abraham: "For it is revealed before God, that Abraham [will] command his sons and his household after him, that they guard the path of God, performing charity and justice, in order that God bring upon Abraham that which He spoke of." [1] We learn that this promise, which God will bring on Abraham – i.e., children, and the land of Israel – is contingent on Abraham following the "path of God." In other words, we will not have God's land without God.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing this very threat to our land, in conjunction with a current Israeli state platform bereft of God and His Torah.

God deemed this lesson of Israel's "contin-

gent nature" so crucial, that He commanded our every doorpost to display this message in the form of mezuzahs. But instead of reading these text-based commands as God intended, Jews convert them into amulets...ironically performing the very sin that the mezuza warns will evict us from Israel, i.e., idolatry. And not only is the Shema in the mezuzah ignored, although posted everywhere, but the larger, more crucial body of Torah is not followed by a majority of Jews, even in Israel...God's gift to us.

Jews desire the reward – Israel – without performing the essential condition of Torah adherence that earns this reward...and we wonder why we are in these straits. We know the answer, but are simply too proud to admit our error. This pride is killing us.

Over the centuries, God sent prophets and leaders to admonish us. Their words are readily available. If we would only take a few moments and realize the "falsehood in our right hand" [2], that we trust doctors with our bodies, but not the One more wise, with our lives and our souls.

During these Three Weeks and the imminent Tisha B'Av holiday, stop and consider the following lessons of God and the Rabbis.

Repentance & God's 13 Attributes

Talmud Rosh Hashannah 17b examines the 13 Attributes of God taught to Moses as a means of securing Israel's atonement. These attributes are located in Exodus 34:6,7: "God, God, the powerful, merciful and gracious, long suffering and great in kindness and truth, guarding kindness to thousands of generations, carry-

ing sin, purposeful and accidental, and He pardons."

The Talmud asks the meaning of the first two names "God, God". It answers, "I am 'God' before man sins, and I am 'God' after man sins". The Talmud asks what is meant by the next attributes of "powerful and merciful". The answer given is, "I [God] have created a treaty with these 13 Attributes, that when recited, [the Children of Israel] will not be turned back empty-handed." This means that God's structure of these attributes assure a definite atonement for those who recite them. The question is this: how does the recitation of these attributes secure atonement?

Let us consider the first Talmudic quote, "I am 'God' before man sins, and I am 'God' after man sins". The Talmud focuses our attention on a 'contrast' of man's states: prior and subsequent to sin. And as with any contrast, its objective is to unveil a 'transition'. The transition here is between man's two states: 1) a follower of God, and 2) a sinner. And despite this transition, we are taught "God is our God...even after man sins". Why must the Torah teach this? The answer is because we would think otherwise. This is the basis for all lessons: to redirect us from erroneous views, towards truths.

The erroneous view here, is that once we sin, God is no longer reachable...we feel we are "too far gone" that God should reenter our lives with His concern for us. Therefore, God teaches man otherwise: "I am your God...even after you sin". In other words, "you have never gone too far". This realization is indispensable for man's repentance, and return to God. This very realization is atonement! Meaning, once man recognizes there is in fact a path back to God, then...this man is a different man, and worthy of atonement. For with this realization, in some degree, he already removes his hands from sin, as man's inclination is always to do the good for himself. Once he is taught by God's words that he has not gone too far, and he can return, his attachment to sin is weakened, and God need not punish him any further, since his realization obviates the need for any further correction. God's punishments target man's return to the right life, but this man has already started back on that right path. Therefore, he is atoned, and God's punishments are no longer necessary.

How God's Attributes Atone

The Talmud continues, "I [God] have created a treaty with these 13 Attributes, that when recited, Israel will not be turned back empty-handed."

The very concept that man recites these attributes of mercy means that he actively and

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Tisha B'Av

truthfully seeks God's mercy. As we said, at first, man understands that he is not "too far gone", and that God can be his God even after many sins. His false self-image of a hopeless sinner is shed. Next, man recites God's "merciful" attributes. But how does this recitation effectuate atonement?

Reciting and understanding these attributes, man transforms through a number of perfecting phases: First, man learns that God has the ability to end one's life...but through His mercy, He does not. Man realizes his life is subject to termination. By recognizing God is "merciful" and "long suffering", man contemplates his mortality, and fears that his very existence is subject to God's will. Second, man will then naturally desire life. Third, he will associate his sins with that which is a "negative", that which can terminate his life. Next, a feeling of regret is evoked within him for those sins. And finally, his labeling of his sins as "regretful" actions removes his attachment to sin, which grants him God's atonement.

These 13 Attributes highlight God's mercy...a mercy to man where our lives are sustained, in place of our destruction due to our sins. These attributes serve to focus us on the sublime realization that we are "created" beings, receiving and possessing sustained life, only if God wills our continued existence. "Existence" is our prime mover, and by reciting these attributes, our lives should be acutely threatened. God's objective is that we return from our futilities, from our fantasy life, and become grounded by the humbling realization that we exist and live right now, only because He desires it as such, and His desire applies only to those who follow His path of Torah.

Therefore, these 13 Attributes atone man, by awaking us to the realization that we are created, "like clay in the hand of a potter", as we recite on the High Holidays. Our lives are in God's hands, and should render us regretful for our sins...actions that can destroy us. And with our subsequent removal from lethal sins, God need not punish us, as we have already abandoned the thought of sin, with no need for His punitive measures. This is how recital of the Attributes atones us. Atonement is meted out in all cases where man abandons a poor lifestyle, in favor of approaching God.

Torah's Corroboration of a Theme

The Rabbis established special Torah readings for public fasts, as well as for Tisha B'Av. The public fast reading commences as follows:

"Seek out God when He is found, call to Him when He is near. Let the wicked forsake his path, and a man of sin [forsake] his thoughts, and return to God, and He will show him mercy,

and to our God, for He is abundant in forgiveness. For My thoughts are not [as] your thoughts, and your ways are not [like] Mine, so says God." [3]

Rashi cites a Midrash on the last verse: "[God says] My judgments are not as the judgments of flesh and blood who still hold accountable even one who has confessed his crime. But regarding My judgments, one who confesses his crime and abandons his sin, I show mercy." Now, keep that Midrash in mind, as you read a few more verses from the ending of this Torah reading: "And the convert that joins God shall not state saying, 'God has certainly separated me from His people', and the eunuch shall not say, 'Behold, I am dry wood' [4]. For so says God to the eunuchs who observe My Sabbaths and choose in that which I desire and seize My covenant. And I will give to them into My house and my walls, a place and fame, better than sons and daughters an eternal name I will give them that shall never be cut off." Additionally, the reading of Tisha B'Av too includes these words: "And you will seek from there God, your God, and you will find Him, when you seek Him with all your heart and all your soul." [5]

We realize that the very lesson that we have never "gone too far" for God to forgive, is a repeated theme; from the 13 Attributes, through the Torah reading for public fasts, and also for Tisha B'Av. Each Torah portion reiterates this theme.

Summary

We conclude that God desires the good for us. He understands the fatalistic and hopeless emotions we all carry, but such emotions do not have any place when it comes to repentance. God wishes us to counter those emotions in connection with repentance. True, God embedded in each of us the feeling of despair. But why is it a necessary emotion? Despair is to be engaged, but only when we meet with frustration when we sin. That is a proper time to be hopeless, and abandon sin. But repentance is something open to us all, and hopelessness and the feeling of being "too far gone" is what closes the doors to our improvement. Therefore, God insures that our Torah be permeated with this recurring theme that counters our feelings of despair by teaching, "there is always a road back". God encourages us to improve, regardless of how low we have become. And as Rashi taught, the very act of removing even our thoughts from sin, afford us atonement: "But regarding My judgments, one who confesses his crime and abandons his sin, I show mercy." Abandoning sin, is the mental commitment to refrain. Isaiah too repeats this theme: "Let the wicked forsake his path, and a man of sin

[forsake] his thoughts..."

The road to perfection may be more far off for some of us than for others, but this is not a competition. It matters none how perfect or imperfect someone else is, when considering "your" relationship with God. Do not despair, and in fact, feel optimistic that you have a chance while yet alive to correct your ways, and embark upon a life where you will find true happiness and fulfillment. We are not designed to achieve happiness through possessions or fantasies, but through ever-increasing knowledge of the universe and our Creator.

We are all created beings, our existence is only at God's will, and He created us with the capacity for great happiness, if only we follow His wisdom.

Following Torah principles is also vital to correcting our national predicament. It behooves all in Israel's leadership to relinquish their subjective agendas, and admit that God's truth surpasses our fantasies. Leading the country of Israel bereft of Torah principles endangers all, as one Rabbi lamented on the IDF soldiers who have lost their lives, all because Israel wished to minimize casualties on the enemy's side. Such political correctness is not a Torah value, and it is clear why: it kills our own people.

In every case, God's wisdom will benefit us. Apply it to yourself in repentance from your individual sins, and Israel, apply it to your leadership if you truly wish to save Jewish lives.

King David succeeded in his battles because God was with him, and God was with him only because David followed God: "And it was that David was wise in all his ways, and God was with him". [6] ■

[1] Gen. 18:19

[2] Isaiah, 44:20. This is the Haftorah of parshas Vayikra that commences laws of sacrifices. Sacrifice is to redirect our focus from animal worship, towards a slaying of mindless beasts in the proper service of God: "He transferred to His service that which had formerly served as a worship of created beings, and of things imaginary and unreal, and commanded us to serve Him in the same manner; viz., to build unto Him a temple; comp. "And they shall make unto me a sanctuary" (Exod. xxv. 8): to have the altar erected to His name; comp. "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me" (ibid. XX. 2 1): to offer the sacrifices to Him." (Maimonides book III, chap. XXXII, pg 323

[3] Isaiah 55:6-8

[4] "Dry wood" is a euphemism for one who cannot bear children, as eunuchs are castrated.

[5] Deut. 4:29 [6] Samuel I, 18:14

Israel



Ignorance & Hatred

*Condemnation of
Israel's Defense –
Silence for Terrorists'
Kidnapping & Shelling*

Some spokespeople have thankfully vocalized the truth: Lebanese civilian tragedies lay not with Israel, but with the foreign leaders harboring terrorists, allowing those killers safe refuge. And when these cowardly murderers shoot missiles at Israel from civilian towns, those leaders are to blame when we retaliate, and civilian men, women and children are killed. We have no choice but to destroy the source of those missiles.

Concerned for innocent lives, Israel warned the Lebanese people of an imminent military response to Hezbollah's unprovoked kidnappings, and sustained targeting of Israelis. And for this, the nations of the world condemn Israel?

Why have these nations been silent, with no condemnations of Palestinian, suicide bombers...for five years?

Why did these nations offer no condemnation of Pales-

tinians who sneak into Jewish homes, and assassinate 4-year-old children?

Why are these nations so silent, when Israel's enemies blow up busloads of families?

Why did these nations offer no condemnation for Palestinians, who – not in war, but in Jerusalem streets – indiscriminately kill Israel's young and old alike, butchering and maiming countless men, women and children?

Why the silence when for years, families were torn apart?

But when Israel rightfully, with no choice but to defend itself from terrorists, unintentionally causes deaths to a nation it that it warned first...the international community condemns us?

If those nations were sitting in Israel as a missile headed for them, they would support us. Why then do they condemn the Jew? One thing is certain; it has nothing to do with the war. ■

Losing "Site"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

To understand the loss of the Temple – Tisha B'Av's commemoration – we must first understand the importance and significance of the Temple.

Maimonides "Laws of the Select House" (2:1,2,4)

[1] "The altar's location is very exact, and that place is never changed, as it states, 'This is the altar of Olah sacrifices for Israel.' And in the Temple was Isaac our forefather bound [by Abraham] as it states, 'Go for yourself to the land of Moriah', and in Chronicles it states, 'And King Solomon commenced to build the house of God in Jerusalem, on Mount Moriah where God appeared to David his father, that he prepared in the place of David, in threshing floor of Arnon the Jebusite'."

[2] "And a tradition is in the hands of everyone that the place where David and Solomon built the altar on the threshing floor of Arnon, this is the place where Abraham built the altar and bound upon it Isaac. And this is the place where Noah built there [the altar] when he exited the Ark. And that was the altar on which Cain and Abel sacrificed. And on it, Adam the first sacrificed when he was created, and from there, was he created."

[4] "Three prophets went up with the Jews into exile. One testified to them on the location of the altar. And one testified to them on its measurement. And one testified to them that there must be sacrificed on this altar all the sacrifices, even though the Temple did not [longer] exist."

Why did Adam, Cain, Able, Noah, Abraham, King David and King Solomon sacrifice on this specific spot? Why did God deem it vital to humanity that Noah's Ark land on this very same Mount Moriah, and that Noah sacrifice on the same location? Why did God demand Abraham bind Isaac on this mountain? Why must the Temple be built here?

To understand all subsequent cases of sacrifice on this specific site, we must learn its incep-



tional significance. And what is so essential about sacrifice, and this place in specific, that even when the Temple no longer stood, sacrifice was essential as the prophets taught?

The first event to occur upon this precise location was Adam's creation...who then sacrificed to God immediately upon his creation. He must have suddenly recognized that he was "just created" a few moments ago, and that prior; he was nothing...he didn't exist until God desired it. Adam was a perfected creature, made in an adult form, and not an infant newborn. His vocabulary and thoughts were mature at his creation. He knew God. Being perfect in thought, he acted perfectly: he suddenly felt compelled to express thanks and praise God for his creation with a sacrificed animal. But why is this the correct response?

Sacrifice is the appropriate response, as it is man's means of identifying with his true state of nonexistence. Man would not exist without God. Adam therefore killed an animal, the embodiment of the non-existent state man

would be in, had God not created him.

We too must identify with Adam's perfection. He represents the highest level of man: a creature that understands he is "created", and thus, that a Creator exists, Who alone is responsible for his creation, and worthy of our thanks and praises.

All of Adam's perfected descendants mimicked Adam's act of sacrifice, and, upon the precise site of Adam's creation. They too desired to express this one, same perfection, demonstrating their recognition that they are created. They desired to embellish upon the truth that man exists, only because God created Adam. Therefore, God assisted perfected men, commanding or causing their arrival and sacrifice upon this very parcel of Earth, where God formed the very first human, Mount Moriah.

The Temple's site on Mount Moriah serves to underscore these concepts: that we are created beings like Adam, who owe our lives to the Creator; and that we must demonstrate this realization through sacrifice: the idea of sacrifice alone is insufficient; active sacrifice is vital. Sacrifice embodies the idea of our non-existence...since we would not be alive without God. Sacrifice, then, become synonymous with Temple, since Temple serves to flag the event and location of man's creation: a creature who in truth, should not exist.

There are many concepts learned through the study of the Temple's laws. But primary to this discussion, is the fundamental that we must relate to God as our life-giver, with this essential and dependent feeling. And when we are convinced of this reality, we will live in daily appreciation of all God has granted us.

Conversely, our loss of the Temple is in truth, a loss of identification with Adam, the true relationship with our Creator, and how fortunate we are to exist.

When the Temple will finally be rebuilt, we will then, once again, recall that ancient event of human creation (and re-creation with Noah) with clarity, and look at ourselves equally as "created". Our attachment to God and His laws will then be a natural lifestyle for all mankind. ■

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