



Parashat Vaetchanan 5770

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On the Parashah... From the Most Spiritual to the Most Down-to-Earth

[Tal Chermon]

The central theme of this week's Parashah is the Torah. "For which is a great Nation that has a G-d so close to it" (Devarim 4:7). Mankind's greatness and uniqueness lies in being created in the image of G-d. A person's goal in life is to become close to his Source. We, the Nation of Israel, are a "great Nation" because of our connection to the Master of the Universe.

There are two main channels through which Man establishes a connection with his G-d - Torah and prayer: "For what nation is there so great, that has such righteous statutes and laws as this Torah" (ibid. 4:8). "For which is a great Nation that has a G-d so close to it, as Hashem our G-d is to us whenever we call out to Him" (ibid. 4:7). Nevertheless, it is a mistake to think that we should "Hear G-d answer us" when we pray to him. We turn to G-d in prayer, but He speaks to us through the Torah. We heard G-d's voice on Mount Sinai, but were unable to sustain such a high spiritual level for long. Most of the Ten Commandments were transmitted to us through Moshe Rabbenu (Shemot 20:15-18). Since then, in every generation, there are Torah scholars who continue what Moshe Rabbenu began (see Chulin 93a and Shabbat 101b).

The Torah is the soul of the Nation of Israel. Through the Torah, all the Divine attributes embedded in the soul of the Jewish People find concrete expression in daily life. Its core is the Ten Commandments which are repeated in our Parashah (see Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 13:16 and others). This leads into the "heart" of Parashat Vaetchanan - the first paragraph of the Shema. It contains all the elements of Jewish life, step by step, in a most wonderful order.

- Faith: "Hear O Israel, Hashem our G-d, Hashem is One" (Devarim 6:4). Monotheism is the basis of our faith, and this means that the world is to G-d as a dream is to the dreamer. It has no independent existence whatsoever (see Rambam, beginning of Mishneh Torah, Tanya - Sha'ar Ha-Yichud, Nefesh Ha-Chaim 3:11, Orot Ha-Kodesh 391).
- Acceptance of G-d's Rule: It is G-d's will that we be His partners in this world by crowning Him as our King - Only on Yom Kippur, when we are like angels and fully accept the Yoke of Heaven, do we say aloud, "Blessed Be the Name of His Glorious Kingdom Forever and Ever" (from the siddur).

- Love: When there is faith, there is love. "And you shall love Hashem your G-d." (ibid. v. 5). True love of G-d, just as love between friends, is a deep feeling based on appreciation and understanding.
- Study: The way to achieve faith, knowledge, and love is through study: "And these words shall be in your heart" (ibid. v. 6). Faith and love motivate one to study, and through study, faith and love are perfected.
- Heartfelt study: "in your heart": Emotion and intellect must work together.
- "And you shall teach them to your children" (ibid. v. 7): Continuity of this faith, knowledge and love from one generation to the next. This is the foundation of the Jewish People and the focus of all parenting.
- Actualization: This faith, knowledge, love, and education must be implemented in all aspects of our life. Since it is the 'arm' which embodies physical action, "you shall bind them as a sign upon your arm" (ibid. v. 8).
- Attitude: Not only are our external actions guided by the Torah, but also our attitudes and how we look at things: "And they shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (ibid.).
- Family: The Shema is one of the Parshiyot of the Mezuzah - "On the doorposts of your house" (ibid. v. 9), and guides our family life.
- Civic life: "And on your gates" (ibid.) - "including the gates of your courtyards, cities, and states" (Rashi, op. cit.). G-d's word is our guide in our civic and political life, no less than in our private lives. It must be inscribed upon the entrance to the state.

Thus the delineation of our life's goals begins with faith in G-d and ends with a sovereign state. The Shema proceeds from the most spiritual to the most down-to-earth. This is the same order followed by the Rambam. His Mishneh Torah begins with Sefer Ha-Mada - faith in and knowledge of G-d, and concludes with Sefer Melachim - guidelines for the Kingdom of Israel.

Rav Aviner on... I Want to be Sephardi

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Devarim 5770 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Forgive me, Rav Berger,
 Forgive me, Rav Meltzer,
 I'm really trying,
 I'm really striving
 to get my son into your institution.
 I don't know exactly what's involved,
 But I'm not succeeding.
 Could it be my name?
 My accent?
 My skin color?
 But I WANT to be a Sephardi!
 I want to very much!

Forgive me Rav Krieger,
 Forgive me, Rav Veltzer,
 I'm really trying
 to have my daughter marry one of you.
 I don't know exactly what's involved,

But I'm not succeeding.
And I don't know why.
Maybe it's my name?
My accent?
My skin color?
But I very much want
To remain a Sephardi.
You teach, "Love your fellow Jew."
You teach of a "Jewish soul".
So maybe you can explain
Why there's an ethnic rift?

Why am I called
"The Second Class Israeli"?
I want to be a first-class Israeli.
So I'm sometimes
A bit confused.
I don't know how you do it.

Forgive me, Rav Weiner,
Forgive me, Rav Peltzer
But you say that all Israel
Have a share in Heaven.
So I wanted to know.
Please give me a clue,
A recommendation
On how to get there?
But I'm not succeeding!
Maybe it's my name?
My accent or skin color?
But I very much want
To remain a Sephardi.

What's better to be?
Ashkenazic or Sephardic?
Or perhaps Yemenite?
What should my name be?
My accent?
My skin color?
For I'm very happy
To be a Sephardi.

Stories about Leaving the Land of Israel - #7

Question: Last week, a story was included in which Rav Elyashiv says that he holds that it is forbidden to leave Eretz Yisrael to attend one's sister's wedding. What is Ha-Rav's opinion?

Answer: It is permissible because it is a mitzvah.

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #2

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

When we daven, we say the Tefilot in the Siddur and also add what we want to say to Hashem. Believe it or not, Hashem really does want to hear from us. He wants us to praise him, to thank him and to ask for what we need. But it is also important to remember that we aren't just davening for ourselves and for our families and friends. Rav Kook zt"l says that our davening is like a test. Do we care only about ourselves or do we care for all of Klal Yisrael? When we daven, we are supposed to connect our Tefilot with all of Klal Yisrael. This doesn't just make our Tefilot more powerful. It also raises them. It makes them more important as we are asking for things that all of Klal Yisrael needs. We ask for Mashiach, for the Beit Ha-Mikdash, for the sick to be healed, for us all to be in Eretz Yisrael, and many more things. Those aren't just things that you and I need. They are things all of Klal Yisrael needs.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

An Easily-Angered Wife

Question: My wife is easily angered. She explodes about even the littlest thing. At first, I was extremely frustrated until I found a solution from Socrates. He had an evil wife, Xanthippe, who would curse him in front of his students and she would flip over his desk. He would calmly respond: This is exactly how a rooster behaves.

Answer: You found a horrible solution, a solution of a swelled, male dominance. I suggest to you the solution of a great Sage of the Gemara: Rabbi Chiya (Yevamot 63a), whose wife used to cause him much distress.. then he would find something that she would like, he would buy it and bring it for her. Rav asked: Why do you do this? She pains you! (Rav wanted to learn how R. Chiya was able to return good in place of evil). Rabbi Chiya answered: "It suffices for us that our wives raise our children and save us from sin." You are obviously not as great as Rabbi Chiya, but your wife certainly does much more for you. Open your eyes wide and look. You owe her a great debt of gratitude. You must therefore greatly value her, thank her day and night and lovingly ignore her minor deficiency of anger, which is cancelled by the majority of her good character.

Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Joint Minyan

Q: We live in a small settlement. Is it preferable to have separate minyanim for Ashkenazim and Sefardim or a joint minyan?

A: One joint minyan. Communal. Together!

Blackening Tefillin

Q: Do I need special color to blacken my Tefillin straps?

A: It is possible with a regular magic marker since they are synthetic. The same goes for the boxes (Piskei Teshuvot 43 #4).

New Car

Q: My wife and I bought a new car. What blessing do we recite?

A: "Ha-Tov Ve-Ha-Meitiv" (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 222:1).

Mixed Swimming

Q: Is it permissible for a woman to swim in a mixed pool if she is dressed modestly?

A: G-d forbid.

Dating Doubt

Q: I have met a young woman a few times, and everything seems good, but I am concerned that maybe it is a mistake. What should I do?

A: Take counsel, face-to-face with someone who knows you personally.

Cell Phone on Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible to carry a cell phone on Shabbat in order to tell the time?

A: No, it is Muktzeh, since its main function is forbidden.

Christian Book

Q: What should I do with a Christian book I received which is full of Torah verses?

A: Throw it in the garbage. It possesses no holiness (Shut Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah #172).

Honoring one's Father

Q: I was angry with my father in front of my son. How do I repair it?

A: Ask forgiveness in front of your son or tell him about it.

Torah Scholars

Q: Who was greater - the Lubavitcher Rebbe or Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Avraham Shapira?

A: Each one in his own way.

Q: Can you specify?

A: The greatness of Torah is not a subject for a text message.

Shidduch

Q: Does one need to tell a young man that the young woman he is getting set up with is heavy?

A: No. This lacks any importance (see Kehilot Yaakov, Yevamot #38).

Modesty

Q: It is important to dress modestly when we are home alone in the house?

A: Yes, also in the dark, because Hashem fills the entire world with His Honor.

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