

THE TRUST OF TRUTH

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

In his monumental essay discussing the reasons for the more than 100 Mitzvos commanded in Sefer Divarim (Book of Deuteronomy), Rabbi S.R. Hirsch posits that the "repeated Mitzvos" (approx. 70) had unique significance and application for the transition of the nation from the desert into the Promised Land. In support of his approach, Rav Hirsch pointed out that the Shalosh Rigalim: Pesach, Shavuot, and Succos are the only Yomim Tovim (holi reviewed in Sefer Divarim, whereas Shabbos, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur are not repeated. The Shalosh Rigalim are closely related to the agricultural seasons and involve Aliya L'Regel - going to Yerushalayim. As such, they could not be fully appreciated while the nation was in the desert. However, upon occupying Eretz Yisroel the nation would be able to experience all facets of those three holidays. Therefore, it was important to review those specific holidays because there would be new aspects to their observance unpracticed over the years in the desert. On the other hand, Shabbos, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur did not involve agriculture and were fully observed while the Jews were still in the desert. Therefore, there was nothing new to add in reviewing them.

In this week's Parsha Moshe reviewed the Ten Commandments. First of all, the Ten Commandments include the Mitzvah of Shabbos. Secondly, why were they reviewed at all? A cursory study of the Ten Commandments shows that the Ten Commandments were as applicable in the desert as they were once the nation had taken possession of the land. Why did they have to be reviewed?

The Vilna Gaon explained that Sefer Divarim is different from all the other Seforim (books) because Moshe did not transmit G-d's words to the nation immediately after hearing them from G-d. Instead, Moshe waited until the last five weeks of his life to tell the nation what G-d had told him previously. The words spoken were still the exact words spoken to him by G-d, however; there was a delay between Moshe's reception and his transmitting them to the nation.

In truth, as far as the nation was concerned the manner of Moshe's transmitting the information should not have made any practical difference. In either case, the nation had to trust that Moshe was delivering G-d's words accurately.

The Talmud in Shabbos (31a) records the famous differences in approach between Shamai and Hillel in dealing with "the" potential convert. Three such instances are recorded in which Shamai refused to deal with a conversion whereas Hillel agreed to do so. In the first recorded incident, the potential Ger (convert) asked Shamai, "How many Torahs do you have?" Shamai answered, "Two - the Written and the Oral." The non-Jew then asked Shamai to convert him even though he would not believe in the

divinity of the Oral Torah. He would only believe in the divinity of the Written Torah! Shamai chased him out of the Bais Medresh (study hall).

The potential convert then approached Hillel who accepted the non-Jew's circumstances and converted him to Judaism on condition that he would study with him. The next day Hillel taught the Ger the Aleph Bais (Hebrew alphabet) so that he could begin studying the Written Torah (Old Testament) that he believed to have been divinely ordered. Hillel pointed to each letter naming them accurately and sent the Ger home to review the lesson. The next day Hillel taught the Ger the same information, but this time he pointed to the Bais calling it Aleph and the Aleph calling it Bais. The Ger immediately questioned Hillel. "But yesterday you taught me differently!" Hillel answered, "The same way that you have to trust me that an Aleph is and Aleph and a Bais is a Bais, trust me that G-d gave us two Torahs, a Written and an Oral! Unlocking the secrets of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah demands that you trust me!"

The point of the Gemara is profoundly simple. All of knowledge is a matter of trust. The teacher must teach and the student must accept. The student must trust the teacher that he is teaching truth and the teacher must be true to the authenticity and accuracy of the lesson. Besides, imagine how time consuming and difficult it would be to teach if the teacher had to always "prove" the authenticity of his lessons! Clearly, trust is central to the transmission of any and all knowledge.

Why then was it so important for the last book of the Torah to be written in a manner and style reflecting the difference in the way Moshe transmitted G-d's words to the nation? In either case the Jews had to trust Moshe that the words he was teaching were the true words of G-d!

Among the concerns for the transition from the desert into the land was the decentralization of the nation's Torah leadership. During the forty years in the desert the Bnai Yisroel were in close proximity and contact with the source of Torah knowledge. Moshe, Aharon, Miriam, and the members of the Sanhedrin, were their direct and immediate contacts with the source of G-d's laws. However, once the nation transitioned into the land their direct contact would be reduced to the relatively infrequent times that they traveled to Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash.

More so than that, the transition into the land meant the death of Moshe Rabbeinu and the transfer of authenticity and truth to Yehoshua and all subsequent Torah teachers. No longer would the Bnai Yisroel be able to see and speak to Moshe, the "First Position of Transmission." In essence, besides the Torah scroll written by Moshe himself (whose authenticity would also be a matter of trust and acceptance) all other Torah knowledge would be reduced to the Second Position of Transmission and the Oral Torah. This meant that without belief and trust in the authenticity and accuracy of what the Torah teachers were teaching there was no proof of anything being divine or not being divine! On Tisha B'Av we just read Yirmiyahu's anguished Kinah over the death of his beloved student and king, Yoshiyahu. King Yoshiyahu encountered his first accurate Torah when he was 26 years old 18 years after becoming king! Prior to that, the only Torah he had ever seen were those that his

grandfather, King Menashe had corrupted by exchanging G-d's name for various popular pagan deities! If not for the far-thinking courage of the Kohanim who hid a Torah from the corruption of Menashe, there would not have been an accurate Torah to be found anywhere in the world! It's foolish to think that the Written Torah demands any less trust to believe its divine and accuracy than does the Oral Torah! As the Bnai Yisroel stood poised to cross the Yarden and embark on their mission as G-d's Kingdom of Priests and Holy Nation, Moshe had to drive home the importance of trusting the Torah leadership of the nation. As the "First Position of Transmission" Moshe gathered his charges around him and said: (The following is the author's imagined conversation.) "My beloved children. The time is drawing near when I will no longer be with you. This greatest of all adventures that we have shared will soon come to an end and you will have to embark alone on a newer and more difficult passage. All of you, those who stood with me at the moment that G-d spoke to us at Har Sinai and those of you who know it to be true because your parents and grandparents made their memories your greatest reality, must now carry the memory and reality of G-d's revelation into the future. It will be up to you to share their memories with your own children and grandchildren as if it was your reality.

"And you will make known to your children and grandchildren the day that you stood before G-d at Har Sinai?"

However, it is not enough that we speak of Matan Torah(Revelation) as a moment that happened. The memory of Matan Torah must be so real that we speak of it in the present, not the past.

(5:2-5) "G-d made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with your forefathers but with us who are here and alive today! Face to face did G-d speak with you from amid the fire. I was standing between G-d and you at that time to relate the word of G-d to you!"

Therefore, gather near to me my beloved children. Let us together relive that singular moment in our collective memories when G-d summoned us to the foot of Har Sinai.

"I am G-d Your G-d Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt?"

Sefer Divarim was the nation's initiation into the reality of the Oral Torah. Knowing the dangers facing them, G-d instructed Moshe to relive with them the most important beginning of their mission. Matan Torah and the Ten Commandments was the singular moment in history when G-d spoke to the entire Jewish people. It was a moment that would have to be replayed in the lives of the nation till the end of time. Every subsequent generation would have to teach their children and grandchildren the reality of that moment as if they themselves stood with Moshe and heard the voice of G-d.

"These orations (first 11 chapters of Divarim) are supported by a review, through the mouth of Moshe, of a past replete with G-d revealing experiences that is now coming to a close that should remain forever in the hearts and minds of the Jews, inspiring them to step forth as faithful son's of G-d's covenant." (Rav S.R. Hirsch 1:3)

HAFTORAH "NACHAMU

This week's Haftorah begins the 7 Haftorah of Consolation selected from the Navi Yishayah. In the aftermath of Tisha B'Av and the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, G-d embraces his children enveloping them in hope and love. It captures the imagery and emotion of a loving parent who after punishing a wayward child picks up the child and, with tears and hugs, kisses away the pain of distance and separation. Yishayah paints a picture of the Creator's majesty in nature and history. Prophesizing 190 years before the Churban, he described the triumphant resurrection of Tzion and Yerushalayim. The exiled will have returned and the very hills of Jerusalem will testify to the eternity of G-d and his chosen people. Our ultimate redemption will be far more than a return to Land and nationalism. It will herald the dawning of our greatest accomplishment as we ascend to our rightful place among the nations. *"The world of the Prophet visualizes the time when the "Jacob" nation will in truth have become "Israel", and as the nations of priests of the world, will have accomplished its mission. Then, Jerusalem will have become the center, the heart from which, and to which, not only the life stream of Israel, but also that of the whole mankind intimately connected with Israel pulsates."* Rav Hirsch

15TH OF AV THE HAPPIEST DAY IN THE YEAR

The last Mishnah in Tanis states that the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur are equally joyous occasions. The forgiveness received on Yom Kippur and the annually renewed closeness with G-d are causes for great celebration. The 15th of Av is equally a time of historic atonement, intimacy, and celebration. The Talmud explains the six events that give this day its unique character. **1.** As explained in previous editions, the above 20, male, generation of the Exodus died out in the desert during the 40 years of wandering. Every Tisha B'Av, 15,000 men, (of the total 600,000) would die. On the last Tisha B'av in the year 2488, the remaining 15,000 dug their graves; however in the morning none had died! Figuring that they must have made a mistake in the calendar, they continued to dig their graves every night until the 15th. Upon seeing the full moon they realized that G-d had rescinded the decree for the remaining 15,000! A day of forgiveness and celebration was proclaimed. ($37 \times 15,000 = 555,000 + 14,700 + 250$ by Korach + $15,000$ Deut.1:44 = 599,000)

2 & 3. In the times of the Shoftim - Judges, under the rule of Othniel, a terrible civil war broke out between the tribe of Binyamin and the rest of the nation. (approx. 2573 -1188 b.c.e.) The tribe of Binyamin was decimated and a decree was issued forbidding any further marriage with the men of Binyamin. This would have resulted in the eventual destruction of the entire tribe. Additionally, women who inherited their father's ancestral properties were forbidden to marry outside of their

tribes. Some time later, on the 15th of Av, both decrees were lifted, allowing for all marriages between the tribes, and guaranteeing the survival of the tribe of Binyamin. The Mishnah teaches that the 15th of Av was devoted to arranging marriages (shiduchim), and the rebuilding of relationships.

4. Following the death of King Solomon, the nation was divided. The evil Yeravam ben Nevat led Israel. Three years after taking the throne, he erected two golden calves in the North and South of Israel, and prohibited his people from visiting the Bais Hamikdash. Checkpoints and other forms of restraint were instituted to discourage going to the Temple and to encourage serving the "golden calves". On the 15th of Av, around 3187-574 b.c.e., under the King Hoshea b. Elah, the decree was lifted and all of Israel was again able to go to the Bais Hamikdash.

5. "Yom Tabar Maagal - The Day of the breaking of the Axes." In the 2nd Temple, wood was scarce after the land had been unattended during the 70-year Babylonian exile. Therefore, wood was very precious and expensive. To guarantee that the Mizbeach (altar) would always have sufficient wood, donations were given by the wealthiest families, exclusively for the Altar. The wood had to be completely dry to guarantee that there wouldn't be any worms. The cut off date to bring the wood into the Temple for the coming year was the 15th of Av. That was the day when the "axes could be broken" and it was a day of enormous joy and rejoicing knowing that the sacrifices could be brought for the coming year.

6. 52-years after the destruction of the 2nd Temple, Bar Kochva lead an uprising against the Romans. He was so successful that some considered him to be the Mashiach. His rebellion ended on Tisha B'Av after a 3-year siege against Betar, and he died along with 580,000 others. To disgrace and demoralize the people, the "fallen of Betar" were not permitted by the Roman authorities to be buried. Instead, they were stacked as a human fence around the vineyards of the governor, Adrianus. (approx. 12 mile perimeter) For almost 11 years, until Emperor Hadrian's death, the bodies miraculously remained intact without decomposing. On the 15th of Av, permission was granted to bury the martyred of Betar. This miracle was cause for celebration. In fact, the fourth blessing of the Birkas Hamazon (Grace After Meals) Hatov V'Hamaytiv - G-d Who Is Good And Who Does Good - was authored by the rabbis of that generation to commemorate this great miracle. This was ordained to remember the special love that G-d displayed in not allowing the martyrs of Betar to decompose before burial.

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