

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS KI SEITZEI
MITZVAH THERAPY**

**BY
HESCHEL GREENBERG**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS KI SEITZEI
MITZVAH THERAPY**

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

CONTENTS

1. MITZVAH THERAPY
2. TAKE THE HIGH ROAD
3. GOING OUT
4. WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM A THIEF?
5. DOUBLE YOUR MONEY
6. REBELLIOUS CHILD
7. HOW MUCH LONGER?
8. TURN ON THE LIGHTS
9. TWO STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT!
10. WHO SCHLEPS US OUT?
11. HYPOCRISY?
12. KEEP OUR WORD/G-D KEEP YOUR
WORD
13. THE FIVE MYSTICAL DIMENSIONS OF MARRIAGE
14. 3 X 13: ITS SIMPLE ARITHMETIC!

15. GOING OVERBOARD

16. INVINCIBLE

17. HOLY CHUTZPAH

18. AN "I" FOR AN "I"

19. STONED!

20. IN PRAISE OF MIRIAM

21. WINDOWS

22. SEND US MOSHIACH AND THE MOTHER BIRD!

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Ki Seitzei* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

* * *

Ki Seitzei is unique in the number of Mitzvos it contains; more than any other parsha. It is this Mitzvah power that provides us with the energy to transform the world into a Messianic utopia.

But even the name of the parsha alludes to Moshiach. Ki Seitzei means "When you go out." Its message is clear that it alludes to going out of exile.

The end of the parsha deals with the command to obliterate the evil nation Amalek. Our ages inform us that the destruction of this evil force is a prerequisite to the building of the Bais Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, and the first step in the unfolding of the Final Redemption.

ESSAY ONE

MITZVAH THERAPY

Each Mitzvah has infinite value and power.

A Mitzvah is enhanced by the quality of the act.

Yet, the quantity of Mitzvah performances is even more significant.

ESSAY ONE

MITZVAH THERAPY

Twelve Percent

One of the salient features of this week's Torah portion of *Ki Seitzei* is that it contains 74 Mitzvos (Commandments), about twelve percent of the total 613 Mitzvos. This is more than any of the other fifty-two Torah portions. The sheer quantity of Mitzvos that we read about is indicative of the need to fortify ourselves with the benefits that accrue from Mitzvah observance.

In truth, even one Mitzvah has importance, and its power cannot be overestimated. The Talmud states—and Maimonides codifies this in his world of Jewish law—that even one Mitzvah can upset the balance between good and evil in favor of the good. This lone Mitzvah—any Mitzvah—can tip the scales in favor of saving the person who performs the Mitzvah and it can also save the entire world from calamity.

This, the Talmud, bases on the need for everyone to imagine that the good and evil in this world are evenly balanced. Thus, even what appears to be one “feather” of a Mitzvah (in Talmudic parlance “a light Mitzvah”) is capable of saving the world.

Nevertheless, this week's Parsha introduces us to the notion of not being satisfied with the **quality** of the Mitzvos we perform. We must also become Mitzvah collectors; amassing as many Mitzvos in as short a time possible. Quantity is also quality.

We can now appreciate the name of this week's parsha "*Ki Seitzei*," which translates as: "If you will go out." The context here is going out to war against our enemies.

The fact that the parsha with the most Mitzvos is about fighting against our enemies indicates that Mitzvah power is the most effective weapon against the spiritual obstacles that lie in our path. In the literal sense the parsha deals with an external enemy. However, it can also be interpreted as an internal force with which we struggle to maintain our moral and spiritual equilibrium. In this battle for the supremacy of good over evil the quantity of our Mitzvos assumes greater importance.

It is interesting that the name of our parsha does not include the word war or enemy. It just refers to the idea of "going out." Whenever we go out of our spiritual comfort zone we are vulnerable. And as long as we increase the number of Mitzvos we are protected.

Stock-Taking

It is no therefore no coincidence that this Mitzvah laden section of the Torah—with its implied message of

emphasizing quantity and not just quality in the performance of Mitzvos—is read in the month of Elul. Elul actually has a dual function. It is the month of stock taking and introspection for the past year, as well as the month of preparation for the future year.

The first and most obvious lesson we can learn from the occurrence of Ki *Seitzei* in the month of Elul, is that Mitzvos too possess the dual feature that parallels Elul. The way we rectify the shortcomings of the past year is through Mitzvos, and the way we prepare for a new year is also through Mitzvos.

On one hand a Mitzvah, our sages teach us, refines and purifies the one who performs it. Every time we perform a G-d given commandment we dig through the layers of imperfection that do not allow us to express the pure Divine energy of our souls.

To be sure, Mitzvah performance without some measure of sincere reflection falls short of the demands of Elul. During this auspicious month we must devote time to do some honest soul searching and return to G-d in our hearts.

There is also no question that in the month of Elul, we must devote more time to prayer. The only way, however, that our efforts at purifying ourselves can be successful is when we employ the right instruments to “bore” beneath the surface of our hardened hearts. The Mitzvos are these instruments.

Paving the Way for a Better Year

Now, insofar as the preparation for the future is concerned, Mitzvos pave the way for a new and better year. The word Mitzvah, in addition to its basic meaning—“commandment”—also means to **connect** with G-d, the Source of the commandment.

If Rosh Hashanah is about making new connections, the means to accomplish this must be through the Mitzvos; the G-d given, and thus, the only real way of making those connections.

To be sure, we usher in a new year by making resolutions, and by expressing our innermost emotions of dedication to G-d.

Moreover, on Rosh Hashanah we “coronate” G-d as our King, by submitting ourselves to Him and accepting His sovereignty. But, in order to make the commitment solid and enduring, we must prepare ourselves by doing Mitzvos, and particularly the Mitzvah of Tzedakah. The Mitzvah creates an enduring connection between ourselves—finite human beings—and the Infinite Creator.

The End of the Torah

This week’s parsha appears near the conclusion of the Five Books of Moses. It is part of Moses’ last address to the

Jewish people before his passing and their entry into the Promised Land. As the end of the Torah, this parsha can also be understood as the inspiration for us in these last moments of our existence in exile and the preparation for our entry into the Promised Land—the Messianic Age.

We are presently living in historic times. By all accounts, all of the Biblical and Talmudic predictions for the Messianic Age have come to fruition. The only thing missing is the actual Redemption. The Rebbe informed us that we are now standing on the very threshold of the Age of Redemption. We are at the end of the journey that took us through thousands of years of travail and sacrifice and are ready to begin the new age of peace and tranquility.

Our historic locus parallels the location of the parsha, which is in close proximity to the Torah's conclusion. There the Torah describes the Jewish people standing on the threshold of their entry into the Land of Israel. In terms of the annual cycle we are also in the month of Elul, which is the threshold of the New Year. We are in a threefold “end” process: The end of the Torah, the end of the year and the end of exile.

And the analogy of Elul to the Messianic Age can be extended further. Just as Elul serves a dual function; of rectifying the past as well as preparing for the future, similarly, the threshold of the Age of Redemption serves a dual purpose:

We now have the capacity to alter the past and to bring the world to a state of refinement. Whatever was missed by our forebears can now be rectified. We have the power through our Mitzvos and unique challenges to not only make the world today a better world, but in the process, we can help to redeem and elevate the past as well.

Simultaneously, we are now in the unique position of being able to prepare ourselves and the entire world for the Redemption.

And as it is true that both objectives of the month of Elul—rectification of the past year and preparation for the future year—can and must be achieved by way of the Mitzvos, which singularly refine the world, even as they pave the way for the future, similarly, the way to achieve the dual function of bringing Redemption to the past and preparing ourselves for a glorious future is through “obsessively” engaging in Mitzvah actions. This obsession translates in the quantity of Mitzvos and not just their quality.

ESSAY TWO

TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

Our essence and default position is peace.

War is a necessary evil.

While fighting our battles we should never lose sight that
we are above war.

ESSAY TWO

TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

Just Wars

War is one of the most objectionable institutions known to humankind. We pray daily for peace and for a time when the “swords will be converted into plowshares,” and “Nations will learn war no more.” Yet, history has taught us that there are just wars. World War II is a perfect example of a just war that was fought to defeat a threat to the Jewish people, and, indeed, to the entire world.

The wars the Jewish people fought before, during and after the conquest of the Land of Israel—some of which are referred to in this week’s parsha—were also examples of wars that were mandated by G-d, to protect and preserve the Jewish people and to rid the world of its most evil elements. But, no matter how many wars the Jewish people have been subjected to, they never lost their sense of the war’s true objective—the end of war.

But, war is not limited to the battlefield. Every time we engage the material world, we enter into a conflict, as to how we should proceed. Materialistic influences “demand” that we devote our lives to more and more “conquests;”

more physical pleasure, more wealth, more acquisitions, more power, etc. The spiritual influences, on the other hand, demand that we utilize the material for noble purposes even as we shun the excesses brought on by a materialistic world view.

Bread and War

In Jewish literature, bread is often used as a symbol for all material matters. And it is instructive that the Hebrew word for bread, *lechem*, is cognate to the word *milchama*—war. Every time we engage the material world there is a struggle as to whether we will control to what extent—where, when and how—we will allow the material aspects of life to occupy our minds and hearts.

Our sages also remind us that every time we pray, we are engaged in a struggle between our internal forces of good and evil. The Psalms that we recite near the beginning of our morning prayer is called *Pesukei d'zimra*. Literally translated, this means the “verses of praise.” It is so called because in no other source can we find such eloquence in describing G-d’s handiwork.

There is another translation of the words, “*Pesukei d'zimra*” that refers to these Psalms as “songs of pruning.” They are so named because by reciting these exquisite praises of G-d we effectively trim away the undesirable matters and attitudes that prevent us from getting close to G-d.

This week's parsha, in describing an actual war, begins:

"If you shall go out to war against your enemy, G-d will deliver him into your hands and you will capture a captive."

In this verse, there are at least three messages the Torah has been teaching us about the proper attitude to war and conflict. This lesson is especially appropriate for the personal war that we must wage—the struggle between good and evil.

Going Out

Firstly, the Torah states "If you shall **go out** to war..," implying that one must go out of where they were previously, in order to fight the war. Isn't that quite obvious that you cannot fight a war from your home? Why then does the Torah not state simply, "If you go to war" or "If you shall wage war?" Why add the word "out?"

Chassidic thought teaches us that the addition of the word "out" was intended to teach us that war is inherently a foreign concept to a Jew. The Jew must go out of his element in order to be engaged in a war. Conflict and a Jew are naturally opposites.

Even when a Jew is compelled into a battle, he must never forget that he is engaged in an alien exercise.

And while certain wars are not only "just wars," they are a fulfillment of Divine commandments—such as wars of self-defense or the initial war of the conquest of the Land of

Israel—nevertheless, in order to engage in a war a Jew must go out of his true and essential being, which is peace. A Jew must be capable of returning to his or her source of inner peace that is the default state of the soul.

When we realize that our foray into the realm of war has transformed us into a combative individual, we must endeavor to move in the opposite direction—to perform more acts of kindness and peace to restore their true innate nature.

On or Against?

Secondly, the Torah states that the war is *Al Oy'vecha*, which, when translated precisely, should read “**on** your enemy,” and not “**against** your enemy.”

The difference between the two expressions “against” and “on” is clear. In the battle between good and evil, we must always recognize that good is superior to evil. And that even though we are involved in a war; we never allow ourselves to be tainted by this involvement, because we always stand above our enemy.

By stating that the war is “on” your enemy—and not **against** your enemy—the Torah instructs us to always maintain our awareness of the superiority of our cause. Never consider your enemy your equal.

We must always maintain a clear understanding of the black and white nature of evil and good. When our value

system becomes muddled and we are confused as to what is good and what is evil, we cannot prevail in our struggle.

And while there are gray areas in the area of right and wrong, we cannot simply “flip a coin” to arbitrarily decide what our course of action will be. In these situations, we must consult an authority of Jewish law, ethics and Torah spirituality to guide us in these uncharted waters. That too is Torah’s instruction to us that brings clarity to our lives and its struggles.

Capturing a Captive

Thirdly, the Torah speaks of “capturing a captive.” This suggests that the object of the spiritual wars we have to fight is not only to *maintain* our existence, but to liberate the good that is hidden within the evil and thereby *increase* the amount of positive energy in the world.

According to the teachings of Kabbalah, every physical object, every experience of life, has a spark of holiness in it that is held “captive” within that object or experience. When we fight our battles against evil, we are extricating and liberating the goodness within that thing and allowing the good to affect the world.

According to the Ari, one of the greatest Kabbalists of all times (whose anniversary of passing on the fifth day of the Hebrew month of Av coincides with the beginning of the Torah reading of the Book of Deuteronomy/*Devarim*), when

the process of liberating the sparks is complete, the world will be ready for Moshiach, because the cumulative forces of holiness that were liberated by all of the battles we've been fighting, will make the world receptive for the Redemption.

Mission Accomplished

The Lubavitcher Rebbe has declared that, in fact, this process of "liberating the sparks" has been completed, and the world is now ready for experiencing the final change that is needed for the age of total peace.

This assertion needs to be understood. If we have already liberated all of the sparks of holiness that need to be liberated why isn't Moshiach here? Why are we still in exile?

While we can never presume to understand G-d's ways as to why things are the way they are, we can and must understand **what** G-d demands of us. If the focus on unleashing the sparks has now receded what is to be our focus today?

The Rebbe explained that in the present standing-on-the-threshold mode our efforts should be directed at "opening our eyes" to realize the good that exists and the unlimited positive energy we have released through our cumulative efforts. This not only complements our increased acts of

goodness and kindness, it imbues them with a new and refreshing energy.

To summarize: Our mission from the time we became a nation was to wage war against the obstacles to G-d's presence in this physical world. In this week's parsha of *Ki Seitzei*, three guidelines as to how to successfully wage this war were given, as was discussed earlier:

- a) Know that war is not our forte; it is a necessary means to the end, but not the end;
- b) Know that we are superior to our enemy;
- c) "Capture the captives," i.e., find the hidden good in the world and release it so it augments the good we already possess.

Now, we are ready to enter into next week's parsha—the beginning of which we always read on the Shabbos of *Ki Seitzei*—which is *Ki Savo*, translated as "When you arrive." Now we are in the arrival mode, with the emphasis on becoming receptive to all the good and G-dly energy that characterizes the Messianic Age.

ESSAY THREE

GOING OUT

Our souls are in exile and yearn to be liberated.

Personal redemption is the catalyst for collective redemption.

ESSAY THREE

GOING OUT

Abhorrence of War

War is one of the most—if not the most tragic—manifestation of life in the pre-Messianic Age. And while we have prayed—and continue to pray—to G-d to bring an end to all forms of warfare, we are presently living in the reality that still tolerates war, and in some extreme cases even requires it. But at all times, Judaism instructs us to view war as a necessary evil at best.

As discussed in the preceding essay, one way the Torah expresses its abhorrence of war, even as it discusses the laws that regulated it, can be found in the beginning of this week's parsha. The very first fragment of the first verse says it all:

“If you shall **go out** to wage war on your enemy.”

By stating “If you shall **go out** to wage war,” and not simply, “If you shall wage war,” the Torah wants us to realize that fighting is never your inner goal and your essence. You must go out of your routine and that which defines you to do the aberrant exercise of warfare. It is not

you!, It represents going out of yourself and being something that you are not.

War and Bread

There is also a deeper, mystical and personal approach to the concept of war, which explains the phraseology of “going out” to fight the war.

All of life is a struggle. Even the word for the staff of life—bread—in Hebrew is *lechem*, the root of which is war. Because in order to procure all of our needs, symbolized by bread, we must struggle. Whether it is the farmer struggling with the elements, or the retailer who encounters stiff competition and barely ekes out a meager living, life is a virtual battlefield.

But if life looks like it is a struggle for us we should look within our inner selves to reveal the existence of a far greater struggle. The soul that we all possess comes from a Divine source that is beyond the whole concept of interaction with a physical body with physical needs.

For the soul to descend into this physical existence is not easy. It must be “convinced” that it is a worthwhile endeavor. It is not natural for a soul to be involved with the mundane and material aspects of life. It must “go out” of its element and be injected into a different and strange world. To the soul, the view of our world is as alien and bizarre as a green Martian would be to us.

Thus, the Torah begins this week's parsha with the words: "When you shall go out to wage war." This alludes to the soul that agrees to go out of its secure and spiritually insulated domain and be thrust into this cruel world to do battle." By using the words "When you **go out**," the Torah conveys to us that essentially we are spiritual creatures introduced into a hostile and alien world.

The Spoils of War

But, the Torah continues to describe what happens in war:

"And you shall capture a captive."

In every war the winner gets the spoils of war. So too in the perennial struggle with the physical world, the soul comes out a winner. It extracts the treasures and positive energies that exist in everything that G-d created, and uses this newfound energy to enhance its own relationship with G-d.

In addition, the very fact that the soul must struggle to win these battles allows the soul to discover its hidden potential. The soul discovers that it possesses the energy to overcome obstacles it was never aware of when it resided in its spiritual home.

Exile!

But very often, the body does not allow the soul to profit from its sojourn in our material world. When this occurs, the soul feels totally out of place, as if it is in a foreign country, or, for that matter, in another galaxy. It feels totally alienated and forlorn

This is what exile really means. When the Jewish people were driven out of their land, there was a simultaneous alienation of their souls from this world. The soul felt it was situated in a world that was so distant and cold. And when the soul feels that it is all alone, it relays its sense of dissatisfaction with life to the conscious mind. And that is when feelings of despair and bitterness set in.

Thus it quite possible that **some** forms of depression can be traced back to the soul feeling alienated and lost in a world that it had to “go out” of its element to live in, and not make any progress; no “captives.”

Treating Depression

To treat this condition, one must first be aware of the fact that we all possess this soul and know from where the soul derives. We must also realize that if we do not nurture it and allow it to feel comfortable in our world of materiality by using the physical as a medium to do Mitzvos, then the soul will be quite unhappy and even despair about the prospects of winning the war.

The key to recovery from the spiritually induced sense of depression is a three step program:

First, we must appreciate who we really are; that we are a composite of a soul and a body, and the soul is our true essence

Second, we must be aware that our soul's descent into our world is the result of a mission it was given to change the world.

Third, we must be aware of the fact that we have the power to succeed. This power to achieve "victory" we have through the observance of the Mitzvos.

This awareness instills in us a sense of meaning and profound joy. Instead of the soul feeling alienated from its place of origin, the soul feels liberated and fulfilled.

The surest way to feeling joy in our lives is not through perpetual entertainment. That just masks the soul's pain. Only a life that is consistently geared to the observance of the Mitzvos can bring contentment and tranquility to the soul, which, in turn, brings joy and fulfillment to the conscious mind.

Personal and Collective Redemption

When we speak of the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption, we must begin to address our own personal state of redemption. Getting out of spiritual

depression is a form of liberation. The soul feels free and rejuvenated because we have allowed our soul to express itself in an uninhibited way.

This personal Redemption is the catalyst for the collective Redemption of the Jewish people and all of humanity.

ESSAY FOUR

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM A THIEF?

Evil is a façade.

It is hidden good waiting to be revealed.

**Our challenge is to see the hidden good by both shunning
evil, learning from it and then transforming it.**

ESSAY FOUR

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM A THIEF?

Why Evil Exists

This week's Torah portion begins with the words:

“When you go forth to war upon your enemies...and you capture captives.”

While the Torah here is simply discussing the laws concerning a prisoner of war in the physical sense, there is a profound message to each and every one of us. Every verse and word of Torah is relevant in all places and all times. The Ba'al Shem Tov, founder of the Chassidic movement (whose birthday on the 18th—Chai of Elul coincides with the parsha of *Ki Seitzei* and *Ki Savo*) provided us with a deeper insight into this verse.

We are constantly engaged in a spiritual battle. After all, we are composites of both a G-dly soul and an animal soul. They are engaged in a perennial struggle for control of the person.

Step One: Shun Evil

Conventional wisdom and classical Jewish thought tells us that we must, first and foremost, shun all evil by distancing ourselves from it lest we will be overwhelmed by it.

That is rule number one.

Don't try to reason with your evil impulse; make deals with it, or otherwise attempt to outmaneuver it. The evil impulse—which is borne out of our natural instinct for survival and self-preservation—comes to us as soon as we are born. The newborn's sucking instinct is one example of how we are born with this natural effort.

From this perspective, the existence of evil can only be justified because it poses a challenge for us. By struggling with evil and then repudiating it, we grow in our spiritual development.

And by no means is this form of growth to be underestimated. According to the teachings of Chassidus, the G-dly energy we unleash by performing a Mitzvah is one that can easily be internalized. The energy that we generate by restraining ourselves and refraining from doing something that is against G-d's will, unleashes a far greater G-dly force—so sublime that we cannot access it by an action. It can only be accessed by being passive in the face of temptation.

Step Two: Harness Evil

There is, according to the teaching of the Ba'al Shem Tov, another way for us to deal with evil that is alluded to in the opening verse of this week's parsha.

While we may never engage in evil behavior for any positive outcome—for the end never justifies the means—there are ways, the Ba'al Shem Tov taught us, we may learn and benefit from evil.

Commenting on the opening phrase of this parsha cited earlier, the Ba'al Shem Tov states that one can and may derive lessons how to better serve G-d from evil. Anything negative in ourselves or in the world can be exploited for the good, if one learns how to derive lessons from it in the service of the Creator.

This then is the spiritual meaning of “capturing captives.” We must seek out the positive lessons from every experience, even if they are evil. We then succeed in augment our positive forces by availing ourselves of the positive energy “captured” from evil.

The Seven Lessons

Rabbi Zushe of Anipole, the famed Chassidic sage (a colleague of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of the Chassidic classic, the Tanya, and the founder of the Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidic movement, whose birthday is on the 18th of Elul, the same as the Ba'al Shem Tov 47 years

later), was wont to say that he had learned seven things from a thief.

1. What he does he does he keeps to himself.
2. He is willing to take risks to achieve his goal.
3. He does not distinguish between “major” and “minor” things, but takes equally exacting care of each and every detail.
4. He invests great effort in what he does.
5. He is swift.
6. He is always optimistic.
7. If at first he fails, he is back time and again for another try.

If we had to find the thread that runs through all of these seven traits of the thief it is: conscientiousness.

In the same manner that Rabbi Zushe succeeded in pinpointing the positive traits of the thief we can, similarly, look for positive lessons in all areas of life.

Why Learn Positive Lessons from Evil?

One may raise a simple question: Why does one have to learn conscientiousness from a thief? Why can't we learn the same lesson from the righteous people that live in every generation? Certainly, it would be far better to learn positive lessons from positive people?

Four answers can be given:

First, unfortunately, evil is far more ubiquitous than good. We cannot always afford to wait to find a righteous person from whom to learn the proper lessons of life. In the meantime we should not feel that we are left without guidance. Just take a look at the way evil works and see what traits that make them effective can be appropriated for the good.

Second, we have a tendency to not learn lessons from people who are head and shoulders above us. Frequently we hear people say, “How can I ever be expected to be like that person?”

Thus, the Rebbe states that the words of Ethics of the Fathers, “Who is wise, one who learns from all people,” are also intended to address those who are loathe to learn from people who are on higher levels. Sometimes we put people on a pedestal so we can find excuses why we’re not like them.

And since not everyone is wise enough to heed that directive of learning from all—including those who are much higher than ourselves—we must resort to learning positive lessons from those who are morally and spiritually lower than us.

Third, there is also the converse attitude we have towards learning lessons from those who are higher than us. It is called cynicism. It is a common occurrence to find fault

even with the greatest of people. How many times do we find people attempting to minimize the greatness of even the most revered individuals. Even rabbis will occasionally try to “humanize” the heroic figures of Judaism and find fault even with the most righteous. There is a human frailty that sees fault with everyone and will see the negative even in the positive. How can one derive the positive lessons of a righteous individual if one will argue that they are not truly so righteous; they also have ulterior motives, etc.

Hence, it is also important to learn lessons from less than righteous individuals. And in some ways it is easier because some will be comfortable identifying with flawed individuals because they see themselves in the others who are flawed. And, since we also like to think of ourselves as being good despite our shortcomings, there is no better way—for people with this mindset—than to learn the good from other flawed people.

The fourth answer relates to the way we benefit the world when we extract positive lessons from evil. By deriving these lessons we take the good that is embedded in the evil and thereby increase the amount of positive energy in the world.

Step Three: Transform Evil

This process of “capturing a captive” is a prelude to an even more sublime form of exploiting evil that relates to the process of Teshuvah (repentance, return, a timely theme in this month of Elul as we prepare for the New Year).

Teshuvah itself has been divided into several levels.

Basic Teshuvah, which derives from fear of retribution, has the effect of merely mitigating the sin. When one's motivation for Teshuvah, however, is out of love, the Talmud declares, the sins then are actually converted into virtues. Teshuvah, thus, has the capacity to not only glean some useful lessons from evil, but to totally transform it into good as well.

Three Steps in Preparation for Redemption

All three steps in dealing with evil carry even greater weight in our day and age as we prepare ourselves for the imminent coming of Moshiach.

The first level of shunning evil is especially relevant today. We are living in the age where the paradox of evil is in evidence. On the one hand, thousands of years of G-dly light has been generated by the good of our forebears that dispelled most of the insidious darkness and force of evil. Yet, what evil is extant today is the most potent and concentrated form.

Therefore, on the side of challenge, our generation has the greatest challenge to combat that evil, thereby unleashing unprecedented G-dly light. And when we reflect on the fact that the intensity of evil notwithstanding, we are on the verge of experiencing the very disappearance of evil, this provides us with tremendous encouragement that the war is almost over. True, the enemy makes his last stand and seems to exhibit greater power than before, but it is his last gasp.

The second level of dealing with evil, which is to learn lessons from evil, is much more pronounced now. We are witnesses to how the most audacious forms of evil assert themselves. The potency of evil is in direct proportion to the G-dly energy it masks and perverts. If we seek unconventional G-dly light we can find it when we unmask the evil and strip the G-dly energy from its vulgar façade of evil.

But, most importantly, we have an unprecedented opportunity to experience the third level of dealing with evil—the higher level of Teshuvah—which is the transformation of evil into good. We are situated on the very last patch of exile with a clear view of the future dynamics. We have the power to do Teshuvah motivated by a profound love for G-d, fueled by our disgust with the state of alienation from G-d we are presently

This third approach to evil is the most effective way of preparing ourselves for the Messianic Age.

In simple terms this entails discovering the good in everyone and in every one of life's experiences; a concept that has been greatly emphasized by the Ba'al Shem Tov as well as Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.

Although we still have to be vigilant not to be ensnared by evil by shunning evil, we must also make an effort to focus on the positive ideals that can be gleaned from everything.

Our transformative Teshuvah and our obsession with seeing the good in everything now is thus a prelude to the fulfillment of the prophecy, "The spirit of impurity I shall remove from the land." During the Messianic Age evil in all of its forms will be completely transformed into holiness so that even the potential of evil will not exist.

ESSAY FIVE

DOUBLE YOUR MONEY

Life is a duality.

We are both recipients and donors.

At the very least, what we give should match what we receive.

In the Messianic Age we will realize this duality at its maximum.

ESSAY FIVE

DOUBLE YOUR MONEY

First Born First

One of the laws of inheritance discussed in this week's parsha relates to a first born son. The Torah states that regardless of the father's attitude towards him, he must bequeath him a double portion of his inheritance.

Ba'al Haturim, one of the Torah commentators (15th century) devoted to *remez*, the hints and allusions in the Torah, finds this law hinted in the very word for firstborn in Hebrew: *B'ChoR*. The 3 key letters of this word are equivalent to the numbers, 2, 20 and 200, each of which is double the numerical value of the letter that precedes it.

To Receive and Give Simultaneously

Why does a firstborn receive a double portion?

Our Sages tell us that the firstborn has the spirit of his father within him.

What is it about a firstborn that singles him out for this distinction of having his father's spirit?

While there are mystical explanations for this phenomenon, we can find a simple explanation for this as well.

A parent and child are the best metaphors for the idea of giving and receiving. No person gives more to another than a father or mother gives to his/her child. The parent is the ultimate giver and the child is the ultimate recipient.

Obviously, there are times when the child can also give to his parents—and indeed, Jewish law requires of the child to be of assistance to parents in addition to the obligation to show them respect. Children also give their parents *nachas*, satisfaction *and* joy.

However, we cannot in any way equate that which a parent gives a child to that which the child can ever return to their parents. Our parents give us our very existence in addition to the sustenance, support and guidance that a good parent continues to give after the birth of a child. What we give to our parents is qualitatively speaking on a much lower level and of a much different order.

The above holds true, generally speaking, for every child with the exception of the firstborn. There is something the firstborn gives his parents that no other child can give. And in some respects it can be said to be in the same league as that which our parents give us.

To be sure, all children enjoy a spiritual bond with their parents. The laws of inheritance illustrate this bond. In Jewish law, even a day old child, automatically inherits his father's estate, because the child is in place of the parent. The parent need not transfer his estate to the child, it is as if he was taking it from his right hand and placing it in his left hand; they are one entity.

The firstborn, in addition to being a child and heir to his father's estate, which suggests a deep connection to their father, is also the child that gives his father and mother the unique status of becoming a parent. The parent, at the birth of the firstborn, experiences an incredible transformation; he is now a parent.

There can be no greater joy, privilege, responsibility and status than being a parent. In just one fleeting second of birth, two people are transformed from individuals to the lofty position of a parent.

In other words, not only is a firstborn one, who is on the receiving end of his parents, as are all progeny, he is also in the unique position of being a "giver." (The above is true for a firstborn boy or girl, although with regard to specific areas of Jewish law, the status of the *bechor* applies to male children.)

By becoming a "giver" one enjoys a close relationship, a partnership with G-d because G-d is the ultimate Giver.

We can now understand the meaning of the statement in the Talmud that parents are G-d's partners. It is not just hyperbole. The parent is enjoying a strictly divine role; that of a giver, rather than just a recipient.

Thus, the first-born has the distinction of transforming his parent into something new and Divine. The first-born is the ultimate giver!

My First Born Israel

When G-d told Moses to speak to Pharaoh to let the Jewish people go, G-d refers to the Jewish people as "My first born son Israel." Obviously, G-d does not have any physical form and the term father must be understood metaphorically, but what does the appellation "firstborn" add onto the word "son?" Wouldn't it have sufficed for G-d to describe them as His "son?"

In light of the above analysis we can say that the relationship we have with G-d is a reciprocal relationship: One of receiving and one of "giving," as it were. As much as we receive from G-d we also give Him!

The above assertion that we are capable of giving G-d something has been challenged on theological grounds:

How can we say that we can give anything to G-d who is perfect and is need of nothing? Indeed, this question echoes the words of the Biblical book of Job, "If you are righteous, what do you give Him?"

Nevertheless, we are taught that G-d “desired” to have a “dwelling place” for Himself in our world. And this is what the Jewish people were chosen to do; to be the primary force that would introduce G-d’s presence into our world by fulfilling the dictates of the Torah. Each and every time we do a Mitzvah—which involve physical action and the utilization of physical objects to fulfill G-d’s will—we generate G-dly energy into the world, thereby “satisfying” G-d’s “desire” to dwell in our midst. Without us and our efforts, G-d could not “satisfy” His “desire.”

While it is certainly true that G-d lacks nothing, but G-d is, of course, “free” to desire something. And His desire is for us to give Him a world that invites His presence to enter.

In effect, by virtue of G-d’s own will, we give Him what He wants, in addition to being the recipients of all His many blessings.

The Day of Doubles

This “firstborn” duality phenomenon is also inherent in the Shabbos, concerning which our Sages state: “All matters of Shabbos are double.”

1) In the Ten Commandments the commandment of Shabbos is introduced with two different expressions: “Remember the Sabbath” (in Exodus), and “Guard the Sabbath” (in Deuteronomy).

2) When the Jews were in the desert, they received one portion of Manna from heaven each day. On Friday they received a double portion, one for the weekday and one for Shabbos.

3) On Shabbos they would offer two lambs as a sacrifice in the Temple.

4) We start the Shabbos meals with a blessing recited on two loaves of bread (Challah).

How does the Shabbos connect to the “firstborn” theme of duality?

Shabbos is both on the giving end as well as on the receiving end.

Shabbos: The Firstborn Day

Shabbos—the Zohar (the principle work of Kabbalah) teaches us—“blesses all the days of the next week.” Shabbos, when observed properly, instills joy and meaning to all of the days of the forthcoming week, as well as to our entire life. Even “secular” writers acknowledged how the Shabbos kept the Jewish people. Shabbos, on the most basic level, allows us to rest our weary bones. Shabbos is a time for families to dine together. It also affords us the opportunity to study Torah unimpeded by the weekday distractions.

Shabbos, in short, brings rest, harmony, unity, peace, holiness and blessing to our homes, communities as well as to our nation.

Shabbos is thus the Firstborn day of the week. Despite the fact that the Torah considers Shabbos to be the seventh day of the week, it can also be considered the first day of the week since it is the “father of the week” in terms of its ability to create a week that is blessed. In this context Shabbos is the ultimate giver and we are the ultimate recipients.

But, there is a Catch

Our Sages tell us, “One who prepares for the Shabbos will have what to eat on Shabbos.” This statement goes beyond food preparation. It also extends to our spiritual state of mind. When we live a meaningful life during the week, the power and inspiration of Shabbos is greatly enhanced.

Not only are we just passive recipients of the extraordinary blessings showered upon us from the Shabbos, we too become contributors to the Shabbos. Without our role as active contributors to the Shabbos, Shabbos would be lacking an important feature. Much like the mutual assistance of a parent and a firstborn, the Jewish people and the Shabbos enjoy similar relationship.

Our Sages in the Midrash speak of how every day of the week has a partner. Sunday is partnered with Monday;

Tuesday with Wednesday and Thursday with Friday. The Shabbos “complained” to G-d why it does not have a partner. G-d’s response was: “The Jewish people are your partner.” We give to Shabbos even as we receive from it.

The Future Redemption: Ultimate Giver and Ultimate Recipient

This theme of duality is also associated with the future Redemption. The Midrash states that many of the expressions pertaining to Redemption are double. For example, when G-d told the Jewish people that He was ready to liberate them from Egypt, the expression used in the Torah is: *pakod, pokaditij*-Remember, I have remembered.” Likewise the future Messianic Age is introduced with a repetitive expression referring to the Moshiach, *tzemach tzamachty* “A blossom I have blossomed.”

Implicit in this duality of Redemption is the notion that the Redemption is a composite of two dimensions: First, it will be the time that will give us infinite goodness and holiness. Indeed, the Messianic Age is referred to as the Shabbos of Creation.

But, in addition, there is a pivotal element of the Messianic Age to which **we** contribute. All the Mitzvos that we perform now will determine the quality of the good and G-dly light that we will enjoy with the coming of Moshiach.

And while we eagerly anticipate and yearn for the coming of Moshiach, we must also cherish the opportunities we have now as we wait and prepare for the coming of Moshiach. As much as Moshiach will give us infinite good and holiness, we contribute to Moshiach and the Era of Redemption.

ESSAY SIX

REBELLIOUS CHILD

**The greatest gift a parent can give his or her child is being
a role model.**

**Moral strength, mutual love and sensitivity of a parent
constitute the ideal model.**

It is the best we can do to raise good children.

ESSAY SIX

REBELLIOUS CHILD

Connected Opposites

This week's parsha discusses two intertwined commandments that are also as diametrically opposite each other as they are connected.

One commandment deals with the Mitzvah to chase away the mother bird when one is interested in keeping the eggs or the small hatchlings. The Torah states that compliance with this commandment brings the promise of long life.

In the words of the Torah:

"If you shall chance upon a nest of birds that is before you, while on the road, on any tree or on the earth... send away the mother... In order that it shall be good for you and you shall live long."

The Midrash comments:

"If you shall observe this commandment, you shall hasten the coming of Moshiach concerning whom the expression of "sending" is used...Alternatively, He shall hasten to send you Elijah the prophet, concerning whom the expression of "sending" is

employed and about whom it is said 'He will restore the hearts of the fathers to the children.'

In this citation, the Midrash connects the sending away of the mother bird with the restoration of the bond between children and their parents.

This Mitzvah is preceded by the rather unusual law concerning the rebellious son, who violates the commandment to honor his father and mother—the only other Mitzvah for which the Torah promises long life—in its most egregious form. His lack of respect for his parents, the Torah tells us, degenerates into gluttony and theft and has the distinct potential of declining further into mayhem and murder.

It is considered such an egregious violation of the honoring of one's parents imperative that the penalty for this recalcitrant child is the ultimate punishment; the harshest prescribed by the Torah. True, our Sages tell us, this penalty was never meted out because the conditions necessary for a conviction are virtually impossible to obtain. Nevertheless, the Torah describes this hypothetical case because it wants us to appreciate the degree to which a child can degenerate if there is no proper upbringing and intervention when problems arise, even in the best of families.

Here we have the discussion of these two commandments for which long life is assured. In the example we cited, the Torah describes the way a person exhibits such sensitivity

to one of G-d's creatures by not letting the mother bird see how its young are taken away (See Nachmanides and Chinuch #545). The observance of this Mitzvah, according to the Midrash cited above, leads to the most harmonious relationship between children and parents.

By contrast, in the part of the rebellious son, the Torah describes the way in which a child grows into this self-destructive, uncaring and basically into a sociopath, which ultimately leads to the abrupt termination of his life.

Many would read this discussion of the rebellious child as a prescient description of the problems confronting so many of our youth today, where rebelliousness degenerates into drug and alcohol abuse, crime and anti-social behavior.

What we have here, on the most basic level, are the two extremes: On the one hand, we have one who demonstrates sensitivity to G-d's creatures, and on the other hand we have a child who has gone to the extreme of not respecting his parents and the rest of society. In the former, there is long life, in the latter, there is certain self-destruction.

The Slippery-Slope

The Torah in making this contrast wishes to impart an invaluable lesson about the education of a child. When a child begins the road down the slippery slope into a wasted life, the parent has to ask himself or herself, from where does this rebelliousness come. And when a child develops

such sensitivity it is also fair to search for the things we did right to cultivate such an admirable trait.

(To be sure, there are children who stray from the path of decency despite the parents' best effort to do everything right. And, conversely, we find some of the nicest people who never had good parental guidance. These cases, however, are the exception.)

When we examine the section of the parsha immediately preceding the one of the rebellious child and the sending away of the mother bird we discover a clue as to where the rebelliousness or sensitivity originated.

Let's begin with the rebelliousness.

Immediately preceding the discussion of the rebellious child the Torah discusses the lack of harmony between a husband and his wife.

The first rule of raising a sensitive child is the way his parents treat one another. When a child grows up in an environment where the parents do not get along, the children lose their respect for parental authority. If the husband doesn't respect the wife and vice versa, why should the child respect either of them? Indeed, he agrees with everything negative the wife says about the husband and everything the husband says about the wife. "A curse on both of your houses" is the subconscious—and often conscious—battle cry of the rebellious child.

The greatest obstacle to sensitivity is the lack of respect. Respect begins with respect for one's parents. If that is lacking so will all other forms of respect for any of G-d's creatures.

But, where does this lack of mutual respect in a marriage originate?

To answer this question we have to go back to the section immediately preceding the one of the person who hates his spouse. It discusses the person who is out fighting a battle and is tempted by an attractive prisoner of war. Although the Torah makes a concession to his evil impulse and allows him to take her as a wife after complying with many onerous conditions, it nevertheless warns us that it will lead to no good. It will lead to a disruption of a harmonious family life, which will in turn, lead to the rebellious child phenomenon.

In effect, it is the concessions we make to our impulses—indicating a lack of respect and reverence for G-d—that sow the seeds of our own domestic strife that can have lethal consequences.

This argument, based on the word of our Sages, we presently refer to as the “slippery-slope” argument.

Conversely, when a child sees a parents' ability to resist the temptations and declines making any concessions to their weaker and baser instincts it imbues the child with the

power to resist his or her temptations, particularly peer pressure.

When a child sees the love and harmony that exists between parents—that they speak with one voice—it removes the dichotomous split in the child's personality, not to speak of the feelings of love that the child will cultivate.

When a child is exposed to these positive influences:

- a) A parent who has values and sticks to them even in the face of pressure;
- b) A home in which love, respect peace and harmony are the rule; the probability is that the child will develop in ways that will bring *nachas* to the parents

The foregoing is an analysis of the rebellious child as it is understood by our classical commentators on its most basic level.

Respecting Differences

Let us now reflect on the Mitzvah that precedes the one of sending away the mother bird.

In the preceding section the Torah prohibits men and women from cross dressing. The wider implication of this commandment is that men and women must appreciate their own G-d given gifts and not try to be like the other. Women's liberation does not mean that women should

emulate men. Rather it means that women should be allowed to express their own unique spiritual gifts of femininity. When a woman recognizes that raising a family is not a sign of weakness but a Divine treasure and opportunity she will truly be liberated.

When a man or woman has a healthy sense of who he or she is and what is his or her distinctive role, she or he can develop self-respect. When, however, a person is confused about his or her own role, he or she will always have self-doubt and lack self-respect.

When a child grows up in a world where the parents understand each other's role and complement one another, the child develops a sense of security and self-esteem. A person who has no identity crisis is free to express his or her own personality and talent and will therefore be able to show appreciation for all of G-d's creatures.

Messianic Clarity

Living on the cusp of the Messianic Age, these two commandments convey a unique message for us in these momentous times.

The Biblical book of Daniel describes the Messianic Age as a time when everything will become clear. Everything will be out in the open. This is in stark contrast to the way all the necessary lines of division have been blurred in our own day and age.

In other words, the era of Redemption is characterized by the way in which every one of us will understand his or her G-d given role and mission. Therefore all the strife that is brought on by the confusion that exists in society will cease to plague us.

This explains why our Sages stated that the Mitzvah to send away the mother bird symbolizes the coming of Moshiach. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni*) clearly connects this Mitzvah to the way the schism between children and parents will be removed.

Translating this thought into practical guidance we can say that when we develop a healthy sense of our role as parents (that engenders mutual respect and love for husband and wife), that is rooted in a healthy reverence for G-d (which enables us to resist making “concessions” to our impulses), we will raise healthy children, who appreciate their own G-d given talents and individual role. They, in turn, will use their natural, youthful exuberance and rebelliousness to rebel against the negative features of society, even as they show sensitivity to all of G-d’s creatures.

This is the surest way of hastening and preparing for the final Redemption when we will all experience the long life (i.e., eternal life) vouchsafed for the observance of these two commandments of sending away the mother bird and honoring our parents. .

ESSAY SEVEN

HOW MUCH LONGER?

Acting impulsively is not always a vice.

When we respond, unprepared, to doing good, it is an indication that we have internalized goodness.

ESSAY SEVEN

HOW MUCH LONGER?

Sending the Mother Bird; Bringing Moshiach

One of the many Mitzvos that are discussed in this week's *Parsha, Ki Seitzei*—which, incidentally contains more Mitzvos (commandments) than any other *Parsha*—is the one about sending the mother bird away from its nest, when one wants to take ownerless eggs or little birds.

In the words of the Torah:

“If you shall chance upon a nest of birds that is before you, while on the road, on any tree or on the earth... send away the mother... In order that it shall be good for you and you shall live long.”

The Midrash comments:

“If you shall observe this commandment, you shall hasten the coming of Moshiach concerning whom the expression of “sending” is used...Alternatively, He shall hasten to send you Elijah the prophet, concerning whom the expression of “sending” is employed.”

At first glance it is hard to understand why this Mitzvah in particular has the capacity to hasten the coming of Moshiach or Elijah the prophet? (See preceding essay for an alternate approach.)

A Chance of a Lifetime

One answer to this riddle can be found in the opening phrase of this Mitzvah: "If you shall **chance** upon a nest..." The Talmud explains that this term was intended to exclude one who was already in possession of these birds. The Mitzvah of sending away the mother bird applies only when one **unexpectedly chances** upon the nest.

At first glance this appears rather unusual. Why should we have an obligation to send away the mother bird only when we didn't anticipate doing the Mitzvah? If the compassionate and proper thing is to send away the mother bird when taking its offspring, why should it not apply for all birds?

The answer lies in an understanding of human nature as it pertains to acts of kindness and goodness. Most of the time, we perform acts of kindness and compassion after we become acquainted with the situation. We see a poor person, for example, whose pitiful plight stir up feelings of compassion in our heart. In most of these cases we do not act impulsively because we usually have sufficient time to become aware of and reflect on the need of the other.

In these cases, our display of compassion is a response to an existing and known situation. Most people, afforded the time would react the way one should, given the requisite time and familiarity with the situation.

The Test

There are times, however, when we don't have the luxury to prepare for the performance of the Mitzvah. Here a crucial test confronts us. Will we respond properly? Or will we be caught off guard? Does our Judaism begin with our brain, or does it come from our gut?

When we do react instantly, it is an indication that our Judaism and our humanitarian feelings are inseparable from ourselves. It is an indication that we are so spiritually sophisticated that we will do that which is right, intuitively.

It is clear that most people would not act properly, if they were denied the opportunity to assess and reflect on the situation. Thus, to instill within us the power to react properly without preparation, to impulsively and intuitively act with kindness and compassion, the Torah gave us one Mitzvah, which can only be performed without preparation.

A Mitzvah is not only a commandment it is also a Divine license and generator to be able to perform it. By giving us a Mitzvah to act compassionately without hesitation and preparation, the Torah has thereby provided us with the spiritual energy to act and live in the most G-dly manner,

even when we lack the time and circumstances to psyche ourselves to perform a Mitzvah.

Remove the Obstacle

We can now understand why our Sages link the performance of this Mitzvah with the hastening of the coming of Moshiach and Elijah the prophet. One of the obstacles to the coming of Moshiach is the fact that we are not spiritually in tune with the level of commitment needed in the observance of G-d's commandments. In short, we are not adequately prepared for an age of peace and pervasive holiness.

To be sure, as the Talmud states, Moshiach can and will come in spite of our lack of preparedness at some designated time. But our fervent desire is for Moshiach to come even sooner than the designated time, and that Moshiach's coming should be **because** of us not **in spite** of us.

How do we demonstrate that we are ready?

One answer is that when we fulfill a Mitzvah that can only be observed when we are not prepared for it, it demonstrates that, indeed, we **are eminently and inherently prepared for a Mitzvah at all times.**

Moshiach will Come Spontaneously!

This might explain the statement in the Talmud that Moshiach will come when we are distracted from it.

May commentators have been puzzled by this statement because no Jew may ever stop anticipating the Redemption. How then could the Talmud state that we will be distracted?

One of the answers is that Moshiach's coming will supersede our expectations.

Perhaps we can offer a novel interpretation based on the above premise that when we can do a Mitzvah spontaneously it is a sign that we have fully integrated it into our system:

The above can also be applied to Moshiach and Redemption:

Moshiach's coming is ideal when we are so sensitized to doing good and being prepared for the Redemption that even when we are engaged in other activities that ostensibly have nothing to do with Moshiach we are nevertheless attuned to him. When we have so internalized Moshiach that even when we are distracted we are ready!

G-d, Please Act Impulsively and Bring Moshiach!

Moreover, even if we are not sufficiently prepared, our one-time impulsive observance of a Mitzvah conveys yet another message to G-d:

Just as we, the Jewish people have transcended our normal routines and have acted impulsively to do the right thing, by performing this Mitzvah of sending away the mother bird, please G-d reciprocate by acting “impulsively” and bring us Moshiach and Elijah the prophet to usher in an age of peace and holiness.

We, in effect, say to G-d, “Even if You think we are not yet sufficiently prepared, please do not wait any longer, bring us Moshiach now and bring an end to all the violence and bloodshed that has engulfed Israel and the world in recent times!”

Ad Masa! How much longer?!

ESSAY EIGHT

TURN ON THE LIGHTS

**Fighting evil is a positive and even noble cause.
Generating light through positive action is a sublime and
Divine endeavor.**

ESSAY EIGHT

TURN ON THE LIGHTS

The Richest Parsha

This week's Parsha *Ki-Seitzei* is the “richest” portion of the Torah, in terms of the number of Mitzvos it contains.

As we noted above (Essay One) of the total number of 613 commandments that the Torah comprises, this week's parsha alone has 74! It is no wonder then that an important principle of Jewish law with regard to many of the Mitzvos is derived from this parsha.

One commandment that appears in this week's parsha is the prohibition against wearing a garment that contains a mixture of wool and linen. This commandment, known Biblically as *sha'atnez* or *kilayim* is followed by the requirement to put fringes (*tzitzis*) on the four corners of our garments.

Why does the Torah juxtapose these two Mitzvos? What connection is there between not wearing wool and linen and the commandment to put fringes on the four corners of our garments?

A Mitzvah Conflict

The Talmud explains that this is to instruct us that if there was a conflict between the two commandment—one that prohibits mixtures of wool and linen and one that requires placing *tzitzis* in our garments—the obligation to wear *tzitzis* would prevail.

For example: if one had a linen garment and the only *tzitzis* he had were made out of wool, it would be Biblically acceptable to insert them into the garment. This teaching establishes a legal principle that a “positive Mitzvah overrides a negative one.”

(It should be noted, however, that there are several exceptions to this rule. Most notably, this rule does not apply to a transgression against one's fellow. One may never commit a crime even if it were to perform a Mitzvah. Our discussion is limited to two commandments of the same man-to-G-d category. And even within this category there are some exceptions.)

Love versus Fear

What is the reason for the preeminence of the positive commandment over the negative?

Nachmanides, the great Biblical and Talmudic commentator of the 13th century, provides the following rationale:

The performance of positive commandments is primarily an expression of love for G-d, whereas avoiding a transgression is primarily an expression of fear or respect

for G-d. We do things for the one we love and we refrain from doing certain things mostly because we fear the consequences.

Accordingly, the positive Mitzvah takes precedence over the negative Mitzvah, inasmuch as love is a greater force than fear. Serving G-d out of love is a superior form of service than serving Him strictly out of fear.

The Mystical Explanation

The Tanya (the principle work of Chabad Chassidic thought) provides a more profound explanation for the preeminence of the positive commandment. When one performs a positive Mitzvah, one generates a G-dly light into the cosmos that is then internalized within one's soul. Failing to perform the Mitzvah will result in the permanent loss of that positive light.

By contrast, observing a negative commandment, though imperative and praiseworthy, does not generate G-dly light into the cosmos and our souls.

Violation of a negative commandment will cause damage to one's soul and the world around. However, if the Torah allows us to perform the positive Mitzvah in spite of the negative, no damage will result. If however the Torah would want us to avoid the negative even at the expense of not doing the positive, while no damage will result, no light will be generated.

In simple language: While we can mitigate a negative action so that it does not cause damage, we cannot replace a positive act no matter how many excuses we have for not doing it.

Thus, when the two Mitzvos clash, it makes more sense for the positive Mitzvah to prevail, because if the negative would prevail and we would not do the Mitzvah, that G-dly light that can be introduced into the world and one's soul, would forever be missing. No matter how well one would behave in the future, the light that could have been generated by the positive command is forever gone.

Why Light?

At this point one is entitled to ask, why is the generation of this G-dly light so crucial?

The answer is provided for in the very beginning of the Torah. The very first thing G-d declared at the time of creation was "Let there be light." This was meant as a declaration of the very purpose of creation. G-d created the universe so that we would generate spiritual light into it.

With every Mitzvah that we perform, the world is imbued with more G-dly light that leaves an indelible mark on the world. When enough light is generated by our actions, Moshiach will come and enable us to realize and enjoy the G-dly light that we caused to fill the world.

G-d does not just want a world that is devoid of evil. Combating evil is a worthwhile endeavor but it does not justify creating the world. If the world would not have been created there would still not be any evil. Why then create a world with evil just to revert to the state of no evil, which was the case before creation?

G-d's plan for the world was one in which we generate positive energy. Without creation there could be no positive light in a physical world.

Keep Away from [fighting] evil!

This concept has been applied the verse in the book of Psalms: "Keep away from evil and do good." Chassidic Masters interpreted this as: Keep away from inordinate focus on fighting evil; instead focus on doing good.

A similar thought was expressed by some commentators concerning the statement of our Sages that when Esau was in his mother's womb he would put pressure on his mother to be born whenever she passed a house of idolatry. This portended his tendency towards evil.

The question has been asked, how could someone born to such righteous parents begin with an obsession for idol worship

And the answer given was that, in truth, Esau did not want to go out and worship the idols, rather he wanted to go out and destroy them...

In other words, he was obsessed with fighting evil and very little regard for generating positive energy. This was the beginning of a slippery slope towards actually becoming enamored with the evil he was so stridently fighting against.

The Practical Lesson: Let there be Light!

The practical lesson for us is that our primary focus should be on generating G-dly light into the world. This, of course, does not free us from our responsibility to combat evil. But, we must realize that fighting evil, as great and important as it may be, does not add any light to the world.

Only by focusing on the positive and actively engaging in the performance of the positive Mitzvos do we conform to the Divine declaration of "Let there be light." As a consequence of these actions we will be able to say with joy, "And there was light!" We will be receptive to the Divine light that will pervade the entire world.

ESSAY NINE

TWO STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT!

Kindness and faith are twin, complementary virtues.
Faith engenders kindness and kindness makes us receptive
to faith.

ESSAY NINE

TWO STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT!

Lack of Compassion

This week's parsha contains an assortment of commandments, more than in any other parsha in the Torah. Among them we find several that deal with the people and nations whom we are forbidden to marry. Two such nations were the ancient Biblical nations of Amon and Mo'ab:

In the Torah's own words:

"An Amonite or Mo'abite may not enter the congregation of G-d. Even their tenth generation may not enter the congregation of G-d, because they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt, and because they hired Bilam, the son of Be'or, from Pesor in Aram Nahrayim, against you, to curse you. But G-d your G-d did not want to listen to Bilam, and G-d your G-d transformed the curse into a blessing for you, because G-d your G-d, loves you."

The import of this above prohibition of entering the congregation of G-d according to the Talmud is that an Amonite or Moabite can never marry a Jewish woman even if he converts. And the reason they were banned is because they did not provide us with food, and that they hired Bilam to curse us.

If this commandment would have been directed against any of the nations that tried to annihilate the Jewish people, or who actually killed great numbers of Jews, we could understand why we would never want to invite them into our family. However, it seems that the first crime associated with these two nations was simply a lack of compassion by not providing us with food and drink when we left Egypt. Why should that have prompted such a harsh reaction from the Torah?

True, the Torah also adds a second reason, that they hired Bilam to curse the Jewish people. However, cursing is not the same as killing them, as did so many other Biblical nations, beginning with the Egyptians, continuing with the Philistines, Assyrians and Babylonians, to name some of the most egregious perpetrators of violence against the Jewish people. Yet, nowhere does the Torah tell us not to marry members of these and other nations that harbor such contempt for us.

Why is not providing us with bread and water and asking Bilam to curse us sufficient a reason not to marry a member of these nations?

Another question can be raised: Why does the Torah continue with the words:

“But G-d your G-d did not want to listen to Bilam, and G-d your G-d transformed the curse into a blessing for you, because G-d your G-d, loves you?”

What does G-d loving us have to do with the prohibition of marrying Amonites and Moabites?

Combined Evil

One answer to the first question is that it was the combination of the two that demonstrated how evil they truly were. On the one hand, they were too cheap to provide bread and water to the Jews. Yet, on the other hand, they did not spare any expense when they hired Bilam to curse the Jews. Had they simply failed to show hospitality they could have argued that they could not afford to feed the Jews. But if that was true how could they afford to hire Bilam?

This explanation is still inadequate because even if they did show that they were willing to spend their money for evil purposes and not for good ones, it is not as bad as actually going out to physically harm others. Why then did these two nations deserve to be ostracized so severely? Why were they singled out for condemnation and banned from the Jewish community?

One Prerequisite

Perhaps the answer to this question is that to become part of the “congregation of G-d” one must have at least one redeeming virtue. There are some people whose faith in, and devotion to, G-d is lacking, but at least, they exhibit *mentshlichkeit*; they know how to get along well with others. They show compassion and kindness. And even if their display of kindness is because of social convention, good behavior for any reason is a positive trait that could eventually lead to a genuine sense of kindness.

On the other hand, there are some people who are not very good to others, but they have a deep spiritual side to them, in that they have strong faith in and reverence for G-d and pursue spiritual goals. Without getting into the debate as to the value of the emphasis on one without the other—for surely Judaism demands that we excel in both domains—it is clear that doing one is better than nothing. It is actually better than better-than-nothing, because a person of faith will eventually come to realize that the G-d he or she believes in and wants him or her to relate well with others.

Likewise, the person who is good to others shows a level of refinement that will make him or her ultimately receptive to the spiritual side of existence.

Moreover, our Sages tell us, “One Mitzvah brings another Mitzvah in its train.” This means simply that whenever we perform a Mitzvah—any Mitzvah—it will inevitably lead to the performance of yet another Mitzvah. Thus, a person,

who is good in one area of Judaism, though deficient in another, has a redeeming virtue worthy of his acceptance into our family.

However, when a person lacks both of these characteristics in the extreme there is little hope that they will ever change.

By virtue of the Amonites and Moabites not offering bread and water they demonstrated that they lacked even the most minimal measure of kindness or compassion that would normally have been shown for people who were so oppressed. And even if they were inwardly insensitive, they could have, at least, feigned some measure of social consciousness by providing them with a token, a onetime gift of bread and water.

The fact that they could not even get themselves to perform a one-time act of kindness that was the socially accepted norm demonstrated that they were bereft of even a scintilla of kindness and compassion, inward or outward.

That alone would not have sufficed for the Torah to ban marrying an Amonite or Moabite. If they would have had a small measure of respect for G-d, it could have been the redeeming feature that would have made them eligible for marrying into the Jewish fold.

But, by hiring Bilam to curse the Jews they demonstrated that they had no respect for G-d as well. They were asking Bilam to invoke a curse upon whom G-d had showered so

many blessings; on whom they knew were G-d's chosen people, considering all the miracles He wrought for them of which they were well aware. They were thus demonstrating that they had no regard for G-d's choice and the people whom He loved.

This explains why the Torah goes on to describe the love G-d had for the Jewish people. It was to underscore that their hiring of Bilam was not just a sign of cruelty. It was also a sign of how they had no respect for G-d, because they wanted Him to abandon His chosen people. How could they try to curse the Jews who were so blessed by G-d?

To do so was a sign that they were not just rotten in terms of their social responsibilities, but that they were degenerate in terms of their respect for G-d as well.

And the fact that they were devoid of both traits meant that they did not have any redeeming qualities. People who were so socially and spiritually compromised thus could not be allowed to enter into the family of a people whose mission is precisely the opposite: to provide others with their needs and to have a healthy respect for G-d's creatures and particularly the ones whom He goes out of His way for.

Going Against Tradition

One could counter the above by citing numerous depraved and idolatrous peoples who exhibited no respect for other people or for G-d. What made the Amonites and Moabites so singularly deviant?

The answer is that even though the idolaters had no respect for G-d it was due to their tradition. They were not worshipping idols to show contempt for the one G-d; they just had no knowledge of Him.

The Amonites and Moabites, however, were well aware of G-d's existence and His love for the Jewish people; and yet they decided to use G-dly power—vested in Bilam—to attack G-d's loved one. It is comparable to one who asks the servant of the king to give him the king's own weapon with which to murder the king's only son!

Didn't Rub Off

Abraham, the first Jew went to the opposite extremes in both areas. He was the epitome of kindness, which he demonstrated through his obsession with hospitality for every person. Abraham represented the idea of hospitality in its maximal state.

Abraham was the epitome of faith and devotion to G-d, prepared to die and even sacrifice his beloved son for G-d.

Moreover, if we examine Abraham's behavior more closely we see that the two areas of devotion were intertwined. Abraham loved and respected G-d so much that he argued for the Sodomite people by advancing the argument that it would be disrespectful to G-d to punish innocent people: "How can the judge of the entire world not do justice?" Abraham was prepared to do anything for G-d's sake. His love for others was rooted in his love for G-d.

Anyone in whom these Abrahamic traits are completely absent even in their minimalist form cannot become part of the Jewish family. Moreover, their lack of the two "Abrahamic traits" was likely intertwined. They cynically attempted to use and abuse G-d's power to harm the Jewish people

Indeed, what makes the Amonite and Moabite behavior more reprehensible is that they were also related to Abraham. (Amon and Moab were the illegitimate children of Lot, Abraham's nephew.) The fact that no part of Abraham's twin virtues rubbed off on them indicated how far they were from these ideals and from becoming full-fledged members of the Jewish community.

Looking for a Partner

The lesson we learn from the above is obvious. When we look for a life's partner, as indeed in all of our relationships, there are two things we should look for:

First, the person must be a good person, who has respect for the norms of a civilized society and, at the very least, acts kindly. Sustained kind behavior will ultimately lead to genuine feelings of kindness.

Second, the person has to have respect and love for those whom G-d loves and has chosen. When we show utter contempt for G-d's children we are, in effect, showing contempt for G-d Himself.

These two traits: caring for others and respecting G-d are two intertwined characteristics that are crucial for our survival as a nation and the key for our future.

The Destruction of the Two Temples

When we lost our respect for our G-d in the first Temple era we lost that Temple. And with the loss of the Temple the Babylonian exile commenced.

When we as a nation failed to show sensitivity to one another, the Talmud states, we lost the Second Temple. And with the loss of that Temple we were driven into exile and endured close to two thousand years of suffering.

The means to get out of exile in all of its forms is to reinforce our concern for others as well as enhancing our relationship with G-d.

The Third Temple Moshiach will build is said to be a double consolation for the two Temples that we lost. The

Third Temple will introduce an interwoven awareness of G-d and sensitivity to others. We will love others because our awareness of and love for G-d will be complete. And, conversely, our attachment to G-d will be greater because we will be whole, inasmuch as true peace, love and unity will prevail. G-d dwells and is manifest only when there is wholeness. Those twin conditions will exist because of the Third Temple that will be built by Moshiach who personifies those two traits in their most powerful form.

ESSAY TEN

WHO SCHLEPS US OUT?

The adage “G-d helps those who help themselves” is the foundation of our efforts to bring Moshiach.

We were empowered to get ourselves out of exile.

Let's do it! Let's do it!

ESSAY TEN

WHO SCHLEPS US OUT?

Transforming Curses into Blessings

Amongst the prohibited marriages discussed in this week's parsha is the one against marrying a Moabite or Amonite (even after they convert to Judaism. It should be noted that this prohibition applies only to marrying Amonite and Moabite men. One may marry a Amonite and Moabite woman. This was a controversial matter in the days of King David, whose ancestress Ruth was a Moabite convert).

The Torah proceeds to give the reason for this prohibition:

“...because they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were on the road leaving Egypt, and because they hired Bilam—the son of B’eor, from Pesor in Aram Naharayim—against you, to curse you. And G-d your G-d, did not want to listen to Bilam, and G-d your G-d transformed the curse into a blessing for you, because G-d your G-d loves you.”

Commentators raise the question as to why the Torah adds the part about how G-d transformed the curses into

blessings. How does that explain why we are not to marry the Moabites and Amonites? On the contrary, the fact that the curses didn't materialize seems to ameliorate the severity of their crime. Even if their intentions were malicious, at least their objective was not realized.

Throw Your Hands Up, but Not in Despair

One answer can be given in light of the discussion in the Talmud about the events that will precede the Messianic Age. The Talmud presents two possible scenarios. One scenario is that negative events will precede the Messianic Age.

The Talmud then proceeds to list some of these tragedies. Strangely, in the middle of its enumeration of those tragedies, the Talmud adds, "we will have no one to rely on except our Father in Heaven."

On the surface, it sounds like the Talmud is saying, parenthetically, that despite the hardships and the state of helplessness that will prevail in the pre-Messianic Era, we still have our Father in Heaven upon whom we can rely.

However, the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe once observed that, on the contrary, the phrase "we have no one to rely on except our Father in Heaven," is not really a blessing, but is actually one of the signs of how much we can decline. Before the Messianic Age there can be a scenario in which we will have so degenerated that we will abandon

hope that we can change the situation. We will throw our hands up in despair and declare that our situation is truly helpless. Only G-d can get us out of this morass.

When we reach that point where we feel that we cannot do anything ourselves to remedy the situation, that is the sign that we have hit rock bottom. That is clearly not a positive situation.

To be sure, a Jew must always raise his hands upwards to the A-mighty and beseech Him for all that we need. It cannot, however, come at the expense of doing our part to make the necessary changes in our lives and in the world at large.

Bilam's Curses Transformed

The same is true of the curses of Bilam that G-d transformed into blessings. There are two ways that transformation could have occurred.

Had the Jewish people exerted themselves and worked hard to overcome the obstacles that Bilam placed in their way, and would have utilized their own G-d given energy to transform these obstacles into opportunities and blessings, it would not have been so bad. In truth, it would have been ideal. It would have resulted in the ultimate defeat of evil that would have brought on the onset of the Messianic Age. Thousands of years of exile, with all its travail, we would have been spared.

Alas, that did not happen. Rather, due to the instigation of Amon and Moab, Bilam's curses had to be transformed by plan B. It had to happen through G-d, and by G-d exclusively.

The nations of Amon and Moab had so corrupted the Jewish people by allowing their daughters to seduce them, as recounted in the end of the Book of Numbers, that they no longer possessed the power to transform those curses into blessings. It had to be done by G-d exclusively. And that was a tragedy!

Two Scenarios

There are two scenarios to bring Moshiach. The first is when we reach the bottom and cannot redeem ourselves. G-d would then have no alternative, as it were, and would be "compelled" to intervene and schlep us out of the quicksand of exile just as He did when we were helpless slaves in Egypt. In this scenario, Moshiach comes **in spite** of us.

This is the scenario our Sages say will happen unconditionally at the **designated** time. There is a deadline, a due date, when Moshiach must come regardless of the state of the world.

Or, as in the case of Egyptian bondage, G-d liberated them before the designated time because there was no alternative. If they would have remained a bit longer they

would have degenerated into the “fiftieth” level, the very nadir of impurity; the point of no return.

When discussing this less than ideal scenario, the Talmud refers to the Biblical description of the Moshiach “as a poor man riding on a donkey.” The simple import of this description of the arrival of Moshiach is that he will come in a time when there is spiritual impoverishment.

But there is another scenario for the coming of Moshiach. It is the scenario that involves our own efforts at transforming the curses of exile into blessings. Every time we go against the prevailing winds of secularism and hedonism to do a Mitzvah, we demonstrate that we are capable of transforming those curses into blessings and thereby bring Moshiach. In doing so, Moshiach comes **because** of our efforts.

When the Talmud speaks of this scenario it refers to another Biblical verse in which Moshiach will come flying on a cloud. This imagery was meant to suggest that the world will be “flying high” because we have done so much to earn the Redemption.

Where are We?

From all of that which has transpired—recent centuries and decades in particular—it appears that we are entitled to demand the second scenario of Moshiach’s coming. The Jewish people have, as a whole, acted admirably and

responded nobly to the unprecedented challenges of the twentieth century and twenty-first century, with its twin onslaught of unrelenting persecution and the enticement of assimilation. We deserve Moshiach and we anticipate his coming because of our actions.

This does not mean that we should rest on our laurels. We still need to do more for a host of reasons.

First, as long as the Redemption has not taken place, every effort of ours will hasten his coming.

Second, every positive deed will ensure that the process will be fraught with less travail. The Redemption will occur with Divine “kindness and compassion.”

Third, the more we do, the better prepared we will be for the Redemption.

Fourth, Mitzvos we do, first and foremost, to fulfill G-d's will even if it would not yield any positive results. There is no greater thing than to do G-d's bidding.

Fifth, all the Mitzvos we do now is assumes greater importance because we are now standing on the threshold of Moshiach and are living in the shadow—or more precisely, in the light—of Moshiach. We can already see the sun rising over the horizon.

ESSAY ELEVEN

HYPOCRISY?

The road to degeneration is often paved with idealism.

The perception that inconsistency is synonymous with
hypocrisy is responsible for the unperformed and
underperformed Mitzvos.

ESSAY ELEVEN

HYPOCRISY?

No Bread and Water

The Jewish people confronted many nations that sought to harm her in one way or another. One of these nations is Moab, from whom the Torah commands us to distance ourselves. The Torah prohibits marrying into a Moabite family even if they were to convert to Judaism.

(According to the Oral tradition, this prohibition was restricted to marrying a Moabite man. It was not directed towards a Moabite woman, if she was properly converted to Judaism. Thus Boaz, King David's great grandfather, married the Moabite convert Ruth. However, this ruling that distinguished between a Moabite male and Moabite female was not universally recognized. King David was therefore taunted by his enemies that he was a product of an illegal union.)

When the Torah introduces the prohibition of marrying a Moabite it provides two reasons:

First, when we left Egypt they did not come out to greet us with bread and water.

Second, they hired Bilam, the heathen prophet and professional “curser,” to curse the Jewish people.

Even a cursory examination of this passage will yield two questions:

First, why the need for two reasons?

Second, of what value is the first explanation when compared to the second? The fact that they tried to destroy the Jews through Bilam’s usual fatal curses is far worse than just not showing the highest standards of hospitality to the fledgling Jewish nation. Why then does the Torah mention this explanation second?

Imrei Eish provides a novel interpretation of this verse.

Two Personality Types

At first blush it would appear that their sin was their lack of compassion. In truth, their sin was not a lack of compassion but a conscious desire to ignore the plight of the Jewish people in spite of their otherwise charitable tendencies.

There are two personality types: One who by nature lacks compassion and kindness. Those personalities have to learn to overcome their weakness and perform compassionate acts even if they don’t have that natural desire to do so. At times, their “default” position, of a lack of compassion for others, might prevail and they will not go out of their way

to help others. We do not refer to these people as hypocrites but as people struggling with their human weaknesses.

There is another personality type. This is the person who is by nature kind and yet he or she may be only selectively kind. These personalities will show warmth and kindness to certain people consistent with their temperament, but they might ignore the needs of others. And while some people will intentionally go to areas where they see suffering so they can do something to help them, others, will purposely avoid going in those areas. They may even deliberately take circuitous routes so that they will not have to confront the misery and respond to it.

If we have to analyze which of the two personality types—both of which fail to show compassion—is worse, we would have to conclude that it is the compassionate person who ignores the needs of others. The person who consciously suppresses his natural trait of kindness is clearly motivated by some perverse ideological position. The person not endowed with natural compassion who is unkind can only be faulted for not making a strong effort to overcome that natural reluctance and miserliness. Not so the person who is generally kind and compassionate.

Hiding Your Eyes

Thus our sages declare that one who “hides his eyes from tzedakah is as if he worshipped an idol.” It does not say that one who fails to give, or one who is not kind or compassionate, but one who hides his eyes. And it does not say that he or she is cruel, but it is as if they worshipped an idol. By making that comparison, our Sages are trying to impress upon us that these people are guilty of an ideological transgression akin to the belief in other gods.

The Talmud is obviously alluding to the second personality type who generally feels comfortable to give, yet chooses to control his or her kindness and withhold it from some deserving people.

That conscious decision derives from an inflated ego. It is engendered by the sense that they are the masters of their own wealth and resources and therefore it is their right to give it or withhold it at will.

That ego driven approach is a form of idol worship, where the idol is oneself. Whereas the first personality type suffers from a human frailty of not being able to overcome his or her emotional weakness, the second personality type is playing G-d.

The Ideological Moabites

Now let us analyze the lack of compassion exhibited by the Moabites when the Jews came their way and they failed to

reach out to them and provide them with bread and water. Was it due to their stinginess? Was it due to their reluctance to part with their money? Or was there an ideological motivation that made them suppress their otherwise generous attitude towards outsiders?

The answer is the latter.

Proof of this is adduced by the Torah by referencing the fact that they were more than happy to spend exorbitant amounts of money to hire Bilam for nefarious purposes. This clearly demonstrated that they were not misers; they were quite generous with their money. Their failure to be hospitable to the Jews was motivated not by a lack of compassion, but by the arrogant conviction that they could play G-d and ignore the Jewish people, whom they regarded as their enemy.

This phenomenon is one of the riddles and paradoxes that characterize our society these days and affects the Jewish people in particular. There are people who are extremely kind and generous on the one hand, but harbor feelings of hatred towards the Jewish people, on the other hand.

Some of the worst anti-Semites are known for their efforts to help people, but find no problem voicing anti-Semitic or anti-Israel (which in many cases, these days, is synonymous with anti-Jewish) sentiments.

Kindness to Animals and Cruelty to People!

The Nazis ascension to power was arguably the most dramatic example of this contradiction:

On the one hand they enacted laws to protect animals from pain, even as they were plotting to annihilate the entire Jewish people! One may, of course, argue that their concern for animals was insincere and was just a façade to cover up their cruelty; however the reality was that they were governed by their evil ideology which enabled them to cover up their humanity.

In addition, there were ample cases where people, who would be prepared to give their lives for some, would, ironically, show gross insensitivity to the Jewish people.

The Moabite model, as well as the more recent examples cited here, are the most radical examples of this dichotomy. However, most decent people might also possess a tinge of this double-standard in our relationships with G-d and with others.

Dichotomy not Hypocrisy

On the one hand we may be excited about Judaism and simultaneously find ways of avoiding involvement in other areas of Judaism. This dichotomy is different from the person who struggles with Judaism, and poses a greater challenge in some ways.

However, even this second personality type may not necessarily be charged with the vice of hypocrisy. We have

to distinguish between hypocrisy and inconsistency. Rather than fault people with doing good for some while seeking to harm others—claiming that they are hypocrites—we should challenge them with the question why they are inconsistent and do not do good for others even as they display kindness to some.

Proof that this inconsistent behavior is not necessarily hypocritical can be deduced from the fact that the Talmudic statement, “one should always do Mitzvos, even for ulterior motives,” is derived from the **Moabite** king, Balak, who offered many sacrifices to G-d.

Despite his ulterior, and even malevolent, motives, Balak was rewarded that his descendent Ruth would become the ancestress of King David and the entire Davidic dynasty of Jewish leaders until Moshiach!

If his sacrifice was considered hypocrisy why would G-d reward him with illustrious descendants?

Connect the Dots

The lesson from this is that contrary to our natural abhorrence of hypocrisy, when we see people who are “inconsistently Jewish,” it is not an indication that their Jewish practices are wrong or that they are hypocrites.

What is wrong and misguided is that they forgot to connect the dots. They should ask themselves: “If I am a compassionate person, why do I refuse to help certain

people?” Or, “If I am pious on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur why do I not maintain my Jewish fervor beyond these High Holy Days?” This reflection is superior to the one that says, because you do not show any feelings towards one individual, there is no point in being nice to another. Or, if you don’t keep Shabbos why do you keep kosher?

The Talmud’s exhortation to us to do Mitzvos even if it is for ulterior motives is followed by the statement, “for when one does things for ulterior motives it will ultimately lead to doing them for pure motives.” In other words the “Moabite syndrome” of inconsistent good, is the prelude to pure good.

From Ulterior Motives to Moshiach

The fact that Moshiach was a descendent from Ruth—a Moabite princess—who was, in turn, a descendent of the very king whose inconsistent behavior is highlighted by the Torah, suggests that the Messianic Age of perfection will come in two stages: First there will be a challenge for us to do good despite the lack of perfection, and that will ultimately lead to the age of Moshiach, when pure unadulterated good will become the norm.

The mechanism for the transition from ulterior motives to pure motives is that when we have an opportunity to do a Mitzvah, the “evil impulse” within us will look for ways to deter us from doing a Mitzvah. Once we succumb to its

influence, it can get us to go downhill until we are forever in the grip of evil.

One of the ways the evil impulse operates is to wax idealistic and argue self-righteously that we should not do the Mitzvah because it would be a sham. The evil impulses argument is: "Why would you want to do a Mitzvah if you do not have your heart in it? Wait until you will cultivate more noble reasons for doing the Mitzvah and then do it."

Of course, this is just a gimmick. By getting us to desist from doing the Mitzvah the evil impulse has successfully ensnared us in his trap and will find it much easier to prevent us from doing good the next time an opportunity presents itself.

When, however we deal the evil impulse a blow and we do the Mitzvah—albeit for the ulterior motive—it weakens the resistance to our doing good. As a result, at the next time the opportunity to do a Mitzvah presents itself, we will have become more refined because our internal resistance has been undermined.

As we continue to ignore the resistance it allows us to develop higher and nobler motives consistent with our G-dly soul's true intentions.

Just Do It!

The process to bring Moshiach likewise starts with doing good for whatever reason. Inundating the world with positive energy—even if it is based on selfish and egotistical considerations—will ultimately refine the world to the point where it will be a refined and holy world; the world the way G-d envisioned it to be at the beginning of creation. However, this process begins with but one Mitzvah, no matter why we decide to do it.

If we were to reflect on what is the primary ingredient missing in our day and age, we would come to the conclusion that it is not idealism; it is the lack of good deeds. If the six-billion plus people in our world would each do just one good act, even if it was for the wrong reason, it would create an explosion of epic proportions. Even one Mitzvah can tip the scales and bring Moshiach. Let Moshiach worry about elevating the status of our Mitzvos. We should worry primarily about just doing them.

ESSAY TWELVE

KEEP OUR WORD/G-D KEEP YOUR WORD

Speech is G-d's gift to humanity.

Cherish it and guard it.

G-d also uses speech to make promises.

**We ask Him to keep and cherish His promises for a better
world.**

ESSAY TWELVE

KEEP OUR WORD/G-D KEEP YOUR WORD

No Freedom of Speech

Civilized society recognizes the importance of honoring one's word.

But only in the Torah, in this week's parsha, do we find that it is actually a legal imperative, to keep one's vows:

“The utterances of your mouth you shall guard and you shall do as you have pledged to G-d your L-rd...”

This commandment is one of the many that apply to the faculty of speech. We are enjoined from slandering others, speaking gossip, using obscene language etc.

What is it about the power of speech that prompts the Torah to so regulate the way we talk, including the imperative to honor one's verbal commitments?

The answer to these questions will shed light on the novel and radical way Judaism treats the power of speech.

Speech Defines our Humanity

In classical Jewish literature a human being is referred to as a speaker. It is what distinguishes us from all other of G-d's creatures. Indeed, the gift of gab is qualitatively different from all the other incredible gifts G-d has given us. Our ability to communicate our innermost feelings or the most profound concepts is a gift G-d has given us so that we can share our spiritual wealth with others and thereby affect the world.

Because it is such a precious instrument, it must be guarded accordingly. In the same manner as one would not use an expensive electronic or laser instrument to open a can of beer, one must never use the extremely delicate and treasured gift of speech for some lowly and objectionable use.

Hence the Torah exhorts us to preserve the integrity of this power of speech.

No Delay

The Torah goes even further. Not only are we to keep our word, when we make a vow to G-d, we are not even permitted to **delay** implementation of our pledge:

“When you make a pledge to G-d your L-rd, do not be late in paying it.”

The Talmud applies this to a case where one vows to donate money to charity (a needy person, G-dly institution such as a synagogue, educational facility etc.), they must not procrastinate in actually making the contribution. (Of course, if one had stipulated when they made the pledge that they are going to contribute at a designated time in the future, they have the right to give the money then.)

The question begs to be asked, why doesn't the donor have the right to decide when he or she wants to make good on the promise? After all, wasn't the pledge done voluntarily? Why don't we have the freedom to decide when we will make good on that pledge?

In legal terminology the principle that applies here is that when one makes a pledge, it is as if they actually gave the money to the needy person or cause to whom they've pledged. To delay giving the money would be tantamount to withholding something that rightfully belongs to someone else.

The same can be said with regard to a vow made to G-d. Once the pledge was made to contribute something to a G-dly cause, the money no longer belongs to the donor. Hence, what right do we have to withhold something that belongs to G-d and His institutions?

One can raise a legitimate question: What is the distinction between making a pledge to charity or to G-d and making a commitment to give an ordinary gift to another individual who is not needy? Why is it that if one was to

tell his friend, “I will give you a hundred dollars” that he is not in violation of the Biblical commandment if he delays making good on his gift?

Obviously, a person should keep his word even when making commitments to others for mundane purposes, but there is nothing improper for one to delay making good on his or her gift, What’s the difference?

Reverting to G-d’s Ownership

The answer lies in a better understanding of the way Judaism looks at our right to ownership of property.

Essentially, everything belongs to G-d. In the words of the Psalmist: “The earth and all therein are G-d’s; the world and its inhabitants.” (Psalm 24). This is why, the Talmud explains, there is a need to recite a blessing before one partakes of food, so that one has permission to benefit from G-d’s universe. Similarly, when we utilize all of the G-d given resources at our disposal for living a just and moral life, G-d allows us to enjoy His bountiful world.

However, when a person makes a vow to contribute to a G-dly cause, the status of that money automatically reverts to its original state: it is G-d’s property.

Similarly, Jewish thought views the act of giving charity not simply an act of generosity, but also an act of righteousness. Hence the Hebrew word for charity is Tzedakah, which means righteousness. By giving Tzedakah,

one is actually returning the money that rightfully belongs to the needy recipient. When G-d apportioned the resources to humanity, He chose to give the money to a poor person through the generosity of the rich individual. The rich individual serves as a trustee of those funds. Therefore, as soon as one makes the pledge to give Tzedakah, the money automatically reverts to the rightful owner.

G-d: Please Don't Delay!

The Midrash declares that all of the commandments that we were commanded to observe, G-d “observes” as well. How does this apply to G-d keeping His word?

The Torah informs us that the world was created with G-d's word. Furthermore, G-d has promised us—in the Torah—that He will bring an end to the pain and suffering that has punctuated our existence in exile. It is therefore imperative that G-d should also keep His word and bring us the ultimate Redemption that we have been waiting and praying for, for the last 2,000 years.

And not only is it imperative that He keep His word, but, there is also a commandment for Him not to delay. Our daily prayers, composed by the prophets of old with Divine inspiration, are replete with requests and demands that G-d keep His promise and bring us the Redemption quickly.

But here too we can ask, why should He be obligated to not delay?

Redemption: It Belongs to Us

We can supply the same answer. When we make a pledge to charity we are not truly giving something that is unequivocally ours. We are returning the money or object to the one to whom it originally belonged or to the one whom it was intended for originally. G-d in His infinite kindness allowed us to get credit for the act of giving as if it was totally ours that we were so graciously donating.

Similarly, the world's initial state was one of a garden, Remember the **Garden** of Eden was the world's original state of existence. We, as people, began with a clean slate, endowed with a holy, divine soul. In Judaism there is a concept of "original virtue."

When we ask G-d to take us out of exile we are not asking of Him to do something radically new. We are simply asking for Him to restore the world and us to its and our original state. Hence, when He made that promise to redeem us, Redemption became rightfully ours. We have a legal right to demand that it be given to us without any further delay!

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE FIVE MYSTICAL DIMENSIONS OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is society's most challenged institution.

**If people would only know the true value and the mystical
significance of marriage, divorce would become close to
obsolete.**

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE FIVE MYSTICAL DIMENSIONS OF MARRIAGE

Indescribable Joy

There is no institution in Judaism that is more important than marriage, the Biblical source of which is in this week's Torah portion of *Ki Seitzei*.

A wedding is cause for great celebration, so much so, that the prophet Isaiah identifies the wedding as the “sound of joy and the sound of happiness; the sound of the bridegroom and the sound of the bride.”

The Talmud declares that there is great merit for one who participates in bringing joy to the newlyweds. “Whoever brings joy to the newlyweds” (that is expressed by the prophet with the word “sound” no less than five times)” the Talmud promises, “will merit the five sounds that are associated with the giving of the Torah.”

Some of the greatest and most dignified Sages of the past would do unconventional things such as juggling just to bring joy to the newlyweds.

Indeed, the unconventional joy displayed at a wedding is indicative that a wedding is an unconventional spiritual experience.

What is the reason for this great joy? What is so special about a wedding?

There are several ways of understanding the spiritual role of marriage in Jewish thought, all of which shed light on the *simcha* associated with a wedding.

In the spirit of the “five sounds” associated with a wedding, we will explore five of its dimensions that focus on five interrelated mystical aspects of a wedding.

An Invitation

Firstly, the marital bond is an invitation for G-d’s presence. The Talmud declares that the words **אִשׁ** *Ish* and **אִשָּׁה** *Isha*, meaning man and woman, respectively, each contain the letters that form the Hebrew word for fire “**אֵשׁ** *aish*.” In addition they jointly contain the two letters of G-d’s name: a *yud* and a *hei*. This is to teach us, the Talmud continues, that when a husband and wife are meritorious the Divine presence dwells between them.

When the husband and wife are single they each enjoy some G-dly energy. But when they join together at the marriage ceremony their intertwined souls have the capacity to access infinitely more G-dly light.

Because of the G-dly light that is unleashed in a marriage it is customary for the bridegroom to give his bride a ring. According to Jewish law any article of value would do, but Jewish custom is to use a ring specifically.

Many reasons have been advanced for this custom. In mystical tradition the reason for the ring is that it has no beginning and no end. It is a metaphor for the infinite light of G-d that is introduced into the lives of the newlyweds and through them channeled to the entire world.

A ring surrounds the finger. It is therefore the metaphor for the Divine Encompassing light that is so elusive that it can only “surround” us, as it were; it cannot be accessed and internalized no matter how spiritual we may be. And it is precisely **this** transcendent energy that is unleashed at a wedding. It certainly is cause for a reciprocal unconventional outpouring of joy.

Reunion

Secondly, as the *Zohar* explains, a husband and a wife, each possess only one half of their respective soul. At birth, the soul is divided into two components. These two “estranged” halves are only reunited in the process of marriage.

There can be no greater joy when two relatives find each other after decades of separation. And there can be no greater reunion of two relatives than the reunion with the other half of one’s own soul.

However, it is more than just a happy reunion. When we remain half souls we cannot fully fulfill the mission for which the soul descended into this world in the first place. Only when we find our *bashert*, the mate destined for us, can we achieve our life's purpose.

To be sure, a person who legitimately remains single is not considered a defective or inferior human being. In those cases it is obviously G-d's choice for the individual to work with only half of his or her potential. One person's half soul can possess greater energy than another's whole soul. It is in some ways a greater challenge and when met it may actually imply that this person is superior to others who are married. The foregoing is valid only when circumstances cause the person to be single. We must, however, consciously look to find our other half and reunite with it through marriage.

We can now understand the reason for the indescribable joy at having found our "other half." It is more than just a reunion. It is the validation of our very existence in this world. There can be no greater joy for a mature person than to be secure in the knowledge that he or she has legitimacy, and that we have the full capacity to actualize the soul's full potential.

The Cosmic Marriage

Thirdly, every marriage within the Jewish community is a reflection of a greater marriage that has taken place over three thousand years ago at Mount Sinai. Then, G-d chose the Jewish people and was wedded to them. The Torah was the wedding contract that outlines the obligations we, the “bride,” has to G-d, the “Bridegroom.”

When the Jewish nation stood at Mount Sinai, the Talmud tells us, G-d lifted the mountain and held it over their heads and “threatened” them: “If you won’t accept the Torah, you will be buried here.”

Chassidic literature explains that the mountain that hovered over our head was the chupah, the wedding canopy that symbolizes the home that will unite the new couple. The “threat” was actually the pressure G-d’s intense love for the Jewish nation had on “compelling” them to say yes. How could we refuse the Torah when G-d showered so much love on us?

This explains why the Talmud, cited above, connects the sounds of joy of a wedding with the sounds that reverberated at Sinai.

Our joy at the wedding is the joy we feel when we realize that it is a reenactment and invocation of G-d’s infinite love for us that is reflected in the love of the bride and the bridegroom.

Rapprochement

Fourthly, this relationship, however, soured at the time of the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem and the subsequent exile.

Every time a Jew marries, he or she is, in effect, reestablishing and reinforcing the marriage between ourselves and G-d. Every marriage represents an act of Divine reconciliation. And in this capacity it hastens the time when we will all see the total rebuilding and restoration of the third Beit HaMikdash-Holy Temple and the return of true and everlasting peace to the Jews in the Land of Israel and for the entire world.

The breaking of the glass at the wedding is generally understood as a way to temper our joy by reminding us of the destruction of the Temple and the suffering of the Jews in the ensuing exile. In truth, happily, it is also a statement that the wedding celebration helps to re-connect the broken pieces in our nation's relationship with G-d.

There is a great outpouring of joy when a relationship that was challenged is allowed to heal.

A Taste of the Future

Fifthly, the wedding celebration provides us with a taste of the future Messianic Age at which time the marriage between G-d and His chosen people will be complete.

In some Midrashic sources, the marital relationship that commenced with Sinai was not consummated until the Holy Temple was built. In other sources, the consummation will only take place in the future Era of Redemption.

Every wedding affords us a glimpse and taste of the future.

When we see the joy that breaks out after the breaking of the glass we can only imagine how the entire world will break out in joyous celebration when we hear the sounds of the shofar heralding the coming of Moshiach and the onset of the Messianic Age.

Could there be any greater cause for celebration?

Mazal Tov! Mazal Tov!

ESSAY FOURTEEN

3 X 13: ITS SIMPLE ARITHMETIC!

**Punishment for the sake of punishment is cruel and
unusual from the Torah's vantage point.**

Punishment is education and rehabilitation.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

3 X 13: ITS SIMPLE ARITHMETIC!

Prison: The Wrong Punishment

Our society has a belief that punishment cannot be cruel and unusual. Because of this constitutional demand we do not have corporal punishment in our legal system. Yet, ironically, we do incarcerate people for years and even decades in the most inhumane fashion. Any criminal will tell you that he would prefer a good beating to even a few months in prison, which, in some situations can amount to a death penalty.

I'm not suggesting that we empty out all the prisons and institute corporal punishment in its place, because in our day and age, prison serves more as a protection of society than it does rehabilitation for the criminal. But, what I am suggesting is that our society must reexamine the way it views punishment.

Whatever role there is in deterrence and protection—and they do play an important part of Judaism's understanding of punishment—Judaism is concerned even more with the rehabilitation of the criminal, wherever possible. And because prison is rarely the environment where

rehabilitation takes place, the Torah did not include prison as one of the different forms of punishment it prescribes for criminal behavior. Throughout Jewish history prison was only used as a last resort or as temporary holding center before the person was tried.

Thus, every punishment was in essence not really a punishment for the sake of punishment, but a way of cleansing the evil that caused the criminal behavior in the first place.

Ouch!

With this introduction in mind we can approach the reason why the Torah—in this week's parsha—in discussing the use of corporal punishment—required the administering of 39 lashes for certain crimes.

In fact, the Torah calls for 40 lashes. The Oral Tradition—that was given to Moses at Sinai and transmitted generation by generation until it was ultimately recorded in the Talmud—explains that it means **up** to forty, but not really forty.

Whenever the Oral Tradition modifies the literal meaning of the text, there must be a reason why it was written in one way and interpreted the other. There must be a lesson in both versions. In other words, there is something we must learn from the association of corporal punishment with the numbers 39 and the number 40.

Reclaiming Thirteen

Kli Yakar, a sixteenth century Biblical commentary explains that the symbolism in the number 39 is that it comprises three sets of 13 (3×13). There are three items related to the number 13 that the criminal undermined in the commission of the crime.

Undermining G-d's Unity

The Hebrew word *echad*/one that we say in the Shema proclaiming G-d's unity, numerically adds up to 13. The criminal behaved in a way that belied his inner belief in G-d's omnipresence and unity.

If the criminal was aware that there is no other force in the world other than G-d He would not have so brazenly defied G-d's commandments. In the criminal's mind, his schemes can succeed. This implies that G-d is not the only source of life and sustenance in this world. Even worse, it implies that G-d is not the sole authority. That is the first "13" that the criminal has undermined.

Distorting the Torah

Torah was given to us to be interpreted; and there are 13 methods of Torah interpretation that were given to us by G-d. (These rules of interpretation, recorded in the Midrashic work Sifra, are part of the daily morning liturgy.)

The criminal has taken the liberty to distort the Torah so that it fits into his own system of priorities and thereby shunned G-d's system of interpreting the laws and substituted them with his own.

Un-Bar Mitzvah

The age of 13 is the age of Bar Mitzvah, the time, our Sages tell us, the *Yetzer Tov*, the good impulse is fully operative within the Jew.

We are born with but one natural impulse, which when left unchecked becomes the source of our evil behavior. This impulse, known as the *yetzer hara*/ the evil impulse is unopposed—except by the overbearing influence of his or her parents, teachers who, hopefully, smother the child with moral inspiration. At the age of 12 for a girl, when she enters her 13th year, and the age of thirteen for a boy, when he completes his thirteenth year, we acquire an opposing Divine force.

This does not mean that before Bat or Bar Mitzvah we have no Divine soul. Our Divine soul makes its entry into the body at circumcision for a boy or the naming for a girl. It does not fully manifest itself until the age of maturity.

By committing a crime, the criminal has demonstrated a lack of respect for his or her own innate goodness and G-dly nature that was acquired at the age associated with 13.

Thus, a crime is an act of rebellion directed against:

- a) G-d;
- b) The Torah and
- c) The person himself or herself.

Thus, for the criminal to be rehabilitated he must “lash” himself with these 3 multiples of 13, learning how to enhance his awareness of G-d; respect for G-d’s Torah; and self-respect.

The Elusive Forty

But the Torah speaks of forty lashes, because there is one level that we cannot administer ourselves. It is the level that G-d must give us.

In other words, for us to rehabilitate ourselves, we must ask G-d—after doing all that we are capable of doing—to lead us to the number forty and the spiritual heights it represents.

The number forty symbolizes the ultimate level of Divine purity and knowledge, as it corresponds to the forty days of the flood that cleansed the world and the forty days that Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Torah that was to transform the world and the forty years the Jews wandered in the desert until they were ready to enter the Promised Land.

Forty Days before Yom Kippur

We are presently in the month of Elul, on the threshold of the New Year, at which time we take stock of our past and prepare ourselves for a new year. This is the time of spiritual refinement. Indeed, these forty days—from the beginning of Elul through Yom Kippur—correspond to and represent the forty days Moses spent on Mount Sinai for the third time to receive the second set of Tablets.

We are also living on the threshold of a new era, the Era of Moshiach, when the world will be deluged with the knowledge of G-d. The Talmud and Zohar also speak of a forty year period at the commencement of the Messianic Age before the Resurrection of the Dead.

Our preparation for these two parallel periods—the New Year and the New Age—is to administer the “39 figurative lashes” to ourselves. This translates into an effort to enhance awareness of G-d’s unity; study of and respect for the Torah; and a more profound understanding of the spiritual treasures that we all possess.

And that should be followed with a humble request of G-d: “Please help us so that we can reach the fortieth level; the level that represents complete purification and atonement. Give us a good and sweet year and may we see the immediate realization of Your promise to bring Moshiach and the final Redemption.”

ESSAY FIFTEEN

GOING OVERBOARD

Doing a little bit more than required is not just an incremental addition.

It transforms the act from selfness to otherness.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

GOING OVERBOARD

Imprecise Weights and Measures!

Honest weights and measures are mandated by the Torah in this week's Parsha. So strong is the Torah's insistence on giving one's customers an accurate weight and measure, that Jewish law requires that we give a bit more than the precise weight and measure.

At first glance, this requirement appears problematic. If one knows for sure that his measures are just, why should he have to lose some of his merchandise? True, there are cases where one might be tempted to give a little less than the required amount, so to compensate for that we are told to give a little more. However, the question still remains. Why does the Torah not make a similar requirement for other Mitzvos?

For example: The Torah requires that we tithe our produce, which means that, in the Land of Israel, one must give ten percent of one's agricultural yield to the Levite. There is no law that dictates that we should give a little bit more, so as to ensure that we don't give less. Why is the

commandment concerning honest weights and measures different?

The “Good Eye”

Perhaps, the answer to this question can be found in human psychology. The Talmud says that when one gives a gift, they give it unstintingly, with a “good eye.” This means that if a question arises, upon receipt of a gift, as to whether all the accessories were included, one can assume, unless there is definite evidence to the contrary, that the donor of the gift meant to make the gift a complete one.

By contrast, if an object was **sold** and the consumer demands the accessories, according to some Talmudic Sages, we make the opposite assumption; that the seller only intended to sell the minimum he is compelled to sell—i.e., the item without its accessories. And without concrete evidence to the contrary, the buyer loses.

What is the reason for this distinction?

When a person is in the mode of giving, it means that they have risen above the natural tendency of a finite creature to be exclusively self-centered. It is natural for an animal — and a person whose personality is governed by his “animal soul” — to try to keep all that rightfully belongs to itself.

The very act of giving a gift to another is a recognition that one is capable of transcending one’s selfhood to think of

others. Once one has risen to that level and expressed a part of his personality that is not driven by self-interest—relatively speaking, for one can have an ulterior motive in giving a gift as well—it is safe to assume that when there is a doubt about the giver's intentions, it most likely was to give away the item with its accessories.

A benevolent spirit is assumed to be benevolent until proven otherwise. And if we have to err, we should err on the side of his generosity, not his self-interest.

From “Self-Interest” to “Other-Interest”

Conversely, when one is in the selling mode, despite the fact that he or she too is giving away his or her personal belongings, it is entirely motivated by self-interest. As the Talmud puts it: “One who buys and then sells for the same price, is he really a businessman?” Business, by definition, demands a profit. When there is a doubt as to the seller's intention, we should assume that it was to come out making more profit than less.

We can now appreciate why the Torah was so strict in its insistence on honest weights and measures and the additional requirement that one must give more than the required measure.

When a person is in the sales mode — as opposed to the gift mode — it is the self-interest aspect of one's personality that is the driving force. One must then do something to shift gears and allow for the selfless aspect of one's personality to temper the selfish dimension.

By giving a bit more than one is required, even when there is no fear of cheating, one elevates the entire selling experience from a purely selfish and mundane one into one that is also selfless and G-dly.

To be sure, one can accomplish this goal when they give some of their earnings to tzedakah. However, the giving of tzedakah occurs **after** the transaction was completed. At best, it can have a retroactive effect on the business dealing. The advantage of giving more than the just measure is that while one is engaged in a selfish act, it is immediately transformed into a selfless and G-dly act.

Judaism is not focused primarily on escaping the day to day aspects of the world into a spiritual ivory tower. The goal of Judaism is to instill spirituality into the physical, selflessness into selfish endeavors, the infinite into the finite and the G-dly into the human. One way we exemplify this ideal is to transform the normal, quotidian exercise of selling a product for profit from an exclusive “self-interest” practice into an “other interest” experience.

The lesson from this is that whenever we extend ourselves beyond that which is required we allow a higher layer of our personality to come to the fore. We allow our G-dly

soul to manifest itself and remove the dominance of our animal soul.

Clearing the Road to Redemption

The Torah associates just weights and measures with the need to remember the wicked nation Amalek that attempted to destroy us and which represents the ultimate in evil. Why would these two totally disparate themes be linked together?

Amalek, we are taught, is the nation and mindset that threatens to abort the process of Redemption. Just as the evil nation attacked us just as we left Egypt—attempting to reverse that Exodus—so too the modern incarnation of the internal Amalek, threatens to keep our G-dly soul in its prison.

Whenever we engage in an entirely mundane and secular activity without any “intrusion” of our G-dly and selfless interests, our G-dly soul can be said to be in an internal exile. We become so self-absorbed that we cannot think about the other—at least for the duration of that self-centered activity.

By performing a selfless act of giving slightly more than is required in the sale of an item; one negates the internal Amalek’s impediment to full spiritual Redemption. It deals Amalek a lethal blow and keeps the road to final Redemption wide open.

The relationship between the state of exile in which we are situated and the state of Redemption that we eagerly anticipate is that exile is stifling and Redemption is liberating. To assist in our collective redemption, we must learn how to redeem ourselves as individuals by breaking out of the limiting aspects of our personalities. This we accomplish by always doing a little bit more than required in every desirable sphere of life. Whatever has become our norm is exile. Whatever we do to increase in the direction of goodness is redemptive.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

INVINCIBLE

Our staying power comes from the most unsuspected sources.

Acting moral when no one would know if we weren't and valuing even small gestures and baby steps is the power behind our nation's immortality.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

INVINCIBLE

Vulnerable

In this week's parsha the Torah juxtaposes the law against false weights and measures with the commandment to remember the evil nation called Amalek.

Rashi explains that when we violate the former we invite the attack of the latter.

We need to understand the connection between honest weights and measures and the attack from our arch enemy Amalek. Why does the violation of this commandment to have honest weights and measures have to do with the attack of Amalek? (See preceding essay for alternate explanation.)

The simple answer is that when we violate this commandment we are rendered vulnerable, because we lose the closeness of G-d and His protective power in our lives.

The question still remains, why does the Torah suggest here that our vulnerability is linked to the specific violation of false weights and measures? Couldn't the same be said of any transgression?

Getting into the Mind of the Violator

To understand the connection it would serve us well to examine the mindset of the one who would disregard the commandment to have accurate weights and measures, while they would not “push the envelope” and commit a blatant crime by taking someone’s property outright.

In the mind of this criminal there is nothing wrong with cheating his customer by using a false weight; it is in his morally warped mind a “victimless crime.” The customer doesn’t know he’s been had.

Another salient difference between outright theft and theft through the use of false weights and measures is that when someone cheats with a false weight it is usually a small and apparently insignificant amount in each individual case. It is only in the aggregate that the perpetrator’s crime involves substantial gain.

From these two distinctions that exist between theft and false weights and measures one can characterize the crime of false weights and measures and the mindset that inspires the commission of this crime thus:

This criminal, in his warped way of thinking, is convinced that when something is not noticed by the victim it is not a crime because he or she does not feel the pain. The criminal is also convinced that when the loss suffered by the victim is negligible it is not a problem even if he were

to become aware of the fact that the weights and measures were false.

There can be nothing more destructive than a nation that has citizens who harbor the above two perverse ways of thinking.

What We Don't Know, Hurts!

Our strength as a people lies in the very two points that the one who uses false weights and measures so blithely dismisses. In general terms our strength lies in our morality and integrity.

More specifically, we are strong and invincible because we are sensitive to the spiritual and physical needs of others even though the other is not aware that he or she is missing something.

On the physical level, there are some in our community who are not aware of the threats to our existence in Israel and other places. It behooves us to sound the alarm and alert these unsuspecting people about the looming danger so that they can adequately avert a catastrophe.

In the spiritual arena the person who was not exposed to the beauty and value of a Torah way of life does not feel that they were deprived of a treasure. So one might think, if that is the way they are, why awaken them from their state of blissful ignorance.

This is analogous to the person who gives a false weight and measure and says that the victim doesn't even know that they were cheated. A person who is in a coma doesn't necessarily know that he or she is in that pitiful state, only the relatives appreciate the seriousness of the plight of the comatose patient. The child doesn't know that he or she is ignorant. Why bother educating children?

With this attitude of "what you don't know doesn't hurt you" no progress can be made. Society will always be in a state of darkness and stagnation which ultimately ends in its demise.

Jews have survived and thrived despite all of the opposition to them because they always maintained that what one does not know does in fact hurt them. It was engrained in us that we are one people and we therefore always felt the responsibility to not cheat others out of their heritage and treasure. It is therefore our responsibility to educate those who were denied a Jewish education even as we have to alert the about the physical threats to their existence.

If this attitude had not prevailed most Jews would have fallen to the wayside and we would have been that much weaker. Indeed, we would have suffered the fate of most other civilizations and would have disappeared from the face of the earth.

Small Strides Take us to Far Places

The second point is that if we failed to appreciate the value of small strides in our Judaism and only valued the major changes in our lives we would never have made any progress at all in educating others. In education all progress is measured in what seems to less than significant increments.

Thus by the Torah telling us that we must maintain honest weights and measures it is also impressing upon us to change our mindset and appreciate that as a nation we must look out for the welfare of others even if they do not recognize the danger to their lives or the positive value in living a life governed by the Torah.

And it is also a message to us to value even the most miniscule changes and improvements without which no major changes would be possible.

It is through this sensitivity that we remain strong as a nation and are protected from external threats represented by the evil nation Amalek.

Amalek: Cooling and Doubting

Amalek, the Torah says, “cooled us off.” The Amalek mindset is one where we do not take seriously the threats

that are invisible and we may not even be aware of. Amalek tries to destroy us by telling us that there is no crisis; don't be alarmed; don't do anything because there is nothing to worry about.

Amalek—which is the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word for doubt “*safek*”—also instills a sense of doubt as to whether it pays to make small changes. “Why bother changing a little if we can't succeed in making the ultimate change?” is Amalek's approach to getting us to never budge and sows the seeds of our own decline.

The Road to Redemption

Since the elimination of the threat of Amalek is linked to the Messianic Age it follows that the admonition to maintain honest weights and measures is related to the coming of Moshiach.

Moshiach will introduce an era of peace and harmony, but he will also remove the veil that blocks our ability to see what is truly good for us. We will also see the value of every small effort and accomplishment. Amalek is the spiritual force of evil that blocks our vision and perception. And with the coming of Moshiach the Amalek threat will be neutralized. And conversely, when we do our part in neutralizing our own internal Amalek by becoming sensitive to the threats that surround us and by appreciating the small, incremental steps we must take, we

become the driving force to make the Redemption process unfold.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

HOLY CHUTZPAH

It takes chutzpah to live as a moral and observant Jew in our immoral and amoral secularized society.

It is this power of chutzpah that makes our generation unique and qualified for Redemption.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

HOLY CHUTZPAH

Amalek's Identity

At the end of this week's parsha, the Torah commands us to remember what Amalek did to us shortly after we were liberated from Egypt.

Who is Amalek and what does he represent?

First and foremost Amalek was a nation, descended from Esau, the son of the Patriarch Isaac and grandson of the Patriarch Abraham. Soon after the Jewish people departed from Egypt, they were attacked by the Amalekites.

Our sages tell us that despite the fact that all the nations of the world were terrified of the Jews and no one would have ever entertained the thought of attacking them, only Amalek was brazen enough to launch an attack against them. Their hatred for the Jewish people was so diabolical, that nothing would deter them—not even the prospects of suffering an ignoble defeat—from attacking the Jewish people.

Amalek, to be sure, is the name of an ancient, evil nation, but, it has come to mean much more than that. Amalek, is

the name that can be applied to the spiritual heirs of the original Amalekites. These are the evil people, blinded by unmitigated hatred towards the Jewish people, who want to see their total annihilation.

One does not have to look far to find these modern day Amalekites. They were the Nazis who perpetrated the Holocaust and their heirs throughout the world who strike indiscriminately at Jewish men, women and children.

We are commanded to remember the evil of this nation. By remembering their evil, G-d empowers us to destroy it and see it that this evil will finally disappear.

The Internal Amalek

But there is yet another dimension to Amalek. There is the Amalek that exists within each and every one of us. This Amalek trait can be identified by its unmitigated gall and hubris, that we callchutzpah.

There are times when our desire to do something that is contrary to Torah is tempered by a sense of shame, guilt and often trepidation. There is always a part of us that does not agree with what we are about to do. The sense of guilt is like the sensation of pain. It is uncomfortable but without it we would never seek medical attention. The same is true in the moral sense. A person who feels guilt will either desist from improper behavior or in the event that they succumbed to it they will be remorseful.

The reason we have guilt is because the evil that we possess is not the essential, concentrated form of evil. It does not take over. Our innate goodness and sense of decency may not have a veto over the impulses we have, but it surely has a vote.

But, when we discover that we are undaunted by the consequences of evil action, we should realize that this is the most potent adversary and the battle to vanquish it will prove most difficult. When we no longer feel any guilt we must recognize that the evil has penetrated to our very core and has stilled any and all opposition.

No matter how much logic we try to use to persuade the Amalek type people that what they are doing is wrong, they will not care. No inspirational experience and no rational discourse can dissuade Amalek tainted individuals from doing what they desire.

Perhaps this is why our sages tell us that one of the negative traits that will characterize the last generation before the final Redemption is Chutzpah. Before Moshiach comes to usher in an age of spiritual enlightenment, where evil will finally be eliminated—particularly, the unadulterated form of evil represented by Amalek—the world will experience a resurgence of Amalek; its “last stand.”

Chutzpah in Reverse

The way to combat this evil chutzpah is to use chutzpah in the reverse. No matter how many arguments can be made against one's involvement with G-d and Torah, a Jew with "holy" Chutzpah remains undaunted.

The Jews, who in the former Soviet Union defied the regime, and remained steadfastly loyal to Judaism, despite threats to their lives, utilized this kosher form of Chutzpah.

When a Jew, born and bred in America, refuses to surrender to the forces of assimilation that demands that we give up our "old fashioned" ways and melt into the modern culture, he or she is using Chutzpah in the positive sense of the word.

When young people rebel against the secularism and materialism of their parent's generation and demand more Jewish knowledge and a more meaningful and altruistic spiritual life, this is holy Chutzpah.

And it is this holy Chutzpah that has the power to defeat the unholy Chutzpah of Amalek.

As we look around us and become aware of the various manifestations of the evil Amalek, we should realize that we are now living in momentous times that call for extraordinary responses. The response that we should have is chutzpah, to stand up against anything that stands in our way to greater commitment to the principles of Torah.

This will surely hasten and prepare us for the ultimate redemption through Moshiach.

Chutzpah Plus One

In the realm of *remez*, the dimension of Torah interpretation that often focuses on the numerical value of a word, we find an interesting correlation between the word chutzpah and its positive application. The word chutzpah in Hebrew numerology yields the number 189, one short of 190. The word *ketz*, which is the Biblical word that denotes the “end of days,” i.e., the Messianic Era, is numerically equivalent to 190.

Translating this in practical terms this suggests that chutzpah, in and of itself, falls short of the end. It goes a long way, but one must add the number one—the ideal of G-dly unity—into chutzpah. Chutzpah without the “One” is not Redemption, although it may be a harbinger of the imminence of Redemption.

What makes Redemption materialize? When the Chutzpah is permeated with an overarching desire to make the oneness of G-d pervade all of one’s life and that it should spread to the entire world. That takes Chutzpah!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

AN “I” FOR AN “I”

G-d wants to meet us on our turf.

G-d cherishes our initiatives.

The ultimate G-dly achievement is Moshiach and it
depends on us.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

AN “I” FOR AN “I”

Elul and Mitzvos

There is a well-known teaching of the *Shelah* (authored by Rabbi Yeshayah Halevi Hurwitz, a 17th century Halachic authority and Kabbalist) that the themes of the weekly Torah portion are connected to the Holidays and other seasonal events which occur in that particular week.

We are now situated in the month of Elul, the month that is dedicated to stock taking for all of our actions of the past year. It is no coincidence, then, that this week's parsha contains the largest number of commandments in the Torah, highlighting the emphasis on Mitzvah conscientiousness during this auspicious month.

More specifically, one of the commandments in this week's parsha involves a person who chances upon a nest with the mother bird crouching on her chicks or eggs. The Torah tells us what one should do if he decides to take the birds:

“If you encounter a bird's nest on the way—on any tree, or on the ground—containing chicks or eggs, and the mother is sitting upon the chicks or upon

the eggs: You should not take the mother from upon the young. You should always send away the mother, and then you may take the young for yourself. This will be for your own benefit and you will live a long time.”

The Midrash introduces its comments on this verse with an enigmatic discussion concerning the laws of circumcision. It poses the rhetorical question:

“If a child is born circumcised do we have still have to circumcise the child?” The Midrash furnishes the answer: “Our Sages taught: One who was born circumcised must undergo a letting of a drop of blood.”

What connection is there between these two seemingly unrelated commandments—of sending away the mother bird and recircumcision? And how does this Mitzvah relate to the month of Elul?

Send Away the Morning Light!

To answer these two questions we must preface the novel, allegorical interpretation of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev of this verse. The word *tzipor*-bird can also be translated as the morning light as in the Aramaic word *tzafra*. Morning light is a metaphor for the spiritual inspiration that comes from above.

Thus the Torah commands us: If we would experience a spontaneous inspiration—the mother bird-*tzippor*—we should send it away; we cannot and should not rely on the inspiration from above. It is imperative that we do things with our own initiative. When we rely on the inspiration from above it will only last as long as we feel that inspiration. It can easily dissipate.

If one wants his or her inspiration to last it must be internalized and reciprocated. This reciprocated inspiration can be attributed to the person and not solely to the “mother-bird” inspiration. Once the person “owns” the inspiration it has lasting power.

We can now understand the connection between the Mitzvah of sending away the mother bird and the child that was born circumcised. Of all actions that represent our efforts at self-improvement and spiritual growth circumcision stands out as the most dramatic. It literally and figuratively enables us to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of our connecting to G-d.

However, when a child is born circumcised it suggests the person’s reliance on a process that comes from above, analogous to the “mother bird” phenomenon. To ensure that the person does not rely on the short lived inspiration from Above, the Midrash cites the law that the child must undergo the ritual of letting some blood. There must be some act on our part to make ascribe the natural circumcision and its effects to our own efforts.

The King is In the Field, But the Ball is In Our Court

We can now also understand the connection to the month of Elul. Elul, our Sages tell us is an acronym, for the four words in the Song of songs: "*Ani l'dodi v'dodi li*—I am to My beloved and my beloved is to me." Unlike the Passover season which marked the liberation of the Jewish people that came solely as a Divine effort, the month of Elul is predicated on personal initiative.

Elul is a paradoxical month. On the one hand, it is a month that demands of us to generate our own spiritual movement towards "our Beloved." On the other hand, it is the month in which, as the Alter Rebbe coined the expression, "The King is in the field." He explains that the king on the way to his palace goes through the countryside and allows anyone to approach him with requests and "greet them with a cheerful countenance and a smiling face." Each and every person has the opportunity and right to approach the king.

How do we reconcile the two apparently disparate descriptions of Elul? On the one hand, we are expected to invest our own effort in drawing close to G-d without the support of Divine inspiration that characterizes the Holiday of Passover. And, on the other hand, we are told that Elul is unique and that G-d is more accessible this month than any other.

In one of his published talks, the Rebbe elaborates on this parable, focusing on why notwithstanding G-d's

accessibility to us in the month of Elul none of the weekdays are designated as Holidays, not even minor Holidays.

The Rebbe explains that while G-d is fully available to us in the month of Elul—as in no other time—He does not make overtures to us. He simply provides us with an unparalleled opportunity to get close to Him. G-d, however, wants to see us in the context of our most ordinary existence to see who we really are absent the trappings of Holy days and experiences. G-d wants to see that even when there is no external impetus for us to approach Him—such as that which we experience on Holidays when G-d's powerful energies dominate the atmosphere—we, nevertheless, take the initiative ourselves and approach the King.

The word Elul, as stated, is alluded to in the words “I am to my beloved...” It suggests that in this month we identify the true “I.” In formal settings such as the Holidays and other inspirational times and places the true I may be concealed by the spiritual veneer supplied by the holy atmosphere. In Elul we discover the true unadulterated, unadorned “I”.

Moshiach and the Bird

The word *tzipor*-bird is also an allusion to Moshiach. Numerically, the word (when spelled without the vowel, *vav*) adds up to the words “*zeh Moshiach*-this is Moshiach.”

The simple connection between the bird and Moshiach is based on the Talmudic statement that dreaming of a bird is an omen that peace is to follow. (Again, numerically, the word *tzipor*—this time spelled with the vowel, *vav*—adds up to the word Shalom-peace.) And Moshiach's role is to bring peace to the world.

However, in light of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev's exposition, a deeper connection between the sending away of the mother bird and Moshiach can be discovered.

In some people's minds there is an erroneous view that Moshiach and the ensuing Redemption is entirely in G-d's hands. Many people harbor the thought that the: what, when, who, where and how of Moshiach is G-d's province, determined solely by Him, and in which we have no significant role. Nothing can be further from the truth. Moshiach and the final Redemption—unlike the first liberation of the Jews from Egypt—is primarily a consequence of our efforts. The Mitzvos that we perform in exile and especially those that we perform in the most sterile, non-spiritual times of exile—akin to the ordinary days of Elul—will bring on Redemption.

This is not to suggest that G-d and Moshiach have no role in all of the above. To be sure, the King is in the Field. G-d—and His chosen human redeemer, Moshiach—is here and is waiting for us to seize the opportunity to do our part in making the Redemption a tangible reality.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

Moshiach is waiting for us to say, “We are ready for Moshiach”! And we express that readiness by accepting Moshiach as our leader, following his directives for an enhanced commitment to Torah and its commandments, permeated with a passionate desire to usher in the Era of Redemption.

Sending away the mother bird in this context means, we should not rely on G-d’s initiative to bring Moshiach who will usher in the age of true G-dly light. It is our responsibility to do our part and justifiably demand of G-d to crown our efforts with success.

ESSAY NINETEEN

STONED!

Life is precarious.

The Torah commands us to take precautions that we do not fall off a roof.

Lest someone feels that falling and failing are inevitable, G-d promises us that He will take us into His secure embrace.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

ESSAY NINETEEN

STONED!

Another Enigmatic Midrash

One of the more enigmatic Midrashic texts elaborates on the words in this week's parsha:

"If you shall build a new house make a fence around the roof."

The Midrash makes the following puzzling statement:

"When G-d said, 'If you shall build a new house...' the ministering angels asked Him, 'Why did you give the Torah to Israel?'"

He replied, 'Did I not write in the Torah 'You shall not take G-d's name in vain?'"

The ministering angels retorted, 'Did You not write in the Torah the section concerning the rebellious son?'

He replied to them, 'The rebellious son incurs the penalty of stoning.'"

What is the connection between the Mitzvah to erect a safety fence so that no one falls off the roof with G-d

giving the Torah to Israel? And how do these two themes connect with the commandment not to take G-d's name in vain and the rebellious son?

The New House: A New Challenge

“Building a new house” can be understood on many levels.

In addition to its literal meaning, it can be understood as a reference to the time a person is born, that is to say when the soul descends from on high and takes up residence in a new home, i.e., the body.

For the soul, the entire experience of coexisting with a physical body is uncharted territory. When the soul is in Paradise, it knows no temptations and has none of the challenges that confront a soul when it is enclosed within a body.

The new house can also be understood to refer to the entire world, which G-d created so that, through our efforts, it will eventually become His home. The world that G-d created and is a home to all of His creatures is to be transformed into a new home, one that fully expresses its G-dly identity.

Indeed, this is what the Messianic Age is all about. It is the time when we shall see the fruit of our labors, performed over the long history of our observance of the Torah and its Mitzvos: when the old world is finally, and for all time, transformed into a G-dly world, a totally new world.

However, there are many pitfalls along the way in the soul's journey—as well as the collective journey of all humanity—to build this new home.

When a soul is disembodied, it faces no pitfalls; there is no threat of falling, in the moral and spiritual sense of the word.

However, as soon as our souls enter the material world to start their new venture, they find so many hurdles, obstacles, traps and challenges that without special protective measures we will likely fall. If we fall that means that the journey of the soul into this world was in vain, and G-d's home—both the macro and the micro—will remain incomplete.

The Torah therefore commands us to erect a fence to prevent falling off the path.

The Angel's Argument

When G-d decided to give the Torah to Moses on behalf of the Jewish people, the angels protested. “Why,” they asked, “would G-d give Divine wisdom to mortals?” Moses responded that humans need the Torah precisely because it was designed for us mortals to use to refine ourselves and enable us to transform the world into a new house.

However, whenever the Jewish people seem to falter and frustrate G-d's plan to make this world a G-dly edifice

through our observance of the commandments, the angels return with a formidable challenge to G-d:

“If building a new home is so fraught with danger that without a fence, i.e., extra measures of security, humans are likely to fall, then the house will never be completed. Why then send any soul into this hostile world armed only with a Torah, where the likelihood is that it will not be observed properly.”

Some days, it seems that the angels had a valid argument.

It's Not in Vain

G-d's response was “Did I not write in the Torah ‘You shall not take G-d's name in vain?’”

How does that respond to their challenge?

These words literally mean do not swear falsely or needlessly thereby unnecessarily invoking G-d's name. They can also convey the message that anything to which G-d attaches His name, His imprimatur, cannot possibly be in vain. Every soul contains Divine energies that are represented by G-d's name.

The most essential of Divine names is known as the Tetragrammaton. It is comprised of the letters *Yud*, *hei*, *vav*, and *hei*. The *Yud*, which is a dot, represents the faculty of *chochma*, the intuitive flash of insight that is the very first and most abstract expression of the soul. It is the

faculty that is most receptive to apprehending G-d. The *hei*, an expansive letter, is representative of the soul's intellectual ability to analyze and draw inferences and make G-d's presence grasped by the human mind. The letter vav—which is a straight vertical line—is representative of the soul's emotions, which, like the vertical line itself, enable the person to relate to and connect with others and so is the part of our soul that generates feelings of love and reverence for G-d. The final letter, *hei*, represents the power of speech and action through which the soul can have an impact on the physical world. Our soul is thus G-d's instrument in making this world a G-dly world.

We were given the Torah to help the soul release its G-dly energy. Torah, the Zohar states, is G-d's name. However, unlike the soul, the Torah cannot be clouded by the physical world, although it deals with physical concepts and situations. The overt G-dly light, contained in and transmitted through Torah, empowers us to reveal the Divine imprimatur of our soul.

G-d's response to the angels thus was that ultimately the "house" will be built. G-d's name, i.e., the combined power of the soul and Torah, cannot possibly fail. G-d's name cannot be in vain.

The Rebellious Son

The angels were still not convinced.

Their next “challenge” to G-d was: “Did You not write in the Torah the section concerning the rebellious son?”

They were referring of course to the commandment in this week’s parsha, which deals with a hypothetical case in which an adolescent who stole meat and wine was initially chastised with corporal punishment. If he persists, the ultimate punishment is death. The Talmud states that this case was purely hypothetical. The legal technicalities needed for conviction were deliberately made so onerous that it is impossible for the rebellious child to get the death penalty.

Why then does the Torah speak of a crime for which there is no chance of punishment?

It is to teach us the danger of neglecting our responsibility for the moral education of our youth. That neglect can lead to the most heinous crimes and the total breakdown of society. We must, therefore, adopt the strongest measures to nip the problem in the bud.

The angels thus argued, aren’t humans very much like the errant child who cannot be rehabilitated? If so, what are the chances that the Torah will have a salutary effect on the people? When a human is young, he or she is prone to rebellion, leading to utter destruction of the “house.” The Jewish people started their sojourn in the desert with constant rebellion. How can they be trusted with the Torah to build a new house when they are simultaneously contributing to its demolition?

Three Dimensions of Stoning

G-d's final response to them was: "The rebellious son incurs the penalty of stoning."

Commentators explain that the severity of the punishment was meant as a deterrent to the rebellious son. Knowing the harshness of the penalty serves as shock treatment for the recalcitrant child.

On a simple level, G-d's response to the angels is that knowing the consequences of undermining the fulfillment of G-d's plan to create a new house will motivate us to return to G-d and commit to the Torah with that much more vigor. The very stark realization that we can destroy everything we have built will be enough to jolt us into compliance.

On a deeper level, one can also say that "stoning" is intended as a metaphor.

According to the Talmud, when G-d offered the Torah to the Jewish people they responded enthusiastically with the words "*Na'aseh v'nishma*—We will do and we will listen." Yet, the Talmud also states that G-d uprooted Mount Sinai and placed it over their heads and threatened to crush them ("stone" them) with the mountain unless they accepted the Torah!

How can we reconcile these two diametrically opposite characterizations of the Jewish people's acceptance of the

Torah? Did they accept it willingly or did G-d have to threaten them with stoning?

One of the answers, found in Chassidic literature, is that the mountain G-d placed over them was a mountain of love. The mountain was like the chupah-wedding canopy that expresses the overwhelming love and protection afforded to us by G-d. This manifestation of love was so powerful that they could not possibly refuse G-d.

Perhaps, the meaning of stoning here, at least with respect to the rebellious son, is that he will ultimately return to G-d, Who, we believe will not allow any Jew to be left behind as we move into the Messianic Age. G-d's unlimited love and compassion for us will envelop us. We will be "stoned" with love.

On a deeper level yet, according to the ancient Kabbalah text, Sefer Yetzirah, a stone is a metaphor for letters. Two stones-letters can create two houses, i.e., two words, etc.

G-d's response to the angels meant that the letters of the Torah contain so much positive energy and light that even the wayward child, or the spirit of rebelliousness within us, will not undermine the "New House." On the contrary, the letters of Torah that we read and learn will actually facilitate the completion of the house in which G-d will ultimately take up residence.

ESSAY TWENTY

IN PRAISE OF MIRIAM

The greatest praise for a person is his or her selflessness.

**The greatest measure of selflessness is to appear
compromised so that others should benefit.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY

IN PRAISE OF MIRIAM

Remember Miriam, But for What?

One of the narratives repeated in this week's parsha concerns Miriam, Moses' sister, who spoke ill of her brother, as recounted earlier in the Book of Numbers. As a result of this "indiscretion," she was afflicted with *tzara'as* (a skin lesion, which renders a person ritually unclean and in quarantine).

In this week's parsha, the Torah admonishes us to be careful in treating these skin lesions. Then the Torah exhorts us to "Remember what G-d, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way when you left Egypt."

Rashi gives a simple explanation for the juxtaposition of these two themes. *Tzara'as* is punishment for slander. Miriam contracted *tzara'as* because she spoke ill of her brother. The Torah continues that to avoid this punishment one should remember how Miriam was afflicted.

Three questions arise when we analyze this verse:

First, why does the Torah focus on Miriam? Isn't mentioning her name in this context itself a form of slander? Why would the Torah, which even avoids mentioning something derogatory about a non-kosher animal, go out of its way to put down Miriam?

Moreover, Miriam was arguably one of the most righteous people ever to have inhabited this earth. In many ways she is considered to be an equal to Moses. In her merit the Jews were given water in the parched desert. Miriam is credited with having convinced her parents, and all of the Jewish people, to continue with their family life despite Pharaoh's cruel decrees. Miriam was a prophetess of note. Couldn't the Torah have stated that people should avoid speaking ill of others, lest they risk *tzara'as*? Why the emphasis that it happened to Miriam? Why place such a holy woman in an unfavorable light?

One might answer that a lesson involving an actual person is more effective than one taught through a fictional character. The moral of the lesson is further reinforced when we know that a woman as righteous as Miriam herself can be afflicted.

These answers, however sound, do not fully justify the Torah's mention of her by name here and rehashing an incident for which she was punished and fully absolved. The Talmud states that one may not remind a penitent of his or her sins because it causes them distress. Doing so,

the Talmud states is *ona'as devarim*-verbal abuse; a serious crime.

The question becomes even more insistent when we recall that Jewish tradition requires us to recite this verse as one of the Six Remembrances that a Jew must remember daily, juxtaposing it with the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Why should Miriam's transgression be etched in the collective memories of Jews for all time? How could we do that to anyone, let alone to one of the most righteous of individuals?!

Where and When

The second question pertains to the end of the verse. Why does the Torah emphasize the where and when of the incident with Miriam: "on the way, when you left Egypt?"

And thirdly, why does the Torah say it happened "when you left Egypt," when it actually occurred about a year after the Exodus? In the Book of Numbers the narrative of Miriam's humbling was linked with the spies who returned from scouting the land with a slanderous report. Rashi explains that the spies who witnessed Miriam's punishment should have learned a lesson from her not to indulge in slander. The spy story—and by extension the narrative of Miriam—occurred over a year after the Exodus. Why then does the Torah refer to it as if it happened right after they departed from Egypt?

A Tzadik Sinning – An Oxymoron

To answer these three questions we must resolve an even greater anomaly: how it was possible that a woman of the caliber of Miriam to disparage Moses? A truly righteous person is remains above the pettiness of common individuals. The righteous and holy woman that was Miriam certainly was above slander and she certainly knew the greatness of Moses.

In truth, when the Torah records the transgressions of the most righteous and holy individuals—such as Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, et al. — one must not take it at face value.

The *tzadik*, as Chassidus teaches, has completely transformed his or her evil impulse into an impulse to doing only good. For the *tzadik* to willingly transgress is like a sane person inflicting severe bodily damage on himself. The challenge for the *tzadik* is not in dealing with personal evil but with maintaining a constant striving to reach higher and higher levels of righteousness and holiness.

In light of this enlightened view of the *tzadik* the question comes into even sharper focus. How can a *tzadik* do something that is contrary to G-d's will?

Growth of a *Tzadik*

The answer is that G-d sees how the *tzadik* wants to grow and knows that the strongest spurts of growth occur only after one has fallen. But there is a hitch. The *tzadik* will never voluntarily do something to degrade himself and can therefore never grow as a Ba'al Teshuvah-Penitent can. G-d, therefore, orchestrates the *tzadik's* "fall" so that he or she can be helped to rise to an exponentially higher level. The *tzadik's* "sins" are, in actuality, opportunities for him or her to reach higher levels of connection to G-d.

In this context, there are two categories of *tzadikim*. The first type of *tzadik* is obsessed with his or her spiritual state. It is well known that one cannot grow spiritually without helping others. This *tzadik* therefore does everything within his or her power to help others materially and spiritually. However, this *tzadik's* focus remains on solidifying his or her connection to G-d through spiritual advancement.

There is another category of *tzadik*, whose entire *raison d'etre* is to lead and nurture the Jewish people. Everything these *tzadikim* do, including their personal spiritual development, is subordinated to the needs of the Jewish people. They are willing to sacrifice everything—material or spiritual assets—for their people.

Thus, when G-d wants to grant them their greatest wish, G-d orchestrates their temporary decline in ways that will be beneficial, first and foremost, to the Jewish people.

Miriam, along with Moses and Aaron, was clearly in the second category. She was a faithful leader of the Jewish nation, whose obsession was her flock and not her own spiritual advancement.

Thank You for Shattering the Tablets

Another illustration of this phenomenon is Moses who shattered the tablets, our Sages tell us, to save the Jewish people from terrible calamity due to their transgressions with the Golden Calf. There was nothing holier or more precious to Moses than the Torah, particularly the very Tablets containing the Ten Commandments. Moses was willing to sacrifice his relationship with G-d, as it was channeled through the Torah, for the sake of his Jewish people. G-d therefore induced Moses to shatter the Tablets to save his rebellious but beloved nation.

The greatest praise that can be given to Moses is for his desire to sacrifice everything for his people. Indeed, this is how Rashi explains the very last verse in the Torah, which speaks of Moses performing great wonders in the presence of all of Israel.

According to Rashi this praise alludes to his shattering of the Tablets, in response to which G-d exclaims "*yasher*

co'ach she'shibata, more strength to you for having shattered them."

Similarly, it may be suggested that Miriam's mild slander of Moses was induced by G-d so that all future generations of Jews should learn how damaging speaking ill of others can be. Miriam, as a faithful leader of the Jewish people for her generation and for all future generations was more than happy to be remembered for eternity as the one who suffered on account of her "indiscretion." No greater praise can be given to this type of *tzadik* who sacrifices for his or her people.

Reinterpretation

In light of the above we can now reinterpret the verse which states:

"Remember what G-d your G-d did to Miriam on the way, when you left Egypt."

It does not say remember how G-d afflicted Miriam with *tzara'as*, but simply "what G-d did to Miriam." In addition to the simple meaning, it also conveys the idea that G-d was the one who induced her to disparage her brother in order to suffer the consequences.

Each time we remember Miriam's "transgression" and particularly how she suffered for it, we are singing her greatest praise. Her entire being was selflessly subordinated to the well-being of the Jewish people for all times.

Catalyst for Redemption

To magnify her praise, the Torah adds “on the way, when you left Egypt.” Prior to the Exodus, Moses was concerned that the Jewish people might not deserve liberation because of the many slanderers in their midst. Their slander risked the division of the people into fragments rather than remaining a cohesive whole. To be liberated, it was necessary for them to be united as one nation, all their flaws notwithstanding.

Thus, when Miriam suffered the consequences of her “slander” and became a powerful lesson for all future generations, she guaranteed that the Redemption dynamic would endure, alive and well, thereby empowering us to be liberated from our own Galus.

We, too, are on the way to our own Exodus. Indeed, we are at the end of the road and are poised to enter into the Promised Land with Moshiach. Just as we needed to learn the lesson from Miriam at the beginning of our journey, today as we stand at the end of the road, it behooves us to invoke Miriam’s contribution to the process of Redemption.

Whenever we learn the lesson of Miriam and engage in positive speech—certainly refraining from negative speech of others—we enhance Miriam’s position and empower her to unleash the forces of Redemption on our behalf.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

WINDOWS

**How do we combat the alienation of the youth?
By teaching them how to open windows between their
hearts and their minds.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

WINDOWS

The Rebellious Son and Daughter

One of the most troubling features of modern times is the phenomenon of the wayward child; the child who rebels against his or her parents, their values and way of life.

This phenomenon is not new and has been addressed by the Torah; in this week's parsha, where it discusses the "*ben sorer u'moreh*-the rebellious child." The underlying message of this section is that moral education must start early, otherwise what seems to be a relatively mild form of rebellion can morph into a deadly form.

In truth, the Oral tradition, as recorded in the Talmud, attaches many conditions towards becoming a full-fledged *ben sorer u'moreh*, and to be "eligible" for its harsh punishment. These conditions are so onerous, that it was virtually impossible to ever mete out the punishment. This prompted our Sages to declare: "a *Ben sorer u'moreh* never existed in real life."

It seems that the Torah's intent was to present us with a hypothetical scenario to teach us vital lessons concerning the moral education of our children.

The Talmud (end of Tractate Sukkah) records an example of a rebellious young woman, whose name was Miriam bas Bilgah, who rebelled against her people and brought disgrace and calumny on her entire family. This Miriam, converted to the pagan, Hellenic faith and married a Greek official. She entered the Temple and pounded the Altar with her shoe and declared:

“Wolf wolf! You have plundered the property of the Jewish people, but you did not stand by them in their time of need!”

Two Windows Shut Down

Because of her radically irreverent behavior, which, the Talmud assumes, she picked up from her own parents, her entire family, was penalized.

Bilgah, was the name of one of the 24 families of priests who were privileged to serve in the Beis Hamikdash. Because of the negative influence of this family it was relegated to an inferior position in the Temple. One of the ways it was penalized, the Mishnah (the end of Tractate Sukkah) states: “its window was sealed.”

There are two explanations as to the meaning of “its window.” According to Maimonides' commentary on the

Mishnah, each of the 24 families had its own alcove where their priestly garments were kept. Bilgah's family window-alcove was sealed compelling it to store its garments with some other family.

According to the Jerusalem Talmud, however, the "window" refers to the alcove where they kept their knives needed for the slaughtering of the sacrificial animals in the Temple. This family could no longer use their own alcove.

Does the Punishment Fit the Crime?

A punishment must fit the crime. There must, therefore, be a connection between the punishment and the transgression of Miriam bas Bilgah and of the entire Bilgah clan. Why would removing their access to a window be a suiting punishment for disrespecting the Altar and the Temple? And what connection does the sealing of these two alcoves (where they stored the priestly garments and knives) have with Miriam bas Bilgah's errant behavior?

Furthermore, why does Maimonides offer an alternative explanation for the alcove that was sealed and not cite the one given by the Jerusalem Talmud (that it was the alcove where they stored the knives)?

Melody Opens Windows

To understand the deeper meaning of this entire episode we ought to reflect on the spiritual dimension of “windows.”

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe), commented on the rabbinic phrase: “*Kol m’orer hakavanah*-melody awakens concentration.” Simply put this means that when we vocalize our prayers it helps to stimulate our focus and concentration.

The Previous Rebbe, however, interpreted this phrase in a novel fashion: “Melody opens up **windows**.” The Hebrew word *kavanah* is etymologically related to an Aramaic word which means windows. Music has the capacity to open windows in our soul.

Prayer is a meditative experience in which we engage the mind with the understanding of G-d’s greatness, His providence and love for us, etc. This reflection is intended to ignite passion for G-d in our hearts, which should ultimately affect our thought, speech and action throughout the day. What begins in the mind, passes through the heart, and extends to all of our faculties and functions.

But, there are times when we experience a blockage between the mind and the heart. As much as the mind tries to arouse our emotions, we remain numb. When that

occurs, our efforts must be directed at opening a “window” between our mind and heart.

And then there are times when we do get inspired, but we nevertheless experience resistance when we attempt to translate that excitement into practice. Once again, we have to open a window to allow the inspiration to reach our thoughts, speech and action.

The medium that opens up these windows for us, the Previous Rebbe explained, is melody. Music, has the capacity to open up windows that allows our mind’s understanding to reach our heart’s emotions, and from there flow unobstructed to and through our entire being.

The Root Cause: Sealed Windows

To reveal the cause of their errant behavior the Sages of the Temple period had the windows to the members of the Bilgah family’s knives and priestly garments sealed to impress upon them, and serve as a lesson for us, that their rebellious behavior was rooted in their failure to open up two parallel windows in their own lives.

Miriam bas Bilgah was a product of exile conditions. She was under the spell of the Greek way of life. The Greek’s of that period were known for their brilliant philosophical teachings. However, their intellectual knowledge, which included sophisticated teachings about morality, rather than introducing enlightenment to the world (micro and

macro), brought moral and spiritual decadence and darkness.

Miriam bas Bilgah was a product of this milieu which engendered the twin blockage between the mind and the heart and between the heart and behavior.

The window or alcove where the knives were stored was symbolic of the constricted neck area, which serves as the blockage between the mind and the heart. The knives were used to sever the head from the heart of the sacrificial animals and alluded to the root cause of Miriam bas Bilgah's behavior. There was a severance of the connection between mind and heart.

The other opinion (that the window where the priestly garments were stored was sealed) focuses on the second blockage between the heart and thought speech and action, which are referred to in the Tanya (Chapter 4) as the soul's **garments**. Our personality consists of our intellect and emotions. Thought, speech and action are the "garments" of our soul because, as garments which lend expression to our bodies, they express our personality; our understanding and our emotions.

Jerusalem Talmud Windows

The Jerusalem Talmud is known as the Talmud of light which represents clarity of mind. In this illuminated

environment, the problem which causes rebellious behavior, must be attributed to a blockage between the mind, the source of light and enlightenment, and the heart. A person, bereft of all feelings for G-d and Torah, will inevitably lose their desire to abide by the Torah's directives.

The Babylonian Talmud, by contrast, is known as the Talmud of darkness, because it was composed in the Babylonian exile and has to contend with more dismal exile conditions.

In these times, our primary focus has to be on our soul's garments; thought speech and action. While we must never give up on bringing more light to our minds and opening up windows to our hearts, what is now most crucial is the translation of our ideals into practice.

Maimonides, cited by the Rebbe on numerous occasions declares: "One thought, word or action can tip the scales for the good and bring salvation to the entire world."

Babylusalem Talmud?

As we stand today straddling the fence between Galus-exile and Geulah-Redemption we must integrate both the Babylonian Talmud model of windows (removal of the blockage that does not allow our actions to follow our feelings) and the Jerusalem Talmud paradigm (removal of the blockage between our mind and our heart).

How do we open both windows?

In addition to learning Torah (particularly the subject of Redemption and Moshiach, which will alter the way we think and bring more G-dly light into our minds, which in turn, has a greater capacity to affect our emotions and our behavior), the Rebbe advocated increased joy.

This is in tune (no pun intended) with the Previous Rebbe's interpretation of the words "melody opens windows." Spiritual Jewish music (such as Chassidic nigunim) has the capacity to break through all the blockages, especially the melodies which express true spiritual joy.

Indeed, the Rebbe Rashab (the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe) stated, "*Simcha*-joy breaks through boundaries."

Bilgah: With Joy

It is interesting to note that according to a 18th century Sephardic Sage, the letters of the name Bilgah, can be rearranged to read "*b'gilah*" with joy.

When we reject the misguided exile melodies and embrace the kosher and holy joy (including the profound and spiritually uplifting Chabad Chassidic melodies) which derives from our anticipation of the imminent Geulah, we can open up all the windows in our souls and remove the curse of the sealing of Bilgah's windows.

We will no longer have to witness the so-called "generation gap" which turns our youth against their elders, as in the

ben sorer u'moreh model, because our youth will experience the joy of Judaism and of the Geulah and we will see the fulfillment of the Biblical prediction, "the hearts of the fathers will be restored through the children."

Even today Moshiach "watches from the **windows** and peers through the cracks," but, imminently we will see the total removal of the barriers, so there will no longer be a need for windows to prevent the Miriam bas Bilgahs-singing the wrong tune (*b'gilah*). Instead even those "who repose in the earth will arise and sing," the "tenth song" with Moshiach's harp that will ultimately consist of ten strands!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

SEND US MOSHIACH AND THE MOTHER BIRD!

Three are the barriers to spiritual growth:

External pressure, internal moral lapses and the gulf
between mind and heart.

The Messianic Age will tackle and remove these three
challenges.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

SEND US MOSHIACH AND THE MOTHER BIRD!

Send Away the Mother Bird!

One of the most enigmatic commandments in the Torah concerns the requirement to send away the mother bird when chancing on a nest.

“If a bird’s nest happens to be before you on the road, on any tree or on the ground, young birds or eggs, and the mother is roosting on the young birds or the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall surely send away the mother and take the young for yourself, so that it will be good for you and prolong your days.”

When the Torah commands us to send away the mother bird it repeats the word for sending. Instead of stating “send away the mother bird,” it says (if we translate this literally) “Send you shall send away the mother...”

The Midrash asks why the Torah repeats this term.

Brings Moshiach and Elijah

One of the answers given in the Midrash is that the Torah here alludes to the reward we will receive for fulfilling this Mitzvah; a reward that is also described as “sending”:

“If you have fulfilled this commandment you will hasten the coming of Moshiach of whom the term “sending” is written.

From where [do we know this]?

For it is stated, “Who sent forth the feet of the ox and the donkey” (Isaiah 32:20).

Commentators explain that the words “ox” and “donkey” are allusions to the two Messianic leaders who will usher in the Final Redemption in two phases as mentioned in the Talmud (Sukkah 52a).

In the first phase, a descendant of Joseph, who is likened to an ox, will fight the wars against the enemies of Israel. According to one source Moshiach ben Yosef will be killed in one of his battles. However other classic sources state that his death is not inevitable; prayer can cancel that outcome.

Moshiach ben Yosef is then followed by Moshiach, a descendant of David, who is said to come “riding on a donkey.”

According to the Zohar, the two Moshiachs actually refer to the same person, whose revelation comes in two phases. The first phase is where he fights evil and paves the way for the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash and the ingathering of the exiles.

The Midrash then provides another interpretation of the repetitive expression of “sending:”

“If you have fulfilled this commandment you will hasten the coming of Elijah the prophet, may he be remembered for good, of whom the term ‘sending’ is written, as it is stated, ‘Behold I send you Elijah the prophet...’ (Malachi 3:23). He will come and comfort you. From where [do we know this]? For it is stated, ‘And he will reconcile the hearts of the fathers to the sons [and the hearts of the sons to the fathers].”

We have to understand how the Mitzvah of sending away the mother bird has anything to do with Moshiach and Elijah the prophet. Other than the word for sending there seems to be no other connection between sending away the mother bird and G-d sending us the two phases of Moshiach and Elijah.

Here is another question to consider. It is generally accepted that Elijah will precede Moshiach to announce his coming. Why then does the Midrash refer to the coming of Moshiach before the coming of Elijah?

This is For the Birds!

To understand the connection between sending the mother bird and Moshiach/Elijah let us reflect on a possible allegorical understanding of this Mitzvah.

One obvious feature of this Mitzvah is that only applies to sending away a mother bird. It does not apply to other species. What is so special about birds?

A bird is a symbol of spiritual growth by soaring to a higher plane. Birds also symbolize peace because they bring distant places together. Thus our Sages inform us that if one dreams of a bird he should anticipate peace. Even if there are wide swaths of land or water, metaphorically speaking, that separate continents, the bird can bring them together. Unity is one of the hallmarks of spirituality.

The bird is therefore an apt simile for the quest for spiritual heights and for Moshiach. Indeed, the word for bird in Hebrew *tzipor* shares the numerical equivalent of the word Shalom-peace and “this is Moshiach” [when spelled without the optional letter *vov*].

How does one achieve spiritual growth, particularly growth that will usher in the Messianic Age of true peace and soaring to spiritual heights?

Getting Our Wings

Our “wings,” the Zohar teaches, are the emotions of love for and awe of G-d.

How do we develop these emotions?

Maimonides explains, and Chassidic literature expounds greatly on this theme, we develop these emotions through deep reflection and contemplation of G-d greatness and His love for us.

The intellectual process is referred to as the “mother which crouches on her offspring.” The mother (and to a lesser degree, the father) is the one who gives birth to the offspring. The mother in Chassidic and Kabbalistic parlance is a metaphor for the attribute of Binah, which takes a concept and develops it so that it gives birth to the emotions of love and awe. It is compared to the process of the fetus gestating in the mother’s womb in order to produce offspring.

One can fly high and get involved in all sorts of spiritual activities and experiences that abound these days but if they are not connected to *binah*, the “mother,” a solid and mature understanding of the spiritual concepts, it will not lead to a mature and stable emotion.

However, the intellectual process is by nature the very opposite of an emotional experience. And although we need the intellectual side to give birth to the emotions, the person must be capable of making the transition from the cerebral aspect to the emotional.

Send Away Your Intellect

Thus, it may be suggested, this is the allegorical dimension of the commandment to send away the mother bird. When we want to create our figurative “children,” our emotions, we must send away the “mother.” While immersed in intellectual pursuits we cannot actualize our emotions. We

must send away the “mother bird,” and make the transition from the cerebral in order to be able to focus on the emotional.

But before we send away the mother bird, we must first ensure that there is a mother, otherwise we cannot perform the Mitzvah.

Three Steps

However, being in Golus-exile impedes our ability to soar to greater heights by developing the requisite emotions because of three factors. As we will see, these three factors are ameliorated by the three stages of Moshiach ben Yosef, Moshiach ben Dovid and then Elijah the prophet.

The first impediment is the existence of powerful external negative and destructive forces. Like a goring ox or the proverbial bull in the china shop, these negative forces inhibit our intellectual power of Binah. Our minds become clouded. No matter how hard we try to develop a solid understanding of spiritual matters, we are distracted and our concentration is wrecked.

Moshiach ben Yosef, representing the initial Messianic phase that struggles against evil as a precursor to the building of the Bais Hamikdash, removes that impediment to our Binah. It is the first step in fulfilling the Mitzvah of sending away the mother bird because it enables us to have that cerebral “mother” in the first place.

There is, however, a second problem in Golus-exile: the need to overcome our own internal weaknesses and moral lapses that stem from preoccupation with material matters.

For this we need the second phase, that of Moshiach ben Dovid who “rides on a *chamor*-donkey.” In this context the donkey stands as a symbol for materialism. Moshiach’s riding on a donkey, the Maharal states, is a metaphor for his ability to control all obsession with materialism. Moshiach is personally head and shoulders above materialistic desires but his critical role is to empower **us** with his energy by activating the spark of Moshiach within each and every one of us.

But now that our power of Binah (our metaphoric mother) is intact, what does Elijah contribute?

There is a third impediment to the Mother producing the offspring. It is the blockage that separates mind and heart. This blockage exists even if one’s intellect is intact. If *binah* is the mother and the emotions are the children, then we have to remove the generation gap between them. To remove the blockage between intellect and emotion G-d will send us Elijah the prophet because it is his talent to bring the parents back to the children and the children to their parents. This refers to bridging the gulf between the worlds of parents (intellect) and children (emotions). Sometimes the mind refuses to leave room for the heart. This is a common problem with brilliant intellectuals who

live in ivory towers and cannot relate to others, a cardinal element of positive emotion.

Conversely, there are others who have uncontrollable emotions that can be compared to a blazing flame that will just burn itself out. Without the tempering influence of *binah*, the emotions alone will not propel the person to more action. It will lead instead to burnout.

Elijah will then **follow** the two Moshiachs' contribution of *binah* by connecting the parents to the children, in other words by seeing to it that there is a wholesome relationship between the "mother" and the "children." Even as the "mother" (*binah*) will nurture and tame the "children" (the emotions) she will not smother them. Elijah will create the bridge between these two worlds.

In this context Elijah comes after the arrival of Moshiach, which is distinct from his other role as the one who announces the coming of Moshiach.

As our preparation for Moshiach shifts into full gear, we must focus on these three areas:

First, we must develop a deep understanding of G-d, particularly by studying the teachings of Chassidus that focus on this very subject and objective. This will enable us to develop the wings of love and awe and simultaneously remove both the external and internal impediments to our *binah* (instilling the energy of the two Moshiachs). We must then develop the skill of fusing these two often

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

colliding worlds of intellect and emotion under the influence of Elijah.

By our observing the law of sending away the mother bird, with all of its deep connotations, it will lead us to the revelation of both phases of Moshiach and Elijah the prophet.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

BUILDING FENCES FOR MOSHIACH

The Challenge of New

When building a new house, the Torah commands us to place a *ma'akeh*-fence on the edges of the roof to ensure that no one falls off.

The requirement to erect a fence is actually a general one, not just for a new house. The fact that the Torah specifies that it is to be made for a new house is instructive.

When people begin a new venture they are full of energy and optimism. While this is an admirable state of mind, any venture can be fraught with unanticipated challenges. The exuberance that accompanies a new venture, whether a job, marriage or literally a new house, can give way to unfortunate and unforeseeable consequences. In any new venture there are pitfalls that one must avoid.

The New House, Year, Stage of Life

We always read this parsha in Elul, the final month of the year; it is the month designed to prepare us for a New Year.

Sefer Yetzirah, the early work of Kabbalah, divides all of existence into *olam*-world-space, *shanah*-year-time, and *nefesh*-soul-energy-personality.

The acronym for these three aspects is *ashan*-smoke.

The Rebbe explains that all physical phenomena are smoke screens that do not allow the Divine light to shine through. Mount Sinai was enveloped with *ashan* because the very purpose of Torah was to clear up the smoke and reveal the true Divine essence of everything.

When entering into a new phase of space, time or energy, we must take protective measures and build a figurative *ma'akeh*.

It follows then that the concept of a new house, which the Torah speaks of in relation to the realm of space, can also be applied when we enter a new phase of time, such as a New Year, and further expanded to include entering into a new era, especially the Messianic Era, which will bring about a total renewal of everything.

The Age of New Reality

In the Messianic Age the world will experience a surge of new Divine energy. Moshiach will reveal new vistas of Torah knowledge. Our eyes will see reality in an entirely new and refreshing manner. We will be exposed to the reality of G-d continuously creating the world, where every instant is its own moment of new creation. In truth, that phenomenon already exists, as we acknowledge in our daily prayers with “Who, in His goodness, continuously renews the act of Creation daily.” In the Messianic Age, however, this reality will emerge from behind the smokescreen and the entire world will bask in this new experience.

Rosh Hashanah, the anniversary of the creation of Adam, dilutes that smokescreen as we become more aware of G-d’s renewal of Creation on the anniversary of the sixth day of Creation.

What Rosh Hashanah is relative to the other days of the year, the Messianic Era is compared to all of the history of the universe. It will introduce us to the concept of “new” in a radically novel way.

If the idea of the new houses can relate to the New Year and then the new era, it can be applied to the third element of *nefesh*-soul-energy-personality. As we age and grow, we enter new stages of life. Some examples are Bar-

Bas Mitzvah, marriage or a birthday. Here too, one must realize that, as exciting it may be to enter into a new stage of life, one must be adequately prepared and take necessary precautions.

Building Our Metaphoric Ma'akeh before Rosh Hashanah and the Final Redemption

As we read this section of the Torah in close proximity to the New Year, we have to reflect on what building a Ma'akeh means in terms of preparing for the New Year.

And as we are in the last moments of exile, standing ready to enter into the ultimate New Age of Moshiach we must ask ourselves how to build a metaphoric Ma'akeh.

One may suggest the answer in the following allegorical interpretation of the word Ma'akeh.

After Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we celebrate the Festival of Sukkos, which is considered a Holiday of protection. The Sukkah reminds us of the way G-d protected us in the desert, by surrounding us with clouds of glory and providing us with booths for shelter.

In a spiritual vein, the Festival of Sukkos protects us from the dangers of a New Year. The greatest danger is that the

burst of inspiration we gained from Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur will dissipate as soon as we go back to our old routines. Our days dwelling in the Sukkah enable us to internalize the inspiration deeply, so that it sustains us until Passover, the next major Holiday.

However, there is another layer of protection afforded by this Holiday. This layer arises from the four species we hold and wave in all directions on Sukkos.

It may be suggested that the four letters of the Hebrew word Ma'akeh-fence allude to these four species.

The Four Letters

The word *ma'akeh*, consists of four Hebrew letters: *mem*, *ayin*, *kuf*, and *hei*.

The *mem* is a unique letter. When written phonetically it consists of two consonant mems. This alludes to the unique characteristic of the Esrog, where the bark of the tree has the same taste as the Esrog itself. Another characteristic is the Esrog's ability to thrive through all of the four seasons. Both of these traits point to it as a symbol of consistency and sincerity, just like the letter *mem*.

Indeed, the Midrash compares the Esrog to our hearts. An Esrog personality is one who is sincere and does everything with all his or her heart.

The *ayin* of *ma'akeh* is the initial letter of the word *Arava*, the willow leaf that is attached to the Lulav. The willow, the Midrash states, resembles the mouth.

The *kuf* stands for the words *k'shei oref*-stiff necked. The Lulav, a palm branch resembling the spine, represents the traits of stubbornness, tenacity and stick-to-itiveness.

The *hei* that completes *ma'akeh* stands for the word *Hadas*, the myrtle leaf attached to the Lulav, which the Midrash says resembles the human eye.

To prepare for and preserve the inspiration of the New Year and the Redemption we must incorporate the four traits represented by the Four Species.

These traits have been instrumental in our survival as a people and will serve us well in the future.

The Heart of Judaism

The degree of kindness and compassion with which we have lived our Jewish lives is unique in the annals of history. Indeed, the Talmud states that if people do not

possess these traits it is questionable that they are really Jewish. Kindness has been programmed into our collective psyches from the time of Abraham and further reinforced at Sinai.

On Rosh Hashanah, as we proclaim G-d our King, we come before Him in a state of unity. We know this from the words at the end of Devarim: "He was king in Jeshurun [a synonym for Israel], when the people's leaders gathered themselves together." According to Rashi, this means that G-d is our King *when we are united*.

Likewise, our way of preparing for the New Age of Redemption is first and foremost by maintaining excellent spiritual cardiac health, as manifested through acts of sincerity, kindness, love and unity.

Judaism's Mouthpiece

The second preparation for the New Year and the New Age of Redemption is the *Arava*-willow with its mouth-shaped leaf.

The secret of our survival as a nation has been our ability to communicate the teachings of the Torah from generation to generation and to express our heartfelt desires to the A-mighty in prayer. This we do

wholeheartedly on Rosh Hashanah when we proclaim G-d as our King and plead with Him to accept our prayers.

Similarly, the way we bring on Moshiach is through our heartfelt prayers and by looking for new insights and deeper ways of understanding the Torah as we learn. This prepares us for the New Age.

Stiff-Necked

The third element of the *ma'akeh* is the Lulav with its stiff-necked message.

We have been described as stiff-necked people in a negative way but also in a positive way. If not for our ability to persevere, despite thick or thin, we would have long disappeared.

The Rebbe, in an historic talk (28th of Nissan 5791) taught us that we need at least 10 stiff-necked people who will not give up clamoring for Moshiach and Redemption.

Open Eyes

The final element on our list is the *Hadas*-myrtle, which resembles our eyes. The eyes represent the way we are to

view things. As a general rule, we have always had an optimistic view of life. The good eye sees the positive in everything.

The Rebbe spoke of how we have to open our eyes. When our eyes are closed we don't see how the world has changed for the better. Open eyes enable us to see the miracles that have happened and continue to happen. The person with open eyes sees how everything that is happening, including the negative, is part of the process of Redemption. An open-eyed person knows that the negative occurrences that still plague our world are evil's last stand before it is totally abolished.

The Overarching Sukkah

There is one more overarching element to our preparation for the New Year and New Era. It is represented by the Sukkah. The rationale behind the Sukkah, the Torah says, is to facilitate **knowledge** of G-d's protective powers.

This approach emphasizes the knowledge of G-d that comes through the study of Torah, particularly the study of the mystical teachings of Torah contained in Chassidus.

This is hinted in the requirement to place the fence around our rooftops. The rooftop relates to the covering of the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

Sukkah, which serves as our awareness of G-d's protective powers.

To summarize, there are four areas of preparation for the New Year and the New Age of Redemption. They are:

The Jewish heart-Love and unity.

The Jewish art of communication; through prayer and Torah study.

Our stiff-necked tenacity, never giving up hope and continually demanding Redemption.

Opening our eyes to see the positive signs of Redemption in our lives.

May we be blessed with the imminent Redemption with Moshiach at our head in time to celebrate this Rosh Hashanah together in Jerusalem!