

Bereishis 5769

“And it came to pass at the end of days, that Kayin brought from the fruit of the ground, an offering to Hashem. And also Hevel brought from the firstborn of his flock and their fat.” (4:3)

The Zohar (Bereishis 54a) speaks about Adam's two sons Kayin and Hevel. It states that Kayin came from the left side, from the side of tumah, and Hevel came from the right side, the side of taharah. The name "kayin" comes from the word "kein," nest, a nest of evil habitations – demons and spirits from the unclean side. When Kayin and Hevel brought offerings, each brought from his own side:

Rabbi Shimon said: "And it came to pass at the end of days [Kayin brought from the fruit of the ground an offering to Hashem]" (Bereishis 4:3). What is "mikeitz yamim"? This is the end of all flesh. And who is this? The angel of death. And Kayin brought his offering from that "keitz yamim". There is a hint to this in the words, for it says, "mikeitz yamim" and not "mikeitz yamin". And therefore it says regarding Daniel (Daniel 12:13): "And you, go to the End, and stand by your portion." He said to him: To the keitz hayamim or to the keitz hayamin? He said to him: To the keitz hayamin. But Kayin brought from the keitz hayamim.

The Zohar seems to say that there are two Ends, one from the right, clean side and one from the unclean side. Daniel asked the angel which one he should go to, and the angel replied, to the one on the right.

For seven hundred years, Jews studied the Zohar and did not know the meaning of this passage. Now, unfortunately, we know. We are living in the time of the “keitz hayamim” – the false end of the exile presented by the angel of death, the Satan.

Just as the Satan came to the Jews at the end of the forty days of Moses’ absence and “mixed up the world,” showing them a vision of Moses dead and convincing them to worship a golden calf, so too the Satan in our century has turned over the entire world in order to bring us the Zionist state. His goal is to convince the Jews that their original hopes of Divine redemption are dead and now they must throw their lot with the state.

Let us emulate Daniel and wait only for the keitz hayamin, the true end of exile promised in the Torah!

Noach 5768

And G-d spoke to Noach, saying: "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, your sons and their wives with you." (8:15-16)

The Midrash Tanchuma compares Noach's leaving the ark after the Flood to the story of Chananya, Mishael and Azariah emerging from the fiery furnace of Nevuchadnezzar, told in the Book of Daniel, Chapter 3.

Nevuchadnezzar built a giant golden statue and forced all his officers and state governors to bow to it, among them the three Jewish officers Chananya, Mishael and Azariah. When they refused, they were summoned before the king and threatened with death in the furnace. "They replied and said the king: 'Nevuchadnezzar, we do not hesitate to answer you on this matter. Our G-d, Whom we worship, can save us from the fiery furnace, and from your hand, O king. But even if He does not save us, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not worship your god, and we will not bow to the golden image you erected'" (Daniel 3:16-18).

When the king heard this, he ordered the furnace heated up seven times hotter than usual, and Chananya, Mishael and Azariah bound and cast into it. But G-d saved them and they were unharmed by the fire. When Nevuchadnezzar saw them walking freely inside the furnace, together with the angel Gavriel, he came to the door of the furnace and said, "Servants of the Most High G-d, come out!" And then they came out (ibid. v. 26).

The Tanchuma explains this story based on the verse in Koheles 8:2, "I keep the word of the king, but on the matter of the oath of G-d – do not be confounded before him." A Jew must keep the decrees of the king of the land of his exile in all matters, except when the king orders the Jew to violate the Torah. Then the Jew is bound by his oath to G-d and must not be afraid of the king.

Thus, Chananya, Mishael and Azariah called the king by his name, Nevuchadnezzar, to signify: When it comes to paying taxes and other laws, you are our king. But if you tell us to violate the Torah, you are not our king, but simply Nevuchadnezzar.

When the king saw that they had miraculously survived, he told them, "Come out, for the Holy One, blessed is He has already freed you and made miracles for you." They said, "We will only come out with the permission of the king – I keep the word of the king. Under his authority we were cast in, and under his authority we will emerge." This conduct, says the Tanchuma, they learned from Noach, who entered the ark by G-d's command and emerged by G-d's command.

What parallel does the Tanchuma see between Noach and Chananya, Mishael and Azariah? Noach and his family were the sole survivors of the Flood. The whole world was wiped out and they miraculously survived. Had Noach not been a righteous man, he might have walked out of the ark with pride and arrogance, crediting himself with the ability to survive the Flood. Perhaps he might have initiated plans to prevent another flood. But this would have been missing the lesson of this unique event in human history. Instead, Noach humbly realized that G-d had brought the Flood and saved him, and he stood ready to accept G-d's next command to come out of the ark.

In the same way, by accepting the laws of gentile kings and rulers during exile, Jews are showing G-d that they accept His decree of exile. The only exception is when the king orders Jews to violate the Torah – then the way to show allegiance to G-d is to disobey the king. Chananya, Mishael and Azariah were placed in a situation where they had to disobey the king, but they wanted to make it clear that this was the exception, not the rule. They told the king, "We will only come out of the furnace when you tell us to do so. We recognize that it was not our own power that saved us, but G-d alone. We therefore show our humility before G-d by displaying obedience to the king."

We Jews today are survivors of a long exile, and it is clear that we did not survive by our own power, but because of G-d's special protection, as He promised in the Torah, "And even so, when they are in the land of their enemies, I did not reject them nor despise them, to destroy them, to annul My covenant with them, for I am Hashem their G-d" (Vayikra 26:44). We must humbly recognize this and accept the exile upon ourselves: to live peacefully with the gentile nations and obey their laws, until G-d Himself commands us to emerge from exile.

Noach 5769

**“However, I will hold you responsible for your own blood; every animal I will hold responsible; I will hold every man and a man’s brother responsible for a man’s blood.”
(9:5)**

The Midrash says that the word “however” comes to exclude certain cases of suicide that are permitted: the acts of Shaul and martyrs such as Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah. “Every animal I will hold responsible” means that G-d will punish a man who causes another man to be killed by an animal. “A man’s brother” means that G-d will punish someone who hires others to kill a man.

Then the Midrash says: Another explanation: “Every animal I will hold responsible” – this refers to the Four Kingdoms [who have subjugated the Jewish people in exile, who are represented as four animals in the vision of Daniel (7:3)]. “I will hold a man’s brother responsible” – this refers to Esav. “A man” – this refers to Israel, as it says, “You are man” (Yechezkel 34:11).

Rabbi Dovid Moshe Avraham Ashkenazi, who lived in the time of the Baal Shem Tov, wrote a commentary on the Mechilta called Mirkeves Hamishneh. He says that according to this second explanation of the Midrash, we can revise the exclusion of the word “however” – it is coming to exclude independent action undertaken by the Jewish people. “Only I will avenge your blood from the Four Kingdoms and from Esav,” says G-d. “You are not allowed to do it yourselves.”

This, says the Mirkeves Hamishneh, is a reference to the oath administered by G-d to the Jewish people not to rebel against the nations who subjugate them (Kesubos 111a). The prohibition includes even cases when the nations have shed Jewish blood; it is forbidden for the Jews to rebel and avenge that blood. Only G-d has the right to do this.

There were, of course, times when G-d instructed the Jewish people to avenge their blood from the nations, such as the wars of Midyan and Amalek. But in exile, this is forbidden under the oath. In this aspect, our status in exile is most similar to that of the Israelites in Egypt. The Egyptians had been enslaving and killing them for over a hundred years, yet when the opportunity arose to take revenge, G-d forbid them to do so. Speaking to the Israelites at the shores of the sea, Moses said, “Do not fear! Stand by and see Hashem's saving that He will perform for you today, for as you see Egypt today, you will never see them again. Hashem will fight for you, and you will be silent.” (14:13-14).

The Mechilta (Beshalach 2:6) says that there were actually four groups among the Israelites at the shores of the sea. The first group wanted to jump into the sea and commit suicide. The second group wanted to go back to Egypt. The third group wanted to fight a war against the Egyptians. The fourth group wanted to pray. Moshe addressed each group separately: To the first group he said “Stand by and see,” to the second he said “you will never see them again,” to the third he said “Hashem will fight for you,” and to the fourth he said “and you will be silent.”

The Mirkeves Hamishneh explains that the first group held like the first opinion in the Midrash on Parshas Noach: that Shaul was allowed to commit suicide to prevent the Philistines from mocking him. Here too, they would jump into the sea and drown to prevent the Egyptians from mocking them. Moshe told them: You are mistaken. The meaning of the verse in Noach is like the second opinion: that only Hashem will avenge the blood of the Jewish people. This led him to his response to the third group.

(Mirkeves Hamishneh, Beshalach)

Lech Lecha 5769

And He said to Avram, “Know you shall know that your descendents will be strangers in a land not theirs and they will enslave them and afflict them for four hundred years.” (15:13)

The Midrash comments on the double expression “know you shall know”: “Know that I scatter them, you shall know that I will gather them. Know that I pledge them, you shall know that I will redeem them. Know that I enslave them, you shall know that I will save them.” (Bereishis Rabbah 44:18)

The Satmar Rav asked: What is so unique about this? Every believer knows that all things in the world are done by G-d. That is one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith: that G-d alone did, does and will do all things. And the Ramban writes at the end of Parshas Bo that a person has no portion in the Torah of Moshe unless he believes that all events, public or private, are miracles, not natural. And the Rambam in his Laws of Fasts (1:3) explains that that is the meaning of the Torah’s warning, “And if you walk with Me with chance” (Vayikra 26:27) – that if G-d brings a punishment upon us and we say it was just a chance occurrence, He will be doubly angry at us. We must believe that nothing is just chance. If so, there was no need for G-d to tell Avraham that when enslavement and redemption occur, he must know that G-d is behind it. Of course He is!

The answer is that the Midrash is not coming to say that when enslavement and redemption occur, G-d is behind it. It is coming to say that we are forbidden to take enslavement and redemption into our own hands. “You shall know that I will redeem them” – and not you on your own; you may not make any efforts toward redemption.

This is indeed a unique prohibition, because in all other areas of life, although G-d does everything, the Torah tells us to make efforts: “So that Hashem your G-d may bless you in all the works of your hands that you do” (Devarim 14:29). We do not sit back and wait for G-d to give us food, clothing and good health. It is well-known that “one must not rely on a miracle” (Taanis 20b). The Ramban (Devarim 11:13) writes, “Know that miracles, for the good or for the bad, are

performed only for completely righteous people or completely wicked people, but average people are treated by G-d through the medium of nature, in accordance with their deeds.” When the Ramban states in Parshas Bo that all events are miracles, he means miracles disguised as nature. Since things happen in an apparently natural way, G-d wants us to make our own efforts. Not so when it comes to redemption, where only G-d has the right to act, and we have no permission to make any efforts other than repentance and good deeds. (Vayael Moshe 1:45)

In a letter sent in 1939 to all the towns of Hungary, the Satmar Rav similarly explains the words of the Shabbos morning prayer: “There is none besides You, our Redeemer, in the days of the moshiach.” Why is it necessary to say this? How could one think that there will be another redeemer besides G-d? The answer is that in the previous redemptions from Babylonia, Media and Greece, there was a certain amount of human effort involved. G-d hid His presence and did not communicate directly with Mordechai, Esther, Ezra, and the Hasmoneans. Thus although G-d ultimately makes everything happen, humans were considered partners in the act, just as it says, “There are three partners in a man: G-d, his father and his mother” (Kiddushin 30b). But the future redemption will be accomplished only by G-d Himself, without any human action. (Moshian Shel Yisroel v. 7, p. 142).

Vayeira 5768

And it came to pass after these things that G-d tested Avraham, and He said to him, "Avraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Take now your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak, and go to the land of Moriah, and bring him up there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you." (22:1-2)

Throughout this narrative, the Torah uses the name "Elokim" for G-d. But when Avraham takes the knife and prepares to slaughter Yitzchak, and an angel of G-d calls to him to stop, the name "Hashem" is used – the four-letter name which Jews are forbidden to pronounce as written.

The difference in meaning between the various names of G-d is explained by the Ramban on Shemos 6:2. The names Elokim and E-l Shaddai mean that G-d intervenes in human affairs – punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous – but only within a structure He created called "teva" or nature. He hides Himself so that whatever happens appears to be merely a part of the natural world.

Similarly, the Shulchan Aruch in Orach Chaim 5 says when pronouncing the name "Elokim" one should have in mind that G-d is "strong, all-powerful, the Master of all powers." Calling G-d the Master of all powers implies that there are other powers, i.e. the forces of nature, and He is the master over them. In truth we know that there are no other powers and everything exists only because G-d wills it. But G-d causes the world to follow certain consistent patterns we call nature, in order to make it seem as if there are other powers. Although He acts to reward and punish, He conceals His action behind the mask of nature.

But the four-letter name "Hashem" - explains the Ramban - signifies the fact that G-d causes (mehaveh) everything to exist, there are no laws of nature, He acts openly and does whatever He wishes. This was the mode of conduct G-d promised to use during the Exodus.

When G-d told Avraham to bring Yitzchak as an offering, it was a time of Divine concealment. Avraham was filled with questions: how could G-d desire human sacrifice? How could G-d tell him to slaughter Yitzchak if G-d had already promised him that a great nation would come out of Yitzchak? But he had faith in G-d and obeyed. Because he passed this supreme trial, Avraham was privileged to see G-d switch to the attribute of Hashem, the attribute of revealing Himself and explaining everything. All his questions were answered.

This trial foreshadows our situation today. G-d told us long ago, "And I will hide My face on that day, because of all the evil that the Jewish people did" (Devarim 31:18). During the exile, G-d hides His face and does not deal with us with open miracles as He did in Scriptural times. And at this final stage of the exile, G-d has hidden Himself even more by allowing heretics to take control of the destiny of the Jewish people and build a state in the Holy Land, acting as if the exile were over. Amidst this deep darkness and confusion, we are filled with questions, but G-d wants us to stay strong and faithful until it is over. Then we will be privileged to witness G-d in His role as "Hashem", unbounded by nature, when He will reveal His presence and glory upon us.

Vayeira 5769

And he said, "By Myself I have sworn, said Hashem, that since you did this thing, and did not withhold your only son, I shall surely bless you and make your descendents numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand on the shore of the sea, and your descendents will inherit the gate of their enemies." (22:16-17)

What was the greatness of Avraham Avinu's test? Rabbi Dovid Hollander once explained it as follows: Avraham's mission in life was to teach the world to recognize the true G-d and to reject all idolworship. He realized that he was getting old, he would soon leave this world, and there would have to be someone to continue his mission. When G-d commanded him to offer up Yitzchok, Avraham's logic told him not to obey. Of course he would have subdued his love to do the will of G-d, but his logic told him that G-d's honor would best be served if he left Yitzchok alive to perpetuate his message and eventually give rise to a great nation that would proclaim the existence of the G-d.

But then Avraham realized: if I can see this benefit in keeping Yitzchok alive, surely G-d can see it too. Yet He commanded me to offer him up on the altar! I will do exactly as G-d commanded, and leave the future up to Him. For this obedience even in the face of his own logic, he and his descendents were rewarded for all time.

He who votes in the Zionist elections is taking a part in leading the state, since he is sending his agents into the state's governing bodies. All anti-Zionists agree that this is a serious sin. Yet at the time the state was established, certain anti-Zionist rabbis argued that this sin should be permitted because the end justifies the means. They feared that without religious participation in the government, the Torah lifestyle could not continue under the Zionist government. Their slogan was "aveirah lishmah" – commit a sin for a noble purpose.

Nowadays, even they have admitted that observant Jews do not really need representation in government to exist. Those who are observant would stay observant even without the benefits they reap. Still, they continue to justify participation on the basis that they are helping the non-observant Jews stay closer to Judaism by keeping the state Jewish.

The Test of Avraham was an extreme case, but in any situation, one can always find a logical reason to disobey G-d's command and commit a sin. The lesson of our Parsha is that one must ignore his own logic and obey G-d's commands, trusting completely in His judgement and His providence.

In hindsight, we can understand the wisdom of G-d's way. Among those groups that participate in the Zionist election and government, the very fact that the Zionist state is a sin has been all but forgotten. Originally, these groups could not dream that anyone would misconstrue participation as consent. They used the analogy of a man who is attacked by robbers and begins negotiating with them over what to steal. Nobody will think that this man advocates robbery. But today, we see that that is exactly what has happened. Many uneducated people are under the impression that the rabbis who permitted voting hold there is nothing wrong with the state, aside from the fact that it is not religious. Truly, it would have been better if they had not committed this sin, even for a noble purpose!

Vayeira 5770

And Avraham woke up early in the morning, and he saddled up his donkey, and he took his two servants with him, and Yitzchok his son; and he chopped wood for the burnt offering, and he got up and went to the place that G-d had told him.

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 55:8) says, "In reward for the two chops that Avraham Avinu chopped, the sea split before the Children of Israel." Rabbi Aharon Rokeach, the Belzer Rebbe (1877-1957) explained this based on the story brought in Midrash Tanchuma (Vayeira 22) and at the beginning of Midrash Vayosha. When Avraham set out to sacrifice Yitzchok, the Satan met them on the way and tried to stop him. Appearing to him as an old man, he said, "Where are you going?" Avraham answered, "To pray." The Satan said, "And why does one who goes to pray need fire and a knife in his hand and wood on his shoulder?" Avraham said, "Perhaps we will stay for a day or two and we will need to slaughter and bake and eat."

Then the Satan said, "You old man, didn't the Satan tell you to sacrifice your son? A sage like you will go and kill a son given to him at hundred years old? You will be punished for this." Avraham said, "It was not the Satan, but the Holy One, blessed is He Himself who commanded me to do this."

Seeing that he was unsuccessful in talking to Avraham, the Satan took the form of a young man and argued with Yitzchok, saying, "How many times your mother fasted and prayed to have you! And now this old man has gone crazy and is going to slaughter you." But Yitzchok said, "I will not go against the will of my Creator and the command of my father."

The Midrash goes on to describe how the Satan took the form of a deep river, but that too did not stop Avraham. Finally he said to Avraham, “I heard from behind G-d’s partition that the burnt offering will be a sheep, not Yitzchok.” Avraham replied, “That is the liar’s punishment: even when he tells the truth, he is not believed. I will do as Hashem commanded me.”

When the Jewish people stood at the shores of the sea and the Egyptian army closed in on them, a similar exchange took place. Hashem said to Moshe, “Speak to the Children of Israel and let them march into the sea.” The Satan came and tried to dissuade them. “To jump into the sea is suicide!” he said. “Throwing away one’s life is a terrible sin. Better to fight with the Egyptians; then at least some will survive.” But they marched into the sea, paying no attention to the Satan’s arguments. Had Avraham Avinu not implanted into the Jewish people the trait of being able to obey Hashem’s command even when it contradicts common sense, they would not have been able to withstand this test. This, said the Belzer Rebbe, is the meaning of the Midrash: Because Avraham chopped the wood and went unquestioningly to the Akeidah, the Children of Israel went unquestioningly into the sea and it split for them (Kol Yaakov p. 79, in the name of Rabbi Chananya Cohen, who heard the above from the Belzer Rebbe when he was in Budapest in 1943).

Avraham’s words, that the liar is not believed even when he tells the truth, seem to be out of place. When a liar tells the truth, such as in the fable of the boy who cried wolf, people really should listen to him and save the sheep. The only problem is that they don’t believe him. But in this case Avraham was saying, “Even if you are telling the truth, I will not listen to you, because Hashem commanded me otherwise.” Similarly in the case of the sea, although logically speaking the Satan was correct that fighting the Egyptians would make more sense, they did as Hashem commanded them.

The answer is that sometimes it is hard to tell whether a given idea emanates from the Satan or not. Is the person offering the idea a messenger of the Satan or a messenger of Hashem? The only way to know is by looking at the messenger’s previous record, just as we disbelieve a liar based on his previous record. Avraham Avinu knew that this old man had been trying to convince him not to obey Hashem; thus he knew that it must be the Satan and whatever he was saying now, even if it were true, could not be the right thing to do.

After overcoming the Satan, Avraham “lifted up his eyes and saw the Place from afar.” The Place was Mount Moriah, the future site of the Beis Hamikdash. On the word “afar” Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah 56:2) comment that the Place would one day be distanced from its owners, during the exile when Jews would be far from the site of the Beis Hamikdash and Eretz Yisroel. Until when will that exile last? The Midrash finds the answer in the following verse: “And Avraham said to his young men: Sit here with the donkey...” Sit here in exile until the coming of moshiach, who will be riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

Rabbi Yitzchok Weiss, the Spinker Rebbe (1875-1944), quotes this Midrash and comments: “We must not force the end, arise on our own and seek power; nor may we take the Holy Land, emigrate to it and rule over it until the king moshiach comes, for this is included in the prohibition on forcing the end, as the Ahavas Yonasan says on the Haftorah of Parshas Vaeschanan – see his beautiful words there. This is what Avraham Avinu commanded us. When

he saw that the Place would one day be distanced from its owners and the Jewish people would be in exile, he was afraid that they might want to arise on their own; therefore 'Avraham said to his young men' – a reference to the Jewish people, as it says, 'For Israel is a young man and I love him' (Hoshea 11:1) – 'sit here' – in exile, and do not go up except 'with the donkey' – with the king moshiach, who will come and gather in the Jewish people from exile." (Chakal Yitzchok, Vayeira)

It is no coincidence that these two verses - about Avraham chopping the wood and implanting the trait of unquestioning obedience to Hashem into the Jewish people, and about the exile and the prohibition on arising from it – are written one after the other. Avraham Avinu foresaw that there would come a time when his descendents in exile would once again face the arguments of messengers of the Satan. First these messengers introduced the idea of leaving exile and ruling over the Holy Land, and most of the loyal Torah Jews of the world, under the leadership of their rabbis, rejected them. But now that things have progressed to the point where almost half of the world's Jews live in the Holy Land under the leadership of these messengers, they come again to us and argue that it would be foolish to give up statehood and power at this point. Avraham Avinu taught us that the only way to overcome these arguments is to look at the previous record of these messengers and realize that this too is nothing but a ploy of the Satan. We must remain faithful to Hashem and keep His decree of exile unquestioningly until moshaiach comes.

Chayei Sarah 5768

I am a stranger and a resident among you; give me a portion of land for burial among you, so that I might bury my dead from before me (23:4).

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains why Avraham called himself "a stranger and a resident". He meant to say: "If you agree to sell it to me, I will be a stranger and buy it. But if you do not agree, I will be a resident – an owner – and take it by my own rights, for the Holy One, blessed is He, said, 'I will give this land to your offspring.'"

The commentators ask that in Parshas Lech Lecha, when Lot's shepherds allowed his sheep to graze in the Canaanite fields and Avraham rebuked him, the Torah says, "And the Canaanite and the Perizite were then living in the land." Rashi comments that they were still living there and the time had not yet come to give the land to Avraham's family, so Lot was wrong for stealing the grass. If so, how would Avraham have had the right to take the burial plot?

The Levush Haorah resolves this question by saying that in Parshas Lech Lecha, the time for fulfilling the promise had not yet come, because Avraham did not yet have any offspring then. Now, however, he had Yitzchok, so the time had come.

But Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi shows from a passage in Bereishis Rabbah (41:5) that the time had still not come. The Midrash says that when Lot's shepherds made their argument that the land would eventually belong to Lot, G-d said, "When I promised the land to Avraham's offspring, I meant only when the seven Canaanite nations are uprooted from it, but now the Canaanite and the Perizite are still living in the land." Here we see that even when Avraham had offspring, the land did not belong to him as long as the Canaanites still lived there.

Similarly, the Yefeh Soar asks from the verse, "And a fourth generation will return here, for the sin of the Emorite will not be complete until then" (Bereishis 15:16). This was a prophecy that Avraham's descendents would not get the Holy Land until after four generations of Egyptian exile. Avraham merely having one child was clearly not enough.

In Yehoshua 14:15 we read, "The name of Hebron was originally Kiryas Arba; he was the great man among the giants, and the land rested from war." Rashi explains that the prophet is telling us why the land rested from war for the forty years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness – why did the Canaanites deserve that grace period? They should have been conquered right away after the Exodus. The answer is "the great man among the giants" – Avraham Avinu, whom the Canaanites honored and called "a prince of G-d among us" (Bereishis 23:6). As a reward for honoring Avraham, they were allowed to stay in the land for forty extra years.

We could take this a step further and say that not only those extra forty years were due to their honoring Avraham, but also the four hundred years from the birth of Yitzchak until the Exodus. The Canaanites were the most immoral of peoples – the Torah uses "the acts of the Land of Canaan" as the example of immorality that Jews are forbidden to follow (Vayikra 18:3). They should have lost their rights to the land, but since they honored Avraham, they were allowed to stay. When G-d foretold the Egyptian exile and the "fourth generation" coming back in Bereishis 15:16, that was because G-d knew the future, that the Canaanites would honor Avraham.

Thus Avraham said to them, "If you honor me, I am but a stranger among you. But should you choose not to honor me and you refuse to sell me the burial plot, you will lose your rights to the land, and I will be a resident, a rightful owner." (Divrei Yoel, p. 490)

Chayei Sarah 5769

And Avraham gave gifts to the children of his concubines, and he sent them away from Yitzchak his son while he was still alive, eastward to the land of the east. (25:6)

Rashi says, quoting Sanhedrin 91a: "He gave them the name of impurity." This is a strange statement. Why would the righteous Avraham Avinu teach impurity to his children?

Rabbi Yaakov of Motroyelle, one of the Baalei Tosafos, explains, "Avraham taught them to call their idols with a name of impurity, such as Peor and Markulis, which are so called because they defile them. But originally they called their idols by the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, as it says, 'Then they began to call in the name of G-d' (Bereishis 4:26)." (Hadar Zekeinim; Tosafos Hashalem)

Avraham Avinu was upset over the fact that the gentiles called their idols by the name of G-d. He saw that this would lead the Jewish people astray. Therefore he had children with Hagar and Keturah and dispatched them among the gentiles with the mission to change the names of the idols to names of impurity and defilement; then it would be easier for the Jewish people to avoid them.

This is the meaning of the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 61:1) that applies the first verses of Tehillim to Avraham Avinu: “And he will be like a tree planted on streams of water, that gives its fruit in the proper time, and its leaf does not wither, and all that he does will be successful” (Tehillim 1:3). Gives its fruit in the proper time – this refers to Yishmael. And its leaf does not wither – this refers to Yitzchak. And all that he does will be successful – this refers to the children of Keturah.” Why does the Midrash consider Yishmael and the children of Keturah such great accomplishments? The answer is as explained above: Avraham considered it a great accomplishment to make sure that idols are called idols and not confused with G-d.

Similarly in our time, it is a great misfortune when heresy, sin and destruction of the Torah are called by holy names. The Zionist state is called Israel, their language is called Hebrew, their currency is called shekel, and living and dying there is called Kiddush Hashem. If we emulate Avraham Avinu and take whatever steps are necessary to change those names and call a sin a sin, then we will have eased our trials and accomplished a great thing. (Divrei Yoel, p. 538)

* * *

Every morning we make a blessing thanking Hashem “who did not make me a gentile.” The Taz (Orach Chaim 46:4) asks: Why don’t we say this blessing in positive language: “who made me a Yisroel”? (This is indeed the version of the blessing in Menachos 43b; but the Tosefta, the Rif, the Rambam, the Rosh and Shulchan Aruch all say “who did not make me a gentile” and this is our custom.)

The Yalkut Shimoni at the beginning of Parshas Haazinu says that at the time of the redemption, the Jewish people will be embarrassed of its sins and say to Hashem, “How can You redeem me? My witnesses are still here, for You called heaven and earth as witnesses.” Hashem will reply, “I will take them away,” as it says, “For behold I will create new heavens and a new earth” (Yishaya 65:17). The Jewish people will say, “My name is still here!” Hashem will reply, “I will take it away,” as it says, “You will be called by a new name which the mouth of Hashem will specify” (Yishaya 62:2). Why will the Jewish people be embarrassed of its name, Israel?

The answer is that the name “Israel” was actually originally the name of the Satan, the guardian angel of Esav (Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer 37). When the name was given to Yaakov Avinu, it became sanctified and purified. As long as the Jews continue in the ways of their forefather Yaakov, their name remains holy. But when they rebel against Hashem, their name has no holiness at all, and on the contrary it is worse than the names of other nations, since it is the name of the Satan. This explains the almost unbelievable fact that we see today, that the heretics and sinners have adopted the name “Israel” for themselves. They pride themselves on bearing this name, which they have used for their defiled purposes.

That is why the Jewish people will be embarrassed of this name at the time of the redemption, and that is why Hashem promises to change it to another name, to be specified at that time. And possibly the reason why neither the Navi nor Chazal tell us what that new name will be is because they feared that if it were to be known, the Zionists would steal that name as well.

Now we understand why we do not say a blessing “who made me a Yisroel.” The Men of the Great Assembly foresaw with holy inspiration that a movement of heretics would one day adopt the name “Yisroel” for themselves, and then the true Jews would no longer be proud of this name. Rather, they made the text of the blessing negative “who did not make me a gentile,” for that applies for all time. (Machzor Divrei Yoel, Succos v. 2 p. 28)

The policy of Der Yid was that whenever the State of Israel (Medinas Yisroel) was mentioned, the word Yisroel was placed in quotation marks - to show that Torah Jewry, the true Israel, did not recognize the Zionists' right to use their name. One time, however, the quotation marks were accidentally left out. Reb Binyomin Eliezer Lebovitch decided to show it to the Rebbe, so he placed a copy of the newspaper on a table where the Rebbe would see it on his way to davening. It was Erev Rosh Hashanah. The hoiz bochur, Shulem Fekete, took the newspaper away so that the Rebbe shouldn't get angry before davening, but Reb Binyomin Eliezer pulled it out of his hands and put it back on the table. The Rebbe passed by, glanced at it and immediately asked someone to summon Reb Sender Deutsch. By the time Reb Sender arrived, the Rebbe had put on his tallis and tefillin. He said to Reb Sender in Lashon Hakodesh, "Der Yid is now a thousand times worse than the Morgen Journal and the Forwards!" Then he said in Yiddish, "I have never before in my life spoken Yiddish while wearing Rashi tefillin, but now I must speak out," and he continued to rebuke Reb Sender for the mistake. Reb Sender apologized, saying he had not had time to look over the newspaper properly before it was printed. He promised to be more careful in the future. (Heard from Reb Shulem Fekete)

Chayei Sarah 5770

And Rivka had a brother, and his name was Lavan; and Lavan ran to the man, outside, to the well. (24:29)

Rashi says: Why did he run and for what did he run? The Torah continues: “And it came to pass, when he saw the nose ring and the bracelets on his sister’s hands...” He said, “This man is rich,” and gave his eyes on the money.

What is forcing Rashi to say that Lavan ran to get the money? Maybe he simply ran to see who was the guest who had given his sister expensive presents.

Lavan said to Eliezer: “Come, blessed of Hashem! Why do you stand outside? I have cleared out the house, and there is place for the camels.” Rashi says that Lavan meant that he had removed the idols from the house. How did Lavan know that Eliezer would object to the idols? After all, everyone in the world at that time worshipped idols except for Avraham Avinu, and Lavan did not yet know (until v. 34) that this man was Avraham Avinu’s trusted servant and disciple.

The Torah describes Rivka as “a virgin, and no man had known her” (v. 16). The Midrash Rabbah (60:5) notes that this seems to be redundant. Rabbi Yochanan answers that “no man had known her” means that no man had ever even approached her and asked her to know him, as Scripture states, “For the staff of the wicked will not rest on the lot of the righteous” (Tehillim 125:3). The commentary Nezer Hakodesh on the Midrash explains that indeed Rivka was very beautiful and the people of her country were immoral, and thus one would have expected that

some of them would have approached her. However, Rivka was righteous and they were wicked, and it is the nature of wicked people to hate righteous people and stay far away from them. Wicked people have no pleasure from being close to righteous people. That is the meaning of the verse, “For the staff of the wicked will not rest on the lot of the righteous.”

According to this, we can answer our questions. Lavan knew that the people of his country hated Rivka for her righteousness, and therefore when he saw a stranger come and befriend her, he knew that the stranger had to be righteous, not an idol worshipper. Therefore he cleared out all the idols from the house.

Now we can also understand Rashi’s question about why Lavan ran. Since Lavan was wicked and he knew that this visitor was righteous, why did he run to greet him and go to such great lengths to clear out the idols so that he would feel comfortable? The answer, Rashi says, is that the desire for money can drive people to do things that are against their nature. The Torah says that a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous (Devarim 16:19). The Gemara comments (Kesubos 105a) that if it does so to the wise, all the more so to the foolish; if it does so to the righteous, all the more so to the wicked. Lavan “gave up his eyes on the money” – he allowed himself to be blinded by his desire for Eliezer’s money. (Divrei Yoel pp. 523-524)

The lesson we must learn from this is that whenever we see the wicked befriending the righteous, there has to be an ulterior motive. Anti-religious Jews do not make concessions to Torah Jews unless they have something to gain.

A year before the Zionists established their state, three of their leaders made a promise to the Agudath Israel activists that certain aspects of their state would be run in accordance with the Torah – notably marriage and divorce. Later, during all the history of the state, although battles were fought over many religious matters, these principles remained constant. Many tout this as an example of how working together with the Zionists and participating in their government yielded a positive result. To this day, the Zionist state has no civil marriage; two Jews can only get married or divorced in a halachic ceremony.

But let us examine the historical context. The following lines are taken from the work of a prominent historian. “The discussions between Agudah and the Zionist Agency began in the spring of 1946, as the Anglo-American Committee was due to arrive in Palestine. Considering the anti-Zionist traditions and statements of certain Agudah leaders who appeared before the Committee, the Zionist Agency feared that Agudat Israel would not support Zionist claims that Palestine was the only haven for Jewish refugees. Hence the Zionist Agency felt the need to approach Agudah...

“When the UN Committee was due to arrive in Palestine (summer 1947), Agudath Israel notified the Zionist Agency that it would appear before the Committee separately and not as part of the Zionist Agency joint delegation. It was then that Ben-Gurion entered the picture, urging Levin to reconsider this decision. “For the sake of Jewish interests,” he said, “the Zionist Agency should be recognized as representing the entire nation.” But Levin did not agree... On June 9, 1947, Agudath Israel leaders again met with Ben-Gurion, informing him that they were prepared to

support the cause of a Jewish state if their religious demands were guaranteed in the state constitution...these words obviously express an implied threat: if the Zionist Agency does not promise to fulfill Agudath Israel's demands, the latter will oppose the establishment of a Jewish state... Ben-Gurion would not deviate from the lines drawn by Shertok and Kaplan a half-year earlier. Regarding marital affairs, he said that there would be no problem arranging matters according to the Torah... Ten days later, the letter from the Zionist Agency Executive was received at the offices of World Agudath Israel... Levin, disheartened, declared that Agudath Israel's policies were not to be changed despite the letter, which essentially says nothing and contains no genuine commitment. Agudath Israel thus decided to appear separately before the UN Committee, still debating how to present its view that extension of the British Mandate would be the least of all evils...

"The UN Committee...recommended the partitioning of Palestine and the establishment of two sovereign states therein – a Jewish state and an Arab state... After considerable efforts the Agudath Israel Executive Committee succeeded in obtaining a rabbinic decision from five members of its Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah. The Moetzes met on November 5, 1947...a decision was taken not to do anything to oppose the Jewish state or to block achievement of a two-thirds majority in the United Nations to establish the state. This was a decision of considerable significance under the circumstances then prevailing. Agudath Israel's leaders throughout the world could have initiated contacts with leaders of UN member countries to thwart approval of the partition plan by the General Assembly. At that time (about three weeks before the scheduled General Assembly session), the Jewish Agency was exerting great efforts to convince various world leaders to support the plan. They had to make sure Agudath Israel leaders and supporters were not working in the opposite direction. The decision by these members of the Moetzes was thus the first step in Agudath Israel's involvement in Zionist efforts to establish a Jewish state."

Throughout the 61 years of the state's existence, secular Jews have made up a clear majority of its population and government, and they could have easily voted to establish civil marriage, had it been a priority to them. Yet we do not find that it was even a struggle, as were other issues such as drafting girls and autopsies. Why have the anti-religious gone along so willingly with this religious coercion? The answer is that just as in 1947, when the world was deliberating over the idea of a Zionist state, the Zionists desperately needed all of the Jewish people to appear to be united behind them, so too today the Zionists need their state to be officially a Jewish state, so that they can tell the world about their "right" to Eretz Yisroel based on the Torah. They need the approval of Orthodox rabbis to maintain the appearance of a Jewish state. Let those Orthodox rabbis who think they are gaining concessions from the Zionists realize that it is they who are really making the biggest concession – it is they who give the state its legitimacy!

Toldos 5768

And the children moved inside her, and she said, "If so, why did I ask for this?" And she went to consult with Hashem. And Hashem said to her, "Two nations are in your belly, and two peoples will emerge from your loins..." (25:22-23)

The Sages say that when Rivka passed by the door of a yeshiva, Yaakov kicked, and when she passed by the door of a house of idol worship, Esav kicked. If she was upset that she would be

giving birth to a wicked son, why then was she comforted when the prophet told her that two nations were in her belly?

Rabbi Yaakov David Willowski of Slutzk (1845-1913), known as Ridbaz, answers that Rivka thought she was carrying only one child. We know that the worst enemies faced by the Jewish people are its internal enemies. Jews who dress like gentiles, talk like gentiles, and eat non-kosher food do not have much influence on good Jews. Whatever they say will probably be ignored. The real danger is the Jew who dresses like a Torah Jew, does mitzvos, goes to the synagogue, studies Torah, and yet spreads heretical ideas. Rivka Imeinu thought she was carrying such a child – righteous and wicked all at once. But when she heard that there were two children, one righteous and the other wicked, she was reassured (Nimukei Ridbaz).

Today we face both the secular Zionists and the religious Zionists. But members of this latter group pose the greater threat because of their observance and dedication to the Torah. Furthermore, secular Zionism as an ideology is becoming increasingly weak over the years as the secular Jews' connection to Judaism grows weaker. Religious Zionism, on the other hand, continues in full force, and threatens to dominate the Jewish people. We must give our attention to fighting the influence of this dangerous movement.

Toldos 5769

And Yitzchok loved Esav, for catch was in his mouth. (25:28)

The Midrash Seichel Tov (Bereishis 33) calls Yaakov Avinu the “choicest of the patriarchs.” What did Yaakov do that was greater than his predecessors, Avraham and Yitzchok? Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld explained that Yaakov passed a unique test that none of the other patriarchs confronted. Avraham Avinu recognized the Creator on his own, in defiance of his idol-worshipping father. He did not expect any support from his father. Yitzchok learned the path of G-d from his father and had his father’s full support. But Yaakov, although he learned from his father to serve G-d, saw at the same time his father’s love for his wicked brother Esav, who rejected all that his father represented. Yaakov was the one following in Yitzchok’s ways, studying Torah and serving G-d, yet Yitzchok preferred Esav to Yaakov. This gave him pause to reconsider: Was Esav on the right path after all? Should he also begin to act like Esav? But Yaakov Avinu strengthened himself in the conviction that he was doing the right thing, and continued to be a straight man living in the tents of Torah. This is why he deserved the title “the choicest of the patriarchs”.

Faithful Torah Jews today face a similar trial. We know we are following the right path, yet we see the success of the Zionists. Their organizations have all the money and they control all the Jewish newspapers. Sometimes we are tempted to wonder: perhaps their success indicates that G-d approves of their ways? Perhaps we should, G-d forbid, be like them? But we must emulate Yaakov Avinu and say: we will continue to do and believe what is right, regardless of whether we are successful or not.

The parallel between Yaakov Avinu and ourselves goes further. Just as Yaakov Avinu realized that Yitzchok’s love for Esav was part of G-d’s plan and it should not deter him in his service of

G-d, so too we must accept G-d's decree of exile, in which Esav and other nations rule over us. We must not be like the Zionists, who attempt to put an end to the love of Esav before its time.

The Midrash Shir Hashirim indeed says that Yitzchok's love for Esav is behind our exile, and is the meaning of the word "love" in Shir Hashirim (2:7). "Do not arouse the love before it is desired" is understood by the Midrash to mean: "Do not use actions to upset the love of Yitzchok for Esav before the desire of the patriarch [Yitzchok] has been achieved."

The Shach on the Torah, in the name of the Shaarei Orah, explains that Yitzchok loved Esav because he saw that Yaakov's children would one day sin and deserve to be punished in Gehinom. In order to spare them this punishment, Yitzchok chose for them the lesser punishment of exile, and chose Esav to carry out the exile. In this manner, he followed in the footsteps of his father, Avraham Avinu, who also chose exile for his children (Bereishis Rabbah 44:21).

Toldos 5770

And the children moved inside her, and she said, "If so, why did I ask for this?" And she went to consult with Hashem. And Hashem said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will emerge from your loins..." (25:22-23)

Rashi says, "If so – if the pain of pregnancy is so great, why did I long and pray for it?" On a simple level, Rivka was saying that she regretted praying for a child at all. If this is how painful it was going to be, she should have not prayed, and remained barren all her life.

But the Arvei Nachal explains that Rivka compared her childbearing to the redemption of the Jewish people. Hashem made the Jewish people swear not to force the end of exile with excessive prayer. The reason is that if the redemption comes in its proper time, it will come naturally and easily, without any opposition or pain. But if the Jews pray excessively, although Hashem will certainly not reject their prayers, and the redemption will come before its time, it will come with many accusers and with much pain and suffering.

When Rivka saw how painful her pregnancy was, she thought: Surely I was not supposed to have a child now. Hashem wanted to wait longer because He desires the prayer of the righteous. That was the reason why I was barren to begin with (Yevamos 64a). He only gave me a child now because of Yitzchok's excessive prayer, as it says, "And Yitzchok entreated Hashem." She went to consult a prophet, who told her, "It is not as you thought. The pain is not because the child came too early, but rather because there are two nations in your womb..."

The first to understand that the oath against "forcing the end" refers to excessive prayer was Rashi on Kesubos 111a. The Midrash on Shir Hashirim (2:7) applies the oath to the revolts of the Children of Ephraim and Bar Kochba, so it is clear that actions to force the end are also included. Rashi merely meant that even prayer is included in the oath.

Rabbi Shalom Ber Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (1866-1920) said this clearly: "Even if these men [the Zionists] were loyal to Hashem and His Torah, and even if there were a chance that they would achieve their goal, we must not listen to them in this matter, to make our

redemption with our own power. Is it not forbidden even to force the end with excessive prayer (Rashi Kesubos 111a)? All the more so that with power and worldly methods, that is, to leave exile by force, we are not permitted... And this is against our true hope, that Hashem will bring us Moshiach Tzidkeinu soon and our redemption will come through Hashem Himself." (Ohr Layesharim, p. 57)

However, the Zionist leader Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook claimed that according to Rashi, the oath prohibits only prayer, not actions: "Rashi adds that we are not to make exaggerated petitions over the End. We are not supposed to be 'nudniks' and clamor, 'Redeem us! Redeem us! Redeem us!' without end. The meaning here is that we are not to hasten the End of the exile through spiritual means. It is not talking about building Eretz Yisroel." (Torat Eretz Yisroel p. 290)

From the Arvei Nachal it is clear that there is no difference between praying for the redemption early and action to bring it early. The problem is that if the redemption comes before its time, "it will come with many accusers and with much pain and suffering." We do not want to bring upon ourselves pain and suffering, G-d forbid, whether through prayer or action.

The Ramban also holds that prayer is included in the oath, and in Sefer Haemunah Vehabitachon (p. 369 in the Chavel Edition) he draws a connection between the oath against praying excessively for the end and the following Midrash in Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 845: "Why do Jews pray in this world and are not answered? Because they do not know the Ineffable Name. But in the future the Holy One, blessed is He, will make it known to them, as it says, 'Therefore let My people know My name' (Yishaya 52:6). At that time they will pray and be answered, as it says, 'He will call Me and I will answer him' (Tehillim 91:15)." The Ramban says that certainly prayer is effective during exile; the Midrash only means that prayer for the redemption will not be effective, because of the oath. Apparently the Ramban understood the oath not as a prohibition but as a decree: Hashem withheld knowledge of the Ineffable Name from us so that our prayers for the redemption would not be effective.

The Ramban proceeds to ask how his interpretation is consistent with the story of Rabbi Chiya and his sons (Bava Metzia 85b), who would have successfully prayed for the redemption had Eliyahu Hanavi not stopped them. He answers that that moment when Rabbi Chiya and his sons tried to pray was an exceptional moment, but in general any prayers for the redemption, even by such great individuals as Rabbi Chiya and his sons, are not answered. Hashem has simply decreed that the redemption will not come until a certain time, or until certain conditions are met. The decree means that both prayers and actions to bring the redemption early will be met with failure.

The Radvaz, in his commentary Migdal David on Shir Hashirim, says that the oath prohibits excessive prayer – not prayer of the Jews in this world, but prayer of their souls in the World to Come. When a Jew dies and his soul ascends, it tells the other souls all about the difficult exile that the Jewish people is undergoing. They feel the pain and wish to complain to Hashem. But the new soul warns them not to force the end before Hashem desires it to come. Here too, we see that the prohibition on excessive prayer is not because Hashem does not want a person to be a nudnik and beg incessantly without doing anything. The souls in the World to Come cannot take any action in any case; all they can do is pray, yet they are warned not to pray.

The Alshich in his commentary on Eichah says that this prohibition on too much prayer is because the exile is for our atonement and we cannot pray for it to end before it is complete. Again, this shows that both prayer and action are prohibited, because the point is not to end our atonement prematurely. He explains this as the meaning of the verses of Eichah 3:25-26: "Hashem is good to those who hope to Him, to the soul that seeks Him. Good and one should wait and be silent, for the salvation of Hashem." For any other trouble that may befall us, prayer is the best response; Hashem is good to those who hope and pray to Him. But when it comes to exile, our response should be to be "good" – to better ourselves so that we need no more atonement, "and wait and be silent" from praying. We must trust "in the salvation of Hashem" – for Hashem is also in exile with us, and we trust that He will, so to speak, save Himself and save us along with Him.

Vayeitzei 5768

"Whomever you find your idols with shall not live..." but Yaakov did not know that Rachel had stolen them. (31:32)

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, says that this curse caused the untimely death of Rachel soon afterward, on the way back to the Land of Canaan. Although Yaakov did not know that it was Rachel who had stolen the idols, and he certainly did not mean to curse her, the curse took effect in any case. This principle is called "bris krusa lasfosayim" – G-d has made a covenant with the lips of the righteous and He fulfills their words. Thus a righteous person must be extremely careful with his words.

Our Sages used this principle to explain the puzzling story of Yeihu, king of the Ten Tribes. The dynasty of Achav had instituted the worship of the Baal and the Asheirah in northern Eretz Yisroel and its capital, Shomron. The wickedness of Achav reached the point where G-d decided to wipe them out and bring in a new dynasty. He chose the righteous Yeihu to carry out the revolution. Yeihu did as he was commanded: he gathered an army, overthrew the king, and killed every member of his family. Then he set to work purging the land of Baal-worship. As a ploy to gather all the idolatrous prophets and priests to one place, he announced, "Achav worshipped the Baal a little; Yeihu will worship him a lot. And now, all prophets of the Baal, all his worshippers and all his priests, come to me, let no one be missing. For I am making a great festival to the Baal; whoever does not come will not live" (Melachim II 10:18-19). When the temple of the Baal was full from door to door, Yehu and his army surrounded the temple and slaughtered all the worshippers. Hashem was pleased with Yeihu, and promised him that his dynasty would continue for four generations.

But then the prophet tells us that Yeihu himself worshipped the golden calves built by Yeravam: "And Yeihu did not keep the Torah of Hashem, G-d of Israel with all his heart; he did not desist from the sins of Yeravam, who brought Israel to sin" (ibid. v. 31). How did this happen? Abaye said, "There is a covenant with the lips." Yeihu said he would worship the Baal a lot; although he meant it as a trick, his words had their effect (Sanhedrin 102a).

Today there are many good Jews who are opposed to the Zionist state, yet will not refrain from using expressions from the Zionist language or singing Zionist songs that speak of Hebron or Jerusalem being "ours". They do this jokingly or for aesthetic reasons, not because they actually believe in the ideology. Some go even further: they feign belief in some aspects of Zionism, or at least lend respect to those beliefs, in order to reach out to non-observant Jews and bring them closer to Torah. Their hope is that someday, when those Jews are observant, they will learn the true Torah view of Zionism. These people should remember the lesson of Yeihu, that pretense of idolatry for any purpose, even a noble one, can lead to actual idolatry.

Rava gives a different explanation of why Yeihu stumbled, which is also reminiscent of today's situation: "He saw the signature of Achiyah Hashiloni and he erred" (Sanhedrin 102a). When Yeravam, the first king of the Ten Tribes, took the throne, he gathered all the leaders of the people together and made them sign and pledge allegiance to him. He asked them if they would do anything he told them, and they said yes. "Even if I tell you to worship idols?" he asked. The righteous men present said, "G-d forbid!" But the wicked ones said to the righteous, "Do you really think that such a great man as Yeravam would worship idols? He only means to test us, to see if we are really loyal to him." So they all signed, including the great prophet, Achiyah Hashiloni. Once Achiyah had given his signature in support of Yeravam, anything that Yeravam did later appeared to have Achiyah's stamp of approval. This is why Yeihu, the great fighter against idolatry, worshipped the golden calves built by Yeravam.

The Agudath Israel organization was founded to combat Zionism, and in its early years it gained the approval and signatures of many gedolei yisroel, such as the Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman and Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky. But when the Zionist state was established, years after all these gedolim had passed away, Agudah activists joined the Zionist government and sought only to make the state more religious. Many people endorsed Agudah's Zionist activities because of those early signatures of gedolim, which made it appear as though all activities done under the name "Agudah" for all time would have the approval of those gedolim. Like Yeihu, Jews who are great zealots against all forms of idolatry and heresy are, at the same time, supporters of the idolatry of Zionism.

Vayeitzei 5770

“I will be like dew to Israel; he will flower like a rose” (Haftarah, Hoshea 14:6).

The prophet Hoshea compares the Jewish people to a rose. Shlomo Hamelech makes a similar comparison in Shir Hashirim 2:2: “Like a rose among the thorns is My beloved among the daughters.”

The Midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah) explains: Just as a rose withers in dry weather, but when the dew comes out it becomes fresh again, so too, as long as Esav's shadow exists, Israel appears to be withered in this world; but when Esav's shadow passes, Israel becomes fresher and fresher.

The Yefeh Kol comments on this Midrash that the rose is the most soft and sensitive of plants, and therefore hot, dry weather has a stronger effect on it. The other side of the coin is that the

rose opens very quickly once the weather turns moist – within 24 hours. Here too, the exile of the Jewish people is more severe than that of other peoples, but their redemption will be more dramatic. It will occur all at once, unlike the rise of other nations which proceeds slowly, in stages.

There is another place where Chazal say that the redemption will come in stages. The Yerushalmi (Berachos 4b) says that Rabbi Chiya Rabbah and Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta were walking together at dawn, and Rabbi Chiya Rabbah said that the redemption of the Jewish people will be similar to the dawn: "So is the redemption of Israel. At first, little by little; and as it continues it gets bigger and bigger."

Some have used this passage as a basis for their claim that the redemption is a long process that will begin before the coming of moshiach, through natural means. However, nothing in this passage or anywhere else indicates that this slow redemption will happen before moshiach comes. The Sages are teaching that the redemption process initiated by moshiach – not beforehand - might have to be in stages so as not to overwhelm us with the full light of redemption all at once, just as the sun rises slowly so as not to overwhelm the eye with so much light all at once.

These two statements of Chazal are no contradiction; they represent the two possible scenarios discussed by the Gemara, Sanhedrin 98a. The Gemara there quotes the verse, "I am Hashem, in its time I will hasten it" (Yishaya 60:22) and expounds: if the Jewish people deserve it, Hashem will hasten the redemption, and if they do not deserve it, it will come in its time. If the Jewish people deserves it, moshiach will come "with the clouds of heaven" (Daniel 7:13); if not, he will come as "a poor man riding a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). But note that both of these scenarios involve moshiach; there is no statement that the redemption will begin without moshiach.

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795-1874) was one of the founders of the Chovevei Tzion movement, and in his 1862 book *Derishas Tzion* he did indeed interpret the Yerushalmi to mean that Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisroel could be the beginning of the redemption. But even he made clear that this did not include fighting wars and conquering the land from the gentiles, which would be prohibited under the oaths:

Regarding the oath of G-d, which forms the basis for people who retreat from listening to the words of the prophet – “Do not give Him silence until He establishes and makes Jerusalem the praise of the earth” (Yishaya 62:7) – I will respond to you in two ways: Firstly, the warning “do not arouse or awaken” (Shir Hashirim 2:7) only means that we may not go up with a strong hand to the walls of Jerusalem, as it is explicitly stated in the Gemara there (Kesubos 111a) “that they must not go up as walls” and Rashi explains “with strength”; and also that they must not rebel against the nations; but rather they must wait for the kindness of Hashem, that He turn His eye of mercy to us, if He is pleased with the work of our hands. He only made us swear not to engage in forceful immigration, to go up to the mountain with strength, but to desire its stones and to settle the land is fine, and there is no greater mitzvah than this, as I have explained at length. (Maamar Kadishin p. 35b)

One of the letters of commendation on Derishas Tzion is from Rabbi Chaim David Chazan, the Rishon Letzion (Sephardic chief rabbi of Jerusalem under the Ottoman empire). He writes in the letter:

Not by might and not by power, G-d forbid, to rebel against the nations of the world, the benevolent kings who surround us; or, G-d forbid, to go up against the walls, to fight with the rulers; but rather to fulfill our desire and perfect our hearts, to fulfill the will of G-d, by arousing from below, by doing what we have the power to do, with G-d's help and the help of benevolent kings and their complete willingness.

Rabbi Yitzchok Yaakov Reines (1839-1915) was a leader of Chovevei Tzion and the founder of the Mizrachi movement. In 1902 he published a book called *Ohr Chadash Al Tzion* calling for settlement in Eretz Yisroel, but cautioning (p. 240) that it must not violate the oaths:

What is the point of Chanukah? Seemingly, there is no lesson for us to learn from it for our generations, for then all the miracles took place only after they arose on their own and fought the war of Hashem, but if we try to imitate the actions of our forefathers of that time, coming out with a battle cry and defeating our enemies, these actions would obviously be forbidden to us, since the Holy One, blessed is He, severely foreswore us not to push for the end of exile by force. But we can learn from the story to work to better the state of the Jewish people and settle it on its land, for this is its honor and the honor of its Torah. And this can take place even now, in acceptable and permissible ways.

In his *Sefer Haarachim* (pp. 298-299), Rabbi Reines explains that the Ramban in *Sefer Hamitzvos* advocates "conquering" Eretz Yisroel only in a peaceful way:

We must ask on the Ramban: How is it possible to say that there is a mitzvah on us to expel the Ishmaelite kingdom? Are we not foresworn not to go up as a wall (*Kesubos* 111a)? Yet the Ramban holds that the mitzvah of conquest applies even during exile, when the land is not under Jewish rule. The answer is that the Ramban means conquest by purchase, that it is a mitzvah to buy land in Eretz Yisroel and to settle there, for conquest does not have to mean through war.

Vayishlach 5768

And Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until dawn (32:25).

There seems to be a dispute among the Talmudic Sages as to who this angel was. The most prevalent opinion (*Bereishis Rabbah* 77:3 and *Tanchuma* 8, quoted by Rashi) is that it was Esav's guardian angel, Samael.

But the *Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer* (chapter 37) says, "The angel said, 'Let me go free.' Yaakov said, 'I will not set you free until you tell me your name.' Then the angel gave Yaakov the name Yisroel, like his own name, for his name was also Yisroel." What is the meaning of this puzzling passage?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1993) explained that there is actually no contradiction here. The Midrash says (Bereishis Rabbah 78:5) that Yaakov Avinu's face was engraved on G-d's throne. This means that G-d's glory is founded on the principle of truth, which was the attribute of Yaakov Avinu as it states, "Give truth to Yaakov" (Micah 7:20). The guardian angel of Esav, whom the Sages called Samael, is in charge of the opposite of truth, but he paints himself as a promoter of truth. This is why the Sages say (Chullin 91a) that the angel appeared to Yaakov as a Torah scholar.

This angel Samael called himself "Yisroel" because his whole essence was falsehood. Similarly, Esav's descendents established the Christian religion, which adopted the Jewish Bible as part of its literature, yet interprets words in the Bible such as "Zion", "Jerusalem" and "Israel" as references to their own adherents and their own idolatry. And among our own people, the Reform Jews, who deny that G-d ever gave the Torah, call themselves "rabbis" when they should really be called "priests". They call their places of worship "synagogues" when in reality they are houses of emptiness and belief in nothing.

And people say that there is a state in the beloved Holy Land whose ministers, leaders and legislators are heretics and non-believers, who desecrate the holiness of G-d's people, and yet they gave their state the name "Israel"! (It is interesting that Rabbi Schwab says "people say" – perhaps he did not quite believe that such a thing could happen.)

The Torah continues, "And he saw that he could not overcome him, and he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Yaakov's thigh was dislodged as he wrestled with him." This symbolizes that Yaakov's attribute of truth was partially compromised. Therefore we pray, "And purify our heart to serve you in truth," until the time when "Yaakov will come in completeness to the city of Shechem" (33:18). Shechem is the initials of "shem kvod malchuso" – the name of the glory of His kingdom. And this is enough for someone who understands. (Mayan Beis Hashoeva)

In this cryptic last paragraph, Rabbi Schwab may mean that Yaakov, the true Jewish people, the true Israel, is engaged in a struggle with the false Zionist "Israel". The Zionists saw that they could not completely defeat the true Jews, so they adopted a different tactic: they induced some of the true Jews to compromise their principles of truth. There have been rabbis who opposed Zionism, yet sanctioned some limited cooperation with the Zionist system with the justification that this furthers their battle against it. This, says Rabbi Schwab, was compromising Yaakov's attribute of truth.

Rabbi Schwab was an active member of Agudath Israel of America. However, it is known that he refused to attend conferences together with the Agudah rabbis of Eretz Yisroel, because he did not approve of their policy of cooperation with the Zionist government.

And he said, “If Esav comes to the first camp and smites it, then the remaining camp will escape.” (32:9)

This parsha is a model for Jewish behavior in exile, and the Gemara and Midrash note how the Jewish people is protected by G-d’s plan of settling some of them in one land and some in another land. (See Volume 1.)

The Midrash on Shir Hashirim 2:8 gives a different reason for the scattering of the Jewish people: G-d has decreed that they must be in exile in all 70 nations of the world. If they all stick together, it will take a very long time for them to go to all 70 nations. By spreading apart, Jews fulfill the decree of exile much more quickly:

“The voice of my beloved, behold it has come” (Shir Hashirim 2:8) – this refers to the king moshiach. When moshiach comes and says to the Jewish people, “In this month you will be redeemed,” they will say to him, “Our teacher, king moshiach, how can we be redeemed? Didn’t the Holy One, blessed is He, say that He is exiling us under the seventy nations?” And he will give them two answers: “One of you goes into exile in Barbary and another of you goes into exile in Sumatra (in the Pesikta Rabasi the text reads: Britain), and it will be considered as if you all went to these places.” The second answer is, “The government appoints local governors from various nations. If one Cuthean, for instance, becomes a ruler over the Jews, although the central government may not be Cuthean, it is considered as if the Jewish people were in exile under the Cuthean people.”

In the early 1920’s, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, wrote a fiery pamphlet opposing the Agudath Israel because of their support of settlement in Eretz Yisroel. What follows is an excerpt from that pamphlet, in which he refers to the above Midrash:

“The spirit of G-d rests on you [Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, the Gerrer Rebbe] to answer those who ask where to move, that they should move to the Holy Land and build their businesses there. G-d has helped you and you have a large Jewish community who submit their questions to you, and some of them will do nothing without your direction. Tell them to go to America or England, but not to take it upon themselves to go to the holy place, bringing their business with them.

“I do not mean to stick my head among great mountains, to criticize the way a holy man answers questions. A holy man does not base his answers only on his limited human understanding, but on inspiration given to him by G-d. And after all, do Jews ask him questions because of his wisdom, his understanding or his broad knowledge? They have chosen him as their holy man, to hear through him the counsel of G-d in every matter, great or small, be it the service of G-d, health, business matters, raising children or lifestyle. They hope for his answer and blessing as the farmer hopes for rain. Therefore it is senseless to criticize such a man’s answer, to evaluate it, or to compare it with the answers given by others.

“However, it is easy to see why a personal answer given to an individual cannot be a basis to decide the question of settling the land. Everyone knows that it is more comfortable for a Jew to live in Eretz Yisroel, breathing the holy air, living together with religious Jews – than to be

breathing the smoke from the chimneys of the British factories or entering the race for profit of the American business world. So when you tell a person to move to Eretz Yisroel and then add logical reasons, you are talking not only from Divine inspiration but from your own opinion; you are guiding people in the proper Torah way, being wise and seeing the outcome of your advice.

“If one travels around the world and looks at Jewish communities, he will see that, thank G-d, the Jewish people is alive and well. Although our enemies (who intend to be enemies but are actually benefactors) persecute us, yet every city has a cheder, a yeshiva and charity organizations. When a religious Jew comes to a new place and gets settled, he will, with the encouragement of gedolim, help build one of these institutions. As the Midrash says (on Shir Hashirim 2:8), when one Jew lives in Barbary and another lives in Britain, it is considered as if the whole Jewish people went to these places and this fulfills the decree of exile to the seventy nations. We must believe with complete faith that when Moshiach comes, he and Hashem will be more pleased with the cheder, the shul and the charity institution founded by the Jews in exile, in Barbary and Britain, than with the factory and workshop founded, G-d forbid, in Jerusalem the holy city. What will you have to say for yourself then?

“You say that the religious Jews in Eretz Yisroel are very good in their dress and behavior. It is very hard to say this, but the appeal of settling the land seems to have blinded your eye. For the sake of this good thing – that Jews should be able to wear Jewish clothing and peyos – have you decided to overlook everything else? If only you could use your strength to take other actions, to make sure that all religious Jews in whatever places they live are perfect, you would bring about improvement without causing ruin to the beauty of the Jewish people.”

Vayishlach 5770

And he commanded them saying, so shall you say to my master, to Esav... (Bereishis 32:5)

Rabbi Tovia ben Eliezer, in his Midrash Lekach Tov, says that the word “saying” means that the command to show respect to Esav also applies to future generations. They must not stand up against the wave, for whoever stands up against a wave, the wave sweeps him away; but when one bows to the wave, the wave passes over.

He is echoing the story in Yevamos 121a, in which Rabbi Akiva’s ship sank and he survived by holding onto a piece of wreckage. To each wave that came his way, he bowed his head. Chazal learned from this that if a man sees wicked people coming his way, he should bow his head to them.

Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz in Yaaros Devash (v. 1, Drush 3) also quotes this Gemara in Yevamos and derives from it that the Jewish people can get the ultimate benefit from exile only if they accept it humbly and meekly.

The Midrash Lekach Tov brings another statement of Chazal regarding the story of Yaakov’s encounter with Esav. Rabbi Yehonasan said: Whoever wants to appease a king or a government,

but does not know the right way, should place this portion of the Torah before him and learn from it the way to appease.

The Sefer Chareidim on the Torah says that in emulating Yaakov Avinu, the Jewish people is keeping the oath that prohibits rebellion against the nations of the world. Instead of rebelling, they must tolerate the exile and give the nations honor, like a servant gives his master. They must not react angrily to the nations, for they are only like a strap in the hand of Hashem. When the nations demand taxes, they must not kick back or speak sharp words, but give them in accordance with the law, respectfully.

The Chareidim also comments that the use of the word “and he commanded” (Bereishis 32:5) implies, according to the Gemara in Kiddushin 29a, that this is a matter that needs encouragement, now and for all generations. Yaakov Avinu wanted to teach his descendents in future generations in exile to be careful with Esav’s honor. This is why whenever our Sages went to visit Roman kings to make requests on behalf of the Jews, they would always consult this passage and learn from it how to conduct themselves.

Later Esav proposed to Yaakov, “Let us travel and go, and I will go by your side” (Bereishis 33:12), and Yaakov declined. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that Esav wanted to split this world with Yaakov. Yaakov, however, said, “My master knows that the children are weak” - the Jewish people will be weak in mitzvos – “and if they pressure them in one day all the sheep will die” - without the atonement of exile they will be sent to Gehinom on the day of judgment and they will not be able to bear the suffering. Therefore, said Yaakov, “Let my master pass before his servant” – you take this world first – “and I will travel in my lowliness” - I will stay in my exile and lowliness. I will not wage any war and I will not rise up in exile at all, but rather “according to the work that is before me” - I will bear the yoke of subjugation. And until when will the subjugation last? “Until I come to master, to Seir.”

The Midrash, cited by Rashi, points out that Yaakov never fulfilled his promise to come to Seir in his lifetime, and that it will be fulfilled only in the messianic era, regarding which the prophet Ovadiah writes: "And the saviors will go up Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esav" (Ovadiah 1:21).

Similarly, the Akeidas Yitzchak (Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, 1420-1494) interprets the words “according to the work that is before me” as a metaphoric description of Jewish history. Yaakov said, "I have much work to do! My children cannot reach their full potential unless they go through the refinery of trials, suffering and exile three times (i.e. Egypt, Babylonia and Rome). Only then will their souls be purified and ready to absorb spiritual good, to be the chosen people and to live peacefully forever. This refining process will take a long time, and will end with the coming of moshiach, when I will come to you at Seir." (Akeidas Yitzchak Shaar 26)

Vayeishev 5768

And Yaakov dwelt in the land where his father lived, in the land of Canaan (37:1).

Rashi says, "Yaakov wanted to live in peace, but the misfortune of Yosef sprang upon him. The righteous want to live in peace. The Holy One, blessed is He, says: The righteous are not satisfied with what is prepared for them in the World to Come, and they want to live in peace in this world!"

Most people understand Rashi to mean that G-d does not want the righteous to live in peace in this world. G-d therefore brought on the misfortune of Yosef to make Yaakov's life less peaceful. We must ask: certainly if a righteous man wants to have wealth and an easy life in order to enjoy this world, we understand why G-d would want him to live more simply and focus on spiritual matters. But Yaakov Avinu surely wanted to live in peace in order to serve G-d better; why then was G-d opposed to this?

In fact, the Rambam (Laws of Teshuva 9:1) says that although the main reward for keeping the commandments of the Torah is in the World to Come, there is also reward in this world as the Torah promises (Vayikra 26:4 and Devarim 11:14). The purpose of the reward in this world is to enable the righteous to live on in peace and continue to be righteous. "The Torah promised us that if we keep it with joy and goodness of heart and we study its wisdom always, He would remove all obstacles to our keeping it, such as sickness, war, famine and the like, and He would bestow upon us all good things that strength us in keeping the Torah, such as plenty, peace, and much silver and gold, so that we should not have to spend all our days on obtaining these bodily needs, but rather be free to study the wisdom and perform the commandments, so that we may merit life in the World to Come."

The Satmar Rav explains Rashi to mean that G-d was saying with approval: "The righteous are not satisfied with what is prepared for them in the World to Come, and they want to live in peace in this world in order to serve Me better! I will give them that peace." But how did the misfortune of Yosef give Yaakov peace?

Yaakov had just come to settle with his family in the Land of Canaan, and he began to worry about the future. He was righteous and had money to live on, but would it always be that way? Maybe his children or grandchildren would be poor and would have to depend on the generosity of the Canaanites or the Egyptians. How could the Jewish people be built on the money of such wicked people? Yaakov wanted to ensure peace and self-sufficiency for his family and his nation.

G-d answered him by causing Yosef to be sold down to Egypt, where he eventually became the ruler and brought all the money in the land under his control: "And Yosef gathered all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan" (Bereishis 47:14). Now all the support that came to Yaakov's family was from a holy and pure source, and on this foundation the Jewish people was built.

A true tzaddik is not satisfied with his own attainment of the World to Come. He may have done many mitzvos and become an outstanding Torah scholar, but he is worried about his family and descendants: who will support them? Who will ensure that they also remain as righteous as I am? Who will ensure that they do not end up being supported by unclean and wicked sources, and thus become like their supporters? When G-d sees that the tzaddik has these concerns, He is

pleased and He arranges the world so that the tzaddik's family lives in peace, on a strong and pure foundation. (Chiddushei Torah Mesibos, v. 1 p. 202)

Chanukah 5768

A man may not go out on Shabbos wearing a nailed sandal (Shabbos 60a).

The Gemora explains that the Sages enacted this law in memory of a tragic incident that occurred during the Greek era. A large group of Jews were hiding in a cave, and they all agreed that no one should leave the cave, lest the Greeks see him come out and thus discover the entire group. But they allowed other Jews to enter the cave and join them, because they would of course make sure that no Greeks were watching before entering the cave. The Jews were wearing sandals that consisted of a piece of leather nailed onto a wooden sole, such that the foot could go into the sandal from either side. However, the sandals did have a recognizable front and back. Once a Jew entered the cave wearing his sandals backwards. Someone saw his footprints and noticed that they faced outwards, making it appear as though someone had left the cave. Immediately they all panicked, fearing the Greeks were coming, and tried to escape. In the process they trampled over each other and many were killed.

The Gemora asks: if the Sages wanted to memorialize this incident by forbidding this reversible type of sandals, why then did they forbid them only on Shabbos? They should have forbidden them all the time! The Gemora replies: because the incident occurred on Shabbos.

This answer seems strange: this law has nothing to do with the laws of Shabbos, so why did they make the law only on Shabbos? Why is it so important to remember that the incident occurred on Shabbos?

Rabbi Ahron Katzenellenbogen explained that Shabbos observance was one of the major targets of the Greek decrees. These Jews were hiding in the cave in order to keep Shabbos. Superficially, this would seem to be a heroic deed. However, G-d wanted the Jews to keep Shabbos in order to declare before the entire world that G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. He specifically wanted their Shabbos observance to be public, so that it should be a statement of acceptance of His kingship. These Jews should not have hidden, but rather they should have openly resisted the decree and kept Shabbos in public. Although this would seem to be more dangerous, the fact is that when Jews risk their lives to demonstrate loyalty to G-d's Torah, G-d intervenes and makes miracles for them, as he did for the Hasmoneans when they fought off the Greeks.

This mistake has been made by Jews at other times in history. During the Spanish Inquisition, when the Jews were expelled from Spain and those who remained were forced to convert to Christianity, many Jews succumbed to this ordeal and converted openly, but continued to keep all of the Torah in secret. Some of them were able to escape from Spain later, but those Jewish families who chose to stay in Spain gradually

forgot about all of Judaism. Similarly, in Soviet Russia there were at first many Jews who continued to keep Shabbos and study Torah secretly, but their children and grandchildren grew up with almost no knowledge of Torah.

There are many Jews who are privately opposed to Zionism, but do not wish to speak out publicly. Sometimes they do not want to offend friends and relatives; other times they want to maintain their job or position. The story of the reversible sandal teaches us that this approach is wrong. G-d wants the Jewish people to publicly accept the yoke of exile and hope for His redemption alone, not for any substitute. Jews must speak out on this subject and accept whatever risk is involved, and then G-d will intervene and come to their aid.

Chanukah 5769

“I recall the distress that befell me; with three blows He struck me in this month... He surrounded me on its eighth day with darkness left and right, for these three events I instituted a fast: the king of Greece forced me to translate the Torah into Greek, on my back the plowers plowed and lengthened their furrow.” (Selichos for the Tenth of Teves)

Why is the translation of the Torah into Greek considered a tragedy, one of the reasons for our fast on the Tenth of Teves? The answer is that the translation marked the beginning of the Hellenistic era in Jewish history, an era characterized by heresy and defection from the Torah on a scale the Jewish people had never seen before. Increasingly, Jews began speaking Greek and studying the Greek culture. They wanted to remain Jews as well, preserving the Torah, but they wanted to transform the Torah from a living book, a text which Jews spent their days and nights discussing and explaining on multiple levels, into a dry text with one simple meaning. The Greek translation, called the Septuagint, suited their purpose well.

This was the era when the Sadducee movement arose. The Sadducees and the Hellenizers were closely related, because the Sadducees also sought to deny the Oral Law and base their Judaism solely on the Written Torah. To them, the Torah was a fixed text with no room for questions or discussions. They did not spend time pouring over the Torah and its interpretation, as the Talmudic sages did; instead, they studied Greek philosophy and culture. Their view of Torah study was typified by the statement of Elazar ben Poirah, who advised King Yannai to kill all the sages. “What will become of the Torah?” asked Yannai. Elazar replied, “The Torah is sitting in a corner; whoever wants can study it” (Kiddushin 66a).

By contrast, the Gemara, the Oral Law, is full of questions and challenges: “How do we derive this? Is this not a contradiction? Why does the Torah repeat this or that word?”

Chanukah is the time when we commemorate the victory of the Hasmoneans over the Hellenizers, and thus the victory of the living Torah, the Oral Torah, over the fixed, dry,

translated Torah. This victory is alluded to in the story of Yaakov Avinu defeating the angel. The angel gave Yaakov the name Yisroel, “for you have contended with angels and men and won.” When Yaakov asked what the angel’s name was, the angel said, “Why do you ask my name?” (Bereishis 32:29-30) Why was Yaakov so interested in the angel’s name? And why didn’t the angel answer the question?

Yaakov reasoned as follows: “My new name, Yisroel, must reflect my essence. If my essence is the fact that I triumphed over this angel, then I want to know the angel’s name. I want to know what was so important about this victory.” The angel replied, “My name is ‘why do you ask’.” You have been victorious over the philosophy that advocates blind faith and opposes asking questions. Similarly, the Jewish people eventually defeated the Sadducees, who left the Torah as a fixed text and denied the Oral Torah.

The Sadducees are long gone, but today we face a different, more sinister heretical movement: Zionism. Among those Orthodox Jews officially opposed to Zionism, there are two types. There are those pay lip service to anti-Zionism because they know that all the gedolim of the past were anti-Zionist. However, they do not spend any time studying the subject in order to understand exactly what is wrong with Zionism. Thus many of them are woefully ignorant, and they use the word Zionism for anything they happen to oppose: irreligious political parties, irreligious kibbutzim, desecration of Shabbos and so on. When asked to explain their opposition to the essence of Zionism, they avoid the question and say piously, “Why do you ask these questions? We have to accept the ‘shitah’ of our famous rabbis of the past even if we don’t understand it.”

Then there are those who are really interested in the truth. They approach Zionism as they approach any other Torah subject: with questions, deep thinking, and analysis of the sources. It was this approach that set the Satmar Rav apart from many other great rabbis of his time. All of them were against Zionism, but the Satmar Rav was the only one who wrote a full-length work analyzing all the sources, quoting the arguments of the Zionists and refuting them.

Studying Vayoe! Moshe and all the relevant sources, asking questions and searching for answers is the only way to ensure that we stay on the proper path. Otherwise we could, G-d forbid, become like those who say they are against Zionism yet advocate Zionism of the most extreme kind.

Chanukah 5770

Speak to Aharon and say to him: “When you kindle the lights, the seven lights must shine toward the face of the menorah.” (Bamidbar 8:2)

Rashi quotes the Midrash: Why was the command to light the menorah juxtaposed to the story of the offerings brought by the princes of each tribe? Because when Aharon saw the dedication of the Mishkan by the princes, he felt bad that neither he nor his tribe were included in this dedication. Therefore the Holy One, blessed is He, said to him: By your life, yours is greater than theirs, for you will light and clean the menorah.

The Ramban asks: Why did Hashem comfort Aharon with the menorah, and not with the incense or any of the other offerings brought by the kohanim, not to mention the service of Yom Kippur, which only he could do? He answers that the reference is not to the lighting of the menorah in the Temple, but to the lights of Chanukah, which continue to be lit even after the destruction of the Temple. Hashem promised Aharon that He would make miracles through his descendents, the Hasmoneans, and that the Jewish people's salvation at that time would be credited to them.

Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum (1897-1969, rav in Kew Gardens) points out an apparent contradiction in Aharon's feelings. On the one hand, we find that on Aharon's first day officiating as kohen gadol, Moshe said to him, "Approach the altar and make your sin offering and your burnt offering..." (Vayikra 9:7). Rashi explains: "Aharon was embarrassed and afraid to approach. Moshe said to him, 'Why are you embarrassed? For this you were chosen.'" At the same time, we find here that Aharon was upset that he was not bringing offerings like the princes of the other tribes.

He resolves this by saying that Aharon was indeed afraid to officiate, due to his role in the sin of the golden calf. The Ramban on Vayikra 9:7 says that Aharon fulfilled the verse in Tehillim 51:5, "And my sin is always before me." He constantly thought about the golden calf, and when he looked at the altar with its jutting corners, it reminded him of an ox or a calf. But Moshe told him, "Hashem has forgiven you and chosen you as kohen gadol." Still, when Aharon says that he was not given a role in the dedication of the Mishkan, he was worried that perhaps his descendents would one day repeat his mistake. After all, as Chazal say, "The deeds of the fathers are a model for their children."

The Torah (Shemos 32:1-5) tells the story of Aharon's sin in great detail. Ordinarily, the Torah conceals the identity of people who stumbled in sin. The Torah tells us that a man was caught gathering sticks on Shabbos (Bamidbar 15:32). When Rabbi Akiva stated that this man was Tzelafchad, his colleague rebuked him for revealing what the Torah wished to conceal (Shabbos 96b). So why does the Torah describe Aharon's sin so openly? Clearly the Torah wants us to learn that even a great person such as Aharon could make such a mistake.

What exactly was Aharon's mistake in making the golden calf? When the people came to Aharon and demanded that he make an idol, Aharon reasoned, "If I refuse, they will kill me and then commit idolatry anyway. I will only be adding the sin of bloodshed to their sin, and for that bloodshed they may never get atonement. Furthermore, if I don't do it, someone else will do it in a worse way. Let me do it and use my wisdom to save the people from sin. I will get them to put off their worship of the calf till tomorrow, by which time Moshe will return."

This was what is called "aveirah lishmah" (a sin for a noble purpose), a compromise made on behalf of the Torah. Regarding such compromises, Scripture states, "He who praises a compromiser blasphemes Hashem" (Tehillim 10:3). The Gemara (Sanhedrin 7a)

says, “This verse refers to the making of the golden calf.” Rashi says: “Aharon made a compromise in his mind and rationalized the making of the calf.”

Hashem did not accept Aharon’s rationalization: “Hashem was very angry at Aharon, and would have destroyed him” (Devarim 9:20). Despite his good intentions to save the Jewish people from sin, Hashem sentenced him and his children to death, and if not for Moshe’s prayer this sentence would have been carried out fully. The Torah writes the entire story, using Aharon’s name explicitly, in order to teach us that even great people can fall on the stumble block of compromise.

When the princes dedicated the altar and Aharon was excluded, he feared that although Hashem had forgiven him personally, his descendents would one day repeat his mistake of making compromises with sinners. Therefore Hashem told him about the Hasmoneans, who would put their lives on the line to wage war against the Greeks and overcome their anti-Torah decrees. The Hasmoneans were a small minority – most Jews felt that there was no choice but to compromise the Torah and live peacefully under the Greeks. The Hasmoneans swam against the current and refused to give up an inch of the Torah. Therefore, when they lit the menorah, they refused to use defiled oil, although technically there would have been grounds to permit it. They used the only clean oil in existence, and Hashem made a miracle to show that He approved of their approach. When Aharon saw that his descendents would fight for Torah in an uncompromising way, he was comforted.

When lighting the menorah, we bless Hashem “Who made miracles for our fathers, in those days, at this time.” This is because the uncompromising attitude displayed by the Hasmoneans applies in our time just as much as it did then. (Kol Yaakov, pp. 46-47)

Mikeitz 5769

And it came to pass at the end of two years, that Pharaoh was dreaming, and behold he stood by the Nile. (41:1)

Rashi at the end of Vayeishev says that Yosef had to sit in jail for an extra two years as punishment for asking the cupbearer to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf. Why was it wrong of him to make this effort? Don’t we all make efforts to earn a living, while at the same time believing that our success is up to Hashem?

The Shlah (Torah Shebichsav, Maamar Tzon Yosef) writes at length about the dispute between Yosef and his brothers. How could it be, he asks, that the brothers, who were all righteous and were greater than angels, wanted to kill Yosef Hatzaddik? He explains that Yosef and his brothers all agreed that the royal family would be descended from Yehuda, but in order for the Egyptian exile to end and Yehuda to take power, Yosef had to rule during the exile. Yosef’s rule subdued the Angel of Egypt and enabled the Israelites to escape from Egyptian slavery. After the Exodus from Egypt, the primacy of Yehuda was established – the Tribe of Yehuda traveled first in the desert, and in Eretz Yisroel the dynasty of David emerged from Yehuda.

The future redemption, says the Shlah, will follow a similar pattern. It will begin with a moshiach from the tribe of Yosef, who will reign not as part of a permanent dynasty but as a preparation for the moshiach from the dynasty of David.

Yosef understood all of this. But his brothers, when they saw Yosef planning to be king over them, thought that he wanted permanent royalty for himself and was thus challenging the Davidic dynasty, a capital crime.

When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he finally explained to them the entire picture. He said, “G-d sent me before you to allow you to remain alive in the land, and to give you life for a great escape” (45:7). Yosef was assuring them that he did not see his rulership as a permanent thing, a goal unto itself, but rather a preparation for the Exodus and eventual monarchy of the tribe of Yehuda.

Since Yosef’s rise to power was a preparation for the redemption, it was subject to the oath against forcing the end, which forbids making any efforts on our own. Unlike making a living and healing, redemption is an area where all human effort is forbidden. That is why Yosef was punished so severely for enlisting the help of the cupbearer. His rise to power – and with it the entire redemption – was postponed.

Although Rashi at the end of Vayeishev speaks only of the sin of trusting in man, and does not mention the sin of forcing the end, he means that because this sort of effort is forbidden, use of it demonstrates lack of trust in Hashem - for truthfully, even efforts to make a living or to heal oneself would have been forbidden, had the Torah not permitted them explicitly.

One might ask: Don’t we see that Yosef made his own efforts to become a ruler? After interpreting Pharaoh’s dream, he offered unsolicited advice on how to avoid starvation during the famine, thus earning Pharaoh’s admiration and his appointment as ruler.

But the truth is that Yosef did not give the advice on his own initiative. One may not offer advice to a wicked man. Chazal say (Bava Basra 4a) that Daniel was punished for giving advice to Nevuchadnetzar (Daniel 4:24). Rather, Yosef’s advice was actually part of his interpretation of the dream.

When Pharaoh related his dream to Yosef, he said, “And [the seven fat cows] came into [the seven thin cows], and it was not recognizable that they came into them, and their appearance was as bad as before” (41:21). This detail of the dream was not mentioned by the Torah earlier (v. 4). The reason is that there is a rule that every dream must have some meaningless element (Rashi on 37:10). In Pharaoh’s dream, the meaningless element was that the thin cows looked thin even after they had swallowed up the fat cows – which would have meant that in the years of famine, people would starve to death and the years of plenty would give them no benefit. Had Yosef not given his advice to store up grain, this would have come true, the dream would have had no meaningless element, and thus Yosef’s interpretation would have been wrong. In order to interpret the dream correctly,

Yosef had to prevent the fulfillment of this verse by giving advice. Since this was the meaningless element of the dream, it was not mentioned by the Torah earlier in v. 4.

Thus, Yosef's rise to power was completely an act of Hashem – Pharaoh's dream was from Hashem, the interpretation was placed in Yosef's mind by Hashem, and the advice he gave Pharaoh was part of that interpretation. The only time he tried to take action on his own was when he asked the cupbearer for help, and for that he was punished.

Today there is a school of Zionist thought that says that Zionism is the preparation for the coming of moshiach, fulfilling the function of moshiach ben yosef. It is true that the Shlah says that the future redemption will be preceded by a ruler from the tribe of Yosef, but as we have seen here, this moshiach ben yosef is part of the process of redemption, and therefore no human effort is permitted to place him in power. The punishment for any such effort is that the redemption is postponed – just as it was in Yosef's case.

Vayigash 5768

And Yehuda approached him, and said, "Please, my master, let your servant speak a word in the ears of my master, and be not angry with your servant, for your likes are like Pharaoh." (44:18)

Rashi says that Yehuda spoke harshly to Yosef. But why was Yehuda so angry? Hadn't he just said that all the brothers were willing to be slaves as punishment for stealing the silver cup? Yosef was the one who had been lenient when he said, "Far be it from me to do that! The man in whose sack the cup was found will be my slave, and you will go up in peace to your father."

Furthermore, what is the meaning of the words "for your likes are like Pharaoh"? He should have simply said "for you are like Pharaoh".

Furthermore, why did Yosef say "Far be it from me to do that!" Rashi on 44:10 tells us that the Egyptian law was indeed that if one member of a group was caught stealing, the entire group was sold into slavery. Certainly a ruler has the power to grant clemency and bend the rules, but the words "far be it from me" are not appropriate.

The Satmar Rav explains that Yosef was acting as a Jew, saying: "Far be it from me to follow Egyptian law and go against the Torah! I will take only Binyamin as a slave." Therefore Yehuda spoke harshly and said, "If you are following the Torah, the Torah says that only a thief who has no money to pay back becomes a slave, but Binyamin has money to pay back."

Although Hashem prevented Yehuda and his brothers from recognizing this ruler as their brother Yosef, they did see that he had some holiness in him and was following the Torah. On the other hand, when it came to Binyamin's form of punishment he was acting like an Egyptian. He was straddling two sides of the fence.

Those who straddle two sides of the fence are more dangerous than those who are only on the wrong side of the fence, because they lead others astray. The first of the Ten Commandments is to believe in G-d, and the second is not to worship any other gods. One who keeps the first without keeping the second is a greater threat to the Jewish people. This is why Eliyahu told the Jews on Mt. Carmel (Melachim I 18:21), "Until when will you straddle both sides of the fence? If Hashem is G-d, follow Him, and if the Baal, follow him!" And that is why Yehoshua said to the people (Yehoshua 24:15), "And if it is bad in your eyes to serve Hashem, choose whomever you want to serve, the gods your fathers worshipped on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Emorites in whose land you live." Eliyahu and Yehoshua were not encouraging idol worship, but were teaching the people that they had to make a clear choice: Hashem or idolatry. Serving both was not an option. (Akeidah, Vaeschanan 89)

The Kli Yakar on Devarim 25:13 says that the prohibition to have in one's pocket "two stones, a large and a small" means that one may not have both an accurate and an inaccurate measure. If one has only inaccurate measures, everyone will know he is a cheater and no one will trust him. But the more dangerous cheater is the one who sometimes uses an accurate measure in order to appear honest.

Yehuda and his brothers knew that G-d had decreed that they must live in exile under the Egyptians, and they were willing to accept the decree. They could live under a Pharaoh who followed all Egyptian practices and posed no spiritual danger to them. But this Egyptian ruler was straddling both sides, following the Torah partially and Egyptian law partially. Under such a ruler they could not live, and this is why Yehuda spoke harshly to him.

He also said, "For your likes are like Pharaoh," meaning that someone like you, who follows a mixture of Torah and Egyptian law, will eventually become a complete Egyptian like Pharaoh, with no holiness at all. However, there are rare exceptions to this, and so Yehuda did not want to say directly, "You are like Pharaoh."

When Pharaoh first met Yosef, he said, "Can we find anyone like this, a man who has the spirit of G-d in him?" Why didn't he say, "Can we find a man who has the spirit of G-d in him like this one?" The answer is that Yosef was able to speak all seventy languages, because the angel Gabriel came to him the night before and taught him the languages. But Pharaoh did not know about the angel, and so he assumed that Yosef had learned all those languages by studying the non-Jewish literature and idolatrous texts. Thus he said, "Can we find anyone like this, who has studied all these texts, and yet has the spirit of G-d in him?" Pharaoh recognized Yosef as an exception. In a similar way, the Chassid Yaavetz writes that studying philosophy is very bad and is sure to bring spiritual destruction upon the Jew. Then he adds, "Do not ask me, what about the Rambam, who studied philosophy yet remained a great tzaddik? The Rambam was holy from the womb and a miracle occurred for him, like a man who eats snakes and scorpions and derives nourishment from them."

So Yehuda said, "I recognize that you have some holiness in you and I am not sure if you will end up being like Pharaoh. But someone like you will end up like Pharaoh!" (Divrei Yoel, p. 431)

Vayigash 5769

And G-d said to Yisroel in visions of the night, and He said, Yaakov, Yaakov, and he said, here I am (46:2).

"Night" is a metaphor for exile; thus "visions of the night" means that this prophecy was the vision of exile. G-d called him "Yaakov" to teach him that in exile he must hold himself low, like the heel ("eikev", heel, is included in the name "Yaakov"). (See Shem Mishmuel, quoted in Parshas Shemos, p. ??) Yaakov was commanded to accept upon himself the exile and to make a declaration similar to the declaration traditionally made before fulfilling a mitzvah: "Behold, I am prepared and ready to accept upon myself the yoke of exile and the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven."

Once Yaakov accepted this, G-d continued with the next verse: "And He said, I am G-d, G-d of your father; do not fear going down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there." Here G-d reveals to him one of the great purposes of the exile: the purification of the sparks of holiness that fell from the holy source. By elevating these sparks, Yaakov's descendents would become a great nation. (Ohev Yisroel)

We see here that only after Yaakov Avinu accepted the exile as a command of G-d, was he privileged to receive the promise of the great benefit that would come of exile: the purification of the sparks. But someone who resists the exile and tries to end it, although in the end he will not succeed and will be forced to endure exile anyway, will not enjoy any of its benefits.

Vayigash 5770

נתנדב ע"י הרה"ח ר' משה יהודה גאלדבערגער הי"ו
בשכר זה יהי רצון שיזכה להצלחה בכל עניניו

And Yosef could not tolerate all who stood before him, and he called out, "Remove all men from before me!" And no man stood with him, when Yosef made himself known to his brothers. (45:1)

Rashi explains: Yosef could not stand the idea that Egyptians would be standing there and hearing how his brothers were embarrassed when he made himself known to them. Since Yosef's revelation was an implicit rebuke to his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, Yosef did not want the Egyptians to be present. In an internal Jewish matter, non-Jews must not be involved. From their point of view, all Jews must be united.

Indeed, we find that when the sin of selling Yosef became known to the non-Jewish world, they used it as an excuse to persecute the Jews: the Yom Kippur Machzor tells

how the Roman emperor Hadrian tortured and killed the ten greatest rabbis of his time in retribution for the crime of Yosef's brothers.

The Gemara (Bava Basra 99a) cites a contradiction as to how the Cherubim stood on the lid of the Holy Ark. According to Shemos 25:20, they faced one another; according to Divrei Hayamim II 3:13, they faced away from each other, toward the walls of the Temple. The Gemara resolves this: when the Jewish people fulfilled the will of Hashem, the Cherubim faced each other as a sign of Hashem's love for them. When the Jewish people sinned, they faced away from each other.

But in Yuma 54b, the Gemara tells us that when the Babylonians destroyed the Temple, they entered the Holy of Holies and found the Cherubim facing each other in an embrace. They took them out to the street and said derisively, "Israel, whose blessing is a blessing and whose curse is a curse, should be interested in such things?" This is the meaning of the verse in Eicha 1:8: "All those who honored her now despised her, for they saw her exposure."

The Ritva and other Rishonim ask: How could the Cherubim have been facing each other at the destruction of the Temple? Weren't the Jews sinning then? A prominent rosh yeshiva answered: Yes, Hashem was angry with the Jews at that time, but that wasn't the gentiles' business. From their viewpoint, the Jews were still the holiest of nations, and Hashem was still as close to them as ever. When the Father rebukes His children, He does so in the privacy of His home, but for the outside world, He shows the same love for the Jewish people as always.

Yet there are times when it is important to express disapproval of other Jews in front of the non-Jewish world. When a Jew commits a crime against the gentiles, and the gentiles know about it already and are angry about it, this creates a danger to all Jews. That Jew is classified as a rodef – and we must disassociate ourselves from him in order to save the rest of the Jewish people.

The source for this is the Rambam, Yesodei Hatorah 5:5. The Rambam says that if the gentiles surround a group of Jews and say, "Give us one of you, or else we will kill all of you," then they are forbidden to hand anyone over. But if the gentiles say, "Give us so-and-so, or we will kill all of you," then it depends: if that so-and-so is liable to die, then we hand him over, but if not, we do not hand him over. The Rambam's source is the Yerushalmi, Terumos 47a.

The Kesef Mishneh cites the question of the Ramach: The Gemara says (Pesachim 25b) that the reason why one must give one's life rather than kill another person is the logical argument, "How do you know that your blood is redder than his?" But in this case, where the gentiles select a particular person who is not liable to die, why is it forbidden to give him over? Here the logic does not apply, for if they do not give him over, the gentiles will kill all of them, including that person! The Kesef Mishneh answers that the logical argument about whose blood is redder is not the real reason for the law; Chazal received

a tradition from Sinai that we may not hand over a fellow Jew, whether it makes sense logically or not.

If this is so, why is it permitted to hand over a Jew who is liable to die? We must answer that if the Jew was liable to die, then he had no right to hide from the gentiles among his Jewish brethren. By hiding there, he has endangered his brethren's lives, and thus he has the status of a rodef, one who pursues another Jew to kill him. One may even kill a rodef, so certainly it is allowed to hand him over to the gentiles. But if he not liable to die, and the gentiles just selected a Jew at random, then he is not a rodef, for at the time he joined the group of Jews, the gentiles were not trying to kill him. According to this explanation, it is clear that when the Rambam says "if the Jew was liable to die," he does not mean that the Jew must have committed some serious crime that carries the death penalty in Jewish law, or even in non-Jewish law. That is not the point. The question is only whether the gentiles were after him previously, before he joined his brethren, or only now they have selected him at random as their victim.

Now we must consider the following case. Let us say that a Jew committed a crime for which the gentiles, if they catch him, will kill him. But the gentiles do not know exactly who the criminal is. They accuse the entire Jewish community of the crime, and threaten to kill all of them unless they turn in the criminal. The Jews know who the criminal is. Should they turn him in? According to the above, the answer is yes, for since that Jew committed a capital crime and then hid among his brethren, he has endangered the lives of all the Jews, and is therefore a rodef. This is stated explicitly by the Taz in Yoreh Deah 157:8.

The first famous incident when this law was put into practice is recorded in Shoftim 15:9. The Philistine army besieged the Jews and demanded that they hand over Shimshon, who had killed many Philistines. The Jews came to Shimshon and said, "Don't you know that the Philistines are ruling over us? What is this you have done to us?" The Malbim explains this based on the Rambam quoted above. When the Rambam says "liable to die," he means that the gentile government has decided to kill him, says the Malbim. Therefore Shimshon, through his violent actions against the Philistines, was a rodef on the Jewish people, and it was permitted to give him over. (Shimshon replied, "As they did to me, so I did to them," meaning that he had thought that his violence was only on a personal level and would not affect the relationship of the Jews to the Philistines.)

This is all the more true if what is involved is not literally turning in the rodef, but disassociating ourselves from him in such a way that the gentiles will not get confused between him and the rest of the Jewish people. This can be done by denouncing his sins in front of the gentiles. Yosef's brothers had committed a crime only against him, not against the Egyptians, so there was no need for the Egyptians to witness his rebuke to them. The Jews at the time of the destruction of the Temple had committed sins against Hashem and amongst themselves, not against other nations, so Hashem's rebuke to them was none of the nations' business. But when a group of Jews offends the gentiles in such a way that they want to kill them, and this group pretends to have the support of all Jews, it is a mitzvah to show the gentiles that we disapprove of them.

This was why at the height of the Jewish zealots' war against Rome, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai came to the Roman emperor Vespasian, addressed him respectfully and apologized for not having come earlier (Gittin 56b). He disassociated himself from the zealots, saying: "It was the zealots among us who did not let me come out to surrender to you."

Vayechi 5768

And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years (47:28).

Rashi says that one reason why this parsha, unlike all others, begins with a "closed paragraph" - in the middle of a line with no break at all - is that Yaakov Avinu wanted to reveal to his children the time when the final redemption would come, but it was closed and hidden from him.

Rabbeinu Bachya adds that this metaphor of "closed" is used in reference to the final redemption in another place. The prophet Yishaya said (9:6), "When authority is increased and there is no end to peace, on the throne of David and his kingdom, to prepare it and support it." The word "increased" (leamarbei) is written with a final, closed mem in the middle of a word, in violation of the rules of Hebrew. This is to hint that the authority and elevation of Israel is closed during exile. During exile, the Jewish people will have no authority, and the time at which they will regain that authority will be closed and hidden from all.

There is one other place, says Rabbeinu Bachya, where the rules of open and closed letters are broken. That is in Nechemiah 2:13, which relates that Nechemiah saw "the wall of Jerusalem, which were open, and its gates had been consumed by fire." The word "hem" – they [were open] – is written with a regular, open mem, not the final mem that is supposed to be used at the end of a word. The open mem hints to the open walls of Jerusalem.

The Midrash (it is unknown what Midrash he is referring to) says that when one of these grammatical errors will be fixed, the other will as well. When moshiach comes and the walls of Jerusalem become closed - symbolized by the closing of the mem -then the authority of the Jewish people will no longer be closed and hidden - symbolized by the opening of the mem.

Vayechi 5769

And Yaakov called to his sons, and he said, "Gather together and I will tell you what will happen to you in the end of days." (49:1)

Our Sages teach that when the Mishkan was first completed, Moshe Rabbeinu set it up and took it down every day for seven days. On the eighth day, he set it up and left it up (Rashi on Bamidbar 7:1). Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, the Gerrer Rebbe (1866-1948), asked: Why did he have to take apart the Mishkan each day? He answered that

Moshe's actions symbolized the seven Temples that were built and destroyed: the Mishkan in the desert, the Mishkan at Gilgal, the Tabernacle at Shilo, the Tabernacle of Nov, the Tabernacle of Givon, the Temple of Solomon and the Second Temple. The eighth day symbolized the eighth Temple, which will be built by G-d Himself and will never be destroyed. Moshe wanted to teach us that anything built by human hands will ultimately not last.

It is possible that the Zionists will one day try to build a Temple, but we must not let that weaken our faith in the least. Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum related that his grandfather heard Rabbi Israel of Ryzhin say over 150 years ago: "Jews, you must know that before the coming of the messiah, a fire will come down from heaven like the fire that came down for Elijah the prophet on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:38). But there will be a big difference: then the fire came down for Eliyahu Hanavi, but in the future before the coming of the messiah, it will come down for the prophets of the Baal. And Jews will have to climb up sheer walls to remain with their faith."

Rabbi Israel of Ryzhin continued: The only solution for a Jew to stay safe from heresy at that time will be to stick together with other believing Jews. This is what Yaakov Avinu told his children, "Gather together and I will tell you what will happen to you in the end of days." The word "happen" could also be translated as "cold", just as we find in the words "asher karcha baderech" (Devarim 25:18) which Rashi translates as "he [Amalek] made it cold for you on the way." In the end of days, when Amalek tries with all his might to "cool off" the Jewish people and lead them astray from their faith, the only road to safety is to gather together and discuss the true emunah. (Kol Yaakov pp. 81-82)

For your salvation I hope, Hashem! (49:19)

Rashi says that Yaakov Avinu was praying for Shimshon, who asked Hashem to strengthen him one last time at the end of his life.

The Targum Yonasan, however, says that on the contrary, Yaakov was saying: "Not for the salvation of Gideon or Shimshon do I wait, for it is but a temporary salvation. For Your salvation I hope, Hashem, for it is an eternal salvation."

The question may be raised: why did Yaakov say this in his blessing for the tribe of Dan? All the other tribes had leaders who saved the Jewish people at one time or another. Yaakov could have mentioned them in their respective blessings, and then said that he hoped only for Hashem's salvation. In particular, Gideon from the tribe of Menashe is mentioned right here in this Targum Yonasan. So why did Yaakov feel the need to emphasize his hoping for Hashem only to Dan?

The answer is that Dan is the tribe that stumbled most in idolatry. It is they who set up Micha's idol in their land. The Meam Loez (Shemos 28:19) says that in the kohein gadol's breastplate, Dan's stone was the leshem, in which one can see his reflection upside down. This hints at the fact that his test was idolatry, and to overcome it he would have to focus himself "Lashem" - to Hashem alone.

Vayechi

And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years. (47:28)

The Baal Haturim comments that those seventeen years, together with the seventeen years from when Yosef was born until he was sold, were the 34 best years of Yaakov's life – equaling the numerical value of the word Vayechi.

Not only were things good during the lifetime of Yaakov – Rashi tells us (on Shemos 6:16) that as long as Yaakov's sons were alive, there was no slavery. This means that the slavery could not have lasted longer than 116 years, from the death of Levi until the Exodus.

The Chida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef Dovid Azoulay, 1724-1807) in his commentary Simchas Haregel on the Haggadah, asks: We know the exile in Egypt was supposed to last 400 years, as Hashem promised Avraham Avinu (Bereishis 15:13). The commentators all deal with the question of why the decree was shortened to 210 years. But even of these 210 years, the Jews suffered for only 116. What happened to Hashem's decree? In what way was the first part of their stay in Egypt considered exile?

He answers this based on the words of the Haggadah: “And he descended to Egypt – by compulsion of Hashem's word.” For tzaddikim such as Yaakov Avinu and his sons, all worldly pleasures, wealth and honor were unimportant. Their only desire was to live in the Holy Land and be close to Hashem. After they came to Egypt, were reunited with Yosef and the famine ended, they would have returned to the Holy Land, but they were forbidden to do so by the decree of Hashem. Now we understand why those years counted as part of the exile – they longed to return to the Holy Land, yet they stayed in Egypt in obedience to Hashem.

Rabbi Yitzchok Lebovits of Khal Yereim, Woodridge, applied this lesson to our situation in American exile today. We must arouse within ourselves nostalgic emotions for the Holy Land, intense cravings for the land of our forefathers. By doing so, we will sense that our existence here is exile, and only Hashem's decree compels us to abide by it. We control our longing for Eretz Yisroel and do not attempt to force the end of the exile through any means whatsoever, G-d forbid; we accept the decree of the Creator with love and we dwell in these lands of the exile because that is what Hashem decreed.

Historically, maintaining this attitude ensured that when exile was not so comfortable, during the many centuries when Jews were subjected to humiliation, intimidation and persecution, they entertained no thoughts of self-emancipation. They surrendered their personal desires to the will of Hashem, lovingly accepting His decree and the hardships accompanying it. Even following the Holocaust, when the Jewish people were tempted with the opportunity to establish a Jewish sovereign state - which would supposedly fulfill the natural desire prevalent amongst Jews then, to have their dignity reinstated –

the strongest among us resisted and declared their willingness to continue living in exile, despite all that they had been through.

But not everyone was so strong. Then Hashem had mercy on His nation and the United States of America too opened its doors. In America, where there exists a constitution ensuring justice for all, as well as a multicultural society where one particular nation does not have sole dominion or permanence, the feeling of being alien has been somewhat lessened for us Jews who reside here. This decreased the difficulty of the challenge of desiring Jewish independence and statehood prior to the arrival of moshiach. If not for the existence of this comfortable exile, who knows if there would even be a minyan of Jews left who could withstand that challenge?

But the test remained difficult for those who had traveled to the Holy Land. Upon the unfortunate recognition by the nations of the Jewish "right" to an independent state, even many of those Jews who had up until that time chosen to remain uninvolved in Zionist activity became gripped with confusion. They began to be inclined to regard the heretical enterprise as a benefit to Jews and an advancement for Judaism. These circumstances prompted our rabbis of blessed memory to once again "wage the war of Hashem" and protest with all their might against the legitimacy of a "Jewish" state prior to the arrival of Moshiach.

Presently however, we Jewish residents of America must conduct a session of genuine soul-searching to ensure that America's liberty from which we benefit so much has not adversely affected us. Perhaps the fact that we have not succumbed to the Zionist temptation – a fact on which many of us pride ourselves - is the result of a phenomenon deserving of much shame. Perhaps it is not because of our loyalty to Hashem and His Holy Torah that we find ourselves able to remain uninfluenced by Zionism, but rather due to our feeling comfortable and satisfied here with an abundance of mundane pleasures. Because of the freedom that we feel here, we have ceased to long for the announcement of the Eliyahu Hanavi, the redemption of moshiach and the return to Zion. We remain apathetic to the plight of the Holy Shechinah in exile.

Under such circumstances, bathing in earthly pleasures, it is certainly simple to exercise restraint and not attempt self-emancipation. Heaven forefend, who knows if Hashem will be impressed with us?

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 33:6) expounds on the verse, "She sat amongst the nations but did not find sanctuary" (Eicha 1:3), as follows: "R. Yudan bar Nechemia said in the name of R. Shimon bar Levi: If she found sanctuary she would not return." If the Nation of Israel found rest amongst the nations of the world, they would not desire to be redeemed. The Chasam Sofer writes, "If we were affluent in the lands of the nations and the governments displayed affection to us, we would not desire redemption at all. We would expend all efforts in order to assimilate with the gentiles, to charm them and emulate them, Heaven forbid (Drashos Chasam Sofer, p.335, column 3; see also Drashos Ksav Sofer, Tisha B'av p. 86).

It is Hashem who has presented this challenge and it is very difficult to withstand. It is our duty to constantly bear in mind, and not to forget even for a brief moment, that our existence here in this foreign land is by the decree of Hashem. He moved us from one country to the next, until He brought us here. We do not live here because life here is pleasant, but because we are compelled to by Hashem. (Drasha by Rabbi Yitzchok Lebovits, 5 Iyar 5758)

See also the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh on the posuk בניו ובני בניו אתו בנותיו ובנות בניו וכל זרעו הביא אתו מצרימה who says that whoever accepted the golus willingly, l'shem shamayim, was rewarded by not having slavery in their lifetime.

Shemos 5768

And these are the names of the children of Yisroel who came to Egypt, with Yaakov, each man with his household came. (1:1)

The patriarch Yaakov had two names: Yaakov and Yisroel. Why does the Torah begin with Yisroel and then switch to Yaakov in mid-sentence? Rabbi Shmuel Borenstein, son of the Avnei Nezer, said that the name Yisroel denotes the elevated and noble status of the Jew, as the angel said when explaining this name, "For you have ruled over angels and men and been successful" (Bereishis 32:29). The name Yaakov, on the other hand, denotes the Jew in exile who must lower himself, bow and scrape before the gentiles, just as Yaakov bowed before his brother Esav and called him "my master".

When Israel began the Egyptian exile, they had to be very careful not to assimilate there and become like the Egyptians. Therefore they armed themselves with three physical boundary-markers that safeguarded the nobility of the Jew, symbolized by the name "Yisroel": they kept their own distinctive names, clothing and language. They viewed their own culture and beliefs as superior to those of the Egyptians; they looked down on and despised the Egyptian idolatry. Hence: "These are the names of the children of Yisroel who came to Egypt" – they survived their stay in Egypt because of the power and nobility of Yisroel.

Yet at the same time the Torah says "with Yaakov" – that in addition to this nobility they maintained the attitude of subservience indicated by the name Yaakov. They accepted the yoke of exile willingly, and they did not complain about the heavy burden of exile. The Kuzari (3:12) says that a Jew who endures the exile with complaints almost loses his share in the World to Come. There was no contradiction between their subservience and their nobility and superiority, because the subservience was not to Egypt, but to G-d, Who had decreed the exile upon them. These two modes of conduct were what kept the Jewish people alive in exile.

This conduct must serve as our model during the current long and bitter exile, to feel the nobility of our Torah ways and yet bow to our oppressors, as the prophet writes, "He gives his beater his jaw, and suffers humiliation" (Eichah 3:30). Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pshischa once said, "If a gentile calls out an insult at a Jew and the Jew answers back, he

lengthens the exile, G-d protect us." Rather the Jew must bear the exile while feeling inner strength and nobility. (This is the opposite of the well-known movement that cannot bear to continue with the subservience and burdens of exile.) By so doing, we will soon merit the redemption, when our ashes will be replaced by pride. (Shem Mishmuel, Shemos, year 5677 (1917))

Once the Satmar Rebbe was walking with Reb Elimelech Schwartz, and a gentile was coming toward them. Reb Elimelech approached him and asked him to move to the side so that the Rebbe could pass. When they got home, the Rebbe rebuked him, "Why did you do that? It's his street!" (Tiferes Yoel v. 2, p. 69)

Shemos 5769

When you take the people out of Egypt, they will serve G-d upon this mountain. (3:12)

The Hagadah says, "The Torah speaks of four sons: one righteous, one wicked, one simple and one who does not know how to ask. The wicked son says, 'Why do you need this service?' The reply he is given is, 'If you had been there, you would not have been redeemed.'" Why is it necessary to tell this to the wicked son?

Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum said that although the Hagadah abridges the story, from the reply to the wicked son we can infer what his argument must have been. He must have argued that he could accomplish the redemption without all these mitzvos. "What do you need them for?" he sneers. "All one has to do to be a Jew is love the Land of Israel and speak Hebrew. With that alone we could have been redeemed from Egypt." We reply to him, "The entire purpose of the Exodus was to "serve G-d upon this mountain" i.e. to receive the mitzvos of the Torah. If you had been there and refused to do mitzvos, you would not have been redeemed. Your Land and your Hebrew would not have helped you!"

On Pesach night we eat matzo and then maror. The Gerrer Rebbe asked that seemingly, the order should have been reversed. The slavery in Egypt came before the redemption, so the maror, symbolizing slavery, should be before the matzo, which symbolizes redemption. He answers that on the day of the Exodus, G-d lifted up the Jews to a very high spiritual level to show them how high it was possible to go, and then He let them down again so that they could work on themselves in the 49 days preceding the Giving of the Torah at Sinai. The Jews felt their spiritual lack, and realized for the first time that they had been in a spiritual exile as well as a physical one. Now they were at last free from the physical exile, and they were able to begin working on their spiritual deficiencies. This is why maror – the bitterness of that spiritual exile – comes only after matzo – the physical redemption.

The final freedom came only when the Jews received the Torah on Mount Sinai. Chazal therefore say that "there is no free man like the man who learns Torah" (Pirkei

Avos 6:2). But the wicked son, who has no interest in this sort of freedom, would not have been redeemed.

Shemos 5770

And it will come to pass on that day that Hashem will beat out [the Jews] from the Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt, and you will be picked up one by one, Children of Israel. (Haftarah, Yishaya 27:12)

Rashi says that the prophet is comparing the ingathering of the exiles to beating an olive tree and subsequently picking up the fallen olives. The owner does the beating and then he and others pick them up off the ground. Here too, Hashem will begin the ingathering process, as it says in the following verse: “And it will come to pass on that day that a great shofar will be blown and there will come those lost in the land of Assyria, and those cast away in the land of Egypt, and they will bow to Hashem in the holy mountain, in Jerusalem.” Later, anyone who finds one of you in exile will bring him up to Jerusalem as a gift..

We see here that the process of gathering in the exiles will be begun by Hashem, not by human effort. This is also the meaning of the verse: “And they will bring all your brethren from all the nations as a gift to Hashem” (Yishaya 66:20). The Metzudas David says there: “They will bring all your brethren – this means the Jews who are far away, who did not ascend with their brethren. The gentiles among whom those Jews live, when they hear about the great wonder that Hashem will do to the camp of Gog and Magog, will bring the Jews on horses and chariots as a gift to Hashem on His holy mountain.” In other words, this is talking about a period in which most of the Jewish people has already been gathered to Eretz Yisroel by Hashem. The nations will gather under Gog and Magog against the Jewish people in Jerusalem, as mentioned in Yishaya 66:18. Hashem will defeat them in a wondrous manner, as described in Zechariah 14:12. After word of this defeat spreads throughout the world (Yishaya 66:19), the gentiles will bring those few Jews remaining in exile to Eretz Yisroel as a gift to Hashem.

Those who advocate a Jewish ingathering with the support of gentile nations before the coming of moshiach point to the commentary on Shir Hashirim attributed to the Ramban (actually it was written by Rabbeinu Ezra, disciple of Rabbeinu Yitzchak, son of the Raavad). On Shir Shirim 8:13 he writes as follows: And after this, the Jews scattered among the nations will appoint one leader over them - Moshiach ben David, who was with them in exile – and with the permission of the kings of the nations and with their help, they will go to Eretz Yisroel, as it is written, “And they will bring all of your brethren from all the nations as a gift to Hashem.” That kingdom will exist forever. And that is the meaning of the verse, “The word of Hashem G-d, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel: I will once again gather unto it, to its gathered ones” (Yishaya 56:8). “Who gathers the dispersed of Israel” – this refers to the Ten Tribes. “I will once again gather unto it” – this refers to Yehuda. The Torah also refers to these two gatherings when it says, “And Hashem your G-d will return your captives and have mercy on you; and He will go back

and gather you from all the nations to which Hashem your G-d scattered you” (Devarim 30:3).

But these people are missing an obvious point. Rabbeinu Ezra is saying that the second stage of the ingathering will take place with the permission of the kings. The first stage will be accomplished by Hashem alone. And as we have seen above, the verse he cites as a source for the gentiles bringing the Jews up – Yishaya 66:20 – was understood by Metzudos David as referring to the second stage of the ingathering, not the first. The same was stated by Rashi on Yishaya 27:12. Furthermore, Rabbeinu Ezra says clearly this ingathering will take place after Moshiach ben David is already here.

It is worth noting that Rabbeinu Ezra writes that even when Moshiach ben David is here, we will not regain Eretz Yisroel through warfare; the return to Zion will take place peacefully, with the permission of the nations. He explains this based on the verse in Zechariah 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion; exult, daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king will come to you; righteous and saved is he – a poor man riding on a donkey.” This modest description of Moshiach is a prophecy that the Jewish people will not regain their land through their bow and sword (Tehillim 44:4), not with horses or chariots, but by the will of the Creator, Who will subdue all the nations before them. Zechariah continues (9:10), “And I will abolish chariots from Ephraim, and horses from Jerusalem; and there will be no more bows of war, and they will speak peacefully with the nations; they will rule from sea to sea, and from river to the ends of the earth.” They will need no weapons, as it says (10:12), “I will make them mighty with Hashem, and with My name they will walk, said Hashem.”

Therefore, to see Rabbeinu Ezra’s words as a prediction of the events of our time, in which a Jewish state, recommended by some nations, was born through a war and maintained by fighting seven more wars – and all this before the coming of Moshiach – is to go completely against his intent.

The Rambam, in his commentary on Sanhedrin and in his Letter to Yemen, also seems to say that in the time of Moshiach there will be no wars. He says, “All the nations will make peace with the king Moshiach, because they will be afraid of him.” Similarly, in Hilchos Teshuva 9:2, the Rambam says (based on Yishaya 2:2) that all the nations will come to hear the wisdom of Moshiach. However, in Hilchos Melachim 11:4 he says that Moshiach will “fight the wars of Hashem.” Perhaps this is referring to the war of Gog and Magog, which the Rambam says (Melachim 12:2) will take place in the beginning of the days of Moshiach. We can say that when the Rambam says that all the nations will make peace with him, he means only after this war. As the Rambam says there, no one will know how these things will happen until they happen.

**"And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be your G-d, and you will know that I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out from under the burdens of Egypt."
(6:7)**

In the Gemara, Berachos 38a, there is a dispute about the meaning of the word "hamotzi" in this verse. Rabbi Nechemiah says it is present-future tense: "You must know that I am Hashem Who is taking you out from under the burdens of Egypt." The other Rabbis say it is past tense, and they connect it to the beginning of the verse: "I will take you to Me for a people when I give you the Torah, and then you will know that it was I, Hashem, Who took you out from under the burdens of Egypt."

This led to a dispute about the correct wording of the blessing over bread. According to the Rabbis, it is "hamotzi lechem min haaretz," meaning "who brought forth bread from the earth." But Rabbi Nechemiah holds that one cannot say "hamotzi" because that would mean "who is bringing forth bread from the earth," which would not make sense because the bread upon which he is making the blessing already came forth from the earth. Rather, one must say "motzi", which is definitely past tense as is evident from Bamidbar 23:22.

The Gemara tells a story: Rabbi Zeira heard his students praising a certain scholar, saying that he was a great man and an expert on blessings. He asked his students to send this scholar to his house so that he could meet him. When the scholar came, Rabbi Zeira served him bread. The scholar recited the blessing "motzi lechem min haaretz" and ate. Rabbi Zeira commented, "This is the man you said was an expert on blessings?! Had he said 'hamotzi', he would have taught us the meaning of the verse, as well as the fact that the halacha follows the Rabbis. But now that he said 'motzi' what has he taught us?" The Gemara adds that the scholar's intent had been to fulfill his obligation according to both opinions, Rabbi Nechemiah and the Rabbis.

The Satmar Rav asks: What was so wrong with what the scholar did? Is it not praiseworthy to be strict and fulfill all opinions? Does everyone have an obligation to make a point of being lenient in order to teach the halacha?

He explains that the reason to be lenient here is to teach the great lesson that emerges from this verse of the Torah the way the Rabbis interpret it. G-d said, "When I give the Torah, you will know that it was I Who took you out of Egypt." This seems strange: why did the Jewish people need to be convinced that G-d took them out of Egypt? Didn't they already experience ten supernatural plagues and the parting of the sea? If that did not convince them, what would?

The Rambam answers this question in Foundations of the Torah 8:1: "The Jews did not believe in Moshe our teacher because of the miracles that he performed. For one who believes based on miracles retains some doubt in his mind, for it is possible that the miracle was done through magic or witchcraft. Rather, all the miracles Moshe did in the wilderness, he did according to the needs of the time, not to bring proof to his prophecy. He needed to drown the Egyptians, so he split the sea and sunk them in it. We needed food, so he brought down the manna. They were thirsty, so he split the rock. The company of Korach disbelieved in him, so the earth swallowed them up. The same is true of all the other miracles. And on what basis did they believe in him? When we stood at Mount Sinai and our eyes saw and not someone else's eyes, our ears heard and

not someone else's ears, the fire and the thunder and the torches, and he drew near to the thick darkness, and the voice spoke to him, and we heard it: 'Moshe, Moshe, go tell them such-and-such.' And so it says, (Devarim 5:4) 'Face to face Hashem spoke with you.' And it says (ibid. v. 3), 'Not with our forefathers did Hashem establish this covenant.' And how do we know that our experience at Mount Sinai alone is the proof that Moshe's prophecy is true? The Torah says (Shemos 19:9), 'Behold I come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people might hear when I speak to you, and also in you they will believe forever.' This implies that previously, they did not believe in him with a permanent belief, but a belief that leaves room for doubts and second thoughts."

Thus the giving of the Torah was the only true proof that G-d was the one Who took us out of Egypt. Only after the giving of the Torah was it clear beyond a doubt that the miracles of the Exodus were the work of G-d and not done in some other way.

In our time as well, we must always keep in mind that the success of an enterprise does not prove it correct, for success, even extraordinary success, can come about in a number of ways. To determine what is right or wrong we must look only to G-d's words spoken at Mount Sinai and recorded in the Torah, and then we will never be led astray. This is the lesson of the word "hamotzi." (Divrei Yoel, Vayikra p. 82).

Va'eira 5769

And Pharaoh called for Moshe and Aharon, and he said, "Go sacrifice to your G-d in this land." And Moshe said, "It is not proper to do that, for we will slaughter the deity of Egypt to Hashem our G-d; behold, if we were to slaughter the deity of Egypt before their eyes, would they not stone us?" (8:21-22)

This answer given by Moshe seems strange. Moshe and the Jews never let fear of the Egyptians stop them from doing anything. Moshe came and went in Pharaoh's palace without permission, giving him harsh warnings. On the day before the Exodus, the Jews did indeed slaughter the lamb, the deity of Egypt, before their eyes.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 16:3) says this explicitly: "The Holy One, blessed is He, said to Moshe: By your life, Israel will not leave here until they slaughter the god of Egypt before their eyes. I will show them that their god is nothing... on that night Israel slaughtered their pesach offerings and ate them, and the Egyptians saw their firstborn killed and their gods slaughtered, and they could do nothing... Let all those who serve idols be ashamed!"

So how could Moshe have been afraid of the Egyptians stoning the Jews? And if he was not really afraid, but just used this as an excuse to Pharaoh, why did Pharaoh believe it? And if for some reason he was afraid, why did he say "it is not proper to do that"? He should have used much stronger words: "we are afraid to do that" or "it would be dangerous to do that."

The answer is that yes, when the time of redemption arrived and G-d instructed the Jews to slaughter the deity of Egypt, they could do so without fear. But now it was not yet the time of redemption, and G-d had not commanded them to slaughter the deity of Egypt before their eyes, so this slaughter would have been a transgression of the prohibition on provoking the gentiles during exile.

For the same reason, G-d commanded Moshe and Aharon to speak respectfully to Pharaoh, as Rashi says (6:13). The time of the redemption had not yet arrived, and talking arrogantly to Pharaoh would have been considered “provoking the nations.”

Moshe continued, “Three days journey we will go in the desert, and we will sacrifice to Hashem our G-d as He will say to us.” Seemingly, the words “as He will say to us” are unnecessary. But the meaning is: we must do everything just as G-d tells us. We will sacrifice here in Egypt, but only when He tells us to do so. It is not that we fear the Egyptians. They will not be able to stone us, but they will certainly want to, and it is not proper to provoke them like that. (Divrei Yoel, p. 161)

Bo 5768

**“And they baked the dough that they took out of Egypt, cakes of matza, not leavened bread, for they were driven out of Egypt, and they could not tarry...”
(12:39)**

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (on Shemos 3:7) gives his famous explanation of why Israel had to leave Egypt in such a hurry: because they had already entered 49 gates of defilement, and if they had stayed any longer, they would have entered the 50th gate, the point of no return. This is why the Hagada says, “If the Holy One, blessed is He, had not taken out our fathers from Egypt, we, our children and our children’s children would be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.” And this is what G-d meant when He said to Moshe at the Burning Bush, “I have certainly seen the poverty of My people... and I have come down to save them from Egypt” (Shemos 3:7). He saw that their spiritual poverty had reached such a level that soon, if they would stay any longer, they would never be able to leave.

The Ohr Hachaim (3:8) asks further: why then did G-d wait till the last minute? He should have taken Israel out earlier, and then they would not have had to hurry. He answers that the purpose of exile is to purify the sparks of holiness that are absorbed in the 50 gates of defilement. In Egypt they were only expected to reach 49 out of those 50 gates, and therefore they were only given 49 gates of understanding. If they had left early, they would have missed purifying some of those sparks.

However, he says, G-d promised that in the future He will grant us understanding of the Torah on the 50th level. We will gain this understanding through the exiles, and especially through the last exile. Then and only then will we be able to purify the 50th gate of defilement. But in Egypt, when the Jews did not yet have the Torah and could not reach the 50th gate of understanding, it would have been dangerous for them to enter the 50th gate of defilement.

The Chazon Ish once said to Rabbi Ahron Katzenellenboigen, "The reason Jews are so confused by the Zionist state is that the state is the 50 gates of defilement. To overcome this we need the 50 gates of holiness. Since the 50th gate of holiness is hidden from us, therefore the confusion is so great, for we cannot stand up against the 50 gates of defilement of the state." (Mishkenos Haro'im p. 1195)

Bo 5769

And it shall be to you a sign upon your hand, and a remembrance between your eyes, so that the Torah of Hashem might be in your mouth (13:9).

The Talmud (Shabbos 108a) relates that a heretic once asked Rabbi Yehoshua Hagarsi, "From what verse in the Torah do you derive the law that one may not write tefillin on the skin of a prohibited animal?" He replied, "From the verse, 'that the Torah of Hashem might be in your mouth' – from something permitted in your mouth." "If so, one should not write them even on the skins of permitted animals that died on their own, for they are also forbidden to eat," countered the heretic. "Animals that died on their own are actually more holy than animals slaughtered in the kosher way," said Rabbi Yehoshua. "I will give you an analogy. Two men were executed for their crimes. One was killed by the king and the other by an officer. Which is more respectable? The one killed by the king."

In the beginning of the Book of Vayikra, the Torah says, "And He called to Moshe..." The Midrash comments that Moshe, in his wisdom, knew not to come in before G-d called him. From this we learn, says the Midrash, that a Torah scholar who has no wisdom is worse than an animal that died of itself.

The Chasam Sofer asks three questions: 1) How could someone be called a Torah scholar at all if he has no wisdom? 2) Why is he worse than a dead animal, of all things? 3) If this is such an obvious act of disrespect, why is it necessary to use Moshe, the greatest of the prophets, as an example? And if, on the other hand, it is such a high level of piety that only someone as great as Moshe knew it, then why is anyone not on this high level considered worse than a dead animal?

He explains that of course it is common knowledge that one must not come in to visit a king without being invited. In Megillas Esther 4:11 we read that whoever would come in to the king without being called would be summarily executed. But here we are talking about a great Torah scholar and righteous man who has reached the point where he is prepared for prophecy, and when he receives no prophecy he is greatly pained and disappointed. For example, Baruch ben Neriyah, scribe and disciple of the prophet Yirmiyahu, longed to receive prophecy but did not. "I was exhausted from my groan, and found no rest," he said (Yirmiyahu 45:3). Such a person may be tempted to take exceptional steps to push for prophecy. But he must follow the example of Moshe Rabbeinu, who, despite being the greatest of all prophets, did not enter the Holy of Holies on his own to receive the word of G-d, but waited until he was summoned.

The punishment for taking exceptional steps to push for closeness to G-d without permission can be learned from the Oaths mentioned in Shir Hashirim (2:7), "I have adjured you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and deer of the field, not to awaken or arouse the love before it is desired." The Sages explain (Kesubos 111a) that this is the prohibition against Jews forcing the redemption and the end of exile, and the punishment is that G-d will declare their flesh ownerless like the gazelles and deer of the field.

Now we understand why one who pushes for prophecy is worse than an animal that died of itself. We have seen that an animal that died of itself is considered "killed by the King" whereas an animal slaughtered by human hands is considered "killed by an officer" and thus on a lower level. Lower still is an animal that was torn apart by wild predators. One who presses for closeness to G-d in an unauthorized way is, G-d forbid, made ownerless and vulnerable to wild predators, and thus meets an end that is worse than the animal that dies of itself. (Drashos Chasam Sofer, p. 152, Drush for Adar Sheni 7 and Vayikra 5586)

Bo 5770

And you shall eat it in haste; it is a Pesach offering to Hashem. (12:11)

One of the laws of the Pesach offering is that no gentile may eat of it (v. 43). The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 19:6) comments on this: This fulfills the verse, "He relates His words to Yaakov, His laws and statutes to Yisroel. He did not do so for any nation, and His statutes they do not know" (Tehillim 147:19-20). The Holy One, blessed is He said to them: Let no other nation mix into to this; let them not know its secrets, only you. In this world when Israel ate the Pesach offering in Egypt, they ate it in haste (v. 11) as it says, "For in haste you left the land of Egypt" (Devarim 16:3). But regarding the future redemption, Scripture states, "Not in haste shall you leave, and in a hurry you shall not go" (Yishaya 52:12).

This may be compared to a merchant who checked into an inn, stayed there during the day, and then arose at night, stole everything from the inn and went on his way. In the morning the innkeeper arose, and she began to shout: "Look at this merchant who arose at night, stole all my belongings and left!" When the merchant heard this, he said, "This only happened because I left at night. Therefore I swear that I will never leave at night again."

So too, Israel prepared themselves at night to leave early in the morning. After they left, the Egyptians arose and said, "Let us chase after them because they took all our belongings." The Holy One, blessed is He said to them: "This is only because you left in haste. From now on, not in haste will you leave."

This Midrash is hard to understand for several reasons: In the parable, was the merchant sorry that he stole? And what does his stealing have to do with his leaving at night? If he was a thief, he would steal during the day as well. And in the story of the Jews leaving Egypt, what did their leaving in haste have to do with their taking the Egyptians'

belongings? Finally, what is the connection of all of this to the law that a gentile may not eat from the Pesach offering, study Torah or “know its secrets”? What are these secrets?

In Sanhedrin 91a, we find the famous story of the dispute between the Egyptians and the Jews, arbitrated by Alexander the Great. The Egyptians quoted the Torah to prove that the Jews had taken their gold and silver, and they demanded it back. The Jewish advocate Geviha ben Pesisa replied that the Jews dwelt in Egypt for 430 years (Shemos 12:40). “Give us our pay for our 600,000 slaves who worked for you for 430 years,” said Geviha ben Pesisa. The Egyptians asked for three days to think of a reply; when they could not, they admitted defeat and left the land.

We see here that the gold and silver taken by the Jews was the rightful payment for their work. The Egyptians finally admitted this a thousand years later. But at the time of the Exodus they did not admit it. According to the Midrash quoted above, it seems that if the Jews had not left in haste, they would have admitted it then too. Why?

The answer is that the exile in Egypt was supposed to have lasted 400 years. However, Hashem took them out early, as it says, “The voice of my beloved, behold it has come, skipping over the mountains and jumping over the hills” (Shir Hashirim 2:8). The Midrash there says, “The voice of my beloved – this refers to Moshe. When he came and told Israel, ‘In this month you will be redeemed,’ they said, ‘Moshe our teacher! How can we be redeemed? Didn’t the Holy One, blessed is He say to Avraham that they will enslave us for 400 years? It has only been 210 years so far.’ He said to them, ‘Since He wishes to redeem you, He does not look at your calculations. He skips over the mountains – the predestined end-times.’”

When the Torah says that they left in haste, it refers to their leaving after only 210 years. Had they stayed the entire 400 years, the Egyptians would have willingly paid them. It is only because they left early that the Egyptians thought they were not entitled to any payment. They reasoned that Hashem had only promised “and afterwards they will go out with great wealth” (Bereishis 15:14) on condition that Israel would fulfill the previous verse and work for the full 400 years. (Actually, however, Hashem in His mercy considered the time Yitzchak and Yaakov spent sojourning in Canaan to be part of the 400 years of exile, so the condition was indeed fulfilled.) We see this also in the story of Geviha ben Pesisa, who won the debate with the Egyptians by quoting the verse, “The time that the Children of Israel dwelt in Egypt was 430 years.” The verse is not to be taken literally - the Jews only spent 210 years in Egypt. But the Egyptians one thousand years later had no way of knowing this, so they accepted their defeat.

The law that gentiles may not eat of the Pesach offering symbolizes the law that gentiles may not study Torah, as we see in the Midrash quoted above. They may study the Written Torah, which was translated into seventy languages and made available to all (Rashi on Devarim 27:8, Sotah 35b; see Meishiv Davar Yoreh Deah 77). But they may not study the Oral Torah, which explains that the Jews really only spent 210 years in Egypt. When the 72 sages translated the Torah for Ptolemy, king of Egypt, they disclosed this secret

(Megillah 9a) because the original Egyptians were no longer ruling Egypt. The Ptolemys were Greek rulers, descendents of one of Alexander's generals.

When Hashem saw that Egyptians at the time of the Exodus did not accept the justice of their payment of gold and silver to the Jews, He said, "This is only because they left early. In the future redemption, I swear that they will not leave exile early." Hashem knew that if we left exile early, the nations of the world would have claims against us, saying that we stole Eretz Yisroel.

The Gemara in fact tells of three debates in which Geviha ben Pesisa represented the Jews: one against the Canaanites, one against the Egyptians, and one against the Ishmaelites. It is interesting to note that in the debates against the Canaanites and the Egyptians, they each asked Alexander for three days to think of a reply, and when they could not, they admitted that Geviha ben Pesisa had won. But in the debate against the Ishmaelites, in which the Ishmaelites claimed that as descendents of Avraham they had a right to part of Eretz Yisroel, and Geviha ben Pesisa replied that Avraham had written a document willing all of his property only to Yitzchak, the Gemara does not say that the Ishmaelites attempted to reply, or admitted their defeat. It seems that the Ishmaelites never retreated from their claim on Eretz Yisroel – a claim they maintain to this day.

Whether they are aware of it or not, there is truth to their claim, as the Zohar (Shemos 32a, end of Va'eira) says: "The Angel of Yishmael stood for four hundred years before the Holy One, blessed is He, and asked: Does someone who is circumcised have a share in Your Name? He said to him: Yes. He said to him: But Yishmael is circumcised – why does he have no share in Your Name like Yitzchok? He said to him: This one was circumcised properly and this one improperly. Furthermore, these cling to Me properly, on the eighth day, but these are far from Me for many days. He said to him: Even so, since he is circumcised, should he not get some reward? (Woe to the day Yishmael was born in the world and was circumcised!) What did the Holy One, blessed is He, do? He distanced the children of Yishmael from clinging to Above, and gave them a portion below in the Holy Land because of their circumcision. The children of Yishmael are destined to rule over the Holy Land for a long time, when it is empty of all, just as their circumcision is empty, not complete (i.e. without p'riah). And they will prevent the Children of Israel from returning to their place, until that merit of Yishmael is used up."

Hashem knew that if the Jews were to leave exile early, they would arouse the Ishmaelites to claim that they had stolen Eretz Yisroel from them. Therefore He said, "For not in haste shall you leave, and in a hurry you shall not go; for Hashem walks before you, your Gatherer, the G-d of Israel" (Yishaya 52:12). If we wait for Hashem to redeem us, He will walk before us and make His presence clear to the entire world. Everyone will recognize this, and they will abandon any claims against the Jews. This is explicit in the preceding verses in Yishaya: "Eye to eye they will see when Hashem returns to Zion" (v. 8). "Hashem has bared His holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our G-d" (v. 10).

Rabbi Simcha Bunim, rav of Zachlin and disciple of Reb Mendel Kotzker, seems to have understood the verse “For not in haste shall you leave” the way we have explained it above - that we will not leave exile early. In a letter printed in Daas Harabbanim (published 1902), he responded to the then-new Zionist movement as follows: “G-d forbid for us to believe that our salvation is dependent on human power. This goes against an explicit verse: ‘And those redeemed by Hashem shall return, and come to Zion with song...’ (Yishaya 51:11). And later (ibid. 52:3), “So said Hashem: You were sold for free, and not through money will you be redeemed” – as they [the Zionists] imagine. And later (v. 12), “For not in haste shall you leave...” And in the words of Chazal: The Holy One, blessed is He made swear three oaths...that they should not force (ידחקו) the end (Kesubos 111a). Rashi explains this to prohibit praying excessively. If we see that even excessive prayer is forbidden, all the more so taking action, to say, “Our hands will prevail, we have our own language, who can be master over us?” G-d forbid! And although there is another version of the text, that they not make distant (ירחקו) the end, through their sins according to Rashi, in my opinion both versions are true, for if they violate the oath and pray too much, and certainly if they take actions, they will thereby make distant the end because of their sins, G-d forbid. (Daas Harabbanim p. 35)

Beshalach 5768

**And in the morning you will see the glory of Hashem, since He has heard your complaints against Hashem; and what are we, that you should complain against us?
(16:7)**

Rashi says that the word "talinu" (complain) actually means to cause others to complain. Thus, the Jews' complaint caused their wives and children and the Eirev Rav, the mixed multitude of Egyptian converts, to complain. This is strange: we usually find that the Eirev Rav were the ones who induced the Jews to sin, and not the other way around. For example, the Eirev Rav initiated the sin of the golden calf. G-d said to Moshe, "Go down, for your people have become corrupt..." (Shemos 32:7) Rashi explains, "Your people – the converts you accepted." And when the people complained about the lack of variety in their diet (Bamidbar 11:4), it was the Eirev Rav who started it. So how could it be that the Jews caused the Eirev Rav to complain?

When Pharaoh devised his plan to enslave the Jews, the Sages say that he consulted three counselors: Bilam, Iyov and Yisro. Bilam advised him to do evil against the Jews, and in the end G-d punished him with death. Iyov kept silent, and G-d punished him with suffering. And Yisro fled; his reward was that his great grandchildren served on the Sanhedrin in the hewn chamber of the Temple (Sotah 11b).

This passage raises many questions. 1) Why did Yisro flee? If he had stayed and, together with the righteous Iyov, advocated good policies toward the Jews, perhaps they could have saved the situation. 2) Iyov was always a fighter against human injustice. In Iyov 29:12-17 we read of Iyov's righteous deeds: he saved the poor, the orphans and the widows; he helped the blind and the lame. He saved the victim from the teeth of the evildoer. So how could it be that Iyov was silent on the issue of enslaving the Jews? 3)

Why did Pharaoh, who was wicked and wanted only to harm the Jews, choose such advisors as Yisro and Iyov, who were righteous? Perhaps he did not know that Yisro was righteous, but Iyov was famous as an upright and G-d-fearing man. At most Pharaoh would succeed in keeping him from protesting. But why did he need to go to the trouble? He should have picked evil advisors who would say whatever he wanted.

The answer is that, as the Ramban says on Shemos 1:10, Pharaoh wanted to disguise his decrees against the Jews in a cloak of moderation and fairness. To achieve his goal of lowering the Jewish population, he could have ordered his men to kill the Jews outright, or to throw the babies into the river, but that would have looked very bad – to make an official policy of killing an innocent nation who came by the invitation of an earlier Pharaoh. Therefore he said, "Come, let us deal wisely with them" – let us act with wisdom and cleverness, so that the Jews do not notice that we are persecuting them. He secretly encouraged the Egyptian people to throw Jewish babies into the river, and when the Jewish parents came to the king or to the governor in protest, they said, "Bring witnesses that so-and-so killed your baby, and then we will prosecute him under the law."

Now we understand why he picked righteous counselors: this was part of the plan to cover up his wickedness. He would say, "Look, there are righteous men on my advisory panel and they agree to my policies." Pharaoh was powerful enough to have no fear that Iyov or Yisro could ever stop him from passing any of his decrees. He knew that they would not protest too much. At most they would keep quiet, and so at least to the outside world it would appear that these righteous counselors approved.

Yisro quickly understood Pharaoh's intentions and so he refused to sit on the panel; he fled. But Iyov did not realize that he was being used, and he stayed. Who knows, he thought, maybe I will be able to use my influence to improve conditions for the Jews in some way and save whatever can be saved. He had good intentions, but since he continued to be Pharaoh's counselor and cover up for him, all the wicked acts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians were counted against him. The Mishnah in Avos 1:7 says, "Do not join a wicked man," and Rabbeinu Yonah writes in his commentary that the punishment for this sin is very great. If a man commits any other sin, he has one count against him, but if he joins a wicked man, he has a share in all the sins committed by that man. He is helpless to stop the man from sinning, nor does he get any benefit from the sins, yet he is punished for them. "Woe to the wicked man and woe to his neighbor!" (Succah 56b)

Perhaps Iyov did protest from time to time, and when the Sages say that he was silent, they mean that most of the time he was silent out of fear of the king. Even if sometimes he registered a weak protest, it was considered as nothing, since his words went unheard. His real sin was simply that he continued to sit on Pharaoh's advisory panel, and for this he was punished with suffering. By sitting there he enabled and strengthened the wicked to practice their wickedness, something they would not have been able to do without his support.

According to this, we can explain Rashi's statement that the Jews induced the Eirev Rav to complain. Certainly the Eirev Rav were always the first ones to complain, but they on

their own did not have enough influence to affect the Jewish people. What good Jew would listen to the counsel of the Eirev Rav? But there were some Jews who joined the Eirev Rav in their complaints, and from this the Eirev Rav gained the prestige and ability to convince the other Jews. Thus, in effect, the Jews who joined the Eirev Rav caused the Eirev Rav to complain, for it was only by virtue of their joining that the Eirev Rav had any power over the Jews. (Divrei Yoel, p. 442)

Beshalach 5769

“And Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to guide them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to illuminate for them, to travel by day and by night.” (13:21)

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 11a) tells the story of Onkelos, nephew of the Roman emperor, who converted to Judaism and went to study in a yeshiva. His uncle sent soldiers to capture him and bring him back, but Onkelos convinced them to convert to Judaism as well.

He sent a second group of soldiers and this time warned them not to enter into any discussion with Onkelos. As they were leading him away, he said to them, “If a simple soldier and a captain are walking together at night, the simple soldier holds the lantern. If a captain and a general are walking together, the captain holds the lantern. If a general and a governor are walking together, the general holds the lantern. If a governor and the king are walking together, the governor holds the lantern. But does the king ever hold a lantern for anyone?” “No,” replied the soldiers. “But,” said Onkelos, “when the Jews traveled from Egypt, G-d illuminated the way for them with a pillar of fire.” When they heard this they all converted to Judaism.

The emperor sent a third group of soldiers, warning them not to speak with Onkelos at all, even about worldly matters. As they were leading him away, he put his hand on the mezuzah and smiled. They could not contain their curiosity and asked him why he was smiling. He said, “A human king sits inside and his servants guard the doors, but G-d stands guard at our doors while we, his servants, sit inside, as it says (Tehillim 121:8): ‘Hashem will guard your going and coming forever.’” All the soldiers converted to Judaism, and the emperor gave up trying to capture Onkelos.

Why did Onkelos choose these concepts to attract the soldiers? Why did they work so effectively? The answer lies in a fundamental difference between idolatry and Judaism. The idolaters see their gods as powerful but limited beings who need their services. By bringing offerings and performing the service of the idol, they are like servants providing the needs of a king. The idol and its priests remain focused on the spiritual while the rest of the people focus on the physical – satisfying their own desires. Their only duty to the idol and its priests is to provide their physical needs. By doing so they buy the right to live however they want. The Talmudic Sages connect idolatry and permissive lifestyles when they say (Sanhedrin 63b) that the Jewish people worshipped idols only in order to permit themselves to do immoral acts in public.

In Judaism, on the other hand, G-d is the ultimate in perfection and does not lack or need anything. He did not create us because He needed us to serve him. Rather, He created us in order to bestow kindness upon us: reward in the World to Come, which we earn through performance of the commandments in this world. Our spiritual obligations are for our own good, in order to better our souls. The Jew's job is to focus on his spiritual well-being as much as possible, and trust in G-d to take care of his physical needs. G-d lights the way for us, guards our houses and provides us with everything we have so that we can continue to live and better our souls. When Onkelos explained this to the soldiers, they realized that the G-d of the Jews is the only true G-d, who is perfect and needs nothing from man.

The redemption for which Jews are waiting will follow the pattern of Judaism: We will complete the spiritual process of teshuva, and then G-d will take care of the physical so that we can devote ourselves to higher spiritual goals. G-d will bring us back to the Holy Land, build it for us, give us the Temple and a kingdom ruled by moshiach. He will give us plenty of food and money so that we can devote ourselves to Torah and Avodas Hashem.

This comparison between the carrying of the torch at the Exodus from Egypt and our future redemption is made by the Midrash Rabbah (Shemos 15:17): "When the Holy One, blessed is He, took Israel out of Egypt, He held the torch and walked before them, as it says, 'And Hashem went before them...' And so He will one day do when He takes them out of Edom, as Yishaya says (52:12), 'For Hashem goes before you, your gatherer, the G-d of Israel.'"

The Zionists, however, have patterned their "redemption" after the system of idolatry. The more religious among them will claim that they are still waiting for G-d to send moshiach, but what exactly is our role and what is G-d's role? In their view, our role is to take care of the physical aspects of the redemption: bringing the Jewish people back to the Holy Land, conquering it, building it up, establishing a government and making food and money. G-d's role will be to bring about the spiritual aspects of redemption. Thus, the Zionist redemption is the exact inverse of Judaism. We pray that the Jewish people recognize this and reject Zionism as the heresy that it is!

פרשה זו נתנדבה לזכות נחמן יחזקאל שרגא פריינד, יעקב יוחנן פילאפף, ומשה נח בן חנה להצלחה בכל עניניהם, ולזכות אסתר פייגא בת רבקה יוטל להפקד בזש"ק

Beshalach 5770

And it came to pass, when Pharaoh let the people go, that G-d did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, because it was near, for G-d said: Lest the people change their minds when they see war, and go back to Egypt. (Shemos 13:17)

Which war is the Torah referring to? The Mechilta says, "This is the war of the children of Ephraim...as it says, 'The children of Ephraim, armed and shooting their bows, turned

back on the day of battle. They did not keep the covenant of G-d, and in His Torah they refused to walk' (Tehillim 78:9). They transgressed the End and the Oath... Hashem did not want the Bnei Yisroel to see the Bnei Ephraim's bones strewn about in Philistia, and go back to Egypt." According to Shemos Rabbah (20:11), some 300,000 of the Bnei Ephraim were killed, and their bones were still lying in heaps.

The Yalkut Shimoni 227 brings the Mechilta, and the Magen Avraham in his commentary Zayis Raanan explains what Oath the children of Ephraim transgressed: "For the Holy One, blessed is He, adjured them not to leave Egypt before the End, as it is written, 'I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem...' (Shir Hashirim 2:7). This was said regarding the final redemption, but it applied equally to the first redemption [from Egypt]."

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Hakohein of Polnoye (disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, d. 1784) asks: It is true that the children of Ephraim left before the foretold end of exile. But the entire Jewish people, who left 30 years later, also left before the end. The exile was supposed to last 400 years, and they left after only 210 years. Of course, they got around this problem by counting the 400 years from the birth of Yitzchok, but then we could make a similar argument in defense of the children of Ephraim, who counted the 400 years from the Covenant Between the Parts.

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Hakohein strengthens his question with a quote from the Mechilta on Parshas Bo, also brought in the Yalkut there, 208: Pharaoh arose in the middle of the night and said, "Get up, get out from among my people!" Moshe said, "Are we thieves? We will leave in the morning!" Pharaoh said, "All of Egypt will soon be dead!" Moshe said, "If you want the plague to stop, say 'You are now in your own possession. You are now the slaves of the Holy One, blessed is He.'" Pharaoh began to shout, "Up till now you were my slaves, but now you are free; you are in your own possession."

Why did Moshe need to squeeze this statement out of Pharaoh? (And this question can be asked in general on the whole story of the Exodus: why did Hashem need Pharaoh to let the Jews go? Couldn't He have taken them out of Egypt against Pharaoh's will?) The Zayis Raanan answers: "Because it was still before the end of the allotted time for the exile, since 400 years had not yet passed, they were not permitted to go out until Pharaoh gave them permission. Although Pharaoh did not give permission out of his own free will, and the usual law is that if one forces another person to give him a gift, the gift is not valid, here we can apply the words of the Gemara (Bava Basra 48a) that when it comes to a mitzvah, such as a bringing a sacrifice or granting a divorce when one is required to do so, agreement under duress is valid; here also, it is a mitzvah to obey Hashem and therefore Pharaoh's obedience under duress was valid."

We see here clearly that the Exodus took place before the time was up. So why, asks Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Hakohein, did it not constitute a transgression of the Oath? It is true that the Children of Ephraim left against Pharaoh's will, whereas the Israelites had Pharaoh's permission. But evidently, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Hakohein held that Pharaoh's granting permission would make absolutely no difference as far as the Oath. The Oath of

exile is a contract between the Jewish people and Hashem, and the permission of a earthly power has no effect on it. He answers: We must say that Hashem Himself annulled the oath because He desired to redeem them early. (Tzofnas Paneach, p. 199)

The parsha begins, “It came to pass (וַיְהִי) when Pharaoh let the people go...” The word וַיְהִי contains the word ווי – a cry of woe. The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 20:8) comments: “Who cried woe? Moshe cried woe. This can be compared to one who was chosen to lead the king’s daughter on her wedding day, and he saw in the stars that he would indeed lead her out of her father’s house, but he would not lead her to her wedding canopy in the groom’s house. He began to cry. People said to him: Why are you crying? He said to them: I am crying because I have worked hard taking her out and I will not come with her to the wedding canopy. So too, Moshe said: I am crying because I worked hard taking Israel out of Egypt and I will not enter the Holy Land with them.”

What does this Midrash mean? Why did Moshe suddenly foresee at this point that he would not be the one to lead the people into Eretz Yisroel? According to the Zayis Raanan, we can explain as follows: From the fact that בשלח פרעה, that it had been necessary for Pharaoh to willingly let the people go, Moshe understood that the full term of exile had not yet elapsed, and therefore the redemption from Egypt would not be a permanent redemption. The Jews would eventually have to spend more time in exile. The verse continues כי קרוב הוא “because it was near” – i.e. this redemption was near and early, before its proper time. Moshe knew that if he led the people into Eretz Yisroel and built the Beis Hamikdash, there would never be another exile. Since there had to be another exile, he concluded he would not enter Eretz Yisroel; that is why he cried.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 20:11) makes an additional point about the children of Ephraim. Despite the fact that the children of Ephraim sinned and transgressed the Oath, that Hashem never took consolation after their deaths. He took their blood and, so to speak, dipped His garments in it. This is the meaning of Yishaya 63:2: “Why is your garment red?” The Holy One, blessed is He said: I will not be comforted until I take revenge for the death of the children of Ephraim. This is alluded to in the words of Shemos 13:17: “And it came to pass, when Pharaoh let out the people, that G-d did not lead them through the land of the Philistines...” The words וְלֹא נָהַם (“and He did not lead them”) can also be translated “He did not take consolation.”

Similarly, in the Song at the Sea the Jews sang, “Trembling has seized the dwellers of Philistia” (Shemos 15:14). Rashi says, “Because they killed the children of Ephraim.” They knew that Hashem would punish them for what they had done.

Yisro 5768

Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it (20:8).

Our Sages teach that this refers to the mitzvah to recite kiddush on Friday night. They enacted that this kiddush be recited over a cup of wine. They also enacted that another kiddush be said on Shabbos morning, before eating the meal.

Once the Chasam Sofer was traveling and he spent several days at the house of a pious but unlearned Jew. Rumors reached the Chasam Sofer's ear that his host was speaking badly about him and calling him a "sinner". He asked his assistant to fetch the man, and asked him in the presence of several of the townspeople why he had said this. The man replied that he had seen the Chasam Sofer eating the noontime Shabbos meal without making kiddush. What Jew eats without kiddush? (The Chasam Sofer arose early on Shabbos morning, prayed, recited kiddush and ate some cake. Then he studied Torah until it came time to eat the main meal. The host had not seen the Chasam Sofer make kiddush earlier.) Some of the townspeople laughed at the unlearned host's mistake, and others were so angry that they would have beaten the man, had the Chasam Sofer not intervened and saved him. Later the Chasam Sofer sat and thought: Why did G-d cause this to happen to me in my old age, that someone should call me a sinner? But then he realized with pleasure that the Torah would continue to be known to the Jewish people, thanks to simple Jews like this man. A time is coming when the rabbis will be wicked and heretical. We need laymen who will challenge them and question their every action. The Gemora says (Beitzah 25b) that the Torah was given to the Jewish people because they are bold. Look how bold this unlearned man was! Here I was, a famous rabbi of a great city, head of a big yeshiva, and all the local rabbis came to greet me. And yet when he saw me doing something different from what his father and father's father had done, he was not afraid to call me a sinner. But if the laymen in future times follow their rabbis uncritically, believing blindly that everything they do is according to the Torah, then G-d forbid the Torah will be forgotten!" (Lev Haivri, p. 54; Chut Hameshulash p. 123)

One might ask: Doesn't this comment of the Chasam Sofer conflict with the well-known principle of emunas chachomim, faith in our Sages? The Torah says, "Do not turn aside from the thing that they tell you right or left" (Devarim 17:11), and Rashi comments, quoting the Sages, "Even if they tell you that your right hand is your left and your left hand is your right." We have mentioned the subject of emunas chachomim in the past, in the Parsha Pearls of Korach, 5766. There we quoted Rabbi Moshe Feinstein as saying that every man must keep the laws of the Torah as interpreted by the great rabbis of his generation, and not just however he himself sees fit. And in the Parsha Pearls of Yisro 5766 we brought the story of the Brisker Rav who quoted the Kotzker Rebbe as saying that Amalek too heard about the Parting of the Sea, yet he failed to learn the correct lessons because he did not have a rabbi to interpret it for him, and therefore he came to fight with Israel. Therefore when Yisro heard about the Parting of the Sea and the war of Amalek, he realized that it is impossible to understand G-d's ways and be a good Jew without a rabbi, and so he came to the desert to learn from Moshe Rabbeinu. Based on this, the Brisker Rav said that the mistake of the Agudah activists was that they had no rabbi at the crucial time of the establishment of the Zionist state, and they decided on great issues on their own. How then could the Chasam Sofer encourage all simple Jews to challenge their rabbis and not accept what they say?

The answer is that of course one must have a rabbi and consult him on all matters, but he must not follow the rabbi blindly, without ever asking questions. Asking questions and challenging one's rabbi has always been the Jewish way, for this is how the Torah is

transmitted from generation to generation. The entire Talmud is full of questions and challenges between students and rabbis.

If one sees his rabbi do something that appears to be forbidden, he should ask: Why did you do that? Is it not written in the Torah such-and-such? If the rabbi gives a scholarly and satisfying answer, then good. And if the rabbi admits that he was mistaken, then he will cease to do the forbidden act. But if the rabbi is a wicked man, the kind foreseen by the near-prophetic vision of the Chasam Sofer, his answer will show clearly that he is not primarily interested in following halacha, and his action was taken for political or other reasons. At that point the follower should leave this rabbi and find himself a different rabbi, a true scholar whose actions are all for the sake of Heaven.

And so we find in the Talmud that when Rav Yehuda saw his teacher Shmuel doing something wrong, he challenged him, and Shmuel in his great honesty and humility admitted that his pupil was correct: "Shmuel was sitting in judgment when a woman came in and began crying before him, but he paid no attention to her. Rav Yehuda said: Does the master not agree to the verse, 'One who closes his ear from the cry of the poor, he will also cry out and not be answered.' (Mishlei 21:13). Shmuel said: Sharp one! Your teacher will be punished with cold water, but your teacher's teacher (i.e. Mar Ukva, head of the court) will be punished with hot water." (Shabbos 55a)

The Brisker Rav blamed the Agudah for taking certain actions at the time of the establishment of the state without receiving any ruling from their rabbis. Without the true Torah opinion of a great scholar, one is likely to err. But even someone who does hear a ruling from his rabbi is obligated to respectfully challenge his rabbi with any questions that he may have, so that the matter becomes clarified.

Yisro 5769

And all the people answered together and said, "All that Hashem has spoken, we will do!" (19:8)

In Parshas Mishpatim (24:7) a similar verse occurs, but with two changes: there it does not say that the people answered together, and it says that the people said, "We will do and we will listen." What is the reason for these differences?

Chazal say that when Moshe Rabbeinu went up to Heaven to receive the Torah, the angels protested that the Torah should be given to them. G-d commanded Moshe to answer the angels. Moshe was afraid they would burn him with their fiery breath, so G-d told Moshe to hold onto the Throne of Glory. Moshe then said to the angels, "The Torah says, 'I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt.' Did you go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? The Torah says further, 'You shall not have other gods.' Do you live among nations who worship idols? The Torah says further, 'Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it.' Do you work, that you should need to rest?" Moshe continued to demonstrate that the commandments of the Torah do not apply to

angels. When he finished, all the angels became his friends and offered him gifts (Shabbos 88b-89a).

What were the angels thinking when they asked for the Torah? Didn't they know that its commandments are only meant for humans? And what was the point of Moshe holding onto the Throne – how did it protect him? And if Moshe was so afraid that the angels would be angry at his answers, why did they become his friends at the end?

The Chasam Sofer answers these questions based on the Ramban in his introduction to his commentary on the Torah. The Ramban says that the entire Torah is made up of combinations of Divine names, and they can be read in different ways. In our world, they are read as the story of the Jews in Egypt, the Exodus, the spies and so on. In the world of the angels, the letters are combined differently and contain other meanings. The angels are so far from our earthly existence that they cannot understand the Torah the way we do. But Moshe Rabbeinu and other great tzaddikim are able to understand Torah not only on the earthly level but on the levels above, symbolized by the Throne of Glory.

The angels wanted to receive the Torah on their own level, not in its earthly form containing commandments and stories. Moshe was afraid that they would burn him when he answered that the earthly Torah only applied to humans, because they would say, "Why are you better than us? The Torah applies to us on our level just as it applies to you on yours." Therefore G-d said, "Hold onto my Throne to show the angels that you understand the Torah on all its levels, from the Throne down to the earth." Moshe held onto the Throne but, out of respect for the angels, did not boast openly about his understanding of the Torah on all levels; because of this respectful gesture they became his friends.

Based on this, Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum explained the difference between the verses noted above. When the people were speaking all together, they said "we will do" because in the practical observance of the commandments all Jews are equal. But when they said "we will do and we will listen" they were not together, because everyone "listens" (i.e. understands) on his own level. Some understand the Torah on a simple level, some delve into the meaning of emunah, and some understand the hidden meaning of the Torah.

A Jew is not obligated to understand the mitzvos that he performs. However, if he has the wrong thoughts and intentions while doing a mitzvah, it is worse than having no thoughts at all. The prime example of this is animal offerings. If a man slaughters his offering with no thoughts at all, it is kosher. But if he has in mind to eat it after its time limit, the entire offering is invalid and the severest penalty, kareis, is given to one who eats it even within the time limit.

The Ramban says that the words "cursed is he who does not uphold the words of this Torah" (Devarim 27:26) apply to any Jew who does not believe in one or more of the mitzvos, or does not believe that those who keep them will be rewarded and those who transgress them will be punished. Even if this Jew personally keeps all the mitzvos, he is cursed. But a Jew who believes in the mitzvos and the principle of reward and

punishment, even if at times he succumbs to his desires and violates the Torah, is not cursed. We see here that the “we will listen” – Jewish belief – is more important than “we will do” – practical observance of the mitzvos. Not everyone is obligated to understand Jewish belief on a high level, but if one tries and has it wrong, it is more destructive than a sinful act.

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk was once speaking terrible words about himself: “I am the worst person, the lowest person...” The Koznitcher Maggid said to him, “You are such a man of truth! How can you say such falsehood about yourself?” Rabbi Elimelech replied, “I will give you an analogy. If a big, heavy beam falls on a man, even on his head, it is possible that he will survive. He may have to be hospitalized for a few weeks, but his wounds will probably heal. But if he is pierced by a needle, even in a minor part of his body, it can sometimes lead to his death. It is true that I am not afraid of practical sin – the beam – but I am afraid of sinful thoughts, doubts about emunah – the needle.”

Once the Shinover Rebbe was staying at a man’s house in a village for Shabbos, and when it came time to make kiddush on Friday night, he said, “I cannot make kiddush. Look carefully around the house to see if there is any heretical book here.” The people looked but did not find. So the Rebbe got up himself and looked, and found the Torah with Moses Mendelssohn’s translation. He threw the book out the window, and then began to say Kiddush. (Kol Yaakov, pp. 74-77)

The Brisker Rav said that his father, Reb Chaim, was not a crier by nature. But there were three times when he cried. One of the times was on Rosh Hashanah, during the prayer that describes G-d as “He who examines hearts on the day of judgement.” He explained: “With his physical actions a person can be careful not to sin, but who can be careful with his thoughts, to make sure that every thought matches exactly with true emunah in Hashem Yisborach? Sinful thought is among the three sins people commit every day (Bava Basra 164b).” The other two times he cried were on Yom Kippur during the “Al Chet” prayer, and when he found out that one of the women in his family knew how to write in the gentile language. The Brisker Rav commented, “From these things we could see what really troubled my father.” (Uvdos Vehanhagos Leveis Brisk v. 3 p. 181)

If great tzaddikim like Rabbi Elimelech, the Shinover Rebbe and Reb Chaim Brisker were afraid of heretical thoughts, what can we say for ourselves today?

Yisro 5770

The seventh day is a Shabbos for Hashem, your G-d; you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your slave or your maidservant, or your animal, or the stranger who is in your gates. (20:9)

From here we learn the law that a Jew may not make his animal work on Shabbos. This includes placing any load on the animal for it to carry in the street. Any unnecessary object is considered a load, even a strap between a cow’s horns. The Mishnah (Shabbos

54b) tells us that Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's cow used to go out with a strap between its horns, and the other Sages were not happy about it.

The Gemara asks: Could it be that Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya had only one cow? We know that he had a herd of cattle so large that he used to separate a tithe of twelve thousand calves every year! The Gemara answers: It was not Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's own cow that went out with a strap, but the lady next door's cow. But since Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya did not rebuke her, it was called "Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's cow."

The Gemara does not explain exactly who gave the lady's cow this prestigious title. We can assume that the other Sages, who condemned the practice of letting a cow go out on Shabbos with a strap, were not interested in attaching Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's name to the transgression. And certainly they would not have wanted to speak badly about Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya or remind everyone of his fault. Rather, the Gemara means that from Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's silence, the common people concluded that he approved of what his neighbor did, and they called the cow after his name, i.e. "the cow that Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya permitted to wear a strap." More likely than not, some of them used this as a basis to do the same to their own cows. This is why the Sages were so upset about his silence. It was not only one lady's sin that was at stake; it was the sins of all the people who followed in her footsteps.

It is important to register one's protest against a transgression, but it is equally important to explain to people exactly what is wrong, so that in case something changes in the future, no one will think the transgression becomes permitted. When the secular Zionist movement was launched, almost all the rabbis of the generation spoke out against it. But not all of them were careful to explain that the problem of Zionism was more than just the fact that it was an irreligious movement. They assumed it would be sufficient to invoke the rule that "one may not join the wicked" and to declare that "Torah cannot be replaced with nationalism."

However, the result was that some religious movements later joined the effort to build a Jewish state in order to try to "accomplish from within." Their intentions were admirable if one assumes that the only thing wrong with the Zionists was their irreligious outlook and lifestyle. What these movements failed to understand, however, is that a Jewish state during exile is forbidden in any form, no matter how religious and Torah-based it may be, and that it is fundamentally heretical for Jews to claim to know better than Hashem. If Hashem decided that the best place for Jews now is in exile, living under the rule of gentiles, and He promised to redeem them from there, how can any believing Jew claim that a Jewish state is desirable?

Rabbi Simcha Yissocher Ber Halberstam, the Chiashenover Rebbe (d. 1914, son of the Shinnover Rebbe and grandson of the Divrei Chaim) was one gadol hador who did speak out against the root of the problem inherent in Zionism. He wrote:

"Woe to the ears that hear such things! The heart is torn in ten pieces to hear their words and see their signs that they hang on the walls of the shuls and halls of

study, openly denying our hope of redemption with words that stab like swords, saying, 'If I am not for myself, who will be for me?' These are words that it is forbidden to hear, and with such words they fill the world.

“And then there arose people who are called Mizrachi, a group which is distinct from the Zionists in name only, but truthfully, inwardly, their ideology is identical to that of the Zionists, for the evil of Zionism lies not in the fact that it is sinners who support it, for the truth is the opposite: Zionism is a dangerous disease in and of itself – heresy and denial of our faith – and that is why these sinners support it.” (Divrei Simcha, 3)

Another such gadol was Rabbi Yehuda Greenwald, rabbi of Satmar (1845-1920), who wrote:

“It should not occur to you that you, by human hands, can build the ruins of Jerusalem, and arouse the end of exile with great love of the Jewish people, to improve their state through this action, as the Zionists hold. Only G-d is the healer of the broken-hearted and the bandager of their pains, and if G-d does not build a house, its builders work in vain.” (Zichron Yehuda 1:187)

Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (1866-1920), wrote:

Even if these men were loyal to G-d and His Torah, and even if there were a chance that they would achieve their goal, we must not listen to them in this matter, to make our redemption with our own power. Is it not forbidden even to force the end with excessive prayer (Rashi Kesubos 111a, and see Midrash Shir Hashirim 2:7)? All the more so that with power and worldly methods, that is, to leave exile by force, we are not permitted. Not in this way will our salvation and the redemption of our souls come. And this is against our true hope, for our whole longing and hope is that that G-d will bring us the moshiach soon and our redemption will come through G-d Himself. (Ohr Layesharim, p. 57)

Those who assist these Zionists will pay on the Day of Judgment, for they are abetting those who cause the masses to sin. Therefore, whoever is for G-d and His Torah will not join the evildoers and will not cling to them. On the contrary, he will oppose them as much as possible. And until it is G-d's will to redeem us, we must accept the yoke of exile to atone for our sins. (Ohr Layesharim, p. 59)

Their plan to gather the Jewish people together with their own power will never be; and all their strength, their many strategies and efforts will not work or have any success against the will of G-d. (Igros Kodesh, letter 130)

Whoever twists the meaning of the Torah and finds proofs to Zionism from the Torah, and especially from the Hidden Torah, is like one who places an idol in the Temple. G-d will not forgive him. May G-d in His great mercy remove this

accursed doctrine from among the Jewish people, and inspire their hearts to repent to Him in truth. (ibid.)

And if the movement takes on this form, to go out of the exile by force and to redeem themselves with their own strength – this is something no believer in Torah and its commandments can ever do on his own, for this runs against the Jewish people's strong faith and hope for their redemption with the coming of the messiah, when they will be redeemed physically and spiritually and will be elevated to the highest degree. Only with this deeply engrained hope can they find rest, and only with this have they lived during their bitter exile, encouraging themselves through Torah and observance. They will not be satisfied with the promises of Herzl and Nordau, who promise them their own state and a good physical life - even if we would fool ourselves into thinking that they could accomplish this. (Kuntres Umayan Mibeis Hashem, p. 50)

Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rokeach, the Belzer Rebbe (1854-1926), wrote:

Zionism itself is founded on denial of G-d's providence, reward and punishment and the coming of the redeemer. Nationalism is built only on the ruins of the holy Torah, belief in G-d, His prophets, and the Talmudic Sages. Therefore, even if the movement were led by G-d-fearing, righteous men with the best of intentions, it would be impossible for it not to destroy faith and Torah. (Kuntres 22 Cheshvan, p. 108)

But it could be that before the arrival of the messiah, the Satan's efforts will succeed and the wicked will get a state in Eretz Yisroel. Therefore it is an obligation on every Jew who must leave his home to move to America or somewhere else, but not to Eretz Yisroel under the state of these wicked men, because their state would be a great danger to every Jew's body and soul. (Om Ani Chomah v. 6 13 Adar I 5717)

Mishpatim 5768

Do not follow the majority for evil. (23:2)

When Rabbi Chaim of Brisk (1853-1918) spoke about Zionism, he gave the following parable: Once there was a town in which there was a well that had been closed and sealed for as long as anyone could remember. It was common knowledge that the water of this well was poisoned, such that anyone who drank from it would go insane.

One day, a group of distinguished doctors came to town, and they heard about the well. "We must investigate this well for ourselves," they said. As they were distinguished doctors, the townspeople could not refuse them, and so they agreed to open the well for them. The doctors performed tests on the water, and determined that there was nothing bad or poisonous about it;

the water was perfectly safe to drink. People began to drink from the well, and they indeed became insane. As more and more people drank and went insane, these insane people began to look at the sane people who had not drunk from the water as insane. For such is the way of insanity: those who suffer from it believe themselves to be normal and everyone else to be insane. The sane people, of course, told the insane people that they had gone insane, but their words went unheeded.

Now that the well was open, more and more people drank from it, until there were left only a small number of people, or perhaps one person, who had not drunk. The whole town shouted at this tiny minority, "Lunatics! Lunatics!" There came a point where these few individuals stopped and reconsidered: "Perhaps the whole town is correct and we are the lunatics, and we must drink from the well water and heal ourselves."

But then they reassured themselves with the following logic, "We still remember the days when the well was closed and sealed, and everyone knew that the water was poisoned and whoever drank from it would go insane. If so, then we must be correct. We are normal and sane, the others are all insane, and we will not drink from the well."

If this parable applied long ago, in Rabbi Chaim Brisker's time, it applies all the more to our day and age, when unfortunately the majority of the Jewish people are Zionists. Sometimes anti-Zionist Jews experience moments of weakness, when they wonder if perhaps they are insane and it is the Zionists who are normal Jews. To regain their bearings, they must continually look back at the previous generations of Jews who all believed in the coming of moshiach, who all believed that the redemption was exclusively G-d's domain, who all believed that Jews were in exile because G-d wanted them there. They must read the classic Jewish commentaries and works of previous centuries, and realize that it is not they but the Zionists who are the anomaly in Jewish history.

This is what Shlomo Hamelech taught us in Shir Hashirim (1:8), "If you do not know, O most beautiful of women, then go in the footsteps of the flock, and pasture your kids among the dwellings of the shepherds." Rashi explains, "If you, My people, who are the most beautiful of the nations, do not know where to go to pasture your flocks safely among the threatening nations of the world, follow the imprints of the footsteps of the flock: study the ways of your forefathers in previous times, who accepted My Torah and kept My charge and My commandments, and walk in their ways, for only by virtue of this will you be able to pasture your kids among the nations."

On the day the state was established, the Satmar Rebbe was greatly pained, and he paced around his room in grief and anguish. The Rebbetzin came in and said, "You look like – I don't want to say what." The Rebbe said, "I look insane? Whoever doesn't look like this now is an apikoros." Later the Rebbe explained that this was predicted already in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 97a): that in the time before moshiach comes, "whoever turns away from evil will be considered insane." (Tiferes Yoel v. 2 p. 48)

And they saw the G-d of Israel, and under His feet was like the work of a brick of sapphire, as pure as the essence of heaven. (24:10)

Rashi says that this brick had been before G-d during the slavery in Egypt, to remind Him of the suffering of Israel, who were forced to do work with bricks.

The Zohar goes a step further and says that the sapphire brick was a reminder of the Egyptians' cruel practice of snatching Jewish babies away from their mothers and burying them alive in brick walls. The Zohar calls this image of a brick the "footstool" of G-d, and says that this is what the words of Eicha 2:1 mean: "How does Hashem darken in His anger the daughter of Zion? He has cast the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth, and He has not remembered His footstool on the day of His anger." The footstool refers to this sapphire brick. It stood before G-d's throne from the Exodus until the destruction of the Temple, when its great merit was finally ignored. (Zohar v. 2 p. 66b)

The Maharik in his commentary on the Zohar explains that the brick was not just a symbol that G-d sympathized with the suffering of the Jews; it was a symbol of the great merit of the Jews, who accepted upon themselves the yoke of exile even at a time when the Egyptians were committing such acts of cruelty against them.

If this acceptance of exile was a source of great merit for the Jews, there was an even greater source of merit. When they stood at the shores of the sea, the Torah says, "And Pharaoh drew near, and the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, Egypt was coming after them, and they feared greatly, and the children of Israel cried out to Hashem" (Shemos 14:10). Rashi says, "They took up the profession of their fathers." A prominent rosh yeshiva asked: Earlier, during the slavery in Egypt, the Torah also says that the Jews prayed: "The children of Israel groaned from the labor, and they cried out, and their outcry went up to G-d from the labor" (Shemos 2:23). Why doesn't Rashi say there as well that the Jews "took up the profession of their fathers"?

He answered based on the Gemara in Shabbos 92b: "The Divine spirit of prophecy only rests on a man who is wise, strong, wealthy and tall." Wise we understand, but what does being strong, wealthy or tall have to do with prophecy? Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner explains that the only real requirement is that the person be humble. But if he were weak and poor, his humility would not show anything, since he would have little to be proud of. A person is truly humble if he retains his humility even when he is strong and wealthy.

Similarly, when the Jews in Egypt prayed to G-d to bring an end to their suffering, it was a beautiful prayer, but it was not yet proof that they were adopting the profession of their fathers. As weak slaves under the whips of their taskmasters, what other choice did they have but to endure the suffering and cry out to G-d? But by the time they reached the shores of the sea, they had already been free for several days and had had time to organize themselves. The Ibn Ezra says that when Moshe said to them, "Stand by and see the salvation of Hashem that He will do for you today" (14:13), he was telling them not to go to war against the Egyptians. The Jewish army, six hundred thousand strong, would have easily been able to defeat Pharaoh's small army.

The only reason they were afraid was because they were not accustomed to battle. But they did not go to war; instead they cried out to Hashem. This was the true proof that they placed their trust in Hashem, as their fathers had done.

Today we have carry with us the great merit earned by the Jewish people for faithfully shouldering the burden of exile for almost two thousand years. But however great that is, there is an even greater merit we can earn in our time. The worst suffering of our exile is still within living memory, and Zionism is available as an alternative to exile. When a Jew rejects Zionism and trusts only in G-d to take care of the Jewish people, he shows that he is truly following in the footsteps of his holy ancestors.

This greatness is something we saw in the gedolei hador who survived the Holocaust and then went on to oppose Zionism. Rabbi Yitzchok Lebovits of Woodridge writes, "Particularly following the unprecedented destruction of our people under the wretched Nazi regime, when the indescribable abuse of our people had exceeded any thinkable limit, when hell was literally experienced here on planet Earth; and following that, also the period of the notorious Soviet Communist persecution of Jews who refused to surrender their holy faith, yearnings for independence were at their peak and suppression of acting upon these feelings was extremely difficult. So much that we are amazed at the character of those individuals who at that time withstood the challenge and controlled their emotions, favoring rather to accept the will of G-d.

"I find it appropriate to mention the courage of my uncle, the Krasner Rav, Rabbi Hillel Lichtenstein, who underwent the seven chambers of hell at Auschwitz, and notwithstanding this fact, when the Zionist activists lurked in the DP camps, morbidly abusing the situation for their personal agenda, recruiting pioneers to aid them in their struggle for independence from G-d, he did not lose his mind and was not able to be coerced. But rather, upon his arrival at the Landsberg DP camp immediately following liberation from Auschwitz, he stood up and vehemently protested against the Zionist delusion. Upon contemplation of this one should be awed at the greatness of this strength, which was a result of his total submission to our holy Torah."

Mishpatim 5770

Follow the majority opinion. (23:2)

The Gemara in Sanhedrin 26a tells the following story: "Shevna's lectures were attended by 130,000 people, and Chizkiyah's lectures were attended by 110,000 people. When Sancheiriv came and beseiged Jerusalem, Shevna wrote a note and delivered it with a shooting arrow: 'Shevna and his followers surrender, Chizkiyah and his followers do not surrender.' Chizkiyah was afraid, saying, 'Perhaps, G-d forbid, the mind of the Holy One, blessed is He, follows the majority. Since the majority will be delivered into the hands of Sancheiriv, we will also.' The prophet Yishayah came and said to him, 'Do not call a conspiracy, what this people calls a conspiracy.' In other words, it is a conspiracy of the wicked, and a conspiracy of the wicked does not count."

If Chizkiyah was so sure that he was right in not surrendering, then why was he afraid that Hashem would follow the majority? And if Hashem would rule in accordance with Shevna's

view, then Shevna's view would obviously be the truth, so why did Chizkiyah say "G-d forbid" to this possibility?

The answer is that even when Hashem agrees with the minority opinion, the halacha follows the majority, as we see from the famous story of the dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and the Sages about the disassembled oven (Bava Metzia 59b). Rabbi Eliezer said, "If I am right, let proof come from Heaven!" A Heavenly voice proclaimed, "Why do you fight against Rabbi Eliezer? The halacha always follows his opinion!" Rabbi Yehoshua, leader of the Sages, stood up and said, "It is not in Heaven! The Torah was already given at Mount Sinai, and we do not pay attention to Heavenly voices, because You already wrote in the Torah at Mount Sinai: Follow the majority opinion." Rabbi Nosson met Eliyahu and asked him: "What was the Holy One, blessed is He, doing at that time?" He said: "He was smiling and saying, My children have defeated Me, My children have defeated Me."

This is why Chizkiyah feared that although he was correct, Hashem would go along with Shevna since his side was the majority. Therefore the prophet told him that a conspiracy of the wicked does not count.

But we must ask two questions here. First of all, Shevna was not wicked, as we see in Gittin 59a: "From Moshe to Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, we do not find anyone who was the greatest in his generation both in Torah and in wealth and power. What about Chizkiyah? There was Shevna." Chizkiyah, as the king, was certainly the greatest in wealth and power; therefore the Gemara must be saying that Shevna was greater than him in Torah. Furthermore, he must have been a tzaddik, since he was one of Chizkiyah's ministers, and we know that righteous kings never appoint wicked ministers (Chullin 4b).

Secondly, if Shevna was really wicked, why did Chizkiyah think that Hashem would follow him simply because the majority was on his side? The Sefer Chinuch (78) says that we only follow the majority when both sides know the Torah equally well, not a majority of ignorant people. Certainly we cannot follow a majority of wicked people, who are worse than ignorant people. There have been many times in history when the majority of the Jewish people was wicked - is the entire Torah then null and void? In Choshen Mishpat 163:1 the Rema says that even in communal matters, we take into account only the opinions of people who express those opinions for the sake of Heaven, not for their own ulterior motives. The wicked will certainly not express their opinion for the sake of Heaven: "They cannot sleep unless they do evil" (Mishlei 4:16). Besides they are disqualified from acting as judges altogether. Clearly, then, the law of "follow the majority" does not apply to the wicked; the beginning of the verse, "Do not follow the majority to do evil," would be more appropriate.

The answer is provided by the Maharsha, who says that the word "wicked" does not refer to Shevna and his followers, who were righteous, well-meaning people. It refers to Sancheiriv, who blasphemed Hashem and said (Yishaya 36:20), "Who among all the gods of these lands saved their lands from my hand, that Hashem should save Jerusalem from my hand?" The "conspiracy of the wicked" refers to Shevna, who wished to surrender and make peace with Sancheiriv. "Does not count" refers to Hashem, who does not take the side of such a majority that wishes to join the blasphemers. The halacha can only follow the view of the majority if Hashem is with

that majority, as Chazal say (Sanhedrin 93b) that when Scripture says that Hashem was with Dovid (Shmuel I 16:18), it means that the halacha followed his view.

Now we can explain a puzzling axiom of Chazal: "A single and a majority, the halacha is like the majority." Why does it say "a single and a majority"? Even when the minority is more than one person, the halacha follows the majority. It should have said, "A minority and a majority, the halacha is like the majority." Furthermore, why does it have to mention the single at all? It should have said simply, "The halacha is like the majority." But according to the Maharsha, we can explain that the word "single" refers to Hashem, who is the One and Only Creator. When the Single, Hashem, is with a majority, then the halacha follows that majority; but if Hashem is not with them, the halacha does not follow them. (Vayoel Moshe 1:154-157)

Terumah 5768

"And they shall make Me a sanctuary." (25:8)

The Rambam in Hilchos Beis Habechirah 1:1 states that it is a positive commandment to make a house for Hashem where sacrifices can be offered and the Jewish people can ascend three times a year. In his Hilchos Melachim 11:1 he writes specifically that regarding the future Temple, this mitzvah is the exclusive domain of moshiach: "The king moshiach will arise and restore the dynasty of David to its former state, build the Temple and gather in the exiles of Israel."

However, in Bava Kama 60b we read: "He that lighted the fire shall surely pay. Said the Holy One, blessed is He: I burned a fire in Zion and I will build it in fire, as it says (Zechariah 2:9), 'And I will be for it a wall of fire all around, and for honor I will be within it.'" A similar statement appears in the prayer "Nachem", recited on Tisha B'av afternoon, "For You, Hashem, lit it on fire, and You will one day build it in fire." If these early sources say that G-d Himself will build the future Temple, then how can the Rambam say that moshiach will build it?

The Aruch Laner (Succah 41a) answers that first the Temple will be built by moshiach, and afterwards a Heavenly Temple will descend into the humanly built Temple, just as a spiritual soul enters a physical body. In a similar way, we find that in the Tabernacle and the First Temple a fire came down from Heaven and joined the fire lit on the altar by the kohanim.

In any case, the claims of the Zionist group calling themselves the "Temple Institute" that according to the Rambam we must build the Temple ourselves, are false. The Rambam says clearly that moshiach will be the one to build it. This was also proven by Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Heller in his commentary Tosafos Yom Tov on the fifth chapter of Yuma. He writes that since the passage in the Book of Yechezkel describing the exact dimensions of the future Temple is unclear in many places, and our Sages have not transmitted to us any explanation of these verses, we must wait for Eliyahu Hanavi to come with moshiach and clear up all doubts. This, he writes, is what the Rambam means in his Hilchos Beis Hebechirah 1:4 when he says that the dimensions of the Third Temple are written in Yechezkel but are not clear.

The Maharam Chagiz in his work Eileh Masei, page 19, tells the story of a time when the Western Wall was covered with garbage, placed there by order of the Romans (i.e. the

Christians), who wanted to obliterate all memory of the Temple. A benevolent king (Selim, the father of Suleiman the Magnificent, the first Ottoman king who conquered Jerusalem) arose later and spent much money on clearing away the garbage until the Western Wall became visible, as it is today. He greatly honored the site of the Temple, and then he called to the Jews and said, "Behold, G-d has brought about the restoration of your Temple. Its foundations are visible – go and build it, and I will pay all your expenses." The Jews were brokenhearted and they all began to cry. The king asked, "Why are you crying? You should be happy, for G-d has sent me to rebuild your Temple, which was destroyed by the Romans. And if you are worried about the cost, I have already said that I will pay all your expenses." One old Jew answered as he cried, "Long live the king! We, your servants, must bless G-d Who has given you counsel, and we must thank you for your kindheartedness in offering to pay for the restoration of our Temple. But according to our faith, we are not permitted to build the Temple; we believe that the future Temple will be built by G-d in Heaven, when He so desires." The Jews in this story took the Gemora literally, but we have noted that even according to the Rambam who says that the physical building will be built by human hands, no one is permitted to build it before the coming of moshiach.

Even if the Zionists do, G-d forbid, succeed in building a temple, it will not be the long-awaited Third Temple of G-d, but a temple of Satanic forces. This was stated 90 years ago by Rabbi Shmuel Weinberg, the Slonimer Rebbe, on his deathbed: "Jews, you must know that before the coming of the messiah, a group of unsavory people will travel to Eretz Yisroel, and they will enjoy great victories there, and they will build a temple, and a fire will come down from heaven in this temple as it did in the First Temple. And you must know that this fire will not be from the Holy Side, but from the Other Side." The previous Skulener Rebbe told Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum of Queens that he heard about the Slonimer Rebbe's words from trustworthy witnesses, and was willing to swear on it.

Similarly, Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum related that his grandfather heard Rabbi Israel of Ryzhin say over 150 years ago: "Before the coming of the messiah, a fire will come down from heaven like the fire that came down for Elijah the prophet on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:38). Jews, you must know that it will not come down for the true prophets, but rather for the false prophets. And Jews will have to climb up sheer walls to remain with their faith." (Kol Yaakov, p. 192)

Vayakhel 5769 (but in the final book it should go here because it relates to the subject of the Terumah 5768)

And let all who are wise of heart among you come and make all that Hashem commanded (35:10).

The Rambam in Hilchos Beis Habechirah 1:1 states that it is a positive commandment to make a house for Hashem where sacrifices can be offered and the Jewish people can ascend three times a year. In his Hilchos Melachim 11:1 he writes specifically that regarding the future Temple, this mitzvah is the exclusive domain of moshiach: "The king moshiach will arise and restore the dynasty of David to its former state, build the Temple and gather in the exiles of Israel." Last year on Parshas Terumah, we brought many other sources to show that we ourselves may not build the Temple before the coming of moshiach.

מצות עשה לעשות בית ליי' מוכן להיות מקריבים בו הקרבנות. וחוגגין אליו שלש פעמים בשנה שנאמר ועשו לי מקדש.

המלך המשיח עתיד לעמוד ולהחזיר מלכות דוד ליושנה לממשלה הראשונה. ובונה המקדש ומקבץ נדחי ישראל

שהבערתי הבערה את לשלם עלי הקב"ה אמר

ואני שנאמר באש לבנותה עתיד ואני יסודותיה ותאכל בציון אש ויצת. שנאמר בציון אש הציתי אני בתוכה אהיה ולכבוד סביב אש חומת לה אהיה.

וכן כתבו רש"י ותוס' על סוכה מא.

A similar statement appears in the prayer "Nachem", recited on Tisha B'av afternoon. This is also stated by Rashi and Tosafos on Succah 41a. The Yerushalmi is telling us that this building by Hashem will take place before the coming of moshiach.

The Zionists, however, have found one source that seems to say that the Temple will be built before moshiach. The Torah says that the fruits from the fourth year in the life of a fruit-bearing tree must be eaten in Jerusalem. But if the owner wishes, he may transfer the holiness of the fruits onto money, bring the money to Jerusalem, buy food and eat it there. The Rabbis enacted that within a one-day radius of Jerusalem, the fruits themselves and not their monetary equivalent must be brought, so as to beautify the streets of Jerusalem with fruit. When the Temple was destroyed and Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Romans, there was no longer any need to beautify it, so the Rabbis suspended their decree and allowed the redemption of the fruits with money. However, they stipulated that whenever the Temple would be rebuilt, the decree would automatically come back into force (Mishnah Maaser Sheini 5:2). The Talmud Yerushalmi says, "This means that the Temple will be rebuilt before the kingship of the house of David."

אמר רבי אחא זאת אומרת שבית המקדש עתיד להיבנות קודם למלכות בית דוד

The Ridbaz and the Tosafos Yom Tov explain that the Yerushalmi's proof was that if the Temple will only be built after moshiach comes, why did Chazal have to stipulate that the decree would automatically come back into force? Won't moshiach and his beis din be there to reenact it? So it must be that the Temple will precede the coming of moshiach.

However, the Yerushalmi does not have to mean that the Jewish people will build the Temple on their own before the coming of moshiach. Rather, it fits quite well with the Gemara in Bava Kama 60b, which says that Hashem Himself will rebuild the Temple in fire. A similar statement appears in the prayer "Nachem", recited on Tisha B'av afternoon. This is also stated by Rashi and Tosafos on Succah 41a. The Yerushalmi is telling us that this building by Hashem will take place before the coming of moshiach.

This solves an apparent problem with the Rashi and Tosafos in Succah. They say that the Temple may be built suddenly by Hashem on the first day of Pesach, and the Omer offering will be delayed until the second half of the following day. If the Temple can only be built after the coming of moshiach, and moshiach will not come on Yom Tov (Eiruvin 43a), how could the Temple be built on the first day of Pesach? But according to the Yerushalmi, the Temple will be built by Hashem before moshiach.

But the Zionists point to the Tosafos Yom Tov commentary on the Mishnah (Maaser Sheini 5:2), who quotes the Yerushalmi and explains, "Until the coming of the kingdom of the house of David, our enemies will have a little rulership over us, just like there was at the beginning of the Second Temple." If he understood the Yerushalmi to mean a Temple built by Hashem, why did he have to say the enemies will have a little rulership? Why couldn't he understand simply that the exile will continue in full force, the enemies will have complete rulership over us, yet the Temple will be built by Hashem? So we see that he understood the Yerushalmi to mean Jews building the Temple on their own. Therefore he was bothered: how can Jews during exile build the Temple? Certainly the nations ruling Jerusalem would not permit it. To this he responds that the enemies will have only a little rulership over us at that time. It sounds as if the Jews will have some degree of sovereignty. How could that, combined with the building of the Temple, not constitute a violation of the oath against forcing the end of exile?

The Satmar Rav explains this Tosafos Yom Tov based on the Midrash in Parshas Toldos (Bereishis Rabbah 64:10): "In the days of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, the evil kingdom (Rome) decreed that the Beis Hamikdash be built..." It goes on to say that the Jews would have built the Beis Hamikdash, but the Cuthites spoke badly of the Jews to the emperor and the emperor retracted his decree. Again we have the question: doesn't building the beis hamikdash constitute forcing the end of exile? Why were the Jews ready to take this opportunity? The answer lies in the word "decreed." The Romans were forcing the Jews to build the Temple. Since it would have been done completely under Roman orders, there was nothing inconsistent with exile here, and it would not have violated the oath. Here as well, the Yerushalmi means that Chazal feared that the Temple would be built under government orders before the coming of moshiach, and there would be no beis din at the time great enough to make the takanah again to bring up the fruit of neta revai. ~~annul the previous decree~~ (Vayoel Moshe, Chapter 61).

Seemingly, this is still not enough to explain the Tosafos Yom Tov's words, "Our enemies will have a little rulership over us, just like there was at the beginning of the Second Temple." If he is talking about the government forcing the Jews to build the Temple, why did he say that they will have only a little rulership? Why not complete rulership?

To answer this, we have to know the context of the Tosafos Yom Tov's statement. He poses a question: the Torah allows the fruits to be redeemed in any location. Chazal originally decreed that they not be redeemed within a one-day radius. When the Temple was destroyed, they annulled their decree, but inserted a condition that it would automatically come back into effect when the Temple is build, lest there not be a greater beis din in existence at that time. Why will we need a greater beis din to re-enact this decree when the Temple is built? A greater beis din is only necessary when *annulling* an earlier decree. But here the old decree was already annulled, and a new beis din can make any new decree it wants. On this, the Tosafos Yom Tov answers

that at the time of the Destruction, Chazal did not just say that one *may* redeem the fruits. They said that one must redeem them. The reason was that Jerusalem was now in enemy hands and Chazal did not want Jews to bring up fruit and beautify its markets. This itself was a decree and would need annulment.

Then he cites a dispute between the Rambam and the Raavad in Hilchos Mamrim 2:2. The Rambam says that if one beis din passes a decree, even if the reason for the decree is no longer there, a lesser beis din cannot annul the decree. The Raavad holds that when the reason is no longer there, any beis din, even a lesser one, could annul the decree. Seemingly, this Mishnah in Maaser Sheini is a proof to the Rambam. When the Temple is rebuilt, the reason for the decree not to bring fruits to Jerusalem will no longer be relevant, yet the Mishnah says that a new beis din will be not be able to annul it unless it is greater. How will the Raavad explain the Mishnah? The Tosafos Yom Tov says that although the Temple will be built, the enemies will still be in power over us, Jerusalem will not be completely Jewish, and thus the reason for the decree will not be completely null. He does not mean that the Jews will have any sovereignty at all. His focus is the nature of Jerusalem: how Jewish it will be. If the government forces us to build the Temple, then there will obviously have to be a Jewish community in Jerusalem. However, the government will still have "some" presence there.

Terumah 5770

And they shall make me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in their midst. (25:8)

The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah 16a says: Heretics, informers and freethinkers, those who deny the Torah and those who deny the revival of the dead, leaders who place fear upon the community, and those who sinned and caused other to sin, like Yeravam ben Nevat and his colleagues - go down to Gehinom and are punished there for generations and generations... Gehinom will be gone before they are gone... Why? Because they stretched out their hands against the Zvul. Zvul refers to the Beis Hamikdash, as it says, "I have built a house of Zvul for You" (Melachim I 8:13). Rashi says: They stretched out their hands against the Zvul - they destroyed the Beis Hamikdash through their sins.

The Rambam codifies this Gemara in Hilchos Teshuva 3:6, but he adds "one who denies the coming of the redeemer" to the list of heretics.

There are two questions to be asked here: 1) Where do we find that the Temple was destroyed because of the sin of heresy? The First Temple was destroyed because of idolatry, immorality and murder; the Second Temple was destroyed because of causeless hatred (Yuma 9b). 2) Even if heretics caused the destruction of the Temple, that could only have been true of those heretics who lived at the time of its destruction. How then can the Gemara make a general statement that all heretics in all generations cause the destruction of the Temple? And how can the Rambam codify this as an enduring principle of halacha?

We can answer this based on the Yerushalmi Yuma 5a: "Any generation in which the Temple was not rebuilt, it is considered as if they destroyed it." Thus, even if the actual destruction took

place because of other sins, the fact that the Temple is not being built in our time is the fault of the heretics, and they are considered to have destroyed it.

Alternatively, we can answer that when Jews do mitzvos they are building the Beis Hamikdash in heaven, and when that Beis Hamikdash is complete, it will descend to earth. The Gemara in Chagigah 12b says that there are seven heavens, and the fourth one, called Zvul, contains Jerusalem and the Beis Hamikdash. This is the Beis Hamikdash that we are building through our mitzvos, but the heretics "stretch out their hands against Zvul" and destroy what we have built.

In our generation we are witness to a flood of heresy. Even many of those who claim to believe in all of the 13 Principles of Faith take actions that belie that belief. The Brisker Rav said: "The Rambam (Melachim 12:2 and Teshuva 9:2) says that moshiach will redeem the Jewish people from their subjugation to the nations. Anyone who believes that it is possible to be redeemed from subjugation to the nations without moshiach is lacking in full belief in moshiach."

We can explain this flood of heresy based on the Mishnah in Avos 5:5, which says that ten miracles occurred in the Temple, and one of them was that the Kohein Gadol never became impure on Yom Kippur. Why was that a miracle? He was pure the day before Yom Kippur, and he was kept awake the entire night (Yuma 19b), so how could he become impure? The Tosafos Yom Tov answers that life is a constant struggle between the Good Inclination and the Evil Inclination. On Yom Kippur morning when the Kohein Gadol performs the service of the day, Hashem wipes out all the sins of the Jewish people and they start again with a clean slate. The Evil Inclination, who is also the Accuser (Satan), is defeated, and he must start over again inducing the Jewish people to sin. On the night of Yom Kippur, since he knows that he will soon be defeated, he puts all his strength into this last stage of the battle. He tries to make the Kohein Gadol impure so that the service should not be performed. It was a miracle that despite his strenuous efforts, the Satan never succeeded at this.

In our time, the Satan faces an even bigger, permanent defeat. When moshiach comes and the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt, the Satan will be slaughtered (Succah 52a). The great shofar will be sounded, and he will be swallowed up (Yerushalmi quoted by Tosafos on Rosh Hashanah 16b). Knowing that his end is near, he puts up a last struggle to avert the redemption by destroying the Beis Hamikdash through heresy. He makes sure heresy spreads in the world as much as possible. For him not to succeed requires a miracle even greater than the miracle of the Kohein Gadol not becoming impure on Yom Kippur. (Vayael Moshe, Introduction, p. 9)

Similarly, the Chofetz Chaim said, "The nature of everything is to become as strong as it can possibly be just before its time comes to disappear. Thus a candle flickers brightly just before going out, and the darkest hour is just before dawn. So when the days approach when we will see the fulfillment of the verse, 'I will cause the unclean spirit to pass from the earth' (ibid. 13:2) the uncleanness becomes strong with its last remaining power, with a strength never seen before. We can infer from this that the days of the redemption are soon to come." (Omer Ani Maasai Lamelech, section 30)

Tetzaveh 5768

And you shall put into the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Tumim (28:7)

Rashi explains that they wrote the four-letter name of G-d and placed it inside the folded breastplate, and when they would ask a question, G-d would answer by causing the letters of the breastplate to light up. The Urim and Tumim were consulted most often before a war, to ask whether to fight, how to fight, or which tribe should go first. In fact, the Gemora in Berachos 3b teaches that King David always asked permission of the Urim and Tumim before he fought a war. He also consulted with the Sanhedrin and with his adviser Achisofel.

The Rambam in his Laws of Kings, chapter 5, says that asking the Sanhedrin (he does not mention the Urim and Tumim) is only necessary in a voluntary war, a war undertaken to enlarge the boundaries of the Jewish people. But in an obligatory war the king may go to war without consulting the Sanhedrin, at any time he wishes. And which wars are considered obligatory wars? The war against the seven Canaanite nations, the war against Amalek, and a war to defend the Jewish people from its enemies.

Not only does the king not have to ask permission from the Sanhedrin to fight a defensive war, but even in our times, during exile, when we have no king or Sanhedrin at all, it is sometimes allowed for Jews to fight such a war. We read about this in Shulchan Aruch, in the laws of Shabbos, Orach Chaim 329:6: "If gentiles are besieging Jewish cities, if they are coming to take money, we may not violate Shabbos to fight them, but if they are coming to kill, or if they are coming without any stated purpose, then we may go out and fight them with weapons and violate Shabbos. And if the city is near the border, even if they come only to steal straw, we may violate Shabbos to fight them. Rema: Even if they have not yet come but are planning to come, we may prepare ourselves."

It can be proven that this law applies even during exile, because its source is in Eiruvin 45a, and there the Amoraim, who lived during exile, explain how it applies to their cities in Babylonia. Babylonia contained a large area that was full of Jewish cities and villages, and the city Nehardea was near the border of this area. If gentiles invaded Nehardea for any reason, say the Amoraim, it would be permitted to fight them on Shabbos because it is a border city.

Some Jews admit that the Zionist state is forbidden, but justify its wars on the grounds that they are defending Jewish lives. But there are three fundamental errors here: 1) The gentile nations who fight the Zionists are fighting because they wish to control the land instead of the Zionists. Thus the Zionists are fighting not to defend Jewish lives, but to defend their statehood and their political control of the land. Since the Three Oaths forbid statehood and political control over the land during exile, it follows that any war fought to maintain that statehood is also a violation of the oaths. 2) Most of the Zionists' wars were not defensive; the Zionists were the ones who initiated hostilities. 3) The Shulchan Aruch is talking about Jews fighting to defend their host country against outside attackers. They are defending a Jewish city that is part of a non-Jewish country, and thus they are fighting not as Jews but as citizens of that country. In other cases, they are defending themselves against criminals in a non-Jewish country whose government would like to control crime. Thus they fight as a service and assistance to their government. But there is no permission for Jews during exile to fight against the gentile nations among whom they live; that is a violation of the Oaths.

And the people heard this bad thing, and they mourned, and they did not put on their ornaments. And Hashem said to Moshe, say to the children of Israel, you are a stiff-necked people; if I go up in your midst for one moment, I will consume you; and now, take off your ornament from you and I will know what I will do to you. (33:4-5)

The Alshich points out a seeming contradiction here: the first verse says that their ornaments were already off and they did not put them on, but from the second verse it appears that they were still on at this point, and G-d told them to take them off.

He explains that there were two groups among the Jewish people: those on a higher level were called "the children of Israel" whereas those on a lower level, who were somewhat sinful, were called "the people". Neither of these groups actually worshipped the golden calf (the worshippers of the calf had already been executed earlier) but they were guilty of not protesting against those who worshipped it. For the lower group, this sin of not protesting, combined with their other sins, was enough to make them lose their "ornaments" immediately after the incident of the golden calf. The "ornaments" were the two crowns given by the angels to each Jew when they said "naaseh venishma" – we will do and we will hear the Torah. Thus the Torah states, "And the people" – the lower group of Jews – "heard this bad thing" – that G-d would no longer be in their midst – "and they mourned" – because now they suffered a double blow – they had already lost their crowns, and now G-d would no longer be in their midst.

The higher group, for the single sin of not protesting, did not deserve to lose their crowns. However, G-d told Moshe to tell "the children of Israel" – this higher group – to take off their crowns for the following reason. The world was created for the purpose of bringing down G-d's presence among men (Bereishis Rabbah 19:6). The first man and woman, Adam and Chava, were perfectly suited for this purpose, but then they sinned and the stench of the snake entered them. At this point G-d's wisdom saw that to achieve their purpose, people would have to die, and their death would purify them and ready them to be a chariot for the Divine Presence like the angels. All of mankind gets the purification of death, but for His holy Jewish nation, G-d added an additional level of purification: exile. Avraham, father of all Jews, asked G-d to give them exile instead of Gehinom, and thus our Sages say (Eiruvin 19a) that Avraham sits at the door of Gehinom and refuses to let his children in, since they have suffered exile instead. The exile prepares them for their purpose of bringing the Divine Presence down into this world.

When the Torah was given and the Jews said "naaseh venishma" their stench departed, and they no longer needed the purifications of death and exile. Therefore they were given two crowns, one to protect them from death and the other to protect them from exile. But with the sin of the golden calf, this all came to an end, and they were back where they had started. They had the stench of the snake, and they would not get rid of it unless they went through the processes of death and exile. Therefore G-d said to Moshe, "Tell them to take off their crowns. Woe to the Jews if they do not take off their crowns, for then they will never experience death and exile and will never achieve their purpose in this world."

This is the meaning of the verse, "Take off your ornament from you and I will know what I will do to you." I alone know the good that I have planned for you, and it is for your own good that I ask you to take off your crowns, for if you keep them, you will never achieve that status."

וידוע מ"ש הרמב"ם במורה נבוכים והובא ברמב"ן פרשת כי תשא, שהטעם שנקרא לשוננו קדוש הוא לפי שלא ימצאו בו שמות לאבר הבעילה לזכר או לנקבה ולא לטפה ולשתן ולצואה רק בכינוי. ונראה לפרש שיטתו יותר, דכל לשון מורה על חייהם ומחשבותיהם של המדברים בה, שאם נמצא לשון שיש בה מילות הרבה לדברים שאינם נקיים, בידוע שאותו העם שטוף בזימה הוא, ואם אין בה מילות אלו מוכח שעם קדוש ופרוש הוא. ובאמת לשון הקודש היא מן השמים שכל מילה ומילה שיש בה ידועה לנו ע"י נבואה וכמ"ש החת"ס בפרשת נח, וא"כ ממה שאין בה דברים שאינם נקיים אין ראיה על בני ישראל שהיו מדברים בה, שהרי הם לא חידשו הלשון מעצמם רק קבלוה מן השמים. אבל הדבר נעשה להיפך, שהלשון משפיע על העם, שכיון שיצא לשון הקודש ממחשבתו של הקב"ה שהוא כולו קדוש וטהור ממילא כל זמן שבני ישראל גדרו עצמם ודברו בה בלא הוספה ושינוי, היו כל מחשבותיהם ודבריהם קדושים וטהורים. וכן בזמן הזה אע"פ שבטלו חז"ל הדיבור בלשון הקודש כמו שביאר רבינו בספרו מ"מ הכותב בלשון הקודש הרי הוא מטהר מחשבותיו ורעיוניו ע"י שכולם מוגבלים ונכללים בלשון הבורא יתברך. אבל כשהוא משנה הלשון כדי שתהיה שוה עם לשונות הגויים שיש בהם דברים שאינם נקיים ומחשבות של כפירה, הרי כל דבר שיכתוב באותה הלשון יהיה מוגבל ע"י אותה טומאה וכפירה. וכל זה אפילו אם היו כל השינויים נעשים ע"י שומרי תורה ויראי שמים, כ"ש היום שקמו פריצי הדור להרוס את התורה ועשו שינויים בלשון לתכליתם כדי לנגח את האדוקים ולהמשיכם לרעיונם הטמא שנהיה ככל הגויים.

Ki Sisa 5770

This is what everyone who passes by the census taker shall give: half a shekel by the holy shekel. (30:13)

The Ramban explains that the shekel coin is called "holy" because it is the monetary unit for all payments in the Torah: erechin, pidyon haben, and the donations to the Mishkan. Every time the Torah gives a number as an amount of money, it means shekalim. For the same reason, says the Ramban, Chazal call the language of the Torah "Lashon Hakodesh" - the Holy Tongue - because it is the language in which Hashem created the world and spoke to His prophets. All the names of Hashem are in Lashon Hakodesh, as well as the names of the angels, and people like Avraham and Yitzchak who were named by Hashem Himself.

The Ramban then cites a second opinion as to why the language is called "Lashon Hakodesh", the opinion of the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim. The Rambam says that it is called holy because it contains no explicit words for matters of immodesty or human refuse. The Ramban counters firstly that there are such words, and secondly, the proper term for the avoidance of such words is "lashon nekiyah" - clean speech - rather than holy speech.

It would seem that the Rambam means to make a more general point about language. A language is an expression of how its speakers think and what kind of lives they lead. If a language contains an abundance of immodest words, one can be sure that its speakers lead immoral lives; if a language is modest, then its speakers must be moral. But that is just one example. The Rambam's point is that a language shows us the mindset and world view of its speakers, because they invented the language in accordance with the concepts they felt a need to express. In the case of Lashon Hakodesh, it is not the speakers who shaped the language; it is the language that shaped

the speakers. Lashon Hakodesh is nothing but the words Hashem Himself used in the Torah and other prophetic books. When a Jew speaks, writes and thinks in Lashon Hakodesh, he is deliberately confining himself to the concepts it expresses, which are the thoughts of Hashem. He trains his mind to think like Hashem, as close as is humanly possible. That is why the language is called holy. Thus the Rambam is saying basically the same idea as the Ramban - that the language is holy because it originates from Hashem. He is only adding that that holiness manifests itself in the language's structure and vocabulary.

The Jewish people spoke Lashon Hakodesh only until the beginning of the Second Temple era; from then on, they spoke Aramaic (Shulchan Aruch Harav, Talmud Torah 1:1). During the Babylonian exile, when Jews lived in a land full of idolatry, the Sages decided that it would be disrespectful to the Holy Tongue to continue speaking it in such a defiled environment (Chasam Sofer on Orach Chaim 85). Additionally, they realized that the people were no longer on a high enough level to use such a holy tongue as their everyday language, for sinful speech is much worse when spoken in Lashon Hakodesh than when spoken in another language (Vayael Moshe 3:8). The Aramaic they used was not the same as that spoken by the gentiles; it was a special Jewish dialect, written with Hebrew letters. Thus they continued to uphold the principle of keeping a separate language, a principle which the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 32:5) says the Jewish people maintained in Egypt. Later, Yiddish fulfilled the same function for European Jews, Judeo-Arabic for Jews in Arab lands and Ladino for Sephardic Jews.

The Modern Hebrew language invented by the Zionists would be forbidden to speak even if they had changed nothing at all of the original Lashon Hakodesh, since it was the Zionist heretics who started the practice of speaking it. Even a Sefer Torah written perfectly by a heretic must be burnt (Gittin 45b). All the more so now that they have made tremendous changes in the vocabulary, grammar and style of the language. Modern Hebrew was invented to make it easy to translate word-for-word from European languages into Hebrew and vice versa. The Jew who writes in true Lashon Hakodesh expresses pure Jewish thought and pure Torah views on life, but the Zionist speaks like a gentile under the thin disguise of a new language. Zionist Hebrew is nothing but English in translation.

In fact, it is much worse than English. When Bais Yaakov of Borough Park began teaching classes in Ivrit B'Ivrit (that is, translating the holy words of Chumash into Modern Hebrew), a group of parents complained, until the school staff agreed to present the question to Rabbi Aharon Kotler. The staff and a group of parents (among them the Debretziner Rav) came before Reb Aharon. The staff argued that they had no textbooks besides those produced in Eretz Yisroel, which were written in Ivrit. The parents argued that the purpose of teaching in Ivrit was to inculcate the students with the Zionist ideology. They demanded that the school teach in Yiddish, or at least arrange for separate Yiddish classes. As he listened, Reb Aharon's face grew stormy. He stood up and said fervently, "There is no doubt that teaching in Ivrit is completely forbidden. It is an assimilation worse than all other assimilations in the world. For the goal of Zionism is to uproot the holy Torah from its source. Assimilation with gentiles is like a gentile idol, which can be nullified; but assimilation with Ivrit is a Jewish idol, which can never be nullified! (See Avodah Zarah 52a.) If you teach in English, that is the language of the country and we have no choice, because we need to know the language to earn a living and so on. This is like teaching one's child a trade. But if we teach in Ivrit here in America, it serves no

constructive purpose; it is only to bring the children closer to Zionism. Therefore it is definitely forbidden."

But the staff threatened that if Reb Aharon ruled this way, they would resign in protest and Bais Yaakov would have to close down. The Debretziner Rav commented, "Who ever heard of one of the parties in a Din Torah threatening the dayan?" In the end, Bais Yaakov arranged separate classes in Ivrit and Yiddish. (Botzina Kadisha v. 1 pp. 263-264; Shailos Utshuvos Be'er Moshe v. 4, 140:6)

Vayakhel 5768

**And let all who are wise of heart among you come and make all that Hashem commanded.
(35:10)**

A certain famous Zionist rabbi was challenged by his contemporaries to explain why he associated with the secular Zionist pioneers who disregarded the laws of the Torah. "Can it be that Eretz Yisroel will be built by young men and women who publicly violate the Torah? Is this not a desecration of the holiness of the land?"

"Absolutely not!" replied the rabbi. "Just think about it. The holiest place in Eretz Yisroel is undoubtedly the Temple, and the holiest place in the Temple is the Holy of Holies. Now, when the Temple stood in its place, no one was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, except for the Kohein Gadol. And even the Kohein Gadol was only allowed to enter once a year – on Yom Kippur – after painstaking preparations, wearing his white linen garments, to perform the sacred service of the day. Nonetheless, when the Temple was being built, workers and artisans from the entire spectrum of Judaism undoubtedly entered the place. Even simple folk, who were not particularly known for their piety, entered the site of the Temple. They even went all the way in to the Holy of Holies whenever they wanted, wearing regular work clothes, until the Temple was completed."

It is unbelievable that such a ridiculous comparison is still repeated today, and was quoted with approval in a book published just two years ago. The Tabernacle in the desert was built by the righteous Betzalel and his assistants from the greatest generation of Jews who ever lived, the generation of prophets who heard the voice of G-d at Sinai. The workers who built the Temples in Jerusalem, even if they were not the most pious of men, were commissioned and directed by righteous people such as Shlomo Hamelech, Ezra and Nechemiah. Not only that, but the entire initiative to build the First and Second Temples came from the prophets of those eras. And even Herod, the wicked king who funded the renovation of the entire Temple, did so at the counsel of the Rabbis, and left all practical aspects of the building up to them (Bava Basra 4a). But the Zionists did and continue to do everything on their own initiative, without any prophetic or rabbinic direction.

Furthermore, the Gemara says that when artisans worked on the Holy of Holies, they were lowered in inside a box with only a small opening in the spot where they had to work (Pesachim 26a). Regardless of what they did in their private lives, when they came to build the Temple they came only to work, and they worked with great respect for the holy place. The Zionists, on the

other hand, came to build not a holy land but a place where they could actualize their dream of secularizing the Jewish people. As Rabbi Chaim Brisker said, "They are not secularizing Jews in order to found a state; they are founding a state in order to secularize the Jews." Instead of comparing them to the workers who built the Temple, it would be more accurate to compare them to Titus, who entered the Holy of Holies with a harlot, committed a vile act, and then stuck his sword into the curtain, claiming that he had defeated G-d in His own house (Gittin 56b).

But the most fundamental problem here is the premise of those who challenged the Zionist rabbi. They seemed to imply that the accomplishments of the Zionists would have been good, if only they had been pious scholars of the Torah. This left the door open for the Zionist rabbi to reply that if an act is good, it does not matter who does it. The truth is, however, that the Torah, the prophets and the Talmud make it clear that Jews settling and building Eretz Yisroel on a major scale is an event that will happen in the days of moshiach, and for any Jews to do it on their own in advance is a great sin, no matter how pious they may be.

Pekudei 5768

And the silver of those counted in the congregation was one hundred talents, and one thousand, seven hundred and seventy-five shekel, by the holy shekel. (38:25)

The Minchas Chinuch (Mitzvah 105) is uncertain as to whether the Temple accepted half-shekel contributions from those who committed idolatry or violated the Shabbos. The Maharam Schick, in his work on the 613 commandments, says that they did not accept them, and brings proof from the Gemara. But it seems that we can bring a simpler proof from the above verse, which says that the silver used for the Mishkan was exactly 603,550 half-shekels, that is one half-shekel for each Jew descended from the Twelve Tribes. The Eirev Rav, comprising much more than that number, clearly did not contribute.

The Alshich writes in the name of the Maharash ben Alkabetz that the purpose of the half-shekel was to teach the Jewish people to be united. Every man by himself is only a half; to become a whole he must unite with his fellow Jews. Similarly, the Yismach Moshe writes that a census, by its nature, divides a large group into individual units. Each man counts as one, and he is thus severed from the group. Therefore it was necessary when taking the census for each Jew to give a half-shekel, in order to unify the people. So we see that the donation of the half-shekel had two functions: unification of the good Jews, and separation from the bad company of the Eirev Rav.

The Tanchuma in Ki Sisa (2) says: "Come and see how beloved the Jews are, for even their sins bring about good things. If this is what their sins do, imagine how much more their merits can do! Yosef's brothers met together and decided to sell him into slavery, and that decision supplied the world with food throughout seven years of famine. Here too, the Jews sinned with the golden calf, and as a result they had to give the half-shekel as an atonement for their soul. If such a great sin brought about such a mitzvah, imagine what a mitzvah done by them can accomplish!"

The Tanchuma's comparison seems very strange. True, the sale of Yosef turned out to be a positive development in G-d's plan, although from the brothers' viewpoint it was a sin. But the

sin of the golden calf had no positive aspect. G-d in His great mercy forgave them for the sin and allowed them to give a half-shekel as an atonement for their soul, but of course it would have been better had they never committed the sin and never required any atonement.

But according to the above, we can explain that the sin of the golden calf was a wake-up call for the Jewish people to separate from the Eirev Rav. At first, when the Jewish people left Egypt, they saw no harm in mingling with the Eirev Rav. But after the Eirev Rav induced the Jews to make the golden calf, G-d gave them the atonement of the half-shekel, which symbolized both separation from the Eirev Rav and unification of all good Jews.

In the same way, we can understand another passage of the Tanchuma (Ki Sisa 5): "For G-d is the judge, this He lowers and this He raises" (Tehillim 75:8). Rabbi Yonah explained this as referring to Israel: with the word "this" they were lowered when they made the golden calf, saying, "For this man Moshe..." (Shemos 32:1); and with the word "this" they were raised, as it says "this they shall give" (30:13). The sin of the golden calf indeed lowered them immensely, but this incident was the cause for their rise, for they realized the necessity of separating from the Eirev Rav and unifying all good Jews. (Divrei Yoel, p. 394)

Vayikra 5769

"And He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying..." (1:1)

The Midrash comments that Moshe, in his wisdom, knew not to come into the tent of meeting before G-d called him. From this we learn, says the Midrash, that a Torah scholar who lacks knowledge (deah) is worse than a dead animal (Vayikra Rabbah 1:15).

In the Holy Tongue there are two words for knowledge: "chochmah" and "deah". What is the distinction between them? Rabbi Avigdor Miller explained, "Chochmah" means wisdom, but "deah" means wisdom with real perception. A person who has deah recognizes G-d's guiding hand in the world as a reality, as if he could see it with his eyes. The Gemara says: "If one acquires this [deah], he lacks nothing. If one does not acquire this, what did he acquire?" (Nedarim 41a) If one lacks clear emunah, then what are his other attainments worth?

We must accustom ourselves to the words of Chazal, "If a person sees that afflictions come upon him, he should examine his deeds" (Berachos 5a). If he has a toothache, he should think perhaps he spoke forbidden words. If a Jew is aroused to repent by small mishaps, he will be spared bigger mishaps. In not, he will need bigger and bigger hints, until he begins to examine his deeds and realize that all is in the hands of G-d and there are no accidents in this world.

"He Who chastises nations, is He not thereby rebuking them?" (Tehillim 94:10) G-d punishes only in order to teach those who remain and all future generations. "He is the one Who teaches man knowledge" (ibid. 11) – the entire purpose of all misfortunes and wars is only to teach man knowledge.

The Torah says, "Also every illness and every plague that is not written in the book of this Torah, Hashem will bring them upon you until you are destroyed, and you shall be left few in number" (Devarim 28:61). All misfortunes and catastrophes that have ever since befallen our nation are here foretold. This establishes a principle: every form of adversity is G-d's retribution for disobedience, and therefore all adversity must be utilized as a reminder. To say that "we do not understand the ways of G-d", to fall back on the indolent and unthinking pretence of pious trust in G-d's ways, is a contradiction to the principles enunciated in this verse. (Shmuess; Fortunate Nation p. 322.)

Vayikra 5770

And he shall pinch its head opposite the nape, but he shall not separate it. (5:8)

ומלק את ראשו ממול ערפו ולא יבדיל

The Gemara in Zevachim 66a explains this to mean that he need not separate it, but he may do so.

Since this is an example of a verse that can be learnt as a חיוב or a רשות, we are going to use it as an introduction to the sugya of the Shitas HaRamban on Yishuv Eretz Yisroel, which כידוע the Zionists use as their אבן הפינה to say that the Ramban is not goreis the Shalosh Shavuos, since he says שנצטוונו לרשת הארץ אשר נתן הא-ל יתעלה לאבותיהו לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב, ולא נעזבה ביד זולתינו מן האומות או לשממה.

דער תוכן פון דע היינטיגע פרשה פערלס איז גבויט אויף דער ספר ויואל משה מאמר ישוב ארץ ישראל סימנים ה און ו.

The Gemara asks: If so, when the Torah says, "If a man opens or digs a pit and does not cover it" (Shemos 21:33), perhaps it means that he need not cover it, but he may. The Gemara answers that there the Torah says that if an animal falls into the pit he must pay, so it is clear that he should have covered it.

Tosafos asks: Why does the Gemara ask from the pit and not from every other negative commandment in the Torah? Perhaps "do not work on Shabbos" means that one need not work on Shabbos, and "do not eat non-kosher meat" means that one need not eat non-kosher meat. Tosafos answers that with every negative commandment in the Torah, there is no reason to think that one would be obligated to, for instance, work on Shabbos, that the Torah should have to permit us to stop working. But here there is reason to think that one would be obligated to cut the sacrificial bird's neck completely, in order that more blood should come out when he splashes it on the altar; therefore the Torah says "he need not separate it." This is why the Gemara cites the case of the pit as comparable: one would think that the digger is obligated to cover his pit, therefore the Torah says "he need not cover it."

We see an important principle from here: whenever the Torah says a certain act should not be done, and that act could easily have been thought to be an obligation, the Torah only means to lower the act to optional status, not to forbid it.

A similar principle applies to positive commandments. The Gemara in Sotah 3a lists three apparent commandments in the Torah that, according to Rabbi Yishmael, are actually optional: charging one's wife with unfaithful behavior, a kohein burying his close relative, and keeping a slave permanently. The reason is that in each of these cases, there would have been good reason to believe that the act was forbidden. Therefore, when the Torah says to do it, it only means to raise it from forbidden to optional status, not to make it an obligation.

The Ramban in Sefer Hamitzvos argues that the Rambam should have counted settling in Eretz Yisroel as one of the 613 commandments. This commandment is found in Bamidbar 33:53:

והורשתם את הארץ וישבתם בה "And you shall take possession of the land and live in it." The Ramban brings proof that this is a commandment from the story of the spies. Before the spies were sent, Moshe said to the people, "See, Hashem your G-d has placed the land before you; go up and inherit as Hashem, G-d of your fathers, has spoken to you; do not fear or worry" (Devarim 1:21). When the spies gave their report and the people refused to go up, Moshe said, "You rebelled against the mouth of Hashem" (v. 26). This, says the Ramban, proves that "you shall take possession of the land and live in it" is a commandment, not just a promise. לשון רש"י: והורשתם אותה מיושביה ואז ישבתם בה, תוכלו להתקיים בה, ואם לאו לא תוכלו להתקיים בה.

און אזוי אויך איז מוכח פון רש"י שפעטער ווען דע תורה רעכנט אויס די גבולים פון א"י, זאגט רש"י: לפי שהרבה מצות נוהגות בארץ ואין נוהגות בחו"ל הוצרך לכתוב מצרני גבולי רוחותיה סביב לומר לך מן הגבולין הללו ולפנים המצות נוהגות

Why doesn't Rashi say that the borders were written to tell us where the mitzvah to settle Eretz Yisroel applies? Clearly he didn't hold there was such a mitzvah.

We see here clearly that the Ramban considered the explanation of Bamidbar 33:53 as a promise rather than a command (as Rashi in fact explains it, and as the Rambam would presumably explain it) reasonable and valid. The only reason he rejects it is because of the story of the spies. Furthermore, the words "go up and inherit" themselves do not prove the Ramban's point, because they could also be a promise. The proof is only from the fact that their refusal to go to Eretz Yisroel was termed "rebellious against the mouth of Hashem."

Understanding "go up and inherit" as a promise would be in line with the principle of Zevachim 66a and Sotah 3a explained above. Moshe needed to say "go up and inherit" because if not, the people would have thought it was forbidden to take over the land. Therefore, his "go up and inherit" only comes to permit the conquest and promise its success, not to command it as an obligation.

That the people were afraid it was forbidden to take over the land is explicitly stated in the Yalkut Shimoni on Devarim, section 803: Moshe said to them, "You have come to the hill country of the Emorites. And if you say, the time has not yet come - see, Hashem your G-d has placed the land before you. I do not say this from guesswork or second hand information. You see it in front of you; go up and inherit."

However, now that it says "You rebelled against the mouth of Hashem," we know that "go up and inherit" must have been a command as well as a permission. How would the Rambam and Rashi respond to that?

The answer is that they would agree that Moshe's words "go up and inherit" were a command, but that does not prove that Hashem's words "you shall take possession of the land and live in it" are also a command. Moshe's command had the status of a temporary rabbinic mitzvah, and violating it was called "rebellious against the mouth of Hashem," since Hashem commanded us to obey rabbinic mitzvos: "You shall not turn away from the thing that they command you right or left" (Devarim 17:11).

The Ramban, on the other hand, was unable to explain it this way, because he holds (in his commentary on the Rambam's Sefer Hamitzvos Shoresh 1) that the Torah does not command us to follow purely rabbinic mitzvos, only rabbinic interpretations of Torah mitzvos. If the people's failure to follow Moshe's command was called "rebellious against Hashem," then it must be that Moshe's command was actually said in explanation of Hashem's command "you shall take possession of the land and live in it."

Some Zionists claim that by categorizing Yishuv Eretz Yisroel as a mitzvah, the Ramban rejects the Three Oaths as halacha and holds that we are commanded to conquer Eretz Yisroel at all times. The above analysis of the Ramban shows clearly that this is not the case. As it is clear from the Torah and the Yalkut, conquering the land was forbidden until the end of the forty-year period in the desert, and even then the people were afraid that perhaps the time had not yet come. The Ramban holds that as soon as the prohibition on conquering the land was lifted, it became not just an optional, permitted act but an obligatory act. During our current exile, the prohibition is in force once again and the mitzvah cannot be fulfilled, except by individuals in a non-confrontational manner. As the Ramban himself puts it, "It is a positive commandment for all generations, in which every one of us is obligated, even during the exile." In other words, during exile the mitzvah falls only upon "every one of us" as individuals; it is not a mitzvah of conquest on the Jewish people as a whole.

Purim 5768

There was a Judean man in Shushan the capital, and his name was Mordechai, son of Yair, son of Shimi, son of Kish, a Benjaminite man. (Esther 2:5)

The Gemara asks: First Scripture tells us that Mordechai was a "Yehudi" – from the tribe of Judah – and then it says he was from the tribe of Benjamin! Rabbi Yochanan resolved this question by saying that in fact, he was from Benjamin, but he was called "Yehudi" because "Yehudi" is a special term of distinction for those who deny belief in idols (Megillah 13a).

This seems to be a strange statement. Idols are patent falsehoods: statues of wood and stone that cannot even move, let alone save their worshippers. Anyone who has any intelligence denies the silly beliefs of idolatry. Why then does someone who denies idols deserve such a dignified name

as "Yehudi"? The term should have been reserved for someone who possesses fear of G-d, love of G-d or another high attainment.

After Moshe Rabbeinu told Pharaoh about the plague of fiery hail that was about to befall Egypt, the Torah says, "Those among Pharaoh's servants who feared the word of Hashem gathered their slaves and cattle into the houses, but those who paid no attention to the word of Hashem left their slaves and cattle in the fields" (Shemos 9:20-21). Here we can ask a question similar to the one above: Why was this considered fear of G-d? Anyone could see that throughout the previous six plagues, whatever Moshe had predicted had come true to the last detail. Whether they feared G-d or not, they should have taken precautions. Those who did not act to protect their property should not have been called "those who paid no attention to the word of Hashem" but rather fools and madmen who did not care about their belongings.

Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, the Alter of Novardok, explained that even when something is obvious and sensible, if it has some connection with belief in prophecy and the word of G-d, then a person will not be able to understand it unless he has a certain level of fear of G-d. If the Egyptians had had any reason to suspect that an enemy army was about to invade their country and steal their property, all of them would certainly have locked up their property well. But since the plague of hail was announced by Moshe Rabbeinu in the name of G-d, and belief in it was thus bound up with belief in G-d's power and attribute of reward and punishment, anyone who was lacking a certain level of fear of G-d was unable to understand and believe that it would really happen.

This is why the Gemara says that one who denies idolatry is given the title "Yehudi" – because however obvious the falsehood of idolatry is, it is impossible for a person to deny it unless he has attained some level of fear of G-d.

We are unfortunately witness to a similar phenomenon today among Jews, many of them religious and some even Torah scholars, who go and settle in the Zionist state, thinking that it is a safe and secure haven, an ideal place to build yeshivos and religious communities in which to raise their families. The terrible danger hovering over Jews in the Holy Land today is obvious and is recognized even by the non-Jewish world. Everyone knows that the State of Israel is the most dangerous place in the world for a Jew to live. Surely, then, wise Jews who have studied the Torah and Talmud should realize this.

But denial of the Zionist idol is the supreme test of our generation, and our entire redemption is hanging in the balance - the Gemara in Sanhedrin 98a states that moshiach will not come until the "low government" is gone from Israel. Admitting that the Zionist state is a place of terrible danger for Jews, and that its army provides no protection but rather puts Jews in even greater danger, involves a certain degree of rejection of the Zionist idolatry, as well as acceptance of the Torah, its principles of reward and punishment, and the words of the prophets. Therefore, although the danger is an objective fact, it is very difficult for many Jews to reach this realization. May G-d help all of us to strengthen our emunah and see the truth!

And all the servants of the king in the king's gate bowed and prostrated themselves to Haman, for so had the king commanded, but Mordechai would not bow and would not prostrate himself (Esther 3:2).

The Gemara asks why Mordechai was called (in 2:5) both a Judean and a Benjaminite. Rava answers that the verse is not coming to tell us what tribe he came from, but rather what tribes caused the near-tragedy in the time of Haman. It was a combination of two acts done hundreds of years earlier, one by King David, from the tribe of Judah, and one by Shaul, from the tribe of Benjamin. David spared the life of Shimi ben Geira, Mordechai's ancestor, and Shaul spared the life of Agag, Haman's ancestor. Thus Mordechai and Haman were born, Mordechai made Haman angry, and Haman decreed destruction on the Jewish people. The Jewish people cried out, "See what the Judean and the Benjaminite did to me!" (Megillah 12b)

The Maharsha asks: Why was the Jewish people angry at Mordechai? Didn't Mordechai save them from the decree through his fasting and prayer? He answers that this still did not make up for the fear Mordechai brought upon them by provoking Haman. It would have been better if Mordechai had never existed and the decree had never come about in the first place.

This seems very strange. We know that Haman himself was an idol and bowing to him was a form of worship. Or, according to one opinion, he hung idols around his neck so that those who bowed to him would be bowing to the idol (Sanhedrin 61b). So what was the righteous Mordechai to do? Of course he had to refuse to bow to Haman. Why did the Jewish people blame him for provoking Haman?

The Manos Halevi answers that Mordechai should have avoided being in the king's gate when Haman walked by. But then the question is how Mordechai could have done such a reckless act of provoking Haman and endangering the Jewish people. To this, the Manos Halevi answers that Mordechai thought that Haman would only punish him personally, not the Jewish people as a whole. He was trying to make a personal sacrifice to atone for the sin of the Jews in the previous generation who bowed to Nevuchadnezzar's statue.

When Haman decreed death on all the Jews, the Jews complained about what Mordechai had done, and even after the decree was annulled, they complained that he had brought fear upon them; it would have been better if he had never provoked the decree in the first place.

However, in the end they recognized that the miracle of Purim had been Hashem's plan – they determined that the Megillah should be included in the Tanach based on the interpretation of a verse (Megillah 7a). They also recognized that only after the miracle of Purim did the Jews accept the Torah wholeheartedly (Shabbos 88a).

Since their complaint against Mordechai was only temporary, why did Chazal tell us about it? What was their purpose in revealing something that reflects badly on such a righteous man? The answer is that Chazal wanted to teach us this important lesson: that if someone brings danger upon the Jewish people, even if later on he saves them, we are not thankful to him.

This is all the more true in the case of the Zionists, who have brought danger upon Jews and have not really saved the Jews at all. Thousands of Jews have died fighting in their wars, and innocent souls continue to perish all the time, may Hashem have mercy. The danger created by the Zionists is unfortunately still as present as ever! (Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah, Chapters 38-41)

Purim 5770

Why did the Jews in that generation deserve destruction? Because they had pleasure from the feast of that wicked man (King Achashverosh). (Megillah 12a)

When Chazal looked at Haman's decree, they perceived clearly why it came. But the simple Jews of the time saw the decree as the result of Mordechai's refusal to bow to Haman. They complained to Mordechai and blamed their predicament on him, as the Gemara says (Megillah 12b): "See what the Judean and the Benjaminite did to me!"

Looking deeper, we see that the Jews' attending the feast and their blaming the decree on Mordechai are two sides of the same coin. Mordechai, as the gadol hador, certainly warned the Jews not to attend the feast, or else there would be dire consequences. They disregarded his warning, yet nothing bad happened to them. Nine years later, Mordechai refused to bow to Haman, and the Jews warned him that he was bringing danger upon them. And indeed, Haman immediately decreed death upon all the Jews. The gadol hador, with his "daas Torah", could not have looked more wrong.

When did the Jews finally recognize that Mordechai had been right? When Mordechai became the king's prime minister. Their whole reason for attending the feast had been to mingle with the gentiles and thus gain respect in their eyes. For the same reason, they held that bowing to Haman was the correct path. But now, who had gained the most respect in the king's eyes? Mordechai, who had opposed attending the feast and refused to bow to Haman and his idol. This was the ultimate proof that standing by our Torah principles, rather than assimilation, is the key to our survival.

This is why we sum up the central lesson of the Megillah with the words: "The rose of Yaakov was elated and joyful when they saw together the royal blue of Mordechai." Seemingly, it should have said that they were joyful when they saw that they had triumphed over their enemies. But the answer is that it is more important to understand why we were in danger and why we were saved - as a lesson for the future. We must always remember that following the directives of the gedolei hador is the way to safety, even if at the time it seems that they are leading us to danger and not following them would lead to safety.

This is the meaning of Chazal's statement (Megillah 7b) that a man must drink until he cannot distinguish between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai." He must get to the point where he mixes up the words and says "blessed is Haman" and "cursed is Mordechai." And even then - even when it seems to him that following the gedolei hador will lead to curses for the Jewish people and blessings for its enemies, he must have faith and follow them.

In our times we are witness to a classic example of this. The gedolei hador warned the Jewish people against the Zionist plan to establish a state, quoting the terrifying admonition: "If you keep the oath, good, but if not, I will declare your flesh ownerless like the gazelles and deer of the field" (Kesubos 111a). Yet when the Zionists went ahead and established a state, that tragedy did not materialize. True, the state has brought on a cycle of wars and violence in which 14,000 Jews have lost their lives, and even one lost life is a good enough reason why the state should not have been established. But this is still nothing on the scale of Chazal's warning.

Today, the gedolei hador instruct us that giving up the state is the only path to safety. The Satmar Rebbe writes in *Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah*, siman 44: "Even now, if they were to give up their state and their government, there is no doubt that they would take Hashem's anger away from the Jewish people... Every minute that they hold on to their power, they are offending the Creator, blessed be He, with violation of the oaths and rebellion against the nations, which the holy Torah has forbidden and for which we have been warned of a severe punishment." Many people read these words but think they know better. To them, it is obvious that giving up the state today would place the Jewish people in danger.

The Purim story teaches us that we must have emunas chachamim. What the chachamim say is dangerous is dangerous, and what they say is safe is safe, even if it looks to us otherwise. When we keep to the terms of the exile in which Hashem placed us, we are under His protection, but when we violate those terms, we are vulnerable.

The classic statement about Hashem's protection of us in exile is found in the Hagadah of Pesach: "And this is what has stood by our fathers and us, for not only one arose against us to destroy us, but in every generation they arise against us to destroy us, and the Holy One, blessed is He, saves us from their hands."

Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi (an early Rishon), in his commentary *Maasei Hashem* on the Hagadah, asks: Why do we need Hashem to promise us that in every generation they will try to destroy and He will save us? Wouldn't it be better if we weren't persecuted in the first place? He answers that the words "this is what has stood..." do not refer to a promise, i.e. that Hashem's promise has stood by us to protect us from attacks. Rather, they mean that the very phenomenon of the nations persecuting us and Hashem saving us has stood by us is the proof in every generation that Hashem still loves us. If, on the other hand, He simply overthrew our oppressors, it would only prove His hatred for them, not His love for us.

But according to this, what is the connection to the previous paragraph in the Hagadah, which quotes Hashem's promise to Avraham Avinu? Doesn't this show that "this is what has stood by our fathers and us" refers back to that promise? The *Maasei Hashem* explains: Hashem promised that Avraham's descendents would be slaves, in order to eventually leave Egypt in a miraculous way, receive the Torah and spread the belief in Hashem in the world. And the promise was fulfilled with the children of Israel, not Avraham's other descendents: the Ishmaelites, the Edomites or the children of Keturah. This showed His special love for the Israelites. But the memory of the Exodus faded in the world's consciousness, and therefore there needs to a reminder of Hashem's love for us in every generation. That reminder is the persecution of the Jews and Hashem saving them from it.

The Maharal (Netzach Yisroel Chapter 10) makes a similar observation on Megillah 11a, which quotes the verse "I did not reject them nor despise them" (Vayikra 26:44) and interprets each part as a reference to a different danger encountered by the Jews in exile, and the people who saved them: Daniel and his companions saved them from Babylon, Mordechai and Esther from Haman, Shimon Hatzadik and the Hasmoneans from the Greeks, and Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi and the Sages of every generation from the Romans. Had Hashem simply influenced the hearts of the leaders not to harm the Jews, says the Maharal, this would not have shown that He did not reject the Jewish people. But when He put Jews in positions from which they were able to save their people, that showed His special love and protection for them.

The Gemara (Megillah 6b) says that the months of Purim and Pesach are always consecutive - even in a leap year when there are two Adars, we keep Purim in the second Adar - in order to draw a parallel between the redemption from Egypt and the redemption from Haman's decree. Just as we saw Hashem's love for us in the redemption from Egypt, so we see it His protection over us in exile. Exile is where Hashem wants us to be in our times, and that is the path to true safety.

Parah 5768

One who touches a dead human body will be unclean for seven days; he must purify himself with [the ashes of the red heifer] on the third day, and on the seventh day [at nightfall] he will become clean. (Bamidbar 19:11-12)

The Mishnah in Parah 3:5 teaches that the first red heifer was burnt under the direction of Moshe Rabbeinu in the desert, and its ashes were used to purify Jews for almost a thousand years, until the time of Ezra, when the Second Temple was built and a new red heifer was prepared. During the Second Temple era a total of eight red heifers were prepared. Another red heifer will not be prepared until the coming of moshiach (Rambam Parah Adumah 3:4). Although after the destruction of the Temple no red heifer was ever prepared, we know that in the times of the Tannaim and Amoraim they still had some of the ashes of the last red heifer, as the Tosefta (Parah 3) states: "The ashes descended with them to Babylonia..." Rabbi Yaakov Emden also says this in Sheilas Yaavetz 1:89, and he brings proof from Chagigah 25a: "The group purifies its wine and oil in Galilee." The same proof is cited by the Mishneh Lamelech in the Laws of Mourners, Chapter 3. It is also known that the Arizal instructed his disciples never to use practical Kabbalah, since we have no ashes of the red heifer in our time to become clean. The Talmudic Sages, he says, had the right to use it because they still had some ashes of the red heifer in a secret place for exceptional individuals to use.

Based on this information, the Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro of Munkacz explained the true meaning of a text often quoted by the Zionists. The Gemara says in Gittin 8b that if a Jew buys a field from a non-Jew in the Holy Land, he may ask the non-Jew to write the document on Shabbos if necessary, because when it comes to settling the Land the Sages waived the prohibition of asking a non-Jew to do work on Shabbos. This statement is also found in Bava Kama 80b, and is codified by the Rambam in his Laws of Shabbos 6:11 and by the Shulchan Aruch in Orach Chaim 306:11. We see from here, say the Zionists, that it is a positive

commandment to settle the Holy Land with Jews, and that this commandment applies even in our times.

The Munkaczer Rebbe explains that there is a difference between the times of the Gemara, which was shortly after the destruction of the Temple, and today. The Gemara says in Megillah 10a that we may offer sacrifices although there is no Temple. The issue of offering the Pesach offering, should we receive permission to do so, has been discussed by Rabbi Akiva Eiger and the Chasam Sofer. Rabbi Chaim Nathanson, after a lengthy analysis in his work *Avodah Tamah*, concludes that we may not offer any sacrifices nowadays. Since we are all defiled from contact with dead bodies, and a defiled congregation cannot offer sacrifices without the atonement of the Kohein Gadol's forehead plate, today as there is no forehead plate we cannot do it.

But in Talmudic times the Jews were not defiled, because they still possessed the ashes of the last red heifer. That is why the Sages were interested in keeping the Jewish settlement alive in Eretz Yisroel, so that they could purify themselves and offer sacrifices if permission were ever granted to do so. If no Jews lived there, who would offer the sacrifices if permission were granted? Jews would have to travel in from afar, a difficult journey in those days, over dangerous roads and stormy seas, and by the time they arrived perhaps the government would revoke its permission. So this buying of property on Shabbos was permitted not because of a positive commandment to settle in Eretz Yisroel, but because the Sages wanted there to be Jews living in Eretz Yisroel to offer sacrifices if it became possible. Since the Sages were the ones who made the prohibition on asking a non-Jew to do work on Shabbos, they had the power to suspend their own prohibition in this case so that the non-Jew could write up the bill of sale, in case he needed to leave right away and could not wait till after Shabbos.

Explaining it this way has an additional advantage: it solves an apparent contradiction in the Rambam. The Rambam, in his list of the 613 commandments, does not list any positive commandment to settle in Eretz Yisroel. This may be because he held that the Torah's words "and you shall take possession of the land and live in it" (Bamidbar 33:53) are a promise and not a commandment (see Rashi on that verse). Alternatively, it was a temporary commandment that applied only during the Temple era (Megillas Esther; see Parsha Pearls Matos/Masei 5766). In any case, there is no such commandment nowadays according to the Rambam. How then can the Rambam codify the law that one may ask a non-Jew to write up a document in order to purchase land in Eretz Yisroel? But according to the above, the Sages' reasons for encouraging Jews to purchase land in Eretz Yisroel have nothing to do with a commandment to settle there.

This halacha – asking the non-Jew to write a document - will not apply nowadays, since we are in any case unclean and cannot bring the Pesach offering. Still, the Rambam codifies it, following his practice of bringing all the laws in the Talmud, past, present or future. The Shulchan Aruch, too, brings it since it does apply after the destruction of the Temple and could conceivably apply today if we had the ashes of the red heifer. (Minchas Elazar 5:16)

Shemini 5770

An oven and a stove shall be smashed - they are defiled, and they shall be defiled to you. (11:35)

The Satmar Rebbe said in the name of tzaddikim that the word "oven" (תנור) in this verse alludes to the Zionist movement, which could be considered to have been born in the year 1896 (תרנ"ו), when Herzl published his book "The Jewish State." The Torah says that תרנ"ו must be smashed, for it is defiled. (Rabbi Yishai Buchinger, Zichronos Fun Heilign Satmar Rebben, p. 17-18)

He also said that תש"ח, the year the Zionist state was founded, is alluded to in the verse, "Go, descend, for your people have become corrupt (שחת). They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them; they have made for themselves a molten calf..." (Shemos 32:7).

In the spirit of "leitzanusa d'avodah zarah" (Megillah 25b) we will bring a few more quotes from gedolim in this vein. The Minchas Elazar once said that the Torah contains allusions to both Herzl and Rav Kook in the following verse: "Do not explore after your heart and after your eyes" (Bamidbar 15:39). "Heart" refers to Herzl, whose name means heart. "Eyes" refer to Rav Kook, whose name means look. (The Gemara in Berachos 12b comments on this verse that "heart" refers to heresy and "eyes" refer to sinful thoughts.)

When Rav Kook was appointed as Zionist chief rabbi, Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld commented prophetically, "Their first chief rabbi is a Kohein. The second will be a Levi, the third will be a Yisroel, and the fourth will be a mamzer." Indeed, the second chief rabbi was Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog, the third was Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman, and the fourth was Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who permitted mamzerim.

Once the Satmar Rebbe was working on writing Vayoel Moshe late in the afternoon and twilight periods, until the last minutes when it was still possible to daven Mincha. He rushed downstairs to daven, and there he met his friend Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanovitz, the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva. The Rebbe excused himself, saying he was in a hurry to daven Mincha. "The Rebbe hasn't davened Mincha yet?!" said Rabbi Kalmanovitz. "We have already davened Maariv." The Rebbe replied with a smile, "We are working to make night into day, while others make day into night!" (Vayoel Moshe Emes, pp. 19-20)

The Satmar Rebbe used to say that the Mizrachi (meaning eastern) party picked an appropriate name: the Gemara (Bava Basra 25a) says that the Shechinah is in the west, and everything they do is against the Shechinah. (Gerlitz, Der Zeil Fun Di Yiddishe Velt p. 222) (Actually the name "Mizrachi" was intended as a contraction of the words "Merkaz Ruchni.")

A descendent of the great Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin (1797-1850) told the Satmar Rebbe that when Rabbi Yisroel heard about Rabbi Hirsch Kalischer's ideas, he had the following to say: "How does geulah (redemption) come about? We take the word golah (exile) and add to it an alef, which stands for the Yechido Shel Olam, the One G-d. But if the Yechido Shel Olam is not part of it, then it is not geulah but golah, and it prevents the geulah!"

The Rebbe once repeated this story and added a twist of his own: "The Zionists call their independence day Yom Ha-atzmaus. If you remove the alef from atzmaus, you get atzamos – bones. I am afraid" – he said with a tremble – "that their Yom Ha-atzmaus will lead, G-d forbid, to bones, because of the terrifying warning given by Chazal that if we force the end of exile, He

will permit our flesh like the gazelles and deer of the field. This is a tremendous danger for the Jewish people!" (Moshian Shel Yisroel v. 3, p. 338)

Once the Rebbe wondered why tachanun was not said on the yahrtzeit of a tzaddik, when one would have thought that one should omit tachanun on the yahrtzeit of a wicked person since "when the wicked perish there is song" (Mishlei 11:10). (The Rebbe, p. 176)

A man once came to greet the Rebbe, who asked him where he came from. The man said that he had come from Eretz Yisroel to see the state of Judaism in America. He continued by saying that, baruch Hashem, he sees that everything is fine, and concluded, "Ashrei haam shekacha lo," pronouncing the word "shekacha" with a patach instead of a komatz. The Rebbe replied, quoting the Gemara (Shabbos 105b), "Such is the profession of the evil inclination: today he tells a man to do this (kach) and the next day he tells him to do this (kach), until he tells him to worship idols, and he goes and worships." (ibid. p. 177)

When the Rebbe came to Eretz Yisroel in 1945, he met a young man named Leizer who had been brought up Chassidic and learned under the Rebbe in Hungary, but now was dressed in the modern style, and without a beard or payos. Someone introduced him, saying, "This is Leizer from Ungvar." The Rebbe said, "Really? When you learned by me, you looked a little different!" The young man excused himself, "I've been in Jerusalem for five years." The Rebbe heaved a deep sigh and said with a sweet smile, "Yes, yes, Uva letzion goel - when you come to Zion, you are ois-leizer!" (Peulas Tzaddik Lechaim, pp. 60-61)

On the sixth of Tishrei 5727 (1966), upon returning from a massive protest against autopsies, the Rebbe said, "The Torah (Devarim 14:1) says לא תתגודדו ולא תשימו קרחה בין עיניכם למת. The Gemara (Yevamos 14a) explains: Lo sigodedu - do not make agudos agudos. This means that if there were no Agudah (i.e. if Agudah did not participate in the Zionist government but rather joined in the struggle against it from the outside) there would be no קרחה בין עיניכם למת - no autopsies. (The Rebbe, p. 181)

The Rebbe once asked a Jew from Eretz Yisroel what was new. When the man answered that all was well ("b'seder"), the Rebbe said, "By the seder there is also maror." (ibid. p. 193)

Shemini 5771 (Note: the first part of this is copied from Devarim 5769. In the book the last part, the new material, should simply be appended there. Or vice-versa, since there aren't any other Parsha Pearls on Shemini.)

If one of these [rodents] falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is inside shall be defiled, and you shall break it. (Vayikra 11:33)

The Gemara (Shabbos 138b) says, "The Torah will one day be forgotten from Israel...a woman will take a loaf of terumah bread that was baked in a defiled oven and go around to all the shuls and batei medrash asking if it is ritually defiled or clean, and no one will know the answer. But doesn't the Torah say explicitly that it is defiled? Rather, the question will be whether it is first degree defilement or second degree, and no one will know the answer."

We must ask: Chazal were making a prediction about our time, when the laws of ritual defilement are no longer kept, since we have no red heifer and we are all defiled. Why then did they pick the laws of defilement as an example of a law of the Torah that will be forgotten? Why didn't they pick a law that is kept nowadays, such as a law of Shabbos or forbidden food?

There is another place where we find that the Jewish people was tested on the laws of defilement and failed. Chaggai Hanavi (2:12-14) tested the kohanim and said, "If a man holds defiled meat [i.e. a dead rodent] in the corner of his garment and touches bread, soup, wine, oil or any food, will it become defiled?" And they said, no. "And if one defiled by a dead body touches any of these, will it become defiled?" And they said, yes. And Chaggai said, "So is this people and so is this nation before me, said Hashem."

Again, we see that the question of defilement spreading from one object to another seems to be the key test as to whether Torah was forgotten and whether the Jewish people can be rebuilt. What is so essential about this question?

Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum (1897-1969, rav in Kew Gardens), said that in order to answer this, we must first note that there are two aspects of defilement that we do not find in any other area of halacha. Firstly, if kosher meat and treif meat are placed side by side, unless the treif meat is hot and placed on the bottom, the kosher does not become treif. The kosher remains kosher and the treif remains treif. But if one object is clean and the other is defiled, the clean is always affected by the defiled and never vice versa. This occurs not only when they come into direct contact, but even when something else intervenes between them: one object becomes defiled to the first degree, and the next to the second degree. Sometimes defilement spreads without any physical contact, such as to an object in the same room as a dead body or in the same vessel as a dead rodent.

Furthermore, one would think that the holier an item is, the less susceptible it is to defilement, but the Torah teaches us the opposite. With regular food, defilement cannot proceed beyond the second degree, but with terumah, it reaches the third degree, and with sacrificial meat it reaches the fourth degree. The reason is that defilement always wants to cling to the most holy object. This is also the reason why, according to one opinion, a dead Jewish body has a higher level of defilement than a dead gentile body (Yevamos 61a). The Ohr Hachaim (on Bamidbar 19:2) gives the analogy of two barrels, one full of honey and the other full of manure. When emptied out and then left in the sun to rot, the barrel that once contained honey attracts more flies, due to its sweetness. So too, when a Jewish body is emptied of its holy soul, the powers of defilement are attracted to it more than to a gentile's dead body, because the gentile's soul had less holiness.

With this in mind, we realize that defilement can be used as a metaphor for heresy and false ideas. Heresy also spreads very easily, as Shlomo Hamelech said, "Keep your path far from it" (Mishlei 5:8), which Chazal (Shabbos 116a) explain as a reference to heresy. And the Gemara continues there: "If a man is being pursued by a murderer or a poisonous snake, he may enter a house of idol worship to save himself but not a house of heresy, because the heretics know and deny, while the idol worshippers do not know any better (and are simply doing what their fathers taught them)."

Chaggai Hanavi foresaw that during Bayis Sheini, the central problem of the Jewish people would be not idolatry as in Bayis Rishon, but heresy: the Sadducees and the Hellenizers. Therefore, at the dawn of Bayis Sheini, Chaggai tested the kohanim, as leaders of the people, to see if they understood the danger of heresy and how contagious it was. They kohanim answered no to Chaggai's first question, thus failing the test (Pesachim 17a). They did not know that the defilement of a dead rodent could spread as far as the fourth degree. This led Chaggai to pronounce, "So is this people and so is this nation before me, said Hashem." If the leaders do not recognize the danger of heresy, what will become of the nation? They will be led astray and the leaders will be held responsible, for it is up to them to steer the people onto the right path, as Rashi says in our Parsha.

Similarly, Chazal foresaw the heresies of our time and said, "The Torah will one day be forgotten from Israel." Which Torah? The Torah that teaches us how easily and how far false Torah views can spread. In a time when such false views can easily be written or spoken by anyone and spread around the world through countless forms of media, it is up to the leaders of the Jewish people to speak out the true Torah view and thus stem the tide of falsehood. Jews are hungry for the truth, as the posuk (Amos 8:11) quoted in that same Gemara says, "Behold, days are coming, said Hashem, when I will send out a hunger in the land: not a hunger for bread, and not a thirst for water, but to hear the words of Hashem."

But it remains to be explained: how is it that the kohanim tested by Chaggai did not know that a rodent could communicate fourth-degree defilement, but knew that a person defiled by a dead body could do so? The Gemara (Pesachim 17a) provides the answer: "Rav Nachman said in the name of Rabbah bar Avuha: They were well-versed in the defilement of dead bodies, but not well-versed in the defilement of rodents."

Metaphorically, this refers to certain rabbis in our time, who speak out publicly against all sorts of "dead" heresies that the Jewish people has faced throughout history. They warn their listeners against the dangers of the Sadducees, the Hellenizers, the Karaites, the Sabbateans, the Christians, and the assimilationists. But they never say a word against the idolatry that is alive and well, spreading quickly like multiplying rodents in our times - the Jewish nationalist movement. When an idolatry is dead, along with all those who once bowed to it, it is easy to speak against it. But when the idolatry is alive, it is easier to keep quiet, because speaking against it could bring insults upon the speaker - as well as loss of his rabbinic position. (Kol Yaakov pp. 11-14)

Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum spoke these words in 1951. Sixty years have passed, and if he were alive today he would certainly add secular Zionism to his list of dead ideologies against which people have no trouble speaking. The old generation of fiery secular Zionists has all but died out, and their children are no longer interested in keeping a Jewish state alive through endless warfare.

Today we live in the era of post-Zionism. Israeli politicians are conducting negotiations to give back more and more of their country to the Palestinians. Israeli citizens are dodging the draft because they see their country's wars as pointless. More and more, they are feeling that the benefits of having a state are not worth the price of constant struggle with their Arab neighbors.

The 2007 National Survey of American Jews found that less than half of American Jews under the age of 35 are comfortable with the idea of a Jewish state.

Hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens have already moved to other countries and have no plans to return. The Zionist Absorption Ministry, once famous for bringing millions of Jews to the State of Israel and providing them with housing and employment, stated recently that between 18,000 and 21,000 Israelis emigrate each year. There are 650,000 Israelis living abroad, and 450,000 of them live in North America. The Ministry is struggling unsuccessfully to recover these expatriates.

Yet among the Orthodox, Zionism is on the rise. The religious parties and the chareidi newspapers are the most hawkish opponents of land concessions. The West Bank settlers are mostly religious. The hesder yeshiva units are the most motivated soldiers in the army. Even as secular Israelis vacation in every part of the world except their own country, Orthodox Jews in America and other countries make the State of Israel their destination of choice - for vacation as well as education. Even as the Israelis leave their country in droves, the religious organizations are drumming up support for aliyah. It is this chareidi Zionism that is the "live" idolatry of our times - and the speakers are silent.

To compound the problem, people play the name game. Zionism is defined as secular Zionism, so that everyone who is pro-Torah is automatically defined as anti-Zionist and could not possibly be accused of promoting Zionism. "The State of Israel" is replaced by the innocent sounding "Eretz Yisroel," a place where Jews live and are in danger. Strengthening the army and praying for its success are portrayed as nothing more than concern for Jewish lives.

In such a time of confusion, we need to show our rabbanim and gedolim that we are ready to hear from them the truth. In the words of the Navi, we are "not hungry for bread, nor thirsty for water, but to hear the words of Hashem."

Tazria 5768

And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised (12:3)

At every bris milah, the mohel recites, "Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon Hakohein, turned away my anger from the children of Israel when he acted out My anger in their midst, and so I did not destroy the children of Israel in My anger...Eliyahu, angel of the bris, here is yours; stand on my right hand and support me." What is the connection between Pinchas, renamed Eliyahu, and bris milah? Why is he called "the angel of the bris"? True, Hashem did promise Pinchas a covenant of peace, but nowhere does it say that this refers to the covenant of circumcision. If any person in the Torah is to be connected with the mitzvah of bris milah, it should be Avraham Avinu, who was the first to perform this mitzvah.

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 48:8) says that Avraham Avinu will sit by the door to Gehinom and not let any Jew enter, unless he is uncircumcised. The Gemara (Eiruvin 19a) says that Avraham will not let any Jew into Gehinom unless he married a gentile woman. What is special

about these two virtues – being circumcised and not marrying a gentile – that they have the power to spare a Jew from Gehinom?

The Meshech Chochmah on Bereishis 15:18 answers this question based on the Midrash in Bereishis Rabba 44:21: Hashem showed Avraham four things: Gehinom, the exiles, the giving of the Torah and the Temple. He said to him, “As long as your descendents are busy with the last two, they will be spared the first two. But if they leave the last two, they will get the first two. [Since the Temple will one day be destroyed, they will have to get one of the punishments.] Which punishment do you choose for them?” Rabbi Chanina bar Papa said: Avraham chose the exiles. Rabbi Yudan, Rabbi Idi and Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said: Avraham chose Gehinom, but Hashem chose for him the exiles...Rabbi Huna said in the name of Rabbi Acha: Avraham was sitting and thinking all that day: “What should I choose, Gehinom or exile?” Said the Holy One, blessed is He, to him, “Avraham! Throw away that coin [of Gehinom]!”

The Midrash on Eichah 1:3 says: Why does Scripture speak so much about the exile of the Jewish people? Aren't there many nations who were exiled from their lands? The Midrash answers: when gentiles go into exile, they assimilate into their new country. They eat the same foods, drink the same drinks and eventually intermarry with the population of the new country. Thus they are not really in exile anymore; they are full-fledged members of their new country's culture. But Jews go into exile and remain separate from the culture around them, not eating with the gentiles or intermarrying; thus their exile continues for generation after generation.

Avraham has the power to spare a Jew from Gehinom because of the deal he made with G-d, that his descendants would go into exile instead of Gehinom. But there is one gap in Avraham's power: if a Jew has assimilated to the point where he marries a gentile or is not circumcised, Avraham cannot save him, because such a Jew chose not to truly experience exile, and by default he has opted for the only other alternative: Gehinom.

Based on these words of the Meshech Chochmah, we can understand the crucial role of Pinchas. Pinchas saw a Jew about to marry a gentile woman, and took zealous action. Through his zeal, that Jew was privileged to die as a Jew. The Torah says (Bamidbar 25:14), "And the name of the Israelite man who was smitten..." He died with the distinction of being called "an Israelite man". Thus Pinchas, with his zeal in fighting assimilation, closed the gap in Avraham's power. Thanks to Pinchas and those like him, every Jew can be saved from Gehinom. This is why he, under his new name Eliyahu Hanavi, was chosen to be the "angel of the bris."

In times past, assimilation was the main threat to Avraham's covenant, which substituted exile for Gehinom. But now we face a different threat to that same covenant: Zionism. By bringing a premature end to the exile, Zionism undermines Avraham's power to spare every Jew from Gehinom. We are in danger of seeing the fulfillment of Rabbeinu Gershom's prophetic words, in his commentary to Tamid 32a: "The Satan triumphs! He confuses them and gives them a redemption, and in the end he will bring them down to Gehinom!" He means that those who partake in the Satan's false redemption will end up in Gehinom, because they will not experience the exile planned by Avraham Avinu as its substitute. Let us emulate Pinchas by acting zealously to close this gap and bring every Jew into the covenant of Avraham.

If a woman's blood flows for many days outside of her period of separation... (15:25)

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 19:5) connects this verse with another verse containing the words "many days" (ימים רבים), a prophecy about the Jewish exile: "And many days will pass by for Israel without a true G-d and without a kohein to teach and without Torah. And they will repent, in their trouble, to Hashem, G-d of Israel, and they will seek Him and He will be found by them. And in those times, there will be no peace for people coming and going, for many upheavals will affect the inhabitants of all the lands. One nation will be battered by the other, and one city by the other, for G-d will confound them with all kinds of trouble. But you be strong, and let your hands not weaken, for there is reward for your actions" (Divrei Hayamim II 15:3-7).

The Midrash explains that "without a true G-d" means that G-d's attribute of justice will not be exercised in the world; the nations will persecute the Jews and seemingly escape punishment. "Without a kohein to teach" means that the office of kohein gadol will cease to exist. "Without Torah" means that the Sanhedrin will cease to exist.

Apart from the similarity of words, what is the connection between this and the subject of our Parsha? The Parsha speaks about a woman's monthly state of separation (nidah). The prophets compare the Jewish people's exile to a state of nidah separation: "Their way was considered by Me like the defilement of nidah" (Yechezkel 36:17). Rashi comments, "Scripture compares the Jewish people to a wife in a state of nidah, whose husband is waiting and looking forward to her becoming clean again." Similarly the Radak says, "Just as a husband sends his wife away from him during her nidah and brings her back after she has become clean, so too G-d exiled the Jewish people into the lands of the nations because of their sins and He will bring them back after they repent to Him and become pure of sin."

But there are two types of nidah: the regular monthly nidah, and the zavah. The regular monthly nidah is predictable and short. It lasts seven days, and then she is clean again (15:19). The zavah, on the other hand, occurs at irregular times, and can last indefinitely - until she has seven clean days in a row. The Jewish people as well have had two types of exiles. The Babylonian exile had an explicitly stated time limit of 70 years, whereas the current exile stretches on and on and seems to have no end. The Midrash is comparing our current exile to the zavah.

The Midrash continues, "When the Jews at that time heard this bleak prophecy, they became discouraged. Then a Divine Voice proclaimed the words of Yishaya 35:3-4: 'Strengthen weak hands and give support to falling knees! Say to the impatient-hearted: Be strong, do not fear. Behold, your G-d will come in vengeance, with Divine retribution He will come and save you.'" The impatient-hearted, explains the Midrash, are those who force the end of exile before its time.

The 5th of Iyar is the anniversary of the day when these impatient-hearted people declared that they had had enough of Hashem's decree of exile, and they had decided to end it with their own action. Although the official declaration was made on that day, it was preceded by six months of fighting, in which the Zionists brought the anger of the local and neighboring Arabs upon the Jews of Eretz Yisroel. Jerusalem was besieged, and the Arab villages along the western approach

to Jerusalem became major battlefields. In the midst of this war, on April 8, 1948, the Brisker Rav and the Chazon Ish encouraged all the religious Jews of Jerusalem to come out to the streets and wave the white flag to show the Arabs and the British that they were not Zionists and wanted no part in this war. The demonstration was led by Rabbi Yaakov Halperin, a close disciple of the Chazon Ish, and Rabbi Amram Blau, a close disciple of the Brisker Rav.

Several hundred Jews of the Old Yishuv gathered in the Meah Shearim Yeshiva to say Tehillim and hear speeches. Then they came out and began to march down Meah Shearim Street. Businesses closed and thousands of other residents joined the march. They held white banners reading, "We are for peace! We demand a ceasefire!" The leaflets they handed out read, "Do not blindly follow the leaders of the Zionist Agency, who refuse to listen to our holy Torah! Do not allow your sons and daughters to be killed for the sake of a state of emptiness! We are for peace! Jews, rise up against the policies of the leadership of the Agency, who are mafkir Jewish blood. The Zionist leadership does not represent us! We are Jews, and we will follow the Torah's guidance! We are for peace! We turn to the British Government to save us from our predicament!"

The demonstrators had planned to march to the British Mandate offices to deliver their message in person. But they had only reached Geulah Street when the Zionist Haganah met them with blows and shots. They beat the demonstrators mercilessly until they scattered and ran home. The Zionists also confiscated all films and pictures taken of the demonstration before they could reach the media. The Jews of the Old Yishuv submitted their plea to the British in writing.

After the demonstration, another leaflet was published explaining its purpose, and, following in the footsteps of Yishaya Hanavi, telling the impatient-hearted to wait for Hashem's redemption: "It is true that among the nations of the world the sword rules, and whoever is stronger wins. But the Jewish people is completely different. Its salvation and redemption will come from the Rock of Israel, and as fast as we repent and purify our minds of thoughts borrowed from the nations, that is how fast our redemption will come. Our land then will be much bigger than the strip they are fighting for now. But we will not get it through our power and not by the sword, but by Hashem's salvation. In the meantime, let us not force the end by killing, G-d forbid, the remainder of the Jews. Let us guard the coal of Israel from being extinguished, G-d forbid. Let us keep our young men, each of whom is worth an entire world... Let us gird ourselves with patience for that great and awesome day, when Hashem will gather us in... We knew we would be beaten for delivering this message. We knew we would be laughed at. But the feelings of Ahavas Yisroel that burn in our hearts did not allow us to stay home and keep our bodies and dignity intact. We exposed ourselves to blows in order to express our position, which is only for the good of the Jewish people."

The Chazon Ish later remarked, "When the state was established, there was a kitrug (accusation) in Heaven against Jews of Eretz Yisroel for not leaving the state. I myself was ready to leave. But when they marched in Jerusalem holding white banners demanding a ceasefire, the accusation was dropped and there was atonement."

"And He saw our affliction, our toil and our pressure." Our pressure – this refers to forcing. (Hagadah Shel Pesach)

Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (1786-1869), in his commentary Maasei Yedei Yotzer, explains that the Jewish people was not deserving of redemption at that time, but with their outcry to G-d they "forced" the end of the exile and were redeemed prematurely. Seemingly, he asks, this would violate the Three Oaths (Kesubos 111a). One of the oaths is not to force the End, and Rashi says that this refers to excessive prayer for the redemption. He answers that the nations were also given an oath: not to afflict the Jews too much. The Egyptians violated this oath, and so the Jews were also permitted to violate their oath.

The Satmar Rav comments that this resolves an important question regarding this comment of Rashi. If it is really prohibited to pray excessively for the end of the exile, then why do we never find the commentators and halachic authorities specifying an exact definition of how much is "excessive"? And it would seem that we do pray a lot for the redemption, mentioning it numerous times in our prayers, three times a day. But according to Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, the answer is that this oath has been null and void almost from the start, because during every phase of the exile, beginning with the destruction of the Temple, the gentile nations have violated their oath and afflicted the Jews too much. It is therefore permitted for us to pray for the redemption as much as we want, and that is why the commentators do not bother to define the limit.

However, this does not mean that the other oath on the Jewish people, which forbids them to ascend to the Holy Land en masse and take it over, is dependent on the gentiles keeping their oath, as Zionists have claimed. If this claim were true, the Jewish oath would have become null and void shortly after the destruction of the Temple, and we would not find the Amoraim Rav Yehuda and Rabbi Zeira discussing whether the oaths prohibit Jews to go from Babylonia to Eretz Yisroel. And as we say in the Hagadah, "In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us." In every generation they have "afflicted the Jews too much" and yet in every generation halachic authorities such as the Rambam, the Rivash, the Rashbash and the Aruch Hashulchan have treated the oaths as binding.

Furthermore, it is clear that the Jews' oath was not made for the gentiles' benefit, since we see that, according to the Yefeh Kol and others, the oath prohibits taking over the land even with the gentiles' explicit permission. Rather, the Jews' oath was meant to preserve our state of exile until the coming of moshiach, sent by G-d at the time He deems correct. To attempt to end the exile before its time is thwarting G-d's plan and is tantamount to heresy. Thus the oaths cannot be understood as a covenant or treaty between the Jews and the gentiles; the Jews' oath is a completely spiritual matter with no connection whatsoever to what the gentiles do.

However, in the case of the oath prohibiting forcing the End, which according to Rashi means excessive prayer, we cannot say that violating the oath is tantamount to heresy, since on the contrary, prayer strengthens the Jew's belief that G-d controls all events and only He can end the exile. Therefore, as long as the gentiles treated the exiled Jews in accordance with G-d's decree and did not exceed their limit, G-d did not want us to pray for the end of exile, since the exile was His plan and is for our benefit. But when the gentiles exceed their limit, their actions

emanate from their own free will and not from G-d's decree, and so we may pray to G-d to save us from them. (Vayael Moshe 1:79)

The question still remains: when the nations exceed their limit, why are we permitted to pray for the coming of moshiach and the final redemption? We should just pray that they stop afflicting the Jews too much, so that the exile planned by G-d can continue for our benefit. Furthermore, the nations have exceeded their limit from the very beginning, and yet we see that the exile has continued for almost 2000 years. Clearly this is G-d's plan, so why are we allowed to pray for the redemption?

We can answer these questions when we realize that the concept of the interdependence of the oaths really has its source in the Midrash. "Rabbi Yosi bar Chanina said: There are two oaths here, one to Israel and one to the nations of the world. He adjured Israel not to rebel against the yoke of the kingdoms, and he adjured the kingdoms not to harden the yoke upon Israel, for if they harden the yoke upon Israel they cause the End to come prematurely" (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2:7). Of course, this Midrash does not say what the Zionists claim it says, that if the nations harden their yoke it becomes permitted for Israel to rebel against them and bring the End prematurely. It says that if the nations harden the yoke then G-d will bring the End prematurely. But we see an important thing here: that at a certain point, G-d's reaction to the nations' affliction of the Jews is not just to stop that affliction, but to bring the final redemption.

The reason for this is explained by the prophet Yechezkel (36:20-24): "They came among the nations, and they desecrated My holy name, when it was said of them, they are the nation of Hashem, and have come out of His land. And I had pity on My holy name, which the House of Israel desecrated among the nations where they came. Therefore, say to the House of Israel, so says Hashem G-d: Not for your sake do I act, House of Israel, but for My great name which you have desecrated among the nations where you have come. And I will sanctify My great name, desecrated among the nations, which you have desecrated in their midst, and the nations will know that I am Hashem, said Hashem G-d, when I become sanctified through you before their eyes. And I will take you from the nations, and I will gather you from all the lands, and I will bring you to your land." Rashi (v. 20) says that the desecration of G-d's name lay in the fact that the nations said, "These are G-d's people, and yet G-d could not save them from going into exile." According to this, the redemption should have happened right away, to correct this desecration of the name. But G-d has a purpose for the exile, and so He lets the desecration of His name pass, up to a certain point. As the Talmud (Gittin 56b) says in a play on words, "Who is like You among the mute, Hashem?" G-d remains mute and does not take action to correct the desecration of His name, so that the purpose of exile can be fulfilled. However, the nations are warned that if they harden the yoke on the Jewish people enough, their desecration of G-d's name may reach the point where it outweighs the benefit of exile, and then G-d will bring the End prematurely.

Therefore, as soon as the nations first exceeded their limit, it became permitted for the Jews to pray hard for the redemption. This prayer is not viewed as contradictory to G-d's plan, for we can never know – perhaps the desecration of the name has reached the point at which it outweighs the benefit of exile. But in retrospect, we see that G-d has caused the exile to last this long, because evidently the nations' desecration in the past did not yet reach that point.

This matzo that we eat - what is its reason? Because the dough of our fathers did not have time to rise before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, revealed Himself to them and redeemed them, as Scripture (Shemos 12:39) states: "And they baked the dough that they took out of Egypt as cakes of unleavened bread, for it could not be leavened, for they were expelled from Egypt and they were not able to tarry, and also provisions they did not make for themselves."

Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (1786-1869), in his commentary Maasei Yedei Yotzer on the Haggadah, page 64a, asks: If the reason for eating matzo is to remember the haste of the Exodus, then why did the Jews eat it while still in Egypt, when the Exodus had not yet taken place? Furthermore, why was the haste chosen as the central point we must remember, as opposed to any of the miracles that took place during the Exodus?

He explains that the exile and redemption from Egypt serve as a model for our current exile and the redemption for which we are waiting. During the current exile, Hashem made us swear with the following words (Shir Hashirim 2:7): "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or deer of the field, not to arouse or awaken the love before it is desired." The Midrash explains that this was an oath not to force the end of exile, because if we do, it will cause bad things to happen to us, G-d forbid. However, Hashem was concerned that after being in exile for a very long time, we would feel as if He had abandoned us or, at least, that He was not in any hurry to redeem us, because He is not in exile and does not feel our pain. We might therefore decide to push for redemption on our own, in order to remind Hashem of our situation.

Therefore Hashem showed us during the Egyptian exile that He was in a greater hurry to redeem us than we were ourselves. The Torah says, "They were not able to tarry," implying that the Jewish people wanted to spend a little extra time in Egypt, but Hashem did not let them stay. He took them out as soon as possible and as quickly as possible. The lesson for us is that if Hashem is not redeeming us now, it is only because redemption is impossible; as soon as it becomes possible He will redeem us without any delay. Therefore we need not push for the redemption with actions of our own.

This is why the oath in Shir Hashirim, warning us not to "arouse or awaken the love before it is desired," is followed immediately by the following verse: "The voice of my beloved, behold it has come, skipping over the mountains and jumping over the hills" (Shir Hashirim 2:8). The Midrash there says, "The voice of my beloved – this refers to Moshe. When he came and told Israel, 'In this month you will be redeemed,' they said, 'Moshe our teacher! How can we be redeemed? Didn't the Holy One, blessed is He say to Avraham that they will enslave us for 400 years? It has only been 210 years so far.' He said to them, 'Since He wishes to redeem you, He does not look at your calculations. He skips over the mountains – the predestined end-times.'" The proximity of this verse to the oath is meant to teach that just as in Egypt Hashem shortened the exile as much as possible, today as well we can rest assured that He will take us out of exile as soon as possible, and therefore we must not attempt to push for the end early.

Now, the Torah gives another reason why we eat matzo - it is the bread of poverty (Devarim 16:3). And Chazal say that just as a poor man usually eats a piece of bread rather than a complete loaf, the matzo we eat must also be a piece, not a whole (Pesachim 115b). And we say in the Haggadah, "This is the poor bread that our fathers ate in the Land of Egypt." Why isn't this reason mentioned in answer to the question "this matzo that we eat"?

The answer is that the two reasons applied at different times of history. When the Jews were powerful and in their land, and even at the very end of the Egyptian exile, when they were about to go free and felt very powerful and important, they needed a reminder of their humble past. If not, they might say, "Our strength and the power of our hands brought us this wealth" (Devarim 8:17); or even if they remembered that Hashem gave them everything, they might forget Moshe's warning (Devarim 9:4) and think that He gave it to them because of their own righteousness. Therefore Hashem commanded that they eat matzo, to remember how they were slaves, so that they should say to themselves, "If it was our own power or righteousness that got us here, why weren't we able to do it earlier? It can only be that Hashem, in His kindness and mercy, redeemed us."

However, during exile this reason does not apply. We are so weak and we suffer so much that there is no fear that we might think thoughts of arrogance and pride. Rather, we eat matzo now for the other reason: to recall the haste with which Hashem took us out of Egypt, and to learn from this that He will take us out of the current exile as quickly as possible.

Now we understand the words of the Haggadah: "This matzo that **we** eat - what is its reason?" Matzo has two reasons, but the matzo that **we** eat today, during exile, is to remind us of the haste of the redemption.

Both reasons for matzo are written in the following verse: "For seven days you shall with it eat matzos, bread of poverty, for in haste you went out of the Land of Egypt, so that you will remember the day you went of the Land of Egypt all the days of your life." The Haggadah says that "the days of your life" refers to the daytime, and the word "all" comes to include nighttime. The Maasei Hashem explains daytime as a metaphor for the times when the Jewish people dwelt in its land, and nighttime as a metaphor for exile. Thus, the Torah is saying that because of these two reasons for matzo, we eat matzo and recall the Exodus "all the days" of our history - both in the good times and during exile.

Vayakhel Pekudei 5770

These are the deposits of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony (38:21). Rashi: This is an allusion to the Beis Hamikdash, which was taken as a security deposit for the sins of Israel in the two destructions.

המשכן משכן שני פעמים רמז למקדש שנתמשכן בשני חורבנין על עונותיהן של ישראל
כמו דאיתא בתוס' קידושין לא: שכילה הקב"ה חמתו על עצים ואבנים ומתוך כך הותר פליטה מישראל

"The hand of Hashem was upon me, and He brought me out by a wind of Hashem, and He placed me in the midst of a valley, and it was full of bones." (Yechezkel 37:1)

היתה עלי יש' ה' ויוציאני ברוח ה' ויניחני בתוך הבקעה והיא מלאה עצמות

With this verse begins the haftarah of Shabbos Chol Hamoed Pesach, about the dry bones resurrected by Yechezkel Hanavi. The Ben Ish Chai (Yedei Chaim, Hilchos Tefillah for Chol Hamoed Pesach, Section 9) asks: Chazal say that this story took place in Tishrei, so why do we read it in Nissan? He answers that our Sages (Sanhedrin 92b) tell us that these were the bones of the tribe of Ephraim who forced the end, left Egypt before the foreordained time, and were killed by the Philistines. Since we hope for our future redemption in Nissan more than in any other month, as our Sages say, "In Nissan we were redeemed and in Nissan we will be redeemed" (Rosh Hashanah 11a), we read this Haftarah as a warning to the Jewish people not to force the redemption, as Scripture says (Shir Hashirim 2:7), "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the deer of the field, not to arouse or awaken the love before it is desired." In view of this, it is no coincidence that we read Shir Hashirim on that very same day, Shabbos Chol Hamoed Pesach.

The author of Shir Hashirim was Shlomo Hamelech. The Gemara tells an incredible story about Shlomo Hamelech. The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 90a) lists three kings who lost their share in Olam Haba: Yeravam, Achav and Menashe. The Gemara (104b) says that this list was written by the Men of the Great Assembly. They wanted to list one more king (Shlomo Hamelech), but an image of his father's face came and pleaded with them not to list him. They paid no attention to him. Fire came from heaven and scorched their chairs, but they paid no attention to it. A Heavenly Voice called out, "Have you seen a man who is quick in his work? He will stand before kings, not before darkened ones (Mishlei 22:29) - this refers to the one who built My house before he built his own house, and not only that - it took him seven years to build My house, but thirteen years to build his own house. Such a man will surely stand before kings in Olam Haba, and not before darkened ones in Gehinom." But they paid no attention to this Heavenly Voice. Finally another Heavenly Voice called out, "Will reward be paid by you? You may have despised [Shlomo Hamelech], but will you choose [who should get Olam Haba] and not I?" (Iyov 34:33)

Why did the Men of the Great Assembly want so badly to exclude Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest man in history and the author of three books of the Tanach, from Olam Haba? The Satmar Rav, speaking in the town of Margareten in 1932, explained it as follows. The Men of the Great Assembly were prophets and men of Divine inspiration. They foresaw all the suffering that would come upon the Jewish people throughout the centuries of exile, and they sought to avoid the exile by forcing the complete redemption to come right away. However, they could not do so because of the oath in Shir Hashirim "not to arouse or awaken the love before it is desired." So they sought a way to exempt themselves from the oath. An oath cannot be forced upon a person; the person must accept the oath himself. Therefore the mere fact that Shlomo Hamelech wrote or spoke this oath does not automatically mean that the Jewish people have to keep it. It must be shown that the Jewish people actually accepted the oath. And even if Shlomo Hamelech did gather all the Jews of his time and they accepted the oath, one cannot impose an oath on unborn people (Yoreh Deah 228:35). If so, perhaps the oath of Shir Hashirim does not apply to future generations who were not alive at the time the oaths were made.

Now, if Shir Hashirim is part of the Tanach, then we can apply the words of the Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 28:6) that all the words of the prophets were said at Sinai, and the prophets' souls, who were standing at Sinai, learned their words from there. The Jewish people, including the souls of all future Jews, accepted all of the Torah given at Sinai (Rashi on Devarim 29:14), and this included the oaths.

The Men of the Great Assembly realized that the only way out of this oath was to issue a ruling that Shlomo Hamelech was a sinner, thus excluding him from Olam Haba and excluding his books from Tanach. They stood by this decision with self-sacrifice, unfazed by Heavenly fire and Heavenly Voices, until they heard the Voice say, "Will you choose and not I? You may not understand why the exile is for the Jewish people's benefit, but it is, and therefore you have no right to interfere in these matters." (Machzor Divrei Yoel, Pesach)

For what sin did the Men of the Great Assembly wish to exclude Shlomo from Olam Haba? The Maharsha says it was the sin of marrying many foreign wives, who turned his heart aside. We can explain that the Men of the Great Assembly's argument against Shlomo Hamelech over the foreign wives was related to their argument against him over the oaths. The reason why Shlomo married the wives was as follows: His father Dovid had wanted to build the Beis Hamikdash, but Hashem told him (Divrei Hayamim I 22:8) that he could not build it because he had shed much blood during his many battles. The Ramban (Bamidbar 16:21) explains Dovid was a man of justice and therefore could not build a house of mercy. The Ramban means that Hashem knew a time would come when the Jews deserved destruction for their sins, but He would be merciful and take out His anger on the sticks and stones of the Beis Hamikdash (Tosafos Kiddushin 31b), while the Jews achieved atonement through exile. Had Dovid built the Beis Hamikdash, it would have been a house of strict justice, and would not have allowed itself to be mercifully substituted for the Jews. Shlomo knew that he would be the one to build the Beis Hamikdash, and therefore he could not be a fighter. But he was worried: what if another nation attacked during his reign and he had to fight back? Therefore he married a thousand wives – from the royal families of every nation in the world – so that the kings of all the nations would be his allies and never attack his country. Thus he was assured that he could build a Beis Hamikdash of mercy, which could one day be destroyed and atone for the Jews. This is why Chazal (Shabbos 56b) say that on the day Shlomo married his first foreign wife, the daughter of Pharaoh, the angel Gavriel came down and placed a stick in the sea, earth accumulated and it later became the site of Rome, the empire that destroyed the Beis Hamikdash.

נעץ קנה בים ועלה בו סרטון ועליו נבנה כרך גדול של רומי

But the Men of the Great Assembly, who wanted to avoid the exile and nullify the oaths by excluding them from Tanach, held that Shlomo was wrong for marrying the foreign wives. Of course, all agree that he was wrong to violate the Torah's prohibition against a king having many wives. But he did not lose his Olam Haba because of this sin, since he had noble intentions. The Men of the Great Assembly, however, wished to argue that exile was unnecessary and thus even his intentions were wrong. Hashem answered them, "Will you choose and not I?" Hashem knows better, and He knows that we need exile to get to the tachlis, the geulah shleimah bb"a.

And you shall keep My laws and My ordinances, and you shall not do any of these abominations, both the native and the proselyte who dwells in your midst, for the people of the land before you did all these abominations, and the land was defiled; and let not the land vomit you out when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation before you. (18:26-28)

When Rabbi Itzeleh Peterburger (1837-1907) arrived in the Holy Land in 1904, he delivered a speech at a reception organized for him in the port city of Jaffa. In his speech, he posed the following question. G-d accused the Jewish people: "You came and defiled My land, and My property you made into an abomination" (Yirmiyahu 2:7). The Midrash (Yalkut on Eichah 3:20) sees a positive side in this verse: "Said the Holy One, blessed is He: If only the children of My people would be in Eretz Yisroel, even if they defile it!" From this it would seem that it is better for irreligious Jews to live in Eretz Yisroel than elsewhere in the world. But the Torah says clearly in Parshas Acharei Mos that Jews who do not keep the laws of the Torah will be vomited out of Eretz Yisroel.

He answered that indeed, G-d wishes, as it were, that the sinners could stay in Eretz Yisroel even while defiling it. But they cannot, because the land will vomit them out. (Mishulchan Gavoah, p. 152)

Reb Itzeleh's words leave us with the question: G-d can do anything He wishes, so if He causes Eretz Yisroel to vomit out sinners, He must want them out. Why then does He say He wishes they could stay? The answer is that G-d wants Eretz Yisroel to be a holy land, conducive to His service. The holiness of the land precludes the possibility of sinners living there. Were they to stay, the land could influence them to become better and please G-d, but then the holiness of the land would be compromised, and G-d wants it to remain holy.

Today there are unfortunately many sinners in Eretz Yisroel, yet it does not vomit them out. This can be explained based on the words of the Alshich in his commentary on the Torah. The Torah first says, "And you shall keep..." using the plural for "you", indicating that all Jews must keep the laws. But the end of the verse is "both the native and the proselyte..." meaning that every single Jew has the responsibility to keep the laws, even if the majority of the Jews do not. When the Canaanites inhabited the land, although only the "people" - i.e. powerful people - did the abominations, they were all vomited out. But with the Jews, the Torah promises, that will not be the case. "The land will not vomit you out in the same way it vomited out the nation before you." When the Jews inhabit the land, if they all sin, they will be vomited out, but as long as there are a few who do not sin, they will not be expelled; those who sin will be "cut off from their people" as the Torah continues (v. 29).

The same statement was made by the Brisker Rav, quoting the Netziv: "The reason why Eretz Yisroel does not vomit out the sinners is because its nature is to vomit out all its inhabitants at once, and thus it would have to vomit out even the Torah Jews. So everyone is saved in the merit of the Torah Jews."

The Brisker Rav continued, "The Zionists take credit for protecting the Jews in the Holy Land with their military might. This is similar to the false prophet described in the Torah (Devarim 13:2) who claims to have received a prophecy that Jews should worship idols, and brings a miracle as proof of his authenticity. The Torah says that despite the miracle, we must not listen to him, for "Hashem your G-d is testing you." Our Sages say, "Even if he makes the sun stop in the sky." G-d may cause the sun to stop in the sky one day, and the prophet will claim that this unusual event is connected with him, but in reality there is no connection. The imagined connection is a test from G-d. Here too, the seeming connection between the Zionists and the survival of the Jews in the Holy Land is but a test from G-d, and in reality the Jews are saved in the merit of those faithful to the Torah among them."

"Any miracles in Eretz Yisroel in our time were not done for the Zionists, as if G-d desires the existence of their state and their army. People say that the state is a place of refuge for the Jewish people, but that is false. The state is a great misfortune for the Jewish people, and no one knows what will be in the end. Our prayer is that we be saved through the kindness of G-d from all the dangers threatening us from inside and outside, without any connection to the Zionists and their state. G-d forbid that we should pray for their success in their wars."

The Brisker Rav gave an analogy: "A mother washed her young child and dressed him in his finest Shabbos clothes, and then he went stomping in the mud puddles. When he came home, his mother, in her love and mercy, washed him again and put clean clothes on him. Then the foolish child went and bragged to his friends about his greatness, his success, his wisdom and his power, showing them the beautiful new clothes he had received. Here too, how foolish are those who got themselves into deep mud, pulling all the Jews of the Holy Land after them into terrible danger, and then when G-d has mercy and they are saved, they take credit for the saving, as if G-d did miracles for their sake!" (Uvdos Vehanhagos Leveis Brisk, v. 3 p. 50)

Kedoshim 5768

You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and do not bear sin because of him. (19:17)

He who has the opportunity to rebuke a sinner and does not will bear part of the guilt for his sin. This is explained at length in the verses of Yechezkel. G-d commanded the prophet to rebuke the people, and gave him the following guidelines: "If I command you to warn a wicked man to repent, and you do not warn him, and he dies as punishment for his sins, I will blame you for his death. But if you do warn him, even if he does not repent, you have saved your own soul. If you fail to warn a righteous man and he becomes wicked and dies as punishment, I will blame you for his death. But if you do warn the righteous man, and he does not sin, but lives, you have saved your own soul" (Yechezkel 3:17-21; the language is hard and this translation is not exact).

The Minchas Elazar asked: In the second case in which the righteous man accepts the warning and does not sin, why does it say "you have saved your own soul"? The prophet has saved the righteous man as well! He answered that sometimes the righteous man accepts the warning, but he has advisers and followers who do not understand his ways, and they will talk him out of hearkening to the rebuke of the prophet. Although the righteous man is not completely at fault

and so is not considered to have sinned, he is not completely innocent either. Therefore it says in this case as well, "You have saved your own soul." (Tikun Olam, Chapter 19)

Shlomo Hamelech writes in the book of Mishlei (28:4), "Those who leave the Torah will praise the wicked man and those who keep the Torah will fight with them." Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, in his work Ohr Haemes (p. 59), writes that his great teacher, Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch, asked two questions on this verse: Those who leave the Torah are wicked, and those who keep the Torah are righteous. So it should have been written simply: "The wicked praise the wicked, and the righteous fight with them." Furthermore, the first half of the verse says "wicked man" in the singular, but the second half says "fight with them" in the plural. Why does it switch from the singular to the plural?

The Maggid explained that there are two kinds of righteous people. There are some righteous people who study Torah and practice kindness, but do not rebuke others who are doing wrong. Although it is a mitzvah in the Torah to do so – "you shall surely rebuke your neighbor" – these people are of such soft and good character that they are incapable of telling another person his faults. There are other righteous people who stand up in public and fight with the evildoers, rebuking and berating them constantly, as it states (Tehillim 139:21), "I quarrel with those who rise up against You." The evildoers hate this second group of righteous people, because they say, "The first group of righteous people are also righteous, and yet they are silent about us, so we must not be so bad. So why do you fight with us?" The second group of righteous people, seeing how the first group has indirectly caused them to be hated, begins to rebuke the first group of righteous people, saying, "Why do you keep silent?"

That is what Shlomo Hamelech meant: "Those who leave the Torah" means the first group of righteous people, who do not rebuke the wicked, but instead try to find redeeming qualities in them. They "praise the wicked." Because of this, "those who keep the Torah," i.e. the second group of righteous people, "fight with them" – with the first group of righteous people.

These words were written by none other than Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, who is so famous for his prayers in which he argued valiantly in defense of the Jewish people and was able to find something good to say about anyone. Indeed this was how he spoke to G-d, but when speaking to the Jewish people he and other righteous men rebuked the wicked and condemned them in the strongest of terms. (Vayoel Moshe 1:178) (?? See also Kol Yaakov p. 100)

Sefiras Haomer 5768

Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of disciples, from Gevas to Antiparas, and they all died during one period, because they did not treat one another with respect...they all died between Pesach and Shavuos...they all died of askara (the croup). (Yevamos 62b)

In the Parsha Pearls two years ago, we wrote about this Gemara, which states that Rabbi Akiva's disciples died from a disease. We mentioned that Zionist authors, as well as heretical Jewish historians before the era of Zionism, invented the story that they died fighting in the revolt against Rome led by Ben Koziva. Rabbi Yitzchok Isaac Halevy showed that these claims have

no historical basis, in Chazal or elsewhere (Doros Harishonim v. 4 chapters 39-41). The Talmud Yerushalmi (Taanis 24a) says only that Rabbi Akiva thought that Ben Koziva was moshiach. We followed with several pages of material about Ben Koziva and the controversy surrounding him.

Since then, our readers have raised many good questions on the subject of Ben Koziva, and we will devote this week's issue to answering two of those questions.

Question: Don't the Zionists have proof from the words of the Gaonim to say that Rabbi Akiva's disciples died in Ben Koziva's revolt?

Answer: The only "proof" they have come up with is a line from the Igeres Rav Sherira Gaon, which reads: "And Rabbi Akiva raised up many disciples, and there was a destruction ("shmada") on the disciples of Rabbi Akiva." The Zionist writer Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz says in his commentary on the Talmud that this might be a reference to the war of Ben Koziva. However, the Doros Harishonim rules out this possibility due to the fact that Rav Sherira Gaon ends off with the words, "as it states in Yevamos." Thus it is clear that Rav Sherira Gaon merely meant to quote from Yevamos, where it is written that the cause of death was a plague of croup; his word "destruction" must be a reference to that plague.

The Doros Harishonim also says that all of the 24,000 disciples learned under Rabbi Akiva before the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. He proves this from Kesubos 63a, which relates that Rabbi Akiva came home to his wife with all the disciples and his father-in-law, Kalba Savua, annulled his vow and gave him half of his property. Since Kalba Savua died in the destruction of Jerusalem, this incident must have taken place before the destruction. If so, it cannot be that these disciples were soldiers 50 or 60 years later in Ben Koziva's army.

In any case, this entire discussion is irrelevant to the issue of Zionism. Whether Rabbi Akiva actually sent his disciples into battle, or whether he merely supported Ben Koziva's revolt as the Yerushalmi says, we still have to explain why this revolt did not violate the Three Oaths. And the answer we gave was that Rabbi Akiva and the Jews of his time were following someone who had the criteria to be moshiach, unlike today's Zionists, who go to battle in the absence of anyone with the criteria to be, or even claiming to be, moshiach.

Question: You wrote: "Moshiach need only be someone who 'learns Torah and does mitzvos and forces the entire Jewish people to follow the Torah' (Rambam Melachim 11:4). Ben Koziva evidently met these criteria, so Rabbi Akiva rightly assumed that he was moshiach, and there was no prohibition on following him into battle. However, to follow a false moshiach who does not succeed in getting everyone to keep the Torah, and certainly to follow someone who does not even claim to be moshiach, is a transgression of the oaths according to all opinions." But doesn't the Rambam also say that moshiach must "fight the wars of Hashem"? If someone cannot be assumed to be moshiach until he leads a war, then how could it be forbidden for someone who has not yet established himself as moshiach to fight a war? How will he ever get off the ground?

Answer: The Rambam's criteria for moshiach are to be read in order, and only after fulfilling each level can the messianic candidate go on to fulfill the next. Thus, if he is someone who "learns Torah and does mitzvos and forces the entire Jewish people to follow the Torah", then he

is assumed to be moshiach with enough certainty that he may continue on to "fight the wars of Hashem". Once he fulfills the condition of fighting the wars of Hashem, he may continue on to the next stage mentioned by the Rambam: building the Temple and gathering in the exiles.

It is also worth noting that according to the Chofetz Chaim, there is one kind of war that is permitted even during exile: a war against a decree of shmad, a decree made by a government that forces Jews to give up their Torah observance. The classic case of a war against a decree of shmad was the Hasmonean war against Antiochus, which we commemorate on Chanukah. This war took place during the Temple era; nevertheless the Chofetz Chaim said that such a war would be permitted even today, when the oaths are in force, against an empire that outlaws the Torah, such as Communist Russia. (Recorded by Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman in his article "Omer Ani Maasai Lamelech" section 9.)

According to this, there would be a way for a messianic candidate to fulfill this condition of fighting a war even before he has completely established himself as moshiach: he could fight a war against a decree of shmad.

Acharei Mos/Kedoshim 5770

And you shall not give some of your children to pass through for Molech, so that you not desecrate the name of your G-d; I am Hashem. (18:21)

Chazal (Sanhedrin 64b) derive from here that if someone sacrifices all his children (not just some) to Molech, he is exempt from punishment. What is the logic of this?

The Ramban notes that the Torah calls offering to Molech a desecration of the name of G-d. Furthermore, in Vayikra 20:3 the Torah says, "For he gave some of his children to Molech, in order to defile My Temple and to desecrate My holy name." The meaning, says the Ramban, is that when the nations of the world hear that a Jew sacrificed to Molech and then afterwards went to the Beis Hamikdash and sacrificed to G-d, the name of G-d is desecrated.

Isn't the very act of sacrificing to Molech a desecration of G-d's name? Why does it matter that he also brings offerings in the Beis Hamikdash? The answer is that if someone merely sacrifices to Molech, he is just another one of the millions of idol worshippers in the world. But if he also comes to the Beis Hamikdash, he shows that he fears Hashem and does mitzvos, yet worships Molech as well. That is a true desecration of Hashem's name, because by his conduct he gives the impression that Hashem approves of Molech worship.

For the same reason, Eliyahu Hanavi said (Melachim I 18:21), "Until when will you vacillate between two thoughts? If Hashem is G-d, go after Him, and if the Baal, go after him!" Worshipping only the Baal is preferable to worshipping both Hashem and the Baal, which will confuse and lead astray other Jews.

Accordingly, we understand why one is only punished if he sacrifices some of his children to Molech. If he gives all his children, he is a plain idol worshipper like so many others in the world. But if he sends some children to Molech and others to the Beis Medrash to learn Torah

and serve Hashem, it looks like he is a good and righteous Jew, and people will begin to see Molech worship as an admirable thing.

The Torah continues (20:4), "But if the people of the land hide their eyes from this man, when he gives some of his children to Molech..." Why does the Torah call the Jewish people "the people of the land," a term not used anywhere else?

The Gemara (Bava Kama 52a) gives a metaphorical explanation of how Hashem punishes the Jewish people: "When the shepherd is angry at his flock, he blinds the leader." Rashi explains that there is one goat who knows the way and all the others follow it. When the shepherd is angry at the flock, he puts out the eyes of the leading goat, so that it stumbles into a pit, and all the other goats follow after it. Similarly, when Hashem is angry at the Jewish people, he places over them unfit leaders.

Rabbeinu Yehonasan, quoted in the Shitah Mekubetzes, explains differently: The shepherd hangs a bell around the neck of a blind goat, making it the leader. All the others follow the sound of its bell, and when it stumbles into a pit, all of them stumble. Similarly, Hashem takes people who are already blind and makes them the leaders of the Jewish people.

Either way, it is the people's fault that the leaders are blind. Accordingly, the translation of our verse would be, "But if the people of the land cause the eyes of the leaders to be hidden from this man..."

Based on this, we can explain an exchange between Yirmiyahu Hanavi and Hashem. Yirmiyahu (14:1-6) received a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem. He responded by praying to Hashem on behalf of the people, "If our sins testify against us, Hashem, act for the sake of Your name...do not abandon us." Hashem said, "Do not pray for the good of this people..." Yirmiyahu said, "Alas, my Lord G-d, behold the prophets say to them, 'You will not see a sword, and you will have no famine, for I will give you true peace in this place.'" Hashem said to him, "The prophets speak falsely in My name! I did not send them nor command them nor speak to them."

Why did Yirmiyahu bring up the false prophets? The Radak and Metzudas David explain that he meant to defend the people by placing the blame on the false prophets. Because these prophets are constantly telling them that everything will be fine, the people think that their deeds are pleasing to Hashem, and so they continue in their ways.

If so, what was Hashem's answer, "I did not send them"? Yirmiyahu already knew that; he was defending the people on the grounds that they thought the false prophets to be true. The Metzudas David explains that the people should have realized that the prophets were false because they could not prove their credentials with a sign. The Radak says that even if they could perform a sign, the people should have realized that they were false because they advocated idolatry. The Torah (Devarim 13:2-6) teaches that any prophet advocating idolatry is false, no matter what miracles he performs.

But according to the above, we could explain Hashem's answer more simply. Sometimes Hashem does indeed send false prophets to test the Jewish people. Then, if they fail the test, it

can be argued that it was not totally their fault. But in this case, Hashem said, "I did not send them as a test. Rather, the people, because of their sins, deserved that their leaders, the prophets, should lead them in the wrong direction. Therefore they cannot be absolved of blame." (Divrei Yoel, pp. 143-148)

Emor 5769

**Do not desecrate My holy name; I will be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel.”
(22:32)**

One of the most commonly cited concepts in the debate over Zionism is Chillul Hashem, the desecration of Hashem’s name. The Zionists are certainly guilty of this sin on many levels, yet we often hear them accusing religious Jews who maintain their traditional opposition to Zionism of making a “Chillul Hashem.” Therefore it would be appropriate to spend some time defining what Chillul Hashem and Kiddush Hashem really mean.

The Torah tells the story of how Yosef was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, and he resisted her day after day. Finally there came a day when she was the only one at home, and Yosef “came to the house to do his work” (Bereishis 39:11). The Gemara (Sotah 36b) says: Since Yosef sanctified G-d’s name in secret, one letter of G-d’s name was added to his name (“He made it a testimony to Yehosef, when he went out into the land of Egypt” - Tehillim 81:6) How did Yosef sanctify G-d’s name in secret? “And it came to pass on that day, that he came to the house to do his work.” This euphemistic expression teaches that both Yosef and Potiphar’s wife intended to commit a sin...at that moment the likeness of his father appeared to him in the window, and said to him, “Yosef, your brothers’ names will one day be written on the stones of the ephod, and your name will be among them. Do you want your name to be erased from among them? Do you want to be known as a shepherd of harlots?” Immediately he strengthened himself and resisted the sin.

This Gemara seems to contradict itself. It begins by saying that Yosef sanctified G-d’s name in secret, implying that he held himself back from sin even though no one but G-d would ever know. But then it says that Yosef would have succumbed to temptation, if not for the fact that his father appeared to him and told him that the entire Jewish people would one day know about his sin.

The Satmar Rav explained that we must first understand why the righteous Yosef ever contemplated committing this sin. The answer is that the Gemara (Yuma 35b) says that Potiphar’s wife threatened him in several ways. She said she would put in jail, but he said, “Hashem frees the captives.” She said she would make him bent over, but he said, “Hashem straightens the bent.” She said she would blind his eyes, but he said, “Hashem gives sight to the blind.” The Midrash adds that she threatened to spread rumors about him and make him hated in the mouth of all – a threat that she actually carried out. The Midrash does not say what Yosef replied to this threat. We can assume that this was the threat that broke his resolve. He thought, “If I refuse to sin, she will tell everyone that I did sin. Everyone knows that G-d is with me and the name of G-d is frequently on my lips (Rashi on 39:3). This false rumor will be a tremendous Chillul Hashem! Better that I should commit the sin secretly and no one will know about it, than that I should refuse to sin and make this great desecration of G-d’s name in public.”

But then he saw the likeness of his father in the window. This means that Yosef, who looked similar to his father (Rashi on 37:3), saw his own reflection in the window, and he saw that he was still pure and clean from sin. He realized that his father and brothers would one day be reunited with him, and because of their great righteousness they would be able to see on his face that he had sinned. That would be the true Chillul Hashem, no matter if the wicked Egyptians knew nothing of the sin.

Furthermore, G-d put into Yosef's mind the thought that the ephod would publicize the truth. The Chillul Hashem of a false rumor could only be temporary, for in the end his name engraved on the ephod stones would bear testimony that he had not sinned, as it says (Tehillim 122:4), "The tribes of G-d are a testimony for Israel." And if he would sin, his name would be erased from the ephod, which would mean that there could be no ephod – since every part of the kohein gadol's garments had to be made exactly as described in the Torah (Divrei Hayamim I 28:19). Without the ephod, there could be no Urim Vetumim, no kohein gadol, and no moshiach – since moshiach will establish the lineage of every Jew based on the Urim Vetumim (Rambam Melachim 12:3).

Now we understand why the Gemara says that Yosef made a Kiddush Hashem in secret. True, Yosef knew that what he decided to do would one day be public knowledge, but at the time it was a secret, and not only that - he knew that the immediate result of his refusal to sin would be a Chillul Hashem. Yet he overcame the challenge and realized that the future Kiddush Hashem was more important.

The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim (3:29) says that Avraham Avinu overcame a similar challenge: "I do not doubt that when he attacked the doctrine of all his fellowmen, he was cursed, despised and scorned by these people who adhered to their erroneous opinions. When he submitted to this treatment for the sake of G-d, as ought to be done for the sake of His glory, G-d said to him, 'And I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you' (Bereishis 12:3). The result of the course which Avraham took is the fact that most people, as we see at present, agree in praising him and being proud of him, so that even those who are not his descendents call themselves by his name."

Jews today who take a stand for Torah and emunah and refuse to accept the Zionist doctrine are often subject to ridicule and scorn. Zionists often claim that their stubbornness creates a divide in the Jewish people and a Chillul Hashem. This is a fulfillment of the prediction of Chazal that in the generation preceding the arrival of moshiach, those who fear sin will be despised and those who turn away from evil will be called fools (Sanhedrin 97a). The challenge of Torah Jews today is thus similar to that of Yosef (Divrei Yoel pp. 316-319).

We must know that a time will come when people will look back and recognize the folly and the heresy of Zionism. Then they will see the Jews who stood up against Zionism as the only ones truly loyal to G-d and His Torah – just as everyone speaks highly of Avraham Avinu today. Then it will be clear that they were making the true Kiddush Hashem – the Kiddush Hashem that really matters. This week's Haftarah begins, "And the Kohanim, the Levites, the sons of Tzadok, who kept the charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel strayed away from Me – they

will draw near to Me to serve Me, and they will stand before Me, to offer Me fat and blood, said Hashem G-d (Yechezkel 44:15). In the same way, those Jews who remain faithful during the Zionist era will be greatly honored in the future and will be G-d's choicest servants.

Emor 5770

And the son of a Israelite woman - but he was the son of an Egyptian man - came out amidst the Children of Israel, and they fought in the camp... And the son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name and blasphemed... (24:10)

Once a Mizrachist came to see the Satmar Rebbe. As soon as he entered the room, the Rebbe asked him, "Where is Yom Haatzmaut mentioned in the Torah?" The Mizrachist did not have an answer. The Rebbe said, "In Parshas Emor, all the festivals are listed, and at the end the Torah tells of the son of a Israelite woman - who called himself Israel, but was actually an Egyptian, since his father was Egyptian (before the giving of the Torah, one's Jewish status was determined by his father - see Ramban in the name of Tosafos). Not only did he blaspheme, but he wanted to include his blaspheming among the festivals of Israel. That is why the Torah tells us that he was the son of an Egyptian man and had no connection to Israel." (Gilyon Haemunah, Iyar 5742)

The Zionists have dared to include their holiday in the holy "At Bash" - a trick designed by the Tur (Orach Chaim 428) to figure out which day of the week each Yom Tov will fall. Alef, the first day of Pesach is the same as Tav, Tisha B'av. Beis, the second day of Pesach is the same as Shin, Shavuot. Gimel, the third day of Pesach is the same as Reish, Rosh Hashanah. Daled, the fourth day of Pesach is the same as Kuf, Krias Hatorah (Simchas Torah). Heh, the fifth day of Pesach is the same as Tzadi, Tzom (Yom Kippur). Vav, the sixth day of Pesach is the same as Peh, Purim. The Zionists added: Zayin, the seventh day of Pesach, is the same day as Ayin, Atzmaut.

We who consider Yom Haatzmaut a day of mourning don't have to dismiss this fact as mere coincidence. It could be that just as Tisha B'av is counted among the festivals because it will one day be transformed into happiness, so too the Zionist independence day will one day be transformed into happiness (see Divrei Yoel, Parshas Tazria, p. 366), when the state comes to an end and the Jewish people is saved from the danger the state has brought upon them. And just as we will merit to see the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash only by virtue of our mourning on Tisha B'av, so too we will only merit to see the end of Zionism if we maintain our understanding of why that day and the events connected with it have brought so much suffering and tragedy to the Jewish people.

Today the Zionist ideology has spread among many who do not consider themselves Zionists and do not celebrate Yom Haatzmaut. This can be illustrated with Rabbi Nachman of Breslav's famous parable of the Turkey Prince: Once the king's son went mad. He thought he was a turkey. He felt compelled to sit under the table without any clothes on, pulling at bits of bread and bones like a turkey. None of the doctors could do anything to help him or cure him, and they gave up in despair. The king was very sad... Until a Wise Man came and said "I can cure him." What did the Wise Man do? He took off all his clothes, and sat down naked under the table next to the king's son, and also pulled at crumbs and bones. The Prince asked him, "Who are you and what are you

doing here?" "And what are you doing here?" replied the Wise Man. "I am a turkey," said the Prince. "Well, I'm also a turkey," said the Wise Man. The two of them sat there together like this for some time, until they were used to one another. Then the Wise Man gave a sign, and they threw them shirts. The Wise Man said to the king's son, "Do you think a turkey can't wear a shirt? You can wear a shirt and still be a turkey." The two of them put on shirts. After a while he gave another sign, and they threw them some trousers. Again the Wise Man said, "Do you think if you wear trousers you can't be a turkey?" They put on the trousers. One by one they put on the rest of their clothes in the same way. Afterwards, the Wise Man gave a sign and they put down human food from the table. The Wise Man said to the Prince, "Do you think that if you eat good food you can't be a turkey anymore? You can eat this food and still be a turkey." They ate. Then he said to him, "Do you think a turkey has to sit under the table? You can be a turkey and sit up at the table." This was how the Wise Man dealt with the Prince, until in the end he cured him completely.

Most understand this as a parable for the proper way to reach out to Jews who have become estranged from Judaism. Instead of telling them that their whole lifestyle and self-image is wrong, we should focus on persuading them to keep practical mitzvos. We should tell them that keeping these mitzvos won't change who they are.

But the Evil Inclination knows this trick as well. He says to each of us, "So you're not a Zionist? Good, I'm not a Zionist either. But who says that someone who is not a Zionist can't live in Eretz Yisroel, or send his children to live there? Who says that someone who is not a Zionist can't appreciate the fact that Jews today can come easily and pray at the holy places of Eretz Yisroel? Who says that someone who is not a Zionist can't appreciate the fact that almost six million Jews have a safe place to live? Who says that someone who is not a Zionist can't appreciate the soldiers who risk their lives to protect all those Jews? Who says that someone who is not a Zionist shouldn't oppose returning land to the Arabs?"

As an example of this, there is actually a prominent Chassidic Rebbe who explained that his Beis Midrash does not say Tachanun on the fifth of Iyar because "on this day 62 years ago, the nations of the world, in a supernatural way, agreed to open the gates of Eretz Yisroel to millions of Jewish refugees who had no safe place to live, and the nations of the world agreed to allow them to settle in the Holy Land. For most of these refugees, this saved their lives. This is relevant to all of us in this generation, when, boruch Hashem, through the kindness of Hashem, we are able to live in Eretz Yisroel, and to pray at the graves of the Avos and other holy places, and at the Western Wall, the remnant of our Temple." He added that "this has nothing to do with what they call Yom Haatzmaut."

In a few short lines, this Rebbe has embraced the Zionist principle that the establishment of the state saved lives and that it provides a safe haven. Although he does not mention statehood explicitly, he has forced himself into the position that advocates statehood, because most Jews believe that the only alternative to a Jewish state is a state run by people who would not allow Jews to live there safely. May Hashem purify our hearts to serve Him in truth!

"And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the day of rest, from the day that you bring the Omer for waving, seven complete weeks they shall be." (Vayikra 23:15)

The period of Sefiras Haomer is linked in our history with the story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, whose yartzeit is on Lag Baomer. The Gemara (Shabbos 33b) relates that he spent thirteen years hiding in a cave with his son Rabbi Elazar, during which time they studied, prayed and lived off a miraculous carob tree and water from a spring.

The Zohar comprises the teachings that Rabbi Shimon learned from Eliyahu Hanavi while in the cave. The Zohar (Shemos 32a, end of Va'eira) contains a prophecy about the children of Yishmoel ruling over Eretz Yisroel: "Rabbi Yosi and Rabbi Chiya were walking on the road. Said Rabbi Yosi to Rabbi Chiya: Why are you silent? The road is only repaired through words of Torah. Rabbi Chiya sighed and cried, and then began: "And Sarai was barren; she had no child" (Bereishis 11:30). Woe for this! Woe for the time that Hagar bore Yishmoel! Said Rabbi Yosi to him: Why? She bore a child later, a son, a holy trunk. He said to him: You saw and I saw, and this is what we heard from the mouth of Rabbi Shimon: Woe for that time, for since Sarah was delayed, it is written, "Sarai said to Avram...come, I beg of you, to my maidservant" (Bereishis 16:2). And that is why Hagar succeeded in taking the place of Sarah her mistress, and she had a son from Avraham. And Avraham said (Bereishis 17:18), "Would that Yishmoel would live before You!" Although the Holy One, blessed is He, was announcing to him the birth of Yitzchak, Avraham clung to Yishmoel, until the Holy One, blessed is He, replied to him, "And regarding Yishmoel, I have heard you..." Then he was circumcised and entered into the holy covenant before Yitzchok came out into the world. And come and see, the angel of Yishmoel stood for four hundred years before the Holy One, blessed is He, and asked: Does someone who is circumcised have a share in Your Name? He said to him: Yes. He said to him: But Yishmoel is circumcised – why does he have no share in Your Name like Yitzchok? He said to him: This one was circumcised properly and this one improperly. Furthermore, these cling to Me properly, on the eighth day, but these are far from Me for many days. He said to him: Even so, since he is circumcised, should he not get some reward? Woe to the day Yishmoel was born in the world and was circumcised! What did the Holy One, blessed is He, do? He distanced the children of Yishmoel from clinging to Above, and gave them a portion below in the Holy Land because of their circumcision. The children of Yishmoel are destined to rule over the Holy Land for a long time, when it is empty of all, just as their circumcision is empty, not complete (i.e. without p'riah). And they will prevent the children of Israel from returning to their place, until that merit of Yishmoel is used up."

This prophecy has become the focal point of debate between traditional Jews and Zionists. Traditional Jews point to this as proof that Jews must not fight wars against the Yishmaelim, the Arabs, to take the Holy Land away from them. It is Hashem's decree that they should control the land until their merit is used up, and it is not for us to say when that time is. Furthermore, the Zohar predicts that the Arabs will prevent the Jews from returning to their land. What could be a better description of the Zionist era, in which Jews have struggled to maintain control of the land through eight wars and two uprisings, and are still struggling? They thought they would found a state and then the Jewish people's troubles would vanish, but their wars with the Yishmaelim never seem to end. Clearly Hashem has sent them to make sure Jews should not maintain a state in Eretz Yisroel.

Some Zionists have argued that the Zohar only says that Yishmaelim have a right to rule Eretz Yisroel when it is empty - not now that it is full. The problem with this is that if so, the Zohar's statement that they will prevent the Jews from returning is meaningless. How will they prevent us from returning, if we can just return whenever we want, fill up the land and nullify their rights to the land? Rather, the Zohar must mean that the role of Yishmaelim is to keep the land empty until the time of redemption arrives. If Jews attempt to come and take it over, they will fight against them relentlessly until they leave.

In this sense, the Brisker Rav once compared the Arabs to the Emorites described in the Torah (Devarim 1:44), who came out to fight the Jews who invaded Eretz Yisroel too early. The Torah says that "They pursued you like bees, and they beat you in Seir until Chormah." Rashi comments, "Just as a bee, when it stings a person, dies immediately, so too when they hit you they died immediately." The Brisker Rav posed the question: The Torah seems to be using the comparison to bees to explain how strongly the Emorites fought, yet Rashi says that the comparison to bees was meant to highlight their weakness, that they died immediately. How does Rashi's comment conform to the simple meaning of the Torah?

The Brisker Rav explained: If A hits B repeatedly and B does not hit back, we only see that A hates B a little. But if B hits back double for every time A hits him, and still A continues to hit B, we see that A must really hate B, for he is willing to suffer so much just to hit B.

Here too, the Emorites also knew that when they fought against the Jews, they would die on the spot, and yet this did not deter them from pursuing the Jews - so powerful was their hatred. Thus the description of the Emorites dying like bees is meant to show how strongly motivated they were to pursue the Jews.

The Brisker Rav quoted the Vilna Gaon, who gave a similarly explanation to a comparison to bees in Tehillim (118:12): "They surround me like bees..." David Hamelech is describing his enemies' motivation to fight as so powerful that they are willing to die like the bees.

The Brisker Rav concluded, "The Zionists think that if they kill Arabs, the Arabs will be afraid and surrender to them. But we find here in the Torah that these nations pursued the Jews like bees - even when they knew it would cost them their lives. The Arabs kill and wound because they were sent by Heaven!" (Nesivos Rabboseinu v. 2 p. 164)

Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Shpoleh, known as the Shpoler Zaideh (1724-1811) used to sing the following song before the bedtime Krias Shema or before Tikkun Chatzos. The song is known as "Kol Bayaar," and each verse is traditionally sung in Lashon Hakodesh, Yiddish and Ukrainian. It is clear that the song is based on the Zohar's depiction of the Arabs as those blocking the gates of Eretz Yisroel until the time of redemption:

A voice in the woods, a cry and a moan:
A Father is calling His children to come home.
My children, My children, where did you go
That you have forgotten about Me so?

My children, My children, please come home
For I cannot stand to be alone.
Our Father, our Father, how can we reach You?
The guard at Your gate does not let us pass through.

Behar 5768

"And if your brother becomes poor and is sold to you, you shall not make him do slave labor. Like a worker and like a resident he will be with you; until the jubilee year he will work with you. And then he will go out from you, he and his sons with him, and he will return to his family, and to his ancestors' land he will return." (25:39-41)

The Ohr Hachaim explains this as a metaphor for the Jews in exile. G-d is addressing Esav and commanding him not to treat his brother Jacob badly in exile. He will only be in exile until the jubilee – the final redemption – when he, together with his sons, will return to his ancestors' land. The sons symbolize the sparks of holiness that are scattered around the world. In every place where Jews live, the sparks are sorted out through the Jews' suffering, Torah, and mitzvos. And this is one of the reasons for the exile – for if the reason were only for punishment, G-d could have punished the Jews while still in their land.

And what if the Jewish people had never sinned and never gone into exile? Who would have sorted out the sparks in all the lands of the Jewish exile? The Ohr Hachaim answers that if the Jewish people had not sinned, they would have had the power to sort out the holy sparks from afar, without ever leaving the Holy Land.

Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano writes that the purpose of every exile, beginning with Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, is to purify the places to which the exiled are sent. This explains why the Jews of Samaria were exiled only to one place, whereas the exiles of Judea were scattered in all directions. The Jews of Samaria were not Torah scholars, and therefore they could only sanctify one corner of the world; but the Jews of Jerusalem were sent everywhere, so that their wellsprings could benefit all of mankind. (Asarah Maamaros 4:13)

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 10b) relates that there was once a king who hated the Jews. He said to his ministers, "If a man has a painful scab on his foot, should he cut it off and heal, or leave it and suffer?" They said, "Cut it off and heal." But one minister, named Ketia bar Shalom, spoke up and said: "First of all, you will not be able to kill them all, for they are scattered all over the world, as it says, "For like the four directions of the world I have scattered you" (Zechariah 2:10). Secondly, those Jews who remain will call you a murderous kingdom.

The Gemara later comments on the wording of the verse in Zechariah: seemingly, it should read "to the four directions of the earth I have scattered you" and not "like the four directions". The Gemara explains that the word "direction" can also mean "wind" and the prophet was comparing the Jewish people to the wind: just as the world cannot exist without wind, so too it cannot exist without the Jewish people.

But according to this, why does the prophet mention scattering at all? The Maharsha answers that the world exists not just because the Jewish people are in the world somewhere, but because they are scattered around the world, making known the existence of G-d and His Torah.

With all of the above in mind, one cannot say that Jews gathered together in their own country in Eretz Yisroel are truly in exile, fulfilling the purpose of exile.

Furthermore, Rabbi Yosef Yabetz (d. 1507) in his work Chasdei Hashem explains the words of Yishaya 53:8, "He was removed from power and judgment" as a reply to the nations who question the greatness of Israel for suffering their exile. "After all," argued these nations, "Israel is not the only nation in exile. Many Muslims live under Christian governments and many Christians live under Muslim governments." The prophet replies that the non-Jews, even when they live in exile, do not suffer true exile since they know that they have a government of their own people in another part of the world to whom they can turn in time of need. For example, when King Manuel of Portugal decreed in 1496 that no Jews or Muslims could remain in his country, he did not actually enforce the decree against the Muslims, for fear of reprisals against Christians living in Muslim countries. Thus the Muslims in Portugal were saved by their own governments in other places. By contrast, the Jews are removed from power completely, not relying on any government somewhere else. According to this, if Jews have their own country, even those Jews living under other governments, if they rely on the Jewish country for help in times of need, are not truly living in exile.

Bechukosai 5768

"And they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers, regarding the trespass they committed against Me, and their acting as if everything happened by chance. I, too, will act as if everything were chance, and I will bring them into the land of their enemies, for then their hard heart will be humbled, and then they will atone for their sins." (26: 40-41)

The Ohr Hachaim asks two questions here: 1) Why will they have to confess the sins of their fathers? Once a person repents on his own sins, he is not punished for his father's sins, as the Targum says on Shemos 20:5. 2) After they have already repented, why will Hashem act as if everything is chance and bring them into the land of their enemies?

He explains that G-d is merciful and often lets sins go unpunished for many generations, allowing the sinners numerous opportunities to repent. In the final years of the First Temple, the prophets rebuked the people, warning them of the exile and the other punishments detailed in the Torah. But the people did not listen, for they said, "Our fathers sinned and none of these punishments came upon them, so what we are doing cannot be so wrong." Even as their situation became worse and worse, they refused to believe that their misfortunes were punishments, and instead attributed them to chance. Therefore, when they finally repented many years after the destruction, they were required to admit their mistake and say, "Yes, we were wrong to attribute all these things to chance. These were punishments for our sins and our fathers' sins. We suffered this punishment because we continued in the ways of our fathers."

The second verse, "I, too, will act as if everything were chance, and I will bring them into the land of their enemies" is actually part of their words of confession. At the time Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were sent into exile, they grumbled, "Why did G-d do this to us? If He had to punish us, why didn't He punish us in our land?" And they added a pious complaint: "If the purpose of the punishment was so that we should repent, sending us out among the nations of the world is counter-productive. We will only get worse there by learning from the ways of the gentiles." But it was wrong of them to doubt G-d's wisdom and justice, and therefore when they repented they had to admit this mistake as well, saying, "Since we sinned by attributing our misfortunes to chance, G-d acted measure for measure and brought upon us more punishments that seemed purposeless, such as exile."

Later on, says the Ohr Hachaim, the Torah gives us a different answer to the question of why the Jewish people had to leave their land – a question which "troubles everyone who has a wise heart". Verse 44 reads: "And also this: when they were in their enemies' lands, I did not reject them nor revile them to destroy them, to annul My covenant with them, for I am Hashem their G-d." The Ohr Hachaim explains: And also this – an additional answer to the question – is that by virtue of their being in their enemies' lands, I did not destroy them. I took my anger out on the land, sparing the Jews themselves.

This is similar to the idea expressed in the Midrash on Eichah 4:11, that G-d took out His anger on the wood and stones of the Temple and the Jewish people were thereby spared. That is why it says (Tehillim 79:1), "A song of Assaf: G-d, the gentiles entered your property, they have defiled Your holy sanctuary, they have made Jerusalem into rubble.' This chapter is called a song, not a lamentation, because through the destruction of the Temple the Jewish people were saved. This is also the meaning of Eichah 4:11, "Hashem used up His anger."

Moreover, says the Ohr Hachaim, when G-d sees such an exalted and noble people degraded, serving their enemies, His mercy is aroused and He does not exact full punishment from them. Their degradation thus saves them from further punishment.

The Satmar Rav (Vayoel Moshe 1:15) points out that here the Ohr Hachaim calls those who question the purpose of exile "wise of heart" whereas earlier he wrote that they were wrong for asking the question. He answers that the wise man is bothered by the problem but at the same time accepts the decree as just and righteous. For the sinner, on the other hand, this unanswered question leads him to a rejection of exile.

The Ohr Hachaim spoke with a prophetic spirit, and his words outline the events of our time. The Zionists enjoyed success in their early years, and so they conclude that G-d must be on their side. Even today, as their situation deteriorates, they say, "What we are doing cannot be wrong, since our fathers were not punished." They cannot believe that current events are punishments, and instead attribute them to other factors.

And among some religious Jews who claim not to be Zionists, we hear the argument that living in Eretz Yisroel is really exile. Like the sinful Jews mentioned by the Ohr Hachaim, they argue that the punishment of exile can be fulfilled even while living in the Holy Land, adding that it is

actually better not to live among the gentiles lest we learn from their ways. Unlike the "wise of heart", they reject the Divine decree under which we were expelled from the Holy Land, and they support the military efforts of the Zionists to maintain a Jewish government in the Holy Land. These people will eventually be forced to confess their sin and the sins of their fathers, admitting that their ways were wrong and that G-d's decree was just. They will eventually see that, as the Ohr Hachaim says, living under the nations is our best guarantee to merit G-d's mercy and protection.

Behar/Bechukosai 5769

And I will lay the land desolate, and your enemies who live in it will find it desolate. And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will draw out a sword after you; and your land will be desolate, and your cities waste. (26:32-33)

The Ohr Hachaim explains these words as a reference to the oaths which G-d made the Jewish people swear in exile. "I will scatter" refers to the first oath, which mandates that the Jews remain scattered and not come up as a wall to resettle Eretz Yisroel. "Among the nations" refers to the second oath, which mandates that the Jews remain submissive to the nations and not rebel against their authority. "I will draw out a sword after you" means that G-d will enforce the oaths: if the Jews violate them, they will die by the sword, G-d forbid, as the Gemara says (Kesubos 111a), "If you keep the oaths, good, but if not I will permit your flesh like the gazelles and deer of the field." The final words "and your land will be desolate..." are the reason for the oaths: G-d wants the Holy Land empty in order that it should rest and make up for the Shmittah years that were not observed.

We see here that the Ohr Hachaim did not understand the first oath the way some Zionists have understood it: that the prohibition on mass immigration is only because this is a form of rebellion against the nations, and that therefore if the nation ruling over the Holy Land gives permission to Jews to immigrate the oath no longer applies. Rather the Ohr Hachaim says that the purpose of the oath is that the land be desolate and empty. The oath has nothing to do with the nations, and so the nations' permission makes no difference.

The previous verse – "and I will lay the land desolate, and your enemies who live in it will find it desolate" – seems like an unnecessary repetition of the same idea. But if we look at what Chazal say, we see that these two verses compliment each other. The Sifra says: "This is a kindly measure, so that Israel should not say, 'Since we have gone into exile from our land, now the enemies are coming and finding satisfaction on it.' Therefore it says 'And your enemies who live in it will find it desolate' – even the enemies who come afterwards will not find satisfaction in it." From the Sifra it sounds as though the kindness is that if we can't use our land, at least it gives us some comfort that no one else can use it either. But it seems strange that the Torah would endorse such a selfish attitude - the attitude of the wicked Sodomites (Bava Basra 12b).

But the Ramban (on v. 16) explains more: "This is a good prophecy, foretelling that during every exile, our land will not accept our enemies. And this as well is a great proof and promise to us, since you will not find in all the inhabited world a land that is so good and accommodating, and

that was once settled, that is now as destroyed as it [the Holy Land] is. For since we left it, it has not accepted any nation or language; all of them are trying to settle it but cannot.”

These words of the Ramban are often quoted by Zionists as a proof that their state is the long-awaited redemption. The land miraculously did not accept any other nation, and now it is accepting the Zionists with open arms, they say. Usually they quote this in conjunction with the Gemara in Sanhedrin 98a, which says that Eretz Yisroel producing fruit is a signal of the beginning of redemption. The problem is that the Gemara refers to the land miraculously producing new fruit every day (Maharsha). Regular fruit is not a sign of anything, and indeed the land produced regular fruit throughout the centuries of exile. We see that the Kesef Mishneh (Hilchos Terumos 1:11) tells the story of a practical dispute among the rabbis of his time over the issue of taking maaser from produce grown on gentile-owned land in Eretz Yisroel.

The Ramban as well never says that the land will not produce fruit when gentile nations plant it. He says that they will not be able to settle it, meaning that no nation will live long there before they are conquered, killed and expelled. A quick look at the historical record shows us what the Ramban means. The Holy Land was conquered by the Romans, the Persians, the Byzantines, and then the Muslims. For over a thousand years following the Muslim conquest, the land underwent a series of devastating invasions, followed by massacres of the existing population. Seljuk Turks and Fatimids were followed by Crusaders, who were followed by waves of Mongol tribes, who were followed in turn by Tartars, Mamluks, Turks and continual Bedouin raiders.

In this history of a land plagued by incessant wars and conquests, Zionist history is no exception. In a mere 61 years, the Zionists have fought eight wars and confronted two prolonged uprisings. Just as the troubles encountered by the gentile nations who tried to settle the land were a fulfillment of v. 32 “and your enemies will find it desolate,” so too the troubles encountered by the Zionists are a fulfillment of v. 33 “and I will draw out a sword after you,” as the Ohr Hachaim explained – that these words refer to the punishment for violating the oaths.

The Ramban explains that the “kindness to Israel” mentioned in the Sifra is that it is “a great proof and promise to us” i.e. a proof that G-d has not abandoned us and will still keep His promise to redeem us. Now we can understand the connection between v. 32 and v. 33. In v. 33 G-d warned the Jewish people with an oath not to return to Eretz Yisroel before the proper time. But He knew that there would be some Jews who would think He had abandoned them in exile, and they would feel they had no choice but to take the initiative and redeem themselves by force. Therefore He prefaced the oaths with the promise that the gentile nations will never be able to settle the land permanently. The fulfillment of this promise will serve as our sign that G-d is still with us and we must keep the oaths, and wait patiently for the time when He sees fit to redeem us.

Behar/Bechukosai 5770

When you come to the land that I give you, the land shall rest a Sabbath to Hashem. (25:2)

The Kli Yakar quotes some of the reasons given by the commentators for the mitzvah of Shmittah, rejects them, and then gives what he holds is the real reason. The Rambam in Moreh

Nevuchim says that the purpose of Shmittah is to let the earth rest, so that it will produce more in the working years. The Kli Yakar argues: 1) If so, why did the Jewish people deserve exile for not keeping Shmittah? The punishment should have been the simple result of their actions: that the land would grow tired and stop producing. 2) Why is this called a "Sabbath to Hashem," if it is for the sake of the land? 3) Why does the Torah say (26:34) that during exile the land will rest and make up its missed Sabbaths? When the gentiles take over Eretz Yisroel, they will certainly not keep Shmittah, and it will not rest at all.

The Akeidah says that Shmittah is a reminder of the creation of the world. The Kli Yakar argues: For that we already have Shabbos. If a reminder every week won't help, how will a reminder once every seven years be any better?

But the true reason for Shmittah, he says, is to teach the Jewish people emunah and bitachon in Hashem. Hashem feared that upon coming into the land, working it and reaping its fruits, the Jews would begin to feel that everything was natural and they need not rely on Him. They would feel that they were the owners and masters of the land. Therefore He commanded that they work six years straight, not letting the land rest every three years, as farmers usually do, and promised that not only would the land not tire - it would produce extra in the sixth year, enough to last until the ninth year. They would rest in the seventh year, rely on miracles and know that the entire land belonged to Hashem. They would depend only on Him for their food, just as the Jews in the desert depended on Him for the manna.

The Kli Yakar's reason is really explicit in the Gemara, Sanhedrin 39a: "A student asked Rabbi Avahu: What is the reason for Shmittah? He said: The Holy One, blessed is He, said to Israel: Plant for six years and let the land rest in the seventh, so that you may know that the land is Mine."

Their failure to keep Shmittah showed that they lacked faith and felt the land was theirs, continues the Kli Yakar, and for that they were exiled. Furthermore, the Holy Land was angry at them: it had hoped to be used as a vehicle to teach the Jewish people trust in Hashem, that all Jews should know that Hashem is the true Owner of the Land, and they are mere sharecroppers. The Land, wanting to be under the ownership of Hashem alone, threw them out. During exile, the Land does not mind when gentiles live on it and farm it naturally, for the gentiles are not expected to live lives based on faith. The Land prefers this situation to the Jewish people living on it and not learning the proper lessons in emunah.

All the more so that the Holy Land prefers to be under gentile rule than to be a vehicle to actively uproot emunah from the Jewish people. Our gedolim always viewed a Jewish state before the coming of moshiach, even a religious state, as an inherent contradiction to our emunah in Hashem's redemption through moshiach. In 1937, the Knessiah Gedolah of Agudath Israel first placed the question of a Jewish state before the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah. The periodical Hapardes describes the reaction of the members of the Moetzes: "Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Rabbi Mordechai Rottenberg of Antwerp, and the Hungarian and Czech rabbis opposed the proposal for a Jewish state, no matter what the borders would be and even if it would be religious, because it would be like a denial of the coming of moshiach."

And the Brisker Rav said on another occasion: "The Rambam (Melachim 12:2 and Teshuva 9:2) says that moshiach will redeem the Jewish people from their subjugation to the nations. Anyone who believes that it is possible to be redeemed from subjugation to the nations without moshiach is lacking in full belief in moshiach."

The movement to bring Eretz Yisroel under Jewish rule before the coming of moshiach was named Zionism, after the word Zion, which is used throughout Tanach as a synonym for Jerusalem and as symbolic of all of the Holy Land. But according to the above, their movement is an affront to Zion and its purpose. Those who advocate waiting passively for the redemption of Zion should really be called Zionists, while those who use the land of Zion to uproot emunah should be called anti-Zionists.

"And of Zion it will be said: every man is born in it" (Tehillim 87:5). The Gemara (Kesubos 75a) explains that even those Jews who are not born in Zion are considered its children if they looked forward to seeing it.

On Hoshana Rabba, we say, "Hoshana Tzion Hametzuyenes" - save Zion, the designated one. The Bobover Rebbe, Rabbi Ben Zion Halberstam (1874-1940), asks: What is the meaning of this extra word "hametzuyenes" - the designated one? What is this designation or indication that Zion must have? He answers that the author of the Hoshanos saw with holy inspiration that there would come a time when wicked Jews would take the name Zion for themselves, to use for their movement to conquer Eretz Yisroel by force before the proper time. Then, whenever the simple Jewish masses would see the word "Zion" mentioned in the prayerbook, for example, "May you cause a new light to shine on Zion," they would think that it refers to this new movement, G-d forbid. Therefore he wrote in the Hoshanos, "The designated Zion" – the Zion that has the mark and indication that it is the right one. What is that mark and indication? The Hoshanos continues, "Hoshana kodesh hakadashim" – it must be a Zion that is holy of holies, with the holiness of Eretz Yisroel – not, G-d forbid, the movement of these wicked men who call themselves Zionists. They have no connection to holiness. (Kedushas Tzion, Moadim, Hoshana Rabba p. 45).

May all those who should rightfully be called anti-Zionists repent and return to true Judaism and true Zionism.

Bamidbar 5768

"And all those counted of the children of Israel, according to their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and up, all who went out to the army in Israel, were 603,550." (1:45-46)

The Ramban speculates as to the reason for this census. His third answer is that the Israelites were about to enter the Land of Canaan and conquer it, and it is normal to count the soldiers before a war so as to know how to plan each battle. Although G-d had promised them that they would be victorious, they could not rely on a miracle, that one Jewish man could defeat a thousand of the enemy's men. They had to be sure to deploy enough soldiers in each place.

Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal was a Hungarian rav who became a Zionist during the Second World War. Zionists revere his book, *Eim Habonim Smeicha*, as one of their most sacred texts. Rabbi Teichtal writes (p. 176) that just as the Ramban says the Jews in the time of Moshe had to make preparations according to the natural way of the world before conquering Eretz Yisroel, so too during exile we are obligated to take natural steps toward our redemption. As proof of this, he cites a letter written by the Rambam to the sages of Marseilles on the subject of astrology. The Rambam says that all the wisdom of the astrologers is foolishness and a waste of time, and then adds:

"And this is what caused us to lose our kingdom and destroyed our Temple and prolonged our exile and brought us to this point, where our fathers have sinned and are no longer here, because they found many books on these matters, on the words of the astrologers, and they erred and followed them, thinking that these were sophisticated branches of knowledge that bring great benefit. And they did not learn warfare or methods of conquering lands, but instead thought that [their knowledge of the stars] would help them. And that is why the prophets called them fools and idiots – they were surely fools and idiots, who went after nothings that could not help them or save them, for they were nothings."

Thus, says Rabbi Teichtal, the Rambam says that the destruction of the Temple and our exile happened because we did not learn warfare, and it is this same attitude of relying on miracles and refusal to make our own efforts that has prolonged our exile. Of course, he says, the Rambam cannot mean that during exile we should learn to fight wars and conquer lands, for this is not in our power due to our dispersion among the nations. Furthermore, we were forsworn on this matter – not to go up as a wall (*Kesubos* 111a). Rather, he means that we should use whatever natural means we have at our disposal, such as asking kings to be kind to us and end our exile, or buying land in Eretz Yisroel.

The first thing to note here is that with these words Rabbi Teichtal makes it clear that he would not have permitted the Zionist state founded in 1948, had he lived to see it. The state was founded through warfare, and Rabbi Teichtal states clearly that the oaths are in force and prohibit warfare. His "Zionism" is limited to buying land and peaceful requests from kings.

Now let us analyze what he says. From his interpretation of the Rambam's letter, a picture of the reasons for exile and redemption emerges that is totally different from the one presented in every other Jewish source, including the Rambam's own writings. The Biblical books of *Melachim*, *Yirmiyahu* and *Yechezkel* make it clear that the destruction of the First Temple happened primarily because of idolatry. Chazal say this in *Yuma* 9b and 69b. We say in our prayers, "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land." The Torah says that the redemption will come when we repent and listen to the voice of G-d (*Devarim* 30:2). The Rambam in his *Laws of Repentance* (7:5) quotes this verse and says, "Israel will only be redeemed through repentance. And the Torah has already promised that Israel will repent at the end of their exile, and then immediately they will be redeemed." And suddenly here, in a letter to the sages of Marseilles, the Rambam says that the exile happened because we did not learn warfare, and we will be redeemed when we begin taking practical steps toward the redemption!

The answer is, of course, that the Rambam did not mean this; in fact he meant the exact opposite. During the time of the Temple, Jews were permitted to take natural steps to defend their land, in addition to trusting in G-d. It was not in their trust in G-d that they were remiss; Chazal say that they placed their trust in Him (Yuma 9b). Their sin was in the natural steps they took. Instead of pursuing permitted natural steps such as warfare, the Jews took natural steps forbidden by the Torah: idolatry. The Rambam equates astrology with idolatry because both involve a denial of G-d's control over the world and attribution of that control to other forces or entities. It was the sin of making these forbidden "natural" efforts that caused the exile. Furthermore, he says, the exile is prolonged because Jews continue to practice astrology. In our times, the "astrology" is Zionism, because Zionism too involves making natural efforts in a forbidden manner.

If we analyze the matter further, we will see that even according to the Eim Habonim Smeicha there should be no permission to take active steps toward the redemption. We have seen that Rabbi Teichtal says that warfare is forbidden under the oaths but peaceful efforts to settle the land are not. Presumably, this ruling is based on his interpretation of the words of Rashi in Kesubos 111a, "beyad chazakah" – with a strong hand – to mean warfare. Most of the commentators (cf. Yefeh Kol) disagree with this interpretation of Rashi's words for the very simple reason that there is already another oath prohibiting "rebellion against the nations". If the prohibition to go up as a wall only prohibits warfare, then that would already be included in rebellion and there would be no need for a special oath. Rather, going up with a strong hand means any mass immigration, even with permission from the nations.

But there was one authority who agreed with Rabbi Teichtal's interpretation of Rashi: the Avnei Nezer (Yoreh Deah 454 and 456). The Avnei Nezer says that there are actually two ways to understand the oaths in his view. The first way is to say that the prohibition of going up as a wall prohibits only warfare because it is essentially the same as the other oath against rebellion, only more specific. The second is to say that the oath against going up as a wall prohibits only warfare because if the gentile rulers of the land give the Jews permission to immigrate en masse, this is considered a Heavenly sign of the redemption.

According to the second way, Jews should not make efforts to obtain this permission from the gentile rulers, because then it would no longer be a Heavenly sign, just part of a natural political process. According to the first way, any non-military immigration is permitted not because it represents an effort toward redemption, but because it does not violate the terms of exile. Thus either way, it is forbidden for Jews to make efforts toward the redemption. It can be an exilic effort, or a redemptive effort set in motion by G-d, but not a redemptive effort set in motion by Jews. This is the meaning of the oath mentioned later in the Gemara not to "force the end."

Many Zionists mistakenly use the Avnei Nezer as a source to permit the state, so it is important for us to take a moment to explain why this is an error. In 1947 the United Nations voted to give the Zionists a state, and in 1948 the British pulled out and left the land up for grabs. In the ensuing war, the Zionists conquered for themselves a large part of Palestine. This was definitely "with a strong hand" according to all opinions! The United Nations did not own Palestine and their resolution was no more than a suggestion; neither they nor the British did anything to implement it. Perhaps an argument could be made that war in an "up for grabs" situation does not constitute rebellion. But the oath against going up as a wall, even according to the Avnei Nezer,

does not just prohibit rebellion; it prohibits anything short of a peaceful gift from the ruling power.

Bamidbar 5769

And with you will be one man for every tribe, each man a leader of his family. (1:4)

The Kli Yakar explains that the Torah is coming to praise each of these leaders as a leader even to his own tribe and even to his own family. They did not fear their people and they did not shy away from criticizing their families. This is similar to the blessing Yaakov Avinu gave to Dan, “Dan will judge his people like one of the tribes of Israel” (Bereishis 49:16). Dan would not be partial or cover up for the transgressions of his own tribe. Rather he would judge them with the same fairness as any other tribe.

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 4a) teaches us that leaders who do not rebuke and criticize their people will be punished along with those people. The Gemara poses a contradiction between two verses. When Avraham prayed for the city of Sodom, he said, “Will you destroy the righteous together with the wicked?” (Bereishis 18:23) G-d agreed to his prayer and rescued whoever was righteous from Sodom. (However, to spare the entire city there needed to be ten righteous people.) But Yechezkel, describing the destruction of Jerusalem (21:8), says, “And I will cut off from you righteous and wicked.” The Gemara answers that Avraham was discussing perfectly righteous people whereas Yechezkel is discussing people are not perfectly righteous. But, asks the Gemara, Yechezkel in another place (9:4-6) describes how G-d commanded His angels to destroy Jerusalem, and He tells Gavriel to write the letter tav on the forehead of every righteous person who cries over the evils committed in the city. The tav symbolizes that they kept the entire Torah, from alef to tav. At first He tells the angels not to touch the people with the tav on them, but then the Attribute of Justice speaks up and says, “They should have protested.” G-d says, “I know that the other Jews would not have listened to them.” The Attribute of Justice says, “Master of the Universe, You know that, but do they know that?” G-d agrees with this argument and instructs the angels to begin killing these righteous Jews as well (Shabbos 55a). So we see, argues the Gemara in Avodah Zara 4a, that even completely righteous people are punished along with the wicked. The Gemara answers that their failure to protest was considered a sin and so they were not considered to be completely righteous. In the case of Sodom, on the other hand, Avraham Avinu was praying only for righteous people who did protest; only they would be saved.

Sometimes, even being totally righteous and protesting is not enough. In order to be saved, the righteous have to remain separate from the wicked. When the Jews worshipped the golden calf, the Levites protested, and even carried out punishment when Moshe commanded them to do so, without partiality to their own family members. “He said to his father and mother, ‘I have not seen him;’ his brothers he did not recognize, and his children he did not know” (Devarim 33:9). Yet the Torah says in this week’s parsha, “But the tribe of Levi you shall not count, nor take their head-count, in the midst of the children of Israel” (Bamidbar 1:49). Rashi says: “The Holy One, blessed is He, knew that He would later decree that every Jew twenty years old and up would have to die in the wilderness. So He said: Let these Levites not be included in the census, for they are Mine, since they did not go astray after the golden calf.” Despite their protest, the

Levites would have been punished along with everyone else, had they not been counted separately.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 19a) tells a terrifying story about Shimon ben Shetach and the Sages of his time. King Yannai's slave committed murder, and the Sanhedrin called him to stand before them. Yannai sent the slave, but the Sanhedrin was not satisfied – they wanted Yannai himself to come and stand before them, as the Torah says “And it will be established with testimony in the presence of its owner” (Shemos 21:29). So Yannai came to the Sanhedrin, and he sat down. Shimon ben Shetach commanded, “King Yannai, stand on your feet and let the witnesses speak against you! Not before us do you stand, but before the Creator of the World!” Yannai said, “What do your fellow sages say?” Shimon ben Shetach turned to his right, but the sages buried their faces in the earth. He turned to his left, but the sages buried their faces in the earth. Shimon ben Shetach said to them, “You are thinkers! Let the Master of Thoughts come and punish you!” Immediately, the angel Gavriel came and beat them into the ground, and they died.

When Yannai refused to recognize the authority of the Sanhedrin, only Shimon ben Shetach had the courage to confront him. Similarly, today, there are few Jews, even among those who are opposed to the existence of the Zionist state, who have the courage to confront it openly. The Zionists, echoing Yannai, ask, “Where are all your supporters? Let them come out and confront us too, if they really oppose us!” We hope that our generation will not fail in this challenge, as did the sages at the time of Shimon ben Shetach.

Shavuos 5769

“And G-d spoke all these words, saying...” (Shemos 20:1)

The Gemara (Berachos 12a) says that the kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash used to say Aseres Hadibros (the Ten Utterances) every morning. This custom, the Gemara tells us, was at one time followed in all synagogues outside the Beis Hamikdash, but Chazal put a stop to it because of “the argument of the heretics.” These heretics would point to the recital of the Aseres Hadibros, which the Jews heard directly from Hashem, as proof that the rest of the Torah, which came to us through Moshe Rabbeinu, was not true.

The Aseres Hadibros were recited daily because they contained the foundations of Judaism (Rambam, Commentary to the Mishnah, Tamid 5:1). The Yerushalmi (Berachos 1:5) says that the whole reason why G-d commanded us to say Shema every morning was because it contains references to each of the basic principles in the Aseres Hadibros. Yet Chazal forbade the public reading of the Aseres Hadibros themselves, because stopping the spread of heresy was more important than anything else.

Similarly, the Gemara says that if a heretic wrote a Sefer Torah, even if he wrote every word correctly, it must be burnt (Gittin 45b). The Rambam (Yesodei Hatorah 6:8) explains that although destroying holy scriptures and the name of Hashem is usually a great sin, in this case it is permitted because the heretic does not believe in the holiness of Hashem's name and writes it as if it were any other word. And, the Rambam continues, not only is it permitted to burn this

Sefer Torah, but it is an obligation to do so, in order not to leave any record of the heretics or their actions.

If this is true of a Sefer Torah written perfectly, how much more is it true of the Modern Hebrew language invented by the Zionists. Even if they had changed nothing at all of the original Hebrew language, it would be forbidden to speak it, since it was the Zionist heretics who started the practice of speaking it. All the more so now that they have made tremendous changes in the vocabulary, grammar and style of the language. Modern Hebrew was invented to make it easy to translate word-for-word from European languages into Hebrew and vice versa. The true Holy Tongue has its own character, its own life and its own expressions. It is the language of Hashem, in which every word comes directly from the words of Hashem to a prophet (Chasam Sofer on Bereishis 11:1). It is language which, by its limited vocabulary, teaches a Jew to speak in a holy way, as befits a servant of Hashem (Rambam, quoted by Ramban on Shemos 30:13). But the Zionists have butchered it and molded it to fit exactly word-for-word with the European languages. The Jew who writes in true Lashon Hakodesh expresses pure Jewish thought and pure Torah views on life, but the Zionist speaks like a gentile under the thin disguise of a new language. Zionist Hebrew is nothing but English in translation.

The Zionists made their new language conform to European languages in several ways. First of all, they constructed words from existing Lashon Hakodesh forms to refer to objects and concepts that were recently invented or discovered, such as clock, car, microphone, address, airplane, minute and tomato. Secondly, they constructed words from existing Lashon Hakodesh forms to match a foreign expression or term even in cases where no new concept was involved, such as their words for age, personal, despite, interesting, problem, calendar date and office. Thirdly, they borrowed words from other languages for objects or concepts that existed already in the past and did not need a new word, such as citation, actual, history and organization.

And they were not satisfied with merely modeling the language after foreign languages. They made it much worse than foreign languages by taking existing words from the Tanach and other holy sources and giving them totally new meanings. It is regarding these kinds of changes that one historian of the Modern Hebrew language wrote that it was created with the intention “to fight against religious Jews.” Examples are their words for electricity, tie (in a game), furniture, wedding hall and fairytale.

Let us take the example of electricity. In the Haftarah for the first day of Shavuos we read the vision of Yechezkel, the Maaseh Merkavah, one of the most esoteric and difficult chapters of the Nevi'im. The reason we read it on Shavuos is because Yechezkel's vision was similar to what the Jewish people saw at the Giving of the Torah at Sinai (Rashi on Megillah 31a). The Mishnah rules that a sage who understands the secrets of Maaseh Merkavah may not teach them even to a single student, unless that student is wise enough to understand it on his own (Chagigah 11b).

Of all the words used by Yechezkel to describe what he saw, perhaps the one most shrouded in mystery is the word “chashmal,” which appears two times in our Haftarah. The Gemara (Chagigah 13a) gives two explanations: angels of fire that speak, or angels that are sometimes silent (chash) and sometimes speak (memalelos). Still, the Gemara makes it clear that the meaning of this word is too deep for a human being to fathom. The Gemara tells of a child who

was learning Yechezkel in cheder and understood the meaning of chashmal, whereupon a fire came out from the chashmal and burned him up. After this incident, the Sages felt that the Book of Yechezkel was too dangerous, and they were ready to remove it from the Tanach and hide it away. But Chananya ben Chizkiya said to them, "Not everyone is as wise as this child."

On the second place where the word occurs (1:27), Rashi says something that he says in no other place: "It is not permitted to think about this verse."

Yet thanks to the Zionists, every Jewish child and adult who speaks Modern Hebrew uses this holy word many times a day, for the most mundane and common thing. The word that once made every Jew tremble with Yiras Shomayim has become a household term used to refer to lights, radios, ovens and washing machines. When a Jew who has been exposed to the Zionist language studies Yechezkel, he misses the point.

In Uvdos Vehanhagos Leveis Brisk (v. 4, p. 190) we read that the Brisker Rav once said, "The Zionists' use of this word from Yechezkel shows that they deny the meaning and existence of that holy concept mentioned by the prophet Yechezkel."

The Brisker Rav pointed out many other falsifications of the Holy Tongue committed by the Zionists, and his blood would boil with anger whenever he heard someone speak a word or expression of Modern Hebrew. When he spoke to Bnei Torah who did not understand Yiddish, he would speak in Lashon Hakodesh with the Ashkenazic pronunciation, but never in Modern Hebrew. He said, "The motive of those who introduced Modern Hebrew was to create a language barrier between the younger generation and the older generation, so that each one should not understand the other."

Shavuos 5770

**And it came to pass in the days of the judging of the judges, that there was a famine in the land, and a man went out from Beis Lechem of Yehuda to sojourn in the fields of Moav, he and his wife and his two sons... and the man's name was Elimelech... and Elimelech died...
(Rus 1:1-3)**

The Gemara in Bava Basra 91a says, "One may not go out from Eretz Yisroel to Chutz Laaretz unless the price of wheat rises to two measures for one sela. Rabbi Shimon said: When does this apply? Only when he cannot afford it, but if he can afford it, even if the price becomes one measure for a sela he should not leave. And so Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai used to say: Elimelech, Machlon and Kilyon were gedolei hador and wealthy philanthropists, so why were they punished? Because they went out from Eretz Yisroel to Chutz Laaretz."

The Rashbam comments: "One may not go out from Eretz Yisroel to Chutz Laaretz - because he exempts himself from the mitzvos (i.e. those mitzvos that apply only in Eretz Yisroel)." We see here that the Rashbam did not hold like the Ramban, who counts living in Eretz Yisroel as one of the 613 mitzvos. That is why he was unable to explain simply that one may not leave Eretz Yisroel because this would be neglecting the mitzvah to live there. Rather, he gives the reason that one is exempting himself from the mitzvos.

The mekubal Rabbi Avraham Azulai (1570-1643), writes in his work Chesed L'avraham, Mayan 3 Nahar 22: "You must know that we have a tradition that on the day when moshiach will arrive in Eretz Yisroel with the ingathered Jews, he will find there seven thousand Jews." He goes on to say that after the coming of moshiach, those seven thousand Jews will reach a higher spiritual level than everyone else. When the ingathered Jews complain about this, moshiach will reply, "Hashem rewards people measure for measure. They risked their lives and subjected themselves to deprivation to come here and lead spiritual lives; therefore Hashem rewards them with a high spiritual level. You put your body and your possessions first and stayed in Chutz Laaretz; therefore your reward will be material wealth."

On many occasions the Satmar Rebbe would show this Chesed L'avraham to people and say, "I tremble when I read this. From all the millions of Jews who are there now, only seven thousand will be left!" (Yishai Buchinger, Zichronos Fun Heiligen Satmarer Rebben, pp. 46-47)

We must ask: it does not seem like the Chesed L'avraham is saying that there will be some massive expulsion that will leave only seven thousand Jews in Eretz Yisroel. If that would be the case, why would the Jews of Chutz Laaretz be to blame for not living in Eretz Yisroel? They tried to live there and were expelled! Furthermore, the Chesed L'avraham sounds like he is encouraging people to live in Eretz Yisroel, saying that those who live there during exile will get a special reward. Why then would he write that Hashem will bring a disaster, chas veshalom, upon the vast majority of the Jews living there?

The answer is that he does not necessarily mean there will be an expulsion or a disaster. Rather, he means that the Jews who will be rewarded for shunning materialism and living in Eretz Yisroel are only those few who want to live there no matter who is in power. But the vast majority of the millions living there today are only willing to live there because of the existence of the Zionist state and the supposed protection and opportunities it affords. When it reverts back to being a gentile country as it was in past centuries, these people, in the best case scenario, will leave of their own accord. Then, when moshiach comes he will find only seven thousand Jews in Eretz Yisroel, and he will tell the rest: By opting not to live a deprived but spiritual life in Eretz Yisroel under the gentiles, you placed your bodies and wealth higher than your souls.

Naso 5768

For behold, you will conceive and bear a son, and a razor shall not go up on his head, for the child will be a nazirite of G-d from the womb, and he will begin to save Israel from the Philistines. (Shoftim 13:5)

The simple meaning of the word "yachel" is "begin," as we have translated it above. But the Gemara (Sotah 10a) explains a different level of meaning: "yachel" can also mean "it is nullified," namely, the oath of Avimelech was nullified. Scripture is about to relate the story of Shimshon's life and how he terrorized the Philistines. Avraham Avinu and Avimelech, king of the Philistines, had made a sworn covenant with each other (Bereishis 21:23). But since the Philistines fought with and subjugated the Jews, thus violating the oath, the Jews were released from their obligation to keep the oath, and Shimshon was permitted to do what he did.

Some Zionists claim that there is a similar relationship between the oaths of the Jewish people and the nations (Kesubos 111a). The Jewish people was prohibited under oath from going up to Eretz Yisroel "as a wall," rebelling against the nations, or forcing the end of exile. The nations were prohibited from subjugating the Jews too much. The claim is that since the nations violated their oath, the Jewish people is no longer bound by its oaths.

In the Parsha Pearls of Naso, 5766, we used logic to explain why this argument is flawed. In this issue we will review the historical record to show that no Jewish sage or commentator in the pre-Zionist era ever made this argument. Every source text that the Zionists can find falls into one of three categories: 1) Reference to an action by G-d, not an annulment of the Jewish oath; 2) Reference to the annulment of the oath prohibiting rebellion against the nations. 3) Reference to the annulment of the oath against excessive prayer. But no one has ever said that the oaths against going up as a wall and forcing the end of exile through action were subject to annulment when the gentiles violate their oath.

We begin with the Midrash, Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2:7: "Rabbi Yossi bar Chanina says: There are two oaths here, one for Israel and one for the nations of the world. He made Israel swear that they would not rebel against the yoke of the kingdoms, and He made the kingdoms swear that they would not harden their yoke upon Israel, for if they would harden their yoke upon Israel, they would cause the end to come not in its proper time."

The Midrash does not say that the oaths are a covenant between Israel and the nations, nor does it say that if the nations harden their yoke upon Israel the oath is annulled. It says only that if they harden the yoke, G-d will bring an early end to the exile.

Similarly, the Shitah Mekubetzes in Kesubos 111a says in the name of the disciples of the Rashba: "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, what will you tell Him? That I am lovesick." (Shir Hashirim 5:8) The Jewish people is speaking to the nations of the world, after the Holy One, blessed is He, made the nations swear not to afflict Israel too much, lest they cause Him to arouse their love before its time, because the Holy One, blessed is He, cannot bear to see Israel in great distress and not save them, as the Gemara says (Sanhedrin 97b), "When the time to redeem them arrives, the Holy One, blessed is He, will raise up a king whose decrees are like Haman's and he will bring them to repent, and then immediately they will be redeemed."

Here again, it is clear that G-d will be the one to bring the redemption before its time. In passing, we note that the Shitah Mekubetzes states clearly that redemption, even when early, must be preceded by repentance.

That G-d will bring the redemption and not the Jews is also clear from the Pnei Yehoshua on Kesubos 111a. The Pnei Yehoshua asks how the oath on the nations of the world fits in with the verse "do not arouse or awaken the love before it is desired" which refers to the redemption of the Jewish people. He answers that if the nations afflict the Jews too much, "they will cause the Holy One, blessed is He, to hasten to bring the redemption before its time, as we find in the case of the Egyptian exile."

(The Pnei Yehoshua also asks how the oath against revealing the secret to the nations has to do with the redemption. He answers based on Rashi's second explanation, that "the secret" refers to the reasons behind the Torah. When the gentiles learn the reasons and secrets of the Torah, they will come to recognize the great love between G-d and the Jewish people, and they will then stop ruling over them and will arouse the redemption before its time. Thus Chazal with their holy inspiration foresaw today's situation, where 85 million Christians are strong supporters of Zionism and push the Jewish people out of exile prematurely, all due to the fact that they have read the Torah and recognize that the Jews are G-d's beloved people.)

Now we move on to the second category: those who write that the oath on rebellion against the nations becomes annulled when the nations violate their oath. As we wrote here two years ago, the oaths not to go up as a wall and not to force the end are not for the benefit of the gentiles, and thus they cannot be part of a deal between the gentiles and the Jewish people. Rather, G-d gave us these oaths for our own benefit, so that we should not try to redeem ourselves at the wrong time. But the oath prohibiting rebellion against the nations might be, logically speaking, part of such a deal with the nations. Of course, if one nation violated its oath, that would not permanently annul the oath of rebellion against the nations, nor would it give the Jews the right to rebel against a different nation; but there might be a temporary relaxation of the Jewish oath with regard to the offending nation.

This is what Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani writes in his commentary Zera Shimshon (published in 1778) on Megillas Esther 9:1. Scripture tells us that on the 13th of Adar, the very day that the Jews' enemies had planned to destroy them, the exact opposite happened: the Jews destroyed their enemies. The Zera Shimshon comments that Scripture goes out of its way to say that "the opposite happened" because if not for this, the Jews would not have had the right to lift up their hands against the gentiles. But now, since the gentiles planned to kill the Jews, the Jews were permitted to kill them. Because it states in the thirteenth chapter of Kesubos, "What are these three oaths? One that the Holy One, blessed is He, made Israel swear not to rebel against the nations of the world, and one that He made the nations of the world swear not to afflict Israel too much." And the Shulchan Aruch says (Yoreh Deah 236:6), "When two people swear to each other and one violates his oath, the other is also permitted and needs no annulment."

Note that of all the oaths in Kesubos, he only quotes two: the prohibition to rebel against the nations, and the nations' oath. He does not quote the oath prohibiting mass immigration to Eretz Yisroel, nor the oath prohibiting us to force the end, because those oaths have nothing to do with the nations and are not subject to any deal with them.

In passing, we note that the Zera Shimshon assumed that the oaths would have applied to the Jews in the time of Haman despite the fact that the king gave them permission to fight back, and despite the fact that their lives were in danger. Thus the very same Zera Shimshon that Zionists trumpet as one of their proofs, besides not being any proof at all, actually contradicts two of their most central claims.

Finally, we have those who say that when the nations violate their oath, the Jews are allowed to pray excessively for the redemption, something that they are ordinarily prohibited from doing

under the oath "that they should not force the end". These are Rabbi Shlomo Kluger in Maaseh Yedei Yotzer on the Hagadah, and Rabbi Hillel Lichtenstein in Avkas Rochel 9:1. This does not mean that the Jews are permitted to take any action towards the redemption! The difference between being permitted to pray and being permitted to take action is simple: taking action toward the redemption is tantamount to heresy, but violating the oath through excessive prayer is not, since on the contrary, prayer strengthens the Jew's belief that G-d controls all events and only He can end the exile. Therefore, as long as the gentiles treat the exiled Jews in accordance with G-d's decree and did not exceed their limit, G-d does not want us to pray for the end of exile, since the exile was His plan and is for our benefit. But when the gentiles exceed their limit, their actions emanate from their own free will and not from G-d's decree, and so we may pray to G-d to save us from them (Vayoel Moshe 1:79). This was explained at length in the Parsha Pearls for Pesach, 5768.

Naso 5769

Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying, so shall you bless the children of Israel, say to them... (6:23)

Rabbi Yaakov Sasportas (1610-1698) received a halachic inquiry from a Jewish community that had always followed the practice of saying Birkas Kohanim only on Yom Tov. But Shabbesai Tzvi, the false messiah, had come to town and started the practice of saying Birkas Kohanim every Shabbos. When the false messiah became an apostate and his movement was recognized by most Jews as wicked and heretical, the community wanted to know if they should now revert to their old practice of Birkas Kohanim only on Yom Tov. Rabbi Sasportas replied that indeed, the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim is very great and it is very good to say it every week, even every day. Chazal say that during exile, every day's curses will be worse than those of another day (Yalkut on Devarim 28:67), and the only antidote to this is to have the blessing of Birkas Kohanim every day. But we have a rule: "A good thing comes about through a good person and a bad thing through a bad person" (Shabbos 32a). The heretic Shabbesai Tzvi, he says, was not merely a bad person but a "meisis" (inciter to idolatry), regarding whom the Torah says, "Do not have mercy on him or cover up for him" (Devarim 13:9). Certainly, then, it is not proper that a mitzvah should be started by him. The practice must be discontinued (Responsa Ohel Yaakov 70).

Rabbi Sasportas published a book called Tzitzas Novel Tzvi about the Sabbatean movement and his reaction against it. The book has been republished many times in an abridged form, called Kitzur Tzitzas Novel Tzvi. Reading this book, we notice some similarities between Sabbateanism and Zionism, and from Rabbi Sasportas's reaction we can learn what our reaction should be today.

For example, he writes (p. 37a) of a certain follower of Shabbesai Tzvi, "How could he have had the audacity to claim that moshiach will go and ask the Turkish Sultan to set Israel free and make him king? This is wrong, for the redemption will not come through any man, but only through Hashem's hand, as it says, 'On that day I will raise up the fallen succah of David' (Amos 9:11). And in the dream of Nevuchadnetzar, 'a stone broke off, not by hands' (Daniel 2:34), which

meant that ‘the G-d of Heaven will establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed’ (v. 44). So how could it happen through the Turkish Sultan?”

In a letter of advice to a rabbi who was attempting to convince his community not to join the Sabbateans (p. 50b), he writes: “In general, you should warn them not to force the end of exile and not to violate the oaths written in Shir Hashirim (2:7) ‘not to arouse or awaken the love before it is desired.’ Remind them of history, of past generations who erred in following false messiahs and prophets. In cases where danger is likely, we must not rely on miracles! This is especially true of the western communities, whose exile is much more difficult due to the oppressive governments they live under. They must lend their shoulder to bear the yoke of exile, and wait for their redeemer, though he may tarry. They must hope and hope again, for he will surely come and not delay. And in reward for their hoping, the redemption will come sooner, as Chazal say, ‘Israel has no merit but hoping. They are worth redeeming in reward for the waiting’ (Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 736).”

Rabbi Sasportas also prints a letter by the rabbis of Venice, bemoaning the fact that their community strayed after Shabbesai Tzvi: “Who does not understand the acts of Hashem? The justice of Hashem is true and right, measure for measure. Because our community did not keep the oath not to arouse or awaken the love, we were punished with anger and powerful hatred that is aroused against us among the gentiles in all places.”

The similarities are striking. Zionism, too, claims to launch the messianic era through human effort. Zionism, too, instead of arousing love, has aroused hatred against Jews among nations all over the world. But with Zionism, everything is unfortunately on a much larger scale than with Sabbateanism.

The Rambam writes at the end of Iggeres Teiman: “And these are things the prophets have already foretold, and they have told us about what I have told you, that when the time of the true moshiach draws near, there will be many who lift themselves high and place doubts in people's minds, but their claims will not be born out, and they will perish and many will perish with them. And when Shlomo, peace be upon him, made known with his holy inspiration, that this nation when it is sunk into exile will try to arouse itself not at its proper time, and they will die because of this and travails will come upon them – he warned against this, and made an oath against this in an allegorical way, and said, ‘I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem...’ And you, our brethren, our beloved – keep his oath and do not arouse the love before it is desired!”

Although the Rambam wrote Iggeres Teiman against a particular false messiah, in retrospect we see that that false messiah did not get very far, neither did any other false messiah in Jewish history. Even the Sabbatean movement’s spread among a large part of the Jewish people lasted less than a year; after that it was a mostly undercover, shunned heresy. The warning of Shlomo Hamelech was clearly referring to the by far most successful false messianic movement in Jewish history: Zionism.

We must listen to the Rambam carefully – he is talking to us! “Shlomo, peace be upon him, made known with his holy inspiration, that this nation when it is sunk into exile will try to arouse itself not at its proper time, and they will die because of this and travails will come upon them –

he warned against this.” When else in Jewish history can it be said that the nation as a whole “tried to arouse itself not at its proper time”? If Zionism is not the very thing foreseen by Shlomo Hamelech, then what was?

Behaaloscha 5768

And Moshe said: "The people in whose midst I am numbers six hundred thousand footmen, and You said, 'Meat I will give them and they will eat a month of days.' Will sheep and cattle be slaughtered for them and be enough for them, or will all the fish of the sea be gathered for them and be enough for them?" And Hashem said to Moshe: "Will the hand of Hashem be short? Now you will see if My word happens to you or not." (11:21-23)

Rashi quotes from the Midrash a dispute between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Shimon. Rabbi Akiva understands these verses literally: Moshe doubted the ability of G-d to provide meat. Rabbi Shimon says that Moshe was asking, "How can you provide all this food to the people and then kill them?" G-d answered, "Let them and a hundred like them perish, but let no one say that My hand is short and unable to provide."

Both opinions are difficult to understand. According to Rabbi Akiva, how could Moshe, the greatest prophet who ever lived, doubt G-d's ability to provide, especially after all the miracles he had witnessed? And according to Rabbi Shimon, why didn't G-d answer Moshe's prayer and provide the food without killing the people? Also, how does Rabbi Shimon's explanation fit into the words of the Torah?

The Maharal in Gur Aryeh explains that certainly, G-d could make a miracle and provide meat for the people. But G-d does not like to make changes in the order of creation, and He is angry with those who request such changes. We see this in the Gemara (Shabbos 53b) where the story is told of a man whose wife died and left him with a small nursing baby. The man had no money to hire a wet nurse. Miraculously, the man grew nipples and nursed his baby. Abaye said, "How deficient was this man! For the laws of creation were changed on his account." Similarly, in Taanis 24a we find that the son of Rabbi Yosi of Yukras was punished for making a fig tree miraculously produce fruits. In Taanis 24b Rava was punished for successfully praying for rain during the summer. If this is true even of righteous people who request miracles, all the more so for the Israelites who complained for meat, expressing ingratitude to G-d for taking them out of Egyptian bondage and providing them with food in the desert (11:4-6).

Therefore Moshe said, "Why should you provide meat in a miraculous way, which will then result in punishment for the people for requesting a miracle? Why not provide it naturally - through gathering sheep, cattle or fish from the sea – and avoid the punishment?" G-d replied, "If I give it through natural means, they will say that My hand is short and cannot provide miraculously. Better that they should be punished and no one should doubt My power."

This is Rabbi Shimon's explanation. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, saw it the opposite way. G-d makes miracles in order to bestow kindness or to inflict punishment. But here, G-d had told Moshe that the people would suffer from eating the meat (v. 20), so Moshe reasoned that this

was not to be a miracle; the meat would come naturally, through sheep, cattle or fish. So he said to G-d, "I do not doubt that You can make a miracle, but how can You provide so much meat through natural means?" G-d said, "Now you will see if My word happens to you or not." The word "happens" is used here to indicate that the meat would come through natural means, as if it just happened.

According to this, we could answer another question. Moshe surely warned the Israelites that they would be punished for eating the quail, as G-d had told him. Why then did the people eat? The answer is that according to Rabbi Shimon the quail came in a miraculous way, and even according to Rabbi Akiva who called it natural, it was still more miraculous than natural. When the people saw that G-d had obviously sent this flock of quail, they reasoned that He had forgiven them for their complaints, so they ate. They realized their mistake immediately, for they began to die while the meat was still stuck between their teeth (v. 33).

This story has two important lessons for our time: 1) G-d's anger is aroused when the wicked request miracles; 2) When the wicked do receive their miracles or near-miracles, many good people mistakenly think that this means that G-d is no longer angry and will not punish them.

There is one important difference between then and now. When the Jews were in the wilderness, G-d dealt with them openly, not hiding His face, so the punishment came right away, while the meat was still between their teeth. Today, however, we live in an era when G-d's presence is hidden, and His actions are harder to discern. This unfortunately adds to the confusion even more. (Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah, Chapter 27)

Behaaloscha 5769

“Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall shine toward the face of the menorah... And this was the work of the menorah: pounded of gold, to its base, to its flower it was pounded; like the vision that Hashem showed Moshe, so he made the menorah.” (8:2,4)

Rashi says (here and on Shemos 25:31) that Moshe had difficulty understanding how to make the menorah, until finally Hashem told him, “Take a talent of gold and throw it into the fire.” And Hashem Himself made the menorah. Therefore it says, “So He made the menorah,” referring to Hashem. We must ask: What was so hard to understand? After all, Hashem showed him a vision of exactly how the menorah had to look. And in the Second Temple, a menorah was made by human hands (Avodah Zarah 43b), so it is certainly possible to do.

The Midrash Rabbah (15:6, brought by Rashi on v. 2) says that when the princes of all the tribes but Levi brought their offerings, Aharon said, “Woe is to me! Perhaps due to my sins the Holy One, blessed is He, is not accepting the tribe of Levi.” Said the Holy One, blessed is He, to Moshe, “Go and say to Aharon: do not fear. You are destined for something greater than this. Sacrifices will only be offered as long as the Temple exists, but the lamps will shine forever toward the face of the menorah.” The statement is hard to understand. Seemingly, just as the sacrifices stopped with the destruction of the Temple, the menorah stopped as well.

The answer is that the Temple was destroyed at the end of the day (Taanis 29a), just after the lighting of the menorah, and the menorah was then hidden from the eyes of the Romans. Still burning, the menorah was placed in a secret underground chamber, where it awaits the redemption and the building of the Third Temple. One should not find this idea so surprising, for we find (Tanchuma Tetzaveh 3) that the menorah sometimes burned miraculously for long periods of time, such as a year or more.

This is the meaning of the Tanchuma (Tetzaveh 7): “The Holy One, blessed is He, said to Moshe: Say to the children of Israel: My children, in this world you needed to light the lamps in the Temple, but in the World to Come, in the merit of that lamp, I will bring the king moshiach, who is compared to a lamp, as it says, ‘I have prepared a lamp for my moshiach’ (Tehillim 132:17).” The “merit of that lamp” refers to the hidden menorah, still burning from its last lighting throughout the duration of the exile.

Moshe knew that the menorah would play a role in the final redemption, and that is why he could not make it. Physically he was able, but he knew that there is a fundamental difference between the redemption and all other areas of life. When it comes to making a living, maintaining health and protecting oneself, a person is permitted and indeed expected to make his own efforts, and then rely on Hashem to grant him success. But in matters relating to the geulah, Jews are strictly forbidden under oath to take any action (other than prayer, teshuva and good deeds). The geulah is strictly Hashem’s domain.

Therefore, at first Hashem commanded Moshe to work on the menorah in order to reward him for his efforts to understand it. Shemos 25:31 begins with the word “v’asisa” – and you shall make. But in the end, as Moshe knew, Hashem did not want the menorah to be made by human hands, but rather by Hashem Himself, since the redemption depends on it. That is why the Torah, later in that same verse, says “teiasch” – it shall be made without your effort (Divrei Yoel v. 7, pp. 254-257).

This is why the angel showed the prophet Zechariah a vision of the menorah, as we read in the Haftarah, and said: “Not by might and not by power, but by My spirit, said Hashem Tzevaos” (Zechariah 4:6). The menorah, made by Hashem Himself, symbolizes the fact that the redemption will come through Hashem’s spirit, not through any human effort.

Behaaloscha 5770

And he [Yisro] said to him, "I will not go [with the Jewish people], but rather to my land and my birthplace I will go." And he [Moshe] said, "Please do not leave us, for you knew our grace in the desert." (10:29-30)

The Yalkut Shimoni explains: Moshe said to Yisro: You think you are increasing Hashem's honor, but you are only decreasing it. How many converts and slaves will you bring under the wings of the Shechinah? You saw the grace that Hashem gave us in Egypt, as it says, "Hashem put the grace of the people in the eyes of Egypt" (Shemos 12:36).

The Zayis Raanan explains that Yisro wanted to go back to his country in order to convert his people. Moshe said: You will not bring them under the wings of the Shechinah that way, but rather by coming with us.

How could Yisro have thought that he would be able to convert his people to Judaism? The people of Midyan hated him; they ostracized him because he abandoned their idols (Rashi on Shemos 2:16). Why would they listen to him? Moreover, the posuk says “you knew our grace in the desert” and the Yalkut interprets this as referring to the grace Hashem gave them in Egypt. If so, it should have said “you knew our grace in Egypt.”

The answer is that Yisro planned to go back to Midyan and befriend the Midyanites, adopting their lifestyle so that they would be more likely to listen to him and convert to Judaism. Moshe told him, “That is not the way. If you join them and become like them, it is they who will influence you and not vice versa. Rather, stay with us, live a Jewish lifestyle and whoever truly wants to be a Jew will follow you here.”

As proof of the danger of joining a society of wicked people, Moshe said, “You saw the grace Hashem gave us in Egypt. We lived there for 210 years, and the Egyptians made our lives very difficult. Hashem could easily have given us grace in their eyes much earlier, so that they would have treated us better. But then there would have been a danger that we would assimilate into their wicked culture. Therefore, he delayed the grace until the last possible moment, when we were about to depart into the desert.”

This explains the order of the verses in Parshas Bo: “And the people took their dough before it had risen, their leftovers bound up in their garments upon their shoulders. And the Children of Israel did as Moshe commanded, and they asked from the Egyptians vessels of silver, vessels of gold and clothing. And Hashem gave the grace of the people in the eyes of Egypt and they lent them, and they emptied out Egypt” (Shemos 12:34-36). Seemingly hoisting the unrisen dough on their shoulders should have been the last thing they did before leaving. And Hashem should have given them grace before they asked for the vessels. But according to the above, the Torah is making a point of saying that Hashem giving them grace in the eyes of Egypt was the very last thing that happened before they left. Since their minds were on the desert, it was considered as if they were already in the desert, just as a person's bread determines his place of rest for Shabbos (Ramban Eirubin 17b). That is why Moshe said to Yisro, "You knew our grace in the desert." (Divrei Yoel v. 7 pp. 273-4)

Yisro's plan to convert his countrymen by blending into their society is reminiscent of those groups today who take part in the Zionist government with the aim of making the people more religious. All anti-Zionists agree that participation in the Zionist elections and serving in their government are serious sins. Yet at the time the state was established, certain anti-Zionist rabbis argued that these sins should be permitted because the end justifies the means. They feared that without religious participation in the government, the Torah lifestyle could not continue under the Zionist government. Their slogan was “aveirah lishmah” – commit a sin for a noble purpose.

Nowadays, even they have admitted that observant Jews do not need representation in government to exist. Those who are observant would stay observant even without the benefits

they reap from the representation. Still, they continue to justify participation on the basis that they are helping the non-observant Jews stay closer to Judaism by keeping the state Jewish.

As the years go by and the religious population increases exponentially, this goal of bringing Yiddishkeit to the Jews of Eretz Yisroel seems more and more attainable. But now there arises a terrible question that may not have been foreseen by those advocating participation in the state. Establishing and maintaining a Jewish state is forbidden by the Gemara in the famous passage of the Three Oaths. Until now, we, observant Jews, could have considered ourselves exempt from punishment for this sin because it was not us but the secular Zionists who founded and ran the state. What will happen when the state becomes dominated by observant Jews? How will we deal with taking sole responsibility for that sin, which is not merely a sin but a total perversion of Hashem's plan for Jewish history, exile and redemption?

The time is not so far off. According to recent data, Haredi Jews and Arabs together comprise 30% of the Israeli population. But among schoolchildren, they are close to 50%, and in another 30 years, the two groups will comprise 78% of schoolchildren.

Because of the higher birthrate among Arabs as opposed to secular Jews, the Arabs would soon overtake the Jews in the demographic race, were it not for the religious Jewish community with its high birthrate. A state with an Arab majority in the government would not be a Jewish state and would not violate the Three Oaths. Thus the religious Jews who participate in the government are literally keeping the state Jewish and in violation of the oaths.

It is time for us to ask, as Moshe Rabbeinu asked Yisro: who is influencing whom? We may succeed in making the state religious, but in the end, Zionism – the concept of preempting the geulah and ending the exile with our own power – will have triumphed. The Torah will have been changed forever. Is this what we want?

Shlach 5768

These are the names of the men that Moshe sent to spy out the land; and Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun "Yehoshua". (13:16)

Rashi says that the name "Yehoshua" was a contraction of the two-letter name of G-d and the word "save". By giving Yehoshua this name, Moshe was praying that G-d save him from the advice of the spies.

Rabbi Yitzchok Yaakov Rabinowicz, the Biala Rebbe (d. 1905) asks: why did Moshe word the prayer this way? He should have simply prayed that G-d keep Yehoshua from committing the sin that the other spies committed.

He answers that since man has free will to choose whether or not to sin, one cannot pray to G-d to save him from sin. He can only pray to be saved from the advice of the evil inclination or wicked people who attempt to convince him to sin.

Sometimes the wicked speak in such a way that it is not readily obvious that they are giving advice; they seem to be simply stating facts. In such cases, our prayer should be that G-d open our eyes to recognize the advice of the wicked as such, and avoid it. Such was the case of the spies. The spies were sent by Moshe to gather and report facts, not to give advice, and on the surface it seemed as if they were merely doing their job. However, a closer look reveals that they added opinions and advice: "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than us" (13:31). Foreseeing this, Moshe prayed regarding Yehoshua, "May G-d save you from the advice of the spies."

The Biala Rebbe continued, "This is similar to the advice that the wicked people of our generation have given us in regard to settling the Land of Israel. Their entire wicked desire is to cause the Jews to believe false ideas that the future redemption will come about through natural means, G-d forbid, as is known from their lies and falsehoods. Just as Moshe prayed for Yehoshua, we must pray that that G-d illuminate our eyes to see that all of this is the advice of the wicked. Once we recognize the advice of the wicked for what it is, we will automatically be able to overcome the sin. Through this, we will be worthy to see the true complete redemption, soon and in our days." (Divrei Binah)

The Biala Rebbe's words are even more true today than when he wrote them. In his time, Zionism was a fledgling movement with far-fetched ambitious goals, and their ideas were clearly in the category of advice. Today, however, many people are overwhelmed by Zionism's apparent successes and feel that we must submit to the facts and make the best of what we have. They see opposition to the existence of a Jewish state as an outdated phenomenon. We must pray to G-d that He save us by opening our eyes to see that the path of Zionism is not a fact, only the advice and opinions of wicked people. Then we will be able to overcome this trial and choose the alternative to Zionism: belief in G-d's plan of exile and the coming of moshiach.

Shlach 5769

“Do not go up, for Hashem is not in your midst, and then you will not be defeated by your enemies!” (14:42)

The Be'er Hagolah is a sefer written by an anonymous author in Amsterdam during the period of the Sabbatean movement (late 1600s). In Chapter 25, Section 2, after describing the wars fought by the Jewish people in times of old, he writes:

But now the mighty men of Israel have fallen and their weapons have perished. Since the enemy overcame us and the anointed kohein and the general failed and were smitten in battle, Israel has known that the Holy One, blessed is He, no longer desires their wars; Hashem has departed from them until the time of the coming of moshiach. And regarding this matter, and regarding the exile of Israel, David prayed and said, “You, O G-d, have thrown us away, and You do not go forth, O G-d, with our army” (Tehillim 60:13). And now, if Israel will arise and wage wars against the desire of the Holy One, blessed is He, they will fall by the sword, as it is written, “Do not go up, for Hashem is not in your midst, and then you will not be defeated by your enemies!” (Bamidbar 14:42). For just as the Holy One, blessed is He, used to fight their wars when the those wars were in

accordance with His will, so too He will become their enemy when the war is against His will, as it is written, “And He became their enemy; he fought against them” (Yishaya 63:10).

The Be’er Hagolah continues in Section 5:

And when Israel saw this, they chose to scatter themselves in all four corners of the earth, so that the nations might see that they had no thought of waging any more wars with them, and that they would not emerge from the exile until moshiach comes. And even if during that time they have some mighty men, still they will not wage war against the nations, for this is what Shlomo, the king and prophet, made them swear by the name of Hashem when he said, “I have adjured you, daughters of Jerusalem, not to arouse or awaken the love before it is desired” (Shir Hashirim 2:7). Behold, he said to the daughters of Jerusalem: If you be in exile among the nations, do not arouse or awaken with them any war because of the love of Eretz Yisroel, until it is desired – until it is the will and desire of Hashem Yisborach to do so, and He sends you the moshiach, just as He sent Moshe to Egypt to say, “So said Hashem: I have surely remembered you” (Shemos 3:16). Then they will know that it is the will of the Holy One, blessed is He, that they should gather themselves from all the four corners of the world and become a great and powerful nation, to take their land away from the Ishmaelites. The prophet Yishaya expressed amazement at them and said, “Who are these who fly like clouds?” (60:8) “Who bore me these?” (49:21) “Can a land have birthpangs in one day...for Zion has had birthpangs and born her children” (66:8). And since it is so, all of Israel has decided not to study warfare anymore, even to assist one nation against another, unless it is the will of their kings under whom they live. And each one prays in the land where he lives that Hashem grant peace and success to the king who rules over that land.

Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl, in his famous 1948 article entitled, “Who Delivered Israel to the Plunderers” (printed in *Toras Chemed*, p. 337), begins as follows:

Chazal, the true lovers of Zion, said in Tractate Kesubos 111a, that the Holy One, blessed is He, made Israel swear not to go up to Eretz Yisroel as a wall, which Rashi explains as together, with a strong hand; and that they should not rebel against the nations. And the Holy One, blessed is He, said to Israel: If you keep the oath, good, but if not I will permit your flesh like the gazelles and deer of the field.

Rabbi Weissmandl proceeds to quote the above section of Be’er Hagolah, and then continues:

And Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz writes similarly in his work *Ahavas Yonasan*, and so does our teacher, the Chasam Sofer, in *Toras Moshe*, *Shoftim*. The same position was taken earlier by the Rambam in *Igeres Teiman*.

“A man does not truly understand a matter of halacha unless he stumbles in it” (Gittin 43a). We must now admit that Chazal in their Divine inspiration were correct. And in their wisdom, they foresaw what would result from not following their words. For in the beginning of this generation, there arose a man from the seed of Israel who did not know of the Torah

of Israel, and with convincing words he adjured Israel to do the opposite of what the oaths of Hashem Yisborach dictate. And although the gedolim and the tzaddikim of that generation opposed him, our sins caused his false ideal to become dressed in the form of a few misguided talmidei chachomim, who joined with the source of heresy in order to actualize the plans of a man estranged from Torah.

Chazal teach that when someone comes to do something against the Torah, Heaven opens up a path for him (Shabbos 104a). They opened a path for them with the Balfour Declaration, and in the course of a few years the heresy became powerful both in Eretz Yisroel and the rest of the world to a degree never seen before. Almost all of Israel, unfortunately, became deniers of the principle of moshiach.

And certainly, for this also the Holy One, blessed is He, became angry at Israel, and punished them according to His attribute, measure for measure. They sinned and said that not Torah but blood makes Israel a nation. They sinned and said that not our holy Torah, but rather seed and birthright, race and descent, language and land, flesh and blood cause a son of Israel to be a Jew. Measure for measure, a hater of Israel arose in Germany who heated up the entire world's latent hatred against the race and the descent of Israel, against his flesh and blood.

Rabbi Weissmandl goes on to describe at length the misconduct of Jewish leaders during the Second World War, and then writes:

And now, Daas Torah and good sense would dictate that we should arouse the mercy of the victorious Allies, and ask of them something that the Torah permits, something that they can fulfill, namely: that each of the fifty-one victorious nations should grant refuge, each in its own land, to some of these unfortunate and poor survivors.

Daas Torah and good sense would tell us that, unfortunately, the Jewish people have lost this war even more than the accursed Germans, for the best and greatest part of the Jewish people has fallen. And just as it would not occur to any German to start a new war now, certainly after the loss of the six million, the best of the Jewish people, it is forbidden to launch a new war, to endanger the weak, tiny and homeless remainder of the Jewish people. Rather we must beseech the nations of the world to permit the remaining Jews to settle in their lands, some here and some there.

But this is not the position these Jewish leaders took. They cried out right away: "Only to Eretz Yisroel must all these refugees go, not to any other place in the world! Israel declares war on Britain! Israel declares war on the Arabs! Israel declares war on the whole world!"

The poor Jews in the refugee camps thought, "What do these leaders care? They don't live in camps. They live on the silver and gold of the charity funds in America, and use our plight to make their business deals. Millions more Jews can perish, G-d forbid, as long as they don't lose their honor."

On the advice of these people, these bitter survivors of the death camps launched a war against Britain, come what may... And on the advice of these people, these bitter souls insulted and angered the Arabs, who have been at peace with the Jews for many generations.

If Britain has never lost a war for generations, and if the Arabs number in the hundreds of millions – what do they care? They are stronger than them; they are stronger than the whole world.

And if Moshe Rabbeinu commanded the Bnei Ephraim, after many generations of slavery in Egypt, when they thought that the time of redemption had arrived, to wait until he would tell them the time had come, but they did not believe him, and so they perished, as it is written in the Tanach... and if Yirmiyahu Hanavi commanded Israel to surrender to the wicked Nevuchadnetzar, but the sinners of his generation refused to listen, and thus the first exile came about... and if Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai and his colleagues commanded Israel to surrender to the wicked Romans, but the zealots of his generation refused, and thus the second exile came about... and if the Holy One, blessed is He, Himself commanded Israel under oath to be subservient to the wicked Edom, and not to go up as a wall against Yishmoel, but the sinners of our generation refused to listen to the tzaddikim, and thus this latest churban came about.... What do these leaders care about a single chapter in Jewish history?

They say words that no mouth can bear to utter. Yirmiyahu Hanavi, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai and his fellow Tannaim, and the tzaddikim of our generation brought the Jews to the Babylonian exile, to the Edomite exile, and to Auschwitz. But they and their predecessors in Yirmiyahu's and Rabbi Yochanan's generations were the true redeemers of Israel!

Even if we were to assume that some of these people do what they do for the sake of a mitzvah, for love of Eretz Yisroel... but if the choice is between Eretz and Yisroel, who doesn't know which comes first? During exile, settling Eretz Yisroel is not a mitzvah that one must die rather than violate. And on the contrary, these people's proposed state transgresses in many ways the three cardinal sins that one must die rather than commit.

The wicked Pharaoh launched the Egyptian slavery with the argument "lest there be a war and they be added to our enemies" (Shmos 1:10). And this same argument was that wicked man's excuse in the last war, leading to the murder of millions of our kedoshim. And these people place the remainder of Israel in danger, by placing the possibility of Pharaoh's argument with all its implications in the mouth of some leader, G-d forbid, if there is ever another war.

And if you ask: is there any way out now? The answer is yes! 1) We must completely relinquish any claim to a Jewish state. 2) We must accept the compromise [trusteeship] proposed by the United States. 3) We must ask Britain to take part in the government of Palestine. 4) Our representatives must meet with the Arabs face to face and reach an agreement, under the auspices of the United States. 5) We must ask the United Nations, and the U.S. and its neighbors especially, to quickly move all the Jews from the camps in Germany and from the rest of Europe to countries overseas and also to Palestine.

This is all possible on condition that we throw all those Jewish leaders who brought us to the current situation out of leadership. Let the nations know that Israel is a "debased and unwise

nation” (Devarim 32:6) only when it follows the counsel of its sinners, but we are a “wise and understanding people” (ibid. 4:6) when Torah scholars and tzaddikim lead us.

And now, do not be disheartened over the Jewish masses who, until now, have believed in this false messiah, even at the cost of their lives. The Jewish people is holy, Ahavas Yisroel burns in their heart, and after thousands of years of bitter exile they allowed themselves to be taken in by inciters to sin such as never existed before in our history, who wore a mask of Ahavas Yisroel but only had one goal: to uproot the Torah from Jewish hearts.

And now, do not be disheartened over the future redemption of Israel and its kingdom. We have an old Father, our Father in Heaven, and a young child of old age, a poor man riding a donkey. The leadership will be on his shoulder, and on his throne no stranger will sit!

Shlach 5770

And they awoke early in the morning, and they ascended to the mountaintop, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place of which Hashem has spoken, for we have sinned." And Moshe said, "Why do you transgress the command of Hashem? And it will not succeed. Do not ascend, for Hashem is not in your midst, so that you do not get smitten by your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you will fall by the sword, because you have turned aside from following Hashem, and Hashem will not be with you. And they defiantly ascended to the mountaintop, but the ark of the covenant of Hashem and Moshe did not move from the midst of the camp. And the Amalekites and the Canaanites, who lived on that mountain, descended, and they smote them and pounded them until Chormah. (14:40-45)

The Minchas Elazar (1872-1937) interpreted these verses as a prophecy about the Zionists of his time: "The Zionists went up to Eretz Yisroel with a strong hand to found colonies and fight with the gentiles. They defiantly ascended to the mountaintop, against the command of Hashem Yisborach through our Sages and our forefathers, who warned that this is not the way, and said that their end would be bitter, G-d forbid. They went in the path of strength and brazenness, as Rashi explains the word ויעפלו (v. 44).

"Yet the ark of the covenant of Hashem - the holy Torah, for we believers have nothing else left over but this Torah - and Moshe - the Torah leaders and tzaddikim (as we find in Shabbos 101b that a great sage can be called Moshe) who cried out against the Zionists and did not ascend with them or join them - did not move from the midst of the camp - the loyal, believing Jews. And the Amalekites and the Canaanites, who lived on that mountain...this is a reference to the evil inclination, which will one day appear in the form of a mountain (Succah 52a). And they smote them and pounded them until Chormah - as unfortunately occurred with the destruction and the killings in Jerusalem, the Holy City, near the Kosel Hamaaravi (in 1929) through these wicked people. May Hashem save us and help us and redeem us soon, in our days, for the sake of His name and His Torah, with love." (Chaim Veshalom, Parshas Shlach)

The Minchas Elazar's contention, that the events of 1929 were the result of Zionism and not of inherent Arab hatred toward Jews, is borne out by a recently published account of the pogrom.

Rabbi Dov (Benny) Cohen was brought up in Seattle, Washington. In 1926, shortly after his thirteenth birthday, his parents sent him to study in the famous Slobodka Yeshiva of Lithuania, which had recently relocated to Hebron, Palestine. He witnessed the pogrom of 1929 and the events leading up to it, and he miraculously survived it all. After 1929, he moved back to Seattle, where he raised a family and lived to an old age.

Like all the surviving yeshiva students, he was shaken up by the events, and for fifty years he kept silent. Only his diary preserved his memories of the slaughter. But 15 years before his passing, Rabbi Benny Cohen opened his heart and mouth, and began to tell his family the events he had witnessed. He visited Hebron and gave interviews. After his passing, his family found his diary and has published his story as a book, "Vayeilchu Shneihem Yachdav." The following are excerpts from the book.

"Hebron is called by the Arabs 'Al Khalil,' which means 'the Beloved,' their expression for the Avraham Avinu – the common ancestor of Jews and Arabs. On this note, we can say that a strong friendship existed among all residents of the city.

"The friendship found expression in the fact that we used to go to attend Arab weddings and wish them mazel tov. Of course we didn't eat anything at the weddings, but we were welcome guests at all their happy events. Sometimes we would come there even before the ceremony, while they were cooking the lamb and rice, the main dishes served at their parties in those days.

"The Arabs, and even their sheikhs, used to attend Jewish weddings as a sign of friendship. I remember that my mother as well, who spent a few months in Hebron after bringing me before returning to America, participated in an Arab wedding, at the dancing ceremony. The custom was that the bride danced before the groom, a ceremony at which only women were present. The Arab neighbors invited my mother, and she came.

"The friendship and trust was such that we, the yeshiva students, used to go down sometimes to the village of Tarkumia to buy eggs and other products, sometimes even after midnight. In those years we walked around freely, without security patrol and without any weapons of self-defense, in all the Arab villages. No one had any fear. It happened once that as we were returning from shopping in Tarkumia, a group of villagers came out to greet us with dances and timbrels. When we asked what the occasion was for such rejoicing, they said that they were doing it in our honor, to express the villagers' respect for the yeshiva students.

"Every month on Erev Rosh Chodesh, the yeshiva, including Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein and Rabbi Leib Chasman, would go to pray at the Cave of Machpelah. We were welcomed there. I remember that the Arab caretaker of the mosque used to watch over the rosh yeshiva's gold cane, and he even allowed us to go above the famous seven steps, sometimes one extra step and sometimes more, I think until the eleventh step. It was well-known that when the yeshiva considered moving to a different location, the local Arab leaders stood up to prevent it.

"The events leading up to the pogrom began at the Western Wall on Yom Kippur, 1928. Until that time, Jews had prayed at the Wall in an unofficial way, without tables or chairs, and without a partition between men and women. On that Yom Kippur they set up a partition, brought

benches for the elderly, and installed lighting. The Arabs, under the leadership of Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini, saw this as an encroachment on their territory, and they threatened to attack the Jews if nothing was done to stop them. So the British Mandate police entered the praying crowd and removed the partition by force.

"In the course of time, the British government, in an effort to strike a fair balance between Jews and Arabs, set exact regulations for what could be done at the Wall and what could not be done. Reading the Torah was permitted on some days but not others, blowing shofar was prohibited at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, and the chazzan's prayer stand could not be above a certain height.

"The Zionists seized on the conflict over the Wall as an opportunity to start a dispute with the Arabs and the British authorities. Over the heads of the poor, humble Jews who prayed at the Wall, the Zionist leaders opened a wave of protest, for they saw the stones of the Wall as symbolic stones of conflict, over which there could be no compromise. On Tisha B'av of that year [1929], which fell on Thursday, the Zionist Jews held a massive demonstration, which culminated in a march to the Wall, accompanied by the cry, 'The Wall is our Wall!'

"These cries, which were heard clearly in the houses of the Muslim Quarter, spurred the Arabs to prove that the Wall was theirs... Following the demonstration, the Mufti's agents spread rumors that the Jews were trying to conquer the Temple Mount. The next day, Friday, the Arabs held their own demonstration, during which they struck many of the Jews praying at the Wall, broke tables and burned prayerbooks."

"After the Mufti's speech in the Al Aqsa mosque that same day, an Arab mob armed with knives marched out of the Damascus Gate toward the Jewish neighborhoods. Over the following week, nineteen Jews were killed in Jerusalem." Rabbi Benny Cohen goes on to describe in great detail how on the following Shabbos, 67 Jews were massacred in Hebron.

Unfortunately, the general Jewish world failed to learn the lesson the Minchas Elazar learned from the events of 1929. The Zionist movement reacted by transforming its Haganah forces from a tiny, untrained militia to a capable underground army of 50,000 soldiers. In the 81 years since then, Zionism's actions have only led to more bloodshed and sorrow. It is time to heed the words of Moshe Rabbeinu: **"Do not ascend, for Hashem is not in your midst, so that you do not get smitten by your enemies!"**

Korach 5768

And Moshe was very angry, and he said to Hashem, "Do not look at their offering." (16:15)

Rashi explains that every Jew has a share in the tamid, the public offering brought each morning and afternoon. Moshe prayed that the portions of the tamid offering belonging to Korach, Dasan and Aviram should not be accepted by G-d; they should not be consumed by the fire.

Why was Moshe so concerned that G-d not accept any offering from the rebels, even an offering unrelated to their challenge to him? The Ohr Hachaim explains that the Torah says that Hashem

is "G-d of faithfulness, doing no wrong" (Devarim 32:4). This means that He does not withhold anyone's reward, and compensates even the wicked for the few good deeds they do. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 96a) says that the wicked Nevuchadnetzar became powerful due to the four steps he took with the intention of rewriting King Merodach's letter with G-d's name at the beginning instead of at the end. Moshe feared that Korach, Dathan and Aviram had some merit from their few mitzvos and would thus escape punishment and be able to continue in their heretical rebellion; therefore he prayed that G-d not give them credit for their portion of the offerings.

The Tanna Devei Eliyahu (Chapter 24) lists several wicked men who enjoyed great success in life due to a small good deed they had done: Esav shed three tears and so he received Mount Seir, a land of abundant rain; Elifaz honored his father and so he begot Amalek; Yeravam rebuked Shlomo Hamelech and so he ruled over the Ten Tribes; Agag cried that he was about to be killed without leaving any descendents, and so he begot Haman; Nevuchadnetzar walked four steps for G-d's honor and became a powerful ruler. This is comparable to a man who finds a lost garment near a town, and comes to the center of town and announces his find, asking the owner to come forward and claim it. The townspeople are impressed with his righteousness and piety and make him their leader. Eventually he uses his power to destroy the entire land.

Although the analogy is not exact – unlike the townspeople who were fooled, G-d knows the future and is aware that the wicked will use their power for evil deeds – the Tanna Devei Eliyahu's point is that not only are the wicked rewarded for their few good deeds, but that reward is often success and power which enables them to perpetrate even greater wickedness. Thus Moshe feared that G-d would pay back Korach, Dasan and Aviram for their few mitzvos, even if that reward meant that their rebellion would last longer and lead more people astray. He therefore prayed that their mitzvos not be accepted.

In Berachos 10a we read that some bullies were bothering Rabbi Meir, and Rabbi Meir prayed that they should die. His scholarly wife, Beruriah, told him that he should rather pray for them to repent, as it says (Tehillim 104:35), "May the sins be gone from the earth" – not the sinners but the sins. But in the prayer against the heretics, we say, "May all the heretics perish in an instant." Why don't we pray for the heretics to repent, as we do for all other sinners?

The Gemara in Avodah Zarah 17a quotes the verse, "All who go to it (i.e. heresy) will not repent, and they will not achieve the paths of life" (Mishlei 2:19). Asks the Gemara: if they will not repent, surely they will not achieve the paths of life, so the second half of the verse is unnecessary! The Gemara answers that it means that even if the heretic does repent, he will die right away. The Maharsha explains that G-d does this out of His great mercy on the repentant heretic. Heresy is hard to resist, and G-d knows that if he were to live, he would be likely to revert back to his old ways. Therefore He causes him to die right after repenting so that he can go straight to the World to Come.

According to this we can understand why we pray for heretics to perish, not to repent. Actually, we are praying for them to repent, but we know that even if they repent they will have to die right away lest they revert back to their old ways (Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah, Chapter 67).

Besides the benefit of this to the heretic himself – that he will be sure to go to the World to Come – there is a benefit to us in his dying. If he lives and reverts back to his heresy, he will be even more powerful than before, since he will be armed with the merit of the good deeds he did during the time he repented - G-d does not withhold the reward of any good deed, even from the wicked.

Korach 5769

There shall not be any more like Korach and his company. (17:5)

The Sefer Chareidim 4:42 writes: Whoever holds onto a dispute transgresses a negative commandment, as it is said, “There shall not be any more like Korach and his company.” But in the next paragraph (4:43) he writes: Whoever does not hold onto a dispute against those who are on the wrong path is punished for all their sins, and transgresses a negative commandment: “Do not bear sin because of him” (Vayikra 19:17). We see from this that failing to fight against the wicked is a greater sin than unnecessary fighting, because although both are negative commandments, failing to fight the wicked carries the additional penalty of punishment for the sins of the wicked.

One reason why fighting the wicked is important is that peace is not good for the wicked. Peace allows them to focus on accomplishing their goals. This is what Chazal state (Sanhedrin 71b): “Death for the wicked is good for them and good for the world. Death for the righteous is bad for them and bad for the world. Wine and sleep for the wicked is good for them and good for the world. For the righteous, it is bad for them and bad for the world. Scattering the wicked is good for them and good for the world. Scattering the righteous is bad for them and bad for the world. Gathering the wicked is bad for them and bad for the world. Gathering the righteous is good for them and good for the world. Peace for the wicked is bad for them and bad for the world; peace for the righteous is good for them and good for the world.” Rashi comments, “When the wicked are separated from each other, they cannot conceive of evil counsel and help one another.” Similarly, David Hamelech prayed (Tehillim 92:10), “Let all evildoers be split apart!”

But there are some statements of Chazal that seem to indicate that Hashem wants the wicked to be at peace. Rashi on Bereishis 11:9, quoting Bereishis Rabbah 38:6, says, “Which was worse, the Generation of the Flood or the Generation of the Dispersal? The Generation of the Flood did not raise their hands against Hashem, while the Generation of the Dispersal did. Yet the Generation of the Flood was drowned while the Generation of the Dispersal did not perish from the world. But the reason is that the Generation of the Flood were robbers and there was fighting among them, and therefore they perished. The Generation of the Dispersal treated each other with love and companionship, as it says, ‘One language and unified words’ (Bereishis 11:1). You learn from this that fighting is hated and peace is great.”

In Deretz Eretz Zuta 9, it says, “Rabbi Elazar Hakapar used to say: Great is peace, and hated is dispute. Great is peace, for even if Jews worship idols and there is peace among them, the Divine Presence cannot harm them, so to speak, as it says, ‘Ephraim is joined together with idols, let him be’ (Hoshea 4:17).

The answer is that certainly it is bad for the world when the wicked cooperate with each other peacefully. But since peace is a good trait and Hashem does not withhold the reward for any good deed, the wicked are rewarded for their peace, although that reward itself ends up being to their detriment. This is similar to all the reward Hashem grants the wicked in this world, which results in their downfall in the World to Come, as it says, "And He pays back His enemies to their face, to destroy them" (Devarim 7:10).

This concept – that Hashem rewards every little good deed of the wicked – is expressed in our Parsha. The Torah says, "And Moshe was very angry, and he said to Hashem, "Do not look at their offering" (16:15). Rashi explains that every Jew has a share in the tamid, the public offering brought each morning and afternoon. Moshe prayed that the portions of the tamid offering belonging to Korach, Dasan and Aviram should not be accepted by G-d; they should not be consumed by the fire. Why was Moshe so concerned that G-d not accept any offering from the rebels, even an offering unrelated to their challenge to him? The Ohr Hachaim explains that the Torah says that Hashem is "G-d of faithfulness, doing no wrong" (Devarim 32:4). This means that He does not withhold anyone's reward, and compensates even the wicked for the few good deeds they do. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 96a) says that the wicked Nevuchadnetzar became powerful due to the four steps he took with the intention of rewriting King Merodach's letter with G-d's name at the beginning instead of at the end. Moshe feared that Korach, Dathan and Aviram had some merit from their few mitzvos and would thus escape punishment and be able to continue in their heretical rebellion; therefore he prayed that G-d not give them credit for their portion of the offerings.

The Prophet Yishaya said (57:21), "There is no peace, said my G-d, for the wicked." The Midrash comments: From here we see that the Holy One, blessed is He, loves the wicked. This seems to make no sense - if G-d loves the wicked, why doesn't He give them peace? The Chida (Kisei Rachamim, Avos Derabbi Nosson Chapter 12) explains: "When the wicked are in one organization, they can destroy the world and commit terrible sins. Through G-d's great mercy, there is no peace among them, and thus the number of sins is decreased. This is what it means that the Holy One, blessed is He, loves the wicked – he splits them up for their own good, so that they should not have so many sins."

This is how Hashem punished the Generation of the Dispersal: He did not kill them, since they deserved to live in reward for their internal peace. Instead, He split them up with disputes, causing them to lose that good trait of peace, and as a result they were no longer able to destroy the world and commit sins. The dispersal was good for them and good for the world. (Vayael Moshe 2:53)

Korach 5770

And they and all that was theirs descended alive into the pit, and the earth covered them up, and they disappeared from among the congregation. (16:33)

Why does the Torah have to add the seemingly redundant words "and they disappeared from among the congregation"?

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:13) quotes another verse describing the punishment of Korach's group: "The earth opened its mouth wide and swallowed them and their houses and their tents, and all the possessions that were at their feet, in the midst of all of Israel" (Devarim 11:6). The Midrash notes the words "in the midst of all of Israel" imply that Korach's group and their possessions fell into the earth wherever they happened to be. There are two ways to explain this. Rabbi Yehuda says that many mouths opened in the earth. Rabbi Nechemiah counters that the Torah says that the earth opened its mouth, singular. Rather, he says that the earth took on the shape of a funnel, and every member of Korach's group, wherever he happened to be, rolled down into the hole. The possessions (יָקוּם, literally "stand up") mean the money, which allows a person to stand on his feet. Our Rabbis say: Even if they had given clothes to the cleaners, they rolled down and got swallowed up with them. Rabbi Shmuel ban Nachmeini said: Even a needle that had been lent out to another Jew got swallowed up. Why? Because he disputed against the Holy One, blessed is He.

This seems strange. We know that Hashem does not make miracles for no reason. We understand why a miracle was necessary to swallow up Korach: because he and his group disputed the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu, all of our emunah was at stake. But why did the earth have to form a funnel and swallow up everything belonging to them, down to the last needle?

The Torah says regarding idolatry: "No part of the condemned property [of the idolatrous city] shall stick to your hand" (Devarim 13:18). It is forbidden to derive any benefit from an idol, even by melting down its gold, or by selling it to a gentile. The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:37) explains that people often think chance occurrences to be causative. People say, "Ever since he moved into that house, or bought this animal or tool, he became wealthy. It was that thing that brought him the wealth." Here too, perhaps a person will become very successful with the money gained by selling the idol, and he will think that the idol was the cause. Then he will believe in the power of the idol, the exact opposite of what the Torah commands.

Korach and his group had to be swallowed up in order to save the Jewish people from his dangerous heretical ideology. But it would not have been enough just to swallow up the people in the group. They had spread their ideology among the Jewish people, and if any of their property was left over and Jews would derive benefit from it, they would be influenced to follow the source of the benefit and attribute some truth to Korach's ideology. Hashem, in His great love for the Jewish people, made sure that not even a needle of theirs remained, for had it remained, that needle would one day stab at the Jewish people like a sword.

That is the meaning of our verse: "The earth covered them up" - Korach and his followers - "and they disappeared from among the congregation" - their false ideology disappeared from the hearts of the Jewish people. Since nothing was left of their possessions, there was nothing to pull other Jews after their ideology.

Now we understand why the verse in Devarim ends with the words, "And all the possessions that were at their feet, in the midst of (בְּקֶרֶב) all of Israel." The possessions would have caused the ideology of Korach to persist in the midst of - in the hearts and minds of - all of Israel.

Accordingly, we can explain the word קרב in another context. The Torah says (Devarim 4:34), "Or has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from the midst of (מקרב) a nation..." Simply understood, this is a reference to the Jewish nation being taken out from the midst of the Egyptian nation. But now that we have explained קרב to mean the hearts and minds of the people, we can read this verse the opposite way: the Egyptian culture and ideology was taken out of the midst of the Jewish nation.

If false ideologies are not removed from the hearts of the Jewish people, even those who continue to learn and keep the Torah will carry the poison with them. We refer to this in the prayer upon leaving the beis medrash (Berachos 28b), which goes as follows: "I give thanks to You, Hashem my G-d, for You have placed my portion among those who sit in the beis medrash, and You have not placed my portion among those who sit on street corners." The last part of the sentence seems to be redundant - if one is sitting in a beis midrash, he is of course not on a street corner. But the answer is that if one has spent time among those who sit on street corners, even when he comes to the beis midrash afterwards he brings street corner ideologies with him and passes them along to others learning there. The beis midrash itself then becomes a street corner. We thank Hashem for the fact that we sit in the beis midrash and are not simultaneously sitting on a street corner. (Divrei Yoel, Naso pp. 124-125)

Chukas 5768

And Edom refused to let Israel pass through its borders, and Israel turned aside from him. (20:21)

Why did Israel not fight Edom over the right to pass through its borders, as they fought Sichon and Og? The Torah explains in Devarim (2:5) that they were commanded not to: "Do not fight them, for I will not give you even a footstep of their land".

The Midrash says that this command was a lesson for future generations of Jews in exile: "If you see Esav trying to start a fight with you, do not stand up against him, but hide yourselves from him." (The word "hatzfinu" (hide yourselves) is a play on the word "tzafonah" (northward) in Devarim 2:3: "Turn yourselves northward.")

Regarding this Midrash, the Chofetz Chaim writes: "The Torah teaches us not to resist the nations even when they fight against us. We must follow in the footsteps of Yaakov Avinu in his encounter with his brother Esav. As the Ramban writes in Vayishlach, all that happened between Yaakov and Esav happens to us constantly with Esav's children. We must adopt the methods of that tzaddik, to make the three preparations that he made: prayer, a gift, and escape through war, that is, to flee and take refuge.

As long as we walked on that well-tread path, Hakadosh Baruch Hu saved us from their hands. But since we have strayed from the path and new leaders have arisen who chose new methods, leaving behind our ancestors' weapons and adopting the methods of our enemies, we have fared worse and worse, and great travails have befallen us. May Hashem have mercy on our people and restore our judges as of old." (Chofetz Chaim Al Hatorah, Devarim)

The literal translation of the Ramban's words are, "escape through war, to flee and take refuge." Clearly the Chofetz Chaim understood the Ramban to mean that actual war is never permitted during exile; the Ramban wrote the words "to flee and take refuge" as an explanation of the word "war". According, we have added the words "that is" in the translation above.

Recently, Artscroll published a translation of the Ramban's commentary on the Torah, in which the above passage was rendered as follows: "that we should prepare ourselves for the three items for which he prepared himself: for prayer, for gifts to appease Esau, and for saving himself by means of war, including fleeing and thereby being saved." This translation implies that real war is also a possibility, which would be against the Chofetz Chaim.

However, a careful reading reveals that the Artscroll translators were not going against the Chofetz Chaim in practice, only in understanding the Ramban's words. They understood the Ramban's words to be referring to Yaakov himself; this is evident from the fact that in the phrase "for saving **himself** by means of war" they added in the word "himself" and not "ourselves". Yaakov Avinu definitely did consider real war as a possibility, as the Torah says (Bereishis 32:8), "And Yaakov was very afraid, and he was in distress," and Rashi explains that he was afraid lest he be killed, and in distress lest he kill others. However, when it comes to the lesson for Jews in exile, all agree that "war" only means "to flee and be saved".

Chukas 5770

This is the Torah: a man who dies in a tent... (19:14)

The Gemara (Berachos 63b) comments on this verse, "The words of the Torah can only be fulfilled by someone who kills himself for it." Usually this is understood as a reference to a diligent scholar who studies Torah at the expense of his physical comfort.

But the Chasam Sofer gives a different explanation. He sees the word מתקיימין (fulfilled) as related to the word יקים in the verse, "Cursed is he who does not uphold the words of this Torah" (Devarim 27:26). In his comment on that verse the Ramban quotes the Yerushalmi Sotah 31a, which says that King Yoshiyahu read this verse, rent his garments and said, "It is my job to uphold!" Even if someone learned, taught and kept Torah, if he was able to uphold the Torah and did not, he is cursed. The Ramban explains "upholding the Torah" to mean causing it to be kept by those who neglect it. This is the obligation of a king or leader in the Jewish people. The Chasam Sofer takes this a step further and says that any Jew can be held responsible for a sin if he was able to protest and did not protest (see Shabbos 55a), and such a person also falls under the curse for not upholding the Torah.

Here too, says the Chasam Sofer, Chazal mean that the Torah can only be upheld by someone who is willing to risk his life protesting against those who neglect it. Protest requires this level of self-sacrifice, since the protestors are invariably hated by the sinners. Those who are afraid of the masses will not be able to uphold the Torah.

The question arises: why was this allusion to upholding the Torah through protest written in the parsha of Parah Adumah - the red cow? The Satmar Rav (Divrei Yoel Shmini p. 204) suggests an

answer to this question. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:8) says that the Parah Adumah was an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Why did the entire Jewish people need atonement, if it was only three thousand of them who sinned, and those sinners were executed on the spot? Furthermore, Chazal (Shemos Rabbah 42) say that the Eirev Rav, the mixed multitude of Egyptians who accompanied the Jews, were the ones who made the calf. Why then was the Jewish people held responsible?

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh on Shemos 32:4 says, "Chazal say that the Eirev Rav made the calf. It cannot be that the Jewish people agreed to what they did, even in their hearts, for had they agreed, they would be considered partners to the sin. The rule is that when it comes to idolatry, Hashem punishes even for a thought (Kiddushin 39b). But their sin was that they did not protest."

It is for this fault of not protesting that the Jewish people needs atonement in every generation, through the Parah Adumah. That is why the verse "a man who dies in a tent" is written here to teach that the Torah can only be upheld by those who protest against sinners and set the Jewish people back on the right track.

But it is just as important to know how to protest and against what to protest. The Jewish people suffered great losses in the war of Pilegsh Bagivah (Shoftim 19-20). Seemingly, they should have been rewarded for the great mitzvah of protesting against the evil perpetrators of that deed. Chazal (Sanhedrin 103b), however, explain that Hashem said at that time, "For My honor you did not protest, but for the honor of a human being you protested?" The sin of Pilegsh Bagivah, however great it was, did not compare with the sin of Micha's idol, described in the previous chapters (17-18). Of course, a protest against any sin is a protest for Hashem's honor, but there is a difference. Idolatry is an affront against Hashem Himself, and thus warrants at least as great a protest as an affront against a human being.

The lesson for us today is that it is not enough to protest against offenses committed by the Zionist government against particular people. We must also protest against the very existence of a Jewish government during exile, which is an affront to Hashem Himself. By setting up a government and a state, the Zionists have rejected Hashem's promise to protect us during exile, as the Torah says, "And even so, when they were in their enemies' lands, I did not reject them nor revile them to destroy them, to annul My covenant with them, for I am Hashem their G-d" (Vayikra 26:44). They have rejected Hashem's promise to send moshiaich to take us out of exile and gather us in. Their state's existence is an affront to Hashem's own honor. If we protest against that, it will be said of us, "Blessed is he who upheld this Torah!"

Balak

"I see it but not now, I look upon it but it is not close: a star will shoot from Yaakov and a tribe will arise from Yisroel, and he will smite the corners of Moav, and gouge out all the children of Shais." (24:17)

The Ohr Hachaim interprets this verse as referring to the two possible redemption scenarios discussed in the Gemara, Sanhedrin 98a. The Gemara there quotes the verse, "I am Hashem, in

its time I will hasten it" (Yishaya 60:22) and expounds: if the Jewish people deserve it, G-d will hasten the redemption, and if they do not deserve it, it will come in its time. If the Jewish people deserves it, moshiach will come "with the clouds of heaven" (Daniel 7:13); if not, he will come as "a poor man riding a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

Here too, says the Ohr Hachaim, Bilam foresaw these two possibilities and said, "I see it but not now" – it will happen not now but soon; this refers to a speedy redemption that the Jews deserve. "I look upon it but it is not close" refers to a redemption at the latest possible date, when the Jews do not deserve it. (This means they do not repent before the arrival of moshiach. However, they will certainly have to repent before moshiach begins gathering in the exiles; see Parsha Pearls Rosh Hashanah 5767.) In the speedy scenario, "a star will shoot from Yaakov" - moshiach will appear from heaven like a star. In the delayed scenario, "a tribe will arise from Yisroel" – in a natural way, like a poor man riding a donkey. The rest of the verse – "and he will smite the corners of Moav and gouge out all the children of Shais" – as well as the other verses, apply to both scenarios.

Some Zionists mistakenly think that the Ohr Hachaim is painting a picture of a natural redemption, similar to the process leading up to the Zionist state and its exploits. Nothing could be further from the truth; he is merely explaining the scenario mentioned by the Gemara of moshiach coming "as a poor man riding a donkey." He is not talking about any part of the redemption happening before the coming of moshiach.

Furthermore, the Ohr Hachaim only says that if the Jewish people do not deserve an early redemption, moshiach will arrive in a natural way. But what moshiach does after he arrives will not be natural – we see that the Ohr Hachaim says that the rest of the verse about conquering the entire world applies even to the scenario of a natural arrival of moshiach.

Similarly, the redemption from Egypt, with the Ten Plagues and the Parting of the Sea, was certainly not natural. Yet when Moshe first arrived on the scene, he came in a humble way, riding a donkey, appearing before Pharaoh respectfully and asking him to free the Children of Israel. At the beginning, Pharaoh and his magicians just laughed at Moshe and Ahron and refused to listen.

Zionists make a similar error regarding the Yerushalmi (Berachos 4b), which says that Rabbi Chiya Rabbah and Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta were walking together at dawn, and Rabbi Chiya Rabbah said that the redemption of the Jewish people will be similar to the dawn: "So is the redemption of Israel. At first, little by little; and as it continues it gets bigger and bigger."

Many Zionists have used this passage as a basis for their claim that the redemption is a long process that will begin before the coming of moshiach, through natural means. However, nothing in this passage or anywhere else indicates that this slow redemption will happen before moshiach comes. The Sages are teaching that the redemption process initiated by moshiach – not beforehand - will have to be in stages so as not to overwhelm us with the full light of redemption all at once, just as the sun rises slowly so as not to overwhelm the eye with so much light all at once.

We find the same concept in the redemption from Egypt. The process began humbly with Moshe and Ahron standing before Pharaoh. The revelation became greater with the miraculous plagues, then greater still at the Parting of the Sea, and it reached its climax at the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. It had to happen this way because otherwise, the Jewish nation, after so many years of living in the defilement of Egyptian society, could not have tolerated the great, blinding light of the revelation at Sinai. (Vayoel Moshe, Chapter 69)

Chukas/Balak 5769

And Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon Hakohein saw, and he rose up from the midst of the congregation, and he took a spear in his hand. (25:7)

Rashi says, “He saw the event and remembered the law. He said to Moshe, ‘I have learned from you that if a Jewish man takes a gentile woman, zealots may kill him in the act.’ Moshe said, ‘He who reads the verdict should be the one to carry it out!’ Immediately, he took a spear in his hand.”

The source for this Rashi is Rav’s opinion in Sanhedrin 82a. However, there is another opinion there, that of Shmuel. According to Shmuel, Pinchas did not ask Moshe’s permission before he took action. “And Pinchas saw” means that Pinchas remembered the principle that “wherever there is a desecration of Hashem’s name, one need not give honor to his teacher” by asking his permission. Had he asked Moshe’s permission, he would have wasted precious seconds, during which someone might have seen Zimri’s sin and followed his example.

According to this, the word “saw” is not literal; it really means “remembered.” But we could add that Pinchas, with his powers of prophecy, saw that there would come a time when others would need to use this same principle, and take it to a new level. At least Pinchas knew that Moshe would certainly have given him permission to do what he did, and all he would have lost would have been time. Furthermore, in his quest to save time he was violating only the principle that one may not rule halacha in front of one’s teacher, even when the teacher himself would have ruled the same way. But Pinchas saw that there would one day come a generation in which rabbis do not speak out against the pervasive heresy of their time, due in part to their fear of the people. Then it would be up to smaller individuals to be the zealots and speak out, even if they know that some of the rabbis would not officially put their stamp of approval on what they are doing.

One should not think it strange that rabbis would refrain from speaking out due to fear of the people. Even one of the greatest tzaddikim in history, Shaul Hamelech, failed in this aspect. When Shaul let the people take from the sheep of Amalek for offerings, Shmuel took him to task. At first, Shaul didn’t understand what he had done wrong, and he said, “I have listened to the voice of Hashem, and walked in the path on which Hashem sent me” (Shmuel I 15:20). But when Shmuel finally made him understand that Hashem desired obedience more than all the offerings in the world, Shaul said, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the mouth of Hashem and your words, because I feared the people, and I listened to their voice” (v. 24).

We see here that Shaul, at first, did not consciously see himself as acting out of fear of the people. He had his reasons, based on Torah, for what he did. It was only after Shmuel showed

him the flaws in his reasoning that he thought to himself, "How could I have made such a mistake? How could I have mistaken an aveirah for a mitzvah?" And he realized the answer: that he had been influenced by his fear of the people. He said, "I sinned - and mistook an aveirah for a mitzvah - because I feared the people."

The Shulchan Aruch recognizes that rabbis on a beis din may be influenced by their fear of the people. In Choshen Mishpat 14:1 at the end, the Rema writes, "If the man on trial is wealthy and influential in his city, he must be tried before a beis din in a different city, even if the beis din of his own city is greater." The Rema thus treats the fear of this influential man like a bribe, which can influence a rabbi to rule the wrong way. It should therefore come as no surprise that many rabbis today feel the pressure of their wealthy and influential congregants and do not speak out against the heresy of our time. (Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah 117-118).

Balak 5770

And G-d came to Bilam at night, and He said to him, "If the men have come to call you, arise and go with them, but only the word that I speak to you, you shall do." And Bilam arose in the morning, and he saddled his donkey, and he went with the notables of Moav. And G-d became angry because he was going... (22:20-22)

We know, of course, that Hashem does not change His mind. In the words of Bilam's own prophecy, "He is not human, that He should change His mind" (23:19). So how could He tell Bilam to go, and then become angry with him for going?

The answer is that Hashem told Bilam, "Only the thing that I speak to you, you shall do" - and nothing else. But Hashem saw that Bilam had no intention of obeying this command. His own words to Balak were, "The word that G-d will place in my mouth, I will speak." He promised to say what G-d would tell him to say, but he did not promise not to add his own words. And he did indeed add something of his own: he advised Balak on how to bring punishment upon the Jews by tempting them into sin with the daughters of Moav.

That is why "G-d became angry because he was going." A man is always going somewhere - either he is getting better or worse. When Bilam decided not to obey Hashem, he began going in the direction of wickedness.

And this advice was not the only thing Bilam added. The posuk says (Mishlei 28:23), "One who rebukes a man to follow Me will find grace more than one who smooths his tongue." Rashi quotes the Midrash: "One who rebukes a man to follow Me" refers to Moshe. "One who smooths his tongue" refers to Bilam. Bilam said only good about the Jews: "How goodly are your tents, Yaakov..." He inserted a false interpretation into his own prophecy: "G-d is not a man that He should lie," said Bilam, only refers to the gentile nations, but regarding the Jewish people it says, "He said [i.e. threatened punishment] but does not carry it out, He spoke and did not fulfill it." With this flattery, Bilam convinced the Jewish people to sin.

Why does Scripture need to tell us that Hashem loves someone who rebukes people to follow Him more than someone like Bilam who flatters them into sinning? Isn't this obvious? The answer is that the word אַחֲרָי ("after Me") in the posuk has another meaning, as Rashi points out: it means "later on." Thus the posuk can be translated, "One who rebukes a man will later on find grace more than one who smooths his tongue." Someone who rebukes the people will be disliked by them at first, whereas they will love the flatterer. But in the end, they will prefer the one giving rebuke, for only truth stands forever, while lies inevitably fall apart.

One of the major justifications given by those religious Jews who advocate participation in the Zionist electoral system is that this is the only way they can guarantee that yeshiva boys will continue to be exempt from the draft. However, haredi representatives in Knesset have always felt forced to take the route of the "one who smooths his tongue." To say openly that Torah Jews are opposed to the existence of the state, are opposed to waging wars, and therefore refuse on principle to serve in the army, seemed too difficult for them - it might appear treacherous and endanger their right to serve in the Knesset in the first place. Therefore they chose a smoother, more palatable excuse: "Just as the state needs an army and weapons, it needs the spiritual merit of the Torah learners."

Today, we see how that falsehood has led Torah Jewry in Eretz Yisroel into an almost irreparable mess. They are suffering from a terrible handicap that no other Jewish community in the world experiences. There is no other country in the world in which 65% (or even close to that) of haredi Jewish men are not working. This phenomenon is only found in the Zionist state, because the state, in effect, does not allow them to work. The only way they can escape conscription into the army (other than by feigning insanity) is by remaining full-time yeshiva students for their entire lives. These men and their wives are struggling to make ends meet. With their large families, their burden is unbearable.

Had they simply told the truth and rejected army service on principle, they would not be suffering today. In most countries (including the one calling itself "Israel") conscientious objectors are exempt from army service. The state does not force Arabs to serve in the army. Why then should it force service upon haredi anti-Zionist Jews, who are just as opposed to the goals of the state as are the Arabs, if not more?

This is besides the tragedy that the lie that "we want to help the state through the merit of our Torah learning" has been accepted as truth among many of the haredim themselves. As the Nazi propagandist Goebbels said, if a lie is repeated often enough, everyone thinks that it is true, even the liar himself.

It is time for the truth to be told. It may not be comfortable, but we must summon the self-respect and confidence to say a principled "no" to the state and its army. There are some irreligious Jews who are dodging the draft and sometimes sitting in jail for it, because it conflicts with their principles. Do we have less confidence in our Torah principles than they have in their secular principles? It is only by correcting this problem that the spiritual and physical condition of Torah Jews in Eretz Yisroel can be saved.

"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon Hakohein, turned away My anger from the children of Israel, when he acted out My anger in their midst, and so I did not destroy the children of Israel in My anger." (25:11)

The Torah is telling us that had Pinchas not acted, G-d would have destroyed the entire Jewish people. Why? After all, only Zimri and a few others were committing sins.

In v. 13 the Torah says, "And he made atonement for the children of Israel," and the Sforno comments, "By doing this before the eyes of all of them, he gave them atonement for their failure to protest against the sinners." In other words, the rest of the people had deserved punishment for not speaking out against the few who were sinning. We indeed find that the Gemara (Shabbos 55a) says that one who fails to rebuke a sinner is punished along with the sinner, and that is why even the righteous were punished in the destruction of the First Temple.

However, the Sforno does not explain how Pinchas's act atoned for the people's sin of not protesting. He seems to imply that it was because he acted in public, "before the eyes of all of them". The Torah itself seems to stress this when it says "in their midst". But even if it was in public, it was only Pinchas acting. How did this exonerate everyone else?

The Satmar Rav answered that Pinchas's heartfelt act, done in front of everyone, brought into the hearts of all the Jews great admiration and envy. Chazal say that there is a kind of envy that is constructive and good: "Envy of the Sages will increase wisdom" (Bava Basra 21a). Here too, their admiration for Pinchas caused them to regret that they had not also done what he did, and they were overcome with powerful thoughts of repentance on their sin of not protesting. It was this repentance that brought them atonement.

Now we can explain the words "in their midst" differently. Pinchas, through his action, brought into midst of the Jewish people's hearts admiration and kinah (envy), which caused their sin to be atoned. (Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah, Chapter 116)

Pinchas 5769

And the name of the Israelite man who was smitten, who was smitten with the Midianitess, was Zimri, son of Salu, a prince of a family of the Shimonites; and the name of the woman who was smitten, the Midianitess, was Kozbi, daughter of Tzur, a head of a family in Midian. (25:14-15)

Rashi says: Just as the Torah gives the lineage of the righteous man (Pinchas) for praise, so it gives the lineage of the wicked man for denigration.

The Kli Yakar asks: We understand how the lineage of Pinchas from Aharon and Elazar is praise. But how is it denigration of Zimri to say that he was the son of Salu? Did we ever hear of Salu being a wicked man? He answers that the names Zimri and Salu themselves contain a hint to the sin of Zimri. Although they were given these names long ago, after the sin people looked into their names and realized their significance.

What was the sin of Zimri? On the surface, he took a Midianite woman. But Chazal imply that there was more to it. In Sotah 22b, it is told that when King Yannai was on his deathbed, his wife was worried about who would inherit the throne. "You became a Sadducee and killed the Sages. Perhaps the people will take revenge on our children and pick a different king." He said to her, "Do not fear the Pharisees, for although they oppose me, they have principles and they would never take it out on my sons. Do not fear the Sadducees because they are my allies. But beware the painted ones, whose outside does not match their inside. They seem to be Pharisees, but are actually not. Their deeds are like those of Zimri, yet they ask for reward like Pinchas."

In other words, Yannai was not worried about people who make their views open and clear. He was more worried about those who pretend to be something they're not, because they might be secretly planning to overthrow his dynasty while hiding behind the disguise of the principled Pharisees.

The Maharsha asks two questions here: 1) Zimri committed his sin in public; in fact, the public nature of the sin was the reason why it was considered so serious. The law that "zealots may kill him in the act" only applies in public. If so, how can the Gemara say that someone could secretly act like Zimri while pretending to be righteous like Pinchas? A sin committed secretly is, by definition, not similar to Zimri's sin. 2) Yannai was obviously not telling his wife to fear those who marry Midianite women. Rather, he was referring generally to sinners who pretend to be righteous, and Zimri and Pinchas are merely examples of wicked and righteous men. If so, why did he pick specifically these examples?

The Kli Yakar answers both of these questions based on the Gemara in Sanhedrin 82a, quoted by Rashi on 25:6. Zimri took Kozbi to Moshe and said, "Son of Amram, is this woman forbidden or permitted? And if you say she is forbidden, who permitted you to marry the daughter of Yisro?" Moshe forgot the halacha, and all the Jews moaned and wept.

We see here that Zimri tried to give himself a righteous image. He publicly asked Moshe whether it was forbidden, and when Moshe did not answer, **he went ahead with the act, claiming that the lack of an answer meant that he had the right to decide on his own.** Thus, Yannai told his wife to fear those who, like Zimri, commit a sin while claiming that they are completely righteous and are doing nothing wrong.

Part of Zimri's sin was that he acted as if he were righteous, and so when people analyzed his name, they found a hint to this trait. Zimri comes from the root "lezamer," meaning to sing praise: thus, he sang his own praises. His father's name, Salu, resembles the word "solu," meaning praise (Tehillim 68:5). Kozbi comes from the root "kazav" meaning falsehood: she represented herself falsely. Her father's name, Tzur (rock), indicates that she elevated herself like a high rock. The Torah makes a point of calling them princes or heads, because that is what arrogant people aspire to be.

This is why the Torah repeats the words "who was smitten". The first time, it refers to his name: after what Zimri did, people analyzed his name and found it faulty, smitten. The second time, it refers to the actual killing of Zimri.

On the 10th and 11th of Sivan 5673 (1913), a preliminary version of the constitution of Agudath Israel was drafted by the temporary committee. (This document, marked “top secret,” is a collector’s item today.) In Chapter 9, titled "Moetzes Chachmei Hatorah", the following is stated (paragraphs 55-61):

The Moetzes Chachmei Hatorah is composed of at least 23 members of Agudath Israel who are known as Gedolei Torah. In connection with the matters of Agudath Israel, this council will clarify and decide the laws of the holy Torah... The Moetzes is obligated to decide on a matter when the leadership committee, the Central Committee or the Knessia Gedolah present a question to it... When the leadership committee sees a great need to bring some matter whose decision rests with the Moetzes to completion, the committee must limit the time in which the Moetzes must reach a decision. **When the time limit has passed, the Committee has submitted its request again and the answer of the Moetzes is still not forthcoming, this will signify that the Moetzes forfeits its right to decide on this matter.** An explanation of reasons must accompany each Moetzes decision.

At the Second Knessia Gedolah in 1929, a permanent constitution was ratified. The notion that the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah is obligated to answer and give reasons, and that the absence of a decision within a limited time grants license to the activists to decide on their own, was not accepted. (Mikatowitz Ad Hei Beiyar, pp. 18-19)

However, this is precisely what happened in 1946-48 at the time of the founding of the Zionist state. The Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah did not convene from 1937 until the end of 1951. During this crucial period the Agudah activists had to be satisfied with asking various gedolim individually. At a meeting in March 1946 regarding Agudah’s appearance before the Anglo-American Committee, it was reported that they had consulted with the Brisker Rav on the subject of a Jewish state, and he had not given his opinion, only said that it was a very serious issue and we must think about it. The Chazon Ish said that he would not get involved and would not give any answer. Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Finkel expressed his opinion against it. Rabbi Yosef Cahaneman did not answer, but said that he was willing to attend a gathering, provided that it would take place in the house of the Chazon Ish (ibid. p. 100).

In September 1946, Agudah leaders visited Rabbi Dushinsky, the Brisker Rav, Rabbi Akiva Sofer and Rabbi Yosef Cahaneman to ask what Agudah’s stance should be on partition. All of these gedolim asked that their comments not be publicized, and said that all the rabbis needed to convene at one table in order to reach a joint decision. Despite all efforts, such a convention was never held (ibid. p. 103).

In October 1946, at a meeting to discuss Agudah’s participation in the Palestine Conference in London, Yaakov Senkowitz said, “We have to make every effort to get Daas Torah, but if we don’t get it, we must decide ourselves.” Feldman said, “We need to get Daas Torah, but after all, the Executive Committee was elected by the Knessia Gedolah with the agreement of the rabbis and are also entitled to an opinion. If the gedolim do not make a decision, it means that they are giving over the matter to the Executive Committee.” Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Levin agreed with

Feldman. Mordechai Buxbaum said, "We must decide our position on our own, if Daas Torah is not forthcoming." (ibid. pp. 96-98)

Throughout 1947-48, the Agudah leaders tried to convene the Moetzes, but to no avail. In the end, when Agudah joined the Zionist government, Levin wrote to Yaakov Rosenheim, "In New York the World Executive Committee decided that it had to join the government. After all, the Executive Committee also has a say about these issues... I don't remember which of the Gedolei Hatorah were against it..." (ibid. p. 89)

And in a speech to Agudah members in September 1951, Levin said, "At the time of the establishment of the state, the World Executive Committee and the National Center in Israel decided to join the temporary government. After the first Knesset elections, the question of Agudah's participation in the permanent government was brought before the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah..."

Yet in another speech in that same year, Levin claimed that "we decided in accordance with the decision of Agudath Israel's supreme institution, Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah, to join the government." (ibid. p. 118)

Pinchas 5770

Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the kohein, turned away My anger from the children of Israel...therefore, say: behold, I am giving him My covenant of peace. (25:11-12)

Rashi says that because the Jews derided Pinchas as the grandson of Yisro, who was originally an idolworshipper, the Torah comes and proclaims his descent from Aharon.

Many Jews at the time saw Pinchas as a promoter of divisiveness and a starter of fights, who in his arrogance stood up against the entire tribe of Shimon and its well-respected leader. They thought that his zealous act emanated from his non-Jewish ancestry - not from Ahavas Yisroel. But in truth, his act actually brought peace and unity between the Jewish people and Hashem. On the other hand, those who make peace and unity with the wicked are actually causing disunion between the Jewish people and their Father in heaven. Therefore, since it seemed that Pinchas was causing disunion, Hashem spoke and proclaimed that he was actually a promoter of peace. His act emanated from his grandfather Aharon, who "loved peace and sought after peace" (Avos 1:12).

Pinchas' reward was to become Eliyahu, the announcer of the redemption, the time when there will be true peace between the Jewish people and Hashem and among the Jewish people themselves. In the words of the Yalkut: "Pinchas is Eliyahu. The Holy One, blessed is He, said: You made peace between Israel and Me in this world, so in the future as well you will make peace between Me and my children, as it says (Malachi 3:23-24), 'Behold, I am sending you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of Hashem, and he will bring back the hearts of the fathers to the children.'"

The Haftarah for this week is the first chapter of Yirmiyahu. Hashem gave Yirmiyahu the unpopular mission to speak out against the leaders of his time: "And you shall gird your loins and arise and speak to them all that I command you; do not fear them, or I will cause you to fall before them. And I, behold, have made you today a fortified city, a pillar of iron and walls of copper against all the land: the kings of Yehuda, its officers, its kohanim and the people of the land. And they will fight against you but will not defeat you, for I am with you, said Hashem, to save you" (1:17-19).

But the very first words Yirmiyahu was commanded to say publicly were in praise of the Jewish people: "Go and call in the ears of Jerusalem, saying: So said Hashem: I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, how you walked after Me into the desert, an arid land. Israel is holy to Hashem, the first of His harvest. All who persecute it will be guilty; evil will befall them, said Hashem" (2:2-3). This was to emphasize that the criticism that was to come was all from Hashem and was motivated solely by Ahavas Yisroel - like Pinchas' act.

Yirmiyahu had to fight not only against the nations' leaders in Jerusalem; he also had to fight those Jews already in Babylon who wished to return to Eretz Yisroel prematurely. Rabbi Naftali Adler was the chief rabbi of England in 1899, and in reaction to the then-new Zionist movement, he said as follows: "When the Jewish people went into the Babylonian exile, there were among them some who found no rest under the enemy government, and their only thought all day long was to return to their land. The false prophets among them told them to rebel against the king of Babylon.

"At that point, Yirmiyahu the Prophet wrote a letter from Jerusalem to the elders, Kohanim and Levites who had already gone to exile. The letter said, 'Thus said Hashem Tzevaos, G-d of Israel, to all the exiles that I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, give your daughters to husbands, let them have sons and daughters, increase there and do not decrease. And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you, and pray on its behalf to Hashem, for with its peace you will have peace. For so says Hashem Tzevaos, G-d of Israel: Do not let your prophets and sorcerers fool you; do not listen to their dreams, with which they answer your queries. For they prophecy to you falsely in My name; I did not send them, said Hashem... And you shall call Me, and go to pray to Me, and I will hear you. And you shall seek Me and find Me, if you seek Me with all your heart... and I will restore your captivity, and gather you from all the nations, and from all the places where I have scattered you...' (Yirmiyahu 29:4-9)."

Rabbi Adler continued, "The prophet's letter is indeed long, but very fitting for this movement. And I say: In the Babylonian exile they had a well-known and short time limit of seventy years, yet Yirmiyahu found it necessary to warn them so much with the word of Hashem to stay put and not take any action on their own. Now that the end is hidden and sealed, and we are forbidden under oath from taking any action, certainly we must not deviate from the words of the prophet in his letter that he sent to the exiles.

“My brothers! I look at this movement with worry in my heart, since I see it as opposed to the Torah of Hashem and to politics. There is a great danger involved in it. That is why I don’t see in it the great quality of love of Zion.”

Matos 5768

And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes, to the children of Israel, saying: This is the thing that Hashem commanded. A man who makes a vow... (30:2-3)

Rashi says, quoting Bava Basra 120b, that Moshe taught the parsha about vows not only to the heads of the tribes but to all of Israel. This is derived from the words "this is the thing" which appear here and in Vayikra 17:2, in the section dealing with the prohibition to offer sacrifices outside the Temple. There it states explicitly, "Speak to Aharon and to his sons and to all of Israel."

But if so, why does the Torah mention the heads of the tribes? The Gemara derives a law from this, but what is the simple meaning? Furthermore, what is the significance of the fact that this is derived from the parsha of sacrifices outside the Temple, which seemingly has nothing to do with vows? And what is the significance of the use of the words "this is the thing" for the derivation?

The Satmar Rav explained: sometimes the evil inclination induces a person to sin by convincing him that the sin is actually a great mitzvah. A vow, for example, seems to be a mitzvah – to spur oneself higher in the service of G-d - but actually it is a sin. The same is true of sacrifices outside the Temple. Chazal highlight this similarity when they say, "One who vows is as if he built an unauthorized altar, and if he fulfills his vow it is as if he offered a sacrifice on it" (Nedarim 22a). This is why these two passages are connected by their use of the same key words, "this is the thing." The Torah is telling us: This is the thing that Hashem commanded – this and nothing else. Do not add to the Torah, placing upon yourself new prohibitions or bringing offerings in places other than the Temple.

This is why the heads of the tribes are mentioned. There are times in life when it is unclear to us what is a mitzvah and what is a sin. Then we must turn to the heads of the tribes – the leading rabbis of our time – and ask them what to do. (Toros V'uvdos Mibeis Raboseinu, p. 339)

Masei 5768

And you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for to you I have given the land to inherit it. (33:53).

The Ramban in his commentary to the Torah and in Sefer Hamitzvos argues that this verse is a commandment, not merely a promise as Rashi interprets it. He says that the commandment to live in Eretz Yisroel should be counted as one of the 613 mitzvos, and that this is why Chazal say (Sotah 44b) that Yehoshua's war against the Canaanites was a "milchemes mitzvah," an obligatory war.

However, the Rambam does not count living in Eretz Yisroel as one of the 613 mitzvos. In the Parsha Pearls of 5766, we analyzed the Megillas Esther's explanation of the Rambam's view, based on the Minchas Elazar. This year, we will look at a different explanation, that of Rabbi Isaac of Komarna (1806-1874).

Rabbi Isaac contends that the Rambam basically agrees to the Ramban that there is a mitzvah to conquer Eretz Yisroel and that we must not leave it in the hands of gentiles or unoccupied. However, he holds that it cannot be counted among the 613 mitzvos because we do not count mitzvos that are not within human power to fulfill. For example, prophecy is central to Judaism, yet there is no mitzvah for a Jew to be a prophet, because a Jew cannot select that status for himself; it is up to G-d to give it to him.

Here too, the conquest of Eretz Yisroel, no matter at what point in history, was not something that the Jews could just do on their own. They needed to be commanded by a prophet to do so. The conquests of Yehoshua and David, as well as the establishment of the Second Commonwealth in the time of Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly, were all accompanied by commands from the prophets of the time. But in the absence of a command, Jews are forbidden under oath to rebel against the nations, and we must accept exile with love until the coming of moshiach. When moshiach arrives, the restoration of the Jews to Eretz Yisroel will not take place naturally, but through prophecy and wonders. Thus it cannot be counted as one of the 613 mitzvos, for the mitzvos were given to men of flesh and blood, not to prophets who change the laws of nature. (Otzar Hachaim, Kitzur Taryag Mitzvos, p. 59)

Although the Rambam (Melachim 12:2) quotes the Gemara's statement (Shabbos 63a) that "there is no difference between this world and the days of moshiach except the subjugation of the nations," the Minchas Elazar (5:16) explains that this means that in the general world there will be nothing miraculous, but moshiach himself will be a wondrous person. He will come in a miraculous way, predicted by a prophet; he himself will be a prophet close to Moshe Rabbeinu's level (Rambam Teshuva 9:2), and he will be able to tell each Jew what tribe he comes from (Melachim 12:3). He will succeed in getting all Jews to repent (Melachim 11:4), a feat no one could accomplish under normal conditions. All the gentile nations will call in the name of Hashem (ibid.), and they will come to hear Moshiach as well (Teshuva 9:2).

The difference between Rabbi Isaac of Komarna's explanation of the Rambam and that of the Megillas Esther (as explained by the Minchas Elazar) is that according to the Megillas Esther, conquering Eretz Yisroel was at one time in history a mitzvah given to the Jewish people to be fulfilled through natural means, like any other mitzvah. But since in the time of moshiach it will not be fulfilled through natural means, it is considered a temporary mitzvah and cannot be counted in the 613. Rabbi Isaac of Komarna, on the other hand, holds that even in ancient times it was not a natural mitzvah, since it required the command of a prophet.

Matos/Masei 5769

And you shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I dwell, for I am Hashem who dwells in the midst of the Children of Israel (35:34)

In the blessing after cake, fruit or wine we say, “And build Jerusalem, the holy city, speedily in our days, and bring us up to its midst, and make us joyful in its building, and let us eat of its fruit and be sated from its goodness, and may we bless You for it in holiness and purity.” The Tur Orach Chaim 208, quoting the Sefer Mitzvos Katan 151, writes that it is incorrect to say the words “and let us eat of its fruit and be sated from its goodness” because we must desire Eretz Yisroel for spiritual reasons, not for the sake of its fruit and its goodness.

However, the Bach defends the commonly accepted text of the blessing as follows: “The holiness of Eretz Yisroel, which descends to it from the holiness of the heavenly Eretz Yisroel, is felt even in its fruits, which derive nourishment from the holiness of the Divine Presence that lives in Eretz Yisroel. This Divine Presence is the reason why the Torah warns at the end of Parshas Masei, ‘Do not defile the land in which you live, in which I dwell, for I am Hashem who dwells in the midst of the Children of Israel.’ G-d warns us: If you defile Eretz Yisroel, the defilement will extend even into its fruits which derive nourishment from it.

“Nowadays,” continues the Bach, “the Divine Presence has already departed from the midst of the land. G-d says: My Presence, which once dwelt literally in the earth of Eretz Yisroel, has departed due to the defilement with which you have defiled it. As a result, I took My Presence away from the midst of the Children of Israel. Until now they were the sanctuary of Hashem, in whose midst the Divine Presence was literally dwelling. But now that they eat from fruits that derive their nourishment from the defilement of Eretz Yisroel, the Divine Presence goes out, because when the defilement enters with the eating of the fruits, the holiness goes out of the Jewish people.”

“Therefore, it makes sense for us to insert into the blessing the words, ‘and let us eat of its fruit and be sated from its goodness’ because through eating the fruits of Eretz Yisroel we will derive nourishment from the holiness and purity of the Divine Presence, and we will be sated with the goodness of the Divine Presence.”

We see an amazing concept in this Bach. The difference between Eretz Yisroel during exile and Eretz Yisroel at the time of the redemption is not that during exile Eretz Yisroel does not produce fruits and at the time of the redemption it will produce fruits. It produces fruits at all times, but during exile the land is defiled, its fruits are defiled and so those who eat it become defiled, resulting in the departure of the Divine Presence from them. When the redemption arrives, G-d’s holiness will once again fill the land, its fruits will be holy and those who eat them will be nourished from holiness. Thus the Smak’s objection is unfounded, because when we say this blessing we truly are praying for the spiritual aspect of Eretz Yisroel.

Many Zionists quote the Gemara in Sanhedrin 98a as a proof that their state is a part of the redemption process. The Gemara says, “You have no more revealed end [of exile] than this: ‘And you, mountains of Israel, give forth your branches and bear your fruit to my people Israel’ (Yechezkel 36:8).” Rashi says, “When Eretz Yisroel gives forth its fruit generously, then the end will draw near, and you have no more revealed end.”

We have already quoted (Parshas Bechukosai) the Maharsha, who says that the Gemara refers to the land miraculously producing new fruit every day, or at least exceptionally large and abundant

fruit like in Temple times (see Kesubos 112a). Regular fruit is not a sign of anything, and indeed the land produced regular fruit throughout the centuries of exile. This is implied by Rashi, who says that the sign is only if it produces fruit “generously.” Now, in the words of the Bach, we find further confirmation of the fact that Eretz Yisroel does produce fruit during exile, and the fundamental difference between the fruits of exile and the fruits of redemption is a spiritual one.

This is further born out by the Midrash Eicha, Pesicha 34: “Rabbi Zeira said: How audacious is Eretz Yisroel! For it still produces fruit [during exile]. And why does it produce fruit? Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi discussed this. One said: Because they fertilize it. The other said: Because they turn over its soil.” Hashem does not wish to alter the natural order of the world, and the natural order of the world is that when one plants and puts in the proper effort, the seeds sprout and grow.

Similarly, the Gemara in Avodah Zarah 54b says, “If one steals a measure of wheat and plants it in the ground, by all rights it should not grow. But the world follows its normal course, and the fools who sinned will be punished.”

Matos/Masei 5770

The Kohanim did not say, "Where is Hashem?" And the supporters of the Torah did not know Me, and the leaders sinned against Me, and the prophets prophesied about the Baal, and followed those who will not help. (Haftarah, Yirmiyahu 2:8)

Rabbi Meir Arik, the Buchacher Rav (1855-1926), used to explain this verse as follows: The Kohanim were the spiritual leaders of the people, whose job it was to teach the people the proper Torah outlook. But they did not say, "Where is Hashem?" They chose to remain silent. Consequently, "the supporters of the Torah do not know Me" - the simple Jews remained ignorant of what the Torah says. From where did they draw their viewpoint on the world? From the prophets of the Baal, who were anything but silent. "The prophets prophesied about the Baal" - they are the ones doing the talking, and thus the simple Jews think that their help will come through the Baal. The whole situation, however, could have been rectified if only the Kohanim had spoken out and taken a stand against the prophets of the Baal. (Kol Yaakov, p. 15)

These false prophets were not as obviously false as we might think. The trial they presented was such that people greater than the greatest among us fell into their trap (see Sanhedrin 102b). They used Torah to justify their position.

Rabbi Yochanan said: Jerusalem was only destroyed because they judged cases according to Torah law. The Gemara objects: How then should they have judged cases - with violence? The Gemara amends the words of Rabbi Yochanan: They based their laws on Torah law and did not go beyond the letter of the law. (Bava Metzia 30b)

We must ask: doing everything according to Torah law is no small achievement. If only all Jews today would follow the simple Torah law! Why then was the Jewish people punished for not going beyond the law? Not everybody is able to achieve that level.

Rabbi Avraham Lieberman answered this based on the Ksav Sofer's comment on the verse מִמְרִים הָיִיתֶם עִם ה' "You have been rebels against Hashem" (Devarim 9:7). The word מִמְרִים ("rebels") can also mean "those who rule on a legal question"; thus Moshe Rabbeinu rebuked the Jewish people and said, "Whenever you sin, you find various legal grounds to permit what you do." The words עִם ה', translated above as "against Hashem," would now take on their literal meaning, "with Hashem": By finding grounds to permit a sin, the Jews made their sin into something done "with Hashem," i.e. permitted acts.

Accordingly, we can explain Rabbi Yochanan's words differently: Jerusalem was only destroyed because they based their laws - the excuses they used to permit sins - on the words of Torah.

One might object that the context of this Gemara in Bava Metzia ("and did not go beyond the letter of the law") shows that it is talking about following strict Torah law, not about using the Torah to justify outright sins. The answer is that the Gemara is talking about both, for both these problems stem from one mistake. When a person understands the spirit of the Torah's laws, he will go beyond the letter of the law. To use the example mentioned earlier in the Gemara there, when a man asked Rabbi Yishmoel to help him lift his load of wood, Rabbi Yishmoel could have refused and walked away, since the Torah exempts an eminent scholar from this mitzvah. But Rabbi Yishmoel understood that the purpose of the mitzvah is to help another Jew in need. Therefore Rabbi Yishmoel paid the man the value of the wood and told him to leave it there.

When someone uses his scholarly skills to "prove" that the Torah justifies a sin, how are his listeners to know whether to accept his conclusion? They may not be scholarly enough to disprove his arguments, but they will be able to tell whether his conclusion follows the spirit of the Torah or not.

Thus, the mistake of not taking the trouble to understand the spirit of the Torah's laws leads to two problems: the failure to go beyond the letter of the law, and the much more serious offense of basing sins on the Torah.

This is the time of year when we mourn the destruction of Jerusalem and give thought to why it has not yet been rebuilt. The criticisms voiced by Yirmiyahu Hanavi and Rabbi Yochanan are still applicable to us today. We have in our midst many false prophets who use Torah arguments to claim that we have the right to rule over Eretz Yisroel during galus. Those who know better are, for the most part, silent on this issue. That leaves us simple Jews to decide the matter on our own. If we understand the spirit of the Torah - that Hashem placed us in galus and wants us there for many good reasons - we will know that any efforts to counter His decree are wrong and will ultimately be met with failure.

Furthermore, our non-acceptance of galus prolongs the galus. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi describes a dialogue between the king of the Khazars and a rabbi. The rabbi states that the Jewish people is closer to G-d today, in their humble state of exile, than if they were a mighty nation. The king asks: "That might be so if your humility were voluntary; but it is involuntary, and if you had power you would slay." The rabbi replies: "You have touched our weak spot, O King of the Khazars. If the majority of us had accepted our humble status for the sake of G-d and His Torah, G-d would not have forced us to bear it for such a long period. But only the smallest portion of

our people thinks thus...If we bore our exile and degradation for G-d's sake, as we should, we would be outstanding even by the standards of the generation of the messianic era, for which we hope, and we would accelerate the day of our long-awaited deliverance." (Kuzari Maamar 1, 113-115)

Devarim 5768

"You have encircled this mountain long enough; turn yourselves northward, and command the people, saying: You are passing through the border of your brethren, the children of Esav...do not start a fight against them..." (2:3-5)

The Midrash Tanchuma associates these verses with the Three Oaths with which G-d bound the Jewish people in Shir Hashirim. According to the Tanchuma, the Three Oaths are: not to reveal the end, not to force the end, and not to rebel against the governments. The Tanchuma adds an ominous version of the punishment for violating the oaths: "If you keep the oaths, good, but if not, I will permit your flesh like the gazelles and deer, which have no one to avenge or seek out [their killers] – so too I will not avenge your blood."

The Buber edition of the Tanchuma, first printed in 1885, contains an additional paragraph that is not in the standard text. This paragraph counts four oaths instead of three, because it considers Shir Hashirim 5:8 to be one of the oaths. The four oaths are: not to force the end, not to ascend from exile in great numbers ("hamonim hamonim"), not to rebel against the governments, and not to reveal their secrets.

In the Talmud (Kesubos 111a), the oath against going up from exile is expressed with the words "going up as a wall". Most understand this to mean any mass immigration, even with permission from the ruling power. There is a minority opinion (Avnei Nezer) that the oath only prohibits military conquest or immigration against the will of the ruling power. This parallel text in the Buber Tanchuma, which was compiled before the closing of the Talmud, indicates that the majority opinion is correct and any mass immigration is forbidden. Of course, the Zionist state with its military conquest violates the oath according to all opinions.

Devarim 5769

“Bring forth for yourselves wise, understanding well-known men for your tribes, and I will place them at your head.” (1:13)

Rashi says that the word *va'asimem* (“and I will place them”) is without a yud, indicating that it could be read *va'ashamam berasheichem* (“and their guilt will be on your heads”). The blame for wrong done by the Jewish people will be placed upon the heads of their judges, who should have rebuked them and steered them back on the right path. (Probably Rashi does not mean that it is actually written without a yud, which would conflict with our mesorah, only that it could be read without a yud, as the Sifri says, “Do not read *va'asimem* but *va'ashamam*.”)

The Gemara (Shabbos 138b) says, “The Torah will one day be forgotten from Israel...a woman will take a loaf of terumah bread that was baked in a defiled oven and go around to all the shuls

and batei medrash asking if it is ritually defiled or clean, and no one will know the answer. But doesn't the Torah say explicitly that it is defiled? Rather, the question will be whether it is first degree defilement or second degree, and no one will know the answer."

We must ask: Chazal were making a prediction about our time, when the laws of ritual defilement are no longer kept, since we have no red heifer and we are all defiled. Why then did they pick the laws of defilement as an example of a law of the Torah that will be forgotten? Why didn't they pick a law that is kept nowadays, such as a law of Shabbos or forbidden food?

There is another place where we find that the Jewish people was tested on the laws of defilement and failed. Chaggai the Prophet (2:12-14) tested the kohanim and said, "If a man holds defiled meat [i.e. a dead rodent] in the corner of his garment and touches bread, soup, wine, oil or any food, will it become defiled?" And they said, no. "And if one defiled by a dead body touches any of these, will it become defiled?" And they said, yes. And Chaggai said, "So is this people and so is this nation before me, said Hashem."

Again, we see that the question of defilement spreading from one object to another seems to be the key test as to whether Torah was forgotten and whether the Jewish people can be rebuilt. What is so essential about this question?

In order to answer this, let us first note that there are two aspects of defilement that we do not find in any other area of halacha. Firstly, if kosher meat and treif meat are placed side by side, unless the treif meat is hot and placed on the bottom, the kosher does not become treif. The kosher remains kosher and the treif remains treif. But if one object is clean and the other is defiled, the clean is always affected by the defiled and never vice versa. This occurs not only when they come into direct contact, but even when something else intervenes between them: one object becomes defiled to the first degree, and the next to the second degree. Sometimes defilement spreads without any physical contact, such as to an object in the same room as a dead body or in the same vessel as a dead rodent.

Furthermore, one would think that the holier an item is, the less susceptible it is to defilement, but the Torah teaches us the opposite. With regular food, defilement cannot proceed beyond the second degree, but with terumah, it reaches the third degree, and with sacrificial meat it reaches the fourth degree. The reason is that defilement always wants to cling to the most holy object. This is also the reason why, according to one opinion, a dead Jewish body has a higher level of defilement than a dead gentile body (Yevamos 61a). The Ohr Hachaim (on Bamidbar 19:2) gives the analogy of two barrels, one full of honey and the other full of manure. When emptied out and then left in the sun to rot, the barrel that once contained honey attracts more flies, due to its sweetness. So too, when a Jewish body is emptied of its holy soul, the powers of defilement are attracted to it more than to a gentile's dead body, because the gentile's soul had less holiness.

With this in mind, we realize that defilement can be used as a metaphor for heresy and false ideas. Heresy also spreads very easily, as Shlomo Hamelech said, "Keep your path far from it" (Mishlei 5:8), which Chazal (Shabbos 116a) explain as a reference to heresy. And the Gemara continues there: "If a man is being pursued by a murderer or a poisonous snake, he may enter a house of idol worship to save himself but not a house of heresy, because the heretics know and

deny, while the idol worshippers do not know any better (and are simply doing what their fathers taught them).”

Chaggai the Prophet foresaw that during Bayis Sheini, the central problem of the Jewish people would be not idolatry as in Bayis Rishon, but heresy: the Sadducees and the Helenizers. Therefore, at the dawn of Bayis Sheini, Chaggai tested the kohanim, as leaders of the people, to see if they understood the danger of heresy and how contagious it was. They kohanim answered no to Chaggai’s first question, thus failing the test (Pesachim 17a). They did not know that the defilement of a dead rodent could spread as far as the fourth degree. This led Chaggai to pronounce, “So is this people and so is this nation before me, said Hashem.” If the leaders do not recognize the danger of heresy, what will become of the nation? They will be led astray and the leaders will be held responsible, for it is up to them to steer the people onto the right path, as Rashi says in our Parsha.

Similarly, Chazal foresaw the heresies of our time and said, “The Torah will one day be forgotten from Israel.” Which Torah? The Torah that teaches us how easily and how far false Torah views can spread. In a time when such false views can easily be written or spoken by anyone and spread around the world through countless forms of media, it is up to the leaders of the Jewish people to speak out the true Torah view and thus stem the tide of falsehood. Jews are hungry for the truth, as the posuk (Amos 8:11) quoted in that same Gemara says, “Behold, days are coming, said Hashem, when I will send out a hunger in the land: not a hunger for bread, and not a thirst for water, but to hear the words of Hashem.” (Kol Yaakov pp. 11-13)

Devarim 5770

And let them report back to us about the approach we should take and the cities we should attack. (Devarim 1:22)

The Sifri says that the Jews wanted the spies to report back to them as to what language the Canaanites spoke. The Satmar Rebbe, speaking in Jerusalem in 1959, asked: What difference did it make what language the Canaanites spoke? Seemingly, all the spies needed to find out was the military strength of the people.

He answered based on the Zohar (Bereishis 75b): "Why did Hashem have to confound the languages [of the builders of the tower]? Because they were all speaking the Holy Tongue, and that language gave them help, for these things depend on actions and words of the mouth...Once their language was changed, their actions had no success. For the powers above do not know or recognize any language but the Holy Tongue, so when their language was confounded their power was weakened and their strength was broken. Come and see that whenever a word is spoken below in the Holy Tongue, all the powers of heaven know about it and are strengthened through it, but if it is spoken in another language, they do not know or recognize it. Therefore, as soon as their language was confounded, 'they stopped building the city.' For their power had been broken and they did not know how to carry out any of their plans."

Accordingly, the Jews needed to know whether the Canaanites spoke the Holy Tongue, for if so they would have help from above and it would be harder to defeat them. The spies reported back,

"The cities are great and fortified in the heavens" (v. 28). Rashi, based on Tamid 29a, says that this was an exaggeration. But with the above Zohar in mind, we can explain that the spies meant that the Canaanites did indeed speak the Holy Tongue, as the Ramban says on Bereishis 45:12. Their language thus fortified them "in the heavens" - by bringing down heavenly power to assist them.

The modern Hebrew spoken today contains many non-Hebrew words and hybrid constructions. Still, there is enough real Hebrew in it to give its speakers this supernatural power of which the Zohar speaks. It is the greatest misfortune when wicked men speak the Holy Tongue, as we see that this was the only way the builders of the tower were able to succeed in leading the entire world to rebellion against Hashem, bringing bitter punishments upon the world. (Divrei Yoel v. 9 p. 34)

During the Roman siege of Jerusalem, there were among the Jews some biryonim (zealots). Rashi says that the zealots were warmongering empty people. The rabbis said to them: "Let us go out and make peace with the Romans." But the zealots did not allow them to do that, saying instead, "Let us make war with them!" The rabbis said, "It will not be successful." (Gittin 56a)

The Gemara later tells that when Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai smuggled himself out of Jerusalem and came before the Roman general Vespasian, Vespasian said to him: "If a poisonous serpent coils itself around a keg of honey, do we not break the keg in the process of killing the serpent?" He meant that despite Rabbi Yochanan's desire for peace, he could not call off the war because he had to defeat the zealots, and it would be impossible to do so without destroying Jerusalem and the Temple. We see from this that Vespasian did not really want to destroy the city and the Temple, and only did so to defeat the zealots. Had these zealots joined Rabbi Yochanan in surrendering, the Temple would never have been destroyed.

This point is made by the Sforno on Bereishis 33:4. He says that although Esav had originally been coming to destroy Yaakov and his family, his heart was turned around by the humble approach Yaakov took. If only the zealots of the Second Temple had followed this example, the Temple would not have been destroyed, as Rabbi Yochanan testified when he said, "The zealots among us did not allow it."

The Satmar Rebbe once compared the Zionists to the biryonim at the time of the Second Temple: "At the time of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, there were also biryonim, but the difference was that then, all the holy Tannaim were on Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai's side; the biryonim were a fringe group. Today, however, most rabbis unfortunately support the biryonim." (Rabbi Yishai Buchinger, p. 23)

Titus took a sword and stabbed the curtain of the Holy of Holies. A miracle happened and blood came gushing out... (Gittin 56b)

When the Satmar Rebbe visited Eretz Yisroel in 1959, he spoke in public for two and a half hours in reference to the Sinai War, bringing proofs from the Bavli, Yerushalmi and Midrashim that Hashem does not make miracles for the wicked. Afterwards, a rosh yeshiva asked the Rebbe,

“Doesn’t the Gemara in Gittin say that when Titus entered the Holy of Holies and stuck his sword into the paroches, a miracle happened and blood came gushing out?” The Rebbe replied, “The Shlah Hakadosh (Taanis, Inyanei Tisha B’av) says that this was not a miracle; it was the absence of a miracle. Every year on Yom Kippur, the Kohein Gadol would sprinkle blood on the paroches, and it would miraculously be absorbed in the floor. Now that the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, that miracle stopped, and all the blood that was in the floor came gushing out.” (Tiferes Yoel v. 3 pp. 66-67)

Devarim 5771

The Serpent Analogy: Rashi vs. Sforno

The Gemara tells that when Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai smuggled himself out of Jerusalem and came before the Roman general Vespasian, Vespasian said to him: “If a poisonous serpent coils itself around a keg of honey, do we not break the keg in the process of killing the serpent?” He meant that despite Rabbi Yochanan’s desire for peace, he could not call off the war because he had to defeat the zealots, and it would be impossible to do so without destroying Jerusalem and the Temple. We see from this that Vespasian did not really want to destroy the city and the Temple, and only did so to defeat the zealots. Had these zealots joined Rabbi Yochanan in surrendering, the Temple would never have been destroyed.

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(The context of this quote is as follows: Vespasian asked Rabbi Yochanan why he had not come out to greet him earlier, and Rabbi Yochanan replied, “The zealots among us did not allow it.” It is not clear what proof the Sforno sees in these words to his claim that if not for the zealots, the Romans would never have destroyed the Temple. Probably the Sforno really means to refer to the next line of the Gemara, in which Vespasian gives the analogy of the serpent and the keg.

But this is also problematic, because Rashi says that the analogy was meant as a refutation of Rabbi Yochanan’s statement that the zealots had not allowed him to come out earlier. Rabbi Yochanan should have destroyed the walls of the city and come out, argued Vespasian. Therefore, this does not reflect at all on what Vespasian would have done if the zealots had surrendered.

If the Sforno were to disagree with Rashi and see the analogy of the serpent as an explanation of why Vespasian had to destroy the city, this would mean that Vespasian accepted Rabbi Yochanan’s excuse as to why he was unable to come out earlier. But the Gemara several lines later makes it clear that Vespasian did not accept Rabbi Yochanan’s excuse: “Did I not answer you?” “And did I not answer you?”)

It would seem that Rashi and the Sforno represent two different approaches to getting rid of the Zionist state: from within or from without.

The Seforno also quotes a Gemara in Taanis 20a: "Faithful are the blows of a friend, and superfluous are the kisses of an enemy" (Mishlei 27:6). The curse that Achiya Hashiloni gave Israel was better than the blessing that the wicked Bilam gave them. Achiya Hashiloni cursed them that they should be like a reed: "And Hashem will smite Israel as the reed bends" (Melachim I 14:15). A reed can withstand any wind in the world, because it bends with the wind, and when the wind dies down, the reed remains standing in its place." But the wicked Bilam blessed Israel that they should be like a cedar (Bamidbar 24:6). The cedar can withstand most winds, but when a very strong south wind comes, it uproots it and turns it upside down. The Seforno says that Yaakov Avinu's bowing before Esav exemplified the quality symbolized by the reed. It is this quality that enables the Jewish people to survive, after all the winds die down.

Vaeschanan 5768

The prophecy of the valley of vision: What troubles you, then, that you all go up to the rooftops? (Yishaya 22:1)

The Gemara (Taanis 29a) says that this verse refers to the destruction of the Temple. The "valley of vision" is Jerusalem, about which many prophecies were said. When the Temple was burning, the young kohanim went up onto the roof of the sanctuary with the keys to the sanctuary in their hands. They said, "Master of the World! Since we did not merit to be trusted custodians, we are handing over the keys to You!" They threw the keys upwards, and a hand came out of heaven and accepted them. Then the young kohanim leapt into the flames.

Rabbi Avraham Lichtenstein was an eighteenth-century rabbi of Prassnysz, in the region of Plotzk, Poland, and author of Kanfei Nesharim. In his commentary Migdenos Avraham on Shir Hashirim, he uses this story to explain the oaths with which G-d adjured the Jewish people not to force the end of exile and not to go up as a wall.

"Heaven forbid for Israel in exile to make any effort with a strong hand, whether through the gentile kings and ministers, or to go up as a wall, all together, each one strengthening the other, saying, 'Let us go to Jerusalem with a strong hand and build the Temple,' or 'Let us pay off the king of Turkey until he sells us all the state of Eretz Yisroel to be ours like it was in ancient times, and we will build the Temple and offer sacrifices.' Heaven forbid for us to do this! We will wait until G-d pours out His kindness from above and sends our redemption through his moshiach, with permission from the King Who sits on high.

"This is the meaning of the hand that came out of heaven and accepted the keys. It can be compared to a person who wants to enter a house, but the house is locked. It appears that the house is ownerless. He wants to break down the door, but we tell him, 'Fool! Stop!' The house does have an owner, the keys are in his hand, and you want to enter by force? You will be considered a burglar! Wait till the owner comes and gives you the keys, and then open the door. Here too, since G-d accepted the keys, how could it occur to us to go up by force without receiving permission from G-d? We must wait until the Owner of the key comes and gives us the key, and then we will go to Zion with song.

"At the same time, G-d warned the nations of the world not to make the exile too difficult for Israel. This is the meaning of the verses in Shir Hashirim (2:6-7) from which the oaths are derived. Israel says to G-d, 'Let His left hand be under my head (i.e. prophecy), and let His right hand embrace me.' G-d replies, 'Look what I have already given you during this exile, and see My great love for you. I have adjured the daughters of Jerusalem – the nations – not to afflict you. So why do you pray so persistently for the return of My love and prophecy – better to wait until the proper time, when it is desired.'

Va'eschanan 5769

Do not make a covenant with them and do not give them a resting place. (7:2)

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 20a) derives from this verse that it is forbidden to sell land to a gentile in Eretz Yisroel. The Rambam brings this as practical law in Hilchos Avodah Zarah 10:3, and the Shulchan Aruch brings it in Yoreh Deah 151:8. Nowhere is it stated that this law applied only during the time when the Jewish people ruled their own land. On the contrary, the Rambam says explicitly (10:6), "All these things were said only when Israel is in exile among the nations or the nations are in power over Israel..."

However, we know that during exile Hashem wants Eretz Yisroel to be in non-Jewish hands. He sent us into exile, and even prohibited us under oath from taking over Eretz Yisroel (Kesubos 111a). Certainly, then, if we already have, in violation of the Torah, gained sovereignty over the land, we should give up that sovereignty. How is this consistent with "lo sechanem" - the prohibition to sell the land?

The answer is that the prohibition only refers to sale of personal property, not transfer of political sovereignty. Jews can own land under a non-Jewish state just as well as they can under a Jewish state. Throughout the world, Jews own houses and land, and Eretz Yisroel under a non-Jewish government would be no exception. No one is asking anyone to sell any of their land.

But some ask: the Rambam (Hilchos Avodah Zarah 10:4) writes, "Why are we forbidden to sell them land? Because the Torah states that one may not give them a resting place in the land. If they do not have land then their residence will be temporary." If this is the reason for the prohibition to sell personal property, then it should certainly be forbidden to give away sovereignty, which would allow them to have more of a "resting place in the land."

Let us take a moment to see how this Rambam has been understood by the poskim. The proponents of the temporary sale of land to a non-Jew in order to exempt it from Shmittah restrictions (heter mechirah) argue that it is unusual for the Rambam in the Mishneh Torah to offer the reason for a mitzvah. The Rambam presents the reason for this prohibition, they argue, because the prohibition applies only when the reason applies. Thus, since the sale for Shmittah is only temporary in nature and the non-Jew is not given the opportunity to reside permanently in Eretz Yisroel, the prohibition does not apply. But the Chazon Ish (Shviis 24:4) flatly rejects these arguments and writes, "The Torah was not given with these distinctions; any time one sells to a gentile he transgresses this prohibition, even if it seems to us that he is not taking up residence in it."

Thus according to the Chazon Ish, the reason given by the Rambam plays no role in determining halacha. One is forbidden to sell land even if it does not lead to non-Jews settling permanently, and by the same token one is permitted to give away political sovereignty even if it does lead to non-Jews settling permanently. And even according to the proponents of heter mechirah, who understand the Rambam as taama dikra (a reason that modifies a law), we know that taama dikra can only work to limit the application of a prohibition; it cannot create a new prohibition. For example, Rabbi Shimon holds that when the Torah forbids taking the garment of a widow as collateral, it means only a poor widow (Bava Metzia 115a). But he does not use his reasoning to extend the prohibition to all poor people. Here too, limiting the prohibition to permanent sales and thus permitting the sale of land for Shmittah is one thing, but claiming that the prohibition applies to something that is not a sale at all is quite another thing.

Some Zionists bypass the entire issue of “lo sechanem” by saying that holding onto Eretz Yisroel and fighting for it is justified on the grounds that this is an obligatory war (milchemes mitzvah) to defend Jewish lives. They find support in the Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 5:1-2), who says that in an obligatory war the king may go to war without consulting the Sanhedrin, at any time he wishes. “And which wars are considered obligatory wars? The war against the seven Canaanite nations, the war against Amalek, and a war to defend the Jewish people from an enemy attack.” Furthermore, these people argue, even in our times, during exile, when we have no king or Sanhedrin at all, it is sometimes allowed for Jews to fight such a war. The Shulchan Aruch states in the laws of Shabbos, Orach Chaim 329:6: "If gentiles are besieging Jewish cities, if they are coming to take money, we may not violate Shabbos to fight them, but if they are coming to kill, or if they are coming without any stated purpose, then we may go out and fight them with weapons and violate Shabbos. And if the city is near the border, even if they come only to steal straw, we may violate Shabbos to fight them. Rema: Even if they have not yet come but are planning to come, we may prepare ourselves."

It can be proven that this law applies even during exile, because its source is in Eiruvim 45a, and there the Amoraim, who lived during exile, explain how it applies to their cities in Babylonia. Babylonia contained a large area that was full of Jewish cities and villages, and the city Nehardea was near the border of this area. If gentiles invaded Nehardea for any reason, say the Amoraim, it would be permitted to fight them on Shabbos because it is a border city.

But this argument misses two fundamental points: 1) The gentile nations who fight the Zionists are fighting because they wish to control the land instead of the Zionists. Thus the Zionists are fighting not to defend Jewish lives, but to defend their statehood and their political control of the land. Unlike the straw mentioned in Shulchan Aruch, statehood and political control over the land are forbidden to us under the Three Oaths, so it follows that any war fought to maintain that statehood is also a violation of the Oaths. 2) The Shulchan Aruch is talking about Jews fighting to defend their host country, a gentile country (such as Babylonia in the Gemara’s case), against outside attackers. They are defending a Jewish city that is part of a non-Jewish country, and thus they are fighting not as Jews but as citizens of that country. In other cases, they are defending themselves against criminals in a non-Jewish country whose government would like to control crime. Thus they fight as a service and assistance to their government. But there is no permission

for Jews during exile to fight on their own against the gentile nations among whom they live; that is a violation of the Oaths.

Furthermore, the entire issue of "lo sechanem" cannot apply to the Zionist state returning lands it has conquered, because the land was acquired illegitimately, through stealing, and on the contrary there is a mitzvah to give back a stolen item. If this is true of movable objects, which are somewhat acquired by the thief, how much more is it true of land, which can never be acquired by the thief (Succah 30b). Although we hold that conquest is different from regular theft and does change the land's legal ownership (as we see that Amon and Moav's land became permitted to the Jewish people after it was conquered by Sichon - Gittin 38a), it is still not permitted to conquer land. This is clear from the first Rashi in the Torah, which states that when the nations argue, "You are thieves for stealing the land of the seven Canaanite nations," the Jewish people can answer that the entire world belongs to Hashem and He give it to whomever He chooses. The implication is that only in this case, where there was an explicit prophecy to Moshe that we should get Eretz Yisroel, we have this answer, but in the absence of prophecy (for example, when the Zionists conquered Palestine in 1948) the argument "you are thieves" remains true.

Vaeschanan 5770

"I call to witness against you today heaven and earth that you will surely perish from upon the land which you are crossing the Jordan to possess." (4:26)

The Yalkut Meam Loez (p. 296) mentions the oaths in his commentary to this verse, in the course of a lengthy section on the destruction of the Temple and Tisha B'av: "The Holy One, blessed is He, made Israel swear that one part of them should not arise and go to Eretz Yisroel and rule over it and build Jerusalem and its walls. Additionally, He made them swear not to rebel against the kingdoms; they are not to rely on their own strength. He also made them swear not to pray excessively to Him that He bring moshiach, not to reveal the secrets of the Torah and the rules of seasons and constellations to the nations of the world. He made the nations of the world swear not to make their yoke too heavy upon us, for if they make their yoke too heavy Hashem will send moshiach even before his time. And the Holy One, blessed is He, said, 'I adjure you...' (Shir Hashirim 2:7). If you listen to My oath, good, but if not 'by gazelles or by the deer of the field' – your flesh will be food for animals like the gazelles or the deer of the field."

We see here that the author of this part of Meam Loez (Rabbi Yitzchak Bechor Agruti) understood that the words "as a wall" do not mean only a conquest by force. They refer rather to the building of the walls of Jerusalem, and this is prohibited even if a part of the Jewish people (not the whole or even the majority) does it.

A recently published commentary on Shir Hashirim written by an anonymous Yemenite Jew in the times of the Rishonim says as follows: "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem..." This is a command that when the Jews are in exile under a foreign power, they must not burst forth with deeds and actions (מעשים ופעולות) before the time comes, lest they bring upon themselves harm or even destruction, instead of the good they thought would come of it. But when G-d wills it and the time is up, they will not need their own actions, nor will they need to use any strategy

(תחבולה), but rather G-d will cause things to happen to bring about His will, in a way that no human being can imagine. This is what Yishaya the prophet (40:2) said, “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her, for her time is up and her sin is atoned.” This verse (“I adjure you, daughter of Jerusalem”) is written three times to hammer in the concept, and also to correspond to the three exiles: Egypt, Babylonia, and the current lengthy exile, may Hashem show us its end soon. (Peirush Ksav Yad Kadmon Miyotzei Teiman)

We see here that this Yemenite commentator did not hold that the oaths become permitted when the gentiles give us permission to return to Eretz Yisroel. For if he did, he would have written only that military conquest is forbidden. Instead he writes that any deeds, actions and strategies to bring the end are forbidden. The Balfour Declaration, the Mandate and the 1947 U.N. vote did not come by themselves. The Zionists used a lot of diplomacy, political threats and arm-twisting to get them.

Rabbi Shmuel Aripol, talmid of the Mabit (Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef Di Trani, 1505-1585), wrote in his commentary Sar Shalom to Shir Hashirim 2:7: I adjure you, daughters who once lived in Jerusalem, and have now gone out and become scattered in a place of gazelles and deer of the field, i.e. in uninhabited places – still, you must not wake up and arise before the End. (In order words, even if you live in exile in places where the gentiles have relatively little control over you, do not arise from exile.)

He explains the double expression אַם תַּעִירוּ וְאַם תַּעֲרָרוּ (“do not arise and do not arouse”) as follows: You yourselves must not arise, and you must not arouse a king or an official with you, to arise with you.

This prophetic reference to Balfour and his declaration should not surprise us, because Rabbi Shmuel Aripol was simply interpreting the words of Shlomo Hamelech, who was a prophet and certainly foresaw exactly what would happen. Remember how the Rambam puts it in Iggeres Teiman: “And when Shlomo, peace be upon him, made known with his holy inspiration, that this nation when it is sunk into exile will try to arouse itself not at its proper time, and they will die because of this and travails will come upon them – he warned against this, and made an oath against this in an allegorical way...” Zionism is the very reason why the oaths were written.

And Rabbi Shmuel Aripol continues: Alternatively, if we understand the words “gazelles and deer of the field” as being the anchor of the oath, the object by which He made them swear (שהשביעם בהם), then we can explain the choice of these animals as follows: A gazelle sleeps with one eye open. A deer runs while looking back at its pursuer. G-d warned the Jewish people: Even when you are asleep in exile, keep an eye out for the evil that will come upon you if you rise up before the time.

The Gemara and Midrashim about the oaths were written 1500 years ago and since then, Jewish scholars have studied them and written about them. This was all so that when our era arrived and the violation of the oaths became a practical reality, we would be prepared and we would know what the Torah wants of us.

And you shall teach them to your sons, to speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the way, when you go to bed and when you get up. (11:19)

The Gemara (Kiddushin 29b) derives from the word "sons" that only men must study Torah, not women. However, women are rewarded if they make sacrifices for the sake of their husbands' Torah study, as the Gemara says in Kesubos 62a, quoting the verse (Tehillim 127:2), "Vain it is for you who get up early and settle down late, eating the bread of suffering – so He will give for His beloved sleep." The Gemara understands this to mean: It is vain for you to toil to earn a living, because G-d gives livelihood to those who deprive themselves of sleep in order to study Torah. The words "deprive themselves of sleep" refer not only to the Torah scholars themselves but also to their wives, who wait up late at night for their husbands to return from the House of Study.

Another interpretation of this verse was given by the Rabbi Moshe of Ujhel, the Yismach Moshe, in his commentary Tefilah Lemoshe on Tehillim. He says that the word "kum" – get up – is used in another place (Amos 5:2) to refer to the Jewish people's arising from exile. Thus "mashkimei kum" means those who make early the arising from exile, i.e. those who force the end of exile, attempting to end it before the coming of the moshiach. By so doing they are actually prolonging the exile.

Some people claim that even a false messianic movement is a good thing because it wakes Jews up from the slumber of exile, to remember that they are waiting for moshiach. But the truth, says the Yismach Moshe, is that when Jews forget to wait for moshiach, they are actually bringing moshiach nearer, as the Gemara says (Sanhedrin 97a): "Moshiach comes due to a diversion of our attention from him."

Thus we read the verse as follows: Vain it is for you who attempt to arise from exile early! You are actually "m'acharei sheves" – causing the redemption to come later. And as to your argument that you are waking Jews up – G-d will give the redemption "liyedido" – to His beloved Jewish people – "sheinah" – sleep, that is, when the Jews are sleeping in exile and diverting their attention from redemption."

Eikev 5769

“And it shall come to pass, if you listen well to My commandments, which I command you today, to love Hashem your G-d and to serve Him with all your heart and soul.” (11:13)

Regarding this verse, the Gemara (Taanis 2a) says, “What kind of service is in the heart? The answer is prayer.” The Rambam (Tefillah 1:1) counts this as one of the 613 Commandments, and adds, “The Torah does not prescribe a number of prayers, a text or a specific time for prayer... Ezra and his court composed the Eighteen Blessings.”

In Megillah 17b, the Gemara goes through all of the blessings of Shmoneh Esrei and explains the reasons for their order. The advocates of the modern return to Eretz Yisroel point to several of

these explanations as proof to their version of the proper order of the redemption, but upon closer examination we can see the fallacies in their reasoning.

Firstly, the Gemara says that the blessing “who gathers in the exiles of Israel” was placed after the blessing over the fruits of the earth because Eretz Yisroel will produce fruit before the ingathering of the exiles. Actually, this is a proof against Zionism. It says that the land will give forth its fruit before the ingathering of the exiles, not that the exiles will come back to the land and cultivate it, causing it to give forth its fruit. This bearing of fruit is clearly not going to be something precipitated by Jewish efforts.

Secondly, they point to the fact that the blessing on the ingathering of the exiles comes so early in the Shmoneh Esrei, long before the building of Jerusalem and the kingship of moshiach. The Satmar Rav has already dealt with this argument in Vayoel Moshe 1:22, and we quoted his words in the Parsha Pearls for Ki Sisa 5766. The Raavad writes (on Eduyos 2:9) that in every exile, there are two times of redemption: a number of years, and a number of generations. When the number of years ends, Hashem takes the Jewish people out from their captivity and subservience to the nations, but for the fulfillment of Hashem’s promises to them they must wait until the right generation has arrived. This is why even after the time came and they left Egypt, they had to wander in the desert for 40 years until the generation destined to enter the Land had arisen. Similarly in the Babylonian exile, they were released from exile after 70 years, but the building of Jerusalem was not completed until 30 years later, in the time of Nechemiah. In the future as well, we will be gathered from all the lands of our exile to an intermediate place called “the wilderness of the nations,” and when the right generation arrives we will go from there to Eretz Yisroel. This intermediate place is described by Yechezkel: “And I will take you out from the nations, and I will gather you from the lands where you were dispersed, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and poured out wrath. And I will bring you to the wilderness of the nations, and I will contend with you there face to face. As I contended with your ancestors in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will contend with you, said Hashem G-d. And I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into My covenant. And I will filter out from you the rebellious and the sinners against Me; from the land of their sojourn I will remove them, but to the Land of Israel they will not come, and you shall know that I am Hashem.” (Yechezkel 20:34-38)

The blessing in Shmoneh Esrei about the ingathering of the exiles refers to this first stage, when the Jews will be gathered into the wilderness of the nations. This stage comes before the building of Jerusalem. Therefore, the blessing reads simply, “Who gathers in the dispersed of His people Israel,” without saying to where. Some versions of the Nusach Ari have the word “l’artzeinu” - to our land - in the middle of the blessing. The Arizal himself said that this blessing has 20 words, so those versions would seem to be incorrect. And even if they are correct, certainly our prayer is eventually to return to Eretz Yisroel, but the order of the blessings laid out in the Gemara in Megillah 17b relates to their main subjects, expressed in the endings of the blessings, which are the most important part. Here the main subject of the blessing is not the return to Eretz Yisroel.

Thirdly, the Gemara says that the blessing “who builds Jerusalem” comes before the blessing “the sprout of David your servant” because “once Jerusalem is built, David will come, as it says

(Hoshea 3:5), ‘Afterwards the children of Israel will repent and seek Hashem their G-d and David their king.’” It seems that Jerusalem will be built before moshiach comes.

The Satmar Rav explains in Vayoel Moshe 1:57 that moshiach’s coming will be in stages. There will be a long period in which he is bringing all of the Jewish people to repent (as per Rambam Hilchos Melachim 11:4), and until he completes that task we will not accept him definitively as moshiach; he will not attain kingship. The building of Jerusalem will take place during that interim period, after moshiach has come but before he attains kingship. The blessing “the sprout of David your servant” refers to the last stage, the kingship of moshiach.

The Rebbe adds that not only will moshiach be here before the building of Jerusalem; many other tzaddikim of the past will be here as well. According to the Gemara, the blessing “restore our judges as of old” (three blessings prior to the building of Jerusalem) is based on the verse in Yishaya 1:26, “And I will restore your judges as of old, and your advisors as in the beginning.” The Yalkut Shimoni on that verse says that “judges” refers to Moshe and Aharon, and “advisors” refers to David and Shlomo. Thus we see that together with the first stage of moshiach’s arrival, there will be a limited resurrection of the dead for very great tzaddikim, to enable them to see and participate in the redemption.

We can add that the blessing “who builds Jerusalem” itself states clearly that the throne of David will be established, and this is an integral part of the blessing. When Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi prepared his famous version of the prayerbook, he brought it to the sons of Rabbi Pinchas Koritzer, who owned the printing business in Slovita. But they refused to print it, because he had made a change in the blessing about Jerusalem. Normally, the blessing goes, "And build it soon in our days an eternal building, and speedily establish the throne of your servant David in its midst; blessed are You, Hashem, Who builds Jerusalem." Rabbi Schneur Zalman, however, switched the order and wrote: "And speedily establish the throne of your servant David in its midst, and build it soon in our days an eternal building; blessed are You, Hashem..." "Why did you make this change?" they asked him. "Because the rule is that the just before the end of a blessing, before the word 'blessed,' we must say the same idea expressed at the very end of the blessing, after the word 'blessed.'" "There is no need to make any change," they said, "for our father said, 'Without the Davidic dynasty there is no building of Jerusalem.'" (See also the Bach on Orach Chaim 118, who asks Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s question.)

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Ber Scheersohn, discusses the order of the blessings in Igros Kodesh 1:130, and reaches a similar conclusion as the Satmar Rav. “Certainly,” he writes, “the coming of moshiach will precede the building of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the building will be done by moshiach. The exiles will be gathered by him, and then his kingship will come; that is the kingship of David. That is why the Gemara is careful with its words and states, ‘Once Jerusalem is built, David will come.’ It does not say ‘the son of David,’ the term usually used for moshiach upon his arrival. This is because ‘David’ is a term for the full-fledged kingship of moshiach, as we see in Yechezkel 37:24, ‘And My servant David will be king over them.’”

"See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing is if you listen to the commandments of Hashem your G-d, which I command you today. And the curse is if you do not listen to the commandments of Hashem your G-d, and you stray from the path which I command you today, to go after other gods that you have never known." (Devarim 11:26-28)

The Ohr Hachaim comments on the word "today", which is repeated so many times in these verses. He explains that it refers back to the promise spoken by Moshe at the end of last week's parsha, that "any place whereon the sole of your foot will tread will be yours". This promise occurs here for the first time in the Torah. Thus Moshe tells the Jews, "This promise I have given you just today can be a blessing or a curse. If you keep the commandments, it is a blessing, but if not, your ownership of the land will be a curse to you, for the nations' jealousy will be aroused and they will destroy them from the land with fierce vengeance. Furthermore, your enjoyment of the land in this world will be to your detriment in the World to Come, because G-d will be paying up your reward for the few good deeds you did do in this world, so that only punishment is left for the World to Come, as it says (Devarim 7:10), "He pays His enemies to their face, to destroy them."

Re'eh 5769

But as much as your heart desires you may slaughter and eat meat, in accordance with the blessing of Hashem your G-d, which He has given you in all your gates, the defiled and the clean together, like the gazelle and the deer. (12:15)

Rashi says that this is talking about sacrificial animals that became blemished and were redeemed with a replacement animal. The new animal is brought as a sacrifice instead, and the blemished one may be eaten as plain meat without any special restrictions. It may be eaten in any place, not just in Jerusalem; it may be eaten by a defiled person; and it may be eaten by a clean person even if the meat is defiled. The Torah compares it to the gazelle and the deer, animals from which no sacrifices are ever brought. (Devarim 14:5 lists five other kosher animals that are never used for sacrifices. But the gazelle and the deer are the two most commonly eaten.)

The Torah uses the same comparison in 12:22 when referring to plain meat that was never designated as a sacrifice, and in 15:22 when referring to a firstborn animal that became blemished and is permitted to eat as plain meat.

There is one other place in Scripture where we find the gazelle and the deer mentioned together: "I have adjured you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the deer of the field, not to arouse or awaken the love until it is desired" (Shir Hashirim 2:7 and 3:5). In a third place (8:4) the verse occurs again, but without the words "by the gazelles or the deer of the field."

The Gemara (Kesubos 111a) explains that the oaths in these verses are the Three Oaths administered to Israel and the nations of the world during exile. Israel is prohibited from conquering the Holy Land and from rebelling against the nations; the nations are prohibited from

afflicting Israel too much. The meaning of the “gazelles” and “deer” is that Hashem says to Israel: If you keep the oath, good; but if not, I will permit your flesh like the gazelles and the deer of the field.

It is clear from the Gemara that this punishment only applies to the Jewish people if they break their oaths, not to the nations of the world if they break theirs. This is probably derived from the fact that in only two out of the three verses, the words “by the gazelles or by the deer of the field” appear. What punishment will the nations get if they break their oath? The Midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2:7) says that Hashem will end the Jewish exile before its time. Then Hashem will come to judge the earth (Tehillim 96:13) and the gentiles will face justice for what they did.

Why is this punishment of “permitting the flesh,” which Rashi explains as “ownerless,” an appropriate one for the Jews if they violate their oaths? Usually Hashem punishes a sinner directly. In particular, regarding one who violates an oath, the Torah says, “Hashem will not exonerate one who takes His name in vain” (Shemos 20:7). Hashem punishes; He does not leave the world as if it were ownerless. And why is the punishment expressed by comparison to the gazelles and deer, of all animals? There are many other animals that are mercilessly hunted or preyed upon.

The Avnei Nezer (Yoreh Deah 454) asks two basic questions on the Three Oaths: 1) An oath only has force when the person himself swears, such as when the Jewish people swore their acceptance of the Torah (Rashi on Devarim 28:69), or at least answers amen, such as the sotah (Bamidbar 5:22) or the oaths at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval (Devarim 27:26). But in this case, if Shlomo Hamelech administered the Three Oaths, he should have gathered the entire Jewish people together to accept them, but we find nothing of the sort. (See Parsha Pearls Ki Savo 5766 for other answers to this question.) 2) What could the nature of the nations’ oath be if they did not even know about it?

He answers that Hashem administered the oath to the guardian angels of each nation. Similarly, He administered the oaths of the Jewish people to their soul roots above. This fits well with the Zohar (Bereishis 242a), which says in reference to Shir Hashirim 5:8 that the words “daughters of Jerusalem” refer to the souls of the righteous. Here too, Hashem made the souls of the Jewish people swear to keep to the terms of exile. This is similar to the oath administered to the soul before it comes into the world, “Be righteous and do not be wicked” (Niddah 30b).

If every person’s soul swears to be righteous before it is born, what was the purpose of the oath the Jews took when they accepted the Torah? The answer is that an oath accepted by the soul is not legally binding. It merely means that the soul is infused with a desire to be good. But a person can ignore his soul and follow the evil inclination. The Jews had to take an oath in this world; otherwise they would not have been punished for not listening to the soul.

If an oath administered to the soul is not legally binding, asks the Avnei Nezer, how can there be a punishment for violating the terms of exile? The answer is that “I will permit your flesh as the gazelles and deer of the field” is not to be understood as a direct punishment, but as a cutting off of Hashem’s protection that comes as a result of the sin. Sometimes even when a person cannot be culpable for what he did, the sin itself distances him from Hashem. We find this in Tikunei

Zohar regarding the concept that the Heavenly Court does not judge a person under twenty years of age (Shabbos 89b). Why, then, do people sometimes die under the age of twenty? Because, says the Zohar, “a wicked person’s own sins trap him” (Mishlei 5:22).

Here too, if the Jews violate the terms of exile and conquer Eretz Yisroel or fight against the nations, Hashem will ask their souls why they did it, and the souls will answer, “We tried our best to push the bodies in the right direction, but they did not listen to us.” Then He will call their bodies in for judgement, but the bodies will reply that they never took any oath; only the souls did. Each has a good excuse, but the connection between body and soul has been ruptured, Hashem’s providence and supervision is removed from the body, and the body is left as ownerless as the wild animals that have no soul. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim and the Chinuch in Mitzvah 169 write that Hashem's supervision does not apply to the particulars of each animal but only to the preservation of the species. The same will be the case for a human being who distances himself from his soul.

Of all wild animals, the gazelle and the deer are singled out because they are used elsewhere as the symbols of detachment from holiness. We have seen that in three places, when the Torah wants to teach us that meat is not holy, it says “like the gazelle and the deer.” In two out of those three places, it is discussing meat that was once holy but now its holiness has been removed. Here also, the result of violating the oaths of exile is that one is cut off from his source of holiness and removed from Hashem’s supervision, may Hashem spare us.

Shoftim 5767

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the announcer, who proclaims peace, announces good, proclaims redemption, who says to Zion, your G-d has reigned. The watchers have raised their voices, and sing together, for they will see eye to eye when Hashem returns to Zion." (Yishaya 52:7-8)

The Chasam Sofer (1763-1839) explained that the future redemption will not be similar to past redemptions. In the past, it was not clearly sensed by all that Hashem dwelt among us. The Jews heard it from the prophets and sages who felt it with their holy inspiration, and believed them; they also saw many miracles that testified that the Divine Presence was with them. But it was not openly seen with the eyes. But in the future redemption, we will be able to point with our fingers and say, "Behold, this is our G-d!" as the Gemora says at the end of the tractate Taanis.

Perhaps, wrote the Chasam Sofer, the Jewish people have already deserved many times to be redeemed through an incomplete redemption, or that peace should be made between us and the nations among whom we live, or – better yet – there could have been a real redemption as in the time of the Second Temple and the like, but that is not desirable. Even if we ourselves would settle for such a redemption – just to be redeemed – our holy forefathers would not consent now to anything less than a complete redemption. It is better for Jewry to suffer for the duration of the exile in order to ultimately experience a redemption that is complete in every way.

Thus the verse: **"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the announcer"** – should really be translated: What good are the feet of the announcer for the mountains, i.e. our

forefathers? Our forefathers do not want a redemption that has to be announced. They are waiting for a redemption that will be clear to all and will need no explanations: "Like a banner raised on mountains you will see, and like the blowing of the horn you will hear." (Yishaya 18:3) The verse continues: "...**who proclaims peace**" – even if the announcer proclaims peace between the Jews and the gentiles – "**announces good, proclaims redemption**" – or even if he announces a higher level, an actual redemption from exile like that of the Second Temple, that is only "**who says to Zion, your G-d has reigned**" – and Zion will have to believe the announcer, but she will not recognize on her own that it is so. So what good is this kind of redemption to them? But the real redemption will be when "**the watchers have raised their voices**" – that they themselves will watch it - "**for they will see eye to eye when Hashem returns to Zion.**" (Toras Moshe, Shoftim)

Shoftim 5769

You shall surely place over yourself a king, whom Hashem your G-d will choose (17:15).

Not only is the king chosen by Hashem – he is considered to be Hashem's representative on earth to preserve law and order. This is the meaning of the verse that states, "And Shlomo sat on the throne of Hashem" (Divrei Hayamim I 29:23).

The Chasam Sofer (Likutei Shailos Utshuvos 86) takes this a step further and asserts that even a gentile king is Hashem's representative on earth. His proof is that when we see a gentile king, we bless Hashem "who gave of His honor to flesh and blood" (Berachos 58a). We do not merely say that Hashem gave honor to the king; He gave of His own honor to the king.

According to this, the Chasam Sofer explains the verse, "Fear Hashem, my son, and the king; and do not join changers" (Mishlei 24:21). He points out that both here and in Koheles 8:2, "I keep the word of the king and on the matter of the oath of G-d," Shlomo Hamelech mentions Hashem and the king in the same verse. This is because our fear of the king is not merely due to his power to punish, but also because we believe in Hashem and we know that He has appointed the king as His representative on earth. We believe that Hashem has commanded us under oath to fear the king.

The difference between a non-religious person who fears the king only for practical reasons (out of fear of punishment) and a believer in Hashem who fears the king as Hashem's representative is that the non-religious person's fear is only for show; in private he mocks the king and thinks he is smarter. He is a "changer" – he changes his attitude toward the king when in private. Shlomo therefore says, "Fear Hashem, my son, and fear the king, even in private, because of your fear of Hashem. Do not be like those changers who take a different attitude to the king in public and private."

And the verse in Koheles 8:2 is to be rendered: "I keep the command of the king, not just because I swore allegiance to him (an oath that might be considered taken under duress and therefore not binding), but because I swore to G-d at Sinai that I would keep the Torah, which commands us to obey the king."

Where does the Torah command us to respect the king? The Chasam Sofer cites three examples from Tanach in which Hashem obligated someone to show honor to a king: 1) He commanded Moshe to honor Pharaoh (Rashi on Shemos 6:13); 2) Eliyahu ran before Achav's chariot (Melachim I 18:46 with Rashi); 3) Hashem's Presence left Esther because she called Achashverosh a dog in her prayers (Megillah 15b). And in general, Jews in exile are forbidden to rebel against their host nations. The prophet Yirmiyahu (29:7) says, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have exiled you and pray on its behalf to Hashem, for through its peace you will have peace."

Based on this, the Chasam Sofer explains a comment of the Magen Avraham in Orach Chaim 284:7. In the prayer we traditionally say every Shabbos morning for the king of our country, we ask Hashem to "conquer his enemies before him." The Magen Avraham says: "This means his enemies in his own kingdom, for in the whole world there are Jews." What problem forced the Magen Avraham to conclude that the prayer refers to internal enemies?

The Chasam Sofer explains that the word for "his enemies" used in the prayer is "sonav," which literally means "his haters." Every Jew is obligated to love his king and hate his king's enemies. Thus if Jews in Country A were to pray for the downfall of the haters of their king, they would be praying for the downfall of their fellow Jews in the enemy country, Country B, who hate the king of Country A. This is why the Magen Avraham had to say that we are praying only for the downfall of the haters of the king within the country itself, who cannot possibly be Jews - for the Jews were commanded at Mt. Sinai not to hate their king.

Regarding our king's external enemies, we have a different prayer in which we simply ask that there should be peace. This prayer appears in the Talmud, Berachos 16b-17a: "May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d, to make peace among the heavenly angels..." Rashi explains that this means the guardian angels of each of the seventy nations. When there is peace among them, there is peace among the nations.

But regarding internal enemies, we do not pray for peace, because those who rebel against a king are wicked, and "there is no peace for the wicked, said my G-d" (Yishaya 57:21).

At first, one might think that this does not apply in democratic countries like the United States, in which the president is an elected official and is supposed to govern in accordance with the will of the people. If we are against something he is doing, we have every right to speak out against him and support his opponents within the government.

This is true, but only in regard to changes that we think would be better for our country. For example, we want our country to be a more moral place. If the president advocates something immoral, we speak out against him, saying that he is not doing what it is best for our country.

But what if the president does what he feels is best for the United States, and Jews speak out against him, not on the grounds that his policies are not good for the United States, but on the grounds that they are not good for the Zionist state? Such Jews are showing that they are more loyal to the Zionist state than they are to the United States, and are violating the principle of loyalty and honor to a king. A president may not be a king as far as the different opinions on how

the United States should be run are concerned. But all Americans agree that there should be a president, and that he should run the country in the country's own best interest. One who acts in the interest of other countries is guilty of treason and is punished severely, even in democratic America. In that aspect the government is still like a king, and one who does not have the country's best interest at heart is like a rebel against the king.

We live in a climate of rising anti-Semitism. According to a recent survey, over 30% of the non-Jews in America believe that Jews are more loyal to the Zionist state than they are to America. The last thing we want is to contribute more to that image. We need to follow the Torah's directives for exile, and then Hashem promises us safety: "And even so, when they were in their enemies' lands, I did not reject them nor revile them to destroy them, to annul My covenant with them, for I am Hashem their G-d" (Vayikra 26:44).

Ki Seitzei 5767

You shall not bring the hire of a harlot nor the price of a dog to the house of Hashem your G-d for any vow, for both are an abomination to Hashem your G-d. (Devarim 23:19)

The Gemora in Avodah Zarah (16b) relates: Once Rabbi Eliezer was arrested for heresy. At that time, the Romans were persecuting the early Christians, and they accused Rabbi Eliezer of being a Christian. They brought him up to the tiered platform to be judged. The judge said, "A sage like you engages in such empty matters?" Rabbi Eliezer replied, "I trust the judge." The judge thought he was referring respectfully to him, but in reality he meant that G-d, the true judge, must have brought this accusation upon him as punishment for some past sin. The judge said, "Since you trusted me, by the idol Deimus you are exempt from punishment!"

When Rabbi Eliezer came home, he was terribly upset, for the Sages teach that a person is only suspected of a sin if he in some way committed a shadow of that sin, or at least thought about committing it, or at least was happy when he saw others committing it (Moed Katan 18b).

His students came to comfort him, but he refused to accept their comfort. Rabbi Akiva said, "My teacher, permit me to say something that you once taught me."

"Say it," said Rabbi Eliezer.

"My teacher, perhaps you heard some Christian teaching and it gave you pleasure, and that is why you were arrested?" said Rabbi Akiva.

Rabbi Eliezer said, "Akiva, you have reminded me! Once I was walking in the upper marketplace of Sepphoris, and I met one of the Nazarene's disciples, named Jacob of Kfar Sechania. He said to me, 'It is written in your Torah, You shall not bring the hire of a harlot to the house of Hashem. What about using it to make a toilet for the Kohein Gadol?' I did not reply. He then said, 'This is what the Nazarene taught me: The prophet Micha says (1:7), "For they gathered it from a harlot's hire, and to a harlot's hire they will return." The money came from a dirty place and it should go to a dirty place.' I had pleasure from this, and therefore I was arrested

for heresy, because I transgressed what is written in the book of Mishlei (5:8), 'Keep your path far from it.'" (We have translated the Gemora according to the Netziv and the uncensored text.)

What should Rabbi Eliezer have done when he encountered the Christian disciple? The Maharsha says that he should have kept away from him and not listened to his answer at all. The Shvus Yaakov in his commentary Iyun Yaakov says that his pleasure from the heretic's explanation of the verse was considered a sin of the thoughts, and therefore he was arrested for heresy.

We see from here the obligation to stay far from heretics and not have pleasure even from an innocent remark made by them, even if the remark itself is true. All the more so that one should not deliberately put himself in a place conquered by the heretics such as the Western Wall or Hebron, where he will derive pleasure from their conquest.

In the Midrash on Koheles (1:8) we read: "Chanina the nephew of Rabbi Yehoshua was going toward Capernaum, when the heretics cast a spell on him and brought him into town, riding a donkey on Shabbos. He came to Rabbi Yehoshua his uncle, who cured him by rubbing oil on him. Rabbi Yehoshua said to Chanina, 'Since that wicked man's donkey brayed at you, you can no longer stay in Eretz Yisroel.' So he went down to Babylonia and lived out his life in peace."

From here we see what great damage comes from having benefit from heretics and their activities. Because Chanina came to Eretz Yisroel on a donkey belonging to heretics and thus benefited from them, although it happened against his will, and although he came afterwards to Rabbi Yehoshua who could surely have healed him spiritually and physically, still there was no solution for him except to leave Eretz Yisroel and live in Babylonia. If one has benefit from heretics, it is impossible that none of their poison will enter him, and there is almost no cure for this. (Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah, Chapter 91)

Ki Seitzei 5769

“If a man has a wayward and rebellious son, who does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother, and they chastise him, but he does not listen to them.” (21:18)

The Parsha begins with the law that a Jewish soldier may take a captive woman as his wife. Next comes the law that if a man has two wives, one beloved and one hated, he may not take the birthright away from the hated wife's son and give it to the beloved wife's son. Then comes the law of the rebellious son. Rashi says (on 21:11) that the Torah places the laws in this order to teach us that although the taking of the captive woman is permitted, it is not the best thing to do, and no good will come of it. The husband will eventually come to hate the captive wife, and the son she bears him will be rebellious.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 107a) says that Dovid Hamelech's life was a living example of this. He married the captive woman Maacha, and she bore him Avshalom, who rebelled against him. The Gemara says that when Dovid was fleeing from Avshalom and realized that Avshalom was planning to kill him, he decided to commit idolatry, so that his punishment would be just. "Otherwise," he argued, "why should a righteous king like me be killed by his own son?"

Chushai the Archite, however, came and explained to Dovid that this was happening because of his marriage to a captive woman. We must ask: why was Dovid so surprised that Avshalom wanted to kill him? Hadn't Nossan the Prophet foretold (Shmuel II 12:11) that Avshalom's rebellion would take place as a punishment for the sin of Bas Sheva?

Furthermore, Chazal (Berachos 7b) question the opening line of Tehillim 3: "A song of Dovid, when he fled from his son Avshalom." Why is this called a "song" – it should be called a "lamentation"! Chazal answer that when Dovid heard from the prophet that a rebellion would arise from within his own house, he feared that it would be a slave or bastard who would not have mercy on him. When he found out that the rebel was his own son Avshalom, he rejoiced in song. The obvious question is: Avshalom did not have mercy on Dovid either – he wanted to kill him. So why did Dovid rejoice?

The answer is that Dovid knew that his punishment would be a rebellion, but did not think that the rebellion would automatically lead to his death. That would depend on who the rebel would be. When he saw that the rebel was Avshalom, he at first rejoiced, thinking that a son would certainly not kill his own father. But then he heard that Avshalom indeed planned to kill him, and he was shocked. Dovid did not understand why he deserved such a severe punishment. Superficially, it happened because Avshalom was born from a captive woman, but why did Dovid deserve this? Moreover, we know that Hashem punishes measure for measure. How was the rebellion of Avshalom measure for measure for Dovid's sin in taking Bas Sheva?

It seems that not only Dovid but Chazal as well were perplexed at the severity of this punishment. The Gemara (Berachos 10a) explains that the third chapter of Tehillim, which is about Avshalom, was juxtaposed to the second, which is about Gog and Magog, so that in case someone asks, "Is there such a thing as a servant rebelling against his master?" - one can reply to him, "Is there such a thing as a son rebelling against his father? Indeed there was, so this too can be." Chazal are saying that there is something unbelievable about the rebellion of Avshalom, and that same unbelievable aspect is present in the rebellion of Gog and Magog. But what is that unbelievable aspect? And what exactly is the rebellion of Gog and Magog?

Avshalom's rebellion ended with a war between Dovid's men and the rest of the Jewish people, who followed Avshalom. This war took place in a forest. The main body of the Jewish people, although vastly superior in manpower, lost the war because "the forest ate more of them than did the sword on that day" (Shmuel II 18:8). The Targum Yonasan, quoted by Rashi, explains this to mean that the animals of the forest ate them. Why did the animals eat Avshalom's men and not Dovid's men? And why did this happen in the war between Avshalom and Dovid, and not in any other war in history?

To answer all these questions, let us go back and study the sin of Bas Sheva. How could Dovid Hamelech, the great tzaddik, steal another man's wife? Of course, Dovid made sure that she was technically not married (Shabbos 56a), but that does not explain why he would do such a thing. As Nossan the Prophet said, Dovid was comparable to a rich man who steals a poor man's only sheep. Dovid already had many wives; why did he have to take away a man's only wife and have that man killed, merely because he was attracted to her? Is this what we would expect of a tzaddik?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 107a) provides the answer: “Bas Sheva was destined for David from the six days of Creation...but he ate her unripe.” When Dovid looked at Bas Sheva, he immediately realized that she was destined to be his wife, and that Shlomo Hamelech, the entire dynasty and, eventually, moshiach would come out of her. He therefore took steps to marry her as soon as possible. His sin was that he made too much effort and married her too soon. He violated the oath against “forcing the end” by taking physical steps to bring the moshiach and the redemption too soon. Had he waited, Hashem would have brought Bas Sheva to him in the right time.

Now we understand why Avshalom’s rebellion was the appropriate punishment for this. Avshalom attempted an even more serious violation of the oaths. He was the oldest remaining son of the king, yet the king had promised the kingdom to his baby son Shlomo, son of Bas Sheva. Avshalom wanted to usurp the throne from his father in his lifetime so that Shlomo would not inherit it. Since the dynasty of Dovid leading to moshiach could only come through Shlomo, Avshalom was really rebelling against moshiach and attempting to take over his role. This is analogous to the oath that prohibits the Jewish people from “going up as a wall” – taking over Eretz Yisroel before moshiach comes, an act that usurps and displaces the role of moshiach. This explains why the people who followed Avshalom were consumed by wild animals – the exact punishment prescribed by the Gemara (Kesubos 111a), based on Shir Hashirim 2:7, for violating the oaths.

Although Dovid was also guilty of violating one of the oaths, the men who defended him had no part in this violation, so they were not eaten by the animals. Had Dovid himself participated in the battle, he might have been in danger; therefore Hashem arranged that he should stay behind (Shmuel II 18:3). But Avshalom’s followers all shared in the violation of the oath, since they wanted to establish him as king in replacement of the dynasty of Dovid, Shlomo and moshiach.

In passing, this explains another enigma: why was Shlomo Hamelech, of all the prophets of Tanach, the one who expressed the Three Oaths? According to what we are saying now, Shlomo realized that he had sparked the entire rebellion of Avshalom. When he, as a baby, was declared Dovid’s successor, Avshalom and the people rebelled, and they were punished with wild animals. Shlomo looked at the history of his own life and said, “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, not to usurp the role of my descendent, moshiach, or else you will meet the same fate that befell those who attempted to prevent me from inheriting the kingdom – you will be eaten like the gazelles and deer of the field!”

Now let us return to the Gemara’s comparison in Berachos 10a between Avshalom’s rebellion and that of Gog and Magog. Tehillim Chapter 2 begins as follows: “Why do the nations make noise, and the peoples speak vainly? The kings of the earth stand up, and leaders meet together, against Hashem and against his moshiach. Let us cut off their reins and throw off from us their ropes. He Who sits in heaven laughs, Hashem mocks them.” These verses are usually understood as describing a war waged by the gentile nations, led by a king named Gog, against the Jewish people, led by moshiach. But it is known that in November 1947, when the United Nations voted to establish a Jewish state, the Brisker Rov paced back and forth in his room and said these verses over and over (Uvdos Vehanhagos Leveis Brisk v. 4 p. 207, based on the testimony of Rabbi Dovid Soloveitchik).

Some religious Jews also rejoiced over the U.N. resolution. The faithful Jews of Jerusalem were very troubled by this, and they decided to post signs describing the Torah view on the current situation. They came to ask the Brisker Rov how they should word the signs. Right away, he opened up a Tehillim to Chapter 2 and said, “Here Dovid Hamelech describes our situation: ‘The kings of the earth stand up, and leaders meet together, against Hashem and against His moshiach.’ We must strengthen ourselves in our belief that the exile was decreed upon us by Hashem Yisborach, and we must wait patiently for Him to redeem us and save us through moshiach. We must pass the tests. Then we will merit to see Hashem’s laughter at the wicked and their false redemption, as Dovid Hamelech continues, “He Who sits in heaven will laugh, Hashem will mock them.” (ibid. p. 195)

Clearly, the Brisker Rov understood that the war of the nations of the world against moshiach, as described in this chapter of Tehillim, does not mean an actual war, but rather an attempt to usurp moshiach’s role by establishing a Jewish state. Gog and Magog – the United Nations - rebelled against Hashem by interfering in the history of the Jewish people, replacing their long-awaited messianic redemption with something else.

Therefore, centuries before the era of Zionism, Chazal said: Perhaps someone will wonder at this chapter of Tehillim and say, “Is there such a thing as a servant rebelling against his master?” Of course servants sometimes rebel against their masters, but the question is: Could it really be that the nations of the world, who are called the servants of Hashem, would rebel against their Master in this particular way – by giving moshiach’s role away to someone else? The next chapter of Tehillim answers this question: Just as Avshalom rebelled against his father and attempted to take away moshiach’s role, so too the nations of the world will one day try to do this.

Now we can answer the first question, asked by Dovid himself: why did he deserve such a severe punishment – that his own son should try to kill him? The answer is that if the rebellion had been a minor one, leaving Dovid alive to bequeath his throne to Shlomo, it would not have interfered with the coming of moshiach or violated the oaths, and this would not have been a measure-for-measure punishment.

There is another parallel here to Zionism. Just as Dovid Hamelech’s minor sin of making an effort to bring moshiach too soon by taking Bas Sheva led to Avshalom’s major sin of completely displacing moshiach, the history of Zionism took a similar course. It began with Rabbi Hirsch Kalischer and the Chovevei Tzion, who wanted to settle Eretz Yisroel with the goal of bringing moshiach closer. They said clearly that they did not desire a state, an army or wars, merely to farm the land and hasten the redemption. But this led to the Zionist movement, whose goal was not to hasten moshiach’s coming but to replace it entirely with a political and military movement.

Achisofel became Avshalom’s adviser, and had his advice been followed, perhaps Avshalom would have succeeded in thwarting the coming of moshiach. When Achisofel saw that his advice was not followed, he went home and hanged himself. This story had an echo in our time, but in the opposite direction. James Forrestal was Secretary of Defense under President Truman, and he

advised Truman again and again to oppose the creation of a Jewish state. Eventually Truman fired him and he went home and hanged himself (on May 22, 1949).

Just as Dovid Hamelech triumphed in the end, we believe with complete faith in the coming of moshiach, and we are confident that the Zionist replacement will not endure.

Ki Seitzei 5770

You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the Heavens; do not forget. (25:19)

Why does the Torah command us to destroy Amalek, while in Parshas Beshalach (Shemos 17:14) Hashem promises that He Himself will do the job? Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum explained that certainly, Hashem will help us. But since the war against Amalek is essentially a spiritual war against those who deny Hashem, we cannot sit with our hands folded and simply pray for Amalek's downfall. We must take the initiative ourselves, and then Hashem guarantees that we will be successful. The knowledge of our guaranteed success, since "Hashem has sworn that His name will not be complete and His throne will not be complete until Amalek's name is wiped out," will boost our morale as we begin the battle ourselves.

The entire story of Amalek's attack on Israel is a very strange one. Usually wars are fought over territory, but here Israel had never threatened Amalek's territory in any way. As the Ramban says, "The reason why Amalek was sentenced to a punishment worse than all the other nations is that at that time, all the nations heard about the parting of the sea and they trembled. The Philistines, Edom, Moav and the Canaanites melted away with fear of Hashem and His glorious majesty. Amalek, on the other hand, came specially from afar, as if to fight against Hashem. As the Torah describes it, 'He did not fear G-d.' Furthermore, he should have known better since he was a descendent of Esav, closely related to the Jewish people. Yet he got involved in a fight that was not his own." And the fact that Hashem swore that His name and throne depend on the destruction of Amalek shows clearly this was not a simple war between two nations; it was a war and a rebellion against Hashem's kingdom, a war of defilement against holiness, of kefirah against emunah.

This is why our response to Amalek has to be so strong. When the battleground is any other aspect of Torah, there is sometimes room for compromise; human life supercedes most mitzvos. But for our emunah we must fight with mesirus nefesh.

This is the meaning of the Gemara in Makos 23b: "Rabbi Simlai expounded: 613 mitzvos were given to Moshe... Dovid came and reduced them to 11... Yishaya came reduced them to 6... Chavakuk (2:4) came and reduced them to one: The tzaddik lives on his emunah." Of course the Gemara does not mean that these prophets actually reduced the Torah - we know that the Torah can never change. Rather, it means that our strategy for maintaining the Torah in the face of adversity is comparable to military strategy. In battle, sometimes the smartest thing to do is to retreat to save lives, but there are certain crucial positions that an army simply cannot afford to lose, and will therefore put everything on the line to maintain them. So too, Chavakuk saw that in future generations, and especially in the time immediately preceding the arrival of moshiach, Jews will have difficulty keeping all the mitzvos, and he declared, "Always remember that the

one mitzvah you must maintain at any price is emunah." All mitzvos have meaning only through emunah, as the Ramban (on Shemos 13:16) says, "The purpose of all the mitzvos is that we should believe in our G-d and acknowledge that He created us." And the Chofetz Chaim used to say, "Without emunah, all the mitzvos are just mud."

Amalek aimed his arrows chiefly at Israel's emunah in Hashem and in Moshe. That is why Moshe's arms grew heavy (Shemos 17:12) but he kept them faithful (emunah) until the setting of the sun. The Ramban (Shemos 17:9) quotes the Pirkei Derabbi Eliezer's description of the battle: "All of Israel left their tents and saw Moshe kneeling and they kneeled; they saw him fall on his face and they fell on their faces; they saw him spread out his hands heavenward and they spread out their hands heavenward. Whatever prayers Moshe, the shliach tzibbur, recited, they repeated after him. Then the Holy One, blessed is He, defeated Amalek under the hand of Yehoshua." Since Amalek's purpose was to weaken emunah, they defeated him by strengthening their emunah.

The outcome of the war was that "Yehoshua weakened Amalek" - it was not a decisive victory, only a temporary one. The war against Amalek will continue from generation to generation (Shemos 17:16). (Kol Yaakov, pp. 26-33)

Now that we understand that Amalek's attack was essentially an attack on emunah, we can understand what Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman writes: "The Torah teaches here that this war against Amalek exists in all generations until the coming of Moshiach. However, the Amalek is not always the same. In the olden days when the Jewish people was ruled only by Torah, the enemies were the descendants of Amalek in the gentile world. But ever since we have thrown off the yoke of the Torah, the seed of Amalek thrives in our midst." He goes on to say that the Zionist leaders are today's Amalek. (Omer Ani Maasai Lemelech, paragraphs 5-6)

Indeed, Zionism is the only movement ever faced by the Jewish people that has been an attack chiefly on emunah and not on the observance of mitzvos. We have suffered under governments that forbade mitzvos and forced Jews to abandon the Torah in favor of another religion, or no religion at all. But the Zionist state allows Jews to keep mitzvos - knowing that mitzvos contribute to their Jewish image in the world - while deviously weaning Jews away from their emunah in Hashem as the only One who can dictate when Jews should be in exile and when they should be redeemed.

When faced with this trial, we must remember that the Torah commands us to take action in initiating the battle against Amalek. Only then can we rely on Hashem's promise to come to our aid and grant us success.

Ki Savo 5767

קומי אורי כי בא אורך וכבוד ה' עליך זרה. (ישעיהו ס,א)

Arise and light up, for your light has come, and the glory of Hashem has shined upon you. (Yishaya 60:1)

Rabbi Yochanan said: This may be compared to a traveler who was walking on the road at dawn when it was still dark. Someone came and lit a candle for him, but it went out. Then another person lit a candle for him, but it too went out. The traveler said: "From now on I will wait only for the morning light." So too, Israel said to the Holy One, blessed is He: "We made for You a menorah in the days of Moshe, but it went out. We made another menorah in the days of Shlomo Hamelech, but it went out. From now on we are waiting only for Your light, as it says (Tehillim 36:10), "For with You is the source of life; by Your light do we see light." (Yalkut Shimoni Nach, 499)

The Holy One, blessed is He, said: "In this world you were saved by humans: in Egypt by Moshe and Aharon, in the time of Sisera by Devorah and Barak, in the time of the Midyanites by the Judges. Since they were human, you went back into captivity afterwards. But in the future, I Myself will redeem you, and you will never again go into captivity, as it says (Yishaya 45:17), "Israel is saved by Hashem with an everlasting redemption." (Yalkut Shimoni Nach 577)

These Midrashim say that the earlier redemptions and earlier Temples were not permanent because they were built by humans, but the future redemption and the future Temple will be built by G-d and so it will be permanent. But one is left with the question: why did G-d want history to proceed this way? Why didn't He redeem Israel Himself and build the Temple Himself from the start? Why did the first two Temples have to be built, only to be destroyed later?

The Yismach Moshe (Tetzaveh) explains this with the analogy of a man who planted a tree, uprooted it, planted another tree, uprooted it, and finally planted a third tree, more beautiful than the other two. People asked him why he did not just plant the third tree from the start, and he explained that the earth had not been rich enough to support such a tree. He therefore planted the first two trees, which drew the proper nutrients to the place and laid the groundwork for the third tree. Similarly, G-d wanted the first two Temples to pave the way for the third. This is the meaning of the verse, "You bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, a foundation for Your dwelling You have made, Hashem, a Temple which Your hands have founded, Hashem" (Shemos 15:17). The Temple "which Your hands have founded" is the Third Temple, which will come down completely built by G-d. The first two Temples are a "foundation" for the third.

The Yitav Lev (Toldos) asks: Seemingly the analogy is not perfect, because while the man has to prepare the ground before planting the tree, G-d is all-powerful and could have created the Third Temple right away. He answers that yes, G-d could have done it, but then the Jewish people would not have enjoyed the redemption as much, since they would not have earned it. There is a Talmudic principle that "one who eats that which is not his is embarrassed to look in the giver's face" (Yerushalmi Orlah 1:3). A person only gets pleasure when he earns what he enjoys. Thus, the Third Temple must be preceded by a long exile in which the Jewish people has an opportunity to prove their faith in G-d and thus earn the redemption. To strengthen their faith, they turn to their holy books and study their history, the great days when the first and second Temples stood, when G-d's presence was manifest in the world, when there were prophets and miracles. G-d wanted the first two Temples to exist in order to pave the way for the Jewish people to remain faithful during the long exile.

With this in mind, the Yitav Lev explains the verses in the book of Eichah (3:18-23): "And I said, my future is lost, my hope from Hashem...this I reply to my heart, therefore I

hope...renewed each morning, great is your faithfulness." During the long exile, a Jew sometimes wonders if all hope is not lost. Year after year we wait, and the redemption does not come. But then he replies to his heart: the exile has an important purpose, and that is to remain faithful to G-d, to continue to believe in His redemption, and thereby to earn that redemption.

The Midrash says that when the redemption finally does come, G-d will say to the Jewish people, "My children! I am amazed at you – how did you wait for Me so many years?" They will reply: "Master of the World! If not for the Torah You gave us, we would have become lost among the nations." (Midrash Eichah 3:19)

Waiting for the redemption is indeed a great test, and even G-d will be amazed if we succeed. The only path to success, says the Midrash, is to study and pay close attention to the holy Torah.

Ki Savo 5769

**And Hashem will scatter you among all the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other.
(28:64)**

The Tanna Devei Eliyahu (10) relates that a priest once said to Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, "We are more merciful than you. When you had the ability to destroy us, you left over only the women, as it says, 'For Yoav and all of Israel dwelt there six months, until they had killed all the males of Edom' (I Melachim 11:16). [But you are living in exile among us for many years, and we let you live.]" Rabbi Yehuda said nothing, but walked outside and called one of his students to come in and answer the priest. The student said, "The owner of the house knows where to keep his tools. And when the owner of the house comes back to his house, he will bring his tools with him into the house." He said this again, and then a third time, until the priest understood what he meant.

Immediately, the priest stood up, lifted his two hands to heaven and said, "Blessed is the Omnipresent, blessed is He, who chose you, Israel, over all the people of the world and over all His creations, and acquired you permanently, and called you His children and servants, and called you a people, an inheritance, and a treasure to His name, and scattered you in many hundreds of places. When we met to plan to destroy you, we said, 'If we kill those in Eretz Yisroel, who will kill those in the north and the south? And in this manner our plans are abandoned.' Truly, the Owner of the house knows where to keep His tools, and when the Owner comes home, He will bring His tools into the house."

The Gemara (Shabbos 119a) tells the story of a man named Yosef, who was known to all as Yosef Mokir Shabbos (Yosef Who Honors Shabbos). Yosef and his family lived on bread and water all week long so that they could spend their meager income honoring the Shabbos with fine food and beautiful clothing. In Yosef's neighborhood there lived a rich and miserly gentile. The stargazers warned this gentile that all of his property would one day go to Yosef. So he sold all of his property, bought an expensive pearl and sewed it into his hat. One day, as he was walking on a bridge, a gust of wind blew the hat off his head and into the river. A fish then came and swallowed the pearl. Late Friday afternoon, the fish was caught and brought to the marketplace. But no Jew bought it – everyone had already bought their Shabbos fish. So someone suggested to the fishermen that they go to Yosef Mokir Shabbos. Yosef bought the fish, cut it open and found the precious pearl, which he sold for twelve attics full of gold coins. An old man met him and commented, "When one loans to Shabbos, Shabbos pays back."

There are two questions here: 1) For the lesson of the story - that Shabbos pays back - it would have been sufficient to say that Yosef found the pearl in the fish. Why does the Gemara need to tell us the history of the pearl – that it came from a rich man who sold all his property to buy it? 2) Why indeed did Yosef buy the fish? If it was so late in the day and all the other Jews already had fish, surely Yosef had fish too. If so, how did his purchase of this fish honor Shabbos?

The answer is that aside from the simple meaning of the story, Chazal had a deeper lesson to teach here. When the rich man heard that he was in danger of losing his property, his reaction was to concentrate all his wealth in one small object, thinking that it would then be easier to guard. The truth, however, was that this was a terrible mistake. It is never good to put all the eggs in one basket. The smart thing would have been to spread his wealth around the world in different investments.

But there is a third, even more foolproof way to protect one's assets: by doing mitzvos with the money. The Gemara (Bava Basra 11a) tells the story of King Munbaz, the convert to Judaism who used all of his wealth and the wealth accumulated by his royal predecessors to support the poor during a year of famine. His brothers and family complained, "Your fathers added to the wealth accumulated by their fathers, and you are wasting it all?" Munbaz replied: "My fathers stored it below, but I am storing it above. My fathers stored it in a place where the hand of others can reach, but I am storing it in a place where no one can take it away. My fathers stored it in a place where it does not bear fruit, but I am storing it in a place where it does bear fruit. My fathers stored money but I am storing souls. My fathers stored it up to leave it for others but I am storing it for myself. My fathers stored it for this world, but I am storing it for the World to Come."

If the rich man's approach to protecting his wealth represented the extreme of foolhardiness, Yosef Mokir Shabbos's approach was the extreme of wisdom. He spent almost all his money on Shabbos, and even when he had extra money, he bought more fish for Shabbos, so that it would be considered spent on a mitzvah. Thus it was fitting that the foolish rich man should lose his money to the wise Yosef.

In confronting the danger faced by Jews in exile, the Zionists have adopted the approach of the rich man in the story. They think that bringing all the Jews of the world to one small state will make it easier to protect them. They do not realize that scattering the Jews around the world was Hashem's plan to protect them, as the Tanna Devei Eliyahu says. Furthermore, they do not realize that the wisest investment for Jews in exile is to devote themselves to Torah and mitzvos, and leave their physical protection up to Hashem.

Nitzavim 5767

"You stand here today before Hashem your G-d." (Devarim 29:9)

Rashi (on v. 12) says: When Israel heard the 98 curses at the end of last week's parsha, in addition to the 49 curses in Vayikra, their faces turned green and they said, "Who can survive these?" Moshe then began to comfort them: "You have already angered G-d a lot, yet He has not totally destroyed you. Just as the day gets brighter and darker at various times, so too G-d shined His light upon you and in the future will again shine His light upon you. These curses and afflictions are what keep you alive and allow you to stand before Him."

Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman explained that the reason affliction allows the Jewish people to survive is because of the principle stated in the book of Koheles (3:15), "G-d looks after the pursued."

"At a time when anti-Semites raise their voices against the Jewish people," Rabbi Wasserman wrote in the 1930's, "and advocate our total destruction, G-d forbid, then we begin to be persecuted and chased, and this triggers the principle that 'G-d looks after the pursued' – which applies no matter what, even when the pursuer is righteous and the pursued is wicked. G-d's attribute of justice, whatever claims it may have against the Jewish people, cannot argue with this principle, it is silenced, and thus the Jews are saved from total destruction.

"We see from this that our whole strength and survival depends on us being in the role of the persecuted. G-d forbid for us to try to become persecutors! One of the three oaths that G-d made the Jewish people swear is "do not rebel against the nations" (Kesubos 111a). "Some come with chariots and some with horses, but we call in the name of Hashem our G-d." (Tehillim 20:8) (Article entitled "The Calm Words of the Wise are Heard," printed in Yalkut Maamarim Umichtavim, p. 159)

The words of Rashi together with Rabbi Wasserman's explanation seem to be a prophetic description of our era. After seeing the 98 curses – the terrible destruction experienced by European Jewry – many Jews said, "Who can survive these? We can no longer tolerate this exile. Let us found a state in order to prevent another Holocaust." The Torah tells them, no! It is precisely the exile that allows you to survive. G-d takes care of the persecuted. If you turn the tables and become persecutors of other peoples, who knows if G-d will protect you?"

Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5769

Lest there be among you a man or woman, family or tribe, whose heart turns aside from Hashem our G-d...and when he hears the words of this curse he will bless himself in his heart, saying, I will have peace, for I will walk in the waywardness of my heart...Hashem will not be willing to forgive him, for then the anger and jealousy of Hashem will burn against this man, and the entire curse written in this book will rest upon him, and Hashem will blot out his name from under the heavens. (Devarim 29:17-19)

The "curse" refers to the prophecy of exile in Devarim 28:15-68. If the entire Jewish people will go into exile, why does this man think he will avoid it by walking in the waywardness of his heart? And what does it mean that Hashem will punish this man by giving him the entire curse – did not the whole Jewish people receive this punishment of exile?

The Ksav Sofer resolves these problems by saying that the exile is atonement for the sins of the Jewish people, as we see in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 44:21) that Avraham Avinu chose the exile in lieu of Gehinom. By virtue of their suffering the exile, they are spared punishment in the World to Come. The wicked Jew says that by throwing off the yoke of Torah observance and assimilating with the gentiles, he will be able to escape from the suffering of exile. The Torah tells us here that not only will he not be successful, but he will lose his atonement as well. "Hashem will not be willing to forgive him" as he forgives the rest of the Jewish people when they suffer the exile. "The entire curse will rest upon him" – he will suffer the exile just like all the other Jews – "and Hashem will blot out his name from under the heavens" – he will be banned from the World to Come as well.

The Ksav Sofer is clearly referring to the Reformers and Maskilim of his time, who thought that Jews could alleviate their suffering by assimilation. However, the same would apply to Zionists, even religious ones, who think that they can throw off the yoke of exile on their own. According to the Ksav Sofer, they will suffer exile in spite of their efforts, and moreover they will not reap the benefits of exile: atonement and escape from Gehinom.

It is interesting to note that the Zionist movement gained momentum in the late 1800s among “repentant” Maskilim who saw that their movement was not helping to save them from exile. The Russian pogroms of the 1870s and 1880s, in which the attackers made no distinction between enlightened Jews and religious ones, forced them to rethink their position. But their solution was not to return to Torah, but rather to find another way to escape exile: by founding their own country and learning to fight.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik once described the transition from Haskalah to Nationalism in a letter: "Not only my grandfather [the Netziv] supported the founding of settlements in Eretz Yisroel, but I myself liked the idea for a long time; however, the actions of the students from Charkov caused me to withhold my support. I always remember that great day [Jan. 21, 1882] when the students of several universities gathered in the great synagogue of Kiev. They fasted all day and confessed their sins, that they had become estranged from Judaism. And they came out with the slogan, "House of Jacob, let us go!" If only there had been someone who had said at that high moment, "Let us return to Hashem! Come, brothers, let us begin to be careful about keeping Shabbos and kashrus." Nothing of the sort. All of them remained the same irreligious people they had always been. They came to Eretz Yisroel and did not improve their ways even a bit. But they crowned Ben Yehuda as their teacher, and they spread in our holy land heresy and lawlessness. Certainly we must oppose Zionism." (Printed in the periodical Dagleinu, 5720, and in the book Mara D'ara Yisroel, v. 2 p. 18.)

Herzl too conceived of Zionism after observing anti-Semitism in France during the Dreyfus trial. Prior to that he had proposed other “solutions” to the problem of exile, such as assimilation and conversion to Christianity. But after the Dreyfus trial he understood that, as the Ksav Sofer says, assimilation will not solve the problem of anti-Semitism.

Instead, he proposed another way of running away from exile, not realizing that his new plan was just as doomed to failure as his old plans.

The Shelah (Parshas Lech Lecha) quotes two Midrashim about the Four Exiles, one saying that they are alluded to in the first verses of Bereishis, and the other saying that they were shown to Avraham at the Covenant Between the Parts. The Shelah asks why these unhappy events had to be mentioned at such times. Seemingly, at a time when the world or the Jewish people is being built, the Torah should focus on the good, saving punishments and misfortune for another time.

He answers that since man is imperfect, the exiles are a necessary element of the building of the world and of the Jewish people. Just as in the laws of Shabbos, a destructive act is considered work only if it leads directly to a constructive act, so too the exile is ultimately not destructive but accomplishes the purification of the Jewish people and of the entire world, to prepare it for the purpose of creation, the messianic era.

We say in Tehillim (30:2), "I will exalt You, Hashem, for You have lifted me up (dilisani)." The Shelah (Parshas Balak) comments that the root letters daled-lamed have two meanings – poverty and uplifting – because the poverty, the misfortunes of exile, are the reason for future uplifting. The Jewish people are children of Hashem (Devarim 14:1), and even when Hashem is angry with us and brings destruction, it is for our own good. "As a man chastises his son, Hashem chastises you." (Devarim 8:5) The purpose of the misfortunes is the purification in the refinery of the exile: to destroy sin and be clean, without impurities, for the future.

The Jewish people accepted several oaths, which contain the terms and regulations of exile. Rabbi Moshe Hager, the Kossover Rebbe (in Leket Ani, Chayei Olam), says that the reason for the oaths is that every Jew must accept upon himself the yoke of exile lovingly, until the time of the redemption arrives. The exile is of great importance, because it atones for the sin of Adam eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Furthermore, exile was chosen by Avraham Avinu at the Covenant Between the Parts to spare us from Gehinom. We must not try to force the hour, for in so doing we will really just be delaying the redemption - G-d will in any case make us return to exile to serve the remainder of our term.

With this in mind, says the Kossover Rebbe, we can explain the two versions of the text in Kesubos 111a as being identical in meaning. According to one version, G-d adjured the Jewish people not to force (yidchaku) the end of exile. According to the other version, the oath was not to delay (yerachaku) the end of exile. Seemingly these two versions are opposites, but according to the above, the oath forbids pushing for the end, since by so doing we will really be delaying the end.

Rosh Hashanah 5768

And it was the day, and the angels came to stand against G-d, and the Satan also came among them. (Iyov 1:6)

The Zohar (Bamidbar 231a) says that "the day" means Rosh Hashanah, when G-d judges the world. The "angels" are the Heavenly Court, the seventy angels appointed over the seventy nations of the world. What does it mean that they came to "stand against G-d"? The first and most important subject on which people are judged is whether they give honor to G-d's name. If they did not give honor to G-d's name, His servants and the Torah, then they are considered standing against G-d. This includes anyone who did not care or do anything about the desecration of G-d's holy name in the earth.

What does this statement of the Zohar have to do with the story of Iyov? We continue reading: G-d said to the Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Iyov? There is none like him in the earth, a clean and upright man, who fears G-d and turns away from evil." The Satan said, "He is only righteous because he is enjoying prosperity. But if You stretch out Your hand and take away all that is his, he will surely curse You." The Gemora (Bava Basra 16a) explains that the Satan's intent was to defend Avraham Avinu, who lived at the same time as Iyov. G-d was praising Iyov more highly than Avraham (Avraham was called only "one who fears G-d" – Bereishis 22:12 whereas Iyov was given that praise plus three other praises), so the Satan proposed to test Iyov to show that he was not as great.

In the end, Iyov complained that G-d had punished him unfairly, and G-d said (38:2), "Who is this who darkens My counsel with thoughtless words? I wrote such great things about you in the beginning of this book, and you have ruined it all." Iyov replied, "You hid Your intentions. Had I known that this was all a test, I would not have said the things I said." G-d said, "Avraham did not know that his Ten Tests were tests, and yet he withstood them." (Rashi)

Iyov may have been more righteous than Avraham Avinu. But in the judgment of Rosh Hashanah, Avraham was favored, because the first subject of judgment is, as the Zohar says, whether a person gives honor to G-d's name or sits by idly while others desecrate it. Avraham lived in a time when the world was steeped in idolatry. He had the courage to stand up and proclaim that the idols were worthless and only G-d had power. He was willing to be thrown into a furnace in order to give honor to G-d's name.

"There were ten generations from Noach till Avraham, and all were sinful, until Avraham came and took the reward of all of them." (Avos 5:2) The Gemora (Chagigah 15a) says that every person starts out with one portion in Gan Eden and one portion in Gehinom. When one person becomes righteous and another wicked, the righteous one gets his own portion plus the wicked one's portion in Gan Eden, while the wicked person gets his own portion plus the righteous one's portion in Gehinom. Why this transfer of portions? The answer is that in order for a tzaddik to be a tzaddik, he must overcome the influence of the wicked. Avraham came into the world after the idolatrous ideology had already been built up for ten generations. To reach his goal of giving honor to G-d's name in the world, he had to counteract the cumulative effect of all those generations, so he deserved to get their portion of Gan Eden.

So we see that the great mitzvah of kiddush hashem, giving honor and holiness to G-d's name, is our key to emerging from Rosh Hashanah with a favorable verdict for two reasons: it is first subject of judgment, as the Zohar says, and it entitles us to get not only our own reward but also the reward lost by the people whose influence we are counteracting. For a century now the Zionists have been building up their ideology and now, with all their religious newspapers and propaganda books, they are stronger than ever. Fortunate is he who comes and denounces this idolatry!

We say in the morning prayers, "A man should always be G-d-fearing in secret and in public...sanctify Your name through those who sanctify Your name, and sanctify Your name in the world...blessed is He who sanctifies His name in public." What do we mean by asking G-d to sanctify His name through those who sanctify His name? If they already sanctify His name, what is there left to ask for? Furthermore, it seems that the ending of the prayer "blessed is He who sanctifies His name in public" does not match its beginning, contrary to the general rules of blessings.

The Shibbolei Haleket raises the question of whether to say the words "in secret" in the above prayer, because it would seem to imply that a person need only fear G-d in secret. His conclusion is that the words "in secret" are an integral part of the prayer and stem from its origin - according to the Tanna Dvei Eliyahu (chapter 21), this prayer was composed in a time when Torah was scarce and the government had passed decrees against keeping the Torah. Then a Jew should at least be G-d-fearing and keep the Torah in secret. But we know that that is not enough – the purpose of the world is to sanctify G-d's name in public. In such difficult times, when we sanctify His name only in secret, we pray: "Sanctify Your name in public through those who are now able to sanctify Your name only in private. Blessed is He Who will in the future sanctify His name in public!"

Faithful Jews have always been opposed to Zionism, but for many decades that opposition has remained largely hidden from the world at large. Our organization has been making efforts for several years to bring the sanctification of G-d's name into the public realm. We have had, thank G-d, a good measure of success, but our expenses are very high. As this Rosh Hashanah approaches, we ask our friends and supporters to continue funding our activities, and in this merit may they be inscribed for a good and sweet new year, and be blessed in all their endeavors.

Tzom Gedaliah 5771

From Horeb, p. 144-145.

The city had been captured, the Temple _____ destroyed, the core of the people had been led to Babylon; the _____ the conqueror had abated, he was displaying a gentler attitude toward the remnant of Israel, and he now allowed them to remain in _____ and appointed, from their own midst, Gedaliah, son of Achikam, as their leader. Gedaliah understood well the task of Israel in their relationship to the nations into whose hands G-d had given them – to be naught but willingly obedient, showing by this attitude surrender to G-d and acknowledgment of the power which G-d used in chastisement – to

yield readily to the divine scheme which G-d had brought to fruition by means of the galuth – to be good, loyal and useful subjects and compatriots of king and country and to leave it to G-d to incline the heart of princes and peoples to lovingkindness so that they might be mindful that suffering man was their conquest, and might learn to heal the wounds which they themselves had inflicted. This was the meaning of Jeremiah's pronouncement of G-d's will to the exiles of Babylon: 'And seek the peace of the city wither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the L-rd for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.' (Jer. 29:7) This surrender by Zedekiah to the divine scheme, even during the siege, was demanded as the toll for the preservation of the city and the Temple, and for their own survival. For this reason Gedaliah, as a Babylonian official, adjured them that they should always serve the Chaldean state loyally, 'and it shall be well with thee.' But "the remnant of the people" that stayed behind could not rise to this willing, ready yielding to the divine scheme, Ishmael, son of Nathaniel, cursed be his memory, arose and, spurred on by jealousy and foreign influence, ignoring the will of his overlord, the king of Babylon, and in defiance of him, treacherously killed Gedaliah and all the Jews and Chaldeans that were around him. And yet those who remained, although not of such a wicked disposition, stilled shared a deep-rooted tendency not to submit to G-d's guidance, and, although robbed of all outer independence, wanted to establish their affairs upon a basis of human independence. This became manifest again in the opposition, in which all concurred, to G-d's command, declared to them by the mouth of Jeremiah, to wait for the clemency of Nebuchadnezzar, even then, despite their deep sinfulness, and to remain in the land and be obedient, submissive subjects. The downfall of all of them because of the path they chose in their own willfulness was the result of their folly which would recognize as G-d's will only that which coincided with their own immediate wishes (Jeremiah 38-44).

The admonition: So against what does Tzom Gedaliah warn us? 1) It warns us against the folly that in the galuth Israel must wrest its independence by its own efforts, as if in its wanderings through its age-old wilderness it was thrown back solely upon itself and therefore had solely of itself to free itself, as far as it could, from the chains of suffering that held it in thrall. 2) Throughout the many centuries it proclaims to the generations of Israel the warning: "Remain true to the land which has accepted you, to the Ruler Who protects you! It is G-d Who leads you everywhere and is with you everywhere. In this great trek through the wilderness too, G-d goes before you unseen and points out to you where to stay and which places to avoid. Give yourselves up entirely to Him, and show this surrender in loyal attachment to your protecting Ruler and Realm, and in resigned obedience even to your oppressors. Thus will He incline their hearts to loving kindness and the length of your suffering will eased."

Haazinu 5770

And He will say, where are their gods, the rock in which they trusted, who ate the fat of their offerings, and drank the wine of their libations? Let them arise and help you, and be a shield to you! (32:37-38)

This prophecy about the final stage of exile foretells that the Jews will be worshipping idols at that time. Idolatry does not mean only the worship of statues – it means any denial of G-d's control over the world and attribution of that control to other forces or entities. In that context Zionism, with its claim that the Jewish people are in exile only because of their own weakness and can redeem themselves on their own initiative and with their own power, is a form of idolatry.

When Moses Mendelssohn died in 1786, the Noda Biyehuda said that Mendelssohn had the recycled soul of the founder of Christianity. Both were Jews who brought a Jewish idolatry into the world and wrought great destruction. The Noda Biyehuda prayed (or, according to another version of the story, decreed) that the soul should never come back into the world again. When Herzl founded the political Zionist movement in 1897, the Shinnover Rebbe said, “The Noda Biyehuda’s prayer was evidently not accepted. He is back again!”

Similarly, Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk said, “Zionism is a second Christianity, and Herzl is much worse than the founder of Christianity.” (Om Ani Chomah, Sivan 5734, quoted in Mishkenos Haro'im p. 391)

The Shinnover added that Rabbi Chaim Vital found an allusion to the founder of Christianity in the verse, “If your brother, the son of your mother, entices you...” (Devarim 13:7). This refers to the Nazarene, who had a Jewish mother and a gentile father (based on the uncensored text of Shabbos 104b). The Shinnover said, “In his second gilgul, he will be “your friend who is like your own heart” as the verse about the enticer continues. In Yiddish, this translates to “dein hertzel’s friend.”

In the end of days, the Torah foretells in Parshas Nitzavim, the “last generation” of Jews, as well as “the gentile who comes from a faraway land,” will see the desolate condition of Eretz Yisroel and ask, “Why did Hashem do this to this land? Why was this great anger aroused?” And the answer will be that they worshipped idols (29:23-25). The Brisker Rav commented: The worst part of the tragedy described here is that the Jews will be just as ignorant as the gentiles as to what caused the Jewish people’s problems. But note that only the gentiles from faraway lands will be ignorant; the gentiles from Eretz Yisroel will know well what the problem is.

In Parshas Vayeilech, the Torah says that the Jews will repent and say, “Surely because my G-d is not in my midst, these evils have befallen me.” Then the Torah continues, “But I will hide My face on that day, due to all the evil that they did, for they turned to other gods” (31:17-18). The question is: if they are repenting, why does Hashem continue to hide His face from them? The Sforno explains that even when tragedies befall the Jews, they do not turn to Hashem for help. Rather “they try to escape through other means.” In other words, their repentance in the previous verse was only an admission of guilt, but not a resolve to change. For all intents and purposes, they still rely on their “other means.”

What should the few remaining loyal Jews do under such conditions? Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman addresses this question: “At a time like this, such as there never was in all of Jewish history, what should we do? Should we despair of doing anything to change the situation, sit back and wait for Hashem to have mercy and bring back His people? G-d forbid to think so! The Mishnah at the end of Sotah (49b) says, ‘Just before the coming of moshiach, chutzpah will increase... the government will be transformed into heresy, and there will be no one who can rebuke...the wisdom of the sages will become rotten, those who fear sin will be despised, truth will be absent...and what will we have to rely on? Our Father in heaven.’ They say in the name of Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner that just as the rest of the Mishnah lists bad things that will happen, these last words are also a bad thing, the worst of all the curses: that the Jews who fear sin at that time will give up hope and stop fighting the war of Hashem, saying, ‘We will rely on our Father in heaven.’ But this is a terrible mistake. Scripture calls out to us (Tehillim 68:35), ‘Give strength to G-d.’” (Omer Ani Maasai Lamelech, paragraph 7)

In another place, Rabbi Elchonon elaborates on this theme, “Can we fulfill our obligations by saying ‘we have no one to rely upon but our Father in heaven’? He promised us that the Torah would never be forgotten from the Jewish people (Devarim 31:21). Can we simply rely on this promise? True, we have complete faith that impurity will lose its war against holiness, as Scripture says, ‘I will cause the spirit of impurity to pass from the earth’ (Zechariah 13:2). ‘And I will sprinkle on you pure water, and you will be purified’ (Yechezkel 36:25). But this does not exempt us from our obligations.

“As an analogy, if a man were drowning, would anyone ask: ‘What is the point of saving him? We believe that no one even hurts his finger unless it was decided in Heaven that he should hurt it (Chullin 7b). So if it was decreed that this man should die, it will not help to save him, and if was not decreed, he will surely be saved without my help. Hashem has many emissaries.’ This logic is flawed, because we have no business looking into Hashem’s secrets. We must do what we were commanded to do, and let Hashem do what He wishes (Berachos 10a). One must save a drowning man as if his life were dependent only on him. One who refrains from saving him based on the above logic is considered a shedder of blood. The same applies to our subject: we are obligated to save the Torah and the Jewish people, and to act as if Hashem had never promised us anything at all.” (New Kovetz Maamarim, v. 1 p. 237).

Shabbos Rosh Chodesh

Who ever heard anything like this? Who ever saw anything like these things? Can a land go through labor in one day? Can a nation be born all at once? For Zion has gone into labor and born her children. (Haftarah, Yishaya 66:8)

The Midrash at the very end of Shir Hashirim Rabbah says that the Neviim use several metaphors for the redemption of Israel. They compare it to:

1. The grain harvest: “Use the sickle, for the harvest is ripe” (Yoel 4:13).

2. The grape harvest: “On that day, sing to it [Israel], the wine vineyard” (Yishaya 27:2).
3. The spice harvest: “Flee, my Beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young deer, on the mountains of spice” (Shir Hashirim 8:14).
4. A woman giving birth: “Therefore He will place them [the Jews in the hands of their enemies] until the time when the woman gives birth” (Micha 5:2). This metaphor is also found in Yishaya 66:7-8: “Before she went into labor, she bore a child; before any pains came to her, she let out a boy. Who ever heard anything like this? Who ever saw anything like these things? Can a land go through labor in one day? Can a nation be born all at once? For Zion has gone into labor and born her children.” And also in Tehillim 113:9: “He makes the barren woman of the house into a joyful mother of children.”

The Midrash says that the common thread of all these metaphors is that they cannot be done too early. If grain is cut too early, it will not be good even as animal feed. If grapes are cut too early, they will not even be good to make vinegar. If spice is picked too early, it will not have a smell; it must be allowed to dry out on the tree. And if a woman gives birth prematurely, the baby will not live.

The Matnos Kehunah explains: “The meaning of all these analogies is that when Israel hurries the end, they are not successful, but at the proper time, may it be soon, they will be successful. And they will ascend in the name of Hashem, may He be blessed and exalted forever.”

The Yefeh Kol explains: “These things, which are not good before their time, are an analogy for what would happen if Israel breaks through to leave the exile with the strength of their hands, like the children of Ephraim.”

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld used an analogy to explain why premature redemption is not good. Once there was a prince who excelled in all areas and was perfect in every way. He was also the only child of his father, the king, and his father loved him dearly. One day the prince became seriously ill. His father sent for the best doctors and brought them to his hospital bedside, where he stood together with him. Could one imagine that such a wise boy would ask his father and his doctors to free him from the hospital and send him home? And even if he did make such a foolish request, they would not grant it, despite their mercy and love for him. Leaving while not completely recovered would put his life in danger.

We, the Jewish people, are in such a situation. Hashem sent us into exile because of our sins. The exile is the Jewish people’s hospital. It is unthinkable that we should take ourselves power in our land before our healing process is complete. Hashem protects us and shields us while doling out to us the medicine of suffering in exact amounts. We are certain that when the time comes and our healing from our sins is complete, Hashem will not delay even one second, and He Himself will redeem us. Not so if we would hurry to leave the hospital – then a mortal danger, a perpetual danger would hover over us, G-d forbid. And even when we pray for our redemption, we only ask that our healing process

be completed quickly – not that we should return to the King’s palace while still sick, G-d forbid” (Mara D’ara Yisroel v. 1 p. 145).

We can better understand the prophet’s question “can a land go through labor in one day” based on the following Gemara in Gittin 57a: Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav Asi: King Yannai had 600,000 cities in Har Hamelech, and each city had 600,000 Jews, except for three, which had 1,200,000 each... Ulla said: I saw that place and it did not even have enough room for 600,000 reeds. A heretic said to Rabbi Chanina: You are lying when you claim that there were so many people there! Rabbi Chanina replied: Hashem said to the prophet Yirmiyahu (3:19), “I gave you a cherished land, the inheritance of the deer, the hosts of the nations.” Eretz Yisroel is called the land of the deer. Just as a deer's skin cannot cover its flesh once it has been flayed, Eretz Yisroel expands when people dwell on it, and shrivels when no one dwells on it.

Yishaya Hanavi, seeing his vision of the redemption, expressed his wonder not just at the sudden dramatic growth of the Jewish people, but also at the ability Eretz Yisroel will have to absorb them. Eretz Yisroel, in its exilic state, is not a land that can support millions of people, let alone hundreds of millions or billions. Like the skin of the deer, it has shriveled up. A few people can live there and successfully farm the land. But when ten million try to live there, they run into insurmountable obstacles: the water supply is inadequate. The rivers and groundwater become polluted and poisoned.

Those attempting large-scale settlement of Eretz Yisroel during exile fit into one of two categories. Some are like the heretic mentioned in the Gemara. They don’t recognize the difference between a time of exile and a time when the Jewish people is supposed to be living on its land. If the land could support so many people in the Temple era, it should be able to do so today too, they say. To them, Rabbi Chanina responds with the analogy of the deer’s skin. Others understand that there is a process of “labor” that the land must go through, as Yishaya Hanavi says, but they think they can induce this labor early. For them, the Midrash at the end of the Shir Hashirim warns that attempting to bring the redemption early is like a woman giving birth early - the baby will not live.

But the Midrash concludes on a positive note: although we may not bring the redemption ourselves, Hashem Himself might bring it early if we are worthy: “I am Hashem, in its time I will hasten it” (Yishaya 60:22). If we are not worthy, it will happen in its time, but if we are worthy, He will hasten it. So may it be His will, soon in our days, amein.

Yom Kippur 5768

The kohein gadol performed five immersions and ten hand-washings on Yom Kippur. (Yuma Chapter 3, Mishnah 3)

In 1922, the Munkaczer Rebbe, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro, known as the Minchas Elazar, traveled to Gur, Poland to meet with the Gerrer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter. The subject of their meeting was the Agudath Israel organization, which had recently spread to many Polish Chassidic communities, including the Gerrer

community. The Minchas Elazar agreed with the importance of founding a unifying Orthodox organization, but objected to some of the Agudah's innovations, notably their policy of establishing farming colonies in Eretz Yisroel. "This," he said, "is an imitation of the Zionist pioneers, and it serves no purpose for religious Jewry, physical or spiritual. Instead we must support the Old Yishuv through the charity of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, as established by our fathers and teachers." He respectfully told the Gerrer Rebbe that although he might not be aware of everything done by the Agudah, the Agudah activists were using his name and prestige to promote their activities. He proposed to modify the platform of the organization, and then he and other Czechoslovakian and Hungarian rabbis would lead their communities in joining it.

The Gerrer Rebbe replied, "True, this is how it should be. But what will people say? You and I both have enemies, and they will say, 'They met together and suddenly spoiled all the arrangements for the organization that, until now, would encompass the whole world.' Besides, I have no power to do this, according to the Agudah by-laws. How will we do it?"

"You will choose ten rabbis, and I will choose nine rabbis, making a total of 21," said the Minchas Elazar. "You will be the head, and we will meet together in Warsaw no later than the first of Tammuz of this year, to discuss this plan and put it into practice."

The Gerrer Rebbe agreed to the plan. Before leaving, the Minchas Elazar added one final word of caution. "Please do not let any of those close to you who are strong Agudists change this decision that we have reached together."

"Why do you suspect that any of my household or close followers would be against this?" said the Gerrer Rebbe. "We have no personal interest. I am only the honorary president, and our sole objective is to work for the benefit of the public."

"Even the greatest of men can have personal interests," said the Minchas Elazar. "The Gemora in Sanhedrin 18b says that the kohein gadol may not participate in the conference of rabbis who decide whether to add an extra month to the year, lest he be affected in his decision by personal interest. He knows that on Yom Kippur he will have to immerse himself five times in a mikveh, and if an extra month is added to the year, Yom Kippur will be later and the water will be colder and more uncomfortable for him. The question is: what kind of personal interest is this? The adding of the month takes place in Adar, seven months before Yom Kippur. The water was not so cold in any case, since they would place pieces of heated iron into the mikveh to warm it up (Yuma 34b). This extra month might mean that the water was a tiny bit, perhaps 2 degrees, less warm. And there are times when the weather is warmer in Cheshvan than in Tishrei, especially in Eretz Yisroel, where, as Chazal say, the end of summer is hotter than the summer. If you took a simple Jew today in the month of Adar and asked him if he would pay even one penny so that the mikveh on Erev Yom Kippur that coming year would be 2 degrees warmer, he would laugh at you. All the more so that the great kohein gadol, who entered the Holy of Holies, should be above such concerns. So why is he unfit to participate in the conference?"

"The answer is that Chazal kept to the rules of disqualifying a judge because of personal interest even in the most extreme cases, so that in case some great man in future times is affected by personal interests – through his family members or disciples – no one will think badly of him. A man cannot be a witness for his own relative, no matter how righteous he is - even Moshe and Aharon (Bava Basra 159a).

"Nevertheless, we are relying on the Rebbe and his followers to make sure this gathering of 21 rabbis takes place by the appointed time." (Tikun Olam, Chapters 18 and 20)

In the end, Rabbi Menachem Ziemba, a close follower and associate of the Gerrer Rebbe, set forth the Minchas Elazar's proposal at a meeting of the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah. The Moetzes was prepared to meet with the Hungarian gedolim, but only on condition that they be elected democratically by a congress of Hungarian rabbis, just as the Moetzes of Poland was an elected body. This requirement was an almost insurmountable obstacle, in view of the difficulties of convening a rabbinic congress from the many different countries and regions that were formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: the Carpathians, Russian, Czech, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Galicia. This was an abrupt change from the original agreement between the Minchas Elazar and the Gerrer Rebbe, that each would select a number of rabbis on his own (ibid. Chapter 23).

And so the proposed meeting between Polish and Hungarian rabbis never took place. "In retrospect," wrote Rabbi Moshe Goldstein, a Munkaczer Chassid, "perhaps this was the best thing, and so it was arranged by Divine Providence, so that later when more serious problems with the Agudah became well known, and their leaders had already been entrusted with the fate of the Jewish people, there would be at least one portion of the Jewish people that escaped untainted by this breach" (ibid. Chapter 25). Goldstein wrote these words in 1936. What would he have said, had he seen how the Agudah activists in 1947-49 led their followers into full-fledged participation in the Zionist enterprise, without the benefit of any ruling even from their own rabbinical council?

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk was invited by the German architects of Agudath Israel to their founding conferences in 1909 and 1912, but afterwards he withdrew his support from it. Family members relate that Rabbi Chaim gave the following analogy to explain his opposition to the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah: In the old times, everyone had a candle in his house to give light. It was a small candle, but a candle nonetheless. And even if someone did not have a candle in his house, there was always a candle in his neighborhood that he could use. But then they built an electric power station to supply light to the entire city at once. Once the electricity was running, nobody kept candles in his house anymore, and if, G-d forbid, the power station stopped working, the entire city would be in the dark, with no source of light. (Mikatowitz Ad Hei B'Iyar, p. 56)

Rabbi Chaim in his wisdom foresaw that a worldwide Orthodox organization could be a good thing, but could also be a very bad thing. As long as every rabbi is independent, even if some rabbis err, there will always be some still on the right path. But when all rabbis subscribe to a single organization, if something goes wrong with that organization,

all of its members go down with it. With eerie accuracy, Rabbi Chaim's analogy foreshadowed events that took place many years after his passing.

Yom Kippur 5771

"For the sin we committed before you under duress..." (Yom Kippur Machzor)

Why must we repent for such a sin? The Siddur Hagra answers that we enjoyed the sin we were forced to do. Today people say it would be dangerous to give up the state. But these same people don't act like they're being forced to sin. They enjoy the state, visiting it all the time and sending their kids to schools there.

Succos 5768

May the Merciful One raise up for us the fallen succah of David.

The source for this line in the blessing after meals is the verse, "On that day I will raise up the fallen succah of David, and I will close its breaches and rebuild its ruins, and I will build it as in days of old" (Amos 9:11). The commentators (Rashi, Radak and Metzudas David) say this refers to the royal dynasty of David.

The Zohar (Vayikra 6a) explains this verse in the context of a discussion on another verse in the fifth chapter of Amos. The chapter begins as follows: "Hear this thing, that I lament for you, house of Israel. The virgin of Israel has fallen and will never arise again." The Zohar relates that Rabbi Yehuda expressed his puzzlement over this verse to Rabbi Acha. He was aware of the answer often given that the verse is to be divided differently to read: "She will never fall again; arise, O virgin of Israel." (See the Gemora, Berachos 4b.) But this did not satisfy him, because the chapter is clearly meant as a lamentation, not a consolation.

Rabbi Acha replied that he had had this same problem, and asked Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who replied, "In all the previous exiles, G-d predetermined an end time, and at that time, the Jewish people returned to G-d; the virgin of Israel returned to her place at the time He decreed for her. But in this final exile it is not so; she will not come back on her own like she did the other times. This verse is the proof, for it says, 'the virgin of Israel has fallen and will never again arise.' It does not say that G-d will not raise her up. This is analogous to a king who became wroth with his noblewoman and banished her from the palace for a certain amount of time. When the time was up, the noblewoman immediately returned to the king. This happened one time, two times, three times. On the last time she was sent far away from the palace for a long time. The king said, 'This time is not like the other times, when she came to me. Rather, I will go with all the members of my palace and invite her back.'" When he came to her, he saw that she was lying in the dust. Who can imagine the glory of the noblewoman at that time, and the king's overtures to her, until the king took her by her hands and raised her up and brought her to his palace, and swore that he would never part from her again. So too, every time the Jewish people went into exile, when the time came she returned and stood before the king, but now in this exile

it will not be so, but rather the Holy One, blessed is He, will hold her hands, raise her up, appease her and return her to His palace. And this is why it says, 'On that day I will raise up the fallen succah of David' – she will not arise again as in previous times, but I will raise her. Who is 'the succah of David'? This is the virgin of Israel. This is her glory and praise."

The Zohar continues and says that this is the meaning of the verse, "Rejoice exceedingly, daughter of Zion; call out in joy, daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king will come to you" (Zechariah 9:9). He will come to you, and not you to Him. He will come to appease you, to raise you up, to pay you up, to bring you to His palace and to come together with you in an everlasting union.

According to this, we can explain the Gemora in Berachos 4b: Rabbi Yochanan said, "Why is there no verse beginning with nun in Ashrei (i.e. Tehillim Chapter 145)? Because it alludes to the downfall of Israel, as it says, 'The virgin of Israel has fallen and will never arise again.'" Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchok said, "Even so, David supported them in the next verse with his prophetic inspiration: 'Hashem supports all the fallen.'" The meaning is that although Israel will never arise again on her own, Hashem will support her and raise her up, as the Zohar explains.