

ESCHANAN 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

This week's Torah portion opens with a plea by Moshe Rabbeinu to be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Here he had brought the Jewish people out of Egypt, he had accompanied them in the desert, and he wanted to enter with them into the Promised Land. This, though, he was denied. He was told he could climb Mount Pisgah and see Israel from there. He would not be allowed to enter the land of Israel. Moshe had struck the rock instead of speaking to Him. Moshe Rabbeinu continually reminds the people that it was their fault that he could not enter the land. G-d was mad at him for your sake, he says. Later on he repeats "and G-d was angry against me for your sakes and swore not to let me cross the Jordan". Here was Moshe Rabbeinu who loved the people very much who always interceded for them with G-d, now showing his resentment. Moshe, who G-d had told "let Me make a nation from you" and who refused because of his love for his people, was now feeling acute bitterness and resentment. This demonstrates to us that in every relationship there is love and even hatred. Moshe Rabbeinu could not have loved the Jewish people more. Yet at this moment he felt deep resentment toward them. In Judaism we are not to feel guilty because sometimes we feel resentment or bitterness. This is natural. We read also in this Torah portion that you should love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might. The Rabbis explain that this means you should love G-d with both your inclinations, with both your good and your bad inclinations. Actually these inclination stand for altruism and selfishness. We are to serve G-d with both. Not all altruism is moral. The Nazi storm troopers were willing to give their lives for Hitler. They were altruistic but this does not mean they were moral. Sometimes the selfish action is the moral action. In ancient days when people used to sacrifice their children to pagan gods the person who said I do not want to give my children up is moral. The Rabbis tell us we are to serve G-d with all our instincts. They tell how at the destruction

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of the first Temple G-d decided to remove the selfish instinct from the Jews. They no longer worshipped idols but they also did not get married or build homes and showed no ambition. G-d quickly relented and gave them back part of their selfish instinct so they would get married and build homes. The Rabbis say that jealousy among scholars is good because it increases knowledge. More papers are written. Of course, things cannot be carried to an extreme. We in Judaism do not apologize for having conflicting thoughts. I remember once a young girl came to me several years ago who was almost insane. In fact, they were thinking of committing her. She had a disagreement with her mother and she said in anger, "I wish you were dead". Two hours later her mother was killed in a automobile accident. She thought she killed her mother. This is ridiculous. She did not kill her mother and even if for that one instant she really meant that her mother should be dead there are so many more instances when she did not want her mother dead. G-d is good and just. He does not listen to foolish prayers or wishes. This point is made in the Talmud when it discusses the cities of refuge that are talked about in our Torah portion. People who accidentally killed another person with contributory negligence were forced to go to these cities of refuge. They had to stay there till the High Priest died. The Rabbis ask, but wouldn't they then pray for the High Priest's death? The Rabbis say, so what? G-d does not listen to those kind of prayers. If a foolish or evil person prays for something wrong would G-d listen to him? That young girl did not have anything to do with killing her mother. Unfortunately, there are many people in this world who are filled with confusing thoughts, to have been driven literally mishugah by these ideas. I am reminded of the story of the woman who went to a psychiatrist. A few days later he met her in the street and he said, "Mrs. Goldberg, do you realize that your check came back? It bounced." Mrs. Goldberg looked at him and said, "Nu, Doctor? My pain came back, too."

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All too often people apply only palliatives to their inner pain. One of the reasons for studying Torah is to spare us from these type of ideas. We study Torah not only to learn how to do Mitzvahs but also to get the right perspective on life. I was very happy to have the young men of the SEED Program here with us this past month. They are such fine young men. I know that they are beset by the same kind of crazy thoughts and ideas that permeate that age group. Just look at all the wild and crazy things that go on in many fraternities, but they are able to handle these things because they know how to study Torah. I hope that all of us, too, will know how to handle life and will not say as the lady in the story, "My pain came back".

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In the Torah portion, Vaeschanan, we have many of Judaism's basic teachings. We have the Shma, the Ten Commandments, etc. The Ten Commandments that are stated here in Hebrew really the Ten Commandments are known as the Azeres Hadibros and really refer to the ten sentences or thoughts because really there are more than Ten Commandments listed. The Ten Commandments that are listed in this Torah portion are different from the Ten Commandments which are listed in the Book of Exodus. The Rabbis knew the Bible backwards and forwards and they, of course, knew that the Ten Commandments here had a slightly different wording than the Ten Commandments in the Book of Exodus. They did not say that it was because there were different authors, P, Q, or J, but because G-d wanted to teach us something very important. If you look at the commandment that has to do with Shabbos we will see that the first word in our Torah portion is Shemor. Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy. It also says that we should remember that we were slaves in Egypt. Therefore, G-d has commanded us the Sabbath. In the Book of Exodus it says we are Zochor, to remember the Sabbath day and it also says that we are to keep the Sabbath because G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. In the famous mystical prayer, the L'cho Dodi, which we sing every Friday night we say Shemor V'Zochor B'Dibor Echad, that G-d pronounced V'Zochor V'Shemor simultaneously. In life we all know that we need two separate things simultaneously. We need to be both independent and dependent. We need adventure and security. In the Torah portion, Bereishis, we have two stories of creation. Rabbi Soleveitchik explains that these two stories talk about man's two simultaneous natures. The first story talks about man the conqueror, man the ruler who wants to know everything, see everything, do everything, and name everything. The second story of creation talks about lonely man, man who owns everything, controls everything, but is unhappy. After all, Adam ruled everything. In fact, there is a famous story that when Eve came and asked him, "Do you love me?" he said, "Who else?". Adam had everything but he was not happy. He had a certain existential loneliness which could not be satisfied. We have to bring our achievements to somebody. Somebody has to appreciate what we do. One of the worst things is to do something and have no one to share it with, nobody to tell you that you have done a good thing. In Hebrew the word Zochor also means male. In

the Book of Exodus we speak about creation and we speak about Zochor. In the Book of Deuteronomy we use the word Shomor which has more of the meaning of preserving, of guarding and which basically speaks to the female, and here in Deuteronomy we speak about relationships. The Rabbis teach us that Shabbos is the symbol of harmony in the world. We are to sit back and to enjoy what we have created during the rest of the week. It speaks about the harmony of creation and of relationships, the harmony of dependence and independence. On Shabbos we have a taste of the world to come. The Rabbis tell us that it is just as great a sin as to make two Sabbaths in the week as not to observe one Sabbath. It is not physical work per se that is prohibited but work that causes us to impose our will on nature. We need simultaneously both the adventuresome, reckless, conquering urge plus the urge to have relationships and conserve the best within ourselves. We need both security and independence. The Rabbis tell us that the first man was both man and woman, that G-d split Adam in two. We need both Shomor and Zochor together. In our Torah portion we connect the Sabbath with slavery in Egypt because unless man has the Shomor principle, unless he recognizes his need for relationships and independence and curbs his urge to conquer the world will end up in slavery. We also need the concept of conquering nature and imposing our will if we are to be able to survive. Boys and girls are different. From birth boys are much more rambunctious. Families who had ~~boys~~^{girls} and then a ~~girl~~^{boy} are greatly surprised by the boy's aggressiveness. In close to 25 years of experiences of marriage counseling I can say that men and women look for different things in marriage. Women look basically for security. I am not just speaking of financial security but emotional security, etc. Men look to be important. This does not mean that a woman has to keep telling her husband how important he is. Sometimes a woman does all the commanding and the man is running around her filling all her needs, but this makes him feel important. Many times marriages break up because the partners do not realize that they are fulfilling different needs. A marriage, to be successful, must have both the Shochor and Zochor principles. There must be a recognition of the simultaneous needs of dependence and independence. Happy marriages must take this into account. Many times marriages founder on technicalities. You can be technically right but still wrong because the basic needs

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are not being taken care of. We need to be both dependent and independent at the same time. This reminds me of a story of a Little League team. A nine-year old was pitching his heart out. He walked the first ten batters. The coach finally had to take him out. The little boy looked at the coach and said, "Gee, Coach, why are you taking me out? I have a no-hitter going". Technically you can be right but still wrong if you do not recognize man's simultaneous need for conflicting forces.

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In the Torah portion, Vaeschanan, we have some of the basic teachings of Judaism. We have the Shma, the Ten Commandments, and the famous line "you shall love the Lord your G-d with all your soul, with all your heart, and with all your might". This, the Rabbis teach us, means that you should serve G-d with both your inclinations; your selfish inclination and your altruistic inclination. Sometimes it is good to be selfish. Not all altruism is good. In the ancient days when people used to sacrifice their children to the gods a person who was selfish did the right thing. A person who said, "I don't want to sacrifice my child, I don't want to give him up" was doing the right and the moral thing. On the other hand, not all altruism is good. Those Nazi stormtroopers who were willing to give their lives for Hitler and Naziism were not doing the right thing. Judaism has its own point of view. It says that we have three responsibilities in this world. We have a responsibility to ourselves, to others, and to G-d. We have a certain value system which we have passed down from generation to generation. In the modern era it looks like our system for transmitting these values has broken down. Today even in our community there is a very serious problem of teenage suicides. Within the last few months several teenagers in this community who come from homes which were wealthy and affluent have committed suicide. They had everything to live for. In Judaism suicide is not an option. We do not believe in the current phrase "it's my life and I can do anything with it I want". We are not the rulers or owners of our lives. G-d has only made us stewards over our lives. It is our business to use our lives to help better this world. We cannot harm it or take it. In fact, this is one of the significant ways Judaism differs from other groups and philosophies because of its great emphasis on life. In fact, when I was just in Israel these are one of the things you can almost feel; this great love of life, the energy, the enthusiasm, of the desire to create. You can feel it. We Jews do not believe in being passive, in just sitting back and letting life pass us by. We always want to do things. We know life has problems and difficulties, but life basically is a wonderful beautiful thing and we cherish it and consider it a great opportunity. What is required, though, to pass on Jewish values from one generation to the other? In this Torah portion we read "and you shall make them known to your children and to your childrens' children the day when you

stood before the Lord your G-d in Choreiv". Choreiv is another name for Mt. Sinai. One of the most important, in fact the most important, element in passing down the tradition is that you must believe in it yourself. One of the big problems today in Jewish education is that many of the teachers do not believe in it themselves and, of course, many parents do not. If the parents do not believe in it and the teachers do not believe in it it is almost impossible for the children to believe in it. If the parents believe in it and the teachers do not, maybe the tradition can be passed on. If the parents do not but the teachers do there is still a chance, but if the parents do not believe in it and give it lip service and the teachers do not believe in it and give it lip service then almost certainly the tradition will not be able to be passed down. In this sentence we also learn the secret of passing down the tradition. "You shall make them known to your children's children." We are known as Israel or the House of Jacob. We are now known as Abraham or Yitzchok. The reason for this is that only all of Jacob's children remained Jews. Seven of Abraham's children did not remain Jews and one of Yitzchok's children, Esau, did not remain a Jew. All of Jacob's remained Jews. The Rabbis tell us that the reason for this was that Jacob was the only one who was also concerned deeply about his grandchildren. The secret of Jewish survival is that it is not just the concern of the parents with transmitting the tradition, but also the grandparents and the whole extended family. Jacob is the only one who blessed his grandchildren. He said, "May the angel who has redeemed me from all evil bless these boys and may my name be called among them." This was the blessing he gave his grandchildren, Ephraim and Menasha. He was the only patriarch to bless his grandchildren. The others just blessed their children. In our modern day we have reduced the family to just the nuclear family. As one way once put it, "If all you have is a nuclear family then all you have is a recipe for a big explosion." Judaism cannot be transmitted just by a nuclear family. That's why we are facing so many problems today in transmitting our heritage. Rabbi Akiba said, "A father gives his children his appearance, his strength, his riches, his wisdom, longevity, and also Mispar HaDorot Levonov, the number of the generations before him." A youngster when he sees his grandparents, when he sees the way they live he knows that the values his parents have given him are not just

arbitrary, that they are the product of thousands of generations, generations which have faced the same basic problems of the human psyche and human passions which we all face today. He then can confront the tradition. He can find out what Hillel said and Rabbi Akiba said, what the Rambam said, what Rashi said. He is part of a living tradition which includes the past, present, and the future because our traditions points the way to the future. With grandparents, with an extended family the values become clear and can be transmitted better. This Synagogue, too, is in existence only because of the grandparents and great-grandparents and some of the parents of the members here who learned what Judaism was about not just from their parents but from the grandparents and their uncles and aunts. We are what we are today because of them. Many times parents have to spend all their energy making a living and if there is no grandparent around to transmit values, then values do not get transmitted. I am reminded of the story of a man who came to this country poor and penniless and an orphan. Seventy-five years later he was a wealthy man and a testimonial dinner was given for him. He said, "Only in America could a penniless orphan come to its shores and at the end of seventy-five years become a well known multimillionaire who is head of a concern called Goldberg and McCarthy, and the most amazing thing is, I am McCarthy". Unfortunately, this is true of the Jewish experience in America. People sacrificed all their tradition in order to get ahead. The Jewish tradition, though, deserves to be transmitted. If it will be transmitted then we will never have to worry about teenage suicide. Teenage suicide is not a Jewish option.

In life, we all suffer pain. Not all pain is of our own making. Life has so many frustrations. What's more, the pain of disease, the pain caused by sudden catastrophes like tornadoes, hurricanes, or the pain caused by a crazed drug addict or a drunk driver can turn our whole world upside down without our having done anything at all to precipitate these tragedies. We all know what a terrible blow the unexpected mental illness or sudden death of a loved one is. Life does not always seem fair. Many times when we see what has happened to us, we feel resentful and bitter. Many times we are even filled with rancor and hatred. In the Torah portion, Vaeschanan, we learn how Moshe Rabbeinu, too, feels resentment and bitterness.

This Torah portion opens with Moshe telling the people how he had pleaded with G-d to let him enter the Promised Land, but how G-d had refused his request. Moshe continually reminds the people how it was their fault that he could not enter the land. He repeats and repeats in these and in other words "and G-d was angry against me for your sakes and listened not to me and G-d said unto me 'Rav Loch, that is enough for you, Moshe, do not continue to speak to Me again about this matter'". Here was this same Moshe who, when G-d had once told him "I will consume them and I will make from you a great nation", had interceded for the people and had pleaded for them because of his great love for them, but who now was feeling and showing acute bitterness and resentment toward them. Moshe Rabbeinu could not have loved the Jewish people more yet at this moment he felt deep resentment toward them. This demonstrates to us that in every relationship there is love and even hatred. In Judaism we are not to feel guilty because sometimes we feel bitterness or resentment. This is natural. Only if we ever give in to our feelings of bitterness and resentment and do despicable acts because of them, should we feel guilty.

In this same Torah portion, Vaeschanan, we have the Shema and the beautiful verse "You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and ^{with} all your soul and with all your might". The Rabbis interpret this to mean that you must serve G-d with both your good and your bad inclinations. The Rabbis explain that the good inclination stands for

altruism, and that the bad inclination for selfishness. We are to serve G-d with both. Not all altruism is moral. The Nazi stormtroopers were willing to give their lives for Hitler, but this does not mean that their willingness to sacrifice themselves was moral. Sometimes the selfish action is the moral action. In ancient days when people used to sacrifice their first-born child to the gods, the person who acted selfishly and said, "I don't want to give up my child, I don't want to sacrifice him to a pagan god" was moral. It is not easy to make choices in life. We can't say everything altruistic is right and everything selfish is wrong. Just having to make choices is a source of great resentment.

Almost all the choices that we make can inflict pain upon us. A person who has a very good paying job but who is being humiliated at work has a painful choice to make. He can either stay and endure the humiliation and lose his self-respect, or he can quit and take his chances on finding a new job. In times of high unemployment, this is not an easy decision. In life, these decisions constantly crop up. We must think of our family. We must think of our own self-respect and dignity. We must think whether ^{OR NOT} our actions are in keeping with the moral tradition of our faith. Many times we end up resenting having to make these choices. We resent the burden that is placed on us, and we lash out at our family or at others because the pain of making a decision is so difficult. Because of the ambivalence of life, feelings of resentment and bitterness inevitably crop up. Our religion teaches us that these ideas and feelings are natural. It is only when a person wants to harm others because of ^{these feelings} ~~them~~ that he becomes a bad person. Having these feelings is no sin.

I remember once a young lady ^{see who was} coming to me ^{almost insane}. In fact, the doctors were ^{just at that moment} thinking of committing her. She had disagreed with her mother and had ^{were} thought in her mind, "Oh, I wish I didn't have a mother, I wish she ~~was~~ dead". Two hours later her mother was killed in an automobile accident. She thought that she had killed her mother. This idea that she had killed her mother is, of course, ridiculous, but it haunted her and drove her ^{insane}. She had nothing to do with the accident and, of course, at the

