

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

ESCHANAN 1981

PAGE TWO

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

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."

ESCHANAN 1981
PAGE THREE
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

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".

45.
VAESCHANAN 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

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

VAESCHANAN 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE THREE

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.

VAESCHANAN 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

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 childrens' 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

JULY 1983

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

PAGE THREE

moment that she was wishing her mother dead she was still filled with feelings of love for her and wanted her very much alive. Her feelings were mixed (as all our feelings are. We believe that G-d does not listen to foolish prayers or wishes. This point is made in the Talmud when it discusses the cities of refuge which are talked about in our Torah portion.

Anyone who killed another person accidentally, and was himself guilty of contributory negligence in the other person's death, was forced, as a form of penitence and punishment, to live in one of six special designated cities of refuge until the High Priest died. He was free to go about his business but he could not leave the city. The Rabbis ask, "But wouldn't these people all pray for the High Priest's death?" and, in fact, we learn that the mother of the High Priest used to bring dainties to these people so they would think good of her son. The Rabbis answer and say, "So what if these people would pray for the High Priest's death? Does G-d listen to those kinds of prayers? If a fool or an evil person prays for something wrong and evil, does G-d listen to him?" Prayer is not magic. Our prayers do not force G-d to do anything. G-d does not listen to foolish and evil prayers. This girl's confused momentary wish for the death of her mother in no way caused her mother's death. Unfortunately, though, we have many people who are filled with all sorts of manias and depressions because they do not realize that random thoughts and crazy feelings are normal, that even Moshe had them. We are not responsible for random thoughts, only for doing evil deeds when we would try to implement these thoughts.

These ideas are emphasized again in this Torah portion when we discuss how the Ten Commandments were given. The Rabbis ask, "Why were the Ten Commandments given on two tablets? Why couldn't they have all just been given on one tablet?" The answer given is because the tablets are compared to a bride and bridegroom, to heaven and earth, to this world and the next, and to the angels, Michael and Gabriel. What kind of answer is that? If we look carefully at what the angels, Michael and Gabriel, stand for, I believe we can understand what the Rabbis are telling us. Michael is the guardian angel of Israel. He stands for kindness and compassion. Gabriel is the angel of justice. In this

JULY 1983

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

PAGE FOUR

world, we need both kindness and justice. It is very difficult to balance these two things. We want compassion and we need it. However, we are not going to ~~go~~^{use} to a brain surgeon who is a nice guy if he is also not a skilled surgeon. On the other hand, we would not ~~go to~~^{use} a lawyer who would win the case for us, but, because of his lack of kindness and compassion, would also swindle us out of all our money.

In this life we have to learn how to reconcile different ¹⁰⁰ ~~one~~ ^{POINTS OF} views, both of which are right. We have to reconcile heaven and earth. It is so frustrating, though, many times to do this. It is so difficult. Many times we wish we did not have to do it and we resent having to do it and we resent those who make us do it. We just do not live in an ideal world. Human beings are not logical. We constantly have to reconcile heaven and earth. We also have to reconcile this world and the next world. In the next world there may be no eating and drinking, but in this world we have to kill creatures in order to eat. We inflict pain by just surviving. Finally, we have the bride and bridegroom. Marriage is a difficult institution. Marriage is basically a reconciling of two points of view, both of which are equally valid. A husband and wife come to a marriage with different ideas and assumptions and, based on their assumptions, they are both right. How, though, can we reconcile two positions which both are absolutely right? This is a difficult job and it is not easy, but that is what we have to do in life.

The Rabbis explain that Moshe Rabbeinu, himself, was rebuked with the same words, Rav Loch, it is enough for you, that he used when he put down the rebellion of members of his own tribe of Levi when they joined Korach in a revolt against him. The Rabbis tell us that he did wrong there in using those words because these members of his tribe were seriously confused. They were trying to spiritually advance themselves. They had chosen the wrong means. They thought that they could take a shortcut to spiritual growth by assuming priestly duties. They were wrong in their methods, but the pain that they suffered was real. Moshe should have sympathized with their pain. Moshe now was himself, suffering great pain because he could not enter into the Land of Israel. He wanted to enter it in order to develop himself spiritually. He could not and he is rebuked by the

JULY 1983

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

PAGE FIVE

same phrase, "It is enough for you".

Too often in life we make light of the suffering of others. Much suffering we cannot understand and much of it is almost inevitable, like death and sickness and the built-in conflicts between heaven and earth, justice and kindness, this world and the next. What we all need to do is to be more sympathetic, more supportive, and more loving when we see people in pain. The pain is there even though the decision that produced it may have been a good one. It may have been best to quit your job so you can have self-respect, but that person still needs support and help. Tisha B'Av, the saddest day in the Jewish year, is commemorated by gathering together, by comforting one another. ✓ This is the way we, in Judaism, have always said is the only way to overcome pain, not through drink, not through drugs, but by being together and helping and supporting each other.

May we always remember this, and may we realize that lashing out at others and verbally and physically attacking others will not ease our pain. It will only make it worse. None of us should ever feel guilty because sometimes we are filled with bitterness or resentment or even momentary hatred. That is natural. That is built into life. The only thing we should feel guilty for is if we allow these feelings to become despicable actions.

^{VA}ESCHANAN 1984

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion ^{VA}Eschanan we have the Ten Commandments repeated. The Ten Commandments were given the first time in the Book of Exodus and the second time here. There are differences of wording between the Ten Commandments given in Exodus and the Ten Commandments that are given in Deuteronomy. The rabbis were fully aware of all the textural differences in the Torah before the Biblical critics came on the scene. They knew all the problems. They, however, felt that all these contradictions were done on purpose. Of course, the Book of Deuteronomy is Moshe's own speech and G-d confirmed his words. Some deviations in phrasing would be normal and acceptable. In the Ten Commandments we have in Deuteronomy it says, "Shemor Es Yom HaShabbos", "Observe the Sabbath day" while in the Book of Exodus it says, "Zochor", "Remember the Sabbath day." The word "Shemor" in Hebrew means "to preserve" as well as "observe" and the word "Zochor" in Hebrew also means "male." In the Book of Deuteronomy when we talk about the Shabbos we say that we should keep the Sabbath as a remembrance of our exodus from Egypt while in the Book of Exodus when we talk about the Sabbath we say we should keep it as a remembrance of G-d's creation of the world. The rabbis note that in Bereishis, in Genesis, there are actually two creation stories. In one man is told to go out and to conquer the world. In fact, that's what the word "Zochor" can also stand for. "Zos V'Keevshuha

4
)D

Urdu" "Go out, conquer the land, and rule over it." In the second creation story we learn how man is lonely. According to the rabbis, the first Adam was both man and woman. G-d did not create Eve from Adam's rib, but G-d divided man in two so man would no longer be lonely. In the first creation story we are given a Divine Mandate to conquer the world, and in the second story we are told about our Divine Nature. We not only have a Divine Mandate but a Divine Nature. We need others. It is not enough just to have success; we need relationships. In the Ten Commandments in the Book of Deuteronomy we learn the word "Shemor" "preserve" your relationships. If you do not you will end up with a slave society. You will end up with terrible cruelty. You will not be able to develop yourself because you will have to be constantly putting down your slaves. Preserve your relationships. Make sure they do not deteriorate otherwise you will not be able to fulfill your Divine Mandate of conquering the earth. On the other hand, we are told in the Book of Exodus to remember our Divine Mandate, that we should not give up all ambition because of relationships. We must learn how to balance both. It is our job to help maintain creation. If we do not impose our will on nature it will eventually crush us. We must know how to strike the balance, how to have relationships and still fulfill our ambition. It is not easy and we have to work at it. Today the pendulum has swung to just doing your own thing and forgetting about relationships. People are told to forget about the family, forget about other people, just fulfill yourself. This will

never be satisfying. It will just leave man lonely. On the other hand, just being with others but accomplishing nothing will make a person feel useless and frustrated. We need both. Marriage, of course, should be an institution in which both the Divine Mandate and Divine Nature of man should be realized. Money and things will never satisfy alone; working together for positive goals will. I am reminded of the story of two grizzly bears in Yellowstone Park. They went wild. The rangers called in an expert from England, France, and Czechoslovakia. The experts came but, unfortunately, the bears were too smart for them. The female consumed the Frenchman and the Englishman, but, don't worry, the Czech's in the male. Of course, this means that words can be used to mean anything. Words alone do not establish relationships. Neither do checks. Time and consideration are required.

In this Torah portion we find the Ten Commandments. When I was teaching one of the young men how to read this Torah portion he became greatly befuddled when he came to the Ten Commandments because on each word of the Ten Commandments there are two separate notes. He did not know whether or not he had to sing the Ten Commandments with a different tune, or how he was going to manage to sing these two notes on one word, especially since the notes were completely incompatible. I assured him that, first of all, he did not have to learn a new tune. This was not like Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur when we use a different tune to read the Torah. He was right. There are two separate incompatible notes on each word of the Ten Commandments.

When we read the Ten Commandments in shul three times a year (once when we read the Torah portion Yisro, once when we read this Torah portion, and once when we read them on Shavuos), we read the upper notes, the Elyonim. The bottom notes, or the Tachtonim, we use only for private readings. The difference between whether or not we read the upper notes or the lower notes is that if we read the upper notes, the first four sentences of the Ten Commandments, the first two of the Ten Commandments, are read as one sentence. Also the four sentences which deal with the Shabbos are also read as one sentence and not as four sentences. When we read the Ten Commandments in public we do not divide up the reading when it concerns the first two commandments or the Shabbos. Why should this be? Also, right after we read about the Ten Commandments we read how after the Jewish people heard the commandments, some say it was only the first two commandments, they turn to Moshe and they tell him, "Today we saw that G-d can speak to man, and he will live, but why should we die, why should we be consumed with this great fire? Because who among all flesh heard the voice of the living G-d speaking from the midst of the fire like us and lived?" In other words, they tell Moshe, "You go up and receive the rest of the Torah. We cannot take this." At first, Moshe did not want to, but then G-d told him to listen to the people.

It seems to me that here we have illustrated why it is that we have two ways to read the Ten Commandments, the Elyonim in public and the Tachtonim in private. In public

we enunciate principles. We aver that these principles are eternal and right, and that we adhere to them 100%. We do not divide them or dissect them and say this is more important than that. When it comes to the first commandment or Shabbos, they are to be considered as a whole, but when it comes to applying these principles in individual cases, it is more difficult. We have to look at circumstances. We have to look at the people involved. We have to know all the facts. It is not enough just to mouth principles.

This is what the Jewish people were telling Moshe, "Moshe, we cannot take these fiery principles which ignite our passion. We need more detailed information." The Torah is compared to light, not fire. The principles are the Eish Dosh, the flaming ideals and ideas. What's the difference between something being on fire and something being illuminated by a higher light? When someone is on fire they shed light, but they also burn and destroy themselves and others around them. When a person, instead, is illuminated by light he sees not only himself but also his neighbor and neither he nor his neighbor is consumed. The people were afraid of these principles unless they could be put in the right context. We should not become zealots, become aflame and ablaze with our principles. Instead we should emanate a quiet light. We should learn how to apply our principles with love and care and concern.

We have just finished celebrating the Fast of Tisha B'Av. Tisha B'Av speaks about the destruction of the Temple. The rabbis say that the Temple was not destroyed because there was no Torah there and not because the people were indulging in idolatry, but it was destroyed because the people did not know how to go Lifneen Meshuras Hadin, they did not know how to go beyond the letter of the law. They did not know how to apply the principles correctly. The zealots, while Jerusalem was being besieged, burned up the grain stores of Jerusalem so people would fight harder they thought. They even attacked and executed people they thought were not fighting hard enough. These zealots were consumed by their passion for freedom and Jewish independence, and they ended up

destroying both. We are not talking about compromise here. We are talking about applying principles in a proper and correct way.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a hunter who went out to hunt a bear. As he was about ready to shoot the bear, the bear said, "Let's sit down and talk about this. Maybe we can arrive at a compromise." They sat and talked. The bear said, "What you want is a fur coat, and what I want is a full stomach." After they talked a while the bear got up alone. The hunter had his fur coat and the bear had his full stomach. We are not talking about compromise which destroys principles. We are talking about applying principles compassionately, fairly, and with loving concern for our fellow human being.

In Judaism it is not enough to have Din, to have the law. You must have Chesed. Chesed means that you must know how to apply the law with mercy. The Din, alone, leads to violence and the destruction of the Jewish people, as the zealots proved. Din with Chesed, Din with mercy, leads to the light of the Torah and not the fire of destruction. It is important in public that we all aver the principles for which we stand, but we have to know how to apply these principles with compassion and truth to individual cases. That's why we must continually study Torah because in this way we learn how to apply the principles with compassion.

VAESCHANAN

VESCHANAN 1986
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

We always read the Torah portion Veschanan after Tisha B'Av. Soon there will be another holiday in the Jewish calendar called "Tu B'Av". Almost no one has ever heard of Tu B'Av, which means the 15th day of Av. It comes just six days after Tisha B'Av. The rabbis tell us that there is no holiday as joyful as Tu B'Av and Yom Kippur. It is hard to understand why the rabbis would say that Tu B'Av is such a joyful and happy holiday. We don't know what it celebrates. The only thing we have on the calendar is that we do not say "Tachnum", prayers of supplication on Tu B'Av. But why do the rabbis consider Tu B'Av such an important holiday? In the Talmud they answer that three things happened on Tu B'Av. What was the first one? First, ~~He~~ ^{Hoch} Ben Elah permitted the Jews of the northern kingdom of Israel to go up to Jerusalem. Until that time the kings of Israel had placed guards on the road and had prohibited the Jews of Israel to go up to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. When Yerovun Ben Novod broke away from Solomon's son, Rehovom, and set up the northern kingdom of Israel he was probably right in doing so; however, he sinned when he destroyed the religious unity of the Jewish people, and he is considered one of the worst of all the Jewish people who ever lived because instead of allowing the Jewish people to worship in Jerusalem, he set up calves to be worshipped, one in Beth El and one in Dan, and he prevented the Jewish people from going to Jerusalem. He did so because he was afraid that if they did so they may

decide they wanted to rejoin the kingdom of Judea and no longer be an independent kingdom of Israel. The other kings of Israel continued this policy. Therefore, the rabbis say that on the day the Jewish people were united in trying to seek Torah and seek inspiration in Jerusalem, that was a happy day. Other rabbis give another reason. They say the reason we had Tu B' Av was that because on this day the Jewish people were allowed to intermarry with each other. Before this time if you were a member of the Tribe of Judah, you could not marry a member of the Tribe of Shimon, if you were from the Tribe of Levy, you could not marry someone from the Tribe of Menasha. The reason for this was that the Jewish people owned land and it was owned by tribes, and they did not want this land to become alienated, to move from one tribe to another. Eventually, though, the rabbis saw that it would be better for the Jewish people to marry among themselves rather than marry only within each tribe, because each tribe might have too many boys or girls or maybe there was intermarriage outside the Jewish fold, and, therefore, they decided that Jews from all tribes could intermarry, and that considered a very happy occasion. The third reason that is given by many rabbis is that during the wandering in the desert for forty years, the generation of the desert was doomed to die in the desert. All those who were more than 20 years old when the report of the spies came back from the land of Israel, the report which caused the people to say, "Better that we die than go into the land of Israel", were doomed to die in the desert. The day that they stopped dying

was Tu B'Av. This was just a few weeks before they were to enter the land of Israel, and, therefore, this was considered a happy day. Also, during the whole 38 years from the time of the sin of the spies until they entered the land of Israel, G-d did not speak to Moshe. G-d spoke to Moshe only now. This was the reason for the great joy. The reason for what the rabbis are telling us here is that great joy comes to the Jewish people when they exemplify certain values, when they feel that these values are the highlight of their lives, for example, going to Jerusalem. When Jewish people feel that going back to the sources, learning about their religion is an important value, then that is a great joy to us. When Jewish people realize that they should marry within the faith, that the Jewish people should never erect any barriers between Jews so that they can marry so that the united of the Jewish People can be maintained, then that is a great source of joy. In today's world it is not clear that the Jewish people consider the height of their joy to support institutions of Jewish learning and encourage their children to learn. It is not clear always, too, that the Jewish people consider their greatest joy to maintain Jewish unity, to make sure that one Jew can always marry another Jew. It is true that it is the joy of almost all Jews to make sure that Jewish lives are safe, that Jews are no longer persecuted. That is why almost all Jews support Israel, because we know that without Israel we are very vulnerable, but that with Israel we are much stronger and many Jewish

lives are being saved because there is a State of Israel. G-d tells us that if you want to hear His voice then there are three aspects of Judaism that we must keep. It must always be our greatest joy to look into the sources, to go up to Jerusalem, both literally and figuratively, to try to always look for inspiration in the Torah and our great rabbinic literature, that we should encourage learning as much as possible. It is also clear that we must promote Jewish unity. We must not try to write off so many other groups. Of course, people, for their own convenience, should not try to change the rules and regulations of Jewish conversion and marriage just for some passing whim. Finally, we must always make sure that Jewish life is considered sacred and that we do everything we can to keep Jews from being persecuted. If we do this, G-d has assured us that His voice will be heard through the People Israel, and we will be able to make great contributions to the world and be a light unto the nations. This is why Tu B'Av is a joyous holiday. It teaches us these things. It teaches us that in order for our people to survive creatively and for our people to survive as a nation touched by G-d, then we must always consider it our highest joy to strive for Jewish unity, Jewish learning, and Jewish self-respect which shows that we will never countenance its persecution or death. I am reminded of the famous Chassidic story of a man running for a train pulling out of the station. He just missed it by seconds. He broke down and cried. A man standing next to him said, "Why are you crying?" He answered, "Well, that was the last train to

the city and today was my wedding day. My fiance will never forgive me. I don't know what I'm going to do." The man said, "By how much did you miss the train?" The bridegroom answered, "By just a few seconds." The other man said, "What are you crying for? You act as if you missed it by a whole hour." There are just certain things in Jewish life that we cannot miss. We cannot miss learning, we cannot miss unity, and we cannot miss Jewish self-respect. If we miss any of these things then the voice of G-d will not be heard among the Jewish people.

VAESCHANAN 1987
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion we have the secret for comforting the Jewish people, and that is that we come back from every tragedy as long as we are willing to educate our children. Without education of our children the Jewish people will disappear and will assimilate and will adopt the values of the people around them. That is why in this country the only group of people really serious about Jewish education was the orthodox after the second world war. Only now are the other groups realizing the importance of education and are stressing it, too. It is only through education that we can come back. It is only through education that our people can be comforted. It is only through education that we can raise future generations who can continue and perservere in Jewish values. I remember what Ben Gurion said once when they asked him how he was going to build Israel, and he said, "Yiddel by yiddel." That is the way we build the Jewish future, yiddel by yiddel, by concentrating on our children, by giving them the best education possible. If we do that we are assured that we will be eternal, and that the Mashiach will come, "Bimheiru B'yomeinu".

VAESCHANAN 1987
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The Shabbos after Tisha B'Av we always read the Torah portion Vaeschanan. This Shabbos is known as Shabbos Nachmu - the Shabbos of comfort, and it is named after the special Haphtorah we read which starts with the words, "Nachamu Nachamu Ami - Be comforted, be comforted my people". This Torah portion has within it the secret to the comfort of the Jewish people. We Jewish people have endured many tragedies throughout our history, but we have always been able to come back because of the secret of comfort which is given in this Torah portion. The whole key to understanding this week's Torah portion is children, that if the Jewish people want to come back from the different tragedies that have occurred them throughout the ages, that "and you should teach them to your children and to your children's children the day that you stood before the Lord your G-d". In other words, we must teach our children the values and principles of Judaism. Unless we do that, our people cannot come back from the tragedies that have occurred to them. We know that many of the tragedies that came upon the Jewish people came upon them because they forsook the values of our people. That is what we learn why destruction of the first temple occurred and the destruction of the second Temple occurred because the Jewish people had forsaken their own values and their own principles.

In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu, in this Torah portion predicts that. He says, "And it will be when you will have children and children's children and you will become old in the land, and you will become corrupt and will you will make idols...and do all evil in the eyes of G-d to provoke Him". In other words, he knew there would come a time in Jewish history when the Jewish people would feel that Judaism is an old and antiquated religion and no longer is relevant to meet the needs of the time, and, therefore, new ideas and new

values must take the place of Judaism. This happened periodically throughout Jewish history, especially when the Jews met other cultures for the first time. It happened when the Jewish people met the Canaanite culture, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, Babylonians. We were overwhelmed by the new ideas they presented, the new way of thinking, and we thought perhaps our way of thinking was outdated, antiquated, and old fashioned until we realized that really many of the values they espoused were deadend values. They led nowhere.

The same thing happened when the Jewish people met the ideas of the western culture a hundred years ago, etc., and once again the Jewish people felt that maybe their ideas were not relevant to the world anymore, that they had to adopt new ways and new values. We see that this does not work. We see the rise of alcohol and drug addiction; we see the broken families. These values that this country espouses are not a cure-all to all the problems of the world, that our tradition has much more to teach, that our tradition has many things in it that the world still needs to know, that we, many times, are afflicted by this confrontation between Judaism and the current ideas, and many of our people fall away and stop being Jews. Tragedies occur to the Jewish people when we stray too far from the Jewish path.

G-d tell us in this Torah portion that there is a remedy, a hope, that Judaism will survive and can be eternal, and we can recoup from these terrible tragedies and make it again. All we have to do is concentrate on our children. We have to make sure our children are given a strong and firm Jewish education and will be able to combat the alien ideas and will be able to come back and prove we are an eternal people, because we are an eternal people because G-d gave that promise to us.

In this Torah portion, too, we have the Shma, the main statement of belief of the Jew: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." It is not enough just to proclaim that G-d is one. We have to prove that G-d is one by loving with all our heart and all our soul and all our might. How do we do that? By having these words which I command you today on your heart. How do you prove that these words are in your heart? When you will teach them to your children. The whole key here is to teach them to your children. If you really think these values are important than you will sacrifice for them and make sure your children follow them, and you will show them an example of how to live according to them. That is the whole message of the Shma. It is not just that G-d is one. You could believe that G-d is one, but it could not change your life or make any difference to you, but to a Jew is you believe G-d is one you have to act differently, and you must especially teach these values to your children.

In this Torah portion we also have the Ten Commandments. It is interesting to note that in the Ten Commandments we are not commanded to love our parents. We are commanded only to honor them. "Honor your mother and father." Nowhere does it say that you should love your mother and father. In another place it says that you should respect your mother and father, because in our day and age it is impossible to command love. Actually, in the whole parent-child relationship you cannot command love because there is a hate-love relationship which always exists between parents and children. Children, after all, want to grow up. They want to assert their independence, and parents stop them. Parents stop them for good reason because teenagers, especially, many of them are not ready for it. They

VAESCHANAN 1987
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

could only end up in trouble, but we have a built-in conflict of people wanting to use their powers and expand their horizons, and parents holding them down. Of course, sometimes parents err and do not give their children the responsibility they should have. They must gradually give them the correct amount of responsibility so they can mature as adults, so sometimes you have to give them independence, but you do not give it to them all at once. Many parents, of course, stifle their children and ruin their children. On the other hand, many children rebel and try to seize independence when they are not ready for it and tragic results occur. It is impossible to command love, but we should respect our parents, and parents, themselves, should demand respect. Too often in our day and age parents do not demand respect. They want to be loved. They are afraid that if they do not give their child the car, the child will not love them. They are afraid that unless they say yes to their child's demands, the children will not love you. It is not important that the children love you but that they respect you. If they respect you then they will love you. This, of course, is true in marriage, too. Unless there is respect then love cannot exist. Love can precede respect, but unless there is also respect, then the love will wither and die and the couple will not have anything to do with each other. They will not have anything in common. We must have respect first. Parents should demand respect. Of course, parents have to deserve respect, too. Parents have to live a life which is exemplary according to the values they preach. They cannot preach one thing and act another way.

I am reminded of the time when a little girl went to get on a plane and the ticket seller asked the girl, "How old are you?" She said she was 8, but the mother said she was 5. The girl insisted she was 8, but her mother slapped her and she became 5. That mother, of course, ruined that child,

because that child cannot have any respect for the mother who lied for the sake of a few dollars. It is like the time a ticket taker looked at a little girl and said, "Do you know what happens to a little girl who lies?" The little girl answered, "Yes, she gets on the plane for half price." A parent who acts this way destroys their children's respect for them. A parent must deserve respect, too. We are commanded to honor our parents whether we respect them or not, but parents, in order to be effective parents, must deserve respect and then they must demand respect. If their child for some reason says they hate them and do not love them because they demand certain standards, then so be it. The important thing is to keep up these standards and eventually the children will love you. The important thing is to demand respect. Unfortunately, today many parents do not understand that, and they do not deal with their children in this way.

VAESCHANAN

LIFE IS A SPIRAL NOT A CIRCLE

AUGUST 1987

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Many times I have been asked, "Rabbi, who do you think are the most difficult people to work with? Which people do you have the hardest time conferring with and advising?" To these questions I always answer, "People who have given up hope, people who no longer feel that things can change for the better." Judaism is an optimistic religion. We Jews have always believed that things can be changed for the better. This is best exemplified by the phrase that is constantly heard in Israel: "Yeeyeh Tov - It will be good." We Jews have never succumbed to the circular view of history, a view which holds that basically nothing really ever changes. The pagan world, especially, espoused this circular view of history. To them life was a circle which could never be broken, that just as birth, teen age, middle age, old age, and death, spring, summer, fall, and winter repeat endlessly over and over again, so, too everything else in life is just an endless replay. We are all trapped. There ^{is} ~~was~~ no such thing as improvement or making things better. We are all forced to follow the same patterns over and over again. Of course, it is true that all of us go through birth, teen age, middle age, old age, and death, that spring, summer, fall, and winter all follow each other, but to Judaism life is not a circle; it is a spiral. A spiral does not cover the same ground. It can rise or fall. True, it follows a circular pattern but a spiral does not repeat itself endlessly. Each of us can make the spiral rise. We can make the spiral go higher and wider. We can increase the number of years we live. We can do great things in this world. We can make this world a better and better place.

That's why, according to many rabbis, the worst possible sin a person can commit is the sin of hopelessness, the sin of giving up. People who give

AUGUST 1967

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

up confirm the fact that life is circular, that life cannot be improved, that the quality of life cannot be made better, that one generation cannot make this world a better place for the next generation. This idea that hope is the most important ingredient in life is emphasized throughout the Jewish tradition. There is a holiday called Tu B'Av - the 15th of Av - which, according to the Talmud, is one of the happiest holidays in the Jewish calendar.

The rabbis say that this is a happy holiday because of three events which occurred on it. One, that the generation ^{which} ~~who~~ wandered in the desert stopped dying on this day, that those people who were between the ages of 20 and 60 when they had left Egypt had now all died. Two, that all the barriers between Jews marrying other Jews were abolished. For many generations Jews from one tribe were not allowed to marry Jews from another tribe. The reason for this was that tribal land was inherited, and the rabbis wanted to make sure that one tribe's land was not transferred to another tribe, that each tribe would always retain all its land. Three, that Hoshea Ben Elah, the last king of Israel, finally permitted the Jews of the northern king of Israel to go up to Jerusalem. Since the kingdom of Israel had been split in two many hundreds of years before, the kings of Israel had prohibited their people from going up to Jerusalem because they feared that if they would let their people go up to Jerusalem their people would, in time, consider Jerusalem to be not just their religious capital but also their political capital and these kings would lose their kingship. It is easy to understand why Tu B'Av should be considered a happy holiday because Jews could marry among themselves and go up to Jerusalem, but it is hard to understand why Tu B'Av should be considered a happy holiday because the generation ^{which} ~~who~~

AUGUST 1987
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

wandered in the desert died out. Why should this make Tu B'Av a happy holiday?

If we look carefully at the sin of the people who wandered in the desert perhaps we can understand this. The Jewish people were commanded to go up into the land of Israel. Moshe sent spies to the land of Israel in order to whet the people's appetite for the land, not in order for the spies to tell the people whether or not they should go up to the land. Ten of the twelve spies came back with an evil report, and the people believed them. The Jewish people lacked courage. They did not feel they were up to the task of conquering the land of Israel and, therefore, they were forced to wander in the desert until that generation died out. Originally G-d did not want to have them wander in the desert. He told Moshe Rabbeinu that He would wipe them out and start a new people from Moshe. Moshe protested and prayed to G-d not to do this. G-d listened to Moshe's prayer and forgave that generation and allowed them to live out their lives, but He decreed that they would not be allowed to enter the land of Israel and would have to die out in the desert. Moshe here does not protest. Why didn't Moshe protest? Earlier when the Jewish people had sinned against G-d by building a golden calf G-d, too, had wanted to destroy the Jewish people and start a new people from Moshe. Moshe there, too, had protested and prayed to G-d not to do this, and G-d there, too, had said that He would forgive the Jewish people, but He also said that from now on His presence would not go up among the people. Moshe protested further and begged G-d not to do this. Moshe said, "If You do not go up with them then I do not want to go up either." G-d relented and His presence did go up among the Jewish people. Why in the case of the golden calf did Moshe Rabbeinu persist and get G-d to totally

AUGUST 1987

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

forgive the Jewish people, while in the case of the Jewish people's refusal to enter Israel he did nothing and did not persist further and beg ~~that~~ ^{to} G-d forgive them and allow them to enter the land of Israel.

The rabbis answer this question by saying that the sin of the golden calf was not caused because the people had lost hope. The people at the time of the golden calf were just confused. They thought that Moshe was lost. They thought (because they had reckoned the time of his going up to the mountain incorrectly) that they could no longer count on Moshe's leadership. They did not say that they did not want to fulfill the Jewish task in the world of spreading G-d's word by being an example to the world of how to live a moral life. Instead, they said, "We need new means in order to spread this message since Moshe is not here." They said to Aaron, "Get up and make for us a god that will go before us because this man Moshe who brought us from Egypt, we do not know what happened to him." In other words, they were not giving up on their mission. They just felt that they needed other means to fulfill it since Moshe Rabbeinu was no longer among them. They were misguided. They erred but they did not give up. Similarly, today we have many people who feel that they must do certain things to save Judaism. We disagree with many of their philosophies and programs, but we still can work with many of these people because they still feel that Judaism should be saved. They may be wrong, they may be misguided, but they still have not given up hope. They still want to try. Some of the means they are using are, in my opinion, counter-productive and will lead to great assimilation, but, yet, these people want to save Judaism. Their motive is not to leave Judaism. They don't say, "We can't do anything. Let's assimilate." Their motive is to save Judaism. This was also the motive

AUGUST 1987

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

of many of the people who built the golden calf. They chose the wrong method ~~in order~~ to ensure Jewish survival but they thought that this was what they had to do. They tried. Moshe could work with many of these ~~type~~ of people because they had not given up hope. They did not say that it was all useless, hopeless.

The sin, though, of the generation who wandered in the desert was that they gave up. They did not want to do anything. They were cowering in fear before their problems. They said that they were like grasshoppers in the eyes of the people around them. They wanted to go back to Egypt. They had completely given up on the Jewish message and the Jewish mission. With these people Moshe Rabbeinu could not work because these people had lost hope.

How often do we find this same attitude today among many people? How many people today who, when confronted with a problem, just give up? It is amazing that today when people have so much more education and wealth and resources to attack their problems than people had in previous generations, that we have so many people who, when they are confronted with any type of problem, just fold. They do not adopt a can-do attitude. They do not say, "Well, since it didn't work this way, I'll try another way." They just give up. Some of our youngsters especially, when confronted with the most elementary problems, immediately flee to drugs and alcohol because drugs and alcohol give them relief from their problems and send them into a never never world where they do not have to face their problems.

Tu B'Av declares that ~~that~~ ^{the} generation of the desert's way of thinking is

AUGUST 1987
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

dead. We Jews cannot and should not ever think their negative way. We Jews must always think positively. We must always feel that we can solve our problems. We must always feel that if we cannot solve our problems one way we can solve them another way.

That is also why the rabbis made sure that after Tisha B'Av, the saddest day of the Jewish calendar we always read the Torah portion Vaeschanan. The whole key to the Torah portion Vaeschanan is hope. Moshe Rabbeinu exhorts the Jewish people by telling them, "Always have courage. Always have hope. Don't give up even when things are bad." Moshe Rabbeinu tells the people that they are going to have many problems. They are going to have to overcome many challenges. In fact, he even predicts that after they enter the land their children "shall deal corruptly...and G-d will get angry with them and scatter them among the peoples," but he said, "Remember, G-d will never forsake you completely," and he exhorts the Jewish people never to give up hope and to always remember that G-d's covenant with them is eternal. The Jewish people should always feel that there is hope even when times are terrible.

Moshe then does an interesting thing. He separates three cities of refuge in TransJordan. This seems to be a foolish act, because these three cities in TransJordan could not have the designation of cities of refuge until the Jewish people had conquered the land of Israel and designated three other cities there. The people knew that Moshe could not lead them into the land of Israel. By this act Moshe was proclaiming that even when you cannot finish the job, even when you, yourself, will never live to see the fruits of your labors, still do it. Do not give up hope. Future generations will be able to solve problems you cannot solve

AUGUST 1987

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

today based on your work. Future generations can be relied upon to complete your work. Never give up hope. Even if you are suffering from a terrible disease and probably will not recover from that disease, the very fact that you take certain medicines and follow a certain regime will help future generations to solve this disease. Do not give up hope. This disease will be conquered. It may take another generation or two but your courage and efforts are helping to conquer it. You are performing a valuable service.

The way Moshe Rabbeinu began the sedra is also the way he ends the sedra: by telling the Jewish people never to give up, to always remember that G-d is there to help them. He says, "G-d did not set His love upon you nor chose you because you were more in number than any people for ye were the fewest of all peoples but because the Lord loved you." The Jewish people should never give up or despair. An individual should never despair either. That is what Tu B'Av teaches us: never give up. Keep trying. Eventually you will succeed or future generations will succeed based upon your efforts. We should never give up on ourselves and our religion as the people in the desert did. We should live our lives based on the saying, "Yeeyeh Tov - It will be good", because truly it will be good, if not in our lifetime then in the lifetime of our children or our children's children. Life is not a circle but a spiral, ever going upward if we will but live lives of dedication and hope. Let us always remember Yeeyeh Tov.

Connectedness: What Questions Religion Can Answer

VAESCHANKEN

AUGUST 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

When we were children we all asked three questions over and over again: why, how, and what. Sometimes we drove our parents crazy with our questions. Children have a natural curiosity. They want to know everything. I am reminded of the story they tell about a young boy who kept asking his father questions which the father could not answer. Finally his father, in desperation, said, "What would ^{have} happen^d, son, if when I was your age I had asked all these questions?" The son answered, "Well, Dad, perhaps if when you were my age you had asked all these questions you would be able to answer my questions now." The truth of the matter is that not all our questions can be answered.

There really is no answer to the question why. Why did G-d create us? Why are we here? Why do certain things happen in certain ways? These questions have no answers. Sometimes we think that just because we give a name to something we answer the question why. We do not. When a teacher answers the question why a ball thrown up in the air falls down by saying ^{it is} because of gravity, she does not answer the question. She just defers it because she and nobody else can answer the question why ~~does~~ gravity makes the ball come down. Science answers the question how. It describes physical phenomena. It can tell you that water freezes at 32° but it cannot tell you why. It can tell you that there are a certain number of stars in a certain portion of the sky and that the planets revolve in certain ways, but it cannot tell you why.

Some people think that religion answers the question why. Maybe it does in an ultimate sense because it says that things are the way they are because G-d made them that way, but it does not explain why G-d made them that way. If anybody ever tells you that he understands

AUGUST 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE TWO

why G-d had to create death, suffering, pain, or frustration, do not believe him. He is either a fool or a liar. We do not know why. We have faith that in the end of days we will know why, but we do not know why now. We do not know why little babies should have to suffer the terrible agonies of AIDS or cancer before dying horrible deaths. We do now know why so many righteous people suffer and so many evil people prosper. We can give answers but they are partial answers at best. We do not know why.

Religion can only answer the question what. What does following G-d's commandments do for me? What happens to me if I follow Judaism? What effect does it have on me? The proof of religion is not really found in eyewitness accounts of revelation or in philosophical speculation, although these are helpful. The real proof of religion is found in the souls of each of us. We all know that when we practice our religion it has a very positive effect on us. We feel connected to others and connected to G-d and connected to ourselves. We do not feel alienated and alone and helpless in the face of our problems.

In the 15 word priestly blessing which is found in the Torah ~~and which is used throughout the world~~ we have reiterated this lesson. The first sentence of the blessing is, "May the Lord bless you and keep you." The rabbis say that this blessing refers to material things. May G-d bless you with material things, and may He also keep you from them, which means that we pray that G-d will keep us from the excesses which these material things can cause. We all know how many times the worst possible thing that can happen to a person is to get rich

AUGUST 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE THREE

too quickly. Most people do not know how to handle sudden wealth. Look at how many movie stars and basketball players commit suicide or get hooked on drugs because they do not know how to handle their sudden wealth.

The second sentence of the priestly blessing is, "May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you," which ~~means~~, the rabbis explain, ^{means,} that we pray that G-d should give us a good personality. The word for "gracious" in Hebrew is "Chain", which also in Hebrew means "favor" or "charm". We should be blessed by becoming ~~a~~ lovable and loving people. We should become charming, outgoing people who make friends easily and who are able to love others and to be loved.

The last part of the priestly blessing is, "May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace," which the rabbis explain means that we pray that G-d should give us His spiritual blessing. The question can be asked, why do we need this last blessing? If we are already blessed with wealth and a good personality, what is left? The answer is that we can have a good personality and be blessed with wealth but not have the spiritual ability to connect with others, with G-d, and with ourselves. Peace, or shalom in Hebrew, does not mean the same as peace in English. Shalom in Hebrew means "harmony". It means that all parts of our being ~~should~~ work at full capacity but in harmony with all the other parts of our personality and in harmony with G-d and with others. If we have shalom we feel connected to ourselves, to our family, to our people, and to our G-d. We are not alienated. We can have a wonderful personality and wealth but

AUGUST 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE FOUR

be miserable because we are not connected to anybody or anything.

The purpose of Judaism is to allow us to feel connected to ourselves, to others, to G-d, and to our people.

In the Torah portion Vaeschanan we ~~have written~~^{find} the Shma. The Shma, of course, is the most important prayer in Judaism. We are supposed to say it on our deathbed if possible. We recite it at least twice a day, yet it is a very strange prayer because it is not even directed to G-d. It is directed to our fellow Jews. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one," is really a declaration which states that there is a unity in the universe. Everything fits together. We are all part of a great whole. We are not alien pieces stuck onto an already perfect universe. We are part of the universe and if we would be missing the universe would not be complete. It states that each of us has a mission in this world and that we must proclaim through the way we live that there is a G-d in the world and that He has called upon us to help Him perfect the world. In fact, even the way the Shma is written in the Torah emphasizes this. The last letter of the word Shma, which is an Ayin in Hebrew, is written large, and the last letter of the word Echod, ~~or one, in Hebrew~~, the Daled, is also written large. If we combine these two letters, the Ayin and the Daled, we have the word "Ayd", which means "witness". We are all called upon to be a witness to the fact that there is a G-d in the world and that we are His partner in creation and that each of us is important because we count and can be counted on. It is interesting also to note that the two letters that are left in the word Shma spell "Shom" and the two letters that are left in the word Echod spell the word "Och". Together these two words are "Shom^{Och}~~ech~~", which in Hebrew

AUGUST 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE FIVE

mean "there is your brother". The way we serve as a witness to G-d in the world is by recognizing that every human being is our brother. The Jewish religion not only proclaims that G-d is one but also proclaims that we can be one, that we can unite the fragmented parts of our personality so ^{that} we can do great things in the world and so ^{that} we can unite with our people and our G-d to feel the power and beauty of the universe. In other words, we can have a wonderful inner ^{life} ~~love~~ irrespective of our outer circumstances.

It is our duty to try to p^erfect the world but we will not always succeed at least right away, but we have all been assured that as long as we try our best that is all that is required of us. That is why we say in the Shma, "The Lord our G-d, G-d is our G-d". He personally interacts with us as long as we want to help Him perfect this world. Even if we fail we can each have a personal relationship with G-d. In fact, we must. One of the main reasons most Jews today do not pray regularly is because they do not believe ^{they} that can have a personal relationship with G-d. Because of this, their inner harmony is threatened and the rich inner life which is within the reach of all of us is denied them. Therefore, they feel uneasy and may seek ~~relief~~ ^{relief} ~~this~~ in things which cannot help, i.e., drugs, alcohol, sex, etc.

In the very next lines after the Shma in the Torah these lessons are stressed. "And you shall serve the Lord your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might," ^{teach us that} ~~which means that if~~ we ~~practice Judaism~~ we will have the ability to love G-d, to feel His presence and to live a rich inner life so that we ~~will never~~ ^{Needn't} be

AUGUST 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE SIX

overcome by feelings of helplessness and depression. "And these words which I command you today will be on your heart," teaches us that we ~~will~~ have the capacity to integrate our personality, to become a whole person so that we can be G-d's partner in perfecting the world. "You shall teach them to your children and you shall speak about them when you lay down and go on the road," teaches us that we ~~will~~ all have the capacity to relate to our children, to our family. "And you will bind them as a sign on your hand and ~~there~~^{they} will be frontlets between your eyes," teaches us that we ~~will~~ all have inner dignity, ~~to~~ self-worth. "And you will write them on the doorposts of your houses and gates," again teaches us that each of us can ~~have~~^{make} a positive impact on the world.

Judaism answers the question what. We may not understand why we have to do all the things that we have been commanded to do, but we know that if we do them they will influence our lives. They will make us family oriented. They will elevate our activities and make us conscious of G-d's presence and our role in the world, and they will enrich our inner life. They will also make us less prone than others to problems of addiction, etc. We may not understand all the reasons why we should keep kosher, but we know that if a person keeps kosher it is much easier for him to just say no to drugs and alcohol, etc. since he already knows he cannot ingest certain things. We know the effect that Judaism has on people. Judaism makes good people. It does not succeed equally well with all people because we do not all start with the same character traits. Each of us are born with different character traits. Some of us are born hotheaded. Some of us are born with strong cravings, etc. I once asked my teacher in yeshiva

AUGUST 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE SEVEN

why it was that not all the boys in the class were up to ^{the} ~~a~~ level an ideal yeshiva boy should be. He looked at me and said, "Because they ~~all~~ ^{all} did not start from the same place. Thank G-d, though, that they are studying Torah and practicing Judaism because if it would not be for their Judaism and Torah study, some of them would be juvenile delinquents." Judaism does have a positive effect on people. We may not know why or even how but we do know what it does.

This conviction that Judaism elevates a person's life ^b is essential to make a person a better person is illustrated by the following famous Chassidic story. A young boy in Europe ran away from cheder. His father ran after him and caught him. As they were walking home on a mud lane a huge gold trimmed carriage with a driver and a footman pulled by 12 horses almost ran them down, splattering them with mud. As the carriage drove past them, the father and son saw the nobleman sitting inside the carriage bedecked with jewels and gold. The father turned to his son and said, "See that man. That is what you could turn out to be if you do not go to cheder. You could become like him." It is not the material things which ~~count~~ ^{can't} primarily. It is whether you feel ~~inside~~ connected to G-d and to man and to yourself. Judaism does that for us. It allows us to feel connected and, because we feel connected, to become better people.