

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Shabbat Nachamu - Parashat Va'etchanan  
July 29, 2023 \*\*\* 11 Av, 5783

Va'etchanan in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/2260/jewish/Vaetchanan-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2260/jewish/Vaetchanan-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The name of the Parshah, "Va'etchanan," means "I entreated," and it is found in Deuteronomy 3:23.

Moses tells the people of Israel how he implored G-d to allow him to enter the Land of Israel, but G-d refused, instructing him instead to ascend a mountain and see the Promised Land.

Continuing his "review of the Torah," Moses describes Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah, declaring them unprecedented events in human history. "Has there ever occurred this great thing, or has the likes of it ever been heard? Did ever a people hear the voice of G-d speaking out of the midst of the fire . . . and live? . . . You were shown, to know, that the L-rd is G-d . . . there is none else beside Him."

Moses predicts that in future generations the people will turn away from G-d, worship idols, and be exiled from their land and scattered amongst the nations; but from there they will seek G-d, and return to obey His commandments.

Our Parshah also includes a repetition of the Ten Commandments, and the verses of the Shema, which declare the fundamentals of the Jewish faith: the unity of G-d ("Hear O Israel: the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is one"); the mitzvot to love G-d, to study His Torah, and to bind "these words" as tefillin on our arms and heads, and inscribe them in the mezuzot affixed on the doorposts of our homes.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 40: 1-26

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/540269/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/540269/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

This week's haftarah is the first of a series of seven "haftarot of Consolation." These seven haftarot commence on the Shabbat following Tisha B'Av and continue until Rosh Hashanah.

This section of Isaiah begins with G-d's exhortation to the prophets: "Console, O console My people . . . Announce to Jerusalem that her period of exile has been fulfilled and that her sins have been forgiven."

Isaiah's prophecy describes some of the miraculous events that will unfold with the onset of the messianic era, such as the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, the revelation of G-d's glory, and the rewards and retribution that will then be meted out.

The prophet then goes on to comfort the people, describing G-d's power and might, and reassuring them of His care for His people.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### The Power of Why: Va'etchanan by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vaetchanan/power-of-why/>

In a much-watched TED Talk, Simon Sinek asked the following question: how do great leaders inspire action?[1] What made people like Martin Luther King and Steve Jobs stand out from their contemporaries who may have been no less gifted, no less qualified? His answer: Most people talk about *what*. Some people talk about *how*. Great leaders, though, start with *why*. This is what makes them transformative.[2]

Sinek's lecture was about business and political leadership. The most powerful examples, though, are directly or indirectly religious. Indeed I argued in *The Great Partnership*[3] what makes Abrahamic monotheism different is that it believes there *is* an answer to the question, why. Neither the universe nor human life is meaningless, an accident, a mere happenstance. As Freud, Einstein, and Wittgenstein all said, religious faith is faith in the meaningfulness of life.

Rarely is this shown in a more powerful light than in *Va'etchanan*. There is much in Judaism about *what*: what is permitted, what forbidden, what is sacred, what is secular. There is much, too, about *how*: how to learn, how to pray, how to grow in our relationship with God and with other people. There is relatively little about *why*.

In *Va'etchanan* Moses says some of the most inspiring words ever uttered about the why of Jewish existence. That is what made him the great transformational leader he was, and it has consequences for us, here, now.

To have a sense of how strange Moses' words were, we must recall several facts. The Israelites were still in the desert. They had not yet entered the land. They had no military advantages over the nations they would have to fight. Ten of the twelve spies had argued, almost forty years before, that the mission was impossible. In a world of empires, nations and fortified cities, the Israelites must have seemed to the untutored eye defenceless, unproven, one more horde among the many who swept across Asia and Africa in ancient times. Other than their religious practices, few contemporary observers would have seen anything about them to set them apart from the Jebusites and Perizzites, Midianites and Moabites, and the other petty powers that populated that corner of the Middle East.

Yet in this week's parsha Moses communicated an unshakeable certainty that what had happened to them would eventually change and inspire the world.

Listen to his language:

Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything

like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation by miracles, signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? [Deut. 4:32-34](#)

Moses was convinced that Jewish history was, and would remain, unique. In an age of empires, a small, defenceless group had been liberated from the greatest empire of all by a power not their own, by God Himself. That was Moses' first point: the singularity of Jewish history as a narrative of redemption.

His second was the uniqueness of revelation:

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to Him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? [Deut. 4:7-8](#)

Other nations had gods to whom they prayed and offered sacrifices. They too attributed their military successes to their deities. But no other nation saw God as their sovereign, legislator, and law-giver. Elsewhere law represented the decree of the king or, in more recent centuries, the will of the people. In Israel, uniquely, even when there was a king, he had no legislative power. Only in Israel was God seen not just as a power but as the architect of society, the orchestrator of its music of justice and mercy, liberty and dignity.

The question is why. Toward the end of the chapter, Moses gives one answer:

“Because He loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them.” ([Deut. 4:37](#)). God loved Abraham, not least because Abraham loved God. And God loved Abraham's children because they were his children and He had promised the patriarch that He would bless and protect them.

Earlier though Moses had given a different kind of answer, not incompatible with the second, but different:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me ... Observe them carefully, for *this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations*, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” [Deut. 4:5-6](#)

Why did Moses, or God, care whether or not other nations saw Israel's laws as wise and understanding? Judaism was and is a love story between God and a particular people, often tempestuous, sometimes serene, frequently joyous, but close, intimate, even inward-looking. What has the rest of the world to do with it?

But the rest of the world does have something to do with it. Judaism was never meant for Jews alone. In his first words to Abraham, God already said, “I will

“bless those who bless you, and those who curse you, I will curse; through you all the families of the earth will be blessed” ([Gen. 12:3](#)). Jews were to be a source of blessing to the world.

God is the God of all humanity. In Genesis He spoke to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, and made a covenant with all humankind before He made one with Abraham. In Egypt, whether in Potiphar’s house, or prison, or Pharaoh’s palace, Joseph continually talked about God. He wanted the Egyptians to know that nothing he did, he did himself. He was merely an agent of the God of Israel. There is nothing here to suggest that God is indifferent to the nations of the world.

Later in the days of Moses, God said that He would perform signs and wonders so that “The *Egyptians* will know that I am the Lord” ([Ex. 7:5](#)). He called Jeremiah to be “a prophet to the nations.” He sent Jonah to the Assyrians in Nineveh. He had Amos deliver oracles to the other nations before He sent him an oracle about Israel. In perhaps the most astonishing prophecy in Tanach, He sent Isaiah the message that a time will come when God will bless Israel’s enemies:

“The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria My handiwork, and Israel My inheritance.’” [Is. 19:26](#)

God is concerned with all humanity. Therefore what we do as Jews makes a difference to humanity, not just in a mystical sense, but as exemplars of what it means to love and be loved by God. Other nations would look at Jews and sense that some larger power was at work in their history. As the late Milton Himmelfarb put it:

Each Jew knows how thoroughly ordinary he is; yet taken together, we seem caught up in things great and inexplicable . . . The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us.[\[4\]](#)

We were not called on to convert the world. We were called on to inspire the world. As the prophet Zechariah put it, a time will come when “Ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you’” ([Zech. 8:23](#)). Our vocation is to be God’s ambassadors to the world, giving testimony through the way we live that it is possible for a small people to survive and thrive under the most adverse conditions, to construct a society of law-governed liberty for which we all bear collective responsibility, and to “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly”[\[5\]](#) with our God. *Va’etchanan* is the mission statement of the Jewish people.

And others were and still are inspired by it. The conclusion I have drawn from a lifetime lived in the public square is that *non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism*. They find it hard to understand why Jews, in countries where there is genuine religious liberty, abandon their faith or define their identity in purely

ethnic terms.

Speaking personally, I believe that the world in its current state of turbulence needs the Jewish message, which is that God calls on us to be *true to our faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith*. Imagine a world in which everyone believed this. It would be a world transformed.

We are not just another ethnic minority. We are the people who predicated freedom on teaching our children to love, not hate. Ours is the faith that consecrated marriage and the family, and spoke of responsibilities long before it spoke of rights. Ours is the vision that sees alleviation of poverty as a religious task because, as Maimonides said, you cannot think exalted spiritual thoughts if you are starving or sick or homeless and alone. [6] We do these things not because we are conservative or liberal, Republicans or Democrats, but because we believe that is what God wants of us.

Much is written these days about the *what* and *how* of Judaism, but all too little about the *why*. Moses, in the last month of his life, taught the *why*. That is how the greatest of leaders inspired action from his day to ours.

If you want to change the world, start with *why*. [1] [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF\\_VuA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF_VuA). [2] For a more detailed account, see the book based on the talk: Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. New York, Portfolio, 2009. [3] Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 2012). [4] Milton Himmelfarb and Gertrude Himmelfarb. *Jews and Gentiles*. New York, Encounter, 2007, p. 141. [5] [Micah 6:8](#). [6] *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:27.

[The Words Upon Our Hearts: Va'Etchanan by Jan Uhrbach](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-words-upon-our-hearts/)  
<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-words-upon-our-hearts/>

In this week's parashah we encounter anew perhaps the most well-known words in our tradition, the first paragraph of the Shema:

*Hear, O Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai alone. You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your "muchness." Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down, and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4-9)*

In these verses, we are commanded to place before us at all times words of Torah. They are to be in our hearts, in our mouths, on our heads and hands, and at the entrances to our homes.

Indeed, according to the rabbinic tradition, the commandment in verse 6 to place these words on our hearts is intended to teach us how to fulfill the foundational. Indeed, according to the rabbinic tradition, the commandment in verse 6 to place

these words on our hearts is intended to teach us how to fulfill the foundational commandment to “love God” found in the previous verse:

*“These words which I command you today shall be upon your heart.” Why is this written? Because it says, “You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart.” But I do not know how one comes to love the Holy Blessed One! Therefore it says “these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart.” Keep these words on your heart, for in this way you will come to recognize the Holy Blessed One and to cleave to God’s ways. [Sifrei Devarim 33](#)*

This causal connection makes intuitive sense. Love for another is premised on our encountering and coming to know (or at least recognize) the other; it is then expressed by our acting on what we know (i.e., behaving in ways which will please the beloved). So too with our love for God. By bringing the words of Torah into our hearts, we sensitize ourselves to God’s presence, learn more about God’s ways, and are thus better able to act in consonance with the Divine will.

Rabbi Menachem Mendl of Kotzk, however, points to a problem with the phrase *al levavekha*, “on your heart”: “[t]he text should have written ‘in your heart’ for it needs to be in the innermost parts of the heart.” The challenge is significant. How effective are words of Torah which remain on the surface of the heart, never penetrating within?

The Kotzker answers: *But, the intention of the verse is that at the very least, the words should be upon your hearts. Because for the majority, the heart is closed. Yet, there is no person whose heart is never open. And then, the words can fall, truly, into the heart. And it is regarding this that we pray, “open my heart with Your Torah” (petah libi betoratekha); God will open our hearts with the Torah. [Sefer Amud Ha’emet, on Deut. 6:6](#)*

The Torah commands us to place these words on our hearts, rather than in them, because it is not always within our ability to place words of Torah into our hearts. In Biblical parlance, the word “heart” (*lev*) refers at once to the seat of intellect and of emotion. Human experience, however, teaches that the two are often quite far apart. Studying the words of Torah and understanding them intellectually—even at very profound levels—is no guarantee that they will permeate our being. We are all too capable of reading the words without living them, speaking them without integrating them into who we are. Sadly, this is often true despite our very real desire to live what we learn. For even when the mind is wide open, the heart can be sealed shut. Therefore, sometimes the best we can do is make the words available, so that should the heart open, the words will be there.

In acknowledging these limitations on our ability to internalize the words of God, the Kotzker subtly recasts our obligations as Jews. I am told that within the discourse of psychoanalysis, faith is sometimes described not as a belief “in” something, but rather as a disposition such that despite the trauma of the past,

one remains open to the possibilities offered in the next moment. [1] Many of us carry disappointment, hurt, or shame that affects our religious lives, whether or not we'd call it "trauma." We are the inheritors of a Torah filled with narratives of human beings and God disappointing and angering each other, and we likely each have our own stories. We may feel wronged by God or by "religion"—having lived or witnessed Job-like suffering or been wounded or disappointed by a faith leader or community. Or we may carry feelings of shame and inadequacy from our own failures, or hopelessness in the face of the failures of humanity. Looking at our individual and collective history, we might conclude that we will never be able to live up to what the Torah demands. No matter how many times we declare God's oneness, we sometimes divide rather than unify, sow discord rather than harmony. Most often, we do not love God with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, and with all of our "muchness"; our resources are all too frequently engaged in the service of something else, usually our own egos. We may come to believe that no matter how much we study, and how long we pray, our hearts and the hearts of our fellow human beings will remain closed, unable to receive as truth that which our minds know to be true.

So the Torah, in commanding us to continually place "these words" upon our hearts, commands us to remain open to possibility despite this "past trauma," whether that trauma challenges our faith in God, ourselves, or humanity. To place these words upon our hearts is an assertion of faith that, because "there is no person whose heart is never open," our past need not dictate our future. Despite our history—and our all-too-painful experience of ourselves and our world—we trust that our (and our fellow humans') habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting will not govern us forever. Our usually closed hearts will indeed open, and the things we just can't seem to "get" will one day take root and blossom within. To love God, then, is not simply to strive to better know God through words of Torah. To love God is to adopt a particular stance: that despite previous distance, greater closeness with God is always possible.

Each one of us has likely placed upon our hearts particular words of Torah that somehow cannot seem to find their way in. There are teachings that we as a people cannot seem to master, lessons that humanity cannot seem to learn. When the heart is closed, the imagination must take over. We place these words upon our heretofore-closed hearts yet again, day after day, imagining that perhaps today there will be a moment of openness and the words will sink in. *Petah libi betoratekha*—open my heart with Your Torah—for there is no person whose heart is never open. [1] I am indebted to my dear friend Shirah Zeller (z"l), a gifted psychoanalyst and teacher of Torah, for this insight. (*Jan Uhrback is Director of the Block/Kolker Center for Spiritual Arts at JTS*)

## Va'etchanan: Strengthen Your Spiritual Health by Akiva Gersh

<http://canfeinesharim.org/vaetchanan-guard-yourself-very-well/>

There is a well known Midrash [1] (an originally oral teaching that comes to explain the written Torah) that tells of G-d taking Adam on a tour of the world shortly after his creation. At the end of the tour, G-d says to Adam, “Now, make sure you don’t destroy this world, for there will be no one after you to come and fix it.”

We can still hear G-d speaking these words today if we listen carefully enough. Woven into the fabric of our tradition, an environmental ethic appears throughout the halachic (legal) and mystical teachings of the Torah. It is part of the ancient consciousness that each generation inherits from those that came before, whose responsibility it is to then pass it on to those who will come next. As history unfolds and society changes, new faces of the Torah are revealed, as its ancient laws must be applied to completely new situations.

Over the past century humans have developed technologies whose use and implementation have exponentially increased our destructive impact on the natural world. Among the most detrimental have been the changes we have made in the most fundamental human action: growing food to sustain our existence. Following World War II, America and the rest of the world began its shift from a more traditional, organic-by-default approach to farming to one that depended on synthetic chemicals in order to control pests and weeds as well as to fertilize the soil. The intent was to increase food production in hope of wiping out world hunger, something that never actually happened, although food production was greatly increased. The original proponents of chemical pesticides, focused solely on the shorter production time and increased crop yield the pesticides would bring, were unaware of the long-term harmful effects these chemicals would have not only on the land and the food it grew, but also on local water sources and animal life, in addition to the effects on, of course, us humans.

Though each negative impact of chemically intensive farming is of extreme importance and can be responded to from within the framework of Torah, we will focus here on the specific impact it has on human health (though the impact on soil, water and other animal life is, of course, also a human health issue).

Therefore the question that stands before us is: Does a method of farming based on synthetic chemical inputs fit within the vision the Torah has for us for life here on Earth?

To answer this question, we go to two verses in this week’s parsha (Torah portion), Va’etchanan, that state, “Guard yourself and guard your soul very much”[2]and “You shall guard yourselves very well.” [3] The Sages explain that these verses refer to the mitzvah of protecting one’s physical health. As Rabbi Ephraim Luntchitz [4]explains: “‘Guard yourself’ means taking care of the body.” According to the Sefer HaChinuch [5], this mitzvah extends beyond the obligation



of protecting oneself from things that can end one's life to include also those things that can damage one's body.

The body was given to us as a vessel whose primary function is to house the soul so that the soul can dwell in this world and fulfill its purpose. The Rambam says on this: "Since maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of G-d,,ÿfor one cannot understand or have any knowledge of the Creator if he is ill,,ÿtherefore he must avoid that which harms the body and accustom himself to that which is helpful and helps the body become stronger." [6]

We also learn from the Shulchan Aruch, [7] the primary compilation of Jewish law, that we should avoid all things that are a potential risk to our lives. So holy and valuable is our being alive in the eyes of G-d that we are directed to stay away from something that is even just potentially harmful.

How much more so in the case of food grown with pesticides, whose harmful effects on human health are supported by a vast amount of documented research. The very purpose of pesticides in the world is to kill living things—weeds, insects, rodents, worms, aphids, termites, or moths— which harm our food. It is not only acknowledged, it is proudly boasted by the pesticide industry, that the pesticides being used are powerful poisons. [8] In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lists over 100 of the 300 standard chemicals in pesticides as carcinogenic. [9] Certain chemicals found in some pesticides, even if present only in very small concentrations on foods and in runoff and groundwater, reach ever higher concentrations as one moves up the food chain. [10] The effects of these chemicals are cumulative, and as they accumulate in our bodies, risks grow with time, particularly for children. [11] Other chemicals used do not have this cumulative affect, yet any small amount of toxic chemicals in the environment can have very profound effects on the lives of unintended victims,,ÿboth human and non-human.

The agricultural industry now pumps over 1.1 billion pounds of pesticides into American farms, soils, and waters every year. [12] Proven links from certain pesticides to thousands of illnesses, increased incidence of cancer, and other human health risks have been well documented. [13] An increasing body of research shows that pesticides and other contaminants are more present in the foods we eat, in our bodies, and in the environment than we thought. By eating organic foods, you can reduce your exposure to the potential health risks associated with those chemicals. [14]

The Torah teaches us to choose life. [15] The decisions we make must enhance our ability (and the ability of others) to live in this world as healthy physical and spiritual beings. The Sages throughout the generations internalized this concept very deeply both in the way they lived their own lives and in the way they guided others to live. An example of this is the Rambam's Mishneh Torah, where he enumerates various situations in which a person is not allowed to eat specific

foods or drinks out of fear that there may be poison in them. [16] How would the Rambam react today to the myriad of foods found in supermarkets that contain residues of multiple pesticides, or in other words, remnants of poison?

Confronting this issue on a very practical level, we know that it is quite difficult to avoid eating any non-organic food. If we are financially able, we can commit to bringing only organic food into our homes, but even so, once we step outside our front door, the control we have over our food is not always what we would like it to be. Therefore, to say that the Torah would prohibit eating non-organic food, like it is prohibited to eat pig, is, of course, illogical and unfounded. The Torah would never demand something of us that could not be fulfilled. But, to say that the Torah would release us from all responsibility of healthy eating and living is just as unfounded.

“You shall guard yourselves very well.” G-d cares a great deal about how we treat our bodies, about how we grow our food, and about the kind of food we choose to eat. Through our modern-day application of this ancient wisdom, we have the ability to transform ourselves and the world into greater and stronger vessels to help further the process of universal redemption, may we experience it soon in our days.

[1]Kohelet Rabbah 7:13. [2]Deut. 4:9. [3]Ibid. 4:15. [4]Rabbi Ephraim Luntchitz (1550-1619) of Prague, is also called the Kli Yakar. [5]Sefer HaChinuch, Rabbi Aaron Halevi, Spain, 13 century, Mitzvah 546. [6]Rambam, Spain, 1135-1204, Hilchot Deot 4:1.

[7]Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Yosef Caro, Israel, 1488-1575, Choshen Mishpat 427, 8-10.

[8]see [Chebucto.ns.ca](http://Chebucto.ns.ca) [9]see reports from McGill and Montana [10]see report from IAS

[11]Ibid. [12]see report from Texas Center [13]see report from [pmac](http://pmac) [14]Consumer Report [15]Devarim 30:19 [16]Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Rotzeach V'Shmirat Nefesh: 11,12.

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Haftarah: Redemption with No Fine Print by Vered Hollander-Goldfarb

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Up7ji7cMPjlmGtPVGF983RHiz1ktQa-K/view>

“Comfort, comfort My people, says your God\*” (Isaiah 40:1) so opens the haftarah that stands in sharp contrast to the harsh haftarot of the weeks leading up to Tisha B’Av.

Isaiah 40 was chosen to start a period of seven weeks of haftarot taken from Isaiah’s prophecies intended to comfort the people sitting in exile. Prof. Yair Hoffman, in Olam HaTanakh, Isaiah (Heb.), wonders how the message of comforting in this chapter might be different from that of other prophets, making this the ultimate prophecy of consolation. The midrash Pesikta d’Rav Kahana poses the same question in story form, presenting various prophets as trying to console Jerusalem, only to be rebuffed because Jerusalem does not know which

of their prophecies to believe: the ones about the looming destruction or the ones giving hope.

Isaiah is different, suggests Hoffman, in that he does not demand anything from the people. Implicit in other prophecies of future hope is the idea that the people have done something to deserve the change, that the problem of the past has been corrected. Isaiah says, *“her hard labor is fulfilled, her iniquity is settled, for she has taken from the LORD’s hand double for all her offenses.”* (v. 2.) The nation has suffered all that it was meant to endure as part of their punishment. They need not fear that more is about to come. They have justly earned their redemption and therefore it must come.

The prophet understands that this approach is necessary. A broken nation, having experienced things that they believed could not happen, has no endurance left for more struggles. The disillusioned nation does not have the inner strength to be proactive in its own redemption. They are likely to just walk away. Isaiah turns to the nation with a promise from God: He will do all that is needed to redeem His people.

If this idea invokes an earlier episode in Jewish history, it is not by chance. Isaiah follows this initial voice entreating or commanding the people to be comforted with a second one: *“A voice calls out: In the Wilderness clear a way for the LORD’s road, level straighten in the desert a highway for our God!”* (v.3) It is not the first time that God has redeemed the people of Israel through a trek in the desert. Awakening memories of the Exodus gives hope. Such a trek across the punishing desert that stretches between Babylon (Iraq) and the land of Israel is impossible, just as the Exodus from Egypt was impossible - but impossible deeds are God’s trademark.

While Isaiah describes world-altering events to come, he ends this part of the prophecy (v.11) with a beautifully gentle picture bringing us back to the images of the nation’s early leaders: *“Like a shepherd He tends his flock, in His arms He gathers lambs...”* But this time our shepherding leader who is taking us out is not human, it is God Himself. *(Vered Hollander-Goldfarb teaches Tanach and Medieval Commentators at the Conservative Yeshiva and is a regular contributor to Torah Sparks, FJC’s weekly message on the weekly Torah portion. She received her M.A. in Judaic Studies and Tanach from the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University and studied at Bar-Ilan University and the Jewish Theological Seminary. Before making aliyah, Vered taught at Ramaz School and Stern College in New York.)*

Tisha B'Av: Making Reparations after Churban by Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb

<https://truah.org/resources/lynn-gottlieb-tisha-bav-moraltorah/>

*“Zachor...Mah Haya Lanu! Remember what happened to us!”*

**This quote from the liturgy of Tisha B’Av**, written in the 12th century by Baruch ben Shmuel of Mainz, expresses how many of us are feeling this season. Tisha B’Av initially commemorated the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE

and again in 70 CE, known in Hebrew as *Churban HaBayit*/Destruction of The House. Over centuries, it expanded to include commemoration of the forced exile of Sefardic Jews from Spain and Portugal, European pogroms, and the Holocaust, initially called *Churban* before the term Shoah came into use.

The Hebrew term *Churban* denotes catastrophic destruction on a vast scale through human agency. And it is not our historic catastrophes alone we are mourning this year. The deadly set of rulings promulgated by the Supremely right wing Court impacting the bodies and well-being of women, girls and trans people, the sovereignty of Indigenous people, the health of the environment, the lives of Black people, freedom of religion, the right to boycott, and free speech compound the sense of emotional overwhelm present in our communities at this time. How then, might we wield our mourning technologies to meet the needs of the times we live in?

From earliest Jewish times, communal mourning also included teshuvah. For instance, we associate the prayer *Avinu Malkeinu* with the High Holidays, but the Talmud, in tractate Ta'anit (25b) - about public fast days and mourning practices - describes when Rabbi Akiva created it during a drought, i.e. a time of public mourning and repentance.

Teshuvah carries the meaning of return to wholeness through acts of repair. In the 12th century, Maimonides famously defined it as a five step process. Here is my updated interpretation of his definition, through a reparations framework:

Teshuvah requires acknowledgement of harms (*hakarah*), remorse (*charata*) - which, in a reparations framework, is a form of accountability for the harms - and public truth telling of harms by people directly impacted by them. Often, we are tempted to think that is enough, that we feel bad and apologize, but Maimonides argues that is not so. The last two steps - compensation (*peira'on*) and guarantees of non-repeat of the harm (*azivat ha-chet*) - are needed for teshuvah reparations to be complete to the satisfaction of injured parties. For the massive harms of colonial settlerism, racism, patriarchy, environmental destruction and, in the Jewish world, Israeli occupation, we need to implement these final two stages. It is not enough to mourn. Mourning must be accompanied by actions that end the harm being done.

To what can this be compared? Several years ago I saw Nancy Pelosi wash the feet of migrants who walked the treacherous road from Honduras to the United States to escape violence and climate devastation. As the Speaker of the House washed their feet, she shed tears of sorrow for their plight. In my understanding of faithfulness, however, you can't wash the feet of traumatized immigrants with one hand and use the other hand to sign off on massive military spending, which is the root cause of the harms that led them to leave their homes in the first place!

So it is with us. For the sake of a healed future, we cannot silo our grief from our

teshuvah. The two go hand in hand. Humanity's fate is tied together. This Tisha B'Av, along with the ancient words of Baruch ben Shmuel, I will recite the words of Honduran human rights worker Berta Caceres, who was murdered defending her community's access to clean water. She said, "In the indigenous world view, we are beings who come from the Earth, from the water, and from corn. Let us wake up! Wake up, humankind! We're out of time. We must shake our conscience free of the rapacious capitalism, racism and patriarchy that will only assure our own self-destruction... Our Mother Earth, militarized, fenced-in, poisoned, and a place where basic rights are systematically violated, demands that we take action. Let us build societies that are able to coexist in a dignified way, in a way that protects life. Let us come together and remain hopeful as we defend and care for the Earth and all of its spirits and living beings." *(Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb is entering her fiftieth year of rabbinic service. She is author of She Who Dwells Within; A World Beyond Borders Passover Haggadah; and Trail Guide to a Torah of Nonviolence.)*

### Yahrtzeits

Mel Zwillenberg remembers his mother Rose Zwillenberg on Saturday July 29<sup>th</sup>..

Marianne Sender remembers her mother Helen Popiel on Tuesday August 1<sup>st</sup> .

Lisa Small remembers her aunt Edith Berman on Wednesday August 2<sup>nd</sup> .

Shari Mevorah remembers her grandmother Yetta Jablonek on Thursday August 3<sup>rd</sup>

Michael Hessdorf remembers his mother Regina Hessdorf on Thursday August 3<sup>rd</sup>