

The Parshah in a Nutshell

Ve'etchanan

Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

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 the 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 G-d is the 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 *Shmah* which declare the fundamentals of the Jewish faith: the **unity** of G-d ("Hear O Israel: G-d our G-d, G-d is one"); the mitzvot to **love** G-d, **study** His Torah, and bind "these words" as **tefillin** on our arm and head and inscribe them in the **mezuzot** affixed on the doorposts of our home.



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Ve'etchanan

Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11
Summary & Commentary

The Parshah of Va'etchanan ("And I Beseeched") continues Moses' "Repetition of the Torah", begun in last

week's reading.

In the closing weeks of his life, Moses speaks to the new generation of Jews who are about to enter the Promised Land, and implement their mandate to serve as G-d's chosen "nation of priests" and "holy people", which they received at Sinai forty years earlier (the generation which Moses took out of Egypt having died out in the desert). Moses recalls the great events that forged the people of Israel -- the Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah at Sinai -- which this generation experienced as children and youths, or which they heard about from their parents. He repeats the laws and teachings which he taught them during the past 40 years, and reiterates the fundamental principles of the Torah. And he warns them against abandoning the Torah amidst the abundance and plenty they will enjoy in the Land.

Va'etchanan includes some of the basic texts of Judaism including the Ten Commandments (as repeated by Moses), the Shema (which proclaims the oneness of G-d, and the duty to love G-d, study His Torah and teach it to our children, and the mitzvot of *tefillin* and *mezuzah*), and Moses' prediction of the exile and the eventual Redemption.

Moses' Prayer

In the opening verses of our Parshah, Moses describes his failed efforts to revoke the divine **decree** that he not enter the Land himself:

Commentary

decree: *But G-d was angry with me for your sakes (3:26)*

G-d said to Moses: You can't have it both ways. I have already nullified My decree and upheld yours. I said: "I shall destroy them" (when Israel worshipped the Golden Calf) and you said "forgive them" -- and your desire prevailed. Now, if you wish that your desire "Let me cross over" should be upheld and My decree (that you not enter the land) be nullified, then you must retract your "forgive them"; if you wish "forgive them" to be upheld, then you must retract "let me cross over."

When Moses heard this, he proclaimed: May Moses die, and a hundred like him, and not a fingernail of one of them be harmed!
....

And I beseeched G-d at that time, saying: "You, O G-d, have **begun** to show Your servant Your greatness, and Your mighty hand; for what G-d is there **in heaven or in earth**,

Commentary

When Moses approached death and the children of Israel did not appeal to G-d on his behalf that he should enter the Land, Moses gathered them together and began to rebuke them. He said: One man saved 600,000, and 600,000 cannot save one man!
(Midrash Rabbah)

And I beseeched: *And I beseeched G-d at that time (3:23)*

Moses prayed 515 prayers -- the numerical value (*gematria*) of *va'etchanan*, "and I beseeched" -- to be allowed to enter the land.
(Midrash Rabbah)

begun: *You, O G-d, have begun to show Your servant Your greatness (3:24)*

Moses was G-d's faithful servant, the greatest of the prophets, the recipient of the Torah from G-d. Yet after 120 of the most G-dly life ever lived, he sees himself as only *having begun* in his relationship with G-d!
(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

in heaven or in earth: When Moses saw that the decree had been sealed against him, he went and drew a circle and sat inside it, and said: I am not moving from here until You nullify the decree! ... He then wrapped himself in sackcloth and covered himself with ashes and stood in prayer and supplication before G-d until the heaven and the earth and the very laws of creation began to tremble, and said: Perhaps the time has come for G-d to destroy the world?...

What did G-d do at that moment? He announced at every gate of every heaven and at every gate of every court that Moses' prayer should not be admitted... for the voice of Moses' prayer was like a sword that slices and rips and which nothing can stop...

Said Moses to G-d: If You will not allow me to enter the land, allow me to [enter] as a beast of the field, who grazes on the grass and drinks water and sees the world that way -- let my soul be as one of those!
Said G-d: "Enough!"

Said Moses to G-d: If You will not allow me to enter the Land, allow me to [enter] as a bird that flies in the air to all four corners of the earth to collect its feed, and in the evening returns to its nest -- let my soul be as one of those!

Said G-d: "Enough!" (Yalkut Shimoni)

Moses said to G-d: Master of the Universe! Joseph's bones are entering the Land, and I shall not enter?

Said G-d to him: He who admitted to his land, is buried in his land; and he who did not admit to his land, shall not be buried in his land. Joseph admitted to his land when his mistress said (Genesis 39:14), "See, they have brought us a Hebrew man..." and he did not deny it; on the contrary, he said (ibid., 40:15), "I was abducted from the land

that can do according to Your works, and according to Your might?

*"I pray You, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly mountain and the **Levanon**."*

But G-d was angry with me for your sakes, and would not hear me; and G-d said to me: "Enough! Speak no more to Me of this matter."

"Go up to the top of the summit, and lift up your eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and see with your eyes: for you shall not cross this Jordan."

*"Instruct **Joshua**, and encourage him, and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you shall see."*

Commentary

of the Hebrews"; therefore, he shall be buried in his land. You, however, did not admit to your land, when the daughters of Jethro said (Exodus 2:19) "An Egyptian man rescued us from the shepherds" and you heard this and was silent, therefore "You shall not cross this Jordan". (Midrash Rabbah)

Levanon: *That goodly mountain and the Levanon (3:25)*

"The goodly mountain" -- this is Jerusalem; "the Levanon" -- this is the Holy Temple. (Rashi)

Joshua: *Instruct Joshua... for he shall go over before this people (3:28)*

G-d said to Moses: Such is the way of the world: Each generation has its teachers. Until now was your portion to serve Me, now has come the portion of Joshua your disciple.

Said Moses to G-d: Master of the Universe! If it is because of Joshua that I must die, let me become his disciple.

Said G-d to him: If that is your wish, you may do so.

So Moses arose early in the morning to Joshua's door, and Joshua was sitting and teaching. And Moses bent his frame and covered his mouth, and Joshua did not see him... And all of Israel came to Moses' door, but found him at Joshua's door, and Joshua was sitting and Moses was standing. And the people said to Joshua: 'Joshua! What has happened to you, that Moses our master is standing and you are sitting? As soon as Joshua lifted

Life Defined

Moses now launches into the theme that pervades this Parshah: If the people are to survive in the Land, and survive as a people, the Torah they received at Sinai is the key:

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, to the statutes and to the laws which I teach you to do, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which G-d, the G-d of your fathers gives you.

You shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish from it, that you may keep the commandments of G-d your G-d which I command you.

Indeed, the **essence of life** is attachment to G-d through the fulfillment of His commandments:

Commentary

his eyes and saw this, he immediately tore his garments and cried and wept: "Master! Master! Father, my father and lord!"

Said the people to him: "Moses our teacher! Teach us Torah."

Said he to them: "I have not license."

Said they to him: "We shall not leave you!"

Then a voice came forth from heaven and said to them: "Learn from Joshua!" and they accepted it.

Joshua sat at their head, Moses to his right and the sons of Aaron to his left; he sat and taught, and Moses did not understand his teaching.

After they stood up, the people of Israel said to Moses: 'Moses our teacher, explain the teaching to us.'

Said he to them: "I know it not" and Moses was stumbling and failing.

At that moment, he said to G-d: "Master of the Universe! Until now, I asked for life. Now, my soul is placed in Your hand." (Midrash Tanchuma)

essence of life: *But you who cleave to G-d your G-d are alive, every one of you, this day (4:4)*

Your eyes have seen what G-d did because of Baal-Pe'o'r: for all the men that followed Baal-Pe'or, G-d your G-d destroyed them from among you.

But you who cleave to G-d your G-d are alive, every one of you, this day.

The Specialty of Israel

The Torah, Moses continues, is not only the Jew's lifeline of connection to G-d -- it is also our mission to humanity:

For this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, who shall hear all these statutes, and say: Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

*For what nation is there so great, **that G-d is so near to them**, as G-d our G-d is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that has statutes and laws so righteous as all this Torah, which I set before you this day?*

Commentary

The wicked, even in their lifetimes, are considered dead... The righteous, even in death, are considered alive. (Talmud, Brachot 18a-b)

G-d is the exclusive source of life; hence life, by definition, is connection with G-d. A "life" of disconnection from G-d is pseudo-life -- life devoid of all but its most superficial illusory shell.

(The Chassidic Masters)

***that G-d is so near to them:** And you shall bind them for a sign upon your arm, and they shall be as tefillin between your eyes (6:8)*

What is inscribed in G-d's *tefillin*? The verse (Samuel II, 7:23) "Who is like Your people Israel, one nation in the earth."
(Talmud, Brachot 6a)

Torah law prescribes that we first tie the hand-*tefillin* on our arms and then set the head-*tefillin* upon our heads (see above).

G-d's *tefillin*, the people of Israel, also consist of a hand-*tefillin* and head-*tefillin*. There are the head-Jews, the scholars and thinkers, and the hand-Jews, the doers. Both are precious to our Father in Heaven, both are integral to the role of G-d's "one nation in the earth." But when G-d ties His *tefillin* to reaffirm His bond with His people, He gives precedence to the "simple" deed, cherishing it above all else.
(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

The revelation at Sinai must remain uppermost in the Nation's collective memory:

Only take heed to yourself, and guard your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; teach them to your children, and your children's children:

The day that you stood before G-d your G-d at Horeb, when G-d said to me: Gather Me the people together, and I will make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.

*And you came near and stood **under the mountain**; and the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.*

And G-d spoke to you out of the midst of the fire: you heard the voice of the words, but saw no form; only a voice.

And He declared to you his covenant, which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Words; and He wrote them upon two tablets of stone.

*And G-d commanded me at that time to **teach** you statutes and laws, that you might do them in the land into which you go over to possess it.*

Commentary

***under the mountain:** And you came near and stood under the mountain (4:11)*

This teaches that G-d overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] cask, and said to them: "If you accept the Torah, fine; if not, there shall be your burial."

Rabbi Acha ben Yaakov observed: This resulted in a strong legal contest against the Torah (since it was a contract entered into under duress). Said Raba: But they re-accepted it (out of their own, uncompelled choice) in the days of Ahasuerus, as it is written (Esther 9:27): "The Jews confirmed, and accepted"--on that occasion they confirmed what they had accepted long before.

(Talmud, Shabbat

88a)

***teach:** And G-d commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and laws*

Sans Form

One of the most important lessons of Sinai is the negation of idolatry; for there it was revealed to man that G-d transcends the physical, transcends form itself:

Take therefore good heed to yourselves, for you saw no manner of form on the day that G-d spoke to you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire --

Lest you become corrupt, and make a carved idol, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of any thing that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth;

And lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you should be misled to worship them, and serve them, which G-d your G-d has allotted to all the nations under the whole heaven...

Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of G-d your G-d, which he made with you.. For G-d your G-d is a consuming fire, a jealous G-d.

Moses Predicts the Exile

When you shall beget children, and children's children, and you shall have remained long in the land, and shall deal corruptly, and make a carved idol, the likeness of anything, and shall do evil in the sight of G-d your G-d, to provoke him to anger:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you shall soon utterly perish from off the land into which you go over the Jordan to possess it; you shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.

And G-d will scatter you among the nations, and you shall be left few in number among the nations, where G-d shall lead you. And there you shall serve gods, the work of men's

Commentary

From here is derived that it is forbidden to receive payment for teaching Torah: just as I (Moses) taught you the Torah free of charge, so, too, must you teach it for free.

(Talmud, Nedarim 37a)

hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

*And **from there** you will seek G-d your G-d, and you will find Him, for you will seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

When you are in distress, and all these things are come upon you, in the latter days, you will return to G-d your G-d, and you will hearken to His voice.

For G-d your G-d is a merciful G-d; He will not forsake you, nor will He destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.

The Revelation at Sinai: "There Is None Else"

The revelation at Sinai, says Moses, was an event unique in human history

For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that G-d created man upon the earth, and from the one side of heaven to the other: has there been any such thing as this great thing is, or whether aught has been heard like it?

Did ever a people hear the voice of G-d speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?

*Or has G-d ventured to go and take him a nation from the womb of another nation, **by trials, by signs, and by***

Commentary

***from there:** And from there you will seek G-d your G-d, and you will find Him (4:29)*

The Torah stresses that when you seek G-d *from there*, from your place of exile "among the nations," you will find Him. For G-d is to be found everywhere, and every corner of His creation can serve as the vehicle to reach Him. If divine providence has dispatched you to a certain place and life, your surest path to Him is from there.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

***by trials, by signs, and by wonders:** I am G-d your G-d, who has brought you out of the land of Egypt (5:6)*

Would it not have been more appropriate for G-d to say, "I am G-d... who created the heavens and the earth"?

But G-d the creator is the G-d that Israel shares with the rest of creation. At Sinai, G-d did not speak to us as the author of nature,

wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that G-d your G-d did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

Moses proclaims what is perhaps the most radical statement of Judaism:

*You it was shown, that you might know, that G-d, He is G-d: **there is none else beside Him.***

This the people saw at Sinai; and this awareness they are to cultivate in their minds and hearts in the ordinary "today" as well:

***Know** this day, and **consider it** in your heart, that G-d, He is G-d in **heaven above**, and upon the earth beneath: there is nothing else.*

Commentary

but as the executor of the miraculous Exodus. For at Sinai we forged a covenant with G-d in which we pledged to surpass all bounds of nature and convention in our commitment to Him, and He pledged to supersede all laws of nature and convention in His providence over us. (The Chassidic Masters)

***there is none else beside Him:** There is none else beside Him (4:35)*

If the eye were allowed to see the spiritual vitality flowing from the utterance of G-ds mouth into every creation, we would not see the materiality, grossness and tangibility of the creation, for it would be utterly nullified in relation to this divine life-force... (Tanya)

***Know:** And you shall know today (4:39)*

The foundation of all foundations, and the pillar of all wisdom, is to know that there is a First Existence, who brings all existences into being; that all existences of heaven and earth and between them, derive existence only from the truth of His existence.

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, 1:1)

***consider it:** There is none else beside Him (4:35)*

Rabbi Binyamin Kletzker, a chassid of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, was a lumber merchant. One year, while he was adding up the annual accounts, he inadvertently filled in under a column of figures: TOTAL: *Ein od milvado* ("There is none else beside Him").

Moses Establishes Cities of Refuge

A short break in the narrative describes how Moses established three "cities of refuge" on the eastern side of the Jordan, "that the slayer might flee there, who should kill his neighbor unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live."

(These are the lands which Moses conquered from the two Emorite kings, Sichon and Og, and upon which he settled two and one-half of the twelve tribes of Israel: the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half of the tribe of Menasseh.)

Moses Repeats the Ten Commandments

And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and laws which I speak in your ears this day, that you may learn them, and keep, and do them.

G-d our G-d made a covenant with us in Horeb. G-d made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.

Commentary

A fellow chassid admonished him for his absentmindedness. "Don't you know, Reb Binyamin, that everything has its time and place?" he admonished. "There's a time for Chassidic philosophizing, and a time to engage in worldly matters. A person's business dealings are also an important part of his service of the Almighty and must be properly attended to."

Said Rabbi Binyamin: "We consider it perfectly natural if, during prayer, one's mind wanders off to the fair in Leipzig. So what's so terrible if, when involved in business, an 'alien thought' regarding the oneness of G-d infiltrates the mind?"

(Told by the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

***heaven above:** In the heavens above and the earth below (4:39)*

Surely we know that the heavens are above us and that the earth is below our feet; why couldnt the Torah, whose every word and letter is measured, simply say in the heavens and the earth?

But here is a lesson in how we are to approach the heavenly and earthly aspects of our own lives. In all that pertains to the heavens, to our spiritual achievements, we must look upwards, to those greater than ourselves, and strive to emulate them. But as regards our earth, our material possessions and attainments, we must look below us, to those who have less than we do, and be grateful for what we have. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

G-d spoke with you face to face in the mountain out of the midst of the fire (I stood between G-d and you at that time, to show you the word of G-d; for you were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up to the mountain) saying:

[1] I am **G-d** your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

[2] You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself any carved idol, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down to them, nor serve them, for I G-d your G-d am a jealous G-d, punishing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, and showing mercy to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

[3] You shall not take the name of G-d your G-d in vain: for G-d will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain.

Commentary

G-d: I am G-d your G-d (5:6)

Because G-d appeared to them at the Red Sea as a mighty warrior, at Sinai as a sage teaching Torah, in the days of Solomon as a handsome lad and in the times of Daniel as a compassionate old man, G-d said to them: Just because you perceive Me in many guises, do not think that there are many gods; rather, it is I who was at the sea, I who was at Sinai, I who is in every place -- "I am G-d your G-d." (Midrash Tanchuma)

Keep: Keep the Shabbat day (5:12)

In Exodus 20 (where the Ten Commandments are first written), it says, "Remember the Shabbat day." "Remember" and "keep" (which represent the imperative and prohibitive aspects of Shabbat) were expressed in a single utterance -- something which the human mouth cannot articulate and the human ear cannot hear. (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 27a)

Six days: Six days shall you labor... (5:13)

This, too, is a divine decree. Just as the people of Israel were commanded to rest on Shabbat, so, too, were they commanded to work on the other days of the week. (Mechilta D'Rashbi)

all your work: Six days shall you labor, and do all your work (5:13)

Is it then possible for a person to do "all his work" in six days? But rest on Shabbat as if all your work is done. (Mechilta)

[4] **Keep** the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as G-d your G-d has commanded you. **Six days** you shall labor, and do **all your work**, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of G-d your G-d: on it you shall not do any work -- you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates, so that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that G-d your G-d brought you out from there with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm; therefore G-d your G-d commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

[5] **Honor** your father and your mother, as **G-d** your G-d has commanded you; so that your days may be lengthened, and **that good befall you**, in the land which G-d your G-d gives you.

Commentary

Honor: Honor your father and your mother (5:16)

And in Leviticus 19:3 it says, "Every man, his mother and father should fear." For it is revealed and known to G-d that a person adores his mother more than his father, and that he fears his father more than his mother. G-d therefore set the honor of one's father first, and the fear of one's mother first, to emphasize that one must honor and fear them both equally. (Talmud, Kiddushin 31a)

G-d: Honor your father and your mother (5:16)

There are three partners in man: G-d, his father, and his mother. When a man honors his father and his mother, G-d says: "I consider it though I had dwelt among them and they had honored Me." (Talmud, Kiddushin 30b)

(The Midrash points out that the Ten Commandments were engraved on two tablets--five on the first and five on the second. The first tablet contains mitzvot that are "between man and G-d," while the commandments on the second tablet govern the relationship "between man and man." This means that as the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," belongs to the category of "between G-d and man"!

that good befall you: Rabbi Jacob said: There is no reward for the mitzvot in this world...

[What is the proof for this?] In connection with the mitzvah of honoring one's parents it is written, "In order that your days may be prolonged, and that good befall you" (Deuteronomy 5:16). In reference to the mitzvah of "dismissal of the nest" (to chase away

[6] *You shall not kill.*

Commentary

the mother bird before taking the young) it is written, "That good befall you, and that you may prolong your days" (ibid. 22:7). Now, what if a person's father says to him, "Ascend to the loft and bring me young birds," and he ascends to the loft, dismisses the mother and takes the young, and on his return falls and is killed -- where is this man's good and where is this man's long days? But "in order that good befall you" means on the day that is wholly good; and "in order that your days may be long," on the day that is wholly long.

Perhaps such things don't happen? Rabbi Jacob saw an actual occurrence. (Talmud, Kiddushin 39a)

Thus we have *Olam ha-Zeh* ("the present world") and *Olam ha-Ba* ("the world to come") -- two entirely different modes of existence, each confined to a world all its own. Our "present world" is the stage for deed and achievement, but without the possibility to enjoy the true fruits of our labor. On the other hand, the "world to come" is a place of ultimate reward, bliss and perfection, but one that precludes any further achievement on the part of man. The Talmud goes so far as to declare "There is no reward for mitzvot in this world", as, regarding the World to Come, to quote the verse, "There will come years of which you will say: I have no desire in them," and say: "This refers to the days of the Messianic Era, in which there is neither merit nor obligation."

Why this dichotomy? Because a world in which the benefits of obeying G-d's commandments are self-evident would lack the challenge which makes their observance meaningful and worthy of reward. Conversely, a world in which the goodness of G-d is manifest precludes truly meaningful accomplishment on the part of man. Thus our sages have said: "A single moment of *teshuvah* and good deeds in this world is greater than all of the world to come. And a single moment of bliss in the world to come is greater than all of this world" (Ethics of the Fathers 4:17).

(The Chassidic masters)

You shall not kill: *You shall not kill (5:17)*

How were the Ten Commandments given? Five on one tablet and five on a second tablet. This means that "Do not murder" corresponds to "I am G-d your G-d." The Torah is telling us that one who sheds blood it is as if he has reduced the image of the King.

What is this analogous to? To a king of flesh and blood who entered a country and put up portraits of himself, and made statues of himself, and minted coins with his image. After a while, the people of the country overturned his portraits, broke his statues and invalidated his coins, thereby reducing the image of the king. So, too, one who sheds blood reduces the image of the King, as it is written (Genesis 9:6): "One who spills a man's

[7] *You shall not commit adultery.*

[8] *You shall not steal.*

[9] *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

[10] *You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.*

The People ask Moses to Intervene

As Moses mentions above, he "stood between G-d and you at that time" at the people's request, because they feared direct contact with G-d. Now he relates what happened in detail:

These words G-d spoke to all your assembly in the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a great voice which was not again. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone, and delivered them to me.

And it came to pass, when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, and the mountain did burn with fire, that you approached me, all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; and you said:

"Behold, G-d our G-d has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire; we have seen this day that G-d does talk with man, and he lives.

"Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of G-d our G-d any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living G-d speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?"

"Go you near, and hear all that G-d our G-d shall say, and speak to us all that G-d our G-d shall speak to you; and we will hear it, and do it."

And G-d heard the voice of your words, when you spoke to me. And G-d said to me: "I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they have well said all that they have spoken.

"O, if only that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"

Commentary

blood... for in the images of G-d He made man." (Mechilta)

"Go say to them: Return again to your tents.

"But as for you, stand here by Me, and I will speak to you all the commandments, and the statutes, and the laws, which you shall teach them, **that they may do them in the land** which I gave them to possess it..."

Commentary

that they may do them in the land: You shall murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal (5:17)

When Moses ascended to heaven, the angels protested to G-d: "What is a human being doing amongst us?"

Said He to them: "He has come to receive the Torah."

Said they to Him: "This esoteric treasure, which was hidden with You for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created, You wish to give to flesh and blood?... 'What is man, that You are mindful of him, and the son of man, that You take notice of him? ... Place Your glory upon the heavens!' (Psalms 8:2-5)"

Said G-d to Moses: "Answer them."

Said Moses: "Master of the Universe! I fear lest they consume me with the breath of their mouths."

Said G-d: "Hold on to the Throne of Glory, and return them an answer."

Said Moses: "Master of the Universe! This Torah that You are giving to me, what is written in it? I am the L-rd Your G-d, who has taken you out from the land of Egypt."

"Have you descended to Egypt?" asked Moses of the angels. "Have you been enslaved to Pharaoh? So why should the Torah be yours?"

"What else does it say? You shall have no other gods. Do you dwell amongst idol-worshipping nations? What else does it say? Remember the Shabbat day. Do you work? ... What else does it say? Do not swear falsely. Do you do business? What else does it say? Honor your father and your mother. Do you have parents? What else does it say? Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal. Is there jealousy among you? Do you have an evil inclination?"

Straightway the angels conceded to G-d... and each one was moved to befriend Moses and transmit something to him. Even the Angel of Death too confided his secret to him...

(Talmud, Shabbat 88b)

Hear: And you shall love G-d your G-d... (6:5)

The Shema

Hear O Israel: G-d our G-d; G-d is one.

Commentary

The Maggid of Mezeritch expounded on this verse, and asked: how can there be a commandment to love? Love is a feeling of the heart; one who has the feeling, loves. What can a person do if, G-d forbid, love is not imbedded in his heart? How can the Torah instruct "you shall love" as if it were a matter of choice?

But the commandment actually lies in the previous verse, "Hear O Israel..." The Hebrew word *shema* ("hear") also means "comprehend". The Torah is commanding a person to study, comprehend, and reflect upon the oneness of G-d. Because it is the nature of the mind to rule the heart, such contemplation will inevitably lead to a love of G-d. If one contemplates deeply and yet is still not excited with a love of G-d, this is only because he has not sufficiently refined and purified himself of the things which stifle his capacity to sense and relate to the Divine. Aside from this, such contemplation by the mind will always result in a feeling of love. (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch)

one: G-d is one (6:4)

G-d ... is one, and His unity is unlike any other unity in existence. He is not 'one' as in 'one species' which includes many individuals. Nor is He 'one' as in 'one body' which includes various parts and dimensions. Rather, [His is] a unity the likes of which there is no other unity in the world.

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, 1:7)

sign: And you shall bind them for a sign upon your arm, and they shall be as tefillin between your eyes (6:8)

While putting on the *tefillin* one should have in mind that G-d commanded us to inscribe [within the *tefillin*] the four passages [Exodus 13:10 and 11:16, and Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21] which speak of His unity and the Exodus from Egypt... And that He commanded us to place them on the arm opposite the heart, and on the head opposite the brain, so that we should submit the soul which is in the brain as well as the desires and thoughts of our hearts, to his service... (Siddur HaRav)

they: When one puts on the *tefillin*, one should first put them on the arm and then on the head. And when one removes them, one should first remove them from the head and then remove them from the arm.

Why is this so? I understand that one should first put on the hand-*tefillin*, since the verse states, You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as tefillin between your eyes; but from where do we derive that the head-*tefillin* are to be removed first?

And you shall love G-d your G-d with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall speak of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.

*And you shall bind them for a **sign** upon your arm, and **they** shall be as *tefillin* between your eyes. **And you shall***

Commentary

Said Rabbah: Rav Huna explained it to me. The verse states "and *they* shall be as *tefillin* between your eyes" -- they, in the plural -- to imply that at any time that there is *tefillin* between your eyes, there shall be both (i.e. both the head and the hand-*tefillin*). (Talmud, Menachot 36a)

The deeper significance of this law:

The head-*tefillin* represents the mind; the hand-*tefillin* represents action. Both mind and deed are to be enlisted in man's service of his Creator. Doing, however, must come first, as the people of Israel proclaimed at Sinai, "We will do and we will hear (comprehend)." Hence the law that the hand-*tefillin* is to be bound first.

Furthermore, while it is possible to conceive of a temporary state in which doing exists without understanding, understanding that is divorced from deed is utterly worthless. Hence the law that "at any time that there is *tefillin* between your eyes, there shall be both." In the words of our sages (Talmud, Yevamot 109b), "Whoever says, 'I have only Torah', does not have Torah, either." (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And you shall write them: *And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house, and on your gates (6:9)*

When Onkelos the son of Kalonymus [a nephew of the Roman emperor Titus] became a proselyte (= a convert to Judaism), the Emperor sent a contingent of Roman [soldiers] after him, but he enticed them with words of Torah and they became converted to Judaism.

Thereupon, the Emperor sent another Roman cohort after him, bidding them not to say anything to him. As they were about to take him away with them, he said to them: "Let me tell you just an ordinary thing: In a procession the torchlighter carries the light in front of the torchbearer, the torchbearer in front of the leader, the leader in front of the governor, the governor in front of the chief

write them upon the doorposts of your house, and on your gates.

Warnings

Our Parshah concludes with a series of warnings. You are entering a land of plenty, says Moses to the people, where you will receive "great and goodly cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill,

Commentary

officer; but does the chief officer carry the light in front of the people [that follow]?"

"No!" they replied.

Said he: 'Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, does carry the light before Israel, for the Torah states (13:21): "And G-d went before them . . . in a pillar of fire to give them light." Then they, too, became converted.

Again he sent another cohort ordering them not to enter into any conversation whatever with him. So they took hold of him; and as they were walking on he saw the mezuzah which was fixed on the door-frame and he placed his hand on it saying to them: "Now what is this?" and they replied: "You tell us then."

Said he, "According to universal custom, the mortal king dwells within, and his servants keep guard on him without; but in the case of the Holy One, blessed be He, it is His servants who dwell within while He keeps guard on them from without.."

They, too, were converted to Judaism. The Emperor sent for him no more. (Talmud, Avodah Zarah 10)

gates: *And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house, and on your gates (6:9)*

The doorway is a sort of "no man's land" between the home and the street, an area where these two realms overlap and interact with each other.

Two mitzvot are connected with the doorway: the *mezuzah* and the Chanukah lights. The *mezuzah* points inward, while the Chanukah lights are oriented outward. The *mezuzah* serves to safeguard the home and define it as a sanctum of holiness and Divine presence; the function of the Chanukah lights is to illuminate the street, to disseminate their message to places still untouched by the warmth and light of the Jewish home.

The *mezuzah* marks the doorway as the entrance to the home; the Chanukah lights exploit it as the gateway to the outside.

(The Chassidic Masters)

and hewn out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant.

"When you shall eat and be replete, beware lest you forget G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

As for the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, "You shall make no covenant with them... Neither shall you make marriages with them: your daughter you shall not give to his son, nor shall you take his daughter to your son. For they will turn away your son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of G-d be inflamed against you, and he will destroy you speedily."

Make sure to eradicate all vestiges of idolatry from the Land

For you are a holy people to G-d your G-d: G-d your G-d has chosen you to be a special people to himself, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth.

G-d did not set his love upon you, nor did He choose you, because you were more in number than any people, for you were the fewest of all peoples. Rather, because G-d loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn to your fathers, has G-d brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Know therefore that G-d your G-d, He is G-d, the faithful G-d, who keeps covenant and truth with those who love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations; and repays them that hate Him to their face, to destroy them; He will not be slack to him that hates Him, He will repay him to his face.

You shall keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the laws, which I command you **today** to do them

Commentary

today: *You shall keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the laws, which I command you today to do them (7:11)*

Today to do them" -- and not to do them tomorrow; "today to do them" -- and tomorrow to receive their reward.

(Talmud, Eruvin 22a)

LAND AND SEE

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

"Don't you see?" we insist when the person we're arguing with won't recognize the shining truth that's staring us both in the face. "Oh, I see..." we concede when yet another comfortable fallacy is debunked. We may have five senses with which to apprehend our world, but somehow "I smelled it with my own nose" or even "I felt it with my own hands" doesn't carry the authority of "I saw it with my own eyes." What we "see"--whether literally or figuratively--is unequivocally, incontestably real.

"Let me cross over," Moses implored G-d as the people of Israel camped on the eastern bank of the Jordan, "and let me see the good Land." But G-d refused. We all know the tragic tale. Moses, who had taken the people out of Egypt, who had climbed Mount Sinai to receive the Torah for them and returned to teach them the word of G-d, who for forty years tended to their hungers and thirsts, their doubts and complaints and rebellions--Moses was to die and be buried in the plains of Moab, and his disciple, Joshua, was to lead a new generation of Jews into the Promised Land.

But upon closer examination, Moses' prayer was at least partially answered. Moses asked to cross over and to see the Land; G-d refused the first part of the request and granted the second. "Ascend to the top of the summit" G-d said to Moses, "... and see it with your eyes; for you shall not cross this Jordan."

Our sages note that all Moses' achievements are eternal and everlasting. Moses liberated us from slavery, and from that moment we have been inherently, irrevocably free: nations may subjugate us physically, but no force on earth can subdue the Jewish soul. Moses gave us the Torah, and never shall the Torah depart from Israel. Even the *Mishkan*, the "temporary" Sanctuary built by Moses in the desert, was never destroyed (as were the permanent Divine abodes built by Solomon and Ezra in Jerusalem), but mysteriously hidden away in an undisclosed place, where it remains intact to this very day.

Chassidic teaching explains that this is the deeper reason why Moses was not allowed to enter the Land of Israel. If Moses would have settled us in the Land, we could never have been exiled from it. If Moses would have built the Holy Temple, it could never had been destroyed. If Moses would have established the people of Israel in their homeland as a "light unto the nations," that light could never have been dimmed.

If Moses would have crossed the Jordan, that would have been the end: the end of the struggle, the end of history.

G-d wasn't ready for the end yet. So He decreed that Moses remain in the desert. But He did allow him to see the Land. And because Moses saw it, and because the effect of everything Moses did is everlasting, we, too, can see it.

At all times, and under all conditions, we have the power to ascend a summit within us and see the Promised Land. No matter how distant the end-goal of creation may seem, we have the power to see its reality, to know its truth with absolute clarity and absolute conviction.

We are still in the midst of the struggle. It is a difficult, oft-times painful struggle; but it is not a blind struggle. Moses has seen to that.

THE INEXISTENCE OF THE UNIVERSE

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Groping for a transcendent word in a vocabulary generated by our physical lives, we seize upon "light." Light is our metaphor for the incorporeal, the spiritual, the Divine. We speak of an era of "enlightenment" dispelling dark ages of ignorance and ignominy, of a "ray" of hope penetrating the blackness of despair, of the Divine "light" that bathes the virtuous soul.

Light straddles the defining line that runs between the physical and the spiritual. Sans weight, sans mass, sans just about any of matter's properties, light is the most ethereal of physical "things." Perceptibly real, yet free of the qualities we ascribe to the objects of our perceptible universe, light serves as a bridge of allegory between a mind grounded in a material environment and the metaphysical abstractions it contemplates.

None Else

In his *Tanya*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi employs the metaphor of light to explain what is perhaps the most radical truth expressed by the Torah: the inexistence of the universe.

Twice in the 4th chapter of Deuteronomy (verses 35 and 39 respectively) the Torah makes this amazing statement:

You were shown to know that G-d is the G-d,¹ there is none else beside Him.

Know today, and take onto your heart, that G-d is the G-d, in the heavens above and the earth below, there is none else.

The ever sensible mind, confronted with overwhelming evidence to the contrary, may perhaps interpret these verses to mean that there are no *gods* other than He. I -- the mind will insist -- the body I occupy, the table it is sitting at and the computer screen it is am looking at, certainly exist. These verses, then, are only affirming the basic tenet of Judaism -- that there is but a single, singular creator and ruler to the universe.

Not so, say the Kabbalists and the Chassidic masters: "there is none else" means that there is none else. Indeed, they explain, to maintain that there are existences other than G-d is ultimately the same as maintaining that there are other "gods" beside Him. What real difference is there between saying that the universe is governed by thousands of gods, or by a god of good and an equally potent god of evil, or by a very powerful god who (almost) always triumphs over a much weaker Satan, or by a great and mighty god who pervades every iota of existence save for a single cubic centimeter of space? Ultimately, one is saying that there is more than one independently potent force in existence. To say that there is a god with the power to create and destroy universes, punish the wicked and reward the

righteous, cause galaxies to spin and crops to grow, but that there also exists a single pebble with a power independent of His -- be it only the power to exist -- is to deny His exclusive divinity and power.

So when the Jew daily declares "Hear O Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is one," this is more than an affirmation that there is but one deity. It is a statement on the inexistence of all else save His one being.

Real In Relation

Yes, we perceive our own existence and the existence of the myriads of objects and forces we call "the universe." But this is our finite and subjective perception of reality. If we could observe reality from the all-transcendent perspective of the Creator, we would see a "world" devoid of selfhood and being. In the words of the *Tanya*: "If the eye were allowed to see the life and spiritual content flowing from the utterance of G-d's mouth into every creation, we would not see the materiality, grossness and tangibility of the creation, for it would be utterly nullified in relation to this divine life-force..."

Modern physics demonstrates the relativity of apparent absolutes such as time and space. An object or event cannot be said to possess an intrinsic size or duration: these are always a matter of perspective. The same object may be an inch in length, as observed from point A, and a hundred miles long, as observed from point B; the same event can be said to transpire over the course of a second or a thousand years, again depending on the position and velocity of the observer. The mind may have to bend over backwards to assimilate a vision of reality so radically different from its first-hand experience of its environment, but every high-school science student has read of the experiments and seen the diagrams that demonstrate this truth.

But the Torah has a more demanding task for the mind: to comprehend the relativity of existence itself. To understand that the very it-ness of creation, even the very "I" that is the making the observations, are also a matter of perspective. That while the created reality perceives itself as real, there is a higher perspective from which reality is the truth that "there is none else beside Him."

Where, in our experience of the universe, is there an example of this sense-defying truth, an analog that may aid us in achieving this tremendous leap of

mind? What model have we for the relativity of a thing's very existence? Light.

Light exists. We regard light as an entity distinct of its emitter, distinguishing between a luminous body and its luminescent expression. An observer on earth, for example, perceives both the sun and the light that extends from it, and hence our dictionary includes both the term "sun" and "sunlight". But what would be the perspective of an observer *within* the sun? Would he, too, perceive "sunlight" as an existence distinct of the sun? Obviously not. Light, by definition, has a source and a destination, an emitter and an observer; light is information -- a communication from one thing to another. Light, then, exists only in relation to that which is outside of its source, but not in relation to the source itself. If sunlight is defined as "the sun's luminescent expression" then it cannot be said to "exist" within the sun, where the very notion of "expression" is superfluous and meaningless.

Does this mean that the entity we call light "begins" outside of the sun? Again, the answer is obviously No. The sun itself is not dark; the luminescence that extends from it certainly pervades it. It is just that the concept of "light" has validity and meaning only to an observer outside of the light's source. Lacking substance of its own, light exists only insofar as it serves its function: to carry information and effect from its emitter to that which lies outside its emitter. Where it has no function (i.e. within its emitter), it does not exist -- not because it is any less "there," but because it lacks the context that defines its existence.

Light, then, both exists and does not exist at the same time, depending on the context in which it is viewed. It goes from non-existence to existence not by undergoing any intrinsic change but simply by being observed from a different vantage point -- a point in relation to which its function has significance.

So light, explains the *Tanya*, is the metaphor through which we can try to understand the relative existence of the universe. Our world is "light" emitted by G-d: an expression of His omnipotence, a revelation of His majesty.² As "light," the created reality has no substance of its own, no intrinsic being; its "existence" is defined solely by its function -- to express and reveal its Emitter. So the world exists only as observed from *without* its Creator and Source. As seen from G-d's perspective, it does not merit the term existence -- again, not because it is any less "there" (G-d, after all, tells us in His Torah

that He created a world) but because in relation to the Divine "sun" the defining function of the sunlight of creation is utterly insignificant.

[Rabbi Schneur Zalman takes this a step further, pointing out an important difference between the sun/sunlight analogue and the Creator/creation relationship it illustrates. With the sun, we identify two distinct areas in whose context the "existence" of sunlight is considered: outside the sun, and within the sun. Outside the sun, sunlight exists; within the sun, it is non-existent. Regarding the Almighty, however, the existence of this "second perceptive" is also only a matter of perspective. In truth, there is no "area" that is outside of G-d's infinite reality; the "vacuum"³ into which G-d emanates His light is a vacuum of perception, real only from our mortal perspective. In other words, G-d did not create a reality outside of Himself, only the perception of a reality outside of Himself. So the "light" of creation is, in truth, "sunlight within the sun" -- that is, non-existent light. To us, the world exists only because we perceive ourselves as being "outside of the sun" - - a perceived vantage point from which "sunlight" is perceived as an "existence."]

The View From Sinai

As cited above, the Torah twice reiterates the exclusivity of G-d's existence, twice in the same chapter proclaiming that "there is none else" other than He. For there are two paths by which man may come to appreciate the nature of his reality *vis-a-vis* the Divine: from the top down, and from the bottom up.

The first verse (verse 35) is referring to the day that "G-d descended on Mount Sinai" in a unilateral revelation of His all-pervading truth. On that day, Moses reminds the assembled community of Israel forty years later, "you were *shown* to know that G-d is the G-d, there is none else beside Him." On that day you were raised above the arc of your subjective vision of self and existence and accorded a glimpse of reality from *His* perspective.

The revelation at Sinai was a brief "foretaste" of a future world -- a world in which all masks and superimposed "perceptions" will fall away. A world in which "your master shall no longer shroud Himself; your eyes shall behold your Master"; a world in which "the world shall be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 30:20 and 11:9). The world of Moshiach, when, as the Zohar puts it,

"G-d will take the sun out of its sheath" and obliterate the concealment that effects the perception of a reality outside of His.

Bracketed between the revelation at Sinai and the revelation of Moshiach, we live in a world in which our Master *does* shroud Himself -- a world in which the sun remains sheathed and we are not "shown to know." It is regarding this world that the Torah enjoins us, in the second verse cited above, to "Know today, and take onto your heart" that "in the heavens above and the earth below, there is none else." The knowledge is there, embodied in the heavens above and the earth below: in every blade of grass, in every sunset, in the depths of our minds and in the sublimity of our hearts. In this world the onus is upon us to unearth this truth, comprehend it, and incorporate it into our hearts and lives.

This explains the difference between these two verses. When we are *shown* the Divine truth, there are no details, no mention of "the heavens above and the earth below." As viewed from the supernal perspective, the particulars of creation fade to insignificance. One does not even see the distinction between the spiritual ("the heavens above") and the material ("the earth below") -- only the singular truth that "there is none else beside Him." But when our quest begins from the bottom up, it is precisely these details and distinctions that build our knowledge and appreciation of the Divine truth. The more we delve into creation's components, the more we recognize them as rays of Divine luminescence. We recognize that creation is "light": an existence defined not in term of self-being but as the bearer of a higher truth.

Based on the teachings of the [Lubavitcher Rebbe](#); adapted by [Yanki Tauber](#)

FOOTNOTES

1. In the original Hebrew, *HaVaYeH* is *Elokim*. "G-d" is first referred to in the verse as *HaVaYeH* (the "Tetragrammaton"), the Divine name that connotes G-d's timelessness and His transcendence of the created reality, and then as *Elokim* -- the Divine name that connotes G-d's infinite power as expressed in the countless particulars and fathomless intricacies of His creation. As the source of the plurality and diversity in creation, *Elokim* is also "screen" that conceals the oneness of G-d, allowing for our world's sense of self and distinctiveness of being. By comprehending that *HaVaYeH* and *Elokim* are, in essence, one and the same, we come to appreciate that our existence is nothing but an expression of His all-transcendent, all-pervading reality (see the discourse *V'Yadaata 5657* by Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch)

2. Thus, light is the first creation, and the exclusive creation of the First Day, for light is existence in its most basic form
3. The Kabbalistic works of the "Ari" (Rabbi Isaac Luria, 1534-1572) speak of a *tzimtzum* ("self constriction") of the Divine reality that created a *chalal* ("vacuum") and *makkom panu* ("empty place"), into which G-d emanated the Divine "light" that is the essence of the created reality. Chassidic teaching, citing the verse "I, G-d, did not change" (Malachi 3:6) and the Zoharic axiom "There is no place devoid of Him" explains that the *tzimtzum* was not the creation of a literal void in the Divine reality (G-d forbid), only the creation of the perception of such a void -- a perception that allows the created reality, even as it is wholly absorbed by the Divine reality "as the sunlight within the sun," to perceive itself as a distinct existence.

THREE DIVINE ECHOES: SINGULARITY, PLURALITY AND ONENESS

Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is one ("echad")

Deuteronomy 6:4

We usually think of the cosmic struggle in terms of good *versus* evil. But according to the Kabbalists, good and evil are but spin-offs of unity and divisiveness. G-d is the ultimate oneness, and everything G-dly in our world bears the stamp of His unity. Evil, simply stated, is the distortion of this oneness by the veil of divisiveness in which G-d shrouds His creation.

Creation, as described in the teachings of Kabbalah, is an evolution from the utterly singular to the plural and dichotomous. The entirety of existence originates as the divine yen to create -- a desire as singular as its Conceiver. But latent in this desire is also another face of the divine -- the infinite possibilities implicit in G-d's unlimited potential. Thus, the singular desire for creation gives birth to our plural world, a world whose immense detail and complexity bespeaks the infinite potential of its Creator.

None of this, in and of itself, is the negative phenomenon we call evil. Yet the seeds for evil are here. Plurality begets divisiveness, and divisiveness begets conflict. As long as a plural reality still echoes its singular source, divisiveness will not take root and spawn strife; but with the development of each particular entity in the diversity of creation into a self that is distinct of the cosmic whole, divisiveness/strife/evil rears its head.

Dissecting Life

How does one restore the divine unity to a fragmented world? By delving even further into its plurality.

For such is the paradox of life: the more something is broken down to its particulars, the more we uncover opportunities for unity.

Take, for example, two physical substances. Your five senses perceive them as different and unconnected; but place them under a microscope and you will discover that they are comprised of similar components -- they might even share an element or two. The deeper you delve, descending to the molecular, atomic and sub-atomic levels, the more unanimity you will find -- and the more ways you will discover to harness these diverse substances toward a singular end.

Or take two nations: on the surface, their goals and aspirations run counter to each other, giving rise to conflict and strife. But dissect these goals item by item and you will inevitably find areas in which they overlap and complement each other. This common ground may cover but five percent of each nation's collective will, but a beachhead of harmony has been achieved. Delve deeper yet, and this beachhead can be expanded. Explore the inner workings of each individual of each nation's millions, and the countless particulars of each individual's will, and additional areas of common interest and mutual dependency will come to light. The differences will remain, but instead of fueling strife, they will serve as the building blocks of harmonious coexistence.

Thus we introduce a new factor into the cosmic equation: harmony. We evolve from the ultimate singularity to plurality to diversity, but diversity need not disintegrate into strife. Instead, the diversity can be further dissected into the ingredients of harmony - - a harmony that mirrors the singularity out of which the entire process was born.

The Investment

A harmonious world, however, does more than reflect the tranquil singularity of its origins: it reaches beyond it to uncover a new, hitherto unexpressed, face of the divine reality. Life on earth is more than the endeavor to come full circle -- to undo creation by restoring its primordial unity. The descent from singularity into diversity is an investment, and (as any self-respecting investor) G-d expects to realize a profit from His outlay. The profit is harmony, which is a deeper, truer expression of the divine unity than the pre-creation singularity.

If there is one phrase that encapsulates the Jewish faith, it is the *Shema*, the verse recited by the Jew every morning and evening of his life and the last words to issue from his dying lips: "Hear O Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is one." But why, ask our sages,

does the verse employ the Hebrew word *echad* ("one") to connote G-d's unity? The word "one" can also be used in to refer to something that is one of a series (as in "one, two, three..."), or to something composed of several components (as in "one loaf of bread", "one human being", "one community"). G-d's unity transcends such "oneness", as Maimonides states in the opening chapter of his Mishneh Torah. Would not the Hebrew word *yachid* ("singular", "only one") have been more appropriate?

But singularity is a challengeable oneness, a oneness that may be obscured by the emergence of plurality. As we have seen, when G-d's infinite potential is expressed in the countless particulars of a diverse creation, this results in a concealment of His oneness. The life-endeavor of the Jew is to effect a truer expression of G-d's oneness -- the oneness of *echad*. *Echad* is the oneness of harmony: not a oneness which negates plurality (and which plurality therefore obscures), but a oneness that employs plurality as the implement of unity.

Three Divine Echoes

Ultimately, the unknowable, un-definable essence of G-d transcends *and* embraces both singularity and plurality. Neither description -- by virtue of its being a description -- can be attributed to Him; nor can either be *dis*attributed to Him, since, ultimately, a dis-attribution would be as much a definition (that is, the identification of areas to which His reality does or does not extend) as an attribution.

So our reality cannot -- indeed, no reality can -- express His quintessential truth. But it *can* express certain elements of it -- elements His truth includes by virtue of its non-definitive all-inclusiveness. Three such elements find expression in the various stages of creation:

- a) G-d's singularity -- expressed in the featureless, objectless reality that precedes, transcends and pervades creation.
- b) His infinite potential -- expressed in the vastly particular world He created.
- c) The divine harmony we manifest by effecting a synthesis and unanimity of purpose in G-d's diverse creation.

Of the three, harmony is the deepest expression of G-d's truth. For its *echad*-oneness embraces the polar phenomena of singularity and plurality, expressing the truth that the divine reality cannot be confined to either mode of being.

When man, confronted with a fragmented and strife-torn world, responds by extracting the potential for harmony implicit therein, he elevates creation beyond its surface plurality, beyond, even, its singular origins, fashioning it into a model of the quintessential unity of its Creator.

Based on the Chassidic discourse "Heichaltzu 5659" by Rabbi Shalom DovBer of Lubavitch; adaptation by Yanki Tauber.