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Va'etchanan Tolerance and Memory Depend on Purity and Humility





# MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת ואתחנן | אנגלית

#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Rabbi Dessler's Question
An Imposter's Ignoble End
How to Arise from the Depths
Summary of the Forty Years
The 'Shattering' of the Holy Attributes 12
An Intellect Blinded by Emotions 14
Self-nullification - The Nature of a Jew $\ldots$ 16
Torah Understanding Arises from Action 19
The Causes of Forgetfulness 21
Passing Over One's Attributes 21
The Solution of Toleration 23
Wisdom is a Source of Life 24
Summary and Practical Conclusions 28



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Parshat Va'etchanan - Rabbi Dessler's Question



## **Rabbi Dessler's Question**

**Rabbi** Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, of blessed memory, spent his entire life in the halls of the House of G-d.

In his early and formative years, he spent 18 years under the wings of the scholars at the Talmud Torah in Kelm.

Later, he served as a rabbi in London.

At the outbreak of World War II, he established a kollel, a study institution for married men in Gateshead, which over time became a beacon of light for all of Europe.

In his later years, he ascended to the Land of Israel and was appointed as the spiritual supervisor of the Ponevezh Yeshiva, where he continued to educate and raise a generation of Torah scholars and G-d-fearing individuals. Throughout his life, he labored in Torah study, prayed with intention, and performed acts of kindness both physically and spiritually, all with the sincere and true desire to bring pleasure to his Creator.

It was three years before his passing, that Rabbi Dessler stood upon the steps of the study hall at the Ponevezh Yeshiva and called out from the depths of his refined soul:

"Who among us does not desire to return to G-d with a whole heart and be counted among the righteous who bask in the light of the Divine in this world and the next? But unfortunately, it often seems that this is beyond our grasp, because the impurity of our sins weighs upon us and prevents us from

#### Parshat Va'etchanan - Rabbi Dessler's Question

this aspiration to return. And without this aspiration, how can we rid ourselves of the spiritual dullness caused by our sins?

If only we would have had a simple and straightforward way to purify ourselves so that we could ascend in Torah study and proper character traits without hindrance and cling to G-d with all our heart and soul."<sup>2</sup>

Before we continue with his words, let us preface with a story.

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**2. The** Torah is infinite, and fortunate is the person who merits to learn new depths of Torah every day.

**Such** a person was Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, as illustrated in the following tale recorded in 'Hasaraf MiBrisk' by Rabbi Wallach (page 89):

**Rabbi** Yehoshua Leib Diskin was an ever-flowing wellspring of Torah.

It once happened, in one of the years when he filled the rabbinical position in the town of Lomza, that the Torah scholars of the city ascended to his sukkah to fulfill the mitzvah of greeting one's rabbi during the festival.

**The** rabbi, radiant and resembling an angel, sat in the shade, fulfilling the mitzvah to be joyous on the holiday with study and contemplation in G-d's Torah, which makes the heart truly happy.

**He** greeted all the visitors with the blessing 'A gut'n moed' and immediately posed them a strong question in Talmud. The depth and erudition that the question required, left the visitors stunned.

**The** sophisticated scholars, deep thinkers, and quick-minded individuals among them were sharp and experts in all the various chambers of the Torah, and compared one matter to another and brought proofs from all across the Talmud to their positions.

**They** all tried their best, but all in vain. The question Rabbi Diskin had posed, remained unanswered, looming large like a fortified wall.

**The** rabbi then opened and presented a sharp distinction between the various topics offered, dissecting them like a master craftsman, and paving a broad path of understanding.

**The** words were enlightening and joyous, clear and proven, and the faces lit up with the joy of the wondrous and true Torah novelty.

**The** visitors then departed offering the traditional holiday blessings and made way for the others who waited for their turn with the Rabbi.

**Thus,** wave after wave of scholars each came, each being posed with an enormous question.

Parshat Va'etchanan - An Imposter's Ignoble End

## An Imposter's Ignoble End

**A** distinguished and venerable-looking Jew named Moshe arrived in the holy city of Jerusalem from England.

He presented himself to be a great Torah scholar and a devout individual.

He was blessed with remarkable talents, particularly in persuasive and captivating speech. Moreover, Moshe performed open miracles and wonders that captivated the hearts of masses, who followed him blindly and were willing to do whatever he instructed, some even speculated that he was the long-awaited Messiah.

Moshe's reputation preceded him, and scholars began to seek him out, savoring the

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**The** scene repeated itself each time. Arguments and proofs would be brought and negotiated, and the scholars tried to push their arguments, dismiss, and explain - but it was all in vain.

**The** rabbi would then respond and clarify the matters, shining a new precious and radiant light, and immediately they responded and supported it with some proof, which the Rabbi accepted and then nodded his head kindly, dismissing them with a blessing, and then they made way for the others.

In the evening, when they gathered for prayer, the city's scholars turned to each other and exchanged their experiences. They each shared the question the great Rabbi had posed, but surprisingly they had all been asked the same exact question.

**Their** great enthusiasm suddenly dimmed, and they were disheartened.

**Did** their wise and great rabbi, who was an ever-flowing wellspring and whose mind flowed endlessly with wondrous Torah innovations, repeat the same Torah novelty again and again?

**This** conduct would have been forgivable for a young rabbi in a small town, but not for their great rabbi.

**But** upon further discussion and upon engaging other scholars who had visited the rabbi that day, an entirely different picture appeared.

**The** rabbi had indeed posed the same question over and over, but each time had offered an entirely different approach and resolution and gave each time a different and novel answer.

**Each** answer illuminated the topic from a different angle, made an additional distinction between the topics, and he had never repeated the same answer.

Parshat Va'etchanan - An Imposter's Ignoble End

sweetness of his words and Torah teachings.

One such visitor was a pious and humble scholar, who seeked the truth and for whom the truth was a guiding light. He came at once to investigate the circulating rumors about Moshe's mysterious and enigmatic persona, and his supernatural claims, like his claims that he stayed awake continuously day and night.

This scholar was joined by a friend, and the two, curious about Moshe's true nature, visited him at two o'clock in the morning, and upon entering his house, they found him fully alert.

He greeted them warmly and invited them to sit near him, and began to engage them in conversation in a captivating manner, inquiring about their studies in Talmud and Halacha.

Moshe then proceeded to demonstrate his prowess in Torah study, and asked the visitors to think of a passage from the Talmud, and the scholars did as requested. Moshe then said to him, "You are thinking of this particular passage from this page and of this line that begins with these words."

Indeed, he accurately identified the Talmudic passage the scholars were contemplating at that moment, and the two visitors were truly amazed by his greatness.

During their visit, Moshe asked if they wished to feel a spiritual awakening in their hearts.

They agreed, and he asked them to repeat the Hebrew letters after him.

Moshe began loudly: "Aleph," and they repeated "Aleph," then "Bet," and so on for about half an hour.

The two repeated after Moshe with great devotion and felt a change taking place in their hearts.

Afterwards, Moshe offered them grapes, urging them to eat, saying that eating the grapes would bring them blessing and success.

The scholar closely observed Moshe's ways, scrutinizing his

Parshat Va'etchanan - An Imposter's Ignoble End

every move. Everything seemed in order and even inspiring.

However, he had noticed that Moshe's nails were extremely long, which seemed very strange to him, remembering the words of the holy Arizal,<sup>3</sup> who said that the external unholy forces cling and attach themselves to the extended nails and draw sustenance from them.

How could Moshe overlook such a clear and well-known instruction of the Arizal that growing nails leads to the attachment of the 'sitra achra', G-d forbid?

Another matter that heightened his suspicion was a rumor he overheard, that Moshe relieved himself in an unusual manner, passing water for over ten consecutive minutes. This rumor was confirmed to him when the scholar saw Moshe enter the bathroom and he heard him pass water for ten minutes.

The scholar was torn; on one hand, he saw here great Torah

scholarship, but on the other, certain behavior that Moshe exhibited, indicated that external forces may have a grip over him.

With audacity and courage, he turned directly to confront Moshe and asked, "You declare publicly that you are the Messiah and redeemer of Israel, how can we know that you speak the truth?"

Moshe smiled humbly and said in a kind voice, "Come, my dear son, let me show you that even the holy books testify that I am the Messiah who will redeem Israel from the current bitter and harsh exile."

Without looking, he stretched his hand and picked up a book, opened it, and without seeing which page the book opened to, placed his finger on one of the lines and said, "Please, read what it says here."

The scholar was stunned, for the book was none other than "Likutei Moharan," and the Parshat Va'etchanan - An Imposter's Ignoble End

verse, referring to Moses, read, "Moshe, the son of Yocheved is the Messiah of Israel" (Moshe's mother's name was Yocheved).<sup>4</sup>

"Do you need more proof than this?" Moshe asked triumphantly.

The scholar and his friend remained bewildered by what they saw and left with mixed feelings.

The scholar found no peace, and to remove the doubts lingering in his heart, made his way to the home of the renowned Kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak Kaduri.

He recounted to him the events of that early morning and asked for his opinion on the matter.

Rabbi Kaduri carefully examined the matter and concluded decisively that this Moshe was entirely possessed by the evil forces of sitra achra and was none other than an agent of the forces of impurity, and that one must stay a far distance away from him.

The scholar was shaken upon hearing this and said, "What did I bring upon myself?! I spent several hours in his presence and even ate from his impure hands, woe is to me."

Rabbi Kaduri directed the scholar to Rabbi Chaim Sanuani, who in his profound wisdom would surely know what to do with the scholar.

With trembling legs, the scholar made his way to the city of Yehud.

He deliberated how to tell Rabbi Chaim what had happened to him, having been ensnared in Moshe's evil trap, but in fact, no words were needed.

As soon as he stood at Rabbi Chaim's doorstep, the righteous man raised his voice and said, "Where have you been? What have you done to your soul?"

With merely a glance, Rabbi Chaim already knew everything that had happened.

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Parshat Va'etchanan - An Imposter's Ignoble End

With a bowed head, the scholar approached the righteous man with downcast eyes and a fearful heart, afraid to look into Rabbi Chaim's holy face.

Rabbi Chaim then said to him that he would need to invest immense effort to rectify the negative influence of his late-night visit to Moshe.

The scholar fully trusted Rabbi Chaim, that he would do everything in his power to save him from his plight.

Rabbi Chaim extended his holy hand, grasped the scholar by the back of his neck, and held him tightly for about fifteen minutes. He looked at him in silence, and it was evident that Rabbi Chaim was focusing and directing his intentions to expel the sitra achra that had clung to him

When the rabbi released his hand, he said to the scholar, "By the grace of the Almighty, I have removed from you the impure influence of Moshe. But what will become of other Jews who

are deceived by him and fall into his impure trap?

My advice is that you should hurry to Jerusalem, to Rabbi Yefet Sharabi, and tell him in my name that I empower him to act against Moshe's impurity and to eradicate it from the earth.

It is advisable to cut off his power now, while it is still small, for if it grows and develops, it will soon be impossible to correct.

If I had my strength as in my youth, I would come to Jerusalem, and sever Moshe from his impure foundation, and within a week or two he would be completely nullified and uprooted from the world."

The scholar thanked Rabbi Chaim greatly for his blessed efforts on his behalf.

Quickly, he made his way to Rabbi Sharabi's home in Jerusalem and delivered him the message from Rabbi Chaim Sanuani.

Rabbi Sharabi asked the messenger, "Which name did Rabbi Chaim call me when he sent you the message, Mordechai or Yefet?" Parshat Va'etchanan - An Imposter's Ignoble End

"Yefet," was the answer.

"In that case," said Rabbi Sharabi, "for now, we will only cut off Moshe's powers, and not act to entirely nullify and remove him from the world.

Now please tell Rabbi Chaim respectfully, that he over there, and myself right here must join forces and fight together against Moshe and his impurity."

Rabbi Sharabi, who had taken upon himself the task, sent a messenger to Moshe, commanding him to come to him.

Moshe, who knew and recognized Rabbi Sharabi's great Kabbalistic and miraculous power, which could destroy and nullify him from the world, refused to obey and come to him.

Rabbi Sharabi did not give up and, out of genuine concern for the Jewish people, sent additional messengers to Moshe, but Moshe persisted in his defiance and repeatedly refused to comply with Rabbi Sharabi's command.

Finally, the righteous man sent him a final warning, stating

that if he continued to refuse, he would be punished by being unable to relieve himself.

This time too, Moshe hardened his heart and refused to heed the warning.

Only a few hours passed, and when Moshe entered the bathroom needing to relieve himself and pass water, he could not.

This caused him immense pain, and he could barely walk around, and he let out a pained groan.

He knew the true reason for his pain but was ashamed to admit Rabbi Sharabi's superiority, so he continued to harden his heart.

However, a short time had passed, and Moshe felt that all hope was lost, the pain was unimaginable.

He debated what to do, but the pain that intensified moment by moment gave him no rest, and he finally broke down - realizing he must now go to Rabbi Sharabi at all costs.

With the last bit of his strength, he signaled to his

Parshat Va'etchanan - How to Arise from the Depths

followers to carry him to 8 Shiloh Street, to Rabbi Sharabi's residence.

Entering with shame, Moshe faced Rabbi Sharabi, who gazed at him with a penetrating and stern look.

Rabbi Sharabi rebuked him harshly, saying, "I know who you are and to which dark forces your soul is bound.

I command upon you to cease your wicked actions, and stop deceiving the masses and leading them to the abyss of the sitra achra. Or else your fate will be most dire." Terrified and trembling, Moshe promised Rabbi Sharabi to stop his actions.

Rabbi Sharabi then told him, "Go to the bathroom and relieve yourself."

Instantly, Moshe felt immense relief from his pain, and went to the bathroom and passed water.

Afterward, he returned to Rabbi Sharabi's room and vowed to cease his strange practices from then on, and only then did Rabbi Sharabi permit him to leave his house.

On that day, Moshe disappeared, and his whereabouts became unknown. 5

### How to Arise from the Depths

**There's** no denying, it is a sad and pitiful tale of poor Moshe.

He had much potential and such immense strength and blessed talents.

Yet in the end, all his powers turned out to be sourced in the forces of impurity.

Indeed, anyone who gets close to people like that inevitably absorbs their impurity and traps themselves in the web of the unholy powers - hence, it's imperative to stay as far away from them as possible!

This leads us to consider: What is the proper way for

Parshat Va'etchanan - Summary of the Forty Years

people caught up in filth and lowliness to rectify themselves, is there a way to help them break free from the claws of darkness?

Do they too have a path to return to G-d with a whole heart and be numbered among the righteous, basking in the light of G-d in this world and the next?

Is there simple and straightforward advice to purify and ascend in Torah and exalted virtues without hindrance and to cling to G-d with a whole heart and a willing soul?

Before we answer this, let us ask another question.

### **Summary of the Forty Years**

**For** forty years, the people of Israel lived under the leadership of Moses.

Although the years under his leadership were 'merely' forty, they had an immense and eternal impact.

During those exalted years of leadership, Moses imbued his indomitable spirit into every Jew, elevating them to the highest and most sublime levels.

As Rambam (Maimonides) wrote in his "Eight Chapters" (Chapter Four), "the smallest among the maidservants, experienced revelations like Ezekiel the son of Buzi."

Eventually however, even these years came to an end.

On the first day of the month of Shevat, in the year 2488 to the creation of the world, Moses gathered the people of Israel and taught them what was later recorded in the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy begins with the Torah portion of "Devarim", followed by "Va'etchanan," which is our week's Torah portion.

The Malbim outlines<sup>6</sup> that "Devarim" and the first section of "Va'etchanan," both explain why the people of Israel were delayed in the wilderness for forty years and why Moses did not enter the land.

Then, in the second part of "Va'etchanan," Moses urges the

Parshat Va'etchanan - Summary of the Forty Years

people of Israel to observe the Torah and its commandments.

The words Moses says to encourage and urge them in the observance of the Torah:

"And you shall keep and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations, who shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."
(Deuteronomy 4:6).<sup>7</sup>

Moses continues and warns the people of Israel not to forget all they have learned:

"But take heed to yourself, and guard your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart

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**6.** On Deuteronomy 4:1.

**7. Many** stories attest to this, and we bring such tale that Rabbi Yosef Chaim, the 'Ben Ish Chai', once shared ('Od Yosef Chai' - Drushim, Va'etchanan):

**The** governor of the city of Prague loved and cherished wisdom, and from the moment he met Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschutz, he did not leave him and sought his company at every opportunity.

**One** day, the governor approached Rabbi Yonatan and said to him: As you know, the city of Prague is surrounded by a wall, and entering the city is possible only through one of the two gates, the large northern gate, or the small southern gate.

**Rabbi** Yonatan sat and listened, as the governor continued:

I am now embarking on a long journey, and as you say 'a wise person is better than a prophet', so please tell me through which gate will I enter the city when I return from my journey, the large gate or the small gate?

Rabbi Yonatan smiled. 'Look, if I tell you that you will enter through the large gate, then to contradict me, you will enter through the small gate. Therefore, the only way to answer this question is in writing. I will write my answer on a note, place it in an envelope, and seal it with my signet. When your honor returns from his journey and sits on his throne in his palace, he will break the seal before me and read my answer.'

**This** idea pleased the governor. He took the sealed letter, placed it in safekeeping, and went on his journey.

**When** he returned, he stood before the city walls and began to sweat. His mind was confused, and he did not know what to do.

**Suddenly,** he called for the city's engineer and ordered him to carve a new entrance in the wall, and the governor entered the city with a wicked smirk on his face.

Parshat Va'etchanan - The 'Shattering' of the Holy Attributes

from your heart all the days of your life; rather make them known to your children and your children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:9).

Even though the simple meaning of the verse is not to forget the traditions and learning, Rashi (the great medieval Jewish commentator) explains this slightly differently:

"But take heed to yourself... lest you forget the things" - 'When you do not forget them and perform them properly, you will be considered wise and understanding. But if you distort

them due to forgetfulness, you will be considered fools."

Rashi's interpretation suggests remembering and avoiding forgetfulness does not refer to knowledge and learning alone, but to action and performance of the commandments - If you will remember, you will perform them correctly; and if you forget, you will perform distorted actions.

We must understand why Rashi suggests that the memory of the revelation at Sinai is preserved specifically through the performance of commandments.

## The 'Shattering' of the Holy Attributes

**In** last week's "Mesilot", we explained that the world as we know it was created through the 'breaking of the

vessels' of the spiritual world of 'Tohu'.

We will now revisit these concepts from a different angle.

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**He** then sat on his throne and called for Rabbi Yonatan.

**The** governor took out the envelope from the safe, broke open the seal in front of the rabbi, and opened it, finding in it one written sentence, a quote from the Mishnah in Tractate Sanhedrin: 'A king may breach a wall to pave a way for himself'.

**The** governor was astonished and asked: 'How did you know that?'

The rabbi replied:

'I calculated all the dilemmas that would pass through your mind and understood the solution that would occur to you'.

Parshat Va'etchanan - The 'Shattering' of the Holy Attributes

The spiritual world that G-d emanated originally was the "World of Nekudim."

That is, G-d brought forth ten powers,<sup>8</sup> namely:

Keter (Crown), Chochmah (Wisdom), Binah (Understanding), Chesed (Kindness), Gevurah (Might), Tiferet (Beauty), Netzach (Triumph), Hod (Glory), Yesod (Foundation), and Malchut (Kingship).

These ten points are divided into two general groups: intellect and emotions.

The group of intellect, include: Keter, Chochmah, and Binah, while the group of emotions, includes: Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchut.

In the spiritual world of 'Nekudim' these ten points were arranged one beneath the other, in linear form, such that each point stood alone and had no relationship, association, or tolerance with the other.

After being created, G-d shined upon them his immense light, but because each point stood alone and was not integrated with the others, they could not withstand the "pressure" of the light and shattered.9

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**8.** At this stage of spiritual formation, these powers were called 'points,' but in the subsequent world, they were already called 'sefirot' - attributes.

#### **9. In** another style:

**Each** point stood by itself without any relation and partnership with another.

**Each** point stood firmly on its self-essence and lived its life alone very prominently.

**Therefore,** when it recognized a reality different from itself, it went to war against it.

**The** point of Chesed fought against Gevurah, Netzach fought against Hod, and so on.

**As** a result, the breaking of the vessels occurred, and the opposing powers shattered and dispersed into many sparks, this dispersion mixing and blending them together completely.

**To** summarize the 'Shattering' in one sentence:

**'The** shattering of the vessels' stemmed from the inner feeling and conviction that 'I' am the true reality, and therefore deserve all my desires.

Parshat Va'etchanan - An Intellect Blinded by Emotions

To be precise:

The breaking occurred only in the group of emotions: Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchut, but the group of intellect only suffered from a defect.

Therefore:

When G-d created man and assigned him the primary task of repairing these broken vessels, since the emotions experienced the main breakdown, it follows

that man's primary task of repair is in the area of refining their emotions. A Jew whose emotions are rectified is greatly esteemed in Heaven. Conversely, a Jew whose emotion is not rectified is not esteemed to the same degree.

This is because a major component of a person's standing in Heaven is measured specifically by the degree of one's proper emotions.

We shall add further detail while on this subject.

## An Intellect Blinded by Emotions

**We** commonly define a person who walks about on the ground and breathes as 'living'.

However, this definition is not entirely accurate.

Indeed such a person is alive, in the sense that they are the opposite of someone who lays lifeless underground and is unable to move, but this does not truly define life as it is.

The true definition of life is according to the manifestation of one's emotions.

A person whose emotions are rectified and balanced, and filled with vitality and joy, and is considered to be 'living' during their time spent in this world.

Moreover, such people aren't affected by external difficulties they may encounter, and these difficulties do not affect their inner life.

Conversely, someone whose emotions are not rectified and whose inner life is gloomy and dull, their time spent down here in this world cannot truly be called life.

Parshat Va'etchanan - An Intellect Blinded by Emotions

One's emotions do not only affect their sense of life and purpose, but also the higher tier in man, his intellect - "Emotions influence a person's intellect; a person thinks and reflects according to the inclination of their emotions." 10

Being that a person's emotions lie at the core of their being, it follows that a person can never truly make an intellectual decision completely free from their personal feelings and self considerations.<sup>11</sup>

This is generally the case.

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- **10.** See Rabbi Yisrael Salanter's "Ohr Yisrael," particularly in Letter 14.
- **11. Whoever** turns to higher studies: medicine, architecture, physics, or law, their goal generally, is to achieve a degree.

**The** talented ones will want to excel, to stand out.

**The** outstanding and prominent ones will want to leave a mark, to be remembered in the scientific community as inventors of a new vaccine, as discoverers and as designers of buildings like no other.

**This** is natural, so human. It is embedded in every person, from a cleaning assistant to a professor. But this fame and success is sometimes achieved in a questionable manner.

**Recently,** the scientific community was shaken by the falsification of research results by first-rate researchers to prove their 'discoveries.'

**The** hostility in hospitals between renowned doctors is an open secret.

Doctors are human too.

**The** tensions at the top of the academic staff pyramid is well-known to all.

**This** leads us to an alternative interpretation of the phrase: 'Science in the service of man' (a phrase which refers to the use of scientific advancements in medicine, technology, and space exploration to improve societies through scientific organizations and initiatives) - science serving the person - the researcher, serving his desires and wishes.

**The** verse states "A man is born as a wild donkey" (Job 11:12). These renowned individuals are made up from the 'raw material' that constitutes mankind.

**This** donkey can be 'buttoned-up' wearing a tie, and eat with a knife and fork, reciting Homer, and quoting Shakespeare. It can be a 'bespectacled' donkey, with the intelligence of a 'human.'

**So** what about him makes him a donkey? His inner point.

**If** we peel the outer layers away, layer by layer, what will we find? A lump of selfishness that sees nothing but itself, its

Parshat Va'etchanan - Self-nullification - The Nature of a Jew

However, regarding the Jewish people of Israel it is said: "For this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deuteronomy 4:6).

The Jewish people were bestowed with a unique wisdom, this wisdom allows and empowers them to step out of their individual sense of self and view reality from an objective and true Divine perspective.<sup>12</sup>

#### Self-nullification - The Nature of a Jew

**This** objective and overarching wisdom is what distinguishes between a Jew and a non-Jew.

My father Rabbi Yoram, may he rest in peace, once said the following in a talk

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needs and impulses, its desires and wants, and nothing more ('Ma'ayan HaMoed' by Rabbi Shalom Meir Wallach- Shavuot, page 56).

**12. Once,** a Jew in Australia sat and wrote a letter to the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

**His** young son, who was playing in the living room at the time, noticed his father sitting and writing with deep seriousness.

'Dad, what are you doing?' he asked.

**The** father replied: 'I am writing a letter to our revered Rebbe.'

'**Dad,** I also want to write a letter,' the child called out, and then sat on the floor, took a piece of paper and crayons, and began scribbling.

**The** father finished writing, folded the letter, and put it in an envelope.

**The** son approached his father and handed him his 'letter, 'Dad, send my letter too,' and the father put the child's letter in the envelope as well.

**Shortly** after, the father received two letters in envelopes from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, one addressed to the father and one to the child.

**In** the envelope to the child, the Rebbe wrote in the letter:

'Much appreciation, your letter ('Pan' - 'Pidyon Nefesh', heartfelt request for blessings) has been received'.

**The** Rebbe, in his great wisdom and sensitivity, read in the child's scribbles a letter requesting blessings.

**It** takes a lot of wisdom to enter another's world and see in their scribbles a soulful letter (Rabbi Michael Tayeb, 'L'chaim Vlivracha', page 241).

Parshat Va'etchanan - Self-nullification - The Nature of a Jew

(Imrei Noam, Vayishlach - Essay 3):

Jacob, our forefather, attained true humility and passed on this trait to his children.

This trait of true humility is ingrained in every Jew's heart, and consequently, the Divine Presence rests on every Jew.

In contrast, among the nations of the world, there is no true humility, and therefore the Divine Presence does not rest upon them.<sup>13</sup>

For a person, the core of life as well as its outer edges —thoughts, worries, and interests—are all primarily about themselves: how to magnify their name, gain honor, and accumulate wealth.

Everything happening around them is only to serve them—they are at the center of the circle, and everyone revolves around them.

In contrast, a Jew, through their divine service, steps out of this circle of self-centeredness, and places G-d at the center.

Such a person who places G-d at the center of their circle is called "humble."

All their thoughts, worries, and interests revolve around how to magnify and elevate G-d's name and how they can help and benefit all of G-d's creations.<sup>14</sup>

This is the essential difference between holiness and the "other side" (Sitra Achra):

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**13. In** the time of Maimonides, the world heard of a non-Jewish philosopher who, besides being praised for his great wisdom, was greatly admired for his extreme humility and modesty before everyone.

**Maimonides,** who did not believe that there could exist such a humble non-Jew in the world, very much desired to meet him and test him.

**During** their meeting, he found that indeed, the rumor was accurate, the person was indeed extremely humble.

**This** fact amazed Maimonides greatly, but there was no disputing it.

**Then,** just as they were parting ways, the philosopher suddenly turned to Maimonides and said:

'Rabbi Moshe, tell me what do you say about my extreme degree of humility?'

**14. In** the introduction to the 'Nefesh HaChaim', Rabbi Yitzchak of Volozhin shares about his father, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, of blessed memory:

Parshat Va'etchanan - Self-nullification - The Nature of a Jew

On the side of holiness, there is submission and self-nullification before G-d, in the aspect of "I am small" and "what am I?"

In contrast, on the side of impurity, there is ego, arrogance, and haughtiness, as Esau, representing the side of the shell, declared, "I have plenty" (Genesis 33:9), in a sense of haughtiness and hot air.

This is what the Alter Rebbe writes in the Tanya (Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 6):

"The meaning of the term 'the other side,' it means the side that is not the side of holiness, and the side of holiness is specifically the dwelling and extension of the holiness of G-d. And G-d dwells only on something that is nullified to Him.

But anything that is not nullified to Him, but rather is a separate entity unto itself, does not receive its vitality from the holiness of G-d openly and gladly, but rather in an 'external' aspect." <sup>15</sup>

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**"He** always used to rebuke me saying that I did not share in the suffering and the burdens of others.

**His** constant words to me were that the entire purpose of man is not that he was created for himself, but rather he was created to be of benefit to others as much as one can."

**15. Elsewhere** in Tanya, the Alter Rebbe writes (Chapter 19):

"This is a general principle in the entire realm of holiness: Holiness is only that which derives from wisdom, called "supernal holiness" which is nullified in its very existence in the infinite Divine light which is clothed in it, and it is not a separate existence—as explained earlier.

**Therefore,** this faculty is called wisdom, which consists of the two words "Nullification Power." ("מת מה" in hebrew, are the same letters as 'כרו מה')

**This** stands in direct contrast to the kelipah and sitra achara (the unholy powers), from which the souls of the gentiles are derived who act only for themselves (see Tikkunei Zohar, 6 - page 22a), saying, "Give, give" (Proverbs 30:15) and (as Esau said:) "Feed me!"(Genesis 25:30)—in order to be independent beings and entities (separated from G-d). This, as mentioned earlier, that kelipah is a separate and distinct entity, far removed from G-d, in direct contrast to wisdom (whose

nature is humility and self-nullification).

**Therefore,** they (those of the realm of kelipah) are described as "dead," since "Wisdom

Parshat Va'etchanan - Torah Understanding Arises from Action

When a person nullifies their ego and considers themselves as naught, G-d opens up the heavenly gates of supreme wisdom before them.

Regarding the wisdom of holiness, it is said that: "From nowhere can wisdom be found" (Job 28:12), meaning that wisdom is found only in one who feels themselves to be nothing and null before G-d.

Therefore, it is called 'wisdom' (chochmah), which consists of the two words 'koach' (strength) and 'mah' (whatever), meaning the strength to be whatever, i.e., to be humble before G-d, as Moses said, 'and what are we?' (Exodus 16:7).

It is indeed written about Moses: 'Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth' (Numbers 12:3).

When a person has this aspect of 'mah' (humility and self-nullification), the light of G-d dwells upon them.

One, however, who considers themselves to be something significant, feeling complete, wise, and righteous, G-d immediately withdraws His presence from them.

This explains what Moses continued to say to the people of Israel in the next verses:

'For what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as all this Torah?' (Deuteronomy 4:8).

Since you were created on the side of holiness, you have the potential to attain the level of nullification to the Divine, and thus to the root and source of wisdom of holiness.

## **Torah Understanding Arises from Action**

**We** now return to Rashi's words.

Moses warned the people of Israel: 'But take heed to yourself,

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gives life" (Ecclesiastes 7:12) (hence, that which is the opposite of wisdom lacks life), and it is written: "They die without wisdom"(Job

4:21) (i.e., "death" is a direct result of lack of wisdom, therefore, the nations that receive their life-force from kelipah are considered "dead"). Parshat Va'etchanan - Torah Understanding Arises from Action

and guard your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen' (Deuteronomy 4:9).

The plain meaning of the verse is forget to not Torah that was taught at Sinai, but Rashi offers a different explanation and explains the verse as follows:

'When you do not forget them [the commandments] and perform them properly, you will considered he wise and understanding. But if you distort them due to forgetfulness, you will be considered fools.'

Rashi suggests that memory vigilance against and the forgetfulness here refer to deeds and action. If you remember, you will perform the commandments correctly; if you forget, you will perform them distortedly.

According to what we have previously explained, Rashi's words become clear:

As mentioned above, 'emotions influence a person's intellect, and person thinks and reflects according to their emotions.'

Since the emotions are what drives the intellect, when the emotions are not rectified, the intellect and understanding then becomes distorted. and actions become distorted as well.

Therefore, one who wishes to perform mitzvot perfectly must first rectify their emotions, and then, will they merit perfection in their actions.

This is Rashi's interpretation:

'But if you distort them due to forgetfulness, you will considered fools'-when vour emotions are not rectified, it can obscure and conceal the intellect from appreciating the importance of the mitzvot, to the extent that one's intellect will 'cast' away and disregard the importance of the fulfillment of the mitzvah.

A Jew in a state of emotional confusion will not merit the wisdom of holiness, which is a result of being nullified before G-d, and ultimately will follow their folly and subjective reasoning, doing as they personally see fit and from what they stand to gain, in a manner somewhat similar to a non-Jew.

Parshat Va'etchanan - The Causes of Forgetfulness

## The Causes of Forgetfulness

**Since** we are discussing memory and forgetfulness - and that refined emotions lead to appreciation and fulfillment of the Torah commandments - let us digress for a moment and discuss forgetfulness.

In "Chelev Ha'aretz" (Part 5, page 225), we brought the words of our holy sages who quote several reasons that cause a person to have memory loss or forgetfulness.

This is caused either by one's sins, by the nature of one's body,

or by doing or consuming things that cause forgetfulness.

These causes can be divided into four categories, namely:

eating and drinking, sight and clothing, bathing and walking, and a person's general conduct and character traits.

See there at further length for a discussion on the effects of these various actions on one's memory.

Let us now return to the words of Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler.

# **Passing Over One's Attributes**

**As** we quoted above in our opening, Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler declared:

"Who among us does not desire to return to G-d with a whole heart and be counted among the righteous who bask in the light of the Divine in this world and the next? But unfortunately, it often seems that this is beyond our grasp, because the impurity of our sins weighs

upon us and prevents us from this aspiration to return. And without this aspiration, how can we rid ourselves of the spiritual dullness caused by our sins?

If only we would have had a simple and straightforward way to purify ourselves so that we could ascend in Torah study and proper character traits without hindrance and cling to G-d with all our heart and soul.

Parshat Va'etchanan - Passing Over One's Attributes

Indeed, there is such a path and way.

Our Sages revealed to us in their Divine spirit:

"Anyone who forgoes his emotions, all of his sins are forgiven" (Rosh Hashanah 17a).

This is a wonderful counsel to rid ourselves of the filth of our sins. Let us delve into this passage.

What does "forgoes his emotions" mean?

Rashi explains: "He does not insist on measuring out strict justice to those who trouble him, but rather lets go of his emotions and moves on."

And "all of his sins are forgiven," meaning "The Divine attribute of justice does not scrutinize his sins but rather lets them pass and moves on."

Therefore, one who overlooks the wrongs done to him, G-d also overlooks his own wrongs.

How can we attain this lofty trait of forgiveness, which has the power to purify us from all our impurities?

There is a simple way:

Accustom yourself to look at your fellow as you look at yourself.

All the anger, hatred, quarrels, and disputes come from each person seeing themselves in a different light and refusing to see things through the eyes of the other.

For example, a poor person asks a rich person for significant help. The rich person sees it as audacity and gets angry. The poor person feels hurt and thinks, "G-d has given him so much, why won't he give me what I need?" They part ways in conflict and disappointment.

Ιf each person would trv understand the other's to perspective—even if not to justify it-most conflicts and complications between people would be avoided.

This is not so difficult because it only requires a minor change of thought.

But it is a profound counsel for improving all character traits, as almost all interpersonal traits are affected by this perspective.

Parshat Va'etchanan - The Solution of Toleration

Furthermore, it is worthwhile to adopt this approach because one who always tries to understand others, will find that everyone befriends them, and a happy and successful life depends on having many friends and acquaintances.

Thus, with a slight change, a person can reach a spiritual level where all their sins are truly forgiven.

The inner explanation for this is rather deep, but to explain it however briefly:

The essence of sin is separation, as it is written: "One who isolates himself seeks his own desire" (Proverbs 18:1), and a person falls and becomes impure through their sins which are the result of their lack of kindness.

Therefore, one who behaves with kindness and humility and strives to repair disunity of the hearts by overlooking wrongs, their sins have no power to make them impure from then on, and their sins are forgiven.

#### The Solution of Toleration

**This** is also the answer to the question we asked initially:

Is there a way for people like Moshe who dealt with dark forces in the first story above, to purify themselves?

The answer is, yes.

The root of the 'shattering of the high spiritual worlds", stemmed from their inability to contain each other. Then eventually, from the lowest parts of the shattering were created the

forces of impurity which emerged and took hold.

So, in essence, the entire existence of impurity was created as the result of the earliest worlds of 'Tohu' having the inability to contain others.

Consequently, when one needs to rectify their involvement in the powers of impurity, they must then take care to tolerate and accept every Jew, thus cutting off impurity from its source of life, nullifying its existence.

Parshat Va'etchanan - Wisdom is a Source of Life

Moshe and confused souls like him must accustom themselves to view others at least as positively as they view themselves.

By doing so, they will be able

to accept and cherish others, and in one moment, they will be freed from all their impurities.

In conclusion, let us expand further on this last point.

#### Wisdom is a Source of Life

**In** a talk given by the Rabbi Zvi Kopschitz, he said:

Who among us does not want a good life? Who among us does not want to feel loved by others? But can we attain this? Is there a way to find favor in the eyes of all who see us?

The answer is, 'Yes. There is a way.'

Thus said King Solomon: "Wisdom brings life to he who possesses it" (Ecclesiastes 7:12), by behaving wisely, a person can attain a good life, a life in the truest sense of the word.

Now, you might wonder: What kind of advice is this? Can a person decide, 'From now on, I will be wise.'—is it in their power?

The truth is, generally, this is a valid question, but the wisdom we are talking about is a different kind of wisdom.

The wisdom that brings a person a good life is the ability to step out of oneself and view oneself objectively, from the outside.

To illustrate:

Reuven is a Supervisor at a construction site. Day after day, he spends his time under the sun and is covered in dust

But he is happy with his work because he has twelve children at home, thank G-d.

One day, the sun was truly unbearable, the heat at the construction site was dangerously high, and the workers lost their patience.

In short: it was a noisy and cantankerous day, and quite hard for Reuven to bear.

Parshat Va'etchanan - Wisdom is a Source of Life

Finally, the day ended, and Reuven got into his car and drove home, eagerly awaiting his wife's smile and a delicious, steaming dinner.

That day happened to be a special day.

On that very day, all twelve children were particularly wild at home, tampering with and messin up everything in sight.

Reuven's wife felt overwhelmed and counted the hours until her husband would arrive.

The door opened, and Reuven stood there with a sour expression, waiting for a smile. Yet beyond the door stood his wife, tears on her cheeks, herself hoping for a kind word of support and appreciation.

Both were disappointed. This immediately led to a simmering fire of anger and resentment to be kindled.

This is a classic case of a foolishly missed opportunity.

If they would have only had a touch of wisdom, everything would have looked different.

The husband who sees his wife is not smiling at him, would step out of himself and see things from her perspective.

'My wife is not smiling; she must have had a hard day. If that's the case, she expects me to smile at her and be the one to say a kind word.'

Similarly, if the wife were to step out of herself and see the matters from her husband's perspective, she would understand:

'He must have had a hard day and expects a smile and a kind word from me.'

Thus, one would smile at the other and say a kind word, and life would turn into paradise.

This is what Solomon meant:
"Wisdom brings life to he who
possesses it."

We also find in Rambam (Laws of Forbidden Relations, Chapter 21, Law 32) a connection between harmony and wisdom of the Torah.

He writes: "A person should marry off their daughter to a

Parshat Va'etchanan - Wisdom is a Source of Life

Torah scholar, for nothing unpleasant or quarrels take place

in the house of a Torah scholar." <sup>16</sup>

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**16. While** on the topic of peace at home, let us add another note:

I have had the opportunity to meet and connect with thousands of people across Israel.

**With** divine assistance, we have discovered that the main reason for issues in marital harmony is the inability to truly accept one another.

**To** quote from 'Chelev Ha'aretz' (Volume 7, Chapter 13):

**G-d** created man and woman, as it is written: "Male and female He created them and blessed them and called them Man" (Genesis 5:2).

**G-d** made them each in a unique way with completely different characteristics, and each with their own role. However, the male completes the female by fulfilling his role, and the female completes the male by fulfilling hers.

**Therefore,** G-d paired each man with the woman suited to him, according to the root of his soul and his attributes, even before he was formed in his mother's womb.

**As** our sages said in the Talmud (Sotah 2a): Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rav, "Forty days before the formation of the fetus, a divine voice goes forth and

declares, 'The daughter of so-and-so is destined for so-and-so.''

"The man and the woman are two kings each bearing two crowns, reigning in their own worlds.

**They** are two species within the human species, with two distinct roles and two sets of rights, both possessing their own distinguished and separate greatness, and their kingdoms do not overlap even by a hair's breadth.

**The** man is the straightforward aspect of the world, and the woman is its secret.

**The** man conquers, and the woman gives him the strength to excel.

**The** man is likened to the trunk of a tree, and the woman to a steady spring beneath it that gives life to the tree.

**The** man's work is extensive and visible to all, encompassing the world over, and this is his advantage over the woman.

**The** woman's work is lasting and its impact eternal, which is her advantage over the man" (Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, 'Ish Ubeito', Chapter 8, page 94).

**Given** their inherent differences, one must learn how to embrace their partner's personality. The first essential piece of knowledge is to know that every person desires and longs to be accepted, respected, and valued just as they are.

#### Parshat Va'etchanan - Wisdom is a Source of Life

**When** one succeeds in overcoming their pride and achieving unity with their spouse, they can actually feel their partner's heart.

**As** my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, of blessed memory, used to say:

**The** litmus test for whether one has achieved marital perfection is the ability to feel each other's heart.

**He** often told us about the righteous Rabbi Aryeh Levin, of blessed memory, who once went to the doctor with his wife and said, "Our leg hurts." The doctor asked, "Both or your legs?" To which he replied, "No, my wife's leg hurts us, for I feel her pain as well."

**For** a certain period, I had the privilege of studying with a wise Torah scholar.

**We** studied diligently and refrained from answering calls during our study time.

**His** wife, who valued her husband's learning, did not call during this time either.

**One** day, he said to me, "Excuse me, I need to call my wife." He called and asked her, "Does your left knee hurt?" She replied, "Yes, very much," and the conversation ended.

**He** then turned to me and said, "I felt pain in my knee and didn't know if it was my knee that was in pain or my wife's, and it turned out to be my wife's knee."

**This** is not a gift from Heaven or an innate talent but rather the result of continuous work and investment in their relationship.

**Shared** understanding, awareness of each other's emotional needs, recognition of the roles and responsibilities of the man and the woman, sacrifice for each other, and active thought about each other create unity and cohesion between the two souls until they become one entity.

I deeply carry in my heart the childhood memories of how my father, Rabbi Yoram, despite his enormous daily responsibilities in Torah study and lessons, and running the many institutions he established, always made time to study together with my mother, may she live long and well.

**Every** day, they had a set study session, and thus managed to study many subjects together.

**He** learned with us as well, never relinquishing our joint study, which was quality time.

**This** investment is a long-term one, significantly contributing to the success of the next generation.

**Parents** whose only connection is through the mundane daily physical activities, shouldn't be surprised if they may eventually hit a rough patch.

A house that is flawed from its foundation, and grew crookedly, must ultimately be uprooted and rebuilt, and the consequences are unimaginable, Heaven forbid.

**However,** when parents understand that just as one invests their whole self in building a business, so too, a person who marries, must invest their whole self in building their home,

Parshat Va'etchanan - Summary and Practical Conclusions

## **Summary and Practical Conclusions**

**1.** What especially distinguishes a Jew is the trait of humility.

Among the nations of the world, there can not be no true humility; and therefore, the Divine Presence does not rest upon them. In contrast, humility is a trait that is naturally ingrained into the heart of every Jew, enabling every Jew to merit the dwelling of the Divine Presence.

**2.** For the non-Jew, their life, thoughts, concerns, and interests are all centered around themselves—how to magnify their name, gain honor, and accumulate wealth.

Everything that happens around them serves only to benefit them in some form—they are at the center, and everyone revolves around them.

In contrast, a Jew, who is engaged in divine service and refining themselves, can succeed and step out of this cycle and place G-d at the center.

Such a person, who has G-d at the center of their circle, is truly called 'humble.' Their thoughts, concerns, and interests revolve around how to magnify and elevate G-d's name and how they can help and benefit all of His many creations.

**3.** A person who is humble and has succeeded in nullifying their self-importance, G-d opens before them the gates of supreme wisdom, and the lofty light of G-d rests upon them.

However, one who considers themselves significant and feels complete, wise, and righteous, G-d immediately withdraws His presence from them.

**4.** This feeling of self-importance and unrefined emotions influence a person's actions.

When one's emotions are unrectified, they obscure and block the intellect from comprehending and understanding the significance of performing a mitzvah. Such a Jew, then has an indifferent and 'non-Jewish' approach to the performance of mitzvot, being that he is far removed from the Divine wisdom.

**5.** When one's emotions are refined and balanced, their mind becomes clearer and more receptive, allowing them to naturally remember important things, especially matters of holiness. However, when the emotions are unrectified, a person quickly forgets and their memory may fail.

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establishing foundations of Torah and holiness, and ensuring that all matters of the divine service are in order.

**In** this way, it is possible to build shared healthy lives, and raise pure children in holiness.

#### Parshat Va'etchanan - Summary and Practical Conclusions

**6.** Parenthetically, there are several factors that can affect one's strength of memory, including behaviors with regard to:

eating and drinking, sight and clothing, bathing and walking, and a person's general conduct and character traits

**7.** A person who attains true humility, thereby cuts off the forces of impurity from their source of life and nullifies their existence, and thus, can tolerate and accept everyone.

Being in such a state, they merit that their sins are forgiven.

Those who have not yet achieved the lofty level of true humility also have a simple and straightforward way to correct their soul - by viewing others as they view themselves. When a person gets in the habit of viewing their fellowman's actions in the same manner as they view their own, all anger, hatred, quarrels, and conflicts disappear as though they never existed.

By doing so, and accepting and tolerating others, in one moment, they too will be forgiven from all their iniquities and impurities, as our sages declared: "Anyone who forgoes his emotions, all of his sins are forgiven" (Rosh Hashanah 17a).

#### **Shabbat Shalom!**



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## **Shabbat Times** Va'etchanan

13th of Av, 5784

City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeim Tam
New York	7:34 pm	8:34 pm	8:34 pm
Miami	7:37 pm	8:30 pm	8:30 pm
Los Angeles	7:21 pm	8:17 pm	8:17 pm
Montreal	7:41 pm	8:45 pm	8:45 pm
Toronto	8:01 pm	9:03 pm	9:03 pm
London	8:02 pm	9:14 pm	9:14 pm
Jerusalem	7:06 pm	7:55 pm	8:45 pm
Tel Aviv	7:03 pm	7:52 pm	8:42 pm
Haifa	7:03 pm	8:52 pm	8:42 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:02 pm	7:51 pm	8:40 pm

#### **Pathways** to the Heart

From the Words of

HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l As long as they are our children, we must dedicate and sacrifice ourselves for them, ensure that they remain faithful to the Torah, and raise proper families themselves.

If we do not assist them in their duties, they will seek all kinds of other venues, and may spiral downward in fear of Heaven, and they, together with their families, may forsake the path of Judaism, G-d forbid.

Therefore, one must care for the future "And see children to your sons, peace upon Israel" (Psalms 128); When you care and provide properly for your children, you will have a peaceful and tranquil life.



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