

Parashat Va'Etchanan  
**Letting the Outside In**  
**Shutting the Outside Out**

TRANSLATED FROM HEBREW BY S. NATHAN  
L'ILUI NISHMAT ESTHER BAT MORDECHAI

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“Pray let me cross, and let me see the good land.”

What is Moshe requesting? “Does he have a need to eat of its fruit? Rather, he desired to fulfill the Land-dependent mitzvot.” (Midrash)

Rav Moshe Feinstein exacerbates the problem further by pointing out that “even on the other side of the Yarden River, the obligation to fulfill Land-dependent mitzvot applies. Even for *bicurim*, bringing the first fruits to the Sanctuary, *midrabanan maivi vekoray*, the rabbinical statute requires that trans-Yarden fruits be brought to the Sanctuary and publicly proclaimed.”

There is an opposite relationship between inner feeling and external action. There is an opposite relationship between an emotional person and a rational person. The qualitative role that the Land of Israel plays is meant to contribute to the complementary balancing of these opposites, to merge inner and outer.

There are certain differences between the Ten Commandments found in this parasha and the Ten Commandments in Parashat Yitro. Among them “keep the day of Shabat to sanctify it”, as opposed to “remember the Shabat day to sanctify it”, in Shemot. Also “do not crave” is added to “do not covet”. “ ‘Do not crave’ addresses the coveting in the heart”.

How is it possible to command people regarding the coveting and craving of the heart? We seem to find here an indication of the fundamental root of difference that separates the Jewish people from the nations.

The nations of the world were given an equal opportunity to receive the Torah, and they refused it. Is this possible? The Creator of the universe offers, and man (albeit created in the image of God) refuses?

It seems to be like the problem of the two offers, the two “great deals”, the once-in-a-lifetime choice. One choice is solid and predictable: Low-risk but also low-profit. The second is high-risk but with a correspondingly high profit. The nations of the world chose the surer deal, with the limited profits. The nation of Israel, *ama peziza*, “an impetuous people” chose the deal with the high-risk factor and the higher profits.

These are the *tsadikim*, of whom our Sages say: “Whoever is greater than his fellow, his *yetser* is greater than his fellow”, meaning whoever is greater than his fellow has a greater risk factor, and much greater opportunities as well.

The higher risk factor is not necessarily because the *yetser* is greater, because in daily activities the *tsadik*'s *yetser* does not incite him to sin. Rather, the difference seems to be in the relationship between his given, inborn nature and his free choice.

Among simple people, and among the nations of the world, personality is comprised of a high percentage of unruly, ungoverned nature, devoid of free choice. This percentage is much higher than their percentage of capacity for free choice, which is rather minimal.

This allows us to understand that the opposite is true as well: In a person whose greater part is given over to control by will and free choice, nature's tendencies are pushed to the sidelines, in order to clear the space for free choice.

This second category of person is like the one who prefers the high-risk deal, the deal that is unable to guarantee regular dividends. Instead, it must be incessantly cultivated and supervised, yet it holds the tense expectation of correspondingly great profits – whereas the sure deal does not demand toil, perseverance or effort.

With the simpler, more nature-ruled person, the circle of free choice is smaller. Such a person is not capable of taking control over the dimension of behavioral tendencies, which are ruled by the environment and by the instincts.

The *tsadik*, in contrast, prefers the opportunity of free choice, through renunciation of the natural part contained in his body and his personality. Here we find the *tsadik*'s form of *yetser*: It is the free choice part of him. It is "greater than his fellow", greater than the part of him that is ruled by nature.

This relationship exists also in the difference between Jew and non-Jew. The nations of the world chose limited choice, which leaves the majority of behavior to be controlled by nature – by the survival instinct – whereas the Jew chose control by free choice, along with its accompanying *yetser*, and he thereby renounced the simple, healthy natural approach.

Things reached such a state that the Creator (be He blessed) found Himself compelled to command the Jew: "You shall choose life." Is there a man anywhere who would not choose life?

Every human being wants to live, and not to die, by his basic nature, thanks to the survival instinct. Only with the Jew, the survival instinct is weak to the point that he is capable of endangering and even renouncing the interests of life, and his own personal interests.

This factor is adequate to clarify an otherwise strange and bewildering phenomenon: The clever and richly-talented Jew benefits the world, but does not benefit himself.

Generously spreading wise advice to all the nations, he cannot wisely advise himself, and chooses instead to harm himself. Thus in the holocaust, and thus in the Arab-Israel conflict. In the holocaust, he assisted his murderers, actively organizing in order to cooperate with his murderers. In Israel too, leftist movements renounce – with a bewildering, infuriating willingness – their own security, begging their murderers to take away from them territories utterly vital to their security.

This is because the Jew is weak in this regard, in matters of the survival system.

Yet the Holy, Blessed One although He created the *yetser* hara, also created a corrective for it: The Torah – an answer to and a healing of the dangers of the *yetser*.

Yet the Jew neglects and wantonly abandons the instructions of the Torah, and its lessons, in everything connected with the Torah's practical – and insight-granting – ramifications for existential reality. He chooses instead to live in a virtual, idealistic, romantic reality, out of naïve, criminal oblivion to the dangers of existence.

This question was answered long ago. Rabi Shimon bar Yohai was informed: “Many have done so, and have not been successful.” In spite of this, the phenomenon of self-endangering repeats itself constantly with the Jew, who empties his wealth for others while leaving nothing for himself, “but plenty of abuse and outrage”.

“For this is your wisdom and your astuteness in the eyes of the nations.” “Through this, you will be thought wise and astute before the eyes of the nations.” (Rashi) Meaning, by doing God's commandments, you demonstrate and prove that the risk-saturated deal promises immeasurably greater profits than the “sure” deal, if you base your existence on Torah rather than on nature. Your choosing God's paths is proof of the superiority of Torah law to natural law.

“For this is your wisdom and your astuteness in the eyes of the nations, who will hear...these laws and say: ‘This great nation is simply wise and astute.’” Meaning, Israel's business choice was better than their business choice.

“Whoever is greater than his fellow, his *yetser* is greater than his fellow” in the ordinary sense, not as we have explained it but as it is commonly explained, only applies to ba'alei teshuva. For this reason, “in the place where ba'alei teshuva stand, even complete *tsadikim* cannot stand”. For the complete *tsadik* is practically devoid of *yetser hara* (ego), because he uses his true, qualitative self (we are speaking of a complete *tsadik*), and his effort of free choice is complete, i.e. perfect, and has taken the place of the laws of nature, which do not rule him. Only the laws of the Torah are active for him, and these obey free choice exclusively.

We are not speaking here of natural wisdom and talents, but rather of the wisdom of the spirit, which too (unlike the case of the ordinary talented person) is given to control by free choice, which is built upon the laws of the Torah.

After all: “[Natural] wisdom among the nations? Believe it. Torah among the nations? Do not believe it.”

In what way does Torah wisdom differ from ordinary wisdom? Torah law replacing natural law is only for the great possessors of free choice – for the *tsadikim*. But what about Torah wisdom?

Ordinary wisdom is rigorous about separating inner wisdom from outer wisdom, the brain’s wisdom from the heart’s wisdom. The Jew is expected to join the heart to the brain. Among the nations of the world, you will find that one nation has the heart’s culture, and none of the brain’s culture, while another nation has just the opposite.

A culture of the heart, detached from the brain, is expressed by the self’s being forced out of the inner space, specifically. The personality is emptied, and there is an excessive openness to outside influence, and a detachment from one’s own inner self. When behavior is controlled by external stimulants, one becomes impressionable, childish, unbalanced in judgment, lacking in originality, systematized (a cog in the system) a part of the mob, that lives the life of society without any private, personal space, and that is incapable of forming an independent personal opinion.

A child of a brain-focused culture detached from heart is a cold, calculating rationalist, a technocrat, and systemized as well. He detaches from the needs of others outside of him, and he detaches from his own inner needs as well.

It should be pointed out that both of these opposite, mutually detached types lose their independence. They are ultimately devoured into an extremely product-oriented system.

An example of this is the population of criminal youth. They are no less the product of the wealthier layers of society than they are the product of the deprived layers. Both lack an independent personality. A basis of human behavior has never developed in either group, for humanness is the exquisite fruit of the harmony between inner, outer, and higher.

Moshe warns them about this personality split, as a danger that lurks behind the gate that is about to open to them – the entry to the Land. He wishes to tell them that the settling of the Land is not a mere territorial, political conquest. It is rather a three-dimensional encounter between man, the earth, and the heavens, which demands the maximum of human capabilities, and which promises cosmic harmony in its “micro” form, that is in man, who must harmonize the head, the hand, and the heart.

Moshe craves this actualizing encounter for himself. God replies: *Rav lecha*. “You have much.” For you I have an even more perfect situation, in which there is no need to reconcile opposites. You have reached greater perfection even than Eliyahu, who was obliged to strip himself of his material being, though he was nevertheless capable of returning to it, of donning it again when needed.

The task of *dvaikut ba’elyonim*, of attaching to the higher realms, takes on tangible realness precisely through the lower realms, in the Holy Land. “And you, who cling to God your Lord...” “To God” is emphasized, and not to the soil or ground of the Land. It is not national self-sacrifice that I require, but rather self-sacrifice for God that is the path to merging with the Land.