

פְּרִשְׁת
וְאֶתְחַנֵּן
Parashat Va'etchanan

*Devarim / Deuteronomy 5:23-7:11, Isaiah 40:1-26
Luke 22:13-38*

Problems with Promoting Unity Among the World's Religions

In this week's Torah portion we read about how Moshe pleaded with God on behalf of the people on Sinai (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 3:23-29*), Moshe urges Israel to obey the Torah (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:1-49*), Moshe repeats the ten commandments (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 5:1-21*), Moshe intercedes on behalf of the people (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 5:22-33*), Moshe writes obedience to God leads to prosperity in the midst of the Shema (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:1-25*), then Moshe gives Israel warnings about when they enter the land (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:1-11*). The opening verses from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 7* state the following, - א כִּי יבִיאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה בָּא-שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ וְנָשַׁל גּוֹיִם-רַבִּים | מִפְּנֵיךָ הַחַתִּי וְהַגִּי רֶגְזֵי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי שִׁבְעָה גּוֹיִם רַבִּים וְעַצְוֹמִים מִמֶּךָ: ב וְנָתַנְם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִכִּיתֶם הַחֶרֶם פְּחָרִים אֲתֶם לֹא-תִכְרֹת 7:1 'When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, 7:2 and when the

Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. (NASB) Here Moshe speaks of the power of God to bring the people unto the place they are today (כִּי יְבִיאֲךָ וַיִּשְׁמָה וַיִּנְשַׁל גּוֹיִם-רַבִּים | מִפְּנֵיךָ) and then states, (וַיִּהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה בָּא-שָׁמָּה) “and cast away (וַיִּנְשַׁל) many nations (גּוֹיִם-רַבִּים) from before you (מִפְּנֵיךָ).” This word וַיִּנְשַׁל is used elsewhere in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 19:5* in reference to an ax head dropping off, and in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 28:40* in reference to grapes dropping off. These things represent a position in which one is firmly attached which are let loose, separated. (*Rashbam on Deuteronomy 7:1 Part 1*) this word וַיִּנְשַׁל is a word that denotes casting away and throwing at a distance. (*Rashi on Deuteronomy 7:1 Part 1*) According to verse 2 Moshe says וַיִּתְּנֶם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ “and the Lord your God gives them before you,” it is important to observe how here we see the Lord God doing this, which is opposed to the leading theologies that neglect to point this out as if this was a NT phenomenon only. (i.e. God doing the work in and through His people.) Here Moshe is telling the people to step out in faith, and then the Lord would work in such a way as to cast the nations out of their strong position. Moshe writes וְלֹא תִהְיֶינָם אֵלֶיךָ “you are not to show them favor.” The word תִּהְיֶינָם is from the root word הָן meaning grace, mercy, חַנּוּנָה, compassion, pardon. The idea here is that the nation of Israel was not to become familiar with the people from the sense of indulging in their feelings of compassion and mercy, or having a curiosity of their ways. *Rabbeinu Bahya on Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:2 Part 1* writes, “It is as if the Torah had written לֹא תִחַוּ אוֹתָם, ‘do not be charmed by them.’” This suggests a familiarity of a sort so as to have compassion which leads to allowing them to live in their midst. This would have the consequences of the nation of Israel learning their ways, which is strictly forbidden as God calls the sinful ways of the nations an abomination. Note the difficulty we have today living in a world as sinful as the days of Noah. Rashi states the following on these verses:

Rashi on Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:2 Part 1

וְלֹא תִהְיֶינָם means, *THOU SHALT NOT ASCRIBE GRACE (חן) TO THEM: it is forbidden to a person to say "How beautiful is this heathen". Another explanation: thou shalt not grant them a חנייה, an encampment (a settlement) in the land (Avodah Zarah 20a).*

Note that Rashi describes this as being compared to one who looks at the physical beauty of the peoples of the nations. He references the *Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 20*. According to the Talmud, this is connected to commenting upon the aesthetic beauty of artifacts designed in honor of idols. I know people who collect such things, statues of Buddha, tikis, dragons, etc. In addition, the rabbis state one must not even admire the physical features of a handsome Gentile man or a beautiful Gentile woman. This is consistent with Moshe's statement וְהִכִּיתֶם הַהָרִים הַהֵרִים אֹתָם "you are to utterly destroy them." We note that the Torah explains why, saying the reason is "so that they will not lead you into sin." These things remind us of the errors of the Catholic Ecumenism which is the principle or aim of promoting unity among the world's religions by praying together. The major difficulty with this is each religion is praying to a different god all of which do not recognize the One True God of Israel! This has the problem of familiarization with a foreign deity and couples the idea of praying to God in Heaven alongside a false God of the nations. Can we see how obviously wrong this is? This is like praying to God in heaven alongside an Asherah and with Baal worshipers believing this is acceptable before God. All of Scripture stands in opposition to this, in fact, in ancient Israel, the people who worshiped at the Asherah and Baal believed they could couple their faith in God as the Ugaritic texts suggest that YHVH was considered one of the many gods in the pantheon of gods of the middle east. This should obviously present a significant difficulty if one reads and studies his or her Bible each day.

This interpretation is consistent with how the text continues saying, ג וְלֹא תִתְחַתֵּן בָּם בַּתָּדָה לֹא-תִתֵּן לְבָנֹךָ וּבִתּוֹ לֹא-תִקַּח לְבָנְךָ: ד כִּי-יָסִיר אֶת-בְּנֵי מֵאֲחֵרֵי וְעַבְדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְתָרָה אֶף-יִהְיֶה בְּכֶם וְהִשְׁמִידָה מֵהָרָה: ה כִּי אִם-כֹּה תַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מִזְבְּחֹתֵיהֶם תִּתְּצוּ וּמִצְבֹּתֵיהֶם תִּשְׁבְּרוּ וְאֲשִׁירֵיהֶם תִּגְדְּעוּ וּפְסִילֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בָּאֵשׁ: ו כִּי עַם קְדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּרָךְ

בְּחָר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְהִיזוֹת לּוֹ לְעַם סְגֻלָּהּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה:
7:3 'Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. 7:4 'For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. 7:5 'But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. 7:6 'For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (NASB) The reason we are not to familiarize ourselves with the way of the nations Moshe writes, "כִּי-יָסִיר אֶת-בְּנֵיךָ מֵאַחֲרַי וְעִבְדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, "because they will turn your sons away from following me and they will serve other gods." The rabbis say the Torah does not say the mother (daughter in law) of such a marriage will lead your son away, but that of the next generation of children will be led away. (*Rabbeinu Bahya on Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:4 Part 1, Rashi on Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:4 Part 1*) This week's reading reveals to us the dangers of familiarizing ourselves with the way of the world, we are not to join ourselves with the gods of the nations, neither are we to join with them in prayer. The reason this is true is as King Solomon wrote that the one who turns away his ear from listening to the Torah, even his prayer, is an abomination. (*Mishley / Proverbs 28:9*) The Torah forbids such a thing! This indicates to us why believers, the faithful, cannot practice ecumenism by joining hands with people of other faiths.

The Scriptures we are looking at for this week are from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:1-11*.

ספר דברים פרק ז

א כִּי יִבְיָאָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה בָּא-שָׁמָּה
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ וְנָשַׁל גּוֹיִם-רַבִּים | מִפְּנֵיךָ הַחַתִּי וְהַגְּרִגְשִׁי וְהָאֲמֹרִי
וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַפְּרָזִי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי שְׁבַעַה גּוֹיִם רַבִּים וְעֲצוּמִים
מִמֶּךָ: ב וּנְתַנָּם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִפִּיתָם הַחֲרָם תַּחֲרִים
אֹתָם לֹא-תִכְרַת לָהֶם בְּרִית וְלֹא תִחַנְּנֵם: ג וְלֹא תִתְחַנֵּן
בָּם בְּתוֹךְ לֹא-תִתֵּן לְבָנְךָ וּבְתוֹךְ לֹא-תִקַּח לְבָנְךָ: ד כִּי-יָסִיר

אַת-בְּנֵי מִצְרָיִם וְעַבְדֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְחָרָה אֶף-יְהוָה בְּכֶם
 וְהִשְׁמִידָה מֵהָרָ: הַ כִּי אִם-כֹּה תַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מִזְבַּחַתֵיהֶם
 תִּתְצוּ וּמִצְבֹּתָם תִּשְׁבְּרוּ וְאֲשִׁירָהֶם תַּגְדְּעוּן וּפְסִילֵיהֶם תִּשְׂ-
 רְפוּן בְּאֵשׁ: וַ כִּי עַם קְדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּחַר |
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סֻגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל-
 פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה: זַ לֹא מִרְבְּכֶם מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים חָשַׁק יְהוָה בְּכֶם
 וַיִּבְחַר בְּכֶם כִּי-אַתֶּם הִמְעַט מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים: חַ כִּי מֵאַהֲבַת
 יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם וּמִשְׁמֹרוֹ אֶת-הַשְּׂבָעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם
 הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וַיִּפְדֶּךָ מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים מִיַּד
 פְּרָעָה מִלֶּךְ-מִצְרָיִם: [מִפְטִיר] ט וַיַּדְעָתָ כִּי-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים הָאֵל הַנִּצָּאֵן שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וְהַחֲסֵד לְאַהֲבָיו
 וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתָו [מִצְוֹתָיו] לְאֵלֶיךָ דּוֹר: י וּמִשְׁלָם לְשִׁנְאוֹ
 אֶל-פְּנֵיו לְהַאֲבִידוֹ לֹא יֵאָחַר לְשִׁנְאוֹ אֶל-פְּנֵיו יִשְׁלָם-לוֹ:
 יא וְשִׁמְרָתָ אֶת-הַמִּצְוָה וְאֶת-הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת-הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר
 אָנֹכִי מִצְוֶיךָ הַיּוֹם לַעֲשׂוֹתָם:

Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:1-11

7:1 'When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, 7:2 and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. 7:3 'Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. 7:4 'For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. 7:5 'But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images

with fire. 7:6 ‘For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7:7 ‘The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 7:8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 7:9 ‘Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 7:10 but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face. 7:11 ‘Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them. (NASB)

The Scriptures continue stating the following, וּכִי עַם קְדוֹשׁ אַתָּה, לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּךָ בְּחַר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְהַיְוֶיךָ לוֹ לְעַם סִגְלָהּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּךָ בְּחַר : על-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: 7:6 ‘For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (NASB)

הַ כִּי אִם-כֹּה תַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מִזְבֵּי-חַתִּימָם תִּתְצוּ וּמִצְבֹּתָם תִּשְׁבְּרוּ וְאֲשִׁירָהֶם תִּגְדְּעוּ וּפְסִילֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בְּאֵשׁ “Instead, this is what you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, smash their pillars, cut down their sacred posts, and consign their images to the fire.” The reason this is so significant is because of what God is telling us, how these people will turn our sons and daughters from the faith. Paul wrote the following saying, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12:2, NLT) We notice how this idea of changing the way

one thinks is consistent with what we are reading here in the Torah. This reminds us of Solomon's words, שֹׁמֵר מִצְוַת שֹׁמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ Shomer Mitzvah Shomer Nafsho meaning "keep the command keep his soul." (*Mishley / Proverbs 19:16*) We notice how the soul, one's inner purity, is kept when walking in God's ways as this demonstrates the outward expression of what has taken place on the inside. The Gospel message speaks to God's presence in our lives, His dwelling in our midst, His changing us on the inside. The presence of God's Holy Spirit in our hearts, the Lord will help us to live for him. This is what the Psalmist writes according to *Tehillim / Psalms 119:9* and Solomon writes in *Mishley / Proverbs 3:5-6*.

ספר תהילים פרק קיט

ט בַּמָּה יִזְכֶּה-נַעַר אֶת-אֶרְחוֹ לְשֹׁמֵר כְּדַבְרֶךָ:

Tehillim / Psalms 119:9

119:9 How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. (NIV)

ספר משלי פרק ג

ה בָּטַח אֶל-יְהוָה בְּכָל-לֵבְךָ וְאַל-בִּינְתֶךָ אֶל-תִּשְׁעֶן: ו
בְּכָל-דְּרָכֶיךָ דַּעְהוּ וְהוּא יִישר אֶרְחוֹתֶיךָ:

Mishley / Proverbs 3:5-6

3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 3:6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

ספר משלי פרק יט

טז שֹׁמֵר מִצְוַת שֹׁמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ בּוֹזֵה דְרָכָיו יוֹמֵת [יָמוּת]:

Mishley / Proverbs 19:16

19:16 One who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, But one who is careless of conduct will die. (NASB)

These scriptures reveal to us the significance of the presence of God and His Word in our lives. This is because we are told בָּרַךְ בְּחַר | יְהוָה לְעַם סִגְלָה אֲלֵהֶיךָ לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סִגְלָה “Hashem has chosen you to be for Him a nation a treasured people.” The rabbis comment on these verses and conclude that our status as treasured people is evident in the fact that instead of appointing one of His angels as a guardian angel, the Lord God Himself acts on our behalf as our guardian. (*Tur HaAroch on Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:6 Part 1*) This is why in Jewish thinking the mitzvot (commandments) are not burdensome, but rather opportunities to express gratitude to God for His mercy, grace, and gift of life! In the concept of שְׂמֵר מִצְוֹתָ שְׂמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ “keep the command keep his soul” the rabbis describe how the commands are like garments that we wear. This is paralleled to what we read in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 12:17

And the dragon was angry at the woman and declared war against the rest of her children—all who keep God’s commandments and maintain their testimony for Jesus. (NLT)

Revelation 14:12

This means that God’s holy people must endure persecution patiently, obeying his commands and maintaining their faith in Jesus. (NLT)

Revelation 22:14

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. (KJV)

Revelation 22:14

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city by the gates. (NASB)

Reading through Revelation, a selection of just a few verses, we read a discrepancy in the way the verses are translated, such as according

to *Revelation 22:14*. The KJV writes “to do His commands,” and the NASB writes “those who wash their robes,” etc. So the question for us is do we keep/obey His commandments or wash our robes? Is the NASB trying to make an attempt to do away with the Torah, by saying “wash their robes” instead of “do the commandments” as some commentators suggest? The actual differences here are found when comparing the Greek manuscripts. The Textus Receptus (Μακάριοι οι ποιουντες τας εντολας) compared to the SBL or Alexandrinus codex (Μακάριοι οι πλύνοντες τὰς στολάς). The Textus Receptus writes “blessed” (Μακάριοι) is the one who “keeps” (ποιουντες) the “commands” (εντολας), while the LSB writes “blessed” (Μακάριοι) is the one who “washes” (πλύνοντες) his “robes” (στολάς). So the variation is found in the manuscripts themselves and not necessarily a conspiracy to do away with the command by the English translators. Both of these translations are an accurate rendition, as they are consistent with the Greek manuscript that is being translated. Now we note the significance of this, based upon what we read here in the Greek manuscripts, there is a tradition in the Greek text which parallels keeping the mitzvot of God, with the washing of one’s clothes, and this is consistent with the rabbinic tradition. This suggests for us these concepts are synonymous, and consistent with both the Jewish way of thinking about the mitzvot of God in the Torah, and the garments spoken of in the book of Revelation, all of which describe God’s transformation in our lives. We also note how in either case, the condition is as doing this (obeying the commands and washing the robes) one is authorized to enter the gates of heaven.

Again, notice how Solomon writes saying, שֹׁמֵר מִצְוַת שְׁמֶר טו נֶפְשׁוֹ בּוֹזֵה דְרָכָיו יוֹמֵת (Mishley / Proverbs 19:16) the word בּוֹזֵה means “to accord little worth to something.” So the idea is that the one would be unconcerned with his or her own ways, like not caring about the sins he or she commits, or being unconcerned with the high calling of obedience that we are given according to the Scriptures. This is a serious issue and all of these things are found within the verse that states, כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּרַחֲמֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְהֵיוֹת לְךָ לְעַם סֻגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: “For you are a people consecrated to the LORD your God: of all the peoples on earth the LORD your God chose you to be His treasured people.” The meaning of the word סֻגְלָה

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segullah (treasure) is what we are to God, a desirable thing to which nothing comparable is to be found anywhere. This is the reason God sent His only son to lay his life down so that those who believe would be saved! (*John 3:16*)