

# Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Ki Tavo

Tel: 815-301-1928

Fax: 815-301-1928

Email: shabbatshalomfax@gmail.com

ShabbatShalom.org

Insights into life, personal growth & Torah

16 Elul, 5780

Over **300,000** Readers Worldwide!

**The Fax of Life**

ד"ב

September 5, 2020

**GOOD MORNING!** As schools cautiously begin to open all over the country I am reminded of the following story: A mother repeatedly called upstairs for her son to get up, get dressed, and get ready for school.

**It was** a familiar routine, especially when the school was administering standardized testing.

**"I feel sick,"** said the voice from the bedroom.

**"You are not sick.** Get up and get ready," called the mother, walking up the stairs and hovering outside her son's bedroom door.

**"I hate school** and I'm not going," said the voice from the bedroom, "I'm always getting things wrong, making mistakes, and getting told off. The teachers hate me and constantly complain about me. Nobody likes me and I don't have any friends there."

**"I'm sorry,** but you are going to school," said the mother through the door, continuing encouragingly, "Really, mistakes are how we learn and develop so please try not to take criticism so personally. I also can't believe that nobody likes you - you have lots of friends at school. Besides, you have to go, you are the principal."

**What always** struck me about this story is that in all the years that I attended school I never once considered that maybe the principal hated being there just as much as I did. It's true, from the time I was a child all the way through my teenage years I absolutely despised going to school.

**I still** remember the time I accompanied my oldest son to his first day at school. As we entered the school he was excitedly jumping up and down in anticipation. I looked at him and sadly thought, "You poor boy, you have no idea that you are about to begin a 15 year sentence."

**(Of course** God has an ironic sense of humor – I have never really been able to stop going to school. For the last thirty years I have been responsible for the operations of an entire school system beginning with preschool and continuing all the way through college. Silver lining – I no longer despise being in school.)

**But whether** you are a principal who doesn't want to get out of bed or a general who is reluctant to go to war, it must be recognized that true leadership is about responsibility, and responsibility is shaped by perspective. The following story is commonly repeated in business development seminars in an attempt to teach a lesson on perspective.

**Around** the turn of the 20th century, as African colonialism began to wane and the continent slowly began to emerge as a potential economic market, two salesmen were sent by a British shoe manufacturer to Africa to investigate and report back on market potential.

**The first salesman** reported back, "There is no potential here - nobody wears shoes." The second salesman reported back, "There is massive potential here - nobody wears shoes."

**Generally,** the lesson they try to extract from that story is that making sales is about optimism; is the glass half full or is it half empty? I think that while it is true, there is a much deeper lesson to be learned.

**What really** differentiated the two salesman was that one only saw the situation as it was and became locked into that paradigm. The other had a vision of what the situation could become and was willing to take responsibility to see it through.

**Of course** this week's Torah reading contains wisdom that is relevant to this lesson.

*And God shall make you the head and not the tail; and you shall be above only, and you shall not be beneath...  
(Deuteronomy 28:13)*

**This week's Torah** portion discusses the amazing rewards for following the Torah or, God forbid, the terrible punishments for straying. One of the rewards for following the Torah is the promise that God will ensure that if the Jewish people fulfill the Torah they will become "the head and not the tail" – i.e. leaders and not followers.

**(An interesting aside,** this concept of being "a head and not the tail" is one of the aspirations we request for ourselves and our families on the first night of Rosh Hashana – (the Jewish New Year) during the first meal of the year. The common custom is to eat a piece from the head of a fish to symbolically articulate this aspiration).

**One of** the great medieval Biblical commentators was Ramban (Hebrew acronym for Rabbi Moses son of Nachman), who was also known as Nachmanides. Born in Girona, Catalonia around 1190 he was recognized as a prodigy from a young age. He was appointed rabbi of Girona at a young age and eventually he was selected as the Chief Rabbi of the entire Catalonia. He died in the Land of Israel around 1270.

**On the verse** quoted above, Ramban is bothered by the seemingly unnecessary words "and not the tail." Since the Jewish people are promised that if they follow the Torah and it's commandments they would become a "head" it would seem obvious that they would not be the tail – after all, a head is not the tail! Why then is it necessary for the verse to explicitly

exclude being the tail?

**Ramban answers** that often a head is also a tail. How so? Imagine a large company with many employees. Obviously, the CEO cannot manage hundreds of subordinates. So a system of management is put into place with middle managers and top managers. Though one may be the head of a division, there may still be a department head above him.

**Similarly**, a nation can be ranked as a world power, making them a “head” over other nations. According to Judaism there are 70 distinct nations in the world. Throughout history a variety of nations ranked at the “top”; for a time it was the Babylonians, or the Assyrians or the Greeks or the Romans etc.

**But as** there are 70 nations to be ranked, most nations are in the middle and are therefore similar to middle managers; a “head” to some nations and a “tail” to others – as there are nations that are ranked above them and others below them.

**In that case**, explains Ramban, that nation is both a head and a tail: They are a head to the nations below and a tail to the nations above. Ramban goes on to explain that in this verse the Almighty is promising us that if we follow the Torah we will be ranked at the absolute top, only a head and not a tail to any other nation in the world.

**I once heard** a brilliant insight from my father on this subject where he utilized Ramban’s understanding and took it in a slightly different direction. “In the case of leadership,” my father remarked, “very often people are both the head and the tail.” How so?

**There are** different types of leaders; a proper leader is one who has a vision for his convictions and implements it. In other words, he sees the proper path, even if it is unpopular, and courageously directs his followers down that path. That is a true leader – the head of his constituency.

**Unfortunately**, most of the leaders of our generation are of the other type – both a head and a tail. This is because they don’t have a vision of what should be done, they merely observe the prevailing sentiment of popular opinion and draw their agenda based on the constituency’s clamoring.


**In this situation**, a head is really just a tail because his leadership isn’t driven by him; it is driven by those who are supposed to be following his lead – the tail. Even worse, when a leader does that, the agenda always ends up following the lowest common denominator, i.e. “On what can we all agree?”

**This is** a particularly dangerous situation because then the nation’s agenda and morality will always be driven by the lowest common denominator. Truth and morality have no real place in such a situation because it is driven by popular demand and not by the right thing for the good of the nation.


**Unfortunately**, this is the essence of our current predicament. Political intractability is obscuring the reality of many situations because no one will stand up and state the truth. Whether it is violent acts done in the name of a religion or ideological movement, or a segment of society that lays the blame of its ills at the feet of others without taking real responsibility, most leaders today steadfastly refuse to call them on the lies of their narrative. They don’t take a stand deemed to be unpopular because they fear losing their position.

**The Torah** is teaching us how to change that. If we follow the Torah we will be true leaders: We will have a real moral compass and a healthy vision for ourselves and the world. But this can only be accomplished if we have an agenda driven by the Torah, and not by the tail of society. When we achieve that we will become real leaders; the head and not the tail.

**TORAH PORTION:** Ki Tavo, Deuteronomy 26:1 - 29:8

 **This week's** portion includes: Bringing to the Temple as an offering the first fruits of the seven species special to the Land of Israel, declaration of tithes, the Almighty designating the Jewish people as His treasured people (*Deut.* 26:16 -19), the command to set up in the Jordan River and then on Mount Ebal large stones that had the Torah written upon them in 70 languages, the command to have a public ratification of the acceptance of the law from Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal; the Torah then sets forth the blessings for following the law and the curses for not following it, and concludes with Moses's final discourse. Verse 28:46 tells us the importance of serving the Almighty with "joy and a good heart." The last verse of the portion instructs us, "You shall fulfill the words of this covenant and do them so that you will succeed in all that you do!"

**SHABBAT LIGHTING:** *Jerusalem* 6:23 Miami 7:18 Guatemala 5:53 Hong Kong 6:20 Honolulu 6:26 Jo'Burg 5:38

 LA 6:55 London 7:24 Melbourne 5:43 Mex. City 7:30 New York 7:04 Singapore 6:49 Toronto 7:28 Moscow 6:56

**“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”:** It is a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead – and find no one there. – Franklin D. Roosevelt

Dedicated with Deep Appreciation to  
**Samuel Pearson**



Shabbat Shalom,  
*Yitzchak Zweig*

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

**Honor a Loved One!** Dedicate an edition of the Shabbat Shalom Fax **ShabbatShalom.org** (IRS# 65-0389241)

Friend of the Fax \$54    Benefactor \$118    Patron \$252    Fax Dedication \$360    Partner \$1,000  
Shabbat Shalom Fax   ●   PO Box 402666   ●   Miami Beach, FL 33140

**To be removed:** Send the name & fax number to: [rabbizweig@shabbatshalom.org](mailto:rabbizweig@shabbatshalom.org) — or ... fax/call: 815-301-1928