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Rambam's Baffling Position Concerning What We Heard at Sinai

RABBI NETANEL WIEDERBLANK

Shavuot celebrates matan Torah. Accordingly, it behooves us to attempt to decipher what exactly we heard at that momentous occasion. Before proceeding, however, let us remember Rambam's warning:

Moreh Nevuchim 2:33*

“Know this and remember it, that **it is impossible for any person to expound the revelation on Mount Sinai** more fully than our Sages have done, since **it is one of the secrets of the Torah. It is very difficult to have a true conception of the revelation and what occurred in it**, for there has never been before, nor will there ever be again, anything like it. Know this.”

Rambam informs us that the journey upon which we

* Translated by Michael Friedlander, with adaptation.

are about to embark is perilous; we must tread carefully. Indeed, Rambam writes in *The Guide* (1:5) that the verse concerning Matan Torah (Shemot 19:24) that states, “V'hakohanim v'ha'am al yehersu la'alot el Hashem” serves as a general warning against attempting to understand concepts that are beyond us. Moshe merited his magnificent understanding because he initially showed trepidation about investigating that which was beyond him, as the verse states (Shemot 3:6): “Vaysteir Moshe panav ki yarei mei'habit el ha'Elokim.”

With this qualification in mind, let us consider a startling interpretation of the Rambam. The Gemara (Makkot 24a) states that the first two of the Ten Commandments were heard directly by the Jewish people,

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as opposed to the subsequent commandments, which Hashem told Moshe and Moshe in turn related to the Jewish people. Rambam, however, understands that this cannot be taken literally, as it is inconceivable that the Jewish people could hear the direct word of Hashem, since they were not on the level of prophets.¹ Rather, this means that the truth of the first two commandments, namely, the existence of Hashem and His unity, can be derived independently using logic. Since there is no need for prophesy to arrive at these principles, our knowledge of them is direct, and in that sense identical to that of Moshe's. This is in contrast to the rest of the Torah, which we know only through Moshe. What then did the Jewish people hear at Sinai? An undifferentiated "kol," or sound. Moshe the prophet deciphered this kol and transmitted it to the Jewish people. Rambam writes:

Moreh Nevuchim 2:33

"It is clear to me that what Moshe experienced at the revelation on Mount Sinai was different from that which was experienced by all the other Israelites, for Moshe alone was addressed by God, and for this reason the second person singular is used in the Ten Commandments; Moshe then went down to the foot of the mount and told his fellowmen what he had heard. Comp., "I stood between the Lord and you at that time to tell you the word of the Lord" (Dent. v. 5). Again, Moshe spoke, and God answered him with a loud voice " (Exod. xix. 19). In the Mechilta our Sages say distinctly that he brought to them every word as he had heard it. Furthermore, the words, "In order that the people hear when I speak with thee" (Exod. xix. 9), show that God spoke to Moshe, and the people only heard the mighty sound, not distinct words. It is to the perception of this mighty sound that Scripture refers in the passage, "When ye hear the sound" (Dent. v. 20); again it is stated, "You heard a sound of words" (ibid. iv. 12), and it is not said "You heard words"; and even where the hearing of the words is mentioned, only the perception of the sound is meant. It was only Moshe that heard the words, and he reported them to the people. This is apparent from Scripture, and from the utterances of our Sages in general.

There is, however, an opinion of our Sages fre-

quently expressed in the Midrashim, and found also in the Talmud, to this effect: The Israelites heard the first and the second commandments from God, **i.e., they learnt the truth of the principles contained in these two commandments in the same manner as Moshe, and not through Moshe. For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity, can be arrived at by means of reasoning, and whatever can be established by proof is known by the prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect. These two principles were not known through prophecy alone.** Comp., "Thou hast been shown to know that," etc. (Deut. iv. 34). But the rest of the commandments are of an ethical and authoritative character, and do not contain [truths] perceived by the intellect."

This revolutionary explanation seems to contradict a fundamental principle of faith that Rambam explicates elsewhere. Rambam writes that that the basis of our faith in Moshe and his Torah is not the miracles that the Jews witnessed in the desert, since miracles may leave a person with a twinge of doubt (as they may be magic). Rather, the experience at Sinai, where we heard Hashem directly communicate to man, forms the basis of our faith in Torah, since the experience of prophesy is unmistakable. He writes:

Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 8*

"1) The Children of Israel did not believe in Moshe [solely] because of the signs he presented, for someone who believes [in a prophet solely] because of the signs he presents is tainted, for it could be that his signs are performed by means of spells and witchcraft. All the signs that Moshe performed in the wilderness were done so according to the needs of the moment, and not to bring proof to his prophecies. There was a need to sink the Egyptians, so Moshe split the sea and drowned them in it; the Children of Israel needed food, so Moshe brought down the manna for them; they needed water, so Moshe split the rock for them; Korach and his followers rebelled, so Moshe opened up the ground and they were swallowed up. The same principle applies with all the other signs. It was the assembly at Mount Sinai that made them believe in

¹ While other thinkers such as the Ran believe that Matan Torah was an exception to the general rule that only wise people that have perfected their character can experience prophesy, Rambam maintains that this principle can have no exceptions.

* Translated by Immanuel O'Levy, with adaptation.

Moshe, when our eyes, and no-one else's, saw, and our ears, and no-one else's, heard, and Moshe drew near to the darkness, and the voice spoke to him, and we heard it saying to Moshe, "Moshe, Moshe, go tell them such-and-such." In connection with this it is written, "The Lord talked with you face to face," and it is also written, "The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us." From where is it known that the assembly at Mount Sinai was the proof that the prophecy of Moshe was true and that he was not speaking baselessly? It is derived from the verse, "Lo, I come to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever." From this we see that prior to the assembly at Mount Sinai their belief in Moshe was not one that would have lasted for ever, but it was a belief that left room for discussion and thought."

Here, Rambam writes that the entire Jewish people heard Hashem's voice, in contrast with his comments in *The Guide* where Rambam states that we only heard the undifferentiated "kol."

The answer to this riddle lies in recognizing what the Rambam in *Mishneh Torah* says we heard. He writes that the Jewish people heard, "Moshe, Moshe, go tell them such-and-such." Rambam does not say that we heard, "I am the Lord your God..." In that sense, he is totally consistent with his comments in *The Guide*. In fact, the

words "Moshe, Moshe, go tell them such-and-such" do not appear in any verse in the Torah. How does Rambam know that the Jews heard these words? Perhaps Rambam means to say that when they heard the "kol," they perceived, "Moshe, Moshe, go tell them such-and-such." While they could not understand the specific words that made up the "kol," they understood that these were words directed towards Moshe with the intention that he relate them to the rest of the people. This experience was unmistakable; unlike miracles, which may be attributed to magic, the Jews heard the voice of Hashem and understood the unambiguous message: "Moshe, Moshe, go tell them such-and-such."

Conceivably, we can go even further and suggest that the Jews heard the actual words "Moshe, Moshe, go tell them such-and-such" from Hashem. This does not contradict Rambam's axiom that unworthy people cannot receive prophesy, because prophesy is defined by the transmission of content and not instructions. Support for this possibility can be gleaned from the introduction to *The Guide*.

Let us conclude by once again remembering Rambam's warning: "It is impossible for any person to expound the revelation on Mount Sinai... since it is one of the secrets of the Law." Nevertheless, to the extent that we can, we must attempt to understand it, for it is the basis of our faith.

Ma'amad Har Sinai and Tzelem Elokim – The Prohibition of Sculpting the Human Form

JONATHAN COHEN

On Shavuot, we seek to relive the events of ma'amad Har Sinai. While we associate ma'amad Har Sinai with matan Torah, a critical aspect of that experience of ma'amad Har Sinai was the gilui Shechinah in context of which the events unfolded. This was a singular and impactful event, and indeed according to Rambam, it is one that we are enjoined never to forget (*Glosses to Sefer Hamitzvot, Additional Mitzvot #2*). It is this experience that serves as the backdrop to the handful of mitzvot with which we close the Torah reading on the first morning of Shavuot: "And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Thus

shall you say to the children of Israel: "You have seen that from the heavens I have spoken with you. Do not make with me (lo ta'asun iti); gods of silver and gods of gold do not make for yourself'" (Shemot 20:19-20).

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashana 24b and Avoda Zara 43b*) explains "Do not make with me (iti)" homiletically as "Do not make Me (oti)." This understanding serves as the source for the Torah prohibition of creating representations of the human form, even for decorative or artistic purposes.¹ What connection might there be between this prohibition and the context in which it appears?

¹ Discussion of the meaning of man being created in the "image of G-d" is beyond the scope of this brief article. See *Sefer Hachinuch 39* and *Shach Y.D. 141:21* in this context.

A central dispute among the Rishonim concerns the types of representations that the Torah prohibits. Ramban (Avoda Zara 42b) and Ra'avad (Glosses to Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara 3:11) rule that even two-dimensional drawings of the human form are prohibited, while most Rishonim (see, for instance, Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara 3:11, Tosafot Rosh Hashana 24b s.v. V'ha, and Ritva Rosh Hashana 24b), cited as normative by the Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 141:4), limit this prohibition to three-dimensional sculptures in relief or statue form. Tosafot (ibid.) explain that only three-dimensional images are included because it is in that manner that we perceive the human form. Thus, the prohibition centers on the attempt to create an authentic representation of our visual experience.

Similarly, the Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 141:7) cites as authoritative the opinion of the Rosh, who restricts the prohibition to creating a complete human form, permitting a bust or a body missing a head. The Shach (Y.D. 141:25) opines that even an entire body is permitted if it is presented in profile. Rav Yaakov Emden (She'eilat Ya'avetz 1:170, cited by Pitchei Teshuva Y.D. 141:10), on the other hand, insisted that even the portrayal of a complete face in relief or as a bust is prohibited. It may be that this debate, too, revolves around the attempt to portray the human form in a "true-to-life" sense. These various opinions reflect differing conceptions of "What is a man?" "At what point has our experience of the human form been represented too accurately?" Indeed, Teshuvot Divrei Malkiel 3:58 links these halachot to the discussion in Niddah 24a of the definition of the human form with regards to the impurity of a birthing woman.

Among those Rishonim who discuss ta'amei hamitzvot, two closely related rationales are presented for this prohibition. The Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzvah 39) states simply that this prohibition is "to distance idolatry." The Rambam (Sefer Hamitzvot Lavin #4), however, explains that the Torah's intent is to distance us from ascribing magical powers to representations of the human form. Both of these understandings reflect the notion that there is nothing per se objectionable about molding the human form; rather, this prohibition reflects a seyag d'orayta - a safeguard, albeit one legislated by the Torah itself. Is it possible to provide a more intrinsic rationale for this mitzvah?

Let us now return to the simple reading of the pasuk, reading it now in the context of Ma'amad Har Sinai.

The Mefarshim provide three distinct interpretations of the phrase "Do not make with me," as connected to the preceding verse, "You have seen that from the heavens I have spoken with you." The Ramban (Shemot 20:19) understands that the plain meaning of the verse is a prohibition against fashioning idols to serve "with Hashem" as a pantheon of deities. Because we saw at Ma'amad Har Sinai that Hashem is the one and only G-d, we must not attempt to "supplement" Him by adding further deities. Ibn Ezra, Seforno, Abarbanel and Netziv (all to Shemot 19:19-20) explain that the verse prohibits making intermediaries between ourselves and Hashem. Ma'amad Har Sinai taught us that we have no need for such mystical devices, for we "have seen that Hashem spoke to us from the heavens," without any need for an intermediary. Finally, Chizkuni (Shemot 20:19) explains that this pasuk prohibits us from attempting to make a representation of Hashem Himself, for we saw that Hashem spoke to us and yet we saw no image or form of Hashem.

We may suggest a link, according to these interpretations, between the simple meaning of the pasuk and the halachic interpretation, in accordance with the ta'amei hamitzvot described above. According to Ramban, the simple reading of the pasuk forbids us from fashioning idols - while the halachic interpretation, according to the Sefer HaChinuch, distances us from idolatry in the form of sculpture. According to Ibn Ezra and others, the simple reading forbids us from creating intermediaries that we believe will aid us in approaching Hashem - while the Halacha, according to Rambam, distances us from beliefs in the talismanic power of the human form. To what understanding may the interpretation of the Chizkuni be linked? In elaboration of the Chizkuni's interpretation, Rav Hirsch (Choreiv, section 71) explains, "You perceived no form at Sinai, hearing only the voice of the Only Invisible One. Take heed, therefore, that you do not attempt to make the invisible visible, and that you do not attempt to represent in pictures that which no picture can capture." The Torah forbids us from attempting to capture the infinitude of Hashem in finite representation. Perhaps the halachic meaning of this verse teaches us that Man, too, contains more than meets the eye. By attempting to capture the essence of a human being in concrete representation, we degrade the true experience of encountering another person, a tzelem Elokim. L'havdil, just as Hashem cannot be represented in physical form, so too a human being transcends

physical matter and cannot be encompassed in a physical portrayal. It is for this reason, then, that the prohibition pertains specifically to the most accurate attempt to represent a human being, as discussed above. It is the perfect facsimile of the physical human form that most cheapens the tzelem Elokim that in truth transcends that form. Indeed, when photography was invented, the 19th century poseik Rav Malkiel Tannenbaum (Teshuvot Divrei Malkiel 3:58) warned that the newfound focus on the physical form of one's friends and relatives made

possible through photography distracts us from the true essence of ourselves. It is our deeds and our neshamot, not our physical appearance, that serve as the ultimate encapsulation of who we are.

This Shavuot, through reliving the experience of Ma'amad Har Sinai when we saw no divine image or form, we should gain a greater appreciation of the infinitude of Hashem and a deeper recognition of the spiritual transcendence of every tzelem Elokim.

From the Masechta

The Final Status of Kinyan Kesef

JASON FINKELSTEIN

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 46b) records a debate regarding which method of acquisition (kinyan) exists on a Torah level for moveable objects. Rabi Yochanan holds that paying money alone is the method of kinyan, while Reish Lakish maintains that meshicha, pulling the object, is the method of kinyan. The Gemara then adds that even according to Rabi Yochanan, Chazal were concerned that a person would pay money for an item and then, before receiving it from the seller, a fire would break out in the seller's house. In such a scenario, the seller would not make any attempt to save the item, as it already would belong to the purchaser. To prevent such a situation, Chazal instituted that kesef does not function as a kinyan, and the ownership of an item does not transfer until the purchaser does meshicha. Once Chazal instituted that kesef is no longer a viable mode of acquisition, is there anything left of kinyan kesef or did Chazal totally eliminate all applications of the kinyan?

The Gemara (48a) brings a proof for Reish Lakish's opinion that meshicha is koneh on a Torah level from a Braita that says that if one gave money that is hekdeish to a bathhouse attendant, he violates the prohibition of me'ilah. The Gemara asserts that this proves Reish Lakish's opinion from the fact that a bathhouse attendant was singled out; only regarding a bathhouse, where there is nothing upon which to do meshicha to solidify the kinyan, is there a violation of me'ilah simply by giving money. The implication is that all other transactions, which contain an item upon which to do meshicha, would not lead to a me'ilah violation until meshicha takes place.

The Gemara thus implies that according to Rabi Yochanan, one would violate me'ilah solely by handing over the money. Now, if Chazal totally erased kinyan kesef, how can one violate me'ilah unless he does meshicha; the kinyan did not yet take effect? The Rashba answers that regarding the biblical prohibition of me'ilah, Chazal did not institute the need for meshicha; rather, we fall back on the Torah-level rule that money alone is koneh. The Rashba seems to be saying that even though Chazal said kesef is not a kinyan, that is true only on a rabbinic level; kesef still has an impact for Torah-level cases.

Seemingly, the Rashba's position would not apply only to me'ilah but to all prohibitions in the Torah. But the Gemara in Avoda Zara (63a) implies otherwise. The Gemara asks: if someone stipulates with a zonah to have bi'ah with him in exchange for a specific lamb, it becomes an etnan zonah, which cannot be brought on the mizbei'ach. The Gemara queries why that should be if there was no meshicha. This question implies that the status of etnan is not created until meshicha is done. At first glance, the Gemara is saying that the lack of meshicha that is required rabbinically prevents the etnan-status from being created. Doesn't this mean that kinyan kesef has absolutely no impact at all? The Ritva and Rashba deal with this by saying that the question of the Gemara is only according to Reish Lakish, who holds that meshicha is required on a Torah level; according to Rabi Yochanan, in fact, since kesef is effective on a Torah level, the lack of meshicha cannot affect the Torah-level status of etnan.

Not all Rishonim accept this interpretation of the Gemara in Avoda Zara. Tosafot assume that the Gemara is asking according to Rabi Yochanan as well. As such, the Gemara clearly is saying that Chazal totally removed the effectiveness of kesef. If so, how can the Gemara in Bava Metzia say that kesef alone can cause a violation of me'ilah even according to Rabi Yochanan? Tosafot explain that "Since there is me'ilah on a Torah level, who would remove the status of me'ilah from the money of hekdeish?" It is not entirely clear what this means; couldn't one equally say, "Since there is etnan on a Torah level, who can remove the status of etnan from the sheep?" Various approaches are given in the Acharonim (see Maharam, Oneg Yom Tov 25, Even Ha'azel Hilchot Mechirah 3:1), but we can suggest a different approach based on the distinction between the respective natures of me'ilah and etnan. Me'ilah may not be based on the effectiveness of the money creating a kinyan, but rather on the attempt to remove the money from the control of hekdeish through a ma'aseh kinayn. Chazal said that kesef is not effective regarding the kinyan taking effect, but as a ma'aseh kinyan that is an attempt to remove money from hekdeish's control, kesef remains intact. An etnan, however, cannot be created through a ma'aseh kinyan alone; in order for the payment to be classified as an etnan, it must be a true payment for the zenut.

The Rambam deals with this issue differently. He writes (Hilchot Me'ilah 6:10) that if one buys an item

with kesef and does not do meshicha, he has not violated me'ilah. The Rambam thus holds that since one is not koneh until he does meshicha, there is no violation of me'ilah. The Lechem Mishneh explains that the Rambam maintains that there is a contradiction between the Gemara in Avoda Zara and the Gemara in Bava Metzia regarding whether Chazal's requirement of meshicha affects laws on a Torah level. The Rambam ruled in favor of the Gemara in Avoda Zara and thus rejected the Gemara in Bava Metzia. If so, the Rambam disputes the above explanation of Tosafot that me'ilah is unique in that only a ma'aseh kinyan is required; for the Rambam, me'ilah is dependent on the ability to practically use the item. As such, the absence of the meshicha that Chazal required can remove what would on a Torah level be a violation of me'ilah.

Accordingly, for the Rashba and Ritva, the definitions of etnan and me'ilah are the same - since there is a kinyan on a Torah level, Chazal's requirement of meshicha cannot prevent Torah-level rules from taking effect. According to Tosafot, me'ilah requires only a ma'aseh kinyan, and an etnan is not created until the item fully changes possession and thus requires meshicha. The Rambam's view is the opposite extreme from Tosafot: me'ilah is not violated until one gains full control over the object, such that Chazal's requirement of meshicha can void the Torah-level violation.

Must a Father be the One to Circumcise His Child?

ELCHANAN POUPKO

The Gemara tells us that one of the key elements in the concept of shlichut, appointing a proxy on behalf of oneself, is that the sender be able to perform the activity for which he is appointing an agent (see Bava Metzia 10b). This requirement creates a complication with one of the most commonly performed mitzvot: brit milah. Jewish fathers are obligated to circumcise their male children (Kiddushin 29a). Unlike most mitzvot, however, fathers rarely perform this mitzvah themselves; the father usually appoints the mohel as a shliach to do the mitzvah for him.

This has been the common and accepted minhag for

many centuries. However, there is a unique view of the Shach on this topic. The Shach's opinion (C.M. 182:4) is that in the case of milah, the father cannot always appoint a shliach; if he is himself competent in the field of milah, he must personally circumcise his son. A father who delegates responsibility for circumcising his son in such a case has neglected his responsibility and has violated a mitzvah aseh.

This opinion of the Shach has puzzled thinkers for the past four centuries. Why should the mitzvah of brit milah be different than any other mitzvah? The Ketzot Hachoshen (ibid.) suggests that we know that one cannot

appoint a shliach to perform a mitzvah that one must fulfill himself with his body (mitzvah sheb'gufo), such as putting on tefillin or shaking lulav. So too, explains the Ketzot Hachoshen, the Shach maintains that the mitzvah of brit milah is a mitzvah sheb'gufo for the father, and therefore he must fulfill it himself.

This explanation, however, leaves several points unexplained. First of all, why should brit milah be considered a mitzvah sheb'gufo? Why would the father's responsibility to circumcise his son be more of a mitzvah sheb'gufo than, say, his responsibility to redeem his son (pidyon haben, which definitely can be done via shliach – see Shach Y.D. 305:11)? Furthermore, it is clear that the Shach holds that the father is in violation only if he is able to circumcise his son himself. If indeed it is a mitzvah sheb'gufo, every single father should be responsible to learn how to circumcise so that he can fulfill this important mitzvah; even the Shach did not go this far!

Perhaps we can provide a different explanation. The Gemara (Kiddushin 29a) derives from pesukim that there are three stages in the mitzvah of brit milah. The first is the father's obligation to circumcise his son; this obligation is present until the son turns thirteen, whereupon the son assumes all of his religious responsibilities. However, the Gemara continues, if there is no father present when the child is young, then the beit din has the responsibility to make sure the child is circumcised.

If the child turns thirteen and has not been circumcised yet, he has the responsibility to circumcise himself.

Thus, the responsibility for circumcising the child can devolve upon three different parties: the father, beit din, or the son, depending on the scenario. However, the mitzvah is counted only once in the count of the 613 mitzvot, and it is described under one large umbrella—the mitzvah of milah (see Rambam Hilchot Milah 1:1)

We can thus conclude that there is only one mitzvah here. Yet there is also a hierarchy as to who performs the mitzvah; the first obligation devolves upon the father. This led the Shach to his conclusion, as the Ketzot Hachoshen explained, that the mitzvah of milah is a mitzvah sheb'gufo that can be performed by no one other than the father. The Shach is referring specifically to this first, most preferable way of performing the mitzvah. This also explains why this responsibility exists only to the extent that the father is proficient in circumcision: the Torah requires that if the father is able to circumcise, then he should come before anyone else so as to perform the mitzvah in the best way. If he is not a candidate to perform the circumcision, however, then he is not in violation and the mitzvah is delegated to the next possible person.

For further discussion of this issue, see Tevu'ot Shorn 25 and Chiddushei R' Shimon Shkop Kuntres Hashlichut 24.

The YU Ethicist

Leadership and Love

EPHRAIM METH

“When they fell ill, my garb was sackcloth. I afflicted my body with fasts. I returned prayer to my bosom” (Tehillim 35:13, as interpreted by R. Levi, cited by Ibn Ezra *ibid.*). Thus King David describes his reaction to his enemies' afflictions. The king empathized with their pain and prayed for their recovery, for although they were his detractors, they also were his subjects.

Chazal equate King David's actions with those of Avraham, who prayed for Sodom's salvation despite the fact that Sodom's value system was antithetical to his own. Avraham prayed because, as the Av Hamon Goyim, the father of multitudinous nations, the Sodomites were his children. Indeed, they, before most other nations, had

acknowledged his spiritual and temporal authority in the aftermath of their catastrophic battle with the four kings. Hence, his prayer.

The Gemara (Makkot 11a) states that the kohein gadol had an obligation to pray for his constituents' salvation. For this reason, the murderous sinners of Israel, condemned to the confines of the Cities of Refuge, would be justified to pray for his downfall; the kohein gadol bears a debt of guilt towards them, for had he loved them and prayed for them properly, they would not have fallen into sin.

R. Shlomo Wolbe elaborates on this theme. It is deplorable, writes R. Wolbe, for a leader not to love those

who submit to his authority (Alei Shur, vol. 2, p. 222). Heads of household, masters of classrooms, and presidents of countries must at times display a stern and rebuking countenance to their families, students, and citizens; yet without a vibrant love to counterbalance their righteous anger, they risk surrendering equilibrium and in rage shattering those whom they are charged to mold. How does one nurture such love? How does one cultivate love for a citizen he or she has never met, for a child once obedient but now rebellious? Marshaling the above examples, R. Wolbe responds: pray for them.

This understanding, I believe, informed Chazal's descriptions (Menachot 65a, Eiruvim 22b, and Bava Metzia 118b) of Moshe Rabbeinu and Yehoshua as ohavei Yisrael, lovers of Israel. Whence this conviction that our early leaders were not just our leaders but also our lovers? True, *imitatio dei* demands such love. True, also, that an explicit verse demands this love, "You shall love your friend as you love yourself." Yet, by ascribing excellence in love particularly to Moshe and Yehoshua, and by associating these sagacious legislators with the mitzvah to love one's fellow, the Gemara emphasizes the inestimable significance of the symbiosis between leadership and love.

While it is clear that leaders must love their followers, and must enshrine their love in prayer and legislation, it is perhaps less clear how this idea relates to the followers. Upon reflection, however, it should be clear that every citizen in a democracy that protects freedom of speech, as a voter, pundit, and inchoate activist, helps carry on his or her shoulders the girder of communal leadership. Democracy is government by the people; representatives

are only representatives; we, the people, lead. Even if our representatives are, for the duration of their terms, our monarchs, we, the voters, exercise national leadership by being the *mamlichei melachim*, as well as by lobbying. Hence, we too are obliged to love all citizens who submit to the authority of our government, to pray for their salvation, and to enshrine our love in legislation.

Painfully, politics across the world nowadays appear to be a calculus of selfishness. This malady afflicts not only politicians, but also voters, and particularly voters like us. While it is true that the ballot box is the most direct avenue to redress or forestall injustices against us, it is nonetheless painful that the public discourse preceding elections tends to focus primarily, if not exclusively, on our particularistic concerns. True, everyone agrees that free love can be deadly both for its givers and its receivers; witness the catastrophic consequences of Yaakov's unbridled love for Rachel and Yosef, and of King David's undisciplined love of Avshalom. Hence, at times, pragmatic and symbolic concerns demand that our discourse display "love that is hidden and rebuke that is revealed." Yet if such concerns are dominant most of the time, our responsibility is that much greater to seek out and take advantage of those opportunities that present themselves to let our love of those we lead shine through. If we believe, as we do, that the freedoms and funding we request are in our neighbors' best interests as well as our own, then we must whenever possible shift our discourse from the language of self-interest to the language of love. I pray for the love that inspires prayer, the love of Avraham and David, and I pray for my followers, prayer that inspires love.