



## The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

### Vayikra: White Space

When you look at a book or any page of text, beyond, around, and between the print there are margins, spacing, and paragraph breaks. Why are these important? This is known as the “white space” without which the eye finds it difficult to focus and to absorb the content of what has been written.

In the Torah, too, the words are divided into paragraphs, with halakhically mandated margins, paragraphs, and breaks between sections. In his opening remarks to *Parshat Vayikra*, Rashi reflects upon the purpose of the subdivisions and paragraphing in the Torah, assuming that these divisions were part of the original transmission of Torah as God taught Moses the Law. He writes:

And what purpose did these subsections serve? **To give Moses an interval for reflection between one division and another and between one subject and another** — something which is all the more necessary for an ordinary man receiving instruction from an ordinary man. (Rashi)

Moses needed the breathing space, these moments of reflection. And, as Rashi suggests, if Moses needed this pause when he studied with God, we, too, need space and time to think, to process, to reflect after we have studied something new. The “white space” gives room for thought, the opportunity to absorb and internalize the information.

This is true not only regarding the written medium. In a blog about oratory skills, the following advice is given:

Using a pause or a strategic bit of silence allows your listeners’ minds to do the same things that white space does for visual works—it allows for absorbing, processing and connecting information. It helps your audience make sense of your message. It tells your audience: “Go ahead. Think it over. Draw your own conclusions.” (Jill Schiefelbein, Dynamic Communicator)

I was thinking about Rashi's comment as I have recently been under an unusually pressured work period, preparing classes, writing, teaching, and planning foreign lecture tours. I have been feeling my lack of downtime, moments in which I can relax. (And for this, Shabbat is just wonderful!) Many of us feel that with emails and whatsapps invading our home lives, and with our cellular devices constantly around us, we fail to get a break. But maybe we need a pause:

Idleness is not just a vacation, an indulgence or a vice; it is as indispensable to the brain as vitamin D is to the body... The space and quiet that idleness provides is a necessary condition for standing back from life and seeing it whole, for making unexpected connections and waiting for the wild summer lightning strikes of inspiration — it is, paradoxically, necessary to getting any work done. (Tim Kreider, "The Busy Trap", NY Times, June 30, 2012)

**So, please discuss:**

- When you hear or read something significant — some Torah or simply a meaningful article — how do you absorb it?
- Do you find yourself thinking about it afterwards — on the bus, as you lie in bed, when you are walking in the street?
- What do you do with those thoughts? Do you write them in a diary, share it with a loved one or a work colleague?
- In life, do you have enough time to stand back and contemplate? When you do get those moments of reflection, what do they add to your life?
- Do you find that our electronic devices drain your "white space"?
- What to do about it?

Shabbat Shalom!