

Torah Tidbits

ב"ה

ISSUE 1626

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ישראל

אוג. 23RD 2025 • כ"ט אב תשפ"ה

פרשת ראה
PARSHAT RE'EH

SHABBAT MEVARCHIM | PIRKEI AVOT 5

Dear Torah Tidbits Family
Rabbi Avi Berman
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Growing Our Garments
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והיה כי יביאך ה' אלקיך אל-הארץ
דברים י"א:כ"ט

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT RE'EH ZMANIM

CANDLES 6:39 PM • EARLY 5:53 PM • HAVDALA 7:52 PM • RABBEINU TAM 8:31 PM



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IMPORTANT REMINDERS



Elul is on Sunday August 24 and Monday August 25

מולד חודש אלול יהיה במוצאי שבת קדש, עשרים ושש דקות ושש חלקים אחרי אחרת עשרה ראש חודש אלול יהיה מחר ביום ראשון וביום שני הבא עלינו ועל כל ישראל לטובה



Earliest Kiddush Levana, 3 Days After Molad: 4 Elul/Wed. night Aug. 27

7 Days After Molad: 8 Elul/ Sun. night Aug. 31

Last Opportunity to Say Kiddush Levana until: 14 Elul/ Motzei Shabbat Sept. 6



COVER IMAGE Photographed by Mike Basilyan

I live with my wife, Chava, and three kids in Jerusalem, Baka. We made aliyah almost exactly 5 years ago from the US. This photo reminds me of the incredible achievements and sacrifices of the people of Israel.

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
August 20 - 30 / 26 Av - 6 Elul

Earliest Tallit and Tefillin	5:14-5:21
Sunrise	6:07-6:13
Sof Zman Kriat Shema	9:24-9:26
Magen Avraham	8:46-8:48
Sof Zman Tefila	10:30
(According to the Gra and Baal HaTanaya)	
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	12:42-12:39
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	1:15-1:11
Plag Mincha	5:54-5:44
Sunset (Including Elevation)	7:21-7:09



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phone: (02) 560 9100 | fax: (02) 561-7432
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	RE'EH			SHOFTIM		
	Candles	Early	Havdala	Candles	Early	Havdala
Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	6:39	5:53	7:52	6:30	5:46	7:43
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	6:57	5:55	7:54	6:48	5:48	7:45
Beit Shemesh/RBS	6:58	5:54	7:53	6:49	5:47	7:44
Gush Etzion	6:55	5:53	7:52	6:46	5:46	7:43
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	6:56	5:55	7:54	6:48	5:48	7:45
Modiin/Chashmonaim	6:55	5:54	7:53	6:47	5:47	7:44
Netanya	6:57	5:55	7:54	6:48	5:48	7:45
Be'er Sheva	6:56	5:54	7:53	6:47	5:47	7:44
Rehovot	6:56	5:55	7:54	6:48	5:48	7:45
Petach Tikva	6:39	5:55	7:54	6:30	5:48	7:45
Ginot Shomron	6:55	5:54	7:53	6:47	5:47	7:44
Haifa / Zichron	6:47	5:55	7:55	6:38	5:48	7:45
Gush Shiloh	6:54	5:53	7:52	6:46	5:46	7:43
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	6:57	5:55	7:54	6:48	5:48	7:45
Givat Zeev	6:59	5:53	7:52	6:50	5:46	7:43
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	6:55	5:53	7:52	6:46	5:46	7:43
Ashkelon	6:57	5:56	7:54	6:49	5:49	7:46
Yad Binyamin	6:56	5:55	7:54	6:48	5:48	7:45
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	6:49	5:53	7:53	6:40	5:46	7:44
Golan	6:54	5:52	7:52	6:45	5:45	7:43
Nahariya/Maalot	6:56	5:55	7:54	6:47	5:47	7:45
Afula	6:55	5:54	7:53	6:47	5:46	7:44

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Re'eh 8:31 PM • Shoftim 8:22 PM

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;
40 mins in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat and Haifa)

Daf Yomi: Avodah Zarah 66



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Headquarters: 40 Rector St. 4th floor, New York, NY 10006 • 212-563-4000 • website: www.ou.org



Editor: Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider | aarong@ouisrael.org
Advertising: Ita Rochel 02-5609125 | ttads@ouisrael.org
Editor Emeritus: Phil Chernofsky
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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OU ISRAEL
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Our third son, the fourth child in our family to join the IDF, enlisted just a few weeks ago to the combat engineering unit and it made me start thinking of my days in basic training so long ago. As we learned how to be soldiers, to be a team, and how to use our weapons well and responsibly, something that was drilled into us over and over again was how important a careful shot is, and that even being off by a millimeter when looking through a

scope can result in missing the target by a meter or much more. Ordinarily, being off by a millimeter doesn't matter very much, but in life-and-death situations, which in the army was almost always the case, it was the difference between protecting innocent civilians and stopping terrorism.

I was thinking of this important message as I attended the *levaya* of Rabbi Berel Wein zt"l. What Rabbi Berel Wein was able to accomplish in his 91 years, between being a *rav* in numerous different communities and through his many classes and the innovative use of new technology for education, through the Destiny Foundation and so many others, most people wouldn't be able to accomplish in 200 years. As I heard at the *levaya*, so many spoke beautifully about his focus, his drive. Even Shabbat was no day of rest for him, because he would regularly give seven to eight *shiurim* every single Shabbat. All to make sure that the message of Torah was getting out to the world.

In fact, this past Shavuot, we ran an OU Israel program in partnership with Rabbi Wein's *shul*, Beit Knesset HaNasi. Unfortunately, I could not be there, though I very much wanted to be. But Rabbi Sam Shor, our OU Israel Director of Torah Initiatives, told me afterward how incredible Rabbi Wein was. How he got up *leil Shavuot*, a 91-year-old man, and started off the evening without a note, yet spoke for almost an hour. Rabbi Shor and others who had attended told me how incredible his *shiur* was and how the

ברוך דיין האמת



The OU Israel Family
mourns the passing of

RABBI BEREL WEIN זצ"ל

*An extraordinary educator,
historian, and Rav who inspired
generations across Klal Yisrael.*

*His wisdom, warmth, and
timeless teachings will continue
to guide us for many years to come.*

*Among the many leadership
positions that Rabbi Wein occupied
in his long and distinguished career,
he served a number of years as
**Executive Vice President of the
Orthodox Union and Director of
OU Kosher.** In the years following
his aliya to Yerushalayim,
Rabbi Wein offered many **inspirational
shiurim on behalf of OU Israel.***

**We send heartfelt wishes
of condolence to his family
and to all of Klal Yisrael.**

יהי זכרו ברוך

entire place was riveted and at the edge of their seats.

Obviously, this Shavuot *shiur* was not recorded, but so many other *shiurim* of Rabbi Wein are recorded and can be found on the OU Israel Shiurim YouTube channel, if you want to discover what I am talking about.

So many incredible rabbis came to give *hespedim* at the *levaya*. The *rav* of the shul, Rabbi Kenigsberg, spoke beautifully, as did Rabbi Meir Goldwicht, Rabbi Don Siegel, several sons-in-law, and close *talmidim* as well. Rabbi Wein, in his tremendous humility and holiness, had instructed that the *hespedim* not be too long, but we all heard such incredible stories of his life and his true greatness.

There was one story that really stood out to me, told over by his son-in-law, Rabbi Yisrael Gettinger. It stood out because it reminded me how much I should be thanking Rabbi Berel Wein for helping to form what the OU is today, even beyond the simple fact that Rabbi Wein headed OU Kosher back in the 1970s. And the story goes as follows.

It is a common custom for those attending a wedding to give a wedding gift at the wedding itself. So when Rabbi Wein's daughter got married, several people had given Rabbi Wein envelopes of checks or cash over the course of the wedding. After the wedding, he brought these envelopes over to his son-in-law and daughter.

Later, as the newlyweds looked through the different gifts that they had received, they realized that there was one envelope that came from a business that they did not know. And when they opened it up, they saw



a check for \$400 (adjusting for inflation, that's something like \$3500 today).

It is certainly unusual to receive such a large gift from a person and a business they did not recognize. Curiosity got the best of them, and so they asked Rabbi Wein if he knew who this generous person was. Rabbi Wein looked at the check and shook his head. "This was not meant for you. I'll take care of it." And put the check in his pocket and went on his way.

Some time later, his son-in-law asked him what the story was with that check. And Rabbi Wein explained that the check was from a company that gets OU Kosher certification. He said that he was worried that this check might appear as a form of bribery from the company, so he called the company and returned the check, telling them that it wasn't appropriate to give gifts like this to the head of OU Kosher. And in fact, Rabbi Gettinger says that he noticed that after a few years this facility lost its OU Kosher certification. Clearly they had been cutting corners in different ways.

This is what I mean by the story of learning in basic training how to shoot and making sure your aim is precise down to the millimeter. Because that is what Rabbi Wein did,

both ethically and spiritually. The reason OU Kosher is so successful today, and is run in such a clean, transparent, honest way, is because Rabbi Berel Wein back in the 70s put his eye on the target in creating a *kashrut* agency that is pure, transparent, and that relies on halacha and the decisions of the *gedolim*, *poskei halacha* of the highest standard. That has enabled OU Kosher to be the gold standard of *kashrut* in the world today. Rabbi Wein's influence continues in every aspect. Today, every company visit is documented, photographed, and signed off by each field representative's supervisor, the rabbinical coordinator, and ultimately signed off by the heads of OU Kosher. This system builds fences upon fences of protection against corruption.

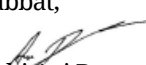
Rabbi Wein continued to be so close to us and gave us tremendous guidance at OU Israel. Of course, he would write his thoughts in Torah Tidbits for so many years, and used to give *shiurim* in the OU Israel Center on Keren HaYesod Street for many years. Additionally, just recently over the last year, we have partnered with his *shul*, the Beit Knesset HaNasi, as one of our locations in Yerushalayim since we moved our headquarters to Har Chotzvim. And I know for sure that our move could not have happened without the tremendous *bracha* and the *birkas ha'derech* from Rabbi Wein, *zecher tzaddik v'kadosh l'vracha*.

**In memory of
our beloved husband, father,
grandfather and great-grandfather
Rabbi I. Fred Hollander z"l
on his yahrzeit Rosh Chodesh Elul**

To hear at the *levaya* the values he infused into the OU early on was so impactful for me. And since the *levaya* was completely packed, without even standing room, I'm sure that each and every one of the participants walked out with a different understanding of the impact Rabbi Wein had on their lives.

May we continue in his footsteps and *bezrat Hashem* continue building the destiny of the Jewish people, through learning from our past, learning our Torah, and passing it on to the next generation in the most beautiful ways possible.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,


Rabbi Avi Berman
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FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

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The Ultimate Blessing

For several summers prior to coming to the OU, I would take a break from my normal rabbinic responsibilities to spend ten days at Sinai Retreats, where for a significant portion of each day I had the privilege to teach Torah to a group of intelligent young professionals who had not previously had that opportunity. We studied and discussed core Torah concepts and ideas about the G-d we believe in, the mission of the nation we are a part of, the challenges and opportunities of life, and the Torah that we dedicate ourselves to study and practice. The opportunity to spend hours day after day in an immersive Torah environment sharing the incredible wisdom and strength of the Torah that we study and observe every day and the meaning and purpose that it gives our lives renewed my own appreciation for the Torah that we live and learn each day. *Ashreinu mah tov chelkinu*, we are indeed very fortunate.

Many understand this appreciation of Torah to be the meaning of the opening phrases of our Parsha. “See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: blessing, that you hear the commandments of Hashem your God that I place before you today....” Rather than spell out external rewards and

consequences for our observance of Torah, here we are zeroing in on the ultimate blessing, the Torah itself. As the Rambam noted in many places (see for example introduction to Rambam’s commentary to Perek Chelek and Hilchot Teshuva Chapter 10), our appreciation of and connection to Torah ultimately depends on our level of appreciation of its inherent value. In the succinct words of Pirkei Avot, *s’char mitzvah mitzvah*, the ultimate reward of doing a Mitzvah is the Mitzvah itself.

Ramban very simply and beautifully underscores the value of seeing the inherent benefits of Torah in explaining this verse in last week’s Parsha (10:12-13): “And now, O Israel, what does Hashem your God demand of you? Only this: to revere Hashem your G-d, to walk in all His paths, to love Him, and to serve Hashem your G-d with all your heart and soul, keeping the L-RD’s commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good.”

Ramban notes - as the Talmud had previously - how odd it seems that this phrase can begin with an apparent minimization of Hashem’s demands of us when in fact the list of expectations is so long and imposing. Yet, noted the Ramban, the key lies in seeing how the entire statement is anchored in its closing phrase, *l’tov lach*, “for your good.” The Torah is big and broad and its obligations many, but once we can recognize and taste the incredible benefit it provides

us in our own lives, its observance moves immediately from burden to privilege. It is not a burden when we appreciate its incredible benefits.

Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu, we are indeed very fortunate. Each of us can benefit greatly from taking every opportunity to learn Torah in a way that helps us transcend our own slide into routine that allows us to lose sight of the gift of Torah life and forget its privilege. Sharing the richness of Torah refreshes our own enthusiasm for it as we bring its light and power both to those outside our community who have never seen it as well as to those inside our family and community who have seen it but have either forgotten or never truly experienced its delicious taste.

Torah itself is the ultimate blessing. ■

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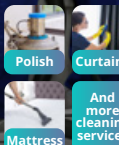
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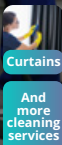
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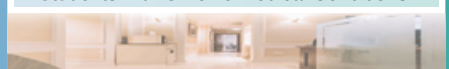
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Mother of Reuven Tradburks

PARSHAT RE'EH

Parshat Re'eh begins a section filled with mitzvot. In the next 3 parshiot there are 170 Mitzvot, ¼ of all the mitzvot of the Torah.

In the flow of Moshe's speech, he pivots from a discussion of how we got to where we are to a discussion of how we are to live in the Land. No more speaking of the challenges in your conquest of the Land; now we are speaking of the Jewish society we are to create in the Land.

In the first 3 parshiot of Devarim Moshe conversed with the people. He addressed their doubts and concerns and reviewed our history to learn its lessons. If you doubt you can take the Land, remember the sin of the spies; don't repeat their skepticism. If you doubt your ability, remember your victories over Sichon and Og. If you are worried that the nations are too powerful for you, remember the wonders of Egypt; He will do what is necessary. If you doubt your worth, remember Sinai; He chose to speak with you, His people. And if you think you are superior, remember your failing of the golden calf.

In these first 3 parshiot Moshe converses with the people, addressing their thoughts, doubts, and concerns. Moshe assuages those uncertainties through recounting the lessons

of their journey to here.

Now Moshe begins to address the society we want to build in the land. Less conversation, more instructions, proscriptions.

What are the pillars of this new Jewish society? What are its principles, its values?

In a word: ethical monotheism. Our parsha outlines that belief in One G-d is the heart of our new Jewish society. And generosity to others. Ethical monotheism. We will get to judiciary, legislature and executive branch in the upcoming parshiot. But ours is the foundation. Belief. And behavior.



1ST ALIYA (DEVARIM 11:26-12:10)

I place before you blessing as a consequence of keeping mitzvot; and curse as a consequence for not. You are entering the Land and will establish yourself there. These are the laws: rid the Land of idols whether they are on mountains, hills or under trees. And hence uproot service of them. Do not serve your G-d in many places rather serve Him in the one place I choose. That is where you shall bring all your offerings. And that is where you shall rejoice.

The first pillar of our Jewish society is, well, the first two of the Ten Commandments. One G-d. And rejection of idols. The directive to root out idols makes sense.

But what is noticeable is the insistence on one central place of national service of G-d. Offerings are to be brought only there. This is in stark contrast to the plethora of idols on hill tops and under trees all over the Land. The one central place reinforces that there

is but one G-d.



2ND ALIYA (12:11-28)

The place that G-d will choose to dwell shall be the place you bring your offerings. And you shall rejoice there with your family, your workers and the Levi. Now, you may consume meat wherever you dwell, but not as holy offerings. The holy things are to be done in this one place only. When you enjoy expansive borders and want to consume meat, you may do so without any restrictions of tuma. However, do not consume the blood. You may not offer holy things and vows in your locale, but only in the place He chooses.

Sacrifices must only be brought in the Temple in Jerusalem (or the Mishkan before that). But you may eat meat, though not its blood, outside of the Temple.

The permission to eat meat out of the Temple is emphasized. I wonder why. Is the Torah trying to make a philosophical statement, like, remember that though you are subservient to G-d, you are the crown of creation and have every right to exercise your dominance over animals?

Or perhaps to contrast the two contexts of consumption. Eating meat out of the Temple, while permitted is consumption, earthy. Eating meat of a sacrifice is rejoicing in G-d's Presence. Do not confuse pleasure with simcha. Eating meat is pleasure; basking in G-d's Presence is simcha.



3RD ALIYA (12:29-13:19)

When you become settled in the Land, be wary of the snare of attraction of the religions in the Land. Though you be tempted to want to learn how they serve their gods and to borrow from that, do not do it. We have ours; do not add, nor

subtract from our own. If a prophet predicts future events with accuracy but instructs people to follow a false god, do not listen to him. You are to follow G-d. If your brother, son, daughter or even wife or best friend try to convince you to follow an idol, do not listen to them. They are to be put to death for attempting to sway people to idol worship; you are not to shield them. If an entire city worships idols, it is to be destroyed.

Idol worship will lure you, hook you in 4 ways: the beauty of the practices, the power of the charismatic prophet, the draw of the people closest to us, and the sway of the crowd.

The religions of the world have their attraction. There are many noble practices, much grandeur, inspiration and beauty. You may wonder perhaps if our services can be enhanced by gospel singers or the majesty of the Church organ. Don't go looking for their best. For 2 reasons: our practices are ours. We serve Him in the way He says. And second, in looking at their practices, you risk being drawn to switch sides and simply stay with theirs.

And people influence people. The prophet, who has earned authority through predicting the future has great sway. Don't listen to him if he professes a belief in idols.

So too, those closest to us, relatives, spouses, best friends. People listen to people they trust. But not if they are drawing you to idols.

And the power of the group – social pressure, an entire city. For all of these, it is difficult to turn against them in judgment. We protect our leaders, our family. We know this all too well; there is a great pull to protect the person in power or the family member, while allowing them to continue their damaging ways.



4TH ALIYA (14:1-21)

The laws of kashrut: animals with a split hoof and chew their cud may be eaten. Fish with fins and scales. Birds that are predatory are listed as not kosher. And do not consume an animal that died on its own, nor cook a kid in its mother's milk.

The laws of kashrut have already been given in Parshat Shemini. They are repeated here perhaps as a statement of Jewish difference. We believe differently. We eat differently.

And following immediately after the allure of idol worship, perhaps these laws are placed here as they create a barrier to social contact with the peoples of the Land. If you can't eat together, much harder to socialize. Food is the lubricant of social intimacy. The kashrut laws set us apart, limiting social contact and so protecting us from slipping into idol worship.



5TH ALIYA (14:22-29)

Maaser sheni: 10% of your produce is to be eaten in proximity to the Temple area. If this is too much to transport, exchange it for money. The money must be used for food in the holy place, shared with others. And you will rejoice before G-d.

Maaser sheni is an unusual mitzvah. Teruma is an amount given to kohanim, as a tax to support the kohanim. Maaser is 10% given to the Leviim to support them.

But Maaser sheni is 10% of the remainder of the crop to be eaten in the holy place, in proximity to the Temple area. In Shilo that meant within eyesight of the Temple area, in Jerusalem it meant within the city walls. It does not need to be eaten by the owner; but it does need to be eaten in Jerusalem.

There are 2 implications to this mitzvah:

- 1) the farmer is forced to go regularly to experience the holiness of the mikdash and
- 2) Jerusalem becomes full of produce.

If 10% of all produce must end up in Jerusalem, the prices fall due to supply. There will always be plenty of food for cheap in Jerusalem. This is fascinating social engineering; an indirect way of creating inexpensive food for the needy.

This is a double mitzvah: a push to the farmer to stay connected to holiness. And a safety net for the needy; Jerusalem becomes a breadbasket, city of plenty, of surplus and hence of help to those in need.



6TH ALIYA (15:1-18)

Shmita for loans: the 7th year cancels all loans. G-d will bless you in the Land so that there will be no poor. When one who is needy approaches you, open your hand and give what he needs. Do not withhold a loan as the shemita year approaches knowing it will be canceled. Rather give him, for there will always be needy people. A slave shall also go free in the 7th year. Give him freely upon his release. Should he want to remain a slave to you, he may do so. Don't resent sending him free, for he worked for you for 6 years; G-d will bless you for your compliance.

This aliya and the one before form a second pillar of society in the Land: care for others. The first pillar was a G-d central society, monotheism, expressed by a central Temple where all offerings are brought. Care for others is the next pillar.

The canceling of loans every 7 years is a form of bankruptcy; allowing a fresh start for one who has fallen on hard times. When someone is in trouble and needs a loan, don't be a loan shark, a predator, swooping down

on the desperate. Rather, if he can't pay, let it go. Give him a fresh start.

As is freeing the slave. A fresh start.



7TH ALIYA (15:19-16:17)

A first-born animal shall be brought as an offering. Should it be blemished, it is consumed by the owner. Pesach: the Pesach offering must be brought in the place He chooses. Shavuot: You and all yours shall rejoice in the place He chooses. Sukkot: You shall celebrate for 7 days at the time of the harvest and shall be joyful. On these holidays one appears before G-d and celebrates with what we have been blessed with.

The 3 regalim or pilgrimage holidays are religious social engineering. The Jew needs to spend time in Jerusalem regularly. That experience makes a difference. We all know that. Moving out of our routine and experiencing a different, more rarified and holy place leaves its mark. While we are always before G-d, the regular journey to Jerusalem creates a regular bond with rarefied holiness.

We see it in our own time; oh, how privileged we are to see the impact of the richness of our modern-day Jerusalem on the Jews of the world. How many of us had our religious journey sparked in these streets of Jerusalem?

The pilgrimage holidays are social engineering: people return home as different people after the experience of the Mikdash.

YESHAYAHU 54:11- 55:5

This week's *haftorah* is the third of a series of seven "*Haftarot* of Consolation." Hashem addresses the "afflicted and storm-tossed" Jerusalem "who has not been comforted," assuring her that she, and her people, will

be restored to full glory. The foundation, walls and ground of Yerushalayim will be laid with precious stones. Her children will be "disciples of Hashem," and will enjoy abundant peace. Any weapon engineered against her will fail.

The prophet then invites the thirsty to acquire "water," namely those who are thirsty for spirituality should study the quenching words of Torah. He promises the nation an everlasting covenant similar to that made with King David. This is also an allusion to Mashiach, David's descendant, who will be revered by all of the nations of the world. ■



STATS

47th of the 54 sedras; 4th of 11 in Devarim.
257.8 lines in a Torah (rank: 4th)
20 Parshiyot - 5 open; 15 closed
126 pesukim - ranks 13th (1st in Devarim).
1932 words - ranks 7th (1st in Devarim).
7442 letters - ranks 7th (1st in Devarim).



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A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOKH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

כי אם אל המקום אשר יבחר ה'. לשום את שמו שם לשכנו תדרשו ובאת שמה (יב:ה)
"But unto the place which G-d shall choose...to put his name there, unto His habitation shall you seek and there you shalt come." (12:5)

Why does the pasuk state that "you shall seek" in the plural form and then "you shalt come" in the singular form?

Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon 1138-1204) in his work the "Guide to the Perplexed" explains that "the place" is left anonymous, with no reference to Jerusalem, in order that other nations won't appreciate the value the Jewish people put on this place and fight for possession. Another reason he gives is in order that no internal strife take place within the tribes arguing who gets Jerusalem in their territory. Now we can understand the answer of the Gerrer Rebbe: (Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter 1865-1948) "seek out"- in the plural, why we have no Temple today because of the multitudes of Israel that fight amongst themselves – in the plural. When "you come" as a single unit then you will merit the coming of the Temple.
Shabbat Shalom V'Chodesh Tov



THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, EMERITUS

What Do We Know About Poverty?

Young Jewish students who are just beginning to study world history are often surprised to learn that early theorists of socialism and communism were Jews. Having been raised in essentially capitalist countries, they cannot fathom the fact that a large percentage of early supporters of those movements, especially in Russia and in Eastern Europe, were Jews themselves.

During the many years I served as a pulpit rabbi, I would meet regularly with a group of teenagers from my synagogue. Our discussions ranged across a wide spectrum of topics, and more than once the question was posed to me, “Rabbi, what attracted so many members of our faith to socialism and communism?”

Like all such general questions, there is not one simple answer. I explained that to the teenagers. But I did assert that one component of that phenomenon was connected to our religion and its values.

Undoubtedly, many who were attracted to those movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were, to some extent, influenced by a desperate need to heal the rampant poverty that typified the human

condition throughout history, especially since the Industrial Revolution. That desperate need was consistent with the religious teachings that these individuals imbibed in their formative years.

Generally, by the time they became active members of these new movements they had long since rejected Jewish belief and Jewish observance. But the imprint of their family environment and *cheder* education remained alive and motivated the political direction they took as they approached adulthood.

The roots of the Jewish attitude toward poverty are to be found in this week’s Torah portion, *Re’eh* (Deuteronomy 12:1-16:17). Now, the number of Torah portions, *parshiyot*, matches the number of weeks there are in a year. There is a total of 613 *mitzvot*, or commandments. Not every *parsha* contains a commandment. Some contain only one or two.

But our *parsha* contains upwards of one hundred *mitzvot*. The exact number is debated by various authorities. How many of these commandments do you think relate to the themes of poverty and charity?

I count at least twenty. They include tithes to the Priests, Levites, and to the poor, especially widows and orphans; to walk in the paths of the gracious Lord; to fear the Lord and to cleave to Him and to His Torah sages; to protest against those who persecute others; that members of the Israelite nation display compassion toward each other; to forgive debts with the approach of the seventh year of the *shemittah* cycle; to avoid becoming

dependent on charity oneself; to conform to the priorities among charitable causes; not to be cold-hearted when distributing charity; not to be stingy; to free a Hebrew slave after six years of service, to reward him or her generously at the conclusion of their term of service, and to always remember that we were all once slaves in Egypt!

Quite a list, wouldn't you say? No wonder so many of our co-religionists were deluded by the new political and economic movements that vainly promised to defeat poverty once and for all!

The fact remains, however, that poverty exists, even in our own circles. Indeed, the gap between needy Jews and affluent ones has demonstrably increased in recent years. Dire poverty has been exacerbated by the current post-October 7, 2023 war. How apt are the words we read this Shabbat: "For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land." (Deuteronomy 15:11)

The above verse is severely disappointing. "Never cease!"? Ever? Yet it is reaffirmed by at least one Talmudic passage, in Tractate *Shabbat* 151b, which reads: "Samuel [an early Talmudic sage] said, 'There is no difference between this world and the Era of the Messiah, except that we will no longer be dominated by alien kingdoms, as it is written that there will never cease to be needy ones in your land.'" Even the Messiah himself will not eliminate poverty!

There are other texts, however, which are more reassuring and which clearly indicate that poverty will cease if we do our part in our own reaction to it. Thus, "There shall be no needy among you... If only you heed the

Lord your God and take care to keep all this instruction that I enjoin upon you this day" (Deuteronomy 15:4-5).

As Maimonides/Rambam comments near the conclusion of his *Hilchot Melachim* in describing the Era of the Messiah: "At that time there will be neither famine, nor war, nor envy or conflict, for all good things will be as plentiful and as readily available as the earth itself."

It is up to us, folks, and we need not resort to newly discovered economic strategies. We must simply cling to the values expressed in this week's *parsha*, act compassionately to all, avoid selfishness and self-aggrandizement, and open our hearts and hands to those in need.

I feel compelled to close with an insight into the minds of poor people. It is presented creatively in an interpretation of a Mishnah in Tractate *Bikkurim* 3:8.

The Mishnah elaborates upon the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*, bringing the first fruits of one's field to the *Kohen* in the *Beit HaMikdash* in Jerusalem. The fruits are to be brought in a basket to the *Kohen*, as described in a *parsha* we will read in several weeks, *Ki Tavo*.

The *Mishnah* reads: "The wealthy would bring their first fruits in containers of silver and gold, while the poor would bring them in baskets of woven strands of peeled willow branches. The baskets and fruits were gifted to the *Kohanim*."

The Talmud (*Bava Kama* 92a) understands this to mean that the "baskets" of the poor were handed to the *Kohen* together with the fruits. But the "silver and gold containers" of the wealthy were returned to them. The Talmud there sees this as an example of the Aramaic adage, "Poverty pursues the poor",

or more bluntly, “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer”.

The commentaries on the Mishnah wonder why some adjustment was not made to avoid embarrassing the poor. After all, the Rabbis could have required the wealthy to bring modest baskets so that the poor would not feel humiliated.

Pinchas Kehati, in his outstanding explanation of the Mishnah, a work I prefer in my own Mishnah study, refers to an explanation offered by Malbim, the nineteenth century commentator on *Chumash*, in his remarks on *Devarim* 26:4.

The poor person, argues Malbim, wove the basket with his own hands. He could afford nothing but willow branches, and he painstakingly peeled off the bark and carefully wove the strands of wood into the form of a primitive basket. He was proud of his work and felt honored to donate the gift. The *Kohen* appreciated the arduous effort of the poor man. The poor man was by no means humiliated. Quite the contrary, he was gratified to have his puny basket ceremoniously received.

The wealthy man, however, put no effort into his golden or silver container. He ordered it at the local shopping mall. The *Kohen*, as a Temple stand-in, is not impressed by material trinkets. He gladly, with no fanfare, handed it back to the rich man without so much as a thank you.

The lesson is an important one. The poor man acting simply but sincerely and authentically stands higher than the wealthy man who merely spends a few dollars to grudgingly do his duty.

Let's assist the needy person, but let us not belittle him, nor, Heaven forbid, treat him condescendingly. ■



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The Mystery of Rosh Chodesh

You may have never noticed, but Rosh Chodesh is something of a mystery.

What exactly is the nature of this monthly occasion? How does it fit into the parameters that usually define special occasions on the calendar? Is Rosh Chodesh to be treated as a festival, or an ordinary weekday?

Strangely, the picture that emerges from the practices of Rosh Chodesh is, at first glance, confounding and contradictory.

Consider the evidence:

In contrast to Shabbat and festivals, melacha is permitted on Rosh Chodesh.

At the same time, some scriptural and Talmudic sources do obliquely indicate that Rosh Chodesh is not to be viewed as a full-fledged workday. This potential limitation

on Rosh Chodesh melacha does not emerge from the Biblical sources prohibiting melacha on Shabbat and festivals. It is instead of rabbinic derivation, based on a tradition unique to Rosh Chodesh; a singular relationship between Jewish women and the occasion.

According to the Midrash, women present during the Revelation at Sinai refused to surrender their jewelry toward the sinful creation of the Golden Calf. In stark contrast, a short time later, these same women eagerly donated their possessions toward the construction of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary in the desert.

As the Mishkan was erected on Rosh Chodesh, Hashem designated Rosh Chodesh as a holiday for women, a reward for the actions of their ancestors.

While this tradition does not give rise to a firm halachic mandate, in various communities women do abstain to some extent from work, particularly menial labor, on Rosh Chodesh.

As on other celebratory calendar occasions, fasting, eulogies and other sorrowful activities are proscribed on Rosh Chodesh.

Nonetheless, while some authorities recommend marking Rosh Chodesh with a festive meal, as is done on Shabbat and full festivals, on Rosh Chodesh such a celebration is not obligatory.

A portion of Torah text outlining the Rosh Chodesh offerings brought to Temple is read on Rosh Chodesh.

May the learning be לעילוי נשמת
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Judy Wasserman

Once again, however, mystery emerges. The Rosh Chodesh reading mirrors that of *chol hamo'ed*, the intermediate days of the festivals, when four individuals receive *aliyot* (are called to the Torah). This contrasts with weekdays, when three individuals are called; full festivals, when five individuals are called; and Shabbat, when seven individuals receive *aliyot*.

Adjustments are also made to the daily services through the omission of specific somber prayers and the inclusion of other passages appropriate to the occasion- such as Hallel (Psalms 113-118).

A significant difference, however, exists between the Hallel on year-round festivals and the Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. While the rabbis debate whether the year-round requirement is of biblical or rabbinic derivation, all agree to its obligatory nature.

In contrast, the Talmud clearly indicates that the practice of reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh originates as a *minhag*, a popular custom.

To reflect this distinction, Psalms 115: 1-15 and 116:1-15 are omitted from the Rosh Chodesh Hallel, resulting in what is colloquially referred to as a half-Hallel.

A Musaf (additional) offering, otherwise exclusive to Shabbat and festivals, was brought on Rosh Chodesh during Temple times.

Consequently, a Musaf Amida focusing on that Temple ritual is recited on Rosh Chodesh, as on Shabbat and festivals, after the morning service.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the unique, seemingly self-contradictory nature of Rosh Chodesh can be seen in its effect on the daily mitzva of wearing Tefillin.

Noting that Tefillin and Shabbat are each

described in the Torah as an *ot*, a sign of the relationship between the Jew and Hashem, the rabbis mandate the suspension of the mitzva of Tefillin on Shabbat and *yom tov*. Days that are intrinsically “signs,” the authorities argue, do not require the additional sign of Tefillin.

On Rosh Chodesh, however, an unusual pattern emerges. Tefillin are worn - as on

weekdays - during the morning service, the recitation of Hallel, and the reading of the Torah. They are then removed in most communities, however, before the recitation of the Musaf amida.

Thus, during the first portions of the morning service on Rosh Chodesh, we wear the

Tefillin as if it were a weekday, while during the concluding sections we remove them, as if it were Shabbat or a festival.

When all is said and done, therefore, we are left with a mystery. Our tradition seems intent on producing a day that is neither ordinary nor extraordinary, but *something in between*; a day which is neither a secular nor a festive occasion, *but an amalgam of both*.

Why does halacha create a monthly calendar event marked by such ambiguity?

Perhaps we can suggest that Rosh Chodesh earns its singular status from the pivotal role that it plays in the flow of our year.

Rosh Chodesh is not a full festival, yet it serves as the “driver” of all the year’s festivals. The very convening of Rosh Chodesh itself determines the days on which the upcoming calendar occasions will be marked.

Rosh Chodesh is thus designed to serve as an enabler, a critical calendar component that finds its ultimate importance, not in its own celebration, but in the occasions that flow from its observance. Rosh Chodesh does

not rise to the level of a Yom Tov; yet, absent Rosh Chodesh, all the year's events, joyous and solemn, would not occur.

Like all enablers, while Rosh Chodesh passes without great "personal" commotion, it quietly resonates with the power of all it brings into existence.

Perhaps that's the point.

Once a month, on days meant to be marked by personal introspection, Hashem challenges us to recognize and value the quiet enablers in our midst. He calls on us to truly "see" those individuals whose contributions, though neither public nor prominent, serve as catalysts for the achievements of others.

And, perhaps, on Rosh Chodesh He wants us to go one step further: to recognize our own value as potential enablers. He beckons us to accept and to teach our children that we don't always need to be center stage; that great, sometimes the greatest, rewards can be found in helping others reach their goals.

For, like Rosh Chodesh, all enablers absorb and carry with them pieces of the accomplishments that they help produce, enriching their own lives beyond measure. ■

Rabbi Goldin is the author of the OU Press volumes "Unlocking the Torah Text," and "Unlocking the Haggada."

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The Politics of Freedom

Having set out the broad principles of the covenant, Moses now turns to the details, which extend over many chapters and several *parshiyot*. The long review of the laws that will govern Israel in its land begin and end with Moses posing a momentous choice. Here is how he frames it in this week's *parsha*:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse - the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. (*Deut. 11:26-28*)

And here is how he puts it at the end:

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil ... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live. (*Deut. 30:15, Deut. 30:19*)

Maimonides takes these two passages as proof of our belief in freewill (*Hilchot*

Teshuvah 5:3), which indeed they are. But they are more than that. They are also a political statement. The connection between *individual* freedom (which Maimonides is talking about) and *collective* choice (which Moses is talking about) is this: *If humans are free then they need a free society within which to exercise that freedom*. The book of Devarim represents the first attempt in history to create a free society.

Moses' vision is deeply political but in a unique way. It is not politics as the pursuit of power or the defence of interests or the preservation of class and caste. It is not politics as an expression of national glory and renown. There is no desire in Moses' words for fame, honour, expansion, empire. There is not a word of nationalism in the conventional sense. Moses does not tell the people that they are great. He tells them that they have been rebellious, they have sinned, and that their failure of faith during the episode of the spies cost them forty extra years of delay before entering the land. Moses would not have won an election. He was not that kind of leader.

Instead he summons the people to humility and responsibility. We are the nation, he says in effect, that has been chosen by God for a great experiment. Can we create a society that is not Egypt, not an empire, not divided into

rulers and ruled? Can we stay faithful to the more-than-human hand that has guided our destinies since I first stood before Pharaoh and asked for our freedom? For if we truly believe in God – not God as a philosophical abstraction but God in whose handwriting our history has been written, God to whom we pledged allegiance at Mount Sinai, God who is our only sovereign – then we can do great things.

Not great in conventional terms, but great in moral terms. For if all power, all wealth, all might belong to God, then none of these things can rightfully set us apart one from another. We are all equally precious in His sight. We have been charged by Him to feed the poor and bring the orphan and widow, the landless Levite and non-Israelite stranger, into our midst, sharing our celebrations and days of rest. We have been commanded to create a just society that honours human dignity and freedom.

Moses insists on three things. First, we are free. The choice is ours. Blessing or curse? Good or evil? Faithfulness or faithlessness? You decide, says Moses. Never has freedom been so starkly defined, not just for an individual but for a nation as a whole. We do not find it hard to understand that as individuals we are confronted by moral choices. Adam and Eve were. So was Cain. Choice is written into the human condition.

But to be told this as a nation – this is something new. There is no defence, says Moses, in protestations of powerlessness, in saying, We could not help it. We were outnumbered. We were defeated. It was the fault of our leaders or our enemies. No, says Moses, your fate is in your hands. The sovereignty of God does not take away human responsibility. To the

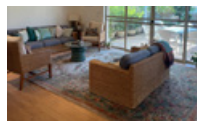


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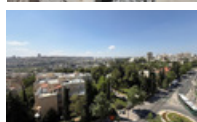
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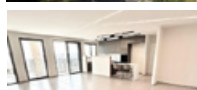
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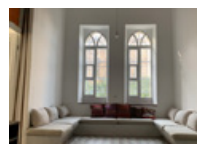
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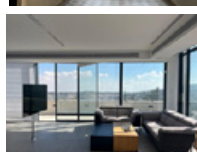
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contrary, it places it centre-stage. If you are faithful to God, says Moses, you will prevail over empires. If you are not, nothing else – not military strength nor political alliances – will help you.

If you betray your unique destiny, if you worship the gods of the surrounding nations, then you will become like them. You will suffer the fate of all small nations in an age of superpowers. Don't blame others or chance or ill-fortune for your defeat. The choice is yours; the responsibility is yours alone.

Second, we are collectively responsible. The phrase "All Israel are sureties for one another" is rabbinic but the idea is already present in the Torah. This too is radical. There is no "great man" theory of history in Judaism, nothing of what Carlyle called "heroes and hero-worship." The fate of Israel depends on the response of Israel, all Israel, from "the heads of your tribes, your elders and officers" to your "hewers of wood and drawers of water." This is the origin of the American phrase (which has no counterpart in the vocabulary of British politics), "We, the people." Unlike all other nations in the ancient world and most today, the people of the covenant did not believe that their destiny was determined by kings, emperors, a royal

court or a governing elite. It is determined by each of us as moral agents, conjointly responsible for the common good. This is what Michael Walzer means when - in his recent book, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* - he calls biblical Israel an "almost democracy."

Third, it is a God-centred politics. There was no word for this in the ancient world either, so Josephus had to coin one. He called it "theocracy." However, this word has been much abused and taken to mean what it does not, namely rule by clerics, priests. That is not what Israel was. Again an American phrase comes to mind. Israel was "one nation under God." If any single word does justice to the vision of Deuteronomy it is not theocracy but *nomocracy*, "the rule of laws, not men."

Biblical Israel is the first example in history of an attempt to create a free society. Not free in the modern sense of *liberty of conscience*. That concept was born in the seventeenth century in a Europe that had been scarred for a century by religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. Liberty of conscience is the attempt to solve the problem of how people with markedly different religious beliefs (all of them Christians, as it happened) can live peaceably with one another. That is not the problem to which biblical Israel is an answer.

Instead it was an answer to the question: *how can freedom and responsibility be shared equally by all?* How can limits be placed on the power of rulers to turn the mass of people into slaves – not necessarily literally slaves but as a labour force to be used to build monumental buildings or engage in empire-building wars? It was the great nineteenth century historian Lord Acton who rightly saw that freedom in this sense was born in biblical Israel:

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The government of the Israelites was a Federation, held together by no political authority, but by the unity of race and faith, and founded, not on physical force, but on a voluntary covenant ... The throne was erected on a compact, and the king was deprived of the right of legislation among the people that recognised no lawgiver but God ... The inspired men who rose in unflinching succession to prophesy against the usurper and the tyrant, constantly proclaimed that the laws, which were divine, were paramount over sinful rulers ... Thus the example of the Hebrew nation laid down the parallel lines on which all freedom has been won.¹

It is a beautiful, powerful, challenging idea. If God is our only sovereign, then all human power is delegated, limited, subject to moral constraints. Jews were the first to believe that an entire nation could govern itself in freedom and equal dignity. This has nothing to do with political structures (monarchy, oligarchy, democracy – Jews have tried them all), and everything to do with collective moral responsibility.

Jews never quite achieved the vision, but never ceased to be inspired by it. Moses' words still challenge us today. God has given us freedom. Let us use it to create a just, generous, gracious society. God does not do it for us but He has taught us how it is done. As Moses said: the choice is ours. ■

1. Lord Acton, *Essays in the History of Liberty* (Liberty Press, 1985), 7

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PROBING THE PROPHETS

BY RABBI NACHMAN (NEIL) WINKLER
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Yesterday's Prophecies; Today's Realities

Throughout the seven haftarat of consolation that follow Tish'a B'Av, the navi Yishayahu presents us with descriptions of the final redemption and return to our land. It is difficult for we who live through today's events to ignore the powerful parallels between the prophet's visions and today's realities. Predictions of a once-barren land that will generously give forth her fruit, of ruined cities that would be rebuilt and of empty streets that would be filled with sounds of rejoicing throngs, are all actualities that we now perceive each and every day.

Yesterday's prophecies; today's realities.

However, the promise that we find in this week's haftarah, a short selection taken from the 54th and 55th prakim of Sefer Yishayahu, is rather unique. The navi tells us: "V'chol

banayich limudei Hashem," "All of your children will be students of Hashem." It is a nevu'ah predicting that the geula will not only mean a physical return to the land, including repopulating of the land, an economic resurgence after years of poverty and the rebirth of the desert-like condition that characterized Eretz Yisrael for almost two-thousand years. Not at all. The geulah would include a spiritual return too, a revival marked not by the reinstitution of ritual Temple service alone but by a resurgence of Torah study. "Limudei Hashem"- "Students of Hashem", refers to those who would be knowledgeable of G-d and His laws.

But the prophecy continues. This revival in Torah study would bring with it another blessing: "V'rav sh'lom banayich", "there will be abundant peace to your children." Torah knowledge, an understanding of what Hashem expects of us, must bring us peace. True study of G-d's words should necessarily bring with it "ahavat chinam", a love of one another and a respectful unity that would prevail between all segments of Jewish society.

This prediction of Yishayahu has also come true in our time. But only partially. There has never been such widespread study of Torah

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in our history as we have now. There are more yeshivot, more Torah students, more Torah teachers, more Torah books and publications than ever before. “Ki mitziyon tetze Torah”, the words, spoken by Yishayahu and echoed by the prophet Micha, declared that Zion would be the source of Torah study, and, indeed, has been fulfilled in our day. However, it is clear that today we still await “v’rav shlom banayich” - that the study of Torah brings us the blessing of peace.

True scholars and students of our Holy Torah understand that it must be a tool for spreading peace and harmony, not controversy and discord. It is for this very reason that the navi explains why peace would reign during the Messianic era, saying (11;9): “Ki mal’ah ha’aretz de’ah et Hashem”, the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d.

As we bask in the joy of “atchalta d’geula,” - the blossoming of our redemption - we pray for the realization of all the prophecies of geula, with the blessing of true peace- peace from the threats of surrounding enemies and peace spreading from within our people. ■

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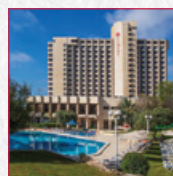
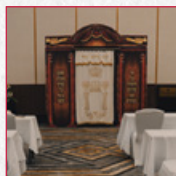
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Keeping Our Father Happy

בנים אתם לה' אלוֹקֵיכֶם - לא תתגודדו... כי עַם קדוש אתה (יד:א)

You are children of Hashem... do not rip out your hair anger... because you are a holy nation.

One is prohibited from expressing too much agony and inflicting pain upon oneself, because we are the children of Hashem. What is the connection of being children of Hashem and the prohibition on inflicting pain on oneself, because we are a holy nation. Moreover, is there any association between the p'shat explained above and the drash on the pasuk, from which we derive - לא תתגודדו - (Yavamot 13b)? Don't be separate groups, rather be united.

Rashi on the pasuk explains that since we are a refined people, we cannot walk around

with ripped hair and cut bodies. The Ramban disagrees and expresses that this pasuk relates to one who is in mourning while Rashi's suggestion would apply at all times. Ibn Ezra posits that since God loves us more than a father loves a son, then we should not be upset at anything that we experience. We should understand that all is for the good, even if we cannot comprehend it. We have a certain trust in Hashem and so we cannot overdo any mourning.

The Ramban believes that the underlying message of this commandment is that if we over react by mourning, it reflects that we think this is the end of life, but we need to believe that there is a transition to the world to come. Over- reacting for the loss of the body, is a reflection of disbelief in the afterlife. If we truly believe that the dead soul is in a better place, then we would not mourn endlessly. Chazal in their infinite wisdom established a routine of mourning, shiva, shloshim and eleven months, so that one can focus on the event, but not wallow forever. To be able to ease the pain over time.

The Shem M'shmuel expands upon the Ramban's explanation, in the name of his father (Avne Nezer and Iglei Tal). One may believe in the afterlife of the soul, but why can't I mourn the loss of the body? We need to understand the body is a temporary container of the soul. It is a mitzva to take care of the body when the soul is within it, but afterwards, it loses its significance. There is a concept of *kavod habriyot*, but respect for

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the living precedes respect for the dead. The purpose of this mitzvah is to focus on the soul (nefesh) and not on the body (guf).

Now we can connect the *p'shat* and the *drash*. When do people get into arguments and separate (אגודות)? When they focus on the body- on externals. When they are jealous of physical things. If we focus more on the *nefesh*, on spiritual matters, then we would not engage in disputes and we would refrain from forming different and separate groups אגודות.

May we be able to live up to our title as being “banim L’Hashem” and make our father happy by acting as unified brothers! ■

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Targeting 'Today'

"Re'eh Anochi noten lifnechem hayom, brachah u'kelalah – Behold I set before you today a blessing and a curse." (Devarim 11:26) Our *parashah* begins with a simple statement; 'today' we are given the opportunity to choose blessing or curse, contingent upon our observance of Hashem's mitzvot. The word 'today' seems unnecessary. Yet, since we know that no element in Torah is extraneous, it must carry a deep, important truth.

The Slonimer Rebbe ztz"l in *Netivot Shalom* explains that the objective of our verse is to remind every Jew of his daily obligation to fulfill his inherent potential. The *Ari Hakadosh* ztz"l teaches that from the beginning of time until the end of time, there will never be two people who are exactly the same. Similarly, every day is different from

the one before and the one after. Each of us must take advantage of the unique opportunities that any given day affords, to utilize its gifts and challenges in the best possible way. We must maintain an awareness that every detail of every day is uniquely designed from Above to help us fulfill our potential to the fullest. When we succeed, we are indeed worthy of Hashem's abundant blessings.

The following question was once presented to Rav Moshe of Kobrin. What is the most important mitzvah for a person to do? We might have responded learning Torah, keeping Shabbat, or strengthening our *emunah*. Rav Moshe responded, "whatever mitzvah the person finds before him at that moment." This includes any and all mitzvot, both positive and negative commandments. When one desists from speaking loshon hara or from viewing inappropriate content, that is the foremost mitzvah of that moment. Living with this awareness enables us to view our relationship with Hashem as dynamic and ever growing. Hence, notes the *Netivot Shalom*, Hashem is described as, "*Hamechadesh be'tuvo bechol yom tamid* – with His goodness, He renews each day always." As each day is totally new, everything the day contains is new as well, even us! With this perspective, we must see each day as offering new opportunities to become the person Hashem envisions us to be.

The Tosher Rebbe in *Avodat Avodah* explains that the word '**today**' conveys a crucial message for this time of year. The



yetzer hara is cunning, and will tell us, “Yes, of course it is important to do *teshuvah*, but not today.” It will convince us that we must approach *teshuvah* with the proper focus and invest the right amount of time and energy into the process. Better wait until we are fully prepared! It is no coincidence that one of the words for *teshuvah* is “*ve’ata - and now!*” We must do what we can to eliminate this voice and grab the moment to make appropriate changes, beginning the *teshuvah* process as soon as we realize the need to improve. Pushing off an opportunity for change and growth is a manifestation of Amalek who epitomizes “*machar -tomorrow.*”

“*Hayom im be’kolo tishma’u* – if you heed my voice **today**,” the ‘present’ is the greatest ‘gift’ of connection. ■



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Re'eh: Anochi

Rav Zeidel Epstein, zt'l, the sagacious *mashgiach ruchani* of Torah Ohr in Yerushalayim, was respected for his wisdom and beloved for his stellar *midos tovos*. Having learned closely with Rav Shimon Shkop in Grodno for close to two decades, he was a long time chavrusa of Rav Yisroel Zev Gustman, who would later become the youngest *dayan* on the Vilna Beis Din. Through a miraculous chain of events Reb Zeidel secured passage on a cargo ship carrying only cattle, docking in the United States in 1939, on the very day that the war broke out in Poland.

Rav Zeidel had a major impact on the nascent, developing yeshivah community in New York and served as one of the *roshei yeshivah* of Yeshivas Rabbenu Yaakov Yosef (RJJ) for more than forty years. In the mid-1970s, Reb Zeidel, then almost

seventy years old, made *aliyah* and joined Torah Ohr — not as a staff member, but as a *talmid*. Rav Zeidel, a *talmid chacham* and leader of renown, would attend the yeshivah *sedarim* just like all the other *avreichim*, a testament to his humility. In time, he became the defacto spiritual supervisor and guide of the yeshivah.

One of his dedicated and prominent talmidim, Rav Ahron Lopiansky, Rosh Yeshivah of Greater Washington, reflected on Reb Zeidel: “There was an ethereal quality about him..., an aura of *kedushah* and *taharah*, a warm and radiant smile, a mischievous twinkle in his wise eyes, a mentor and guide who embraced and encouraged”. An inspiring biography of Reb Zeidel, *L'Ovdo b'Leivav Shalem*, “To Serve Him With a Whole Heart”, includes the following *ma'aseh*:

A number of *mashgichim* from a cross section of yeshivos in Eretz Yisrael gathered around Rav Zeidel for a private *shmuess*, and presented their questions on an array of topics. Rav Zeidel turned to the educators and asked the group: “What, in your opinion, is the first thing one ought to do upon completing davening in the morning?”

One *mashgiach* replied that it is best to begin one's day by learning a few *mishnayos*; another suggested learning two *halachos*. Yet a third recommended studying the daily *Shemiras haLashon*. Rav Zeidel nodded in approval for the meaningful instructions each proposed. “These are all very nice, meaningful ideas,” the Rav replied. “One



should find time for each of these each day. However, in my opinion, the most important thing to do right after *Shacharis* is to greet those in our proximity with a hearty '*Boker tov*.' The immediate result of davening *has to be* that we draw closer to others. Our prayers must directly impact our *bein adam l'chaveiro*, our interaction and connection with our fellows."

One of the great *mechanchim* of Yerushalayim and author of numerous works on the Vilna Gaon, Rav Shlomo Brevda, zt'l, reminisced about Rav Zeidel's last years. The elderly *mashgiach* would be effortfully brought to yeshivah in his wheelchair, where he would join the davening. After removing his tallis and tefillin, the Rav strained himself to shift his weight toward the young men sitting near him in order to wish them *Boker Tov, Yom Tov*, 'Good Morning, Have a good day.'

Rav Zeidel went to great lengths to ensure that he could relate to people in a way that they would feel respected and appreciated. Unlike many other Torah scholars of his caliber and stature, upon arriving from Europe, he committed himself to learn English. Beyond communicating effectively with American *talmidim*, how else could he

appropriately greet and honor those whom he'd meet and interact with? Decades later, when moving to Eretz Yisrael, Rav Zeidel began to study conversational Hebrew, so that he could relate to his new surroundings and connect with the people he would meet, to the best of his ability.

רֵאָה אֶנֶכִי נִתֵּן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה

"See, I place before you this day a blessing and a curse...." (*Devarim*, 11:26)

In considering our Divine purpose and service, choosing how we stand before Hashem and others on a daily basis, our sedra calls out: *Re'eh Anochi*, 'See the Anochi.' When you truly see another person, you can reveal in them the Divine Presence, the essential *anochi* of 'Anochi Hashem!'

Nosein lifneichem hayom beracha..., "To place before you today a blessing...." Making the choice to recognize the Divine Presence within others allows us to draw a *beracha* down 'before them' for that day, or even for the rest of their life. As we approach Rosh Chodesh Elul and begin to focus our hearts and minds on the new year, let us consider each day how we will choose to 'see' those around us, and how we will connect with them and give them a blessing. ■



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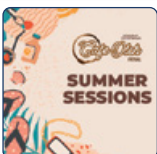
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Introduction to Kosher Ingredients

Many times, both Jewish and non-Jewish individuals inquire about how kosher certification functions. Although this is a broad topic, it can generally be broken down into three main components:

1. Ingredient Compatibility – whether ingredients are kosher-sensitive or not
2. Production Process – how the food is produced (e.g., cooking methods, mixing dairy and meat, etc.)
3. Supervision – the level and frequency of involvement required from a kosher representative

Kosher ingredients are the cornerstone of kosher certification. Since ingredients are sourced globally, extracted in various ways, and processed differently, extensive knowledge is required to determine whether a given ingredient is kosher-compatible. Beyond the impracticality of having a full-time kosher supervisor at every production site worldwide, it's essential to understand the fundamentals of kosher ingredients to grasp how the OU manages its certification system, which covers over 1.3 million products globally.

GROUP ONE

A small but vital unit within the OU's

Kashrut Division is the Ingredients Department. Every OU-certified company is contractually required to register all its ingredients with the OU. This department is responsible for evaluating whether each ingredient is acceptable under kosher standards.

In many cases, the evaluation is straightforward. It involves checking which certification agency supervises the ingredient's production and whether that agency's standards align with those of the OU. In other cases, the question is not whether an ingredient is certified, but whether it requires certification at all.

Take potatoes, for example. Raw, unprocessed potatoes are entirely innocuous from a kosher perspective. An OU-certified company that makes French fries, for instance, is not limited in where it can source its potatoes. Such an ingredient is classified by the OU as Group One. It is essential that the OU has such a classification to enable OU certified companies to function with a reasonable degree of latitude in the food ingredients supply chain, while still maintaining strong standards of kashrut.

However, sometimes Group One status comes with a caveat. That is, while the ingredient is generally acceptable, sourcing may not be completely unrestricted. A good example is agricultural products that are also grown in Israel. For instance, a product may be listed as "Any Source" but with the added note: "not from Israel



without certification of tithed status.” This is because, in Israel, agricultural produce must be tithed according to Jewish law. To keep things concise, only this requirement is listed, even though other laws apply.

NON-GROUP ONE

There are, of course, cases where an ingredient might appear to qualify as Group One, but its production process prevents the OU from granting it that status. For example, an OU-certified company recently applied to use pea protein isolate from a supplier that was not kosher certified. They asked whether the ingredient required certification.

This inquiry was expected, as pea protein isolate is a rapidly growing product in the plant-based food market, often used as an alternative to meat and dairy proteins. Fortunately, the OU has a broad knowledge base it can draw upon when assessing the kosher sensitivity of manufacturing processes—particularly from its existing certifications. In this case, the OU already certifies one of the largest ingredient manufacturers, ADM, and was familiar with the process.

Here's how it works at ADM: yellow peas are delivered to the processing facility, where the hulls are physically separated. According to Mike Odland, Operations Manager at ADM's Edible Beans site, the remaining material—consisting of starch, fiber, and protein—undergoes a series of physical and chemical steps to separate

the components. Pea starch is dried and handled separately.

The complexity from a kosher perspective lies in the next step: isolating the pea protein from sugars and fibers. This involves a cooking step, typically spray-drying. However, spray-drying is often outsourced to a third-party facility known as a toll-drier, because the equipment and expertise required are highly specialized and costly. Most companies do not operate their own spray-drying equipment.

Here's the concern: toll-drying facilities rent their equipment out to multiple clients, which means non-kosher products may have been processed on the same machinery. Residue and absorption present a significant issue under kosher law.

Because of this, pea protein isolate cannot be considered a Group One ingredient. Any processor wishing to use it must ensure the spray-drying facility has appropriate kosher certification. ■

Kashrut Questions in Israel?

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10:15 AM Rambam: Letters and Introductions **Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz**

11:25 AM Pshat in the Parsha **Rabbi Shmuel Goldin** (Resumes Sept 9)

12:20 PM Unpacking the Messages of Chazal **Rabbi Shai Finkelstein**



WEDNESDAYS

in partnership with Beit Knesset HaNassi, 24 Ussishkin Street,Rechavia

9:15 AM Holy Poetry- **Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler**

10:20 AM Contemporary Issues In Halacha & Hashkafa **Rabbi Anthony Manning**

11:25 AM Mussar and Self Improvement: A study of Rav Kook's sefer Midot HaRaya
Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

12:30 PM Jews in the Middle Ages: External Threats and Internal Development
Dr. Deborah Polster



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Beit Knesset Shai Agnon, 11 Leib Yaffe, Arnona

9:15 AM Parshat HaShavua **Rabbi Ari Kahn** (Resumes Sept 11)

10:30 AM Parshat HaShavua **Rabbi Baruch Taub**

11:25 AM Trailblazing the Text of Tanach **Rabbi Neil Winkler**

12:20 PM Modern Masters **Rabbi Sam Shor**



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Elul Midrasha



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6:00 PM

Coffee and Refreshments

6:10 PM

The Haftarot of Rosh Hashana

Atara Starr

6:55 PM

Dinner

7:25 PM

Insights into the Machzor

Rabbi Eli Wagner

8:15 PM

Rav Soloveitchik on Teshuva

Miriam Tannenbaum

9:00 PM

Evening Activity



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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
DIRECTOR, TORAH INITIATIVES,
OU ISRAEL

Our Sedra this week opens with the familiar *pasuk*:

'Re'ay Anochi notein lifneichem hayom, bracha uklala-See, I set before you today, a blessing and a curse..."

The Chasidic Masters offer a number of beautiful interpretations of our verse.

The **Mei HaShiloach, the Ishbitzer Rebbe zy'a**, explains:

Everything is from Hashem. In times of trouble it is the man's nature to shout and cry out to Hashem, "what have You done to me?" Yet at the time when Hashem bestows His goodness man's eye is clouded from seeing that it is from the master of the world. Then he says, "my power and the strength of my hand has made me this wealth [Devarim, 8:17]," therefore Hashem shows him, "See! I give before you," meaning that everything is indeed from Hashem.

According to the Rebbe of Ishbitz, the fundamental message to learn from this

verse is that everything we experience, everything we can and do accomplish, everything we witness around us-everything comes from *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Rabbi Kalonymous Kalmish Shapira hy'd, zy'a, The **Piaszeczna Rebbe**, offered a more novel interpretation of our verse.

Re'ay Anochi notein lifneichem hayom, bracha uklala - See I, give Myself to you Hayom-Today and everyday....which can be a blessing or chas v'shalom a curse.

The greatest blessing that a Jew can experience, explains the Rebbe, is the comfort in realizing that *Hashem* is there with us **HaYom-Today and everyday**-even when we are experiencing trauma or pain, and the worst curse that one could ever experience is to imagine even for one day that *Hashem* is absent from our lives, that *Hashem* is not there with us always in joy and triumph as well as in sadness and difficulties.

Re'ay Anochi notein lifneichem hayom, Hashem, Anochi, gives himself to us **HaYom-today and everyday**.

Rabbi Yisrael Grossman zt'l notes that we must understand this verse as presenting us with the potential inherent within every single day.

Re'ay Anochi notein lifneichem hayom-Hashem has given us **Hayom-Today-this day**-to either bring blessing into the world through our actions, or *chas v'shalom* to bring further harm and damage into this world through inappropriate or destructive choices and behavior.

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The **Kedushat Levi, Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev zy'a**, offers a similar interpretation of our verse, developing this important idea even further. **Hashem** gives us **HaYom-each day**- **Hashem** gives us each day as an opportunity through our actions, to be a source of blessing in this world, or through our failings, **chas v'shalom**, to bring consequences into this world. However **Reb Levi Yitzchak** explains that the greatest **chesed** is that this opportunity is renewed each and every day. Yesterday I may have come up short, but **HaYom-Today**, I get another opportunity to indeed bring blessing into this world through my deeds and actions.

Yehi Ratzon, may we all merit to heed these powerful teachings, and to experience these blessings today and everyday....
Shabbat Shalom ■

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Elul and “Ani L’dodi V’dodi Li”: A Month of Love and Resilience

Every year, inevitably, the dog days of summer yield to the solemn currents of Chodesh Elul. Leisure and vacation fade, replaced by a season of spiritual intensity and sober introspection. The shofar’s piercing call, the daily recital of L’dovid Hashem Ori, and, for Sephardim, the midnight selichot, herald a decisive turn toward the Yomim Noraim – Days of Awe and judgment. As the Chasam Sofer once remarked, in Elul even the fish tremble. The serenity of summer fishing trips yields to the roaring tremors of Chodesh Elul.

DAYS OF AFFECTION

However, a second emotion stirs during these forty days. They are not merely days of judgment, but days of deep affection. We are the only nation that openly crowns Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, the sole human community to consciously exalt Him on the day of Malchut. And because of this devotion, on that awe-inspiring day of judgment, Hashem recalls our many zechuyyot, beginning with the Akeidah. It is a day of formidable justice, yet also a day of intimacy and mercy toward His people.

The devotion we show on Rosh Hashanah sets the stage for the intimacy of Yom

Kippur, a day of cleansing and mercy. It is His cherished gift to us—a day to purge our sins and cleanse our souls. Chazal teach that never was there a day as radiant and joyous as Yom Kippur.

These days which begin with Elul are not only solemn and awe-inspiring; they are also moments of intimacy and affection between Hashem and His people, who carry His Presence into the world.

TWO SHOFARS

Perhaps no symbol better captures the dual tonality of this profound season than the shofar. On one hand, its cry carries an ominous weight, warning us of the impending gravity of judgment in the Heavenly Court. As the Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 3:4) teaches, the shofar acts as a clarion call, rousing us from our stupor and from our preoccupation with life’s trivialities. Its wailing, plaintive notes summon us to solemn—and even trembling—reflection.

Yet the shofar, sounded daily throughout Elul, also recalls a different moment: Moshe Rabeinu’s third and final ascent of Har Sinai. Fearing a repeat of the golden calf tragedy, Moshe instructed that the shofar be sounded

on the day he ascended. These final forty days, culminating in Yom Kippur, were days of love and reconciliation. Hashem had already pardoned His people, yet now came the gift of a second, enduring set of Luchot. During this period, Hashem also revealed the 13 Middot of mercy to Moshe and taught him the art of praying for the Jewish people. We recite this list nearly a hundred times during selichot and Yom Kippur—it is our divinely authored tefilla for mercy.

By blowing the shofar during the month of Elul, we recall that golden 40-day period when our relationship with Hashem—so badly ruptured—was repaired with love and compassion. During Elul the shofar carries both weight and warmth, its cry blending the tension of judgment with the promise of mercy.

LETTERS OF LOVE

The name of this powerful month, Elul, already hints at divine affection. The origin of the name is Babylonian and carries little meaning in Hebrew. However Judaism weaves together historical fact, cultural heritage, and national folklore. Because of Elul's monumental significance, throughout history, various phrases from pesukim became associated with this month, particularly those whose letters spell out the word E-l-u-l.

The most famous, of course, is the phrase Ani L'dodi V'dodi Li (which spells אלוהים) from Shir HaShirim. Almost every Jew recognizes this acronym; yet many are less aware of the precise moment in Shir HaShirim when this declaration of love occurs—a moment that resonates deeply with our current stage in history.

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Jewish history, told through the metaphor of a man and woman in search of a relationship. Through this lens, it recounts the beautiful romance we once shared with Hashem, who drew us from the deep, dark bondage of Egypt into the luminous desert of faith. Yet time and again we strayed from His will—a pattern that ultimately led to our exile from the Land of Israel and our long, winding journey through the deserts of history.

For the past two thousand years, we have struggled to mend that punctured bond. At times, He has been ready to resume the covenant, but we have hesitated. At other moments, we have yearned for renewal, yet He has withheld it. Jewish history is a story of unrequited love—an elusive relationship lost thousands of years ago amid the deserts of Sinai and the hills of Jerusalem, still awaiting a long-anticipated reunion.

FINDING OUR FOOTING

The opening sections of Shir HaShirim paint the portrait of a shy and timid young woman, overwhelmed and intimidated by the prospect of marrying a famous and renowned king. She dwells in the countryside of Ein Gedi, surrounded by shepherds and vineyards. Her intended husband resides in an ornate palace in Yerushalayim, fashioned

from fine woods and plated with precious metals. When He calls to her, she does not immediately join him—uncertain and hesitant. As she herself confesses, “I am black, but beautiful”—unsure of her worthiness to wed this majestic prince.

Of course, this image of a reluctant, shy girl—intimidated by a mighty king—serves as a metaphor, offering a profound lens on our earliest betrayals and failures against Hashem. Shir HaShirim portrays our early religious missteps not as outright acts of treachery, but as arising from the natural asymmetry inherent in our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Monotheism is no easy path. To be chosen by the Melech Malchei HaMelachim and entrusted with His mitzvot is an awe-inspiring and daunting destiny. It took time for us to find our footing, steady ourselves, and fully orient our lives toward the rigorous demands of monotheism. Our early errors—the golden calf, the meraglim, and even some struggles during the initial centuries in the Land of Israel—are seen by Shir HaShirim as the challenges of a people still learning to meet the exacting call of Torah and mitzvot.

In perek 2, confronting this asymmetry and her hesitation to join him in Yerushalayim, the young girl longingly declares her devotion to her beloved and her conviction that their relationship—though not yet fulfilled—will one day be fully realized: “Dodi li va’ani lo.” We may not be united now, but he will wait for me, and we will remain forever bound in loyalty to one another. Spoken in the early stages of Shir HaShirim, this phrase is a declaration of faith in an eventual reunion that will restore the bond to its full glory. The path may not always be smooth, but the bond

endures, eternal and unbroken.

FROM TIMIDITY TO CONFIDENCE

Fast forward to the end of the 6th perek of Shir HaShirim. The woman is still not united with her beloved. Indeed, she has been searching for him for some time after their bond was ruptured by her own refusal to answer the door. She encounters night watchmen who strike her violently and remove the jewels from her head. Chazal interpret this section of Shir HaShirim as a metaphor for galut, caused by our failure to return from Persia to rebuild the Second Mikdash. Only 42,000 Jews returned with Ezra, while the majority remained amidst the luxury and palaces of Persia. Because of this collective apathy and inertia, the Second Mikdash never gathered lasting momentum, and ultimately, we were exiled once more—this time for two millennia. Two thousand years during which we were exposed to hatred, violence, and the stripping away of our national pride. We have faced these violent watchmen who sought to tear away our crown and rob us of our jewels.

In the end of the 6th perek, as her search for her husband almost reaches its culmination, the woman declares “Ani l’dodi v’dodi li,” reaffirming her belief that, though they are not yet together, they remain eternally committed and will one day reunite.

While this declaration of ani l’dodi v’dodi li mirrors the first declaration of dodi li va’ani lo, there is one crucial difference. In the earlier phrase of “Dodi li va’ani lo,” she placed her husband—Hashem—first. In this later declaration, she places herself first: “Ani l’dodi v’dodi li.”

What may seem a small difference is, in fact, profound. By the end of Shir HaShirim, she has transformed from a timid, uncertain

girl into a confident, self-assured woman. In the early stages, she placed her beloved first in their mutual declaration of love; now she names herself first, followed by her beloved. She has evolved from a shy, hesitant girl who hoped her husband would love her into a confident woman who first declares her own loyalty and expects the same in return.

This shift mirrors a transformation in Am Yisrael over the past two thousand years—a deepening confidence in our relationship with Hashem. This confidence enables us to declare our devotion with certainty and courage, rather than with mere longing and hesitation.

MESIRAT NEFESH

What changed through history? What gives this woman the confidence she so sorely lacked at the beginning of her relationship? By extension, what should give Am Yisrael the courage to utter the phrase “Ani l’dodi v’dodi li” with newfound confidence?

Chazal see the watchmen’s violent confrontation as a metaphor for the resilience Am Yisrael has developed throughout history. For over two thousand years, we faced unimaginable persecution and relentless pressure—challenges that might have crushed us if we had abandoned faith in Hashem. From the moment we left Yerushalayim, we defended Him, even at the cost of our lives. From Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya in the fiery furnace, through Daniel in the lions’ den, the Macabim who sacrificed for Torah, and Rebbe Akiva with his colleagues, we remained defiant.

Our survival stands as one of the greatest anthropological miracles in human history. Against all odds, we endured—without a common country, flag, currency, or any of

the usual cultural bonds that hold nations together.

Yet our miracle is also profoundly religious. Condemned to live among hostile nations determined to undermine our faith, we not only survived, but transformed the world into a vessel of monotheism, preserving the presence of Hashem on this earth.

This endurance should fill us with confidence and empower us to proclaim: Ani l’dodi v’dodi li. The mesirat nefesh of Am Yisrael over the past two thousand years should infuse our tefillot with both pride and anticipation. Our prayers must weave together the raw, desperate pleas of an underserving heart with the steadfast confidence earned through millennia of mesirat nefesh.

If this is true after two thousand years of galut, it is all the more so after the past two years. Mi Ke’amacha Yisrael. We have courageously defended our Land, our people, and Hashem’s prophecies at great cost. This mission has been carried by the devoted few who understand both the immense mitzvah and the historic duty to help shape the final chapters of our nation’s story. The courage and mesirat nefesh our people have displayed rivals that of the heroic generations who came before, those who safeguarded Hashem’s presence in our world.

As Elul arrives, affirm your love and confidence, praying that Hashem swiftly reveals His Presence to a world that longs for redemption. ■



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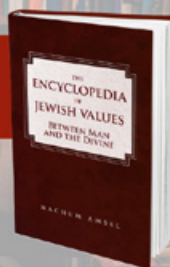
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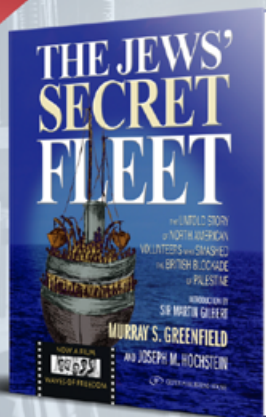
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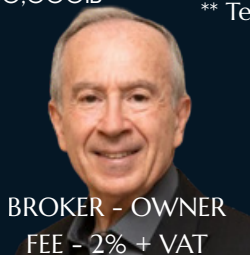
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Yoni thanks Hashem for having the opportunity of having Tziporah in his life, to learn of her caring, patience and happiness, to overcome her challenges. May Tziporah's Neshama be a light onto the world, in a time of darkness, and may her Neshama shine to Gan Eden. Yoni misses Tziporah with tears in his eyes, as Hashem gave him a gift, a crown jewel, now he returns her to Hashem.

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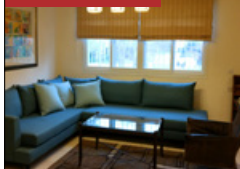


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Lovers and Learners

This week's haftarah, the third of the Shiva D'Nechemta, paints a vision of healing and promise: ורב שלום בניך, *All your children will be students of Hashem, and great will be the peace of your children* (Yeshayahu 54:13). The *Midrash Rabba* on Parshat Naso draws our attention to another pasuk: שלום רב לאוהבי תורתך ואין למו מכשול, *Abundant peace belongs to the lovers of Torah, and there is no stumbling for them* (Tehillim 119:165).

The *Shnei Luchot HaBrit* (Shelah HaKadosh) explores the relationship between these two pesukim. Why does the first speak of Torah learners, while the second speaks of lovers of Torah? Why does one promise peace without stumbling, while the other omits that assurance? And what is the meaning behind the different phrase orders — שלום רב vs ורב שלום?

The Shelah explains that there are two

kinds of Torah engagement. One is rooted in deep personal love — a desire to understand, connect, and grow. These are the אוהבי תורה, the lovers of Torah. The other is a merit inherited — learning that comes from being born into a home or community that values Torah, but where the personal passion may be less developed. These are the לומדי תורה, the learners of Torah.

Those who love Torah often face more obstacles. Their desire drives them deeper, and with depth comes complexity and the risk of stumbling. Yet this is precisely why they are promised אין למו מכשול — not because they will never trip, but because their love ensures that those stumbles become stepping stones. As the Gemara (Gittin 43a) teaches: אין אדם עומד על דברי תורה אלא אם כן נכשל בהם — *a person cannot truly understand Torah unless they've first stumbled in it*. The peace they receive is hard-earned and therefore enduring.

In contrast, learners who merit Torah through the actions of their ancestors may walk a smoother path. But because their engagement may be more surface-level, they are not promised the same freedom from stumbling. Their peace is present, but less transformative.

The Shelah goes one step further: the posuk in Tehillim says שלום רב — abundant peace. But the posuk in Yeshayahu reverses the phrase: ורב שלום בניך — *and great will be the peace of your children*. He reads this not just as a promise of quantity, but of leadership.



One who immerses in Torah can become a רב שלום — a leader, a master of peace; not just a recipient of peace, but a creator of it.

In a time when peace feels distant — globally, communally, and often personally — this teaching offers a blueprint for restoring it. It reminds us that true peace is not passive. Peace isn't only the absence of conflict, but the product of deep engagement — struggles, stumbles, and sincere effort in the pursuit of truth.

Whether one learns Torah because of personal yearning or inherited merit, the Torah offers peace. But it is the love of Torah that refines us through our challenges, leading to an internal clarity that radiates outward. In the words of the Shelah, we don't merely find peace — we become its bearers.

May we merit to be both learners and lovers of Torah, so that we too can become builders of enduring peace: ורב שלום בניך. ■



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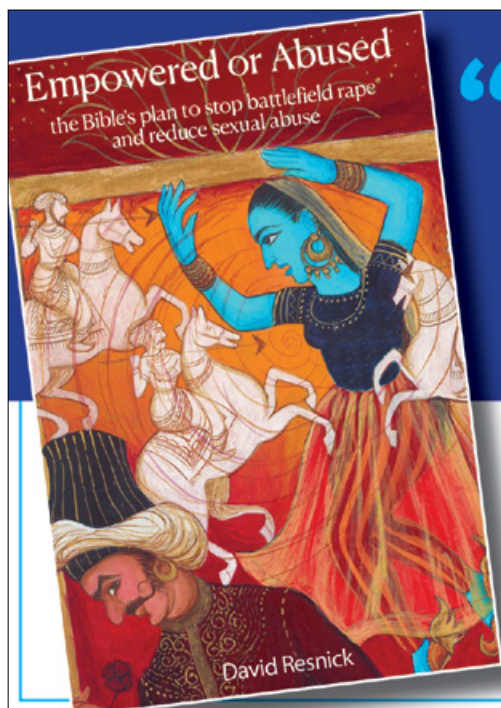
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RABBI AARON GOLDSCHIEDER

EDITOR, TORAH TIDBITS
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Emulating the Almighty

“You shall follow the Lord your God...” (Deuteronomy 13:5). Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik made the striking assertion that emulation of God, often referred to by the Latin phrase *imitatio Dei*, is the guiding principle of Jewish life.¹ He was possibly inspired by the fact that the Rambam enumerated this as one of the 613 mitzvot, and further stressed it in his halachic code: “A person must act in accordance with these paths and emulate Him to the extent of his ability.”² This, in turn, is based on two

1. Schachter, *Nefesh ha-Rav*, 59.
2. *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, mitzvot aseh §8, and *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Deot*, 1:6.



Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l

Talmudic sources:

“Rabbi Chama be-Rabbi Chanina said: What does the verse mean, “You shall follow the Lord your God”? Is it possible to follow the *Shechinah* (divine presence)? Does it not say “for the Lord your God is a consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24)? Rather, it means that one should emulate

the Holy One’s attributes. Just as He clothes the naked, as it is written, “and the Lord God made clothes for Adam and his wife and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21), so should you clothe the naked. The Holy One visited the sick, as it is written, “The Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre” (Genesis 18:1), so should you visit the sick. The

Holy One comforted mourners, as it is written, “It was after Avraham died that God blessed his son Yitzchak” (Genesis 25:11), so should you comfort mourners. The Holy One buried the dead, as it is written, “and He buried [Moshe] in the valley” (Deuteronomy 34:6), so should you bury the dead.”³

“Abba Shaul says: *Ve-anvehu* (Exodus 15:2)—be like Him. Just as God is gracious and compassionate, so should you be gracious and compassionate.”⁴

Children often look to their parents in

3. *Sotah* 14a.

4. *Shabbat* 133b. See Rashi ad loc. who explains that *ve-anvehu* (“beautify him”) is being read as *ani ve-hu* (“I and he”).

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learning how to behave. Jews have a Father in Heaven who has set for them the ultimate example to follow.

HOLINESS OF THIS WORLD

Imitatio Dei holds out the promise of holiness to us. If God is holy, and by emulating Him we become more like Him, then we partake of His holiness. If one pauses to think about it, this kind of holiness is markedly different from the usual conception of it.

God's call to "Be holy for I... am holy" (Leviticus 19:2) has been translated by an entire school of thought into terms of separation.⁵ From time immemorial, asceticism and isolation have been considered primary methods for attaining holiness. *Imitatio Dei* offers a different, more populated path to holiness. One lives in the world and engages with other people in ways modeled for us by God: clothing the poor, comforting the bereaved, burying the dead, acting with compassion. These examples stand in stark contrast to the monastic conception of holiness that focuses on unburdening oneself of the world and of all the people in it, so that one can meditate and achieve communion with God.⁶ The Rav referred to the emulatory model as the "holiness of the concrete." The Rav expressed it wonderfully in his *Halakhic Man*:

An individual does not become holy through mystical adhesion to the absolute nor through mysterious union with infinite... but, rather, through his whole biological life, through his animal actions, and through actualization of the Halachah

in the empirical world.⁷

THE CREATIVE ACT

The very beginning of *Parashat Bereshit* is devoted to the creation narrative, but so many of the details are inscrutable or left unsaid. What, then, are we intended to glean from it?

The Rav answered beautifully that "this elaborate emphasis... on God's creation was meant to be converted into a moral challenge to man, that as God created, so should man."⁸ The directive of *imitatio Dei* does not limit itself to the actions enumerated by the Sages, but encompasses the act of creation as well.

Man must be creative in both the material and spiritual realms. There are diseases to conquer..., rivers to control, miseries to extirpate.... Conquering and settling *Eretz Yisrael* are also mitzvot of *yetzirah* (creativity). [...] To build a yeshivah in inhospitable territory.... Indeed, education in fulfillment of "and you shall teach them diligently to your children" (Deuteronomy 6:7) is creativity par excellence.⁹

Creation does not exhaust itself in bringing something new into being. Again, let

7. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 46.

8. Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav*, 26.

9. Ibid.

5. See, e.g., Rashi on Leviticus 19:2 and 20:26.

6. See further Shatz, "Separation or Engagement."



us look to and learn from how God acts. The Midrash tells us that God created, destroyed, and recreated worlds.¹⁰ Man's responsibility, said the Rav, extends to rebuilding after destruction. As individuals and as a people, we are called on to never throw up our hands after failure, but to pitch in and get our hands dirty. In doing as God does, we become a holy people and actualize the divine quality of *yetzirah*.¹¹

By emulating God, even mortal man can touch the heavenly realm.¹² Our forefather Yaakov, after a turbulent time in his life, erected an altar. In its conventional translation, the verse says, "and he named it 'God is the God of Yisrael' (וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ אֵל) (Gen 28:19). The Talmud, however, parses it differently: "and the God of Yisrael called him 'Lord.'"¹³ What does this mean? The Rav answered simply that Yaakov emulated God. In his actions, he identified with God so strongly that one could actually see a reflection of the divine within Yaakov. This identification goes in both directions. The image of Yaakov, "Lord," is engraved on the divine throne.¹⁴ ■

10. *Genesis Rabbah*, 3:9.

11. Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav*, 28–29.

12. In his volume on *chesed*, the *Chafetz Chayim* began by noting the eight places where the Torah commands us to follow in God's path. Beyond signaling its importance, the number eight in mystical thought also indicates what is above nature. See his *Ahavat Chesed*.

13. *Megilah* 18a, cited by Rashi ad loc.

14. Schacter, *Nefesh ha-Rav*, 280–281.

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Using Replacement Mezuzot When They Are Being Checked?

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Question: I want to bring my *mezuzot* to a *sofer* for a periodic check. Should I try to get replacement *mezuzot* until they return?

Answer: The argument to have them – *Mezusa* is a Torah-level **obligatory mitzva** for one living in a standard house, applying as long as he lives there. Therefore, presumably one who is capable of fulfilling the *mitzva* without an interruption of hours or days (while it is at the *sofer*) should do so. There is even an opinion that if one's *mezusa* falls on Shabbat, if he can spend the rest of the day somewhere else, he should do so (see

discussion in Pitchei Teshuva, Yoreh Deah 285:1).

In practice – There is no need. One strong indication not to require replacement *mezuzot* is that since Halacha requires checking every few years (Yoma 11a) and classical *poskim* do not talk about replacements, it must not be necessary. This is bolstered by accounts of great rabbis who did not seek replacements (see Revevot Ephraim V:548 about Rav Moshe Feinstein, albeit apparently regarding a shorter check at home). One can suggest a proof by means of “reduction to absurdity.” If one may not be without *mezusa* for hours/days, then it should not be permitted even for seconds (where is the cutoff point!?), which would require you to put one up exactly as you remove the one to be checked, which does not seem plausible. One could deflect this by saying that the Torah requires it to be done close to right away, or perhaps that it is not prohibited to be without it, but one who can have *mezuzot* all the time is expected to do so in a normal amount of time.

There are a couple of explanations why one need not be concerned. Arguably, the *mitzva*

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is “for the life of living there,” so missing hours every few years for a good reason is considered a 100% fulfillment of the *mitzva*. After all, many understand that *tefillin* is a *mitzva* **all day** (see Be’ur Halacha to 37:1), and yet we suffice, for good reasons, with wearing them during *Shacharit*. We seem to be doing better than that for *mezuzot* even without replacements during checking.

Another possibility (see discussion in Shevet Hakehati I:273) is that there is a **special dispensation** made for the purpose of checking *mezuzot*, which is, after all, a halachic requirement (see Shulchan Aruch, YD 291:1). Perhaps we can explain that since it is not practical to expect everyone to have replacement *mezuzot*, the practice of checking includes a dispensation from *mezuzot* as long as is necessary for the checking. Some **possible** differences between approaches are: how fast one must act once the *sofer* has completed his work (see Rivevot Ephrayim *ibid.*, who thinks one should act promptly); order of action if the return of the *mezuzot* coincides with another *mitzva* (*ibid.*); whether it is a good thing to check the *mezuzot* more than Halacha requires (see Shevet Hakehati *ibid.*) or to do a check that takes longer.

Is there at least a voluntary preference to use replacement *mezuzot*? Although ostensibly “Why not?”, there are a few drawbacks. Shevet Hakehati (*ibid.*) references a precedent regarding the laws of checking *mezuzot* that when we make it difficult to check, people push it off (see Rashi, Yoma 11a). We can

add that it complicates the *berachot* situation. In Living the Halachic Process I:G-5, we discuss the *machloket* about whether to make a *beracha* upon returning the *mezuzot* after the check. If you put back different ones, or use replacements, it likely calls for *berachot* because *berachot* are impacted by the *mezuzot* used (see Chovat Hadar 11:14). However, if one is exempt from having *mezuzot* during the check, there is an additional question whether a *beracha* is called for when putting up replacements (see Sha’ar Hatziyun 475:39). There is always the general question about how good an idea it is to act stringently when it is clearly not required (beyond our present scope).

Therefore, our recommendation is just to do what almost everyone does – not use replacement *mezuzot*. Exceptions can be when there will be a delay of several days or if the house will be left with no *mezuzot*. ■

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Weak Proofs

Last time we saw a proof that birth is the halachic definition of motherhood is birth and not genetics. The source was the Talmudic passage that discusses a woman who converts during pregnancy with twin boys. The boys are born and have a filial connection through their mother. This strongly suggests that birth is the definition of motherhood.

However, this is far from a definitive proof, since the Talmud is concerned with whether the unborn fetus is included in the mother's conversion or not. Does the child require a separate conversion when they are born, as they are considered a separate entity from the mother? Or, is the fetus part of the mother's body, a limb of the mother, in the words of the Gemara, and, is included in the conversion process and would need no other conversion?

While this Gemara does suggest that the mother is the woman who gives birth, this

cannot be used as a proof.

Therefore, all of the sources that we have recently quoted that point to the mother being defined as the woman who gives birth, are all flawed. Either they are not halachic proofs, or they do not exactly prove the definition of motherhood. This may be the basis for the oft-quoted words of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, that for all the numerous halachic questions that he was asked he was always able to find a reliable source. But he was not able to find a source for the question as to whether motherhood is defined by birth or genetics. Maybe he meant that there are sources, but they cannot be relied on to give a definitive answer.

All this brings us back to the court case surrounding the birth and family of Sofia, the unfortunate girl who was born after the tragic mix-up during an in-vitro fertilization and an embryo transfer to the wrong couple.

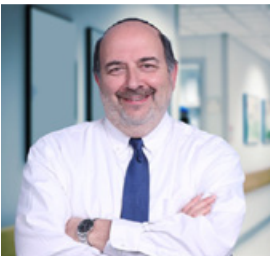
The birth parents are willing to raise her, and it was them who gave her the name, Sofia, but the genetic parents also claim total custody.

A judge recently wrote that it is clear and indisputable that genetics is the definition of motherhood, and therefore it is obvious that the genetic parents claim is the only valid one.

The judge completely ignored the other opinion and neglected to quote any of the Jewish precedents that we presented. While it is not clear that the birth mother is definitely the mother, the judge is amiss to ignore her legitimate claim to parenthood.

More on this next time. ■

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Finding Your 'Type'

Ronit asks:

How can I let go of the mindset that only a certain type of guy is right for me? I feel like it's blocking me from many opportunities, but when someone suggests a guy who isn't exactly my style, I'm not willing to meet him. My heart isn't open to it, even though my

mind knows it's time to let go.

You described what so many people feel. Many people experience this when their "type" doesn't seem to match what life is offering them. I want to reframe this for you: your "type" could be who you find, but since that's not working at the moment your type is limiting your options. It feels safe and familiar, like a road you've walked before. But sometimes Hashem wants to show us something new. Sometimes the blessing we're meant to receive comes in packaging that doesn't look like what we desired or expected.

And it's certainly possible to find what you're looking for as well. But since we don't know who he is and since what you're doing currently isn't yielding the results you'd like I can see why you're desiring to expand your search at this point.

Letting go of a fixed mindset about the "right" type of guy can be a profound journey.

In Torah, we see this again and again. Avraham Avinu left everything he knew because Hashem asked him to. His blessing didn't come from staying in his comfort zone, but from being willing to walk into the unknown. Dating is not just about finding someone it's about building something. And building requires flexibility, curiosity, and trust.

So how do we open the heart when it feels closed? First, I encourage you to shift the question from "Is he my style?" to "Could I see areas of potential with this person?" Think about qualities like kindness, faith, resilience,

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and growth-mindedness. Those are the real building blocks of a bayit ne'eman.

Second, give yourself permission to meet someone just for curiosity, not commitment. Say to yourself: "I'm just gathering information. I don't need to decide anything yet." That softens the pressure and makes space for the heart to breathe. It allows for a date and for first impressions, which may surprise you.

And third, It's essential to recognize that our perceptions of compatibility can sometimes be more limiting than liberating.

So maybe the next time someone suggests a name, pause before you answer. Ask yourself: What if Hashem's blessing is hidden here? What if this is the opportunity I've been praying for, but I just can't see it?

May you find the courage to open your heart a little wider, the strength to try even when it feels uncomfortable, and the joy of discovering that Hashem's plans are always better than our own.

Blessings, **Aleeza ■**

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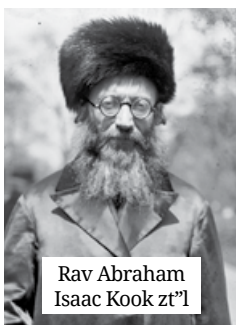
Elul: Completing the Year with Strength

Here we are—Shabbat Mevarchim Elul, the final month of the Jewish year, a time saturated with holiness and possibility. Elul is often described as an exciting opportunity to reignite growth, to refocus, and perhaps even to cram in the spiritual accomplishments to be worthy of a blessed, sweet and prosperous New Year. It's an opportune time to stop and visualize where I want to go, who I want to be and analyze what stumbling blocks have been impeding my growth in the past.

Rav Kook offers a profound insight about Elul. He explains that this month is not just about preparing for Rosh Hashanah—it is about finishing strong. In Orot HaTorah, he teaches this explaining שלימות אמיתית בצאת שנה—true completion at the year's end. Elul gives us the chance to fulfill the promises, dreams, and commitments we set for ourselves last Rosh Hashanah, when we stood trembling and pleading for life. Even if the year was filled with ups and downs, even if our inspiration waxed and waned, Elul empowers us to pick up the pieces and complete what we started. Sometimes, we may even surpass what we originally imagined for ourselves. This too will prepare us

for Rosh Hashana.

We can each recall exactly where we were when we first heard about the legendary Operation Grim Beeper. Its precision, creativity, and sheer brilliance shocked the world. Beepers and walkie-talkies—turned into weapons that maimed thousands of



Rav Abraham
Isaac Kook zt"l

Hezbollah terrorists in seconds. And from that turning point came wave after wave of victory: the targeted elimination of Nasrallah, the blitz in Lebanon, Operation Iron Wall in Jenin, the fall of Sinwar, Gideon's Chariots, Operation Rising Lion. These are the headline successes. There were also hundreds, probably

even thousands, of “smaller” miracles that were no less extraordinary.

When did this shift begin? It was in the aftermath of October 7th's devastation, after unbearable losses, that Israel's strength began to shine in new ways. And remarkably, the turning point—the Beeper operation—took place exactly in mid-Elul 5784, י"ד אלול תשפ"ד.

It is as if Rav Kook's words applied not only to us but to Hashem Himself. שלימות אמיתית, כביכול, Hashem, בצאת שנה—also “completed the year” by bringing about miraculous strength and precision for His people in the

closing stretch of the year.

Shabbat itself carries special clarity and blessing, making this Shabbat Mevarchim the perfect moment to begin the work of Elul. Ask yourself:

- What kind of person do I want to become? What are my spiritual aspirations?
- What are my unique strengths and abilities that I can further develop?
- Which stumbling blocks consistently trip me up, and how can I move past them?
- Who are my role models, my friends, my teachers—the people who can lift me higher?
- Which Torah books should I already take off the shelf to prepare to learn ?

And perhaps most importantly: What did I set out to do last year? What commitments did I make on Rosh Hashanah 5784—whether written down or whispered in prayer? Did I strive for character development, deeper Torah learning, more meaningful tefillah, acts of chesed? What was on your תשפח to-do list? Elul asks us to return to that list, to pick up where we left off, and to finish with strength.

THE VISION OF THE HAFTARAH

If the task feels daunting and overwhelming, the Haftarah offers us encouragement, reminding us what all this work is for. This week we read the third of the Haftarot of Consolation, in which Yeshayahu prophesies about the ultimate redemption. He speaks of Zion rising to glory—its cities rebuilt, its children flourishing, its Torah shining forth.

In that time, even the nations of the world will recognize Torah as the ultimate truth, nourishing them like bread and water. The Yalkut Shimoni (Yeshayahu 479) explains that in the Messianic era, Torah study will come

directly from Hashem Himself. Unlike our current system—filtered through the limitations of human teachers and students—Torah will be transmitted without distortion, with perfect clarity. The result will be unity and harmony, as all of Am Yisrael walks a single, luminous path of Torah.

Yeshayahu concludes with a breathtaking vision: “Behold, nations that never knew you will run to serve you, because the glory of Hashem will shine upon you” (55:5). Zion will be exalted not only as the center of Torah for the Jewish people, but as the spiritual heart of the world. The nations will stream toward her light, and her long history of pain and loneliness will be transformed into everlasting glory.

Our role is to prepare ourselves—to be vessels worthy of that future light Yeshayahu speaks of. This week as well as all the other Haftarot of his we read during these seven weeks of consolation.

Elul is our time to do exactly that. To close the year not with despair at what we failed to achieve, but with determination to fulfill what we can. To seize the chance for שלימות אמיתית.

May this Elul be our chance to connect, to prepare, to learn, to accomplish, to grow and to successfully step into the Yamim Nora'im as vessels—ready to receive the bounty of blessings of the new year and b'ezrat Hashem, the ultimate fulfillment of Yeshayahu's visions of the glorious time of Mashiach. ■

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OU ISRAEL FACULTY

Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

בס"ד

From Eicha to Iyov: Reflections on National and Personal Affliction

Among the numerous possible eras in which Iyov may have lived, Hazal suggest that he was a contemporary of Nevuchadnezzar, who destroyed the First Temple.¹ The basis for this suggestion is the news brought by a messenger that a band of Chaldeans had fallen upon Iyov's camels and camel drivers. Maharsha explains that only in the time of Nevuchadnezzar would the Chaldeans have been unified under the banner of that appellation.²

Further support for the notion that Iyov lived during the era of the destruction of the First Temple is found in Megillat Eicha. The third chapter of Eicha opens with the phrase "אני הגבר ראה עני" - I am the man (*gever*) who has seen affliction." Hazal offer several suggestions as to the identity of the speaker. While Rashi cites the view that the speaker is Yirmiyahu, who unlike other prophets witnessed the fulfillment of his dire predictions, Hazal offer another opinion: "אנא הוא" [The speaker is] Iyov, as the verse states 'Who is a man (*gever*) like Iyov, who drinks scoffing like water?'³

The proof text brought by the midrash is not the first time in the sefer that Iyov is referred to as "*HaGever*", nor is this the only support for the notion that Iyov was a contemporary of Yirmiyahu. In Chapter 3 of Sefer Iyov, after his friends had sat with him for some time in silent commiseration, Iyov bursts forth with a heartrending lamentation, cursing the day of his birth and the night of his conception - "יֵאבֶד יוֹם אוֹלָד בִּי, וְהַלִּילָה אִמִּי" - "Yirmiyahu similarly curses the day upon which he was born. Da'at Mikra sees in this and other similarities between the language of Sefer Iyov and Megillat Eicha a suggestion of contemporaneous forms of expression.⁴

Rav Medan offers an insightful contrast between the two figures: While Yirmiyahu's lament expressed his despair that he was unable to fulfill his life's mission of preventing the Churban, Iyov was lamenting his own personal suffering. The latter was a failure of Emunah, while Yirmiyahu was expressing a legitimate sense of frustration at his inability to prevent a national catastrophe.⁵

The use of the term *Gever* is not unique to

1. Bava Batra 15b

2. Chiddushei Aggadot Bava Batra 15b

3. Eicha Rabbah 3

4. Da'at Mikra, Introduction to Sefer Iyov

5. Iyov: Between Darkness and Light, Chapter 3

Yirmiyahu and Iyov, yet Hazal link them by virtue of this shared expression. Commenting on the use of the term in Megillat Eicha, Rav Baruch HaLevi Epstein explains that the speaker chose specifically this expression because of its shared root with the term “*Gevurah*”, might. Hashem endowed us with the strength to withstand suffering, and even one who experiences profound national or personal affliction is capable of accepting these challenges with love if he possesses faith in Hashem.⁶ How many courageous men and women of our own time have demonstrated the truth of this principle! Iyov has the capacity to accept his suffering as just, and his refusal to do so is therefore a failure of Emunah.

While this may be the classic understanding of Iyov, Rabbi Sacks turns this theory on its head. In his words, “Though [Job] defies G-d, he does not lose faith in Him... Despite the fact that he knows his suffering is unjust, he does not cease to talk to G-d, to argue, pray, challenge, debate, question and fight against wrong even to the very gates of heaven itself. He is capable of the sustained cognitive dissonance that lives at the very nerve center of Jewish consciousness. G-d exists and evil exists (at least from the perspective of humankind)... *Faith does not mean certainty. It means the courage to live with uncertainty.* It does not mean having the answers, it means having the courage to ask the questions and not let go of G-d, as He does not let go of us.”⁷

May this cognitive dissonance speedily be resolved with the coming of Mashiach and the end of all human suffering. ■

6. Torah Temimah Eicha Chapter 3

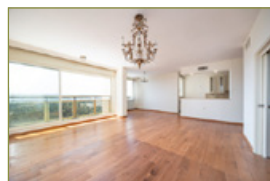
7. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, To Heal the World, pp. 198-199

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women’s Initiative Nach Yomi program

In the **OU Women’s Initiative Nach Yomi series**, currently in its third cycle, women scholars deliver a daily shiur on the books of Prophets (Neviim) and Writings (Ketuvim) at the pace of a chapter a day. Shiurim are geared toward learners of all levels who would like to participate in the two-year Nach Yomi study cycle. Visit the OU Women’s Initiative to register for additional content.

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SHOSHANA JUDELMAN

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Growing Our Garments

The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe used to say that on the Shabbos before Rosh Chodesh Elul he could already “smell the aroma and feel the wind of teshuva” in the air.

My favorite understanding of the concept of teshuva is “return.” A return to the real you- the “You” Hashem sees and knows you can become.

Last week in parshas Eikev, Moshe Rabbeinu told us that during the Forty Years in the desert, שְׂמֹאלְךָ לֹא בָלְתָה מֵעָלֶיךָ.

Your clothing did not wear out from upon you

Rashi explains that this refers to the miraculous way that the Clouds of Glory kept our clothes freshly pressed and laundered as well as the fact that our clothing grew with us.

In Chassidus, a person’s thoughts, speech and actions are called “levushim,” the garments or “clothing” of the soul. They are the ways through which the soul interacts with the body and with other people, the pathways through which a soul interacts with the world.

In the desert, Hashem was constantly teaching us Torah. He was fully supporting our growth, guiding us exactly where to go, when to fight, and how to stop and rest. And so the growth of our “clothing,” both physical

and spiritual, was constant and continuous.

Since entering Eretz Yisrael, Hashem handed over the responsibility of maintaining our garments to us. We are responsible for making sure they are up-to-date and fitting for the lives we want to live.

But the path is much less clear to us. We encounter stumbling blocks. And we get stuck.

Part of the growth we are looking for is in realizing when we have outgrown old garments. Noticing that the way I think about myself is no longer appropriate to who I am, that the way I speak to my loved ones comes from a place of hurt rather than a place of connection, that my actions reflect the defensiveness of a child rather than the expansiveness and generosity of emotional balance.

It takes a lot of strength and courage to see the ways our garments no longer fit us. And even more to change them.

Elul, with its air of teshuva and change, is an auspicious time for this type of personal growth.

But we have to believe that it is possible before we even begin.

R’ Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev helps us get there.

He points out that according to Chazal, teshuva is embodied in the concept of “Now.” “Now” tells us that each moment holds the potential for growth.

He points out that as Hashem is constantly creating the world, so too He is continuously

creating each one of us.

As we are breathing, we can imagine each exhalation as old energy leaving us, old garments returning to their source.

And we can understand that each and every inhalation is new energy, new life and new potential being sent back to us from Hashem. With every breath that He sends us, He is supporting us, believing in us, and giving us the strength to improve. To create new garments and to grow into them.

May Hashem bless each one of us to tap into the transformational energy of Elul, to have the courage to look at the state of our garments and believe in the possibility of sizing up, and to inhale the teshuva-scented air knowing that the ability for growth is as close as the next breath. ■

Shoshana teaches Chassidus for the Shirat David Community in Efrat as well as in Jerusalem for Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya and Shiviti Women's Institute. She is a guide in Poland with JRoots and co-leads inspirational trips to Ukraine and around Eretz Yisroel. Shoshana has also been a guide at Yad Vashem since 2014.





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‘Did You Hear What I Said?’

Rabbi Berel Wein passed away last Shabbat, at the age of 91. He was a rosh yeshivah, an educator, author and historian, who made aliyah and inspired tens of thousands over the years.

The following is a story that Rabbi Wein told over many times and that can influence



Rabbi Berel
Wein zt”l

us as well:

“I was a young American boy in 1946 when my father woke me up early and said: ‘We’re going to the airport—Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog from the Land of Israel is arriving in Chicago!’ The whole city came out to welcome this famous rabbi.

“Rabbi Herzog even came to our school and told us the following: ‘I have just returned from meeting the Pope in Rome. I handed him a list of thousands of Jewish children who had been placed in Catholic monasteries by their parents during the Holocaust, in order to save them from the Germans. I told the Pope: “I present you this list as the representative of the Jewish people, and I ask you to return these children to us.” But the Pope refused. He explained that anyone who had entered a Catholic institution had already been baptized and must remain a Christian forever.’

“I remember, as a child, how Rabbi Herzog finished quoting the Pope, paused for a moment, and then burst into tears. I had



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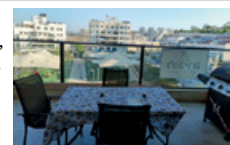
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never seen anyone weep like that. He bent his head over the podium, and it was as if two thousand years of Jewish history poured out of him. The entire audience was stunned.

“Then Rabbi Herzog straightened up, looked at us, and said: ‘I cannot do anything more for those children. But you—what will you do for the Jewish people? What will you do to rebuild our nation?’

“Afterward, when we went to shake his hand, he repeated the same message to each one of us individually. And when he looked at me, still just a boy, he said: ‘Did you hear what I said?’

‘Don’t forget what I said.’

That moment changed my life. It also changed the lives of many who were there. From that group came forth individuals who built great educational institutions and Jewish organizations, and many who made aliyah. Over the years, the young Americans in that hall went on to inspire tens of thousands to be active participants in the Jewish people. All because of one speech, and one sincere cry of anguish.” ■

Sivan Rahav-Meir is a media personality and lecturer. Married to Yedidya, the mother of five. Lives in Jerusalem, and formerly served as the World Mizrahi Shlichah to North America. Sivan lectures in Israel and overseas about the media, Judaism, Zionism and new media. She was voted by Globes newspaper as most popular female media personality in Israel and by the Jerusalem Post as one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world.

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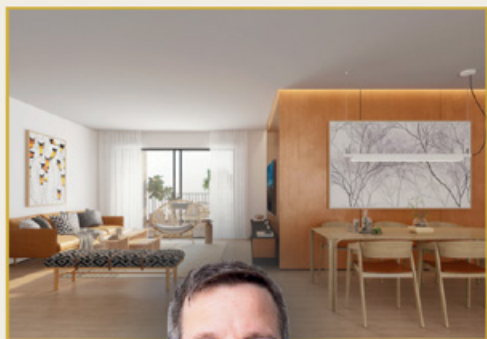
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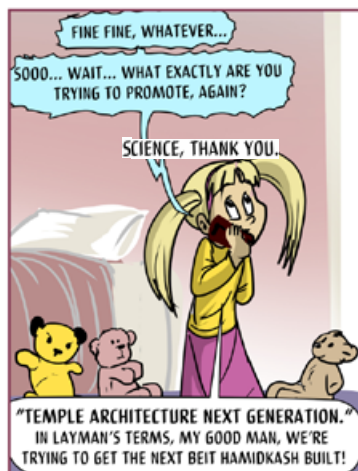
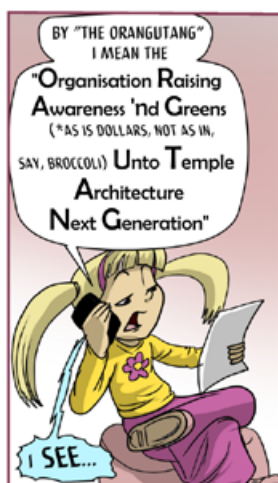
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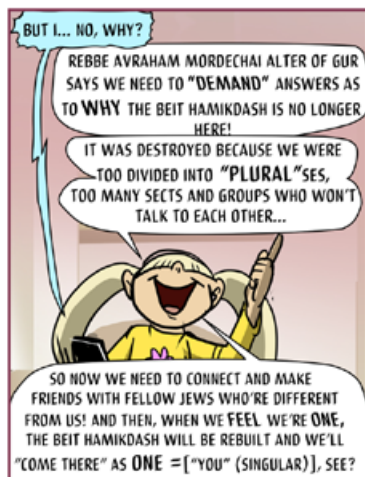
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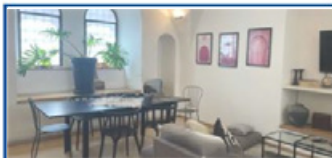
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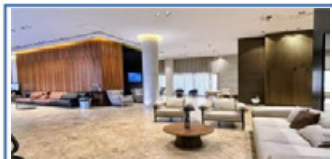
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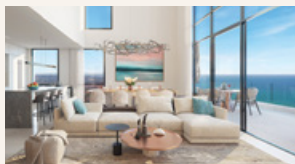


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