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ISSUE 1672

AUGUST 8TH 2026
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ראה - RE'EH

AVOT 6 | SHABBAT MEVARCHIM

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**"Summer, the Season
for Self-Control"** Page 16
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb



Challenging Our Internal Voice
Shoshana Judelman
Page 64



ואכלת שם לפני ה' אלקיך
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IMPORTANT REMINDERS

 **Rosh Chodesh** Elul is on Thursday August 13th and Friday August 14th
מולד חודש אלול יהיה ביום חמישי בשעה 8, 15 דקות ו 0 חלקים
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Sof Zman Kriat Shema	9:21-9:23
Magen Avraham	8:40-8:44
Sof Zman Tefila	10:29-10:30
(According to the Gra and Baal HaTanya)	
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	12:44-12:43
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	1:18-1:16
Plag Mincha	6:07-5:59
Sunset (Including Elevation)	7:36-7:27



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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
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Forty-one years ago, my parents gave my siblings and me the greatest gift they could have given us: they made *aliyah*. They did not really know much about Israel beyond what they had learned in school, because neither of them had ever set foot here before they came. And they came straight from Brooklyn and Staten Island, to a *yishuv* in the Shomron called Kedumim, sitting between Shechem and Qalqilya, near another beautiful community, Karnei Shomron (where many Americans live in the neighborhood of Neve Aliza, not far from Kfar Saba). It was, to put it mildly, very different scenery from Brooklyn or Staten Island.

Whenever my mother tried to explain to relatives in the United States what living in Kedumim was actually like, she reached for the same example. Think about what you have in your backyard, behind your house in Brooklyn, she would say. Some grass, some trees, if you're lucky. What I have behind my house is Shechem, where Yosef HaTzadik is buried, and on the two sides of Shechem, Har Gerizim and Har Eival, the two mountains that come up in this week's *parsha*: "*Venatata*

et habrachta al Har Gerizim, ve'et haklala al Har Eival - And you shall put the blessing on Har Gerizim and the curses on Har Eival" (Devarim 11:29). This is literally one of the first places the Jewish people went right after entering the Land of Israel.

So the words Har Gerizim and Har Eival were ingrained in me, from my mother saying them again and again. And they were never abstract. As a young child, before the first Intifada, when Jews and Arabs generally got along in the area and Jews could walk around Qalqilya and Shechem without a problem, I remember walking around Shechem and going with my parents to Kever Yosef, simply driving there. These experiences of growing up there left a tremendous impression on my siblings and me. We understood that we were living in a very different place than Brooklyn, a place where the mountains we were looking at and the gravesites we were going to visit and *daven* at came straight out of Tanach and the Torah.

Har Eival is where Yehoshua built a *mizbe'ach*, an altar, when he came into the Land of Israel together with the Jewish people, right after forty years in the desert. For most of modern history, nobody could find Mizbeach Yehoshua. Then, in 1980, an archaeologist named Adam Zertal came across a large stone structure while surveying the mountain, and excavated it over the decade that followed. He found an altar built of unhewn stones, with a ramp rather than steps, standing on Har Eival exactly as it is written in *Sefer Yehoshua*. Inside it were thousands of animal bones,

May the learning
from this Torah Tidbits
be לעילוי נשמת

My beloved father

Milton Braun ז"ל

מנחם מנדל בן יחיאל מיכל ז"ל

On his 43rd yartzeit- י"ז אב

You are greatly missed!

Judith Wasserman

and only from kosher species. There were also Egyptian scarab seals from the era of Ramesses II. It is about as close as you can get to verifying that this really is Mizbeach Yehoshua.

My next connection to Har Eival came while I was in Vancouver, and it came in a very painful form. In October 2000, terrorists opened fire on a group of Israeli men, women and children who had gone up the mountain, and Rav Binyamin Herling HY"D of Kedumim was killed. I knew Rav Herling. I remember frequently seeing him, sitting and learning in the *yeshiva* and *Beit Midrash* in Kedumim. He was a tremendous *talmid chacham*, a man I looked up to as someone so pious, such an extraordinary Torah learner and such an incredible teacher.

I had seen Har Eival many times looking out from Har Kabir, next to Elon Moreh, which this week's *parsha* also mentions (Devarim 11:30). And I always yearned to get to Har Eival itself, to see Mizbeach Yehoshua: the place where we know the entire Jewish people stood when they entered the Land of Israel, making very clear what is the right thing to do and what is the wrong thing to do, standing there between the mountain of the blessings and the mountain of the curses.

This past Sukkot, Omer Rahamim, the Director General of Moetzet Yesha, told me that Har Eival was open. I said to myself, I have not been up there in many years, and I would love to go and see the *mizbe'ach* now that I am an adult and can really appreciate it. On different occasions, I took two close friends, Avi and Asher along with their families, as well as Rabbi Daniel Rose from Baltimore and his congregants from BJSZ, out to Mizbeach Yehoshua on Har Eival. That was another moment of wow. It is so powerful to stand in the place where Yehoshua very likely stood.



Then the area became personal in a much closer way. My son was asked to partner in building a *yishuv* on Har Eival, a decision passed by the government and supported by the IDF. This was to be close to Yeshivat Elon Moreh, where he had received so much of his Torah education. He felt this was his calling. I knew this was a big decision, so I asked him to think about it for a day or two, and I told him that his job right now was to go back to *yeshiva* and learn. He said, "Aba, I feel like this is something I have to do." I spoke it over with my wife, and we told him that if he considers this his calling, then he should go and do it.

Everything went into planning, and then

one night he started sending us pictures: caravan after caravan after caravan coming up on trucks, along a paved but not particularly comfortable road leading up to Har Eival, the flattening of the land, the preparations. Pictures and videos throughout the night. And then, in the morning, a photograph of him standing on Har Eival with a cup of coffee in his hand and all the caravans in place. I remember waking up the next morning, suddenly seeing all these pictures and videos, and being deeply moved. Har Eival, being such an important aspect of my life, just became a home for my child.

The community has kept growing, and roughly five months on, there are twenty families living up there and a *yeshiva*, a branch of the Elon Moreh Hesder Yeshiva, with some fifteen young men sitting and learning.

So I look at Har Eival very differently now than I did last year when I read *Parshat Re'eh*. I raise my eyes to the heavens and think, wow, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, You have given us the ability to turn this *yishuv* of Eival into a tremendous blessing, another place where Jews can live, where they can connect to their forefathers, connect to their history, connect to the Torah that was given to us thousands of years ago, and ultimately connect to *Bnei Yisrael*, and to the unique words in this week's *parsha* and throughout the Torah and Tanach.

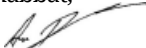
I see this as another step in *Bnei Yisrael* coming home. And we are not coming home saying that we will only live in the major cities. Every place in this country that carries such deep meaning, we want to be there.

Some are yearning for the city of Yerushalayim and everything that makes it special, the "*harim saviv lah* - the hills that surround it." Others are benefiting from Kiryat Arba and the whole beautiful area surrounding our forefathers and foremothers buried in Chevron. Others are living in Ma'aleh Adumim, drawing from the place where the *Kohen* would take the *sa'ir la'azazel* out on Yom Kippur, Midbar Yehuda. Others are up north in Tzippori, or by the Kinneret. There is just so much to benefit from. Every single place in this country really has such deep meaning.

And thank you, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, for bringing us back Home. Thanks to our forefathers and foremothers, who for millennia prayed that He bring us home, "*Ve'techezenah eineinu* - Let our eyes see Your return to Zion in mercy," and "*Teka be'shofar gadol* - Sound the great horn for our freedom, lift up the banner to gather in our exiles." Now we are seeing the fruits of their prayers, which are enabling all of us to come home hopefully for the last time.

Before ending, I want to bless us all that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* should grant us an era filled with peace, growth, and abundant *berachot*. The *parsha* opens by placing both the blessing and the curse before us, reminding us that the choice is ours. As we look to our children, hoping they will always choose the right path, we realize that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* looks at us with that same desire; *b'ezrat Hashem*, may our commitment to choosing right merit His continued protection and *chesed*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,


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A profound highlight of the Shabbat was the elevated davening and tisch, facilitated by Rav Yonatan Attias, Rav Kehila of Penima in Katamon.

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ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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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 are 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, it's 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)

Shemita 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.

HAFTORAH 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

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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 (first in Devarim).
7442 letters - ranks 7th (first in Devarim).



MITZVOT

55 of 613; 17 positive, 38 prohibition.
That's almost 9% of the Torah's mitzvot; only Ki Teitzei & Emor have more.



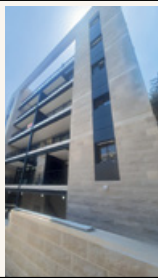
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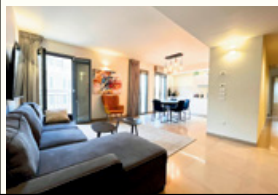
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A SHORT VORT

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

וירשת אתם וישבת בארצם (יב:כט)

"And you shall dispossess them, and you shall dwell in their land." (12:29)

Why does the Pasuk just tell us to "dwell in the land" without emphasizing the need to fulfill the Torah in the land?

Rabbi Shaul Yedidya Elazar Taub (Second Admor from Modzitz 1886-1947, Austria-Hungary-Palestine) quotes the Sifri Reah where Rabbi Elazar ben Shamoah and Rabbi Yochanan HaSandler were on their way leaving Eretz Yisrael. Upon crossing the border, they began to reminisce about Eretz Yisrael. As they began to cry, they tore their clothes as if in mourning. They called out this Pasuk "You shall dispossess them and dwell in their land." Immediately thereafter, they backtracked and returned home while saying "The Mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael is equal to all the Mitzvot in the Torah."

Rabbi Taub continued with his comparison to the story. Eretz Yisrael matches to following the Mitzvot of the Torah. The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) states one should always be involved in performing and studying the Torah even for ulterior motives (Sheloh Lishma) for eventually he will be motivated to do so for Heaven's sake. Similarly, here, one should live in the Land of Israel even for one's own or ordinary reasons. Ultimately, one will flourish and will appreciate the spirituality of the Land.

Shabbat Shalom

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THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

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

“Summer, the Season for Self-Control”

Summer was the season we looked forward to when we were young children. My parents decided that the hot streets of Boro Park, Brooklyn were not where they wished to spend the summer, and certainly not the place for me and my two sisters.

In late June, we prepared for our yearly trip to Rockaway, a beach community a bit more than an hour’s drive from our home. Back then, neither of my parents knew how to drive, so we recruited my dear Uncle Yossel, may he rest in peace, to help us load his car as we excitedly crammed into the back seat.

Every summer, my parents would rent a small apartment in a sprawling boarding

house owned by a wonderful Irish Catholic family. There we remained until just before Rosh Hashanah.

How I enjoyed my pre-bar mitzvah summers there! Swimming in the ocean, visiting Playland and boardwalk arcades, Wednesday night fireworks display, fishing off a bay bridge with my friend Marty, viewing war movies that were then so popular, and enjoying weekly concerts on the boardwalk.

The summer before my bar mitzvah, my parents wisely decided to enlist a Boro Park *talmid chacham* to travel to Rockaway and study with me for several hours every weekday. Back then, I only knew him as Rav Abramczyk. He was a Holocaust survivor who studied and taught at Yeshivas Bais Yosef, named for Rav Yosef Yoizel Horovitz, of blessed memory, known as *Der Alter* (the “old man”) of Nevardek, the head of a many-branched yeshiva based in the town in Lithuania by that name. He was one of the major disciples of Rav Yisrael Salanter, founder of the Mussar Movement.

As a student of Nevardek, my tutor followed the methodology espoused by his mentors. It stressed avoiding temptation and mastering self-control so that one could focus one’s attention upon Torah study and the performance of good deeds. No wonder that he soon convinced me to control my “temptations”, such as they were, and focus upon my studies, honor my parents, no longer tease my sisters, and discontinue fireworks and movies and penny arcades.

Was I a perfect pupil of Rav Abramczyk?

Our lives have grown
spiritually and joyously
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Thank you Hashem!

Rachel and Isaac Z'L Botbol



Decidedly not! But as I grew older, I became enamored of the Nevardek approach and continue to devote my personal studies during the summer months preceding the New Year to the teachings of the *Alter* of Nevardek. Hence the following lesson for this week's Torah portion, *Re'eh* (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17).

It is a lesson taught by another proponent of Nevardek methodology, Rav Chaim Zeitchik, of blessed memory. It is based upon this verse our *parsha*: "Three times a year - Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot - all your males shall appear before the Lord your G-d in the place that He will choose" (ibid. 16:16).

One wonders how all those men could abandon their homes, farms, vineyards and olive groves for weeks at a time, exposing their families and belongings to enemies and bandits. The answer lies in this passage in Exodus 34:24: "...no one will covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your G-d three times a year."

Rav Zeitchik, in an essay in the anthology entitled *Ohr Chadash*, sees the verse in our *parsha* as a *mitzvah* demanding self-control. We are commanded to resist understandable temptations of protecting our most vital possessions to travel to Jerusalem three times every year. We are to rely upon Almighty's promise that our homes and possessions will be protected by Him. That's the model of self-control that was advocated in Nevardek!

To uncover the sources of our ability to develop such extreme self-control, he quotes the following *midrash* (*Beresheet Rabbah* 43:9):

"Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons and take the possessions for yourself.' But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I lift my hand to the Lord, G-d Most High, Creator of heaven and earth: I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap or

what is yours...'"

The *midrash* proceeds to quote three opinions: Rabbi Yehuda viewed Abram's refusal as his designation of the booty as sacred and therefore untouchable. Rabbi Nechemiah insisted that Abram's refusal was based on his oath not to accept something which was not rightfully his. Other rabbis maintained that Abram transformed the opportunity into song!

Rabbi Zeitchik bolsters the opinions of both Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nechemiah and accepts them both as reasonable. But transforming his refusal into a song? That calls for an explanation.

Rabbi Zeitchik's homiletic expertise inspired him to interpret the other rabbis thus: After refusing to accept even a sandal strap, a shoestring, Abram revealed within himself the capacity of self-control. Once he experienced that spiritual capacity, he sang a song of joy, giving voice to the depths of his soul. He sang the song of self-control in the face of temptation.

Rabbi Zeitchik elaborates further on the joy that comes with one's discovery of deep inner strength. He concludes his essay, however, with a story he personally heard while in the Nevardek yeshiva in Mezeritch:

"A simple but G-d-fearing Jew, a water carrier, lived in town. One Friday afternoon, *erev Shabbat*, he found a purse with five hundred American dollars in it, a fortune in those days. He began screaming so that a crowd of townspeople soon surrounded him. The crowd was stunned as they began to realize that he was

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screaming so that they would become aware that he wished to ascertain the identity of the person who lost the money. He wanted to combat the temptation to keep his find for himself and thus violate the *mitzvah* of returning lost objects.

“It turned out that the owner was a needy widow who had saved the money to be able to afford a dowry for her daughters.

“The widow insisted that he take a significant portion of the money for himself as reward. He refused despite her pleas. He eventually yielded but asked for just enough money to hire the local fiddler. He then invited the entire community to the town square where he danced to the fiddler’s lively music and sang a song of thanks to the Master of the Universe for enabling him to withstand temptation and instead perform this great *mitzvah*. In the process, he was emulating no one less than Father Abraham, *Avraham Avinu*, singing the song of self-control.”

A powerful lesson for this summertime is when we are tempted to loosen our self-control and instead put some Nevardek *mussar* to good use.

Do not be surprised, dear reader, to find more Nevardek teachings in this column during the summer weeks, leading to the upcoming New Year and all that it signifies. Shabbat Shalom. ■





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HaRav Ya'akov Zvi ben David Arie'el zt"l

לעילוי נשמות

פנחס בן יעקב אשר וגולדה בת ישראל דוד איז ע"ה ועזריאל בן אריה לייב ומעניה בת יצחק שרטר ע"ה

Judaism's Social Vision

If you seek to understand Judaism's social vision, look at its anti-poverty legislation:

If there be a poor person among your kinsfolk in any of your towns in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart or close your hand toward your brother in need. Open your hand generously and freely lend him enough to answer all his needs. Be vigilant: let your heart not whisper a depraved thought: 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is close, ' making you miserly toward your brother in need, giving him nothing. He will cry out to the Lord about you, and you will be held guilty. Give to him generously, and do not let your heart begrudge it, for by merit of this the Lord your God will grant you blessing in all your work and all your hands' endeavours. There will never cease to be poor people in the land. And so I command you: open your hand. (Deut 15:7-11)

Ostensibly the passage is about the cancellation of debts in the seventh year (*shemittah*, the year of "release"). The Oral Tradition, however, extended it to the laws of *tzedakah* – the word usually translated as

"charity", but which also means "distributive justice, equity". The rabbis interpreted the phrase "sufficient for his needs" to mean the basic requirements of existence: food, clothing, shelter and so on. "That which he lacks" was understood as referring to a person who was previously wealthy but has now become impoverished. He too must be helped to recover his dignity:

It is related about Hillel the Elder that, for a certain poor man who was of good family, he bought a horse to ride on and a slave to run before him. When on one occasion he could not find a slave to run before the man, he [Hillel] himself ran before him. (*Ketubot 67b*)

The force of this passage lies in the fact that Hillel himself was notoriously poor, yet he gave of his money and time to help a rich man who had lost his money regain his self-respect. This double aspect is evident throughout the laws of *tzedakah*. On the one hand, the laws are directed to the brute fact of poverty. No one must be deprived of basic physical necessities. On the other, they address with astonishing sensitivity the psychology of poverty. It demeans, embarrasses, humiliates, shames. *Tzedakah*, ruled the rabbis, must be given in such a way as to minimize these feelings:

When Rabbi Yannai saw a certain man

giving a coin to a poor person in front of everyone, he said: It would have been better not to have given it to him than to have given it and put him to shame. (*Hagigah 5a*)

In a famous passage, Maimonides describes the eight levels of charity:

There are eight degrees of charity, one higher than the other.

The highest degree, exceeded by none, is that of one who assists a poor person by providing him with a gift or a loan or by accepting him into a business partnership or by helping him find employment – in a word by putting him in a situation where he can dispense with other people's aid. With reference to such aid it is said, 'You shall strengthen him, be he a stranger or a settler, he shall live with you' (Lev. 25:35), which means: strengthen him in such a manner that his falling into want is prevented.

A step below this is the one who gives alms to the needy in such a way that the giver does not know to whom he gives and the recipient does not know from whom he takes. This exemplifies doing a good deed for its own sake. One example was the Hall of Secrecy in the Temple, where the righteous would place their gift clandestinely and where poor people from noble families could come and secretly help themselves to aid. Close to this is dropping money in a charity box...

One step lower is where the giver knows to whom he gives, but the poor person does not know from whom he receives. Thus the great Sages would go and secretly put money into poor people's doorways...

A step lower is the case where the poor person knows from whom he is taking, but the giver does not know to whom he is giving. Thus the great Sages would tie coins in their scarves, which they would fling over



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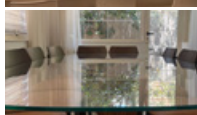
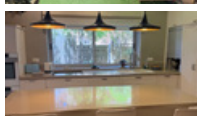
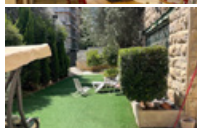
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their shoulders, so that the poor could help themselves without suffering shame.

Lower than this, is where someone gives the poor person a gift before he asks.

Lower still is one who gives only after the poor person asks.

Lower than this is one who gives less than is fitting, but does so with a friendly countenance.

The lowest level is one who gives ungraciously. (*Mattenot Ani'im 10:7-14*)

This exquisitely calibrated ethic is shot through with psychological insight. What matters is not only how *much* you give, but also *how* you do so. Anonymity in the giving of aid is essential to dignity. The poor must not be embarrassed. The rich must not be allowed to feel superior. We give, not to take pride in our generosity, still less to emphasise the dependency of others, but because we belong to a covenant of human solidarity, and because that is what God wants us to do, honouring the trust through which he has temporarily lent us wealth in the first place.

Especially noteworthy is Maimonides' insistence that giving somebody a job, or the means to start a business, is the highest charity of all. What is humiliating about poverty is dependence itself: the feeling of being beholden to others. One of the sharpest expressions of this is to be found in the Grace

after Meals, when we say, "We beseech You, God our Lord, let us not be in need of the gifts of men or of their loans, but only of Your helping hand ... so that we may not be put to shame nor humiliated for ever and ever."

The greatest act of *tzedakah* is one that allows the individual to become self-sufficient. The highest form of charity is one that enables the individual to dispense with charity. From the point of view of the giver, this is one of the least financially demanding forms of giving. It may not cost him anything at all. But from the point of view of the recipient, it is the most dignifying, because it removes the shame of receiving. Humanitarian relief is essential in the short-term, but in the long-run, job creation and economic policies that promote full employment are more important.

One detail of Jewish law is particularly noteworthy: even a person dependent on *tzedakah* must himself or herself give *tzedakah*. On the face of it, the rule is absurd. Why give X enough money so that he can give to Y? Giving to Y directly is more logical and efficient. What the rabbis understood, however, is that *giving is an essential part of human dignity*. The rabbinic insistence that the community provide the poor with enough money so that they themselves can give is a profound insight into the human condition.

Jewry has had many distinguished economists, from David Ricardo (whom Keynes called the greatest mind that ever addressed itself to economics), to John von Neumann (a physicist who, in his spare time, invented Game Theory), to Paul Samuelson, Milton Friedman, and Alan Greenspan. They have won an astonishing 38% of Nobel prizes in the field. Why should this have been so? Perhaps because Jews have long known



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that economics is one of the fundamental determinants of a society; that economic systems are not written into the structure of the universe, but are constructed by human beings and can be changed by human beings; and thus that poverty is not a fact of nature but can be alleviated, minimised, reduced. Economics is not a religious discipline. It is a secular art and science. Yet, deeply underlying the Jewish passion for economics is a religious imperative:

There will never cease to be poor people in the land. And so I command you: open your hand generously to your kinsmen, your poor and needy, who share your land. (Deut. 15:11) ■

These weekly teachings from **Rabbi Sacks zt"l** are part of his 'Covenant & Conversation' series on the weekly Torah teaching. With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel. Visit www.RabbiSacks.org for more.

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PROBING THE PROPHETS

BY RABBI NACHMAN (NEIL) WINKLER
FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Words of Prophetic Comfort

In his study of the seven haftarot of consolation that follow Tish'a B'Av, the Abudraham [R. David Abudraham, 14th century, Seville] submits that the very opening words of each haftarah reflects an ongoing theme of Yishayahu's visions of comfort. The first haftarah demands that prophets cry out to the nation to be comforted: "Nachamu, Nachamu Ami", while the second haftarah begins with Israel's response that there could be no "Nachama" for them because: "Azavani Hashem" - G-d had abandoned them! And yet, despite the prophet's assurances that G-d could never forsake His children, and despite the fact that the very last message the navi gave to his nation was "Ki nicham Hashem Tiyon" - G-d has comforted Zion... Yishayahu realized that Israel had remained in grief! And, for

that reason, he opens his vision of the third haftarah with the words: "Aniya So'arah- **lo nuchama**" - Israel remains **un**consolable.

But why was that true? Why was there no comfort for Israel in the promises of Hashem?

Rav Yigal Ariel points to Yishayahu's prophetic promises of a glorious future and wonders: "**Why should Israel be comforted?**" Or, more specifically: "**Why should future generations of Israel be comforted through hearing the promises of a future glory?**" After all, even if they return to the "good old days", even if they live to see the fruition of Yirmiyahu's plea "chadesh yam-emu k'kedem" [Eicha 5:21] they would find themselves facing the same challenges of earlier generations - including the real possibility of repeating the same sins which would lead to the same punishments!

In response to that fear, the navi depicted a future for Israel that would be clearly different from that of past centuries. The reality of this promised future would be one far superior, far more glorious and even more miraculous than the world that was. Rav Ariel points to the Yishayahu's promise: "v'chol banayich limmudai Hashem" [v. 13], as the birth of new generations who would be imbued with, and inspired by, G-d's teachings. The navi guarantees that the future would not be a "repeat" of Israel's mistakes but would, instead, be a world that would build an idyllic future on which "all your children shall be disciples of Hashem."

Rav Moshe Lichtenstein, however, suggests



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a different understanding of the Yishayahu's promise of comfort for Israel. The last haftarah, Rav Lichtenstein says, finds Israel's "inconsolability" based upon their assumption that Hashem had abandoned them, "VaTomer Tziyon: 'Azavani Hashem'". The navi succeeded in comforting them by assuring them that G-d would never do so -as reflected in his closing words: "Nicham Hashem et Tziyon".

This week's haftarah, however, addresses a second concern of the nation. Realizing the poverty and lack that galut would bring, the people rightfully wonder how they could ever survive such an experience. No longer do they doubt Hashem's relationship to His nation but they do doubt whether *they* could endure such years of scarcity – as the opening words describe Israel as "**Aniya** So'arah", poor and turbulent. How beautifully does Yishayahu relieve their concerns by promising future prosperity and success, including precious stones and "windows of jasper" [54: 11-12].

The divine words of the prophets respond to the needs of the people...and their concerns. Messages of comfort may not reach each generation in every era. But the simple knowledge that there **WILL BE** a future for Israel is, indeed, a source of comfort.

...Perhaps, that is why we stand here today, living in the same land, speaking the language and thanking the same One G-d, some 2,700 years after Yishayahu offered those prophetic promises! ■

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The Road to Spiritual Exposure

Rabbi Norman Lamm¹ raises a striking question about two very different travelers described in the Torah: the *oleh regel* journeying joyfully to Jerusalem for the festivals, and the accidental killer fleeing to the *arei miklat*, the Cities of Refuge.

At first glance, one would expect the Torah to make the pilgrimage to Yerushalayim as smooth and welcoming as possible. After all, *aliyah laRegel* was among the great spiritual experiences of Jewish life. Yet Chazal describe no elaborate accommodations for these pilgrims.

Meanwhile, regarding the *arei miklat*, the Gemara teaches something remarkable: תָּכִין לְךָ הַדֶּרֶךְ - *You shall prepare the road for yourself*.² The roads to the Cities of Refuge were carefully marked with signs pointing travelers in the proper direction. The Gemara in Makkot³ explains that signposts reading *Miklat*

were placed throughout the land to ensure that the accidental killer could quickly find refuge.

Why this apparent imbalance? Why were clear directions provided for the one who killed accidentally, while pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem were left to wander and ask for directions?

THE EDUCATIONAL VISION OF CHAZAL

Rabbi Lamm suggests that this distinction was intentional and deeply educational. The Torah wanted Jewish society to maximize interaction with spiritually elevated people and minimize exposure to morally compromised behavior.

The *oleh regel* was not merely a traveler. He was someone willing to sacrifice comfort, convenience, and routine in order to stand before Hashem in Jerusalem. Such a person embodied dedication, idealism, and spiritual aspiration. Therefore, Chazal intentionally avoided creating a streamlined, isolated pilgrimage route. Instead, pilgrims would stop in villages, ask for directions, enter homes, and interact with families along the way. Jewish children would meet these travelers and witness their devotion firsthand. The roads themselves became instruments of *chinuch*. The pilgrim spread kedushah not only by arriving in Jerusalem, but by traveling toward it.

WHY THE MURDERER WAS DIFFERENT

The accidental killer, by contrast, represented a different kind of influence. Although the Torah distinguishes sharply between intentional murder and accidental killing, the *rotze'ach b'shogeg* was nevertheless not entirely

1. Rabbi Norman Lamm, Drashot L'Dorot

2. Devarim 19:3

3. Makkot 10b

Mazal Tov to
Noki & Naami Ganz
and family on the **Bar Mitzvah**
of their son, **Gamliel**



blameless. Chazal emphasize that *shogeg* is not the same as *ones*, an unavoidable accident. A person who kills unintentionally often bears some degree of carelessness or negligence. Something in his conduct required correction.

For this reason, society was not meant to normalize or romanticize his presence. The Torah's concern was not only legal protection, but spiritual protection. The roads to the *arei miklat* were designed to move him quickly and quietly away from public life. The Torah recognizes a profound truth: environments shape people.

THE POWER OF SPIRITUAL EXPOSURE

Modern culture often assumes that the healthiest approach is total exposure. Children and adults alike should encounter every ideology, every influence, and every form of culture in order to become sophisticated and resilient. Rabbi Lamm respectfully challenges this assumption.

Certainly, one cannot live in fear or isolation. Yet Judaism insists that what we expose ourselves to matters profoundly. The sights we see, the sounds we hear, the conversations we normalize, and the values we absorb all leave impressions upon the soul.

The Rambam writes:

דרך ברייתו של אדם להיות נמשך בדעותיו ובמעשיו
אחר רעיו וחבריו

*It is part of human nature for a person to be influenced in his character and actions by his friends and associates.*⁴

Human beings are porous. We absorb our surroundings. Therefore, the Torah seeks to

surround people with what is constructive, elevating, and spiritually healthy.

We live in an age of unprecedented access. Torah learning has become available instantly and globally. A person can study virtually any topic, in any language, at any hour of the day.

At the same time, the barriers protecting moral and spiritual life have weakened dramatically. Every value system, every temptation, and every form of distraction can enter the home with the click of a button. Technology itself is neutral; the question is what roads we choose to travel. Will we construct pathways that lead toward Jerusalem, or roads that pull us away from holiness?

SHOFTIM VESHOTRIM: GUARDING THE GATES

Next week's *parasha* begins with שֹׁפְטִים וְשׁוֹטְרִים תִּתֵּן לָךְ - *judges and officers shall you appoint for yourself*.⁵ The Chassidic masters often explain that this command applies not only to society, but to the individual. Every person must place *guards* at the gateways of life, especially one's eyes,

ears, mouth, and heart.

We must ask: What influences are entering our inner world? Which voices shape our thinking? Which values are we allowing into our homes and our souls? Spiritual greatness rarely emerges suddenly. It is built gradually through the roads we travel and the environments we cultivate.

The Torah teaches that journeys matter. Not only destinations, but roads. The *oleh regel* transformed the Jewish people simply through his presence along the way to Jerusalem. His very travel became an act of inspiration. The *rotze'ach*, meanwhile, was quietly



Rabbi Norman Lamm z"l

4. Rambam, Hilchot De'ot 6:1

5. Devarim 16:18

redirected away from society so that destructive influence would not spread.

Every day, we too travel roads. These paths are physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. We choose what enters our minds, whom we admire, what we watch, what we celebrate, and what kind of people we become. In the weeks leading toward Elul and the *Yamim Noraim*, the Torah asks us to become architects of our inner world. To place signposts toward holiness. To create homes filled with Torah, kindness, dignity, and meaning. To always remember that the influences we welcome today shape the people we become tomorrow.

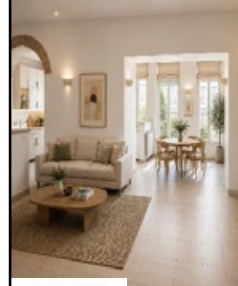
May we merit to walk the roads that lead to Yerushalayim, remain on paths of *kedushah*, growth, and closeness to Hashem and may our journeys inspire all those we meet along the way. ■



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A wealthy Jew and clever businessman approached Reb Yisrael Meir, the Chofetz Chaim zt'l, with what he thought was a winning proposition: "In my *tzava'ah* (will), I'll divide up my estate into seven portions. As I have six sons, each will receive one *cheilek* (portion) and the seventh portion I will leave to the yeshivah on condition that you will learn Mishnayos for the sake of my *neshamah*. The talmidim of Radin will benefit, and I will enjoy the merit of your Talmud Torah from the next world!"

The sagely Chofetz Chaim answered, "Why wait until after you are dead to dedicate one-seventh of your belongings to tzedakah? Give the money to the yeshiva today, and instead of me learning Torah for the sake of

your *neshamah*, you yourself can learn those Mishnayos right now!"

"*Re'eh*, Behold, I set before you *hayom*, today, a blessing and a curse; blessing if you will heed the commandments of Hashem, which I command you *hayom*...and the curse, if you will not heed the commandments...but turn away...to follow other gods, which you did not know." (11:26-28)



The Chafetz Chaim zt'l

The directive is simple and clear: we are empowered to choose to make the most of our lives, to determine our fate and create the reality in which we desire to live. The choice is ours, and we have the responsibility to embrace a path of blessing and revealed good, or the opposite. We are the masters of our own fate, and the Torah places the ultimate respon-

sibility for the life we lead directly upon us.

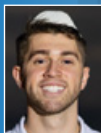
One of the details in this directive that draws attention and hints at deeper meaning is the repetition of the word *hayom*.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov teaches (*Likutei*

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Moharan 272) regarding the verse in *Tehilim* (95:7): *Hayom, Today - if you heed His voice...* "It is an important rule in *Avodas Hashem* to focus only on today. Whether with regard to one's livelihood and personal needs, one should not think about one day to the next... with regard to serving God, he should not consider anything beyond this day and this moment. Sometimes the world of *Avodas Hashem* can seem overwhelming, heavy, even burdensome. However, when a person considers that he has only 'that day' ...he will find it no burden at all."

Rebbe Nachman's advice parallels the directive of our sedra and is the essence of the wise words of the Chofetz Chaim. When we feel moved to grow and strengthen our relationship with Hashem, we ought to immediately attach an action-point to this awakening and capitalize on a feeling of inspiration or desire for self improvement and responsibility in our lives:

"...A person should not procrastinate from one day to the next, saying, "I'll start tomorrow. Tomorrow I'll pray more attentively, and with the right enthusiasm," and likewise for other devotions. For a person's world consists only of the present day and moment. Tomorrow is a different world entirely." (*Likutei Moharan*, 272, continued).

Hayom — as soon as Hashem sets before us a blessing or presents a *mitzvah* - may we merit to swiftly ground it in this world of action. As the Chofetz Chayim urges us, "Why wait?"

.....
Excerpt from Baderech: Along the Path of the Torah, forthcoming (Mosaica Press, Elul 5786) ■

Rav Judah Mischel is executive director of Camp HASC, the Hebrew Academy for Special Children. He is the founder of Tzama Nafshi and the author of the "Baderech" series. Rav Judah lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh with his wife Ora and their family.

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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 lachem 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 **Piaszecna Rebbe**, offered a more novel interpretation of our verse.

Re'ay Anochi notein lachem hayom, bracha uklala - See I, give Myself to you Hayom-To-day 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 lachem 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 lachem 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



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inappropriate or destructive choices and behavior.

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.

The *Netivot Shalom*, *the Slonimer Rebbe zy'a*, points out that our *sedra* is typically read on *Shabbat Mevorchim Elul*. The Rebbe explains that our verse is a reminder as we prepare to enter *Chodesh Elul*, that *HaYom- Yom HaDin*, the *yom tov* of *Rosh HaShana* is just around the corner! As we enter these days of *Elul*, the Rebbe explains, we are meant to emotionally and spiritually prepare for the *yomim noraim*!

Yehi Ratzon, may we all merit to heed these powerful teachings, and to experience these blessings today and everyday,, and look ahead to the many new opportunities and blessings that are set before us...*Shabbat Shalom* ■



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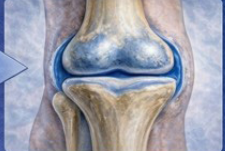
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Glatt/Chalakh Beef

Among the most familiar terms in the world of kosher food is Glatt meat. When planning a simcha or catered event, it is common to hear the question, “Will you be serving Glatt?” Over the years, the term has become synonymous with a higher standard of kashrut, often being used as a general expression of meticulous kosher observance.

However, the term Glatt applies exclusively to the kashrut of beef and lamb. It has no halachic relevance to poultry (at least until very recently), and it certainly has no application to other areas of kashrut. Nevertheless, one frequently encounters advertisements for “Glatt Kosher” dairy restaurants or poultry products—an inaccurate use of a term that properly relates only to the inspection of an animal’s lungs after shechitah.

Because of the widespread misunderstanding surrounding this subject, it is worthwhile to examine the basics of what Glatt (or *Chalakh*) actually means, its halachic source, and the

practical standards followed today in Israel and throughout the world.

THE HALACHIC SOURCE

The Torah teaches that an animal suffering from certain life-threatening injuries or illnesses is not kosher, even if it undergoes a perfectly valid shechitah. Such an animal is known as a *treifah*. The various injuries and defects that render an animal non-kosher are collectively referred to as *treifot*.

Although *Chazal* identify numerous physical conditions that can render an animal a *treifah*, they also established the principle that the overwhelming majority of animals are healthy. Consequently, there is generally no obligation to inspect every organ after slaughter. The notable exception is the lungs.

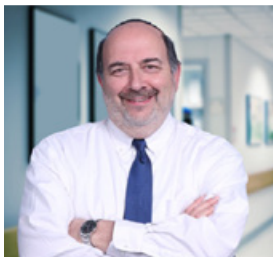
Although most cattle have healthy lungs, a significant minority develop punctures, lesions, or other abnormalities that may render them *treif*. Because these defects occur with sufficient frequency, every kosher-slaughtered animal must undergo a thorough lung inspection.

If an actual puncture or other halachically disqualifying defect is found, the animal is immediately classified as *treif*. It is removed from kosher production and may not be sold as kosher meat.

SIRCHOT (ADHESIONS)

One of the most common findings during lung inspection is the presence of

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sirchot—adhesions or membranous attachments connecting one section of the lung to another or to the chest wall.

The Gemara teaches that the presence of a *sircha* may indicate that a puncture once existed beneath the adhesion, which later healed by forming scar tissue. Since an animal with a punctured lung is a *treifah*, the halachic significance of *sirchot* became the subject of extensive discussion among early authorities.

Here lies one of the fundamental differences between the rulings of the Shulchan Aruch and the Rema.

The Shulchan Aruch maintains that while there are certain types and locations of adhesions that do not invalidate the animal, a *sircha* that raises concern cannot be “tested” or peeled away in an attempt to prove the lung is kosher. According to this approach, any attempt to validate such an adhesion through physical examination is halachically unacceptable.

The Rema, however, adopts a different approach. He agrees that problematic adhesions may indicate a *treifah*, but based on earlier Ashkenazic authorities he permits a carefully regulated method of examination. If the membrane is found to be extremely thin and fragile, separating with minimal contact and without any force, it is considered merely a superficial mucus-like attachment rather than a true *sircha*. In such cases, the animal may remain kosher.

The Rema himself notes that the “Checking” method is a halachic leniency, yet rules that it had become the accepted custom throughout

Ashkenazic communities.

HISTORICAL PRACTICE

Historically, Sephardic communities followed the rulings of the Shulchan Aruch, while Ashkenazic communities relied upon the inspection procedures described by the Rema.

In practice, however, many communities adopted a broader standard commonly referred to simply as Kosher meat. Under this system, the leniencies of both traditions were utilized. Meat would be approved if the adhesion met the criteria accepted by either the Shulchan Aruch or Rema. This became the standard sold in many kosher butcher shops for generations.

WHAT IS GLATT?

During the twentieth century, many Ashkenazic communities - particularly in the United States and parts of Europe—began adopting more stringent standards. Rabbinic authorities increasingly felt that combining the leniencies of both the Shulchan Aruch and the Rema was inappropriate.

The term Glatt, meaning “smooth” in Yiddish, came into use to describe meat that met a significantly higher standard. The name

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refers to lungs that are essentially smooth and free of significant adhesions.

Under modern Glatt standards, only a very limited number of extremely minor adhesions may be accepted, and only if they separate effortlessly without the application of force. Many authorities limit this to only a few insignificant membranes. Meat approved based on this standard became the accepted norm among virtually all major kosher certification agencies in North America, while the older “Kosher” standard has largely disappeared from the international kosher marketplace.

CHALAK BEIT YOSEF

The development of the Israeli meat industry required the Chief Rabbinate to determine which standards would be recognized for official certification. After considerable discussion, two distinct standards were established.

Kasher (*Kasher U'Muchshar*) permits the inspection procedures accepted by the Rema while also incorporating the leniencies recognized by both the Shulchan Aruch and the Rema. This represents the lower of the two official standards.

Chalak Beit Yosef, by contrast, follows the stricter interpretation of the Shulchan Aruch regarding *sirchot*. It does not rely upon the Ashkenazic method of checking adhesions and therefore represents the highest standard accepted by both Sephardic authorities and many Ashkenazic communities. In Israel, this standard is commonly referred to simply as *Chalak*.

Although many Ashkenazim continue to rely on the American Glatt standard, others prefer to consume only *Chalak Beit Yosef*, thereby satisfying the stricter opinions of both traditions.

UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S STANDARDS

Today, three practical standards are commonly encountered.

The first is *Kasher*, the standard still recognized in Israel that incorporates the accepted leniencies of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic practice.

The second is Glatt, the standard developed primarily in North America. This standard is considerably stricter than traditional Ashkenazic practice and places severe limitations on acceptable adhesions, but it does not necessarily satisfy the requirements of the Shulchan Aruch.

The third is *Chalak Beit Yosef*, which follows the strict rulings of the Shulchan Aruch and is widely accepted by Sephardic communities as well as many Ashkenazim.

In Israel, the overwhelming majority of Sephardim, together with many Ashkenazim, consume only *Chalak Beit Yosef*. Likewise, someone who accepts only Glatt meat abroad should recognize that the standard known simply as *Kasher* in Israel is not equivalent to the Glatt standard commonly found in North America and may not meet the standards practiced within his own community.

Understanding these distinctions enables consumers to make informed decisions and appreciate that the terms *Kasher*, *Glatt*, and *Chalak* are not interchangeable. Each reflects a distinct halachic approach to one of the most carefully scrutinized aspects of kosher meat production. ■

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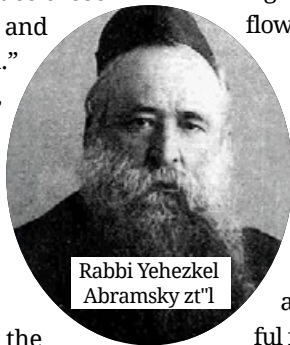
Positive Potential

Am Yisrael has reached the end of their desert journey and they are approaching the border of the Land of Israel. Our *parashah* opens with the commandment to “place those blessings upon Mount Gerizim, and those cursing upon Mount Eval.” (*Devarim* 11:29) Rashi expounds, “that when speaking of the blessings, the Levi'im were to turn to Gerizim, and when mentioning the curses to turn to Eval.” What can we learn from this momentous event?

Rav Avraham Gurvitz quotes the *Midrash Talpiot*: the two mountains were exposed to the same physical conditions conducive to growth and thriving. They were both open to sunshine and both had ample water sources. However, we know that while Mount Gerizim was beautiful, lush and green, Mount Eval was empty and dry. Here we learn that goodness is solely the by-product of Hashem's blessing, it is not one's material features or attributes that guarantee success.

The message is profound. Oftentimes we lay blame for our failures on circumstances or outside factors. These two mountains clearly teach us that fortune and prosperity are in Hashem's hands. We can, however, increase our worthiness of Hashem's grace

and kindness by growing and developing our good *middot*, and *avodat Hashem*. When we focus on the goodness in life, when we are growth-oriented, then even when faced with difficult situations, we can flourish and transform it into blessing. Likewise, one can have the best of circumstances, but a negative attitude can destroy everything good. Appreciation, recognizing our blessings despite the challenges, conducts goodness and helps it flow all around us.



Rabbi Yehezkel Abramsky zt"l

A story is told of Rav Chatzkel Abramsky that beautifully illustrates this lesson. Rav Abramsky was sent to Siberia for the terrible crime of teaching Torah. Upon awakening one morning, he started saying *Modeh Ani* and asked himself, “What am I thankful for? I cannot properly learn Torah and my mitzvah observance is severely limited!” The harsh conditions made basic functioning extremely challenging. Then he stopped as he said the words, “*rabbah emunatecha*.” He realized that he still had the mitzvah of *emunah* — that could never be taken from him or compromised. The thought strengthened him and he survived. Such is the power of finding blessing even in the harshest circumstances.

This is the lesson Hashem wanted to convey to *Am Yisrael* upon entering the land. Living with blessing or curse is up to each person. We are all blessed with a storehouse of bounty, material and spiritual. It is our choice to use it or abuse it. ■

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Yet the blessings of settled life also carry new dangers. Financial and agricultural success can breed self-assuredness. Moshe warns us that our success is not a product of our virtue or righteousness, but rather of Hashem's selection.

Prosperity will also create economic

inequality. Some will be more successful, while others less so. For this reason, Moshe instructs us about tzedakah and about shem-itah, which resets the financial system once every seven years.

Finally, as society grows more prosperous and more complex, it will require courts and public institutions to govern it. Yet these institutions introduce a new danger - the corruption of justice. Moshe warns that the judicial system must never become slanted or corrupt. A society cannot function without respect for the rule of law, and the rule of law cannot exist without trust in the fairness of the judicial system.

ONE GOD, ONE PLACE

One of Moshe's primary concerns is the shift from scattered sites of worship to a single place in which we encounter Hashem. This concern reflects Moshe's dread throughout the entire first part of Sefer Devarim—the fear of idolatry. As we enter a Land filled with pagan shrines and altars, Moshe repeatedly warns us to demolish and uproot every vestige of idolatrous worship.

But Moshe's message extends beyond merely destroying pagan worship. He also instructs us not to imitate its model of worship. Unlike pagan worshippers, who maintain numerous sites of worship reflecting their numerous gods, we are to concentrate all of our ceremonies in one designated location. לא תעשון כן לה' אלוהיכם (Do not worship Hashem in this manner).

This instruction had practical halachic application. In the desert, *bamot* (private

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altars) were permitted. Likewise, during the conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel, sacrifices on private *bamot* continued to be permitted. However, once Shiloh was established as the permanent location of the Mishkan—and certainly once the Beit HaMikdash was built - private *bamot* became forbidden.

The primary reason for concentrating worship in a single location is theological. Unlike paganism, which recognizes multiple gods - a different god for every force of nature, human experience, or aspect of creation - monotheism proclaims one God who created everything. If there is only one God, there should likewise be one place where He is worshiped.

However, there is a second reason for concentrating worship in a single location. Moshe seeks to move us away from the religious culture of *במות*, in which *איש כל הישר בעיניו יעשה* (each person does what is right in his own eyes). A private *במה* invites religious self-direction, allowing each individual to determine how he will worship. Moshe instead seeks greater regulation and standardization in how we stand before Hashem. Though the Beit HaMikdash is more public and less personal, he prefers that model to a religious culture of *איש כל הישר בעיניו יעשה*.

THE RETURN OF THE BAMAH?

The Torah is introducing a tension that every generation must negotiate: the desire for a deeply personal religious experience versus the need for a common religious culture. This tension between personalization and centralized worship continues to shape contemporary religious life. Should tefillah be conducted primarily in an institutional setting, such as a large shul, or should it take place in smaller, more intimate environments and *shtiebel*-like atmospheres?

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there has been a powerful shift away from large, collective tefillot. Many shuls are refurbishing their buildings and dramatically shrinking the size of their main sanctuaries in favor of multiple smaller rooms to accommodate smaller minyanim. Likewise, and even more dramatically, smaller *shtiebel*-style minyanim have become increasingly popular at the expense of large communal services. Equally popular are in-home minyanim.

There are numerous benefits to smaller minyanim. Firstly they personalize religious experience. In the era of the *bamot*, each family offered its own sacrifices, supervised by its own firstborn, who effectively served as the kohen of the family altar. The great challenge of religion is to find a personal voice within a world of regulations that is highly standardized and demands conformity. Similar to a *bamah*, smaller minyanim allow for that personalization. They can be tailored to specific

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populations and create a more personal religious experience.

Secondly, smaller minyanim build mini-communities, which in turn foster warm and enduring relationships that are much more difficult to develop in larger, more collective settings.

Finally, smaller minyanim are, by definition, less regulated and less bureaucratic. Larger settings require rules and guidelines, and sometimes the mere existence of those rules formalizes the experience and makes it feel less authentic. Often, people in large settings feel that they are simply following regulations rather than expressing genuine religious feelings.

To summarize, smaller minyanim offer personalization, warm and close-knit relationships, and a less formalized tefillah experience, all of which can hopefully lead to greater authenticity.

However, there are also significant drawbacks to these smaller settings. There are several benefits that only a larger, more institutional setting can provide.

WHY A BEIT KNESSET MATTERS

Before discussing the advantages of larger minyanim, it is important to note that any shul - large or small - offers a distinct religious experience that cannot be replicated in a home minyan.

Central to tefillah is not merely the words we recite, but the experience of standing before Hashem. The first recorded tefillah is

Avraham's prayer on behalf of Sedom. The Torah describes his prayer with the words אל שם המקום אשר עמד שם, from which Chazal derive the term Amidah. The verb used to describe the first tefillah is not one of speech or verbal expression. Rather, it describes standing in the presence of Hashem.

A Beit Kneset possesses a halachic level of kedushah. According to the Rambam, the sanctity of a shul parallels, in many respects, the sanctity of the Beit HaMikdash. If tefillah is, in part, the experience of standing before the Shechinah, should we not be more motivated to daven in an actual shul whenever possible?

Based on this, the Shulchan Aruch rules that one should strive to daven in an actual shul even if he has already missed the minyan and will be praying as a *yachid*. Even without the opportunity to recite Kaddish or Kedushah, the Beit Kneset provides the experience of standing before the Shechinah.

WHY LARGE SHULS MATTER

Assuming tefillah should ideally take place in a Beit Kneset, the question then becomes what type of shul best serves that experience.

Larger settings specifically allow people from different walks of life and different generations to stand side by side. In a world of ever-narrowing social circles, we have fewer and fewer opportunities to encounter people who are different from ourselves. There is great value in davening with a wide range of people and experiencing the diversity of Am Yisrael.

Large, intergenerational minyanim preserve our masorah in a way that smaller settings often cannot. Intergenerational minyanim, in which young and old stand together in prayer, give tangible expression to the continuity of our masorah. A child who grows

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up davening alongside parents, grandparents, and elderly members of the community experiences Judaism not merely as a personal practice, but as an unbroken chain linking past generations to future ones.

Imagine life in the Beit HaMikdash. It must have been filled with a constant flow of people from every sector of society, every background, and every generation. It brought together Jews who would otherwise never have met. Standing before Hashem alongside people who were different from ourselves was itself part of the religious experience.

Larger settings also provide stronger communal expectations. Communal expectations can certainly become stifling, but when kept within healthy limits they establish clear communal norms and encourage people to live up to them. The model of *איש כל הישר בעיניו יעשה* is not ideal.

In many ways, the highly decentralized shul system in the United States reflects the broader culture of personal choice and individual autonomy. While that culture offers many advantages, it also weakens a community's ability to establish shared norms and expectations.

Take, for example, the plight of an agunah. In more tightly structured communities, greater communal pressure can be brought to bear upon a recalcitrant husband. In the United States, by contrast, there are often simply too many places to go and too many shuls in which to daven, making it far more difficult for a community to create the healthy social pressure needed to confront this injustice.

A third advantage of larger shul settings is their ability to strengthen broader communal infrastructure. Historically, especially in developing Jewish communities, the shul served as the nucleus around which schools,

mikvaot, chesed organizations, and other communal institutions were built. That remains true in smaller communities today. In larger, well established communities, much of this infrastructure already exists, but larger shuls still provide the financial resources, volunteer base, and organizational capacity that sustain and strengthen communal life.

Finally, larger shuls make us feel part of something greater than ourselves. Tefillah, in general, is meant to expand our horizons and connect us to a story larger than our own lives. We recite the very same words that our ancestors prayed. We return to the template established by the Avot, who founded our nation. We envision the day when we will once again return as one people to Yerushalayim. Davening in a larger setting brings that sensibility into sharper focus. The more people with whom we stand in prayer, the easier it becomes to imagine standing among the millions of Jews who have uttered these same prayers throughout history and embracing Hashem together.

Perhaps we have lost some of the humility required to daven in larger shuls. Perhaps we should ask less how to create a tefillah that fits us and more how we can fit ourselves into tefillah. Perhaps in smaller settings we lose some of the gravitas of standing before Hashem. Perhaps in smaller tefillot the story shrinks, and we lose sight of the larger historical narrative that tefillah is meant to evoke. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Reclaiming Redemption, Vol. II: Faith, Identity, Peoplehood, and the Storms of War**, is available at: mtaraginbooks.com.



HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

BY REBBETZIN DR. ADINA
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The Foundation and the Future

Yeshayahu paints a breathtaking vision of Yerushalayim's future. He begins with its foundation: וְיִסַּדְתִּיךָ בַּסַּפִּירִים, *I will lay your foundations with sapphires*. From there, the city slowly takes shape. Its windows, its gates, and its borders are fashioned from precious stones. Every detail reflects beauty, permanence, and glory.

Then, just as the construction seems complete, the Navi introduces an entirely different image: וְכָל בְּנֵיךָ לְמוֹדֵי ה', וְרַב שְׁלוֹם בְּנֵיךָ. *All your children will be disciples of Hashem, and great will be the peace of your children.*

At first glance, it feels like a change of subject. We have moved from architecture to education. But Chazal hear something deeper. On the words "וכל בניך," they comment: אַל תִּקְרֵי בְּנִיךָ אֶלָּא בּוֹנֵיךָ - "Do not read 'your children,' but 'your builders.'"

The Navi is not leaving the image of construction behind; he is completing it. Hashem lays the sapphire foundations and raises the city's walls, but the building of Yerushalayim does not end when the last stone is set in place. A city is never completed by its buildings alone. Its future rests with its בניך, its children.

The precious stones provide Yerushalayim's physical foundation. Its children become its living builders. They are the ones who will fill the city with Torah, shape its character,

and ensure that the redemption endures from one generation to the next. The stones establish the city, but the children give it life.

The Haftorah reminds us that redemption is not a single moment in history. It is a process that continues in every generation. Hashem lays the foundation, but He entrusts the future to His people. The city is built first with precious stones, and then with precious souls. ■



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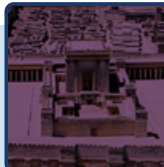
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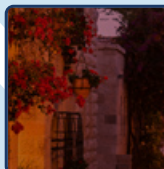
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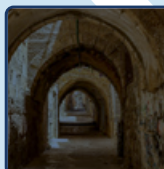
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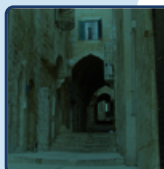
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Rav Kook on Pirkei Avot 6:11: Back to Nature

"Everything that the Holy One, Blessed is He, created in His world, He created only for His glory..." (Pirkei Avot 6:11)

It seems profoundly fitting that the extraordinary compendium of teachings in *Pirkei Avot* concludes with a message that speaks of the glory of God. A Jew strives to become ever more cognizant of God's presence and to make *Kavod Shamayim* (God's majesty) more genuinely palpable in his life. The Mishnah teaches that all of creation is joined in the task of making God's goodness manifest and bringing the universe to its ultimate perfection.

The notion of perceiving an underlying unity in all of existence and recognizing God's presence throughout the natural world are among the defining themes of Rav Kook's thought. Again and again, he demonstrates that nature is not merely the backdrop to religious life; it is

itself a revelation of the Divine. The following teachings beautifully illustrate how attentiveness to the natural order deepens our awareness of God's glory.

A WORLD IN HARMONY

One striking example of this worldview emerges from Rav Kook's interpretation of an apparently simple halachic obligation regarding the feeding of one's animals.

Based on the Torah verses that describe God providing food for the animals in the field before providing food for man (Devarim, chapter 11), the Talmud deduces that a person is obligated to feed his animals before sitting down to eat his own meal.

It is generally understood that this unique law expresses the compassion a Jew must demonstrate toward all of God's creatures. While this explanation is certainly compelling, Rav Kook offers an additional and striking insight. By first feeding the animal, one acknowledges that, in a sense, the animal is actually more deserving of receiving the food first. The enormous physical strength of certain animals, such as an ox, a strength humans do not possess, enables the plowing of the fields and the cultivation of the crops that ultimately provide man's sustenance. In this respect, man is indebted to the animal. The animal deserves to be fed first.

Indeed, Rav Kook explains that this

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perspective cultivates an appreciation of the unique role that animals, and, in truth, every facet of nature, play in the harmonious unity of creation. The more we cultivate this awareness, the more conscious we become of the remarkable intricacy of God's master plan and of how every segment of creation contributes to the perfection of the world. (*Ein Ayah*, Berachot, vol. 2, chapter 6, piska 26, p. 180)

MAN'S CAPACITY TO REFRAIN

Rav Kook then offers an additional and equally compelling explanation.

Although every part of creation glorifies God, man occupies a unique place, reflected in the fact that he was created last. "Those being created later are superior to their predecessors" (Bereshit Rabbah 19:4). This, Rav Kook suggests, is another reason we feed the animal before ourselves.

The animal lacks the capacity for self-restraint. It is instinctively driven to satisfy its physical needs. By contrast, the human being, and the Jew in particular, possesses the unique ability to delay gratification and subordinate physical appetite to higher ideals.

Accordingly, one first provides the animal with its basic needs, acknowledging the instinctive nature of the beast. Man, however, is expected to elevate himself above mere instinct. Waiting to eat until after feeding the animal underscores man's spiritual superiority over the animal kingdom. He pauses, fulfills his responsibility toward God's creatures, and only then partakes of his own meal in a disciplined and elevated manner. (*Ibid.*)

REFRESHINGLY NATURAL

Rav Kook applies this same perspective even to our eating habits.

The Talmud (Berachot 40a) teaches that after a

meal one should eat some salt, and after drinking one should conclude with a glass of water. In this way, says the Talmud, one will not be adversely affected by what one has consumed.

On the surface, this appears to be practical health advice. Yet Rav Kook, as he so magnificently does throughout *Ein Ayah*, uncovers a deeper spiritual lesson. Although Judaism permits us to enjoy the rich bounty of God's world, we should continually accustom ourselves to return to foods that are simple, wholesome, and natural.



Rav Abraham
Isaac Kook zt"l

God has created a world that abundantly provides for our needs, as we proclaim in *Birkat HaMazon*, "*Hazan et ha'olam kulo be'tuvo*" ("He sustains the entire world with His goodness"). Salt and water represent the most basic and natural of foods. The Talmud's recommendation to conclude our meals with these simple gifts symbolizes the importance of appreciating the earth's uncomplicated goodness. Such eating not only promotes physical health but also nurtures spiritual well-being. (*Ein Ayah*, Berachot, vol. 2, piska 27)

Healthy eating, and the conscious return to the organic goodness found throughout God's world, is itself a means of perceiving His glory. The nourishing foods and refreshing waters

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that emerge from the earth remind us that we inhabit a universe overflowing with Divine blessing and bounty.

Rav Kook extends this lesson still further by applying it to Torah study. Although rigorous analysis and intellectual sophistication are indispensable components of *Talmud Torah*, we must periodically return to the elementary truths of faith and the simple foundations of Judaism that anchor our spiritual lives. Returning to the "salt and water" of Torah learning is essential for maintaining a healthy spiritual diet.

He concludes by broadening the lesson once more. Just as we return to nature, so too we should return to the quiet simplicity within ourselves, listening attentively to the gentle whisper and authentic yearnings of the soul. In doing so, we naturally cultivate a deeper trust, greater closeness, and a more intimate relationship with our Father in Heaven. (*Ibid.*)

PRAYING WITH SUNRISE AND SUNSET

Finally, Rav Kook carries this appreciation of nature into the realm of prayer.

The Talmud teaches that the ideal time for *Shacharit* is at sunrise, while the preferred time for *Mincha* is toward sunset (Berachot 29b). On the surface, the Gemara is simply identifying the optimal times for prayer.

Rav Kook, however, detects a deeper message. He notes that the Talmud employs an unusually poetic expression, referring not merely to sunrise and sunset but to "the reddening of the sun." This evocative language teaches that when we stand before God in prayer, we should consciously contemplate the beauty and majesty of creation. The splendor of the morning and evening skies awakens within us an awareness of Divine providence and the abundant *chesed* that fills the world.

It is fitting that we draw feelings of awe and reverence from the wellsprings of creation, a

universe in which every detail proclaims the wisdom and glory of its Creator. (*Ein Ayah*, vol. 1, Berachot 29, 1:49)

As we return to the Mishnah with which we began, Rav Kook's message comes into sharp focus. Animals, wholesome food, foundational Torah study, sunrise, and sunset are not merely features of everyday life; they are invitations to perceive the Divine. The more deeply we appreciate the wisdom woven throughout creation, the more readily we recognize that every aspect of existence quietly joins in the same eternal chorus: *"Everything that the Holy One, Blessed is He, created in His world, He created only for His glory."* ■



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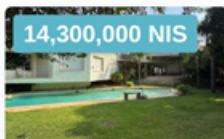


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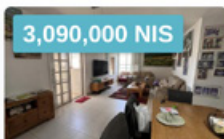


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AI for Halacha

Question: To what extent is it responsible and wise to use AI models for guidance or information on questions of practical Halacha?

Answer: *This discussion is for those for whom AI is already part of their practical, intellectual, and/or professional lifestyle.* What follows is in line with the broad consensus amongst *rabbanim* in our communities. Hopefully the presentation will clarify somewhat and highlight distinctions and nuances.

A futuristic possibility – Someday, machines might surpass humans in sheer memory, analysis, and application of Halacha (if they do, it will happen later than for most other intellectual endeavors). We must distinguish between halachic information and *p'sak*

halacha. When a *halacha* is clearly established and a non-expert does not remember facts or know how to “connect clear dots,” the future AI will be trusted. For time immemorial, we do not ask our *posek* such questions, but ask a more knowledgeable acquaintance. However, when a new question or a unique dilemma including conflicting factors or personal sensitivities arises, this requires a *p'sak halacha*. The process that the Torah describes for deciding such matters (Devarim 17:8-11) involves human *talmidei chachamim*, which outweighs even a divine omen (Bava Metzia 59b). There is also something to be said for *siyata d'shmaya* of a *yarei shamayim* toiling over an answer.

Current AI capabilities – As many know, while AI does certain things in the realm of Torah impressively, its level of **reliable** scholarship pales in comparison to even a basic-level *talmid chacham*. AI summarizes straightforward, basic halachic text well. (One AI model retrieved for me my positions on a variety of topics quickly and impressively.) Some of its most impressive feats are plagiarism – summarizing articles by *talmidei chachamim* without citing them. It can follow Talmudic and halachic logic and notice distinctions. One **can** get a broad, brilliant answer on a halachic question.

However, it is totally **unreliable**. It can “quote” non-existent sources. It can “miss” a part of the question and apply an answer in its “grasp” about a similar case; i.e., the answer is wrong for the actual case. It can give an answer based on one source it understood correctly, but fail to realize that most

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opinions disagree. I compare it to having an absolutely brilliant *chavruta* who is new to the world of Torah. When it gets something right, it can be breathtaking. However, when that lack of proper background causes it to err, it can say things that sound great but are totally off. My impression is that on “cookie-cutter” clear matters, where there is little complexity and no *machloket*, it usually gets things right. The chances are higher when one knows how to ask AI in the right way. Moments ago, I asked three AI models the *berachot* on 7 foods (quite straightforward). They all were accurate about the foods that have one correct answer. The answers for foods upon which there are *machlokot* differed from model to model, as did the level of accuracy.

Here is my practical summary. A *talmid chacham* who lacks encyclopedic knowledge, but knows how to check everything before believing anything, can, if he desires, use AI to get to opinions and approaches. He can be aided faster and sometimes more efficiently than by using a Google search to find and read articles or reading through classical sources,

which he might find “the old way” or with the help of Bar Ilan Responsa, Otzar Hachochma, etc. It serves more like a halachic anthology *sefer* with an “automatic index” when you don’t look up the sources cited in footnotes. The researcher must avoid the danger of falling into the horrible habit of believing too much, which already exists regarding some anthology *sefarim*; it certainly exists for AI. To quote one AI model’s disclaimer: “XXX is AI and can make mistakes. Please double-check cited sources.”

For those who are not *talmidei chachamim*, using AI to get Torah information is usually **highly irresponsible**. (This is true for non-experts regarding other intellectual or professional fields.) ■

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Challenging Our Internal Voice

There was once a town suffering through a terrible drought. The Jews of the town were simple, G-d-fearing people. They were not great scholars, but they sincerely sought to serve their Creator with open hearts.

In those days in Poland, it was common for wandering preachers to travel from town to town delivering fiery sermons intended to frighten ordinary Jews into repentance. If a preacher could leave his audience weeping in despair and trembling with fear, he was considered successful.

One such preacher arrived in this drought-stricken town. Standing before the desperate crowd, he thundered, "How can you ask Hashem to send rain when you have not yet learned to serve Him properly? How dare you pray for your own needs when your own shortcomings are so great? Are you no better than spoiled, selfish children?"

And he continued in that vein, rebuking and condemning the people.

Unbeknownst to the preacher, however, another visitor had also arrived in town that day, a humble travelling melamed. Hearing the preacher's harsh words, he stepped forward to defend the wholehearted Jews before him.

"My dear Jews," he said gently, "don't you

know that Hashem loves you? That Hashem is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth? Don't become discouraged. Serve Hashem with joy! Serve Him with the confidence that He loves every one of you as a loving father cherishes his child."

Then he smiled and said, "Come. Let us dance with the certainty that Hashem hears our prayers. Let us dance knowing that the rain will come."

And they danced.

And soon afterwards, the rains came.

The travelling melamed was, of course, the Baal Shem Tov, whose teachings opened a new path in serving Hashem, a path rooted in joy, hope, love, and a deeply personal relationship with our Creator.

I first heard this story decades ago, and I have repeated it countless times since. Yet only recently have I begun to understand that this story is about me.

And maybe it is about you too.

How many of us speak to ourselves with the voice of the preacher? How often do we judge ourselves harshly, whether the mistake or failure is real or imagined? If I am honest, my inner voice often sounds much more like the preacher than the Baal Shem Tov.

In the story, it seems obvious which voice is the healthier one. Yet in our own lives, the critical voice so often wins. We mistake its harshness for honesty. We convince ourselves that relentless self-criticism is humility, accountability, or a necessary prerequisite for growth.

But perhaps it is none of those things.

Perhaps it is simply another strategy of the yetzer hara.

The voice that insists we are never good enough rarely inspires us to become better. More often, it leaves us discouraged, ashamed, and exhausted. The Baal Shem Tov understood something profound: people grow most deeply not when they are crushed by criticism, but when they are lifted by hope.

Self-criticism is a habit, like any other one. Difficult to break, but not impossible.

What is the key to changing that inner voice? The Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches that the way to get rid of darkness is by adding light. The more I learn to hear my inner “Baal Shem Tov,” the voice of compassion, encouragement, faith and possibility, the more I begin to see myself as Hashem sees me: not only as I am today, but as the person I am capable of becoming.

May we be blessed this Elul to recognize which voice we are listening to. May we learn to quiet the preacher within and make room for the gentle, hopeful voice of the Baal Shem Tov. May we know that when we serve Hashem with joy, trust, and love, we become capable of growing farther than fear could ever take us. And then, just like the townspeople, may we merit to feel Hashem’s blessings raining down upon us. ■

Shoshana Judelman is passionate about learning and growing through Chassidus. She gives shiurim to women in many communities around Israel, including Efrat, Elazar, Raanana and Jerusalem as well as at Midreshet Rachel V’Chaya. Shoshana also guides groups at Yad Vashem and leads journeys to Poland and other countries around Europe for JRoots.

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The Elul Opportunity: Awakening Together

One of the greatest gifts Hashem ever gave us is Elul.

Left to our own devices, many of us simply wouldn't do it.

Life is busy. The routine is relentless. There are bills to pay, laundry to fold, emails to answer, children to entertain, and endless distractions competing for our attention. Summer, especially, has a rhythm all its own. School is out, schedules are fluid, vacations are planned, and we try to create memories with the people we love.

And then, we blink and it's Chodesh Elul.

The shofar begins to sound each morning. We add *L'David Hashem Ori V'Yishi* to our daily tefillot. We increase our tzedakah. The

language of teshuvah slowly finds its way back into our vocabulary.

It's as though Hashem lovingly interrupts our lives and says, "Wake up. Don't let another year simply happen to you."

How grateful I am that He built this into the Jewish calendar.

This past Shabbat I found myself lingering over a familiar verse:

וַעֲתָה יִשְׂרָאֵל, מָה ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ שָׁאֵל מֵעַמּוֹ, כִּי אִם לִירְאָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ...
וַעֲתָה יִשְׂרָאֵל, מָה ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ שָׁאֵל מֵעַמּוֹ, כִּי אִם לִירְאָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ...

What does Hashem ask of us? The very first answer is *yirah*.

Not simply fear of punishment, but living with an awareness that I stand in the Presence of Hashem. That my choices and actions matter because He is here.

If I'm honest, I realized this is an area where I have work to do.

My love of Hashem feels genuine. My desire to serve Him is real. But Chazal teach us, *ה' ראשית חכמה יראת ה'* - the beginning of wisdom is awe of Hashem. It's the foundation upon which everything else is built.

So I began thinking practically. What habits could strengthen that awareness? How could I carry Hashem's Presence into ordinary moments instead of limiting it to extraordinary ones? But while reflecting, another thought occurred to me.

Elul asks us to think about ourselves. Yet it never asks us to think only about ourselves.

There is the *prat*—the individual.

And there is the *klal*—the Jewish people.

We spend so much of Elul asking, "Where do I need to grow?" Perhaps we should also

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ask, “How does my growth strengthen Am Yisrael?”

Chazal describe the Jewish people as one body. No organ can perform every function. The eye cannot hear. The heart cannot walk. The hands cannot think. Each part contributes something unique that every other part depends upon.

The same is true spiritually. Some Jews naturally connect through heartfelt tefillah. Others through rigorous Torah learning. Some inspire with music. Some through extraordinary acts of kindness and generous donations. Some sacrifice on the battlefield. Some dedicate themselves in the Beit Midrash. None of us embodies every strength.

And that’s exactly the point.

My avodah doesn’t compete with yours. It complements yours.

Perhaps when I become a stronger version of myself, I’m filling a space that someone else cannot fill. And when I celebrate the gifts Hashem gave another Jew, they help complete what is lacking in me. Our differences actually help us.

I’ve been privileged to witness it firsthand at Beit Binyamin. Over the past two years, our retreat center has welcomed an extraordinary cross-section of Am Yisrael. Bereaved parents, wives of reservists, soldiers, volunteers, therapists, rabbis, teenagers, retirees, religious and secular Jews, Israelis and visitors from abroad.

They do not all think alike. They do not all connect and serve Hashem in the same way. Yet every single person brought something indispensable.

Beit Binyamin reminds me that Am Yisrael becomes strongest not when we become identical, but when each person brings their unique strengths in the service of something greater than themselves.

That thought became especially tangible while participating in the OU’s film *Beit HaMikdash in the Making*.

There were stone carvers and woodworkers.

Women practicing weaving and tailors sizing garments for the Kohanim.

Researchers studying laws and techniques.

Bakers preparing the Lechem HaPanim.

Those caring for the Parah Adumah.

Builders. Teachers. Torah scholars.

And one day there will also be musicians, singers, gatekeepers, craftsmen, Kohanim and Levi'im—each fulfilling a role no one else can.

No single person could ever build or operate the Beit HaMikdash.

Only a nation could.

Perhaps that is true of Elul as well.

Yes, Hashem asks each of us to engage in deep, personal work. To examine our choices, our character, our relationships, and our connection with Him.

But He never intended us to become identical.

He asks us to become the fullest version of ourselves - and then bring that unique self into the service of the *klal*.

Maybe that’s why Moshe’s words begin, ועתה ישראל - “And now, Israel.”

מה ה' אלקיך, Only afterward does he ask, שואל מעמך - what does Hashem ask of you?

The individual lives within the nation.

This Elul, I certainly have my own work to do.

But I also want to notice the holiness in the people around me. To appreciate the Jew who serves Hashem differently than I do. To recognize that their gifts are not a challenge to mine, but a completion of them.

Because when every Jew brings their unique avodah to Hashem, together we

become something none of us could ever become alone.

And perhaps that is exactly the kind of nation worthy of building - and filling - the Beit HaMikdash once again. The kind of nation Hashem is proud to call his children. His holy treasured nation.

בנים אתם לה' אלוקיכם...ובך בחר ה' להיות לו
לעם סגולה. ■

The **Airleys** have built **Beit Binyamin**, a retreat center in Tzfat for those directly affected by the war. Soldiers, Zaka members, security forces, bereaved families and widows can come for respite, relaxation and rejuvenation. For more information and to donate, visit Beitbinyamin.org

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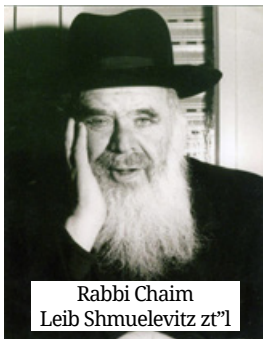
בס"ד

Relighting the Fire

In Chapter 29, Yeshayahu HaNavi castigates the people for performing mitzvot rotely, offering lip service without engaging their hearts. He terms this service "*Mitzvat Anashim Melumadah*" - learned behaviors, mimicked by their practitioners without understanding or intent.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l taught that הרגל, habit, is the archenemy of sanctity and spiritual elevation. When a person stands before Hashem, lofty and exhilarated, he initially feels sparks of holy fire in his soul, but then along comes הרגל and extinguishes his excitement. "We've been down this road before, been there done that," argues the voice of habit, as we slide into the routine of the same words, the same actions performed day after day. The essence of man's *Avodah*, his service of Hashem, is to relight the fire of enthusiasm with which we perform the mitzvot, not to fall into the trap of מלומדה but to really think about what we're saying and doing, with the intent of drawing closer to Hashem through our service.¹

In instructing Moshe Rabbeinu regarding



Rabbi Chaim
Leib Shmulevitz zt"l

the *Hatzotzrot*, the silver trumpets blown in the Beit HaMikdash, the Torah teaches that they are to be blown in times of war and at times of rejoicing. Rav Avraham Schorr notes that the Rambam counts these two situations as one mitzvah, despite the fact that they appear in two separate *pesukim*. He explains this phenomenon in light of a verse in Sefer Tehillim: "חסד ומשפט אשירה לך" - In times of mercy and in times of judgment, I will sing to You." The trumpets, as musical instruments, are a form of song offered before Hashem. The intent of David HaMelech in this verse, explains HaRav Schorr, was to teach that both חסד and משפט, mercy and judgment, share the same underlying principle - Hashem is sending us a wake up call to rouse us from the state of habit in which we are rotely performing

the mitzvot. Whether we are celebrating a special simcha or experiencing a personal or national challenge, we must recognize that it's an opportunity to renew our close relationship with Hashem. This spiritual awakening is given expression through song, or the music of the *Hatzotzrot*.²

A story is told of the Ba'al Shem Tov, who on a freezing winter day, when icicles were hanging from every rooftop, went with his students to immerse in the mikveh. The Besht warmed the waters through supernatural means, and remained immersed for several hours, until the candle the students had brought with them

1. שיחות מוסר עמ' רפב-רפג

2. הללקח והלבוש תשס"ב פרשת בהעלותך

began to flicker and threaten to burn out. A student cried out to the Baal Shem Tov that the flame was about to be extinguished, and he responded, “Fool! Take an icicle and use it to relight the flame! He Who causes fuel to burn will cause the ice to burn.” The student did as he was told and the candle burst into flame, remaining lit for another two hours until the Besht emerged from the water and returned home. The story is told by Hasidim to illustrate that even a heart which is spiritually frozen can be warmed through the light of Torah and genuine service of Hashem. Even one who is distanced from Hashem, whether through estrangement or simply through habituation to religious observance, can relight the flame of enthusiasm in his service.

Rav Schorr, in the essay cited above, notes that today, in the era of *Ikveta d'Meshiha*, the era in which we hear the approaching

footsteps of Mashiah, many hearts are sealed off from apprehending Hashem in the world. We have experienced so much tragedy that we are inured to bad news, and we lack the silver trumpets of the Mikdash to wake us up and shatter our complacency. However, the inner meaning of the *Hatzotzrot* lives on in our memories, so that when we find ourselves threatened by war or rejoicing in our victories, we can experience these events as opportunities to awaken ourselves, to shake off the mode of *מלומדים מלומדים* and relight the fire of passion in our service of Hashem, bringing Mashiah closer with each passing day. ■

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



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Ayelet answers:

One of the things I love about the ambassador model is that there is always the extra set of loving eyes that approves the match. The value you bring is that you get to know your candidates, understand what's really important to them, and sometimes recognize a good match that isn't obvious on paper.

When that happens, I believe in being completely upfront. If there's something that

doesn't match what your candidate originally described, don't try to hide it or hope he won't notice. Say it yourself: "I know you mentioned you were hoping for someone a little older," or "I remember you said this wasn't usually what you picture." The moment you acknowledge it, you've shown that you were listening all along and that you're making a thoughtful recommendation, not forgetting what matters to him.

Then explain why you still think it's worth considering, but make sure the explanation is about **his** needs. There's a big difference between saying, "She's looking for someone exactly like you," and saying, "From everything you've shared with me, I think she has qualities that could give you the kind of relationship you're hoping to build."

Notice the difference? In the first version, he's being asked to fill a role in someone else's story. In the second, you're showing him how this suggestion connects to the future **he** wants.

For example, if your candidate keeps talking about wanting someone emotionally mature, easy to communicate with, and ready to build a home, lead with that. "I know those qualities are really important to you, and from what I've learned about her, I think she has them." If one detail isn't exactly what he imagined, it's no longer the headline, it's simply one piece of a much bigger picture.

Our role as ambassadors isn't to convince people to say yes to every suggestion. It's to help them see possibilities they might otherwise overlook while always making sure they feel heard, understood and represented. When your candidate feels that you're

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advocating for **him**, even a suggestion that isn't a perfect checklist match becomes much easier to consider with an open mind.

Of course, your candidate is always allowed to say no. You are not here to force him out on a date, you're here to present a suggestion you genuinely believe is worth considering. If he does decline, don't stop there: ask why! Understanding what's behind the "no" will help you get to know your candidate better and make stronger suggestions in the future.

Every suggestion we present to our friend is a small act of trust: trust that we listened, trust that we understood, and trust that we are thinking carefully about who we bring into their lives.

Behatzlacha!! ■

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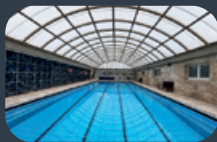
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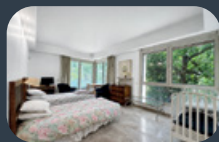
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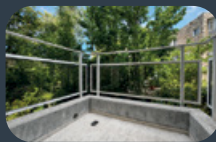
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