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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

*Preserving American Jewish History*

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series E: General Alphabetical Files. 1960-1992

Box 89, Folder 6, Rabbinical Assembly, 1988.



# RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY HOMILETICS SERVICE

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Contributors: Rabbis William Fertig, Abraham Havivi, Hayim Y. Herring, Daniel Liben, Robert Pilavin, Arnold E. Resnicoff, A. Charles Shalman, Alan Silverstein, Robert B. Slosberg, and Alan Yuter \*\* Also Included in this Package: Sermonics from the Writings of Rabbi Milton Steinberg (Edited by Rabbi Bernard Mandelbaum) \*\* Rabbi Kenneth E. Berger, Chairman, and Rabbi Lionel E. Moses, Co-Chairman, Homiletics Service; Rabbi Alan Silverstein, Chairman, Expansion of Services Committee; Rabbi Akiba Lubow, Director of Programming \*\* September 1984 \*\* Tishrei 5745



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## AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

We are grateful to our many colleagues who have submitted sermons and other materials for publication. As you know, we rely upon our members' willingness to share their ideas with their colleagues. We are always searching for new materials, whether they be complete sermons or outlines. We also welcome materials related to life-cycle events which might be of use to colleagues.

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Rabbi Lionel E. Moses as Co-Chairman of the Homiletics Service. We know that his skills and talents will be helpful during the coming year.

**Upcoming Deadlines for Submitting Materials:**

***Shemot* - November 12**

***Vayikra* - January 28**

Please mail your materials to either Rabbi Berger or Rabbi Moses:

Rabbi Kenneth E. Berger  
Congregation Beth Shalom  
Rugby Road & Rutland Avenue  
Teaneck, New Jersey 07666

Rabbi Lionel E. Moses  
Jewish Center of Jackson Heights  
34-25 82nd Street  
Jackson Heights, NY 11372

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What was the motivation for Adam and Eve to transgress God's directive not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge? Christian theologians claim that these initial human beings "fell from God's grace" because their sexual lust overwhelmed them; their inner desires overcame their commitment to the Divine.

Jews disagree with this pessimistic assessment of human nature. In offering a different perspective, Martin Buber claimed that Adam's motivation was not sinful at all. Rather, it represented his unwillingness to exist in a totally controlled environment. Life in the Garden of Eden was care-free and painless, but it was also devoid of thinking, of decisions, of morality. To be blunt, life was "paradise", but it was also boring.

During a symposium on theodicy, Walter Wurzberger said,

Many philosophers would agree that....given the choice to be attached to a pleasure machine, which would guarantee bliss and happiness forever, but would also deprive us of the ability to make any kind of decisions, most of us....would refuse to deprive ourselves of our liberty and the ability to decide our fate. I certainly wouldn't want to live in the kind of world depicted in George Orwell's 1984, even if I were assured that it would yield a great deal of satisfaction.

Similarly, to be a Jew in the Soviet Union is not unacceptable due to the lack of food, clothing, or shelter. It is intolerable because of the absence of spiritual nourishment, intellectual apparel, and the structure provided by a religious tradition.

Adam's motivation, not his "sin", was a quest to be mortal, not to be evil or lustful. His motivation was the desire to be given free will and the knowledge to choose among opposites (good and evil). It was Adam's goal to step out of the suspended animation of Gan Eden, and into the joys and agonies of human history, to rise or fall on his own merits, according to his own ideas, his own deeds.

\* Rabbi Silverstein notes that the sermon notes appearing here and elsewhere in this package are intended as just that - sermon notes - and are provided in order to hopefully spark an idea for development into a sermon.

It was an hour of sorrow for Abraham Joshua Heschel as he addressed a conference of Quaker leaders. Heschel was speaking in Germany in 1938, just as night was falling on the Jews of Eastern Europe. He tried to formulate the religious significance of that terrible hour. "History," he said, "is a pyramid of efforts and errors; yet at times it is the holy mountain on which God holds judgment over the nations. Few are privileged to discern God's judgment in history. But all may be guided by the words of the Baal Shem: if a man has beheld evil, he may know that it was shown to him in order that he learn his own guilt and repent; for what is shown to him is also within him."

Eleh toldot Noah – truly, this is the plight of Noah. Who was Noah? Isht zaddik tamim hayah – Noah was a man who was both pious and naive. The Torah adds the pregnant word, b'dorotav – in his generation. Had Noah lived in the generation of Abraham, he might not have been considered righteous. A man who is both naive and spiritually second-rate is hopelessly unqualified for a divine challenge. And what a challenge it was.

Ketz kol-basar ba lifnei – the end of mankind is imminent, said the Lord. What were Noah's options at that moment? He could have mimicked Abraham, who pleaded with God to spare two wicked cities. He could have followed Moses, who risked his life to save one wicked nation. Noah, however, was asked to save a world, to defend humanity before his Creator. And yet he did not do so. Noah sided with God. We read this passage with incredulity. Surely this righteous man is capable of one, small protest. And yet Noah is silent. The next words spoken issue from God.

Aseh lekha tevah – build yourself an ark. The Midrash Tanhuma notes that our sages were troubled by this odd request. Why did God save Noah through such a cumbersome scheme? The sages conclude that God was not being arbitrary. While building the ark, Noah would have ample opportunities to warn people about the impending flood. Who knows? – perhaps they would repent. The rabbinic explanation is puzzling, however, for the Torah gives no indication that Noah warned anyone. He seemed content to save himself, his family, and the animals. Aseh lekha tevah – Noah built the ark for himself; it was of no use to the rest of mankind.

Perhaps we have been too harsh on Noah. The Torah tells us that Noah was righteous b'dorotav, in his generation. It may well be that Noah was righteous in spite of the unfavorable spiritual climate. Had Noah lived in the generation of Abraham, he might have been still more righteous. We recall the commentary of Rashi: Yesh dorshim l'shevah, v'yesh dorshim l'genai – some people see the good side, others see the bad. Who is truly righteous? It's a matter of perspective. Much depends on how we go about collecting the data. Noah is a case in point. How easy it is to find fault with him! He did not come to the aid of his fellow human beings. In Bereishit Rabbah, Rabbi Yochanan accused Noah of lacking faith in God. Noah was open to this accusation because he did not enter the ark until the waters of the flood forced him to do so. Finally, let us not forget that it was Noah who planted a vineyard, became intoxicated, and cursed his descendants. And yet – we could also dwell on the other side of Noah: Noah as the man who maintained his integrity in an age when no one else could. For all we know, Noah may have tried his best to induce his neighbors to repent. And even when humanity perished in the flood, it was Noah who tended to the daily needs of the saving remnant, in the ark. Yesh dorshim l'shevah, v'yesh dorshim l'genai – some people see the good side, others see the bad. To be sure, many situations in life are ambiguous; they can sustain both positive and negative evaluations. The true challenge, however, is to look at both sides of an issue, to leave the fantasy world of black

and white in favor of a tension filled existence where everything is perceived in shades of gray.

Not everyone is equal to the challenge of seeing both sides of an issue. I remember my year in a Jerusalem yeshivah. I had just completed my first year of rabbinical school, but I felt the need to study in an Orthodox setting as well. It was a reconnaissance mission. Like the 12 spies before me, I asked: Is Orthodox Judaism strong or weak? More importantly, is Orthodoxy open-minded, or does it have a fortress mentality? And I found out. The yeshivah was composed of college-educated students, many of whom also had advanced degrees. Despite their secular credentials, the students were quite narrow religiously. They dismissed as inauthentic those who did not conform to their own belief and practice. Diaspora Jews were maligned. Non-Orthodox scholars were reviled. Even students from other yeshivot were suspect! I came to realize that many Orthodox Jews are fettered by fundamentalist categories which dictate their beliefs. The great majority are incapable of appreciating alternative formulations of Jewish Tradition. They lack the courage to break with the world of black and white.

It is sad to note that Reform Judaism also falls prey to a one sided view of Jewish Tradition. They have published a Torah commentary whose Hebrew text does not include cantillation marks. It cannot be used in a traditional synagogue. They have published a prayer book which contains numerous types of prayers and prayer services. Conspicuous by its absence was the traditional liturgy. Most recently, Reform Judaism has decreed that a Jewish child is no longer defined only as one born to a Jewish mother. It is enough, they argue, that either the mother or the father be Jewish. Professor Jakob Petuchowski, a leading Reform scholar, has noted that his Movement has now become a sect on the periphery of Judaism. Ironically, Reform has become the bedfellow of Orthodoxy. Both groups consciously exclude those Jews whose belief and practice differ from their own.

Which brings us to Conservative Judaism. Conservative Judaism in general, and the Seminary in particular, shed light on Noah and the ark. Eleh toldot Noah - this is an intellectual history, the story of our Seminary and our Movement. Tamim hahah b'dorotav - we are blameless with respect to our own generation, for we have taught them an important principle, namely, that the critical scholar, as well, may walk with God. Critical study and piety are not mutually exclusive. Aseh lekha tevah - we have built ourselves an ark. The Seminary, like the tevah, is a repository of Torah. But we have a unique conception of what an ark ought to be. The Conservative ark has no distinct party line. V'kofarta otah mibayit u'mihutz bakofer - the ark is surrounded inside and out by kofrim, heretics in the positive sense, those who reject dogmatic formulations. We do not merely read classical Jewish texts. We take care to study those modern works which illuminate our sacred literature.

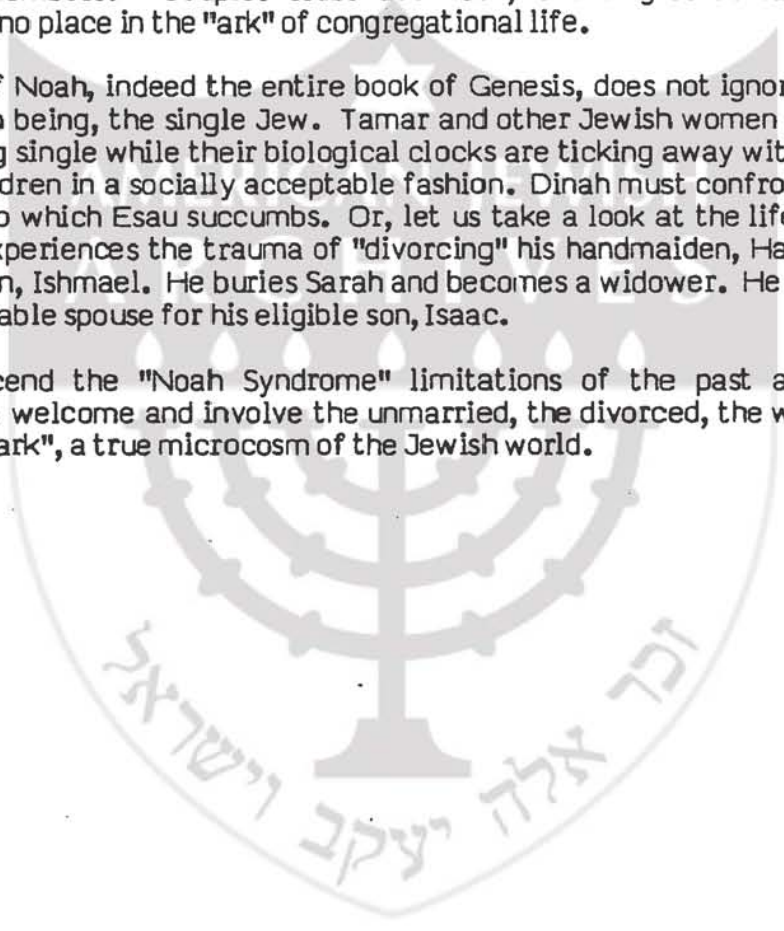
Prof. Nahum Sarna points out that the keshet, the bow, is normally a symbol of war. Only in the context of God's covenant with Noah does keshet mean rainbow. We of the Conservative Movement should be encouraged. Like a rainbow, our community is distinguished by its many colors, its commitment to diversity. We are told in Masekhet Berakhot that one who sights a rainbow is obliged to recite a blessing. Here, then, is our challenge as Conservative Jews. We must demonstrate both in word and in deed how our rainbow is worthy of a blessing. By examining both sides of an issue, by rejecting black and white solutions and recognizing the gray areas, we become a rainbow - that fragile yet eternal reminder that the covenant with God will never be broken.

The ark which Noah is commanded to build is intended to become a microcosm of society. It is intended to be a miniature world, in which the seeds of the future will be planted. On this ark, we see Noah and his extended family, and we also see all species of animals, male and female, two by two.

For Jewish singles, the synagogue world has become a microcosm of an organized Jewish society in which the "Noah Syndrome", the obsession with couples, with married pairs of adults, indeed with an intact nuclear family, has been paramount. Until recently, synagogue membership rates have been calibrated solely for families. Synagogue social gatherings have been priced specifically for couples. Young, unmarried adults were considered as the "children" of members. Couples clubs abounded, but singles remained an invisible population, with no place in the "ark" of congregational life.

Yet, the story of Noah, indeed the entire book of Genesis, does not ignore the problems of the single human being, the single Jew. Tamar and other Jewish women agonize about the prospect of being single while their biological clocks are ticking away without being able to give birth to children in a socially acceptable fashion. Dinah must confront the prospect of intermarriage, to which Esau succumbs. Or, let us take a look at the life of Abraham, the first Jew. He experiences the trauma of "divorcing" his handmaiden, Hagar, and of losing custody of his son, Ishmael. He buries Sarah and becomes a widower. He worries about the locating of a suitable spouse for his eligible son, Isaac.

We must transcend the "Noah Syndrome" limitations of the past and re-orient our congregations to welcome and involve the unmarried, the divorced, the widowed, etc., in a true synagogue "ark", a true microcosm of the Jewish world.



And Abram said, "O Lord God, what canst Thou give me, seeing that I go childless?" (Genesis 15:2)

What are the products (fruits) of a righteous man? Commandments and good deeds. (Genesis Rabbah 30:1)

In all ages and in all men: thirst for immortality. Man dreads death - unknown, always afraid. But more because of extinction - will to live - cannot resign himself to extinction. Refuse to face it. End of hope - The world is never quite what we should like it to be. Pain, frustration - the things we want, we never attain. Hope for better - ideals. Death means the end of hope. This is why man has always thirsted for immortality. This offered double escape - escape from extinction and preservation of hope.

This thirst for immortality has expressed itself variously. In the next world - a life continued after death. All peoples have had this belief. But notice that each people - conceiving its future world, conceived it in terms of its hopes: American Indian - happy hunting ground; Buddhist - Nirvana; Moslem - water, houris; Aristotle - theoria; Medieval Jew - yeshivah shel ma'alah, heavenly abode. There is a second way of gratifying thirst for immortality: through children. Secret of parental love - animal instinct - nature's way of preserving the species - habituation and self-sacrifice. Mainly, assurance of immortality. Biological continuity - our bodies live in our children. Psychological survival - our personalities live in our children. So do our hopes, pains - spare them; education - they must have it; security.

Neither type satisfying. The first - an act of faith - totally unknown. The second - irrelevant - children annul hopes of parents. But there is one type of immortality which we all neglect. Let us return to the text: What are the products (fruits) of a righteous man? Commandments and good deeds. (Genesis Rabbah 30:1)

The immortality of influence - Rabbis believed in personal survival after death. Recongized importance of children. Still, they insist - true immortality - influence.

Consider Isaiah - Does it matter where he is now? Who knows his children? He lives in dreams of peace. Consider Socrates - Where is his soul - who are his descendants? He lives in love of truth.

Ah, you will say, that immortality possible only to great. Not so! Law of Nature - Energy can neither be created nor destroyed. No life without influence. All mingle with infinite stream of humanity and color it. Stone dropped in pool. In this immortality - each of us lives forever. This is the highest type of immortality - the inescapable immortality.

But there is a second element in immortality. Not only survival, but survival of our hopes. This type is also inescapable. Each act of kindness - cruelty, truth - falsehood, service - selfishness. We all live forever in our influence. As we have lived - so is our immortality. Our lives here of infinite significance; they make our immortality.

Do you remember Dante - Wicked in Hell - punishment - sins to all eternity. Virtuous in Paradise - reward - virtue to all eternity. We no longer believe in Hell or Paradise. But essentially belief is true: All men live eternally in their influence. He who has lived cruelly, selfishly, falsely, to all times lives so. He has made himself an eternal Hell. But he who has lived in love, truth, and service - lives forever as a blessing to all mankind. He has built himself a paradise in which to dwell to the end of time.



I would like to begin my derashah with a request from the kahal. I would like you to think of a modern title for this morning's parashah. Perhaps such titles as "Family Feud", "All My Children", or "Abraham for the Defense" spring to mind? I forgot to mention that there is a stipulation to my request which invalidates all of those possibilities. This title must reflect the broad range of events about which we read this morning. To illustrate the difficulty of my request, let me remind you that such diverse incidents as the destruction of S'dom and A'morrah, Abraham's deceit of Avimelekh, and the Akedah must be incorporated in this title. Now this simple request for a title is beginning to sound like "Mission Impossible!" Perhaps our best alternative is to retain the original title, for Parhsat Vayera contains so many disparate units that no single title can totally embrace its contents.

Despite the initial appearance of fragmentation, if we read the parashah closely we will detect an internal logic. The parashah is indeed coherent: it is bound together by the motif of sight. In other words a great number of phrases in the parashah are related to the act of seeing. In order to give you a flavor of the sight motif, I would like to list a few examples as they are found chronologically in the parashah. (Note: See Genesis 18:1, 18:2, 18:3, 18:21, 19:1, 19:8, 19:14 for just a few examples.) The exercise of cataloging all of the sight-related phrases found in the parashah provides us with about thirty examples.

The parashah emphasizes the importance of sight by means other than language. How did the Malakhim, the Divine messengers, save Lot from being victimized by the Sodomites? "And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness." And what part of the body is responsible for the destruction of Lot's wife? Her eyes! God cautions: "Don't look behind" (at the destruction of S'dom and A'morrah). Lot's wife cannot resist temptation, and, for violating this command which is related to sight, she is turned into a pillar of salt. And again, a reference to the significance of sight is found in the obscure statement that Avimelekh makes to Sarah upon discovering that he was the object of Abraham's deceit.

"I herewith give your brother 1,000 pieces of silver; it is for you a covering of the eyes before all who are with you, and you are cleared before everyone." We see from these three examples that by focusing on the eyes, the parashah calls our attention to the importance of sight. These examples are particularly illuminating for two reasons. As we noted, the eyes play a central role in these incidents. Moreover, their significance is underscored by the use of rare phrases. Sanverim appears in only one other place in the Bible, and k'sut einayim is unique.

I think that we are now ready to alter our initial judgments about the editorial skill found in our parashah. The parashah is coherent, and it is the motif of sight which lends it this coherence. At this stage, we need to ask, "So what?" What is the purpose of impressing the use of sight upon us? Does the narrator wish to merely demonstrate his artistic abilities and provide us with aesthetic pleasure, or are we supposed to learn something of religious value from the literary motif?

I would like to suggest that there is a didactic motive behind the narrator's use of the sight motif. The pervasive and intentional use of sight language is supposed to cause us to "open our eyes" to the events of the parashah. Because of this constant stress on sight, we come to realize that we are expected to use our sight to arrive at insight. We are asked to probe the reality that is present before our eyes and examine what lies behind this reality. In other words, the use of the sight motif alerts us to the problem of illusion - what we visually

perceive, and reality – what truly lies underneath this perception.

We could raise this problem of illusion and reality on every incident in the parashah. For example, the parashah creates the illusion that Lot's daughters perpetuated their deception on their father because they believed that all other men on earth had been destroyed. But is it really that simple or, are we in reality supposed to connect their behavior to Lot's readiness to sacrifice them to the lascivious people of S'dom, earlier? Or, is Abraham's plea bargaining with God over the fate of S'dom and A'morrah a test for God, as illusion would have us believe, or is it in reality somehow a test for Abraham? These types of questions, once we become aware of the sight motif, need to be raised about every single incident in the parashah. Naturally we cannot do so this morning. I have therefore chosen one incident in the parashah which has much personal meaning for me.

More precisely speaking, this incident is a case of shtein she'hen ahat, two cases which are one. I would like to explore the respective reactions of Abraham and Lot to the Divine messengers. The parashah creates the illusion that these reactions are similar. In the light of our discussion on the function of the sight motif, the very similarity of the descriptions demands a more skeptical reading. I will read the opening verse of chapters 18 and 19 which deal respectively with Abraham's and Lot's reactions to the Malakhim. (Note: See Genesis 18:1-5 and 19:1-3.)

We may note, in summarizing these passages, that Abraham and Lot perform similar actions. They rise upon seeing the messengers, greet them, bow down to them, and urge them to stay for a meal. As any considerate host would do, they invite them to refresh themselves and recommend that they rest before resuming their journey.

In language and content, we see an amazing similarity between Abraham and Lot. Our initial perception would lead us to conclude that Lot is a near perfect copy of Abraham. Superficially observing them in action, we would likely stress the affinity between Abraham and Lot. And yet, despite the empirical data, regardless of what our eyes would have us believe, there is reason to deny this affinity. If we can move beyond the superficial, visual facts, beyond the illusion of affinity, we might ask a serious question about Lot. If Lot was such a tzaddik, if he was truly like his uncle, how could he make his permanent home in a place as corrupt as S'dom.

The answer to this question begins six chapters earlier, when Abraham and Lot agreed to part ways. As you recall, Abraham suggested the separation in order to alleviate the strife that had arisen between their shepherds. These details are narrated in Genesis 13:10-13.

"Lot looked about him and saw how well-watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it – this was before the Lord had destroyed S'dom and A'morrah – all the way to Zoar, like the Garden of the Lord, like the Land of Egypt. So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan....and Lot settled in the cities of the plain, pitching his tents near S'dom. And the inhabitants of S'dom were very wicked sinners against the Lord." (Gen 13:10-13). This section contains two significant facts. From it, we learn that Lot's choice of S'dom was motivated by financial concerns; he saw in the exceptionally fertile plains of S'dom a tremendous opportunity for grazing his flocks. But this same section also informs us of S'dom's notorious reputation. Taken in tandem, these two facts shatter the illusion of the sincerity of Lot's religious convictions. As still waters may conceal great depths, good deeds may mask shallow beliefs. Can we maintain that Lot had the same commitment to tzeddek and mishpat that Abraham did, after realizing that he made a conscious choice to live in S'dom?

In the light of Lot's choice, we need to reevaluate his relationship with his uncle Abraham. And as we reexamine this relationship, it might be helpful to think of it in broader terms. We need not necessarily view their relationship in restricted terms of kinship. We may also view their relationship as that of teacher and student. As Rashi remarks on the basis of B'reishit Rabbah, "Lot learned to look after travellers from the practice in Abraham's house." We may assume that hakhnasat orhim, hospitality, was only one of the many things that Lot had the opportunity to learn from Abraham.

From Lot's choice to live in S'dom, we may conclude that no essential likeness existed between him and Abraham. It was only after probing behind the facts of these apparently similar descriptions of Abraham's and Lot's reactions to the Divine messengers that we came to this conclusion. But what was it that led us to initially identify Lot with Abraham? What was it that lent credence to the illusion of affinity?

This illusion was supported by the similarity in action between Lot and Abraham. In behavior, Lot and Abraham, when faced with the Divine messengers, acted in a similar fashion. This similarity in behavior led us to presume a similarity in belief. But when we became conscious of the sight motif and looked beyond the illusion, we discovered that in reality, Abraham and Lot were two different men. In form, Lot, the student, had mastered the practices of Abraham, the mentor. But beneath the illusion, in substance, student lagged sorrowfully behind teacher.

Abraham's piety was real. If we probe behind his actions, we see a man with profound religious belief. His piety existed both in form and in substance. His actions were a direct consequence of his beliefs. The relationship between his beliefs and his actions was one of cause and effect; his beliefs generated his deeds. In reality, Abraham was an integrated religious personality.

Lot on the other hand, created an illusion of piety by manipulating form. Yes, he learned how to perform good deeds, but he never perceived their underlying significance. He never came to understand that beliefs are supposed to be the underpinnings for actions. He never came to realize that deeds cannot be a substitute for beliefs, but that they must be an expression of beliefs. In reality, that organic harmony between belief and action was unattainable for him.

Reality and illusion, Abraham and Lot, substance and form. These fare the polarities of Parshat Vayera. Nowhere better are these polarities expressed than in the midrash on the second verse of the parashah.

"And Abraham lifted up his eyes and he saw three men standing over him, and he saw...." The Midrash asks why "yayar", "And he saw", is written twice. It explains that the first time refers to Abraham's seeing the forms of three men. The second time refers to Abraham's understanding that his perception of three men was an illusion. He realized that in reality they were actually Divine. The challenge of the parashah is for us to incorporate the double meaning of "yayar" into our lives - the ability to discern form from substance, reality from illusion, so that we may be able to bring the Divine into our lives.

My second son, Noah, was born one month ago. Many of you honored him, and his parents, by celebrating his Brit with us. That moment, of Noah's being admitted into the Brit of Avraham, is etched in my mind, as only a few moments in one's life can be. Noah's birth is another such image, as is the birth of Micah, his older brother.

True, these vivid images of birth and brit fade during sleepless nights of hungry infants and tireless toddlers, and yet they root those mundane, trying times in a greater reality - the utter holy and mysterious reality of birth. These images, of birth and brit, preoccupy new parents, as we struggle to assimilate the reality of a new life into our lives, and only slowly and intermittently fathom the meaning of the event. It should not be surprising to you, then, that in studying Parshat Vayera, I was inevitably drawn to the birth and brit of another second son, Yitzhak, as a source of inspiration for my sermon this morning. To my new father's eye, the patriarchal narratives which we read today focus on both the brakhah, the blessing, and the Divine imperative of childbirth.

Primarily, conception is portrayed in our parashah as a blessing from God. The Torah states: "So Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Avimelech, his wife, and his maidservants, and they bore children."

Va'yitpallel Avraham - from the beginning of creation until this point in time, the midrash points out to us, no human being had yet prayed to God on behalf of another human being. And what, according to Hazal, was the content of that prayer?

"Master of the world - You created Man to propagate and be fruitful; then indeed, let Avimelech and his household be fruitful and multiply!"

A prayer so short, yet filled with pathos. Allow me, on this most basic and profound level, to be your partner in creation.

The Torah tells us immediately thereafter: "God remembered Sarah as He had said, and did unto Sarah as He had spoken." Thus, Sarah conceived, and, from the juxtaposition of these verses, the Rabbis teach us that he who prays on behalf of another will himself be blessed in kind.

If Sarah's conception is portrayed as a Divine blessing, the conception of Lot's daughters reads as a willing human embrace of a Divine imperative. After escaping the furnace that had been S'dom, they believed that mankind had been wiped out like the generation of the flood, and that they had been spared only in order to perpetuate the human race. Thus, they conspired to render their father senseless with wine, and during his drunken sleep, conceive his children.

We read in the Midrash: "Said the Holy One, Blessed Be He, 'If I judged you according to your deeds, you would be condemned to death, but rather, I judge you according to your intention, which was to build my world.'"

Because their concern was to build God's world, they too are blessed as the mothers of nations, Ammon and Moav, and ultimately, through Moav, of Ruth, the forebearer of the Messiah. Thus, the Biblical world takes its shape through the destinies of these individual children, born to the generation of Avraham.

That generation was only 10 generations removed from the flood. Surely, the memory of that catastrophe must still have been fresh in the mind of mankind. How acutely they must have felt the Divine imperative to repopulate God's world, to replace what had been lost. It is ironic that we, who are but one generation removed from the Holocaust, do not feel the same sense of overwhelming urgency. Where is our commitment to replace, at least numerically, our own catastrophic and irreplaceable loss?

No one is surprised anymore to hear statistics on our declining Jewish birth rate. Our percentage in the American population has dropped from 3.7% in the mid-1940's to 2.6% in 1970. Jewish families are now averaging under 1.7 children, which is well below the 2+ per family we need just to replace ourselves in the population. An uninspiring birth rate, even among caring, committed Jews, reflects to a significant extent, our failure as a community to adequately respond to a certain social reality - the changing role and status of women.

The women I have grown up with were the recipients of mixed signals. They were raised under two different sets of expectations. They were college bound, encouraged to be independent and career oriented, and yet expected to be traditional wives and mothers at the same time.

We continue to project these mixed signals. What father sitting here today would not encourage his daughter to attain a college education? And what father sitting here would discourage that daughter, 4 years later, from pursuing her Ph.D., or her medical studies, or whatever endeavor towards which her innate abilities led her? The largely unasked question is where, in this busy life, is that same daughter to have her 3 or 4 children?

We as a community have offered little help to women who expect themselves to juggle these conflicting roles. The current American trend is to postpone childbearing until one's career niche is carved out. By then, however, even the most maternal of career women have their options limited by their own biological clocks. Thus, educated, working women tend to produce one, or at best 2 children, at a time in their lives when adjusting to the rigors of parenting is not easy.

Men ignore the inherent contradiction in their attitude towards women because they silently hope the contradiction will disappear. Perhaps the feminist tide will turn and our wives and daughters, of their own volitions, will turn their backs on years of education and hard earned positions in order to devote themselves full time to the needs of the Jewish family.

But the tide is not turning. More than 50% of the women in this country work today. The percentage of married women with children under 6, who work, rose from 15.6% in 1960 to 34.4% in 1974. These statistics indicate that more and more American families, and we Jews are no exception, are depending on the secondary, if not primary income brought home by Mom.

The Jewish establishment focused its concern for our low birthrate, a few years back, on ZPG, the Zero Population Growth Movement, which was then in vogue. In a 1975 Time magazine article, Rabbi Norman Lamm urged that "each Jewish couple should have 4 or 5 children," because "Jews are a disappearing species." Similarly, albeit more moderately, the Central Conference of American Rabbis issued a statement encouraging Jewish couples "to have at least 2 or 3 children....because there are simply not enough of us to be assured of survival in succeeding generations." Throughout the community, ZPG was blamed, in Rabbi Lamm's words, as the cause of a potential "Preventive Holocaust".

The response from working women to the ZPG vs. Pro-parenthood debate of the 1970's was

understandably ambivalent, and ultimately, inadequate. Jewish feminists were angered by the call to, in Mary Gendler's words, "subordinate their own needs to that of the community," and to become "eternal mothers", precisely at a time when women were just beginning to reach positions in Jewish scholarship, education and even the Rabbinate. Surely, they claimed, these roles are just as important as motherhood. In Rabbi Rebecca Trachtenberg Alpert's words: "Whether or not one chooses to become a biological parent, by a commitment to enhancing the life of the Jewish people, a person can exert an influence, can be a spiritual ancestor, to future generations."

This "spiritual ancestor" argument is misguided: For a rabbi to suggest that bearing spiritual progeny in any way compensates for a conscious decision not to bear flesh and blood children is, from a religious perspective, tragic. For ultimately, is not the earth's destiny dependent upon humanity fulfilling its own biological destiny? Lo tohu b'ra'ah proclaims the prophet Isaiah - God did not create the world to be a wasteland, but rather l'shevet y'tzarah - He formed it to be inhabited.

But if women have responded ambivalently to the pro-parenthood advice heaped upon them by the Jewish establishment, it is because that advice was simplistic. Very little discussion was heard regarding the necessary adjustments within family life and communal institutions, that might enable 2 career families to handle an extra child.

And by failing to deal with reality constructively, we continue to reap the results of a low birth rate: Not only the long range question of ultimate numerical survival, but also reduced synagogue affiliation, since parents will need the services of the Hebrew school for fewer years, as well as diminished organizational strength across the board. Thus, for our own survival, we have to take the problems of working women seriously and adjust both our personal and institutional patterns accordingly.

First, we must reorganize our priorities within the family. If there is a crisis in the American Jewish household, it is not the advent of the working mother, but the eclipse of the unique role of the father. For decades the Jewish father's role in childrearing has diminished as his role of family provider has become all consuming.

One of the healthier aspects of the feminist movement is its call to bring Abba back home where he belongs. The example of Avraham Avinu is instructive on this point. The Midrash reflects two images of Avraham as a father. Avraham, father of an immoral idolator, and Avraham, a caring, instructive father to righteous sons.

The Torah tells us of Ishmael, that Sarah saw him mocking: m'tzahek, a seemingly innocuous word, is interpreted by the Rabbis as referring either to idolatry, immorality or the propensity to kill. Thus, Sarah, was right to want to be rid of this other child of Avraham, who was at best a bad influence on Yitzhak, or worse, a threat to his life.

One may well ask, where was Avraham until now? Had not our Father Avraham exercised a fatherly influence over his own son? Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochi, voicing the same concern, rejects the opinion that Ishmael was an evil son: "Heaven forbid that such a thing should take place in the home of that righteous man! Is it possible that there should be idolatry and fornication in the home of him of whom it was said, 'For I, God have chosen him, that he may teach his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord?' But rather, "mocking" refers here only to Ishmael's claiming priority over Isaac in the matter of inheritance." The majority of commentators, however, disagree with Rabbi Shimon, and portray Ishmael as a bad seed.

Which Avraham do we emulate – an Avraham so concerned with bringing souls to God that he failed to exercise a paternal influence over Ishmael? Or do we emulate Avraham, father of Isaac, a father whose son could follow him even unto the heights of Moriah – a father who trained his sons in the ways of the Lord? Jewish Tradition, as well as feminist wisdom, urges us to opt for the latter. But, as the responsibilities and joys of childrearing belong to both parents, so must both parents' careers be affected by, and at times subordinated to, the responsibilities of childrearing.

The Jewish feminist Blu Greenberg offered the most reasoned advice of all in a 1977 speech to the American Jewish Congress: "Perhaps the Jewish thing to do in light of our community's population needs, would be to begin our families early, with part-time or delayed career for the husband or wife. Starting a family ten years early would add a new generation of Jews every 30 years."

....Flexibility within the family is just not enough. Institutional help from a concerned, aware Jewish community is also called for. It is sad that we as a community have not taken the lead in instituting Jewish, quality, day care which could enable and encourage young couples to start their families.

Ask the secretaries in our Seminary offices who cares for their young children while they are working. The extended families that traditionally helped working mothers care for their children have disappeared from the landscape. Most likely, their children spend at least part of the day in day care facilities. And very likely, these day care centers are sponsored and run by the local church. Sadly, we Jews refuse to recognize our own community's pressing need.

I am not the only parent in the Seminary community who sends his child to Union Theological Seminary's Day Care Center. We have a Hebrew speaking metapelet who cares for Micah at home. But we send him a few afternoons each week for the added enrichment of peer group play. How much deeper that enrichment would be, for parent, as well as child, if the experience of group child care were shared with other members of our Seminary community, indeed, if it were an integral aspect of our Seminary community. The example of loving, community care, imbued with the warmth of Jewish Tradition, which we have the potential to establish, could be a model for synagogues and Jewish community centers throughout the country.

Sadly, our ambivalence towards the realities of working women and delayed families keeps us from realizing this model, and through our inaction, the quality of our community, as well as its numbers, is diminished.

As I began this talk by mentioning a Brit, it is only fitting that I conclude by reminding you of another Brit, that of our Father Avraham. According to the Midrash, there was a good reason why God waited until Avraham was 100 years old before blessing him and Sarah with a son. Before bringing a child into the covenant, it was necessary for Avraham himself to bare the sign of the covenant upon his own flesh before bringing a child into the covenant.

Perhaps the Midrash tells us that we should not rush thoughtlessly into having children, but rather, we should wait until we have come to understand the awesome responsibilities that fall upon us as Jewish parents. That Avraham and Sarah conceived in their old age, however, was a miracle. Let us not indefinitely postpone our own childbearing, for it is folly to think that we, too, will merit such a miracle.

This week's portion continues the adventures of our favorite Patriarch, Abraham and his delightful sidekick, Lot. The contrast is remarkable. It is the biblical equivalent of a comedy team: While Abraham always seems to know the right thing to do or say, Lot bumbles from one misadventure to another. Abraham is the eternal straight man to his nephew's antics.

Lot looks for a good neighborhood to move into, and bumbles into Sodom. He finds strangers lodging in the street and practically forces hospitality on them. His hospitality to his guests is so strong, he is willing to sacrifice his daughters' honor. When Sodom's time runs out, he is still trying to reason with his sons-in-law rather than pack his bags. Then, the angels have to drag him out of town to save his life. Finally, the ultimate absurdity. Convinced that no other men have survived the devastation that struck Sodom, his daughters seduce him. To his credit, he is drunk at the time.

The progeny of this unholy union will be the nations of Ammon and Moav, two groups near the top of Israel's list of least favored nations. What a joke! One might wonder why the Bible devotes so much space to the saga of Lot altogether. The joke is on us though, for when we carry the story further, we discover that among the descendants of Moav was a young woman named Ruth, whose role in later Jewish history was, to say the least, significant. When we examine the lineage of King David, which is the Messianic line, we thus discover that he was the biological product not only of Abraham, through the tribe of Judah, but also of Lot.

This should make us re-examine our earlier impression of Lot's ineptitude. Indeed, all of his failings resulted from a good heart, sadly mismatched with a pathetic lack of savoir faire. In all of his actions, he was trying to do the right thing, albeit ineffectively. I find this all very comforting. When I look to the Bible for role models, Abraham often seems inaccessible. He always seems to know the right thing to do, and when he doesn't, he can always talk things over with God. Lot, on the other hand, is closer to home.

If there is a message for me in this week's portion, it is that one need not be an Abraham to be significant in Jewish history; the Messianic lineage itself would have been incomplete without Lot. Whenever I feel I am spinning my wheels or bumbling from one failure to the next, I can rest assured that even a person's failings, if performed with a good heart, have a part in the ultimate Redemption of the world.



"And it was after all these things, that God tested Abraham and said, 'Take your son, the son whom you love, and go to the Land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you.'" (Genesis 22:1-2)

**Question:**

What was the purpose of the binding of Isaac? Why did God test Abraham? Didn't God know Abraham's heart?

**Literal Meaning (v. 12):**

Now, I know that you revere God, that you did not hold back your son from me. The Bible did not have a doctrine of omniscience. God had to see if the relationship could be put to the test.

**Ramban:**

The test was not for God, but for Abraham. The exercise of such faith will strengthen him.

- (1) Assumes God is omniscient.
- (2) Sees testing as a means of strengthening.
- (3) So that he lives by God's command, and not affection for his son, as an ideal.

**Maimonides:**

- (1) An educational device for the non-Israelites - They will see what true devotion to God really is.
- (2) Abraham's religious faith was not dependent upon external conditions. He left his parents in Mesopotamia. Why would the test be repeated here?
- (3) Crowning test - after leaving home, father, homeland, suffering circumcision in old age, exiling his son, Yishmael, how much more could God ask - could apply to Abraham and no one else.
- (4) We learn that for the man of faith, faith is fact, to sacrifice one's children.

**Abarbanel:**

- (1) God tested Abraham - not for God, because for God, more information would be pointless.
- (2) Not for Abraham, because his faith was not dependent on realities, but on his experience.
- (3) Not for Isaac because (a) Abraham was being tested, not Isaac; and (b) Isaac agreed to the sacrifice. His faith, if not ability, was equal to Abraham's.
- (4) Not for education of others, because it should not have been private - with only Abraham and Isaac going up an isolated and desolate mountain without even the servants. It should have been a public sacrifice if it was for the education of others.
- (5) Nissa, test, has the same root as nes, miracle or banner. God made an example of Abraham.
- (6) Abraham must have believed in an afterlife, without which the test would have indeed have been meaningless.
- (7) From Abraham's perspective, it was a test. From God's perspective, it was a nes, a banner, a sign and testimony of the ideal faith, especially in the context of Abraham's biography.

**Lessons:**

- (1) The plain meaning of the Bible teaches that God is not necessarily omniscient.
- (2) Our Sages were not afraid to ask hard questions about the Bible.
- (3) They applied their minds and religion to the Bible on their terms. We can do no less.

- (4) Moral lesson of Akeda, the binding of Isaac, remains. Our relationship with God is conditioned on commitment, a willingness to sacrifice oneself is a condition of love, as a parent, child, spouse, and believer in a faith.
- (5) Religion without commitment, like relationships without commitment, is sterile. Abraham's test is the nes, the sign, that commitment invests our faith with vitality.
- (6) Every human enterprise requires ongoing and occasionally ultimate commitment for life-long satisfaction. We know, because we are the seed of Abraham.

Netsiv of Volozhin comes to a similar conclusion, apparently not reading Abarbanel:

- (1) The plain and obvious meaning is that God tested Abraham, and the Bible's literal meaning always exists. You cannot explain it away, even though this seems impossible.
- (2) Testing here must be understood as a sign, a nes. From Abraham's perspective, it was indeed a test (a) to find out if he was righteous? No; (b) to improve him? Possibly; (c) To see if he could bear more? Possibly.



"And Abraham was old, advanced in years...." (Genesis 24:1)

"'The hoary head is a crown of glory' (Proverbs 16:31)....From whence do we learn this? From Abraham, for it is written about him, 'They keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice,'....(Genesis 18:19). This made him worthy of old age...." (Genesis Rabbah 59:1)

Surprising comment - Old Age a Reward - A Privilege - The best Part of Life for individual.

"....At forty one is fit for discernment, at fifty for counsel....at eighty for special strength...." (Avot 5:21)

The most valuable part socially - The whole Jewish Tradition: Rabbis - elderly preferred - Elders ruled community. Hindu - the ascetic; Greek - worship of youth; Philosophers - Plato in Republic, Cicero - De Senectute.

Rather shocking notion - Our judgment, respect, condescension, pity. Imminence of Death - Loss of faculties - ailments. Passing of friends - lonesomeness. Struggle not to get old. Our society? Old age a social problem - Dependence.

How, we ask, could they feel as they did? Were they not aware of these factors? Inner - Social. There must have been a different viewpoint.

Modern social attitude to old age - Can no more create. Ours is a "doing" society. Their attitude - Creation not so important - poverty of their world.

Another standard: not doing - "being". What do I mean by "being"? Process of life - widening horizons. Infant - child - adolescent - mature. To have wide horizons: Process of life - cumulative. Experience - understanding. To understand all things - To be tolerant - compassionate. Process of life - discovery of essentials - Child with toy - Young adult with pleasures - Things that abide - These things independent of age.

Great blunder of our lives - Absorbed in "doing". Not prepared for old age. Two people grow old - one crochety - another....Miss essence of life in processes of youth. Ourselves, our children - their education - their careers.

Now we understand rabbinic text: Old age is a reward. But more important, a reminder to us: Doing not the whole of life, as much - more, is becoming. Turn our eyes from world - into ourselves.

Today's Torah portion is a famous one. In it is Jacob's well-known dream, a dream of a ladder touching the sky, with angels ascending and descending, and with God at the top. In the dream, God makes certain promises to Jacob. Identifying Himself as the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, God promises the land to Jacob, and to his descendents. And God tells Jacob something important. He will be with him in all places. He will not leave him. (Perhaps Jacob might have thought that Bet El or the land of Israel was God's home, a home which Jacob was now leaving.)

Jacob is filled with His vision and filled with hope. Jacob leaves Bet El, but a very interesting expression is used here: "And Jacob lifted his feet (or "carried his feet") and went...." (Genesis 29:1)

Our Sages note the special expression. They ask: Isn't it usual that a man's feet carry him? Why here does the Torah tell us that Jacob carried his feet? The Sages offer several explanations. I think that we may find one message in this expression particularly important for you, David, on your Bar Mitzvah day.

Jacob, you remember, was leaving home after the deception involving his father. The important thing was for him to leave, and not to arrive, not so much to go somewhere for a specific purpose. Indeed, Rebecca's first words to him are to flee - flee from your brother. She thinks of Haran as a place to go because her brother Laban lives there. So, she tells Jacob to go there for a few days, until Esau's anger cools, and then she will fetch him.

The idea of Jacob's finding a wife there is almost an afterthought, almost an excuse that Rebecca uses to convince her husband, Isaac, that Jacob should go. So Jacob leaves, but he goes because he has to, listening to his mother, just as he had listened to her advice when he fooled his father. He moves, but he is being carried along. He is following plans which are not his. He is being carried along by his feet, acting out the script.

But at Bet El, he has a dream, and this is a turning point. Here, he gains a new perspective, an idea about his own personal role in the world. God identifies Himself as the God of Jacob's grandfather, and of his father. Now, He is Jacob's God. Jacob receives the Tradition. Still more, God speaks of the future, of Jacob's children, so along with the privilege of receiving the Tradition comes the knowledge that it will be his responsibility to pass it on. Suddenly, Jacob is seen by us, and by himself, in a new light. He is a very important link in the continuity of the Jewish people.

With this in mind, Jacob assumes control. He no longer simply follows orders, drifting without his own self-control, allowing his feet to carry him. Now he shares the vision. He has a purpose and he lifts his feet and sets out on the path. He has grown.

David, today, on your Bar Mitzvah, you share a lot with Jacob. You, like he, are at a turning point in your life. Sometimes, when you are young, it is very important to grow old, not to accept new responsibilities, but to leave, to escape the old situation. I remember how happy I was when I began Junior High School, not because I was a big shot there, not because being a freshman or sophomore there was important, but because I was leaving elementary school, and that was for kids.

When you are young, there are not so many choices. Everyone goes to school. If you're

Jewish, then everyone studies for a Bar Mitzvah. Everyone lets his feet carry him along while he grows. Now you are here in shul on your Bar Mitzvah Day, standing before your family, your friends, and before God. And here, like Jacob, you should gain a new perspective. You are chanting a haftarah and accepting certain responsibilities as a Jew, just as your father did, and his father before him, and, God willing, just as your children will do after you. And hopefully, as you accept the Tradition, and along with it the responsibility to pass it on, you will also hear God's message that He will be with you everywhere, not just here in this "holy" place, the synagogue, but there in the world.

David, this is a time for you to be proud of your past, but it is more a time to make the decision that you will be proud of your future. This is a time to make the same decision Jacob did at Bet El, to stop being carried along by your feet, but, instead to carry them, to lift them with purpose, pledging to carry yourself well, taking a first step on the path to your future.



"Jacob left Beer-sheba" (Genesis 28:10)

"Did no one else leave there besides him? Didn't several donkey and camel drivers leave also? And still, you say, 'Jacob left Beer-sheba.' Rabbi Azariah in the name of Rabbi Judah, son of Rabbi Simon and Rabbi Hanin in the name of Rabbi Samuel, son of Rabbi Isaac, said: When the righteous man is in the city, he is in splendor, he is its glory. If he leaves the city, its splendor and its glory also leave." (Genesis Rabbah 68:6)

With typical wisdom, Rabbis point to the true greatness of a state: Not industry, not commerce.

How do people normally estimate political importance?

- (1) Size
- (2) Power and influence - army
- (3) Industry
- (4) Commerce

Rabbis disagree. The true greatness - not donkeys or camels. But the tzaddik.

What makes a state great?

- (1) Social life - justice - happiness
- (2) Creation of tzaddik
- (3) Creation of learning

Ancient Empires: Babylonia - Palestine; Greece vs. Persia

Modern Society: Those states will be remembered which have Justice - Learning - Humane Living

Leads to discussion of patriotism - Normally associated with militarism, jingoism, group superiority. Not so - a higher patriotism:

- (1) Fuller life
- (2) Science and literature
- (3) Human ideals

For the glory of a city - Not its donkeys and camels - But its tzaddikim. They are the greatness of a generation.

"Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran. He stumbled upon a certain place...."  
(Genesis 28:10-11)

"Stumbled on God (Makom)...."

In this phrase - a method of finding God, religion. People wait to stumble on them.

Faith - Wordsworth - Book - Personality - Critical moment  
Morality - Koneh Olam  
Judaism - Anti-Semitism

Obviously not desirable method

- (1) Mr. Micawber
- (2) Distinction between finding and searching in things that matter
- (3) Waiting for break - may not recognize it - in the interval have nothing

But can religion be found?  
Do not grant - Judaism does not grant

"Seek the Lord while He may be found...." (Isaiah 55:6)

Faith - leading thinking - association - persons - values - living  
Morality - Ideals - application

No guarantee of results. Search its own reward - some insight, some benefit.

"(If a man says to you), I have labored and not found, do not believe him...." (Megillah 6b)

Adventure

Religion - morality - Judaism - Precious values - Silly to go through life hoping to stumble on them - One girds up his loins and searches.

The Joseph stories are a classic Jewish statement of the tension between human free will and determinism by God alone. At one level, the outcome of Joseph's life seems predetermined in his childhood dreams. These omens foreshadow the final vindication of his career, in which his father and brothers bow down before him. Yet, if Jewish history and life itself were merely "B'shert", fate, there would be no morality, no ethics, no religion. All of us would merely be automatons, amoral robots, acting as our Godly master commands.

This tension is equally evident within the High Holy Day liturgy. On the one hand, we pray to God to inscribe us in the year ahead for life and for good health and fulfillment. Yet, if all were predetermined last year, we would have no moral responsibility for our fate during the past twelve months. If such predetermination were true, why should we "clop" Al Het? Why should we seek teshuvah?

The dichotomy is played out in Joseph's life and in the Jewish view of human history in general. We see for Joseph and for mankind a partnership of Divine and human actors. God provides a general scheme of historical events, and mankind fills in the details. God establishes a beginning and an end to the history of the world. At one point, God pushes man into human history by expelling him from the Garden of Eden. At another point, and at the opposite extreme, following the lead of God's appointed messenger, the Messiah, man is brought to the eschaton, the end of time, of human events. Yet, within these Divine parameters, it is man who fills in the details. Yes, man, inspired by God, in dialogue with God, in quest of God, but nonetheless man acting in human terms.

So too, with the life of Joseph. The outset and conclusion of his life are part of the Bible's Divine conception of Israel's patriarchal history. Joseph's birth is the vehicle for providing an heir to Jacob, to Israel, from his preferred, his beloved wife Rachel. And Joseph's final years serve to bring the children of Israel down into Egypt, thereby fulfilling God's prophecy to Abraham. (Genesis 15)

Yet, within this Godly framework, we experience a multitude of Joseph's ethical decisions, his moral growth, his remorse, his reconciliation, and ultimately his reuniting with his family. For the Jew, neither free will nor determinism alone can suffice for understanding the drama of human events in a Divine world. Both forces have their indispensable role.



Criminologists and graphologists who study handwriting, assert that, like our fingerprints, no two signatures are exactly the same. They argue and testify in courts of law that a signature is a valid means of indentifying and distinguishing people. Embodied in our signatures is a code, which when properly studied, reveals the nature of our personalities and values.

This basic assumption of graphology, that the way something is written reveals the writer's qualities, seems to have been known to ancient man. In the ancient world, documents were not only validated by signatures, but also by special seals. These seals always contained some distinguishing mark which served to authenticate the identity of the document's endorser. The rabbis assigned a seal to God as well. What is the seal which represents God's virtues and qualities? "The seal of God is truth."

By designating truth as God's distinguishing seal, the rabbis made a profound statement about society. In Judaism, truth is of indispensable value, if society is to be just and good. In the words of Rabban Gamliel in the Mishnah Avot (1:18): "The world rests on three things: On judgment, truth and peace."

Echoes of emet reverberate throughout prophetic speeches. In no uncertain terms, we are told that the "emet": "The God of truth," requires truth in all human relations. We read in the Book of Zechariah (8:16): "These are the things you are to do. Speak the truth to one another. Render true and perfect justice in your courts."

In this morning's Torah reading, Yossef is confronted by the problem of determining the extent and limitations of truth-telling. In the beginning of our parashah, dreams once again play a fateful role in Yossef's life. The Egyptian wisemen and magicians fail to interpret Pharoah's troubling dreams. Finally, at the behest of the Chief Cupbearer, Yossef is released from prison and brought to the palace to elucidate Pharoah's dreams. Yossef interprets Pharoah's dreams as portending seven years of abundance followed by a similar period of famine. Pharoah rewards Yossef with a position in the Egyptian hierarchy.

With the onset of seven years of famine, Yossef's brothers minus Binyamin, are sent to Egypt by Yaakov to purchase food. Little do they know that the young dreamer whom they had ruthlessly abandoned in a pit, is now supervising the distribution of food throughout Egypt. The brothers arrive in Egypt and ironically bow obediently before Yossef, whom they did not recognize. Yossef immediately recognizes his brothers, but keeps his identity to himself. "When Yossef saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he acted like a stranger to them." (Genesis 42:7)

Certainly, we can empathize with Yossef's feelings and behavior. His negative response to his brothers is quite reasonable considering his past experience with his family. Nonetheless, the Biblical commentators were troubled by the fact Yossef concealed his identity. How could the Biblical hero whom the Sages called Yossef ha-zaddik, be guilty of withholding his true identity?

Although a number of answers are given by traditional commentators, I would like to focus on a reason given by Isaac Abravanel, a 15th century Spanish Biblical exegete.

Abravanel explains that Yossef did not conceal his identity in order to seek revenge, but to test his brothers. He wanted to ascertain whether they had repented of their unbrotherly

conduct towards him. Abravanel notes that Yossef tests his brothers, by charging them with espionage, jailing Shimon, and when Binyamin is brought to Egypt, by having him framed as a thief. In each trial, the Bible shows the brothers' remorse and guilt for their past behavior. For example, when Yossef insists the brothers bring Binyamin to Egypt, they respond: "Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, Yossef, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us." (Genesis 42:21)

Abravanel notes that the brothers achieve repentance when Yossef has his silver goblet placed in Binyamin's bag. With the goblet uncovered and Binyamin accused of theft, the brothers rally to his side, instead of abandoning him to slavery. At the end of our Torah reading, we read Yehudah's response to Yossef: "What are we to say to my lord? How can we plead our innocence?...Here we are then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found." (Genesis 44:16)

With Yehuda's statement, we see that the brothers' have performed teshuvah, repentance, in accord with Rambam's prescription found in the Mishnah Torah (Hilchot Teshuvah 2:1). Genuine teshuvah has only been performed when the repenter resists a similar temptation to the one to which he once succumbed. The brothers, who had once deserted Yossef, triumph over their past misdeeds by resisting the temptation to free themselves by abandoning Binyamin in Egypt.

Abravanel's explanation that Yossef withholds his true identity from his brothers to enable them to do teshuvah, raises a serious ethical issue. It would appear that Abravanel believes that one can withhold the truth in order to achieve a greater objective. Abravanel proposes that Yossef could rightfully deceive his brothers to facilitate their teshuvah. He therefore condones Yossef's concealment of his true identity. Yet isn't this genavat da'at or "deceiving of a person", which is explicitly forbidden in Judaism?

This ethical dilemma of the parameters of truth-telling is currently on the public agenda. Is it permissible or even preferable for a government agency such as the C.I.A. to deceive and lie to the public in the interest of national security? Under what circumstances is a so-called white lie acceptable, or is it always deception and perversion of the truth? What should we do when our professional duty involves working with the terminally ill and their families? Should a physician or rabbi truthfully answer patients queries? Or are there circumstances in which the truth should be withheld?

I think we should take pride in the fact that the rabbis grappled with these ethical issues. My dear teacher, Professor Max Kadushin, of blessed memory, taught that rabbinic value-concepts and laws reflect the constant interaction between the rabbis and the common man. Their lives were interwoven. Consequently, the critical dilemmas of every day living had to be confronted by the rabbis. This is seen particularly in the rabbinic legends of the aggadah, in which we get a beautiful picture of how people lived their lives, in contrast to the halakhah, which prescribes how people should live their lives.

There are three rabbinic sources dealing with truth, which I believe define the requirements and parameters of truth-telling in interpersonal relationships.

In Massekhet Yevamot (65b), we find the famous statement of the School of Rabbi Yishmael which reads: "Preserving peace is so important, that for its sake, even God intentionally misquotes a source." This passage discusses how 90 year old Sarah responds when told she is to conceive and give birth to Isaac. She says: "But my husband Abraham is too old." In the very next verse, God speaks to the 100 year old Abraham: "Why did Sarah laugh and say; "How could I possibly bear a child at my old age." (Genesis 18:13) We see how God modifies

Sarah's cynical statement about Abraham's age, which would have made Abraham resent her. God misquotes Sarah on purpose, bending the truth, changing her real statement for the sake of peace.

This rabbinic paradigm based on the behavior of God Himself, shows the consequentialist approach Judaism has toward ethics. If by being truthful, the shalom uniting two people will be disrupted, it may be better to bend the truth. This, of course, differs from Immanuel Kant's ethical philosophy that truth is "a sacred unconditional command" never to be violated.

Our second source is the rabbinic discussion of the currently popular wedding song: In Rashi's words: "What does one say to a bride?" As usual, Hillel and Shammai disagree. Hillel states that it is permissible to bend the truth and to praise a bride's beauty, regardless of her appearance. Shammai, although he didn't know it at the time, follows Kant and states that the truth must always be upheld. The bride must be told the truth, even if beauty and grace are not among her main attributes. Fortunately, the Sages followed Hillel and declared: "We should always be pleasant to people."

Rashi comments: "Tell the person whatever he or she wants to hear." In other words, in certain situations, telling a white lie, which technically might be untrue, is nonetheless the moral thing to do. The truth should not be revealed if it will cause embarrassment or humiliation.

In Midrash Kohelet Rabbah (on verse 5:6), we find the rabbinic reconstruction of a conversation between King Hezekiah and the Prophet Isaiah. In the Second Book of Kings, we read of King Hezekiah's near fatal illness. The Prophet Isaiah, speaking for God, says to the King (2 Kings 20:1): "Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die, you will not get well."

The midrash departs at this point from the Biblical narrative. Instead of King Hezekiah's prayer to God for mercy, the midrash has Hezekiah rebuke Isaiah:

"Isaiah, the customary way of the world is for a person visiting one who is sick to say to the afflicted person, 'May heaven have mercy upon you...' Even if he sees that death is imminent, he does not say to him, 'Set your affairs in order', lest the person become depressed. Now Isaiah, why did you tell me to set my affairs in order for I am going to die?"

In this Midrash, the rabbis are teaching how one is to behave in the presence of a terminally ill person. We are taught through the medium of King Hezekiah, that in such circumstances, we should not be brutally truthful. Rather, we are to be concerned with what is best for the patients. If the knowledge of the truth will bring pain and mental anguish to the sick person, then the requirement of truth is to be waived. This midrash teaches that absolute truth cannot exist in a world where human welfare is a priority. In Judaism, truth is not our supreme good. Truth must yield or be withheld in order to preserve human dignity and peace between people.

We can now appreciate the insightfulness of Abravanel's explanation of Yossef's behavior. Yossef was justified in withholding his true identity from his brothers. By doing so, Yossef did achieve a greater good: he enabled his brothers to repent. Ultimately, his behavior reunited them in love.

Yossef's behavior provides insight into the intricate nature of truth. Truth was chosen to be

God's seal because it is the foundation of interpersonal relationships. Without truth, we would be unable to trust one another. Without trust, human relationships, whether social or business, would be clouded by suspicion.

By concealing his identity, Yossef teaches that sometimes the very same objectives of being truthful, may be best attained through withholding the truth. Even though truth is a moral imperative, it isn't always morally right for the entire truth to be known.

In Psalm 85, we find a metaphorical expression of world perfection. "Mercy and truth meet. Justice and peace kiss." Why in this verse does hesed, mercy, precede emet, truth? Mercy can be united with truth in the world, only if mercy takes precedence over truth. And only when mercy governs truth, will justice and peace embrace mankind. We learn from God, one of whose name is Shalom, truth must never override the preservation of shalom.

"Mercy and truth meet. Justice and peace kiss."

With this humanistic vision, we, too, can use mercy and truth to preserve human dignity and shalom in the world.



"Then Judah went up to him...." (Genesis 44:18)

It is the climax of that most beautiful story, the tale of Joseph. Last week we read - sold into Egypt - brothers appear - he has them in his hands. Desire for revenge - inner struggle. Joseph plays with his brothers like a cat toying with a mouse, like a savage using refined and ingenious tortures against his enemies. Finally, after wrestling with himself, his love and mercy break out.

We ask why could not Joseph have revealed himself at once? Why did he play with their sufferings? Why could he not be kind?

From our own lives, we know the answers. We know that each of us is not one person, but two - savage - saint - evil instincts - Dr. Jekyll - Mr. Hyde. Ship - good captain - mutinous crew. And it is not hard to understand why this should be. Our bodies are animal - all animal instincts. Our ancestors were savages - developed traits of character which they have given to us. And then came civilization, imposed ideals, kindness, and truth. But the evil instincts of the beast - the habits of the savage are still there!

Curiosity: Every animal has it, dog and mirror; cat and leaf. Savage at sight of phonograph. We have inherited instinct - pry into each other's business - gossip - scandals in newspapers.

Ambition: In jungle - conquer or die - Either I rule him or he will rule me. Ambition to rule, to conquer, was born. Result: War - Napoleon - Alexander. Wealth at any price - regardless of human cost. Trickery in order to advance. Self-debasement.

Sex-passion: Savage nature's own way of perpetuating race. Result: jealousy - streets of vice - cruelty - Minds never at rest.

Combativeness: Will fight. Animals have it - self protection. Jungle - fight or die.

It is still in us. Quarrel and enjoy it. Sarcasm and insult. Come to blows - over the weather. Somebody insults a flag - nations seized with fever and go to war.

If only there were no beast in us - no inheritance from the savage - how much happier we would be - how much better the world.

Can we not get rid of it - flee from it? The flight from the heart was tried once and failed. The monks tried it - into isolation. Did they escape? No, for they carried their instincts with them - their bodies, their ancestors. They were still curious - ambitious - sexually passionate - combative. They were worse off - no outlet.

The Rabbis, with their knowledge of human nature, were much shrewder. Tale told in Talmud (Yoma 69b). Caught the Yatzer Harah. Tied it for three days - there was not a fresh egg in the whole world. "For if it were not for the Evil Inclination, no man would build a house or marry a wife or beget children or engage in business." (Genesis Rabbah 9:7)

Underneath this shrewd tale of the Rabbis lies this thought: There is no way of getting rid of our animal instincts. Nay more, they are essential to life. In other words, say the Rabbis, these instincts may be the root of our troubles - but they are also the source of our blessings. These instincts are not inherently bad - it is only the purpose for which they are exploited.

"The bestial instincts are like iron that has been cast into the fire." (Avot D'Rabbi Natan, ed., Schechter, p. 64) They can be molded in any direction. The loyalty of a dog to man is only the loyalty of the wolf to the pack.

Consider curiosity - we have seen its evils. Same instinct is the source and can be used for noble things. What impels the scientist? Galileo and his telescope. What drives the explorer? What motivates the psychologist?

Ambition. No evil in itself. What is it used for? Ambition for children. Ambition for self-improvement. Ambition for honorable fame.

Sex. The root of all evils. But is it? That same power that can burn worlds can also be the source, if properly used, of life's most beautiful things. Love - Romance - Courtesy - Art - Statues - Poems.

The Will to fight. Cause of murdering soldier, brutal gangster, bestial prize fight. But it can be used for noble purposes. The Prophets and social injustice. John Brown and slavery. The editor and his crusade.

One child born in slums - curiosity - ambition - sex - combatativeness - will be gangster: "The genius of the slums." Another - with same instincts - will be great author. Not the animal instinct is the problem, but taming it. Not the savage, but how he is used.

Here lies answer to haunting problem. How will world ever get better? Human nature always the same! We tend to despair. If we had to tear out heart - progress would be impossible.

That isn't necessary. Society doesn't have to change human nature. It has to teach it to express itself in good and not evil directions; it has to take these harmful passions and turn them in a useful direction. Or, as the Rabbis once put it: "And thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart, etc. 'With all thy heart', with both of your inclinations, the good and the evil." (Berakhot 54a)

It is possible to love and serve God even with the instincts and habits of the savage within us.

In Parshat Vayahi, we come to the final climax in a story that holds one climax after another. It is easy to miss the moment I am referring to, because it is related in such an unassuming way. In the last chapter of Bereishit we learn that, following Jacob's death, his sons are thrown into a panic. The thought occurs to them: What if Joseph has refrained from taking revenge on them solely out of respect for his father's feelings? With Jacob gone, nothing will prevent Joseph from giving his brothers exactly what they deserve. So they communicate their fears to Joseph, first by messenger, then in person. They fling themselves down before him, pleading for his mercy. Joseph soothes them and tells them not to worry. Revenge is the farthest thing from his mind.

Joseph's response to his brothers' anxieties boils down to one sentence that is stunningly succinct: "Am I in God's place? Hatahat Elohim ani?" Those three little words may sound simple, but they are not. Those words bear more emotional and psychological freight than we may imagine when we first hear them. To understand that phrase - Hatachat Elohim ani - properly, we must hear it in the context of Joseph's whole life. If we understand his development from beginning to end, if we can grasp what it was that he came to grips with over the course of his turmoil filled years, this final great moment will fall into its proper perspective. For surely Joseph's response to his brothers is the most glorious triumph in a lifetime full of triumphs.

The tale began, for us, only three weeks ago, in Parshat Vayeshev. There we met Joseph the adolescent. Like many adolescents, Joseph locates himself in a world neatly divided into black and white. People either love you or hate you. In this case, the father loves, the brothers hate. The people who inhabit this black and white world are rather straightforward. Actions flow out of feelings in a simple and direct way, and they evoke logical reactions. Our narrator tells us all this by describing life as Joseph must have seen it, as a simple sequence of cause and effect: "Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic." With all apologies to the JPS translators, an ornamented tunic could never inspire a long-running Broadway musical. But, Jacob loves Joseph. Therefore, he gives him the special coat. "And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so, that they could not speak a friendly word to him." "Once Joseph had a dream which he told to his brothers; so they hated him even more." And after Joseph's second dream, our narrator says of the brothers: "And they hated him even more because of his talk about his dreams."

Here is Joseph's early world. It is so easy to understand. People do what they do for clearcut motives. The way they react to things is predictable. Love brings gifts, hate brings enmity. Although it contains both love and hate, life is secure and familiar, for it holds no surprises. People are simple, events are simple, and getting to wear a fancy coat probably is the most exciting thing one can imagine. All that is soon to change, as life for Joseph becomes very exciting. The excitement in Joseph's life flows out of the fact that the ground always is shifting under him. He quickly learns that people are far from simple, and events far from predictable. To begin with, family members are supposed to redeem one from slavery whenever possible, not sell one into slavery. True, Joseph's brothers hate him. But their action is most unexpected. Here Joseph begins his education about human nature, about life, in a way that is sharp and unpleasant.

The education continues, always in unexpected ways. Slavery turns into success, and, just as easily, success turns into disaster. Olam Hofekh - a world continually reversing itself --

that is the world in which Joseph finds himself. Morality lands him in prison, while immorality would have preserved his success. How bewildering! Even more unexpected, prison turns out to be the shortest route to the King's court, but not without a twist along the way: "Pharaoh restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; but the chief baker he impaled, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet, the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph; he forgot him." When we, and Joseph, expect the cupbearer to be grateful, and remember, he forgets. And then, mikketz shenatayim yamim, two years later, by which time Joseph must be sure that Pharaoh's courtier has forgotten, he remembers. And within a few short hours, the slave in prison becomes Prime Minister. Such is the story of Joseph's trip from the top of the world, being a spoiled favorite child, to the bottom, and back to the top again.

And then, once again most unexpectedly, the brothers reappear. Joseph seems torn between wanting to test his brothers and wanting to exact revenge. After having them thrown into prison, he takes several days to consider his next step. He settles on a plan that is largely a test, with a little revenge thrown in. And in the end, he learns some unforeseen things about his brothers, and especially, about Judah. The younger Judah was the one who had suggested selling Joseph to the traders in the first place. He and his brothers seemed to care little about the fate of their brother, and they thought not at all about how much pain the loss of Joseph would cause Jacob. Judah shows that the brothers who stand before Joseph in Egypt are different men. Before, no one even thought of Jacob's feelings; now Judah says that he could not bear to face his father without Benjamin in hand. And the man who was prepared to sell his brother, to get rid of him forever, now is prepared to sell himself forever to save a brother.

Poor Joseph. Surely none of us envies him his exciting story. But in the course of his rollercoaster ride, he gains some insights into life that are available to us as well. Surely the mature Joseph must have recollected how the young Joseph saw the world and laughed at his naivete. How straightforward and open to understanding everything once seemed! But matters turn out to be nothing like that at all. Joseph has seen that good turns into bad and bad into good unpredictably. He has seen the people he trusted let him down, and the people who let him down turn out to be trustworthy. Life for Joseph is like quicksilver, always changing, never fully grasped. Faces turn out to be masks hiding in shadows. He never knows what someone is really thinking, or what someone will do next. Joseph is as much a surprised spectator at the suspenseful drama of his life as we are. Who will disappoint him, and who will come through for him - this, he never knows.

And then, some years later, Yaakov Avinu dies, throwing the brothers into a tizzy. What if Joseph now decides to pay them back? They appeal to Joseph. "Hinenu Lekha La'avadim," They say, "We who made you into a slave, are prepared to submit to the same fate. Do with us what you will." I think that a person less wise, less mature than Joseph would have taken the brothers up on their suggestion. After all, do they deserve better than slavery? Who could forgive them their grievous crime? Perhaps Joseph does not forgive. Surely, if he forgave his brothers he would have told them so, but he doesn't. If he had forgotten the wrong they had inflicted on him, if it no longer mattered, surely he would have said that, but he doesn't. We cannot blame him, for who among us could forget?

Instead, Joseph utters three words that represent the culmination of his life experience: "Hatahat Elohim ani - Am I in God's place?" This sentence is shorthand for everything that Joseph has learned about the world. The vicissitudes of life have reduced him to humility. Joseph realizes that all of his judgments about people - his brothers, Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, the cupbearer - were wrong. They were wrong because at any given point in Joseph's life, he had access to only one piece of the jigsaw puzzle, one part of the picture. Or, as we



In the computer age say, he didn't have all the data. To judge properly on the basis of incomplete data is impossible. Only one being is capable of seeing all the parts of the puzzle at once, and that is God. Joseph finally comes to understand this. His statement "Hatahat Elohim ani" is not so much an assertion of piety as a surrender, a surrender of judgment in the face of the complex phenomenon that is human nature. Joseph seems to be saying, "The one thing I've learned for sure about people is that I don't know a blessed thing about them. God understands people and what they do. I don't." Joseph gives up trying to understand, and he yields his judgment. He recognizes the fallibility that is inherent in his human, imperfect way of seeing things. And the infallibility that inheres only in the perfect God. As far as powers of judgment go, there is a clear line between a person and God. Joseph sees the line, and refuses to cross it. He will not judge in God's stead.

What would it mean to see oneself tahat Elohim? I think that people act as if they are in God's stead when they make their judgments of others, of what they are, what their motivations are, what makes them tick, and pretend that they are God's judgments. We put ourselves tahat Elohim when we mistake our imperfect view of reality for a perfect one. That is what Joseph doesn't allow himself to do.

Now there is nothing wrong with the simple act of judging someone. We judge others constantly. This is a deep seated human need, for we locate ourselves in the world only by measuring ourselves against others. Only by judging people, by discriminating among them, do we make meaningful human interaction possible. Everyone must have his or her private opinions of people in order to function. And surely Joseph had a private opinion of his brothers. But he responds to their plea by saying, in effect, "I may or may not be able to forgive; I may or may not be able to forget. I think what I think. But I cannot know for sure that God thinks what I think, and that's why I will not judge you."

When we err by thinking that our partial view of reality is a complete one, when we forget that our judgment is fallible, we mistake ourselves for God. In our more radical moments, we Jews might call that a form of avodah zarah, for avodah zarah occurs whenever we deify something that is not God. So we commit an act of avodah zarah when we forget that our limited, imperfect way of looking at things is just that - limited and imperfect.

How many times a day do we make the mistake that Joseph managed to avoid? How often do we presume to know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, what someone really is all about, and what really lies behind their actions? When we decide that the ani on the corner of 114th Street isn't worthy of our tzedakah because, surely, he is only a welfare bum; when we decide that someone wants to be a rabbi because he's on an ego trip and wants to stand at a microphone for the rest of his life; when we make these and countless other judgments daily, scolding people and holding them in contempt, we put ourselves tahat Elohim. Three times a day we say "Va'anahnu korim u'mishtachavim u'modim lifnei melekh malekhei hamlakhim HaKadosh Baruch Hu." But far many more times each day, our thoughts and actions give the lie to that statement. We fling God aside, bowing low to the lo-elohim, the no-god of the self. We worship the idol that the popular writers call "Number One."

Poor Joseph. How often must he turn in his grave, when he sees the sons and daughters of Jacob judging others with little compassion and great self-assurance. We wrong him by forgetting his example. And what an example! Joseph, who started out with delusions of grandeur, with dreams of being tahat Elohim; who became second only to Pharaoh, who was believed to be a god; who had all of Egypt on its knees before him; this same Joseph is able to say in the end, "No. They may defer to me, but I defer to God." That is the image of Joseph that we should carry inside ourselves, so that we can always be reminded to leave the final judgment to God, where it belongs.

When Jacob died, his twelve sons, indeed the entire Jewish and allied community, stopped abruptly and mourned for an unprecedentedly lengthy period of time (See Genesis 51:1-13). This period of avelut for Yaacov, both in duration and in intensity, exceeded even the distress which followed the earlier demise first of Abraham and then of Isaac. What was the source of such a unique sense of loss at the passing of one patriarch, which surpassed even the grief which accompanied the end of the lives of his father or his grandfather? In what way was the aftermath of Jacob's life reflective of a new, more challenging reality?

The added sense of communal chaos resulting from Yaacov's removal from the scene can be attributed to the symbolic sensing of the completion of an entire era. It is the conclusion of the Book of Genesis, because it is the termination of the patriarchal epoch of Jewish history. Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob, have now collectively disappeared from the center of Jewish life. Their children, their successors, can no longer rely upon the founders of Judaism for support, for guidance, and for making the ultimate decisions. A new generation of leaders will now succeed or fail on their own merits. The moorings of the past have been irretrievably cut. There is no longer a buffer between the twelve sons of Israel, and their tribes, and the passing on into history.

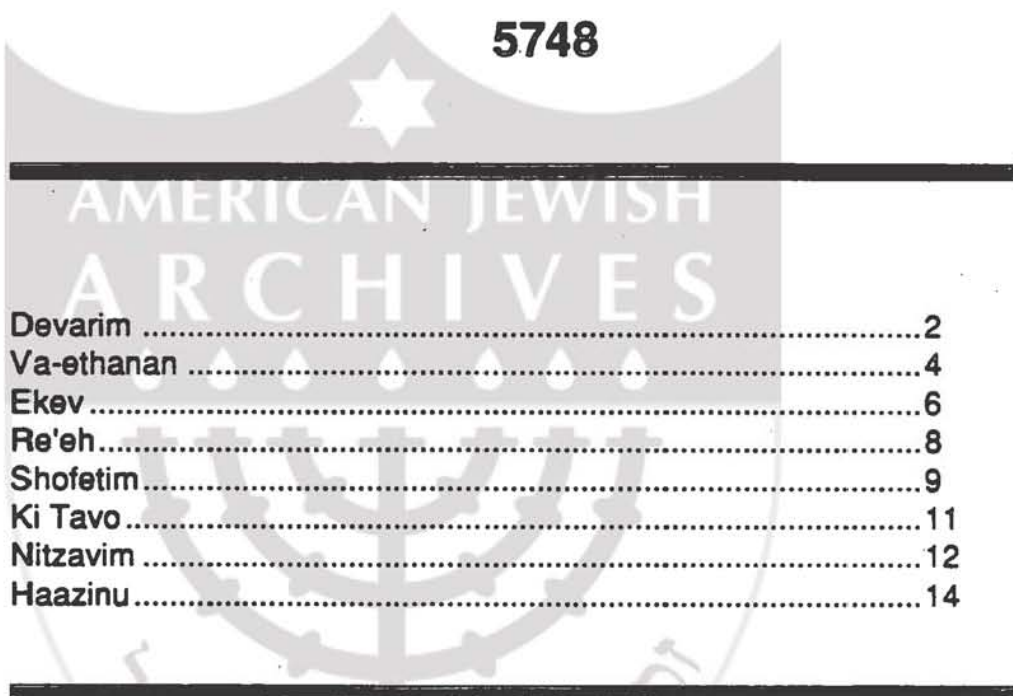
In contemporary terms, this experience is evident in the chaos which has followed the recent Israel elections. This is the first national campaign of Israel's post-patriarchal era. With the passing from the political scene of Menahem Begin, the founders of the Jewish state are now absent from shaping Israel's political affairs. Begin has joined Ben-Gurion, Weizman, Sharett, Dayan, Meir, and others in the collective memory of our people. And his disappearance, and that of the other leaders of the past generation, bequeath unto the current Knesset an unprecedented challenge. Like the twelve tribes-to-be following the death of Jacob, Israel's political establishment has witnessed the end of an era. Like Yaacov's sons, the members of the Knesset are now on their own.

In our own lives, the death of a last surviving parent is similarly traumatic, more so than the painful reality of the loss of a beloved relative might otherwise be. When both parents are gone, also absent is our buffer against the prospect of death, at least as perceived by the natural sequence of events. In addition, they were our conscience, our source of memory, of traditional moorings. Their existence held our disparate siblings together. Conversely, their death marks our own turning point, our necessity to embark upon life truly alone, for the first time. And so too, was the challenge for the twelve sons of Jacob, and at present for Israel's Knesset members. Fractious, fragmented, bitterly divided, they have been, like so many of us, accustomed to relying ultimately upon a parental generation for definitive answers to fundamental questions. Now, they must, as many of us must, embark affirmatively upon a new era, and assert their own capability. That is the challenge! That is the hope!

RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY HOMILETICS SERVICE

# Devarim

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**Contributors:** Rabbis Jacob Chinitz, Seymour Cohen, Sidney Greenberg, Elliot Salo Schoenberg, Robert Schumeister and Hillel Silverman

Rabbi Saul I. Teplitz, *Chairman, Homiletics Service*  
Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal, *Chairman, Publications Committee*  
Rebecca Jacobs, *Editor*

June 1988

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New material is always welcome; either complete sermons or outlines, as well as materials related to lifecycle events and social justice issues. We look forward to hearing from you.

Please mail your material to Rebecca Jacobs, Rabbinical Assembly Homiletics Service, 3080 Broadway, New York, NY 10027.

Sincerely,

**Rabbi Saul I. Teplitz**  
*Chairman*  
*Homiletics Service*

P.S. As you can see, this homiletics package has been printed on three-hole punched paper to give you the option of filing the sermons in a three-ring binder. If you have a strong reaction to this *hiddush* that you'd like to share with us, please be in touch.

# דברים

## Mishne Torah

(Devarim)

Rabbi Jacob Chinitz

*Sefer Devarim* is also called *Mishne Torah*, the second Torah, or a review of the Torah. We tend to associate religion and prayer with repetition and review. We often complain about the repetitiveness of the prayerbook. Why is it necessary to recite the same liturgy every Shabbat, and sometimes to repeat the same words within the same service, as we do with the *Kaddish* which we repeat no less than seven times in one Shabbat morning?

But in reality, we find repetition and review everywhere. The essence of physical fitness, for example, is repetition. People who seek to escape from monotony by pursuing one thrill after another find that, inevitably, the very thrills they seek become repetitive and imitative of each other. I will not go so far as that unappreciative nature-hater who said that after you've seen one redwood tree, you've seen them all. I delight in the great variety in trees, in birds, in insects, in food, in wines, in all existence. But we all repeat ourselves; in fact, in the things that matter to us most, we stress repetition. On Broadway, every once in a while they stage a "revue", in which beloved old songs, old skits, old enjoyments, are presented and repeated. And no show dares go on the road without proper rehearsal. For practice not novelty, makes perfect.

However, in traditional Jewish learning, in addition to the concept of *Mishne Torah*, the old Torah rehearsed and reviewed, there exists also the concept of *Hiddushei Torah*. *Hiddush* means new; and, paradoxically, traditional Judaism, traditional Torah, not only permits novelty but demands it.

Consider this. There are thousands of commentaries upon the Bible and the Talmud. Did they all repeat the same thing, over and over again? Why, in fact, are there five books of the Torah? And is the fifth actually a review of the other four? Those of you who listen to the Torah reading through the year know that it is not. There are new elements in Devarim not found in the other books. Likewise, the *Mishnah* does not merely repeat the Torah, nor does the *Gemara* merely repeat the *Mishnah*. The roots may be the same, but the leaves and the branches are new and different.

When we return the Torah to the Ark, we sing, "*Hadesh yamenu ke-kedem.*" Renew our days as of old. We look forward to renewal and novelty in the midst of our hoped-for return of the old.

When I was a 17-year-old yeshivah student, my uncle was Rosh Yeshivah in Ostrov, Poland. My father once received a letter from his brother the Rosh Yeshivah, in which he asked that I, the student in the American yeshiva, send him some *hiddushe Torah*, origi-

nal insights of my own. Unfortunately, I was not advanced enough at that time to contribute original *hiddushim*, and later, when I did, my uncle had been murdered by the Nazis and it was too late.

*Hiddushei Torah* are the ideal and the pleasure of every yeshivah student and Talmud scholar. Whereas in secular learning, it is only the candidate for the Ph.D. degree who is expected to come up with something new, in the yeshivah, even the undergraduate is expected to study the old *hiddushim*, and come up with original new *hiddushim*.

The generations of Jewish history beginning with Moses and the *mishne Torah* he taught to the Jews standing on the shores of the Jordan are not meant to duplicate each other endlessly. Each generation and each individual Jew must contribute something new to the tradition. *Mishne Torah* and *hiddush Hatorah*, are not contradictory concepts. They complement each other. Not only Jews, but all human beings would fail tragically if they were to choose only one of these alternatives. Human life demands both conservatism and novelty. *Ele Hadevarim*, these are the words: the ancient words of the Torah of Moses which we are obliged to renew every time we read them.



# וַאֲתַנַּחֵם

## Disturbing the Comfortable (Va-ethanan)

Rabbi Sidney Greenberg

The first Shabbat after Tishah be-Av has a special name; *Shabbat Nahamu*, the Sabbath of Comfort. It is so designated because the prophetic portion that is read in the synagogue this Shabbat begins with the words: "Comfort my people, comfort them, says your God" (Is.40:1).

One of the primary functions which Judaism performs for us is to provide comfort in sorrow and solace in time which try our souls. Heinrich Heine alluded to this truth when he called our Bible "the medicine chest of humanity." When we are bruised and burdened, when we suffer disillusionment and despair, when we grow "tired of living and feared of dying," we can find restoring balm in the Biblical assurance that "God is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth."

Any student of Jewish history knows that it was the life-giving reservoirs of strength and hope that our people found in our heritage that enabled us to survive the repeated efforts to destroy us.

In a tremendously moving essay in *Midstream* magazine (April 1983) Lisa S. Kovitch provides graphic illustrations of the sustaining power so many Jews found in their faith during the cruelest of all epochs in our history. Thus she writes: "Though the Nazi savagery and ruthlessness in carrying out the extermination of the Jewish people in Europe could have robbed anyone of his faith in God, the evidence points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that Jews did not lose faith; belief in God and in His commandments often sustained Jews throughout the Holocaust period. And when they could no longer avoid death, their faith also enabled them to march to their deaths with a dignity that mocked everything the Nazis tried to accomplish."

But even after we have said this we have not exhausted the role which our religion should play in our lives. It should not only comfort us when we are disturbed; it should also disturb us when we are comfortable.

The prophets who could soothe with motherly compassion when their people were heartsick, could also scold with bitter condemnation when their people appeared heartless. Isaiah who called out: "Comfort my people, comfort them," was the same prophet who cried out: "Woe unto the rebellious children" (30:1).

Of course, it makes better advertising copy to promote Judaism as a comforter rather than as a disturber. Heaven knows that in these difficult days the need for comfort and solace runs deep. And there are enough things in our personal lives to disturb us without turning to our religion for additional irritants.

And yet we cannot escape the truth that when Judaism offers only serenity and content-

ment, when it focuses all of our attention upon our personal needs and turns its back on the rest of the world, at that point Judaism betrays its own character.

“The enemy,” wrote Norman Cousins, “is any man in the pulpit... who is a dispenser of balm rather than an awakener of conscience. He is preoccupied with the need to provide personal peace of mind rather than to create a blazing sense of restlessness to set things right.”

It is worth noting that when Jews gather in our synagogues on the holy day of Rosh Hashanah the central ritual is the sounding of the Shofar. The Shofar, as Maimonides explained it, cries out to us: “Awake from your sleep, shake off your lethargy.” The Shofar is not a lullaby but an alarm clock. It does not encourage complacency; it shatters it.

These are surely days when religion should be a disturber of the peace, a goad to conscience and “a blazing sense of restlessness” to address the world’s wrongs.

In a world where so many worry about overeating while two-thirds of its inhabitants worry about eating at all; where if we were to observe a minute of silence for every man, woman and child who died of hunger-related causes in any given year, we would be standing in silence throughout the rest of this century and beyond;

where the two superpowers *each* has the equivalent of 30,000 pounds of TNT for every man, woman and child on the face of this earth;

where our rivers are being poisoned and our air polluted;

where terrorists are acclaimed as “freedom fighters”;

where powerful countries publish and distribute hate literature;

where Jews languish in Russian prisons for the crime of wishing to emigrate;

where nations buy missiles and tanks before they build hospitals and schools;

where four out of every five people live under a dictatorship—

in such a world our religion should be a disturber of the peace.

What is needed today is not the reassurance that “God’s in His heaven and all’s right with the world.” Rather we need to be reminded that there’s so much wrong with the world that we must try to right.

“Noble discontent,” it has been said, “is the path to heaven.” It is also a good way to walk the earth.

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# עֵקֵב

## Human Hungers (Ekev)

Rabbi Elliot Salo Schoenberg and Rabbi Cathy Felix

We are all aware of the terrible hunger that exists in Africa and Asia and even in our inner cities. We are blessed to be able to eat very well, yet we have other hungers, hungers that go beyond physical nourishment. We suffer from spiritual and emotional hungers.

Our *parashah* this week says "כִּי לֹא עַל הַלֶּחֶם לִבְדוֹ יֵחִיָּה הָאָדָם". People do not live by bread alone. The labor poet J. Oppenheim wrote in the early part of this century after the labor difficulties in Lawrence, Massachusetts, "Hearts starve as well as bodies: give us bread, but give us roses!" The author of the Torah and the poet both recognize the existence of profound human hungers. What are we truly hungry for?

First, we hunger for spiritual insight, we thirst for Truth. We long to feel God's presence in our lives, however infrequent our attendance at services, however estranged we may feel from Jewish life. Many people have told me that they come to services on the High Holidays to test their relationship to God. Rabbi Harold Kushner, analyzing the success of his *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, said that people want to believe in God but they have questions, problems, and doubts. "My book is successful because it let people believe in God again."

Elie Wiesel tells this story of faith that gave him the courage to believe in God. One night in Auschwitz, when he was a boy the older men decided to put God on trial. There was a prosecutor and there was a defense attorney, a jury and a judge. When the defense rested, the foreman of the jury announced the verdict: "God is guilty of neglect of the Jewish people." But then the judge said, "it is time to *daven* Maariv." And the prosecuting attorney, the defense lawyer, the jury and the judge all went to *daven*. Wiesel said that these people wanted to believe in God, despite their judgement against Him, despite all the terrible things that happened.

We need to ask ourselves: "How do I fill my hunger for God?" Judaism teaches that when we do a *mitzvah* or say a *berakhah* with a loving, open attitude, we can feel close to God. When we cultivate a loving, grateful attitude toward all our material benefits and emotional supports we create room for God to enter our lives. When we dissolve and remove the fears, angers, rigidities that fill our minds, we allow God to enter our lives. A Hasidic saying sums it up: "Where is God? Wherever we let him in."

Second, we all share a great hunger for meaning, for a job which enriches our community, for the ability to work toward *tikkun olam*. So much in our time empties our lives of meaning: the break-up of extended families and of neighborhood communities, economic pressures, society's ambivalent messages about morality, faithfulness, and honesty. The

pursuit of this goal explains the success of Rabbi's Kushner's second book, *When All You Ever Wanted Wasn't Enough*. Kushner says:

We are afraid of never having lived, of coming to the end of our days with the sense that we were never really alive, that we never figured out what life was for. Of all the fears that haunt us, from fear of the dark when we are young to fear of snakes and high places, there is nothing to compare with fear that we may have wasted our lives with nothing to show for it.

Alfred Nobel, a Swedish chemist, made a fortune inventing powerful explosives and licensing the formula to governments to make weapons. When Nobel's brother died, a newspaper accidentally printed an obituary notice for Alfred, identifying him as the inventor of dynamite who made a fortune by enabling armies to achieve new levels of mass destruction. Shocked, he used his fortune to establish awards for accomplishment in various fields that would benefit humanity—the Nobel prize.

We must ask ourselves, "How do we fill our hunger for a meaningful life? Does our daily work contribute to the betterment of the world, or at least does not contribute to its destruction? Am I involved with Jewish life, do I volunteer to help with a Sisterhood project or serve on a synagogue committee? Are our lives a benefit to ourselves alone or to others as well?"

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we hunger for love and affection. Dr. Ashley Montagu the anthropologist, writes, "A person's most imperative need is to receive love." The psychologist/educator Leo Buscaglia is so popular because his message is: "I love you." Buscaglia understands our need to be loved.

How do we satisfy our hunger for love? Judaism calls on us to cultivate our loving relationships. We need to be available to our families not only physically, but emotionally. Judaism teaches us that we must derive satisfaction not only from our jobs and careers but from being with our children and spouses, helping them grow, and sharing their lives.

My father died *erev* Passover of this year. I have participated in several hundred funerals through the years. As a rabbi, I do not feel uncomfortable in a funeral home or at the cemetery. I also knew for several months how sick my father was, so I had time to prepare for his death. Yet, the Friday morning he died, I was devastated. I still am. Why? Because my father represented to me unconditional love; now it is gone.

Dear friends, we are all hungry, for spirituality, for a worthwhile life and for affection. If we have the courage and wisdom to recognize these needs, we can channel the appropriate energy and resources to acquire them.

*(This sermon was inspired by the theme of a sermon by Rabbi Sidney Greenberg)*

# ראה

## Here and Now (Re'eh)

Rabbi Seymour J. Cohen

*"See, this day I have set before you a blessing and a curse." (Deuteronomy 11:26)*

Today, Rosh Hodesh Elul, we begin our preparations for the "Days of Awe." We open our penitential season with the sounding of the Shofar during each weekday morning service, and our religious fervor increases as we move closer to the New Year. We begin to recite the Selihot, the expression of our moral deficiency and the confession of our sins, and finally, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, our prayers end on the grand note, *"This day mayest Thou strengthen us—this day mayest Thou bless us."*

Notice that the Torah speaks in the present tense; the word *hayom* is used. The Bible does not say "I gave you the opportunity of choosing the blessing or the curse." Its very words emphasize "I give you *this day*." Man has a choice given to him every day to reject evil and to choose good, to return in repentance and to renew himself.

Frequently men and women ignore the demands of the present and seek their peace of mind elsewhere. They fly off into the fantasy of dreams. The realities of life are too harsh for them and they try to run away, at least in their minds, to find a haven in the world of illusion.

There are those who fly away into the past. We are grateful for prior generations and are always thankful for the wonderful memories that are ours. But many people look only backwards. They try to recapture what they consider to have been their most wonderful and most creative days. They rush away from the problems of the here-and-now which they feel they cannot solve.

Some fly away into the future. They seek to escape from the imperfections of the present by awaiting the next opportunity. The future is important, but it must begin with action—here and now.

It has been said that man should not look back in anger nor forward in fear. Man should look around him in awareness. For the religious person, living with God means living in this moment of opportunity, in the present hour which God has given us. We must learn to put our entire being into what God expects of us in this hour and in this day. The past and the future belong to Him. It is the present which waits to be hallowed by us.

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# שפטים

## Accessories Before the Fact (Shofetim)

Rabbi Sidney Greenberg

A strange and mysterious ritual is described in this *Sidrah*. Even the ancient Rabbis had trouble understanding it.

The Torah says: If a person is found murdered in an open field and the perpetrator of the crime is unknown, the leaders of the nearest city are obliged to offer a sacrifice of expiation. In addition, all the elders of that city are expected to wash their hands and to make the following public declaration: "Our hands have not shed this blood neither have our eyes seen it" (Deut. 21:1-9).

The Rabbis in the Talmud asked the obvious question: Why did the most respected and most honorable members of the community have to make this declaration of innocence? Who accused them of the crime? Indeed, who would even suspect them of such a terrible deed?

The Rabbis gave the following answer to their own questions: What the elders were saying in their public declaration was not a denial of outright murder. They were denying any contributory negligence on their part. "The victim did not come to us hungry and we sent him away without food; he did not come to us alone and we offered him no protection."

A penetrating and disquieting truth leaps at us from these words. The elders were obliged to assure all the people that they had not failed to do anything that might have prevented the tragedy. For if things were otherwise, if in fact they had been able to prevent the crime and had not done so, then they would have indeed been implicated and culpable.

The lesson of all this is clear. We are each morally responsible for every wrong we have the power to prevent and fail to prevent.

In our American legal system there is a category of crime known as "accessories after the fact." This includes people who aid a criminal to conceal the crime or evade capture. What Judaism is telling us is that there is another category, accessories *before* the fact. This includes people, decent people, law-abiding people, people as respectable as the elders of whom the Torah talks, who by their negligence or indifference enable preventable disasters to happen.

As Jews living in this post-Holocaust era, we are especially sensitive to the heavy burden of moral responsibility that lies on the shoulders of all those who could have done so

much to help Hitler's victims and failed to do so. The voices of world religious leaders which were not raised in screaming protest, the death factories that were not bombed out of existence, the escape routes from hell that were not opened- all these are shameful monuments to moral indifference in the face of lurking disaster. How many world leaders of that dreadful era are entitled to wash their hands and say: "Our hands have not shed this blood neither have our eyes seen it"?

John F. Kennedy was fond of quoting Dante to the effect that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a time of great moral crisis maintain their neutrality.

Edmund Burke pointed to the contribution that accessories before the fact make to the preventable disasters that afflict us. "All that is necessary for evil to triumph," he wrote, "is for good men to do nothing."

How about us? Have we ourselves learned anything from the tragedy of the Holocaust? Have we become more sensitive to the need to fight bigotry, hunger, disease, the threat of nuclear disaster? Have we become more committed to work for the security of Israel, the freedom of Russian Jewry, the strengthening of Judaism? Are we among the good people who do nothing?

There is a new bumper sticker which contains no words at all. It is totally blank. It is meant for those who don't want to get involved. Was this bumper sticker designed for us?

Pastor Martin Niemoller was one of the leading Protestant clergymen in Germany during the Nazi era. After the defeat of Nazism he wrote some memorable words which should serve as an effective antidote wherever we are tempted not to get involved.

"In Germany, the Nazis first came for the Communists and I didn't speak up because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists and I didn't speak up because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Catholics, and I was a Protestant so I didn't speak up.

Then they came for ME...by that time there was no one to speak up for anyone.

To make sure this doesn't happen again, injustice to anyone, anywhere must be the concern of everyone, everywhere."

Niemoller's words are a poignant reminder that whether we like it or not we are indeed involved. Our choice is whether we do something about it or not. Our own future, the future of our children and grandchildren, depends upon our ability to choose wisely.

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# כִּי תבֹא

(Ki Tavo)

Rabbi Robert Schumeister

When the Israelites brought their first fruits to the temple Priest, they were bidden to make the following declaration: "My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation...(Deut. 26:5) This is an expression of gratitude for God's beneficence, but the facts contained in this declaration were well-known to the average Israelite and certainly to the Priest. Why make such a declaration?

The simplest answer is that our tradition places a value on saying aloud what you know and feel inside.

The institution of confession is well-known in the Catholic church. But many Jews fail to realize that the confession of sins has its origins in Judaism. In the sixth blessing of our daily *Amidah* we ask God to forgive our sins. It is among the most ancient insights of our people that it is important to verbalize our feelings — be they of guilt, be they of gratitude.

This fact was rediscovered in recent times by Sigmund Freud, who discovered that merely by talking, speaking of fears and anxieties, a patient was relieved of hysterical symptoms. Freud termed this his "talking cure". It seems that there is something cathartic and curative in simply talking aloud about how we feel.

This insight has countless applications in daily life. Numerous studies have bemoaned the breakdown of the traditional family. This is often attributed to increased mobility and changing values. The real problem is that families no longer communicate with one another. In how many homes do families watch television during the dinner hour? Entertainment has replaced the honest engagement of hearts and minds. We fail to talk with those we love best.

We're all familiar with the touching scene from *Fiddler on the Roof* in which Tevye asks his wife, "Do you love me?" She is taken aback; what sort of a question is this after twenty-five years of marriage? This scene strikes a universal chord for its viewers. There are people we love very deeply, yet we never tell them so. While actions speak louder than words, sometimes actions are not enough: sometimes we need the words too. It's important to make the implicit explicit.

This message is indeed appropriate to this season of the year. During the holiday season, we all seek ways to improve ourselves. One of the simplest is to begin to say aloud what we feel in our hearts to our friends and to our families. If we can do that, the new year will be a better one for us all.

# ניצבים

(Nitzavim)

Rabbi Hillel E. Silverman

**You are standing this day all of you before the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 29:9)**

How do we know when we are truly “standing before the Lord”? To this question the *Hidushei HaRim* replies: “When you are *kulkhem* (all of you) united in heart and spirit—your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your officers, even all the men of Israel.”

Only when the Jewish people are united in pursuit of the good can they expect to be in the presence of God.

**With him that stands here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day (Deuteronomy 29:14).**

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev explains that the Torah is here speaking of those who, when they pray or participate in religious observances, permit their minds to wander and fail to give their whole attention, enthusiasm and *kavanah* to what they are doing.

Some of us identify with the Jewish way of life with our physical presence, but not with our minds. The Torah refers to such people as to “Him that is not here with us this day.”

“May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to You, O Lord our God.” Sincerity, conviction, and concentration are the hallmarks of true devotion.

**And it will come to pass, when he hears the words of this curse, he will bless himself in his heart, saying: “I shall have peace” (Deuteronomy 29:18).**

This verse refers to the “cardiac Jew,” who considers it unnecessary to attend the Synagogue, observe the Sabbath and holidays, participate in Jewish ceremonials, or pursue Jewish studies. “I am at heart a Jew, and this is sufficient!”

But this kind of Jew cannot “bless himself” in the delusion that “I shall have peace.” For he is separating himself from the Torah and Jewish living.

The peace and blessing of Judaism are granted only to those who demonstrate their faith in action.

**For this commandment...is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in**

heaven (Deuteronomy 30:11, 12).

Judaism is a this-worldly religion, seeking to bring man closer to God through noble living. It is devoid of esoteric mysteries and ecclesiastical hierarchies.

The synagogue is a democratic institution in which qualified laymen participate in the conduct of the service and the Torah reading.

The rabbi is a teacher, not a mediator or priest. The Jewish home is the Temple, and the table is the altar. The father is High Priest; the mother is High Priestess; and the children are communicants. Judaism "is not in Heaven" and "this commandment" can be accepted and obeyed by every intelligent Jew, young or old.

**I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that you may live (Deuteronomy 30:19).**

"That you may live" might seem to be redundant. How can we choose life and yet not live? This verse implies that there are those who merely exist because, throughout all of their years, they do not *choose* to live. When we prefer to accept the curse of half-heartedness, our length of years becomes a living death.

We must add life to our years, and not merely years to our life. How is this to be achieved? By choosing the blessings of a rich and meaningful life, guided by the insights of Torah.

Reprinted by permission of the author from *"From Week to Week: Reflections on the Sabbath Torah Readings."* (Hartmore House, Bridgeport, CT, 1975)



## האזינו

### The Fine Art of Forgetting (Haazinu)

Rabbi Sidney Greenberg

The rabbi in Leon Uris' novel about the persecuted Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, *Mila 18*, makes a penetrating observation. He declares that when a Jew says "I believe," he really means, "I remember." It is quite true that historical memories are the glue which has kept our people together over the centuries.

A Jew is born 4000 years old. We have a special Sabbath called "*Zakhor*," remember. All of our festivals are designed to relive ancestral experiences in ages past. "Your shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt," is a Biblical exhortation that is repeated again and again.

In our personal lives there are a host of rituals designed as mnemonics to help us remember our loved ones who have died. There is the Kaddish, yahrzeit, Yizkor. We name our children and our grandchildren after them. We put their names on memorials in Synagogues, we plant trees, and we give *tzedakah* in their memory.

For all the emphasis we place on the importance of remembering, it is appropriate that we reflect from time to time on the importance of forgetting.

Ingrid Bergman once said that she was fortunate to possess the two assets on which happiness depends—good health and a poor memory. That talented lady gave us a much needed reminder that the ability to forget is no less important than the ability to remember.

We often apologize for forgetting things. In his farewell address, Moses rebukes his people for forgetting a crucial fact: "You forgot the God who brought you forth" (Deut. 32:18).

But important as is the power to remember, no less important is the power to forget. Life, as we know it, would be unbearable if we were not blessed with what one eight-year-old called "a good forgettery."

If we had to live each day burdened with the weight of past griefs and bereavements, if we could not banish from our minds our accumulated failures, fears and frustrations, if the wounds we suffer on life's battlefield were always raw and gaping—then life would be a heavy curse.

Long ago, our Sages taught us this same truth. In a charming legend we are told that after the Almighty finished creating the world He was about to release when He suddenly

realized that He had omitted an indispensable ingredient without which life could not endure. God had forgotten to include the power to forget. And so He blessed the world with that special gift, and then He was content that it was now fit for human habitation.

Many of us could use that gift. So many families remain splintered and fragmented because of some slight, real or imagined, suffered long years ago which the offended party cannot or will not forget.

Recently I was discussing funeral services for a father who was survived by two sons. When I asked the son who was making the arrangements where the family would sit *Shivah*, I was requested to make no public announcement because the sons would not sit together in one house. The reason? Their wives stopped talking to each other years ago over some invitation which was not reciprocated. At least, that's what he thought it was. By now, he was not quite sure what had caused the split in the family. He could not remember the source of the conflict, but whatever it was, neither brother could forget it.

Many a marriage could stand a healthy dose of forgetting. One man complained to his friend that whenever his wife gets angry she becomes historical. "You mean hysterical," the friend corrected him. "No," said the husband, "I mean historical. She starts listing everything I did wrong in the last 27 years."

Lewis E. Lawes, who served many years as the warden of Sing Sing, once said that our prisons are filled with people who could not or would not forget.

So many lives are cluttered with all kinds of destructive memories. They carry accumulated resentments, hurts, sorrows and disappointments suffered in the arena of life. The price for such remembering is exorbitant. It includes our emotional and mental health. When the Torah admonishes us not to "bear a grudge," it is urging us for our own sake to use our God-given power to forget.

An anonymous poet put into rhyme some thoughts about forgetting we would do well to remember:

"This world would be for us a happier place  
And there would be less of regretting  
If we would remember to practice with grace,  
The very fine art of forgetting."

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RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY HOMILETICS SERVICE

# Bemidbar

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**Contributors:** Rabbis Sidney Greenberg, Irwin Groner, Stephen Chaim Listfield, Howard Morrison, Elliot Salo Schoenberg, Philip S. Scheim, Philip Spectre

Rabbi Saul I. Teplitz, *Chairman, Homiletics Service*  
Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal, *Chairman, Publications Committee*  
Rebecca Jacobs, *Editor*

April 1988

Dear Colleague,

We are grateful to our many colleagues who have submitted useful and interesting sermons and other materials for publication by the Rabbinical Assembly Homiletics Service. As you know, we are entirely dependent on the cooperation and good will of our members who share their ideas with their colleagues.

New material is always welcome; either complete sermons or outlines, as well as materials related to lifecycle events and social justice issues. We look forward to hearing from you.

Please mail your material to Rebecca Jacobs, Rabbinical Assembly Homiletics Service, 3080 Broadway, New York, NY 10027.

Sincerely,

**Rabbi Saul I. Teplitz**  
Chairman  
Homiletics Service

P.S. It is not too early to start thinking about the *Yamin Noraim*. Sermons on appropriate themes are most welcome.

The story is told of the late Rabbi Moses Soloveichik, the father of the contemporary Orthodox leader and authority, Rabbi Joseph Soloveichik. Rav Moshe's Gemara *shiur* was suddenly interrupted by a father with his young son. "Rabbi," he pleads, "you must hear my son recite his lessons. Rav Moshe's students are annoyed at the interruption; nonetheless, the rabbi listens to the child. When the child finishes, the rabbi remarks: "Wonderful. *Halevai oif mir gezugt* (It should only happen to me)!" The father, beaming with pride, departs with his son. The students are astounded. What did Rav Moshe see in the child's mediocre recitation? Rav Moshe replied: "Yes, the child's knowledge was nothing to brag about. But, look! His father knows even less. *Halevai oif mir gezugt*. It should only happen to me, that my son should know more than I do!" [Rabbi David Feldman, *The Jewish Family Relationship*, USY, p. 32]

Few Jewish parents wish anything but the best for their children. For many, the ultimate in *nahas* comes in knowing that their children have surpassed them in education, achievement, in affluence. As the Talmud teaches: "(Sanhedrin 105b) *Bakol adam mitkanei*: A person can feel jealousy and envy for everyone, *hutz mib' no v' talmido*: except for his child and his student." There is room only for pride and satisfaction. Those of my generation whose parents weathered the Holocaust in Europe; poverty and the Depression in North America, know how much it has meant to Jewish parents to see their children succeed. I meet parents who speak with pride, and joy of the successes of their children, that their own struggles with poor health, with advancing years, seem to matter little. Their rallying cry is: *Halevai oif mir gezugt*: It should only happen to all of us, that our children surpass us in knowledge and achievement.

Yet other expectations are not so high. Many of those very same parents happily settle for a level of religious observance in their children that barely matches, let alone surpassing, their own. In our history, the passing of generations has often led to a diminution of religious commitment. Even Moses, according to the Midrash, lacked some of the virtues of preceding generations in matters of faith: Moses asks why God sent him to Pharaoh, when his mission, apparently, caused the lot of the enslaved Israelites to worsen. God's response to Moses: (ShR: 6:4): "*Haval al d'avdin v'la mishtak-hin*: Woe to those who are gone and will be no more! Why can't you, Moses, be more like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who had reason to complain, but never did? Why can't your faith, Moses, be as strong as theirs?"

We have always known that religious commitment tends to lessen from one generation to the next. Which brings us to this morning's parashah, Bemidbar. It speaks of a census of the Israelite population. The summarizing verse of the census tells us: "These are the enumerated Israelites, according to their fathers' households: 603,550." The rabbis relate this statistic to God's promise to Abraham, telling him to look upward and try to count the stars. "*Ko yihye zara' kha*: Such shall be your seed," God promises him. Are we to understand that Abraham's seed will be as numerous as the stars in heaven? Perhaps. The sages suggest, alternatively, that God desperately wants to bless Abraham, but most blessings would be inappropriate. God says to him: *Avraham, ma yesh li lomar lekha*: what can I say to you [your faith knows no limits, your impact upon humanity is that of no other human being], *u'ma yeish li levarekh' ekha*: and how am I to bless you? That you and Sarah should be righteous? You already are! How then shall I bless you? *Ela kol banim she-atidim la' amod mimkha*: by wishing that all the children shall come forth from you *yihyu kamotka*: shall be just like you." For God knew that the flame of faith burning in Abraham could not have

been stronger - but that that flame, passing from one generation to the next, would tend to weaken. He knew that only extraordinary effort on the part of Abraham would insure that his son's faith be as strong as his own.

No doubt, the enormously out-of-proportion to population statistics of Jewish college students, of Jews in graduate and professional schools, suggest how successful Jewish parents have been at urging their children to achieve. And yet, the relatively small percentage of young Jews with active Jewish commitments suggests how much less successful parents have been at urging their children to carry on our tradition. In stark contrast to the numbers of Jews in universities, in the professions and in higher income brackets we always find ourselves at the lowest end of the scale in studies surveying religious practice. If we want God's blessing to Abraham to ring true in our day, that *ko yihye zar' akha*, that our children remain identifying and practicing members of *klal Yisrael*, then the expectations thrust upon Jewish children today must include that which fosters Jewish souls and *kiyyum mitzvot*.

Now that Lag B'Omer has passed, wedding season again begins. One of my favorite wedding talks centers upon the custom of breaking a glass at the end of the ceremony. Contemporary Jewish brides and grooms must realize that the smashed glass is rendered useless. In our society, where possessions, and tangible success mean everything, divorce, suicide, and unhappiness abound. The values which really matter, spiritual values, cannot be destroyed. Yet tradition and religious practice are virtually ignored.

Two similar stories that emerge from the Kingdom of Night suggest the power of religious upbringing in enabling one to cope with suffering. A young woman named Sheila, marching on a forced work detail, frozen and starving, imagines herself in her home town erev Shabbat, seeing Jews on the way to synagogue preparing to usher in the Sabbath. She sees her mother inviting her to the *Shabbes* table. She can taste the fish, the soup, the freshly baked *hallah*. The horrors of Bergen Belsen are forgotten as the rich memories of her childhood, her home, well up within her. The story of Ezra likewise takes us to a camp, where typhus threatened him and all his fellow inmates. As he would later recall, his illness depleted all of his bodily strength. Sleep finally overtook him, and then, a dream. A dream, in which the Sabbath table of his youth stood before him. The wine, the *hallah*, the candles. Ezra's last recollection from his dream is a vision of his father telling him to drink the wine. Upon awakening, he finds that his terrible thirst has vanished. The taste of the wine of his childhood Shabbat meal lingers on. Against all odds, he survives the typhus epidemic, the war, and to this day, keeps the Sabbath as did his father before him. These two Jews, Sheila and Ezra, survived with the help of parents, who, years earlier, had implanted Yiddishkeit in their lives. Those rituals of Jewish living, when all else is lost, proved to be the difference between life and death, between hopelessness and survival. All of the university degrees in the world, all of the wealth imaginable cannot even remotely approach in effectiveness, the loving memories of a Shabbat table.

It is, no doubt a credit to Jewish parenthood that education and making something of one's life, has become so ingrained in the Jewish psyche. And yet, the greatest blessing that we can imagine, the blessing spoken by God to Abraham, that "*Ko yiyhe zar' akha*; that your descendants will be like you in what really matters," in spirit as well as in substance, remains largely unfulfilled. It remains our task to insure that our descendents become as comfortable and as confident in the realm of Jewish life, as are we, today, in all avenues of modern life.

Parents who point to "my son the doctor; my daughter, the lawyer" are right to be proud. But let them be equally proud of their child, the Jew. History teaches that, in the end, that is what really matters. *Halevai oif mir gezugt*: May our children surpass us in achievement, in education, and even, with God's help, in the fulfillment of the traditions of our people.

**When either man or woman shall clearly utter a vow, the vow of a Nazirite...(Numbers 6:2)**

The Hebrew *Yafli* (clearly) is derived from the word *Pele* (a miracle).

Once a person has stupefied himself with drink or wallowed in unbridled sensuality, he becomes so insensitive and undisciplined that it is difficult for him to regain his balance and sense of propriety. He must struggle to deliver himself from the "Id" of lusts and craving appetites.

We must reject the temptations that would tarnish our spirits and weaken our moral fiber.

**And this is the law of the Nazirite, when the days of his consecration are fulfilled: he shall bring...a sin-offering (Numbers 6:13, 14)**

What is the sin of the Nazirite? Rabbi Shmuel answers: "Whoever indulges in fasting is referred to as a sinner" (Talmud, *Ta'anit* 11a).

Maimonides in the *Mishneh Torah* elaborates on this viewpoint: "If a man should argue: 'Since envy, passion and pride are evil...I shall divorce and separate myself from them. I shall eat no meat, nor drink any wine, nor marry, nor reside in a comfortable dwelling nor wear fine clothes'...this also is an evil path and it is forbidden to walk therein, as in the case of the Nazirite. Therefore our Sages commanded man to deny himself only the things denied him by the Torah. He should not inflict on himself vows of abstinence from things permitted him."

Judaism is a wholesome, "this-worldly" religion, encouraging self-discipline, but discouraging asceticism and self-flagellation.

God encourages us to partake of the legitimate pleasures of life.

We ought enjoy those pleasures that are lawful and right, with gratitude to God who has granted them.

**The Lord bless you, and keep you (Numbers 6:24)**

Abarbanel comments that "bless you" refers to material blessings, such as those that sustain life, provide security, and give us offspring. "Keep you" refers to the hope that God will protect us from the dangers of these blessings.

To put it another way: May God *bless* us with possessions and *keep* them from possessing us.

The blessings and comforts of life are not denied to us. But once they become ends in themselves, and not the means to a more productive and creative life, we become sheer materialists. When the accumulation of

material goods becomes our goal in life, our values become distorted and our standards warped.

“Who is wealthy? He who is satisfied with his portion” (Talmud, *Shabbat* 25b).

**The Lord lite up His countenance upon you, and give you peace (Numbers 6:26)**

The first petition in the priestly benediction is for material blessings; the second is intellectual blessings; and the third is for spiritual blessings.

Rabbi S. R. Hirsch regards this third blessing as most valuable of the three, since material and intellectual blessings are but means to an end. The gift of “Shalom,” however, is an end in itself.

True *Shalom* (peace, inward harmony and tranquility) can be ours only if we dedicate our material and intellectual blessings to the service of man and the glory of God.

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This week's Sidrah focuses on the nature of leadership. Moses is beset by the murmuring and the rebellion of the people in the wilderness who remember the fleshpots and creature comforts of Egypt. Discouraged and disheartened, Moses is instructed by God to select leaders who will share the burden of responsibility for the welfare of the people. Designated as *zekenim* or "Elders" they were people of reverence and knowledge and upon them rested "the spirit of the Lord." In this brief passage is intimated the essential qualities of leadership.

Seventy were chosen. Why were they chosen? What qualification did they possess? Jewish Tradition offers an instructive legend about their background. When the Hebrew people lived in Egypt, Egyptian task-masters were placed over the Israelite labor camps and Hebrew officers were appointed. The task-masters demanded the daily quota of bricks. When the quota was not met, the Egyptians started punishing the slaves. The Hebrew officers then came forward and said: "We are to blame; it is we who deserve the punishment and not the people because we did not encourage the slaves to work hard enough." The Hebrew officers then accepted the lash of the task-master's whip, and bore the people's pain. Years later, Moses turned for leadership to that group who had demonstrated compassion for the needs of others, concern for the travail of those they represented.

This, therefore, marks the test of leaders. Do they have love for those on whose behalf they speak? Are they able to articulate the needs and yearnings of those they represent?

The Bible said about these seventy that "the spirit of the Lord came upon them" and that they prophesied. The text suggests that the prophetic spirit is an indispensable element of great leadership, because true leaders summon us to the highest call of conscience and morality; they show us the promise of the future in the midst of difficulty and struggle. How desperately we need such leaders today. We need the kind of leadership that achieves power through its vision of love and unity, that brings progress by reconciling different groups in our society, and not by seeking to exploit hate and fear.

We need this kind of leadership in the family, in the classroom, and in the executive office because the nature of our society is changing. A generation or two ago, families were ruled by parents as absolute despots; educators had complete authority over their students, and owners had unquestioned power over their employees. But today children seek to have a share in family decisions, students want to participate in the education process, and employees seek to add their views to management's in the conduct of business. No longer do leaders have the capacity to coerce others. We lead by persuasion and by personal example. We must lead by creating a consensus based on effective communication. We must project that vision, sincerity, and commitment which will win the support of those whom we seek to influence. Our concern should inspire trust; our wisdom should inspire confidence; our faithfulness should inspire loyalty.

This achievement of the "elders of Ancient Israel" presents a meaningful challenge to our generation.

Who are the people in our midst who cause us the most problems? Who in our own ranks are “bad for the Jews”? In an astute comment in this week’s Sedrah of Beha’alotekha, Rashi says, not surprisingly, that our lowest and most debased individuals drag us down. But also, says Rashi quite boldly, sometimes it is our most prominent and respected leaders who drag us down.

The passage in question is Numbers 11:1: “And the people were as murmurers, speaking evil in the ears of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and devoured in the outermost part of the camp (*“Bi-ketze hamahaneh”*). The word “ketze” (outermost) can be connected either to *“muktzin”* (basest) or *“ketzin”* (leader). Hence Rashi’s insight that our sufferings may be brought about by the worst of us — or maybe by the best of us

Surely the basest among us have caused mischief. For example, in the 13th-15th centuries Nicholas Donin in France, Pablo Christiani and Joshua Lorki in Spain, and Petrus Schwarz in Germany all led theological attacks on Judaism, and proposed coercing Jews to convert to Christianity. All were born Jewish. Worse yet was the apostate Abner of Burgos, who eagerly justified vicious persecution of the Jews. Even if we assume that some Jews apostasize out of conviction, we have to marvel at the grossness of these individuals who turned with such venom against their own people.

But what of the leaders among us? How can it be said that they are responsible for the angry “fire of the Lord” in our Jewish camp? For an example of this phenomenon we may look not to the 15th century but to the 20th. During the dark days of European Jewry, our American Jewish leaders were almost completely ineffective. These leaders were timid to the point of cowardice. Worse, they sometimes spent more energy in fighting one another than in trying to halt the slaughter of 6 million of our people. An example of timidity is the story of the Wagner-Rogers Act, a bill proposing the admission of 20,000 German refugee children in 1939-40. According to *Were We Our Brothers’ Keepers?* by Haskel Lookstein, “Stephen A. Wise . . . maintained a public silence as did the principal spokesmen of the other major Jewish organizations.” It seems they were afraid of arousing anti-Semitism. As it became clear that immigration to capacious America was essential in order to save Jewish lives, our Jewish leaders were busy exercising “cautious restraint” [*Congress Bulletin*, May 12, 1939]. But Jewish leaders weren’t timid when it came to being jealous and petty. In late 1943 a Senate resolution called for a “a plan of immediate action designed to save the surviving Jewish people of Europe from extinction at the hands of Nazi Germany”. This time, the two leading Jewish factions managed to get into virtual open warfare with each other. Rabbi Lookstein writes, “The charges and countercharges resulted in a hideous spectacle in which both sides emerged as losers.”

Rashi was astute. We are entitled to say that the leadership of American Jewry has not always been glorious. And therefore we have the obligation to demand the best from our leaders today. We can ill-afford so-called leaders who are timid and tired, and we can ill-afford so-called leaders who are petty, egotistical, and self-serving.

The worst among us cannot be the best, but we must demand that the best among us be the best.

With the onset of summer, many of us will plan our summer vacations. This is the time of year when many people tour undiscovered parts of America; when many Jews tour Israel; etc. What exactly is touring? In the dictionary, a tour is defined as a "brief trip or through a place for the purpose of seeing it." This definition of the word tour sets the stage for unlocking the message of *Shelah-Lekha*. At the onset of the portion, Moses instructs the twelve leaders of the tribes of Israel to take a tour of the promised land: "When Moses sent them to *scout* (alternatively, "tour" or "spy") the land of Canaan, he said to them, 'Go up there in the Negev and on into the hill country, and *see* what kind of land it is.'"

This is the story of the twelve so-called spies, who are better regarded as tourists. They are told by Moses to tour (*la-tur*) the land in order to *see* it and understand it.

The very end of this week's Torah portion deals with the commandment to wear *tzizit*. We recite these verses morning and evening as the third paragraph of the *Shma*. As part of the rationale for donning the fringe, the Torah says: "*see* it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, so that you *do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge*." The Hebrew for "do not follow (*lo taturu*) comes from the same Hebrew root as *la-tur* (to tour or spy). In other words, the vocabulary of this commandment pertaining to *tzizit* places it in direct contrast to the episode of the spies.

One can derive a significant lesson from the words *tour* and *see*. When we do with no prior background or information, we will not truly see or understand what lies before us. For example, when I was touring Israel two years ago and went to Masada, I really did not see (i.e. perceive) what was standing before me: the caves, digs, ruins, etc. because I had no previous knowledge. When I went again later in the year with an experienced guide, I was no longer a mere tourist. I understood what I was supposed to be seeing. In the *sedra*, the spies were guilty of not understanding what they were supposed to see. As a result, their tour led to the people's going astray. Conversely, in the section of *tzizit*, by seeing and looking at the *tzizit* first and thereby remembering the commandments, we will not be tourists within our tradition, and we will not be led astray.

Unfortunately, too many Jews today are simply tourists in their Judaism. Some are not affiliated or observant. Others speak as experts on Judaism when they have barely scouted the surface. If a person told you that he was an expert in American history because he had studied it in junior high-school, would you consider him to be an expert? Unfortunately, many Jewish communal leaders attained no more than a high-school level (if that!) of Jewish education. Jewish illiteracy has increased because we simply have not considered Judaism as important as secular disciplines. As a result, we lead our Jewish lives as *spies*, touring Judaism hoping for quick simple ways of becoming experts.

Sadly, the apathetic attitude prevalent among many parents has trickled down to the children. The following remarks were offered by two twelve year olds in the seventh grade of Hebrew school:

Like even if our class learned Hebrew where are we ever gonna speak it?...Public school is important because that could do with getting a job or something. But with Hebrew school, that's not gonna have anything to do with it; well, if you learn - but what's it gonna have to do with when you get older? What do you care if Moses crossed the Red Sea or something? I don't care.

The second student responded: "Grades wouldn't do any good. Who cares if you get an E in Hebrew school? It won't stop you from getting into college."

(Genesis May 1981)

From those who often speak for the community, to those who are already disenfranchised, down to the children who sit in our Hebrew schools, there has been little done in attaining a solid understanding of Judaism. We are tourists in our own tradition.

I wonder, however, if we are different from other generations in Jewish history. The fact that the *sedra* spends most of its time describing the rebellious attitudes of the spies and then the complaints of the people indicates that a continuous crisis in Jewish education has existed since the days of our people's formation. Only suddenly, at the end of the portion, are we given the commandment about *tzitzit*: "See it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge." Just as this brief command reminded the ancient Israelites that a prerequisite for an educational tour is a solid background; so too, this passage, which we recite twice daily, reminds us that there is an ideal worth pursuing, an ideal which says that it is okay to tour different lands, but do not become a tourist in your own tradition.



In this week's Sidrah, God tells Moses to gather the people around a great rock, commanding him to speak to it and bring forth water. As the people assemble, Moses addresses them angrily and impatiently, saying "Listen to me, you rebellious folk. Shall we then bring forth for you water from this stone?" Whereupon he lifts his staff, strikes the rock twice, and immediately hears the Divine decree: "Since you didn't believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the sight of the Children of Israel, you will not bring this people to the land which I have given them."

Why so grievous a punishment for so minor an offense? Entering the Promised Land, Moses' great dream for which he had labored long and selflessly was to be denied. He struck the rock instead of speaking to it. Was the miraculous power of God thereby diminished? Was it fair that Moses should be thereby so utterly condemned?

Commentators ancient, medieval, and modern struggle with this question. Many and ingenious are the answers that have been offered. I suggest the following approach: Moses' offense was not that he struck the rock instead of speaking to it. His transgression was the attitude demonstrated by his impatience and his lack of faith in God and in the people. When he exclaimed "Listen to me, you rebels," Moses evinced disdain of those whom he was to elevate and guide. When he said "Shall we draw water for you from this rock," he expressed skepticism of God's power. However, this explanation may only sharpen the question: Granted this was a display of impatience and anger, but it was momentary. Should Moses' lapse from his usual standards of patience and faith and inner strength be so harshly punished? Others who sinned more, suffered less. But in asking the question again, we have essentially answered it; common faults can be forgiven common persons, but Moses was an uncommon man. Speaking in the name of God, he was a Divine messenger; within him were embodied Divine truths. Since his was an extraordinary responsibility, and an exalted privilege, so great should have been his powers of restraint, patience, and faithfulness.

This message is addressed not to Moses alone, but to all of us. One who enjoys a privilege has a commensurate responsibility. The greater the privilege and the larger the power, the more far-reaching the obligation. It matters not whether the privilege is leadership, wealth, education, or talent; the Talmud says that with the righteous God is more exacting than with the rest of humanity.

We tend to view with alarm the lawlessness of the underprivileged, but we should be even more disturbed by wrongdoing committed by the powerful and the privileged. Americans are outraged by the Shiite Muslim terrorists who hold American hostage, but Americans have not adequately responded to or understood, during recent decades, the increasing danger of international terrorism directed first against Israel and now against the Western democracies aided and abetted by a United Nations that declared "Zionism is a form of racism." The U.N. declaration on Zionism is perhaps an even greater perversion of justice and truth, since it was adopted by representatives of the international diplomatic community, rather than fanatic hijackers.

Being a Jew is a great privilege. Our religious, moral, and cultural heritage is a previous legacy bequeathed to us by generations of loyalty and faithfulness. Therefore, we Jews should set high standards of integrity in business practices, aspire to compassion and understanding in our relationships, and express to our

children, by word and deed, a love and devotion for our way of life. Our conduct sometimes falls short of these ideals. Nevertheless the great privilege of a Jew should be matched by an equivalent sense of responsibility. We, like Moses, need to be reminded that we are God's messengers, bearing witness to His truth.



The Biblical character Balaam is better remembered for his talking donkey than for any of the words he himself uttered. But we may be surprised to learn that some of the most extravagant and beautiful tributes to the Israelites in our entire Bible were spoken by Balaam.

Balaam, we will recall, was believed to possess a special power. As Balak, the king of Moab, said to him: "I know that whomever you bless is blessed and whomever you curse is cursed." And since Balak dreaded the alleged military might of the approaching Israelites, he engaged Balaam to put the curse on them. Much to Balak's dismay, however, he who came to curse remained to bless.

His praise borders on the rhapsodic. "None has beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has one seen perverseness in Israel; the Lord his God is with him ...". And in a burst of admiration which has become the first words we utter when we enter the synagogue, Balaam exclaims: "How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel!"

Nor the strange thing about Balaam is the fate he suffered at the hands of the Jewish authorities in post-Biblical times. He is called *Bilam ha-rasha*, "Balaam the wicked." Why such a harsh verdict? Is this the way to treat a friend?

A Hasidic *Rebbe* gave a suggestive explanation for the unfavorable light in which the tradition regarded Balaam. His intention was not to help the Israelites but to hurt them. By lauding them so profusely he wanted to persuade them that they had already attained perfection and therefore did not need to strive to improve themselves.

Had they taken him seriously and accepted his inflated estimate of themselves they would have deteriorated and disappeared as did the other peoples the Bible mentions.

What saved the Israelites from such a fate were the stern rebukes and the strong criticisms of the prophets of Israel. Because the prophets loved their people, they sought to spur them on to ever greater achievement and they therefore never grew weary of castigating them for their moral failures and shortcomings.

The *Rebbe's* insight was echoed by Winston Churchill who once wrote in another context: "Censure is often useful, praise often deceitful."

But how many of us are philosophical enough to accept censure and criticism? The Book of Proverbs assures us: "Rebuke a wise man and he will bless you"; but how many of us bless our critics? Criticism is a blow to our ego, an assault upon our self-image. Words of criticism hurt; often they hurt longer than a physical blow. How true the Yiddish adage: "A slap passes, a word remains." We can even understand the outraged complaint of Chicago's former mayor, Richard Daley: "The press has vilified me, they have crucified me; yes, they have even criticized me!"

Hard as it is to accept criticism, it is so necessary and so beneficial. Taken seriously it can prove a great

stimulus to growth. A genuine friend is not one who rehearses all our virtues. We already know them quite well, thank you. A good true friend is one who cares enough about us to call attention in a gentle way to our faults. That's a friendship worth cultivating.

What is true of us as individuals is also true of a country. A reliable measure of our loyalty is our willingness to criticize the land we love. We thrill to the patriotic fervor of Capt. Stephen Decatur who explained: "My country, may she always be in the right, but my country, right or wrong!" However, we suspect that a more helpful patriotism was voiced by the American statesman Carl Schurz: "My country, may she always be in the right. If right, to be kept right, if wrong to be set right."

America, John Gardener once observed, is caught in a crossfire between its uncritical lovers and its unloving critics. The same might be said of Israel. There are those who love Israel so totally and so fervently that in their eyes Israel can do no wrong. And there are those who oppose Israel so completely that in their eyes Israel can do no right.

We heard a great deal from these unloving critics during the Lebanese incursion. So intemperate was their attack, so violent their language, so distorted their perspective, that Norman Podhoretz could amply document a charge of anti-Semitism against them.

What America needs, what Israel needs, what each of us needs, are neither uncritical lovers nor unloving critics. The uncritical lovers overlook faults. The unloving critics are blind to virtues. Truly needed are loving critics. Because they criticize out of love they bring growth and blessing. They also prove themselves worthy descendant of the prophets in whose footsteps they follow.

Reprinted from *Lessons for Living* by Rabbi Sidney Greenberg. (New York, Hartmore House, 1985)



Pinhas, the hero of this week's Sidrah, was singled out for praise because "he was zealous for his God." An Israelite Prince, Zimri, had done a scandalous thing. The people were encamped in the territory of Moab, and through associating with the women of the land, were being seduced into heathen worship and corruption. Zimri openly brought a Midianite woman into his tent. This was more than a private act. It was a public statement of license for general participation in pagan immorality. Pinhas, a priest, and therefore a man of peace, was filled with righteous indignation. He seized a spear and inflicted the punishment of death upon the offender and his partner, because the Hebrew Prince had committed an act that would have led to the extinction of the nation.

Today, we look at this test and see it from a different perspective. We are not ready to applaud Pinhas; in fact, we are more inclined to criticize him. Pinhas and his violent act seem to be in conflict with today's moral standards. But one aspect of this story bears careful attention: the character of the priest. It is not so much the act as the motivation of Pinhas which evokes the praise of the Bible. Pinhas was filled with *kinah* or "zeal". The word "zeal" is derived from the Greek term meaning "to boil". The zealous person boils inwardly, filled with passion for a cause. The opposite of zeal is coldness, indifference and detachment.

Like any other great force or energy, zeal can be dangerous. Its excess can be destructive, generating a fanaticism that is cruel, bitter and inhuman. The history of religion is filled with fanaticism expressed in terms of oppression and intolerance. The Islamic persecutions, the Inquisition, the Crusades and the pogroms of Eastern Europe are all horrors visited upon the Jewish people and humanity in the name of religious zeal. As we consider recent events involving the ultra-Orthodox and their opponents in the land of Israel, we are dismayed and concerned by the destruction and desecration that has resulted from undisciplined emotion and zeal.

But another contrasting truth needs to be affirmed. Judaism in North America does not suffer from an excess of religious passion as much as it does from the deficiency thereof. The danger we encounter in our time is that of the uncommitted heart. Many lives lack conviction, and many Jews are detached and indifferent. It is hard to find those for whom religion represents an inward fire or ecstasy, an expression of *hitlahavut*, of enthusiasm or enkindlement. Most Jews are partisans of no ideology. They live beyond the passion of negation or affirmation. If we asked them, "Are you religious?" they would answer, "No." If we asked, "Are you an atheist?", again the answer would be "No." These Jews make detachment a way of life; it enables them to function without any commitment to those values, beliefs, or ideals which could make demands upon them.

Such Jews represent the greatest challenge of our time: to the synagogue, to the community, to the Jewish people. If religion means anything, it means total commitment. Authentic religion is more than obligation, duty, and formal rules. It is experienced as enthusiasm and moral passion. To be a part of Jewish life means to make commitments, for community and commitment are inseparable. That is why the zeal of Pinhas is always remembered by the Jewish people.

In this week's Sidrah, we read of an intense conflict whose consequences endured in the consciousness of the Hebrew people. On their arrival at the border of Canaan, two tribes, Gad and Reuven, and a substantial portion of the tribe of Menasseh saw that the area before them, trans-Jordan, was suitable for their flocks and offered excellent grazing for their cattle. Consequently, these two and a half tribes came to Moses and said, "We are not interested in entering the Land of Canaan or in crossing the Jordan. We have found a suitable place for ourselves here." This separate initiative could have destroyed the strength of the people and undermined their resolve to inherit the Promised Land. Moses therefore exacted from these tribes a promise that they would join their brethren's fight for the conquest of Canaan. Only after the land had been won would they be permitted to settle east of the Jordan.

Centuries later, as the Sages considered the fate of these two and a half tribes, they noted: "These people were affluent and powerful, and they had great flocks. Because they loved their cattle so dearly, they dwelled east of the Jordan and did not enter the Land of Promise. Therefore, when the enemy came, he attacked their exposed settlements first and they went into exile before the other tribes." In their conclusion, the Sages declared: "There are three great gifts that we find in this world: wisdom, power, and wealth. However, they will not abide unless they express the will of Heaven."

Jews have never looked with disdain upon the material world. We never cursed wealth nor deprecated power. We have certainly aspired to knowledge. But we have recognized that these gifts do not necessarily yield fulfillment. Moral purpose and ethical direction are required in order to make these gifts sources of blessing to those who possess them. This insight is of special meaning to our generation.

We live in a time when knowledge has increased enormously, when a junior high school student may know more about the physical universe than a science professor of forty years ago. Wealth is available in greater abundance today than in any other time, for technology makes possible the production and distribution of goods on a scale more vast than earlier generations could even imagine. The instruments of communication, the organization of society and the weapons of our time provide incalculable power to political leaders. Yet ironically, each of these gifts creates critical problems. We have enough material abundance to eliminate poverty, and yet the persistence of deprivation in the midst of affluence breeds hostility, resentment, and violence. The vast destructive power of atomic weaponry acquired by the major nations of the world has led them more than once to the brink of global catastrophe. Knowledge, too, is a mixed blessing. Too many knowledgeable people have assumed the attitude of the cynic, the person who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. The values that sustain human life - integrity, faith, and discipline - have eroded in an age marked by an explosion of knowledge accompanied by moral confusion.

Our task is to meet the challenge faced by our ancestors. As we seek to enter our Promised Land, we should utilize the gifts Divine Providence has placed in our hands for moral purpose, for the enhancement of life, for the will of Heaven. If not, we shall discover, like the tribes of ancient Israel, that our bounty and privileges will not endure.

What is the single most important *mitzvah* in the Jewish tradition? Ritual circumcision? Observing the dietary laws? Being honest in one's business dealings? The answer found at the beginning of our prayerbook is "*Talmud Torah Keneged Kulam*: Studying Torah is equal to all the other *mitzvot*. Clearly, in classical Jewish tradition the single most important *mitzvah* is learning Torah because it leads to doing *mitzvot*. Our emphasis on learning traditions and texts is well known, both to us and to the enemies of our people: When persecutors sought to make Jewish life difficult, the first thing they did was forbid the study of Torah. Rabbi Akiba was martyred for teaching Torah to his students.

However, *kriat haTorah*, our public reading of the Torah on Shabbat and festival mornings, is quite distinct from Talmud Torah, study of Torah. Not only is the reading a different *mitzvah* than studying the Torah, it in fact diminishes — and even negates — study.

Let me explain. When we study Torah, we ask questions, delve into the meaning of the text, linger over every word and every nuance. We consult rabbinic commentaries compiled over centuries. But when we read the Torah at services, we read the original text only. We may study Torah along or in groups, but we read the Torah only in the presence of a minyan. We may study Torah silently or out loud; when we read the Torah it is chanted to Torah *trop*. We study from a printed book, but read from a parchment scroll. When we study, we inevitably make mistakes. These inaccuracies are expected and encouraged because they make learning possible. However, when we read Torah, the Torah scroll must be perfect and the reading perfect. We appoint *gabbaim* to correct errors in reading. Finally, to study the Torah, we simply remove a book from the shelf and begin. When we read the Torah it is ceremoniously taken out of its special ark with high drama, and the reading is accompanied by prayers, blessings and much ritual activity. This ritualized formal activity is clearly not conducive to actual Talmud Torah, the study of Torah.

How do we resolve the apparent tension between these two fundamental *mitzvot*? It is clear that reading the Torah is not study. Reading the Torah in the synagogue is a sensory, spiritual experience that recreates the high drama of God's revelation of the Torah on Mt. Sinai to the Jewish people. After hearing the Torah read on a Shabbat morning, we are supposed to feel just like our ancestors did after the theophany, commanded by God to do his will. *Reading the Torah is about doing mitzvot*. As our ancestors said at Mt. Sinai, "*Naaseh ve-nishma*, we will do and we will listen." The formal rituals, the sights and songs and prayers of the Torah service expand our attention beyond the intellectual realm to engage our whole being, and remind us that our Judaism, too, must engage our whole being.

Talmud Torah and *kriat HaTorah* are the two poles of the Jewish tradition. Learning and knowing about Judaism is merely the beginning of Jewish life. Talmud Torah, the first *mitzvah*, is certainly not the last. Learning about Judaism without also doing *mitzvot* is insufficient. *Kriat HaTorah* reminds us that we must do more than study about Judaism, we must be more than knowledgeable Jews: we must observe *mitzvot*, we must be practicing Jews.

The Ten Commandments are given twice in the Torah. The Commandments are the same but the specific

texts vary slightly. The first time God commands the Jewish people to observe the Shabbat He says, "*Zakhor et yom HaShabbat*, remember the Sabbath." The second time God says, "*Shamor et yom HaShabbat*, observe the Sabbath." Our rabbis comment that after the giving of the Ten Commandments the first time, many Jews still did not observe Shabbat. God then inquires: "Why do you not observe my Shabbat?" The people replied, "You only commanded us to remember the Shabbat and we do that. We study about Shabbat; we think about it often." So the second time the Commandments were written down, God changed the wording so that that argument could never be used again. God did not envision Shabbat in specific, or Jewish life in general as a mere intellectual exercise, but as a commitment of our whole beings to living Jewish lives.

*Kriat HaTorah* reminds us that it is not sufficient merely to know the difference between a kosher chicken and a treif one, if we drink milk with a hot dog at our July 4th barbecue. *Kriat HaTorah* instructs us that it is not sufficient to study *Pirke Avot* if we evade income tax. *Kriat HaTorah* tells us that Jewish life consists more than sending children to Hebrew school; it includes living a committed Jewish life as an adult.

I have a friend who tells the following story: When he lived in Washington a Thanksgiving Day weekend weather forecast predicted snow. He heard the report but ignored it. Early Friday morning, he went shopping and by the time he was ready to return home, there was about an inch of snow on the ground. Without snow tires, his car was immobilized. A cab driver stopped, shoveled away the snow and finished the job with a throw of salt and sand. He said to my friend, "I want you to go back into the store and buy a shovel and bag of salt." My friend pulled out, but the cab driver did not go away. My friend put a hand in his pocket to give him a tip. The cabbie refused the money and repeated to my friend, "I want you to go back into the store and buy a shovel and bag of salt." The cab driver still did not depart. My friend began to get nervous. He asked him in desperation. "What do you want from me?" The cab driver replied, "I want you to go back into the store and buy a shovel and a bag of salt and I want you to do it *now*." This taxi driver did not want to merely teach my friend how to prepare for the capricious weather, he wanted him to take those precautions at that very moment. Jewish life, too, consists of more than just knowing facts. It is not a mere intellectual exercise, but a commitment of our whole beings to living Jewish lives and doing *mitzvot*.

**SHAVUOT:  
The Ten Commandments**

**Rabbi Philip Spectre**

At this Shavuot season there are three lessons we might learn from the Decalogue. The Ten Commandments are certainly the most sacred of all our biblical dicta: Given on Mount Sinai before the entire people Israel, spoken by God and etched in fire on stone not once, but twice and delivered and taught to the people by Moshe Rabbenu.

Yet despite all of these credentials, the Commandments are not even mentioned in our daily, Shabbat or Festival prayers. But this was not always the case. In *masekhtot Tamid* and *Berakhot* we find mentioned that one feature of the ancient morning daily prayer services was the faithful recitation of the Ten Commandments. The Babylonian Talmud records (*Berakhot* 11) that the practice of reciting the Decalogue was discontinued when the sectarians asserted that only the Ten Commandments were revealed by God on Sinai. Thus, in order to demonstrate that the Commandments were not more sacred than the rest of the Torah, they were expunged from our daily prayer. From then on, the Shema and the verses following were considered to be the essence of the Commandments and sufficient for our liturgy.

Yes, our prayer service has developed. It was adjusted to deal with a theological attack. Not simply to comply with the mode of the time, but unabashedly to develop an important philosophical point: Jews have no catechism...not even the Decalogue.

A second lesson might be learned from the ancient history of the biblical period. Yehezkel Kaufmann, in his work, *The Religion of Israel* (translated and edited by Professor Moshe Greenberg) said: "What innovation was it, centuries after Hammurabi, to ban murder, theft, adultery, or false witness? The Bible itself recognizes the existence of a universal moral law from primeval times, to which all men are subject...What point was there to the Lord's giving such ancient and elementary commands to Israel in an awful (full of awe) theophany at Sinai?"

The novelty was in the very giving. For the first time, morality was represented as a prophetic revelation, an expression of the supreme moral will of God. It was not the doctrine of sages, or the command of rulers, nor even the wisdom of a God who revealed laws along with other matters of art and science. This law was the command of God - His absolute will. The idea was expressed in an unparalleled legend: God revealed himself not to a visionary, a priest, or a sage, but to a whole people, who heard the command directly from the mouth of God. Morality was thus transferred from the realm of wisdom to the realm of prophecy, the realm of the absolute divine command."

Thus, the second and crucial point which we learn from the Ten Commandments as given on Sinai is that there is a concept of an absolute. There is a right and a wrong, beyond the norms we people create. Theft, cheating, murder and adultery are wrong in the Jewish moral code. We are not going to allow ourselves the luxury of thinking that ethics depend upon the situation. If everyone heard together and gave witness, then this people at the moment of the giving of the law became the living proof-text to an absolute ethic for humanity.

Thirdly, and perhaps most important for us today is the lesson taught by Yosef Albo in fifteenth-century Spain. In his famous treatise *Ikkarim* he points out that the difference between the Commandments in the

first column from those in the second is that the first set deal with Commandments *Ben Adam La-Makom* (between man and God). The second column directs us to the ethical Commandments *Ben Adam Le-havero*, between man and his fellow man.

From this follows a lesson: There are two distinct areas of religious concern: The ethical and the ritual. Both columns of our tablets were given and taught to the Jewish people at Sinai.

Today we are witnessing in Israel a breaking of the tablets. Some in our society are concerned only with ritual. Others are concerned only with the ethical. Worse: Those who are concerned with the ritual seem to disregard the ethical, and those who are primarily concerned with the ethical display less and less consideration, respect or understanding for those whose lives are ritually motivated. And the split between these two is growing. This bifurcation is splitting our people.

Recently our son, having completed basic training, was officially inducted into the Israeli Defense Forces at a ceremony at the Western Wall. With great pain we noticed a group of religious men engrossed in conversation as they passed by the ceremony paying no attention to the playing of Hatikvah. After the ceremony my wife commented to our son: "Wasn't that disrespectful?" "Yes," said our son. "It really bothered me seeing my officers turn their backs on the Wall. They seemed not to give it a second thought."

If only we could unite the tablets again. If only those of us who live by the theological, the ritual, the halakhic dicta of Judaism would pay more attention to the other half of the Decalogue, we would have less religious coercion, cause less hatred and bigotry. And if only those of us who live by the ethical dimension of the Commandments could have more respect, love and understanding for those who follow the ritual...we would be building a truly Jewish society based on mutual reciprocal respect.

There are 620 letters in the biblical text of the Ten Commandments. In *gematria* the word spelled out by 620 is *keter* (crown). What a crowning glory to our modern Jewish state if we could only unite the tablets, understand and love one another, and act in a common ethic.

*(An earlier version of this talk was delivered on Israel radio in May, 1987.)*

April/May 1988

# RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY

## Social Justice Committee

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Also included with the packet are brochures from the Jewish Fund for Justice and the Shalom Center.





## Social Justice Packet May, 1988

### I Resolutions for the Israel Convention

All colleagues planning to submit resolutions to the Israel Convention are urged to forward the texts of such policy statements directly to me - Rabbi Alan Silverstein

Resolutions Chairman  
20 Academy Road  
Caldwell, New Jersey 07006

NOTE: Rabbi Joseph Heckelman has been assigned Resolutions responsibilities by the Israel Region. Such resolutions will be forwarded to me in the near future.

### II Religious Action Center Intern

On behalf of the Social Justice Committee I wish to express appreciation to Debbie Orenstein who served capably during this past year as our first Conservative movement intern at the Religious Action Center. In addition to her many on-going projects (preparing mailings for our membership, assisting with Conservative movement participation in the December 6, 1987 Soviet Jewry March in Washington, facilitating Conservative movement lobbying visits to the Capitol, acting as resource person for our many Portfolio Chairpersons on the Social Justice Committee, etc), Debbie prepared a final and detailed evaluation of her experience in addition to creating a comprehensive volume (now available at the RA national office) of all Social Justice Resolutions approved by the RA, United Synagogue and Women's League during the past thirty years. As a result of Debbie's efforts, colleagues may now more easily research the Conservative movement's stance regarding a wide range of contemporary issues. Included in this packet is the latest Religious Action Center Legislative Update. Debbie has also submitted a description of the many and varied activities which were part of her six months of service.

### III Rabbinical Assembly Social Justice Intern

As the academic year draws to a close, I would also like to express the thanks of our Committee to our Intern at 3080 Broadway, Keith Winnick. Keith has been indispensable to the effective functioning of our Social Justice activities. In particular he has worked diligently with Rebecca Jacobs in the National Office in preparing the final format of our Social Justice Packets. In addition to his technical assistance, Keith has added his own passionate commitment to ideals of Tikkun Olam. In keeping with such goals, Keith attended and has committed to writing brief descriptions of the major issues addressed by three recent conferences at which he was directly involved - "Ethics and The American Jew," "Judaism and The Land: Responding to The Farm Crisis," and "Theology in a Pluralistic Setting."

### IV Social Justice Survey

In order to best meet the needs of our colleagues and the Conservative movement in the realm of Social Justice, Andy Warmflash and Jan Kaufman have prepared a Social Justice Survey

in order to gather recommendations and input from our membership. We URGE EVERYONE to complete this brief questionnaire and to return your answers to -

Rabbi Andrew Warmflash  
 Congregation B'nai Tikvah  
 1001 Finnegan's Lane  
 North Brunswick, New Jersey 08902

#### V Tzedukah Organizations

David Gaffney, our representative to the national Board of Mazon, has submitted an excerpt of the most recent Mazon newsletter which describes a case study of one's synagogue's successful implementation of Mazon into the congregation's programmatic life. We are also enclosing the most up-to-date brochures of the Jewish Fund for Justice, the Washington based organization at which Ben Kahn is our liaison.

#### VI Ethiopian Jewry

Barry Starr has enclosed a current description of the deteriorating conditions and political situation of our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia. In addition, Moshe Tutnauer describes his recent first-hand experiences with the Jews of Ethiopia and his advocacy of one specific tzedukah project in that distressed region.

#### VII Syrian Jewry

Larry Troster has agreed to Chair our Sub-committee on Syrian Jewry and has provided an analysis of crisis facing the dwindling numbers of Jews who are unable to leave that repressive regime.

#### VIII Monitoring State Legislatures

Paul Kerbel is providing his latest list of colleagues who have agreed to join with him in monitoring the legislative activities within their respective state legislatures, along with offering guidelines for such efforts.

#### IX Homeless

Jonathan Ginzburg reflected upon the successes in aiding the homeless which he encountered while serving an urban New York City congregation. For further details and other models, please consult the Religious Action Center "Shabbat Hagadol" Packet which was mailed prior to Pesach or contact our colleague Eric Lankin who has agreed to replace Jonathan in coordinating our Social Justice efforts on behalf of the homeless.

#### X Black - Jewish Relations

Our colleague Richard Yellin has completed a survey of existing programs for promoting Black-Jewish dialogue and cooperation. This survey will be distributed by the Synagogue Council of America, under whose auspices the RA will also be participating in some projected national level Jewish communications with the black community.

#### XI Arab Uprising In the Territories

As part of our continuing effort to share thoughts regarding the crisis in the territories, we are including an article by our colleague Reuven Hammer, as well as a sermon by Seymour Rosenbloom.

#### XII South African Jewry

Menahem Herman is continuing his efforts to alert us to the needs of South African Jews both under the stress of the Botha government as well as once such Jewish immigrants arrive in America. The enclosed articles describe a portion of Menahem's tireless efforts.

#### XIII Environmental Concerns

Scott White has agreed to begin to create an agenda for the RA in the realm of environmental concerns, an arena which my predecessor Myron Fenster has long urged upon our Social Justice Committee.

#### XIV Bilateral Nuclear Arms Reduction

Jan Kaufman has included brochures from the Shalom Center as well as a description of their available materials. Jan serves as our liaison to this Philadelphia based Peace Organization.

#### XV Soviet Jewry

Enclosed is a manual prepared by a member of my congregation, and an activist on behalf of Soviet Jewry for our local Federation. The manual provides guidelines for enabling local towns and local officials to "adopt" a refusenik family and to maintain on-going contact with these Soviet Jews. As we approach the May U.S.-U.S.S.R. summit, such efforts will become ever more important.

As Social Justice Chairman I have been gratified by the many letters of support and appreciation which have been sent by colleagues encouraging our Committee to continue to develop the RA's involvement with Social Justice issues. I welcome all recommendations and reiterate my request that EVERYONE COMPLETE and RETURN the enclosed Social Justice Survey to Andy Warmflash at your earliest convenience.

B'yedidut,

Alan Silverstein

SOCIAL ACTION SURVEY - RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY

The Social Justice Commission is conducting a survey to assess what the role of the Conservative movement in social action issues is and the role we ought to play. Please take a few moments to fill out this form and return to the address indicated on the back.

A. RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY

1. Would you favor the R.A. on a national level taking a more activist role on social justice issues.     Yes     No
2. What do you think should be the focus of those concerns?  
 Exclusively Jewish  
 Universal
3. Should the R.A. join coalitions on a national level?     Yes     No  
on a regional level?     Yes     No
4. Who should speak for the Conservative rabbinate on social justice concerns?  
Check all that apply  
a.  Rabbinical Assembly President  
b.  Rabbinical Assembly President only after consultation with Executive Committee  
c.  Executive Vice-president of Rabbinical Assembly (paid professional)  
d.  Social Justice Committee  
e.  Only Rabbinical Assembly as a whole by passing resolution at convention  
f.  Chancellor of the Seminary
5. Have you found the Social Justice Committee's mailings with the Homiletics material helpful?     Yes     No
6. Would you like to receive such information more frequently?     Yes     No
7. Would you like to become more involved in such activities?     Yes     No

B. RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY - REGIONS

8. Do you think each region should have its own social action committee?  
Yes        No
9. Does your region have a social action committee?     Yes     No

C. YOU AND YOUR CONGREGATION/ORGANIZATION/SCHOOL

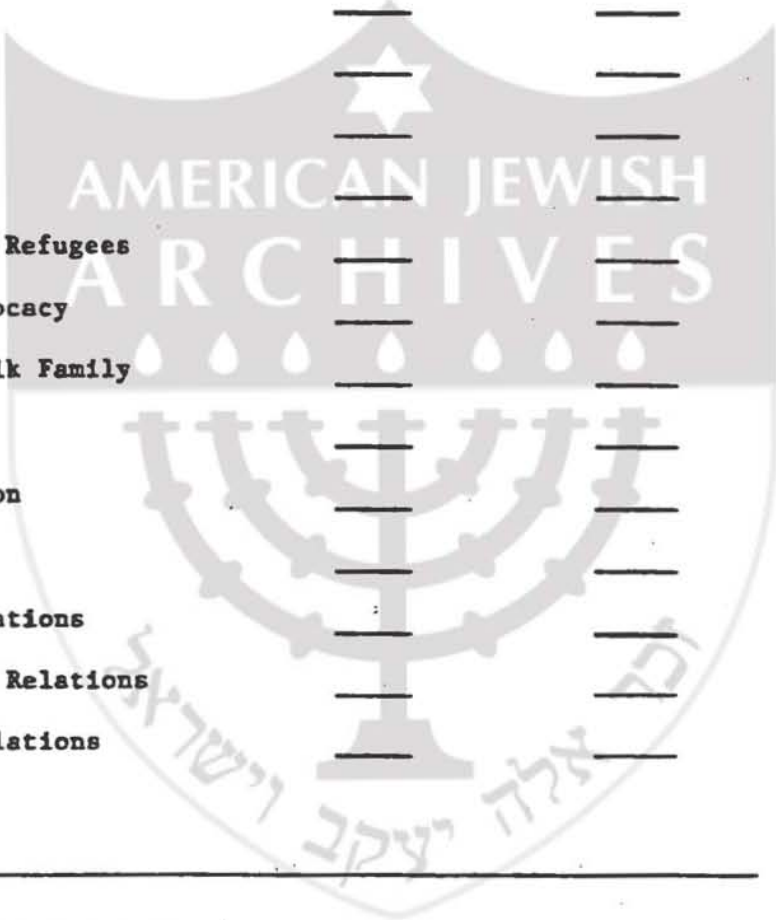
10. Does your congregation/organization/school have a social action committee?  
 Yes     No
11. Is it a standing committee?     Yes     No

over

12. Are you or your congregation/organization/school involved in any social justice projects?

Please check all that apply

	Self	Institution
Homeless	_____	_____
Food shelters	_____	_____
Health Care Issues	_____	_____
AIDS	_____	_____
Elderly	_____	_____
Hospice	_____	_____
Nuclear Arms	_____	_____
Sukkat Shalom	_____	_____
Environment	_____	_____
Central American Refugees	_____	_____
Soviet Jewry Advocacy	_____	_____
Adopting Refusenik Family	_____	_____
Ethiopian Jewry	_____	_____
Voter Registration	_____	_____
Economic justice	_____	_____
Black-Jewish Relations	_____	_____
Christian-Jewish Relations	_____	_____
Moslem-Jewish Relations	_____	_____



NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE RETURN TO:  
 Rabbi Andrew Warmflash  
 Congregation B'nai Tikveh  
 1001 Finnegan's Lane  
 North Brunswick, New Jersey 08902

## SUMMARY

This year, for the first time, the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue have jointly sponsored a representative at the RAC. As the first person to hold this position, I filled three roles: (1) to engage in the regular work of the RAC, (2) to serve as the "Washington office" for Conservative rabbis and for the volunteers and professionals in each arm of the movement who devote their time to social justice, and (3) to facilitate communication and cooperation between the two movements in matters relating to social justice. Specific tasks included the following:

Tracked legislation on Civil Rights, Low-Income Housing, Death Penalty, Native Americans, Voter Registration, Health Care, Minimum Wage, Welfare Reform, and the right to wear religious head coverings with military uniforms (Yarmulke Bill). Wrote summaries of these issues for inclusion in the RAC's monthly legislative update. Was the staff person in charge of these issues for the office; attended relevant meetings and lobbying sessions; prepared agendas, hand-outs, and briefings on these topics for the Social Action Commission; responded to requests and correspondence that came to the RAC on all these issues.

Lobbied on behalf of the Reform and Conservative movements on a variety of issues, including the Yarmulke bill and the Civil Rights Restoration Act.

Represented the RAC at regular meetings of the Washington Interfaith Staff Council, the Coalition for Human Needs, the Voter Registration Network, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, and Georgetown seminar on Access to Healthcare.

Responded to requests from rabbis and laypeople, and from professionals at United Synagogue (regional and national), Rabbinical Assembly, Vaad Gemilut Hasadim, and Ometz, for information on legislation or for Jewish resources on social justice issues. (On average, I filled five such requests a week.)

Coordinated communication between Conservative movement institutions and the RAC concerning the Soviet Jewry march in Washington, reserving housing for out-of-towners in Conservative synagogues, and writing the working draft of the letter that was sent to Conservative synagogues.

Sent regular mailings on social justice, including monthly legislative updates, to leaders of the Conservative movement.

Submitted sign-on and coalition invitations to the various arms of the movement. Women's League signed onto Voter Registration Coalition, Long Term Care '88, and the Alliance for Better Childcare. The RA signed on in support of the Home Health Care bill. Alan Silverstein signed on to a letter sponsored by Coalition for a Liveable World on the INF treaty.

Did a radio spot on the Jewish community and voter registration to be distributed in syndication by CBS World Religious News and Barnes Media Service.

Selected and sent information on voter registration to the RA Social Justice

sub-committee on voter registration and education. Coordinated activities with the Churches Committee for voter registration and education, the Washinton, DC voter registration network, the Religious Action Center, the Vaad Gemilut Hasadim and the Synagogue Council.

Developed a working draft of Rabbi's Voter Registration/Education Kit to be sent out by the Synagogue Council.

Contacted ECHO, the Ezrat Cholim organization, with suggestions on health care advocacy. Some of those suggestions implemented; others in process.

Contacted John Ruskay with suggestions on how to involve the Seminary in the work of social justice. Follow up in process.

Served as liason to the Orthodox and Reconstructionist movements and to the Synagogue Council of America, coordinating cooperative efforts, responding to requests, gaining membership lists, billing for services provided.

Responded to a group of rabbis and rabbinical students concerned about the nomination of Judge Bork to the Supreme Court by initiating an R.A. Social Justice Committee vote on that topic, writing a letter on behalf of the interested parties, soliciting additional signatures, and sending the letter to 100 Conservative rabbis, along with information on how to "block Bork."

Wrote Chai Impact action alerts on Catastrophic Health Care and Home Health Care. Assisted in the writing and editing of other Chai Impacts.

Researched, wrote, and edited the following sections of the Shabbat Hagadol packet: Data on Hunger and Homelessness, Liturgical materials, Eyewitness Accounts, Jewish Resources on the Responsibility of Privilege. Assisted in the compilation and editing of the other sections; chose the League of Women Voters material for inclusion in the same packet.

Wrote an article for the Ometz Shaliach on voter registration.

Wrote a briefing on the Religious Action Center for the RA newsletter.

Wrote a detailed memo on the proposed charter for the RA Social Justice Committee; most of the suggestions in it were adopted.

Selected and gathered social justice materials for the RA sermonic packets.

Initiated an arrangement whereby the RAC will provide social justice informational packages to RA members at cost. (Thusfar seven rabbis have ordered packages.)

Read through Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue resolutions since 1950, selected those that pertained to social justice, photocopied and arranged them according to topic and chronologically. Also included women's league resolutions, and made the collection of resolutions available to the Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue, and Women's League.

## Nevey Shalom Congregation

Paul David Kerbel, Rabbi

Rabbinical Assembly Social Justice Committee  
Committee on Monitoring State Legislatures  
An update by Paul Kerbel, Sub-committee Chair

1. The Social Justice Committee would like to have one colleague in each state who will monitor the legislative agenda in their state and maintain regular contact with the necessary state representatives and agencies on issues of concern to us (as Jews and as members of the Rabbinical Assembly).

The following colleagues have agreed to monitor their state legislative agenda:

Florida -	Leon Fink	Pennsylvania -	Mark Greenspan
Georgia -	Marvin Richardson	New York -	Baruch Frydman-Kohl
South Carolina	Gerald B. Weiss	Tennessee -	Ronald Roth
Virginia -	Myron Berman	New Jersey -	Howard Hersch
Maryland -	Paul Kerbel		
Delaware -	Kenneth Cohen		

This is what we ask of each colleague:

- a. To express the support or opposition of The Rabbinical Assembly of America on issues we have taken a position on.
- b. To actively lobby issues of concern to The Rabbinical Assembly in your state and inform the national Social Justice Committee on issues that you would like us to know about.

Our goal is: to create a greater presence of Conservative Judaism on issues of concern, to encourage a more systematic representation of our colleagues in local issues, and to develop a network for the sharing of information on important issues.

If you would be willing to serve as a monitor in your state, Please write or call Rabbi Paul Kerbel, Nevey Shalom Congregation, Bowie, Maryland 20715 301-262-4020.

## 2. Legislative Update

In the past several years, 31 state legislatures have adopted stricter laws aimed at curbing religious or ethnic vandalism.

With an increased involvement of organized hate-groups in anti-semitic incidents, it is important for us to work toward encouraging other states to adopt stricter laws. In those states with tougher enforcement, there have been more arrests of those 21 years of age and over in connection with anti-semitic incidents.

12218 Torah Lane • Bowie, Maryland 20715  
Office and School (301) 262-9020 • Rabbi's Study 262-4020  
Affiliated with the Conservative Movement



**Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**  
**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE -- April 1, 1988**

*To identify legislation requiring immediate action look at the recommended action column for legislation marked **\*\* URGENT \*\***. For additional information contact the Religious Action Center, 2027 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 387-2800. Glossary of terms provided on last page.*

Issue & Bill No.	Description	RAC Position	Status	Comments	Recommended Action
<b>ISRAEL</b>					
FOREIGN AID S. 1274 & HR. 3100	Authorization of all Foreign Aid including \$3 billion to Israel.	Support	Passed House 286-122 on 12/10/87. No action expected in Senate soon.		None
<b>NUCLEAR ARMS</b>					
INF TREATY RATIFICATION	Ratification of intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty between US and USSR.	Support	Senate floor vote is expected in April.	The UAHC testified in favor of the treaty. Copies of the testimony are available upon request.	<b>** URGENT **</b> Contact Senators & urge their support.
<b>CENTRAL AMERICA</b>					
SUSPEND SALVADORAN & NICARAGUAN DEPORTATION (Deconcini/Moakley) S. 332 & HR. 618	Suspends the deportation of Salvadorans and Nicaraguans while a study is conducted on the fate of those who have been deported.	Support	Passed in House. Senate vote possible in April.		<b>** URGENT **</b> Contact Senators & urge their support.
<b>SOUTH AFRICA</b>					
COMPREHENSIVE SANCTIONS S. 556 & HR. 1580	Mandates complete disinvestment of all US corporations from South Africa and Namibia within six months.	Support	House committee action expected mid-April with floor vote possible in May. No Senate action scheduled.	There are 82 co-sponsors in House and 5 in the Senate.	Urge Senators & Representatives to co-sponsor.
<b>GENOCIDE TREATY</b>					
GENOCIDE CONVENTION IMPLEMENTATION ACT S. 1851 & HR. 807	Implementation legislation needed to make genocide a crime punishable under domestic law.	Support	Committee votes possible in April.	This legislation is needed for the U.S. to become an official signatory to the U.N. Genocide Convention.	None
<b>VOTER REGISTRATION</b>					
UNIVERSAL REGISTRATION S. 1888 & HR. 3666	Establishes mail-in and election day registration for federal elections.	Support	Committee hearings expected in both House and Senate in late-April.		None

Issue & Bill No.	Description	RAC Position	Status	Comments	Recommended Action
<b>CAMPAIGN FINANCE</b>					
SENATORIAL CAMPAIGN ACT S.2 & HR.2717	Places voluntary limits on campaign spending, PAC and personal financing of elections. Bill also calls for partial public financing of campaigns that remain under spending limits.	Support	Record eighth cloture vote failed to end filibuster 53-41 on 2/26/88. No further action expected until fall.		None
<b>HANDGUN CONTROL</b>					
HANDGUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACT S.466 & HR.975	Mandates 7 day waiting period and background check of persons purchasing handguns.	Support	Committee hearings are now being held.	S.2180 & HR.4268 to prohibit the manufacture, importation, sale or possession of plastic handguns has also been introduced.	None
<b>SUPREME COURT</b>					
KENNEDY CONFIRMATION VOTE	Confirmation of Supreme Court nominee, Judge Anthony Kennedy.	No Position	Confirmed by Senate 97-0 on 2/3/88	Senate rejected previous nominee Robert Bork 42-58 on 10/23/87.	None
<b>CIVIL RIGHTS</b>					
CIVIL RIGHTS RESTORATION ACT S.557 & HR.1214	Restores Civil Rights protections in accordance with the original intent of Congress before the Supreme Court <u>Grove City</u> decision.	Support	Veto over-ride passed Senate 73-24 and House 292-133 on 3/22/88.		Celebrate passage !
FAIR HOUSING S.558 & HR.1158	Strengthens the enforcement of housing anti-discrimination laws.	Support	House committee action expected in April with floor action possible after. No Senate action expected.		None
JAPANESE-AMERICAN REPARATIONS S.1009 & HR.442	Provides monetary reparations to surviving Japanese-American internees and establishes a fund to conduct educational activities about the internment.	Support	Passed House 243-141 on 9/17/87. Senate floor vote expected in early April.	There are 73 co-sponsors in Senate.	** URGENT ** Contact Senators & Urge their support.
<b>CHURCH/STATE</b>					
SILENT PRAYER SJR.37	Constitutional amendment in support of voluntary school prayer.	Oppose	Not moving at all. No committee action expected in near future.		None

Issue &  
Bill No.

Description

RAC  
Position

Status

Comments

Recommended  
Action

WOMEN'S ISSUES

FAMILY & MEDICAL  
LEAVE ACT  
S.249 & HR.925

Guarantees 10 wks of job security  
for workers needing to take work  
leave to care for a newborn, newly  
adopted or seriously ill child.

Support

House vote expected in April.  
Senate waiting for House vote  
before taking action.

Only workers employed for at least  
one year in a company of over 50  
employees qualify.

**\*\* URGENT \*\***  
  
Urge Representatives  
to support bill.

PAY EQUITY  
S.552 & HR.387

Promotes equitable pay practices  
within the Federal civil service.

Support

Possible floor votes expected in  
April in both the House and Senate.

None

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

AID FOR THE HOMELESS  
HR.490

Supplemental \$263 million  
appropriation for homeless  
programs.

Support

Introduced 3/10/88 and referred  
to committee.

Would provide additional funds  
originally authorized but not  
appropriated under the McKinney Act.

None

CATASTROPHIC  
HEALTH CARE  
HR.2470

Expands Medicare's coverage to  
include one year of hospital care,  
80% of prescription drugs and 35  
days of home health care.

Support

Passed both the Senate and the  
House last fall. Differences  
being worked out in conference  
committee.

It is hoped this will be out of  
conference by mid-April.

None

HOME  
HEALTH CARE  
HR.3436 & S.1616

Provides quality home health  
care for the chronically and  
catastrophically ill.

Support

House floor vote expected in  
early May. No Senate action  
expected.

This legislation currently has  
130 sponsors in the House

**\*\* URGENT \*\***  
Urge Representatives  
to support bill.

LOW INCOME HOUSING  
S.825

Provides for new housing programs,  
prevents housing discrimination and  
protects tenants from displacement.

Support

Signed into law on 2/15/88.

Celebrate Passage!

MINIMUM WAGE  
S.837 & HR.1834

Raises minimum wage from \$3.35 to  
\$5.05 per hour by 1992.

Support

House floor vote expected in  
early April. No action in Senate.

The increase would be in 4 steps:  
\$3.85, \$4.25, \$4.65, & \$5.05

None

WELFARE REFORM  
S.1511 & HR.1720

Establishes work, child care,  
education and training programs.

Oppose  
S.1511 in  
current form.

Passed House 230-194 on 12/16/87.  
Senate committee vote expected in  
April.

NJCRCAC supports HR.1720 and  
opposes weaker S.1511.

Urge Sen. to support  
HR.1720 language.

ACT FOR BETTER  
CHILDCARE  
S.1885 & HR.3660

Provides \$2.5 billion for childcare  
to be used to match state grants.

Support

No action in either house expected  
in near future.

Urge Senators &  
Reps. to support

MINIMUM HEALTH BENEFITS  
S.1265 & HR.2508

Requires employers to provide minimum  
health benefits to all employees.

Support

Senate vote possible in April.

None

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### APPROPRIATIONS BILL:

A bill that grants the actual monies that the authorization bill approved, but not necessarily the maximum amount. Originates in the House.

### AUTHORIZATION BILL:

A bill that specifies the aims and scope of a particular program. It also puts an upper limit to the amount of money that can be spent on the program. Originates in the House.

### CLOTURE:

The process to stop a filibuster in the Senate. 60 Senators are required to invoke cloture.

### CONFERENCE COMMITTEE:

When the House and Senate pass differing versions of the same legislation, a conference committee is set up consisting of members of the House and the Senate. This committee irones out the differences between the House version and the Senate version of the legislation. Provisions that are passed by both houses are usually safe from being cut when the bill goes to the Conference Committee. Amendments that are not common to both versions are subject to deletions as part of a compromise bill.

### FILIBUSTER:

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The Shalom Report #1

The Shalom Center's statement of purpose, information on Rainbow Sign observance and a Jewish curriculum for the nuclear age. \$2.00 each.

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Articles on organizing for Rainbow Sign; "The Bat Mitzvah Meets Sukkat". Speeches about the Jewish stake in fighting the nuclear threat by Elie Wiesel, Michael Wyschogrod, Rabbi Murray Salzman, and Frederic Morton, and a report on Sukkat Shalom 1986. \$2.00 each.

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Articles on the economics of the arms race; fundraising at The Shalom Center, a legislative update on arms control as of February 1987, suggestions for celebrations of Rainbow Sign, and an outline of a strategy for bringing an end to the arms race by the year 2000. \$2.00 each.

The Shalom Report #11

Las Vegas Sun article covering the Passover seder held at the edge of the nuclear-weapons testing site in Nevada; "Peace and the Refuseniks: A Journey in the Soviet Union", an article by Jeffrey Dekro about his and Brian Walt's recent trip to the Soviet Union and his findings; an article on what to do for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah to affirm the Brit HaDorot, the Covenant between the Generations. \$2.00 each.

Love Peace and Pursue Peace: A Jewish Response to Nuclear War and Annihilation by Bradley Shavit Artson, United Synagogue.

Introductory Guide: Jewish Nuclear Education. Available from JESR, 50 Verndale Street, Brookline, MA 02146, 617-735-0734

NFTY Against the Arms Race - Rabbi Ramie Arian with Adam Lipton. NFTY Resources, Glen Way, Syosset, NY 11701, order #S31, \$3.

Jewish Roots of Non-Violence - Jewish Peace Fellowship, Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960, 914-358-4601.

Dialogue: A Teaching Guide to Nuclear Issues - Educators for Social Responsibility, 23 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, 617-492-1764, \$12.95.

The Nuclear Winter, an illustrated pamphlet by scientist Carl Sagan. Available free, from Council for a Livable World Education Fund, 11 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108.

"Torah and the Megabombs," by Joseph Polak. Judaism, Summer 1983.

"The Siege and Civilization," by Bradley Shavit Artson. Judaism, Winter 1987.

"New Category of War for the Nuclear Age," Journal of Reform Judaism, Spring 1987.

"  
Suggestions Regarding The Homeless."  
"

Jonathan Ginsburg

Enclosed you'll find some material and suggestions that the Rabbinical Assembly can keep on file for colleagues that call in. First, the Jewish Board of Family Children's Services in New York has programs for the homeless to provide for their immediate needs, and in addition mental health and counseling services. They serve people of all religions, races and backgrounds. The phone number there is 212-460-0900. In addition, the Partnership for the Homeless, 208 West 13th Street, New York, New York 10011, can supply anyone with information regarding a check list for consideration in planning a shelter. Enclosed is a copy of the Partnership check list and a brochure from the Board of Family and Children's Services.

In terms of a synagogue specifically starting one, probably Marshall Meyer or his associate, Rolando Matalon, should be contacted. If someone wants to contact a synagogue that is heavily involved in a shelter in a church, one could contact the Social Action Committee of the Kane Street Synagogue at 226 Kane Street, Brooklyn, New York 11231. Marshall Meyer is at Bnai Jeshurun in Manhattan.

In terms of literature, I am enclosing an article from Hadassah Magazine by Neil Reisner called "Dealing with the Homeless" which might be of some help. I might also indicate that I'm not sure whether it was passed, but a resolution was submitted at the last Rabbinical Assembly Convention for dealing with the homeless. You might check the record on that. Also, the Metropolitan Region of United Synagogue of New York, the Social Action Committee is also dealing with that, and I'll enclose a copy of a letter from Sol Shapiro from '83 which talks about it.

On the general issue of hunger, probably the best way to get synagogues involved in the hunger issue is through the Mazon Project, and I believe each region of the

Rabbinical Assembly is supposed to have a coordinator of Mazone implementation.

In terms of notes for a sermon, if you want to type something up, I think the following points should be made: on Birkat Hamazon.

Begin with the problem of 753 וְלֹא יִשְׂכַּח עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַם אֲחֵרִים ש"פ ע"מ 18791 272 and to note that you encounter people in the past who stay silent at that last paragraph because they perceive that it's a mis-statement of reality. They had never seen anybody going hungry and the beginning of it which says that וְלֹא יִשְׂכַּח עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַם אֲחֵרִים

How can it be *lachol bassar* לֶחֶם בָּסָר when the reality is the opposite?

Here are some of the facts which we seem to contradict in that ending paragraph the first and end of Birkat Hamazon. First, the new book "Harvest of Sorrow" documents the Soviet collectivization in 1929 and 1932 in the terror of famine where the government caused the death through starvation of more than ten million people. World hunger estimates now are a hundred million severely malnourished bordering on starvation. Add to this that Jews spend between five hundred and eight hundred million dollars in catered affairs per year.

Texts to be used here are supposed to oppress the stranger, the widow, the orphan. If you do and I hear them cry, my anger will wax out and I will kill you. Or that Yom Kippur Haftorah I don't want you to fast. The unrighteous feed the hungry. And the story of Honei Magal about how his disciples found him blind, no arms and no legs. What happened - how could a righteous man suffer like this? He said, "It's my fault. I was riding on my donkey, and somebody saw me, asked me for help, and I said wait till I dismounted. By the time I dismounted, he had died. And I prayed that my eyes did not see the extent of his plight be blinded. And my arms did not reach out to him in his time of need be rendered useless, and my legs that did not move me quickly enough to help him be cut off." That reflects the Jewish attitude.

So what's the answer to the Birkat Hamazon? It's not meant to stating reality. It's a challenge. Hazan Ahagoal means that God made the world in such a way that all can have food. If some go hungry, it's our fault, not God's.

The Jewish community must see to it that no one

begs for food. So the question remains, why, then do a hundred million people starve and we remain callous?

First, there's a level of cynicism. We hear reports all the time that we give food to various governments, and it ends up going to store houses where officials sell on the black market, and it doesn't go to the hungry.

Another idea is that out of sight, out of mind, we go to grocery stores with huge amounts of food, and it's very difficult on a daily basis to perceive the hunger and the extent of the hunger that other people do.

So, what, then, should our response be? First, we have to stress that it's considered a transgression to sit idly by while the blood of our neighbors spill. Secondly, we have to recognize that while it's not up to us to complete the task, neither are we free to desist from it. We could aim this for a Purim push and use *מזנות* as the vehicle to balance the joy we're supposed to feel when Adar comes, we're supposed to be extra happy, a part of the responsibility is gifts to the poor.

A question could be posed, just suppose the responsibility of gifts to the poor. So the bottom line is not to give up our banquets because we have a right to celebrate our own good fortune, but, at the same time, while we're celebrating, we should continually understand the responsibility of gifts to the poor. And through a vehicle like Mazone, which says, "Enjoy your simcha, but everytime you have a simcha, give 3% of the gross expense to the Hunger Foundation to help us understand the way in which the tradition hopes to have us balance realism with joy.

Suggested sermon possibilities for homelessness might be - on Sukkot every year, you could use the purpose of the Sukkah as a reminder to us that one week a year we should recognize that we have to leave our nice homes and sit out in a hut where we're not protected from the wind and the rain. It's a little dangerous, especially sleeping in a Sukkah in New York City. And, once a year, it gets us in touch with the reality that there are many who live in a Sukkah or worse 52 weeks a year and don't have a nice warm physical structure to enter when it gets rainy or too cold.

## ETHICS AND THE AMERICAN JEW

By Keith Winnick - Social Justice Intern

For two days in February, Rabbis of the three major rabbinic organizations met in Washington D.C. to discuss current ethical issues which affect us all as teachers and preachers in Israel. The conference was sponsored by the Committee on Judaic Studies of George Washington University in conjunction with the R.A., R.C.A., and C.C.A.R.

The sessions began with a look at the theoretical. Our own David Gordis reminded us that the current series of public (and private) problems of Jews must indeed be evaluated as a Jewish problem because of our concern for the character of our people. He understands that as American Jews we have manifold sources of values, but we need conviction that the Halakha is a process, not an event. Halakha is working at the ethical and includes the Divine precisely because it involves the generation of values and the instruments for reviewing them. In this way the Halakha is always morally alive and responsive. What is required of us is a continued commitment to do 'what is right' and a knowledge of how to use our rich traditions to pursue it.

Attorney Arthur Liman then addressed the theoretical implications of the practices we have witnessed as of late - especially the Iran Contra Scandal. He noted that the Iran deal involved people acting out of moral commitment, not out of greed, and how this latter can be equally dangerous. It was such 'holy causes' which the founding fathers of the American government sought to limit through the system of checks and balances. Rabbi Sol Roth closed the session by noting that we can not change Jewish law without changing values. For him the Halakha represents law and ethics at one time and is Divine. The Torah is just because it is the Divine will and we are in no position to act as judges. Thus we are called not to re-evaluate, but to return to the Biblical values. And the needs of today are not so different from those in the time of Jeremiah who lamented similar if not the same problems.

The next topic was the status of the Jewish community. It was noted more than once that the very existence of this conference speaks of the awareness and outrage of at least certain members of the community. Professor Daniel Elazar of Temple University reminded us that Jews have been quick to join the civic culture and in doing such have entered to all ends of the moral spectrum. The condition is neither as bleak as it may be made to appear, nor is it without its real and serious problems. Judge Avner Mikva spoke of the Jews as a community acting as a witness against criminals. It is not alright for us to have 'our share' of criminals. In addition, our serious dilemma is not necessarily an abundance of criminals, but a lack of real ethical heroes whom we need to stand out and serve as leaders. Rabbi Walter Wurzbarger rounded out this session by calling on us as rabbis and leaders of religious institutions to work first at making sure our own dealings are in order. We must distinguish between 'feeling good' and 'being good' and remember that the Jewish G-d is not only the source of power, but the source of moral perfection.

The second day began with a wonderful reminder that this is not only a Jewish problem, but a human issue. Dr. Louis Linn spoke of the prerequisites for moral development - including a stable family unit.

Ultimately people and especially children, follow their role models for better or worse. Our goal as a community might be to not only encourage parents to take a more responsible role in the moral development of their children, but to also create and publicize other healthy role-models that young and old alike can emulate.

The final session of the conference was dedicated to the practical role of rabbis. Rabbi Reuven Bulka cited test results which indicated the widespread extent of 'cheating' - from insider trading to stealing paper supplies from work or understating income on one's tax return, etc... He reminded us of the need to view others as our brother and remember that while we almost all are guilty of some transgressions, we are never in the shoes of another person. He closed with the call to us as rabbis to make the current state of ethics our issue. If religion does not result in more ethical behavior, then something must be seriously questioned. Marshall Meyer of the Rabbinical Assembly was kept away by uncontrollable circumstances, but sent a copy of his prepared remarks which again called on us all to be not only aware, but active in pursuing ethics and morality, both in our own financial lives and in the larger issues of the world. Rabbi Arnold Sher concluded this panel by making the poignant suggestion that we must as rabbis have the courage to take these issues directly to our congregants. The time is past for hinting and speaking indirectly of wrong-doing. Without necessarily going so far as to publically point fingers in shul, we must be willing to make individuals feel uncomfortable and accountable to our community and to our Maker.

The closing activity of the conference was small group discussions aimed at developing specific responses to the panels of the preceding two days. There was an overwhelming call for a continued effort by all the rabbinic organizations to work together to respond to these basic Jewish issues. In addition, the need was seen to involve lay participation into our future discussions. Together we must break down the various issues at hand - business affairs, social justice, synagogue affairs, sexuality, fundraising, etc... - and deal with them realistically, religiously, directly and publically.

The conference was successful in a variety of ways. It allowed religious people the opportunity to share their discontent with the current status of affairs and reminded us of the goals and demands of the Jewish moral tradition. It publically brought together the three major rabbinic organizations - which happens so rarely that this alone speaks for the shared need to address these issues. Yet while this conference was successful, all agree that it is only the beginning. Those present need to continue their study and commitment. And those not present need to join the task by making it a key item on their rabbinic agenda.

Tapes of all the panel sessions are available. See the order form in the March R.A. Newsletter for details or contact the Rabbinical Assembly office.

JUDAISM AND THE LAND - RESPONDING TO THE FARM CRISIS  
By Keith Winnick - Social Justice Intern

The Rabbinical Assembly worked in close partnership with a variety of other Jewish organizations to sponsor this one day conference on February 28 at the Hebrew Union College. The conference approached the current farm crisis in this country as a religious issue (for Jews and others concerned with the well-being of farmers and the land) and as a social or political issue with specific ramifications on the Jewish people of America. Speakers in the morning session included Rabbi James Rudin of the American Jewish Committee who strongly and beautifully defended this issue a Jewish issue. He was followed by representatives from Jewish and non-Jewish organizations who spoke candidly of the current struggle taking place in America's farmlands and how all caring people and especially all Jews are ultimately involved - whether we live on the prairies of Minnesota or the city streets of New York. For while we may not be informed or feel involved, those who are in the middle of the crisis think Jews are involved. There has been a unmistakable growth of anti-semitic fervor in many of those areas where family farmers have been hardest hit. This if nothing else makes it an issue for the city dweller.

The keynote address was delivered by Jim Hightower, the Commissioner of agriculture in Texas. He combined his expertise in the area of farming with a sincere interest in the Jewish involvement in the issue. In addition, Jim Hightower is the founder of the Texas-Israel Exchange, a group which works to share the ideas and technology of two agriculturally dependent areas. He was followed by an animated debate between Jim Nichols, the Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture, and Peter Myers, the Deputy Secretary for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They each discussed their views of current government policies. Whether farms products should be subsidized domestically and the prices at which they are sold internationally were the key areas of concern.

For the afternoon session, participants had their choice of the following workshops:

- 1) The impact of Anti-Semitic organizations on farm areas;
- 2) Land stewardship and environmental ethics;
- 3) American Jewish rural life;
- 4) Land and agriculture in Jewish text and ritual.

The closing address was delivered by David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center in Washington D.C. who tied together the specific need of the Jewish people with the moral obligations to all people and the Holy obligation to be the watchguards of the land in general. The group ended the day acknowledging the religious connection through the recitation by the R.A. representative of appropriate Biblical passages and the singing of Hebrew and English songs. The moment and the day as a whole were indeed uplifting.

Cassette tapes of some or all of the sessions are available. See the enclosed order form.

THEOLOGY IN A PLURALISTIC SETTING - Belonging, Behaving, Believing  
By Keith Winnick - Social Justice Intern

The Social Justice Committee has had an ongoing sub-committee on inter-faith dialogue which strives toward growing communication and understanding between rabbis in the field and their Christian (or Moslem) colleagues. This three day conference at Stony Point New York March 6-8, 1988, was part of an ongoing effort of the National Conference of Christians and Jews to give seminary students a head start on such positive interaction. The conference was attended by approximately one hundred and twenty-five students from twenty-one different seminaries. The range included Liberal Protestants, Black Protestants, Evangelical Christians, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews. (Although it should be noted that the orthodox Jewish student was a student of religion at Union Theological Seminary, and not officially representing any orthodox institution).

The conference was broken into four main components. The first was exegesis sessions where each of the groups mentioned above (with all Jews being considered together as one group) was given the opportunity over the three days to present itself to the conference as a whole by using the format of text study. The participants were to study a text of their choosing which dealt in some way with the issue of inclusiveness or exclusiveness. The discussion was to be among the group members only as it would be done at their respective seminaries. The conference members were given the opportunity at the end of each session to ask questions of the group members.

Each of the exegesis sessions was followed by meetings in small mixed groups which constituted the second component of the conference. It was in these small mixed groups that the real questioning, dialoguing, and bonding took place. Issues raised during the exegesis sessions as well as any and all other types of questions were discussed. The tone was set that led to respectful listening and sharing of beliefs, opinions, and concerns. It was in my small mixed group that Jews were asked about belief in Jesus and that frustration and concern over active proselytism were expressed. On many issues the differences between the various faiths were highlighted. In other cases, the discussion was very helpful in clearing up misunderstandings which could have been harmful. While by mere virtue of being present at the conference, all the participants showed some interest in ecumenical relations, the amount of pluralism and mutual respect varied markedly from person to person. As a Jew and particularly as a conservative Jew, I was aware of these different definitions of pluralism and respect and tolerance. But this was dialogue at its best : learning and sharing; agreeing and disagreeing. I can already say that I have kept contact with some people from my small group and hope that the process started there will continue.

The third component of the conference was called tradition groups - where each of the large groups met to prepare for their exegesis session. This was indeed a fascinating part of the



conference. The Jews in a group by themselves were perhaps the antithesis of what the small groups were supposed to be. While it was a fascinating example of group dynamics, I can safely say that almost zero content was achieved in the nearly four and one half hours that we spent together. As much as good listening, respect and toleration were expected in the mixed groups, they were ignored in the Jewish tradition group. The subject to be presented at our exegesis session had been agreed upon before the conference and was patrilineal descent. The texts to be used had also been selected and duplicated. The time together was then spent 'discussing' a variety of ways to format the presentation. While the exegesis presentation came off well, it was quite clear that even if we are at the point of dialoguing with other religions, there is a tremendous amount of work needed to mend Klal Yisrael. It is easier and safer to sit peacefully with a total stranger than to sit with a cousin. While we were able to present a united front against certain attacks or misunderstandings coming from the non-Jews, there was ample evidence of painful and dangerous erosion of the Jewish entity from the inside. I hope this issue will itself be addressed soon not only on the seminary level, but in the professional ranks as well.

The final component of the conference was traditional worship services by some of the various groups. These, like the exegesis sessions were intended to be conducted as if in the seminary. They were not ecumenical. These were interesting and educational, and even led to some confrontation. One Black Protestant student more than once in his sermon equated Israel with evil oppressive governments such as South Africa. This was insensitive and yet his opinion. I led to much discussion about Israel and the current situation.

This conference was part of an ongoing project of the N.C.C.J. to foster dialogue among seminarians and clergy people. It was clear that as much as many of us had been involved in such conferences and dialogues in the past, there is always more to learn and issues to defuse. At the same time, it was evident that many of the different faiths are dealing with the same issues. Of the six exegesis sessions, two focused on the ordination of women and a third on the acceptance of homosexuals into the church. In addition I think it became evident especially in the small groups that specific dogmas aside, there was a certain comradeship and sense of shared values among religious people in a world which is often very frightening and full of people who deny values in general and a 'Value-Giver' in particular.

For more information, please feel free to contact me at the Rabbinical Assembly office (212) 678-8060 or Ms. Ellen Charry at NCCJ, 71 Fifth Ave, NY, NY 10003; (212) 206-0006. Each tradition and exegesis group as well as smaller identity groups were asked to prepare summaries which Ms. Charry will have on file.

# Turning divine promise into a political platform

Reuven Hammer

LAST YEAR, long before the present series of riots and disturbances began, a young soldier was asked what his feelings were about serving in the Hebron area. He talked about the situation there as he knew it and the danger to his life and the lives of other soldiers. Then he remarked, "I really don't want to kill anyone, but I don't want to get killed either."

I don't know if the young man was aware that he was paraphrasing a famous rabbinic passage from close to 2,000 years ago, concerning the biblical description of Jacob's feelings when he was returning to the Land of Israel, knowing that Esau was coming to meet him with a company of 400 armed men:

*And Jacob feared greatly and was troubled (Genesis 32:8) ... He (Jacob) said, "If he overpowers me, will he not slay me, and if I overpower him, will I not slay him?" Thus it states, "he feared greatly lest he be slain," and was troubled lest he slay him. (Genesis Rabbah 76).*

JACOB'S DILEMMA was the dilemma of the young soldier, and is the dilemma of the State of Israel today. The need to defend ourselves is clear. The necessity to quell riots and disturbances is clear. The need to serve under the most terrible circumstances in Arab areas when there is violence is absolute.

Those who refuse to serve in the name of moral principle are actually denying the most moral of all principles, which is self-defence.

Any moral decision requires taking into account the alternatives available, and the alternative to continuing to defend ourselves is to leave ourselves completely vulnerable to destruction. What is important is that we make certain we are taking all possible steps to avoid the killing and the conflict.

I am not speaking now of the specific tactics adopted to quell these riots. What I am concerned with is

the long-range view of the entire situation, for we are deluding ourselves if we believe the only problem is to bring calm to the current situation and demonstrate to the Arabs in the territories that they cannot win in a situation of armed conflict. If we succeed in doing so, do we really believe that these riots will not repeat themselves in ever-increasing cycles of violence in the future?

THERE ARE THOSE among our leaders who obviously believe that the situation is controllable. They tell us that once order is restored, we shall begin the task of bettering the conditions of the refugees, and then things will change.

It is indeed admirable to want - at last - to improve these conditions. But this so-called solution contains two major problems. The first is that, for reasons both political and economic, it is doubtful if Israel can possibly improve them in any significant way. The second is that, even if we were to do so, this would not satisfy a population which simply does not want to be ruled by us.

For us to do that would require fulfilling the plans of Kahane, would call down the wrath of everyone against us, and would undermine the moral fibre of the state. It would turn Israel into the kind of country in which many of us would not want to live.

Ruling over others in a state of perpetual warfare can be justified only if it is the only option for survival. What has gradually happened to Israel over the past decade is that we have turned from being a nation which was taking necessary, morally justified, actions in order to defend its existence, a state that is willing to negotiate and compromise with its neighbours and to find justifiable solutions to difficult conflicts,

into a nation that is insisting upon conditions for settlement which are not acceptable and which are not necessary for the continued existence of the state.

We are making it a precondition that the entire territory we now occupy must remain under our control.

Shamir has made that abundantly clear at every possible opportunity. Whether such a stance is based upon mystical messianic religious principles, nationalistic visions of a Greater Israel, or concepts of defence, it presents an obstacle to peace which cannot be overcome and which dooms us to constant warfare and suffering for the foreseeable future.

WHAT IS THE solution? I certainly do not know, but it seems to me that the immediate problem is not to come up with the perfect solution, but to change Israel's posture in relation to the possibilities of a solution.

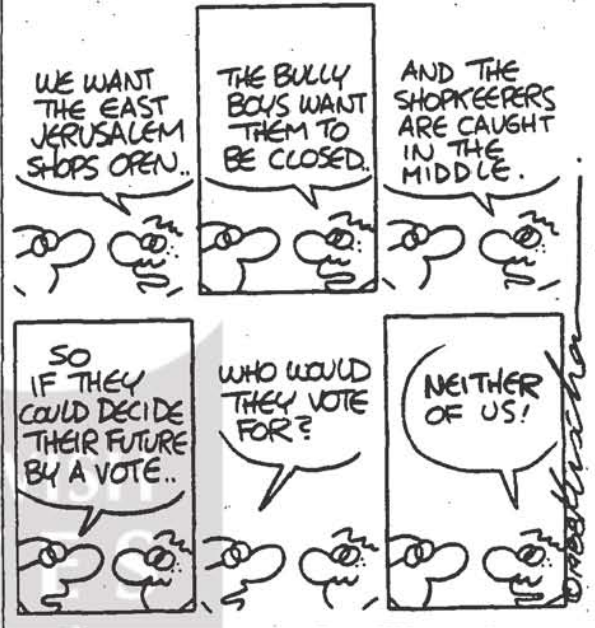
We must once again be in the position of saying that we want a solution which will recognize the right of the Arabs in the territories to govern themselves, which will enable Israel to remain both a Jewish state and a democratic state, and which will provide us with defensible borders.

The Green Line is not sacred, but neither are the borders of the so-called Greater Israel. The Bible makes many promises, but they are not so specific as to bind even the most religious person to a specific map of the future of this country.

Hearing Rabbi Goren and others like him declaiming "our historic rights to the biblical borders" and proclaiming that if we would only incorporate the entire territory into Israel, all opposition would stop, is to understand what false prophecy means.

We have heard the proclamation "Peace, peace" before, and we know what it led to. There is no peace. For those for whom the Bible

## Dry Bones



is not a guide to everyday life - which means the vast majority of the "nationalist camp" - to make of the Divine promise a political platform is little less than blasphemous.

AS A PEOPLE living in this world, we must learn to distinguish between illusion and reality. The illusion of our invincibility led us to the disaster of the Yom Kippur War. The illusion of our ability to control other forces led us to the catastrophe of the Lebanon War. Where will the illusion of our destiny to control Greater Israel lead us?

The wonderful ideals that led us to the creation of the state; the need for Jewish independence; the ability to control our own destiny and to create history; the redemption of the land and the creation of Jewish settlements - all of these become corrupted and perverted when we try to apply them to a situation which is radically different from the pre-state situation.

The time has now come to recognize this, to stop applying yesterday's solutions to today's problems, and to seek the way to realize the dream - not the illusion.

The dream, the hope, is to be a free people living in peace and fulfillment in our own land, true to the traditions of our past, and seeking to implement the ideals of Judaism which make us what we are.

We cannot afford the stagnation this unity government has forced upon us. We will not be able to afford another period of such a government, or of a nationalist government that will continue the present posture of clinging to illusions which will not save.

If Jacob could afford to look into the possibility of peace while maintaining the option of force for self-defence, why cannot we?

Reuven Hammer is director of the Seminary of Judaic Studies in Jerusalem.

"To Identify with Israel...Always."

Sermon by

Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom

Congregation Adath Jeshurun, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

February 20, 1988

For almost three months now, Israel has not been off the front page. We have read reports of Palestinians killed and beaten in Gaza and on the West Bank. We have seen earnest descriptions of a people perceived to be living without hope and resorting to violence from the midst of their despair.

Journalists have given us anecdotal coverage of a Palestinian youth (or man or child) who is seventeen years old (or nine or twenty-eight), who has grown up in squalor and been "beaten into submission" by "brutal" Israeli captors.

If one were to listen to the press one would come away with the impression that Israelis are on a rampage against hapless, youthful demonstrators.

On the editorial pages we read pious incantations calling for peace and justice. Everything would be all right, they tell us, if only Israel would agree to an exchange of land for peace. They warn ominously that Israel will lose its soul. And they warn of the "demographic time bomb" which will explode the Jewish state to pieces unless the bomb is disarmed now.

In the American Jewish community there is criticism of the Jewish state unprecedented in its intensity, its public character, and its harshness. Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, has accused Israel of the "brutalization of innocents" and demanded that it "must not only be stopped immediately, but repudiated, if Israel is to preserve its good name."

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and a former chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, has called Israeli tactics "an offense to the Jewish spirit that violates every principle of human decency and betrays the Zionist dream."

Criticism of Israel unites such diverse Jews as Woody Allen ("Are these the people whose money I used to steal from those little blue and white cans after collecting funds for a Jewish homeland?"), my local rabbinic colleagues (who are circulating a letter stating that they are "appalled by" Israeli policy and

characterizing Israeli military practices as "morally offensive"), and the Neturei Karta (the Satmar Hasidim who live in the state but do not recognize its authority, refusing to pay taxes or serve in the army, who wrote in an ad in the New York Times that "the time has come for the Torah communities throughout the world, to rise in their anger and say to the Zionist leadership -- in the name of God you have sat here too long -- be gone. If not now, when?").

I know how very much Israelis must be touched and grateful for all of those who are so concerned for her soul that they have offered this unsolicited advice. But I am not so touched, nor so grateful. I am distressed and grieved by journalists and American Jews, whose distorted reporting and unfortunate remarks have given aid and comfort to the intransigent foes of the Jewish state and of the Jewish people. Our enemies have become emboldened and embrazened by the intoxication of the nightly news cameras, and by the perception of disarray and division in the American Jewish community.

But even if that were not the case -- that our foes would not have become more bold or brazen in their opposition -- the current journalism and the critiques by American Jewish leaders have been both misleading and irresponsible. They neglect the force of history; they neglect the context of the current struggle going on in Israel and in the occupied territories; and they neglect the realistic boundaries of action that could ameliorate the situation in the Middle East.

Let's talk about each of these elements in turn -- history, context, and reality limits.

#### History -- One Hundred Years

First, history. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, former Ambassador of the United States to the United Nations and articulate friend of Israel has wisely observed that

the longer a problem lasts the harder to remember what it is about. Since the so-called Arab-Israeli problem is now 40 years old, it is hard for Americans and others to remember that Israel's Arab neighbors still refuse to accept Israel's existence.

How true it is that "the longer a problem lasts the harder it is to remember what it is about." That is especially true for journalists and even American Jews, many of whom were but toddlers when the state of Israel was founded, and some of whom were not even born when the Six Day War took place.

But if I may correct Dr. Kirkpatrick on one small point -- the so-called Arab-Israeli problem is not now only 40 years old...in truth it is more than a century old.

From the time of the first aliyah, when Jews began to return to Israel with the dream of establishing an independent, sovereign Jewish homeland in Palestine, their presence was met with Arab antagonism. The settlements existed in a precarious state, surrounded by Arab hostility which frequently erupted into attacks by angry mobs.

To placate the Arab states, Great Britain restricted Jewish immigration in the 1930's and 40's, condemning thousands if not millions of Jews to their death in Europe because of Arab hostility.

In 1948, when the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, it was not the Jewish citizens who refused to abide by the plan. Seven Arab armies attacked the Jewish state the moment it was born, sure in their conviction that they could drive the intruder into the sea.

For nineteen years, the West Bank was occupied by Jordan; the Gaza Strip, by Egypt. It was a conscious policy decision by these Arab governments to keep the residents of those territories in virtual concentration camps, living in squalor, usually without electricity and without running water. They showed no concern for their own people, for whose plight they were largely to blame. They made no effort at granting these people self government within the territories that had been designated by the United Nations as a Palestinian Arab state. Palestinian Arabs were made pawns in the ultimate delusion that one day the state of Israel would be destroyed.

In 1967, in the days following the Six Day War, where were the Arabs who wanted peace? When "land for peace" was still the official Israeli policy, where were the takers among their leaders?

The history of the Arab-Israeli crisis is one of Arab hatred for the Jew and for Jewish independence. Arab leaders sought to deny Jews a state, and then to destroy it when they could no longer prevent it.

#### Context -- A Democracy in a Sea of Totalitarianism

The context. Israel is one state, Jewish and democratic, among more than twenty Arab states in the region. Not one of those Arab states is remotely a democracy. Not one of those Arab states shows respect for the human and political rights of its own citizens, much less for those minorities which dwell among them.

Every Arab state in the region has a history and present where torture, violence, and sanctioned murder are used as a matter of course in ways that make the West Bank and Gaza dramas look like "kinderspiel."

Are these the people upon whose good will and alleged change of heart we are to rely for the safety of the Jewish State?

#### Moral Action in the Real World

Which brings us to the reality. With whom is Israel to trade "land for peace"?

Is it the little king of Transjordan, who repeatedly seduces willing world leaders with promises of moderation, but time after time never, ever delivers?

Is it the PLO and Yasir Arafat who cannot bring himself even to utter the words "land for peace"...unless, that is, the "land" includes Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa?

Is it the indigenious Palestinian leadership on the West Bank or in Gaza -- who incite teenagers to hurl rocks and Molotov cocktails at Israeli troops and settlers?

Or is it the moderates who have dared to say the words "land for peace" and who have ended up in the morgue at the hands of PLO assassins as an object lesson to others?

The truth is that the so-called "demonstrators" on the West Bank and in Gaza are not demonstrators at all. Demonstrators have a policy, a program, an agenda. These are rioters, plain and simple. They are rioters striking out at Israel with a seething hatred borne not of nineteen years of Israeli occupation as their apologists would have it, but out of a century long animus that failed to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state, that failed to destroy the Jewish state, and now pommels it with anger and frustration at their fate, the product of their own hands and the betrayal of their leaders.

In the American Jewish community, many of us understand the history, we understand the context, and we understand the reality. Nevertheless, we are drawn by wishful thinking and a confusion of the state of Israel with its messianic pretensions.

We want Israel to be a beacon of moral perfection and unimpeachable rectitude. For some of us, it is only an Israel that is morally perfect and unimpeachably correct that is valid, in our eyes and in the eyes of its critics.

is morally perfect and unimpeachably correct that is valid, in our eyes and in the eyes of its critics.

But this is a self-defeating goal. Israel is a real state. It is made up of human beings who sometimes succumb to real human emotions. They are individuals who face a harsh reality that threatens not only the dream but their very lives.

We must judge them, and we must judge the state, by realistic standards, not by messianic hopes. By real standards, Israel can be proud. Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel wrote in a recent article published in the Jewish Exponent:

On French television I declared, "Compared to other countries, Israel need not be ashamed, and she is not in need of lessons from anyone. After all, who is judging her? France, with her Algerian past? Britain with her colonial policy? The USA whom we all remember in Vietnam? Russia, still occupying a number of conquered nations?"

Indeed, by the standards of "the family of nations," even those of us in the "civilized" West, Israel has nothing to be ashamed of!

#### The Challenge of Power

Understanding that is a challenge for us Jews which is closely associated with the very challenge of Jewish power. Our tradition has pronounced so long as the powerless critic of the powerful that we are, in fact, taken aback by what is needed to repel real adversaries. We do not want Israel to base its security on military might, and somehow many of us blame Israel for its use, rather than her adversaries which force its use.

The painful and unhappy truth is that in the real world national interests are secured by military power and are not left to the good will of adversaries and potential adversaries.

Now some of you may be saying, but Rabbi, really, is your view of Israel such that you want to see the current situation perpetuated? Is this your idea of what the Holy Land should be?

My answer turns on one word -- "should." For too many of us, morality is based on wishful thinking and not a hard look at the limits of reality. I believe that a moralist cannot afford to confuse a dream of what should be with the realization of what can be.

There is a story which I am sure many of you have heard told about David Ben-Gurion. It seems that Ben-Gurion took a foreign

dignitary to visit the Biblical Zoo in Jerusalem. They went from exhibit to exhibit, looking at the various animals in their natural habitat, and noting the biblical references to each one.

Finally they came to a cage containing a wolf and a lamb, representing the vision of the prophet Isaiah that "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb."

The guest turned to Ben-Gurion in astonishment and said "how do you do that? How do you get the wolf and the lamb to live together in the same cage?"

"No problem," said Ben-Gurion. "We just have to put in a new lamb each morning!"

Now if we were to throw Israel in with her adversaries as a lamb to a wolf, hoping on hope alone that the day has come when the wolf's nature has changed...well, we just don't have another lamb for tomorrow morning.

#### In the Present Situation

What then is my counsel for the present situation? I think there are two writers whom I admire greatly and who have offered the best advice. Charles Krauthammer wrote in the Washington Post that there is

an air of unreality about the advice being offered Israel regarding Palestinian rioting. "End the occupation" amounts to an admonition to risk suicide in order to improve one's image abroad. Israel waits to sit down with Palestinians (and Jordanians) unequivocally prepared to coexist with Israel. If out of this generation of rock throwers a leadership eventually arises which is prepared to deal, rather than dream and demand, then some good may come out of the current agony. In the interim, the only advice worth offering Israel is better riot control.

I echo Krauthammer's sentiment. And his hope that one day there will be an Arab and Palestinian leadership willing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the state of Israel and to live in peace with her. Israel has amply demonstrated in its response to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat that it is receptive and forthcoming with those who truly desire peace.

The second author is Elie Wiesel, writing in the same Exponent article quoted above. He reports that "Since the current disturbances in the West Bank and Gaza, newspapers and television stations have tried to get me to denounce Israel's



policies." He has refused. But his refusal has not been without consequences. He writes that

Clearly, my popularity in certain circles has declined. The reason is very simple -- I refuse to blame Israel. I have always refused. As a man living in the diaspora, I believe I owe something to Israel; to stand at her side and identify with her. Always.

Let us pray for peace -- that the hearts of Israel's foes will be softened -- if not out of sympathy for Israel, then out of remorse for the agony their policy of hatred for the Jew has inflicted upon their own brothers and sisters.

Let the search for peace go on -- but only with a heavy and sober recognition of the history, the context, and the reality in which peace is to be achieved.

As American Jews, let us stand by Israel and refrain from offering gratuitous advice based on messianic moralism, wishful thinking, diaspora insecurity, and slanted media reports.

Let us leave the politics to Israel which has sufficient military and moral might to know how to balance them for the preservation of the Jewish state and the Jewish soul.

And, let us leave the Messiah to God, secure in the ultimate faith that though he tarry, yet do we wait and yearn for his coming.

From the House Select Committee on Hunger, the following is the basic situation in Ethiopia:

**U.S./ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS:** Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, is the oldest independent country in Africa, one of the oldest in the world. Ethiopia's close relationship with the Soviet Union and Cuba and the presence of 7,000 Cuban troops which have been in Ethiopia since the 1977-78 Ogaden war with Somalia complicate the country's relations with neighboring nations and with the United States. Prior to the 1974 revolution, which overthrew the emperor, the United States provided extensive development assistance as well as considerable military training and equipment to Ethiopia. Following the revolution, U.S./Ethiopian relations began to cool as a result of differences over compensation for expropriated American property (a dispute recently resolved), human rights practices, and the new government's ties to bloc. The central government is fighting major insurgencies (both basically Marxist) in the northern provinces of Tigray and Eritrea, where stalemated situations continue without immediate prospect of resolution.

**GOVERNMENT POLICIES:** Ethiopia is regarded as the poorest nation in the world. Its largely rural population lives mainly without access to water, education, health care; the life expectancy is thirty-eight years. Agricultural productivity is low and declining. The attempts of the government to deal with such conditions, including a massive resettlement program (the movement of people to more productive areas) and the consolidation of remote villagers (villagization) into larger communities where basic services can be provided, have encountered great controversy. The resettlement program, which was marred by coercion and abuses, was effectively suspended in late 1985. The U.S. Government had originally funded resettlement schemes in Ethiopia as part of development assistance programs. Approximately 600,000 rural Ethiopians have been relocated to resettlement areas during the past several years. The villagization program has succeeded in expanding the delivery of basic services to the rural population without encountering the harsh criticism which marked resettlement.

**EMERGENCY SITUATION:** Protracted drought in 1984 triggered massive crop failures across Ethiopia, resulting in a severe famine which claimed hundreds of thousands, perhaps one million, lives. The world responded with one of the largest and most complicated relief operations in history. Obstacles to providing emergency assistance to the famine victims were considerable: political differences between the government and donors, rugged terrain, the weak infrastructure. But the obstacles were largely overcome, the relief assistance was effective, and the people in need were ultimately reached. The U.S. Government provided the largest volume of emergency food aid.

Now the rains have failed in Ethiopia again. Drought and locusts are expected to destroy 100 percent of the 1987/88 harvest in Eritrea and large percentages in other areas. Initial assessments indicate an emergency food deficit of 950,000 metric tons for the coming year. The U.S. Government is currently processing an initial contribution of 135,000 metric tons of food aid. Considerable non-food relief assistance will be needed to ensure adequate distribution of the food.

This information impacts on the Jews in a number of ways. The famine is about to impact on Gondar Province where the majority of Jews do live. They will need massive relief help simply to survive. All the organizations are gearing up to deliver as much of this relief as possible. This will strain their budgets to the limit.

Villagization creates another problem. Several Jewish villages have been resettled with their non-Jewish neighbors. Outbreaks of anti-Semitism have increased as a result of this policy, and as my sources tell me, at least five Jews have been murdered. Also, this policy must be of concern because of its effect on the Jewish practices of the villagers.

The consulate... probably...  
When the Consulate...  
...had brought HALLAH, wine, and a...  
...The...  
...vegetable...

Cut off from their homes and resources and put in an often hostile environment, these Jews are having difficulty in maintaining any semblance of Jewish ritual practice. All this reinforces the need for getting Jews out of Ethiopia as quickly as possible. In 1987, about 120 Jews were brought out, down from 200 in 1986. As in the past, Israel is well aware of these rescue efforts and in certain instances has actively participated. There remain about 16,000 Jews in Ethiopia (this is only an estimate). Almost all the Jews from Sudan are now in Israel and the situation in Sudan is tense so further use of that country for a staging area may be impossible. There seems to be a witch hunt for Jews in the Sudan.

Several Jews are still under arrest in Ethiopia for "seditious activity and smuggling" (translate helping Jews). Their trial has been pending and during that time some have been released. Their status is on a day to day basis.

Efforts for Ethiopian Jewry continue on many fronts, political and fund raising. The intervention of third party governments is being sought. Note: the relationship between the U.S. and Ethiopia has improved a bit, and hopefully that will open avenues for pressure. We must keep the issue alive before the Jewish public and the American press.



*Margie and Moshe Tutnauer 57 Bar Kochba Jerusalem 97875 Feb. 20, 1988*

Greetings from Jerusalem and how good it is to be back home! Margie and I have just returned from a very moving ten day visit to Ethiopia. We are bursting with information, impressions, and very strong feelings; we are also guided by one terrible fact — our visit to Ethiopia would not have been necessary if only a few well intentioned people had resisted the temptation to tell the world about the important things they were doing on behalf of Ethiopian Jewry at the time of "Operation Moses".

Our trip to Ethiopia really began with a love affair between the Tutnauers and two young Ethiopian Jewish women who now live in Israel. Edna and Elana are nineteen year old students at the Hebrew University. Last year they were living on Mt. Scopus, just a short walk from our home. We "adopted them" and have tried to fill the void left because their parents are still in Ethiopia. They can not visit their family and friends; we wanted to be their emissaries. We also wanted to visit the families of other young Jews who have left behind their widowed mothers, aging parents, and infant siblings. These young people save every possible shekel and try to send money to their loved ones. They never know whether it arrives, whether it is enough to help, and what is really happening to their stranded families yearning to join them in Israel. We were begged to carry money, presents, pictures, and hope. With heavy hearts we told our friends that while in Ethiopia we could never mention leaving Ethiopia; we could only talk about family love, our personal concern, and the undying faith of the Jewish people. Now to the trip. There were 26 of us from Israel, the United States, and Amsterdam (Erna Bindelglas) who gathered at the Cairo Airport for the Ethiopian Air flight to Addis via KHARTUM, SUDAN!!! The flight, which originated in Athens, was quite full, especially in the no smoking section (rows 4-10). Margie and I each found middle seats in rows 7 and 8. As soon as the plane took off the men on either side of Margie lit up. When she mentioned the non-smoking section they pointed thru the window to the wing and told her to sit out there. A kind gentleman, sitting across the aisle offered to change seats. Margie was now sitting on the opposite aisle; three men occupied the row in front of me. The stewardesses appeared, and after a few harsh words, the two smokers moved to the back of the plane. Suddenly, there were three seats for the nice man who had switched with Margie and was now sitting next to the window. I noticed what had happened and moved up to sit on the aisle opposite Margie. The nice man turned to me and told me that his friends had moved so that he could have all three seats and sleep. Politely, I told him that two were quite sufficient. He scowled and proceeded to fall asleep. When he awoke, we chatted, he gave me his card, told me that his name was Saeed and asked that I call him. That chance meeting would turn out to be one of the turning points of our trip. More later.

The flight was uneventful. We landed at the bustling Addis Airport almost on schedule. Lost baggage resulted in a two hour wait so it was almost noon when we arrived at the comfortable Ethiopia hotel. No sooner had we begun to unpack than the phone rang. An emergency meeting. My heart began to pound. Was I at fault for talking too much on the plane? My heart was to pound often and the same suspicion was to haunt all of us during our entire trip. The reason for the meeting had nothing to do with our behaviour. We were scheduled to spend five nights in the Gondar area (where there are several Jewish villages), but, we were told, the airport was now closed. An alternative was offered; we could fly half way, to Lake Tana, see Tissisat Falls— the headwaters of the Blue Nile, then take a six hour boat ride followed by a three hour bus ride to Gondar. All that for \$75 more. See the good side, be tourists, agree. We did!

We were then hustled off, without rest or lunch, to a boring city tour and a fascinating meeting at the American Consulate (not Embassy! because there is no Ambassador). The Consul was informative if not excited to see us. Some statistics:

- The average Ethiopia income is \$125 per year.
- Most Ethiopian walk 5 days to the nearest dirt road!
- 1,000,000 babies are born each year; 20% die before 5.
- 100,000 died in the last famine; another threatens!
- Everyone knows that there are areas of unrest.
- The unrest is national, not necessarily political.
- Any act which might be considered as giving special treatment toward ANY ethnic group is forbidden.
- "Zionist propoganda" and dollar bills left (illegally) by previous tourists have been confiscated.
- Tourists leave — Ethiopian Jews remain!
- Some are arrested because of contacts with tourists!
- There may be as many as 50,000 Ethiopian Jews.
- The community probably will not disappear.

We left the Consulate stunned, sobered, and scared. It was almost Shabbat and there was little time to prepare. Margie and Jackie had brought HALLAH, wine, and a kiddush cup from Jerusalem. Two wonderful Orthodox young men brought cans of Tuna. The hotel served a vegetarian meal. Of course, I threw the Hallah! A nice dinner and a good way to start our trip.

When we returned to our room there was a message. Saeed had called. He wanted to show us around Addis. We explained that we did not travel on Shabbat. OK he would come in the morning. No, that too was Shabbat. Finally, we made up to have dinner Saturday night. How nice of him!

Shabbat morning was spent at the Addis synagogue, a 40 minute uphill walk from our hotel. The synagogue is a two storey building with a capacity of about 75 persons and a separate woman's section. It was built by Jews who migrated from Aden somewhere between 1920-1950. They seemed to be quite comfortable, secure, and free from Anti-Semitism. About 30 families remain. Most of the men can read from the Torah and chant the service. A few children attended; they too chanted part of the services! Touching!

Approximately fifteen of the worshippers were not from the tan skin Adenite community, but rather from the black, Beta Yisrael group. Most had come to Addis from the countryside during the last few years. They appeared old, poor and uneducated. The only women present were from the Beta Yisrael. The Beta Yisrael men sat on one side of the synagogue; the Adenites were on the other side. In the past, the Adenites did not recognise the Beta Yisrael as Jews, but now do so in compliance with the decision of Israel's Chief Rabbinate. Still, Aliyot were given only to tourists and Adenites.

After services we were all invited to a home for lunch. Our generous host drives the synagogue so not all of us could accept his kind invitation. Some went to kiddush at a nearby apartment. It turns out that there are very few women in the community. Many men are bachelors, others have wives and children living in England or in Israel! We saw no cases of intermarriage or conversion. All the women we met were "imported" from Israel. The children attend the English school. They have difficulty speaking AMHARIC and are much more comfortable in English. Some know a few words of spoken Hebrew; their parents speak Hebrew rather fluently. Margie and I were reminded of Kenya and of Peru; communities whose ability to survive is doubtful.

So much for Shabbat. We made Havdalah in our Hotel and dressed for our dinner with Saeed. He arrived exactly at 7:30 and told us that he had brought a van in case friends wanted to join us! How thoughtful! And what an interesting evening. The discussion ranged from:

- AIDS** It is destined to sweep Ethiopia because Africans come to Addis bringing it with them.
- HOMOSEXUALITY** We had one who was infected in West Germany. He infected 5 others. We killed them. Males become homosexuals because of deprivation. Sex is readily available in Ethiopia-prostitution is legal. Homosexuality is unnecessary, evil and should be eliminated.
- ETHIOPIA** Is a wonderful country. Once rich-It will be rich again. My wife and children live in Denver. They will return! I hold a foreign passport. My late father was from Aden. My mother is an Ethiopian Christian. I am a Moslem like my father.
- ECONOMICS** Once I made lots of money. So did my employees. Now I make less, but they make much less. I am still well off. They are hungry.
- ISRAEL** I would like to visit but doubt whether Israel will agree. I prefer doing business with Jews. They can be trusted. I lived in Saudia Arabia. I understand Israel's hesitancy to trust "moderate" Arabs.
- EDUCATION** Once the standards were high—20 students per class. Now there are 80. More can read and write. But they can't earn a living. Another highlight of that memorable evening was a chance visit to an Ethiopian wedding held at one of Addis' fancy hotels. The reception room was decorated with paintings depicting the romance between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. After the ceremony, the bride and groom entered a waiting Mercedes. The groom's friends surrounded it. . . entertaining the couple (and delaying them) with song and dance.

Sat. evening ended with Saeed's offer to show us around Addis upon our return from Gondar the following Friday. Sunday morning began with a bang. The bus to the Airport was very late. We came to a chaotic airport at the last minute. Gondar, our destination, is a separate province, so we had to go through customs. Every piece was checked amidst shouting and pushing. Finally we boarded and were off, on time. An hour later we landed at Lake Tana, and set out on our boat trip. Fairly interesting! We stopped on two islands with "ancient" castles and churches (1500 CE). We encountered native children, barefoot and dressed in rags who had been taught to beg . . . "You . . . give me centes (money) . . . give me pens". Cute, but tragic.

We reached the Northern shore of Lake Tana rather late in the afternoon. It took over an hour to transfer our luggage from the boat to the bus. A group of youngsters gathered around us and Oscar Rauch had them singing "Old MacDonald had a farm". Warm, friendly people. Very, very poor. The bus ride to the Hotel was an adventure. There is a 8PM curfew in Gondar and we were in innocent violation of it. Since our bus was never used at night, its lights hardly worked. The road was treacherous and the many road blocks were manned by armed soldiers.

Great was our joy when we finally arrived at the Ghos Hotel in Gondar. It was to be "home" for five nights and seemed quite comfortable. Just one problem: water. The hotel was atop a high hill and there was insufficient fuel to pump the water. Therefore, we had water for only one hour in the evening (hot) and less than that (cold) in the morning. Furthermore, no one knew the exact time. Picture us — each in his/her own room, standing nude before the shower, waiting for the hot water, and then, after two minutes, screaming as it turned cold. Picture us, flushing the toilet at

7:30PM knowing that it would not refill till the next morning. Woe to him who had diarrhea! Never mind, we had come to work.

Sunday night was spent sorting medicines we had brought for the people of the villages. Our schedule called for visiting Abbas Antonius, a predominately Jewish village, early Monday morning, eating lunch on the bus, and then going on to Wolleqa, a mixed village often visited by tourists because of its pottery factory in the afternoon. When the government security officer arrived on Monday morning he told us that we would visit Wolleqa first. Our leader protested . . . to no avail.

Wolleqa is within walking distance of our hotel, but we had to go by bus. It is considered a prosperous village. People live in mud huts. There is electricity but I did not see running water . . . even for one hour a day! The village has a mixed population with a Jewish majority. At the highest point in the village there is a synagogue (a mud hut @80 sq. feet) presided over by a KES (rabbi) who is the community's teacher and leader. He is considered a TZADIK who has taught many young people synagogue and other skills. All ancient Jewish hopes beat deeply in his breast. He is brave, tragic, yearns to be remembered and cherishes every visit. His flock ranges from a person afflicted with Polio, without a wheel chair, forced to crawl so much that his hands have taken on the shape of feet, to a beautiful young woman who speaks three languages, and, somehow manages to attend High School. He and I are both "rabbis"; but Wolleqa is so very far from Wilshire Blvd. In Wolleqa there is much sickness and malnutrition. Our doctors dispensed vitamin A and encouraged the people to grow carrots lest many of them go blind. Who knows whether they listened?

Wolleqa has a pottery factory with a gas fueled kiln. It costs \$400 per month for gas and \$300 more to transport the cylinders back and forth from Addis for refilling. Margie and I discussed the situation. Guided by Maimonides' principal that the highest form of charity is helping someone earn his/her own living, we decided to contribute one month's gas. We even suggested that the village share some of its profits with less fortunate, neighboring villages, but have some doubts as to the feasibility of that proposal. Now, dear reader, if you would like to help with this project why don't you put this letter aside, now, pick up a pen, and write a check to:

National Coalition for Ethiopian Jewry-Wolleqa Project  
185 E. 56th St., New York, NY 10022

We left Wolleqa, laden with pottery bought to support the village, heavy of heart because they were staying while we were leaving, and full of admiration for some brave people. The moment we got onto the bus, we whipped out our antiseptic wash and dries. With some shame, we proceeded to "cleanse" ourselves. We had touched sick people and were going to lunch without washing our hands in running water! Only then did we eat at the hotel and waited for our security person to return. We waited a long, long time. He returned with bad news-permission to visit the other villages had been cancelled! No reason given. Each of us felt guilty...maybe I did something wrong, said something wrong, or, innocently, visited a place which was off limits. We had asked permission for everything...still we blamed ourselves.

We were destined to spend four frustrating days at the Ghos Hotel in Gondar. We got used to the water, we loved the staff, we enjoyed the climate, but we hated the place. True, we were "let out" to tour the local ancient castle, to attend a very colorful religious ceremony called Timkat (Ephiphany), and to visit the local market. So we bought baskets, chatted with the people, shared impressions, and tried not to sulk as we washed our hands and moved the medicines and clothing that we had brought for the poor from one suitcase to another.

Why had our permission been revoked? Our leader, June Mueller, tried to contact the authorities; they never returned her calls. She made an appointment with the local governor who kept her waiting three and half hours and then was "called away on Party business". Some of our group had had it. They decided to catch the next plane out of Ethiopia; maybe their protest action would be heard by tourist officials desperate for foreign currency. The rest of us "stuck it out", hoping against hope and trying to be helpful. Our dentist treated the hotel staff; even pulled one tooth. Some of us paid a second visit to Wolleqa, bought more pottery and baskets, and tried to be of some help and encouragement. Paul Bindelglas treated some sick children. Jackie Merrin taught others to chase flies as they sang: "Shoo fly, Shoo."

I joined a small group which walked into Gondar. Kids were drawn to us like flies. Most spoke only a few words of English, but there was one exception-Gmacho, an eleven year old genius. With him we discussed the laws of gravity and magnetism, in English! He helped me climb a steep hill, noticed that I was sweating, and told me: "Moses, you are very fat. But don't worry, your diet is much better balanced than mine." I asked him how it was during the famine? We ate once a week. Was another famine approaching? Not yet, besides, Ethiopia had friends who help. Who? The United States, Canada, and West Germany! Anyone else? You must mean the Soviet Union. They supply us weapons! Gmacho, we'd like to give you a sweatshirt. Do you prefer blue or orange? The color doesn't matter, only the size and the quality. Gmacho, we'd like to give you some antibiotic ointment. Do you know how to use it? No! Well, if you skin is cut . . . Oh, then there is a danger of infection. This ointment must kill bacteria.

By this time a crowd of kids had latched on to us. We went into the hotel and brought them ball point pens and notebooks. They swarmed all over us. Gmacho began to push them around, he would keep order. Gmacho, you are very smart. Some day you will be president of Ethiopia. Try to learn not to use force. Speak softly to people. Moses, you don't understand — these people are very primitive, they only understand force. Gmacho almost made Gondar worthwhile.

On Friday morning, we made a party for the Hotel employees, gave them medicine, vitamins and toys for their children, and left Gondar for Addis. We wanted to sulk, but didn't.

Upon returning to Addis on Friday afternoon we found a message: Saeed was inviting us to dinner. Margie decided to join the group for Shabbat Dinner at an Adenite home. I felt obliged to this nice man. We walked to a Chinese restaurant...for a vegetarian dinner. Shabbat Shalom in Addis. My host refused to let me pay for anything. As a matter of fact, he had a present: 10 tapes of Ethiopian music, just in case we knew people from Ethiopia who missed their native music. We talked well into the night and departed after agreeing to have dinner again on Sat. night, our last in Ethiopia. Shabbat morning was spent at the Adenite synagogue. Apparently word of our presence had spread because many more black Jews were there. We spoke to some teenagers who had relatives who know us. They invited us to visit their home after Shabbat. We asked: would that endanger them. They said no. We decided to meet them elsewhere and to talk about their situation. Some of us wanted to photograph them. They said, not on Shabbat. They then walked ten miles to their home. Shabbat lunch was at an elegant Adenite home with a beautiful, warm family. The children can chant the service and the youngest led in BIRKAT HAMAZON. The conversation warmed up when we talked about University for the children. Someone suggested Brandeis, someone else Yeshiva University, and a third person the Jewish Theological Seminary. Margie and I were shocked. We mentioned a wonderful University very close to our home. The wars of the Jews continue.

After lunch, we returned to our hotel, packed small duffel bags with medicine and clothing, and waited for our Sat. night meeting. At last the sun set. With loaded cameras we set out to meet our friend from the synagogue and some of his family. This is the story they told us:

He is a teen-ager with two older siblings in Israel. His mother, father, younger brother, younger sister (with infant baby) and infant brother have moved to the city in the hope that, somehow, they might be united with their family. Together they live in a one room hut, made of mud, supported by wood, and with a tin roof. There is one electric bulb, but no running water. The 80 square foot room is subdivided by cloth partitions hanging from the ceiling. If you were to enter the hut the first thing you might see is a woman lying on a rag mattress with her infant in her arms. Funny how large one room can be when you don't need closet space because you have no clothing, when you don't need cupboard space because there is no food to store, when you don't need a laundry room because there is nothing to launder and no machine to launder it with, when you don't need a place for the TV, Video, Stereo, when you don't need at least one bathroom for each person, and when you don't have beds and chairs to clutter the place.

The moments flew by; somehow we communicated. Some Hebrew, some English, lots of love. You are not forgotten. This duffel bag is for you. Use the vitamins, don't sell them, give them to your children. Take this sweater. Some eye ointment and baby aspirin. We'll bring pictures back to your relatives, but are you sure that we are not causing you problems by talking to you? (We are still haunted by that question.) Do you have a bank account? Can money be sent legally? Can you get to the bank? Is the money really transferred? So many questions and such a feeling of helplessness. A second family joined us. They told us that their home is a hut even farther from town, near the top of a steep hill; the smell of sewerage never goes away. They have no electricity — one small candle provides all their light. We showed pictures taken in Ashkelon. The young woman stared. Her brother! She hadn't seen him in four years. Her husband died walking from their town to the city. She was now alone with four small children and another on the way. She kissed the picture, again and again and hugged Margie with all her might. I took pictures hoping to capture the moment. The Polaroids were left with them, the others we kept. Would they come out? Did I capture the love, the longing in their faces? What can we tell her brother, what hope can we offer her, would our visit cause her trouble? We opened the duffel and gave them the few things we had left. Was this legal? Was helping poor people a crime? Would we ever see them again?

Then we left. They stayed; we drove to a wonderful Italian restaurant, washed our hands, and had an elegant vegetarian dinner with Saeed. He offered to take us to church at 6:30 the following morning for a special ceremony. That night we hardly slept. We were downstairs at 6:20. Our punctual friend was late. 6:40, 6:45, 6:50. Had he been arrested for spending time with us? Was he reporting our activities to the police? Neither . . . there is a fuel shortage in Addis. Private cars are banned on Sunday. He had gone for a pick-up truck. Church was fascinating. Thousands of people, mostly dressed in white. A church with a Holy of Holies and a ceremony reminiscent of Biblical worship. Men and women in separate sections! But I have written way too much and you are not interested in Religious Anthropology.

We left Addis, returned home and escorted our group to Hofim, a Youth Village where Ethiopian children learn Hebrew, carpentry, and electronics. We showed pictures we had taken. That's my brother, that's my mother! May I kiss the picture? May I keep it? Thank you.

We played basketball, touching them, but didn't wash our hands. We were home — they were too. But not their parents. At least, not yet.

Now our letter is done. We wanted to do so much and wound up doing so little. Maybe our presence brought hope to a few and maybe our prayers will bring help to others. So, dear friends, before you put this letter away and wash your hands for dinner, wouldnt you like to become a partner in the Pottery Factory of Wollega, Ethiopia:

With much love,  
M & M

*An agonizing decision*

# South African Jews ponder emigration

By Rabbi Menahem Herman

□ *This is the first of two parts on the dilemma facing the South African Jewish community by Rabbi Menahem Herman of Congregation B'nai Israel of Tustin.*

Cape Town South Africa—During the 1930s, members of the prosperous and historic Jewish community of Germany debated at agonizing length the merits of emigration in the face of what some felt was an impending cataclysm.

While comparison with the situation in South Africa today is by no means identical, there are some echoes of a very similar debate now taking place among many white South Africans, but especially among the nation's Jewish community.

I recently visited the Jewish community in South Africa, because of the impact this debate has already had on my own Orange County congregation. About 15 per cent of this rapidly growing Conservative synagogue are South Africa Jews. There are some 250 South African families that have relocated to this area, especially in Irvine.

I was content for some time to accept the common wisdom that prevailed in our community, that "South Africa Jews know what's best for South Africa Jews." After all, Jews welfare organizations and South African emigre self-help groups were dealing with this need.

The difficulties associated with the relocation process for South African Jews had become well known to me. I knew about the strain put upon marriages, about the sense of dislocation experienced by these people who were otherwise indistinguishable from other Southern Californians, either by dress, language, or demeanor. But I couldn't find the "hot button" that would help me earn the trust of South African Jews in our area.

Something happened to alter this situation dramatically. A young family that had been in this country for less than six months returned to Johannesburg from my community. Their departure had a galvanizing effect upon me and upon the leadership of the synagogue.

We resolved that no effort should be spared in our search for a way to reach out to South African Jews who had emigrated to our area. It also was evident to me that a visit to South Africa could do much to augment my understanding of the social, cultural and religious background of this group.

The issue of emigration was a part of virtually every encounter of my visit. However, there was nothing to prepare me for the emotional roller coaster ride that attended these experiences.

Unknown to me, a woman sitting next to me on the flight from London to Johannesburg was, in fact, the sister of a Jewish businessman who was killed the previous day on a South African Airways plane that crashed while enroute from Australia to Johannesburg.

Among the Jews who lost their lives in this accident were some seeking out prospects for a new life in Australia.

On my first full day in Johannesburg, I attended a memorial service for the dead at a synagogue filled to overflowing. The sense of loss was clearly shared by the families and community at large. I could not help but be moved by the outpouring of support and empathy that was plainly evident that evening.

In the course of a concentrated tour of Jewish educational facilities throughout South Africa, faculty willingly discussed the impact of the emigration debate.

For example, staff shared with me their concern that students leaving for other countries continue with their Jewish education. We discussed whether North American colleagues in Jewish education and in the rabbinate would be willing to help students and their families become situated in their communities if they were informed in advance of the arrival of a transfer student from a South African Jewish day school.

I found that the current pressures have taken their toll on the Jewish community in South Africa. People talk of increased numbers of divorces and even suicides among Jews, particularly in the 30-40 age group.

However, the pulse of Jewish life today



## More: Jews in South Africa

beats on in Johannesburg and Capetown, the two Jewish communities I visited on my trip. People look after their Jewish concerns: educating the young, sustaining Jewish family life, and caring for the elderly.

I had occasion while in Capetown to learn about emigration from the perspective of a non-Jewish educator. Both he and his wife are completing degrees in fields related to education and plan to emigrate to Europe. He stressed to me the fact that other young professionals such as he who are not Jewish also contem-

plate prospects for leaving the country. It is as painful for them as for their Jewish peers to leave behind family and home.

Not everyone is prepared to confront the tensions and burdens that attend the emigration effort. I met families who had returned from Israel, North America, and Australia. Some expressed the determination to try again at a future date. Some have decided to stay in South Africa, following an unsuccessful emigration attempt. Others have returned "burned out" financially, physically, and

*Continued from Page 11*

emotionally.

I learned on my visit to South Africa that emigration is not kept under wraps. In fact, it's big business. Appliance dealers run ads in newspapers encouraging those who are leaving to purchase home appliances from them with the appropriate current for the country of their destination. Bookshops have racks of books on "how to emigrate." However, none of this lessens the trauma associated with the emigration process.

On the two Friday evenings that fell during my trip, I sat down to Sabbath dinner in two homes with more than a

dozen people on each occasion. The subject of emigration dominated the table talk.

One invited guest was a mother who spoke of her four children, one in Johannesburg, one in Australia, one in Canada, and another in America. A closely knit family no more. The mother now spends a good portion of the year "continent-hopping."

"But what happens," she wandered aloud, "when I'm too old to make the long trips to be with my children? Silence.

—To be continued

## Canadian Issues

Lawrence Troster

The Canadian Jewish community is more centrally organized than the American community and many social action activities are dealt with by Canadian Jewish Congress. Some of these issues have not been given as high a priority as they should have, however, and many Conservative synagogues have very limited social action activities. What follows is a partial list of issues and a overview of activities.

### Soviet Jewry

This is one issue which receives the most attention and which is best organized both at the national level (through special committees of Canadian Jewish Congress) as well as at the synagogue level.

### Hunger and the Homeless

A Canadian branch of Mazon has been started and is making some headway but most congregations do not have Mazon committees. Some of the synagogues have begun food collections for community foodbanks. Canadian Jewish Congress has not acted in any significant way to lobby for the alleviation of hunger in Canada. There has also not been much effort to help the homeless or to solve a severe affordable housing crisis which has begun to affect the Jewish community.

### Syrian Jewry

See attached report and material.

### Abortion Rights

There is a vigorous anti-choice movement which is seeking to have the government pass legislation protecting the fetus from conception. This is in response to a recent Supreme Court decision striking abortion from the criminal code on constitutional grounds. The community has not, on an organized level, brought Jewish views on the subject into the public eye.

### Sunday Closing Laws

Many provinces in Canada still have Sunday closing laws. Thus Jewish businesses have sometimes been prosecuted for opening on Sunday even when they have been closed on Saturday (This may depend on the size of the store and the number of employees). In Ontario, there is a considerable amount of debate on the subject and Canadian Jewish Congress has attempted to put forward the idea that everyone should choose their own "pause day" without government coercion.

In future reports I will report on the progress of these issues as well as others not listed here.

Syrian Jewry Update

Rabbi Lawrence Troster

In addition to the material reproduced here the following information must not be put in to the general press for fear of endangering the rescue efforts of the Dr. Ronald Feld Fund.

The Feld Fund, which operates out of Toronto and Baltimore, is not only for supplying Syrian Jews with ritual objects, but is also used for rescuing people. The details of these rescues must remain secret but they have succeeded in bringing out over a hundred people in the last few years at a costs of tens of thousands of dollars. Therefore, any monetary effort for the fund is critical. This is especially the case now, as the Fund has been depleted by several recent rescues.

The National Task Force for Syrian Jewry of Canadian Jewish Congress attempts to have the Canadian government apply political pressure on the Syrians to allow Jews to emigrate legally.

The Task Force also sponsors the yearly Shabbat Zachor services which are meant to keep the plight of Syrian Jewry in the communal consciousness.

The situation in Syria is now quite bad. Jewish children have been beaten in the Jewish area in Damascus at Purim by Palestinians. Palestinians have also been following young Jewish women around and making obscene remarks to them. There are also 9 men who have been held without charge in secret police centres in Damascus for about six months. These men have been tortured. Four of them are teenagers.

Polical action to publicize the plight of this community must be made along with the raising of funds for the rescue efforts. The material given with this report gives several examples of what can be done.



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# Organizations and People

## Ashkenazim, Sephardim to pray together at Shabbat Zachor

# Special yahrzeit service dedicated to Syrian Jews

By  
**ANCIL KASHETSKY**

**TORONTO —**

Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews will pray together at the Beth Tzedec Synagogue Saturday, Feb. 27 in a special Shabbat Zachor yahrzeit dedicated to the memory of four Jewish women murdered in 1974 while trying to escape from Syria.

Beth Tzedec has been dedicating the yearly Shabbat Zachor service to the memory of the murdered women since 1975 by combining the styles of both Ashkenazi and Sephardi

traditions and by reciting the mourners kaddish for the women.

Yahrzeit for the four — sisters Laura, Mazel and Farah Sabbagh and their cousin Eva Saad is now celebrated in shuls throughout the world, says Judy Feld Carr of the National Task Force for Syrian Jews of Canadian Jewish Congress.

"Shabbat Zachor is the only day of the year we dedicate to Syrian Jews who are the forgotten Jewish hostages of the Middle East," she said.

It is ironic that the mutilated bodies of the murdered women from Damascus were found just

prior to Shabbat Zachor whose weekly Torah parsha is about Amalek, an arch enemy of the Jewish people, Carr said.

Carr said the yahrzeit is more than a commemoration of the four murdered women. "It is a day we go public and remember what is happening to Jews in Syria today.

"Today there are nine Jewish men, five of whom are under the age of 18, who have been held in Syrian interrogation centres without charges or without trials since September, 1987. Rabbis are being asked to pray for their release."

Rabbis throughout

Canada were sent letters from CJC's National Task Force for Syrian Jews, National Committee for Jews in Arab Lands and National Department of Religious Affairs requesting them to dedicate Shabbat Zachor to the memory of the four murdered women, she said.

At Beth Tzedec, aliyas will be given to members of the Sephardi community who will daven in the style they would do in their shuls.

The cantor of Beth Tzedec, Paul Kowarski, will be joining with Sephardi cantor Armand Moyal (formerly of Magen David congregation) in a

service which will combine the Ashkenazi and Sephardi prayers.

Prof. Norman Stillman of Boston, an authority on Jews in Arab lands, will deliver the sermon dealing with Ashkenazi and Sephardi relations. Following the Shabbat Zachor service, Stillman will speak at a noon hour luncheon the same day on the topic of Jews in Arab countries. Tickets for the event must be reserved in advance.

Carr said the Jewish

community of Syria, which numbers between 4,500 and 4,800 people, is totally isolated from world Jewry, and Jews are denied the right to emigrate and live under constant fear. Because there aren't enough Jewish men, many women face the serious problem of not being able to marry. Some women, she said, may be forced to intermarry with Arabs.

Consequently, rabbis in Canada are also being asked to tell their con-

gregation to send letters of concern to External Affairs Minister Joe Clark to intercede with appropriate Syrian officials to allow some of the Syrian women to leave for Canada in order to get married.

Currently, all religious materials, books and articles are being sent from Toronto to Syria by the Dr. Ronald Feld Fund for Jews in Arab Lands of the Beth Tzedec congregation, Carr said.



*Guards whipped soles of feet***Syrian torture of Jewish prisoners revealed****TORONTO**

Details of Syrian secret police torture of Jewish prisoners have been revealed by a man who spent six months in that country's jails.

The man, whose identity cannot be published, later managed to leave the country. He related his prison experience to the National Task Force for Syrian Jews of Canadian Jewish Congress.

During his imprisonment, he was moved back and forth from a small isolation cell to a larger area which contained 140 prisoners. In neither place were there any

washing or toilet facilities.

"We slept on stone floors, which were unbearably cold. We had no blankets or other covering. To get some warmth in the large cell we had to sleep on top of each other."

While in the isolation cell he was bound hand and foot, frequently blindfolded. He constantly soiled his clothing because of refusal of access to any toilet facilities. He was repeatedly beaten by the secret police, the city police and his jailers during interrogation sessions.

He was placed blindfolded inside a large suspended truck tire. The tire was

spun and as it revolved he was struck repeatedly until he blacked out. Upon revival the process was repeated.

The guards also used the dreaded Syrian torture process known as "falakot." The soles of his feet were whipped with flails of thin strips of leather, until the skin and flesh were torn away. The prisoner was unable to walk.

Even after receiving medical treatment following his release he requires help to walk, is in constant pain and has other permanent disabilities.

This is not an isolated instance, says the task force.

Over a long period of time, similar reports of this kind of treatment have been given by Jews who have been imprisoned without charge or trial.

The number of Syrian Jews now held by the secret police in Damascus has risen to nine.

Latest reports monitored by the task force reveal that four recent arrests have added to the five young men reported by The CJN on Dec. 3, 1987, to have been held in a similar manner for several months.

Selim Swed and Eli Swed, two brothers, and Albert Laham and his 18-year-old son, Victor,

were seized in December and are held in different interrogation centres in Damascus.

Earlier, on Saturday, Sept. 5, 1987, Faraj Dirziah (16), Kassam Ghounegh (15) and Moussa Khalife (15) were arrested while attempting to leave the country. For over two months their families knew nothing of their imprisonment.

The mothers have recently been allowed to see their sons once every two weeks through a small window in the interrogation centre, but are not allowed any contact.

Zaki and Faraj Namroud, two brothers, were seized in late November and are also held without charge.

Syria, although a signatory to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which provides citizens of contracting countries the right to free movement across national borders, prohibits Jews from emigrating.

Unsuccessful attempts to

leave result in arrests without charge or trial, indeterminate periods of im-

prisonment, and carefully planned, official sessions of beatings and torture.

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# FAC" ' SHEET: JEWS N SYR A

## CURRENT STATUS OF JEWS IN SYRIA

Approximately 4,500 Jews remain or the more than 40,000 who lived in Syria before 1948. They are now concentrated in the ghettos of **Damascus** (3,600), **Aleppo** (700) and **Qamishi** (100). Their condition has been described as desperate. There is a growing sense of fear and hopelessness among the Jews, and this has led to desperate attempts by entire families to flee the country. Thus, a Danish journalist writing in the magazine, "Politiken Copenhagen" in an article entitled, "Jews in Syria, Locked up in a Nameless Street" stated, "Should the world hear the scream from there, it would be shocked!"

## DENIAL TO JEWS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

— No Jewish emigration has been permitted at all during the various regimes in Syria; the attitude of the Syrian government has always been extremely harsh. In fact, Syria has been the only Arab country which, since 1948, has never permitted its Jewish citizens to leave. Alone among Arab countries, the Syrian government continues to hold its Jewish community hostage. According to the former Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister, Abdallah Khani, "Syria is at war with Israel, and we cannot let our citizens go to swell the ranks of the Israeli Army. The absurdity of this contention is apparent when one considers the fact that less than 1,000 Syrian Jews are of military age. Even if all were to go to Israel, they would hardly affect the military balance. Moreover, the Syrians refuse to allow the emigration of those Jews who have relatives in Canada, the United States or in the Latin American countries, far removed from the Middle East conflict. What is even more absurd is the denial of emigration to young Jewish women to other countries in order for them to marry.

The dashing of all hopes for legal emigration combined with the deteriorating situation within Syria, has prompted Syrian Jews to turn in desperation to illegal avenues of escape. These illegal attempts to escape have led to arrests, harsh interrogation and imprisonment of those caught by the authorities or suspected of aiding others to leave.

— Identification cards of the Jews are marked in black letters with the word "Mousawi" which means "Member of the Mosaic Faith" or more simply "Jew". In the case of Moslems and Christians, the entry for religion is left blank.

— The Damascus cemetery, which antedates the Romans, was confiscated, and almost entirely destroyed, and a highway to the airport built over the ruins.

**WHAT WE MUST DO** — The Jewish community of Syria is sustained by two things — their religion and their hope. With few teachers and fewer religious books and ritual objects, they desperately struggle to teach their children their glorious heritage; for they have always been a religious community, and notwithstanding the horrors and realities with which they live, they look to the free world in the hope of rescue and redemption.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us, as free people, to indicate our displeasure when the human rights of Syrian Jews are endangered. They must be free to leave for friendly countries, and to be reunited with their families abroad. Until that time, our efforts must continue, and our voices must cry out.

In order to prevent the ultimate destruction of the remnants of Syrian Jewry, we Canadians call upon the government of Syria to lift all repressive regulations, and permit its Jewish citizens to emigrate freely in accordance with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights to which Syria is a signatory.

We call upon the world governments which adhere to traditional humanitarian principles to use their good offices and best efforts to press for the reunification of Syrian Jewish families with their relatives abroad.

## LETTERS OF CONCERN MUST BE SENT TO THE FOLLOWING:

1. Members of Parliament, House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario.
2. Secretary of State for External Affairs, House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario.
3. Minister of Immigration and Employment, House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario.
4. His Excellency President Hafez el-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Damascus, Syria.
5. Secretary General Xavier Perez de Cueller, United Nations, New York, New York 10017, U.S.A.

In order to finance the shipments of religious books, ritual objects, and monetary support for the Syrian Jewish Communities, cards for all occasions and donations are sent from:

### THE DR. RONALD FELD FUND FOR JEWS FROM ARAB LANDS

Beth Tzedec Congregation, 1700 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Canada M5P 3K3 Area Code (416) 781-3511.

U.S. address: c/o The Beth Tfiloah Congregation, 3300 Old Court Rd., Baltimore, Maryland 21208

Contributions \$5.00 and up are tax deductible.

### ALL PROCEEDS FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN SYRIA

Published by:

**NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR JEWS IN ARAB LANDS AND THE NATIONAL TASK FORCE FOR SYRIAN JEWS**  
Canadian Jewish Congress • 4600 Bathurst Street, Willowdale, Ontario, Canada M2R 3V2

(416) 635-2883

— Jews are not allowed to vote or to be candidates for election.

— Arrests and torture are commonplace.

— Mail from abroad is censored.

## ECONOMIC RESTRICTIONS

— Government employment is not open to Jews.

— Jews have great difficulties with regard to inheritance or in disposing of property, requiring special permission to sell a car or a house.

— The Jews must account for any foreign money sent to them, by informing the Secret Police.

— There is a great deal of Jewish poverty. Unless a Jew is skilled in a profession or owns his own business, he works at a lower scale of income than the Moslems.

## JEWISH EDUCATION IN SYRIA

— Moslem directors are appointed by the government to supervise the Jewish schools.

— Some Jews are allowed to attend university, but their numbers and fields of study are restricted.

— The two remaining Jewish schools in Damascus, and one in Aleppo, were ordered to accept a large number of Palestinian students who intimidate the Jewish students. Several teachers in the Hebrew schools are Moslem.

— Jewish teachers are grossly underpaid, because many parents of the students are very poor.

— There are few religious books and ritual objects because so many were destroyed in anti-Jewish riots.

— Jewish students study from the same Syrian textbooks as other students. These contain vicious anti-Jewish propaganda.

## FOREIGN TRAVEL AND EMIGRATION

— A few Jews have been allowed to leave Syria recently to visit relatives or to seek medical treatment, but they are still required to leave a large security deposit, and to return by a stipulated date. The members of their immediate family must stay behind as assurance for their return.

[end]

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## COMMENT

The Forgotten  
Prisoners Of Zion

DAVID TOPPER

Special to the Jewish Times

Last May, 21 Soviet refuseniks sent an extraordinary telegram to Prime Minister of France Jacques Chirac prior to his visit to Moscow. The appeal in the message was not for the plight of refuseniks themselves, but rather for another oppressed Jewish community — the Jews of Syria. The telegram asked Chirac to use his influence to "facilitate the exodus of those Jews who wish to leave Syria." The plight of Syrian Jews, despite the very clear awareness of the situation among Soviet refuseniks, nevertheless remains a low priority item on the North American Jewish agenda.

The rectification of this inequity is a major endeavor of the National Task Force for Syrian Jews of the Canadian Jewish Congress. In addition to disseminating information on the fate of Syrian Jewry, the Task Force sends religious books and artifacts as well as financial aid for the poor to the community in Syria.

As I write this, five Syrian Jews (three of whom are boys) are being held in the interrogation center of the Syrian secret police in Damascus for trying to leave the country. Their families are not permitted to visit them and there is fear that they have been tortured.

These five Jews are part of a remnant community of about 4,500, approximately one-tenth of the Jews who lived in Syria before the founding of the State of Israel. For most, the present situation is almost hopeless: they are humiliated and harassed at the whims of the police and other authorities.

The plight of Syrian Jewry is perhaps most poignantly revealed by the suffering of broken families. The following

*Dr. Topper is a representative of the National Task Force for Syrian Jews, a part of the Canadian Jewish Congress.*

story is representative of countless episodes in the recent tragic history of many Jewish families trying to escape. In this case, the parents were professionals (the mother a physician, the father an engineer), and thus by Syrian standards relatively prosperous. But the mother developed cancer and needed special chemotherapy

**Entire families are never allowed to leave; they are always broken in some manner.**

treatment available only in the West. She and her husband were permitted to travel to New York for such medical treatment, provided they leave their children behind (boys, aged 4 and 6).

This ploy is typically used by Syrian authorities to insure the return of Jews. Entire families are never allowed to leave; they are always broken in some manner.

The tragedy of this family was particularly acute. For after spending 18 months in treatment, the mother was diagnosed as terminal (she is only 28 years old). She therefore faced a terrible dilemma: she did not wish to return to die in Syria, yet, of course, she desperately wanted to be with her children. Fortunately, she was spared having to make that choice, for the Task Force helped the children to come to freedom with the financial support of the Dr. Ronald Feld Fund for Jews in Arab Lands. The family was reunited — with tears of joy — last August.

In Canada, this Shabat has been designated as a National Day of Remembrance for Jews in Arab Lands. Perhaps it will become a North American tradition.

The choice of *Shabbat Zachor* is of grave significance, for it is the Yahrzeit of four young Jewish women from Damascus who were

Continued On Page 31

## COMMENT

Continued From Page 7

murdered in 1974 while trying to escape into Lebanon. Their raped and mutilated bodies were dumped in sacks in front of their parents' homes. Such atrocities we must not forget — especially on the Sabbath of Remembrance.

*Shabbat Zachor* is always the Sabbath before Purim. One of the four "special" sabbaths, its name comes from the additional Torah portion read from Deuteronomy (25: 17-19) whose theme is the duty to remember what Amalek and the Amalekites did to Israel. The Amalekites were people of the Negev who attacked the tired and famished stragglers at the rear of the Israelites after they crossed the Red Sea. The portion ends: "Thou shalt not forget."

Haman, we are told, was a descendant of the Amalekites so it is appropriate that it be read this weekend.

If the Soviet refuseniks did not forget, despite the peril of their own situation, surely we too should not forget the plight of Syrian Jews.

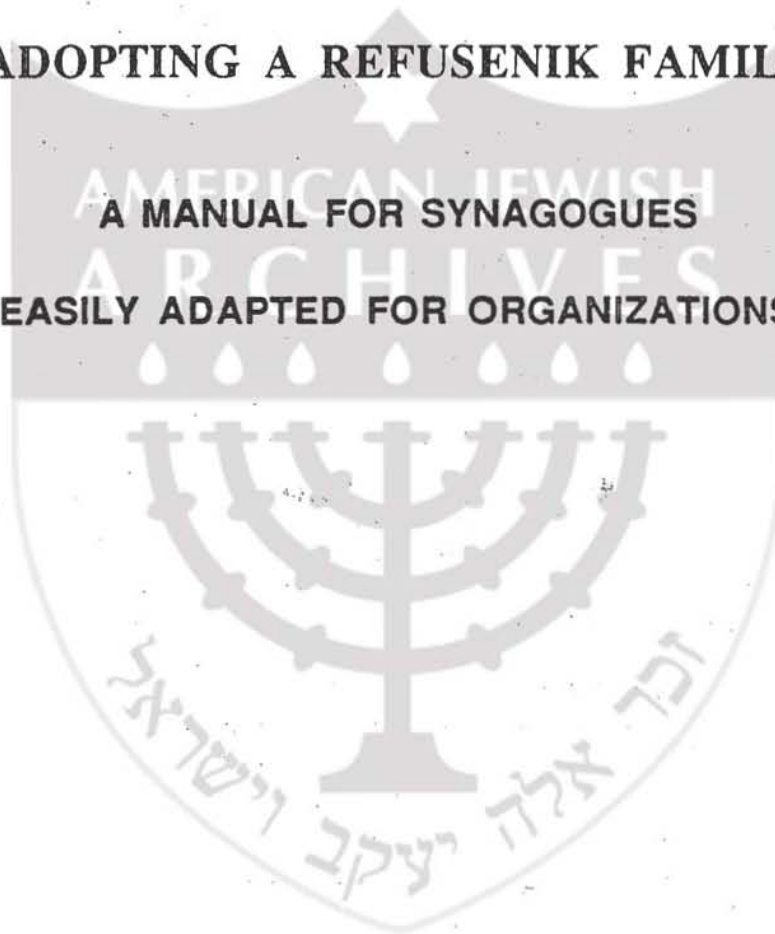
For further information, contact the Dr. Ronald Feld Fund for Jews in Arab Lands, c/o Beth Tfiloh Congregation, 3300 Old Court Road, Baltimore, MD 21208. □

# ADOPTING A REFUSENIK FAMILY

AMERICAN JEWISH  
A MANUAL FOR SYNAGOGUES

ARCHIVES

EASILY ADAPTED FOR ORGANIZATIONS



Prepared by Marilyn Labendz  
Chairman of Campaign to Summit III  
MetroWest Conference on Soviet Jewry  
60 Glenwood Avenue  
East Orange, New Jersey 07017  
(201) 673-6800

## HOW TO ADOPT A REFUSENIK FAMILY

### GUIDELINES FOR SYNAGOGUES

**AIM:** The adoption of a refusenik family gives that family moral support on an ongoing basis, knowing that they are members of a congregation of Jews that care about their welfare and safety and their Judaism.

The adoption of a refusenik family also **PROTECTS** that family in that a continual writing campaign and a phone campaign to the Soviet government indicates that the West knows and cares about that family. This increases the likelihood of an easier time for the family and perhaps a quicker release.

The adoption of a refusenik family sensitizes our own congregants as to the great ease with which we choose to practice or not practice our Judaism. **IT IS AN EXCITING AND ENRICHING EXPERIENCE.**

**A WONDERFUL RESULT, IF NOT THE QUICK RELEASE OF THE FAMILY, WOULD BE A VISIT BY MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION TO MAKE THE TIES EVEN STRONGER.**

#### **HOW DOES A SYNAGOGUE ADOPT A FAMILY?**

Call your local Conference on Soviet Jewry, usually through your Federation's Community Relations Committee for the name. They will send you the profile on that family.

#### **WHAT IS A CONTINUAL WRITING CAMPAIGN?**

The aim of this campaign is to have Gorbachev receive a letter **DAILY** on behalf of your family!!!!!!

Set up a schedule by which each of those who are participating know that every 2nd Tuesday, for example, they are to write a brief letter, on the official stationary, and send it **REGISTERED, RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**. If enough congregants participate, no one member should have to write more than once or twice a month.

## WHAT IS OFFICIAL STATIONARY?

Create a name for your committee. (The Gilbo family of Leningrad, now released, were the objects of the "INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE TO SAVE THE GILBOS").

Create a letterhead. This does not have to be fancy, nor does this have to be on special bond paper. Multiple copies are needed however. Photostats are fine!

Enlist the aid of your political committee, whether or not your municipality is involved, to ask government officials, local, state and federal to lend their name to the margin as supporters. **ONCE THEY SAY YES, THEN YOU CAN INCLUDE THEM IN YOUR NEWSBRIEFS ON THE FAMILY, INVITE THEM TO PHONE CALLS, ASK THEM TO ADVOCATE FOR THEM AMONG THEIR COLLEAGUES, AND ABOVE ALL, ASK THEM TO WRITE TO GORBACHEV ON THEIR OFFICIAL STATIONARY! (IF THEY BECOME REALLY INVOLVED, YOU CAN SUGGEST THEY TRAVEL TO THE USSR ON A FACT FINDING MISSION)!**

## WHAT IS A CONTINUAL PHONE CAMPAIGN AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The refuseniks thrive on contact from the West. We have been told countless times that we are their lifeline. If you establish a specific time that your calls will be placed (every third Tuesday at 2:PM), you will ensure that your family will be home eagerly awaiting your call. Of equal importance, **YOU WILL BE TELLING THE KGB THAT THEY ARE KNOWN IN THE WEST AND ARE BEING MONITORED!!!!**

Please understand that calling to the Soviet Union is not always easy and sometimes their operators are, in fact, quite temperamental. Not all calls go through as scheduled.

The first phone call should always be a "messenger" call, for which the refuseniks are summoned to the Post Office to receive the call. At that time, it is best to ask them if it is advisable or safe to make subsequent calls to their home.

There is no set limit on how many phone calls you may or should make. Temple Sholom of Succasunna, NJ, under the inspiration of Rabbi Joel Soffin, has an average of 3 calls a week from various congregants' homes, (to different refuseniks, however).

It is up to each congregation to determine if the calls be placed from the synagogue, at the synagogue's cost, or from someone's home, as a donation.

It is highly recommended that at each phone call, one person from the previous call be there ("Remember me? I spoke to you last. I'd like you to meet my friend...").

Where possible, invite government officials, from any level to the phone call. We encourage publicity at these times (newspaper coverage, etc.).

The National Conference on Soviet Jewry has a pamphlet on how to call to the Soviet Union. Write for it or call.  
10 E. 40th Street, New York, NY 10016. (212)679-6122.

#### WHERE DO WE GET THE REFUSENIK NAME BRACELETS?

Call the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, for order forms. The cost is \$10 each.

If the name of the family is not one that is already imprinted, and you order in bulk (at a reduced cost), NCSJ will imprint them for you.

Your synagogue may opt to give a bracelet to each official participating in this advocacy as a gift.

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE YOUR MUNICIPALITY INVOLVED?

Montville Township, NJ, at the insistence of Rabbi Asher Krief, of the Pine Brook Jewish Center, and with the help of the MetroWest Conference on Soviet Jewry, drafted a proposal that their family, the Kosharovsky's, be made honorary citizens of the Township. It was passed immediately by the Town Council.

If your municipality does want to become involved this way, then it is important to outreach to all civic groups and schools. (Each homeroom, for example, could write once a month, etc). **MOST IMPORTANTLY**, involve them in each process, writing, calling, etc., and **KEEP THEM INFORMED** as to what is happening. Otherwise, the adoption is meaningless to them.

#### WHY A PUBLICITY COMMITTEE?

This adoption, if done to its fullest, will involve a great many members of your congregation. A central clearing house for news on the family, (preferably the overall chairs), will facilitate a monthly official update for the entire congregation, easily published in the synagogue's bulletin and for copies to the Town Council, schools, civic organizations, etc.

By involving the press, you are sensitizing the general population as to the plight of Soviet Jewry, and perhaps inspiring other communities to do the same.

### **IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE WE NEED TO KNOW?**

It is vital that you keep the local Conference on Soviet Jewry abreast of any news on your family, especially after phone calls. You should send them a copy of your news updates on a regular basis.

Keep in touch with your Conference on Soviet Jewry because they can tell you when someone is travelling to the USSR and will be seeing your family, or someone who knows your family. In this way, you can send in items and fulfill their requests for material needs. You can even exchange photos more readily, making the contact more personal.

Your Conference on Soviet Jewry can supply you with pamphlets on how to mail to the Soviet Union, important names and addresses of the Soviet government officials, in addition to supplying you with who your town, state and federal officials are if necessary.

Your Conference on Soviet Jewry will contact you, if possible, as soon as they hear of your family's release.

### **WHAT DO WE DO WHEN OUR FAMILY IS GRANTED A VISA?**

Call your family to wish them "mazal tov" and, of course, notify all congregants and participants in their adoption.

Then, call the Conference on Soviet Jewry for a new family to bring "mazal" to and start all over again!!

**ADOPTING A REFUSENIK FAMILY IS A VERY SIGNIFICANT UNDERTAKING FOR ALL THOSE INVOLVED. ITS CONSEQUENCES ARE BROAD AND MULTI-FACETED. WE HOPE THAT YOUR CONGREGATION CAN SHARE IN THE JOY THAT OTHERS HAVE HAD IN GREETING THEIR ADOPTED FAMILY AT THEIR SYNAGOGUE.**

**SUGGESTED FORMAT OF COMMITTEES**

**CO-CHAIRS IN CHARGE OF SYNAGOGUE OUTREACH  
SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES:**

**phone committee:**

- 1). canvas membership, starting with Mobilization participants, as to who would like to participate in periodic phone calls to USSR, perhaps offering their home.
- 2). set up schedule of calling, (whose turn it is, what official will be present, etc.).
- 3). confirm those to be participating in call several days before, and find replacements if necessary.

**correspondence  
committee :**

- 1). work with phone committee to determine who will call and/or write.
- 2). set up correspondence schedule of who will write which day of week, and remind them.
- 3). make certain all correspondents have a supply of official stationary.
- 4). keep track of who received "return receipt requested" stub back,( and report to postal claims committee.
- 5). of course, it would be wonderful if the correspondents would also write to the family. Seeing official stationary on their behalf is a big boost of morale.

**OBJECT: TO HAVE ONE LETTER EACH DAY OF THE WEEK GO TO  
KREMLIN ON BEHALF OF FAMILY.**

**postal claims  
committee:**

keep track of who did not receive "return receipt" stub and file on a somewhat regular basis with US Post Office. This makes the USSR Postal System pay us for non-receipt of letters. Monies collected can then be used to defray the cost of the phone calls.

**Hebrew School liason committee:**

- 1). help coordinate writing campaign from school with general correspondence campaign.
- 2). create programs for youth to do.

**bracelet committee:**

- 1). ask all those on committees to purchase name bracelets; expand to general membership.
- 2). see to it that all officials who participate in a phone call receive a bracelet at that time.

**SINCE THE CO-CHAIRS RECEIVE ALL THIS INFORMATION AS PART OF THEIR SUPERVISORY CAPACITY, IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED THAT THE CO-CHAIRS (SYNAGOGUE AND OUTREACH) WRITE THIS COLUMN AND ENSURE ITS INCLUSION IN THE BULLETIN AND TO SEND IT TO ALL OUTREACH CHAIRS, WHERE APPLICABLE. IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE SYNAGOGUE'S MONTHLY BULLETIN CONTAIN NEWS OF WHO CALLED, THE SUBSTANCE OF THE CALL, WHO GOT A LETTER THROUGH, WHO RECEIVED A LETTER, ETC. (YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER PUBLISHING THE LETTERS RECEIVED).**



**CO-CHAIRS IN CHARGE OF CIVIC OUTREACH**

**(THIS IS NEEDED PRIMARILY IF TOWNSHIP ADOPTS THE FAMILY AS HONORARY CITIZENS)**

**political committee:**

1). to get as many local, state and federal leaders to lend their name and support to the official stationery (COMMITTEE TO SAVE THE.....) on which the correspondence campaign to Kremlin is written.

2). be liaison to town council, as to publicity, and including important town members in any event regarding the family.

**outreach committee:**

1). high school, junior high and elementary school to involve them in writing, perhaps calling. (Be in touch with correspondence committee as to who received letters and return receipt stubs).

2). organize program for assembly, with help of Community Relations Committee or local Conference of Soviet Jewry.

**YOU MAY WANT TO BREAK UP THIS COMMITTEE INTO AN OVERALL CHAIR AND SUB-COMMITTEES FOR EACH SCHOOL.**

**publicity:**

1). develop relationship with local newspaper reporter and keep her/him abreast of developments; invite to all major functions, phone calls, etc. **FIND OUT IF YOUR NEWSPAPER COVERED THE WASHINGTON RALLY AND USE THAT REPORTER AS HE/SHE IS ALREADY SOMEWHAT EDUCATED AND AND PROBABLY SYMPATHETIC.**

2). ensure that outreach committee receives information to be sent on a regular basis to "agencies" they are dealing with.

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOVIET JEWRY**  
**10 East 40th Street, Suite 907**  
**New York, New York 10016**

**USEFUL ADDRESSES IN THE USSR AND THE USA**

**SOVIET OFFICIALS IN USSR**

**Mikhail M. Gorbachev**  
**General Secretary of the**  
**CPSU Central Committee**  
**The Kremlin**  
**Moscow**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Andrei A. Gromyko**  
**President of the Supreme Soviet**  
**The Kremlin**  
**Moscow**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Eduard A. Shevardnadze**  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs**  
**Smolenskaya-Sennaya Square 32/34**  
**Moscow 121200**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Nikolai Ryzhkov**  
**Chairman, Council of Ministers**  
**The Kremlin**  
**Moscow**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Aleksandr M. Rekunkov**  
**Procurator General**  
**ul.Pushkinskaya 15-A**  
**Moscow 103009**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Sergei P. Burenkov**  
**Minister of Health**  
**K-51 Rehmanovsky Pereulok 3**  
**Moscow 103051**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Anatoly P. Aleksandrov**  
**President, Academy of Science**  
**V-71, Leninsky Prospekt 14**  
**Moscow 117901, GSP-1**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Gen. Karpov**  
**Chief, Moscow KGB**  
**Moscow**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Viktor M. Chebrikov**  
**Chairman, KGB**  
**ul.Dzerzhinsky 2**  
**Moscow 10100**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Aleksandr V. Vlasov**  
**Minister of Interior**  
**ul.Ogareva 6**  
**Moscow 103009**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Boris Shumilin**  
**Deputy Minister of Interior**  
**ul.Ogareva 6**  
**Moscow 103009**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Rudolf Kuznetsov**  
**Chief, OVIR**  
**ul.Ogareva 6**  
**Moscow 103009**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Gen. Ivan Shutov**  
**Chief, Moscow Militia**  
**Moscow**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Gennady Ivanovich Tomin**  
**Chief, Moscow OVIR**  
**Kolpachny Pereulok 9**  
**Moscow**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Andrei Bokov**  
**Chief, Leningrad OVIR**  
**26 Zheliabova Street**  
**Leningrad**  
**RSFSR, USSR**

**Mr. Petrenko**  
**Chief, Ukraine OVIR**  
**ul.Bogomoltsa 8**  
**Kiev Ukr.SSR, USSR**

SOVIET OFFICIALS IN USA

Ambassador  
Soviet Mission to the U.N.  
136 East 67th Street  
New York, New York 10021

Yuri V. Dubinin  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the USSR  
1125 16th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Valentin Kamenev  
Consul General  
Consulate of the USSR  
2790 Green Street  
San Francisco, Calif. 94123

UNITED NATIONS OFFICIALS

Javier Perez de Cuellar  
Secretary General  
United Nations  
New York, New York 10017

Vernon Walters  
The Representative of the USA  
to the United Nations  
799 United Nations Plaza  
New York, New York 10017

INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS

Heinrik Beer  
Secretary General  
Executive Council  
International Red Cross  
7 Avenue de la Paiz  
Ch. 1211  
Geneva 1, Switzerland

UNITED STATES OFFICIALS

President Ronald Reagan  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Hon. (Your Senators)  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Hon. George P. Shultz  
Secretary of State  
Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Hon. (Your Representative)  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Commission on Security and  
Cooperation in Europe  
(Helsinki Commission)  
Congress of the United States  
3257 House Office Building, Annex 2  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Assistant Secretary for  
Human Rights and  
Humanitarian Affairs  
Department of State  
2291 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

NA/D1/007

# LEADERS' DIGEST

A PERIODIC SUMMARY OF MATERIALS AND NEWS FROM THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

January 1988

This bulletin is designed to provide readers with a quick overview of materials produced and distributed by the American Jewish Committee in recent weeks. If you would like copies of any item described, please use the order blank on the last page. Single copies of materials, except those marked with an asterisk, will be sent free to AJC members; all other orders must be prepaid.

**The Quality of American Jewish Life — Two Views**, by Steven M. Cohen and Charles S. Liebman. 55 pp.

Two scholars consider much the same data about Jewish life in America — intermarriage, education, ritual observance, etc. — but reach very different appraisals. Rejecting the extremes of both optimism and pessimism, Prof. Cohen writes: "Hope for a better future ought to replace fear of an imminent catastrophe as the motivating spirit...of Jewish communal life." On the other hand, Prof. Liebman maintains that what passes for Jewish life and belief is "increasingly incoherent...and random," with little real Judaic content.

###

**Women of Faith in Dialogue**, edited by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. New York: Crossroad, 1987. 195 pp.

Eighteen Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim women discuss the challenges that confront women of their respective faiths, in a unique dialogue project sponsored by the AJC. Topics include: racism, sexism, classism, confrontation, and a common agenda for working toward world peace and justice. The book also contains a model interreligious service and

guidelines for founding local chapters of Women of Faith.

###

**Jewish Women on the Way Up: The Challenge of Family, Career and Community**, by Rela Geffen Monson. 36 pp.

A study of some 1,000 Jewish business and professional women, sponsored by the AJC and Lillith magazine, examines the strategies — avoidance, staggering, juggling — by which these women cope with the conflicting demands of jobs, marriage and child rearing, as well as the ways the Jewish community encourages or hinders them.

###

**A Time to Speak: The Evangelical-Jewish Encounter**. Edited by A. James Rudin and Marvin R. Wilson (Grand Rapids, Mich. and Austin, Tex.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. and Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1987). 202 pp.

The editors, the AJC's interreligious affairs director and a professor of biblical studies at Gordon college in Wenham, Mass., issue a 10-point statement stressing the importance of



religious pluralism and the perniciousness of all bigotry, in an effort to strengthen understanding between Evangelicals and Jews. Scholars and theologians of both communities examine various facets of their relationship.

# # #

**American Jewish-Israeli Relations: History, Current Issues, and the Role of the American Jewish Committee**, by Gary E. Rubin. 20 pp.

The AJC's director of programs reviews the history of world and U.S. Zionism as backdrop for a discussion of current issues between American Jews and Israelis. He identifies six categories of such issues. These affect the status of Jews in the U.S., the status of world Jewry, the internal structure of the American Jewish community, the political standing of American Jewry, civil- and human-rights interests in the U.S., and internal Israeli matters. "In dialogue with each other," he concludes, American Jews and Israelis "may enhance each community's strengths and alleviate its weaknesses."

# # #

**The Recent Disturbances in the West Bank and Gaza: Questions and Answers**, by George E. Gruen and Gary Wolf. 5 pp.

Two AJC experts on Israel and Middle East affairs analyze the causes of the latest wave of violent incidents in the territories controlled by Israel since 1967. The paper explores how the situation is being exploited by the PLO, the reasons for failure to establish a Palestinian state back in 1947, and what Israel and other countries might do to promote peace in the territories.

# # #

**The American Jewish Committee: Past as Prologue**, by Henry L. Feingold. 12 pp.

From its inception in 1906, the AJC has been a "pacesetter" among Jewish community organizations, growing and evolving to meet the everchanging needs of Jewish people, concludes a professor of history at Baruch College and the Graduate School of the City of New

York. Dr. Feingold praises the vast achievements of the AJC and its leaders over eight decades, and contemplates the organization's future directions in dealing with one of the most crucial issues facing Jews today — restoring American Jewry's inner vitality.

# # #

**Conversion to Judaism: A Background Analysis**, by Lawrence Grossman. 13 pp.

The AJC's newly appointed director of publications examines the controversy resulting from differing approaches to the conversion of non-Jews to Judaism, which, he warns, could ultimately lead to "two separate Jewish peoples." Dr. Grossman points out that there are rabbis of all denominations eager to reach a consensus on conversion procedures, and urges that such efforts be encouraged.

# # #

**Jewish Unity: A Call for Cooperation and Mutual Respect. A Statement by Concerned Jewish Laity**. 5 pp.

A group of active Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist lay leaders express concern about the hostility and divisiveness among the various Jewish denominations over such issues as intermarriage, conversion, divorce and the ordination of women. They examine the progress toward greater unity achieved in the past two years and the schisms that still exist, and urge all Jews to stress civil discourse and mutual tolerance.

# # #

**The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights: Projects in Progress and Other JBI Activities, Interim Report**. 6 pp.

The report on current programs of the Institute includes: the Strasbourg Declaration on the Right to Leave and Return; the Second Seminar on Human Rights Education of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights; a study on human rights in the Middle East; and the Conference on Genocide at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY).

**The Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations: A Five-Year Report, 1982-1987.** 17 pp.

The booklet describes the purpose, history, organization and programs of this AJC institute, which works to promote better understanding between Israel and American Jews. It includes lists of Institute publications and of Advisory Board members and associates in the U.S. and Israel.

###

**A Look at American Jewry and American Jewish-Israeli Relations,** by Alfred Moses. 13 pp.

The chairman of the AJC's Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations looks at the complex and emotionally charged relationship between American Jewry and Israel over the past 40 years. He notes that the Pollard spy case and the Iran arms sale have caused American Jews to reexamine their formerly uncritical support of Israel.

###

**The Other Refugees: Impact of Nationalism, Anti-Zionism, and the Arab-Israel Conflict on the Jews of the Arab World,** by George E. Gruen. Presentation at the Third International Conference of the World Organization of Jews from Arab Lands, Washington, D.C., October 26-28, 1987. 14 pp.

The AJC's Israel and Middle East affairs director analyzes the "push factors" that impelled the vast majority of Jews in the Arab world to leave their homes in the past 40 years, "sometimes at great personal peril."

###

**Visa Denied,** by Samuel Rabinove. Reprinted from Reform Judaism, Winter 1987-88. 2 pp.

The AJC's legal director explains how the U.S. government uses the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 to deny entry to foreigners or deport them. "There is no question that America should refuse admission to foreign criminals, terrorists, saboteurs, and others who might pose a 'clear and present danger' to our institutions," Mr. Rabinove concludes. "But mere

political belief, however unorthodox or unpopular, should not be grounds for exclusion."

###

**Japan and the Jews,** by David A. Harris. 3 pp.

Amid rumors of growing Japanese anti-Semitism, the AJC's Washington representative examines some of the stereotypes of Jews and Judaism that have developed in Japan, and suggests what can be done to overcome them and promote greater understanding between the Japanese and the Jews.

###

**How Many Children? Dilemmas of Family Planning,** by Amy Avgar. 17 pp.

A summary of two informal pilot studies in Atlanta and Cleveland, exploring the personal, economic, religious and sociocultural factors underlying the decisions of Jewish couples about how many children to have.

###

**The Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987: An Update on the Controversy Surrounding Efforts to Close Down PLO Offices in the U.S.,** by George E. Gruen. 6 pp.

The AJC's director of Israel and Middle East affairs assesses the recent closing of the PLO office in Washington and the proposed legislation to shut down additional ones around the country. Dr. Gruen stresses that "the basic intent of the legislators is not to deprive supporters of the PLO from expressing their opinion, but to induce the PLO to renounce the use of terrorism."

###

**Reflections on a Jewish Theology of Pluralism,** by Alan L. Mittleman. Reprinted from This World: A Journal of Religion and Public Life, Fall 1987. 9 pp.

The AJC's program associate in interreligious affairs discusses how Jews can make theological sense of non-Jewish faith traditions in the modern world.

**"Talk Radio's Impulse to Entertain, Provoke Must Be Tempered by Sensitivity,"** by Harold Applebaum. Op-ed in Atlanta Constitution, October 29, 1987.

The AJC's specialist on anti-Semitism and extremism describes "shock radio," a popular form of talk show that is rapidly becoming a forum for bigots and extremists to carry their hateful messages to millions of listeners. Mr. Applebaum highlights the conflict between responsible broadcasting standards and the industry's continuing quest for higher ratings.

# # #

**The Current Status of the Arab-Israel Peace Process,** by George E. Gruen. 5 pp.

Despite "a grudging acceptance of Israel's permanence" among the moderate Arab states, Dr. Gruen asserts that increasing violent clashes between Palestinians and Israelis, and the potential negative effects of current demographic trends compel the revitalization of the peace process.

# # #

**Statement to the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs on the Immigration Act of 1987,** by Gary E. Rubin. October 23, 1987. 6 pp.

The AJC's program director examines the pluses and minuses of the new immigration law. He stresses that "the nation benefits from immigration to the degree that inflow is diverse and adds to the pluralistic nature of the country."

# # #

**The Arab Summit in Amman: A Qualified Success for King Hussein, Egypt and Pragmatism,** by George E. Gruen. 6 pp.

An analysis of the three major issues of the

"first summit to focus primarily on inter-Arab problems": the Iran-Iraq War, Arab rapprochement with Egypt and the Arab-Israeli dispute. The official conference motto, adopted from King Hussein's plea for solidarity among the Arab nations, was "Harmony and Accord."

# # #

**Arab "Generosity" to the Palestinians.** 3 pp.

The AJC's Israel and Middle East Affairs Division provides a statistical analysis of the military expenditures, gross national product and oil revenue of the Arab members of OPEC from 1974 to 1984, comparing their enormous wealth with their contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) and the Palestine National Fund (PNF).

# # #

**Immigration and Absorption of Jews from Arab Countries: Israel's Experience 1948-1986,** by Yehuda Dominitz. 6 pp.

Massive immigration from Arab countries to Israel since the creation of the Jewish State changed the composition of Israeli society, writes the former director general of the Aliyah and Absorption Department of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem. This summary of a Hebrew-language study reviews government efforts to ease the newcomers' transition into Israeli society through housing, education, job-training and health-care programs.

# # #

**Profile of a Jewish Community: Hungary.** 4 pp.

This background memorandum reviews the history of Hungary's 80,000-90,000 Jews over the past 60 years, and explores why they face fewer hardships than Jewish communities in other Communist countries.

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## How one Synagogue does Mazon

Around the country many synagogues have made Mazon a high priority. Among the most successful is Temple Shaare Emeth in St. Louis, where Rabbis Jeffrey Stiffman and Jim Bennett, together with Mazon chairman Curtis Mann, have together helped make Mazon a part of the congregation's life. Here, in summary, is how they've accomplished that:

Spring, 1986:

Congregation Shaare Emeth becomes a Mazon partner.

Summer, 1986:

Shaare Emeth appoints its first Mazon chairman.

Fall, 1986:

A Mazon appeal is made from the pulpit on Yom Kippur morning, followed by information sheets being handed out at the exits from the temple.

Spring, 1987:

A Passover appeal is made to all members by letter.

Fall, 1987:

A Yom Kippur appeal is mailed out right after Rosh Hashanah, requesting a donation to Mazon of the amount saved by fasting on Yom Kippur.

## Policy question: What do you think?

Along with the considerable satisfactions of being involved with MAZON, there comes a very specific frustration. Around the world, there are some 800 million people for whom hunger is a constant companion, whose days are spent in search of a crust of bread and whose nights are spent in pain. MAZON has been a stunning success. We have helped alleviate the pain of some thousands of people, and we have added joy and meaning to the celebrations of those who have shared with us. But to help thousands while millions—hundreds of millions—remain, praiseworthy though it be, does not yet "solve," in any important way, the problem of hunger.

Here are two responses to the frustration. What do you think? We'd be pleased to hear from you, either with your own reasoning or even just your expression of preference.

On the one hand:

and suggesting \$18 as the appropriate amount. Shaare Emeth's board adopts a resolution providing that a voluntary 3 percent add-on be provided for on all congregational food (or drink) events, and on all similar events of temple auxiliaries.

Throughout these months, congregants received mail, hand-outs, reminders in the temple bulletin. Here, for example, is one letter that is sent to all celebrants:

Dear

The upcoming (brit) (naming) (wedding) (anniversary) (Bar Mitzvah) (Bat Mitzvah) (Confirmation) will be an exciting and emotional time for you and your family—and we join in sending our warmest mazal tov.

We also want to offer you an opportunity to add an extra dimension to your simcha. Our congregation has officially endorsed the Mazon program.

Mazon is a national Jewish organization dedicated to fighting hunger in our world.

The concept is simple.

We Jews celebrate with food. We enjoy our special times with meals and togetherness. But while we feast, millions go hungry. Now we can help them.

No one can, or should, try to do everything. *Tafasta m'rriba, lo tafasta*; when you try for too much, you accomplish nothing. Nor should Mazon's current work be dismissed as trivial. Starting from scratch, Mazon has now distributed almost half a million dollars. As it continues to grow for the next two years at the pace it grew in its first two, it will soon be distributing well over a million dollars a year. Admittedly, that will not "solve" the problem of hunger, but it will make a real difference to thousands upon thousands of people. Mazon contributors are entitled to know that their dollars are going to help bring real food to real people, not to fund agricultural research or political advocacy or what have you. Perhaps some very modest percentage of Mazon grants should go to groups that are trying to deal with the underlying problem, but by all means let the bulk of it go to relieve today's pain. Otherwise, we are holding those who are in need today hostage to tomorrow's solutions. As to the frustration, let us always keep in mind that a person who saves even one life has saved an entire world.

We ask each Jewish family celebrating a joyous event to consider making a contribution equal to 3 percent of the expenses spent on that simcha to Mazon, Inc. Thus, if you spend \$1,000 on a reception, a gift of \$30 would be made to Mazon. A nationally recognized Board of Directors will allocate the monies collected to fight hunger locally, nationally, and internationally—for Jews and non-Jews as well. Hunger respects no nationality or religion. We thus can help to fight this evil by sharing our own joy with the hungry.

We have personally investigated Mazon and have contributed to it. If all American Jews who celebrate special events would participate, we could make a real impact on the hunger problem.

If you wish, table cards recognizing your gift to Mazon are available, so that others may learn of its important work—and of your giving a special kind of tzedakah in honor of the occasion you are celebrating.

All gifts may be sent to the Rabbi's secretary at the temple. Unless you advise us otherwise, they will be acknowledged periodically in the Bulletin. Again, mazal tov—and thanks for considering Mazon.

Winter, 1987:

Total funds raised for Mazon in 18 months:  
\$11,582.70.

On the other hand:

No one proposes that all Mazon's resources be invested in long-term, comprehensive solutions to the problem of hunger. The point, instead, is that even as the bridge is burning and those on the bridge must be rescued, a new bridge must be built. Feeding the hungry one at a time, meritorious though it be, is essentially a feel-good response to the problem. There is enough food—especially here in America—to feed all the hungry. That means that the problem we face is one of public policy. How is it that all the food does not reach the people who suffer? How is it that we pay farmers not to plant in a world where people are starving? These questions cannot and should not be ignored, and there are groups struggling to find the answers and to press new and more enlightened policies upon our government. Such groups deserve our support. Why not say, for example, that for every two dollars Mazon provides for direct relief, it invests one dollar in advocacy programs? Otherwise, we are being penny-wise and pound-foolish; worse, we are being self-indulgent.

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## North American Conference On Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ)

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March 7, 1988

Irving Cramer, Executive Director  
Mazon, Inc.  
2288 Westwood Blvd., Suite 200  
Los Angeles, CA 90064

Dear Irv,

I want to officially thank you and the Mazon Board for the \$20,000 grant you have made to NACOEJ. We are deeply and warmly appreciative not only of the funds, but of your confidence in our ability to use them well.

As you know, our January mission to Ethiopia was prevented from visiting four of the five Jewish villages to which we had been promised access. As a result, only about \$5000 was distributed, rather than the much larger sum we had hoped to spend there. One of the recipients of the funds we were able to distribute was this mother in Waleka village -- a woman so worn and dehydrated that she had to be sent to the hospital by the doctors on the mission. The funds left with her will not only provide for immediate medical care, but for the nourishing food and clean water she needs in order to nurse her baby. In many villages, we have encountered babies whose "failure to thrive" can be attributed to the bad nutrition and hydration of their mothers.

The mission did not find outright starvation in the area they were able to visit. They did find the usual dreadful poverty and disease, now exacerbated by a 75% rise in the price of tef, the staple grain; they brought back reports of refugees coming into Gondar from other, more severely stricken areas, putting an additional strain on the food supply; they were repeatedly told that people who had food enough to get them through January and February were living in dread of the months after that, when their reserves would be gone.

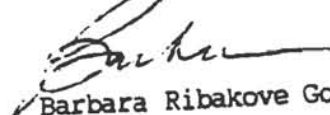
As a result, we are increasing our relief caseload daily, adding new names to the list of those receiving funds from us through methods other than hand-delivery by missions. (We have at least four other presently effective means of getting help to families in need.) We choose recipients from names provided to us by a variety of sources, including Israeli Ethiopians who ask us for help for their families, and are an excellent source of confirmations that the help actually reaches the intended recipients. As I told you on the phone, the Mazon grant has now been allocated to this type of relief, and you will receive a more detailed description around the end of April.

Irv, we know that a great deal of special effort went into the making of this grant. (Rabbi Saul Berman, who presented the check to us last week, said smilingly that at least he didn't feel like part of a rubber-stamp allocations board.) We are grateful to you and the Mazon Board for your



confidence, and we will do our best to justify it fully. Nothing that relates to Ethiopia in general, and Ethiopian Jews in particular, is easy, but with good will and great care, we can accomplish a lot. Thank you for making so much so possible.

Sincerely,



Barbara Ribakove Gordon  
Director

BRG/msm  
encl.

# AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

## MAZON *update*

### Partner Synagogues

Movement	Number of Temples	Number of Families
Reform	127	83938
Conservative	87	49338
Reconstructionist	9	2382
Traditional	3	1060
Orthodox	7	2780

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PAUL M. FINSTEIN  
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STEVEN W. DRESS  
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463-7223

April 6, 1988

DELLY MUSEN  
Principal  
942-2586

Dear Colleagues:

Preservation of the environment and conservation of natural resources are matters of considerable importance in our tradition, flowing from the attitudes implicit in the verse, *אלהינו אלהי האדמה*, and the mitzvah of *לשמור את האדמה*.

A few years ago, Acid Rain grabbed the headlines and mobilized concerned citizens to seek legislation and funding to remedy the problem. While this issue continues to be of concern, another equally threatening environmental issue has arisen, which also requires our efforts.

Scientists recently discovered a growing hole in the ozone shield over Antarctica, caused by the accumulation of chlorofluorocarbons in the atmosphere. Alarm over the possible effects of continuing depletion of ozone in the atmosphere resulted in the Ozone Treaty, signed by a remarkable alliance of countries, unified only by a threat common to the entire globe.

This month's Social Action Packet contains recent newspaper reportage and commentary on the Ozone Treaty, and on the dangers inherent in depleting the ozone layer. An article in **National Geographic**, Vol. 171, #4, April 1987, entitled, "Are We Poisoning Our Air?" provides a more in-depth analysis of the ozone problem.

Basic treatments of Judaism's attitude toward the environment and ecology may be perused in two of our colleagues' published works. Robert Gordis's book, **Judaic Ethics for a Lawless World**, contains a chapter entitled, "Ecology and the Judaic Tradition." Samuel Dresner's book, **Judaism: The Way of Sanctification**, features a chapter called, "To Take Care of God's World."

The emergence of this problem does more than create an opportunity for us to educate congregants about our tradition's attitude towards the environment. It also beckons us to preach about increasing performance of an important mitzvah -- *לשמור את האדמה* -- by cutting down on the use of products containing chlorofluorocarbons (such as aerosol sprays).

B'shalom,

*H. Scott White*  
H. Scott White



UNITED SYNAGOGUE AFFILIATE



**REPORT OF THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
BORDER TRIP TO SOUTH TEXAS  
APRIL 24 - APRIL 28, 1988**

Rabbi Charles M. Feinberg  
Rabbi Andrew C. Warmflash

May 16, 1988 – 29 Iyar 5748

## PURPOSE OF THE MISSION

Our goals were:

1. To learn about Central American refugees and their problems.
2. To learn how United States policy affects refugees.
3. To begin to talk about these problems from a Jewish perspective.
4. To decide whether and how the Rabbinical Assembly should become an advocate for Central American refugees.

## PARTICIPANTS

The following people came on this mission:

Bernice Balter, Executive Director, Women's League for Conservative Judaism, Riverdale, New York  
 Rabbi Eric Cytron, Metairie, Louisiana  
 Rabbi Charles Feinberg, Madison, Wisconsin  
 Laurie Lemel, Madison, Wisconsin  
 Maxine Lowy, New Orleans, Louisiana  
 Rabbi Sheldon Lewis, Palo Alto, California  
 Danny Siegel, Rockville, Maryland  
 Rabbi Andrew C. Warmflash, North Brunswick, New Jersey

## AGENDA

During the mission, we spoke with a great many refugees. In addition, we met with the following individuals who are involved with dealing with the situation in Texas.

1. Father Gus Kennedy, Pastor of St. Joseph the Worker, described the conditions of refugees in his parish and took us on a tour of refugees in MacAllen.
2. Sister Marion Strohmeier, founder and director of Casa de la Merced, a refugee shelter receiving Central Americans.
3. Brother Lalo Hinojosa, a Mennonite church leader who has been active in aiding refugees. He took us on a tour of the border area.
4. Grace Reyna, a community organizer associated with the Neustra Senora de la Paz Church.
5. Juanita Valdez-Cox, representative of the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Texas Project.



6. Arturo Solis, director of the Center for Migrant Studies in Reynosa, Mexico.

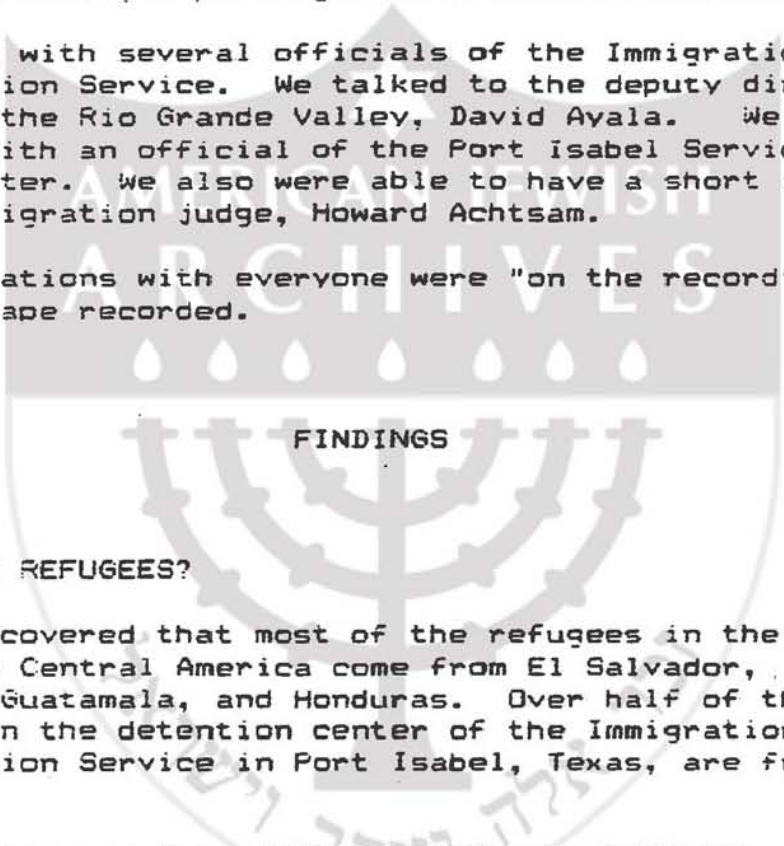
7. Father Lenny de Pasquale, chaplain at the INS detention center in Port Isabel, Texas, and director of Central American refugee services for the diocese of Brownsville.

8. Alice Lawler, director of Proyecto Libertad, a legal services project established in 1981.

9. Jonathan Moore, a paralegal at Proyecto Libertad.

10. We met with several officials of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. We talked to the deputy director of the INS in the Rio Grande Valley, David Ayala. We aatalked at length with an official of the Port Isabel Service and Process Center. We also were able to have a short interview with an Immigration judge, Howard Achtsam.

Our conversations with everyone were "on the record" and have been tape recorded.



FINDINGS

WHO ARE THE REFUGEES?

We have discovered that most of the refugees in the United States from Central America come from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatamala, and Honduras. Over half of the 410 detainees in the detention center of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Port Isabel, Texas, are from these countries.

We met refugees in two different refugee shelters: Casa La Merced, sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, and Refugio del Rio Grande, an independent refuge for Central Americans. In both places we met refugees who fled their homeland because they feared for their own lives and the safety of their families.

In Casa La Merced, we met a Salvadoran woman who was pregnant. She had left behind her family in a community which is close to military activity between the army and the rebels. Her brother-in-law had been killed. This left her and her mother (the grandmother) with the care of eight children. Because of war conditions, she and the family had no way to sustain themselves. The family was destitute and she decided to leave to find work so that she could send money back to her mother and the children of the family. She hoped that after she earned some money, she would return

to her family and her daughter. She showed us pictures of her family, including her mother and daughter. She wept when she looked at the pictures. At the moment, she has no work and she is not able to leave the Rio Grande Valley because of INS restrictions.

Also at Casa La Merced, we met a young Salvadoran man, who was 23 years old. He too came by himself from Salvador. He had gotten into serious trouble with the police and feared for his life.

At the Refugio de Rio Grande, we met seventy refugees who fled from Salvador, Honduras, and Guatamala. Refugees told us of their struggle to leave. These refugees were men and women of a wide range of ages. We met a number of children as well. Many of the people we met have been separated from their families for months and some for years.

We met a man who was in his mid-fifties from El Salvador. He had left behind his wife, his children, and grandchildren because he feared for his life and theirs. Many of the refugees we met fled not only because they feared for their own lives, but also because they feared for the lives of their loved ones. They believed that by remaining in their homeland, they endangered others. For this reason many are also afraid to apply for political asylum.

The group met refugees who fled because they feared persecution. But we also met refugees who fled for a mixture of reasons, some economic, some political. As a group we felt it most difficult if not impossible to distinguish between political and economic refugees. People fleeing from war ravaged Salvador may flee because they have no resources to sustain their families. They have no resources because a key family member was murdered or killed because of his involvement in politics.

This impression was reinforced when we visited Reynosa, a border town in Mexico. Mexicans are not refugees. There is no civil war in Mexico. But the group was deeply moved and sickened by the poverty we saw. We were in neighborhoods that had nothing. People were living on the edge of a huge garbage dump. There were no services of any kind in this neighborhood: no water, no sewage, no electricity, and dirt roads that turn to rivers when it rains. There were hardly any trees growing in this neighborhood, called a colonia. When we looked around at this barren landscape and the hovels people lived in, we were amazed that so many could live there. We were amazed not that so many leave and look for work in the United States, but that so many stay!

We then understood that people living in terrible poverty, who also are surrounded by civil war and political

repression, feel they have little choice but to leave in order to survive.

Finally, we did not meet anyone who really wanted to be in the U.S. They all missed their families terribly, many had suffered horribly in order to reach the U.S., and they all longed for their homes and their land. No one should fool him or herself that being a refugee in the United States is desirable.

#### HOW DO THEY GET TO THE UNITED STATES?

Most refugees sell much of what they own in order to travel to the United States. Many of them walk across Salvador and Guatamala in order to get to Mexico. In Mexico, they usually look for a "coyote", a person whom they pay most of the cash they have to lead them through Mexico to the United States border. The coyotes help them with the transportation system in Mexico, they pay off whom they have to pay off, and try to get them to the border. Some coyotes actually are decent human beings. But many are not. They deceive the Central Americans, they rob them, and sometimes they are in collusion with Mexican authorities.

The trip to the United States through Mexico is dangerous for Central Americans. The Central Americans speak Spanish differently than Mexicans. Their accent is different and they are readily identifiable as being strangers. They are thus easy marks for robbers, thugs, and corrupt officials. We heard many stories from refugees and refugee workers how Central Americans are abused on their way to the U.S. They said it was routine for Central American women to be raped on the way. Many are handed over to the Mexican officials and they take their last pesos from them. In short it takes a lot of courage, and a knowledge that it is worse at home, for these refugees to make it to the United States.

Many of the refugees enter the United States through the Rio Grande Valley. The Rio Grande Valley extends from Brownsville on the eastern side to Rio Grande City on the West. It is bounded on the south by the Rio Grande River and on the north by the King ranch, which is a privately owned ranch that covers four or five counties. Refugees come to the Rio Grande Valley because it is the border closest to Mexico City, and also the closest to United States east coast cities. The bus ride from Mexico City to Matamoros, opposite Brownsville, is 16 hours.

The Rio Grande River is not too deep or wide in the Valley. There are many points where it is fairly easy to walk across. Refugees remove their clothes and hold them over their heads as they walk across the river. There are other parts that are more treacherous with stiff currents. People

cross the river all the time. There is no way of stopping them and the authorities don't try too often.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service works very hard to keep the refugees confined to the Rio Grande Valley. While refugees enter the United States easily, it is very difficult to leave the Valley. There are only two roads that lead north out of the valley. About 65 miles north of the border the Immigration and Naturalization Service maintains two checkpoints. Every vehicle traveling north is stopped at the checkpoint. People are asked where they are born and where they are from. People with darker skins are asked more questions and have to produce identification and papers.

The effect of this is that the real border is at the checkpoints. The refugees are confined to the Valley. Hundreds per month are arrested by the Border Patrol after they cross the Rio Grande. Most are not detained but are released on their "own recognizance," which is referred to in the Valley as "OR." They remain confined to the Valley until their immigration hearing. The Valley is teeming with refugees and undocumented people who are released on their "own recognizance." These people are usually denied workpermits and have no way of sustaining themselves. They fall upon the mercy and love of the refugee workers who are overwhelmed by their needs and their suffering.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service thus has turned the Rio Grande Valley into a vast detention zone. The Rio Grande Valley, while it has its pockets of wealth (much of it due to profits in agriculture or drug traffic), is a very poor area. Several counties in the Valley have some of the highest unemployment rates in the country. For instance, Starr County has an unemployment rate of over 40%. Thousands of refugees, including men, women, and children, are confined to a very poor area, and have little hope of supporting themselves while they wait for their immigration hearing. No government aid of any kind is available to help these people.

#### HOW ARE CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES TREATED IN THE UNITED STATES?

We have come back deeply disturbed by the way Central American refugees are being mistreated in our country. For instance:

1. Decisions about bail and detention appear to be extremely arbitrary. For example, one federal official told us that refugees who turn themselves in to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, requesting asylum, are just as

likely to be incarcerated as those who are caught attempting to evade the service.

2. Those refugees who are not detained are confined to the border area of South Texas pending the disposition of their cases. Many are denied the right to work while awaiting deportation hearings. This means that the burden of caring for these refugees, many of whom have sold or abandoned all their possessions fleeing their countries, falls upon church and privated agencies which are already enormously overburdened in attempting to deal with the social needs of one of the poorest areas of our country.

3. Refugee families are routinely broken up by the I.N.S. Not only are husbands and wives housed in separate dormitories, but a new facility is currently being made ready for the detention of children several miles from the adult detention center in Port Isabel. There is even evidence that refugee children are being rounded up and detained as a way to force their parents to surrender to the Border Patrol.

4. Many of the Central Americans we met did not know what rights they had under United States law and were terrified about being sent back. In one court proceeding which we witnessed, a Salvadoran was repeatedly lectured by an immigration judge about the importance of obtaining legal representation in seeking asylum. He was then provided by the court with what was described as a list of organizations offering legal services to indigent aliens in deportation proceedings. The list was inaccurate and incomplete. Moreover, it was ultimately irrelevant since it was apparent to everyone, including the judge that the refugee was illiterate and could make no use of it. Even if the refugee could read the list had no value. The agencies listed either could not represent him or only for a fee. Proyecto Libertad, the one legal services agency that does represent refugees without charging, was not on the list! When we asked the judge in his chambers whether he felt there was adequate flegal representation available for Salvadorans seeking asylum, he said, "That's a very good question, but I am not going to answer it. It is too controversial a question."

We feel that Salvadorans and other Central American refugees deserve better treatment than this. The refugee act of 1980 was passed with the purpose of offering humanitarian protection to those people who have a reasonable fear that they will be persecuted if forced to return home. The refugee act was passed so that the United States would treat all refugees fairly, unbiased by political and foreign policy considerations.

## WHY SHOULD THE JEWISH COMMUNITY BE INVOLVED?

Allow us to quote both Danny Siegel and Chuck Feinberg on this question. The following is excerpted from an article Danny Siegel wrote for the Baltimore Jewish Times:

"When we arrived at the refuge (Refugio de Rio Grande), somewhere in a faraway place in Texas we would have never known from reading a map, when we arrived we toured the place, and then sat with the members of the committee. We asked them questions, and they asked us questions. We asked about the place itself and their struggles to get to the United States and their families and their hopes and fears. They answered openly, eloquently, appreciative of the fact that we cared to ask. They were particularly impressed that we had come from so many places (Wisconsin, California, Louisiana, Washington, New Jersey, New York).

But most of all, they wanted to know how it came to be that a group of Jewish people arrived in their refuge to meet them, to hear them out, to dine with them on their hard wooden benches and tables. Many had never met Jews, or at most had some casual encounter with one or two of them. They wanted to know.

We asked one of the rabbis to speak, Andrew Warmflash. He explained how we had been slaves in Egypt and had been refugees, wandering forty years in the wilderness, a Biblical story known to all of them. Passover was still fresh in our minds, and verses from the stranger, the outsider-coming-in, how we, as Jews, are commanded to remember what it was like to be oppressed, as we had been oppressed some 400 years many centuries ago.

And the rabbi explained that we were all children or grandchildren of refugees whose near-ancestors had fled the Czarist pogroms from Egypt, and that there are many, many Jews in the Soviet Union who wish to be free. And then he took up the theme of the Shoah, the Holocaust, and how one-third of our people had been murdered and how a million of them were children, and how the doors were closed to so many countries, including the United States. He was not comparing the enormity of the Shoah to the Central American refugees' situation, but he was speaking of doors barred shut, no place to go but to the Babi Yars and gas chambers and ovens.

We eight Jews had heard that time and again as sermon material. We had nodded our heads, even seriously felt the needs of refugees around the world: our Ethiopian Jews, the Jews of the Soviet Union, Jews of Arab lands, people in Africa and Asia, and so many other places seeking refuge. But here, here in this refuge it finally sunk in, full force. There is so clear a similarity. Their emotions must

be very similar to what my grandfather felt in 1908 when he arrived at Ellis Island, questions, feelings of never going back home to Chorzele, Poland, to his house, his relatives. So, too, my grandmother, and my other grandmother, and my other grandfather's parents who came in the late 1880's or early 1890's. We even said it to each other later on, we eight Jews---"There but for the Grace of God..."

I know the Jewish people has a long, involved agenda. We have so many, many things to take care of, and we all know the list. Perhaps, had my friend Rabbi Feinberg never known of this work in the Valley I, too, would have only viewed it from a distance. Now I am "hooked" I am not throwing out the other items on the list of Jewish things to be involved in. By no means. I am just making a little more room in my free time and spare money, to include this very important problem.

I would hope other Jews would do the same."

The following is an excerpt from a talk Chuck Feinberg gave at the Jerome Hall Forum at Harvard University on May 5, 1987:

"'Veger Lo Tihatz, veatem yedatem et nefesh hager, ki gerim hayeetem be'erezt mitzrayim.' 'You shall not oppress the stranger, for you know what it means to be a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.' (Exodus 23:9)

Central Americans fleeing oppression, violence, and persecutions are strangers in our midst. They have nothing to protect them, except their faith and the faith of those who take them in. They have fled their country because they have witnessed a murder, or because of their political beliefs, or because they are members of a trade union, or because they are suspected of being informants. They have fled their country not because they think it will be easy for them, but because they are terribly afraid, for themselves, for their children, for their family.

It is a disgrace that our country, instead of providing for these people, arrests them, locks them up as if they are criminals, and deports them. Guatamala and El Salvador are the Sodom and Gomorrah of our time. If Lot and his family showed up on our doorstep, would we send them back to Sodom?

The commandment not to oppress the stranger is repeated many times in the Torah. It is repeated more often than the commands to observe the Sabbath, the dietary laws, or not to steal or murder. The Talmud (Bava Metziah 59b) says the command not oppress the stranger is 36 times. Some else says 46 times. Why 36 times? Why so often? I believe the Torah realizes how easy it is to exploit and oppress the stranger. For really, who cares what happens to the

stranger? Who cares if a stranger is raped, beaten, and left for dead? Who cares if the stranger gets sick and dies? The stranger is not part of our community. No relative is going to protest. No one in the community will notice the absence of the stranger, if he or she disappears. It is just because of this that the Torah reminds us over and over again not to exploit the stranger. The Torah knows how easy and painless it is to oppress the stranger by overlooking him. The Torah knows how we will be tempted to turn away from the cries of the stranger.

As a Jew I cannot help but identify with Central Americans in our midst. I cannot help but identify with people who are fleeing persecution and violence. The Jewish people knows the 'nefesh hager.' We know what it means to be a stranger. We knew it in antiquity in Egypt and Babylonia. We knew it in the Middle Ages as we were hounded, oppressed, and expelled from every Western European country. And we have known it as no other people in this century, when the Jewish people had no place to flee.

In 1938, 1939, 1940, we knew what it meant to be a 'ger', to be a stranger in a strange world. We knew what it meant not to be counted. In 1938, our government gave the same arguments about not letting in foreigners as they do today. Then, our government said that the Jews would take people's jobs, or that they would go on welfare and sap our precious resources. Because no one cared for the Jew or the Jewish people, six million died. A whole world stood by indifferent to the suffering and agony of an entire people. In 1938, that indifference strengthened the hands of the oppressors and murderers. In 1937, our indifference to the plight of Central Americans fleeing persecution, strengthens the hands of their oppressors.

As a Jew, I must ask myself if I believe in both the God of Creation and the God of the Exodus. Do I worship a God who cares only for the Jewish people and its land? Do I worship a God who has no concern for the rest of His Creation? If I do, then I have become a pagan, an idolator. I have placed stringent limits on God, circumscribing His love and justice.

The Torah teaches that God doesn't care only for the Jewish people. God cares for His entire creation: for the plants, the grasses, the trees, the animals, and for all humankind. As a Jew, I am asked to care for my Jewish brothers and sisters who are being persecuted in the Soviet Union and Ethiopia. But God also demands that I open my heart and extend my hand to the poor, the homeless, the stranger in our midst, whoever they are and from wherever they come. To be faithful to the covenant between God and Israel demands no less. This is both the glory and responsibility of the



Jewish people. This is what it means to be a member of a holy nation and a kingdom of priests."

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY

On the last night of our stay in the Rio Grande Valley our group met and discussed future steps. We now list a number of actions that the Rabbinical Assembly could sponsor or help sponsor. These steps include educating both the members of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Conservative Movement on the problems of Central American refugees, leading a campaign to raise the consciousness of the Jewish community about this issue, lobbying the government to change some of its immigration policies, and sponsoring projects that could aid refugees and refugee workers.

More specifically we recommend the following:

1. that articles be written in our journals such as Conservative Judaism, Outlook, and the United Synagogue Review about this trip and the problems of Central American refugees.
2. that we send this report to other community wide agencies, such as the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), the Religious Action Commission of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Synagogue Council of America and other like agencies; that we urge these agencies to lobby on behalf of Central American refugees.
3. that we lobby the Congress and the Immigration and Naturalization Service through our congressional representatives to close children's detention centers; that we issue statements deploring the detention of refugees who are children.
4. that we lobby the Congress through our congressional representatives to offer extended voluntary departure status to Salvadorans, Guatamalans, and Hondurans. This would permit them to remain in the United States for increments of one year until the situation in their countries stabilizes. It has been granted in the past to Nicaraguans in 1979, Afgans, Ugandans, and Ethiopians.
5. that the Rabbinical Assembly organize another trip to the Rio Grande Valley involving the other constituent bodies of the Conservative Movement: United Synagogue, USY, the Seminary, Women's League, and Men's Club; that one of the purposes of this trip will be to produce a video entitled "Refugees are a Jewish Issue." We would then distribute the

video widely in order to educate Conservative Jews and the Jewish community.

6. that the Rabbinical Assembly along with the Women's League, the Men's Clubs, the United Synagogue, and USY, organize to support both refugee centers and legal aid services at the border. Such support could be in the form of monetary contributions or gifts of used clothing and shoes, and medical supplies.

7. that the Rabbinical Assembly urge the formation of small groups of volunteers which could include young and old, to volunteer at the border for short periods of times. Volunteers could help out at the refugee centers or in giving legal aid.

8. We should form ties with Central American groups in the Hispanic community which are seeking to aid refugees. This will enable us to be more effective in aiding Central American refugees, and combating racism, poverty, and injustice. It will also enable us to build coalitions which will help us in other areas of Jewish concern.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We want to thank the Social Action Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly for sponsoring this mission. We are very grateful for the assistance and support of Rabbi Alan Silverstein, chairman of the committee.

This trip would not have been possible without the efforts of Laurie Lemel. Laurie worked as a refugee worker in the Rio Grande Valley for almost five years during the 1980's. She was instrumental in setting up Rio Grande Border Witness, a program for educating concerned citizens about the problems of refugees. Laurie worked closely with us in drawing up the itinerary. She went down a week early to confirm all the arrangements. Our entire group is very grateful to Laurie for helping us to meet the many wonderful people of the Rio Grande Valley, and for opening our eyes to injustice, extreme poverty, and racism.

## Political Ads in the Subway <sup>W.P. 22</sup>

7.30.88

**F**OUR YEARS ago, the subject was the "Jellybean Republic." Now it's the Israeli army. Disputes involving both center around advertising in the Metro, specifically on whether Metro officials can censor political messages in the form of paid advertising in the public transit system.

In 1984 artist Michael Lebron sought to buy space to display his poster satirizing the Reagan administration. "Are you tired of the Jellybean Republic?" was the headline above two pictures, one of the Reagan Cabinet laughing and the other of poor people and racial minorities. Mr. Lebron had to sue to overcome Metro's decision that the poster was "deceptive." But a unanimous panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals—Judge Robert Bork wrote the opinion—ruled in his favor. No political branch of the government, the judges held, can impose prior restraint on the publication of a political message.

This week the Metro board had to face the same question again, but the case for censorship was even weaker. Instead of an artist's conception, a montage of images arranged to make an exaggerated point, the poster in question consisted of a photograph and a few words. The picture was of several Palestinian women cowering before a group of Israeli soldiers. The message was designed to remind riders that American taxpayers subsidize the Israeli government and presumably the alleged human rights violations

depicted in the photograph. The ad is clearly labeled "This is a paid political advertisement of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee."

It is disappointing—even surprising—that pressure has been brought to bear on the Metro board to refuse to allow the poster to be displayed. A joint statement issued by the United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Washington and the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington protested that the ad was "provocative and inflammatory . . . distorted and misleading"—almost exactly the argument that was made, unsuccessfully, four years ago. The Metro board knew the law and turned them down.

Those who still must be reminded of what the First Amendment protects in these cases should reread Judge Bork's clear and simple ruling: "Subject to a limited number of exceptions—most notably, reasonable time, place and manner regulations—political speech may not constitutionally be restricted in a public forum." Citizens can disagree with political speech, ignore messages they object to and take steps to present counterarguments. But they can't ask the government to decide what is provocative or inflammatory and suppress it. The right to judge political speech belongs to individuals, not to the state, and attempts to shift that right are profoundly wrong.

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

TO PEACE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

By Menachem Milson

The Palestinian problem is the core of the larger conflict between Israel and the Arabs and therefore there can be no progress toward a stable peace between Israel and the Arab states unless there is a breakthrough toward peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. The largest Palestinian constituency and the one which is the most relevant to the peace process is that of the Palestinians living under Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza strip. Many of them do not believe that the policy of the PLO is realistic and therefore they wish to speak for themselves. They have not been able to, until now, to do so because of the PLO's intimidation and pressures from pro-PLO Arab governments. The Israeli authorities who are opposed to any form of Palestinian political activity in the territories have stopped the initiative of such Palestinians who support the camp David peace process; unfortunately, Israel has been more effective in curtailing the efforts of those moderate Palestinians than in putting an end to the PLO intimidation and clandestine activities. Israel and the U.S. should jointly act to strengthen and encourage those Palestinians who reject the PLO line and support the camp David framework and the Reagan initiative and allow them to organize politically, in order to reactivate the peace process.

#83-315-120

Mr. Muhammad Nasser

Biographical Digest

Born in the village of Dura in Hebron District May 1, 1944

Graduated from Secondary School in 1963 in Hebron and worked as a Teacher in Saudia-Arabia until 1968

Joined Engineering College, Karachi University and Graduated as Electrical Engineer (B.E.E.) June 1973

Worked in Libya and then returned to the West Bank in 1974

Worked as Planning Engineer and Contractor from 1974-1981. During these years he electrified 85 towns, villages and camps in West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Worked as a Commentator in Radio Pakistan and as a Journalist in East Jerusalem Newspapers and was the Chief Editor of the Newspaper AL-MIR-AAH ("The Mirror") published by the Village Leagues.

Joined the village leagues in 1978 and in November 1982 became the Chairman of the Hebron Village League.

Forced out of his position as Chairman of Hebron Village League by the Israeli Chief of the Civil Administration in March 1983 because he tried to build up the "Democratic Peace Movement" as the first Arab Political Party recognizing Israel and calling for direct negotiations with Israel\*. He is now involved in attempts to organize a peace Movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in cooperation with the Israeli "Way to Peace" Movement.

Married and has four children.

\* No political organization is permitted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

SB/ea  
12/5/83  
83-315-118

# Organizing for peace

By AMNON DOTAN / Special to The Jerusalem Post

WITH PLO chairman Yasser Arafat badly bruised in Tripoli, hard-bitten terrorists in Beersheba jail are reportedly voicing doubts that the PLO's path of terror and intransigence ever had a chance of success.

Even when the PLO was still entrenched in Beirut, Palestinian moderates in the West Bank were warning that the extremists were embarked on a dead-end course and called on their brethren to take the path of peace and sane compromise.

One of the most courageous and determined of these West Bank moderates is Muhammed Nasser, former head of the Hebron Village League, a 39-year-old electrical engineer from Dura village, near Hebron. He believes that the Camp David peace process must be revived immediately.

A principal activist in the village leagues, Nasser has lately complained of harassment by a hostile civil administration that spurns his outstretched hand for peace.

This may explain the widespread doubts in the territories about Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's sincerity when he called on the Palestinians there to take up the path of peaceful negotiation in view of Arafat's latest debacle. The Palestinians also have not forgotten Shamir's original opposition to the Camp David accords.

Nevertheless, Nasser asserted in an interview before the blow-up in Tripoli that the hearts and minds of the Palestinians in the territories had already turned in the direction he and other moderates had shown.

"Most Palestinians blame the unrealistic policy of the PLO's leadership for the tragic slaughter so far of 100,000 of our brethren," he said, citing the Black September of 1970 in Jordan, the Tel al-Zaatar massacre of 1976, and the continuing tragedy in Lebanon.

"Most Palestinians now deny the PLO leadership the moral right — let alone the formal right — to represent us," he said.

WHAT ABOUT those Israelis who accept the PLO's assertion that it is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians.

"How dare those Israelis deny legitimacy to me or any other

Palestinian moderate," Nasser replies. "While these peaceniks demand moderation from their fellow Israelis, they insult the Palestinians by assuming us capable only of blind extremism.

"Nobody ever consulted the Palestinians in the territories, or anywhere else, about the PLO — and we never chose them as our representative," he said. "The PLO was imposed on us as our sole representative by the Arab heads of state at the 1974 Rabat Conference."

He conceded that the PLO did indeed represent "a certain portion of the Palestinians."

"But how can the PLO deny us the right to disagree when it is rent by so many conflicting factions, each with a different strategy and interest and each with a different patron state."

ACCORDING TO NASSER, most Palestinians in the territories now oppose the PLO consensus that calls for Israel's destruction, and most reject the PLO's terror tactics.

"Furthermore, most Palestinians now see negotiations with Israel and a link with Jordan as the only solution to our plight."

But Nasser also conceded that the Rabat decision prevented King Hussein from joining the peace process as the Palestinians' representative: "King Hussein cannot challenge the Rabat decision by himself," he said.

Nasser also referred scornfully to another obstacle facing Hussein — "the vain hope of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, who provide 90 per cent of Jordan's budget, that Arafat will eventually join the peace process."

"The Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, who suffer directly from the Israeli occupation, must take matters into their own hands," he said.

"We must organize to represent ourselves and put pressure on King Hussein to join us in entering into direct negotiations with Israel."

"Jordan must play a very important role in the peace process," he stressed.

Concerning the territories' eventual relationship with Jordan, Nasser would say only that "contact clearly must be maintained between both parts of the same people —

those who live in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and those who live east of the Jordan River."

HAD NOT the large number of Jewish settlements on the West Bank already become an insuperable obstacle to a political settlement?

"We don't like these settlements, and the continuation of the Likud's policy will only harm the peace process," said Nasser.

"But we don't have to demand the prior removal of the settlements before we start talking. This problem must be included in our negotiations with Israel."

In the meantime, Nasser fears that "the continued paralysis of the peace process will lead inevitably to annexation by Israel and further tragedies."

Why did it take Nasser and the other moderates in the territories so long to broadcast their call for recognition of Israel and direct negotiations? How did the PLO come to dominate so completely the political scene in the territories?

I blame the PLO's domination squarely on the policy of [former] defence minister Moshe Dayan from 1967," replied Nasser. "Dayan's ban on open political organizing in the territories actually created a political vacuum there, which the PLO was able to fill clandestinely through the use of bribery and terror.

"In these circumstances, mayors who at first weren't associated with the PLO — such as Fahd Kawasmeh of Hebron — were unable to resist its pressure.

"Eventually, even such a pragmatist as Bethlehem's Elias Freij began to declare that the PLO was our sole representative."

BUT ALL THIS was reversed, said Nasser, when Professor Menahem Milson became head of the civil administration.

"Milson was the first Israeli to understand that no peace is possible without a Palestinian peace movement, and that the Palestinians in the territories must be a major factor in any progress towards a political solution," said Nasser.

But Milson's successor, Tat-Aluf Shlomo Ilia, had turned the tables

on the moderates, said Nasser. Early this year, he said, Ilia squashed the initiative Nasser and other young village leagues activists were taking to broaden their base and establish the Palestinian Democratic Movement for Peace.

"We planned to base our movement mainly on the cities, where 70 per cent of our intelligentsia live. And we also planned to bring in the Gaza Strip," said Nasser. "We submitted to Ilia our plans, as well as our platform — the National Covenant for Peace."

In contrast to the infamous PLO Covenant, his document's operative point was recognition of Israel and direct negotiations with Israel.

"Naturally, we also accept UN Resolutions 242 and 338," he added.

But Ilia responded, according to Nasser, by forbidding the founding convention that Nasser and his associates had planned for mid-February.

Nasser cited reports in the Israeli press about subsequent harassment by Ilia, and noted that his appeal was pending before the High Court against a decision by Ilia to remove him from his position as head of the Hebron Village League.

The High Court ruled this week that Nasser had, in fact, been wrongly dismissed by the civil administrator, and the court ordered the state to pay Nasser's full costs amounting to IS10,000, as Nasser had requested.

Because of a subsequent change in the law, Nasser can no longer be re-appointed to head the Hebron Village League.

After Moshe Arens became defence minister, the civil administration whittled down the village leagues to what Arens's new coordinator for the territories — Tat-Aluf Binyamin "Fuad" Ben-Eliezer — calls "their natural size."

Fuad recently told Israel Radio that the village leagues were repressed because "they had already begun to speak about the return of Judea and Samaria, and about the rights of the Palestinian people."

ON THIS point, indeed, Nasser is

unequivocal: "It should be clear to all that we cannot agree to live forever under Israeli occupation."

He also completely rejected what he called "the Likud's conception of autonomy as a permanent solution, giving us rights only as individuals."

Nasser pointed out that the Camp David accords provide for autonomy only as a five-year intermediate stage.

In criticizing what he perceives as the civil administration's mistaken policy, Nasser described a problem which he believes is not known to the Israeli public and even to Israel's political leadership.

"Most of the top Israeli officials in the West Bank — including Ilia and Fuad — do not really know Arabic, and they do not understand Arab politics."

"They cannot read the Arabic press, understand a political speech or hold a serious conversation in Arabic. And I don't believe that these military men are even capable of thinking beyond the minimal requirements for ensuring basic public order."

He regards Ilia as "a terribly insecure man, worried most of all by our links with Israelis because he fears that any Israeli-Palestinian cooperation and familiarity will lead to doubts about the wisdom and fairness of his measures."

Nasser said that Fuad and Ilia have acted to prevent contacts between the moderate Palestinian activists and Israelis from kibbutzim, cities and development towns — including even Likud MK David Magen.

FINALLY, Nasser and his followers were the only Palestinians to show up at a conference last September organized by the new Israeli Way to Peace movement after the civil administration "advised" several moderate West Bank leaders not to participate.

Nasser is encouraged by the Way to Peace movement, which also opposes both the PLO and Israeli annexation of the territories, and advocates a dialogue with its moderate Palestinian counterparts.

But Nasser clearly was disappointed by the veteran Peace Now movement: "Peace Now has played an important role in Israel, but I'm sorry to say that they have not used their strength and influence also to support the Palestinian peace movement in the territories."

"While Way to Peace activists meet often with us," he said, "no Peace Now leaders or members have initiated meetings with me or any other village leagues moderate."

"Does Peace Now believe that the intransigent terrorists of the PLO can be the only partners in the peace process?" asked Nasser. "Peace Now's disregard for the non-PLO moderates has certainly not contributed to the cause of peace."

Nasser was even more disturbed by those Israelis on the left "who pointedly spurn our outstretched hand for peace."

"They inadvertently aid extremists on both sides to heap up additional obstacles that make the way to peace yet more difficult," he said.

But Nasser made it clear that despite the many Israelis he counts as acquaintances and friends, he does not see any solution in a purely interpersonal approach: "The problem is not our rights as individuals, but our situation as a people."

LAST WEEK, Nasser told Israel Radio that the decline of the PLO in Tripoli provides an excellent opportunity to revive the peace process, which he has proposed, but he warned that the policy of the civil administration would forestall any such effort.

"I cannot over-emphasize the need for Israeli supporters of peace to pressure the Likud government to allow us Palestinian moderates in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to organize politically and to make ourselves heard," he said.

"And we moderate Palestinians must not be prevented from cooperating with people of good will in Israel for the cause of peace and a better future for the entire region," he added.

Reprinted with permission from

The Jerusalem Post  
November 18, 1983

Professor Menachem Milson

Biographical Digest

Professor of Arabic Literature

Colonel in the reserves Israel Defense Forces

Born Haifa Israel, October 16, 1933

Education: Harvard University Ph.D. 1964 Arabic Literature  
Harvard University A.M. 1959 Arabic Literature and  
Middle Eastern Studies

Hebrew University of Jerusalem B.C. 1957  
Arabic Language and Literature and Middle Eastern  
Studies.

Fellowships: 1968/69 Research fellow at the Harvard Univ. Center  
for Middle Eastern Studies  
1974 Visiting Fellow Clare Hall, Cambridge, England

Professional Experience

Since 1963 Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel  
Associate Professor of Arabic Literature

1970-73 Chairman of the Dept. of Arabic Language and  
Literature of Hebrew University

1979-81 Director of the Institute of Asian and African  
Studies at Hebrew University

July 1976-Sept. 22, 1982 Chief of the Civil Administration  
of Judea and Samaria

A leading expert on Middle Eastern Affairs, in general and on the  
Palestinian question in particular, Col. Milson served as president  
Sadat's Israeli Aide De Camp during Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in  
1977.

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12/5/83  
83-315-119





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(212) 714-9500

# CLAL

NEWS AND PERSPECTIVES

February 1987

Shevat 5747

Volume II

Issue 3

## Loup Installed as CLAL National Chairman

December 9, New York City—Over 70 people gathered for dinner in a warm and familial atmosphere to install Robert (Bob) E. Loup as CLAL's new national Chairman. Loup succeeds outgoing Chairman Herschel Blumberg.



Robert E. Loup, receiving CLAL's mantle of leadership from outgoing National Chairman Herschel Blumberg. The tallit, woven by Sharon Norry, is crimson, gold and magenta on white.

This installation inaugurated a new tradition for CLAL: a literal passing of the mantle of leadership from Chairman to Chairman. The mantle chosen for the occasion is a hand-woven, rainbow-colored, full-size tallit created by Sharon Norry, "to be worn," Blumberg declared, "by chairpersons during their term and to be transferred to the person who assumes the task of continuation." For CLAL, Blumberg explained, the tallit is especially appropriate, for "its four corners symbolize the embrace of the four corners of the world, of every Jew, everywhere."

The transfer of office was one of those moments when everything

comes together, when, through a symbol, the fullness of the task can be held in one's hands; when one's furthest goals seem almost within reach; when the secular and the sacred touch. Blumberg placed the tallit on Loup, and they embraced.

With the new symbol of office draping his shoulders and arms, Loup accepted the trust that had been placed upon him. "Jewish unity and Jewish leadership," he said, "are each a sacred cause. I pledge that I will serve faithfully

(continued on page 3)

## Mazel Tov CLAL Buys Beit CLAL

On Friday, December 19, CLAL closed on the site which will ultimately become the Beit CLAL Study/Learning Center. The property, located in Goshen, N.Y., only one hour's drive from Manhattan, was purchased with the help of generous contributions from CLAL supporters. It includes a 13 bedroom, three-story wood frame household mansion which sits on 184 acres of beautiful woodlands. A full report on the development of the site and its programs will appear in the next issue of *CLAL News and Perspectives*.

## Learning Leaders

One of CLAL's most exciting innovations is our Learning Leaders program. Originally developed for the Federation of Nashville, Tennessee, this program has, within the course of one year, exploded from one group to eight, and from 22 participants to 140. What has without doubt contributed to its meteoric growth is its unique approach, both philosophically and methodologically, which distinguishes it from all other fine adult learning experiences.

Philosophically, the Learning Leaders program attempts not only to let the "students" enter critical moments in Jewish history, allowing them to see what moved our ancestors to do what they did. It desires not only to illuminate the texts which serve as our windows to the souls of those who kept the covenant before us. The Learning Leaders program is also designed to let today's leaders recognize, and even more—feel, that they in fact are the direct heirs to these keepers of the faith, that they are participating in the biblical covenant no less than those who came before them, and that what they do will shape Judaism for those to come.

(continued on page 4)



## Yitz Greenberg Opens San Francisco Programs

Over 85 leaders of the San Francisco Jewish community attended CLAL's Bay Area opening programs, September 30th and October 1st. Rabbi Yitz Greenberg opened the program on "The Presence of Jewish History" with sessions on "The Covenant." The program is funded and sponsored by the San Francisco Jewish Community Foundation, under the capable guidance of Phyllis Cook.

Yitz additionally conducted an evening for CLAL's ongoing Media Study Group entitled "Was Jonah all Wet or What?", in preparation for Yom Kippur. The library meeting room at the Board of Jewish Education overflowed with attendees, many of whom heard about the program last year and were eager to become a part of it. The Media Group is coordinated by San Francisco Board of Jewish Education librarian, Nanette Stahl.

CLAL: *News and Perspectives* is published by CLAL: The National Jewish Center for Learning And Leadership for our friends and supporters. It provides information on CLAL activities and presents an ongoing forum for the discussion of issues of import and interest to the North American Jewish community. CLAL's offices are located at: 421 Seventh Avenue, N.Y.N.Y. 10001.

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Ben Zion Leuchter presents replica of Shroder Award to Aaron Ziegelman, Am Echad Chairman, and his wife Marjorie (left) and to Herschel Blumberg, Past National Chairman of CLAL, and his wife Goldene (below). CLAL won the prestigious CJF Award for its pioneering Am Echad—One People programs.



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# PERSPECTIVES

VOLUME NO. 2

FEBRUARY 1987

SHEVAT 5747

ISSUE NO. 3

## MAH TOVU AS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION TO PRAYER

Reuven Kimelman

Prayer without preparation is like exercise without limbering up. Not only the body but also the mind and emotions have to be attuned to prayer. The Jewish prayerbook understood the task sufficiently to focus on bodily movements as a way of limbering up for active prayer.<sup>1</sup> But what about the emotions and the mind? Is there an emotional or intellectual, indeed theological introduction to prayer in the prayerbook itself? Happily both are available. As we shall see, the opening prayers of the morning liturgy—the *Mah Tovu* and the *Adon Olam*—serve as the emotional and intellectual introductions to prayer.

*Mah Tovu* forms the opening prayer of most traditional rites as well as of all modern denominations.<sup>2</sup> It runs as follows:

1. מַה טֹּבוֹ אֹהֲלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל  
How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! (Numbers 24:5)

2. וְאֲנִי בְּרַב חַסְדֶּךָ אָבִיא בֵּיתְךָ  
As for me, by virtue of the abundance of Your Grace, I enter Your house.

2a. אֲשַׁתְּחֶה אֶל הַיְכָל קִדְשֶׁךָ בִּירְאָתְךָ  
I shall prostrate myself to Your sanctuary in awe of you. (Psalm 5:8)

3. יי אהבתי מעון ביתך  
Adonai, I love Your house,

3a. וּמְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ  
the place where Your glory dwells (Psalm 26:8).

4. וְאֲנִי אֲשַׁתְּחֶה וְאֶכְרַע, אֶבְרָכָה  
I shall prostrate, bow, and kneel

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## ETHICS I. AN INTRODUCTION

David Elcott

*This is the first in a series of articles devoted to an investigation of various aspects of Jewish ethics.*

As Americans, we automatically separate the universal ethical value from the cult/ritual forms of religious behavior. On the personal level, we hear Jews say: "Rabbi, I'm not very religious." In saying this, the congregant does not mean that he or she is not an ethical, caring, moral human being. What the congregant is declaring is that he or she does not practice ritual. But this distinction is unknown in traditional Judaism and its jurisprudence. In the index of Jewish life, ethics does not have a separate heading. Judaism never adopted the bifurcation of civil law from religious law, of function as separate from transcendent value or meaningfulness. These are not trivial literary distinctions. Viewing all states, religious institutions, armies, bureaucracies, as well as individuals as subservient to God, reflects the world view of Judaism. What is ethical, according to Jewish tradition at least prior to the eighteen hundreds, is determined by God, who is the source of ethics. Ultimately, both ethical standards and ethical behavior are judged by God.

The Torah would respond to the statement by the congregant separating observance from ethical behavior with amazement. The same text in the Torah, Leviticus 19, which (inexplicably) forbids you to wear a garment of linen that is mixed with wool also defines how to eat the cultic sacrifice and commands you to leave a portion of your vineyard or field for the poor. For the rabbis and generations of Jews, to disclaim being "religious" was to state precisely that one is immoral and unethical. And to be observant would require one, in the words of the Psalm, to: "Prevent the tongue from speaking evil, the lips from deceit, flee from wickedness and do good, desire peace and pursue it." Ignoring either the behavior or its ethical demands would be a sin.

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In the ghetto and shtetl, adherence to this pattern was simple. Since Jews played no official role in the political decision-making of the nations and were invariably subservient to the caprice of the church or local monarch, they constructed an internal world which addressed their personal lives and fantasized in study about what God's world would be like if only Jews were in control. But that did not prevent a Jew from seriously committing himself or herself to deal with justice and compassion. In the practices of the Jews of Safed in the 1500's are listed obligations to reprove oneself before Shabbat with a *chaver*—a friend who will help you locate the ways in which you failed to deal lovingly and respectfully with others. A story of the Musar movement of the 18th century reminds Jewish men that, when they throw their tallit around their body, they should be sure not to slap their neighbor with the *tzitzit*—the fringes. Certainly issues of *lashon hara*, the evil uses to which the tongue can be put, is a central concern no matter how small or removed the Jewish community may be. How one speaks to a spouse or child, parent, friend or merchant is not a matter of taste or tact, but inextricably connected to how one observes life as a Jew. The listing of sins in the Yom Kippur confessionals focuses essentially on the intimate and common personal interactions. These concerns over daily matters, the regular and often most troublesome aspects of our lives, remain still at the heart of ethical living. The principle of Musar is that I must change myself before I can transform the morality of the whole world.

Yet the moral failings of the Jewish community of the medieval period were, in spite of their confessions to the contrary, rather benign. In a world where murder, rape, and torture were common, the powerless Jew had little room for significant sinning. But with the advent of modernity, and the greater mobility and opportunities available to the Jewish community, halakhah—the norms and behaviors developed by the rabbinic understanding of the Torah—often seemed in tension with emerging enlightened principles of ethics. The treatment of non-Jews and women, for example, so offended the ethical sensibilities of the reformers of Judaism, that they abrogated laws which they felt were humiliating or hurtful. If halakhah can not respond to an enlightened world's new moral awarenesses, they claimed, then it is anachronistic and irrelevant.

Likewise, the modern age destroyed the powerlessness of the shtetl. Like a womb, perhaps, our weakness had insulated us from great sin. But powerlessness also left us too often as martyrs, not merely dominated and humiliated, but also exiled and murdered. Facing genocide in the Holocaust, no sensitive and caring Jew could any longer opt for the purity of powerlessness over the moral anxiety that would be caused by finally having the power to do wrong. For the first time in two thousand

years, Jewish decision-making could cause evil and death and destruction. Unaccustomed as we were to holding power, one could have expected moral catastrophe. That has not been the case, although critics from within and without have pilloried Israel and Jewish leadership for a wide array of perceived sins.

In this first generation of Jewish power, our moral memory of suffering and subjugation has insured Jewish sensitivity to ethical matters. The Kahan commission, empowered by the Israeli Government to examine the massacre of Palestinians in Lebanon, resonated the consensus of most Jews. First, it cited the case of the "beheaded heifer" in Deuteronomy (21:1-9) in which a human being is found murdered in a field. They employ the rabbis' explanation that the citizens of the nearest town must prove that they had no knowledge of the murder. Then, having cited in a "secular" commission both Torah and rabbinic commentary, the judges present the Jewish experience as a foundation for ethics:

The Jewish public's stand has always been that the responsibility for such deeds (pogroms) falls not only on those who rioted and committed the atrocities, but also on those who were responsible for safety and public order, who could have prevented the disturbances and did not fulfill their obligation in that respect.

The commission then adds that, while even enlightened nations have side-stepped this responsibility, a Jewish nation cannot.

Yet in this era of Jewish success and acceptance, there has been a gradual but persistent rise in behaviors and public attitudes which could indicate an erosion of our confidence in the natural ethical state of Jews. In matters of personal status, Jewish divorce—coupled with adultery and wife abuse—is increasing. The recent scandals on Wall Street, allegations of pay-offs in New York City politics and banking scandals in Israel by Jews, both secular and observant, are viewed by many as common. With charges of murder and dismemberment by the "Israeli Mafia" or "slave rings" organized by a group in Beverly Hills, the claim of Jewish moral chosenness is weakening. We run the danger of Duddy Kravitz, whose apprenticeship taught him that Jews are successful, and that success is the end-product and not a means towards something else. While Judaism never aschewed wealth, power, and success, one's achievements were for the sake of repairing the world, of affirming our divinity, and of helping complete the divine plan.

As a community, we have further problems to confront. Should the wife-beater have an aliyah? Should the business person whose income derives from rent gouging or promoting dangerous products such as cigarettes become chairman of a national Jewish organization? Should the politician convicted of graft and abusing the public trust be eulogized glowingly in a public Jewish

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funeral? If creating an ethical Jewish community based on a tradition of Jewish morality is our goal, then can a leader of the Jewish community today pound a fist at a board meeting and declare: "I may not know a lot about being Jewish, but I know how to run a business and that's what counts." And should we expect that such a Board meeting will be run on Jewish principles, meaning no innuendo, gossip, maligning or irrelevant negative comments, and where respect based on the inherent spark of divinity of each lay and professional member is promoted?

We must focus our questions in other directions as well. In a nation where civil law is determined by the

secular state, can we expect Jews to follow Jewish law and tradition in the business world in matters of public policy? What sort of influence should Jewish tradition exert over Jews in their personal, professional, and national lives? And should Jews respond to non-Jews not bound by Jewish tradition and values differently than to fellow Jews?

The articles that will appear on these pages in following issues of CLAL's *Perspectives* will begin to address how Jewish leaders in our age of power and democracy can utilize the teachings of Jewish ethics to create better Jews, Jewish organizations, and a better world.

### Mah Tovu

לפני יי עשׂי

4a.

Before Adonai, my Maker (Psalm 95:6 ?).

ואני חִפְּלֵתִי לְךָ, יי, עֵת רְצוֹן

5.

And as for me, may my prayer [come] to you Adonai at a favorable time.

אֱלֹהִים, בְּרַב־חַסְדֶּךָ

5a.

God, in the abundance of your grace

עֲנֵי בְּאַמַּת יִשְׁעֶךָ

5b.

Answer me with your unfailing help (Psalm 69:14).

There are so many questions we have about this prayer. Why does it come at the beginning of the liturgy? Why of all prayers does it have a special locus in the synagogue? What is its function in the liturgy? And above all, what does it mean?

The answers to the latter questions help also explain the former ones. *Mah Tovu* is not only the prelude to prayer, but primarily an entrance prayer to the synagogue. In antiquity entrance to a temple was an awesome event. Those religions in which cultic procedures were paramount required special entrance preparations such as ritual cleansing, reciting pledges, or undergoing examinations for physical defects. In criticism of demanding only these requirements, the psalmist asks:

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

Who may stand in His holy place?

One answer is:

He that has clean hands and a pure heart,  
Who does not long after what is worthless,  
And has not taken an oath in deceit (Psalm 24:4).

Another is:

He who lives without blame,  
Who does what is right,  
And in his heart acknowledges the truth;  
Whose tongue is not given to evil;

Who has never done harm to his fellow,  
Or borne reproach for [his acts toward] his neighbor.  
(Psalm 15:2-3)

All ancient sanctuaries had entrance requirements, be they ritual, be they moral. The synagogue entrance liturgy—*Mah Tovu*—makes no such pretense despite the overwhelming presence of psalmist ingredients. Its concern with inclusion overrides any exclusionary considerations. As we shall see, *Mah Tovu* serves as a threshold prayer which seeks to help the to-be worshipper overcome his diffidence upon entering the Lord's house. As such, it does not open as invitingly as the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service with a psalm such as 95, saying:

Come, let us sing joyously to the Lord,  
Raise a shout for our rock and deliverer;  
Let us come into His presence with praise;  
Let us raise a shout for Him in song.

or as exuberantly as Psalm 100:4.

Enter His gates with praise,  
His courts with acclamation.  
Praise Him!  
Bless His name!

*Mah Tovu*, as presently constructed, opens with a verse from the Book of Numbers followed by selections, with some alterations, of Psalms. Note that none of the verses are juxtaposed in their biblical context. The biblical elements have been reconstituted to create a new poetic piece. It will no longer do to discover their biblical meaning. The rearrangement of notes produces a new symphony. What was the liturgist's aim in recontextualizing the biblical material to orchestrate a new liturgical threshold prayer? Since this is a prayer expressed poetically we must inquire not only about its

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content, but also about its form. Let us attempt to trace the flow of both the feelings and ideas by a line-by-line analysis.

The opening line is strange not only because it alone derives from The Book of Numbers, but also because its formulator was none other than the soothsayer Balaam who had been hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel encamped in the wilderness. One medieval authority found this so outrageous, he simply skipped over it.<sup>3</sup> Why did our poet select it?

From the Bible all we know is that Balaam, swept away in rapt admiration of the Israelite encampment, could not utter the curse. The Talmud adds: it was upon perceiving their tents so pitched that no one might see what was going on in the homes of the others that compelled him to burst into praises of Israel. Since the theme of modesty has little to do with what follows, commentators have been drawn to the talmudic view which understands the tents as schools and synagogues.<sup>4</sup> Once the verse had been so overhauled, synagogues and academies crop up so high on the horizon that the ancient desert tents disappear from view. Having been updated to incorporate contemporary institutions, the verse can serve to introduce the worshipper to the two places of prayer—the academy and the synagogue. It is not unusual in liturgy for biblical verses to become disengaged from their original meaning and assume talmudic ones. Liturgically, *midrash* becomes *pshat!*

Still the question remains: Why allude to Balaam when there are such exquisite openers from the Psalms as:

I rejoiced when they said to me,  
"We are going to the house of the Lord." (Psalm 122:1)<sup>5</sup>

The genius of the selection becomes evident after understanding the function of the whole prayer. In the meantime, let us continue our analysis with the second verse. "As for me, by virtue of the abundance of Your grace I enter Your house." While the opening verse is focused on the "synagogue," this one is centered on the self as if to say, It is all very well that the synagogue is so lovely, but what am I doing here? How do I fit in? Am I able to leave mundane reality and cross into sacred space? It is out of awareness of God's everpresent graciousness, responds the verse, that one dares to cross the threshold knowing full well that by entering the synagogue he is coming into "Your house."

But, if it is not my house, why do I not feel more estranged? It is as if I knocked on someone's door, only to find a party in progress. Such excruciating self-consciousness. Suddenly, the host appears smiling and while placing an arm warmly over my shoulder, apologizes saying, "If I only knew you were in town, I would have invited you." Here God's abundant kindness whispers to me, the would-be worshipper, "It is my

home, come in." So relieved, I bow down in the direction of the holy sanctuary (line 2a). While biblically God's house and sanctuary allude to the ancient Temple, liturgically they refer to the synagogue and ark. Indeed, having wavered at the entrance of the synagogue, I now take my first step forward, gratefully prostrating myself towards the Holy Ark, which is located across from the entrance.<sup>6</sup>

Finding myself prostrate before the ark, my feelings are buoyed by an enveloping sense of God's awe almost as Jacob of old who upon envisioning God's presence, blurted, "How awesome is this place!" (Genesis 26:17).<sup>7</sup> Overwhelmed by such stirrings of awe, I realize how inadequate my previous gestures were and redouble my efforts not only of prostrating, but also of bowing and kneeling as did King Solomon in the ancient Temple.<sup>8</sup> The first of the three synonyms in Hebrew אשתחה repeats the previous bowing. Piling up synonyms compounds the effect so that I am bowing, on my knees, flat on my face. But now I am no longer bowing *towards the ark*, but "before Adonai, my Maker." Heretofore, the ark was the available symbol of God. Prior to feeling God's awe, that sufficed. Now having given myself totally over to God, the opaque symbol of the ark gives way before the transparent presence of God. In talmudic parlance, I no longer "stand in awe of the Temple, but in awe of He who commanded with regard to the Temple."<sup>9</sup>

So why am I not praying? True, I feel in the presence of God, but is this the opportune moment? Should I be importuning God now? Are there not times for prayer? Even King David, fretting over this, entreated:

"Master of the world, when I pray to you may it be a favorable time," as it is written, "And as for me, may my prayer to you Adonai be at a favorable time."<sup>10</sup>

Just as diffidence about being in the right place was overcome by awareness of the "abundance of Your grace," ברכ חסדך so here doubts about timing are resolved by awareness of the "abundance of your grace." Once getting through, there is no being put on hold.

My apprehensions with regard to the place and the moment have been met. By the grace of God, I can finally begin to pray.<sup>11</sup> So please, "Answer me with Your unfailing help." Awareness of God's presence intensifies the desire for His closeness. It is such intimacy which allows me to believe that my needs could be His concerns.

Of the whole *Mah Tov*, only the last three Hebrew words consist of prayer. The rest constitutes prayer therapy. It outlines a strategy for working through the psychological inhibitions with regard to prayer. It is an intensely personal activity. We do *Mah Tov* a disservice by underscoring its public function. Those who see in



line 2 only ten words for ascertaining the presence of a minyan;<sup>12</sup> or those who find it adequate to attribute the three-fold repetition of genuflection terms to an allusion to thrice-daily prayer;<sup>13</sup> or who see in the expression "favorable time" עת רצון a reference to the hour of public prayer<sup>14</sup> miss the point.

The decisive factor in selecting the verses from Psalms was that they begin by mentioning "I/me." So overriding was this consideration that line four (Psalm 95:6) not only has its biblical plural form subverted into the singular,<sup>15</sup> but its own beginning "Come" is lopped off in favor of "I." Indeed, the Hebrew word for "I" is the leitmotif of the whole composition. No wonder that the first liturgical attestation of the beginnings of *Mah Tovv* are included under "private prayers."<sup>16</sup>

The crux of the problem of prayer according to *Mah Tovv* is the all-pervasive sense of self. The word "I" constantly reverberates out of the aperture of the mouth. So much of our prattle is nothing more than mouthing various forms of the word "I." *Mah Tovv's* program is not the dissolution of the ego, but its decentralization. From beginning to end it begins with "I," but gradually references to "God" which are initially only implicit become more explicit until by the last line they outnumber the references to "I." The transition from self-centered consciousness to divine-centered consciousness is made through the repeated reference to "bowing" and to "Your abundant grace," which serve as pulleys going up and down, raising the focus from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Release from the self allows for attentiveness to the divine.

According to Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Prayer comes to pass . . . (in) the momentary disregard of our personal concerns, the absence of self-centered thoughts . . . (when) we forget ourselves and become aware of God."<sup>17</sup> *Mah Tovv* never succeeds in achieving that self-transcendence which totally disregards the self, but in struggling with the problems of self it limits the ego's stranglehold on consciousness allowing for the divine to come into focus.

To return to the question of Balaam—why does his encomium open the composition? It is, of course, one thing if we testify about ourselves; another if wicked

Balaam does.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, if *Mah Tovv* is showing us a way to wrestle with the issue of prayer when crossing the threshold of a synagogue, what better example than a man who though coming to curse, surveyed Israel's places of worship and ended up blessing! The gap we have to traverse is so much smaller.

After analyzing *Mah Tovv* as the psychological preamble of the liturgy, the next part in this liturgical series will focus on *Adon Olam* as the theological introduction to the service.

#### REFERENCES

1. See Reuven Kimelman, "The Blessings of Prayerobics," *The B'nai B'rith International Jewish Monthly* (February 1986) pp. 12-17, reprinted by CLAL.
2. For the various rites, see A. Hilvitz, *Sinai* 78 (5736) pp. 263-278. For the denominations, see the Reform prayerbook, *Gates of Prayer*, p. 51; the Reconstructionist prayerbook, *Sabbath Prayer Book*, pp. 4-5; the Conservative prayerbook, *Siddur Sim Shalom*, pp. 2-3; and the Orthodox prayerbook, *The Traditional Prayer Book for Sabbath and Festivals*, pp. 101-102.
3. Maharshah, *Responsa* 64.
4. B. *Sanhedrin* 105b.
5. This verse does follow Numbers 24:5 in the medieval rite of Mahzor Vitry 89, p. 56.
6. So *Beit Yosef ad Tur Shulkhan Aruch, Orakh Hayyim* 150, see Saul Lieberman *Tosefta Kifshutah* Vol. 5, p. 1200.
7. For present purposes, line 3 is excluded from the analysis. The formal reason is because of its exclusion in some rites. The informal reason is because of its mention of "love," albeit of God's house, which seems too facile at this juncture. Its inclusion may be due to the theological tendency which underscores the compatibility of awe and love—a combination which is deemed unique to the divine-human relationship (*Sifre Deuteronomy* 32). It is not uncommon to seek to have the awe and love of God placed in our hearts. In fact, the morning prayer before the Sh'ma alludes to Ps. 86:11 by saying, "Unite our hearts in awe and love of your name" even though the original makes no mention of love.
8. I Kings 8:54.
9. B. *Yevamot* 6b. Otherwise it is problematic to bow down to an ark, see M. M. Kasher, *Torah Sheleimah*, vol. 19, pp. 310f.
10. J. *Makkot* 2:7.
11. So Ibn Ezra to Psalm 66:20.
12. Rav Hai Gaon, *Otzar HaGeonim ad Yoma* 22a, *Responsa* #18, pp. 8f. and subsequent authorities.
13. Following *Midrash Tanhuma, Kee Tavo* l.
14. Following B. *Berakhot* 8a.
15. In opposition to the ruling of the *Tur, Shulkhan Aruch, Orakh Hayyim*, 116. Cf., however, Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, vol. 5, p. 1222 f.
16. *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, ed. Goldschmidt, p. 182.
17. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, p. 15.
18. *Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah* 6.9.5.



# CLAL STAFF AT WORK



(L-R) Intern Les Bronstein (H.U.C.), Program Associate Rabbi Steven Greenberg, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, Program Director David Elcott, and Intern Leonid Feldman (J.T.S.).



(L-R) Elcott, Feldman, Intern Barbara Penzer (R.R.C.), and Program Associate and Intern Coordinator Dr. David Kraemer.



(L-R) Program Associate Rabbi David Harbater, Program Associate Arlene Lepoff, CLAL Past Chairman Herschel Blumberg, and Intern Meyer Eckstein (Y.U.).



(L-R) Eckstein, Bronstein, and S. Greenberg.





## Loup

(continued from page 1)

and seek to live up to the communal, ethical and human standards which make CLAL so special."

Serving with Loup are the new Associate Chairman Aaron Ziegelman; Vice Chairmen: Barbara Friedman, Sanford Hollander, Magda Shenberg Leuchter, Norman Lipoff, William Spier and Martin Stein; Secretaries: Harvey Arfa and Klara Silverstein; and Treasurers: Donald Landis and Moshe Werthan; as well as the newly installed Board of Directors.

The evening was chaired by CLAL's first chairman, Ben Zion Leuchter, who was praised by President Yitz Greenberg as "the leader who took responsibility when there was no one else, the one who established our existence and set out on a journey into the unknown."

Several special guests added to the lustre and the significance of the evening: Alexander Slepak, son of refusenik Vladimir Slepak; Stanley Horowitz, President of National UJA; Stephen Solender, Executive Vice President New York UJA/Federation; Elliot Spack, National Director CAJE; Harold Cohen, Assistant Vice President of National UJA; Marshal Jacobson, Senior Assistant Vice President of National UJA; and Rabbi Nathan Laufer, Director of Programs for the Wexner Heritage Foundation, among others.

The evening was capped off by an address from one of the most powerful Orthodox advocates for *clal Yisrael*, the current Chairman of UJA's Rabbinic Cabinet, and Chairman of the New York Board of Rabbis, Rabbi Haskel Lookstein.

Illustrating his talk with personal and painful anecdotes, Rabbi Lookstein spoke of CLAL as an organization whose time has come. "Ideologically, as Jews, we should not put the adjective before the noun. We cannot put Reform, Conservative,

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Orthodox or Reconstructionist before Judaism. We are Jewish before we are anything else."

CLAL, he maintained, is organized in the spirit of the great sage of pre-state Israel, Rav Kook. "Rav Kook," said Rabbi Lookstein, "believed that all Jews are a *mishpacha*, a family, even if we disagree. We must love each other, he said, despite our disagreements. The rabbis say that the Temple was destroyed because

of *sinat hinam*, groundless hatred. The only antidote to groundless hatred, said Rav Kook, is *ahavat hinam*, groundless love. We must love every Jew.

"A student asked Rav Kook, Aren't there some Jews who don't deserve our love? Yes, said Rav Kook. But none of us is perfect. Let my mistake be that I love a Jew who is not deserving of love."

Such is the mission of CLAL.



## Learning Leaders

(continued from page 1)

Methodologically, the program consists of 2 all-day seminars which begin and end the year, led by two members of CLAL's faculty with different religious orientations, and four to six group study sessions led by the learning leaders themselves. The opening seminar introduces the central themes for the year, offering a tour of the transforming events of Jewish history. The concluding day-long seminar moves the group from analysis to synthesis, culminating in a series of leadership exercises.

Each intermediate group study session includes:

1. an adult training program utilizing texts in translation and analysis activities
2. discussion guides
3. supplemental materials, interactive exercises, special readings, personal or group questionnaires

A member of CLAL's faculty is available by phone for on-going consultation and support.

It is this element of guiding and encouraging lay leadership to enter realms previously reserved for scholars and rabbis which empowers the lay leaders to make decisions for their communities possessed with a more clearly articulated sense of Jewish history, values and destiny.

The Learning Leaders program is ably coordinated by CLAL Program Associate Rabbi Steven Greenberg.

### Set Your Clocks and VCR's

for

**Aaron Ziegelman  
and Yitz Greenberg**  
discussing  
Pluralism in the  
Jewish Community  
on NBC's

First Estate: Religion in Review

**Sunday, February 8th at Noon**  
**Rebroadcast A.M. February 9th**  
Please check local listings

## Calendar of Events

CITY	DATE	SCHOLAR	SPONSOR
Birmingham, AL	February 1	David Nelson Steve Greenberg Learning Leaders	Federation Karen Oster 205-879-0416
Charleston, SC	February 1	Reuven Kimelman	Charleston JCC Leah Chase 803-571-6565
Detroit, MI	February 2	Reuven Kimelman "Judeo-Islamic Synthesis"	Wexner Foundation Rabbi Herbert Friedman, Michael Burke 212-355-6115
Providence, RI	February 3	Yitz Greenberg "Approaching Common Ground: Living With Our Differences"	Temple Emanu-el Rabbi Daniel Liben 401-331-1616
New York, NY	February 3	David Elcott "Tzedakah"	West. Federation. Andi Shaviv 914-761-5100
Delray Beach, FL	February 6-8	Reuven Kimelman "Changing Images of Ideal Jew"	Temple Emeth Haim Packer 305-499-2023
Orlando, FL	February 8	David Elcott Steve Greenberg Learning Leaders	Federation Naomi Etzkin 305-645-5933
New York, NY	February 8	Yitz Greenberg "Judaism & Christianity as Covenants of Life"	Baruch College Professor Wischograd 212-505-2157
Pittsburgh, PA	February 8	David Nelson Orthodoxy	Sharon Stern 412-681-8000
San Francisco, CA	February 9-10	Reuven Kimelman "Modernity"	Jewish Community Fed. Phyllis Cook CLAL Arlene Lepoff
Los Angeles, CA	February 11	Reuven Kimelman	CLAL Media Group Arlene Lepoff/Nanette Stahl
Austin, TX	February 15	David Nelson Steve Greenberg Learning Leaders	Rick Goldberg 512-331-1144
New Orleans, LA	February 18	Reuven Kimelman "Tzedakah"	Federation Margo Garon 504-525-0673
Madison, NJ	February 22	David Nelson "One Jewish People..."	Summit JCC David Lowe 212-490-2525
Detroit, MI	February 23	Reuven Kimelman "Judaism In Its Mystical Hasidic Guise"	Wexner Foundation Rabbi Herbert Friedman, Michael Burke 212-355-6115
Washington, DC	February 23-25	Irving Greenberg "Non-Jewish Victims of the Holocaust"	U.S. Holocaust Mem. Coun. Marion Craig 202-653-9220
Roslyn Hts., NY	March 1	Irving Greenberg "One Jewish People"	Temple Sinai Rabbi Aaron Petuchowski 516-621-6800
Los Angeles, CA	March 5-8	Irving Greenberg "Unity & Challenge of Plurality"	Ramah Academy Dr. Alvin Mars 213-476-9777

# RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY HOMILETICS SERVICE

## *Vayikra* Homiletics Material - 5747

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Contributors: Rabbis Kassel Abelson, Rudolph J. Adler, Jacob Chinitz, Seymour J. Cohen, Mark Friedman, Frederic Kazan, Elliot Salo Schoenberg and Hillel E. Silverman \*\* Rabbi Saul I. Teplitz, Chairman, Homiletics Service; Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal, Chairman, Publications Committee; Rabbi Akiba Lubow, Director of Programming; Rebecca Jacobs Handler, Editor \*\* March 1987 \*\*  
Adar 5747

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I am very eager to make our Homiletics Service a true representation of the preaching skills of all of our men.

Therefore, I am appealing to you to send me a favorite sermon or sermons that you recently delivered and we will see to it that it receives a far wider audience than that of your congregation alone.

You can send the material to me directly at Box 204, Woodmere, NY 11598.

With sincerest thanks and warmest personal regards, I am

Faithfully yours,

Saul I. Teplitz

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*"When a ruler sins and does through error any of the things which by the commandment of the Lord...ought not to be done...once the sin of which he is guilty is brought to his attention he shall bring as an offering..."*

(Leviticus 4:22-23)

The book of Leviticus does not receive much attention from the modern reader. Although there are extremely significant passages like "Love thy neighbor as thyself" or "Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof," most of Leviticus, the Book of the Priesthood, remains uninviting. Twentieth century men are not excited about reading the laws of sacrifice.

Only a few centuries after the destruction of the temple and the suspension of the sacrificial system, the rabbis brought another level of appreciation to Leviticus. They used its texts to understand some of the basic values of Judaism. They projected their sensitive appreciation of human nature against its background, seeking an understanding of the strength and weakness of people, particularly those in power.

The rabbis observed that the chapter under discussion lists different categories of people who unwittingly sinned, through error. In each case the preposition "if" is used. For example, "If the anointed priest sins..." However, in the case of the ruler or the leader, the preposition "when" is used. The Bible, itself, seemed to indicate that a leader, by the very nature of his position, was bound to make mistakes, knowingly and unknowingly. For this he ought to ask forgiveness.

"A prince's heart is uplifted because of his error," the Book of Splendor stated, and therefore he is almost bound to sin. The rabbis seemed to capture the spirit of Lord Acton's epigram, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The leader, possessing great power, is tainted by pride of heart.

Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai taught, "Happy is the generation whose ruler brings a sacrifice for a sin he committed unwittingly." (The Hebrew *asher*, "when," was rendered *ashrey*, "happy.") Happy is the community whose leader is self-critical and is willing to make a visible demonstration of his act of atonement.

Rabbi Israel Salanter, the founder of the Mussar movement, added his thoughts on this theme. He asked, "Why is a generation to be regarded as fortunate and happy if its leader brings a sacrifice for his sins?" He observed that the leader's action was in response to the community's reaction. The generation was a happy one because it did not bow down indiscriminately. The leader's contemporaries did not flatter him. They were courageous, willing to be critical. Happy is the age when leaders acknowledge their shortcomings and those led are mature enough to exercise their responsibilities.

Back in 1898, a United States Supreme Court Justice stated, "It is a mistake to suppose that the Supreme Court is either honored or helped by being spoken of as beyond criticism. On the contrary, the life and character of its Justices should be the objects of constant watchfulness by all and its judgments subject to the freest criticism."

Criticism is good when it is constructive and helpful.

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Tzav begins with the command to Aaron to keep the fire burning on the altar perpetually. Aaron and his sons are instructed that they have a two-fold duty. They must, of course, add wood to the fire to keep the flame burning. But also, and equally important: "He shall remove the ashes from the altar, and carry the ashes out of the camp - and deposit them in a holy place." (Lev. 6:4)

An altar, no matter how holy, gathers ashes, and even the best tended of fires produces them, and it is the priest's duty to remove the ashes from the altar. The fire burning on the altar is a good symbol of human life at many levels, and there is an important lesson about life that can be learnt from the neverending need to remove the ashes so that the fire will not be choked out!

The word "hearth" is often used as a synonym for home, and it is not at all far fetched to think of the home as a sacred altar. The fire on the home hearth was kindled by the love that brought man and woman together. And their marriage vows consecrated them as priests charged with maintaining the integrity of the family. Theirs is the sacred function to guard the altar, and to keep alive the fire of their love.

However, even the holy altar in the Temple gathered ashes, and the best-tended hearth in the home will eventually produce cinders which can threaten to choke out the flame. What are the cinders that accumulate in the family altar? They may come from jealousy, selfishness, vanity, stubbornness or a lack of mutual understanding. Or the ashes may be the result of the boredom that comes from taking one's life partner for granted and making less and less effort over the years to talk, to communicate, to share new experiences with each other. The result is that when the children have grown and left home, there is almost nothing left of shared interest for husband and wife to talk about.

No marriage runs so smoothly that there are no problems. No marriage remains so exciting that no boredom creeps in. However, to allow the ashes to accumulate, and to run the risk of choking the fire on the altar of the home, is unpardonable.

And as the altar must be tended daily, and the ashes removed before they accumulate, so, also the ashes of misunderstanding, the ashes of selfishness and stubbornness, must be cleared away day by day, as they occur, or the fire of the marriage will be choked out. And, husband and wife must learn that the longer the ashes are permitted to accumulate, the harder they are to remove!

The dedicated priests of the home will therefore stand guard and not allow the fire to burn out. Not only will they clear the ashes as soon as they form, but will also add new firewood to keep the home fire burning continually. And the firewood on the family altar is forgiveness, consideration, patience, the cultivation of common interests, shared concern for their children, and a selfless regard for the happiness of the other.

While the metaphor of ashes on the altar may be a suggestive one, it leaves open the question of which of the two priests, the husband or the wife, must take the first step in clearing the altar of those accumulated ashes that might lead to a family break-up. Who must take the first step toward reconciliation? In too many families the husband and wife angrily blame each other. In the meantime, the glowing embers of love begin to turn to ashes - and the flame begins to flicker!

Neither husband nor wife should be trapped by vain pride, nor stand on ceremony. Neither should stubbornly wait for the other, who is equally stubborn, to make the first move, but should be ready to clear away the misunderstandings that block the channels of communication. Most important, neither party should, after the first step is taken by the other, stubbornly insist on an apology but should rather

accept even the most tentative move in the direction of removing the ashes of misunderstanding, and to respond by doing one's share in removing the blackened cinders that mar the marriage.

There are many other human experiences to which this mataphor can be applied, for life is a temple with many altars. There is room for many fires which have the capacity to warm the heart and brighten human existence. Children, parents, friends, character - all are fires on the altars of our sanctuary. However, they need watchful care and constant tending. None can be neglected, for it is these embers which give meaning to life and significance to our very being. The Divine command applies here no less: "The fire on the altar shall be kept burning."

Let us do our share not only to put new fuel on the fire, but also to remove the ashes of the past, so that the fire may burn brightly to light our lives, and the lives of all those with whom we associate.



What is the meaning of *kadosh*? In other Semitic languages *kadosh* means cut-off, separated, and sometimes, shining. In Biblical texts, *hol*, the antonym for *kadosh*, clarifies its meaning. *Hol* means regular, common, profane, even polluted; so *kadosh* is to be understood as special, different, unique, set apart, even pure. However, the word generally chosen by translators for the three letter Hebrew root K-D-SH is HOLY, sometimes, SANCTIFIED.

The word *kadosh* pervades the Torah, especially in Shemot and the Book of Leviticus which we read this morning. The word *kadosh* may describe:

- the people: "A Kingdom of Priests and a *Holy* People"
- a place: "You shall eat Matzot in a *Holy* Place"
- a state of being: "All his Nazirite days, he shall be *Holy* to the Lord"
- a time: "For the day is *Holy* to the Lord your God"
- and most of all, to describe Adonai and His People: "Then, you shall be *Holy*, just as I am *Holy*."

Since God is holy, then His people is holy, i.e. set apart. The dietary laws, described in this week's *sidrah* have nothing to do with cleanliness or health: they are a requirement for *holiness* so that the people of Israel be set apart, differentiated from all other peoples.

Kiddush is the verbal noun which describes the setting apart of something. Thus, on the Sabbath, we bless God for having *set us apart* by His commandments and having *set apart* the special time that is called the Sabbath. On Festivals, too, we recite, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who has set apart Israel and the times." (Usual translations of Kiddush use the word "sanctification" to convey the meaning.)

A bridegroom betroths his bride with the word "*mekudeshet*", "be consecrated", and the term for betrothal is *kiddushin*, indicating a status of holiness for the woman, set apart to her husband.

*Kedushah*, holiness, is "something more", a "great plus", described by theologian Rudolph Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*. Holiness is beyond the everyday world of reality, beyond the phenomena of our senses; it is set in the realm of the noumenous which is indescribable.

*Kadosh*, meaning "charged with significance", also refers to the energy which strikes down those who dare to break into God's sacred realm. We see this power in this week's Sidrah, as the eldest sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, offer a strange fire before the Lord and are struck down.

The *haftarah*, too, for this week's Torah portion, further explicates the charged energy of that which is set apart as sacred. On David's orders, the sons of Avinadav, Uzzah and Ahio, transport the Ark of God. Uzzah touches the Ark, and God strikes him dead.

The Sanctuary in the desert and the Ark of the Covenant were charged with God's holiness. Thus, in Moses' time, when Aaron's sons came near the Sanctuary, and in David's time, when Uzzah took hold of the Ark, they died before the holiness that is untouchable, taboo and can bring death.

"KADOSH, KADOSH, KADOSH. SANCTUS, SANCTUS, SANCTUS. HOLY, HOLY, HOLY." The first Isaiah heard these words 2700 years ago in the Temple in Jerusalem. In a positive affirmation,



the angelic choir declared God's Holiness as beyond all things, while the fullness of the earth is God's manifested glory, different from His transcendent Holiness.

Our people have understood that we must be Holy, since the Lord is Holy. The Rabbis over the centuries never permitted us, as the people of Israel, to forget our holiness. While every nation and every people have significance and meaning, the words of Torah require of us the realization that the Holiness on earth then would be manifested in the people of Israel. "For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, therefore you shall be Holy, for I am Holy."



The book of Vayikra, and subjects such as sacrifices, the consecration of the priests, priestly duties in the sanctuary, the dietary laws, and this week's reading with the hygienic regulations governing a person afflicted with leprosy might mislead one into thinking that Judaism is mainly concerned with outward forms, with correctly performed ritual acts. However, even in these sections, there is an underlying theme which sheds an entirely different light on the nature of Judaism. Over and over again - we are told by God: "You shall be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:44).

The ritual was to impress upon the Jew that he was a member of a *goi kadosh* with a responsibility to sanctify his own life by learning to differentiate between that which was permitted, and that which was forbidden. The treatment of the leper also had as its goal preserving the holiness of the Israelite camp by placing the leper outside of the camp until he was cured. This quarantine (originally intended to safeguard the physical health of the community) was later interpreted by the Rabbis as referring also to safeguarding its religious health. For the Rabbis taught that leprosy had not only a physical cause, but a moral one. The individual was afflicted with leprosy, (became a *metzora*) because he was guilty of the sin of *motzi shem ra*, of gossip and slander. For the Israelite community to maintain its holiness, it had to be protected from the moral leprosy of slanderers and gossipers--hence the symbolic isolation of the moral leper. What is learned by a play on words at this point is made explicit later in the book of Leviticus, in Kedoshim. This portion opens with the same reason given for observing the ritualistic dietary laws: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy". But this time, the way to achieve holiness is by revering one's father and mother, by helping the poor, by being sensitive to the handicapped, by respecting the aged and the rights of minorities, by not committing adultery or incest.

The Torah, therefore, does not differentiate between ritual and ethics. Judaism recognizes the interrelationship of life in all of its dimensions, physical, spiritual and ethical. This view is not widely understood nor applied in the modern world, even by Jews. The Western mind tends to compartmentalize life; it regards as secular the domains of nature, society, and human relationships. Religion is limited to worship of God, and to ritual observances. This thinking prevails in the artificial but real division between the Federation - which sees itself as the secular Jewish community, and the synagogue - whose role is limited to the "religious" sphere.

This division has also permeated popular thinking. If I ask you, "Are you religious?" Did you think of coming to the synagogue regularly? Of observing the Sabbath punctiliously? Of eating kosher food? Did you include integrity? Justice? Sensitivity? Respect for parents? Faithfulness to one's family? Love of the Jewish people?

As a result of the division between religious and secular, we tend to equate religion with ritual and to believe that piety has little effect on conduct. Each time a person says "Rabbi - I'm not religious, but I'm a good person" or "I'm a good Jew, because I've never harmed anybody" he is reflecting such a belief. Unfortunately this charge is given a certain amount of credence by the conduct of some observant Jews, who may religiously follow the ritual commandments of the Torah, but seem oblivious to the ethical injunctions found in the same Torah. Judaism has a total of 613 commandments, more or less evenly divided between the ethical and ritual. While no one person can observe all of the commandments, to observe the ritual commandments, while ignoring the ethical ones is to falsify what Judaism is all about. As a Conservative Jew I view both ritual and ethics as being important, but I do not see them as equal. For me the ritual commandments are secondary, and the ethical commandments are primary. Ritual is educational; it refines character; inspires us to serve God and our fellow men.

When I speak of keeping ethical commands, I do not mean observing "you shall not murder" or "you shall not steal"; in an organized society with a police force, to observe such commandments is not to be ethical,

only prudent. One is ethical when one observes moral commandments which society does not enforce with laws, such as "honor your father and your mother", "you shall not commit adultery", "you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor".

For when society does not punish us, we tend to rationalize away our misconduct by saying "it's not illegal" or "everyone is doing it" or even justify it as "the new morality". Hence the Torah repeats the words "*ani Adonai Eloheikhem*" "I the Lord am your God" after such ethical commands. Even if "everyone is doing it", there is a right and a wrong, and God will hold responsible those who are guilty of ethical wrongdoing.

Classical Judaism did not rely on the fear of God as the sole motive for higher ethical conduct. Judaism, rather, sought to motivate its followers to overcome their weaknesses and failures through love of God and through the desire to achieve holiness. Ethical and spiritual growth were encouraged by study of Torah, with the conviction that the study of Torah would shape character, and inspire the religious Jew to climb to a higher spiritual level and to achieve ethical sensitivity and moral responsibility.

For instance, many observant Jews gossip during the Torah reading. They, the Rabbis held, were guilty of the sin of *lashon ha-ra*, of gossip and slander. For a remark to be considered *lashon ha-ra*, it need not be false. A lie is not considered as harmful as gossip. A lie, which can be tracked down and proven to be false, is less dangerous than gossip, against which there is no defense. What transforms telling the truth into *lashon ha-ra*? A simple test can help the religious person differentiate between them: We should ask: "What is the purpose in repeating this "truth"? To go a step further: The difference between truth and destructive gossip is not only the motive, but also the result. If the result is harmful, then even a good motive does not justify repeating a truth. On the other hand if refraining from speaking will cause damage to individuals or to a community then one has a responsibility to speak, lest evil be encouraged through silence, and wrongs left unrighted.

The goal of Judaism is the sanctification of life. It teaches that the food we eat, that prayer, that cleanliness and health must be governed by religious principles. However we must not fall prey to the error of identifying ritual as religion. To be religious in the fullest sense we must not only pray every day, we must take to heart the prayer: "O Lord, guard my tongue from evil, my lips from speaking guile", and make every effort to guard our tongues from evil, and our lips from speaking even the truth, with guile.

In the play *Seventh Heaven* by Austin Strong, there is a character named Chico. Although his life was difficult, he always maintained a positive view of life and of himself. He says: "I work in the ditches, but I live near the stars. I never look down; I always look up."

In our modern age, this attitude seems increasingly difficult to sustain. These days, people are often divided into categories - useful, contributing members, who deserve to share in society's governance and its rewards; and others, viewed as non-contributors, who do not participate in the community's decisions and bounty. Can people in this later category view themselves and life the way Chico did? It is not surprising that they may see themselves like specks of dust: If one is blown away, nothing of importance has been lost.

A very interesting story in the Bible deals with this second category of individuals. In the second Book of Kings, the forces of Aram are engaged in battle with Israel. The capital of Israel, Samaria, was under siege. No one could leave the city or enter it. The prices of food soared from day to day until a piece of meat sold for 80 pieces of silver. There appeared to be no hope, and no way out of the plight seemed possible. The king, completely at a loss, rent his garments, and dressed himself in sackcloth, as if in mourning.

Outside the gate, four men decided to go to the camp of the Aramean forces. They assumed they were sure to die either way, either due to the famine in the city, or at the hands of the Arameans. They hoped to find something to eat, and somehow survive. The Bible tells us that God caused the Arameans to flee their camp, abandoning all their provisions. When the four men enter the camp, they discover silver and gold, food and drink. They eat and drink, and then realize that they must notify the king; for their discovery represents the key to the city's salvation. What is unique about this account is that these four men were all suffering from the disease of leprosy, and had been stationed at the gate, outside the city, in accordance with the isolation prescribed for them by the Torah, due to their ritual defilement. These marginal members of society became instruments of salvation and victory.

Let me tell you about Trevor Farrell, a quiet 11 year-old who gets average grades in school, sometimes fights with his brother and sisters, swims in season in the family pool, and rides his minibike around his suburban Philadelphia neighborhood. But every evening, Trevor enters a very different neighborhood. Aided by his parents and some neighbors, Trevor provides aid and comfort to the street people of Philadelphia. He spreads a blanket over one man's shoulders and serves soup and sandwiches to others. Trevor touches shoulders, hands, and many hearts, too.

Trevor's mission began on a cold night last December when he saw on television the street people huddled over steam vents. "I asked my father if people really lived like that", Trevor explained. "He said, 'Sure, they are right here in Philadelphia', and he said, 'If you want to see for yourself, I'll take you down there.'" Trevor then asked his father if he could bring along a couple of items, a blanket and a pillow. It was the first of many trips there, and the first of many blankets and pillows delivered. The following March, Trevor made an additional trip downtown, to City Hall to receive a commendation from the City Council and the Mayor. Yet, Trevor has even further aspirations and goals; he and his family are now attempting to raise money to build a shelter downtown. Most people, asked what 11-year-olds can do for the homeless would respond: "How can they help? What can they do?" Trevor's answer is: "A great deal."

Alexander and Tsipora Zaid lived in Beth Shearim, in the lower Gallilee in 1936 Palestine. As the region's *shomer*, its watchman, Alexander guarded the lands purchased by the Jewish National Fund until they could be settled with Jewish communities. At that time, Beth Shearim was an isolated spot along a dirt road. At this same time, the archaeologist, Dr. Benjamin Mazar, conducting an excavation at Beth

Shearim befriended the Zaid. "They came from Russia. Alexander came from Siberia; Tsipora was from Lithuania," Mazar relates. "The Zaid had a philosophy of life that was clear and simple. Land, idealism, Zionism. That was all...They lived in a pioneer's house. In the rainy season, it was always a problem to find a place in the house where the rain wasn't dripping on you. But somehow, there was always warmth...My excavation was important to them. It was a symbol of their past."

In the second year of Mazar's excavations, while Alexander Zaid was on patrol, he was ambushed and shot. British mandate law required that a death benefit be paid to Zaid's widow, Tsipora. "She didn't want any money from the government," Professor Mazar says. "In fact, she held the British Mandate responsible for the death of her husband, and wanted nothing to do with the British. Tsipora Zaid decided to put the money into the excavation of Beth Shearim. But she had conditions. She would sign the money over to the work, provided she didn't have to even see a bureaucrat, and provided she could sign the necessary papers only in the presence of friends. And this was done. And we received 600 Palestine pounds for the excavation." These funds allowed Mazar to continue his work, and to unearth one of the most important archaeological sources of the Talmudic period found in Israel. Tsipora Zaid, a simple woman with very limited financial resources, made possible the uncovering of a crucial link in the history of the Jewish people in the land of Israel.

My friends, people like these--an 11-year-old boy, the widow of a watchman of an out-of-the-way town in Palestine of the 1930's--would be considered to be on the lower rungs of society's ladder, people who might aspire only to limited goals. Yet they, like the four men described in the Book of Kings, were capable of being the instruments of salvation, of making their own special contributions to the betterment of society. It is not a person's station or stature which determines his or her ability to enrich and improve our world. It is rather, as Thomas Guthrie said, that the greatest things ever done on earth have been done by little agents, by people who asked themselves a very large question: "God, what do you require of me?"



Arthur Herzberg, a Conservative rabbi who is a professor of Jewish history at Dartmouth, asks, will the Jews continue to exist in America in the 21st century?

In the past Jews have remained Jews for three reasons: Many Jews believed that God demanded that the Jewish people remained Jewish. According to the Midrash, at Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah, God lifted up the mountain, held it over the peoples' heads and asked, do you want the Ten Commandments? The implied threat was enough to guarantee that every Jew in every generation would accept the Jewish religion. Marshall Sklare wrote in *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier* that few Jews today believe God makes demands upon them and even fewer regard those demands as binding.

A second reason to maintain the Jewish religion was an organic Jewish community, with jobs, housing, education all delivered and organized in a Jewish context. Today, membership in the Jewish community is completely voluntary. Leaving the Jewish community is very easy because of the openness of American society. A Jew can live magnificently in America with no connection or association with a Jewish community. Ours is a time of the breakdown of the organic Jewish community that once preserved the Jewish identity.

The third key factor in preserving Jewish identity was anti-semitism. The life of persecution of fear, poverty, inquisition and pogroms was a remarkable preserver of Jewish identity. In fact obsession with disappearance became a protective device to insure continued existence. The Jewish historian, Simon Rawidowicz writes "no catastrophe could take this end fearing people by surprise....still less to obliterate it, as if Israel's incessant preparation for the end made this very end impossible." Charles Silberman, in *A Certain People*, presents evidence that anti-Semitism is no longer a factor in American Jewish life. As a result the ability of anti-Semitism to be a protective device for the Jewish community is no longer operative.

These three safeguards of Jewish identity no longer operate to preserve Jewish identity in America. On the other hand, assimilation continues to threaten Jewish life in America.

A French sociologist in 1840 described the "three-generation hypothesis": "The grandfather prays in Hebrew, the father reads the prayer in French and the son does not pray at all". From a New York Yiddish newspaper, 1924: "During the recent High Holiday season, three generations rejoiced: The old - over the Torah; the middle-aged - over the business page in the newspaper; the young - over the sports page."

The threat of the "three-generation hypothesis" has not been felt strongly in America because there have always been fresh waves of immigrants to renew Jewish identity and Jewish spirit on these shores. Today we can expect no new wave of immigration to refresh our Jewish identity. Now if the "three generation hypothesis" is true, it will be able to take effect because there will be no new wave of immigration to counter it.

Arthur Herzberg asked: "Will the Jews continue to exist in America into the 21st century?" His reply: "The answer must be in the negative; history, sociology and the emptiness of contemporary Jewish living all point in the same direction, negative."

I feel that this scenario is greatly exaggerated. I believe that Jews will continue to be Jewish voluntarily because they will choose to do so. Let me tell you about the Jewish community of Winchester, Massachusetts. Winchester is in the heart of Yankee New England. For decades no Jews were allowed to live in this community; recently, Jews have begun to move into the town. When I taught there more than

fifteen years ago, there was no organized Jewish community, no synagogue; just a one-room school with about a dozen children ranging in age from five to fifteen. In this past year, the Jews of Winchester founded a congregation with 33 families, and hired their first rabbi. By the end of the year these 33 families became more than 70. In the heart of Yankee New England, these are Jews who choose to be Jewish.

An AT&T commercial says that when it comes to computers, long distance service and telephoning, "make the right choice." It seems to me that the future of Judaism is in the hands of the Jewish people. Don't let someone else make the choice for you--choose to be Jewish. And if we choose to be Jewish, not only will Judaism survive, but it will thrive.



I have a hobby: popular sayings. First, I want to know whether anyone actually said them in the form they are known today. Second, I want to know whether the original source had the same meaning in mind that is attributed to them today. Third, was the original meaning retained throughout the generations?

Such a saying is *or lagoyim* -- "A light unto the nations," used by many different, even opposing groups. Religious moralists who want to remind us that Israel cannot be "just another state" invoke "*or lagoyim*". Secular moralists say with irony: "*or lagoyim?*" Even Ben Gurion, the practical, secular, nationalistic Zionist, towards the end of his life, started talking about *or lagoyim*. He wanted Israel to be not a religious teacher of mankind, but a moral one.

In none of the three Biblical sources for this phrase does it occur in the exact form of *or lagoyim*. All three sources are in the book of Isaiah. Chapter 42:6 reads "I, the Lord, have called Thee in justice...and I shall make Thee a Covenant of the People, a light of the nations." In Hebrew: *L'brit am, l'or goyim*. Not *or lagoyim*.

How does Jewish tradition interpret this phrase?

Rashi: *L'or goyim* -- Each tribe (of Israel) is called *goy* separately.

Kimchi: *L'brit am* -- for the existence of every people. For it is for your sake that the entire world exists. Covenant means existence. And so shall you also be the light of nations, as it is said: Nations shall walk by Thy light. Light is Torah, which shall go forth to them from Zion. Israel shall sustain the nations in two ways: One, for their sake there will be peace among all the nations, as he says concerning the Messiah: He shall speak peace to the nations. And he shall chastise many nations, and they shall beat their swords etc. Secondly, because of Israel the nations will observe the seven (Noahide) laws and follow the path of goodness.

Shadal (Shmuel David Luzatto): You shall be famous and praised among the nations. Your name shall be honored among them. I shall cause it to be that the salvation with which I am going to save you will be known and publicized to the end of the earth.

What is remarkable is that this latest and most modern of the commentators we have investigated continues as follows: "At first I was moved to interpret that through Israel the eyes of the nations shall be enlightened, and thus all of them will be saved. But I deserted this interpretation, because it is not the habit of the prophets to use the term salvation for the nations, in the sense of their giving up idolatry. For, in truth, the nations are not punished for idolatry."

The second source is Isaiah 49:6: "It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be My servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the offspring of Israel. I will also give thee for a *light of the nations*..."

Rashi: To prophesy concerning the fall of Babylon, which will be a source of joy for the entire world.

Kimchi: Your prophecies will, in the future, be a light of the nations, for they shall see that your prophecies will have been fulfilled, and they will return to the path of goodness. Thus they shall enlighten you to be the source of My salvation unto the end of the earth, for in the salvation of Israel shall they be saved.

Metzudat David: For I shall appoint thee to prophesy and give the news about the future redemption, which shall be as a light unto all the nations, for then they shall all walk in the light of the Lord and believe in Him.

Ibn Ezra: I shall not return Israel to be their spoil, but I shall make thee a light of the nations, to be My salvation, to make it known before it happens.

Source Three: Isaiah 60:3: "And nations shall walk by thy light."



Ibn Ezra: It is customary for those who dwell in darkness to see those who are in the light.

Talmud Babli, Baba Batra 75: The remainder (of the skin of Leviathan) will be spread by the Holy One be He on the walls of Jerusalem, and its light will shine from one end of the world to the other, as it is written, They shall walk by thy light.

Yalkut Shimon: Jerusalem will, in the future, be as a torch for the nations of the world, and they shall walk by its light.

Sefer HaIkkarim (Joseph Albo), Section Two, Chapter 29: Because light shows man the path in which he should walk, light is a symbol of decency and proper behavior, as it is written, And nations shall walk by thy light, which means they shall live properly according to the guidance reaching them from you.

We see from the above survey of text and commentary that, in addition to the concept of "light to the nations" in the sense of a moral model, two other possibilities exist. One is that Scripture is referring to the prophet himself, not to the people of Israel. And the second is that it is not moral perfection which is the source of the light to the nations, but rather the wonders of God's salvation for Israel.

Unfortunately, the option of interpretation which identifies the *or goyim* with the moral model usually connects it with another Isaiahic concept: the suffering servant. While the Jewish reading of Isaiah prefers the idea that the prophet himself is the suffering servant, the non-Jewish preferred reading is that the Jewish people are the suffering servant.

I shall never forget the great protest rally in New York City following the Zionism is Racism resolution in the United Nations. To inject an ecumenical note into the meeting, the organizers invited a Christian clergyman to participate. He said: Do not be dejected. You are fulfilling your Biblical role in history. You, the Jewish people, were meant to be the Suffering Servant of the Lord. This anti-Zionist resolution is another example of Biblical prophecy coming true.

From this point of view the greatest light to the nations is the Holocaust. As in the story of the Baal Shem Tov who wanted to know who his roommate would be in Paradise. He is shown a hugely fat man. The Baal Shem asks why he eats so much, and he tells that his father, who was burned to death by Cossacks, was so thin that the fire made no impression. The son vowed that he would eat and become so large that when he was burned, the fire would reach to the ends of the earth.

Another form of light to the nations provides an alternative type of Kiddush Hashem. Instead of the light of martyrdom, there can be a light of triumph. A poem by Shimon ben Sirah, written in Jerusalem, about the year 200 BCE, puts it this way:

"Help us, God of all / Raise your awe over all the nations, / Let them see your power. / As you have been sanctified through us before their eyes, / So bring honor to yourself, through them, before our eyes."

The burden of being a light for the nations is perhaps too heavy for any one people to carry. Let all nations be lights to each other and the world.

The concept of holiness of a deity or priestly group is not new in religion or societies but for an entire people to aspire to that state of being is unique to our Jewish people. Rabbi de Sola Pool called this a democracy of holiness. Not only the *Kohanim* but an entire people are dedicated to holiness, committing themselves to live a holy life.

Midrash Rabba informs us that after the sin of the Golden Calf and Moses' prayer of forgiveness, the Almighty replied, "I'll meet you half way, Israel, if you will make yourself holy, I'll return to you." The Ramban adds, we must sanctify days and seasons because God said, "Just as I am holy above, you must be holy below."

According to Jewish tradition every Jew is a miniature priest, every home a small sanctuary; it is quite possible that through history, the priestly holiness was expanded to include all Israel. (This would explain the difficult verse in Ezekiel Ch. 44 "The priests shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself, or is torn, whether it be fowl or beast.")

Yoma 39a comments on Leviticus 11:44 "And you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy" ...A person who sanctifies himself a little will be sanctified a lot;...if he sanctifies himself on this earth, he will be sanctified in the hereafter.

Parshat Kedoshim outlines the level of holiness for all Israel based on the assumption that Israel be a "Kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Parshat Emor demands a higher level of sanctification for the priests of the tribe of Levi, the descendants of Aaron. But like the *Kohanim*, all Israel must strive for perfection, no *mum* (imperfection) was permitted, and all holiday gatherings for all Israel were referred to as *mikraei kodesh* holy assemblies.

We Jews must live as if God were watching over us, as if all Jewish generations were looking upon us. Kedoshim and Emor tell us: make your life, time, thoughts, speech and action Jewish. *Kedushah* in Judaism is to avoid the separation between secular and religious life. In Judaism, all aspects of life are regulated by Torah, for example; "Correct worship, or gifts to the poor.... Shabbat observance, or setting no obstacle before the blind... eating permitted things or love thy neighbor. Judaism looks at total life and the total personality; we refuse to divide life or human existence into compartments. As Philo said long ago, "Holiness toward God and justice toward men usually go together." Life for us Jews must be a challenge; we are not satisfied with the ordinary, we must learn to rise above the average to our highest potential. We must strive to become a *mamlechet Kohanim vegoy kadosh*. Every generation must take up the special call.

**And the Lord spoke to Moses in Mount Sinai (Leviticus 25:1)**

The name of this *Sidrah*, taken from the opening phrase, is *Behar* (in the mountain).

The mystic poet, William Blake, wrote: "Great things are done when men and mountains meet!"

The Bible records many instances of where mountains play a significant role: the grounding of the Ark on Mount Ararat; the testing of Abraham on Mount Moriah; the receiving of the Tablets of the Law on Mount Sinai by Moses; the confronting of the idolatrous Priests of Baal on Mount Carmel by Elijah; and the meeting of the enemy on Mount Tabor by Deborah.

From time immemorial, mountains have constituted a challenge to men. Mountains have represented mighty obstacles to be overcome. (Sir Edmund Hillary was asked why he climbed Mount Everest. "Because it was there!" he replied.)

There are apparently insuperable mountains that loom on the horizon of our lives. But these mountains are meant to be climbed and overcome. In daily life, we ought not prefer to live on monotonous, level, unexciting, plains. Without mountains, life would be colorless and dull. Civilizations have been founded by those unafraid to take risks--pioneers undaunted by the wilderness, dreamers unafraid to act.

When we encounter obstacles in our lives, may we say with the poet, Arthur Guiterman, "God gave me hills to climb and strength for climbing!"

**When you come into the land which I give you (Leviticus 25:2)**

"I give you" should be *natati* (that I have given you). The present tense, *notein*, indicates that God extends to us an ever-present, day-to-day opportunity to taste of the spiritual inspiration of the Land of Israel. He enables us to identify with those who have dwelt (and now again dwell) there, and with their historic mission.

A journey to the Holy Land, a summer in Israel, a *sh'nat sheirut* (a year of service), or permanent *aliyah*, can now be a reality for all who desire it. Israel is the cradle of our past and the promise for our future. And we, who are privileged to have witnessed the twentieth-century redemption of our ancient homeland, must identify with this miracle.

**And you shall number seven sabbaths of years to you, seven times seven years (Leviticus 25:8)**

Many reasons have been given for the establishment of this Jubilee. Economically, this measure was designed to maintain an even distribution of wealth. Ethically, the Jubilee reminded men that "the earth is the Lord's" and that human beings must control their natural acquisitive instincts. It also permitted a kind of public repentance for injustice.

The Jubilee cultivated the virtues of charity and compassion, and gave expression to gratitude and thanksgiving.

May we also seek solace and spiritual nourishment in the Sabbath, as an antidote to the hustle and bustle of everyday affairs.

**Proclaim liberty throughout the land (Leviticus 25:10)**

There are many interesting interpretations of the word *d'ror* (liberty). Ibn Ezra tells us that it is derived from the Hebrew word for swallow, a bird that in captivity bitterly cries. Rashi explains that etymologically *d'ror* is related to *dor* (generation), because "a generation comes and a generation goes," signifying that liberty insures the survival of the human race. Perhaps most fascinating of all is the observation that "liberty" is derived from the word *dur* (to dwell). True liberty and freedom enable a man to dwell in safety and security anywhere he likes.

We must proclaim liberty and freedom to all who are enslaved in totalitarian countries so that they may be permitted to emigrate and settle in the country of their choice.

**If you walk in My statutes... (Leviticus 26:3)**

How can we be certain that we follow the path of Divine Guidance? The *Sifra* answers: "If you labor in the Torah."

Only by a careful study of the Torah, the Talmud, and the Rabbinic Commentaries, can we fully comprehend the tradition that has sustained our people through the ages.

For the Jew, study is the highest form of prayer. When we pray, we speak to God; but, when we study Torah, God speaks to us.

To say "*Eyn am ha-aretz hasid*" "an ignoramus cannot be a pious person" (Pirkei Avot 2:6) is not to belittle the man incapable of learning. Rather it attests to the great importance of learning and scholarship if we are ever to guide our lives by civilized precepts and behavior.

For the Jew learning is a lifetime pursuit.

**And you shall eat you bread until you have enough, and dwell in your land safely (Leviticus 26:5)**

The verse reads "eat *your* bread in plenty," not merely "eat bread in plenty." From this we infer that the Jew shall dwell safely in his land only when he produces his own bread, and does not rely on the gifts of others outside of Israel.

In his *Ladder of Charity*, Maimonides teaches that the highest form of *Tzedakah* (charity) is to enable a man to support himself, so that he need not rely on any charity.

Gifts and donations to insure the security of our people in the Holy Land are of extreme importance. But we must also work on behalf of those causes which enable our people in Israel to achieve self-sufficiency.

**And the sound of a driven leaf shall chase them (Leviticus 26:36)**

In the list of horrifying threats of retribution for faithlessness to God's moral law, we read that the sound of a dry leaf wafted by the wind will frighten the people. This can scarcely be compared to the horrors of exile, loathsome disease and death.

Figuratively speaking, this kind of punishment may be likened to the paranoiac affliction of the wicked "who flee when no man pursues."

Many of us are plagued by the "sound of a driven leaf": imaginary persecution, hypochondria, fear of poverty or bereavement, panic over fortune's reversal, or a host of other anxieties.

May we come to understand that the only cure for such haunting chimerae is the *truth* --the ability and determination to master our own unreasonable fears. To those so afflicted, such fears are as real as

physical ailments. Therefore we must get to their roots and seek to heal them. As Emerson enjoined us, "Do the thing you fear and the death of that fear is certain."

**When a man shall clearly utter a vow... (Leviticus 27:2)**

Judaism has always discouraged vows for fear that later they would be dishonored. The *Kol Nidre* is an ancient legal formula for the Eve of Atonement. It "neutralizes" the well-intentioned, but unfulfilled vows which may be made to God during the coming year--as well as vows made under duress.

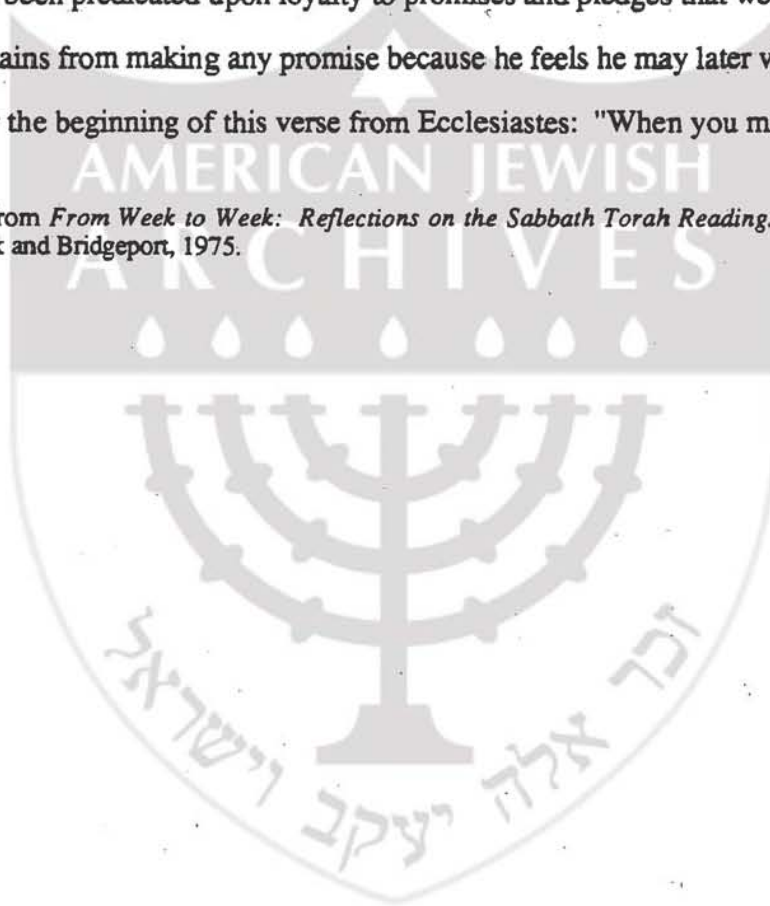
We read in Ecclesiastes: "It is better not to vow than to vow and not fulfill" (5:4).

Keeping promises and meeting obligations are basic principles of our faith. Many worthy endeavors of the Jewish people have been predicated upon loyalty to promises and pledges that were made in the past.

Only the hypocrite abstains from making any promise because he feels he may later violate his word.

We ought to remember the beginning of this verse from Ecclesiastes: "When you make a vow to God, do not defer fulfilling it."

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RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY HOMILETICS SERVICE

# Yamim Noraim

5749

AMERICAN JEWISH

ARCHIVES

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**Contributors:** Rabbis Samuel Chiel, Jacob Chinitz, Yosef Green, Sidney Greenberg, Joseph Heckelman, Shamai Kanter, Gilbert S. Rosenthal, Elliot Salo Schoenberg, Gerald Zelizer

Rabbi Saul I. Teplitz, *Chairman, Homiletics Service*  
Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal, *Chairman, Publications Committee*  
Rebecca Jacobs, *Editor*

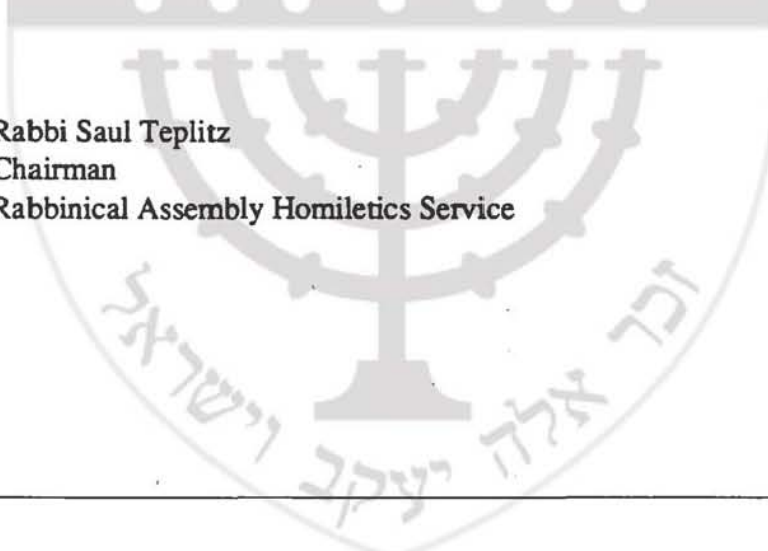
Dear Colleague:

As we begin the new year, we are grateful to the members of the Rabbinical Assembly who have been contributing their thoughts and words to our Homiletics Service.

As you teach and preach during the year ahead please keep the Homiletics Service in mind. We look forward to broadening our base of contributors; we hope to hear from you.

לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו

Rabbi Saul Teplitz  
Chairman  
Rabbinical Assembly Homiletics Service



# ראש השנה

## OUR IDEAS ABOUT GOD

Rabbi Shama Kanter

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I want to make a shocking assertion this morning: Ideas are important. Why is this shocking? Because it goes against the assumptions of most of the Jewish community. Federations, the Israel Bonds Organization, Community Centers, all take it for granted that so long as you are willing to belong or to give, that ideas don't matter.

How did we get to think that ideas aren't important? I think it comes from a distortion of the democratic concept that people have a right to express their different views. Because everyone has the right to hold different ideas, all ideas are equally true. Therefore, ideas really don't make any difference. But the ideas we hold really determine how we live and behave. That is why they are important; and that is why some ideas have to be challenged— simply because they are wrong,

I have one particular idea in mind. It is very widespread. In fact, I first learned it from my mother. (She has many wonderful qualities, but being a theologian is not one of them.) When I was six or seven, and tripped and fell as kids will do, or if my roller skate came off and I skinned my knee, she would say, "See? God punished you...you must've done something wrong!" (Sometimes I wonder how I managed to wind up religious at all, with that kind of training. Fortunately, I did have access to other kinds of religious information.)

My mother's idea isn't hers alone. It's still around, in all sorts of places. Recently, in Israel, a train hit a stalled school bus at a railroad crossing and a number of children from the town of Petah Tikvah died in the crash. Some months before, there had been a controversy in Petah Tikvah involving town council's approval of Friday night film showings at the local movie house. Following the accident, Rabbi Peretz, who then held the Israeli cabinet post of Minister of the Interior, declared that the death of those children was a punishment for Shabbat violation in Petah Tikvah. There was a great public revulsion at this; but though Rabbi Peretz later expressed sympathy for the bereaved families, he never retracted his original statement. When both chief Rabbis, Sephardic and Ashkenazic, were interviewed by the press, they qualified their answers by saying that we really can't be sure how these things operate. Neither one disagreed on basic principle with Rabbi Peretz. They might at least have quoted the prophet Ezekiel, to the effect that children will not be punished for the sins of their parents, but they did not.

Some years earlier, when 26 people (mainly women and children) died at the hands of terrorists in the town of Maalot, representatives of one famous Hasidic group, especially concerned with encouraging Jews to put up mezuzot, declared that after the tragedy they had inspected the doorposts of Maalot, and found exactly 26 defective parchments!

Several years ago, a professor of Jewish studies was leading a discussion of High Holy Day liturgy with one of our *havurot*. He read the *U'netaneh Tokef* prayer with them, which describes the possible tragic events of the coming year: "Who shall live and who shall die," and the climactic state-



ment, "But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severe decree." He turned to one of the women, whose mother had died during the previous year: "Do you really believe that? Do you really feel that your mother was a sinner last year, and died because she was so bad?" The woman was in tears.

Sometimes I get the impression that this point of view has become semi-official within Orthodoxy. Rabbi Bernard Maza has recently published a book called, With Fury Poured Out: A Torah Perspective on the Holocaust. In it he insists "That Torah life in Eastern Europe was so much on the decline...that the Lord needed the Tzaddikim of Eastern Europe to be sacrificed...so that Torah could begin to flourish again for future generations (*Jewish Press*, Oct. 2, 1987)." [Rabbi Maza is the brother of Jackie Mason, but I am afraid he was not joking here.]

If this is what people who represent religion say about God, one can only say that with friends like this God need no enemies!

I think I can anticipate a question that has been forming in your mind. You may well ask: "Why do you say they are wrong? After all, these people are in many ways more strictly observant than you are. Maybe they are correct in the way they describe God, and you are wrong in your objection to it!

Well, first, Judaism is not one-dimensional. Observance is important, but not the only measurement in Judaism. It is also important not to be morally intimidated, not to assume that some idea which is morally repugnant to you happens to be right, or even to be Jewish, because it's said by someone more observant than you are.

Are you familiar with the name of Shabbetai Zvi? In the last third of the 17th century most of the Jewish world agreed that he was the Messiah, and would soon lead us all back to the Land of Israel in glory. Shabbetai Zvi was what we would now call a manic-depressive, a charismatic figure in his "up" periods who could win over anyone. Unfortunately, the Sultan of Turkey arrested him when Shabbetai was in depression, and gave him the choice of conversion to Islam or death. He converted. The effect on world Jewry was disastrous: thousands of defections to Christianity and Islam by people who had their bags packed, ready to leave for Israel on his signal, who now lost all faith in Judaism.

How was it possible for the Shabbetai Zvi movement to be so successful? Gershom Scholem points to one key element. The proclamation of the Messiah came from Jerusalem. The Jerusalem rabbis knew Shabbetai Zvi and his erratic personal symptoms. Had they expressed skepticism, the movement would never have gotten underway. Why, then, did they remain silent? In a recent book, Prof. Joseph Dan of the Hebrew University suggested an answer. Shabbetai's assistant and publicist, Nathan of Gaza, was prolific in sending out pamphlets encouraging repentance and increased observance. His message was: Since the Messiah is here, become better Jews. Keep the Sabbath more strictly, study more Torah. Get up at midnight to pray, etc. The Jerusalem rabbis, seeing the efforts to increase Jewish observance thought, "Look at these worthwhile goals. How can we criticize them?" So they remained silent.

For me, this example is instructive. Because the most widely-known of the Hasidic groups is in many ways profoundly un-Jewish. They believe that their rebbe is the Messiah. (It is the "open secret" of their community, only waiting to be publicly proclaimed. No one will deny it.) Their

vending

philosophy of *mitzvot* resembles a gumball machine: put the *mitzvah*-in-and-a-reward comes out. What goes on in your mind and heart is not relevant. Contrary to the Mishnah, they insist that if the shofar is sounded in your presence, whether you intend to hear it or not, it will still "do you good".

- If you have tefillin put on you, it does you good regardless of your inner state. And, of course, as we
- have seen, their idea of God is that He kills little children because of defective *mezuzot*....

Why then has there been no public criticism? It is because the group is so diligent in encouraging observance, that people are inhibited from calling attention to these things.

So: ideas are important, and some of them can be terribly wrong. But if so, what does it mean, about Repentance and Prayer and Righteousness averting the severe decree? Doesn't it mean what it seems to say? No, it does not. Back in the 13th century Rabbi Moses be Nachman exclaimed, "It can't possibly mean what it literally says. Didn't the author of the prayer ever read the book of Job?" Job's children were perfectly righteous, and they died horribly. Can it mean to say that someone who lived a decent life for 91 years, and died at the age of 92, suddenly became a sinner in that last year, and was punished with death? If so, there's a perfectly good way to express that idea in Hebrew, that Repentance/Prayer/Righteousness cancel a decree: *m'vatlin et ha-gezerah hara'ah*.

But our prayer says something else: these three things cause the evil of the decree to pass away. What's a decree? It is something arbitrary, sometimes irrational. Many things that happen in life are just that: arbitrary and irrational. If something terrible and painful were to happen to you during the coming year, (illness or bereavement or business failure), what could you do? You could let it destroy you. You could let it make you bitter, and resentful, jealous of people who haven't suffered like you. You could even let it push you away from God, so that you don't only suffer but lose a great source of strength. You would then suffer twice: once from the tragedy and again from the loss of meaning and hope that God gives us.

But horrible events don't have to do this to you. The prayer tells us about the power of *teshuvah* - living close to God; and *tefillah* - communicating with God, both alone and with a congregation that gives the support for prayer when it might be hard to pray alone; and *tzedakah* - actions that reach out to help others. These things make the evil of the decree pass away; they take the sting out of it. You know that American folk song: "You've got to cross that lonesome valley/ You've got to go there by yourself/ Ain't nobody gonna do it for you/ You've got to go there by yourself?" The anonymous author of that song forgot something important. He forgot about David the shepherd, who reminded us: Even when I go through the darkest valley, I won't be afraid of evil because You are with me....

If you want to understand God, understand Him as did Rabbi Meir, in the second century: "When a human being suffers, the Shekhinah cries out, 'Oh! My head! Oh! My arm!' God says, 'I suffer when my creatures are in pain...' Understand Him as described in the Talmud, tractate *berakhot*, which declares: "The idols stand right in front of their worshippers, but they can scream all day and not be heard. Yet someone who slips into the back of the synagogue, behind a pillar (in the cheap seats!) and silently whispers a prayer, knows that God hears that prayer..." Can you have a God closer than that?

Understand God not as an enemy, but as One who is on your side, if you'll let Him into your life. May that understanding be true for all of us, so that we'll have a New Year that is filled with happiness. Amen.

# ראש השנה

## The Ideal Jew

Rabbi Elliot Salo Schoenberg

The High Holidays are a time for us to contemplate who we are and ideally who we could become. Our tradition calls upon us to spend this day doing a *heshbon hanefesh*, accounting for our days and lives. There is no harder responsibility before us because it is human nature to resist change. To assist in this arduous personal task, this morning we will examine three ideal Jewish types: The *tsaddik*—the just person, the *talmid hakham*, the rabbinic scholar and the *hasid*, the pious person.

The *tsaddik* is the Jew who does *mitzvot*, Jewish holy deeds, trying to fulfill the Law as far as it lies within human power. The *tsaddik* is a doer. In modern language this ideal Jew is the willing Jew, whose life echoes the dictum "Nothing Jewish is alien to me." All of us are called upon to do our duty; and everybody is equipped with sufficient strength and innate judgement to succeed. But not everyone is willing. The Talmud says that the *tsaddik* is not expected to be a person of words, but a person of action.

The patriarch Abraham, the featured Jewish personality of the High Holidays, is, according to tradition, the epitome of the *tsaddik*. Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai in the second century was credited with the saying: "The world never lacks thirty *tsaddikim* like Abraham." Why is Abraham the primary Jewish example of a *tsaddik*? God calls upon Abraham to leave his home and move to a new country. Abraham willingly goes. God calls upon Abraham to renounce idols and to accept monotheism. Abraham willingly does. God asks Abraham to cast out his son Ishmael. Abraham willingly agrees. Finally and climactically—God asks of Abraham the ultimate sacrifice—that he give his only remaining son as an offering—and Abraham willingly complies.

What does a *tsaddik* look like today? This Jew wants to do the *mitzvot* as authentically and seriously as possible. A *tsaddik's* willingness involves not only a commitment to observe the *mitzvot* and to advance Jewish concerns, but to refract all aspects of life through the prism of Jewishness. The content of a *tsaddik's* professional dealings, communal involvements and interpersonal interactions are shaped by the values of our faith, honesty, dependability, just prices, sincere effort, respect for others. The *tsaddik's* week and year move to Jewish rhythms: the week culminating in Shabbat, the cycle of the year marked by the holidays. The moral imperatives of our tradition impel the contemporary *tsaddik* to universal concerns and deeds of social justice, helping the poor, visiting sick friends. The *tsaddik's* home is filled with Jewish books, art, music and ritual objects, and it is a home sustained and guided by the ethical insights of our heritage.

I am not asking you to tie up your children as Abraham did; I suggest that we change our attitude about Jewish life from the negative to the positive. I suggest we be Jewish more willingly. When the call comes for minyan, the *tsaddik* willingly helps. When the Temple appeal is made, the *tsaddik* adds to last year's gift. When a committee needs volunteers, *tsaddikim* do not find an excuse they find an opportunity. The *tsaddik* is the Jew who acts.

The second ideal Jew is the talmid hakham, the rabbinic scholar. This term reflects our esteem for a life of study and contemplation; appreciation for the thrill of gaining new insights; an approach to God characterized by the intellectual comprehension of Divinely inspired writings. What is asked of the scholar? A rational effort of the mind, concentration and focus. A true talmid hakham's full command of the art of reading and interpreting sacred texts enables the scholar to apply this interpretation to the changing needs of the contemporary community. My grandmother used to tell me that in Eastern Europe the highest praise you could pay to somebody was the deceptively simple sentence "Er ken lernen (He knows how to learn)." No more modest formula could be found to express the highest value.

Who is the talmid hakham today? He or she is the learning Jew. The talmid hakham learns Hebrew and studies our classics in order to become enriched by their message, gain insight and be inspired to live more Jewishly. Today's talmid hakham, acquainted with contemporary Jewish thought and events, is prepared for future challenges and opportunities. For the talmid hakham, Jewish learning is a lifelong quest through which Jewish and general knowledge are integrated for the sake of personal enrichment, group creativity and world transformation.

The Vilna Gaon, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, is probably the finest classic illustration of the talmid hakham ideal. Born the first day of Passover in 1720, he was a child prodigy. At the age of six he was advanced enough in his studies of Bible and Talmud to dispense with the assistance of a teacher. At the age of six and a half he delivered a learned discourse in the great synagogue of Vilna before the Chief Rabbi of this center of great Jewish learning. His diligence in study was unparalleled. To shut out distraction, Elijah would close the windows of his room by day and study by candlelight. He studied all night sitting in an unheated room, his feet in a bucket of cold water to prevent himself from falling asleep. According to his sons, he never slept more than two hours a day, and never more than a half hour at a time. Every waking moment of his life, the Gaon spent either studying or teaching. Having read a book once, he was able to recite it by heart for the rest of his life. Yet he would repeat by memory every chapter of the Bible and every passage in the Talmud hundreds of times, even if they presented him with no difficulty at all. He simply loved to study; it was his way of serving God.

The Gaon's literary output is impressive. He wrote commentaries on nearly all the books of the Bible; treatises on Biblical geography, chronology and archeology; commentaries on the Mishnah and the Jerusalem Talmud; critical notes to all the early midrashim, notes on the Zohar, the classical work of Jewish mysticism. His most important work was his commentary on the Shulhan Arukh, the foremost code of Jewish law. Although the Gaon lived to be 77, he finished all his writing by the age of 40, saying: "Now I will have time to study."

We must subscribe to Jewish periodicals like the Jerusalem Post or Sh'ma or Moment. Our synagogue continues its adult education program. We invite well known guest scholars. Sisterhood has a book study group. The talmid hakham takes advantage of the opportunities his Temple provides for learning. We can each become the talmid hakham, the learning Jew, the Jew who continues to study and learn.

The third ideal type of Jew is the hasid. The Hebrew word hesed evokes charity, lovingkindness and grace, so the usual translation of hasid, "pious", does not really convey its true meaning. The hasid

demands nothing of others and everything from himself. While the *tsaddik* does what is demanded, the *hasid* goes far beyond the requirements of duty.

In traditional literature both the *tsaddik* and the *talmid hakham* embody the ideal rational Jew. They measure their steps, they weigh their actions, and create the Jewish community in highest form. On the other hand, the *hasid* is the radical Jew, who in trying to follow the spiritual call, goes to extremes. Never content with the middle road, the hasid's radicalism and utter emotional commitment are not to be deterred by constraints.

The *hasid* today is the striving Jew. No matter the level at which they start, *hasidim* are not content with their current level of observance or knowledge. *Hasidim*, knowing we can all grow, develop and improve as Jews, bring an open attitude to those traditions they have yet to observe, and the desire to grapple with those issues and texts he has yet to confront. The great twentieth-century Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig was once asked if he put on *tefillin*. He did not say no; he did not say yes; he said "not yet". Rosenzweig was a *hasid* – a Jew striving to be more Jewish. Complacency is the mother of stagnation and the antithesis of the modern day *hasid*, the striving Jew.

We can all become *hasidim*. We are basically all good people here, but we must not be satisfied with who we are. How will we grow Jewishly? What new mitzvah will we add to our weekly agenda? What new Jewish book or periodical will we read this year? What synagogue committee will we volunteer to serve on?

Nahman of Bratslav was a hasidic rebbe who lived at the end of the eighteenth century in the Ukraine. His followers are known to the world as the "dead *Hasidim*" because their is the sole group which did not seek a successor to their original master. Nahman of Bratslav led a tormented life. His leadership was unappreciated outside his immediate circle. He suffered severe bouts of melancholia and depression. His sole male child, Shlomo Ephraim, his one hope to continue his dynasty, died in infancy. His beloved wife, Sosia, died after a few short years of marriage. At the age of 35 he contracted tuberculosis and died before accomplishing many of his goals. In his few short years, what made Nahman of Bratslav irreplaceable? I believe it was because he was the epitome of the *hasid* who was a striving Jew.

Reb Nahman called his goal "Bratslav shel Maa'alah", Bratslav in Heaven; his goal was to touch the sky. Bratslav shel maalah was not a place but a state of mind – moving, growing, reaching. Nahman depicted the spiritual growth of the seeker as an ongoing chain made up of challenges, resolutions, and higher challenges. The reward of work is more work, but on a higher, sweeter level.

Reb Nahman wrote in his *Shivhey ha-Ran*: <sup>1770</sup> He never rested and he was never still, even in his adult years, despite the awesome heights of spiritual understanding which his mind had reached. He would never be satisfied with anything he had attained. He was constantly in a state of struggle, accepting hard and bitter sufferings upon himself, sufferings which have almost no parallel in the world. When he reached a higher rung he would begin again from the beginning, forgetting the entire past, as though he were a complete newcomer...

The Bratslav Hasidim never try to find a new leader, because Nahman's ability to grow, persevere and strive despite his difficult life, is a constant inspiration. Reb Nahman was the ideal *hasid* because he was always striving to grow as a Jew.

Each of us can become a *tsaddik*, doing more *mitzvot*, Jewish deeds, this year. Each of us can become a *talmid hakham*, learning more this year. Each of us can become a *hasid*, striving to be better, more moral, more spiritual, more Jewish.

(This sermon was inspired in part by *Emet ve Emunah: The Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*).



# רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה

## THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal

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Often, I have the following conversation with a husband about to end a long-term marriage. "Why do you want to break up your family?" His reply is invariably: "I'm not happy." (Similar sentiments are expressed to me by women, but less frequently). I continue by asking, "What do you mean by happiness? Define it." There usually comes a fumbling, uncertain reply. It's not so easy, it appears, to define that elusive ingredient: happiness.

Yet we all want it, seek it, search for it whether in marriage or vocation, family relationships and life itself. The "pursuit of happiness" is part of our American political system; it is an inalienable right. But please note: The Declaration of Independence speaks of "the pursuit of happiness"; it makes us no guarantees that we'll catch it.

It is sadly curious how many people are unhappy in this wonderful, free, affluent society. Here we are, the richest people on earth and yet for all our money and possessions, our free-wheeling sex, our entertainment, our unequalled opportunities for instant gratification and the like, we detect frightening phenomena and dangerous symptoms.

The divorce rate soars at over 1.1 million a year, although that finally represents a hopeful drop from the previous year. Teenage suicide has tripled since 1950. The children of the wealthy are often spoiled rotten and end up sick, sad, alone. The tragic Levin murder case in New York of a rich preppy by an equally rich preppy dramatized the problem of what some have described as the disease of "affluenza." Executives who have made it to the top and have reached the zenith of their fields are too often harried, harassed, ill, unhappy, and insecure. Small wonder that many corporations engage industrial psychiatrists to counsel their neurotic executives.

What, then, is wrong? With all of these material blessings; with all of these physical benefits, with all of these riches and goodies, what is lacking? Part of the answer lies in our greed for more happiness than each is entitled to in life and in unrealistic expectations from life. Montesquieu observed: "If we only wanted to be happy it would be easy; but we want to be happier than other people, which is almost always difficult since we think them happier than they are."

Part of the answer lies in our frustration at not doing what we really want to do with our lives (or at least so we perceive our existences). It is a sad, sad thing and deeply frustrating to do that which bores us, to pursue that which eludes us, to spend time at a trade or with people whom we really do not care for. As Goethe put it, "to be doing what you like and to have done what you like is happiness." I suspect not too many of us have lives accord with that statement.

Part of the answer — perhaps the greatest part — lies in our definition of "happiness." I suppose that each one of us conceives it somewhat differently. Interestingly, I studied my Hebrew concordance and found only one or two Hebrew words for "happy" or "happiness." The noun form *simhah* is familiar to all of you and often used in Bible, Talmud and Midrash. The noun *osher* which proba-

bly means "good fortune" is less often used. The adjective for "happy," *samaeh*, is rarely used, while *ashrey*, "fortunate" is popular. I find this most instructive because language and its nuances are revealing clues to the values of cultures and civilizations. How and in what context do we use the terms "happy" or "happiness" in Judaism?

Often the phrase "happy" or "fortunate" is used in connection with God, serving Him, revering Him, trusting Him, sensing His presence. "Fortunate are those who trust in the Lord" (Psalm 2:12). "Fortunate the people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 145:1). "Serve the Lord in joy" sang the Psalmist (Ps. 32:11, 100:12, etc.) For the Biblical authors there is no greater joy than experiencing Divinity. Another common use is the joy in coming to God's house or Temple in Jerusalem and in celebrating a sacred day, a festival, a Sabbath. "I rejoiced when they said, 'Let us go to the Lord's house'" (Psalm 122:11). "Happy are those who dwell in Your house" (Psalm 145:11). "I rejoiced when I came to God's house of prayer" (Isaiah 56:7). The Torah commands us to rejoice in your festival" (Lev. 23:40 & Deut. 14:20), and be "totally joyful on the holidays." (Deut. 16:15). (*Ve-samahtah be-hagekha ve hayyita akh-samaeh.*)

A Jew finds joy in God's laws and *mitzvot*, in keeping His commandments and statutes. "The precepts of the Lord are right, they make the heart glad" (Ps. 19:9). There is joy in moral behavior and in living the good, decent, ethical life, in helping the poor and being charitable to the needy. One of the greatest verses in Psalms is this one (41:2): "It is a joy for the righteous person to do justice."

There is happiness to be found, says the Bible, in family and children and in stable domestic affairs. "A man shall cause his wife to rejoice," ordains Scripture (Deut. 24:5, Proverbs 5:18). And there is joy in fruitful labor: "When you eat the labor of your hands how fortunate are you and how good is it for you!" (Ps. 128:2).

And I also discovered something very revealing about happiness as the Bible viewed it: Rarely is happiness used in connection with mere possessions or material things. The only example that comes to mind is the case of Jonah and the leafy shade plant, familiar to you all from the *Maftir Yonah* which we chant on Yom Kippur afternoon. Jonah was happy that God made for his protection from the broiling sun a leafy castor-bean plant (*kikayon*). But you all recall how short-lived was his happiness over the plant (Jonah 4:6).

How did the sages and rabbis view the ideal of "happiness?" Not the way too many of us moderns do, I suspect. They talk a great deal of *simhah shel mitzvah* of "the joy of performing religious acts" (*Berakhot* 31a), even as we like to use the term these days of Jewish life-cycle moments or events of "happenings" as a *simhah*. They stress the need to serve God in a spirit of *simhah*; of praying in a mood of joy rather than sorrow; of acquiring Torah through joy (*Berakhot* 31a; *Yer. Sukkah* V, 1; *TBE Zuta* 17, etc). One of the great teachings of the Hasidim is that we must serve God and keep His laws in a mood of joy — with song, dance, even vodka!

Our teachers stressed the joy to be found in family settings and domestic life. A man is required to be married because there can be no full joy in bachelorhood; marriage is the path of full happiness; a man must help his wife rejoice physically, sexually and emotionally (*Sotah* 40a; *Pesahim* 72b; *Rosh Hashanah* 6b).



When virtue triumphs and good defeats evil and morality wins out there is joy (*Sifre* par. 117). The prayer in the *Mahzor* is familiar: "Therefore the righteous will fear You and rejoice; the honorable will be glad and the virtuous will sing with gladness at the victory over wickedness." There is joy to be found in helping others, in doing good deeds such as acts of kindness, compassion, charity, serving, aiding those less fortunate. One of the profoundest statements of all is in *Pirkei Avot* (IV, 1) and it may hold the key to happiness because it talks of the proper frame of mind we must all cultivate if we are ever to find true happiness. Ben Zoma asked: "Who is rich?" And he answered: "The person who is happy in his lot in life."

So I return to my original question: "What is happiness? How do we find it? Is it attainable? What ingredients make for true, joy in life?" Here are the guidelines, as I see them. The first is the joy of serving God, worshiping Him, joining in synagogue prayer, sharing Jewish experiences, participating in festivals, studying Torah, being present at *simhahs*, at Jewish "happenings." It's fun and warm and wonderful and exhilarating to rub shoulders with fellow Jews on these sacred days, to raise our voices in song and worship, to discover great insights in the Bible or Talmud or Midrash, to sit in the *sukkah* and share a family Seder. And for all the criticisms about our vulgar conspicuous consumption, A Jewish *simhah* is unique and when we carry the bride and groom around the ballroom on two chairs and sing and clap and dance — I am joyfully uplifted!

We must and can find joy through family life and love, through our mates and children, parents and grandparents. Yes, I know only too well the pitfalls and painful challenges, the annoyances and frustrations. But consider the alternative: the loneliness and despair and emptiness of lacking the family support group, the Sabbath dinner, the family trips together. We have to understand that "ideal" marriages or families exist only in Hollywood movies or insipid TV sitcoms. We know, writes Dr. Michael Brodsky in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, that people die of broken hearts, stress, tension, heartache. "Nobody ever died from love," he adds.

We find joy in helping others and serving humanity. "The door to happiness opens outward," suggested Kierkegaard. I love to tell of the late nurse of Jerusalem's Shaare Zedek Hospital, Schwester Selma Mayer, who worked till her death well up in the 90's. She was an orphan from Hamburg who came to Shaare Zedek in 1916 and nursed the sick with her heart and soul. She never married but adopted and raised two orphan daughters. Her favorite poem was by the great Bengali poet of Calcutta, Rabindranath Tagore; it summed up her philosophy of life:

I slept and dreamt  
That life was joy  
I awoke and saw  
That life was duty  
I acted and behold  
Duty was joy.

So in helping others we find true joy in life. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, "I believe that every human mind feels pleasure in doing good to another." Above all, we must cultivate a contented mind and spirit, learning to be grateful for what we have, envying others less, lusting for less, learning to be thankful for so many things. We must be thankful for the gift of life itself for it is the most precious gift. Just to be alive is happiness! To enjoy good health, to see our dear ones, to hear their voices, to touch them, to smell the flowers, to have a clear mind and control over our bodily func-

tions — that is happiness! To relish the love and loyalty of family and hear ones and a circle of good friends is happiness! To have bread and food on the table and shelter over our heads when so many pathetic creatures are homeless in our cities — that is happiness! To enjoy the blessings of freedom and justice in this very unique country — is happiness! To experience the pleasure of travel to interesting places, the adventure of great books, a rousing concert, a great opera or ballet performance, a stimulating theatre evening or a good movie — that's happiness!

There are rich people who are desperately unhappy. J. Paul Getty, perhaps the richest man in the world, was utterly miserable: he failed in numerous marriages, he was despised by his children, he despised people. Henry Ford II, who died recently, was equally miserable despite his huge fortune: he failed in several marriages, had terrible relationships with friends and associates, betrayed and was betrayed by his closest. His greatest happiness, we are told, was to get drunk, jump fully dressed into a pool and make noise.

And there are people of modest circumstances who are happy, as you and I know. Perhaps it is all in our minds and spirits, our outlook on and philosophy of life. "The city of happiness is in the state of mind." The story is told of a deeply depressed and suicidal man who came to a psychiatrist for help. He poured out his bitter heart and wept for about a half hour. Seeing his terribly depressed state, the doctor said: "My friend, you desperately need cheering up, you need fun, you need to laugh. I've a suggestion for you: The circus is in town and it's a great way to spend a few hours laughing. The world-famous clown named Stromboli makes everyone laugh. He'll surely cheer you up and get you out of your depression." "But you don't understand," replied the patient with tears rolling down his cheeks. "You see, I am Stromboli!"

Perhaps after all is said and done, the key to happiness is within ourselves. And that is why one of the first prayers we say every morning is this great prayer which we ought to recite more fervently: "How fortunate are we!" How good is our portion, how pleasant our lot, how beautiful our heritage!"

# ראש השנה

## THE SEFER WE WRITE

Rabbi Shamaï Kanter

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Let me lead you in reciting that blessing we say on seeing a large crowd of people: Barukh Hakham ha-razim. You can use it at a football game, rock concert or at the Indianapolis Speedway. It praises God who knows the secrets in every heart; the rest of us have to guess the thoughts of each others' hearts. This Rosh Hashanah morning my guess is that one reason why we come here involves the secret we don't want to admit: We are afraid to die (except for teenagers who think they are immortal). That's why we respond to the image of the Book of Life. Usually we think of it as God's record book in which he checks us off for another year of life. But the Midrash Tanhuma imagines it differently. Adam complains to God, "Your Torah will record that I brought death into the world. I don't mind being responsible for the death of the wicked, but I do mind being held responsible for the death of the righteous!" God replies, "Don't worry, Adam. I'm going to have every person write an account of his/her life, and seal it."

So Midrash Tanhuma says that not God, but we are the ones writing the book of our lives. That idea can be depressing, if you know anything about the book publishing industry nowadays: only 1 in 10,000 books become a best seller, only 1 in 50,000 is remembered past 10 years. Further, thanks to new tax laws, a publisher can't keep books around in the hope that they'll be appreciated after several years. If they are not instantly successful, they must be remaindered or shredded. I think that many young people see the book of their lives that way: that they must make it right away or not at all. This would explain the urgency of the yuppie criminals. A large income and a bright future is not enough: you must be a millionaire by 30. It explains the business people who won't invest a company's profits in the future, which would look bad on the current quarterly report, but will sell off the assets of a good company for brilliant quarterly profits and move on to another job on the basis of that "success". And it is only an extremely short-term view of success that can see dishonesty as worthwhile. Ethical living takes a longer view of life than 3 months.

But Jewish tradition has an alternative vision of the kind of book of life we can write. Our prayer says, "inscribe us in the sefer of life." For there is a difference between a book and a sefer, and not every book in the Hebrew language can be considered a sefer, in the Jewish sense, either. See how Jews treat a sefer: a book can be set down in any position; a sefer is set down right side up. If a book falls, the owner may or may not pick it up; a sefer is picked up and kissed and then replaced. When a book's usefulness is used it is thrown away; a worn sefer is never discarded or burned or shredded — it is reverently buried. Most important, no sefer is holier than any other. Rashi and Maimonides are equally holy; the Baal Shem Tov along with the Hafetz Hayyim.

Some years ago at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Rabbi Wolfe Kelman was displaying his brother's newly published sefer to a friend, who remarked, "Well, it is an impressive scholarly work, but I suspect it's not going to be a best-seller!" Rabbi Louis Finkelstein was passing by, and he commented, "You know my definition of a best seller? It is the *Shiboley Haleket* (an anthology of rabbinic biblical interpretation). The *Shiboley Haleket* was published in the 13th century, when it sold 200 copies each year. In the 14th and 15th centuries it sold 200 copies a year. This century and in the 23rd century it will also sell 200 copies a year. That's my idea of a Jewish best seller!"

So, how can the book of your life become a sefer, rather than just a book? Well, a sefer isn't distinguished by its design or its cover, or its length: that book of Psalms which kept up Natan

Sharansky's spirits in the Gulag, the one he risked his life to retain, was less than 100 pages long. One thing is its vocabulary the kind of words you regularly use. If your life-story regularly uses words like Shabbos, kosher, tzedakah and Torah, that will help make it a *sefer*. I think of a young woman named Nancy Abraham concerned about homeless families in New York. She bought a building, and together with her father, reconditioned it to house 31 families, and from their \$100,000 donation (and 6 months of careful effort), provided comfortable apartments at the same cost to the city and federal government as the squalid, rat-infested kitchenless welfare hotels which house so many today. "Really," she says, "anyone can do it." Anyone whose family has been influenced by words like tzedakah and yosher and compassion. (What interests me most is that Nancy Abraham's life profile is strikingly similar to that of the young men indicted for white-collar "insider trading" crimes: She is a 39-year-old vice-president at Shearson Lehman Co. But she uses her economic talents for more than her own success).

More important that vocabulary is Theme. Novelist Joyce Carol Oates has said that there are really only two stories in the world. One is somebody goes on a journey. The other is a stranger comes into town. The Jewish story uses both of those themes: our people went on a journey, and in the course of that voyage God revealed Himself to us. I know that many of you are more comfortable with the idea of human beings discovering God, proving the existence of God. You would be interested in reporter James Bleick, writing about the new generation of physicists in the *N.Y. Times*: "Some of (them) have been seeing an argument for God in the esoterica of high-energy physics. They feel that somewhere in the (the mathematical description of fundamental physics) lies the evidence of design that cannot be explained away. Perhaps they feel science is finally reaching a level of knowledge that will confirm God." He quotes R.J. Berry, of the University of London: "I think there is a certain disenchantment with good old-fashioned humanism slash materialism slash whatever-you-want-to-call-it."

You may prefer the idea of the discovery of God. But the actuality is that God first showed Himself to us (the technical term is Revelation) and once we knew about His existence we were able to set about discovering hints of His presence in the universe. A character in a recent John Updike novel has something more to add: "Wouldn't a God Who let Himself be proven — more exactly, a God who can't HELP being proven — be too submissive, too passive and beholden to human ingenuity (just another fact to be discovered)?... We all know, as teachers, what happens to facts: they get ignored, forgotten. Facts are boring. Facts are inert, impersonal. A God Who is a mere fact will just sit there on the table with all the other facts: we can take him or leave Him... What manner of God is He who has to be proved?" So try to get more comfortable with the idea of God reaching out to us, meeting us. For the impact of that meeting still has reverberations today.

One more thing about a *sefer*: it doesn't begin on page 1, always on page 2. The story of your life does not start with you; it starts before you were born, with Abraham at Ur, and with Moses at Sinai. And it doesn't finish with you either: it finishes with a happy ending for humanity, a time of peace and justice and fulfillment, and you are part of it. (The technical term for that is Redemption.)

So my prayer for you is not just that you'll be inscribed in the Book of Life, but that the book you're writing will be a true *sefer* using the vocabulary of faith, and part of the larger theme of God's connection with the Jewish people and our future.

(My appreciation to Prof. David Roskies' "D'var Torah" column on life as a *sefer*, and some thoughts of Rabbi Hillel Silverman on the Book of Life.)

# שבת שובה

## MEMORY, REPENTANCE and REBIRTH

Rabbi Joseph Heckelman

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The word that most clearly characterizes this season is *teshuvah* - repentance, return. The Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is called Shabbat Shuvah, or Shabbat Teshuvah, the Sabbath of Repentance. The entire period from the 1st through the 10th of Tishrei is called The Ten Days of Repentance. The words are clear. What is not clear is how to do *teshuvah*. Should we try to erase the past, to emerge new-born the day after Yom Kippur? Or should we do the reverse: instead of rejecting what has been, should we focus on the past, come to terms with it, and build a better future on the foundation of our lives and the events in our past?

A convert to Judaism undergoes total immersion in a *mikvah*, emerging symbolically reborn. Fundamentalist Christianity uses the phrase "born again" in conjunction with baptism (the Christian version of *mikvah*) as the basis for discarding the old and embracing the new. Perhaps then, the purpose of this part of the Jewish year is to accomplish via the calendar what otherwise is done via a body of water: put the past aside, and consider ourselves new-born. Or perhaps such a conclusion is incorrect.

Does the Torah really tell us to forget, or does it tell us to remember? After a great deal of research, I must report total failure to find any mitzvah that commands us to forget. On the contrary, the terms "zakharta, zakhartem, zakhor" - commands to remember - appear 15 times in the Torah. What are the things we are commanded to remember? Five times we are told: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt." The other ten include: Remember the Lord your God, Remember that the Lord your God guided you throughout this route...Remember all the Lord's commandments... Remember that this day you left the land of Egypt...Remember the Sabbath day to make it holy...Remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and all Egypt...Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way as you were leaving Egypt...Remember what Amalek did on the way as you were leaving Egypt...Remember how the Lord your God became furious with you in the wilderness...Remember the everlasting days: Understand the years continuing from generation to generation. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will relate it to you.

*Zakhor, zakharta, zakhartem*. Remember. The Torah teaches that we are not rootless, that the world is not created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Rather, our history, going back more than 3,000 years, continues to shape and direct us. Only by understanding and incorporating the essence of those past events which shaped the generations before us, do we have a firm place to plant our feet. Our past and our roots shape all of us whether we are the biological descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or their spiritual descendants via conversion yesterday or a thousand years ago (and most of us have no record of our lineage even two hundred years ago). The rebirth function of *mikvah* remains valid, yet it is limited. In the case of conversion, its function is indeed to wash away the traces of rival theologies, so as to be able to begin a new life as a Jew. Otherwise the function of *mikvah* is to symbolically wash away some impurities. But our past, collective and personal, does not rinse off: it makes us who we are. Our history explains our being in the land of Israel at this time. If our past did not continue to function into the present, our presence in Israel might indeed be questioned.

We remember to trace our claim back to the divine promise made to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob. Yet frequently, the Torah requires us to remember our interval of slavery in the land of Egypt. A slave has no past, no future, no personality: He is an ultimate secular cipher. Mired in our own ultimate nothingness, we were taken out of the land of Egypt - the land of massive pagan statuary and temples and overwhelming stone power - to become the people uniquely covenanted with the living God, on its way to its destiny in the land of Israel. The centripetal pull of the power of *galut* remains a force in every generation. Whether it is the geographic Babylonia of the first millennium and earlier, or the spiritual Babylonia of today in which we also maintain great institutions of learning and share economic and political power, the Torah repeats its warning five times, to convey the thought that behind the facade, all the Babylonias may still be Egypt, and all Jews who live there may have chosen an attractive form of bondage.

What of the other 10 commands to remember? The first two recall the first of the 10 Commandments, "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt..." Here, we are urged to "Remember the Lord, your God, and remember that the Lord your God guided you throughout this route." That is, the rock on which all else is built is awareness of the Lord who is your God - yours, collectively and individually. Then, we are directly told to remember all the Lord's commandments: We Jews relate to God not simply via *devekut*, mystical union, but by carrying out commandments. (Children, too build a relationship with their parents by properly carrying out assigned tasks, a functional aspect of the love they feel for their parents.)

We are told to remember the anniversary of our departure from the land of Egypt, and the special nature of the Sabbath day. The Sabbath therefore, can be celebrated fully and freely only outside Egypt. We are told to remember God's functioning in our history: Remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and all Egypt." Next, a curious coupling. Two events that took place "on the way as you were leaving Egypt": We must remember "what the Lord your God did to Miriam" and "what Amalek did". What had they done? Miriam, the prophetess, had gratuitously scolded her younger brother, Moses - a seemingly minor act, yet judged so harshly that God Himself punished her. It seems we are being told that in some way Miriam's crime is comparable to that of Amalek, who picked off the Israelite stragglers and who will war against God and Israel from generation to generation.

We are next reminded of the vulnerability of each of us and of all of us: Remember how the Lord God became furious with you in the wilderness.

And finally, poetically spelled out, the reality of continuity - a collective conscious and unconscious extending for all time. "Remember the everlasting days: Understand the years continuing from generation to generation..."

Let us, therefore, do *teshuvah* - repentance - not by wiping out and denying the past, but by remembering, by focusing on the pluses and minuses that have brought us, collectively and individually, to this day - with the prayer that by more fully digesting the past we will be enabled to more fully and authentically embrace the future.

# כל נדרי

## GUILT-GUARDIAN OF OUR GOODNESS

Rabbi Sidney Greenberg

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A few years ago the late Dore Schary, a strongly committed Jew, was asked if he would compose a prayer for the new High Holy Day Prayer Book, *Mahzor Hadash*. He graciously consented and after some time he submitted a sensitive and moving piece called "Not Guilty?" Instinctively, he focused on the themes of guilt and repentance which are at the very heart of the holiest season of the Jewish calendar.

On Yom Kippur we pray for forgiveness and, of course, there can be no forgiveness without a prior awareness of having done wrong, a sense of guilt for having done wrong, and a profound yearning to remove the guilt through genuine remorse for the past and a resolve not to repeat the wrongs which produced the feeling of guilt.

Even as we speak about guilt we know that we sound very old-fashioned. The guilt feeling has had its legitimacy questioned in recent years. Somewhere along the line it has gotten itself a bad name. It is regarded as the stuff that other people lay on us. It's a bad trip to be avoided at all cost.

According to some novelists and comedians one of the heaviest traffickers in guilt is that much maligned character - the Jewish mother. One stand-up Jewish comedian brings down the house with the one-liner: "My mother is the east coast distributor for guilt."

One syndicated columnist wrote recently: "Guilt is a pollutant and we don't need any more of it in the world."

Dr. Theodore Rubin, a psychiatrist, calls guilt "a destructive form of self-hate."

A whole spate of recent books and articles have as their theme: "Stop Feeling So Guilty." Our cartoon friend Ziggy accurately reflects the prevailing attitude toward guilt. He is lying on the couch and says to his analyst: "Lately I've been feeling guilty about my guilt feelings."

To be sure there is indeed a great deal of unmerited guilt, neurotic guilt, unearned guilt that does terrible things to undeserving people.

One desolate mother punished herself mercilessly over the death of her daughter 15 years earlier, because she had encouraged her to undergo the surgery which proved fatal. That two physicians had encouraged the surgery hardly entered into her misery-producing feelings.

Another woman, a Holocaust survivor, cannot forgive herself for surviving then fiery ordeal which consumed her parents, husband and three brothers. That she did not contribute in the slightest to their deaths has done nothing to mitigate her self-flagellation.

And what of the guilt that unjustifiably consumes so many parents when their children don't turn out

the way they had hoped. "Where did I go wrong?" they ask self-accusingly, as though any parent is omnipotent and has total control in determining the course of a child's life.

Conscience is a great servant but a terrible master. It is somewhat like an automobile horn. It is useful for warding off impending danger. But if a horn gets stuck it's a terrible nuisance. (drive you mad)

However, because guilt can be neurotic and unearned, it does not mean that all guilt is suspect. Certain acts (including perhaps the attempt to abolish guilt) should indeed produce guilt feelings. Cheating, lying, stealing, breaking promises, malicious gossip, failing to honor commitments, indifference to suffering, insensitivity to others' feelings, failure to expand our horizons and deepen our sympathies – shouldn't these things produce within us at this holy season a profound sense of spiritual discomfort? And if we do not feel guilt for such sins, haven't we already suffered the greatest of all punishments – a coarsening of the fabric of our lives, an abdication of all that makes us human?

Dr. Willard Gaylin, a psychiatrist, calls guilt "a guardian of our goodness....It represents the noblest and most painful of all struggles."

Another psychoanalyst, Dr. Allen Wheelis, called guilt "the socializing emotion." He added: "I don't think we can have a civilization without it. Guilt feelings do not have to mean the presence of a neurosis. They more likely mean the presence of a soul, and when we do wrong we should feel guilty....A sense of guilt may be uncomfortable to have but it is fatal to be without." (Na'ani education)

The late Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel put the matter in his inimitable lyric words: "The cure of the soul begins with a sense of embarrassment, embarrassment at our pettiness, prejudices, envy and conceit, embarrassment at the profanation of life. Only as we feel this embarrassment, this guilt, can we hope to strive for the forgiveness to which this holy season summons us. Then we can say as Dore Schary did at the end of his prayer:

✓ "And I am now repentant  
And will repair what damage I have done,  
Repay the debts I owe,  
And pray to wipe the word "Guilty" from the book,  
And ask again this year  
That my name be inscribed in the Book of Life.  
Then, when next year the list is read again,  
Perhaps somewhere - some one place, at least -  
I can say 'not guilty' - no repentance due."

(Reprinted by permission of the author from *Lessons for Living: Reflections on the Weekly Bible Readings and on the Festivals* by Rabbi Sidney Greenberg. Hartmore House, New York and Bridgeport, 1985.)



# כל נדר

## THE MITZVAH THAT REALLY MATTERS

Rabbi Yosef Green

Kol Nidre the world over, Jews flock to the synagogue. We stand this night stripped of all pretense and guile as we recite the confessional. We are contrite but we are likewise confident that God is ever ready to pardon our sins and grant us atonement.

We are all here for good and valid reasons. Another good reason is suggested by the story of a boy who walked into a drugstore to use the phone. He dialed a number and asked to speak to Dr. Bergson. The boy said: "Hello, Dr. Bergson, how would you like to hire a boy to cut the grass and run errands for you? Oh, you already have someone. Are you satisfied? You are. O.K. and goodby." As the boy was about to leave the proprietor stopped him and said: "Listen son, if you're looking for a job, you can work for me." "Thank you sir," the boy replied, but I already have a job." "But didn't I hear you ask Dr. Bergson if he needed someone to work for him?" "Well, not exactly," replied the lad, "you see, I'm the boy who works for Dr. Bergson and I was just checking up on myself."

Yom Kippur is a time for self-scrutiny, a time for the annual personal check up. A day devoted to a review of our performance during the past year as parents or spouses, siblings or friends, students or teachers, as children, as Jews and as human beings. I also did some checking. I checked into our classical sources with regard to the primary purpose and essential meaning of Yom Kippur. Shocking as it may sound, I discovered you don't necessarily have to fast or even refrain from work on Yom Kippur. A *baraita* in *Shavuot* 13a unambiguously says: "Perhaps you may think that Yom Kippur does not atone unless one has fasted and observed it as a holy day and refrained from all work. If one did not fast and did not observe it as a holy day and performed forbidden work on it, how do we know that Yom Kippur nevertheless atones for one's sins? For this reason the verse says: "It is a day of atonement. And on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins." To which R. Judah adds that Yom Kippur atones for every transgression mentioned in the Torah, (except for three,) whether or not one repents. Regardless of what we do or refrain from doing there is a general amnesty or pardon on the Day of Atonement. The only condition is that it be a day of sincere atonement, not merely in a ritualistic manner, but a day of atonement in the radical, root meaning of the term. Namely, a time of atonement, a time of reconciliation, a time of healing.

That this is indeed the primary meaning and essential purpose of Yom Kippur is clear from the very last *Mishna* in *Yoma*: עבירות שבין אדם לאדם מקום זמן הכפרים מכפר. For sins between man and God, Yom Kippur atones (even eating and drinking and working on this very special day). When it comes to sins between man and God, *teshuvah*, *tefillah* and *tzedakah* can be enormously helpful. Nevertheless, the holiness of the day, the special character of Yom Kippur works in its own mysterious way to bring about our reconciliation, our at-one-ment with God. But for sins between one person and another, there can be no atonement until one is reconciled with his fellow.

This then is the essential meaning of Yom Kippur and the primary purpose of all our prayers and

petitions. It requires a heightened sense of *ahavat Yisrael* and *ahavat ha-briyot*. The Hazzan, before chanting the Kol Nidre must declare with the authority of the Beit Din, which is why the Hazzan is flanked by two people holding sifrei Torah. It is to give the Hazzan's words the weight of a tribunal that this congregation welcomes into its fellowship of worshippers on this the holiest day of the year even those who transgressed its laws and acted like criminals. "אנו מתדיין להתפלל עם העבוינים" Can there be a more dramatic declaration of a desire for welcoming the alienated and estranged into the congregation of the Lord?

The Kol Nidre hour forces us to overcome every prejudice, suspicion and mistrust so that every Jew without exception is made to feel welcome and accepted and loved. We all stand together on an equal footing recognizing that no one is perfectly righteous and no one is completely lacking in merit. This unity can bring us the peace and the blessing we seek.

In a Midrash composed in Italy during the 9th century, *Tanna de-Be Eliyahu Zuta*, we read of King David's concern that one day the Temple would be destroyed and the sacrifices on the altar would no longer be offered. He asked the Almighty: How will Israel secure atonement for their sins? And God answered him as follows: "Whenever they will stand before Me bound together by love for one another and recite together the confessional followed by the Selihot prayers, then will I answer them and grant them all pardon and atonement." If on this most solemn and sacred day we cannot remove the barriers that divide Jews from each other in order that we stand together, not necessarily in the same synagogue, but nevertheless in the same spirit of unity, harmony and fraternity, then you may be sure that the prophet had us in mind when he said, "Is such the fast I desire?"

More than our prayers, God wants us to love and respect one another. Violent demonstrations, especially if they be in the name of Judaism or any of its most sacred institutions, are *hillul ha-Shem*. Throwing stones at other Jews is a sin for which Yom Kippur doesn't atone. Only by loving and respecting all Jews regardless of how they pray, or for that matter, even if they don't pray at all, do we sanctify God's name and atone for our sins.

"Israel in whom I glory" (ישראל אשר בך אתפאר) is a biblical reference not to those who make Judaism odious and religion repugnant to the non-observant but rather, as the *Minhat Hinukh* writes in his commentary on the 613 commandments, to those whose practice of Judaism is characterized by love, peace and friendship for Jews as well as non-Jews. "Let no one say," we are taught in *Avot d' Rabbi Natan*, "I will love the sage and not the unlearned. You must love them all."

In the words of Maimonides, "Duty demands that we demonstrate *ahavat Yisrael* to every Jew without exception, that we love another Jew as we love ourselves and that we protect and respect each other. For whoever glorifies himself by humiliating someone else has no share in the future world."

The wars of the Jews have one underlying cause: causeless hatred. As Rav Kook understood causeless hatred - it can only be overcome by causeless love: אהבת חנם. And love costs. The root of אהבה is חב - to give. For we can never have אהבה אוחה שלום ורעות unless everybody is prepared to be somewhat more giving, to be more forthcoming.

Remember when we say *oseh shalom* after the Amidah and at the end of kaddish, we take three steps back. *Oseh shalom* means "Establish peace" and it is axiomatic that there can never be peace or

even co-existence between groups that don't see eye to eye unless each is prepared to step back, leaving room for compromise. The struggle today both in Israel and in the Diaspora is between a Jewish fundamentalism, intolerant of alternative views and a Judaism with sufficient humility to recognize that the whole truth is not given to one group and one group alone, regardless who their rebbe is and how pious he may be. The struggle is between those who confuse inflexibility with piety and those for whom accommodation and reasonableness are not apostasy, but rather the genius that preserves Jewish continuity and identity. The struggle is between those who function by exclusion and those who practice the art of drawing Jews closer together.

Prof. Ephraim Urbach, renowned Talmudic scholar and devout Jew, has demonstrated from impeccable sources that "any form of coercion in matters of religion is contrary to the concept of Judaism and carries with it no moral authority."

We are all entitled to cling passionately to our own views and to try through persuasion to win over those who disagree. But the very possibility of influencing others is predicated upon respect, from the Latin meaning "to take another look." It means if you are prepared to take a second look at my views I'll do likewise and take a second look at your views. For without openmindedness there can be no genuine respect for those with whom you are in disagreement.

If Yom Kippur beginning with Kol Nidre until the final blast of the shofar doesn't drive home the lesson of unconditional love for every Jew, then it has failed miserably in its primary purpose. Unconditional love will never be the offspring of either ostracism or de legitimization. It will not come from a belief that divided we stand and united we fall. It can only come from the acceptance in principle and in practice of religious pluralism and the ultimate realization that no one movement or ideology can reach all of our people.

I believe it was Buber who said: "All real life is meeting." In the name of *ahavat Yisrael* and for the sake of *kelal Yisrael*, we must strive for more Jewish dialogue. We must learn the art of speaking to one another. This should be the major Jewish imperative at this hour, because the alternative to speaking is hatred and violence. There can be no such thing as ignoring a fellow human being, much less a fellow Jew, regardless of his or her views.

This, I believe, is the quintessential lesson of Yom Kippur 5749, so that not only one day but every day will be for us and for all Israel a year of joy and a blessing. A year during which Israel will know the true meaning of joy in our land and gladness in Jerusalem; renewed strength among the defenders of our Holyland in order that 5749 be a year of peace and tranquility between Jew and Jew serving as the paradigm of peace between Arabs and Jews. And if only we will all take it to heart and practice it, then this New Year will usher in an era of universal and abiding peace among all the children of God.

# יום כפור

## LIVE THIS DAY

Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal

We all feel something particularly solemn and poignant about Yom Kippur. Surrounded by a sea of memories, we feel the presence of unseen loved ones who are, strangely, so very close. In our mind's eye we see sweet companions who are departed — a wife, a husband, parents, a child, a loved one, a friend. This is a moment of sobering thoughts. And it is also a time for wonder and curiosity: Where are we going? What is our future? What does life hold in store for us? Is it health? Wealth? Happiness? Peace? Life? Death? Nowhere is this theme more cogently summed up than in the *U-Netaneh Tokef* prayer where we picture God holding open the ledgers of our lives, weighing our deeds and determining our fates: "Who shall live, and who shall die... On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur the decree is sealed."

Some tell us: "It really doesn't matter what we do, all is predetermined." In Yiddish we would say that everything is *bashert*. And a popular Italian song of a few years back proclaimed: "*che sera, sera* — what will be, will be." Even the Torah implies this in a difficult verse: הנסתרות ליה אלהינו "The secret things belong to the Lord our God" (Deut. 29:28). The Talmud taught that "No one hurts his finger else God decrees it on high" (*Hullin 7b*). And Hamlet stated: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will." Yet most human beings believe that we are given the power to steer our courses on the sea of life. We are captains of our own soul, though perhaps not fully masters of our fate. Note that the verse in Deuteronomy continues: והגלית לנו לבבנו "But the revealed matters are for us and our children to do forever." This is how one great sage understands the apparent contradiction between the two halves of the verse: "The ultimate redemption is God's secret; but is revealed to man how to hasten that redemption" (*Ketab Sofer*).

Indeed, we are often told in the Bible that man shapes (or misshapes) his tomorrow by his actions today. Although we may be ignorant of God's plans for tomorrow, we can rest assured that our moral or immoral deeds now lay the basis for tomorrow's developments. The idea of *teshuvah* is clearly in line with this. We can change; we can avert calamity tomorrow. As our liturgy puts it so well: "repentance, prayer, and charity can avert evil decrees." The choice, then, is ours, for we are free agents. In the words of Julius Caesar: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves." Tomorrow may be *recondite*, a secret; today is clearly revealed to man.

What then are we to do? How are we to come to grips with life?

Some say: "Life is so short, we know not what tomorrow holds." Therefore "eat, drink and be merry — for tomorrow we may die!" (Is. 22:13). This approach, a pagan approach indeed, teaches, "The devil with today. Be immoral if you will, be cynical and ruthless, for there is nothing beyond the present." Scott Fitzgerald summed up this outlook with a pungent phrase that epitomized his own pathetically short life: "Live fast, die young — and make a handsome corpse."

On the other hand, we find those who consign their lives to a kind of drugged resignation. Since tomorrow is a secret and the future concealed from our gaze; since all is *bashert* and preordained; there is little we can do except to endure this miserable world of illusions. Such people are masters

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of the shrug; resigned to their fates. They care little for tomorrow, their will is paralyzed, they become morose "nebbishes" who are content merely to be alive and breathe.

A third philosophy of life is well-expressed by Thomas Carlyle who wrote: "Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand." We must live our lives for today — seeking, of course, to shape tomorrow.

In specific terms, this means several things. First and foremost, live well today. As Koheleth put it: "There is nothing better than rejoicing and doing good in life...enjoying good food and drink...for that is God's gift" (3:13). I am not recommending a hedonistic philosophy of "eat, drink and be merry." We have seen what such a philosophy engenders. It leads to vulgar behavior such as the \$500,000 Bar Mitzvah celebration on the QE II. Hedonism leads to "the strange agony of success," the drive to achieve financial success that is unhinging many executives, forcing them to drug use, wrecking marriages, and enriching psychiatrists. But I am saying that life is short, so very short. We scarcely turn our heads ere our lives have slipped away. One of the greatest failings of human nature is our tendency to put off living. As Stephen Leacock observed: "the child says, 'When I am a big boy.' The big boy says, 'When I grow up.' And grown up he says, 'When I get married.' Then the thoughts change to 'When I'm able to retire.' And when retirement comes, he looks back over the landscape traversed; a cold wind seems to sweep over it; somehow he has missed it all, and it is gone. Life, we learn too late, is in the living, in the tissue of every day and hour."

Therefore, let us drink of the cup of life now — ere it is too late. I am saying: "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may." I am suggesting that we ought live our best here and now; that it is a sin to rush by through life so quickly that we miss the joys and beauty of this world. A Rebbe once stopped a Hasid who was hurrying through the street at breakneck speed. "Where are you rushing?" he asked the Hasid. The Hasid answered; "I'm running after life." "How do you know you have not passed it by?" was the reply.

A driver was speeding on a particularly scenic stretch of highway. The sound of a siren brought his car to a halt. He was fully prepared to take the punishment due him. However, much to his amazement, the police officer opened as follows: "Mister, five miles back did you notice the thick patches of green grass which separate your lane from the upstate lane?" "Not really," the driver answered cautiously. "About three miles back you came to a half circle in the road. Did you see — even slightly — from the corner of your eye, the bed of beautiful lilies which have just begun to bloom?" "I am not sure," the astounded driver responded. "And then, just a mile back, did you even catch a glimpse of the long stretch of the aqueduct which bounds the road on the right side?" "No," said the man caught speeding. "Mister," said the officer, "the State spends so much money to make this road beautiful, so that you can enjoy the ride. Why do you rush and speed and miss all the joys?"

This is mankind today, rushing by the blessings that count, always pushing towards a future goal that has not arrived. For too many of us, life has become a mad dash to catch a train to nowhere. And too many miss the train in the process. I like this little prayer I once read:

"Slow me down, Lord, I am going too fast,  
I can't see my brother when he's walking past.  
I miss a lot of good things day by day;  
I don't know a blessing when it comes my way..."

Slow me down, Lord, so I can talk  
With some of your angels —  
Slow me down to a walk.”

Hillel and Shammai disagreed as to how to live the good life. Shammai would set aside a calf for the Sabbath meal as early as Monday. If, on Tuesday, he found a choicer animal he would set that one aside. And so on all through the week, he would miss the beauty of daily living in frustrating preparation for the Sabbath. Hillel, on the other hand would take each morsel of food as it came to his hands and enjoy it in its own time. Each day was precious to him; each moment a joy. He did not postpone living. He would say: “Thank God” each day! Thus our rabbis stated: “He who has food and say, what will I eat tomorrow? is lacking in faith.” The true person of faith says simply, “This is the day the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad thereon” (Ps. 118:24).

Love well today. Don't put off the loving relationships for the future. Reach out for your wife or husband, your child, your father or mother — reach out and embrace them now. Tomorrow may be too late; next year they may be on the Yizkor list; you may be on the Yizkor list. Now is the time for love and friendship, for the tender embrace of a spouse, for the unequalled joy of a child's smile, for the benign touch of a parent or grandparent.

And this is the moment to make amends, to bury the hatchet and forget past hurts. I once knew a man who had a serious falling out with an officer of the synagogue over a synagogue policy. Their dispute was heated and unpleasant — they parted as enemies. A few days later, the synagogue officer died. His antagonist was guilt stricken: “I feel terrible, Rabbi, that he left this world on bad terms with me. If only I had smoothed things over before his death.” If only indeed! For who knows whether we will receive a chance to rectify hurts and correct injustices tomorrow?

Work for a better world and for peace today. Live the good life now, set the proper example now for no one knows the extent of one's influence for a better tomorrow. As the Swiss philosopher Amiel stated: “Every life is a profession of faith. Everyman's conduct is an unspoken sermon that is forever preaching to others.” You never know what enormous influence for good a kind deed and a tender word may exert. Nor can you gauge the impact of one honest, decent ethical act on mankind.

The great quest of mankind is peace. We must realize that peace will not come all at once, in one sudden or dramatic act. Peace for tomorrow will come in slow, painful steps — inch by inch. We must not despair if the goal seems elusive and the steps all too slow. Because we suffer setbacks today, we must not give up on tomorrow.

Live full Jewish lives today. Do not put off the service of God and the Jewish people till tomorrow. For opportunities once lost may never return and tomorrow may become yesterday ere long. The rabbis taught, “When you have a chance to perform a mitzvah do not tarry lest it sour.” And they urged us to study Torah now, when the opportunity is available, “Say not: I will study Torah when I have free time lest you have no time.” I had a very good and dear friend who was learned in Judaism but had strayed from Jewish observance. He often would say to me: “Rabbi, soon I hope to sell my business and retire. Then you'll see me in the Temple all the time.” He said that to me for several years and now it's too late: He died of a heart attack, unable to redeem his pledge.

Repent today, this very Day of Repentance — for tomorrow may be too late. The rabbis observed:

“repent one day before your death.” But it is possible to know the day of one’s death? Precisely, say the sages, you can never know when your time will come. Therefore repent every day, this very day — lest it be your last. Repentance in the Jewish tradition implies return to God and a radical change in the direction of our lives and the values by which we live. These ten days have been the “days of repentance.” And the time for change is now - this very day, and not tomorrow.

If money is your chief value — change today.

If you are unconcerned about your fellow human beings — today is the day to help them.

If you have offended your neighbor, slandered your business associate, acted with disrespect towards your parents, alienated your child — this very day is the day for reconciliation and atonement, for there may be no chance to atone tomorrow.

Above all, do not wallow in regret and remorse over past hurts, for that is yesterday’s history and not today’s action. Regret is an emotion that tends to paralyze; it is not the stuff on which to build today’s repentance or tomorrow’s new world.

No indeed, God’s plan for humanity will not be known! It is a secret reserved unto God alone. All that we can do is to live today so as to shape the world of tomorrow. Life is like a chain reaction; what we do here and now may change the course of life and the world for decades to come. The mood of these sacred days, the temper of the poignant Yizkor moment is summed up in the thought that “man is of dust and to dust he must return.”...And that return is often all too quick.

So let us resolve to live the best possible life now, this very day. And let us find lost loves and old values once cherished. Let us savor each precious moment that God has given us. Let us learn to number our days more wisely. Let us live this day.

I conclude with the poem “Salute to the Dawn” by the Indian poet Kalidasa:

Look to this day  
for it is the very life of life.  
In its brief course lie all  
the verities and realities of your existence:  
The glory of action,  
The bliss of growth,  
The splendor of beauty,  
For yesterday is but a  
Dream and tomorrow is only a vision;  
But today well lived makes every  
Yesterday a dream of happiness,  
and every tomorrow a vision of hope.  
Look well, therefore, to this day.”

# יום כפור

## LIFE AND DEATH AND THE BOOK OF JOB

Rabbi Joseph Heckelman

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The Yom Kippur liturgy forces us to face life by confronting death. The opening verse of today's Torah reading states: "And the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron. For they came close to the presence of God and they died." At Yizkor we remember those near and dear to us: we remember the Six Million; we remember the soldiers of Israel's armies and its under-grounds who were killed in the course of their duties. The prayer *U-Netaneh Tokef* asks "who will live, and who will die". Finally, the martyrology brings us face to face with the terrible deaths of ten great leaders 1800 years ago, as well as the much more recent horror of the Holocaust. Why this emphasis – clearly deliberate – on death as we try to shape our lives for the coming year?

Death is so awesome that we build "shelters" to defend us against the proximity and even the awareness of death. Unfortunately, in insulating ourselves from death, we almost inevitably isolate ourselves from God. If all goes well, our prayers are said by rote. But when our hearts are broken or we are confronted by serious illness or by misfortune, our prayers break out of their routine and have the power to storm heaven, as our focus shifts from the trivial to the transcendental.

Consider the classic example, the Book of Job. Job, a righteous man, is seriously afflicted by God. The Book seems to say our fate depends not on earned reward and punishment, but divine caprice. Satan argues that humanity can be manipulated via reward and punishment. Job (and God) prove that human motivation can and will rise above circumstance. But the first and last chapters reveal another view of the story. At first Job is mechanically, ritually religious. But his soulless observance leads to no contact with God. Even when he suspects his sons of blaspheming, he responds by offering additional rote sacrifices. Job, then, is made to suffer not to "settle a bet", but in order to bring him into contact with God. To accomplish this God manipulates Satan, Satan afflicts Job, and Job rises to the challenge.

The content of Job's conversations with God is less important than the fact that they take place. Like a child who loyally carries out chores, Job mechanically performs mitzvot. However, a very different, deeper, kind of relationship develops if parent and child discuss the meaning of those chores. Although the content of such a conversation is not irrelevant, I am suggesting that it is less important than the fact of the conversation. Indeed, a transformation takes place: Job, the well-behaved servant of the opening chapter experiences *devekut*, cleavage to God by the end of the book. Instead of a distant servant, he is now, in effect, God's son. Job, having reached out to God from his affliction, has found God, and emerges transformed. He is more mature and relaxed. He even becomes a bit of a religious reformer: although he has sons, he gives his daughters inheritances too. (Going beyond the Torah's nod to the daughters of Zelophehad, who may inherit only because they have no brother.) And the Job fable does end with all Job's possessions restored. (It is ironic that, having understood the irrelevance of material reward to the really important values, Job is nevertheless materially rewarded.) But the story of Job is set perhaps 3500 years ago; what of today?

*(As inspiration for some of what follows I am indebted to Rabbi Harold Schulweis who suffered a massive heart attack not long ago.)*



Why does our tradition speak so much of *yirat ha-Shem*, fear of God? Why not exclusively of love of God? At times of danger we find ourselves conscious of the proximity of death - and of God. "I have cried out to you from the depths." From the lowest depths, paradoxically, we most successfully reach the remotest heavens. Sometimes we search the world for that which is in our hand. A certain Rabbi Isaac, legend tells us, living in a remote village, dreamt that he was to look for great treasure beneath a bridge in the capital city. He immediately went to the bridge but its base was guarded by soldiers day and night. The Captain of the Guard asked him why he was spending so much time in the vicinity. Rabbi Isaac described the dream that led him to the bridge. The Captain of the Guard said, "I too had a dream. My dream was of a treasure hidden beneath the oven of the house of a particular Jew named Rabbi Isaac in such and such a village." Isaac immediately returned home and dug up the treasure, beneath his own oven. Among the mysteries: Why does God so order the world that the search is necessary? Sometimes, during part of the life of each person, it almost seems that the search itself is the goal.

A morning prayer recited by traditional Jews thanks God for the body's orifices and apertures. "If one be improperly blocked, or improperly opened, life would be impossible." When illness strikes, the body's routine functioning can no longer be taken for granted. Suddenly the word "miracle" seems an objective description of existence. Life's every detail becomes clear, sharp, important. We no longer pray routinely, but are grateful to be able to draw each breath; we are grateful that God has created doctors with the ability to learn the skills that save our lives. Thus, an encounter with death can enhance our Jewish sense that life is holy.

The thirst for life pulses within each of us. At age 120, Moses, according to the Midrash, pleaded with God for more time. A story tells of a miserable peddler carrying a heavy bundle of sticks. A gust of wind suddenly scattered the sticks on the ground. "Master of the Universe", he cried, "Who needs a life like this? Send the Angel of Death, the *malakh ha-mavet*, to end my misery!" His prayer was answered. The Angel of Death appeared immediately. "You called?" he asked. "Yes, I did," the peddler stammered, "Could you, kind sir, help me gather the sticks and place them on my shoulder again?"

We are born alone and die alone, yet the Jewish approach to life is collective. The very word "*hayyim*" (life) is grammatically plural, as are most of our prayers. Thus, the prayer for healing includes the words: "Heal *us* O Lord, and *we* shall be healed." We experience our individual lives in a group framework. Job suffers alone, yet in the midst of a mini-community of friends. Some Hassidim emphasize *hitbodedut*, meditation in isolation. Yet they remain thoroughly Jewish in that the individual meditator is basically anchored in the community. By wrapping oneself in a *tallit* in the midst of a group of worshippers, one strives for individual communion with God in the midst of the *minyan*. So it is with our experience of life and of death. *Yizkor* includes both prayers for close relatives and prayers for all who died *al kiddush haShem*. On Yom Kippur we are judged both as individuals and as a community. We set our paths for the coming year, so what we decide, or do not decide, on this day establishes our readiness – both personal and communal – to encounter our world during the year to come. May the circumstances and events that lie ahead enable us to live more fully meaningful lives.

# יום כפור

## I REMEMBER – I BELIEVE

Jacob Chinitz

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On Yom Kippur, and throughout these High Holy Days, we pray: "Remember us for life, King who desires life, inscribe us in the book of life, for thy sake, God of Life." As in: Happy life. Tragic life. That's life. Long life. This you call living? I'd rather be dead. This service is dead. This party is dead. Or as in, I feel alive for the first time in years. I remember saying to a young lady: with you I could live. Later I married her. What is life? Long ago I was impressed with a Biblical verse: "I shall not die. I shall live. I shall relate the workings of the Lord." The first two parts of this triad are as secular as can be. What could be more secular than the proclamation "I shall not die, I shall live." (It sounds like the American Declaration of Independence: Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness.) Its third part is as religious as you can get: "I shall relate the workings of the Lord!"

What does it mean not to die? The Rabbis make an astonishing statement in the Talmud. They say; "The righteous, even in death, are called living." The wicked, in life, are called dead. Once, at an unveiling ceremony, as I quoted this passage, I saw the son of the deceased, a medical doctor, wince. He must have been thinking: What kind of nonsense is this Rabbi talking? Indeed, we have to ask ourselves, is this a pious paradox, or does this statement make sense?

We are determined not to die, and yet there is so much death right in the midst of life. Boredom can create a sense of death in the midst of life. We will undergo every treatment, we will have any surgery, we will spare no expense, not to die. And yet we do such things as "kill time", or kill our own emotions, to protect ourselves from the onslaught of pathos and compassion in the sight of the world's ills. And so the first statement is: "lo amur", I shall not die.

But it is not enough to say I shall not die. It must be paralleled by the statement, "I shall live." Not only every moment, but with every fibre of my being. I shall live when I'm young. I shall live when I'm middle aged. I shall live when I'm old. I shall live when I'm poor. I shall live when I'm rich. I shall live when I'm single. I shall live when I'm married. I shall live with my children, with my grandchildren, with my friends, with my synagogue, with my God.

But what about "relating the workings of the Lord?"

One of you wrote me a nice letter after Rosh Hashanah in which the phrase was used, "your sincerity in your beliefs." And reading this, I was forced to ask myself what I believe, and why this person was impressed with my sincerity. How do I hope to sing the glories of the Lord?

And, so, at this moment, I arrive, not at confession of sin, but a confession of faith. I believe in — Maimonides' Thirteen Articles of Faith as a text to which I add my own commentary:

— I. *Ani Maamin.* I believe. That there is a world outside of me, and that it was made by the same — power that made me.

- II. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that this power is one, as the universe is one. I am proud that my faith never played around with dualisms and trinities.
- III. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that this power is not flesh, blood, face and voice, but as spiritual as electricity, magnetism, and gravity.
- IV. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that this power was first and will be last, before the "Big Bang", and after it.
- V. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that if the prayer of my mouth is heard by my own ears, it is better than praying to saints or symbols.
- VI. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that the prophets of Israel said something relevant, worthwhile and shocking for all time.
- VII. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that of these prophets, Moses was the supreme classic, author of the constitution of Judaism, the Torah.
- VIII. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that this constitution, written before, during, and after Moses, was accepted by the Jewish people as basic law.
- IX. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that this Torah was, is, and will be amended, according to its own rules, but will not be replaced.
- X. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that our actions are written in the book of reality, and that history cannot be falsified by fancy.
- XI. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that our actions have consequences, as causes have effects. It is we who reward and punish ourselves.
- XII. *Ani Maamin*. I believe that the essence of Messiah is hope, and it resides in every child, woman and man, worth waiting for, every day, till the end of time.
- XIII. *Ani Maamin*. I believe in resurrection, as my mother and father live in my memory, and my people live on after Yom Kippur and after Tisha B'Av, and were able to create the State of Israel after the Holocaust.

This is my creed. These are my thirteen articles. They constitute my declaration of the workings of the Lord. According to them, I teach and preach. I strive for the strength to live by it, to practice what I preach, and to preach what I practice.

Before the thirteen, and after them, before Yom Kippur and after it, before Yizkor and after it, I declare my intention not to die, but to live, and to declare the workings of the Lord. I am a link in a chain of generations that survives the grave. And I belong to a people whose faith has carried them through life and death, across the centuries, to survive the Hitlers, the Arafats and the Farrakhans, and restore the glories of Israel, in the land of Israel, and throughout the world. *Am Yisrael Hai*. The people of Israel lives.

# יום כפור

## AGING WITH STYLE

Rabbi Gerald L. Zelizer

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We visit the graves of loved ones to meditate on what they would advise us at critical passages of life; what would our deceased parents and grandparents tell us about our own aging? I want to consider the process of aging with you now. Statistics tell us that if the number of Americans over 65 has increased dramatically, we Jews are the trendsetters — the most rapidly aging ethnic group in the United States.

Our deceased elderly parents and grandparents would be astonished at the strength of the American Association of Retired Persons, 28 million strong, which may be a more potent force than the young in this year's presidential election. They would *kvell* at sitcoms such as *Cosby* and *The Golden Girls*, which highlight characters whose ages, only twenty years ago, would have relegated them to mere supporting roles.

But those changes are relative. More money is still spent in this country on the art of concealing age than the science of curing heart disease or cancer. Many have seen *I'm Not Rappaport*, a humorous but sad play about aging. Its aged protagonist daily establishes his "office" on a bench in Central Park. His middle-aged married daughter from Great Neck who wants her father to settle in to more conventional patterns of aging: Either to move in with her at her home in Great Neck; enter a nursing home; or continue to reside in Manhattan but attend a senior center on the West Side, to which Rappaport's comment is "So my choices are either exile, Devil's Island, or kindergarten." That sums up what many of us regard as the ultimate choices for the aging!

It is hard to escape the realities of our own society. Rather than lament those realities, I want to think together about ways to avoid being cast off as we age, especially in our own minds. I am never quite sure who is young and who is old, for old and young cannot be defined strictly chronologically. I was talking to a fifteen year old boy recently who told me that he had lost all enthusiasm for life. "It stinks," he said. To me he is an old man. Some of the youngest people I know are chronologically years older than that boy. Dr. Jonas Salk, 73, who developed the first polio vaccine 35 years ago, is now searching for an AIDS vaccine. Nolan Ryan, a major league pitcher at 45, flutters pitches past youngsters on Sunday afternoons. In this synagogue, a woman in her late 70's puts us all to shame by walking to classes, lectures, shopping malls, supermarkets and shuls. We must learn to measure our own aging as much by our attitudes as by our chronological age. That is the insight expressed by the Midrash when it writes regarding the archetypal heroes of these Holy Days: Abraham was called old when he was longer identified with the future; Sarah was called old despite her physical beauty because she regarded the process of childbearing as amusement; contrariwise, Isaac, although very young, was "older in knowledge of Torah, and good deeds." Aging is a function of both biology and attitude. One can be old at 30 and young at 85.

A leading expert on the human brain, Dr. Wilder Penfield of Montreal, underlines in biological terms this insight of the Midrash. "Disease and disability may overtake men at every age and force them to withdraw from work. But the capacity of the human brain for certain purposes often increases

through the years...At 60 the body has certainly passed beyond its greatest strength and physical demand should be lessened and changed. But the brain quite often is ready for its best performance in certain fields..."

Recent research has revealed that of 400 famous people in history, one-third achieved their greatest accomplishments after 60, 23% after 70. Between the ages of 70 and 83, Vanderbilt added about 100 million dollars to his fortune. Golda Meir was over 70 when she was prime minister of Israel. At 74 Verdi composed "Othello", at 80, "Falstaff" and at 85 "Ave Maria". Noah Webster wrote his monumental dictionary when he was 70.

Among our own people today there lives the outstanding Jewish historian in the world. He has revolutionized Jewish history because he taught us to see it as more than a lachrymose procession of suffering and persecution, but rather as the lively interaction of Judaism with the world around it. His name is Salo Baron. All other historians are but twigs on the tree. You may remember at Eichmann's trial that he was called in as expert witness. His *Social and Religious History of the Jews* is 15 volumes long. Before retirement from his posts at Columbia and the Jewish Theological Seminary, he worked from 7:00AM to 11:00 6 days per week. Since retirement, he works from 6 AM to midnight.

I know that few of us are Verdis or Websters or Barons. But we can learn to gauge our own aging not only in terms of chronology but in terms of our mental attitudes. How can each of us measure our spiritual, non-physical age? Some indexes are suggested by a gerontologist: First, a person who is spiritually old insists that no one else is ever as right as he is. Such certainty is aged because it does not allow for the possibility of change. It is a kind of spiritual and psychological hardening of the arteries.

The second indication of spiritual old age is when one refuses to try anything new; new styles, new approaches to architecture, or to religion. The Talmud in *Berakhot* tell that when God created the world he created man with two heads, one looking backward and the other forward. But upon further consideration, He gave man only one head looking forward, which could be turned backward only with discomfort. For God concluded, man should only proceed forward.

Third, a person is aged when everything in the past seems to have been better, more beautiful, more ethical. Why? Because as sure as physical hardening of the arteries makes one forget the past, spiritual hardening of the arteries makes one forget that, indeed, the past was not always what it is made to be by those who chronically dwell on it.

Fourth, by the same token, automatically glorifying the present or the future at the expense of the past can also be a sign of old age. Machine X is often better than machine Y which preceded it. But that need not be true in the area of ethics, morality, and reverence, which transcend any one age. To automatically reject the past is another form of spiritual hardening of the arteries. Those of us who are young who automatically reject anything because our parents, or rabbi or Torah says it, show our spiritual old age.

So much for spiritual aging. Are there advantages to physical aging, doors which open up as old ones are closed? One older novelist writes: "The greatest blessing of age for me is the freedom it brings from the pressures of convention. You're just not deeply concerned any longer with things

that seemed so important when you were younger. You don't have to prove yourself to save face, or try to impress anyone, or go anywhere unless you really want to. Psychiatrists who specialize in the aging underline these advantages of aging which indeed await those of us who are not yet there:

1. We will not need to be bound by convention to the same extent as when younger.
2. Our sense of time becomes different as we will experience more of an immediacy regarding time. The elemental immediate things of life - children, plants, nature, human touching, color, shape—become important in old age than in youth.
3. For many the sense of struggle against economic pressures of life diminishes.
4. As to the fear of bad health in old age which torpedo the best of attitudes, consider that half of all people between 75 and 85 are free of health problems that require special care or curb their activities. And as to sex in old age, an elderly person pointed out “all ages have sexy people!”

When we make a *Mi Sheberach* at the Torah, we pray for *רפואת הנפש ורפואת הגוף*. First we seek curing of the soul and then curing of the body. Instead of lifting our faces, let us lift our faiths. Dr. Abraham Heschel wrote that there are three spiritual ills of old age:

1. The sense of being useless, of being rejected by society.
2. The sense of inner emptiness, of boredom.
3. The fear of time, resulting often in loneliness.

“We fear aging because we fear no longer being useful to society, general or Jewish. It is important to worry about our function in society. Those who have no function beyond their own family, certainly live self-centered lives. But is our function to society the only way to measure our value? Is the grandeur of the sun or of an oak tree reducible to its function? The grandeur of human life is not reducible to its function. One of the crucial differences between Judaism and the materialism of our secular world is that Judaism insists that you are not simply a means to an end.

Lest you doubt this and just think I am trying to make you feel good, consider this: What if at any given point, the society upon which you depend becomes corrupt, or wrong, or immoral, or sets destructive goals? Isn't one of the lessons of general and Jewish society of the Holocaust years that society itself was wrong on critical issues and values? The only way to do that is to establish for ourselves a regimen of learning and doing. We need not be intellectuals or saints to do that. We can each can do it on our own level. Whether it be formal classes or a self-discipline of serious reading and study, minimal standards of intellectual well-being are as vital as minimal standards of physical well-being which many of us establish.

Of course, the major anguish of aging is, Dr. Heschel pointed out, the fear of time. “Prisoners serve time; referees call time; historians record time, musicians mark time; the sick dread time; the bored kill time. But no one controls time!” (Rabbi Sidney Greenberg) In old age, because we have not been accustomed to deal with time, it becomes our worst nightmare. Busy with things all our life, we cannot cope with time. Psychiatrists tell us that the more we see ourselves as unrelated to society as we get older, the more we will age successfully. The theological underpinning of that attitude is that society itself is often in need of meaning. Our worth is conferred upon us by society; it comes

from our being created in the image of God.

The second anguish associated with aging is the inner anguish of boredom. The response once again is to feel significant. "The sense of feeling significant is not a matter of medicine nor of even psychology. It is a spiritual issue. Stunts, games, hobbies, slogans are all important for aging but do not get to the guts of the matter. The best method to attain a sense of the significant is to be involved in thoughts that are ahead of what we already comprehend, to be involved in deeds which will generate higher motivations."

Dr. Heschel suggested that time becomes a problem when we dwell on the past, or fear the future. Living a *mitzvah* is the best way to squeeze the most out of present time. Each time we *daven*, each time we give *tzedekah*, each time we say a berakhah, *mitzvah* helps us to age because it makes of the present a glorious moment. ברוך ה' יום יום "Bless God in each moment."

So, as our parents might tell us, "Age with style. Some of the best people are doing it!"



# סוכות

## SUKKOT

Rabbi Samuel Chiel

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On Sukkot the major symbols of the Festival present a striking paradox. They remind us of “the worst of times and the best of times.”

The sukkah reminds us of the “worst of times.” It reminds us of our bondage in Egypt, followed by the sojourn in the desert, when we suffered all kinds of setbacks and defeats.

But then we have a set of different symbols, which reminds us of the “best of times.” The *etrog*, *lulav*, *hadassim*, and *aravot* remind us of the time that our people finally settled in the Promised Land and they gathered in these symbols of the harvest as well as the other bounties of the land.

Why should our Tradition provide us with these symbols on the same Holy Day which seem to represent opposite poles of human experience?

Perhaps, indeed, this was done for a special reason: to teach us that both kinds of symbols are needed as a symbolic representation of the reality of Jewish history and that both have very important teachings for our people.

What are these very different symbols supposed to teach us as a people? The reason for the sukkah is given by the Torah in these words:

*L'maan yedu doroteychem ki vasukkot hoshavti et b'nai yisrael  
b'hotzii otam meyeretz mitzrayim.*

“So that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in sukkot, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.”

As Israel settled in its own land, built homes, and acquired fields, the Torah recognized the likelihood of our people becoming smug, self-satisfied, and even arrogant. Therefore, God commands: leave your beautiful homes and dwell in a little sukkah, at least for a week, because this is how you began; you were not always so fancy and so comfortable as you are now. The purpose of this temporary dwelling was to inculcate greater understanding and compassion for those who continue to live in substandard houses and in slums, who are constantly exposed to the hazards and uncertainties of a life of poverty and deprivation.

It is very hard, when we live in a luxurious home, drive a beautiful car, and can afford the basic necessities and even many luxuries, to remember what it was like for us or our parents who did not live this way and what it must be like for people who still live this way. If we complain about inflation and the recession, how devastating these must be to those who have been struggling to subsist even before our economy fell into such deep trouble.



*Basukkot teyshvu:*

“Dwell in a sukkah so you shall be reminded of those who still live in sukkot.”

And what are the four symbols of the harvest, the *etrog*, *lulav*, *hadasim*, and *aravot*, supposed to teach us? We say a blessing over them: “*al n'tilat lulav.*” During the Hallel Service we wave them in all directions to symbolize that our blessings from God come to us from every direction. All this is intended to teach us to be grateful to God for all our blessings: for life, our families, our homes, our health, our Synagogue, and our faith.

I imagine you must know some people who are constant complainers. In Yiddish we say about such a person: *Er burchet* - he grumbles and complains. Or, we say: *Er hot a farkrimten ponim* - his face is always contorted. Some people complain about everything: their family, their wife, their husband, their parents, or their children. In upstate New York, long before the John Birch Society appeared as an organization, a Rabbi described a whole group of men who sat in the back of his Shul as “burchers,” who would complain about him and about everything else! The lesson of the *etrog* and *lulav* is that you are surrounded by blessings and don't even know it.

Every *b'racha* prescribed by our Tradition is to remind you of a blessing you possess: when you open your eyes in the morning, give thanks for the gift of sight. When you stand up from bed, be grateful that you can get up and go to work. Look around you and give thanks that you are part of a family who care about you and love you. It's time to stop complaining and to begin to appreciate the gifts that are yours each day of your life.

The *etrog* and *lulav*, symbols of the harvest, are intended to teach us one more lesson. Again, in the words of the Torah:

*Uvkutzrechem et ktzir artzechem:*

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the harvest of your field...”

*Le'ani v'lageyr taazov otam:*

“you shall leave some of the harvest for the poor and for the stranger...”

It is not enough to be understanding of another's plight. You have to be willing to do something about it by sharing your bounties with those who need your help. You have to be willing to give *tzedakah*, for Israel, for those who are hungry in many parts of the world, for those in your community who feel defeated and hopeless and are ready to give up the struggle for existence.

Like our peoples' experience, each one of us also has our bad times and our good times. We have our hard times when there are struggles, business reverses, defeats, and disappointments. And we also have our good times when we achieve a goal, or receive a promotion, or celebrate a successful accomplishment, or rejoice in a *simcha*.

There are some people who remember only the hard times of the past. They remember the struggles, the disappointments, and the heartbreak of their lives, and their attitude becomes one of bitterness,

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There are some people who remember only the hard times of the past. They remember the struggles, the disappointments, and the heartbreak of their lives, and their attitude becomes one of bitterness,

hostility, and cynicism. They become angry with the world and with people. They say, "life gave me a raw deal!" They cannot deal with the present because they are crippled by their own anger and hostility.

And there are other people who remember only the good times of the past. They talk about "the good old days," when people were more friendly, when tradespeople took pride in their work, when kids used to listen to their parents. Life was simpler then and made much more sense, they say. As a result, they view today's people and events with a jaundiced eye. They say that the kids will never amount to anything, living is becoming impossible, and the world is rapidly going to hell.

The symbols of the Festival of Sukkot remind us of the need for a balanced view, for perspective. Life is a mixture for all of us. *Basukkot teshvu* reminds us of its struggles, hardships, problems, and defeats. But at the same time, the *etrog*, *lulav*, *hadasim*, and *aravot* remind us of our harvest of blessings: of our accomplishments, our *naches*, our *simchas*, the beautiful moments, and even occasionally, of great triumphs.

When person who achieves this kind of perspective, can truly fulfill the great mitzvah of this Festival:

*Usmachtem lifney Hashem elokeychem:*  
"You shall rejoice before your God."

The person who can become a genuinely great human being is one who is happy with life and grateful for God's blessings and at the same time is concerned about the needs and the happiness of other human beings as well.

May the beautiful symbols of Sukkot remind us that each of us needs to achieve this perspective in our own lives.

(Reprinted by permission of the author from *Living Courageously* by Rabbi Samuel Chiel. KTAV, New York, 1984.)

# שמיני עצרת

## THE THREE-WALLED SUKKAH

*Rabbi Sidney Greenberg*

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A rabbinic comment on the Book of Job seems to be speaking to us most intimately at the Yizkor hour on Shemini Atzeret.

Job was a good man who suffered compound calamities. A Midrash tells us that "When Job complained about his misfortunes, the Holy One, blessed be He, showed him a Sukkah with three walls."

What was the Almighty trying to teach Job through this strange symbol? What would a three-walled Sukkah say to a man in the depths of despair and anguish?

We can only guess at what the author of this Midrash had in mind. Each of us can read different meanings into the enigmatic metaphor.

Let us suggest a few things it might say.

One message may be that the three-walled Sukkah is God's way of reminding Job that every person's Sukkah has one wall missing. Sure, everyone would like to have a four walled Sukkah - a happy marriage, gifted children, a successful career, good health, and a long life. In actual life, however, no one has a four-walled Sukkah. Sorrow, failure, loss of health, disappointment—in varying degrees—these are our common human lot. There is a democracy in suffering—no one is exempt. You, Job, are not alone in your travails. Three-walled Sukkahs are the rule, not the exception.

A second message is conveyed by the strange symbolism. Rabbinic law tells us that "a three-walled Sukkah is kosher for use" (on the holiday). Despite the missing wall, the Sukkah continues to stand. Somehow life goes on. Life, it has been observed, is full of heartbreak but it is also full of ways of overcoming it.

In the first flush of sorrow we say, "Oh, I can never get over this, I cannot survive such a blow." But somehow we do survive and we do go on. In life, a piece of a wall falls away now, another piece at another time, but the Sukkah remains standing.

Which rabbi or counselor has not heard people cry out when the wound is raw, "How do I go on?" The only honest answer is, "I don't know how to go on but I do know that others have gone on and you are probably as wise and as brave, and as strong as they."

But if life is to go on, if we are to survive the collapse of a wall of our Sukkah, we must learn to look at the three walls that are standing rather than at the one which has fallen. Some of us having sustained a grievous loss either of a loved one or a fortune cannot erase the loss from our minds. We keep talking about it, bemoaning it, weeping over it.

Harold Russell, the handless veteran of World War II, told us his story in a book ironically titled

*Victory In My Hands*. One sentence in that book deserves to be held before every Job: "It's not what you have lost, but what you have left that counts."

So, God was saying to Job, stop thinking only of the pains you suffer, you also have pleasures to enjoy. Stop counting and recounting your losses, and begin counting your blessings. Sure you have lost a wall of your Sukkah but there are three walls remaining. Make the most of those three walls. You will be held accountable for what you do with those remaining walls.

And remember, Job, that you belong to a people which has mastered the art of surviving in a three-walled Sukkah. Your people survived the loss of a land, dispersion, persecution and bigotries of varying intensity and severity. Despite these multiple deprivations your people retained their humanity, their compassion, their dedication to justice, and have extravagantly enriched an undeserving mankind in a measure grotesquely disproportionate to their meager numbers. We have shown the world how to live in a three-walled Sukkah.

And one last thing, Job. Because a wall of your own Sukkah has collapsed, you have an unobstructed view of your neighbor's Sukkah. Look carefully and you will see he, too, is missing a wall in his Sukkah.

Perhaps this is why we come together to say Yizkor. As we look upon others remembering and memorializing, we are so vividly reminded that we all are knit together in the common brotherhood of pain and vulnerability. Another's pain does not lessen our own, but it may help to move us from self-pity to the healing which comes from trying to bind up the wounds of another.

In the blessing for the food which we recite after the meal on this festival we insert these words: "may the All-Merciful raise up for us the collapsed Sukkah of David." We look forward to the day when all Sukkot will be full and intact. Until that blessed day arrives we must make do each of us with a three-walled Sukkah and make that Sukkah as beautiful as we can.

Reprinted by permission of the author from *Lessons for Living: Reflections on the Weekly Bible Readings and on the Festivals* by Rabbi Sidney Greenberg. Hartmore House, New York and Bridgeport, 1985.

09-12-88

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## Dwindling, controversial sect shares New Year date with other Jews

By Steve Rodan  
RNS Correspondent

RAMLE, Israel (RNS) — The Jewish New Year began Sept. 12 and for Rosie Peruz the scheduling was heaven sent.

The reason? Rosie, a ninth grader born to a Karaite family, is celebrating the high holy days on the same dates as all of her Jewish friends. This year, she does not have to admit her religion to her friends.

"In school, I was afraid all year that they would discover that I was a Karaite (kay-ra-ite)," Rosie said.

The Karaite community in Israel is the remnant of a controversial sect that fought with mainstream Judaism for 2,000 years. The estimated 7,000 Karaites are recognized as Jews by the government but ostracized by the country's chief rabbis.

"For years, we have been fighting for our own courts," said Haim Levi, the Karaite chief rabbi. "We marry couples by our own laws, but we are not allowed to divorce."

Karaites compose a sect that broke off from mainstream Judaism in the Middle Ages after centuries of dispute. The sect began during the Second Jewish Temple by Zadok, who preached that Judaism must reject all rabbinical teachings.

Instead, Zadok preached literal adherence to the Jewish Bible, so calendar dates became different as well as observance of holidays.

The sect reappeared in the ninth century and at that time became known as the Karaites. The group was powerful in Turkey and Egypt and rivaled mainstream Jewish leaders until the 17th century.

Karaites do not separate meat and milk or don phylacteries. Their rabbis do not cover their heads except in the synagogue.

Jewish sages are divided over the Karaites. Some scholars held that Karaites could be taught the Bible, but others ruled that they must be ostracized.

"In a way, the Karaites were considered the Reform Jews of their times," said Daniel Sinclair, a Jewish scholar at Tel Aviv University.

Karaites do not accept converts, although, unlike Judaism, a member can leave the sect. Offspring of a mixed marriage are not part of the faith. Consequently, the children of Karaites are being lost to the faith as they marry Israeli Jews. Karaite youngsters attend the same schools as Jews and perform military duty.

"Mixed marriages threaten to wipe out our sect in Israel," said Moshe Murad, a community leader.

Many Karaite youngsters say they are glad to intermarry. They say that their teachers are ignorant of their beliefs and their colleagues often mistake them for Muslims.

The Karaites pray in houses of worship, but like Muslims, congregants remove their shoes and pray on their knees. "It looks like the Arabs' prayers, but this is how the Jews prayed 2,000 years ago," Rabbi Levi said.

But many Karaite parents do not even inform their children of their faith. "They prefer not to subject their children to this," Mr. Murad said. "They want them to live like everyone else."