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THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY **כנסת הרבנים**

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Dear Colleague:

Enclosed are two sample High Holy Day sermons, a poster and an order blank for the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs "Art of Jewish Living", Phase 1: "The Shabbat (Friday Night) Seder" training program.

On September 15th, copies will be available of this exciting six-session instructional technique for spreading knowledge to our congregants concerning the home rituals of Shabbat.

This material has been developed by Dr. Ron Wolfson of the University of Judaism, field-tested by some of our congregations in Los Angeles, reviewed by our colleague, Barry Eckstein and endorsed by the R.A. Expansion of Services Committee. The High Holiday sermons by our colleagues Moshe Tutnauer and Mordecai Waxman are intended to facilitate the "kick-off" of this Shabbat "literacy" campaign in each of our congregations following the holiday season.

If you have any questions concerning the application of this "Art of Jewish Living" material within your congregation or alternative education setting, please contact Rabbi Charles Simon at the office of Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs.

Our Committee is delighted to participate in this venture with our Men's Clubs and looks forward to its successful implementation throughout the country.

Shana Tova,

Alan Silverstein  
Chairman, R.A.  
Expansion of Services Committee

Whoever has spent a Sabbath in Jerusalem has some concept of what the Sabbath can mean to a total society. Every Friday afternoon the pattern of life is changed. The stores close in the early afternoon. A hush descends upon the city. You see people carrying flowers home from the vendors who are seen on the streets. As twilight begins to descend, the buses stop running. The city is totally stilled and one is aware that one has entered into another period of time. This situation prevails through Saturday. There is a peculiar pattern to Saturday among many Jews. For many, it is a day of prayer in the morning, of kiddush after shul in many private homes, of rest on Saturday afternoon, and then the buses rumble again and the Sabbath is over and the city returns to work—a-day life.

I experienced this in Jerusalem during a period of seven months when I lived there. I was, however, aware not only of experiencing the Sabbath, but missing something which was a familiar part of my life. Sunday as a day with a special character of its own, disappeared. In Israel Sunday was Monday or Tuesday, just another day in the work—a-day life. If there was any parallel to Sunday it was simply that it was on Friday when the Sunday papers came out and when the work—a-day was reduced to 1/2 a day. When I came back to the U.S., I discovered that save for the period spent in the synagogue, I had lost the Sabbath. All around me the world was celebrating Sunday on Saturday, even as it celebrated Sunday on Sunday. America today really has no Sabbath with a sense of sanctity. It merely has two Sundays which, indeed, reflect a different pattern of life, free for relaxation, but also without a sense of the sacred.

Granted that Jerusalem has a special tone. Is there a need to seek the same spirit against far greater odds posed by a society and by the surroundings in New York or Boston? Has not, indeed, the goal of the Sabbath been achieved simply when one refrains from ordinary work and has a day off to relax as he chooses? In a sense, the world has accepted the Jewish view that we need a regular day off from work. Is it indeed necessary to burden oneself with the many injunctions and restrictions with which Judaism has surrounded the Sabbath?

Isaac Arama (*Akedat Yitzchak, Vayakhel*), a medieval commentator, in effect responds to this question by pointing out that the observance of the Sabbath is mandated in the Ten Commandments in two different ways. In Exodus (20:1) we are bidden *Zakhor* to "*Remember the Sabbath Day.*" In Deuteronomy we are bidden to *Shamor*, "*Observe the Sabbath Day.*" *Zakhor*, says Arama, refers to rest as sanctification, while *shamor* implies rest from physical labor. When we refrain from labor, we are at best fulfilling half of the injunction. The *Mekhiltah (Yitro)* suggests that half by itself is not satisfactory since God spoke both words at the same time.

To understand the value of the Sabbath, it might be useful to consider it from within the Jewish perspective and from the point of view of someone who views the Sabbath from the outside. The Jewish perspective has been offered in various formulations by many people. A sensitive view by an outsider is provided by Harvey Cox, a Christian theologian, the author of *The Secular City*, in a book entitled, *Turning East*. There Cox is concerned with the impact of Eastern religion on American life and he has a chapter on the Sabbath in which he makes several significant points. The Jewish perspective indeed is reflected in the statement of the *Mekhiltah* that cessation from work without sanctification is not sufficient. The whole thrust of Judaism has been to emphasize the need to invest the ordinary and mundane with sanctity.

It is in this spirit that we are bidden to recite 100 blessings a day, blessings which call attention to the miracles of daily existence, the gift of intelligence, of sight, of food

and clothing, of ingestion and excretion, of sleep and awakening, of rest and energy. We are thus reminded that what we take for granted is in itself miraculous and we are given a list of blessings to recite by way of saying, stop a moment in the daily routine and make yourself aware by the recitation of blessings, that is by a declaration of sanctification, that the ordinary is extraordinary and the mundane is sacred.

We seek to do the same with as common and ordinary an act as eating. One great challenge to the human being is to remind himself of his spiritual status even while he is enveloped in a body whose needs and demands are much the same as those found throughout the animal kingdom. The dietary laws and the rituals surrounding eating are designed to remind us that the actions which are essentially animalistic can be sanctified. It is this, rather than health considerations, which are the bases for Kashrut, and it is on this account that both the Bible and the Talmud set these laws and practices in the context of *Kedoshim Tihyu*— "You shall be Holy."

The sanctification of time is part of the Jewish pattern of investing life with holiness. In terms of sidereal time, there is no difference between one hour and another. Differences appear when we impose "personal time" upon the undifferentiated hours. Thus, perhaps, some special occasions in our lives whose duration may be only a few moments may hold a place in our memory greater than many months or years.

The Sabbath and the Holy Days represent an attempt to take a block of time and invest it with special meaning. The idea behind it is to compel us to recognize the extraordinary in the ordinary, thus giving significance to both dimensions of life by setting aside a day for a break in the routine of daily living. By surrounding it with regulations designed to emphasize its sacredness, we heighten our sensitivity to time and experience. That is the sense of the Talmudic story that food which the pagan seeks to emulate has a special taste because it enjoys the special spice which is the Sabbath.

Cox, viewing the Sabbath from the outside, indeed sees it as endowed with a special spice. On his way to explore Eastern modes of meditation, he paused to participate in a day long Sabbath observance in a small town in Colorado and concluded that "meditation is in essence a kind of miniature Sabbath." Cox is taken by the fact that Shabbat means "to desist" and he understands it to mean that it originally was a time designed for "ceasing from all activity and simply acknowledging the goodness of creation. It was set aside for affirming what is." In contrasting it, however, with meditation, Cox makes the cogent point that while meditation is represented as a total way of life, Israel recognized that although human beings can catch a glimpse of the realm of purity and innocence, they also live in the fractured world of division, greed and sorrow. Sabbath, is, therefore, only one day out of seven and is Israel's ingenious attempt to live both in history and beyond it — both in time and eternity.

Cox secondly points out that the Sabbath is the Jewish answer to the profound question all religions face about the relationship between doing and being, between reality as changeless and reality as change. In the Bible the key terms are not being and energy — but creation and rest. In this connection, the use of the word, *Vayinafash* (Exodus 31) which carries the connotation of "drawing breath" as applied to God himself, in the context of the Sabbath, establishes the Sabbath as the link between God and man (who also "draws breath") in a dialectic action and rest. But as against the point of view of Eastern thought, which emphasizes how to do nothing, the Jewish view sees the retreat from and the return to the work—a-day world as equally important.

Thirdly, Cox sees the democratic principle embodied in Israel's observance of the Sabbath. In Eastern religions, meditation is left to the Monks. In Christianity, contemplation was largely the role of a spiritual elite. In Judaism everyone is requested to pause and "draw breath."

Because the Sabbath is universal, embracing man and woman, servant and animal, rather than an elite, it also has an ethical dimension. It sets the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless alike in their equal role of imitation of God. This is precisely how Heine envisioned the Sabbath in his image of the enchanted prince compelled all week to live as a dog, who is returned to his own shape on the Sabbath.

Writing in these terms, Cox goes on to say: "To rediscover in our tie this underlying human meaning of the Sabbath should make Jewish young people think twice about whether they want to follow in the footsteps of 'enlightened' parents who have shied away from Sabbath observance as an embarrassment. It should cause Christians to wonder how some of the seventh day spell, so spoiled by misguided puritan opposition to enjoying its freedom, can be found again."

Cox, however, is not sanguine that a general observance of the Sabbath can be reinstated in our time. It would require, for Jews, a fight and self-conscious subculture which Jews once had but do not have any longer. Rather, what we need is a form of Sabbath observance which we can function on an individual or small group basis, but which restores the lost dialectic of action and repose.

What Cox craves for society at large, is available to Jews who are in quest, because it comes out of an authentic tradition which has sought and found. Judaism has developed a way of experiencing the riches of the Sabbath, if the will is there. It recognizes that one cannot be enjoined to feel different at 6 P.M. on Friday night. But the ceremonies and the actions which are involved in entering upon the Sabbath are all designed to induce a mood. Thus, the preparation of special food and a special table for the Sabbath, the donning of "Sabbath clothes," the lighting of candles, the recitation of Kiddush, table songs and the more leisured meals and consequent table talk can all create an ambience. If in the course of a day free from work and shopping and physical tasks, time is set aside for prayer, for cultivation of family and friends, for reading or study of a special kind (one young man I know made it a point to read Buber on the Shabbat), and to familiarize oneself with the Bible, the Sabbath will indeed have a special flavor....

Nonetheless, the difficulty of maintaining the Sabbath in an atmosphere where it is not being maintained by others, is as Cox suggests, a major problem. In the age of the small and dispersed family it may be necessary to create artificial groups who together will undertake to share in Sabbath observance and create an atmosphere from which all may benefit. In every congregation, there must be a number of families or individuals who will undertake to share in an adventure of the spirit. This is not only desirable, but is eminently necessary if Judaism is to continue to be a vital and vibrant faith in the Diaspora where we need patterns and attitudes to unite us to one another and to unite the generations one to another. The words of Ahad Ha'am certainly true for the past, are equally vital for the present and future — "More than Israel has preserved the Sabbath, the Sabbath has preserved Israel."

Explanatory Note: This sermon outline has been prepared for use at Neilah. Neilah is a time of quiet and reflection. It is an appropriate time for contemplating how we will behave as Jews during the coming year.

- I. Story found in Agnon's *Days of Awe*: King whose beautiful daughter refuses all suitors. Decrees that she must marry next person seeking her hand. He turns out to be a boorish person, living far from civilization. King's daughter is desperately unhappy. She writes to father, complaining. King decides to visit his daughter. Townspeople hear that the king is coming. Crowd around her filling house with music and dance. King arrives, is astounded, and asks daughter why she is complaining. Daughter; Today the king is here and I am beloved. Tomorrow, he will be gone — and what will become of me???
- II. Sermonic Development: King is the High Holy Days. Daughter is the Jewish soul. Husband is the Jewish People. The Jewish soul is dying of loneliness. Cries out. King comes. Husband and neighbors fill the house, but what will be when the king leaves???
- III. Can Judaism be meaningful only when the king is present?
- IV. Perhaps we have to invite the Queen into our homes. That Queen is Shabbat.
- V. The Queen is beloved by every segment of the Jewish People.
  - A. Those who relate to Judaism as a Theology: The Shabbat is a "sign" between God and the people forever. He who desecrates the Shabbat breaks the tie which has existed since the creation of the world and the inception of the Jewish people.
  - B. Those who relate to Judaism as a legal system: The Shabbat provides a network, delicately constructed, which helps the observant Jew to set aside one day a week for prayer, study, and the building of relationships with community and family. An opportunity "to purify our hearts, to serve thee in truth."
  - C. Those who are moved by the ethics of Judaism: What better vehicle than the Shabbat for teaching the primacy of the spiritual over the material? "What we are depends on what the Shabbat means to us." (Heschel) The influence of the Shabbat extends throughout the week. Each day is a pilgrimage toward the Shabbat.
  - D. Those who want to be part of the Jewish people: Can one picture a Jewish community which has abandoned the Shabbat? Indeed, "More than Israel has preserved the Shabbat, the Shabbat has preserved Israel." (Ahad Ha'am)
- VI. The queen can be brought into our lives and into our homes every week of the year. She can be greeted with song, she can help us become closer to our families and to our communities. She can bring holiness and Godliness into our lives.
- VII. No wonder then that the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs is embarking on a program to help Conservative Jews bring the Queen into their homes — every week.
- VIII. What should follow now is a description of the program. See other materials included in this package; also Alex Shapiro's column in *RA News*, Vol. 2, No. 7.

# LEADERS' DIGEST

A PERIODIC SUMMARY OF MATERIALS AND NEWS FROM THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

September 1989

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.

**American Jewish Year Book 1989**, edited by David Singer and Ruth R. Seldin. 588 pp.

In its demography section, this latest edition of the standard reference work on Jewish life in the U.S. and abroad reports that the Jewish population continues to grow in the Sunbelt and on the West Coast while some communities in the Northeast and Midwest have declined 10 percent or more. Two special articles are featured: Sylvia Barack Fishman, in "The Impact of Feminism on American Jewish Life," reports on the "multifaceted flowering" of American Jewish women and on radical transformations in the home, the synagogue, and the community; Jack Wertheimer, in "Recent Trends in American Judaism," surveys the changing character of American Jewish life and resulting changes in religious institutions. The volume includes updated world Jewish population estimates, a directory of Jewish organizations, obituaries, and Hebrew calendars.

**Israel and the Intifada: Findings of the April 1989 Roper Poll**, by David Singer and Renae Cohen. 20 pp.

A national Roper poll that included questions furnished by the AJC found that "between April 1988 and April 1989, Israel's standing with the American public was essentially unchanged, with only a very slight increase in pro-Arab sentiment. . . . American Jews . . . continued to be seen by the American public in a positive light." The Roper data are presented in 16 tables. David Singer is director of the AJC's Department of Information and Research, and Renae Cohen is a research analyst.

**Living in Two Civilizations: Jews in the Political Process**, by Ira Silverman. 12 pp.

Speaking at AJC's 83rd annual meeting, the

organization's executive vice president urges American Jews to pursue their group issues in the national political process just as other groups legitimately do. He advocates that Jews adhere to a liberal approach to public policy that is consistent with "our interest in promoting a stable society . . . that is tolerant of diversity and provides the kind of fertile ground in which groups like ours may best flourish."

**Major U.S. Supreme Court Civil Rights/Affirmative Action Decisions, January-June 1989**, by Samuel Rabinove. 17 pp.

AJC's legal director analyzes seven recent decisions of the Supreme Court in affirmative-action cases and concludes, ". . . the Supreme Court has swung to the 'right.' . . . Its recent watershed decisions, taken together, are likely to make discrimination suits more difficult to bring, more difficult to win, and more vulnerable to challenge if, in fact, they are won. They will assuredly have a chilling effect on the aspirations of racial minorities and women."

**The New York News Media and the Central Park Rape**, by Linda S. Lichter, S. Robert Lichter, and Daniel Amundson. 29 pp.

Cosponsored by AJC's Institute for American Pluralism and the Center for Media and Public Affairs in Washington, D.C., this report analyzes two weeks of media coverage of the beating and rape of a young white woman in New York's Central Park by a "wilding" gang of black and Hispanic teenagers in April 1989. The authors find that even at their most sensationalistic, the media conscientiously labored to prevent the incident from exacerbating racial tensions in the city.



**An Analysis of Jo Franklin-Trout's TV Production "Days of Rage: The Young Palestinians,"** by George E. Gruen. 8 pp.

Of this controversial TV film about the *intifada*, AJC's director of Israel and Middle East Affairs concludes: ". . . it is not really a documentary at all. Its use of selective quotes, carefully chosen images that stress Israeli guilt and Palestinian innocence, and its distortion of fact, make 'Days of Rage' not simply advocacy journalism, but dishonest advocacy journalism."

**Address by Richard von Weizsaecker to the American Jewish Committee, June 4, 1989.** 13 pp.

Recipient of the AJC's American Liberties Medallion, the president of the Federal Republic of Germany discusses the vital role of the United States in the development and maintenance of German democracy. The principles underlying Germany's constitution, he says, are "consistent with those of the American Constitution," and he praises AJC for its ongoing work in promoting "an honest though not easy dialogue between Jewish Americans and Germans."

**Conflict or Cooperation? Papers on Jewish Unity.** 81 pp.

Ten academicians, rabbis, and communal leaders explore diversity and schism in historic and contemporary Judaism in papers prepared for a December 1987 conference convened by AJC, CLAL--The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, and the City University of New York Graduate Center in response to growing internal Jewish religious conflict. "At stake," writes Steven Bayme, director of AJC's Jewish Communal Affairs Department, in his foreword, "are the future relations among the movements, especially between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews, American Jewry-Israel relations, and the ability of the community to maintain a united front in its public advocacy efforts on behalf of Jewish domestic and foreign concerns."

**Interim Report: Think Tank on Immigrant Absorption and Acculturation,** prepared by Dr. Ronald Kronish. 14 pp.

The think tank formed in Israel by AJC to deal with Israeli immigration problems makes more than a dozen recommendations for improvement in immigrant services in housing, employment, information, education and child care, stipends, municipal involvement, and immigration organizations.

**Judaism in the Jewish State: A 1989 Survey of Attitudes of Israeli Jews,** by Hanoeh and Rafi Smith. 29 pp.

An opinion poll conducted in Israel for the AJC found that majorities of Israeli Jews oppose revising the Law of Return to deny Jewish status to persons converted by non-Orthodox rabbis and favor permitting Reform and Conservative rabbis in Israel to perform marriages and conversions and to grant divorces.

**Policy-Oriented Research on Antisemitism: An Inquiry,** by Ben Halpern. 18 pp.

In this second publication in the series "Working Papers on Contemporary Anti-Semitism," the Richard Koret Professor of Near Eastern Studies Emeritus at Brandeis University argues that research on anti-Semitism has thus far failed to produce effective policy directives because it has regarded anti-Semitism as a disease whose causes could be identified and removed. In fact, writes Halpern, anti-Semitism is not a disease but a persistent tradition, and "Jewish policy must find ways to live with it, since it cannot uproot it." Historically, a "fluctuating balance" between anti-Semitism and tolerance has enabled Jews to survive among gentile peoples. The problem for Jewish policymakers today is to maintain the delicate balance of toleration, to understand "the current limits of recognition and rights that others are ready to concede."

**The Roots of Altruism,** by Pearl M. Oliner and Samuel P. Oliner. 22 pp.

The authors of *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (The Free Press, 1988) summarize their study of the social and psychological factors that impelled some non-Jews, who had nothing tangible to gain and much to lose, to save Jewish lives during the Holocaust while others stood by. They conclude: "Altruistic predispositions are learned -- cultivated, nurtured and nourished in primary relationships. . . . [B]ut the task cannot be left to parents alone. . . . [M]any social institutions need to assume this obligation, including schools and churches."

**The Transformation of American Jewish Politics,** by Peter Y. Medding. 32 pp.

"Less than three decades ago," writes Medding, an associate professor in the departments of political science and contemporary Jewry in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, American Jewry "was politically weak and unimportant. Today it is widely perceived to be a significant and influential force . . . . Issues of direct and immediate concern to Jews figure prominently on the American political agenda . . . ." This was accomplished, he explains, by American Jews' movement from the "liberal politics of individual rights" to the "pluralist politics of group survival."

**The Arab-Israel Conflict and the Peace Process.** 3 pp.

This background paper, agreed to at AJC's 83rd Annual Meeting after often-heated debate, calls for action by Israel, the Arabs, and the United States to resolve the Arab-Israel conflict. It commends the decision of the Israeli government to propose "free and open" elections in the occupied territories by which the Arab inhabitants can choose their own representatives to negotiate with Israel on the future status of those territories.



**Capital Update: Policy Issues of Concern to the Jewish Community.** 60 pp.

The May 1989 review from AJC's Washington office highlights three issues: U.S. immigration policy toward Soviet Jewish emigres; possible revision of U.S. foreign-aid law that will impact negatively on Israel and Egypt; and church/state issues in recent congressional child-care initiatives. Also reviewed is the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, in which AJC joined with other major national organizations in an amicus brief urging the Court to strike down a Missouri statute limiting access to abortions.

**Child Care in Jewish Family Policy,** by Ruth Pinkenson Feldman. 10 pp.

A consultant on childhood and family issues, Dr. Feldman urges the Jewish community to more actively support Jewish family life by providing day-care services, by adopting in its own institutions liberal employment and benefits policies, and by participating in the public-policy debates on child-care legislation.

**Grandparenting,** by Gladys Rosen. 6 pp. **Teaching Kids Jewish Civic Responsibility,** by Steven Bayme. 8 pp.

In articles reproduced from *The Hadassah Magazine Jewish Parenting Book*, Gladys Rosen, program associate in AJC's Jewish Communal Affairs Department, highlights the role of grandparents in transmitting Jewish and familial values, and Steven Bayme, director of that department, shows how parents can teach Jewish ethical and civic values to their children.

**Jewish Political Power in America,** by Hyman Bookbinder. 6 pp.

AJC's retired Washington representative, speaking at the organization's 83rd Annual Meeting, urges Jews to become increasingly active in the political party of their choice. Jews should not take either party for granted, he advises, nor should either party take the Jewish vote for granted.

**"Skinheads" -- Shadow or Substance?,** by Milton Ellerin. 10 pp.

Immaturity, ignorance, and mindless love of violence, more than racism, are the hallmarks of the skinhead phenomenon. Numbering only 2,000-2,500, without central headquarters, command structure, or cohesion, and with no clearly defined objective or philosophy, the Skinheads do not constitute a political movement. Besides being a law-enforcement problem, they have the potential of providing manpower for such established hate groups as the KKK and the Posse Comitatus.

**The Condition of the Christian in Israel: Proceedings of a Sixth Meeting of the Liaison Group.** 27 pp.

Cosponsored by AJC's Israel Office, the Ecumenical

Theological Research Fraternity in Israel, and the Israel Interfaith Association, this conference examined the status of Christians in Israeli society by asking: What are their legal, natural and historical rights? What are their social circumstances, and what are the public attitudes toward them? Are Christians "strangers" or indigenous to the land? What, indeed, is their status, and what are the legal aspects of that presence?

**Diaspora-Israel Relations: New Trends and Developments,** by A. James Rudin. 9 pp.

Rabbi Rudin, AJC's director of interreligious affairs, examines divergent trends in American Jewish and Israeli life and concludes: "After 40 plus years, the false assumptions, the unrealistic expectations, and the overblown promises have given way to a complex, problematic, and long-term family relationship. What is called for now is realism, hope, and maturity."

**The Arab Summit in Casablanca: Unity Still Eludes the Arab World,** by Riva Silverman. 6 pp.

Silverman, a research analyst in AJC's International Relations Department, notes that the May 1989 meeting reached consensus on three points: Egypt was readmitted to the Arab League; the PLO's "peace initiative" received qualified endorsement; and principles were agreed upon for the exchange of prisoners in the Iran-Iraq war. The presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon remained a divisive issue.

**Jewish Identity and Self-Esteem: Healing Wounds Through Ethnotherapy,** by Judith Weinstein Klein. 58 pp.

This is the second edition of Dr. Klein's pioneering 1980 study for the AJC's Institute for American Pluralism, with a new introduction by the author. "For practitioners of mental health who wish to guide their clients and patients through the intricacies of ethnicity and selfhood," writes Irving M. Levine, the Institute's director, in his preface, "and for lay people who wish to demystify their own ethnic identity conflicts, this book serves as an excellent compass."

**Seder of Understanding: An Interethnic/Interreligious Program for the Passover Season.** 11 pp.

Readings from the *Haggadah*, thought-provoking insights and observations, holiday songs, and cross-cultural references used during the third annual "Seder of Understanding" on April 11, 1989, to promote greater understanding among different ethnic and religious groups. The seder was sponsored by the Successors, the young leadership group of AJC's New York chapter.

**Talking Points on the Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Peace Process,** by George E. Gruen and Riva Silverman. 5 pp.

Updated statements of AJC positions on 10 vital issues involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, including an

international conference, West Bank elections, and the Israeli record on human rights. Dr. Gruen is director and Riva Silverman is a research analyst in the Israel and Middle East Affairs Division of AJC's International Relations Department.

**Ties and Tensions: An Update -- The 1989 Survey of American Jewish Attitudes Toward Israel and Israelis**, by Steven M. Cohen. 60 pp.

In his most recent survey of American Jewish opinion about Israel, Cohen, professor of sociology at Queens College of the City University of New York, gauges the impact of the ongoing *intifada* and the "Who is a Jew?" controversy on American Jewry. Among the issues he addresses are the degree of attachment to Israel,

commitment to Zionist ideology, opinions on Israel's foreign policy and treatment of the Arabs, and reactions to criticisms of Israel in the American media. The new data are compared to the findings of previous studies to identify trends.

**Are American and Israeli Jews Drifting Apart?**, by Steven M. Cohen. 11 pp.

Professor Cohen reviews the survey data on American Jewish attitudes toward Israel and suggests that a more realistic and mature approach is replacing the former tendency to romanticize the Jewish state. He also points to differences in the nature of Jewishness in the two countries that may lead to distancing in the future.



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- Living in Two Civilizations: Jews in the Political Process* (single copy free)
- Major U.S. Supreme Court Civil Rights/Affirmative Action Decisions, January-June 1989* (\$1.00)
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## Two Sermons on Israel

Rabbi Yosef Green

In an address before AIPAC the U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. James Baker, reflecting his government's attitude with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, said, "Israel must lay aside, once and for all, the unrealistic vision of a greater Israel."

If by "a greater Israel" Mr. Baker had in mind the annexation by Israel of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District, or for that matter Israeli rule of the administered territories, the consensus in Israel would be in complete agreement. Full autonomy for the Palestinians is favored by the great majority of Israelis, but that does not mean that the Jewish people in Israel and in the Diaspora reject the vision of a greater Israel.

Many still remember the hit song from the musical "Man From La Mancha" entitled "To Dream the Impossible Dream". Twenty two centuries before Cervantes, the Jewish people were "dreaming the impossible dream". Returning from the Babylonian captivity, בשוב ה' את שיבת ציון היינו כחולמים.

And after the destruction of the Second Commonwealth in the year 70 C.E., we never abandoned the dream of a reconstituted Jewish State. Even when Jerusalem was renamed by the Romans, Aelia Capitolina and Jews were refused entry, we remembered Jeremiah's words: "The children (of Israel) will return to their land."

For 1800 years the land was governed by Romans, Byzantines, Saracens, Crusaders, Mamelukes, Ottomans and the British, our people were in exile, strangers in the land of their dispersion. Our eyes were filled with tears but our vision remained clear. In our festival prayers we recalled those times when Jewish pilgrims thronged the courts of the Temple:

והביאנו ציון עירך ולירושלים בית מקדשך ויקבץ נדחינו מארבע כנפות הארץ

And behold, the impossible dream came true 5 Iyar 5708 —41 years ago. The prophetic vision was realized. And even when the Nazi beast gassed and incinerated one and a half million Jewish children, we never abandoned the dream of the prophet Zachariah "And the squares of the city (Jerusalem) shall be crowded with boys and girls playing (Jewish children answering to the names of Avrele and Yankele, Sarale and Chanele)." And though it will seem impossible to the remnant of this people in those days, God tells the prophet "Shall it also be impossible to me? —declares the Lord of Hosts."

When all is said and done and written, the greatest wonder is that Jews continue to cling to the impossible, to the unrealistic dream of a greater Israel in the figurative if not the literal sense. Battered by every tempest, afflicted by every ordeal, sometimes appearing to be crushed by the weight of a tragic destiny here we are, Mr. Baker, always resilient, never defeated, never without a vision of an even greater Israel.

Few events in human history have seemed more improbable than the vision of a Jewish national renaissance, nothing in human history would have seemed more unrealistic than the rebirth of Jewish freedom here in the land of Israel. Here, on a patch of land no more than 200 miles long and 100

miles wide at its broadest point, in this *alt-neue*, land a people now numbering less than five million out of a world population numbering in the billions has realized an impossible dream, 3000 years after David made Jerusalem capital of the Kingdom of Israel, 19 centuries after we were exiled from this land by the Romans, our people returned to the land where it was born and from which it had been separated for thousands of years.

This, Mr. Baker, was achieved against every calculation of chance. Our generation has lived through one of the lowest points in modern Jewish history. A time when even well-meaning gentiles must have been wondering if an end had not come to the unrealistic Jewish dream.

Yet within a few years of its darkest days, the Jewish people beheld its flag with the star of David planted in the family of nations from which it had been absent for so many centuries. Jews arose phoenix-like to new life, new strength and to youthful vigor. Never was the Jewish people stronger than in its moment of weakness and never more helpful than in its moment of despair.

The theologian Søren Kierkegaard said, "Life must be lived forward but can only be understood backward". It is the backward look at 4000 years of Jewish history that enables the Jewish people to cling to unrealistic visions such as a greater Israel a vision which takes into account the civil liberties of the Palestinians, which would allow for their elected representatives to administer their own affairs in an autonomous manner and in peaceful coexistence and in regional cooperation with Israel and Jordan. We will never give up our dreams מינו ואורך ימינו nor can we give up our visions because without a vision a people loses not only restraint but its very will to exist. And so, Mr. Baker, the Jewish-Israeli vision, if anything, must be sustained and enlarged to encompass the messianic dream of the lion lying down with the lamb while every man shall sit under his own fig-tree in peace and security for swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

But that messianic era has not yet arrived. And until then, neither hostile acts, pressure from the great powers or U.N. resolutions will force us to surrender. Do you, Mr. Baker, actually believe that what the combined might of seven Arab armies and their allies failed to accomplish will be achieved by hooligans, schoolchildren and religious fanatics armed with rocks and petrol bombs?

Indeed, the best hope for the Palestinians is to end the intifada and accept the Shamir-Rabin proposal for free elections in the territories which will pave the way to a permanent and peaceful solution of the Arab Israeli conflict.

Yesterday we commemorated the day when more than 3,000 years ago at Mt. Sinai our ancestors stood in awe at the foot of the mountain and received a message of Divine unity, of moral choice and ethical duty. A message which the prophets of Israel expanded into a universal vision of justice and peace. Today, there is virtually no civilization which does not bear the mark of this unrealistic vision. Shall we, proud descendants of Moses and Aaron, Amos and Isaiah, Yehudah Halevi and Herzl, Weizmann and Ben Gurion renounce the hope of transmitting this dream to future generations?

I am afraid not, Mr. Baker. Israel, with the help of the Almighty will carry its past into its future. A future we hope and pray, which will be as long and as glorious as its past. And we will continue to be inspired by a large ambition: to see great visions and to dream great dreams. And to articulate

them with a voice that will continue to echo and resonate in authentic Jewish accents

עד ביאת הגואל במהרה בימינו. אמן!

There is an incident reported in today's Torah portion which is more timely at this very moment than ever before in the history of the Jewish people. The incident took place after 38 years spent in the wilderness. The old generation has died or is dying, a new generation has grown up. (Even the old leaders Aaron and Miriam and Moses are dead or about to die). The Israelites are now in the final stretch of their journey to Eretz Israel. But blocking their way to the eastern bank of the Jordan, gateway to the promised land, is the territory of Edom, descendants of Esau. To save time, Moses thought it best to cross Edom directly, from South to North. The road through Edom was known as derekh ha-melekh and led from the Gulf of Akaba in the South up through Edom to Damascus in the North.

And as we read in Deuteronomy 20:14-21, Moses sent messengers from the encampment in Kadesh to the king of Edom. The messengers addressed the king as follows:

This is your brother Israel speaking: You know all the hardships that have befallen us, that our ancestors went down to Egypt and lived there for a long time, and the Egyptians dealt harshly with us and with our ancestors. We cried to the Lord and He heard our plea, and He sent a messenger who freed us from Egypt. Now we are in Kadesh, the town on the border of your territory. Allow us then to cross your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, and we will not drink water from wells. We will follow the king's highway, turning off neither to the right nor the left until we have crossed your territory.

But Edom answered, "You shall not pass through us, else we will go out against you with the sword". Edomite king saying, "We will keep to the beaten track and if we or our cattle drink your water, we will pay for it. We ask only for passage on foot —it is but a small matter". But they replied, "You shall not pass through!" And Edom went out against them in heavy force, strongly armed, and Israel turned away from them and journeyed roundabout in order to reach their final destination.

It struck me as I read these verses that this is the first instance of hasbarah conducted by the Israelite nation. Moses sent a messenger to explain to the king of Edom all about the trials and tribulations of the Jewish people and why it was imperative that Edom permit them to pass through their territory. Moreover, the Israelites would greatly benefit from such a friendly gesture and the Edomites in turn would be amply rewarded. The answer was negative; the Israelites, not wishing to violate Edom's sovereign right, had no choice but to find an alternative route.

In Deuteronomy (2:5) the Israelites are in fact admonished not to become an excuse for any hostile act *vis a vis* the Edomites in the future. On this verse, Nachmanides writes: "It is not fitting nor is it proper to take from Esau what was given to them as a legacy from God."

The *hasbarah* mission to the Edomites ended in failure, as did the request for assistance from this foreign power. Unfortunately, we have seen a replay in our own day of unsuccessful attempts to explain Israel's recent history, the genocidal attack on Jews by the Nazis, the centuries of anti-Semitic attacks on our people which preceded the Holocaust and our position in the Arab-Israeli conflict. We have been trying to offset Arab propaganda and win broader support for Israel in the international arena. The results have been rather discouraging. Some months ago P.M. Shamir was in Washington and in appearances before the media and before audiences from coast to coast succeeded in winning broad Jewish support for Israel's peace initiative. President Hayim Herzog re-

turned from a state visit to Canada, having scored an unqualified success in presenting before the Canadian Parliament and the Canadian people and before the world media good reasons for supporting Israel and the Israeli peace initiative. He did so like a good lawyer which he is by profession, presenting Israel's case logically, persuasively and articulately.

No matter what it takes, Israel must continue to wage a campaign for the hearts and minds of Jews and gentiles alike. Not every *shaliah* will have the stature of Israel's president and prime minister. But they can, nevertheless, articulate passionately and persuasively the policy of Israel's National Unity Government. They can express the sentiments of a majority of Israelis who form a national consensus even though it may be unacceptable to a minority to the right and to the left.

I would point out that the obsessive fixation with every stone-throwing incident in the West Bank has only served to obscure the truly ominous developments in the Middle East, be they in Iran, Afghanistan or in Lebanon, and that it is against this background that the free world must view Israel, the one and only bastion of democracy in the region. One only has to look at the map of the Middle East to realize the vital significance, for the security of the free world, of the State of Israel, the single solid island of stability, loyalty and friendship to her partners in the free world. Israeli *hasbarah* must not let the world forget that 41 years ago in Israel's Declaration of Independence we held out our hand to our Arab neighbors in a quest for peace. Our peace offer was rejected; instead, the armies of seven Arab states combined with Palestinian Arabs in an effort to destroy the embryonic Jewish state before its birth and to drive us into the sea. Let it not be forgotten how in Israel's War for Independence we fought back desperately without adequate arms and outnumbered outgunned and embargoed by most of the countries of the free world. Thanks only to heroism and sacrifice of the Yishuv, the leadership of Ben Gurion, the help of the Almighty, and of world Jewry, did we manage to survive.

From the moment of its birth, Israel stretched out its hand in an offer of peace, but it was rejected. For 19 years, from 1948-1967, the West Bank was occupied by Jordan and the Gaza strip was occupied by Egypt. But the Palestinians were not granted independence, nor was a Palestinian state established, because the, as today, the last thing the Arab world wanted was a Palestinian state.

There days after the conclusion of the Six Day War in 1967 the Israeli Cabinet offered to return the Sinai desert to Egypt, the Golan Heights to Syria in return for demilitarization and peace. The Arab reply to this approach was the Khartoum Summit Conference with its three "no's" —no to negotiations with Israel, no to recognition of Israel and no to peace with Israel.

In 1977 the program of full autonomy for the Palestinians proposed by the then Prime Minister Menachem Begin was rejected out of hand. Had this proposal been accepted, we might by now have been well on the road to a permanent settlement. But the Palestinians responded in the manner of the Edomites.

Israel is nevertheless irrevocably committed to the peace process and I believe that sooner or later peace will be achieved.

One only has to look back to the year 1977 when most of Israel's borders were hermetically sealed and there was no passage of people or trade across our borders. Who would have dreamt then that today the Israeli flag would fly over an Israeli Embassy in Egypt and Egyptian flag over the Egyp-

tian embassy in Israel? Who would have dreamt that ten years after the signing of the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, Egypt would be accepted back into the Arab league while remaining loyal to its commitments to Israel and what is more, would resume its role as a leader in the Arab world?

Who would have dreamt that this year approximately 120,000 Israeli tourists will visit Egypt and that joint Israel-Egypt agricultural projects would be taking place simultaneously in the Nile Delta and the Negev?

Who would have dreamt 12 years ago that over a million people would annually be crossing over the bridges of the Jordan river in both directions and that each day hundreds of trucks carrying produce and exports are moving in both directions. (And who would have dreamt that in 1989 thousands of Israeli Muslims would be making their way to Mecca for the Haj, their holy pilgrimage?)

The present unrest in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district is as irrational and self-destructive as each of the previous Arab attacks on Israel. But we must remind our friends, Jews and non-Jews alike that it is easy to discuss our problems at a distance, to make speeches, write articles and offer solutions. It is less easy for those of us living in Israel who, together with our children and grandchildren, will bear the consequences should Israel's leaders, God forbid, make the wrong decision.

There is no desire in Israel to rule over another people and to direct its lives; neither can Israel permit the Intifada to continue, because if it does it can only deteriorate into another edition of Beirut or Teheran. And so Israel has no choice but to put down the civil unrest and restore law and order, which in our eyes poses a threat to the security of our state and to peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs.

As for the criticism levelled against Israel's handling of the uprising, in the territories I have yet to see any country facing a similar situation with greater restraint. The world hears about the 500 Arabs killed as a result of their participation in the attacks on Israeli personnel. But how many people have been told by the media that in Algeria last summer 500 demonstrators were killed — not in 20 months but in two days?

What other army in the world would exercise greater restraint than the IDF in coping with a society that cynically and cruelly sends its children to carry out acts of violence, endangering human life on both sides? Remember Rachel Weiss and her three children who were burned alive in a civilian bus are no less tragically dead because the perpetrators who threw the petrol bomb were youngsters. I believe that Israel has shown more restraint and more humanity than any other society in similar circumstances.

And even as the National Unity government of Israel labored to produce a new peace proposal to end this bloody conflict, how could its leaders ignore the thunderous silence of the world as the city of Beirut is being bombed by Syrian artillery day and night, as the Lebanese nation is being destroyed along with its Christian community while the rest of the Christian world remains indifferent. Surely, the apathy of our world now as in days of Hitler must be uppermost in the minds of those who are entrusted with lives of Israel's citizens — men, women and children.

Already 25,000 refugees from Beirut — Christians and Muslims — have crowded into the security zone adjacent to our northern border. Instinctively they come to Israel for protection and security.



All of this is going on at this very moment, but it arouses little reaction in the civilized world. In the distorted and prejudiced coverage by the media of events in the Middle East, the slaughter in Beirut doesn't warrant the coverage given to children throwing stones in some West Bank village.

Yes, we are moving inexorably towards peace, and that is the major goal of our Nation Unity Government, reflecting as it does the prayers of millions of Jews, Muslims and Christians alike. The Shamir-Rabin plan for secret elections in the territories, whereby the Palestinian Arabs living in these areas will elect their own representatives empowered to enter in negotiations with Israel in order to establish self-rule for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is a positive step in the direction of an end to the violence and the beginning of coexistence.

Peace will be achieved because the present situation is intolerable for Jews and Arabs alike. And as we pursue our struggle in the ongoing search for peace, we shall continue to develop as a free, democratic, vibrant society, which stretches out its hand in cooperation and in strength, seeking partners to the peace process, which can only yield the blessed fruits of security and prosperity for two peoples joined by geography and linked by a common destiny.



RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY HOMILETICS SERVICE

# Yamim Noraim

## 5750

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*Dear Colleague,*

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*Best wishes for a sweet and happy 5750!*

*Rabbi Saul Teplitz  
Chairman,  
Rabbinical Assembly Homiletics Service*

## Naches fun Kinder

Rabbi Gilbert Kollin

The story is told of an elderly Jewish lady, a widow, and great-grandmother, who sat in shul on Rosh Hashanah and talked with God. This particular lady had long been on intimate terms with God, seeking His help and encouragement during times of sickness, health, poverty and prosperity. Being a good Jewish mother, she began to wonder what she could do for God. After all, her life was full and fulfilled and she had little by way of unfinished business. She was in a place where she had all she needed and could look exclusively to the needs of others.

"Nu, Tatenyu, Gottenyu," she said, "what should I wish for you, riches? You have no need for money or material things. Power? You are already Master of the Universe, and Lord of all creation. / So what can I wish for you—the one thing you don't always have and can't create. In the year ahead I wish you should have *naches fun die kinder!*"

The same question was asked on a sophisticated level by the distinguished scientist Norbert Weiner, the father of cybernetics. He asked "Isn't God bored?" Having created the universe, which is yet governed by certain discoverable mathematical relationships, what does God have to do all day? What can possibly be going on that isn't predictable?

We are! That's right. You and me. All of us willful individuals whom God has been trying to persuade to do right and live well since Adam and Eve missed their opportunity in the Garden. We are the only game in God's town worth watching—that is we and any other form of intelligent life that may have evolved elsewhere. Weiner compared it to a game of chess. He predicted thirty years ago that chess could and would be computerized and that as soon as that happened the game would lose its appeal because the element of unpredictability would be lost. After all would anybody watch a baseball or a football game or tennis match if computers were able to infallibly predict the outcome?

So that little old Jewish lady in our story knew a profound truth that she shared with this very sophisticated scientist. In all of the universe the thing that most concerns and interests God is us. For only intelligent human beings with the capacity for free choices provide the element of unpredictability that alone creates interest.

This leads us to a second concern, an issue raised by modern psychology. Are children supposed to be "naches producing machines" for parents? Is being a good child, a responsible adult, a proper Jew, tantamount to keeping your parents happy or even your Father in Heaven content? Contrary to what many people think, Jewish law and tradition does not assert parental authority in all cases. Once a child is bar mitzvah, parents may advise but, according to the Shulhan Arukh, cannot dictate to their child in the choice of a teacher or school, the choice of friends, or bride or groom.

Much of modern psychology deals with problems of growing away, that is "separation" of the child from the parent to be followed by a different relationship that exist between parents and adult children. Indeed many therapists say that the inability to separate from parents is a cause of great tension

and anguish on both sides. I have met many sad cases of middle aged and even older people who strive vainly to gain approval or blessing from parents, who are unable to give it either because of their personality or because—in many cases they are no longer among the living. Yet the children still go through life desperately trying to please people who are unable or unwilling to be pleased with them. “All I ask from you is a little *naches*”, they say, when they really mean “I want you to remain my little child forever.”

Most of us agree that parents who seek fulfillment through their children are unfortunate because our children can never really compensate for what is lacking in our lives, and our children whose total source of validation is their parents' approval are sad souls with no life of their own. Both children and parents are both doomed to profound disappointment.

What did the nice Jewish lady mean when she told God he should have “*Naches fun die kinder?*” I suggest she meant something very different.

During the seven weeks which preceded Rosh Hashanah we read stirring passages from the prophet Isaiah which gives us some insight into the kind of *naches* God wants from us.

Isaiah describes the Jewish community as a happy family. The land of Zion is the Mother, God is the Father and the Jewish people are the children. What does God want? He wants his children to dwell peacefully and prosperously in the land while he watches over them protectively.

But the children didn't follow the terms of the agreement. God reluctantly revoked the covenant and brought about the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews. Zion, bereft of her children, her cities in ruins, mourns her sad state and her loneliness. The children, in distant Babylonia, recall fondly the land they once had and yearn to go home. What does God want? Nothing more than that the children should look into their past, identify their mistakes and failures, mend their ways and ask to come home. So that the Jewish family—God, the Land of Israel and the Children of Israel, can be reunited again.

S.Y. Agnon, one of the great Hebrew writers of modern times, tells of a Rabbi who arose to address his congregation on Rosh Hashanah. The congregation knew that this rabbi had a son who had gone to *arbut ra'ah*, strayed to evil ways. The rabbi described his joy at the birth of his first son, the celebration at the *Brit*, a beautiful child well endowed physically and mentally. He seemed to be possessed by a troubled and restless spirit. Soon after his Bar Mitzvah, the young man began to associate with bad people, got into trouble with the law, abandoned the *Mitzvot*. His father learned that his son was in prison convicted of some serious crime.

“My son has frightened me. He has embarrassed me, he has insulted me. But were he to appear before me today, knocking at my door, asking me to take him back in, do you think I wouldn't? All I want is that he should be happy and healthy. My door is always open to his *shuvah*. His return is all that I desire.” And from this the rabbi suggested that אבינו מלכנו our Father and King patiently and lovingly await our return, prays earnestly that we repent of our sins and seek righteousness.

Parents who have suffered the loss of a child through death, through alienation, through the trials and traumas of growing up, know that when all is said and done the real *naches* that we derive from our children is their success and happiness. We want things to go well for them.

So on this Rosh Hashanah, as God looks down on His world is He having much *naches fun die kinder*? Is he happy with the way his children are getting on?

In the Middle East, He sees Iranians and Iraqis killing each other in his name. In Africa He sees oppression and terrorism as South Africa's white minority tries desperately to maintain control over an increasingly restive black majority. He cannot find much joy in the fact that many use Holy Scripture to justify racism and exploitation.

Here in America, He must shake his head in wonder at a nation burdened with crop surpluses in which too many millions to bed each night hungry, in which thousands have no roof over their heads, and poverty or illness are often regarded as a kind of sin and Holy Scriptures are cited as justification for hard-heartedness.

And within the Jewish world, God must sometimes look on in disbelief if not in anguish as he sees Jews fighting among themselves, treating other Jews with disrespect or even disdain. What is God to make of it when Jews justify racism and terrorism by quoting the Torah, or when Jews calling themselves Haredim, "those who fear the Lord" defend the sanctity of the Sabbath by rioting and stone throwing at people who want to attend the movies on Friday night. Which desecration of the Sabbath is worse? Movies or the violence?

Planet Earth is a kind of Garden of Eden *in potentia* containing all that we need to live safe and abundant lives. Yet, we persist in spending our time quarreling, ruthlessly and irresponsibly squander the limited quantities of natural resources available to us, heedless of our responsibilities to future generations.

So what does God want from us? Perhaps, only a little *naches*. He would like to see us squabble less and love more. He would like to see us spend less time trying to do each other in and more time trying to help each other out. He would like to see us stop judging people by the color of their skin and start judging them by the quality of their character. He would like to see us show less anger and more compassion. He would like to spend less time talking at each other and more time to listen to each other.

Maybe that's what all this *teshuvah* and confession and resolution is all about...Just to make us a little more considerate and compassionate toward each other, a little more responsible and sensitive about the planet He has given over to our care, to make our world a little more like He hoped it would be after He created it.

So, let's say "Thank You" to God for all of the good things we have been given as a gift...Let's give God a little *naches fun die kinder* this year.

# Forgiveness

Rabbi Edmund Winter

Recently I read that the first and second most watched programs in the history of television have been "The Cosby Show" and "Family Ties" respectively. The Huxtable family of "The Cosby Show" and the family in "Family Ties" have become as real to us as our next-door neighbors. These situation comedies, have won their way into the hearts of America's families.

We laugh at the familiar pattern of conflict and tension created by family disagreements, trivial and not so trivial: the possibility that an overstudious young woman will skip a grade; an engagement announcement; a 50th birthday; a big telephone bill; a fight between young lovers; a decision by a boy that he wants to take flying lessons; the divorce of a friend; the death of a young friend. As we laugh, we see the virtues required for conflict resolution; such frequently honored but rare qualities as patience, trust, sensitivity, honesty, generosity, flexibility and forgiveness.

The popularity of these programs about intact, healthy, upper middle-class families seems all the more remarkable in the face of the social realities of rising divorce rates, single-parent families, abortion, incest, wife beating and teenage pregnancies. But when the Huxtable family is on the screen we absorb the affection of a functioning intact family and feel good. When the program is over, we are more hopeful for families, and for our own family.

We as Jews should not be surprised at the enormous interest in these programs, because the longest running family drama in history is our possession. For over two thousand years, on Rosh HaShanah we have been reading from chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Genesis; Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael are our counterpart to Heathcliff, Claire, Theo, Alex, Andy, and Vanessa. On the holiest days of the year, when our liturgy deals with such profound issues as life and death, sin and transgression, peace and justice, why was the "Abe and Sarah Show" chosen? Why do we read of a quarrel between two women? Or of a trip that a father and son take together? Even today's Haftarah deals with a family situation: A woman with a fertility problem. Many portions in the Bible address major issues in a direct sublime way, eloquently describing our obligations to God. Why not read the Ten Commandments or the Shema?

These stories, concerned with family conflict and its resolution, are a part of the High Holidays for the same reason that the "Cosby Show" and "Family Ties" are so popular. We read today how Abraham and Sarah, deeply divided over Ishmael's negative influence on Isaac, argue over Sarah's demand to cast Hagar and Ishmael out of the home. We react with distress to Abraham and Sarah's harsh and unjust behavior towards Hagar and Ishmael. Yet we also recognize the parallels, in which members of the family cut each other off emotionally as well as physically.

Tomorrow's reading might be entitled "The Ties That Bind". Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac for whom he has given up so much. We wonder at the nature of God who would cruelly test and torture his creatures. However, we must acknowledge how often it is that in families children are sacrificed for the ideals of the parents. We can only speculate at how this must

have divided Abraham and Sarah. What is going on in Isaac's mind as he is bound upon the altar. Is he confused, angry, frightened? At a literal level it is the notion of trust which animates this story: Abraham's trust in God, Isaac's trust in his father, and Abraham's trust in himself and his ideals.

These readings are not situation comedies. They are written in a very sparse style, without detail or elaboration. There is no humor to lighten the mood. But we do recognize that the issues revealed through these stories are the situations every family faces. We also realize that the concerns raised by the modern sit-com are not very far from those raised by Genesis chapters 21 and 22.

The themes of these narratives are, like the themes of the sit-coms, very germane to the High Holiday season. The rabbis indeed chose well. For what is *teshuvah*, repentance, but reconciliation between people? Transgressions of which we are guilty today are not murder, theft, adultery, idolatry, in the literal sense, but rather the unresolved conflict, which results in alienation from loved ones, cutting off friends and members of the family, holding on to anger, violating the bonds of trust, refusing to forgive ourselves and others. The ordinary relations of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael move us in ways that the Ten Commandments and the Shema cannot. Further, in addressing the mundane issues arising out of family life, we are forced to face the major concerns of the Days of Awe. For our views on peace in the world to be taken seriously, then we must have peace in our own families. If we want justice for the Soviet Jew or the Black in South Africa, then we need to strive for equity in our relations with our parents or spouses. If we want to see the end of hunger and poverty, then we need to begin at home and attend to our own love-starved children and emotionally deprived families.

One aspect of family life which is really the beginning point of all *teshuvah*, reconciliation. That is forgiveness.

An episode in the show "Valerie" (starring Valerie Harper) illustrates how forgiveness works in a family. In the program Valerie has three sons: one is about 16 or 17, the middle one is about 13 or 14, and the younger one about 12. The children are involved in a quarrel because the middle son has been using some items belonging to the other sons without permission. On top of that, he has been breaking them and not reimbursing his brothers for that which he has broken. Finally the other two boys resolve to teach him a lesson by ganging up on him with excessive violence. He is so hurt by this, even though they were justified in their anger, that he moves his bedroom furniture to the attic. His mother tries to convince his brothers to forgive him. But they argue, "Why should we forgive him? He broke our things and never paid for them. He is the one who should ask us for forgiveness." As in most of these programs, there is a secondary plot: Valerie's diet. She has baked a cheesecake for dessert for the rest of the family and is constantly being tempted by it. The episode concludes on a happy note. The boys go up to the attic, forgive their brother, who promises to be more careful and reimburse them. Valerie doesn't eat the cake, because one of her friends, also on a diet, tells her:

"You have to forgive yourself for he desire to break your diet."

How does this episode apply to the work of *teshuvah*? The English poet Alexander Pope wrote, "To err is human; to forgive, unusual." Why do we find it so hard to forgive others?

What made this episode of "Valerie" so extraordinary is that the older brothers, in spite of their justified grievance, forgave their brother. It was as if the brothers looked into their hearts and realized that they punished their brother, not to teach him a lesson, but out of pure hatred. So when they



were forgiving their brother they were also forgiving themselves for being human in getting revenge. For the other brother to have asked for forgiveness we would have expected. But then the episode would indeed have been trite. But when the aggrieved parties asked for forgiveness, then we have something special. Someone once wrote: "It is a principle of human nature to hate those whom you have injured...the highest and most difficult of all moral lessons to forgive those we have injured." Strange as it may sound, it is true that we frequently develop very strong feelings of dislike and animosity against people whom we have hurt.

In the case of this morning's Torah reading we would have expected to have read some act of reconciliation by Abraham with Hagar and Ishmael. His exile of them into the desert was a terribly cruel act. Yet nowhere do we read of Abraham's act of selihah, request of forgiveness. We can speculate that over time Abraham may have come to dislike Hagar and his son, Ishmael. He certainly had ample justification: Ishmael, by making sport of Isaac, was a negative influence on Isaac. Ishmael had bitterly disappointed Abraham by not living up to his standards. Sarah has told Abraham to banish them, and God himself had instructed him to listen to Sarah. But Abraham had disagreed with his wife and God in the past. There must have been something else to block him from this act of selihah. I believe that Abraham could not face himself, could not admit to himself that he was capable of such an unjust act against his own flesh and blood. As time went by, his hatred of himself for not living up to his standards was projected outward upon Ishmael, thus preventing him from reaching out to him in an act of reconciliation.

In the episode in "Valerie" the brothers are able to face their own shortcomings and thus forgive their brother; Abraham is not. In a sit-com there must be a happy ending. The Bible is more realistic in its appraisal of human nature.

We can identify with the Biblical account because we know how difficult it is to forgive those who have hurt us, how easy it is to strike back in revenge, and how hard it is to forgive ourselves for being human. In how many of our families has the Abraham scenario taken place? Our spouse or our children have deeply injured us for whatever reason. We, in a moment of anger, justified or otherwise, strike back, and now although we want to reach out and heal the breach, we cannot because we hate them, and even more important, hate ourselves for hating them. I firmly believe that the reason, among others, we are in synagogue during the High Holy Days is to gain the strength and the courage to mend our broken relationships, especially with our loved ones. For if this were not the case, then our words are meaningless. How can we ask God for forgiveness, if we cannot forgive ourselves and our dear ones? Therefore we need to begin with ourselves. We need to use the time on these High Holy Days to confront ourselves with honesty and with consideration. By accepting ourselves as we are, human with many shortcomings, by reconciling the opposite parts of our nature, then we are in position to forgive others. If we dislike ourselves, how can we truly forgive the transgressions of others, their human frailties? But if we accept all parts of us, then we can have consideration for the faults of others. This is the work of teshuvah. The hard part is getting started.

- Our tradition tells us that if we go part of the way back, God will come the rest of the way. I believe that also works in human relations. If our loved ones see us returning part of the way, they will be inspired to come the final distance.

May God give us the strength and courage to do teshuvah. May he inspire our loved ones to do the same. May the coming year bring healing to all. May it be a year of peace and harmony for all.

# True Rahamim in Our Time

Rabbi Jeffrey Marker

Time and again in the High Holy Day liturgy we chant, "Adonai, Adonai, el rahum vechanun Adonai, Adonai, is a compassionate and gracious God." God's attribute of mercy is our hope in this period when we are so very aware of our shortcomings.

We are also reminded that we are to base our action upon God's, to follow in the steps of God's compassion and make it our own.

The word rahamim, compassion, is related to the word rehem, womb. God is rahum, shelters us as in a womb. A womb nourishes and protects a being that is not yet ready to make it on its own. Similarly, God protects us when we are not yet ready to make it on our own. We turn to God as one who is stronger than we are, as that power in the universe which offers hope of protection for the weak, the powerless, for those who are in need of shelter.

Another human reaction to those who are powerless is fear. We are afraid that we will become like them, or we are reminded that we could be like them. There is a new kind of weakness that is spreading through our population today, a weakness in the face of infection, the terrible condition known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome — AIDS. It is spreading through the population, and so far there is no cure. I do not intend to provide a medical report; this concerns human reaction of fear springing up about this disease. People talk about quarantine. People do not want to be near someone with the disease, or even with the virus. Despite assurances that the virus is not spread through casual contact, people who are not infected (at least to their knowledge) are afraid to associate with those who are. People are afraid to touch, afraid to use the same toilets, afraid to eat food touched by those who have been infected.

In a Florida town, three children, hemophiliacs infected by a blood transfusion, had been kept out of school last year, but a court ruled that they must be admitted and allowed to lead normal lives. Half the town's parents kept their children home from school, fearing contagion, and the family's house was burned down. They moved out of town, and were later forced out of the motel where they were staying. Now they are living anonymously in another state.

Despite all the evidence that AIDS is not spread by casual contact, the parents in that town acted out of irrational fear. Clearly there is more a chance of their children being killed in an automobile accident than of contracting AIDS, but they don't hide them behind locked doors.

Another story in the paper told about the AIDS patients who are well enough to leave the hospital, but have no place to go. They have lost their homes, sometimes because of financial constraints, but just as often because the people with whom they lived no longer want them in their homes, whether lovers, family or "friends". Because of hospital rules, they cannot even leave the hospital to look for a place. These people, acutely aware of the passage of time, must spend the healthy time they have left "imprisoned" in the hospital.

On the other hand, one hears stories of great compassion in the face of AIDS, people devoting their

lives to make the lives of victims easier, or reaching out to friends who have the disease. Included among these are those serving as "buddies" through the Gay Men's Health Crisis, providing care and companionship to those with AIDS. These people give up much in their own lives to help others, sometimes lovers or family, but other times only casual friends or even strangers before they were stricken.

Two women in Massachusetts have taken three children with AIDS into their home, two infants and a 3-year old. They are giving them the love that they need and say that neighbors have been good, and even let the girls play with their children, but they are afraid too much publicity may bring attacks from less sympathetic folks, and they have been cut off by some of their relatives, fearing not just the disease, but the prognosis that the children will die.

Similarly, a Harlem woman named Loraine Hale started taking AIDS babies into her own home. Now she has a home called Hale House, dedicated to the care of children with AIDS.

The AIDS scare has created barriers between people. We all need affection and love and physical contact, yet people have been reluctant to touch each other. There is a new caution about in the land, not only about sex, but about love, about affection, about intimacy. People are drawing back into what they see as "safety".

One of the keys that affects how we react to AIDS is how we perceive the victims. Are they part of our community, or the "other"? Could it be us, or is it only something that happens to someone who does something wrong. As long as it was something only happening to gay men and IV drug users, those who were neither could say it doesn't concern them. This is part of the motivation behind those who want to isolate, to quarantine AIDS carriers: to make a clear demarcation between us and them, and then we will be safe. This is irrational in the face of the statistics that the majority of those carrying the virus don't know it.

Judaism teaches that we are all part of one community, that we are all responsible one for the other. We must reach out to the other, the weak and powerless, "the widow, the orphan, and the stranger". This is both justice, compassion, and self-interest, since tomorrow we may be among the ostracized. In no circumstance is this more true than with AIDS.

On this day of judgement, we turn to God and ask God to remember the divine attribute of *rahamim*, compassion, and apply it to us. Yet we, who need *rahamim* are in a position to increase the level of *rahamim* in the world. As we are considering our deeds on this Day of Judgement, let us help spread *rahamim* in the world and combat the selfish inhumanity and alienation spreading through out society.

# A Formula Against Despair

Rabbi Harvey Meirovich

It is easier for me to speak this morning as a Jew than as a rabbi, for in our tradition, spiritual leadership, as exemplified by Israel's prophets, has always entailed a dual duty; to criticize out of love and concern, and, in the next breath, to offer words of comfort and consolation. I take up this dual burden as my thoughts turn to Israel's present predicament which pits Jew against Arab in a way which is ripping apart the social fabric of the Jewish state. I have two messages to transmit. The first is for external consumption, to the Gentile community, and I ask that what I say you will, in turn, find opportunities to transmit to them; for I believe every Jew is an ambassador for Israel. My other message is meant strictly for internal consumption, within the confines of family.

What do you say to a Gentile when it is obvious that he is being fed only a slice of the bread and not the whole loaf? How to respond authentically, without describing Israel as the personification of perfection? Is not love a feeling of passion, concern and warmth, despite the imperfections we detect in our beloved? To love Israel, then, means to accept its frailties and still take pride in her miraculous accomplishments. In seeking to explain Israel's case to the Gentile outsider, we speak of a biblical principle we hold in common: "There is no man on earth always in the right who...never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). This holds true for Jew, Christian and Muslim. Only angels do not sin. Man is imperfect. He is frail. He errs. To make matters worse, he has memory, both a blessing and a curse. (It is a curse because not forgetting often means not forgiving.) Memory, then, accounts for much of the festering mutual hatred of Arab and Jew. But Jewish tradition prescribes an antidote to wrongdoing, *teshuvah*. I would remind the Gentile outsider looking in, that throughout Jewish history prophets, priests, rabbis and philosophers have challenged their people to live up to Judaism's moral heritage. And in Israel judicial and moral wrongdoing by Jews,—not only during the current crisis but in the past forty years—have been punished by the lawful arm of Jewish justice. This is one of the glories of Jewish statehood.

It should be understood, too, that there are moments in shaping a nation, be it Jewish or Gentile, which do not fit the prophetic prescription of walking with clean hands and a pure heart. Over the years, Israel has exhibited considerable goodwill, (not perfect goodwill, mind you) in trying to negotiate peace. All along the way, she has had to contend with the PLO, who are not only masters of terrorism, but experts in the art of deception. Jews in this century, however, have incorporated into the depths of their consciousness this reality principle: "Don't trust until you have reason to trust".

Therefore, while Israel is acutely aware of the obligation to uphold human rights, she is, at the same time, painfully conscious that she embodies the resurrected aspirations of the Jewish people, re-born from the ashes of the Shoah. In a post-Auschwitz world where human life is cheap and expendable, Israel knows that her civilian army has no choice but to practice the necessary art of self-defense.

Israel is in agony at this hour, for it is her monumental challenge to try and forge a nation spiritually committed to justice and mercy, while seeking to survive in a world where "might is right". Golda Meir once said that she could forgive Israel's enemies for many things, but not for turning Jewish boys into killers. A midrash teaches: "When the Egyptian hosts were drowning in the sea, the angels

in heaven were about to break forth into songs of jubilation. But the Holy One, blessed be He, silenced them: 'My creatures are perishing and you are ready to sing?' Our spilling drops of wine at the Seder because Israel's cup of joy cannot be full when our triumph causes suffering. (Compare this *Weltanschauung* with celebrations on the PLO calendar marking anniversaries of the 1972 Munich massacre of Israeli athletes and the 1974 massacre of children at Maalot.)

Finally, I would tell my gentile friend that even those Jews who acknowledge the possibility of trading land for peace agree: "Do not trust until you have reason to trust". Many liberal Jews wait with increasing frustration for a reciprocal response from the Arab world. Much more remains to be said amongst ourselves. What can give us hope in the midst of our despair? I located an optimistic foothold in the words of Nachman Krochmal a historian and philosopher who died in 1840. His book, entitled *Moreh N'vukhei Hazman: A Guide for the Perplexed of the Times*, helps us to make sense of the whirlwind swirling about us. Krochmal sees world history as a series of cycles, consisting of growth, maturity and then decline. Unlike the other nations of the world, the cycles of the Jewish people, instead of dying out, are re-born out of the midst of decay; the Jewish flame is never quite extinguished. A tiny ember re-ignites and, once more, the Jewish people spirals upward, attaining great heights of creativity and holiness. Though we never achieve perfection, we never forfeit the challenge of trying to become a holy nation, treasured God's eyes. To read our history this way is to appreciate, that the past forty years of Jewish statehood is only a drop in the ocean of Jewish time.

Krochmal's cyclical view of history offers a spiritual antidote to despair. Who in 1945 would have placed a bet on our celebrating, in 1988, forty years of Jewish statehood? Nachman Krochmal wouldn't have expected nothing less. The Shoah did not extinguish the will of the Jewish people to re-enter history. Among the ashes of the Shoah, there was, as it were, a burning ember which re-ignited its flame and fanned out to the west and to the east. The western flame added lustre and substance to North American Jewry. Out of the eastern flame, Israel was re-born. The ongoing re-birth of the Jewish people, Krochmal would tell us, defies *all* principles of logic and reason. It is the triumph of faith and of will.

Krochmal informs me that we, the Jewish people, can forge new springs out of the winters of our discontent and disenchantment. Shall we continue to do so? I believe the answer can be yes, but much depends on our readiness to learn from our past. Three major lessons embedded in our past are relevant to the moment. (Should your disagree, I shall not be insulted but, rather, take our differences to be a genuine mahloket l'shem shamayim, a controversy for the sake of Heaven. In fact, I maintain that it is important, as perhaps never before, to argue among ourselves, here and in Israel, so that, in due course, a consensus of purpose and design will be achieved.)

Lesson number one: Critical as military might is political savvy (Balaam's curse to the Jewish people, was that Israel "is a people that shall dwell alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Numbers 23:9) It is one thing to advocate that a Jew is commanded to live apart religiously, but a grievous error for the Jewish state to espouse isolation from the concrete support of its most trusted ally, the United States. Two thousand years ago, the Maccabean state was a faithful ally of Rome. This loyalty secured not only independence for the Maccabean state, but made possible, the perpetuation of Judaism. When Jewish statehood ended in 70 C.E., (in part due to Jewish infighting over how to deal with Rome) the Rabbis, astute readers of the political map, realized that the preservation of Judaism could only be accomplished by political quietism. In the Middle Ages, the *shtadlan* lobbied to protect Jewish interests. This political law drawn from Jewish history, is

most relevant to Israel today. Forty years of American goodwill, the infusion of \$43 billion in military and economic assistance has ensured Israel's survival. Israel has lived up to her side of the bargain: Jewish blood has been spilled, not only in defense of her independence, but in defense of America's strategic interests. The hour does not call for a show of bravado, that somehow we can go it alone. Rather, the hour calls for respect and high regard for the American nation and its government which has, more than any other Western democracy, stood by Israel these past forty years. At the same time, while friends must never give orders to each other, friends should be entitled to influence each other's thinking through persuasion; The United States has earned this right. Lesson number one: As a minority group, down through history, our leaders have recognized the importance of the political sagacity of maneuvering within the echelons of power politics.

A second lesson is the biblical commandment: to protect the interest of the minority who lives among you. We can trace much Jewish trauma directly to the doorstep of Gentile nationalisms. Israel's Declaration of Independence safeguards the political, religious and cultural rights of its Christian and Muslim citizens. This equality principle is now at risk, particularly in Jerusalem where so much valiant effort has been expended by Jerusalem's mayor, Teddy Kolleck. Years spent in building bridges of understanding have been washed away.

My colleague, Rabbi Jack Riemer, told me the following true story. It concerned the son of our colleague, Rabbi Lee Levine, who is a professor at the Hebrew University. Rabbi Levine's son, in *miluim*, chanced upon an Arab woman rummaging through the garbage. He took pity on her and gave her his sandwich. His soldier buddy then said to him, "I don't know whether I can go to war with you. You might shoot *too late*." Rabbi Levine's son responded, "I don't know whether I can go to war with you. You might shoot *too soon*." This is the dilemma! No one argues against the case for strength, but is the price of strength hate? Who was more entitled to hate than the Israelites who suffered through four hundred years of cruel bondage? Yet, the Torah insists "You shall not abhor the Egyptian for you were a stranger in his land" (Deuteronomy 23:8). When were we strangers in Egypt? During Joseph's day, when Egyptian food enabled Jacob and his sons to survive. Surely the 430 years of slavery more than evened the score of repayment! The political *sekhel* of tradition teaches that in the real world, even adversaries must make mutual efforts to get along.

History bears eloquent testimony that when our enemies have but taken a step of reconciliation towards us, they have become the recipients of Jewish generosity. After World War II, Israel applied the commandment "do not abhor the Egyptian" to West Germany; it established diplomatic relations with West Germany, not out of love for Germany, but out of *sekhel*. Similarly did Menachem Begin fulfill the biblical command literally when he welcomed Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977. Out of that dialogue came a peace that has endured for almost a decade. And so, we wait...with a messiah-like yearning for a courageous Arab leader to come forward to continue this process.

While we wait, the natural temptation is to allow frustration and bitterness to bring on despair. But this we are forbidden to do. This is the final lesson I plead with you to take to heart. Voltaire declared that "when all hope is gone, death becomes a duty". For a Jew, this sentiment is blasphemy. We may have countless reasons to succumb to despair, but, as Jews, we affirm that forty years of Jewish statehood is but a new beginning, tied to *forty centuries* of struggle, defiance and hope, for an ever-dying and ever-renewing people.

Nachman Krochmal speaks to me as a philosopher and historian. I learn the same lesson from two

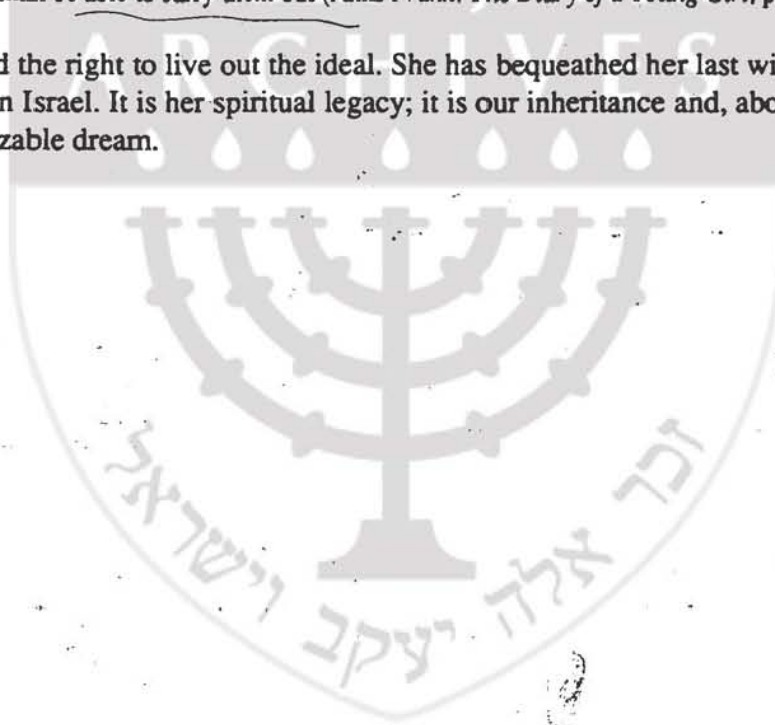
stories which come from the bleakest experience of our people. May they uplift our sagging spirits:

In a concentration camp barrack, several hundred Jews gathered to celebrate Simchat Torah, but since there was no Sefer Torah, how could they organize the traditional procession with the sacred scrolls? As they were trying to solve the problem, an elderly *yid* noticed a young child standing in the corner. 'Do you remember what you learned in *heder*?' asked the man. 'Yes, I do,' replied the boy. 'Really? You really remember *Sh'ma Yisrael*?' 'I remember much more,' said the boy. '*Sh'ma Yisrael* is enough,' said the man. And he lifted the boy, clasped him in his arms and began dancing with him — as though he were the Torah.

Amidst decay, Jews proclaimed life. They sang, they danced, they wept, but, above all, they celebrated. (Elie Wiesel, *A Jew Today*, pp. 162-163). The second story unfolded in the Amsterdam attic of Anne Frank, three weeks before her deportation to Bergen-Belsen where she died. What she wrote is surely an antidote to despair and cause for celebration:

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder, which will destroy us. I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out (Anne Frank: *The Diary of a Young Girl*, pp. 233).

Anne Frank was denied the right to live out the ideal. She has bequeathed her last will and testament to each Jew, here and in Israel. It is her spiritual legacy; it is our inheritance and, above all, we must believe that it is a realizable dream.



## "Use it or Lose it"

Rabbi Noach Valley

Anthropologists at the University of Michigan recently demonstrated that in the last 10,000 years, human teeth have been shrinking twice as fast as they did during the prior 90,000 years. Modern teeth average half the size of the teeth with which Neanderthals tore and chewed raw mammoth flesh, 75,000 to 100,000 years ago. Prior to that time, the size of our ancestors teeth had remained stable for tens of thousands of years. The scientists contend that our teeth will continue to get smaller, because large teeth will loom even less important for human survival. This process started in ancient times when tools for pounding, grinding and milling replaced many of the functions of teeth. Most important of all, was the introduction the art of cooking. Before the advent of cooking, you survived if you had very large teeth that were not worn down by chewing raw and gritty food. After the advent of cooking, people with smaller teeth were not selected out of the population, and were able to pass on this genetic trait to their descendants. The anthropologists tell us that human teeth may ultimately disappear, if there is no longer a survival advantage in having teeth. This scientific discovery has a powerful message: What we no longer use becomes lost or greatly diminished. In other words, "Use it or lose it."

Unless we exercise our muscles and bones, our body parts may very well weaken or atrophy. In the weight-free outer space environment, astronauts' bones sometimes atrophy, since they are not being used as intended. Insufficient exercise accounts for under-use of a person's respiratory and vascular systems. In effect, exercise gives the body a circulatory reserve, which could be lifesaving and heart-protecting, on occasions when ordinary oxygen supplies would be depleted.

We need to learn that we should never take our bodies for granted. We should also not take our family for granted. When your spouse says to you, "Do you love me?" you should never respond by saying, "Well, I married you, didn't I?" Courtship and romance should take place after, as well as before, marriage. A husband and wife need to work at their marriage continuously, anticipating each other's needs, without taking each other for granted or waiting to be told what these needs are. It should be filled with words of praise and appreciation. A nonfunctional marriage could be compared to seldom used teeth or to weak, atrophied muscles, bones and hearts. Without proper "use", a marriage may dissolve, and we face the danger of losing the one we love.

We must exercise our minds, to constantly relearn and reinforce our intellectual talents and experiential skills. At any age, the human mind, can either atrophy or act as a veritable sponge, absorbing useful information and practical knowledge. It is never too late to go on for an advanced college degree, or to learn that special skill that you always wanted to acquire. More mature students often succeed to a far greater degree than do younger students, because they have had many more years in which to exercise and strengthen their minds. People who retire should have hobbies, interests and creative activities. After receiving the proverbial gold watch at the retirement party, a person can either retire from something, or retire to something. Without the continuation of meaningful activity, a person may become decrepit and feeble, and his mind and body may wither and waste away.

Our minds, just like our bodies, need constant use and should never suffer from neglect or abandonment. A good example of this is the foreign language we learned in high school. If we haven't used



that language since then, it becomes, for all practical purposes, a lost language. Who studied French or Spanish or Hebrew in high school? How many of us could put a two-week vacation in Paris, Madrid or Jerusalem to good use, by conversing with the local people in their native tongue?

It is important for us never to surrender our minds because, in so doing, we surrender our freedom. An example is the great success that the mind-controlling cults are having with Jews of all ages. We Jews are less than 2% of the American population, yet we comprise anywhere from 15-30% of America's cult membership. So many Jews, especially our young people, are idealistic and possess beautiful souls. If they don't use their minds, but let others do their thinking and decision-making for them, they may eventually surrender their minds to a guru, to Big Brother, or to a political despot or dictator. (Similarly, it takes a long time for the new arrivals from behind the Iron Curtain to get used to the freedom of mind, body and soul that we enjoy here in America, and to learn to function and make decisions on their own.)

In the popular movie, "Big", Joshua Baskin is a 13-year-old boy who wakes up in the body of a 30-year-old man, while maintaining his 13-year-old mentality. "Big" has a moral to teach us: Many American Jews reach 30 with 13-year-old Jewish minds, most often because they became junior high school dropouts from Jewish education and practice just as soon as they became Bar Mitzvah.

Without continuous practice, a Jew runs the great risk and danger of becoming rusty at being Jewish, and is unable to tune in to a fulfilling Jewish religious experience. Abraham Joshua Heschel used to tell a parable about a small remote town which had no watchmaker. In the course of time, all of the clocks in the town became inaccurate. Many of their owners gave up in disgust, ignoring their clocks or discarding them. Other people, however, kept winding their clocks each day, even though they realized that there was no sense in depending on them. One day, a watchmaker came to town. Everyone rushed to him, but the only clocks he was able to repair were those that had been kept running. The others had become rusty beyond repair. For many Jews, the mechanics of being Jewish are like the clocks in that town.

The question is asked, "Why did all ancient civilization except one disappear from the face of the earth?" One answer is that they outlived their usefulness. One ancient religious civilization has survived to this day: Judaism! Judaism has survived because we Jews continued to exist as Jews, because there is a need for us. In the *Kuzari*, Judah Ha-Levi identifies us Jews as the "heart" of the world. The world cannot survive for too long without its "heart", without its Jews. The world can survive only as long as we Jews continue to play our role as a moral guide, and ethical conscience, a compassionate voice, and an indispensable contributor to the spiritual, medical, scientific, literary and artistic health and well-being of humanity. Only if we Jews continue to exist, will there remain the attainable prophetic Jewish messianic vision of humanity united in peace and harmony.

If we really and truly love ourselves, let us develop our total being, both mental, physical and spiritual. Let us keep our Jewishness and Judaism in good working order, and pray that there is a glorious future ahead of us.

## "I Came to Say I'm Sorry"

Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal

It was July 3, 1988 in the Persian Gulf. The United States guided missile cruiser Vincennes was embroiled in combat with Iranian warships. Suddenly the crew spotted on the highly sophisticated Aegis radar system a plane taking off from an Iranian airfield. The ship sent a number of warnings to the plane, but no response was received. The radar team believed the plane was descending menacingly; all indications were it was about to attack the Vincennes. The team alerted the captain again. Recalling how the U.S. Stark has been attacked by Iraqi missiles and thirty-seven men were killed by a sluggish and sloppy crew that failed to respond to a clear challenge, the captain ordered the firing of two missiles which downed the plane. But tragically, it turned out to be a civilian Airbus, and 290 innocent civilians—men, women and children—lost their lives.

The American Board of Inquiry concluded its study by assuring us that the Aegis radar system worked perfectly. The crew erred in interpreting the data. Why? Because they lacked combat experience and, more importantly, the stress of their initial combat distorted their judgement. Many called for our country to apologize to Iran and the indemnification of the families of the victims. President Reagan expressed regrets over the loss of life, but offered no apology. Vice President Bush blamed the Iranians for flying a civilian plane near a war zone. Congress has thus far balked at payments to the Iranians primarily because of our disgust with Khomeini's Iran, especially after the American hostage ordeal. So no apology, no payments, no restitution, no sense of remorse that through our error in assessing facts, 290 civilians were destroyed.

It is, I concede, hard to say, "I'm sorry." It is, perhaps, even harder to forgive someone's error, insult, sin, lethal mistake. Yet, that is what Yom Kippur is all about. We are here today to say openly and frankly, חטאתי—I have hurt someone. I have offended God or fellow human. I have lied or cheated or gossiped or deceived someone. And I've come here, today, to say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

That takes both guts and חוצפה. All year long we sin and err and act in an antisocial fashion, and on Yom Kippur we present a long list in על חטא. After enumerating our innumerable flaws, we have the impudence to pray: ועל כולם אלוקי סליחות, סלח לנו מחל לנו כפר לנו. "For all of these sins, O God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement." Now that takes חוצפה.

Jewish tradition, however, endorses the idea of saying "I'm sorry." God is viewed as מחל וסולח a pardoning and forgiving Deity. In the words of Ezekiel (33:11), "He does not seek the death of evil-doers; rather, He desires that they repent and change their ways." He wants *teshuvah*. You recall that Adam was given but one mitzvah by God, not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, but he and Eve broke their pledge and ate and were severely punished. But, say our Sages, Adam wept and repented and begged forgiveness, and God forgave him. Cain killed his brother Abel. Is there any crime more heinous than that? Surely not. When confronted by God with his crime, he responded impudently, "Am I my brother's keeper?" He was punished with a terrible penalty, but God forgave him after he repented and expressed remorse. The Book of Jonah, which we read on Yom Kippur

afternoon, describes the wicked and sinful city of Nineveh which was doomed to destruction. But the people of Nineveh responded to Jonah's warnings; they were contrite and humbled, they repented, they said, "I'm sorry"—and they were forgiven. God *wants* us to say, "I'm sorry" because He *wants* to forgive.

The classic heroes of biblical tradition plead for pardons even when the guilty parties do not themselves apologize. You remember the great scene in Genesis 18 when Abraham tries to bargain for the lives of the depraved Sodomites. Joseph forgave his brothers after they expressed contrition for having sold him into slavery. Moses begged God to forgive Israel for the atrocious Golden Calf sin, and he humbly forgave Aaron and Miriam for slandering him. The Sages of the Midrash use particularly suggestive language in describing Moses' technique for apologizing to God for the people's sins: "Moses, so to speak, grabbed hold of God like a person who grabs his friend's cloak and says, 'I refuse to let go until you pardon them.'" (Gen. R. 3:29).

It is, I concede, not always easy to say, "I'm sorry." Hubris, גאווה, pride often get in the way. There are people, who, even when they know they are wrong, just can't seem to get those three words out of their mouths: "I am sorry," or the two words, "Forgive me." I know. It took me a while to learn, but I did learn that sometimes it's better to apologize even when you did no wrong, if it will bring about harmony, an end to feuding, true *sh' lom bayit*. It's hard for nations to say, "I'm sorry," because national "honor" is at stake, and we must "save face." Consequently, America never apologizes to Iran, and Iran never asks forgiveness of us; Iraq and Iran continue to slaughter each other, Russia and America remain adversaries; Arabs and Israelis perpetuate the ancient blood feuds. It has taken America over 45 years to make amends to over 110,000 Japanese-Americans who were unjustly placed in concentration camps when not a single case of espionage was ever proved against them. We have only now righted that terrible wrong and paid reparations to the families who suffered so unjustly. So we must learn individually and collectively to say when we are wrong, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

If it's so hard to apologize. It's even harder, I suspect, to forgive. We say, "To err is human, to forgive divine." and I suppose there's more than a grain of truth to that. Certainly it is hard to forgive past insults, hurts, cruelty. The story is told of two feuding congregants who had a long-standing hatred for each other over an ancient wrong. The rabbi, after great difficulty, finally succeeded in bringing them together for reconciliation. One man extended his hand and said to his opponent, "For the new year, I wish you everything you wish me." The second responded heatedly, "Aha, there you go again!"

How do you forgive someone who has wronged you, maligned you, cheated you? How can America forgive Iran after the hostage outrage? How can there be forgiveness between Arabs and Israelis after all the bloodshed that goes back a century? How can there be reconciliation between Jews and Christians after nineteen brutal centuries culminating in the Holocaust?

Of course, forgiveness is not automatic. It requires a formula, a process. First, there must be genuine *teshuvah*, repentance, marked by fasting, praying and genuine change of life-style and behavior patterns. There is no pardon for the hypocrite who shams remorse. The rabbis rule that a person who sins twice or even three times and repents can be forgiven, but no more than three times (*Yoma* 86b). Likewise, the person who repents only to sin again is not deserving of forgiveness (*Yoma* 8:9 and

ARN 39). Second, there must be genuine, regret, remorse; the apology must be verbalized and sincerely so. Third, there has to be resolve by the offender to turn over a new leaf and to adopt a new pattern of behavior. There must be, repentance, accompanied by, good and proper behavior. Merely mouthing the pious platitudes is worthless unless accompanied by concrete action.

There is no alternative for, if we perpetuate an "eye for an eye" mentality, we will all end up blind. Grudges lead to tragic consequences as we know from history and literature. You know the terrible results of the Montague-Capulet feud, the Hatfield and McCoy controversy, the Italian vendetta and the like. World War I was sparked by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand by a crazed student, and, since no one was prepared to swallow pride and apologize, we sacrificed untold millions of lives. Bloody feuds wreck the chances of Arab-Israeli peace—feuds that go back so far that the true details have long faded into forgetfulness. I have seen families sundered, neighbor pitted against neighbor, brother unwilling to speak to brother, father and son, mother and daughter estranged to the point of hostility and even hate.

Many years ago, when I served as a rabbi in New Jersey, I used to drive to the Jersey shore to swim. I would pass two fish stores about half a block from each other and noticed that the proprietors had the same last name. Upon inquiring, I discovered that they were, indeed, brothers and had been partners in an old family business, working together for many years. They had a serious falling out, split up, and, instead of making peace, went into competition a half-block from each other, trying to kill each other off in business!

Yet, we surely know and acknowledge that this is not the proper way. We must learn to apologize when wrong. We must be prepared to forgive when wronged. If we expect God to forgive us, as we do on Yom Kippur, we may do no less if someone asks us to pardon him. The law requires a wrong-doer to ask forgiveness three times. If his victim spurns him three times, then the wrong-doer has done his duty and need not apologize further. In fact, the stubborn victim is categorized by the rabbis as an אכזרי, a cruel, hard-hearted person. (B.K. 92a, Yoma 87a and Numbers R. 19:12) The truly "big" person knows how and when to apologize and forgive. It is told of the saintly and renowned scholar, Rabbi Israel Isserlein, who lived in Vienna in the fifteenth century, that every Kol Nidre he would have his *shamash* mount the *bimah* and announce to the congregation, "Rabbi Israel forgives all who have hurt him this past year, and he begs forgiveness of anyone he may have offended."

There is an old Arab tale told of two fast friends who were traveling in the gloomy and dangerous mountains of Persia. One day, one of the friends lost his footing and fell into a swirling and turbulent stream. His friend quickly leaped into the waters and saved him from certain death. The friend who almost drowned ordered his most skilled slaves to carve these words on a nearby boulder: "Wanderer! In this place Nagib heroically saved the life of his friend Mussa." The two friends continued their journey, and, after many months, they came to the very spot where the one had saved the other's life. They sat for a while reminiscing when, suddenly, for a trifling matter, they quarreled violently. In a fit of anger, the one who almost drowned was struck in the face by the friend who had saved his life. The one who was struck got up, picked up a stick and wrote in the white sand near the boulder "Wanderer! In this place, in a trivial argument, Nagib broke the heart of his friend Mussa."

When one of Mussa's men inquired why he would record his heroism in stone but his cruelty only in the sand, he replied, "I shall cherish the memory of Nagib's brave assistance forever. But the grave injury he just gave me I hope will fade from my memory even before the words fade from the sand."

Today we've come to bare our souls and let it all hang out. Today there is no deception, no concealing, only a frank admission: על חטא שחטאנו לפניך "I've come to say I'm sorry." We ask Divine forgiveness. We must also learn to apologize and to forgive those who beg our pardon. This applies to husband and wife, parent and child, brother and brother, neighbor and neighbor, religion and religion, nation and nation. Let this mood spread in ever-widening circles. Then God will answer our prayers and proclaim: סלחתי כדבריך "I have forgiven. I have forgiven."



# From Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur: A Mini-Lifecycle

Rabbi Elie Spitz

Ten days ago we gathered in this room and amid prayers of introspection, there was celebration. We focused on the marvel of creation and we shared the joyful stories of the long-awaited births of Isaac and Samuel. We greeted each other with warm wishes of *Shanah tovah!* Today the mood has shifted. We gather on this tenth of Tishri with a distinct seriousness. We spend all day intense prayer and self-examination including the repeated recitation of a long list of sins accompanied by beating on our chests.

Why is there the need for such acute self-examination so soon after the start of the New Year? Perhaps because these ten days from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur are structured as a mini life-cycle. If Rosh HaShanah is birth, then Yom Kippur conjures up our mortality. We fast, we don't wash or engage in sex, and we traditionally wear a kittel, the same garment in which burial takes place. Our words and symbolic acts put us beyond this world. On Rosh Hashanah we chant *hayom harat olam*; Today our refrain is *be-Yom Kippur yehatemun*—"On Yom Kippur our fate is sealed."

Why this need to confront the end of life before our time? Perhaps to force us to confront the reality that death is part of life and hence that we are finite. Surely our sages knew that the finite is what is valued. In the open-ended flow of time we nestle into habits, and fail to step back and assess priorities. At the end of life, or in crisis, as we confront our limits, our priorities are often quite clear.

Last year I worked as a hospital chaplain. My experience presented me each day with the concrete challenge of illness. It was my responsibility as rabbi to comfort, care and pray for those in pain and fear. What I heard, saw and learned is a great deal and really not very much. I would like to share some of my experiences, which perhaps match some of your own.

First (life is unpredictable). As we say in our prayers, "who will live and who will die." We do not know; it is in God's hands. For some, illness comes suddenly. There was the 36 year-old psychotherapist, a model of good health. One day, leaving a restaurant, he collapsed on the street. The hemorrhage he suffered left him unable to walk. Among my patients were many who suffered from AIDS. Through them, I could identify with the words of the fourteenth century Jewish poet, Yedaya Penini:

And remember that the companionship of time is but of short duration. It flies more quickly than the shades of evening. We are like a child that grasps in his hand a sunbeam. He opens his hand soon again, but to his amazement finds it empty and the brightness gone.

At the other end of the spectrum were the elderly who awaited death but their bodies wouldn't quit. I visited each day a 90+ year-old named Luba. She didn't remember my name from one day to the next. Upon request, she would serenade me with old Yiddish and Polish songs in a surprisingly resonant and melodious voice. At other times, she would point to her chest and with moist eyes say, "I want to die, but my heart is too strong."

For my patients and for us, the length of our days is unpredictable.

hurricanes  
air crashes

Second, I saw the value of loved ones. Money can buy a private nurse, but not the will to live. That comes from purpose, which is primarily garnered from loved ones. My patients displayed pride as they shared with me pictures of children and grandchildren. They were markedly calmer, happier and more hopeful when they introduced me to husbands, wives, children and friends.

Third, I gained a renewed sense of my value as a rabbi. Aside from my own personal concern, I was a symbol of the Jewish community. My patients gained a perspective that their lives transcended their limited years that they belonged to a people that was, is and will be. It was also my responsibility to pray for others. At first it was awkward for me to initiate prayer. After all there are no intermediaries in our religion. Yet in our nonreligious world, we often lack the tools of prayer. I learned that most of my patients wished to reach beyond themselves to a Presence which transcended their pain, their life, and creation itself. After a few weeks, I began to offer to recite the *Mi Sheberakh* which requires a special spiritual directedness. That challenge and the patients' responses were surprisingly touching. They would share with me associations of a parent or other loved one, or their feelings of connectedness which my prayer had elicited.

Last, I saw the way people confronted their crises correlated with how they had lived their lives. Those who had loved life and gave of themselves were more accepting of their fate than those who led predominantly self-involved lives. Those who had felt empowered in life to direct their fates were generally the ones most willing to accept their fate. For these patients there was dignity in the face of the unknown.

All and all, I learned as a chaplain that those who confront the finitude of their life appreciate family and friends, the importance of community, and the connection to a life well-lived, including a connectedness with God.

For most of my patients their fears turned to hopes of recovery. For many the experience in the hospital changed them. It added a new vigor to their lives and a commitment to readjust their priorities.

On Yom Kippur we acknowledge our own limits and power. In the words of the Rabbis הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים. While our span of years and our health unpredictable, we nonetheless have much control over the kinds of lives we lead. On Yom Kippur we immerse ourselves in an appreciation of our limits. The goal is *teshuvah*, the process of return that gives our precious years meaning and dignity. Our challenge today is to reassess our priorities and to commit ourselves to act accordingly.

Yes, today we fast, but an expectant mother also goes without food while in labor. Yes, today we wear a kittel, but so does a groom as he pledges himself to his betrothed.

May we use these hours well. As we confront and accept our finitude, may we find in that acceptance a source of rebirth. May we feel empowered to share our lives and when needed, accept our fate. Despite unpredictability, may we trust in each other and in God. May the shofar blast at the end of the day, the *Tekiah Gedolah*, point us forward and mark our commitment to lead our lives with dignity and joy, lives which draw us close to each other and to God.

In Thomas Butler's work *Memory: History, Culture and Mind*, the historian Milan Hubl is quoted; "The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history...Before long the nation will forget what it is, and what it was."

Judaism is a religion of remembering. Our New Year is called Yom Hazikaron, a "Day of Remembrance." On each festival we find Yizkor in our liturgy. Yizkor is a moment set aside to remember our departed. Throughout the year, our rabbinic commentators allude to the formative power of memory. Myriads of expressions of remembering are found in the Torah. We can not validate our prayers unless there is cognition and mention of our past. We "remember" to find expression in the present of what we are and from where we come.

Robert MacAfee Brown tells us that memory is threefold. Memory makes us again part of our community. We "RE-MEMBER". We again become a member of a community by common longings, common sharings and common pursuits.

Memory, Brown tells us, is selective. We say "if my memory serves me right", but our memories never serve us right. We select those memories which are somehow significant to us. The process of selection means that identity is not a given, but an act of creation. Our memories construct the person we now are.

The neurologist Oliver Sacks speaks of this in his *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. He tells us "we repossess our life stories. We recollect ourselves." And thus memories form the self and make us what we are this moment.

The third quality of memory is to challenge. We remember the glory of a people and we are charged to emulate and become the heroic bearer of the message, Greatness comes to people and to nations from the response to the challenges of individual or collective memory.

Judaism is a religion of memory.

We gather at Yizkor and find ourselves part of a community. We become connected to our people from our past. We "re-member" our ancestors, our prophets and sages, and find ourselves walking in the paths of our people. We reflect on the loved ones with whom we shared love and devotion and find ourselves enriched by a past of joy and happiness. Death is not the victor, nor is it what the Greek philosopher spoke as "the last horrible act." Memory supports us and binds us. We are a community together with our sadness, our longings and yes, even here now, our triumph. "We remember." In the silent presence of a community, even death loses its sting.

Memory is selective. As we pause in Yizkor we find ourselves thinking of the virtues and the character of those with whom we shared from in the land of the living. We become faithful to memory by reflection on the qualities and virtues which make us, during these moments, ever conscious of our



loss and ever mindful of the blessings felt.

As a nation we absorb from the “belongingness” of our community, and find the uplift from being part of a noble nation. A people who never despair. A people who can overcome the vicissitudes of life because we are able to sanctify a moment and celebrate an occasion.

Moments of structured memory invite us to be challenged by the magnitude of our faith.

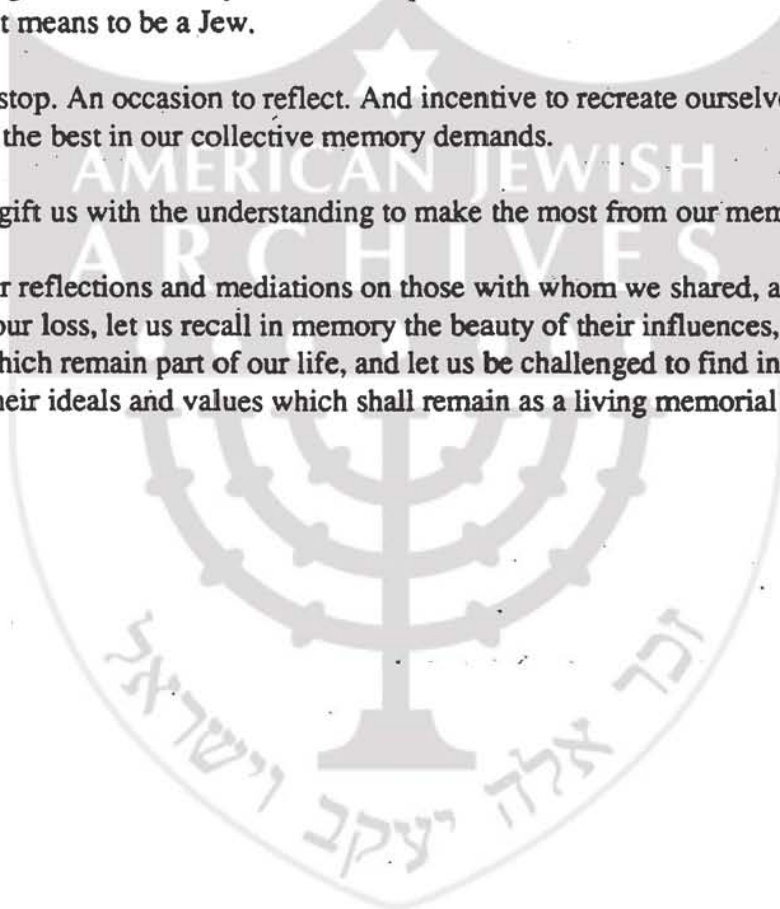
Yizkor is such a moment.

It awakes us to the challenges of memory. We find inspiration from our ancestors to again find Judaism part of our experience. It is an occasion to be mindful of our loved ones and the contributions of means and energies in which they sacrificed to preserve the mitzvot and the commandments and the ideals of what it means to be a Jew.

Yizkor is a moment to stop. An occasion to reflect. And incentive to recreate ourselves in the most positive image of what the best in our collective memory demands.

We pray that God will gift us with the understanding to make the most from our memories.

As we pause now in our reflections and mediations on those with whom we shared, and from whom we find the void from our loss, let us recall in memory the beauty of their influences, the legacy from their memories which remain part of our life, and let us be challenged to find in our life a vibrant expression of their ideals and values which shall remain as a living memorial in tribute to their memory.



# What Yizkor Teaches About Living

Rabbi Jonathan H. Ginsberg and Rabbi Julie K. Gordon

There was a movie released recently called "That's Life" with Jack Lemmon and Julie Andrews. Harvey, an architect, is going to pieces on the eve of his 60th birthday. As his children gather at his home to celebrate the occasion, he edges toward the brink of despair. He whines about his car. He ridicules his clients. He has had to accept the fact that he isn't Frank Lloyd Wright. He tells his remarkable patient wife of many years that he's never accomplished what he wanted to do and that time is running out. He's also convinced that he is the host to any number of terminal diseases. The people around him, including the medical doctor who has given him a clean bill of health, encourage him to seek psychiatric help which only infuriates him more. What Harvey doesn't realize —and the audience knows from the film's opening sequence is that Gillian, his wife, who has her own career as a singer, is confronting the possibility that a small tumor in her throat is malignant. Having had a biopsy done on the Friday afternoon of the birthday weekend, Gillian won't receive the results until Monday. Thus, as Harvey behaves with increasing nastiness towards all those near and dear, it's Gillian who suffers most profoundly. Harvey's concerns are real, but Gillian's suffering is so much more profound. Why?

She suffers, first, because the fear of illness. Second, she suffers because she feels the illness might lead to her death. We share many of Gillian's fears. Some of us feel our bodies turn against us. During my first year of rabbinical school when I was 22, a teacher of mine said: "No one gets to the age of 40 without suffering a horrible tragedy." We smiled politely thinking it couldn't be. But by the time we had graduated five years later, a classmate, several of our parents, and many other relatives and friends had all died.

There is no time when we feel the loss more than the High Holidays —when those who once sat beside us on this day are gone, the victims of relentless years. We go about with the sense something is missing, that something is not quite right.

On this, the holiest day of the year, we must confront the challenges posed by illness and death. We must do it because it will help us address the most basic questions in our lives. How can life have meaning? How can life be more than an absurdity in the face of the enormous pain and grief, fear and despair, brought on by illness and death?

This pain of illness and the pain of death are the greatest pains we know. Rabbi Soloveitchik describes the pain he felt after the death of his wife this way.

Over the course of many years, a man becomes accustomed to returning home from his outside affairs. He climbs the few steps before the front door of his house in the same way he has done for years. He rings the bell out of habit and expects to hear, as always, the soft steps from the other side of the door. He waits, but the steps never come. He puts his hand into his pocket, pulls out the key and opens the door. It seems to be the same door and the same furniture. Everything is clean and polished as usual. Nevertheless, something has changed. Everything appears to be in exactly the same state and in the same place in which it was before he left his house. Nothing has been moved, only no one is there waiting for him. All around there is peace and quiet which can sometimes be worse than heartrendering cries. Mourning engulfs his whole being.

There is a beautiful new book entitled *Why Me, Why Anyone?* by Rabbi Hershel Jaffe and James and

Marcia Rudin, who are best friends. Rabbi Jaffe, a devotee of long distance running and considered the health nut among the Reform rabbis who are his colleagues, was diagnosed as having leukemia at the age of 46. In an early stage of the illness as he begins to confront his fear of dying, he writes:

How long will I live? That day with Judy in the hematologist's office, when I asked him how long people live with this disease, he said, "Well, six months, two years, ten years. I guess they really don't know." Jim really pushed me this afternoon and started me thinking: He asked me if I felt God is punishing me and if I'm angry with God. Now that I'm alone and the night is so long and I'm just lying here waiting for tomorrow, I am beginning to wonder why this is happening to me. Why is this happening to me? Do I deserve this? Have I done something wrong or been a bad person? Am I being punished? Why should someone like me who is trying to do God's work, a rabbi, trying to preserve Judaism and help people lead better Jewish lives, be afflicted? Is this the reward I get? This illness will interfere with my goals. Doesn't God want me to succeed? Then why did God put such a difficult stumbling block in my way? It doesn't make sense.

Where do we find hope, strength, meaning when we feel so alone? How do we deal with our feelings that God has deserted us and we are terribly alone? What can we say to all of us who face the starkness of this terrible loneliness? Some would say: detach yourself, transcend the pain. Rabbi Harold Kushner, in his new book, *When Everything You Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*, a search for a life of meaning, mentioned a discussion he had with a Hindu theologian at a conference on suffering.

The Hindu representative explained to me over dinner one night that his religion taught him to deal with pain and suffering, not by denying it or ignoring, but by rising above it. His religion taught him to say to the most painful experiences imaginable: "I will not let you hurt me. I will experience the worst that can happen and triumph over it. I will learn the art of detachment and transcend the pain." He said, "How lucky you are to have lost a child when you were so young so that you could learn to conquer grief and pain." Most people don't have an opportunity like that until they are much older, he went on. When a person dies, it is not a tragedy. His soul returns to the great stream of life, like a drop of water returning to the ocean, its source. Dying is not painful.

Some others react in the opposite way by giving in to the despair. Some believe that for every pain there should be a pill to make the hurting stop. When it does not work out that way, our inability to handle any strong emotion, especially pain, leaves us feeling confused and helpless, and we do not like feeling helpless. When something happens to hurt us and we cannot make the pain go away — illness and rejection, some do not know how to deal with it. Some try to deny it, to pretend that it did not really happen, or to pretend that it does not really bother us. But we are unable to fool ourselves, when the pain still hurts, we are at a loss. Never having learned to live with pain, some people see no other way except to give up on living.

What is the response from our tradition to this question? Surely not by detaching, and not by giving up on life. We Jews have a berakhah, a blessing, for everything, even death. When we hear someone has died, we say, "Barukh atah... dayan ha-emet, Blessed art Thou, righteous Judge. What prayer do we recite as our basic mourner's prayer? The Kaddish. What does it say? Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba. In death and suffering we are taught to confront God head-on. We don't hide from God for the pain. Our funeral service is held with the dead body in the room. We watch it being lowered into the ground. We shovel earth on top of it. We sit and mourn for a week surrounded by the memories. We recite Kaddish, Yizkor and we visit the grave: all these rituals force us to confront our pain and despair, not ignore it. We do not share the Hindu's belief that we ought not feel the pain. Rabbi Kushner writes:

I look at him incredulously. Here was a man I liked personally and respected for his religious sincerity. But what he was saying was so totally the opposite of what I felt and believed. What his religion taught him about

life and death was so different from what mine taught me. I did not feel lucky to have lost a son whom I loved. Neither had I achieved tranquility or transcended the pain. The sense of loss still hurts years later, though I had learned to live with it. More than that I believed that it was supposed to hurt. Living, sensitive souls are easily hurt. I don't like being hurt. I don't enjoy experiencing pain, but I believe that I have become less of human being if I learned the art of detachment so well that I can experience the death of a friend or relative and not be emotionally affected by it. When I protect myself against the danger of loss by teaching myself not to care, not let anyone get too close, I lose part of myself. And when I protect myself from disappointment by not wanting to be happy, by telling myself that happiness is a mirage and an illusion, I diminish my soul. To be alive is to feel pain, and to hide from pain is to make yourself less alive.

We must not believe that life has no meaning, nor do we flee from pain. So how do we resolve the problem of the paralysis and seeming meaninglessness when we are in pain, from illness or the death of a loved one? What is the Jewish answer? The answer is really in two parts. The first I find almost paradoxical, but the most important truth in the world. We blame God for our pain, we feel deserted, we feel that we are being unjustly treated, and yet at the same time, it is precisely faith that lends meaning. It is God that helps us cope with our despair. Think about the emotional state of the biblical psalmist who wrote: "אֲשָׁא עֵינַי אֶל-הַהָרִים מֵאֵין יְבֵא עֹזֶרִי—I lift up my eyes to the mountains and ask from where comes my help?" Desperate, alone, despairing. His answer: "Our help comes from Adonai." How?

When a Jew is sick, we turn to the doctor and we turn to God. Why God? Rabbi Jaffe wrote about his illness:

The great Talmudic Sage, Rabbi Yohanan became ill and a colleague visited him. When the friend was about to leave, Rabbi Yohanan said, "Give me your hand. The visitor held his hand. The Talmud says that Yohanan was at that moment cured because, like the prisoner who cannot free himself from prison, so, too, the patient cannot free himself from illness without outside help. Like Rabbi Yohanan, I had asked a colleague to hold my hand and to pray for my recovery, to help me break free from the spiritual prison of my illness and the physical prison of my hospital room. Maybe this is where God comes into all this. He is present in the love and concern of people for each other. He tries to help us learn to cope with our destiny and to accept it. God is in the power of love, the power of prayer, the power of human faith, the power of blessing.

When we are ill, God gives us the strength to battle our illness. But how does God help us in the face of the eternal void? Rabbi Maurice Lamm writes in the book, *The Jewish Way of Death and Mourning*,

The worst evil of all we created in the image of God is death. It is the end to all our hope and striving. But believing in a God prevails over the evils of lifetime. So do we believe God will prevail over the final evil, that of death? But how? How could the psalmist write, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I fear no harm for you are with me. Your staff and your rod do comfort me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall abide in the House of the Lord forever."

How could he write that? It is because he could find comfort from God. It is because the psalmist understood that what death means to us, depends on what life means to us. If we believe life is an inconsequential drama, a purposeless amusement, then death is only the final curtain that falls on the final act. When we live our lives in such a way that we show that life is the creation of a benevolent God, infusion of the divine breath, than death is a return to the creator. We can find meaning in the face of despair through our faith in God.

There is one final answer to the search for meaning when faced with illness and death. It is true that our end will be the same as all creatures. The difference is not whether or not we die, but how we

live. We can face death, our own and the loss of our loved ones, more easily when we feel that we have truly lived. We can affirm at the end of our days and at the end of the life of our loved ones that life has been meaningful.

Dear friends, on this holiest day of our year, as we prepare to say the Yizkor Service, I pray that all of us be entered into the Book of Life, for a healthy and happy new year.



# The Hidden Face of God

Rabbi Noach Valley

The most commonly asked questions that I receive as a rabbi pertain to the problem of suffering. People ask: "Rabbi, if there is a loving God, why did He permit six million of us Jews to be murdered in the Holocaust? Why is there so much sickness and suffering in the world? Why do millions die of starvation each year?" This morning, I will attempt to offer some answers to these questions.

In one respect, the Holocaust is beyond explanation. To give it spiritual justification or metaphysical meaning degrades the memory of the six million of us Jews, martyrs all, whose lives, sweet and beautiful and intensely Jewish, were snuffed out, *not* as punishment from God, but as the worst act of evil perpetrated by so-called human beings.

Last Shabbat, we read in the Torah, *...ve-histarti fanai mayhem...bayom ha-hu...* "...And I will surely hide my face from them...on that day..." The Talmud Yerushalmi [*Sanhedrin* 10:2] states that there was no more difficult hour in the world than that hour in which God made that statement to Moses. *Hester panim*, the act of God turning His face away from us, hiding from us in our anguish, is just a temporary state, however devastating it can be, and is never total abandonment. Let us not ask where was God during the Holocaust. Let us ask, instead, where were the nations and religions of the world, and where was our Jewish leadership?

We ask for God's help in our tribulations. We ask that He show us that He is, indeed, a God of love. There is the story of the man who religiously looks in the newspaper for the winning numbers in the state lottery and is always disappointed that he does not win. Every week, he prays to God, "I am a religious father. You are a loving God, what have you got to lose, please let me win the state lottery." Finally a voice from heaven calls out, "Give *Me* a break, first buy a ticket."

We need to do our parts in order to bring God's love into our lives. After the Holocaust, we said "Never again!" —and we took to heart the important Talmudic statement, "*kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh*, All Jews are responsible for one another." On this Yom Kippur day, we pray that God will send His love and forgiveness to us. But, isn't it logical, that for our prayers to be answered, we need to answer the prayers of Jews in distress all over the world?

Recently, we rallied under the banner of Operation Moses and 8,000 Jews from Beta Yisrael, the House of Ethiopian Israel, were rescued. Now, we must rescue the 10,000 to 15,000 Jewish souls still languishing in Ethiopia. A leader of the Association of Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel pleads for our help: "The most important issue today is *aliyah*, advancing the reunification of families who remain in Ethiopia and all I hear is silence from the Jewish world. No one speaks out on our behalf...I am depressed every day when I think about my brothers, sisters and grandmother...I pray that a repeat of the Holocaust will not take place. But, the only way it can be prevented is if we all take responsibility for the Jews who remain in Ethiopia. We must speak out!..."

Because of our efforts, the plight of Soviet Jewry was made known to the world. We wrote our elected officials and took part in protest rallies and marches; witness the successful rally in which a quarter of a million people converged on the nation's capital, to let it be known that the rights of

freedom and emigration, must be granted to every one of us who is oppressed in Russia. Recently uncovered documents have shown that Josef Stalin was actively planning the expulsion to Siberia and ultimate *genocide* of every Soviet Jew. The only thing that stopped his nefarious plans was his death in 1953! I like to think, that just as God stepped in 44 years ago to prevent the Holocaust from becoming *total genocide*, he also interceded 8 years later, *on Purim* in the year 5713, to stop the Holocaust of Soviet Jewry, *before* it got started.

Let us not forget the 4000-5000 Jews still trapped in Syria, a country whose ruler, Assad slaughtered close to 20,000 of his own people in the city of Hama a few years ago. The Syrian Jewish community is under virtual "house arrest," is not permitted to emigrate to Israel, and is held in terror of rape, torture, mutilation and murder. Unless we do our part, and fight for the immediate release of our brothers and sisters in Syria, the mad modern Antiochus, Assad, may, at his whim, destroy every Jew in his country.

The re-establishment of *medinat Yisrael*, the country of Israel, in 1948, was surely a vivid demonstration of God's love. Despite the fact that Israel is strong, we must not take lightly official Arab declarations about destroying Israel and committing genocide against all Jews. Are you aware that the popular Arabic expression *itbakh al yahud*, which is often on the lips of Arab schoolchildren, and is a call for another holocaust of us Jews? I am 100 percent for Israel to finally enjoy peace and for an end to the horrible bloodshed. I would be in favor of Israel giving up land if that would bring us lasting peace. But I know better and so does Israel. Giving up land, *carte blanche*, would place most of Israel's population within easy striking range of chemical weapons, mortars, rockets, shoulder-launched missiles, and other devastating weapons of total destruction. A generation ago, the Holocaust was aided and abetted by a silent world. In this generation, United Nations lynch mobs, Western lust for petro-dollars, Third world malevolent anti-Zionism, and the media's constant bashing of Israel, are laying the groundwork, for, God forbid, yet another Holocaust!

When I am asked why there is so much sickness and suffering in the world, I am often at a loss for an immediate response. Sometimes there is not answer. Certain things are simply not in our control and, as a result, we feel that God's love is nowhere to be found.

God gave us an inheritance of clean air and sky, water and earth, to help insure our being in good health. We human beings, in turn, are polluting our inheritance and leaving our descendants a legacy of devastating illnesses, genetic mutations, and a world that may soon become uninhabitable. Human beings, not God, are responsible for nuclear contamination, damage to the ozone shield and toxic waste dumps.

How can we enjoy good health when American industry forces us to become human guinea pigs with noxious chemicals in our food, and with lethal hormones, drugs and antibiotics in our beef cattle and poultry; all this helping to destroy our immunological systems and disease-defenses?

How can we be well when government agencies that are supposed to protect us, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, are not fulfilling their mandate or public trust, with laws unenforced and gross violations covered up?

How can we be free of sickness when we don't practice moderation as recommended by

Maimonides, but, instead, constantly *khap a nosh*, with unlimited smorgasbords, with fatty and greasy foods at every meal, with gallons of coffee, tons of sugar and salt, and pastries. The famous nutritionist, Dr. Nathan Pritikin, once said that "The average Jewish diet must have been designed by the enemies of the Jewish people!"

It is true, that no matter what we do, we may still fall victim to terminal illness. Yet, Maimonides does provide us with a dietary blueprint for good health, which includes not eating many of the foods that we are presently eating. God also provides us with a blueprint for good health, when He commands us in the Torah [Deut:4:15], *ve-nishmartem me-od le-nafshotekhem*, "You shall diligently guard your life and your health," a command which means that we should not subject our bodies to any unnecessary risks or dangers. Yet, doctors continue to speak of specifically *Jewish* diseases and types of cancer that are diet-related! This means that we are not living as God meant us to live. We need to stop abusing ourselves before we can benefit from God's love.

Why do millions of people throughout the world die of starvation each year? This sad fact does not diminish the quality of God's love for all of His children. In the *birkat ha-mazon*, the Grace After Meals, we say the words, *noten lehem le-khol basar*, which means that God gives sustenance to all flesh because of His loyal, loving faithfulness. *Hu El zan um-farnes la-kol*. He is a God who feeds and sustains everyone. Many well-meaning and sensitive Jews point out, that since millions of people are literally starving to death, it is hypocritical to say the *birkat ha-mazon*. I tell these people to continue saying it, because in actual fact, the verses are true and correct; God does provide enough food to sustain the entire universe. It is not God's fault that surplus agricultural crops are destroyed rather than distributed to the needy. It is not God's fault that American farmers are paid a subsidy for *not* harvesting bumper crops. It is not God's fault that many countries (and I cite the example of the cruel and corrupt government of Ethiopia in particular) refuse to distribute the food that is donated to their starving citizens. It is not God's fault that 80 percent of the grain grown in the United States is fed to animals destined for slaughter. It is not God's fault that we human beings use chemical fertilizers and deadly pesticides, causing widespread air and water pollution, soil erosion and depletion, irreversible damage to the environment, and the poisoning of the food chain. Unless we do something, and do it soon, none of the enormous bounty of food that God has provided for us, will be fit to eat.

One important thing we can do is to support the organization called Mazon, which is a Jewish response to hunger. Last year alone, Mazon distributed more than 1/2 million dollars to soup kitchens and food pantries, and other programs and projects, that help bring food directly to those in need. Many people, whenever they arrange a *simhah*, add 3 percent to its total cost, and send this money to Mazon to feed the hungry. Since we Jews spend somewhere between 500 and 800 million dollars a year on catered functions and life-cycle parties, think of how much money we could raise, if all *simhah*-celebrants added 3 percent to the cost of their family celebration, for the purpose of helping the worthy aims of Mazon! Think how meaningful it could be for a young Jewish person who knows that a portion of the joy in becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah, is set aside to help those people who are truly in need.

Why do we fast on this sacred day of Yom Kippur? We become hungry in order that we empathize with, and do something about, the starving people of the world, who have no choice in the matter, and whose fast is involuntary. For our Yom Kippur fast to have its special meaning, we need to bring God's love to the hungry and the wretched poor, in the form of sustenance or nourishment. We need



to help bring to an end the hunger-related diseases which plague the world. In the Haftarah that we just read from the Prophet Isaiah, God tells us, "Surely, this is the Fast that I have chosen: To loosen the fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke. To let the oppressed go free, and to break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home. When you see the naked, to clothe him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh and blood. Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your healing shall spring forth speedily." [58:6-8] Then you will really know the meaning of God's love.



# Lessons in Life From Rabbi Hanina

*Rabbi Mark Friedman*

Hanina ben Dosa was a Palestinian Rabbi who lived during the first century of the Common Era. Renowned for the simplicity and saintliness of his life, Hanina was also known as a worker of miracles. In particular, Rabbi Hanina's prayers on behalf of the sick were considered especially efficacious. Most of the stories about him, therefore, deal with miracles. On one occasion, the Talmud tells us, while Rabbi Hanina was out walking, it began to rain. He said, "Master of the Universe! The entire world is suffering, and Hanina is comfortable?" And the rain began to fall again.

This tale makes an important observation about human nature. We are concerned, naturally with our own comfort and happiness, particularly when we perceive others as being well-off and contented. There is a danger here: self-centeredness. We may, like Hanina, place our personal needs above anything else.

When we open our eyes as babies, we see the world stretching out around us, and we are at its center. This always remains true of our physical vision; we are at the center of the world we see. The danger is, though, that this will remain true for our mental and spiritual vision also. We must recall that we are not the center of the world, or the standard of reference between good and bad; God occupies that place. Rabbi Hanina's words upon returning home, "The entire world is suffering, and Hanina is comfortable?" are the words we need to keep in mind, so that we always occupy our own human place in this world, and not God's. These words remind us that there are needs to be met beyond our own, and that we can contribute to the fulfilling of these needs. As the late humanitarian Albert Schweitzer advised: "Open your eyes and look for some person, or some work for the sake of humanity, which needs a little time, a little sympathy, a little friendliness, a little toil. See if there is not some place where you may invest yourself."

Another miracle story involving Rabbi Hanina can teach us a lesson. Rabbi Hanina once saw the people of his town taking a variety of offerings and gifts up to Jerusalem. He said, "Everyone is taking gifts and offerings up to Jerusalem, and I am taking nothing." So Rabbi Hanina went to the outskirts of town, and found a beautiful stone. He cut it, shaped it, and polished it so it was truly a sight to behold. He then declared, "I hereby promise to take this up to Jerusalem." but the stone was too heavy for him to carry on his own. So he tried to find workers to carry it. He found five workers. He asked, "Will you take this stone up to Jerusalem?" They answered, "If you will pay us, we will take it up to Jerusalem for you." When he discovered that he had no money with him, the workers left. God, observing the predicament in which Rabbi Hanina found himself, arranged for five angels in human form to appear. When they appeared, Hanina asked, "Will you take this stone up for me?" They responded, "We will take it up for you on the condition that you, too, help with the carrying." Rabbi Hanina lacking any alternative, decided he must also pitch in. So he placed his hands on the stone and wrapped his fingers around it. Suddenly, he found himself standing in Jerusalem. He looked around, trying to find the people who offered to help him. But he could not find them. He then went into the Temple, and entered the chamber where the Sanhedrin, the Supreme court, held its sessions, and explained what had taken place. The rabbis there advised him to give up his search for these individuals, who were not human. Then Rabbi Hanina understood that they were angels

sent from Heaven to help him carry his stone, and to teach him an important lesson about personal involvement.

It is true that it is essential for each of us to recognize our limitations. But do we respond like Rabbi Hanina, looking for others to do it without offering to participate ourselves? Harry Truman once observed, "I studied the lives of great men and famous women, and I found that the men and women who got to the top were those who did the jobs they had in hand, with everything they had in energy and enthusiasm and hard work."

Anyone involved in team sports knows that it is essential for a team's success that each member do his or her job to the utmost even if that role is only supportive. At the same time, a team must function like a team, looking out for each other, and providing assistance when and where it is called for. These tales of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa remind us that a life lived only for oneself is not really living, and a life lived without independence, effort, and a sense of participation, is a life lacking in real meaning and true fulfillment.

