

BEREISHEES

How to Handle Rejection

One of the main problems that everybody has to face in their life is the problem of rejection. It hurts so much to be rejected. Rejection is something we can hardly bear. Children who are rejected by their parents bear the scars of this rejection throughout all their life. Aborigines in Australia when they are rejected by their peers shrivel up and die. Shunning is one of the most effective of all punishments, and in prison solitary confinement is the worst of all punishments.

This theme of rejection permeates the Yom Kippur services and is actually the theme which underlies much of the first chapters of the Torah. On Yom Kippur we plead with G-d to hear our voice and have mercy upon us and receive with compassion our prayers. We beseech Him, "Cast us not out from before You. Your Holy Spirit do not take from us." We continue to plead, "Our G-d and G-d of our fathers, do not leave us. Do not reject us. Do not disgrace us. Do not break Your covenant with us." We ask G-d to "bring us nearer to Your Torah, to teach us Your Commandments." We continue by saying, "Forgive us, pardon us, clear us because we are Your people and You are our G-d. We are Your Children and You are our father. We are Your servants and You are our Lord. We are Your congregation and You are our portion." The worst thing we fear on Yom Kippur is to be rejected, is to be alienated from the source of being, is to be completely stripped of our connection to G-d and to others. We need this Connection to G-d and to other people more than anything else.

Unfortunately, many of us do not know how to connect with G-d or connect with others. We fear rejection and many of us take the attitude, "Since I am going to be rejected anyway, I'll reject G-d or that other person before he rejects me." This, of course, was what Adam and Eve did after they ate from the forbidden tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They hid and G-d had to look for them. They were afraid G-d would reject them so they rejected G-d before G-d could reject them, but G-d would never reject them just as He never rejects any of us even after we have sinned. He wants us always to return to Him. That's why we say, "We are Your people and You are our G-d," and we do not say, "We are Your congregation and You are our G-d," because we know that even when we do not act like G-d's congregation, even when we sin G-d is still our G-d. That's why, too, we say, "We are Your children and You are our father," Parents do not normally reject their children and certainly G-d will never reject us.

The story of Cain and Abel is also a story of rejection. Cain was mad at his brother Abel because G-d turned to Abel and to his offering and not to Cain and his offering. G-d went to great lengths to tell Cain that because He did not turn to his offering and to Cain, himself, it did not mean that He rejected him. What it meant was that Cain had to do better. Sometimes partial rejection is not meant to hurt a person but it is meant to improve him. Cain forgot to bring himself when he brought his offering. Abel not only brought an offering which was the best of his sheep but he also brought himself. Cain brought just a plain offering from the fruits of the ground. He did not bring the best fruits and he most certainly did not bring himself.

Sometimes in life it is hard to deal with rejection, even partial rejection, even though we know we deserve it. We become mad at the people who get A's and B's when we only get C's on a test even though we know that if we would have studied we would have been able to get A's and B's, too.

Cain, according to the rabbis, was the first one who did Teshuva. Cain said, "My sin is greater than I can bear." He recognized his error and G-d punished him but He also forgave him. The sign of Cain was not a punishment, according to our tradition, but a symbol of Cain's reconciliation to G-d. His feeling of rejection had got so out of hand that he struck out and slew his brother, although the rabbis say that he did not know at the time that he could even slay his brother. His act was manslaughter rather than murder. At first he tried to deny his guilt but at the end he admitted it. In order to reestablish his connection to others and to G-d he had to reject those things within himself that led him to sin. Today in the Middle East the Arabs cannot understand why they have been rejected. They, who were the most powerful people in the world, now are at the mercy of infidels. Instead of looking at their own faults they strike out at others. It is not their errors which have led them to be rejected; it is the machinations of Israel, the Jews, America, Satan, etc.

The story of the Tower of Babel is also a story of rejection. The people said, "Let us build a city and a tower with its top in heaven. Let us make for us a name lest we be scattered on the face of all the earth." The people were terrified of being rejected. They lived after the flood. They saw how G-d had seemingly rejected His people because of their sin, especially the sin of violence, and they did not want this to happen to them. Many times the fear of rejection mars the total human personality and causes an individual's or nation's ego to become inflated. In order to compensate for the evil deeds we do we create a cult of personality so that we will never be rejected especially by those who come after us. This never works. Look at Stalin and all his statues and pictures. After he died they were all toppled. The same is true of all the despots of Eastern Europe. Even in China, Mao Tse Tung's pictures and statues do not hold center stage anymore. A tyrant's evil deeds cannot be hidden and once the people are free to, they quickly reject him and his ideals.

At the end of the Torah portion Noah we learn about Abraham. Abraham did not fear rejection. Peer pressure did not work on him. He was called "Ivri" (Hebrew) because he was on one side and the whole world was on the other. He rejected the idolatrous ideals of the world without rejecting the world. His house was always open to every stranger. He was the epitome of hospitality. From Abraham we learn how to reject false ideals without rejecting the people who hold these false ideals. We must not be afraid of rejection if we feel that we have the truth. In order to pursue the values of our faith we must not and we cannot let the fear of rejection maim us, but, at the same time, we should never reject people. We should reject only their false ideas. Many times G-d has punished the Jewish people, but He has never rejected us as a people. He has only rejected our foolishness and our foolish ideas, but never us.

This is what we emphasize over and over on Yom Kippur. "We are a vineyard and You are our keeper. We are Your handiwork and You are our creator. Forsake us not, Lord our G-d. Keep not far from us. Forgive the errors and transgressions of Thy people. Be not angry at the guilt of Thine own children." We know that G-d's rejection is the worst penalty of all. We know that alienation and loneliness are terrible burdens. We need to be connected to others. Our modern society has almost made it a virtue to be rejected. It has extolled roaming free without any ties. This, unfortunately, was the lot of Cain: to be a wanderer because of his sin. He, though, was able to bear it because he was still tied to G-d. He knew that although the peoples of the world may reject him, G-d would not

reject him.

We Jews have been looked at throughout history as a cursed and rejected people, but we always knew that G-d never rejected us, that although we might have been punished for our sins we were still G-d's children. It is important that none of us ever let the fear of rejection dominate our lives. It is this fear of rejection that has caused so many of our young people to become drug addicts and engage in unseemly behavior because they were afraid of being rejected by their peers. The fear of rejection, especially in marriage, has caused so many spouses to take preemptive action and say, "I'll reject you before you can reject me," and this has wrecked their relationship. This fear of rejection has caused many children to say, "I can never please my parents anyway so I might as well do this horrendous thing or that horrendous thing." The fear of rejection has caused many husbands to bankrupt themselves trying to feed the appetites of insatiable wives and has caused many wives to intellectually bankrupt themselves and do morally wrong things so that their husbands should not reject them. True love can always stand the truth. If it cannot, it is not true love. We all must learn that sometimes partial rejection is deserved, especially if we do not measure up to our abilities, especially if we disappoint others by not living up to our responsibilities. However, total rejection is never deserved. We must never totally reject our children or others just as G-d never totally rejects us.

This is the message of Yom Kippur. Like Abraham, when we know that we are doing the right thing, then we should not fear human rejection. Also, when we reject other people's ideas, we should never reject them as people. Yom Kippur proclaims, "Wipe out our sins like a cloud." The cloud darkens the horizon. It causes man to be separated from the light. However, when the cloud dissipates, it produces rain which fructifies the earth. It causes a rebirth of foliage. It causes the land to come alive again. When we look into ourselves, as Adam and Eve had to and Cain had to, and realize that it is our own sins, our own defects which are causing us to be partially rejected, then we can release that energy in us which will allow us to live a life of renewed vitality and connectedness. We cannot achieve this by building Towers of Babel, by trying to deny that the problem is at least partially within ourselves. We must, if we feel rejected, look into our own hearts and find out what it is that is causing this rejection. If we determine that we are being rejected because we stand for correct moral values like Abraham did, then we should reject this feeling of rejection and instead bear proudly our ideals as we Jews have throughout the ages. On the other hand, if we, upon reflection, realize that our rejection is caused because we have, like Cain and Adam and Eve, sinned and let other people down, then we should go about the process of changing so that we can reestablish our links to others and to G-d so that the vitality of life can return to us.

On this day, Yom Kippur, G-d says to each of us, "Turn to your better self, I have never rejected you totally. Come and reestablish your full links with me." This we should also say to every one of our friends and especially to the members of our family: "I have never totally rejected you. If I have rejected your ideas, I have never rejected you, and if I ever have totally rejected you, I am wrong. Please forgive me." Let us never be afraid of rejection, but let us never take rejection lightly but always search our hearts to see whether we partially deserve it or not. Only in this way can we reestablish our links with man and G-d. May we do so in the coming year so we will truly be worthy of a Shana Tova.

Noah

Each of us has many personalities. We have a public personality, a private personality, a professional personality, etc. Each of us acts differently in different settings. We have a public image, a private image, a self image. Many times these images are not congruous. We have all been shocked to learn how people with whom we have had perfect professional relationships have turned out to be vicious, cruel, crude and boorish people when we have socialized with them. We have all observed the phenomenon of how a person will act one way toward us when we are alone and how when he wants to social climb in the company of others will act entirely differently toward us. Other times we have been shocked to learn how some very great public figures, even some very great geniuses, have had sordid private lives. They truly did great things publicly, but they certainly cannot be held up as models of family wholesomeness. On the other hand, there have been many people who have been the embodiment of family wholesomeness who have failed as leaders.

King Saul of ancient Israel had an exemplary family life, but he failed as a leader so much that the crown was taken from him and given to King David. King David, on the other hand, had many family problems. He got involved with Bathsheba. He did not handle his children right, but he was a superb leader. We all remember his leadership to this day with great awe, wonder and affection.

The rabbis teach us that there are two different types of transgressors. There is one type of transgressor who is called a *Mummar L'Tayavon*. He is a person who transgresses different commandments, not on principle but because he is weak. He knows and readily admits that what he has done is wrong but at the time he just could not help himself. His desires, passions or lusts have overcome him. This, of course, is what happened to King David. When he was confronted with his son by the prophet Nathan, he just said, "I sinned." To be caught in the spirit of the moment and to do things we should not do is a very human failing. Unfortunately, many of us will either lie or finagle or cheat, not because we think it is right but because at the moment we are weak. This, of course, is wrong and the halacha condemns and punishes a person for doing this, but it is usually very understanding of such a person.

However, there is another type of transgressor who is called a *Mummar L'Hachees*. He is a person who violates Jewish law and moral norms on principle. He does not, in most instances, even enjoy what he has done. He just wants to make a statement that he is not bound by moral principles or Jewish law. This type of person the halacha rebukes and punishes severely because this type of person says that what he is doing is right and he undermines the moral order of the whole community

On Yom Kippur we pray continuously in the plural. We also mention two types of sins, as we ask forgiveness for two types of sins. When we conclude the *Kedusha Hayom*, the main prayer of the silent Amidah for Yom Kippur, we say, "Blessed are You, O L-rd, King Who does pardon and forgive our sins and the sins of His people, the House of Israel, and removes our guilt every year, King over all the earth, Who sanctifies Israel and the day of atonement." Why do we need to mention "pardon and forgive our sins and the sins of His people, the House of Israel"?

There are sins which we do out of weakness as individuals, and there are sins that we do as members of the Jewish people. Both these types of sins must be forgiven. How is it that we sin as members of the Jewish people? We sin as members of the Jewish people when we purposefully, publicly violate its traditions and moral norms. In Judaism there is

a very big difference whether or not you sin publicly or privately. The person who publicly upholds the values of Judaism, even though on occasion he or she may violate them privately because he or she is weak, but the person has not sinned also against the Jewish people. He or she has not committed two sins, only one sin, but a person who publicly and proudly violates Jewish tradition and morals has committed two sins, a private sin and a public sin. It is much worse in Jewish law to violate the Sabbath publicly than to violate it privately. I remember having many discussions with youngsters who have told me, "What do you mean, Rabbi, that I should not smoke in front of the synagogue? I am not going to be a hypocrite. I smoke on Shabbos. What do you mean I should walk a block away if I want to smoke?" A person, by walking a block away and then smoking, is saying, "I cannot help myself. I feel that I have to smoke on Shabbos, but at least I am not going to violate a Jewish norm. I am not going to violate a sacred tradition." For this same reason, there are people who, although they do not keep kosher strictly in their own homes, will always make sure that when they have a public affair that it will be a kosher affair. They respect the traditions of their fathers and want to see Jewish traditions carried on. They, themselves, may not be totally consistent, but they are not hypocrites. They are not pretending to be something they are not. They have just said that they want Judaism to continue even though they are not always strong enough in their personal lives to adhere to it.

The same thing applies in other spheres. King David may have sinned with Bathsheba, but he certainly did not approve of his own conduct. He did not publicly brag about it. He did not show her off until he could marry her. We are all called upon to make our private lives as close as possible to our public moral pronouncements, but if for some reason we fail, this does not mean that we should stop believing in morality and in Jewish law and say that what we are doing now is right. We should instead say Jewish law and morality are right; I have just not been able yet to live up to them.

That's why also in the silent Amidah of Yom Kippur we not only ask G-d to forgive us for our private sins and for our sins as members of the people of Israel by not upholding publicly Jewish principles, but we also say, "And Who removes our guilt ever year." Why should we say "every year"? We should just say "Who removes our guilt." We say "Who removes our guilt every year" because we know that every year we will fall short of our ideals, but this does not mean that our ideals are wrong. It just means that we should try harder to achieve them next year. This prayer concludes by saying, "You are King over all the earth Who sanctifies Israel and Yom Kippur". G-d knows about the earth. G-d knows about our temptations and, yet, G-d has still sanctified Israel. He has still told us that we should strive for Judaism's ideals even if sometimes we will fail. The prayer concludes by saying that G-d not only sanctified Israel, He also has sanctified Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur signifies forgiveness. It reminds us that we should never say that the sins which we have committed are really right but instead we must admit our sins and try again to reach Judaism's ideals in the coming year. We will be forgiven for our past sins as long as we do not abandon Judaism's ideals, as long as we renew our commitment to try to achieve them in the future.

In the Torah portion Noah, we learn how Noah is described as an Eesh Tzadik Tomeem, that Noah was a man, a righteous man, and a wholehearted man. The rabbis explain that the word Eesh means that Noah was a man of achievement. According to the rabbis, he invented the plow. He also was a man of righteousness. He was a Tzadik. He also was

Tomeem, he was wholehearted. These are very high compliments. However, afterward it mentions "in his generation". Some rabbis explain that Noah could only be considered righteous in his generation because his generation was so bad. It was only in a bad generation that he could stand out as a righteous man. However, if he would have been in Abraham's generation he would not have been considered a righteous man at all. In Abraham's generation he would have been just a run of the mill person. Other rabbis say the contrary. They say that most assuredly if Noah could be righteous in a bad generation he would have been much more righteous in another generation and would have stood out even more as a righteous man. The argument really turns around the public personality of Noah. No one doubts that he, himself, was a righteous man. He was a good family man, a good worker, an upstanding citizen, but did he forcibly, courageously in the public domain put forward the ideals of morality and justice that were necessary? Was he willing to go to bat for the oppressed and the helpless? Some rabbis say, yes, he did everything he could. He was subjected to the ridicule of the mob. He tried within the limits of the society in which he lived to not only live a righteous life but to also protest the injustice of his society. Others say no. They claim that he was passive and timid, that he had no interest in protesting the evils of his society, that he was a Tzadik in furs. What they mean by this is when a person enters a cold room he can do one of two things. He can put on a fur coat and thereby warm himself and do nothing for others, or he can light a fire and warm himself as well as others. Noah, they claim, chose only to warm himself. As proof of that, they quote the next line which says, "And Noah walked with G-d." Abraham was not content to walk just in his private life with G-d. He also walked before Him publicly protesting the injustices of the world and trying to correct them. Each of us is called upon to not only live personal lives of decency but also to ensure that society is just. Sometimes in our personal lives we may fail, but this does not mean that we should give up our public ideals, and sometimes we may fail in our public lives, especially when we become so smug and selfish when we have been able to keep our ideals in our private lives, that we have no concern at all for the helpless and downtrodden. This, the rabbis say, is wrong.

One of the main images of Yom Kippur is a cloud. "I will wipe out your sins like a cloud," we repeat over and over in the Yom Kippur davening. A cloud can bring darkness to our lives, but when it releases its rains it is rejuvenating. When we admit our sins we are renewed and rejuvenated and have the capacity to try again. Noah, when he came out of the ark, was given the rainbow as a symbol that we can conquer our sins, that G-d will never again destroy the world. The rainbow is composed of two parts. It is composed of water and light. We must all learn to do like King David, to cry over the sins that we have done privately but never fail to uphold the light of our ideals publicly. If we will never give up our ideals even if sometimes we do not always live up to them, the world will be safe. On the other hand, if we instead of condemning ourselves try to destroy the light by saying that what we have done is right and the ideals are wrong, then the rainbow will never be seen and perhaps G-d will not destroy us ever again but we will surely destroy ourselves.

Even if a person lives an exemplary private life but advocates corrupt public ideals, that person brings destruction upon the world and is to be condemned. Any tears he would shed have no light and the rainbow could not be seen. On the other hand, a person who, himself, does not lead a 100 percent exemplary life but who sheds tears over his own

misdeeds and publicly advocates moral public policies can still bring redemption to the world. His tears, together with the light he sheds in public, will bring forth a rainbow which can again bring forth G-d's promises to all the earth. May we all be blessed by these promises in the coming year. Blessed are You, O L-rd, King over all the earth Who has sanctified Israel and the Day of Atonement.

LECH LECHA

American Judaism, Communism and Collapse

Life is filled with all sorts of unexpected twists and turns. One of the reasons why on Rosh Hashonna we blow the shofar and not any other type of musical instrument is

because the sound of the shofar is uncertain. Many times it has happened that the Baal Tekiah, the person who blows the shofar, cannot get any sound out of it at all or he gets the wrong sound out of it. If we would blow a trumpet we could always be sure that we would get the sound that we want, but it would not convey the right message that life is uncertain. The shofar represents life and emphasizes that we all need G-d's help because life has so many unexpected twists and turns. When things are at their darkest we should never give up hope because we never know when things will change dramatically for the better. We must always maintain our faith. In spite of the seemingly endless darkness we must always believe that the light will eventually break through.

Look what has happened in Russia the past months before our very eyes. Who would have ever thought that communism would be banned in the Soviet Union? Who could have predicted such a thing? If anybody would have made this prediction a year ago he would have been hooted down and accused of hallucinating. Who could have predicted that the Soviet State would disintegrate so rapidly? For 75 years the Jews of Russia did not give up hope. Yes, some did, but a hard core of two million Jews never gave up. They persisted and they proclaimed their Jewish identity even though they were not able to openly practice many Jewish traditions. There were Jews who tried to hide their Jewish identity and assimilate into the masses. The chief rabbi of Moscow told us that there are actually five million Jews in Russia, and if you count every Russian who has at least one Jewish grandparent, there may be as many as 12 million Jews in Russia. The hard core, though, never gave up hope and pretty soon there will be a more vibrant Jewish community in Russia than there is here in the United States. There will be more yeshivas in Russia than we have here in the United States.

What, though, caused communism to collapse so rapidly? There is a medrash which perhaps can shed light on the reasons for communism's collapse and which also can help us prevent Judaism's collapse in America. This medrash states that there are two examples where figures in Jewish history listened: one listened and was punished and the other listened and was rewarded. There are also two instances in Jewish history where one figure did not listen and was rewarded and another figure did not listen and was punished. The rabbis say that Adam listened to his wife, Eve, and ate from the forbidden fruit and was punished, while Abraham listened to his wife, Sarah, and sent away Hagar and Ishmael and was rewarded. Joseph did not listen to the wife of Potifar who tried to seduce him and he was rewarded, while Israel did not listen to the prophets and was punished.

What does it mean that Adam listened to his wife and was punished? Communism posited that man is good, that man naturally will do good. Why, then, is there evil in the world? There is evil in the world because of the institutions and structures which we have constructed. If you remove all these outside impediments man would naturally be good. Evil is something outside of man, not within man. Adam believed that, too. He did not realize that he had an evil inclination as well as a good inclination. Man does not do good naturally. Man is born neutral. We do not believe that man is born evil either, but man has to be taught to do good, otherwise he will follow the line of least resistance. He will listen to anyone or any urge which tells him to do something and which he feels at the moment like doing. The purpose of Jewish education is to teach us to want to do what we ought to do. Man is not naturally good. Man will not do the right thing always unless he is taught to do it. It is important that he is taught to always try to do the right thing.

Jewish education is not just to teach rituals. It is to teach people how to distinguish between right and wrong.

What does it mean that Abraham listened to his wife and was rewarded? Sarah wanted to expel Ishmael and Hagar from the camp. Abraham did not want to do it. It was only after G-d told him to listen to Sarah that he did it. We can only punish people and ostracize ourselves from people whose ideas differ from ours for only the direst offenses.

According to the medrash, Ishmael was playing William Tell with Yitzhak. He was putting an apple on his head and shooting it off with an arrow. Sarah was in mortal fear that her boy would be killed. Also, the Hebrew word for sporting, Mitsachaik, has homosexual connotations. We are to be tolerant of other people's points of view. We are not supposed to cut off a person from his family, his heritage, his nation, his people. Even Ishmael and Hagar were eventually readmitted to the camp. Communism tried to cut off man from his past, from his people, and from other people. It denied the importance of family and religious ties and especially nationalism. It tried to put an iron curtain around its people to prevent them from contact with the rest of the world. It tried to suppress nationalism, religious identification, etc. It mistook what man is all about. Man needs roots and religion and a people.

Joseph did not listen to the wife of Potifar and was rewarded. How was he rewarded? By being sent to prison. What kind of reward was that? Joseph was a person who was filled with only his own dreams. He was insensitive to others. He was a bright intellectual who did see more than others, but he thought that he knew what was best for everyone. He brought a lot of the hatred of his brothers on himself because he never considered their feelings. He knew what was best. When he was sent into prison, he learned to listen and respond to others. Communism never listened to the people. Its leaders thought they knew best what was good for them. At the end, they could not even feed the people. Israel did not listen to the prophets and was punished. Israel did not kill the prophets. Israel physically heard their message and perhaps applauded and said how well they spoke. They just did not change their lifestyle to reflect the teachings of the prophets. In communism, too, the theory did not match the practice. The theory of communism is so beautiful: from each according to his ability and to each according to his need. The problem is that this theory is impossible to carry out, but, more than that, the gap in the living standards between the ruling communist elite and the common people was so obvious for all to see. Communism did not result in a society in which everyone was treated equally, etc. On the contrary, it resulted in a society of gulags, of death, and of the crushing of the human spirit. The theory and the practice were so out of kilter that it was impossible to believe in the communist theory anymore.

Communism failed because: one, it did not realize that man could do evil; two, it tried to cut off man from his roots, from his G-d, from his nation, and from his family, especially beyond its borders; three, it thought it knew what was best for everyone and did not consult the people; and four, its theory and practice were way out of whack.

Unfortunately, in our day the American Jewish community is on the verge of collapse mainly because it, too, has adopted similar positions to these communist positions which are not traditional Jewish positions and which will, if not modified, lead to the complete destruction of the Jewish community. Most Jews in America believe, like the communists, that man is naturally good and that, therefore, Jewish education is at best marginal. You do not need Jewish education to teach people how to be good. This is

wrong. Man is not naturally good and must be taught to be good, and the more intensive the Jewish education is, the better the result. Jews never had in the past juvenile delinquents, drug addicts, alcoholics, etc.; now we do have. Also many Jews, from both the left and right, believe that they have to cut themselves off from any Jew who disagrees with them. They have to erect barriers. They do not want their children contaminated by medievalists, or on the other hand, by goyishe Jews. In some instances they demand complete conformity otherwise they will not have anything to do with you. This applies to the left and the right. Unfortunately, this polarization not only weakens the Jewish community, but is pointless. Just as the walls of the iron curtain were pierced by outside ideas, so will these fortified positions be pierced by ideas.

There are also in America many Jewish organizations and people in leadership positions who do not understand the needs of the people. They think that they know what is best for everyone without even consulting the people. They feel that the sole criteria for leadership is large donations. Unless they begin to listen to the people they will not be able to provide the proper leadership so the Jewish people can survive. They do not realize how expensive they have made Judaism in America. Unless you are rich, it is almost impossible to give your children a good Jewish education and to participate in many Jewish organizations.

Finally, the gap between what people say and do is so great that Judaism has become a mockery in the eyes of many in the younger generation. How many Jewish leaders fight for everything Jewish and then intermarry and do not keep any Jewish practices at home? How many Jewish community leaders preach how we should sacrifice for our faith and then do not even take time off from work to observe Jewish holidays? The gap between what a Jew is supposed to do and what Jews really do is so great in America that many young people do not think that Judaism has any relevance for their lives at all. How does their parents' lifestyle differ from their gentile friends parents' lifestyle? In order for Judaism to survive in America, we must rethink what we are doing. If we really believe in Judaism we must give our children the most intensive Jewish education we can. We must reallocate our resources so that our young people see that being a Jew makes a difference in our priorities, and only in this way will Judaism survive in America. Yes, communism failed and is now even banned in Russia. It failed because it did not understand man as he is. Man is not naturally good. He needs roots and contact with others. He cannot be condescended to and he needs leaders who practice what they preach. Let us hope and pray that in America we will raise up a Jewish leadership who understands that Jewish education is important, that a fortress mentality is self-defeating, that the ordinary Jew cannot be condescended to and that they must practice what they preach. If we do so then with G-d's help Judaism will not only survive, but will also thrive in America. If we do not, then perhaps we also will have to analyze why Judaism failed in America.

VAYERA

Religion, Morality and G-d's Command

In the Torah portion Vayera, we learn something very amazing. We learn how on the third day after Abraham had been circumcised G-d comes to see him. But Abraham spies

out three strangers and he tells G-d, "G-d, if please I find favor in Your eyes do not pass from your servant." In other words, Abraham says, "G-d, wait a minute. I see three strangers over there and I have to go help them. Don't go away. I'll be right back." This is indeed amazing. This episode emphasizes Judaism's main teaching that we cannot get close to G-d unless we are first moral. G-d had purposefully made the day hot hoping that Abraham would stay inside because this would allow him to heal faster, but, instead, Abraham looked at the situation from the opposite point of view. He said, "What happens if someone decided to travel in this hot weather? He would surely suffer from sunstroke or die from thirst." So Abraham told G-d, "Wait a minute I see three strangers out there. They could be in danger." We know that Pekuach Nefesh, that saving a life pushes aside all other considerations, even getting close to G-d. We know that on Yom Kippur we are supposed to break Yom Kippur if we can save a life, etc., so we know that moral considerations must come even before our trying to get close to G-d.

The rabbis say that Abraham was the first Jew, that Abraham discovered that there was only one G-d at an early age. In the Gemorah Nodorem it says that Abraham was three years old when he discovered G-d. However, in the Medrash it says that he was either 40 or 48, and the Rambam (Maimonides) when he decides this issue in the Mishna Torah, decides that Abraham was 48 years old when he recognized G-d. All the commentators are up in arms asking how can it be that the Rambam has chosen a Medrash over a clear Gemorah? The Gemorah says that Abraham was only three years old. The Kesef Mishnah answers by saying that here we are really talking about two different things. Abraham when he was three years old recognized the fact that there was only one G-d in the world, but when he was 48 years old he recognized that you can only serve G-d if you are first moral, that you can only get close to G-d if you are first moral. In the ancient world there were many people who believed in the concept of only one G-d. Abraham was not really unique in believing in that concept. Even from the Torah itself, we learn that Shaim and Aver had a yeshiva in which they promulgated the view of one G-d. We learn in last week's Sedra about Malkeetzedek. Malkeetzedek, too, believed in the one G-d. But what differentiated Abraham from his predecessors, and from the later Greek philosophers who also believed in one G-d, was that Abraham also believed that you could not approach G-d unless you were first moral. When we learn about Malkeetzedek, Malkeetzedek says that G-d is the "G-d of the heavens," but when Abraham replies to him he says G-d is not only the "G-d of the heavens but also of the earth." We cannot have any relationship with G-d, we cannot get close to G-d unless we are first moral. The ancient pagans believed that the Jewish people were atheists. The reason they believed that we were atheists was because we did not have any idols that we worshipped. The whole concept of an idol is not as foolish as it may seem, because the ancients believed that you could capture spirits. You could entice spirits to incarnate in a certain object or living animal and then you would have power over those spirits. This would give you great power to do different things. This belief is the basis of the genie legends we still read about today. Many ancient peoples also believed that at certain times of the year, certain spirits were incarnate in certain animals and therefore these animals should be revered things. We Jews believed that his was all foolishness. Of course, we do know that we can create objects which can destroy us, which can have great power, like a battery. A battery can electrocute us, but we do not believe that we got close to G-d by doing all sorts of ritual acts alone or by creating all sorts of habitats for

the gods to incarnate in. So the ancients thought that the Jewish people were atheists because, first of all, we did not make any idols which the gods could incarnate into, and second of all, because the Jewish people did not put their prime emphasis on getting close to the gods. In the ancient world, morality and religion were completely separate, but Abraham said that a person could not be religious unless he was first moral.

Throughout Jewish history there have been two distinct types of heresy. The first type of heresy was the heresy that says that all you have to do is get close to G-d; you do not have to be moral. You daven, you put tephillin on, you keep Pesach, and it is enough. You do not have to be moral at all. That, of course, we know is not true. That's why Abraham was so worried about finding a successor. He first thought that his successor would be Lot, but Lot was a man who even though he looked like Abraham and even though he kept many of the rituals of Judaism, was a gonif, a thief. When his shepherds needed grass to graze on he told them to take the sheep to the Canaanite grass even though it did not belong to him. He said, "Well, in a few hundred years Abraham is going to get it anyway, so it is okay." Later on when he was given a choice of where to live after he separated from Abraham, he decided to go to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, even though these were evil places, even though he knew these places would be bad for his children, because he could make a lot of money there. Then the angels came to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, the rabbis say it was Pesach and Lot had matzahs in his house. But he was so interested in preserving his own reputation as a person who protected his business guests that he was even willing to surrender his daughters to the mob. That is how far he had gone. To him religion and morality had nothing to do with the other. He could get close to G-d and feel G-d's power and encouragement even if he was immoral. Abraham, of course, knew that that was not so.

The second heresy is the opposite heresy, that all religion is morality and nothing more, but we know that is not so. It is from religion that we get the courage and the strength to overcome our problems, and when we do not have religion it is difficult to find meaning in life. If we do not feel that there is a purpose in life then we cannot summon the courage and strength to overcome life's problems and we can fall prey to alcoholism and drug abuse. These are things that Jews never in the past were ever prey to, but now you can find Jewish alcoholics, Jewish drug addicts, Jewish wife beaters, Jewish child abusers. They are now found in our community because people feel empty inside. That is, of course, why Eliezer could not succeed Abraham because Eliezer was just a servant of Abraham. He did not have any connection to G-d. It is true he followed Abraham's morality but to him religion was only morality. Unfortunately, in our day this is the way many Jews feel. Therefore, they lack the special courage and strength which religion gives them to overcome their problems and to bring out the best within themselves.

Abraham later thought that Yishmael would succeed him, but Yishmael, although he believed in what Abraham believed in and although he believed that you had to be moral first before you could approach G-d, was a wild man. He did not have any self-discipline. He could not control himself. Therefore, eventually he was kicked out of the camp, although he was invited back later on and became a Baal Teshuva when he was able to control himself. Yitzhak was the only fitting heir to Abraham.

In this week's Torah portion, we also learn about the Akedah, which is considered a terrible trial for Abraham. Why isn't this considered primarily a trial for Yitzhak? After all, Yitzhak was no youngster; according to tradition, he was 37 years old, but this trial

was primarily a trial for Abraham because Abraham by acceding to participate in the Akedah was going against every single thing that he had preached for over 130 years. Abraham thought he heard G-d say "Go to the land of Mareeah and offer him up there as an offering." It actually means to elevate him there. Abraham misunderstood what G-d was talking about here. This then was a great test for him. The Akedah also taught all of us that there was besides the two unique things that Abraham promulgated to the world, the belief in one G-d and the belief that you can only serve G-d if you are moral, the very important lesson that even G-d cannot tell us to act immorally. We do not believe with Kierkegaard that religion is the suspension of the ethical. It is not. G-d cannot ask us to do things that are unethical. That, of course, is also one of the themes of this Torah portion. Earlier we learn that Abraham argued with G-d saying, "The judge of all the world will not do justice?" when Abraham fought to save the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Therefore, at the Akedah it is not even G-d Who tells Abraham to desist from sacrificing his son. It is a Malach, an angel, who tells Abraham to desist from sacrificing his son. Some people say that the Malach is the Torah. Even G-d cannot ask us to violate the laws of the Torah. It is impossible. We must be moral before we can be religious, and even G-d himself can never suspend the laws of morality. It is very important that we all recognize this fact. It is very important that we all recognize that we need religion, but that religion cannot exist without morality and that even G-d himself cannot ask us to act immorally. If we all understand this then truly we can have a wonderful religious life. We also cannot just stop with morality, otherwise we will be empty inside.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who was earning \$200 a week. He got his paycheck at the end of the week and it was \$350. He decided not to say anything, but the next week he got a check for only \$150. This time he was a little perturbed and he went up to his boss and said, "How come I only got \$150 this week?" The boss looked at him and said, "How come you did not say anything last week when you got more money?" The guy looked at his boss and said, "Well, one mistake I can overlook but not two." Unfortunately, there are many people who act this way. He was a true disciple of Lot. He was only interested in money and not morality, not in leading an upright life. However, if we lead an upright life, if we are moral then certainly and truly we can take the next step and get close to G-d and have a fulfilling and meaningful life, too. Let us all pray that we will all have such a life so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

CHAYE SARAH

Hope, Falling Asleep and Sacrifice

In the Torah portion Chaye Sarah we learn how Sarah died at 127 years old. The rabbis explain that when Sarah heard about the Akedah, the binding of Isaac, she died. The rabbis all ask, why is it that she died? After all, what she heard was that Avraham and

Yitzchak were both coming back; she should have been very happy. She should not have died.

Why is it that she died after she heard about the Akedah?

Also, the Torah mentions the word "years" many times when it mentions that she was 127 years old when she died. It says, "They were the lives of Sarah 100 years and 20 years and 7 years. These were the years of the life of Sarah." Rashi explains that all of the ages of Sarah's life were equal, childhood -seven years, adulthood - 20 years and old age - 100 years. How could that possibly be that all of the ages of Sarah's life were equal? After all, we know that every age has its advantages and its disadvantages, so what does it mean that all the ages of her life were equal?

What's more, later on when we learn how Abraham goes to the sons of Chais in order to buy a burial plot for Sarah, we learn how the sons of Chais tell him three times that they are going to give the burial plot to him free, but he ends up paying an exorbitant price, a price that some people say is 80 or 100 times the average yearly wage of the working man at that time. He should have been able to buy a burial plot for just the average wage of a working man. Why is it that the Torah tells us that the sons of Chais offered the burial plot to Abraham three times for nothing, and that Abraham, himself, mentions the sons of Chais ten times?

Perhaps the answers to these questions can be found in a Medrash, in fact, in two parallel Medrashim that say almost exactly the same thing. The Medrash says that Rabbi Akiva, when he noticed that the audience to which he was speaking started to fall asleep, would say "Because Sarah lived 127 years, Esther ruled over 127 provinces." He based his comment on the Megillah, which states that Achaverosh ruled over 127 provinces and, of course, Esther was his queen. There is a similar Medrash in which Rabi noticed that his audience, too, was falling asleep so he said that there was one woman in Egypt who bore at one time 600,000 men. He later explained that the 600,000 men were really Moshe Rabbeinu, that the woman who bore 600,000 men was Yocheved, Moshe's mother. The Torah says that Moshe was equivalent to all the men in Israel so, therefore, Yocheved bore 600,000 men.

The rabbis explain that in the time of Rabbi Akiva terrible depression had set in among the Jewish people. Many of the Jewish people had given up hope that Judaism could survive. Hadrian had put down violently and viciously the rebellion of Bar Kochba. In fact, Suetonius the Greek historian says that 600,000 Jews were killed and countless millions were exiled and sold into slavery. The Jewish people were in a very bad situation. Hadrian banned the Jewish religion. He banned Rabbi Akiva even from teaching the Jewish religion. A rabbi caught teaching the religion was to be put to death. Rabbi Akiva, himself, was put to death because he would not stop teaching Judaism. The Jewish people were in a terrible state and, therefore, Rabbi Akiva said what he said in order to encourage them. What Rabbi Akiva meant by their falling asleep was that they now thought that G-d no longer cared for the Jewish people. They thought that Judaism could no longer survive, that's why he told them that Sarah lived 127 years. What does this mean? Sarah, too, went through all sorts of turmoil. She left her home. She traveled with her husband. She could not have children, yet, she never gave up hope. She never gave up belief that Judaism would continue, that she would eventually have a son, and she did have a son when she was 90 years old. She never gave up hope. She never lost her faith even though she had a difficult time. She was taken captive by Pharaoh and by

Avimelech, both of whom had sexual designs on her but because of G-d's intervention nothing happened. She was shunted back and forth between this city and that city and she had to endure all sorts of privations, yet, she never gave up hope. That, of course, is what Rabbi Akiva was telling them, that Sarah lived 127 years and no matter what life brought her, no matter what the trials and tribulations, no matter the threats, no matter the compromising situations, she never gave up hope, and that was exactly the same thing with Queen Esther. When Haman came on the scene he had wanted to do what Hitler had wanted to do. He had wanted to kill every single Jew. He almost succeeded. It was only through the intervention of Esther that the Jewish people were able to obtain arms from the king and were able to defend themselves. They acquitted themselves well against the enemies of the Jewish people who wanted to destroy them. In the darkest days when many Jews had already given up hope, Esther did not give up hope and Esther said, "I will continue and I will eventually prevail," and she did prevail.

The same thing is true of the story of Moshe in Egypt. The people in Egypt had sunk to the 49th level of Tumah. They had given up. They thought that Judaism was dead, that they had no future, but then Moshe came on the scene, and Moshe, of course, with G-d's help, rescued the Jewish people. He took them out of slavery. He took them out of Egypt. This was the message that Rabbi Akiva and Rabi were giving to the people of their times. Rabi, too, lived in difficult times under Roman control, not as difficult as Rabbi Akiva but also in a difficult time. Many times Jewish people when they are confronted with a choice of either giving up their religion or being successful and/or either giving up their religion or being hounded and persecuted, they many times succumb. It takes rare individuals who can stand up to this kind of pressure.

The boy who was Bar Mitzvah here today four years ago was not even sure he was Jewish. He could not speak a word of English or a word of Hebrew. You heard how well he read the Torah, you heard how well he did the Haphtorah, how well he is going to do the Mussaf, what a fine speech he gave. His parents are true heroes because in Czechoslovakia in their town almost every single Jew, especially the young Jews, ran away from the religion, changed their names, in fact, changed their names twice because on Czechoslovakian forms they ask you what is your name and what was your former name. The Jews of their town did not want to be singled out anymore as Jews. Only four Jewish couples in the town retained their Jewish identity. They refused to kowtow. When they had a chupa they were investigated by the police. When they gave their son a bris they were accused of child abuse. They had difficult times. They were hounded. They were persecuted, but they refused to give up. They refused to say that Judaism was dead. Many of their Jewish friends had accepted communism. "Communism is a better idea than Judaism," their friends said. "Let's accept it. Let's live with our neighbors," even though the neighbors always pointed out that these were the former Jews, like the Spaniards did in Spain with the Moranos. These four couples never gave up. These couples were like Sarah and Esther and Moshe who served as beacons of hope to the people who had already fallen asleep as far as their Jewishness was concerned.

This is, of course what the rabbis mean when they say that all the ages of Sarah's life were equal. They were all equal because she never gave up. No matter what tzores came to her she never gave up. Why was it that Sarah died after she heard about the Akedah? She died because she knew that her mission in life was over, that she had raised a son who was going to continue on the footsteps of herself and Abraham. She had raised a son

who was willing to sacrifice for Judaism, who was willing to go to the Akedah. She knew that she had fulfilled her function in life because her son, too, was willing to stand up for Judaism. Her son, too, was willing to put his life on the line for Judaism. Therefore, her mission was really over in life. We all know that many times Jews think that they can rely on the promises of others, but we know that throughout history we have been disappointed. The German Jews thought they could rely completely upon the German promises. Anything that we Jews have ever achieved, we have achieved because we have had to pay a high price. The same thing was true with Abraham. Three times the sons of Chais said they would give him the burial plot free, but at the end Abraham paid 100 times the average yearly wage of a worker. He was greatly overcharged for that plot of land. The Jewish people, if we are to survive, it will be because we are willing to sacrifice for our beliefs. We can say the Bnai Chais will do this, and Bnai Chais will do that and we can interact with them, but we know that unless we stand up and be counted we will not continue to exist. There are many more Jews now in Czechoslovakia than we first thought because now that communism has collapsed, many Jews who had hidden their identity and didn't have the gumption to stand up for Judaism are now coming out of the woodwork. Israel is now sending emissaries. Jews in Czechoslovakia now have free summer camps for their children. They can now go on aliyah. This is all possible now in one Czechoslovakian town because four couples were willing to stand up for Judaism. Because they were willing to stand up for Judaism, there is now a revival of Yiddishkeit in Czechoslovakia. It never died, so, therefore, the others can now come to it after communism has collapsed. The Jews of Czechoslovakia have been given a great legacy, the legacy of their religion, because of the love four couples in a Czechoslovakian town had for it. They were willing to endure tears and blood to keep it alive. They were like Sarah, Esther and Moshe. They made sure that hope would still be there, that no matter what would be thrown against them, they would not deny their Jewishness because Judaism is something precious. Judaism is something the world needs. They believed and still believe that Judaism has much to teach the world. We all hope and pray that we will always remember this, that we all will remember that we are descended from heroes and that Judaism is something that they sacrificed for so that we could have it. Let us all hope and pray that through the merit of these four couples and through the merit of the many other heroes who stood up for Judaism throughout the ages, Jews will not only survive but will thrive and truly be a beacon of light to the world. Amen.

TOLDOS

Personal Purity, Society's Responsibilities and Succos

One of the tragedies of the modern world is that somehow those people who believe in personal purity and self-discipline do not believe that society has any responsibility at all to help the poor or the helpless or the less fortunate, while those who believe that society has a responsibility to help the poor and the helpless, by and large, do not believe in personal purity and self-discipline. This dichotomy is totally foreign to the Jewish view

of things. We do not see any contradiction at all between being personally pure and being concerned about the welfare of the poor and the helpless and the handicapped, etc. Somehow in the west, ideas of personal purity are associated with religion, while the ideas of society helping the poor and the helpless seem to be rooted in the so-called atheistic philosophies of the French Revolution.

This tragic dichotomy has caused an immense amount of suffering even in our country today for no reason. People who are loyal churchgoers and who themselves are personally pure refuse to support any programs which allow the government to help the poor and the helpless, while, on the other hand, those people in our society who are willing to help the poor and the helpless and disadvantaged add to the problems of the poor and helpless and disadvantaged by not stressing to these same people and to themselves the need for personal purity and self-discipline. Drug addiction, loose sexual morals/mores, excessive alcohol consumption, lax health practices all contribute to the problems which they feel society should help cure.

In the Torah portion Toldos we learn about the blessings that Yitzchak gave to Yaacov and then to Esau. These blessings seem strange blessings because they do not seem to speak about spiritual things at all. They seem to speak of only physical things. It is true that in the third blessing which is mentioned in this Torah portion, a blessing which Yitzchak gave to Yaacov before he leaves ostensibly to seek a wife in Mesopotamia from his mother's family, but in reality to flee his brother's wrath, the blessing of Abraham is mentioned, but in the blessing which Yitzchak gave Yaacov when he thought he was Esau and the blessing which he gave Esau, contains at first glance no spiritual message at all. It talks about the dew of the heavens, the fat places of the earth, plenty of corn and wine, people serving you, etc.

Perhaps a clue to what these blessings really mean can be found in the Torah portion Vayishlach where after Yaacov and Esau are reconciled it says, "And Esau went on his way to Sayer and Jacob traveled to Succos." The rabbis explain that the word Sayer means a goat and is another name for Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur the famous ceremony of the scapegoat was enacted in the Temple, at which time the people's sins were symbolically sent out into the desert. Esau could only go religiously as far as Yom Kippur. Yaacov could go to Succos.

What's the difference between Yom Kippur and Succos? Yom Kippur is primarily a holiday of personal purity. It is a holiday in which we strive to rid ourselves of our guilt over our actions in the past by confronting our sins, admitting we did wrong, and determining never to do them again. It is a holiday in which we basically look at our individual actions. Succos, on the other hand, is a holiday in which we go out into the world, in which we proclaim that G-d has given us a task and that is to make a just society and to exploit all the marvels of nature which G-d has given us in order to make a paradise on earth. The rabbis are very much aware of the fact that to some people religion can just stop at Yom Kippur, and, therefore, they have ordained that on the Haphtorah on the day of Yom Kippur we are to read how it is necessary for all of us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. G-d does not want a fast that just allows us to concentrate only on ourselves. The rabbis teach us that Succos is placed purposefully five days after Yom Kippur to teach us that Yom Kippur and Succos are tied together. You first have to have a Yom Kippur before you can come to Succos. You first have to believe that you have to be personally pure before you can attempt to correct the ills of the world and the ills of

society, otherwise you may make them both much worse, not better.

The rabbis all ask the question, why is it that on the holiday of Succos we bring 70 bullocks? On no other holiday do we bring so many bullocks. The rabbis say that we bring them for the nations of the world. They also ask, why is it that on Succos we take only natural material? The schach that is placed on the top of the succah must be made of natural materials. If you made a mat out of reed you could not use it. If you shellacked wood you could use it for the sides of the succah but not for the schach. The lulav and esrog that we take are all natural. Why are we only concerned about natural materials? Also on the Shabbos of Succos we read a portion from the Torah which does not seem to have anything to do with Succos. We read about Moshe saying to G-d after G-d had forgiven the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf, "You did not make known to me who You will send with me [to lead the Jewish people from Mount Sinai to Israel]." Moshe continues by saying, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not take us up from here."

Finally, Moshe says, "I will know that You are going up with us if we will be distinguished, I and Your people, from all the nations of the earth." In other words, "If the Jewish people are distinguished, if they have great men in the arts and sciences, then I will know that You, G-d, are with us." What does all this have to do with Succos?

The Ramban, or Nachmonides, tells us that there are actually two holidays which celebrate the creation of the world. One is the weekly Shabbos, about which we read in the Book of Genesis, that G-d created the world and rested on the seventh day. The other, Nachmonides says, is Succos. That is why there are seven days of Succos, corresponding to the seven days of creation. Shmini Atzeres and Simchat Torah are special holidays. There are actually two aspects to creation. Shabbos celebrates G-d creating the world out of nothing. Succos celebrates the unfolding of the process of creation which began when G-d created the world. G-d created everything that the world needs in order to become a veritable paradise. Succos teaches us that creation is an ongoing process, and G-d has asked man to help Him complete the process of creation. It is our job to take the materials which G-d has given us and to fashion them into materials and structures which will benefit us all. Raw nature is cruel and vicious. Man cannot live like an animal. Man is the most puny of all animals. Other animals do not have to cook their food. They do not need clothes. Without clothes in the north, we would freeze to death, and without clothes in warm climates, we would all get skin cancer. G-d created the world. He created everything that we need to make this world a paradise. G-d initiated the process for the completion of the world and He has given us the job of being his agents in completing the world. We must, though, start with ourselves. That is what circumcision is all about, and basically what the hymen is all about, too. We have to perfect ourselves before we can even perfect creation. We have to be personally pure and self-disciplined before we can perfect nature and society. That's why on Succos we go out into nature to remind us that G-d has put everything in nature that we need to perfect the world but we have to find it. We have to discover all the things in nature which will help us create a paradise on earth. We have to discover the medicines and energy sources and techniques to give our people good health, to allow our societies to function correctly, to give us the tools in order to create a paradise on earth, but there is a problem. The problem is that everything we discover can be used both for good or bad. That is the symbol of the esrog. The rabbis say that the forbidden fruit that Adam and Eve ate in the Garden of Eden was not the

apple, but the esrog. The esrog is a symbol that man can use all the knowledge that he acquires both for good and evil. The more advances we make in chemistry, the better food products we can produce, but also the more efficient we can become in creating chemical weapons. The more efficient we become in physics, the better power sources we can create but also the better atomic bombs we can create. The more advances in biology, the more genetic defects we can cure but also the more monsters we can create. Knowledge is a two-edged sword. It is our business to try to make this world a paradise. All our modern inventions have helped man to expand his life expectancy, develop his artistic and spiritual talents, but they also have led to a Holocaust and to other mass exterminations. At Succos we go to nature because G-d has told us that He wants us to help Him complete the process of creation, but we also pray for peace because unless there is peace among all nations, all the discoveries that we make will not help us. They will only destroy us.

Moshe, too, was now about ready to embark on a new mission. He had completed his mission of taking out the Jewish people from Egypt and leading them to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. G-d was now telling Moshe that he was to take the Jewish people and bring them into the land of Israel, where they would enter history and help Him complete creation. Moshe wanted to be assured by G-d that G-d would be with him, because without G-d's help, the mission would be futile. Everything that the Jewish people would discover to make the lives of all mankind better could be turned around and instead of being used to help mankind, could be used to destroy it. Moshe said, "G-d, if You will not go with us, do not take us up." This was, in effect, the blessing that Yitzchak gave Yaacov about the dew of the heavens, the fat places of the earth, the corn and the wine, and that the peoples would serve Yaacov. Yitzchak was not talking here about military conquest. He was talking about how the peoples of the earth would want to learn from the Jewish discoveries, from distinguished scientists and men of arts and letters who would come from the Jewish people. Therefore, everyone who would bless us would also be blessed because they would be blessed by the great advances that would come from our people. Everyone would recognize because of these advances that G-d was with the Jewish people, that the Jewish people were a distinguished people, as Moshe Rabbeinu said. However, if the Jewish people would slip, would become personally immoral, then none of their genius would avail them. The Jewish people would be subjected to the sword of Esau. If the Jewish people lower their moral standards, then they would be subjected to the power of Esau.

That, of course, was the second blessing of Yitzchak, which he gave to Esau. Yitzchak was telling Yaacov that the Jewish people must be both personally pure and be concerned about the world if they are to fulfill their mission. Esau only looks a personal morality. He conceives of religion only in personal terms, not societal terms. Esau only goes as far as Sayer. When Esau sees the Jewish people act immorally, then he knows that they have forfeited G-d's protection and he attacks them and destroys them, even if the advances and knowledge they bring can aid him. Unfortunately, this has been true throughout history. The Jewish people, especially when they fight among themselves, not only lower their standards but invite the enemy to destroy them. If a country is to be strong, it must have both elements. It must have people who believe in personal purity and also in helping the poor and the helpless in society. Only in this way can it endure.

Let us hope and pray that the rift in American society will be healed, that soon it will not

be seen to be contradictory that a person can both be personally pure and very concerned about the problems of society and wish to cure them. We Jews go out into the succah at Succos to teach us that we must help perfect nature by taking all the elements of nature and combining them in ways that will produce better health and better knowledge to help us all. We also go into the succah to teach us that we have to be concerned about people who live in huts and poverty. Let us hope and pray that soon everyone will learn that we all have to go not only to Sayer, but also to Succos.

VAYAETZAE

Creativity, Joy and Strength in Judaism

What is it that Judaism promises a person if he practices it? What difference should it make in person's life whether or not he practices Judaism? Is Judaism just a matter of taste, is it just like preferring different ice cream flavors? Some people like vanilla and some do not, some people like chocolate. Some people like to help others and some do not. Is practicing Judaism only a question of preference and style which really does not add or detract anything from a person's life? Many people would answer yes to this question, and that is why in their lives Judaism has such a low priority. To them Judaism may be nice but it is not too important. We believe the contrary, that Judaism is very

important and that it adds much to a person's life by giving him the capacity to overcome his problems, develop meaningful relationships, maintain his integrity, and ultimately determine whether or not he is going to have a satisfying life.

The rabbis tell us, based on the Kaballah, that G-d, in order to make room for the world which He was going to create, contracted Himself, but He left little pieces of Himself in everything and in each of us so that every time we do deeds of kindness, we release these little sparks of G-d, thus enabling us to get closer to each other and to Him. The Torah also teaches us that on the first day, G-d created light. Everyone, of course, asks the question, how could G-d have created light on the first day when He did not create the sun until the fourth day? We all know from the big bang theory that this light could be the light of radiation. The rabbis explain that this was the light reserved for the righteous in the world to come, the light which now is hidden in everything and everyone, and that it is our job to reveal this light.

When G-d created the world, the rabbis teach us, He did not just create the world; He also began a process. G-d creates out of nothing. We must create using materials. G-d created out of nothing the materials with which He later created everything, including man, but He also told man that He was giving him this same power, not to create out of nothing, but the power to create by combining things that were already created. G-d's creation was not only an act, but also the beginning of a process. We have been told that we are to be G-d's partner in perfecting the world, and we are to begin by perfecting ourselves.

Judaism, first of all, gives each of us a mission in this world. The world is not boring to us. There are so many infinite numbers of possibilities in the world. There are so many more beautiful things that we can create out of that which G-d has given us. There is so much more beautiful music, beautiful architecture, but most importantly, beautiful human beings and beautiful society structures that we can create. By learning Torah too, we can create new things, new interpretations, new insights into the human condition. We Jews have always been producing "Cheedushim", which in Hebrew literally means "new interpretations, new things." The world is not static. That is why we in Judaism are always optimistic that the future is going to be better than the past if we work at it. "Yeeyah Tov - it will be good." Optimism is one of the main themes of the Jewish religion. There is so much potentiality in the world and in each of us. The joy of knowing you can bring a better world, the joy of knowing that you can improve yourself, and the joy of knowing that you can renew yourself, has been one of the great forces which has allowed Jews throughout the centuries to withstand all sorts of persecution. Judaism to the Jew has always been a joy, not a heavy burden. Those who cease to practice Judaism, usually within a generation or two, lose this joy and optimism.

The second quality which the practice of Judaism gives to its adherents is the ability to withstand criticism, the ability to stand alone, the ability to stand up for your principles, the ability to be different. Abraham was fearless. He was known as "Ivri," which in Hebrew means "on one side." He was the first to break with the pagan world. He disagreed without being disagreeable, and he had the inner faith to withstand the criticism of others. This is an important quality and probably accounts for the fact that there are so many first-rate Jewish composers, writers, and scientists because new ideas always invoke criticism. It is hard to give up old ideas. We Jews have always been on the cutting edge of society. The ability to be different and to stand out is an important quality if a

person is to maintain his intellectual integrity. Judaism gives a person this strength. The third quality that Judaism gives to a person is the ability to overcome suffering. Judaism has never promised that if a person would be religious that he would not have any problems. G-d has never promised us that. All G-d has promised us is that if we are religious, He will give us the strength to overcome our problems, that our problems will not defeat us. We will defeat our problems. As Rabbi Levi of Berdichev, said, "G-d, I do not ask You to explain to me why we suffer, only that You should let me know that we are suffering for Thee." G-d listens to all our prayers, but many times He says no. Religion is not magic. We cannot force G-d to do anything by our prayers. Sometimes the best thing that can ever happen to us is not to have our prayers answered. How many times has it happened that someone's prayers were answered, or they thought they were answered, and they married the wrong boy or girl, or they became a success in business too soon and it destroyed them. G-d never promised us that we will not have problems. He only promised us that He will give us the strength to overcome our problems. Judaism also gives us the ability to discern between right and wrong. It is difficult to rationalize away your deeds if you follow the Jewish religion. It is still possible and you still could try, but the harmful effects of your evil deeds will not permit you to maintain an evil course for long.

Finally, Judaism potentially can, like our patriarch Isaac, allow you to have mystical experiences and can potentially, like Moshe Rabbeinu, make you a very wise and discerning person. Judaism can also teach you how to form meaningful relationships and maintain them throughout your life.

In the Torah portion Vayaetzae, we learn about these qualities in the life of Yaacov. He was forced to flee from before his brother Esau because he had received his father's blessing under dubious circumstances. His brother Esau believed that this blessing belonged to him, yet, in spite of his having to flee, Yaacov maintained his joyful optimistic attitude. He still dreamed of angels ascending to heaven and he still swore that if G-d would be with him that he would give one-tenth of whatever he had to G-d (to the charities G-d designated). He was not overcome with pessimism even though his plight looked desperate. He also knew that he had to be fearless, that he had to be willing to stand up and be different. He knew that his uncle Laban would try to change him and make him into the same type of charlatan that he was. He knew that in order to maintain his integrity he would have to be willing to be different. He also knew that whatever life threw his way, with G-d's help, he could overcome. He did not give up. He did not cower and retreat. He also did not strike out violently. When Laban tricked him and gave him Leah instead of Rachel, he just buckled down and worked another seven years for Rachel. When Laban changed his salary many times, he still figured out how to earn a living. He would not be defeated. He also knew the importance of relationships. When he first saw his cousin Rachel by the well, he himself, without waiting for the other shepherds, rolled the stone off the mouth of the well and watered the sheep. He knew that his relationship with Rachel gave him much greater strength than he would have if he would be alone. He also knew that with her by his side, he could better overcome his problems and he could forge a wonderful family. He could reach his potential. He could roll the stone from off the mouth of the well. The Torah is often compared to water. He knew that together with his family, he could reveal new insights into Torah. He could also elucidate many of life's problems, both physical and moral. The word for "well" in

Hebrew also means "to explain." Because of his strong relationships and his strong sense of identity, he would have a much easier time revealing the hidden light in everything. Because of his strong belief, he felt close to G-d and in two instances, he had mystical experiences. The last one warned him that it was time to go back to Israel because all he was dreaming about now was one sheep mounting another. He had become almost as materialistic as his uncle Laban. We know, according to Medrash, that Yaacov studied in a yeshiva for 14 years. This study also made him wise enough so that he was able to solve his problems with Laban without having to resort to violence. He contrived a plan for leaving and with Leah and Rachel and Bilah and Zippah and their 12 children, he fled from Laban to Israel. Laban eventually overtook him, but with G-d's help and his wisdom, he was able to arrive at a face-saving compromise which allowed him to continue on his way.

Today, vis-a-vis the Jews, nothing in the world has really changed since the time of Jacob. We Jewish people are still filled with hope and optimism in spite of one-sided UN resolutions condemning Israel, Russian anti-Semitism, Arab threats, and David Dukes. Anti-Semitism has never destroyed our hope and optimism. We see today how Israel must stand alone like Abraham. We know that no other country would have been condemned by the UN if her policemen had reacted to the vicious assault of 3,000 stone-throwing youths upon 30,000 people worshipping at their holiest site by opening fire. Not only were the worshippers' lives in danger, but also the lives of the 45 policemen. They and many worshippers would have been killed if they had not opened fire. Twenty-five Jews had already been seriously wounded by the rocks and a police post burned down. We today must still have the courage to be different and stand up for what we believe in. We today, too, must realize that no matter what the problems and suffering, G-d has given us the strength to overcome them if we will but try, and we too must remember that the greatest source of our G-d-given strength is found within our family and community, that the relationships that we forge help us to overcome everything. Finally, we must believe that with wisdom and with G-d's help, eventually solutions will be found to all the problems in the Middle East.

Let us hope and pray that the current situation in the Middle East will soon be resolved so that Israel will become not only a haven for Jews throughout the world, but also a source of great blessing in the world because of her spiritual and physical creativity. May peace quickly come to Israel and the Middle East. Judaism offers much to those who practice it: hope, creativity, joy, courage, fearlessness, strength, good relationships, and many times, wisdom and mystical experiences. May none of us ever give up these wonderful gifts for foolish fads. We need Judaism in order to live optimistic, joyful, meaningful lives.

VAYISLACH

Religion, Insurance and Problems

Many people misconceive of what religion, especially Judaism, is all about. They conceive of religion as an insurance policy. They believe that if they do things for G-d, then G-d must give them riches and a life free from all serious problems. They feel that if they are good and fulfill the commandments, they are entitled to prosperity, good health, and a life free from all problems. Many times these people, when problems do strike them, are completely shattered. They cannot understand what happened. Here they felt they had upheld their part of the bargain, now G-d has failed them and has turned out to be an untrustworthy G-d, not worthy of being believed in or of being served. They feel that since problems have come upon them, they either must be evil people and deserve the problems that they now have received, something which they know in most cases is

not true, or G-d is no G-d and has no power because He cannot keep His end of the bargain.

Many middle class people, and rich people especially, believe in an insurance-type of religion because it validates their success. It tells them that they must be good otherwise they would not be rich. It also allows them to shrug off the problems of the poor. After all, poor people are poor because they have not done what G-d has wanted them to do, otherwise they would have been rich. Poor people are, in effect, sinners who are being punished. Therefore, the poor really have no claim on them. "I may help them because it is good for my soul to do charity," they claim, "but they do not really deserve it." In fact, among the Puritans who founded this country there was a theological view which stated this clearly. This view held that the rich deserved to be rich and the poor deserved to be poor, and that the poor did not deserve to be helped because they deserved it but only because it is good for the rich person's soul to help them.

In Judaism, we do not know why certain people are rich and certain people are poor, just like we do not know why G-d has given certain people great gifts and other people mediocre gifts, or no gifts at all. All we know is that whatever gifts G-d has given us, we must share them with others. If G-d has given us a great mind, then we must share the fruits of our intellectual endeavors with others. If G-d has made us a great musician, then we must share our musical talents with others. If G-d has made us rich, then we also must share our riches with others. Judaism teaches us that G-d has never promised us that if we are religious we will not have problems. All He has promised us is that if we have problems, He will give us the strength to overcome these problems, even if that means the strength to face death with dignity and courage, even if it means the strength and courage to sing Ani Maameem while being led to the gas chamber.

Many people who conceive of religion as an insurance policy also cannot stand to hear about the Holocaust because it shatters their whole view of religion. To their mind, the victims of the Holocaust must have somehow been guilty, otherwise this would not have happened to them. This, of course, is a proposition that all of us reject. We have just celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Massacre of Babi-Yar, where more than 33,000 Jews were killed in an eighteen hour period. Among them were over 100 of my relatives. They were not evil people. We do not know why problems come on people. We do not know why some people are rich and some people are poor. It is true that if you lead a religious life by and large, your life will be better than others who do not, even materially, because if you do not spend all your money on wine, women and gambling you will have money to support your family, maybe even money to invest, and you will be a better employee, etc. But this assumes that the society in which you live will be stable, that there will be no wars, depressions, that sickness will not strike, etc.

In Judaism, we believe that the purpose of religion is to bring us close to G-d. Getting close to G-d gives us meaning and purpose in life. It allows us to feel that our life is worthwhile. It allows us to know that we count because G-d is counting on us. It tells us that G-d needs us and cares for us. We do not understand His ways. We do not understand the whole picture. We do not know precisely what happened before we were born or what will happen after we die, but we have faith that ultimately in Messianic times we will understand why things have to be the way they are. We will understand G-d's justice, but right now, we do not.

Judaism is not an insurance policy. People, when they come to the synagogue, are not to

be congratulated on how righteous they must be, otherwise why would they be middle class or rich or successful? Unfortunately, there are many people who feel that this is what religion should do, and in many religions, that is what they do. Their religion makes these people feel so self-righteous and smug. This is not what the prophets did. The prophets warned the people of impending doom, even though at that moment they were rich and prosperous, if they did not learn to share their gifts, including their wealth, with others. They also warned the people that it is not always true that if they were truly religious that they would not have any problems in their lives. They reiterated the basic Jewish teaching that G-d's only promise to us as individuals is that He will give us the strength to overcome our problems if we are religious, not that we will not have any problems.

In the Torah portion Vayislach, we learn about the encounter of Yaacov with Esau. Yaacov is afraid and he does three things: he prepares for war; he prays to G-d; and he sends a huge gift in order to appease his brother. When Yaacov prays, he reminds G-d that it was, "the G-d of my father Abraham, and the G-d of my father Yitzchak, Who told me to return to your land and to your birthplace and I will be good to you." He continues to say, "I am not worthy of all the mercy and all the truth which You have done to Your servant, for with my staff I crossed this Jordan and now I have become two camps. Save me from the hand of my brother Esau."

The question is asked, why does Yaacov say, "I am small from all the kindness and all the truth which You have done with Your servant"? In the previous Torah portion Vayaetzae, we learn how G-d promised him that He would be with him and would guard him, that He would never desert him, and Yaacov promised that he would tithe. Didn't Yaacov keep his end of the bargain? Of course he did, but Yaacov knew that our relationship with G-d is not like with an insurance policy. G-d promised to protect Yaacov and to make sure that his seed would continue forever, but He did not promise that Yaacov would not have problems. He did not promise that Yaacov would not have a pitched battle with his brother Esau. Yaacov knew this, and therefore, he was afraid. Thank G-d, the pitched battle, as we learn later on in the Torah portion, was avoided, but it was not foreordained that it would not occur because Yaacov tithed. Yaacov and Esau made up just as we hope that in our day Israel and the Arab nations will make peace and that there will not be any more wars. One of the reasons that Esau made up with Yaacov is because Yaacov shared his wealth with him. When Yaacov gave Esau his present, he referred to it as his brocha, his blessing. The willingness to give of yourself and your things helps you overcome your problems. Yaacov's life, though, was filled with many problems. He was able to overcome these problems, though, because he was religious. G-d did not promise him that he would have no problems, only that if he acted righteously he would be given the strength to overcome his problems.

In the next Torah portion, Vayeshev, we learn about the problem of Joseph and how he was sold as a slave by his brothers. The rabbis explain that the reason this whole problem of Joseph came upon Yaacov was that "Vayeshev Yaacov - and Yaacov sat." Yaacov thought that now all his problems were at an end. He thought that he could now sit back and enjoy life, but G-d told him, "You want the next world and a trouble free this world, too?" It is the job of the righteous to plunge forward and try to make this world a better place, not to just sit back and enjoy what they have and not to be concerned about the problems of the poor and the downtrodden. Being concerned inevitably causes problems,

but if we do nothing and just sit still, if we just celebrate our righteousness and do not try to improve our surroundings and correct our shortcomings, then worse problems will come upon us. We need Judaism but not just because it is an insurance policy. We need it because it gives us meaning and purpose in life and tells us that we count because we can be counted on. In this world, we will have problems, but if we lead a religious life, G-d has promised that He will give us the strength to overcome our problems.

Let us all hope and pray that none of us will feel that we are so righteous that we need not improve or that we are so deserving of gifts and wealth that we do not have to share them with others. Let us all hope and pray that none of us will ever be afflicted with problems, but that if we are, we will have the inner strength to overcome them because we are tied to our traditions, our people, and our G-d.

VAYESHEV

Should We Blur or Stress Differences?

We all know that it is very difficult for people to live together. Each of us has special desires and special beliefs and special attitudes, and each of us is very sensitive. It is very difficult to live in a family or in a congregation or in a city or in a state with different people who have different views and tastes who have different ways of doing things. The only way we can live together is if we obfuscate our differences; in other words, if we blur the differences between us. Sometimes we know that we cannot express clearly, sharply, and openly the differences that we have because if we do so then we will hurt other people's feelings and cause unsolvable arguments. Therefore, we know that diplomacy is required, compromise is required; but if we utilize diplomacy, if we compromise, what does that do to the truth? Doesn't that sometimes destroy our own true feelings? Does that sometimes destroy our own vision of what the future is to be? Doesn't

that trample on our individuality?

This is indeed a difficult problem, and there are some people who would go to an extreme by saying that if a person is polite, he is being immoral. If you say thank you for certain things for which you are not thankful, aren't you a liar? If a certain person gives you what is only due to you, should you heap him with praise? After all, by saying thank you, aren't you, in effect, giving credit to someone for something for which he does not deserve thanks? Also, when you deal with people in a polite way instead of demanding that which is yours, don't you, in effect, give up part of your claim? So we see that many times we do obfuscate, we do cloud over different issues in order for us to live together in peace. In fact, the Gemorah tells the story of a man who came to live in a city in which everybody was sworn to tell only the truth. He lived there and was getting along very well when one day a neighbor came over and asked to speak to his wife. His wife at that time was very sick and was throwing up. He did not want to embarrass his wife by saying that she was indisposed and throwing up, so he said that his wife was busy now and that she would call on this lady when she was finished. It was found out by the elders of this town that he had not told the whole truth and he was expelled from that town. The point of the story in the Talmud was to inform us that many times we should not tell the whole truth. This, too, we know is one of the purposes of clothing. Clothing hides, many times, our true feelings, especially different types of automatic responses. Also, by choosing what type of clothes to wear, we sometimes hide our true feelings. We dress formally at an affair to honor someone even if we do not feel he should be honored. It is true that there comes a point when we cannot cloud over differences, when we can no longer bridge seemingly unbridgeable gaps, and then we must take a stand. However, until that point in time comes we should try to bridge the gaps. We should try to make the necessary compromises so that we can live together.

In the Torah portion Vayeshev, we learn about these things. The rabbis also have us read this Torah portion Vayeshev right before Chanukah. In this Torah portion Vayeshev, we learn about the quarrel of Joseph and his brothers. We learn how the brothers were jealous of Joseph and how they had, in a certain sense, reason to be jealous because Joseph would tattletale about them to their father, especially how they were treating the sons of the handmaidens, the sons of Bilah and the sons of Zilpah. He also told them all about his dreams. Jacob tried to paper over these differences. He tried to make sure that they would not blossom into full blown hatred. It turned out that he was unsuccessful. When Joseph told his dreams to his father, the Torah says that his father rebuked him. He said, "What is this dream that you dream? Will we come, I and your mother and your brothers, to bow down to you to the ground?" Then it goes on to say, "And his father watched this thing." His father also was guilty of exacerbating this problem by giving Joseph a striped coat. Joseph's brothers hated him also because they saw that their father loved him more than all of the other brothers. The rabbis say that Joseph was a scholar. He was a studious individual who used to study with his father. Therefore, because of this, his father had a lot in common with him, and gave him this coat of many colors. It is interesting to note that throughout this Torah portion, a coat, a garment, plays a very big role because a garment covers not only the body but a garment also many times covers the truth. In fact, in Hebrew the word for garment, Begeg, is also the word for a traitor because a traitor appears to be something that he is not. A traitor pretends that he is a friend, when he is really an enemy. He is cloaked with friendship, but in his heart there is

nothing but enmity.

Throughout this Torah portion we learn about how we have to cloak differences in order to be able to live in peace until we come to a point where we cannot any longer, until we have to say that we can go no further. That, of course, is one of the reasons why the rabbis have determined that we must read this Torah portion close to Chanukah because there is one gap that can never be bridged, and that is the gap between Judaism and idolatry. Many Jews tried to bridge that gap in the time of the Maccabees. In fact, to a large extent, the story of Chanukah is the story of a civil war in which the Hellenist Jews tried to claim that the truths of Judaism and the truth of paganism could be bridged over, that we could be both pagan and a Jew. Of course, we know that this can never be so. There is a limit to how much we can cover over, how much we can obfuscate. We cannot cover over all problems.

Most problems, though, can be easily, and should be, covered over. People say that a husband and wife should never argue before their children, that if they do, this will destroy their children's feelings of security and so, therefore, they should paper over their differences until they are in private and then they can discuss their problems. I personally do not think that this is always a good idea. I think that many problems should be discussed in front of children, even when parents disagree, because later on when these children get married and they have disagreements with their spouses, they will not know that it is normal to have disagreements with your spouse. They will now know that in marriage it is normal to have differences of opinion. I can tell you that many times young couples have come to me and said that they are very, very upset because they have disagreements and they say their parents never had disagreements. I tell them that their parents did, but that they did not know about them. When they quizzed their parents, they found out that their parents had many disagreements, but that they had cloaked them from their children.

In the Torah portion Vayeshev, we learn about a garment over and over again. We learn how after Yehuda convinced his brothers to sell Joseph, they stripped Joseph of his coat and dipped it in the blood of a goat and then gave it to their father and said, "Recognize, please, the coat of your son." Jacob was forced to pronounce Joseph's death. He said, "A wild beast has eaten him. Joseph has been torn." When Reuben came back to the pit in which he had told the brothers to keep Joseph, he tore his clothes because he, too, had tried to disguise his true motive. He, too, had pretended to be with the brothers when really he had told them not to actively kill their brother, but to passively put him in a pit so that later he could come and save him. Judah, too, was punished by a garment when he was confronted by his daughter-in-law Tamar, whom he had mistakenly slept with. His older son had died after Tamar had married him. He had given her his second son and he, too, had died. Judah was then supposed to give her his third son, but he was at that time too young. Tamar then covered herself with a veil and pretended to be a prostitute and Judah came to her and he left behind his own coat, signet ring and staff as a surety for payment. The rabbis say Peseleem refers to a coat, a coat that even had tzitzis on it. Later when she was brought before a court accused of consorting with a man, she said, "The man who did this to me, here is his coat, signet ring and staff," and Judah admitted that it was he, that he was the man and that she was blameless, that he had failed her by not giving her his third son. The cloak was stripped away from him.

We learn later on that Joseph, too, was sent to prison because of a garment. He was the

head of the household of his master and the wife of the master had set her eyes upon Joseph. When no one was there, she entreated him to lie with her. He refused and she grabbed hold of his garment, saying to him, "Lie with me." He left his garment in her hands and he fled. When she saw that she had the garment in her hands, she called the men of her household and she said, "See, this man, this servant, tried to rape me." Because she had the garment, the rabbis say, Joseph was actually saved because when his case came before trial, the judges knew that if her clothes had been ripped, then he would be guilty, but if she was holding his clothing in her hand, then obviously things were not the way she claimed. But because of the honor of his master, Joseph was sent to prison. He was not, though, killed. In a certain sense, his garment saved his life. Without it he probably would have been convicted on her word alone.

We see that many times it is good to paper over differences, especially if the problems are irreconcilable. At other times, the problems are so basic that we have not only to speak about them, but we even have to fight for them, as the Maccabees did, otherwise Judaism will disappear. It is not true that in all instances we should let everything hang out, and it is not true that in all instances we should cover up things, but we do know that many times when we discuss problems, we legitimize them. We make them commonplace and, therefore, we justify people doing certain things that they normally would not do because of social pressure. Now they can say that since everybody else is doing these things, they might as well do them, too. Yes, sometimes we have to cover up our feelings. Sometimes we have to cover up different kinds of problems and paper over differences so that we can live together, otherwise we could never live together. On the other hand, though, there are certain problems that are so basic that we can never cover them up. The Maccabees demonstrated one type. Joseph demonstrated another type. He left his garment because he was not going to give up the morality of his forefathers. Judah admitted that it was his garment when he saw that someone else was going to be punished for his sin. The brothers acted terribly immorally when they covered up their own deed by having their father pronounce Joseph dead, never once saying what happened to Joseph. Joseph, too, should have covered up his dreams. He should not have let it all hang out. He should not have caused jealousy to reign in his family. Yaacov, too, should have covered up his admiration for Joseph because Joseph was a scholar, and he should not have distinguished him from the other brothers by favoritism. We see that many times it is not clear as to when things should be brought out in the open and when things should be camouflaged and papered over. Most times in life, though, it is much better to paper over differences because then relationships can continue and people can live together in peace, while if issues are forced to the surface, then all that usually happens is that enmity breaks out, hatred ensues, and nothing is really ever solved. Jacob did rebuke Joseph, but it did not solve the problem because the problem was really the difference between Joseph's dream and the brothers' dreams. Joseph dreamed about sheaves and stars, the future. The brothers dreamed only about the present. Let us all hope and pray that in the future, we will know when to paper over differences and when to bring out differences sharply, as the Maccabees had to do, so that the Jewish people can continue to live. Let us also all hope and pray that our differences will never destroy us but that we will always know how to deal with them so that there will always be harmony among us and not hatred.

MIKETZ

Family, Miracles and Jewish Survival

The rabbis have always arranged it that we read the Torah portion Miketz on Chanukah. Why should it be that we always read the Torah portion Miketz on Chanukah? What's more, if we look at the mitzvah of lighting the menorah on Chanukah, we notice that we do it at home. Why should it be that we light the Chanukah candles at home? It would seem to be more appropriate if we lit them in the synagogue, but we know that if we do light them in the synagogue that we don't fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candles. We light them in the synagogue only in order to publicize the miracle, but the real mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candles can only be done at home. Nobody can fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candles by seeing them lit in the shul or by lighting them in shul. This indeed seems strange since the whole miracle of the oil occurred at the Temple, and although it is true that our modern synagogues are not the Temple (there was only one Temple in Judaism and that was in Jerusalem), yet, we do call our synagogues little temples, and they do partake of some of the holiness of the

Temple. Why is it, then, that we do not light the Chanukah lights in the shul? That would seem to be the most appropriate place. The miracle of the oil happened in the Temple, and the whole purpose of lighting the oil was that the menorah in the Temple should be lit. Why is it then that we light them at home?

It is true that since we do not have the Temple today some people may get confused and think that our modern synagogues are the Temple, but that seems unlikely since even when the Temple stood, the mitzvah was not to light the Chanukah lights in the Temple, but the mitzvah was to light them at home. From the very beginning, the mitzvah was to light the lights at home.

Perhaps if we look carefully at the story of Chanukah we can understand why it is that the home was singled out to be the place where we light the Chanukah candles. The miracle of the Chanukah candles was not just the miracle about the Maccabees finding the little flask of oil that had not been defiled by the Syrian-Greeks and which should have lasted for only one day, but which lasted for eight days and which was lit in the Temple. It was also the miracle of the defeat of a major power by a small band of rebels led by Judah Maccabee. But even more than that, the miracle was especially that the Jewish people should even think that they could fight and win. The whole enterprise looked hopeless. How could the Jewish people win against a super power? It was impossible. The situation could never result in a Jewish victory. But Judah Maccabee, and especially his father, were very stubborn and said they were going to persevere and make sure their religion was not wiped out from the face of the earth. The courage of the Jewish people, especially the Maccabees, was a great miracle in itself.

Similarly, at the turn of the century there were Hebrew writers who persisted in writing in Hebrew, even though they themselves questioned whether anybody besides themselves would ever read their works. They felt that they were the last generation of Hebrew readers, and that perhaps it would be better if they wrote in Yiddish. Some of them succumbed and did only write in Yiddish and stopped writing in Hebrew, but as it turned out, Yiddish is the dead language and it is Hebrew that has a huge audience. In Israel today everybody speaks and reads Hebrew. Many times those things that looked completely hopeless, and which everyone agreed we should give up on, survive and those things that looked permanent disappear. It was the perseverance of the Maccabees in the face of what looked like almost certain defeat which allowed the other miracles to occur. Their perseverance in itself was a miracle.

That's why the rabbis all ask the question, why is it that we light eight candles on Chanukah? We should light only seven because the first day was not miraculous. The first day was how long the flask of oil should have lasted, so the miracle should be only seven days. The answer they give is that the first day, too, was a miracle because for the Maccabees to even light the oil hoping it would last for eight days was a miracle. It was similar to their having started the revolt which everyone said that they could not win. It was a great miracle in itself. Therefore, the miracle of Chanukah really had its origins not in the Temple but in the home. It was because of the influence of Mattathias' home that his five sons were willing to persevere even though everyone told them that they would be defeated. This was the source of all the miracles. It is true that it took them a long time to prevail, three years to recapture the Temple and another 25 years before the Jewish people got their independence, but they knew that they could not give up because if they gave up, that would be the end of the line for the Jewish people and Judaism would be

finished. It is one thing to compromise here and there with the authorities if you know that you are going to persevere and your religion is not going to be touched. You might accept added taxes or even persecution, but only if you know that your religion is going to continue. But if you know that your religion is going to be completely wiped out, then you will have no choice but to fight.

Where, though, did this courageous spirit come from? The spirit came from the family. That is why we light the Chanukah candles in the bosom of the family. That is why the rabbis say we read the Torah portion Miketz, because of the third word of the Torah portion, which is Shenaim. The rabbis say that this word is an acronym which stands for "on the left side of the door you should light the Chanukah candles and on the right hand you should affix the mezuzah." In the olden days they used to light the Chanukah candles outside, not inside. The reason for this was to publicize the miracle, to tell everybody not to give up. We did it at the home, not at the synagogue, to tell us that the strength of the Jewish people has always been in the home. If you teach your children correctly, if you give them the right education, if you, yourself, serve as a good example, Judaism will thrive and miracles will happen for our people because this is the promise that G-d has made to us. You have to take care of the hidden things, and that is why it says that the mezuzah is on the right and the Chanukah light is on the left. We stopped lighting the Chanukah candles outside when the Zoroastrian religion prohibited us from doing so. They believe that fire is one of the four sacred elements, and you could not use it any time you wanted to, so we were forced to light the Chanukah candles inside instead of outside. The concept still remains today, though, that we are supposed to publicize the Chanukah miracle. Why did the Chanukah miracle happen? Because it was tied to the mezuzah. The most important thing in the mezuzah is not the cover, although people spend hundreds of dollars for a cover and they get mad when you tell them it is \$25 for the parchment, but the parchment which has the Shma Yisroel written on it is the most important thing. It is the thing that you cannot see. The most important things in life you cannot see, the most important things like love and devotion and respect and integrity and sincerity and enthusiasm you cannot see. You can only feel them. You can only see them by their effects, and sometimes you can be fooled. Even the negative qualities, hatred and envy and greed, you can only see by their effects. You cannot really see them. The most important things are the things that are not seen.

How do you convey passion and love and sincerity and warmth and dignity and respect? These things you can only transfer in a home in interactions with people. These are things that cannot be learned from a book. You cannot memorize them. You have to learn them by interacting with your family. If you have a strong family, you will be able to learn how to obtain these qualities. You will be able to understand the importance of certain values and be willing to sacrifice for them. You will be willing to commit yourself to them and to live by them.

Unfortunately, today there are many good people who are willing to give a lot of money for Judaism but they have no passion about Judaism. To them Judaism is a museum.

They do not want to practice it themselves. They do not want to implement it into their own lives. The mezuzah tells us that it is the hidden things that are the most important. After the hidden things are taken care of, then you will be able to blaze with the Chanukah lights. Everybody will be able to see your dedication and devotion.

Therefore, Chanukah is basically a holiday which revolves around the family because it

is the family which teaches us about dedication and devotion and self-abnegation. When the father gives over his paycheck to the mother, while the mother devotes herself to the children, the values of dedication, devotion and love are felt and learned by the children. These are great qualities. These qualities can only be learned in a loving family. It is only these qualities which have allowed Judaism to survive. They are also the only qualities which will allow us to fully achieve happiness in life, because, to my way of thinking, happiness is composed of just three elements. It is composed of achieving certain self-set goals, which America believes is the only road to happiness, but it is only a partial road to happiness. It is also composed of knowing that you are loved for yourself and knowing that you can bring joy to others. If you have these three elements, you will be very happy. These three elements are the basis of every functioning family. In a family, there are goals that everyone works on together. Everyone in the family knows they are loved for themselves, and everybody in the family knows they can bring joy to other members of the family. The family is also important because it teaches about the hidden things, love, devotion and dedication.

That is why we read this Torah portion every Chanukah because we learn about Joseph. Joseph was very good at understanding the hidden things. He took the outward dreams of Pharaoh and showed what they really meant. It is the hidden things, the things you cannot really see in life that are the most important things, and Joseph was very good at discerning them. It is very important that we realize this. It is very important that we realize that the strength of Judaism has always been the family, and that we must do everything we possible can to strengthen the family, so we can all appreciate the hidden things which really bring happiness in life.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a young man 21 years old who came to ask for the hand of a man's eldest daughter, who was only about 20, and there were four other daughters. He came up to the man and said, "Sir, I would like to marry your daughter." The man said, "Well, young man," looking him over, "do you think you can support a family?" The young man said he thought he could. The father said, "Well, I want you remember there are seven of us." In Judaism, we draw strength from our family and from our extended family, too. It was because of the bravery of the five brothers who fought together that the Jewish people were saved from extinction. All five of the Maccabee brothers died violent deaths. They gave their all for the Jewish people. It is important that we realize that it is the family which causes us to be strong. In America, the family is in the process of completely disintegrating, because on the list of priorities, it is 372 down the list. People feel family gets in the way. We see that when the family disintegrates, human beings disintegrate, too, and the quality of life disintegrates, and of course, Judaism deteriorates and quickly disintegrates also. Let us hope and pray that we will all realize that it is the family that is the strength of our people. May we by working within the family gain the proper values to that we too can perform miracles and cause Judaism to survive.

VAYIGASH

Talent, Pain and G-d's Will

Life is very complex. Things are not always the way we think that they should be. We have all been taught, especially by the literature that was created especially for youngsters in this country, that clean, moral living is what brings material and professional success. We have all read in this literature about how it was only the clean-living baseball players who made it to the big leagues. Unfortunately, this is not true. Some of this country's best ballplayers have been everything but examples of clean, wholesome living. Talent and morality do not always go hand in hand. Sometimes the most talented people are not the most moral, and sometimes the most moral, upstanding people have no talent whatsoever. The movie "Amadeus" about the life of Mozart tried to make this point. Mozart, according to this movie, was not a serious person and had many moral flaws. This, though, did not prevent him from writing some of the most beautiful music ever composed. His music was infinitely superior to his rival's music even though his rival was a very moral and serious fellow. It is true that a talented person can destroy his talent and shorten his life dramatically by not living a moral, decent life and that talent is not the most important thing in life, but it is also true that a moral, decent person

cannot acquire talent if he is not born with it.

The same thing applies to world history. Sometimes the most atrocious events in retrospect are the most beneficial and some of the most seemingly beneficial events, at least at the time, have the most dire consequences. Czar Nicolas II, by his surreptitious backing of the pogroms in Russia, beginning in the 1880's and continuing almost to the First World War, caused two million Jews to leave Russia. If these Jews would not have left Russia, they most probably would have all been killed by Hitler. The great Jewish communities of the United States and Canada, South Africa, South America and Australia, etc. would not have come into being. On the other hand, the granting of Polish independence after World War One and the relative freedom granted to the Jewish community there, lulled many Jews into feeling that they did not have to leave Poland, and as a result, they were almost all wiped out by Hitler. This does not mean, of course, that we should all start making statues in honor of Czar Nicolas II. He was an evil man who meant no good by his actions, but G-d works in mysterious ways. G-d has told us that we cannot thwart His will. If we follow the mitzvahs and if we are kind one to another and are compassionate, caring people we will be able to achieve His will without suffering. If, on the other hand, we act evilly and harm each other and try to hurt each other, G-d's will will still be done, but we will suffer.

In the Torah portion Vayigash, we have these great themes intertwined: the theme that talent and goodness do not necessarily go together, and the theme that G-d can even turn the evil we do into good and reveal to us the evil beneath what we momentarily have considered good because of our short-sighted vision. In the Torah portion Vayigash, we learn about the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers. We learn that Joseph is no longer able to control himself after he hears his brother Judah say, "How can I go to my father and the boy [Benjamin] is not with me, lest I look upon the evil that shall come upon my father?" Joseph realizes that his brothers have done Teshuva. They are treating their brother Benjamin the exact opposite way that they treated him. They are trying everything they can to save their brother even though they know that their father favors him. When he, Joseph, was living with them, they tried everything in their power to get rid of him, because they felt that their father had favored him. Joseph orders everyone out from his presence and then the Torah says, "And he wept out loud." It is strange that Joseph wept now. Nowhere does it say in the Torah that he wept when he was cast into a pit by his brothers. Nowhere does it say that he wept when he was sold as a slave, but we read here that he wept when he revealed himself to his brothers. Why should he have wept? After all, he was vindicated. His dreams were vindicated. He had dreamed that his brothers would bow down to him and they had. He had dreamed that he would become a big man and he had. Why did he weep? He could have exulted and said, "See, I was right after all. My dreams were not foolishness. You had no business harming me because I was only revealing what G-d had prophesied to me," but he did not do that. He wept. He wept, the rabbis tell us, because for the first time he felt not only his pain, but the pain of his brothers. The rabbis say that the Jewish people were destined to go down to Egypt. G-d had prophesied that to Abraham years before, but the Jewish people did not have to go down to Egypt this way. They did not have to come down first in Joseph's person as a slave and then later as a group which was shamed by being accused of being spies and which was forced because of a famine to come and beg for mercy. They could have come down proudly as the official herdsmen of Pharaoh, etc.

Joseph also wept because he knew that the special talent which G-d had given him and which ultimately saved his family by causing him to rise to be the viceroy of Egypt, was also the same talent that brought terrible tragedy to his father Jacob. It caused Jacob to mourn for 22 years for a son whose body he could never locate because Joseph was alive and it was this talent which caused his whole family to suffer because Jacob could not stop mourning. A great talent can also be a curse. Look at modern day football and basketball players who, because of their talent, make huge sums of money. This money allows them to buy cocaine and other drugs which then ruin their lives. If they would not have had access to this money, they would not have been able to so easily purchase all these drugs and they would not have shortened their lives and destroyed their marriages, etc. It was their talent which has cursed them. This is also true of many young people who have become successful too soon. Their success causes them to become egotistical and overly critical of others and stunts their growth and causes them eventually to fail miserably. Joseph told his brothers, "Do not be sad. Do not be grieved. Do not be angry with yourselves because you sold me here because G-d sent me before you to preserve life." G-d had turned the consequences of their evil into good, but the brothers knew and Joseph knew that they were guilty. They did not intend to do good. They had intended to do bad. Thanks to G-d, it turned out good.

The brothers bore this guilt all their lives. In fact, after their father Jacob died, they sent a message to Joseph in which they said, "Your father commanded before his death by saying, 'Please forgive the sins of your brothers because they did you evil and now forgive, please, the sins of the servants of the G-d of your father'." Joseph on that occasion wept also. He wept because he knew that this brothers still suffered because of what they had done. G-d knows why we do certain things and G-d looks at our motives as well as our deeds. The rabbis say that if a person wanted to do evil but he did not do it, G-d forgives him immediately, but if a person intended to go do good but was prevented from doing it because of some outside circumstances, he is given credit for the good. However, in this case the brothers intended to do evil and they actually did evil. They actually sold their brother Joseph into slavery. The consequences of their evil eventually turned into good but they could not take credit for that. They intended evil and they did evil. Joseph forgave them because they truly repented of their evil and, because they repented of their evil and tried to make amends, G-d forgave them, too.

Life is not easy or simple. Sometimes in our concentration to do what we consider to be good, we end up doing great evil. The rabbis ask, why was it that the brothers sold Joseph in the first place? The answer they give is because they felt Joseph was ruining the family by his tattling, by his misconstruing facts which were not always what he thought they seemed to be. He was creating a rift between Jacob and his sons by his vanity and overweening ambition. Backed by great talent, Joseph, they thought, was continually mocking them. They could not match his talent. The brothers failed to see how Joseph was using his talent in a moral way. They felt that it was best for the family if Joseph were to be removed from the family. They also, according to the rabbis, resented Joseph preaching that times were changing and that they had to give up being shepherds and that they had to learn other trades. They felt that it was best for everyone concerned if Joseph were removed. They ended up by doing great evil. They thought they were saving their family. By momentarily forsaking moral principles, they felt they were doing a big mitzvah. They were not. They were doing great harm. The end here could never justify

the means.

Unfortunately, in the world today we see the same phenomenon. We see how great nations are willing to sacrifice little nations for what they conceive to be the greater good. We all are very concerned that the United States should not sacrifice Israel in order to preserve its shaky Arab-American alliance. The world's events are never simple and life is very complicated, but we do know that G-d has always promised that the Jewish people will exist. We are sure that this promise will be kept in this generation as it has in the past. The problem has always been, will our existence be assured only through our great suffering, or will our existence be assured without this suffering? Many times our own people make foolish decisions. Sometimes our own people turn on each other, as Joseph's brothers did against Joseph, because they feel this is best for the Jewish family. This happened during Antiochus' time when many Hellenistic Jews turned on their people and even assured the Syrian-Greeks that the Jewish people would give up their religion easily. Part of the Chanukah story is the story of the struggle of a people against itself.

We should all learn from the story of Joseph and his brothers that this should never be. We must never turn on our brothers and never exclude any part of the Jewish people, but we must always be forgiving and say, as Joseph did, that G-d has brought these things upon us to cause us to live. Let none of us ever feel that we know G-d's mind and can fathom His ways. Joseph himself was punished years earlier when he had been cast in prison after he had been falsely accused by Potiphar's wife because he relied on the butler to save him. His sin was not that he relied on the butler to save him, but that he relied only on the butler to save him. G-d can save the Jewish people in many ways. Let us all hope that we will all always want to do the right thing so that it will be without suffering.

VAYECHI

The Double Standard and Jewish Excellence

One of the problems that we Jews have always had to face is the problem of the double standard. Jews are always judged by a different standard than everyone else. We can see that especially now vis-a-vis Israel. If Israel should expel one or two Palestinian terrorists, the whole world is up in arms. The president and secretary of state condemn Israel's brazen act of expulsion and a special session of the UN Security Council is called. On the other hand, when Kuwait and Saudi Arabia expel hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, not one peep is heard. In modern day Saudi Arabia there is still slavery. There are no human rights. Torture is common. Thieves' hands are chopped off. There is no democracy, no free speech, no freedom of religion, and there is not a word of protest from our government or from really anyone in the United States. On the other hand, if because of security reasons a reporter is banned from a certain section of the West Bank, or if an individual Israeli soldier uses excessive force, it makes the headlines of all the nations' newspapers. Nobody protests when Jews are banned from visiting Arab lands. Nobody protests when Jordanian law states that anybody who sells land to a Jew is subject to the death penalty. Nobody protests when the Arabs impose a boycott on all commercial relations with Israel, but everybody protests when Israel erects a new settlement on government land or on land that Jews have bought. These headlines blare,

"Israel Seizes Arab Houses." When you read the article you find at the very end of the article that Jews have bought these houses, but the Arabs consider the very act of Jews buying homes owned by Arabs as a provocative act.

This problem of the double standard is found not only in Israeli-Arab relations but throughout Jewish-Gentile relations. Jews are expected to behave better than everyone else. If a Jew does something wrong, the entire Jewish people is blamed, while if a non-Jew does something wrong, only the individual is blamed, not his group. We see this throughout American society today, too. The justification offered for the pogrom, the riot, which struck Crown Heights in Brooklyn was that the Jews were getting preferential treatment. Their children were not being arrested for drugs. They were not being thrown in jail because of thievery, mugging, etc. The reason they were not is because the Jewish children of Crown Heights are not on drugs and are not engaged in crime. The only charge that could be made to stick was that on certain Jewish holidays, certain streets were closed off, but streets in Crown Heights are always closed off for parades, block parties, etc. We see in Louisiana anti-Semitism raising its ugly head in the person of David Duke. Somehow it has been insinuated that the Jews are behind all the problems in America. Even Oliver North in his book stated that subtle anti-Semitism was rampant in the State and Defense Departments and in the upper levels of American society, as well as in the American government. This anti-Semitism takes the form of, if Jews are not perfect, they are to be condemned.

To a large extent, we are very susceptible to this type of anti-Semitism because of the claims we profess. We claim that the whole world should live by the laws of morality of the Torah, that the seven commandments of Noah are incumbent upon the whole world. We claim that the Ten Commandments are the very basis of western civilization and we expect our society to be moral. Jews are in the forefront of most of the organizations which fight for the moral betterment of society. We claim that the world should live by high moral standards and we fight in every society in which we live for these moral standards. Many people in every society do not want to live by these moral rules. These people hate Jews and Judaism because of what Judaism stands for. They do not want to live by the rules of morality and they take special glee in pointing out to the world that many Jews do not live up to these rules of morality either, and are, therefore, especially liable for punishment. In their eyes and in the eyes of the world, the Jewish people are the symbols of morality. Many Jews would rather not be symbols of morality but as long as they carry the name Jew they are in the eyes of the world, nevertheless, symbols of morality. Hitler, therefore, determined to kill all Jews irregardless of whether they themselves believed in morality because they were symbols of it.

Being a Jew is a great opportunity because it allows us to be G-d's partner in creation. It allows us to help Him perfect the world, but it also is a big responsibility. It brings us great joy and happiness and it puts us in the forefront of history, but it also is a big responsibility. We Jews must always realize that being Jewish enhances our lives and gives us an added spiritual dimension which allows us to overcome our problems and allows us to live joyous, optimistic lives. It also gives us the opportunity to make great contributions to the world in all fields. It allows us to see the beauty in the world and to see the order and the unity beneath the world's surface chaos.

In order, though, for us to bear the burden of the ridicule and hatred that will be directed against us because we want change, because we attack positions which are immoral and

because our very presence challenges injustice and immorality, we must be firmly rooted in our traditions and recognize the joy that they bring us, otherwise our young people especially will say, "Why do we need this burden? Why don't we just assimilate and be done with it?" In many eras, it has been impossible to assimilate. Hitler would not let any Jew assimilate, but in eras like our own it is possible to assimilate. "Let us biologically mix with the people about us and disappear," some say. "The burden has been too great." Most Jews, though, reject this notion because we know that not only is the Jewish continued presence necessary for moral growth of the world, but also that Judaism offers such a satisfactory, joyous life that we do not want to give it up. We Jews, though, must always realize that we will be judged by a double standard and that we must accept this fact and realize that we will just have to act more nobly or morally than others around us. We also have to realize that in order for us to survive we do not need to be loved, but we need to be needed. We need to have and acquire skills which make us indispensable. It does no good to show that we are the victims of a double standard; we must just excel. In the Torah portion Vayechi, we have these lessons set out. We learn how throughout this Torah portion when Yaacov addresses Yosef, he always addresses him by the name of Yisroel except for one time, and that one time was when he told Yosef that Yosef's two sons, Ephraim and Menashe, would be considered like Yaacov's own sons and would, therefore inherit a portion in the land of Israel. Otherwise throughout this Torah portion, every time Yaacov addresses Yosef, he addresses him by Yisroel. We know that Yaacov's name was changed to Yisroel after he defeated the angel of Esau with whom he wrestled all night before his encounter with Esau. This name means "You have struggled with man and with G-d and you have prevailed." Later, G-d Himself confirmed Yaacov's new name Yisroel, but Yaacov, unlike Abraham whose name was originally Avram, was still referred to by both names. He was referred to a both Yaacov and Yisroel. Abraham, after his name was changed from Avram, was only referred to from then on as Abraham. The name Yisroel stands for moral perfection. The reason why Yaacov retained both names was because only occasionally could he achieve this high state of moral perfection. Sometimes he slipped. He could not and did not live up to all his highest ideals all the time and when he slipped, he once again became Yaacov. He never gave up his ideals and kept trying to achieve them in every situation, but sometimes he did not make it. When he talked to his son, Yosef, though, he always talked to him with the name Yisroel. This is very clear from the sentences in the Torah. Sometimes the Torah itself will start out with the name Yaacov but will immediately switch to Yisroel when it mentions that Yosef is coming.

What was the reason for this? The rabbis tell us that the reason for this was because Yosef was the viceroy of Egypt. He held a very important government position. In his hands lay not only his fate but the fate of all his family and relatives. He had to always excel. The Egyptians would look at Yosef and not judge him just as an individual but as a representative of all Jews. If he would do well, it would be well for all Jews. If he would do badly, it would be bad for all Jews. Yaacov wanted to impress this fact upon Yosef. He wanted Yosef to remember that what he achieved, he achieved not just for himself but for his whole family. When he failed, he failed not only himself but also his whole family. Yaacov wanted to tell Yosef that things could change rapidly, that he was not loved for himself but that he was loved because of what he could do for Egypt, that Jews are only allowed to retain high positions when the rulers or the people think that it is in

their best interests but if the people or rulers think it is no longer in their best interests, Jews will abruptly be dismissed and all our accomplishments will be forgotten and we will be persecuted. This is, of course, what happened later. A new king arose who did not know Yosef.

This same idea is expressed when Yosef brought his two children to be blessed by Yaacov, his father. Yosef brought Menashe opposite his father's right hand and Ephraim opposite his father's left hand. Menashe was the older. Yaacov, however, crossed his hands and put his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Menashe. Why did Yaacov do this? If Yaacov wanted to bless Ephraim with his right hand, why didn't he just have them change places? The rabbis tell us that Menashe followed in his father's footsteps. He was also a government official. He also did great things for Egypt. Ephraim, on the other hand, was immersed in Jewish learning and in working with the family and the Jewish community. Yaacov did not have them change places because he wanted Menashe to know that what he was doing was important. He wanted Menashe to know that he bore not only his reputation but the reputation of the whole Jewish people. However, Menashe may not be able to bear this burden unless he had an Ephraim next to him who could demonstrate to him continually the beauty and joy of the Jewish religion, how it is good to be a Jew. It may be hard, but it was better to be a Jew than anything else. Therefore, he placed his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Menashe, but he did not ask them to change places.

Each of us in our own lives will run into the double standard. Each of us will suffer in some way because Jews are judged harsher than other people. Perhaps we will at times regret the fact that we have to bear this burden, but if we are well-grounded in Jewish traditions and in the joy and optimism of our faith, we will always come to the conclusion, as Menashe did when he looked at Ephraim, that it is all worth it. Let us hope and pray that all the peoples of the world will want to live up to the highest moral standards, that all the peoples of the world will appreciate soon what the Jewish people have done for them, not by showering us with honors and wealth but by allowing us to live in peace and by allowing us to contribute our talents to the greater good so that truly we can together create a paradise on earth.

SHMOS

Predictability, Openness and Judaism

Nothing ever stays the same. Life is always filled with surprises. We can never predict with certainty what is going to happen. Commentators with hindsight are always able to figure out how the surprising events of today flowed naturally from the events of the past, but none of these commentators have ever been able to predict these events before they happened. Who would have ever thought that communism would have collapsed so quickly and so decisively in eastern Europe and with so little resistance? Who would have thought that one of the major worries of the world today would be our concern about the dissolution of the Soviet empire into its constituent 15 states with all the tension and uncertainty that that could bring? Who could have predicted in 1989 that in 1990 approximately 170,000 Russian Jews would come to Israel?

We like to pretend that life is predictable and that we can control or at least anticipate the many forces around us, but we cannot. Life has so many twists and turns. One of the reasons why the Jews in eastern Europe could not believe that the Germans under Hitler meant it when they said that they were going to exterminate us was because during World War One, after the Germans had conquered most of eastern Europe, they treated us so well there. The Germans had been the most enlightened people in Europe. It was thought before World War One that the scourge of anti-Semitism had almost been completely expunged from their society, but life is not predictable. In looking at the events of world history a good rule to follow is that the unexpected is to be expected. Predictions are made which many times turn out to be completely false while unlikely and even mocked

scenarios turn out to be the correct ones. At the turn of the century, Proust in his novels stated that world peace is a surety, that man has overcome war. He mocks Zionists and uses the word Zionist in his novels as a synonym for a fool. We all know that a few short years later, World War One broke out and we all know that the Zionists' vision was a correct vision that not only led to the creation of the State of Israel, but also to the saving of millions of Jewish lives.

We are all called upon to act in the world based upon what we perceive to be the trends, but we should always remain open to contrary indications and look for the unexpected. We should never lock ourselves into a course of action so rigidly that we cannot respond when the unexpected occurs. G-d's will, so to speak, breaks through and shatters what we might think are unassailable positions, i.e., communist strength. We should also remember that complacency is bad and that it is shattered many times by the moral decay which we have allowed to accumulate because we have allowed it to fester and grow. Surprising inventions, unexpected ambitions, unlooked for diseases can all transform society very quickly. Nobody worried about AIDS 15 years ago. Nobody worried about Iraq's military might ten years ago. Nobody thought possible the resurgence of Jewish life in Russia or even of Orthodox Jewish life in America. We should not become prisoners of unexpected trends.

One of the questions that is always asked about Chanukah is, why is it that we celebrate eight days of Chanukah? If the cruse of oil lasted eight days then the miracle occurred only seven days. The cruse of oil was supposed to burn one day naturally, so the supernatural event was only seven days. Why is it then that we celebrate Chanukah eight days? The rabbis answer by saying that the first day was a miracle, too, because the very fact that the Maccabees lit the menorah knowing that it only contained enough oil to last one day was a miracle. They had no assurance that it would last the necessary eight days. The miracle was that in spite of all the predictions they refused to give up even though everyone said that it was impossible for the oil to last eight days, that it was impossible for Jewish life to continue. The cruse of oil symbolized the whole Maccabean struggle. It symbolized Jewish perseverance in the face of persecution. Everyone said that it was futile to resist the mighty Selucid empire, but the Maccabees found the courage to light the Torah of revolt anyway and G-d saw to it that it succeeded.

At the turn of the century, everybody claimed that Hebrew was dead. The Hebrew writers themselves doubted the importance of their own writings. They complained, "Who are we writing for? People are no longer studying Hebrew. Hebrew is disappearing. If we want to reach the masses, we need to write in Yiddish or other languages." They, though, being stubborn, continued to write in Hebrew and their Hebrew works today are read by four million Jews in Israel. The ability not to give up in the face of current trends, but to persevere, has always been the mark of the Jew. In spite of all odds, we continue hoping that if we will do our part, G-d will do His. He will assure that the light of Judaism will never be extinguished, that it will continue to burn until it will grow into a mighty flame acknowledged by the whole world as a source of great goodness and hope.

In the Torah portion Shmos, we have much this same message. In fact, one of the main motifs of this Torah portion is the burning bush. G-d appears to Moshe Rabbeinu from the midst of a burning bush. This thorn bush, which is generally identified as the wild acacia, is a stubborn little bush which clings to life against all odds in a very hostile environment. Moshe is amazed when he sees that this bush is consumed with fire but is

not destroyed. In reality, it is the fire itself which gives the bush the power to survive. It is the inner fire of that bush which causes it to exist in spite of all difficulties. If that fire or enthusiasm, though, would ever go out, then the bush would be consumed and destroyed by the natural elements around it. When Moshe turns to see the bush, G-d tells him, "Do not draw near. Remove your shoes from on your feet because the place that you are standing on is holy." The word "here" in Hebrew also means "to suit, to fit". In other words, "Moshe, do not come near with your preconceived notions. Do not put yourself in a straitjacket." "Shaal Neolecha", which in Hebrew can mean not only "to remove your shoes" but also "to remove your locks". Remove those things that shut you in. Do not let your predictions of the future shut yourself out from doing those things which you know are right and which can bring a better future. It is also interesting to note that the same word for "remove" also means in Hebrew "to deceive, to mislead". Predictions are only a guide but they are not the inevitable truth. If they lead to passivity and smugness, they can only mislead. Surprises always lurk in the shadows and man, if he will look at his projections as only a guide, can change things so that dire predictions especially need not come true. Moshe is told, "Do not feel that the problem of the Jewish people's slavery is insurmountable. Do not feel that the Jewish cause is hopeless."

The whole of this Torah portion is really concerned about surprises, twists of fate. It starts out by telling us how the Jewish people waxed mighty in Egypt, how they filled important positions and were very powerful, but then inexplicably a new Pharaoh arises who "knows not Joseph", and then the Jewish people were enslaved, but again, against all predictions they did not wither and die but increased. When Pharaoh tried to have the midwives kill all the Jewish boys at birth, they inexplicably refused, and, according to certain Medrashic interpretations, these were not Jewish midwives, but Egyptian midwives. Pharaoh perseveres and orders all the newborn Jewish boys drowned in the Nile, but against all odds, Moshe's life is saved and who saves him? Pharaoh's own daughter. And who is it that raises Moshe, the one who is going to be G-d's agent for redeeming the Jewish people? Again, Pharaoh's daughter, an idolatrous Egyptian princess who to this day is revered among Jews as the epitome of kindness and goodness. That is why so many Jewish women bear the name Bessie or Bess. They are all named after Pharaoh's daughter Bisia. When Moshe grows up and goes out to try to help his people, who is it that discourages him and causes him to lose heart and causes him to run away? Jews. When he sees Jews quarreling among themselves and ready to turn on those who try to help them, he runs away from Egypt in disgust. And, most surprising of all, who does G-d choose to save the Jewish people? A Jew who has endured slavery? No. A Jew who has married within the Jewish people? No. G-d chooses a Jew who has intermarried, a Jew who has, according to the Medrash, even agreed to raise his oldest son as an idol worshiper in order to marry his wife Zipporah, a Jew who fails to circumcise his son, so that when he is on his way to Egypt to save the Jewish people, his own life is only saved when his wife Zipporah circumcises their son. It seems that G-d, Who had just sent him to Egypt, was going to kill him because he had not circumcised his son. A Jewish leader must at least practice basic Jewish principles if he is to be credible, but, in spite of all this, G-d chose him and no one else. Moshe goes to Egypt and, lo and behold, the Jewish people accept his message. Who would have ever thought that they would do so? Then, Pharaoh, instead of killing Moshe, decides to make the lives of the slaves harder.

This Torah portion is filled with these many twists and turns to teach us that we should

never give up hope and be too rigid in our ideas of what is inevitable in the world or how G-d is going to save our people. Salvation can come from the most unexpected places. We should also never become smug or complacent. We live in perilous times. There are many dangers but we should never give up just because trends seem to be against us. We should persevere in the proper path and do what is right and seize those opportunities which G-d provides for us in order to live a Jewish life and to save our people. Right now we have a wonderful opportunity to save Russian Jewry. Who would have thought it possible? Who would have thought that there would be a religious revival among Russian Jews? The opportunities are there. Let us not be overwhelmed by the immensity of the task or by dire predictions. We have a terrible amount of assimilation in America, but this does not mean that we should wring our hands and do nothing. It just means that we should seize the opportunities available and do what we can. We most certainly should not give up and say, "Well, since the majority of the Jewish people are not observing this practice or that practice, it is time to give up these practices." Jewish institutions should maintain high Jewish standards. They should not say that since most Jews do not keep Pesach or Succos or Shavuos that we should also abandon these holidays. We should continue to light the light. Somehow G-d will cause it to burn until new oil is found. Ten years ago everyone wrote off Soviet Jewry. It was predicted that they were going to be totally lost to our people, but they are streaming into Israel now and they will not be lost, and those who come to America will also not be lost if we do not give up and keep trying. Let's not be blinded by our predictions; let's instead be challenged by them. G-d has many agents. Let us never give up, but let each one of us do his share and be open to the unexpected.

VAERA

Belief, Commitment and Deeds of Kindness

The Torah portion Vaera begins with Moshe Rabbeinu being very despondent. At the end of last week's Torah portion, we learn how Moshe complains to G-d, "Why did You do bad to these people? Why did You send me? Since I came to Pharaoh, to speak in Your name, things have gotten worse for this people." In fact, he complains that even the Jewish people are accusing him of making them stink in the eyes of Pharaoh. Things had gotten much worse for the Jewish people. Pharaoh no longer gave them straw to build the bricks, and we know that without straw, the bricks would not hold together. They will disintegrate just like concrete today will disintegrate without steel rods. What's more, according to the rabbis, the Jewish people were now not even allowed to gather together. Before Moshe's coming, they were allowed to gather together for religious services, for meetings, to strengthen each other, etc. Things had gotten so much worse for the Jewish people, and Moshe was very discouraged.

In this Torah portion, we learn G-d's answer to Moshe. The Torah says, "And G-d spoke to Moshe and He said to him, 'I am G-d'." In Hebrew there are two distinct names for G-d that are used throughout the Torah. One is Elohim, which stands for that aspect of G-d, the creator, who created the laws of nature, that aspect of G-d who created the scientific laws of nature. These laws are immutable. It doesn't matter whether you are a pious man or not a pious man, we cannot flaunt these laws and not get hurt. We can be the most pious man in the world, but if we run in front of a fast-moving car, we are going to be injured. Therefore, when we refer to the word Elohim, it refers also to that aspect of G-d which denotes strict justice. The other name, Yod Kay Vov Kay, which we pronounce as Adonai but which we really do not know how to pronounce, stands for that aspect of G-d which desires a relationship with man. That is why there are two creation stories. One talks about G-d, the creator of nature, and the other that aspect of G-d which wants to

relate to man. G-d says, "I am G-d, the relater, and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name of the nurturing G-d. My name Yud Kay Vov Kay I did not make known to them." This seems a very strange answer. What is G-d telling Moshe here, and why does Moshe accept this answer?

We know that each of the patriarchs found G-d in his own way, and that is why we have three patriarchs. That's why we always say, "The G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob," because each of them found G-d in a different way. Abraham found G-d in nature, in the natural order of things. He was convinced that there was a unity behind nature, that the world was not just filled with random occurrences, that the moon and the wind and the sun all obeyed a higher power. He knew that there was something behind all these seemingly powerful natural bodies. He saw patterns in nature. He recognized that nature was regulated by a set of laws. He knew that there was a G-d behind nature. Isaac, on the other hand, found G-d in personal experience. He had a personal, all-consuming experience of G-d. Someone came to me a few years ago and said, "Rabbi, I think I'm going to have to change my religion." I asked why, and he said, "Because I have a personal relationship with G-d, a personal feeling that G-d is close to me and communicates with me and we do not believe in that." I said, "What do you mean we don't believe in that? Who were the prophets? Of course we believe in that. Did you ever see 'Fiddler on the Roof'? Tevye was convinced he was talking to G-d all the time and G-d was talking back to him." Then we have Jacob. Jacob found G-d in history, in the events of his own life and in the vision of the ladder extending to heaven which the rabbis explain was a preview of world history on which nations ascend and descend. So there are three ways to find G-d. We can find G-d in the patterns of nature, we can find G-d in an intense personal experience and we can find G-d in the patterns of the little events that happen every day.

The rabbis tell us that the paradigm of the relationship between G-d and man is the relationship between a man and a woman. Therefore, if we want to understand the relationship between man and G-d, we have to understand the relationship between a man and a woman, and many times in the Torah, the people of Israel is compared to a wife and G-d is compared to a husband. In fact, when we put on our tephillin every day, we say, "I will marry you forever" and the seven windings on the hand stand for the seven marriage blessings, and the tephillin on our head stands for the marriage veil. If we look at this Torah portion, we will see what is necessary for a relationship to succeed. In order to have a relationship with G-d, we have to find G-d in nature, we have to find G-d in personal experiences and we have to find G-d in history. Of course, today all we have to do is pick up the newspaper and we can see how G-d is appearing to all of us in history. Read the Book of Ezekiel and we will see that all His prophecies are coming true today. Of course, we are called upon to help G-d. We are called to make these prophecies come true. G-d helps those who help themselves, and therefore, we should all give to UJA and help Russian Jewry and help Israel to make sure that these prophecies truly come true in our day, that their fulfillment truly endures in our day.

If we look at the relationship between a man and a woman, we will see that this relationship is composed of three elements. First of all, we have to believe that the relationship is natural. We have to believe that a man needs a woman and that a woman needs a man and that we are not complete unless we are married. We do not believe in any alternative life-styles. We have to believe in the institution of marriage. It is very

difficult to persist in a marriage unless you believe in the institution of marriage, because there are ups and downs in every marriage. It is impossible to continue with an education unless we believe in the value of the education. Sometimes it is tough to pass those tests. Sometimes we have setbacks. Sometimes we have teachers we do not like. The same thing is true in a marriage. We have all sorts of problems and setbacks but we have to persevere because we believe in marriage. We believe that it is the best possible state that a man and a woman can be in.

The second thing is, of course, that we have to have an intense personal experience, which we call love, but love is not enough. Many times people come into my office in love, greatly in love, but a little while later, their marriage has soured, one, because they did not really believe in marriage, or because they did not fulfill the third requirement of marriage. The third requirement is that you have to constantly be doing things for each other. It is the little things that we do constantly for one another that really count. That is the history, the history of the relationship. If we are not there for each other, doing little deeds of kindness for each other, supporting each other, helping each other, the marriage will not endure. I know a man who used to work all sorts of hours, who hardly ever saw his wife. He saw his secretary 150 times more than he saw his wife, and of course, you know what happened. The relationship between him and the secretary flourished but not the relationship between him and his wife. That's what G-d is telling us here in this Torah portion. "Moshe, do not be upset. There is a relationship between Me and the people of Israel. They feel it. They know it is there. Maybe now in the history, in the events that are happening right now they cannot perceive it, but they will. They will soon see how I am there for them and will always be there for them."

In this Torah portion, we also learn about the plagues. The plagues are divided into three parts, plagues against nature, plagues against personal experience and plagues against the cumulative experience of people. We first learn about the plague of blood, which was a plague against nature. Then we learn about the plague against the personal experience of the people, frogs. Frogs in their soup, frogs in their bed, frogs in their stove. The finally we learn about the plague against the cumulative experience of man, lice. One louse we can deal with, two lice we can deal with, but when it becomes hundreds of lice, it is impossible to deal with it. With the second set of plagues, the series repeated. We have a plague against nature, wild animals who arrived into the city and terrorized the people. We then have a plague against personal experience, the personal experience of the cattle plague, which some rabbis say also afflicted human beings. Then we have a plague about cumulative experience, boils. One boil, two boils you can take, but a hundred boils, it is impossible to take. The same thing goes for the last set of plagues as well, the hail against nature, the locusts against personal experience and the darkness against cumulative experience. A little bit of darkness, we can all take, but three days of darkness becomes overwhelming. The plagues demonstrated that the Egyptians had sinned by severing their relationship with G-d and man.

In order to have lasting relationships we first have to have correct values. We have to believe in the holiness of each individual and not in slavery. Marriage is not slavery. It is an institution based on mutual responsibilities; so is our relationship to G-d. In order to have a successful marriage, we must believe in the institution of marriage. And in order to have a relationship with G-d, we must believe that G-d needs us and cares for us and is concerned for us. That is why He created us. Then we must have a personal experience.

When we are in a marriage, we must feel deeply for our spouse and in our relationship with G-d we must feel that He cares for us. Finally, we must have a history of kindness, a history of helping each other, of constantly being there for each other. In our relationship with G-d we must also feel that G-d is there constantly for us. G-d's answer did dispel Moshe's despair, because G-d was in effect telling Moshe, "The Jewish people know that they have a true relationship with Me, based on mutual responsibilities, and that I care and am concerned about them. Right now they may not be able to see how I am doing them a kindness, how I am backing them up and supporting them, but they will. Especially when the plagues come."

In order also for us to have successful marriages, we also have to always realize that we must believe in the institution of marriage itself. We must have a deep love for each other, and we must also always be willing to do deeds of kindness for each other. I am reminded of the story they tell about a farmer who looked out his window and saw a truck come by and then stop. A man came out of the truck and dug a good-sized hole. A few minutes later, another man came out of the truck and filled the hole. Then the truck drove 50 feet and the same procedure was repeated - a man got out and drilled a good-sized hole and then another man came out and plugged the hole. That happened four times. The farmer was amazed so he decided to go over to the truck driver and ask him what was going on. The man said, "Well, you see we are from the highway beautification department, and the man who plants the trees is sick today." Because one man was missing, the whole enterprise failed. This same principle applies to human relationships. They must be based on three principles. If one is missing, our relationships will fail. We have to believe in the institution of marriage. We have to have strong feelings for each other. Finally, we have to be willing to support each other and help each other and do everything necessary for each other. This applies to all our relationships in life. We need to have a belief in the institution itself, a deep commitment to it, and also follow through with loving deeds of actions. May all of us have such types of relationships and such commitment so that our relationships will flower and our commitments will deepen so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

BO

Democracy, Values and Religion

One of the major problems with modern western culture is that its very strength is its weakness. Modern western culture does not tell man what he should do. It just tells man what he should not do. It gives us no direction as to how we are to lead our lives. It only tells us that we must respect the rights of others. Almost all the political battles that we have had in this country and in the west generally, have centered around whether or not we should discriminate against other peoples, i.e., limit their rights because of either their race, national origin, sex, religion, or life-styles. Freedom and nondiscrimination are great values. However, they do not tell us what we are to do with our lives. They only tell us what we should not do with them. Therefore, there is a great vacuum in the lives of many people in America and especially in Europe today.

Since the Second World War, that vacuum had been filled to a large extent for many people by their opposition to communism. They had dedicated much of their energies and activities, especially the young people, to fighting communism. Now, since communism's demise, these people have nothing to fight against and they do not know what they should fight for. Unfortunately, nature abhors a vacuum. This applies to the human soul as well. If it is not filled with positive values, then it will be filled with negative values. We have all watched with horror the rise of anti-Semitism and of xenophobia in Europe. The skinheads and their Nazi allies have proven once again that there is no such thing as automatic human progress. In every generation we have to fight the same evils. We have to be eternally vigilant or else nations will succumb once again to the terrible negative influences which will once again kill millions of people. Even in this country we are not immune. A recent ADL study has shown that 20 percent of Americans are strongly anti-Semitic.

Human beings need positive values to fill their souls, otherwise they will be filled with negative ones. One of the reasons why so many young people especially feel turned off by democracy is that democracy does not give them a goal in life. It does not tell them how we can make this a better world. It just tells them what they should not do.

In the Torah portion Bo, we discuss many other ideas. Many people are under the false

assumption that when Moshe came before Pharaoh he told Pharaoh, in G-d's name, to "Shlach Ami" - "let my people go", but that is not what the Torah says. The Torah says, "Let my people go so they shall serve Me." The goal of the Jewish people was not just their freedom. The Jewish people's goal was freedom so that they could serve G-d. The lands of eastern Europe have been freed and so have many of the republics of the former Soviet Union, but the question is, what are these people going to do with their freedom? As we all know, there are two types of freedom. There is freedom of and freedom from. There is freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, which are basically negative freedoms. These freedoms say that nobody can prevent us from petitioning our government, from expressing our opinion, etc., but they do not tell us what to do. There is also freedom from, which is a positive freedom, freedom from hunger, freedom from disease, freedom from persecution. This means that society must take upon itself the goal not only of not discriminating against people and of not limiting people's freedom, but also the goal of seeing to it that everyone is fed and housed and given access to health services. Sometimes, however, these freedoms clash. Freedom from hunger demands many times that the wealthy be taxed at a much higher rate than the poor. Freedom from disease means that adequate access to all health facilities be provided not just to those who can pay for them, but to everyone. Freedom from disease also means that strict environmental controls must be established, which means that we cannot do with our property what we want to do with our property.

How can we balance these conflicting freedoms? In this country, we have two political parties which basically stress one of the freedoms over the other, although we need both. The Republicans have basically stressed freedom of and the Democrats have basically stressed freedom from. Because of this, freedom from cannot and should not be pursued without taking into account freedom of. Idealistic youth demands a cause. If we will not give them a positive cause, they will seize a negative one.

That's why right after the plague of hail and before the plague of locusts, the advisors of Pharaoh complained to Pharaoh saying, "For how long shall this man Moshe be a snare unto us? Send the people so they will serve the Lord, their G-d. Don't you know that Egypt is lost?" Pharaoh then turned to Moshe and said, "Who is going with you?" Moshe answered, "Our youth and our elders will go. With our sons and our daughters, our sheep and our cattle will go because we must hold a feast for G-d." Pharaoh grew angry and said, "No, only the men can go and serve G-d," and he chased Moshe from his presence. Notice Moshe said our youth even before he said our elders. He knew that it was important especially that the youth be infused with positive values. In this sentence, Moshe actually states the criteria which are necessary in order to have a sound society. You have to have ideals which inflame the youth, but these ideals must be centered around the future, around our sons and daughters, around the family, and also people need a certain amount of private property, a certain amount of breathing space in order for them to feel fulfilled. If only the adults would go out to worship G-d, then the youth would run wild. They would become worse than Pharaoh's taskmasters. We see this phenomenon in our own cities today where, because we have failed to give our youth a vision of the future and strong family values, we are plagued with gangs and murders, dope, etc. By our countenancing poverty and by our not giving a basic existence to many members of our society and by our making it almost impossible for many of our young people to reach educational goals and by our not giving especially the youth of the inner

cities a positive vision of the future, we have condemned them and their souls to be filled with negative values.

At the end of the plague of darkness, the ninth plague, Pharaoh relents and says, "You can all go and serve G-d. Only your cattle and your sheep shall stay here." Moshe rejects this offer because he knows that people must be given a stake in society if they are to be considered part of it. It is interesting to note that during the last plague, the plague of the firstborn, the Jewish people were commanded to stay in their homes. They were not to go outside. They were to put a mixture, the rabbis tell us, of the blood of the lamb they slaughtered and the blood of circumcision outside their doors. The rabbis all ask the question, why did they have to stay inside? After all, during all the other nine plagues, the Jewish people were free to roam about. They were in no danger of being afflicted by these plagues. Only the Egyptians were afflicted. Now, however during the last plague they were told explicitly to stay in their homes and put the blood on the door. If they would not stay inside and put the blood on their door, the Angel of Death would strike them down, too. The rabbis answer that there was a fundamental difference between the first nine plagues and the tenth plague, the slaying of the firstborn. The aim of the first nine plagues was merely to discomfort the Egyptians. They were not meant to kill them. Blood was not to flow. The tenth plague was completely different. Its main purpose was not just to frighten the Egyptians but to actually kill their firstborn. The Jewish people were told to stay inside because once negative forces are unleashed, even in pursuit of a good goal, the results most often are catastrophic. When blood flows people become completely irrational.

The Jewish people were told to stay home, that the only way they could avoid the general havoc was to concentrate on the positive values of family and devotion to G-d. The blood of the lamb on their door showed that they rejected idol worship, that they rejected the negative idea that at this time of year, spirits were incarnate in the lamb which could be manipulated to be used against their enemies. They were not to be filled with these negative notions. The blood of circumcision was the antidote to these negative views. Man's main task in life is to work on himself, to improve himself, to self-discipline himself enough so that he can become immune to the negative influences around him and be able to help correct society's ills. Judaism's main concern is to give people positive goals, goals which allow them to interact with others in a positive way, goals which allow them to help bring about justice, peace, harmony, and prosperity to all segments of society.

We learn in this Torah portion that the Jewish people were not to harm the Egyptians in any way. They were to ask their neighbors for gifts of gold and silver since by right they were entitled to their wages for being enslaved for over 210 years, but they were not to take their wages; they were to ask for them. They were not to go on murderous rampages. They were not to pillage. They were to leave in family groups and not as rampaging killers. Their hearts were not to be filled with hatred, but they were to be filled with the positive idea of going out into freedom in order to serve G-d. They made no claim on Egyptian land. They were willing to go into the desert and make their way there. It was very important that when they left Egypt they be filled with positive values and not negative ones.

Today, we need again to stress to our youth that the main enemies of each of us are not our neighbors and those who are ethnically or religiously different from us, but our main

enemies are found within ourselves. Our main task is to create out of ourselves kind, compassionate, caring human beings. This is an awesome task, but it is truly a worthy task. Our job is to learn how to relate to people, especially members of our family, in a positive way. There is so much wife abuse, child abuse, grandparent abuse in America. Different strata of society have forgotten how to relate one to another. They have become estranged. Our main job is to attack our problems realizing that almost all of our problems are caused because of what is happening within ourselves and with our society and not because of an outside threat from others or foreigners. America needs to fill the vacuum which exists in our society with positive values. We need once again to introduce into our school systems a positive set of values which recognizes America's diversity, which does not call upon any group to give up its individuality but teaches each of us how to appreciate others, how to work on solving the problems that we have here in our society.

We need both freedom of and freedom from. We have to learn how to mix them in correct measure so that freedom of does not become completely selfish and freedom from does not become completely totalitarianism. Our western culture needs religion (at least religion based upon Judaic principles, the seven commandments of Noah) because only religion can fill the value gap in our society. However, religion, too, must recognize that it needs democracy and should never become dictatorial and oppressive. Democracy can provide a structure; religion must supply the internal goals which will make the outer structure stable. Religion is not the enemy of democracy. It is its necessary handmaiden, just as democracy is not the enemy of religion, but it is the guarantor of the religious principle of free will. Religion and democracy must always both work together. Let us all hope and pray that our youth will not have to turn to violence and racist or anti-Semitic doctrines in order to fill the emptiness that they feel, but that they will quickly learn that the emptiness within them can be filled by their attaching themselves to religious values, values which stress self-improvement and the correction of society's inequities while not destroying democracy's freedom.

BESHALACH

Understanding and Advise, Two Different Things

One of the most difficult problems in interpersonal relationships is the problem of "what to say". We all have been caught in situations where we do not know what to say. We want to respond. We want to help but we do not know what to say. Someone has just lost a loved one, or someone has just lost their job, or someone has just gone through an operation. What do we say? It is so difficult to know what to say because many times there are no answers, and the truth of the matter is, the individuals who have just gone through these traumatic experiences do not want answers. They just want us to understand their pain. Sometimes very well meaning people cause terrible pain and increase their friends' suffering because of their foolish, tactless remarks. Most of the time these remarks are well meant, but they cut like a knife. For example, I remember a young rabbi coming to me completely bewildered. A couple in this congregation had just lost a baby. He went to comfort them and he told them, "Don't worry. You are still young. You can have another baby." They became so angry with him that they kicked him out of the house. He could not understand what he did wrong. He thought that he had comforted them, but instead he had only made things worse. He had trivialized their loss. He had exacerbated their pain. They knew that they were still young and could still have children. They were not looking for advice. They were just looking for understanding, someone who could sympathize with their pain, someone who would relieve the sharpness of their grief by understanding their hurt.

In life we are given two gifts: the gift of understanding and the gift of advice. They are not the same. Sometimes they can be confused. Giving advice when all a person wants is understanding can sometimes be devastating to a relationship, and also giving understanding when advice is what is needed can also ruin a relationship. There are many people who claim that this is one of the main reasons for many of the disagreements between men and women. Women, by and large, when they engage in conversation are looking for understanding, not advice, while men, on the other hand, generally look for advice and not understanding. That, too, usually explains the differences between women's friendships with other women and men's friendships with other men. A man can be a good friend with another man and hardly ever talk to him. He will talk to him just when he needs something. It was well known that Moshe Dayan and David Ben Gurion

were good friends, but, as Moshe Dayan writes in his autobiography, he only call Ben Gurion when he needed some advice or help and vice versa. Women, on the other hand, are constantly talking to their girlfriends. They constantly need the reassurance and the understanding that their feelings are valid.

This point was driven home to me recently when a young couple came into my office. They had a terrible fight. The man was terribly bewildered. He could not understand what he had done wrong, and the wife was terribly hurt and thought her husband had completely rejected her. It seems that the woman had had an operation on her arm and it had left a scar and, although the woman could hide the scar by wearing a sleeve, she felt very bad about the scar. She told her husband that she felt the scar was making her ugly. Her husband looked at her and said, "Well, then, why don't you go to a plastic surgeon?" She immediately blew up and screamed at him saying that he thought that she was ugly, that he wanted her to have another operation even though it would be painful, that he did not care for her, etc. He, of course, retaliated with some very unkind words and they ended up on my office. The problem here was that the man totally misconstrued what his wife wanted. She did not want advice. She wanted understanding.

Many times when a rabbi visits people he has no advice to offer and he should not offer advice. He should just give understanding. He should confirm that the person's feelings he is visiting are valid and right or at least understandable, and that this person's feelings have not distanced him from either G-d or man. Sometimes people come to a rabbi for advice. They want to know how to make a wedding or a bris or a bar mitzvah, what Jewish law says on this subject, etc., but many times all they are looking for is confirmation of their feelings. Sometimes a person is bewildered, angry, frustrated, even mad at G-d, and sometimes it is our responsibility to tell him that his feelings are understandable and sometimes even that his feelings are right and justified because at that particular point they are. It is very difficult, though, to know many times when to give the gift of understanding and when to give the gift of advice.

In the Torah portion Beshalach, we have this problem discussed. We learn how the Jewish people are trapped on a peninsula. The Egyptian army is pursuing them. They have no place to go. They are frightened. They divide up into several groups: some want to commit suicide; some want to go back to Egypt; some want to protest; some want to fight. Moshe tells them not to be afraid, that "G-d will fight for you". In other words, he confirms that he understands their feelings. He does not criticize them but he tells them, "Hang on. Your feelings are justified. The situation does look hopeless, but G-d will help somehow", and G-d does. The Red Sea splits.

Later when the people leave the Red Sea and go for three days without water, they again complain to Moshe because they have no potable water to drink. This time G-d instructs Moshe to take a certain tree and cast it into the briny water and it will become potable. Here action was required. Later the people complain about the lack of food and manna is given to them. When the people have complaints about food and water and their personal safety, then practical advice is called for, not understanding. When Amalek attacks, the Jewish people have to be organized into an army to defeat Amalek. When water is needed Moshe is instructed the first time how to strike the rock to produce water. However, when it came to dealing with the people's fears, with their feelings, then no action is called for. Understanding is what is needed.

This is illustrated in a strange incident when Moshe remains completely silent. Moshe

responds positively to all the complaints of the Jewish people throughout this Torah portion except once. The Torah states, "And the name of the place was called Massa and Umriva" because of the striving of the children of Israel and because they tried G-d saying, "Is G-d among us or not?" In this instance, Moshe gives no reply at all. Moshe recognized that the people had gone through a lot. They had experienced the low of being pursued by the Egyptians, the great fear of an impending Holocaust, of being totally wiped out by the Red Sea, and then the high, the great exultation after they were saved when the Egyptian army was destroyed. They had had to face all the difficulties of the desert, problems of food and water and they were exhausted and bewildered. On the one hand, G-d had always come through and rescued them, but on the other hand, they had to endure great terror and privation before He did. They were on an emotional roller coaster. Moshe understood that. He did not castigate them when they asked, "Is G-d in our midst or not?" He understood their feelings.

It is interesting to note also that the expression "B'nai Yisroel" - "sons of Israel" is used when the Jewish people asked, "Is G-d in our midst or not?" , and not the word "Am" which denotes the Jewish people but not the Jewish people at its best. When the expression "B'nai Yisroel" is used instead of the word "Am" it denotes the Jewish people when they are honestly searching not when they have been overcome by fear or greed or are trying to curry favor with others.

At the end of this Torah portion, we learn how the Jewish people were only able to overcome Amalek when Moshe's hands were raised. Aaron and Chur stood on each side of Moshe. Each had to hold up Moshe's hands. If either one of them would let one of Moshe's hands fall then the Jewish people would begin to lose the battle against Amalek, but when they both held Moshe's hands up high, then the Jewish people were victorious. Chur stood for practical things, for the gift of advice. Aaron stood for spiritual things, for the gift of understanding. When Moshe's hands were raised, when Moshe's leadership was informed by both the gift of understanding and the gift of advice, then the Jewish people had no difficulty at all defeating the forces of Amalek, those forces which tried to destroy all human relationships. Understanding and advice are needed to sustain any relationship and to overcome the problems of life.

We, too, when we employ both gifts, the gift of understanding and the gift of advice, are able to overcome all of life's problems, even the most divisive ones. However, if we neglect either of these gifts, then the divisive forces of life will destroy us. Let us all hope and pray that each of us will always know when to give understanding and when to give advice so that our relationships will always remain strong.

YITHRO

Single-mindedness, Success and Failure

One of the paradoxes of life is that in order to succeed we must be single-minded. We must set goals and be willing to work for them. Without single-mindedness no goals can ever be achieved. However, no success can ever be maintained if a person remains single-minded. The paradox is that the qualities which we need in order to achieve our goals will eventually cause us to lose our goals if we do not moderate them. The very strengths we need in order to succeed will also assure our failure if we persist in them. People who have concentrated all their energies, like Donald Trump, in making money according to a particular formula in a particular business will at first seem to succeed brilliantly only to fail later because they could not see the total economic picture. They overexpanded when they should have contracted or they recklessly pursued their formula for success without taking into account changed circumstances.

We see this throughout our economy today. So many S&L's and other banks have failed because they have single-mindedly built shopping centers and office buildings when they were not needed. One of the problems with a person being successful too early in life is that such a person many times then feels that he can just replicate his original successful formula over and over again without any regard to changed circumstances. These people feel that they cannot fail. They feel that their single-mindedness and devotion will ensure their success.

In the political realm, too, dictators seem to have a distinct advantage over democratic leaders because they can single-mindedly amass power by eliminating their enemies, but eventually their own ruthlessness causes them to be so hated that they are toppled from power. Ideologues, too, seem to have an initial advantage over democratic leaders, but, the ideology which propelled them to power usually after a few years becomes so odious to their people and its own weaknesses become so glaring that they are toppled, too. We saw this recently in eastern Europe where communism toppled of its own accord. We saw this also with Hitler, who could have probably won World War Two if he would not have expelled all his Jewish scientists and proclaimed nuclear physics a Jewish science and, thus beneath contempt. Also, if he would have moderated his ideology and treated the millions of Russian soldiers who surrendered to his advancing German armies decently, he would have been able to conquer Russia easily and would have won World War Two. Single-mindedness in the beginning seems to be effective but it eventually destroys the person employing it. Saddam Hussein is another case in point. He is a man who has always been able to stare down his enemies. His single-minded pursuit of power has

allowed him to terrorize his opponents, betray his friends, and kill his comrades. Now, though, he has pushed this technique too far.

In the Torah portion Yisro, we learn how Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, joins him in the desert after the Jewish people had come out of Egypt. We learn how Yisro rejoices because of all the goodness which G-d did to Israel, how He saved Israel from the hand of Egypt and Yisro said, "Blessed be G-d Who saved you from the hand of Egypt . . . from under the hand of Pharaoh. Now I know that G-d is great, greater than all the gods because they dealt proudly against them." The rabbis explain that this means that G-d made use of Pharaoh's very pride and arrogance to bring about the Egyptian's doom while, at the same time, saving Israel. What brought about the destruction of Egypt was Pharaoh's reluctance to see reality. He could not grasp that things had changed. G-d uses our own stubbornness, our own foolishness to destroy us. G-d gives us enough rope to hang ourselves, or, as the Book of Proverbs says, "Pride cometh before a fall." Pharaoh was so sure of himself that he could not acknowledge what was happening about him. He single-mindedly went about doing what Pharaohs had always done: ruling over people with cruelty and injustice, using huge numbers of slaves to build his public works. He had no time or energy to look and see whether what he was doing was right. Yisro knew that G-d was greater than the other gods because G-d does not have to destroy evil people directly. He allows them to destroy themselves by their own arrogance and stubbornness. This, of course, applies throughout life. There are even many people who in their zeal to further good causes trample over the rights and feelings of others. Even good causes cannot be pursued with a rigid single-mindedness. There always has to be room for human feelings, for exceptions. That's why the word for "rejoice" in the sentence, "And Yisro rejoiced", is a special word because this word can also mean "one" or "single-mindedness". Yisro was pleased to learn that the single-minded vision of the Jewish people to teach morality and justice to the world was tempered with laughter. This word can also mean "to gladden, to cheer, to cause joy". Single-mindedness must always be modified by the human factor. There are certain things we cannot do in order to achieve our goals. If we do these things we may temporarily achieve our goals, but we will not be able to maintain them.

That is why we learn something very strange in the beginning of this Torah portion. We learn how it says, "And Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, took Zipporah, the wife of Moshe, after he sent her away and her two sons, the name of one was Gershom . . . and the name of one was Eliezer, and he [Yisro] said to Moshe, 'I am your father-in-law, Yisro, come to you and your wife and two of her sons with her'." What's going on here? Didn't Moshe know that he had a wife and two sons? Also, why did Yisro have to send a messenger saying he was coming?

The rabbis tell us that originally Moshe had taken his wife Zipporah and his two sons with him when he went down to Egypt to save the Jewish people. However, when Aaron, his brother, met him at the border, Aaron told Moshe, "Aren't there enough slaves in Egypt? Send your wife and children back to Midian. When we are free they will join us." That's why it says, "And Yisro, the father-in-law of Moshe, took Zipporah, the wife of Moshe, after he sent her away." Yisro was not sure what type of reception he would get from Moshe. Therefore, he sent a messenger ahead to let Moshe know he was coming, and the message he gave this messenger he worded in such a way so that if Moshe did not want to come out to greet him, a former pagan priest, he should at least come out to

greet his wife Zipporah, and if he did not want come out to greet his wife, he should at least come out to greet his children. Notice also it mentions her children, not his children, since according to our religion, the children go after the mother. Yisro was afraid that Moshe, in his single-minded devotion to save the Jewish people, would want to disregard his past. After all, wouldn't it hurt him as a leader of the Jewish people for people to find out that he had a Midianite wife, that his father-in-law was or had been a pagan priest and that his children had not received a good Jewish education? Moshe, for purely prudent reasons, could have downplayed his relationship to Yisro, could have divorced his wife and had nothing much to do with his children and this would have perhaps made it easier for him. His critics and enemies would not have had these things to throw up at him, but in the long run it would have cast a cloud on his leadership. Yisro rejoiced because he saw that Moshe did not lose his human values because of his single-minded quest for the Jewish people's redemption.

It is interesting to note that the word for "redemption" in Hebrew, "Goal", also means "to pollute". Single-minded obsessions always wind up polluting those around them and everyone who has them. This applies even to single-minded obsessions which are good. Yisro also gave Moshe advice on how to deal with the Jewish people. It says, "And it was on the morrow and Moshe sat to judge the people and the people stood by Moshe from morning to evening." The rabbis explain that this was the day after Yom Kippur and the people had just been forgiven for the sin of the golden calf, and Moshe sat to judge the people while the people stood. Yisro did not like this. He told Moshe, "I know you have to sit because it would be too hard for you to stand all day, but the people should also sit, but better yet, appoint able men over tens and fifties and hundreds and thousands so they can try these cases." Single-mindedness without the ability to delegate is also very destructive.

It is important that we teach our young people how to act to achieve their goals, but we also have to teach them how to take in the full picture. We must teach them that acting single-mindedly may allow them to momentarily achieve their goals, but that they will quickly lose them unless they learn how to moderate their single-mindedness. Our own arrogance will destroy us. G-d has given us a Torah which allows us to achieve our goals without arrogance. It may take more time and it may even seem to open us up to criticism and even sometimes to ridicule, but it will allow us to maintain our humanity. We can all become instant millionaires by robbing a bank, but we will not stay millionaires for long. The story of Purim teaches us this same lesson. In the end it was Haman's arrogance that did him in. He was a hard working, ambitious man. The rabbis say that Haman had many of the good qualities of Mordechai. He was ambitious, he was a family man, a dedicated servant, but he could brook no opposition. He was arrogant and immoral. It was these qualities which brought him down, thank G-d.

Let us all have faith that no matter the bluster of tyrants and dictators, their own arrogance will always bring them down. As Yisro said, it is the self-destruction of the arrogant that proves that G-d is a great G-d. Eventually, a person's own immorality and arrogance will bring him down. It will always destroy him. That is a basic Jewish belief.

MISHPATEEM

Reconciliation, Gestures and Punishment

One of the most difficult of all problems in life is: how can we be reconciled with our enemies? In life there will always be disputes. Many times these disputes will get out of hand and they will become personal. Often words will be exchanged, threats will be made, and blows will even be exchanged. This happens within families, within institutions, within nations, and of course, between nations. War many times is a product of these disputes. Other times war is a product of greed, ambition, etc. We all know, though, that eventually the bitterest of enemies must make up. Even in war the victors, after they have vanquished their foes, must still somehow reconcile themselves to their foes and their foes to them. After all, the victors are not going to kill every last one of their enemies. If they would, they would not only commit genocide, a terrible crime, but they would also destroy the moral base of their own society. But how can nations or individuals make up, especially when there have been great wrongs done? How is it possible for relations to be re-established and for their former enemies to live together normally at peace? This is a difficult problem especially when an enemy has without provocation attacked you or enslaved you or killed your children or completely robbed you of your dignity.

This is one of the underlying themes of the first chapters of the Book of Exodus, the Book of Shmos. The Jewish people are to leave Egypt. They are to be freed from slavery. Throughout the Torah and especially in the Torah portion Mishpateem, the Egyptian experience is continually referred to either in the text or in the commentaries to warn the people that they should act justly and not harm others because "strangers you were in the land of Egypt". We learn "and a stranger you shall not wrong neither shall you oppress him because you were strangers in the land of Egypt". We learn how "we should not wrong widows and orphans because G-d will hear their cry", which the commentaries explain means that just as G-d heard the Jewish people's cry in Egypt because they were persecuted, He will hear the cry of the oppressed no matter where they live. G-d will also intervene if a person would take someone's garment as a pledge and not give it back to him at night so he would have something to cover himself with against the night cold. G-d will also intervene if justice is perverted, especially if a stranger is treated unjustly. We are to remember that we were slaves in the land of Egypt. The Egyptian experience marked us and taught us to be a compassionate people. Everyone is a Meracheem, which means an individual who can potentially be compassionate, but that is not enough. We all had to become a Rachum, which means someone who must be compassionate, whose very nature demands that he be compassionate. The rabbis teach us that if you find a person who claims that he is a Jew but who is not compassionate, doubt whether he is a

Jew. The Egyptians were in many ways the antithesis of everything that Jews and Judaism stood for. They were a cruel, vicious, arrogant people, yet we learn in the Torah portion Ki Satzay that we are not supposed to abhor the Egyptians, that we are supposed to make peace with them, that we are supposed to learn how to interact with them in a normal way. How is this possible after they had done all these terrible things to us? We also learn in the Torah portion Mishpateem "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of your enemy lying under his burden, you should not pass him by but release him [from his burden]." In the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 25, verses 21 and 22, it says, "If your enemy be hungry give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink, and the L-rd will reward Thee." The greatest hero, the rabbis say, is one who can turn an enemy into a friend, and this can only be done through deeds of loving kindness. This does not mean that if your enemy attacks you, you should not defend yourself, but this means that when opportunities present themselves you should try to establish some sort of communication with your enemy, be it through his animal or be it through his own need, spiritual or physical. Both you and your enemy need to be reconciled. The only way to keep a man down in the mud is to stay down there with him.

Right before we learn how Moshe Rabbeinu is to tell Pharaoh about the last plague, the killing of the first-born, we learn how G-d tells Moshe, "Speak, please, in the ears of the people and each man should ask from his friend and each woman from her friend vessels of silver and vessels of gold." The rabbis are puzzled by this. After all, why should the Jewish people ask for vessels of silver and gold from the Egyptians before they are to leave Egypt, and why does G-d say, "Speak, please" to the Jewish people? What's more, why was it that only for the last plague, the killing of the first-born, did the Jewish people have to take any special precautions? During the previous nine plagues the Jewish people had to take no precautions because they were assured that none of these plagues would affect them. However, for the last plague the Jewish people were told that if they did not stay inside their homes and if they did not put the blood of the lamb on the outside of the door, their first-born, too, would be killed by the Angel of Death as it passed over Egypt. Why?

The rabbis answer that G-d was concerned. G-d wanted to make sure that after the Jewish people had left Egypt that they would still be able to have a positive relationship with the Egyptians. The Egyptians were not going to disappear. The Jewish people would have to live in the same world with them, and some way had to be found for them to reconcile themselves to the Egyptians in spite of the atrocities which the Egyptians had wreaked upon them. That's why G-d said, "Speak, please in the ears of the people and each man shall ask from this friend and each woman from her friend vessels of gold and vessels of silver and G-d will give the favor of the people in the eyes of the Egyptians." The Jewish people did not want to take the silver and gold. That's why the Torah says, "Speak, please". They did not want to take what they considered to be blood money. This money could never make up for the lives that were lost or for the indignities that they had suffered. Therefore, G-d said, "Speak, please". I want the Jewish people to take this gold and silver so that the Egyptians and the Jews can be reconciled after they leave Egypt." That's why after the Jewish people had left and had asked for the silver and gold, the Torah says, "And the Egyptians were saved". The Egyptians would no be able to have some sort of relationship with the Jewish people. They had at least at their last encounter

with the Jewish people tried to help them.

Moshe Rabbeinu did not want the Jewish people to ask for this money. He thought it would be a corrupting influence, and indeed, after the Jewish people worshipped the golden calf, according to the Medrash, Moshe said to G-d that if they would not have had this gold, they could not have built a golden calf. G-d, though, told Moshe that just as He had promised Abraham that the Jewish people would be enslaved, He had also promised him that the Jewish people would leave slavery with a great possession, and that He was going to keep His word to Abraham. Moshe answered that they did get a big possession, a spiritual possession. They had learned how to be compassionate, but G-d said, "Yes, this is true, but I want them to get this material possession also so that they could also gain another spiritual possession, the ability to reconcile themselves to Egypt." This did not mean that the Egyptians would not be punished for their atrocities, but that was not the Jewish people's business. G-d rights all the accounts. The Jewish people were to stay inside their homes and put the blood outside their door. G-d would take care of those who acted evilly.

In our own day, too, we have seen how the Arabs have acted cruelly to our people, but they have not had an easy time these last forty years. Look at all the people the Iraqis lost during the Gulf War. Look at the million lives lost in the Iran-Iraq war. Look at Syria where some say up to 50,000 people were killed in Chamas by the war of Assad against his own people. Look at all the Palestinians, 10,000, who were killed by the Jordanians during Black September in 1970, but that is not our business. Our business is not to punish anyone but to learn how to live in peace with our neighbors. When they are ready, we should be ready. This same reasoning applies to German reparations. Many people have been opposed to these reparations because they have considered them to be blood money, but they really are not. They have allowed the Jewish people and the Germans to open communication and eventually to be reconciled. Acceptance of these reparations does not mean that we have forgotten, but it just means that we have to move on.

G-d promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and that these nations would live in harmony some day. G-d wants us all to live in harmony on this planet. In order to do that we have to learn how to be reconciled to our enemies whether it is as individuals or as groups within institutions or as groups within nations or as nations between themselves. There can never be peace unless there is reconciliation. G-d will square all the accounts; it is not up to us to do that. It is up to us to learn how to reconcile ourselves to everyone no matter the past grievances. Let us all hope and pray that we can all learn to do this so that there will be peace among our families, peace within our communities, and peace within nations so that there will truly be peace throughout all the world. Amen.

TRUMAH

Man, Meaning and the .4 Percent

What is it that makes us uniquely human? What is it that differentiates man from the animal kingdom? There are those who would say that there is no distinction at all between a man and an animal. To them it is just as wrong to kill an animal as it is to kill a human being. This view has led some animal rights activists to the extreme position that all medical experiments on animals should be banned. They do not care that these experiments have saved millions of human lives. To them it is the height of hubris to think that a man's life is more important than an animal's life.

The very basis of Jewish morality is that there is an enormous difference between a human life and an animal life. If we honestly believe that killing a fly is as great a moral crime as killing a human being, then since we inevitably must kill flies, we might as well go ahead and kill any human being who annoys or bothers us. We believe that G-d breathed into Adam a special ingredient called a Neshoma, a soul, which is actually a piece of G-d. Starting with Adam and Eve, man was no longer just an animal. Man was unique and special. The rabbis say that before Adam and Eve there were 974 generations of pre-humans, creatures that may have looked and acted similarly to human beings, but they were not humans. Science now tells us that a chimpanzee has 99.6 percent of the DNA of a human being. However, it is that .4 percent which is crucial. It is that .4 percent that makes us human beings different and special. What makes human beings special and unique besides the ability to talk is the urge to create something beyond ourselves, the urge to create holiness.

One of the reasons why communism failed is because it denied the human impulse toward transcendence, toward creating a sense of holiness beyond one's person and beyond one's time. Originally communism was imbued with the spirit of transcendence when it is postulated that its goal was to make sure that all mankind was well fed, well housed, provided with adequate medical care, and given the ability to develop itself fully. However, it quickly became clear that these goals were not sufficient by and in themselves to give personal comfort to people in times of trouble. They were also themselves contradicted by many of the other beliefs of communism.

According to science, the probability of life occurring on earth is just about zero. So many coincidences would have had to have occurred. Also, for all these random occurrences to have occurred, it would have taken many more billions of years than the 15 billion years that science has calculated that the universe has existed. As Nobel laureate Jacques Monod has written, "Life appeared on earth: what before this event were the chances that this would occur? Its prior probability was virtually zero." In effect, science is forced by its basic premises to postulate that life began as a unique event, an event which had no possibility of occurring but which must have occurred because we are here. In other words, all life, and man in particular, is absurd and we had, according

to the laws of science, zero possibility of happening, but yet we happened. This would seem to point directly to a Creator, a Creator Who wanted us to come into being and Who has given us definite tasks, our main task being to take what G-d has given us and make it holy. This means that we primarily are the ones who create holiness.

We, by taking the materials of the universe and using them in the correct way, give meaning and purpose to our lives. We human beings are unique, therefore, because we crave more than life. We crave meaning. We want our lives to have meaning. We want our lives to make a difference. Each of us wants to be able to say, I am not just a member of a genus (animal species) that is not important. I am unique. I am special. I can make a difference. We human beings are, therefore, unique in that we want more than life. We want life which has meaning and gives us importance, which does not reduce us to a number of a cipher. We want to leave behind a mark. We want our lives to advance human progress. We want our lives to make this world a little better place because we lived. We need to believe that our lives have helped fulfill some divine plan. Originally communism latched on to that human need and tried to convince its adherents that they were fulfilling some grand plan for the universe by their sacrificing for communism, but if there is no creator, how can there be a plan? If there is no rhyme or reason for life and its probability is zero, why all this sacrifice? What difference does it make whether life ends or not? How can there be a plan with a planner?

In the Torah portion Terumah, we have encapsulated many of these ideas. The Torah portion Terumah talks about the building of the Tabernacle and of the objects especially that went into the Haichal, the holy part of the sanctuary. First of all, the Torah says, "Speak to the Sons of Israel and they shall take for Me an offering." The answer is that when a person gives he is also taking. He is taking meaning and purpose and putting it in his life. He is saying, "I am important. I am needed to help fulfill G-d's plan." The word Terumah, itself, means not just "offering" but "that which is lifted up". When we give we are uplifted. This idea is further driven home when the Torah says, "And they shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in them." When a person realizes that the purpose of life is to sanctify life, is to help G-d complete his plan for this life, then G-d dwells in him. The word for Tabernacle in Hebrew means "that which is holy". We are the ones who create holiness in the world by our attitude toward things. G-d has given us wonderful materials on this earth, a whole physical universe which we can use to either elevate ourselves and it, or to diminish ourselves and it. It depends how we use things. When we make a brocha over food, we are basically taking a selfish act, eating, and transmuting it and making it a holy act. Judaism does not believe that we achieve the holy by denying the physical. We believe that we achieve the holy by going through the physical. Man is not supposed to be an angel with no physical desires. If G-d wanted man to be an angel, He would have created him as such. G-d does not demand that we rid ourselves of our impulses. He asks us that we mold them and shape them so that they are acceptable. We are to use all our impulses for good. We can elevate them all.

The Tabernacle that was built illustrates this by showing how we transmute physical objects and make them holy. The Ten Commandments were housed in the Holy of Holies. They were housed in an ark that was actually very small. The ark measured no more than about 45 inches in length and 27 inches in width and depth. It was smaller than an average desk. A person does not have to do grandiose things in order to be holy, in order to feel life's meaning. He has, though, to be willing to carry the Ten

Commandments wherever he goes and it must be in the inner recesses of his heart, in the holy of holies of his being. The poles of the ark were never to be removed, which is to symbolize that they were to be carried by everyone everywhere. This point is also emphasized by the fact that when all the other objects of the Tabernacle were to be made, it says, "And you shall make," but when it comes to the Ten Commandments, it says, "And they shall make," which means that "Moshe, you shall make or have made the other objects of the Tabernacle, but everybody has to make a portable ark in which to carry the Ten Commandments for himself, not literally, but figuratively." The Ten Commandments cannot be carried by only a few. They must be carried by everyone.

On top of the Ten Commandments was an ark cover which was composed to two cherubim with the faces of children in a warm embrace whose wings spread upward but whose faces were facing each other. Holiness, the rabbis teach us, cannot be achieved unless we first look at one another and try to help one another. Without morality there can be no transcendence. Judaism has always said that we cannot reach G-d unless we are first moral. It was between the cherubim that G-d spoke to Moses. Holiness, transcendence, in Judaism also means the desire to have children. It also means the willingness to invest in your children, to teach them the Torah. Abandoning your family can never result in holiness.

Human beings need light. We need knowledge, but knowledge alone does not satisfy. Human beings also need physical comforts, but again, without a feeling of purpose, they leave us bored. Within the holy there was also the menorah, the light which stood not only for knowledge but for the soul. Knowledge must illuminate our souls. It must be directed not just to make us an observer of natural phenomenon but also be directed inward to teach us how to be better people. That's why secular knowledge alone is not enough. We also need Torah knowledge. There was also a table in the Tabernacle with twelve matzahs, which signified our physical needs but that these physical needs must also be directed toward a purpose. They must allow us to do things for our family and for our people, etc. Finally, there was an altar, which teaches us that without the ability to give, the ability to sacrifice, we can never feel holy. We can never feel that our life is worth anything. We must be willing to sacrifice, but we also must learn that we can only sacrifice for worthwhile things. The urge to sacrifice must also be informed by the Ten Commandments, by the cherubim whose faces were above the Ten Commandments, by the light of the Torah, and by the physical needs of our family and our community.

Yes, man is unique. He is unique because he wants more than life. He wants his life to have meaning. As Victor Frankel and his school of psychiatry have propounded, it is not sex or power or primeval symbols which motivate man and make man what he is; it is his search for meaning. All of us need to know we are special and unique, that only each of us can do certain tasks by being the best parents to our children and the best children to our parents. We may be 99.6 percent chimpanzee, but it is the .4 percent which makes us special and unique and which will allow us to eventually create a world of peace and harmony and justice and which will allow us to fulfill our need to be holy. Let us hope that that day will come soon. Amen.

TETZAVEH

Pure Olive Oil, Truth and Darkness

In the Torah portion Tetzaveh, we learn how the Jewish people are commanded to take pure olive oil beaten for the light. This Torah portion begins, "And you shall command the children of Israel and they shall take pure olive oil beaten for the light to cause the lamp to burn continually in the Ohel Moed outside the Perochas which is by the testimony, Aaron and his children shall prepare it from evening to morning before G-d a law forever for their generations from the sons of Israel." It is from this passage that we learn about the commandment of lighting the eternal light.

There are though several questions that we can ask about this passage. First of all, why does it say that it would be "a law throughout your generations for the children of Israel"? After all, we know that the Temple only stood for a portion of Jewish history. For 2,000 years we have not been lighting this light. Secondly, why does it say, "and you should command the children of Israel"? Usually when a command is given by G-d to Moshe, it says, "And G-d spoke to Moshe and He said . . .", but here it says, "you shall command the children of Israel". And finally, what does it mean when it says you should take pure olive oil beaten for the light to cause the light to burn continually? The rabbis say that this pure olive oil refers to the oil which comes from the olives that are on the very top of the tree. It also means that you could not take the olives from the lower branches of the tree and that you could not beat the tree in order to caused the olives to fall and use those olives. In fact, that is the way they used to harvest an olive tree, by beating the tree.

Today we have machines that shake the tree and the olives fall off. They had to go up to the very top of the tree to get the olives. Not only did they have to get up to the very top of the tree, but when they brought the olives down, they had to beat them by hand and not by machine. In those days, too, they had machines, not driven by electricity but by hand power, which would pulverize the olives and allow the oil to come out. In this case, they had to beat them individually and only the first drop of oil could be used for the olive oil which was to be used to light the eternal light. The rest of the olive oil could be used for the meal offerings, but only the first drop of oil could be used to light the eternal light.

Aaron and his sons would light the eternal light from evening to morning. Aaron every morning had to prepare the wick. He had to remove the burned wick and replace it with a fresh one and fill the lamp with oil, but he did not actually light it until the evening. Only the central shaft of the menorah in the Tabernacle, according to most opinions, was kept lit continually day and night. Again, we still are left with the questions. Why was it that Moshe was commanded to tell the Jewish people himself, and why was it that this was a "law throughout all your generations"? What does it mean that it had to be pure olive oil? The rabbis tell us that Moshe Rabbeinu was willing to sacrifice his life for the Jewish people. He went from the security of Midion to Egypt to save the Jewish people, risking his life. Later on when the Jewish people sinned at the golden calf, Moshe said, "Wipe me out from the book but just save the people". Moshe would do anything for the people. He was given the opportunity to give the Jewish people this command because of his own fearlessness in standing up for them and because of his own fearlessness in the search for

truth.

I am reminded of a story that was just told to me by Rabbi Gedalya Rabinowitz who was chosen by Adin Steinsaltz in 1989 to open the first yeshiva in Moscow since the Russian Revolution in 1917. He tells the story of his great-grandfather's great-grandfather. In the Ukraine there were two brothers who owned a very successful publishing company in Salutva, Ukraine. They published especially Chassidic works, and they were known throughout all the Jewish world for their fine publications. They published pamphlets, books, everything that people need in order to have an intellectual life. They employed many, many workers. They were the mainstay of this small town. As their prosperity increased, of course, jealousy of them also increased. The Ukraine is known to this day as an anti-Semitic place. It has always been the hotbed of anti-Semitism, especially since Chmelnitzky in 1648 destroyed a third of the Jews of the Ukraine in his war against the Poles. Right before Pesach in 1839 one of the employees of the printing house, a non-Jew, was found murdered on the premises. Apparently, he had gotten into a fight with another gentile worker and was stabbed to death, but the authorities did not want to accept the facts in the case and instead they turned on the two brothers who ran this very successful book publishing concern and they claimed that they had killed this gentile man in order to use his blood to make matzahs, the famous blood libel, which started in England in the early Middle Ages. Throughout the Middle Ages until the 20th century, Jews have been accused of having to kill gentiles in order to use their blood to make matzah. Nothing could be further from the truth. We Jews abhor blood. We know how our religion does not allow us to eat blood. We have to drain the blood from any meat that we eat. A woman and man cannot have sexual intercourse anytime a woman has her period because of blood. We know, too, that Jews stay away from blood as much as possible, but yet, this blood libel has spread. Many Jews have lost their lives because of it. The two brothers, Shmuel Abba Shapiro, who was the ancestor of Rabbi Gedalya Rabinowitz, and his brother were brought to trial. They were sort of found guilty or sort of found innocent. What does that mean?

The court could not make up its mind, so they decided that they would punish them by ordeal, by having them run a gauntlet, but there was enough evidence to their mind that they were really guilty and so, therefore, they were given a two-part punishment. One, that they would have to run naked between two rows of soldiers who were wielding whips, which means that by the time they finished running this gauntlet, they would have received 1,500 whippings, and if they survived that ordeal, they would then be sent to Siberia. They were taken to run through this gauntlet. They were stripped naked, but they had one request to make of the officer in charge and that is that they be allowed to wear their yarmulkas. Their request was granted, and then they ran through the gauntlet. One of them, unfortunately, lost his yarmulka and ran back to get it. Both of them miraculously survived. The one who lost his yarmulka was estimated to have gotten 50 extra stripes because of it. Here were two middle aged men, not particularly robust, who managed in some miraculous way to survive this ordeal. The second part of their punishment was also very harsh, especially since they hadn't been found guilty of anything. They were to be sent to Siberia. In those days, when people were sent to Siberia, very few of them returned, the same as in Stalin's day. They would be sent to a gulag where most of them would perish. They were first sent to Moscow to be transshipped to Siberia, but because of the intervention of the Jewish community and

others, their sentence was rescinded so that they were allowed to live in Moscow. This mercy was shown to them probably because of a big bribe that was given to certain Russian officials, but in Moscow there were no Jews. Russia never allowed Jews to live in Russia proper. It was illegal for Jews to live in Russia. If a Jew was caught in Russia, that Jew would be killed, just like in England from 1290 until Cromwell's time in the 1640's, no Jew was allowed to live in England either. In fact, even the personal physician of Queen Elizabeth, when it was found out that he was a Jew, was killed. Queen Elizabeth, herself, even could not save him. Jews only lived in those parts of Russia that Russia had conquered from Poland and Lithuania. At one time, Poland ruled the Ukraine. It was illegal for Jews to live in Moscow, except for Jews who had served 30 years in the Russian Army. The Czar's fiendish plan was to take Jewish boys seven and eight years old and induct them in the army and then while they were in the army, subject them to all sorts of Christian missionarizing, hoping that they would convert. Many of them did. Those boys who survived 30 years in the Russian army and who did not convert were allowed to live in Moscow, but they were just a handful. When these two brothers came to Moscow, there was no organized Jewish community there. These brothers, who were also rabbis, although they had not practiced being rabbis up to then, quickly organized a small community of these Nicolaitstat Soldaiten and the first synagogue to open in hundreds of years in Moscow opened in 1839. Almost 150 years to that day, Rabbi Gedalya Rabinowitz opened the first yeshiva in Moscow since the Revolution, or perhaps legally, ever. It was interesting also that of the two other faculty members that he brought with him, they, like him, were also descendants of either one of these two Shapiro brothers. Yes, miracles seem to happen in our day, too.

This is what perhaps lighting the eternal light meant, and that is why it was continually for every generation. The rabbis explain that the olive oil in the menorah stood for the light of Torah, for the light of Judaism. We are called upon to light it continually throughout generations because there are many who would seek to quench it. Many times, Jews have been misled into thinking that they no longer need Torah, and then Aaron and his sons, the priests, the leadership, must once again light the menorah, and they must do it in the evening. When things are dark, when it does not seem possible that Judaism could ever be revived, then we must light the menorah. It was a miracle, too, that the reforms in the Soviet Union occurred when they did because there were still a few old people, learned Jews, who could teach the young. When the Refuseniks were kicked out of their jobs and they wanted to learn more of their heritage, they could still go to some old people and learn a little bit about Judaism. If these reforms would have happened ten years, 20 years later, there would probably not have been anybody to teach the younger generation. The spark within the younger generation had to be lit. The Pinkele Yid there had to be set aflame.

What we Jews must always do is to seek the truth, and that is what Moshe was telling the people. Judaism will always survive if you will look for the pure olive oil. Don't be fooled by the dregs which pretend to be new theories of light and hope. Many Jews in the beginning were fooled by communism. Many Jews originally became Communists but almost immediately saw its fallacies, and that is why Stalin was so tough on us because in the late 1920's and 1930's, most Jews realized communism would not work. It took the other Russians another 50, 60 years to figure that out, that communism just would not work. When Moshe told the people, and he was the one who was supposed to tell the

people because he was a man who searched for the truth, that when you search out for a light to live by, make sure that it is true. It has to be the finest oil. There cannot be any dregs in it. After the first bang on the olive, the rest of the oil comes out with dregs with some pulp, with some skin. That you cannot use. It has to be pure olive oil.

We all know how many times people will say, "I know it is not true, but look how much good it is doing." That is what the German industrialists said. "Oh, yes, we know Hitler's theories are false, but look, there is full employment in Germany now. There is pride in Germany now. We are respected as a world power now. So what if he also has a few crazy theories? Who cares? This type of thinking will never work. We cannot say that we believe in theories that are false because these false theories will always lead to great terror and great destruction.

In the United States, too, we cannot promote a Judaism which we know is false. We cannot add to Judaism a lot of things that we think are nice because they will please our gentile neighbors or because they are good economically to Jews or because they are good public relations or because they give us a good feeling inside if we know that they are not true. Judaism must always reflect truth, otherwise, it too can deceive us. We must look for the truth in it. This truth will shine out. That is what the lighting of the menorah is teaching us here. Yes, it is beaten for the light. It is not easy to arrive at the truth. Sometimes it is extremely difficult, but we can only use the olives upon which the sun shines most. We cannot be content with olives that are on the lower branches on the tree. Moshe commanded the Jewish people that they should demand of their religious leaders that they give them the truth, that they do not give them things that just sound good and look good, but which are not the truth. This presents a great challenge to our religious leaders. Sometimes our religious leaders do things for political reasons, etc. It was the responsibility of Aaron and his children to especially light the menorah when things are dark. They are to encourage the people. They are to tell them that things will get better. The dawn will come. We see now in Russia how because of those few Jews who held the light aloft even in the darkest hours, the menorah is starting to burn bright there again. There are already yeshivas in Moscow, in Leningrad, in Kiev, and throughout all Russia. The light is starting to burn again bright. None of us should ever give up. We should always realize that we have to continually light the light, even in the darkest times.

I am reminded to the story they tell about the chief rabbi who was supposed to have gone to Russia. It is an apocryphal story. He met the Minister of Religion. The Minister of Religion had just come back from a walk on the streets of Moscow when a little girl came up to him and said, "Oh, Minister of Religion, would you like to pet my communist puppies?" The Minister of Religion thought that that was such a nice thing to say and to do. When he met the chief rabbi of Israel, he said, "Come, I want to have you meet a little girl." When he took him to meet the little girl, he asked the little girl, "Do you still have your puppies?" She said, "Yes, I do," and she brought them over to the rabbi and she said, "Would you like to pet my Jewish puppies?" The Minister of Religion said, "Little girl, I thought these were communist puppies. You told me just a few hours ago they were communist puppies." The little girl said, "I did, but that was before they opened their eyes." Let us all hope and pray that we will always light the menorah of Judaism, even when times look dark and that the menorah that we light will always be based upon the truth, the truth of Judaism so that the Maschiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

KI SISSA

War, Bullies and the Duty to Resist

Judaism agrees with William Tecumseh Sherman who said, "War is hell." We do not look forward to war. We do not want war. Our tradition says that we must do everything possible to prevent war. In fact, according to the Talmud, even when Joshua entered the land of Israel, he had to first offer peace to its inhabitants. As Maimonides said, "It is not permissible to wage war on anyone in the world without first offering them peace." We, though, are not pacifists. We do not believe that it is wrong in all circumstances to wage war.

There is a basic difference between the Western concept of the right to resist an aggressor and the Jewish conception of the duty to resist an aggressor. Resisting an aggressor in Western thinking is based on the concept of self defense, which means that everyone has a right to defend himself. Whether you exercise the right or not is up to you. If you, as an individual, do not want to pursue your right of self defense, you do not have to. In fact, Quakers and others would say that it is a moral imperative not to fight back. Also, this whole concept of resisting an aggressor revolves around you, the self. If you are directly threatened, then you have the right to defend yourself, but it does not say anything at all about the duty you have to prevent bullies from attacking innocent third parties.

In Jewish thinking, the right to resist an aggressor is not a right; it is a duty and it does not revolve around you, the self, but around innocent third parties. It is the duty of each of us, if we have the power, to stop bullies from attacking innocent third parties. In Jewish law, this is called the law of *rodeif*. If I see a person attacking another, I have the duty to stop him, even if it means that I have to take his life. In Judaism, even though capital punishment was allowed, it was very rarely enforced because of all the stringent legal safeguards which surrounded it. The Mishnah says that if a court put to death anyone once in seven years, and some say seventy years, it was called a bloody court. After an aggressor had been captured, it was almost impossible to put him to death, but if the only way to stop the aggressor while he was in the act of aggression was to kill him, it was not only permissible, but a *mitzvah*. Bullies must be stopped, otherwise nobody can live safely in the world. Also, since the Talmud says, "My blood is as red as anyone else's," I have the right to stop an aggressor who is attacking me. Of course, there are all sorts of other questions that have to be raised as to how much force I can use to stop an aggressor, but if the only way I can stop that aggressor is to kill him, then I must kill him. Judaism, though, does not glory in this prospect. The rabbis say that war is really a punishment, even the wars that we wage to resist an aggressor, even wars that are in self defense. They say that even the war of Joshua to liberate the land of Israel, which was obligatory, was a punishment because G-d could have created the conditions whereby the Jewish people could have entered into the land and settled it without war. That, the rabbis explain, is the true meaning of what happened at the Red Sea. The Jewish people had just left Egypt, but at G-d's direction, they had circled back and seemed trapped on a peninsula. The Egyptian army under the leadership of Pharaoh came thundering after them. Once again, Pharaoh hardened his heart. He now thought that he had made a mistake in letting the Jewish people go free and he wanted to bring them back into slavery. As long as that Egyptian army was intact, the Jewish people could have been

brought back to Egypt at any time, but G-d saw to it that the Egyptian army was destroyed, destroyed so badly that Egypt did not become a world power again for hundreds of years. G-d told the Jewish people to be silent and to move forward, They did not have to fight the Egyptian army. They moved through the Red Sea after it split and after they had passed safely to the other side, the waters came cascading down on the Egyptians. A great victory was given to Israel. They did not have to fight. When the Jewish people are worthy, the rabbis say, they can achieve victory without having to fight. If they are not worthy, they will have to fight.

The truth of the matter is that even in our own day, we Jewish people gained the right to enter the land of Israel and establish a national home there without having to fight when the Balfour Declaration was promulgated by the British government. Chaim Weizman had developed a way to make acetone cheaply, a necessary ingredient of TNT, which was needed for the war effort (World War I), and the British, in gratitude, issued the Balfour Declaration. Later this promise of a Jewish homeland was ratified by the League of Nations and later by the United Nations. It is true that then we had to fight a bloody war of independence and subsequent bloody wars, but it is easy to see the hand of G-d in all these events. In a certain sense, today, right now, the events of the Red Sea are being replayed, only now it is the United States telling Israel "to sit quietly and we will destroy the Iraqi army for you." The United States has its own reasons for doing so, but this can also be looked at as a miraculous event.

According to the Torah, the Jewish people were to exercise sovereignty in the land of Israel. The word "kibush" does not necessarily mean "conquest by war"; it just means to exercise sovereignty, to rule over. This word is also used in the ethics of our fathers to refer to a person who rules over himself. This word can also mean to buy land. When the modern day Jewish National Fund bought up tracts of land in Israel, this enabled the Jewish people to rule over the land they bought. This happened even before the State of Israel was born. Obtaining sovereignty need not be by war. The whole thrust of the Zionist enterprise was to obtain sovereignty in Israel without war. If people attack us, if defensive wars are thrust upon us, then we have to defend ourselves, and if other parts of the land of Israel fall into our hands, then we can keep them if this is in the best interests of the Jewish people. We are not supposed to initiate any wars in order to obtain other parts of Biblical Israel today. The rabbis tell us that only the war of Joshua was obligatory, but no other war has been since, and even during the time of Joshua, he had to sue for peace first.

In the Torah portion Ki Sissa, we learn how all those who were mustered into the army had to give a half shekel to the Temple. In those days, the draft age was 20 years old, not 18 like today. The reason the soldiers had to give this money was in order to make atonement for their souls. The question the rabbis ask is, what did these soldiers do so wrong that they had to make atonement for their souls? The rabbis say that they were going to have to fight to defend the Jewish people against the attacks of Sichon, the king of the Amarrites, and Og, the king of Boshan, and they were going to have to kill people. We do not like having to kill people. Why, though, they ask, did they only have to give a half shekel? Why didn't they have to give a whole shekel? The answer they give is because they were fighting a just war. It is a shame that victory could not have been theirs like on the Red Sea without their having to kill anybody, but G-d saw fit to force them to fight. It was perhaps because of their lack of merits after the sin the golden calf

and the sin of listening to the spies and not going up to the land of Israel immediately that they had to do so. War is a punishment but their war was still a just war. Therefore, they did not have to give a full shekel. War is sometimes necessary. The bullies of the world cannot be allowed to take over the world. Evil must be resisted. Many times the only way evil can be resisted is through war.

During the Middle Ages, when we Jews had no power and were scattered among the nations, the only way we could resist evil many times was through spiritual defiance, courage in the face of certain death. We would not allow our spirits to be bowed, and even when we were taken to the gas chambers, we sang songs of faith, Anim Mainim, but if we have the power, we certainly should resist aggression. We do not glory in war and we certainly realize that war, itself, is a punishment, but if we have to wage war, then we have to do it with courage, strength, dedication and devotion. Resisting the aggressors in Judaism is not based upon whether or not it is good or bad for you, but whether or not the helpless and the weak are being attacked by bullies. The world must be run justly, otherwise we are all in danger. G-d demands that we do not stand by innocent blood. According to Jewish law, if we see a person drowning and we can swim, we are commanded to rescue that person. We cannot be indifferent, as is the law in the United States today. We cannot say, I have no interest in this person and I have no duty to intervene. If I want to I can, but if I don't want to, I don't have to." According to Jewish law, we must intervene.

At the Red Sea, the Jewish people were told to be quiet and that G-d would fight for them. The Egyptian army was not only defeated but almost all of the powers of the world at that time were so impressed that they left the Jewish people alone for many, many years. No serious threat to Jewish survival was mounted for centuries. Let us all hope and pray that today when we have been asked to be quiet and let others destroy our enemies that this will so impress the powers in the Middle East and the powers throughout the world, that no longer will Israel's existence be threatened, that Israel will be able to live in peace for many, many centuries. Let us also hope and pray that the Holy One, Blessed by He, will help in every way possible the servicemen of the United States and its allies to defeat Saddam Hussein quickly with a minimum of casualties so that future aggressors will learn that bullies have no place in this world.

VAYAKHEL

The Importance of Things Which Occupy Space

In the Torah portion Vayakhel, we have a description of all the material that was collected from the Jewish people in order to build the Tabernacle. We also learn how they built each part of the Tabernacle. However, this Torah portion starts in a very unusual way. It starts by telling us how Moshe gathered together all the congregation, the sons of Israel, and he said to them, "These are the things which G-d commanded to do them. Six days work shall be done, and the seventh day for you shall be holy, a Sabbath of Sabbaths to G-d. All who do on it work will die. You shall not kindle any fire in all your habitations on the Sabbath day." What do all these laws about the Shabbos have to do with building the Tabernacle, and why does Moshe start out by saying, "These are the things which G-d commanded to do them"? Why had Moshe gathered together all the congregation of the sons of Israel? What's more, why does it say, "Six days work shall be done" using the passive and not the active? What does it mean a "Sabbath of Sabbaths to G-d"? What is this emphasis on fire? After all, fire is just one of the 39 proscribed work that is prohibited to do on Shabbos. Why did Moshe single out fire? After all, we all know that it is not just any work that is prohibited on Shabbos; it is work in which you change nature. A person could theoretically move all his furniture all through his house all day of Shabbos. It would be very tiring work but theoretically it is not prohibited. However, you cannot build a piece of furniture because if you do that, you are changing nature. Why did these commandments have to be put right here before the building of the Tabernacle? They seem to be out of place here.

Perhaps we can understand why these commandments about Shabbos are taught first in the Torah portion Vayakhel, before we learn how the Jewish people contributed the necessary material things that were needed for building the Tabernacle because there are really two temples in Judaism. There is a temple in space and a temple in time. Shabbos is our temple in time. Not only is the Tabernacle our temple in space, but also we are to make our whole planet a temple in space. G-d has told us all that we can make this world a paradise, but that we have to conquer and subdue nature. Then we can make this world livable. We all know that unless man puts forward his best energies we could not live on this planet. Without air conditioning in Houston in the summer, it is almost impossible to live here. In Minnesota without heat in the winter, it is definitely impossible to live there. Man, in order to exist in the world, must change nature. He must make nature more hospitable to him. Otherwise, we cannot exist. We all know that we have to cook our food. We have to make our clothes. We will die of exposure and hypothermia if we do not take proper precautions. Therefore, we are commanded to work for six days.

Moshe said to the Jewish people, "These are the things which G-d commanded to do them." Yes, you are supposed to do things. You are supposed to work hard. You are supposed to create things. You are supposed to create societies in which people can live with a certain amount of amenities. That's why it says, "Six days work shall be done". Notice it says it in the passive to teach us that there is a more important temple that we all have to build besides our temple in space and that is our temple in time. We know that we can have the finest factory with the finest machines with the most beautiful plans and still our factory can fail because the qualities which do not occupy any space are actually the most important ones: loyalty, devotion, dedication, integrity, honesty, compassion are missing. These things do not occupy any space but they are many times more important

than the things that do. We see here in America where firms can have the finest factories but they can be ripped off by their own executives. We also have seen how here in America today top executives in industry have run their companies into the ground. They do not care because they are going to take their big salaries and invest them in bonds or other investments and live off the interest for the rest of their lives. It is not true that you can just exist with a temple in space. People in America have been sold a bill of goods. They think that the most important thing is prosperity as measured by things, but it is not so. We also have to have the intangibles, those things which do not occupy any space, if we are to have a successful economy. Unless we have them, all our institutions will fall apart, businesses, families, government, etc. We will not be able to have a functioning society. We need to have these values which the temple of time represent. We need to have those attributes which do not occupy any space. Therefore, before the Jewish people could build the Temple in space they had to be cognizant of the temple in time. They had to realize that those values are even more important than the physical objects of the temple in space. Yes, it is true that we have to have skills in order to build things. We have to have the engineers, mathematicians, physicists, chemists, but these engineers, mathematicians, physicists, chemists, etc., also have to have integrity and honesty if the structures they build are to succeed. They need not only building material but they also need to have knowledge, concern for others, compassion, love and kindness, etc. Where do we learn these intangible things? We learn these intangible things from the temple in time.

That is what the Shabbos is supposed to teach us. Shabbos is supposed to teach about the importance of the intangible values, love, devotion, dedication. We are supposed to spend Shabbos with our family and in pursuing spiritual pursuits. We are to promote those values which cannot be quantified by time but which underlie everything we do. That is why it says, "Six days work shall be done" in the passive. Work can only be done if people have these values. If they do not, then they will destroy themselves and others. We saw this in Nazi Germany, where there were great enterprises but they were used to promote the destruction of others and eventually of Germany itself. They were not based on positive values. The Torah says, "This seventh day shall be for you holy, a Sabbath of Sabbaths to G-d." Many people read about Shabbos, but they do not understand what the Shabbos is about. The Shabbos is to inculcate into us those values which do not occupy any space.

That is why in this Torah portion the prohibition of not kindling fire in all our habitations is singled out. There is an argument among the rabbis about the prohibition of kindling fire on Shabbos. Some rabbis say that the reason we mention fire is to teach us that if we would make a fire on Shabbos we would not be punished as harshly as if we would have violated any of the other 39 categories of work. If we kindle a fire, we would only receive stripes, but we would not receive the death penalty. Others say, no, kindling fire was singled out to teach us that if we violate by accident one of the 39 categories of work on Shabbos, we would have to bring a sin offering. Kindling fire is just brought as an example. Other rabbis say, no, that the prohibition against kindling fire was emphasized here to teach us the lesson that we have just talked about - the importance of the intangible over the tangible. After all, when did Moshe gather together all the congregation of the sons of Israel? He had gathered them together the day after Yom Kippur, the day after G-d had forgiven them for the sin of the golden calf. What was the

sin of the golden calf? The sin of the golden calf was that the people worshipped their own creativity, that they had taken their gold and silver and had thrown them into the fire, and what came out of the fire? The golden calf. Fire is a symbol of man's creativity. Fire can be very constructive. We cook our food with it. We create machines with it. It can also be very destructive. If we let our creative energies run amok, we can create concentration camps as well as creating beautiful cities. We, through the harnessing of forces of nature, which can be both constructive and destructive, can use nature to destroy others and nature itself. Therefore, Shabbos teaches us that we must have the values of the temple of time. Unless we wed these values of time to the temple of space, we will create a civilization which will destroy and kill and will use all the constructive attributes to destroy. Let us hope and pray that all of us will realize this, that all of us will realize that we need more than the temple of space; that we also need the temple of time. If we combine the temple of time with the temple of space, we can make a paradise on this earth.

I am reminded of the story they tell of an orchestra conductor who had scheduled ten rehearsals for a big concert. Unfortunately, many of the orchestra members were absent from many of these rehearsals. Finally, at the last rehearsal, the conductor turned to the concert master, the first violinist, and he said, "I want to publicly, in front of everybody, thank you for being the only member of the orchestra who attended all ten rehearsals." The concert master got up and said, "Well, that's the least I can do since I cannot attend the concert tonight."

Unfortunately, that is the way many people feel. They feel that all that is necessary in this world is to build a temple of space, but that it not at all necessary to be concerned about the temple of time, about the values of love, concern and compassion. Prosperity alone will not cure the problems of crime or broken families or loneliness. In fact, sometimes prosperity itself, by allowing us to use half the workers to create the same amount of steel, will cause great dislocations and by its producing better weapons will just increase crime. It is important that we all recognize that we need in addition to the temple of space, a temple of time, that in addition to all the great tools and all the great technology, we need the values that occupy no space in order to make sure that the things which do occupy space produce only good results for mankind. Let us hope and pray that we will only produce these good results so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

PEKUDE

We Need G-d's and Moshe's Blessing

In the Torah portion Pekudai, we learn how Moshe Rabbeinu blessed the people when

they finished all the work of the construction of the Tabernacle. It says, "And Moshe saw all the work and behold they did it as G-d commanded, so they did, and Moshe blessed them." The question the rabbis ask is why did Moshe bless them? G-d, Himself, had already said that He would bless the Jewish people if they built a sanctuary for Him. It says, "And they shall build a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst." Why did Moshe have to bless them? After all, G-d Himself was going to bless the Jewish people.

If we look carefully at the word for Torah, we will note that the numerical equivalent for Torah is 611. The rabbis tell us that there are 613 mitzvahs. The reason for this is that there are 248 bones in the human body and 365 days, which means that we are to worship G-d every day of the solar year with all the bones of our body. Why, though, the rabbis ask, is the numerical equivalent for the word Torah only 611? Why don't we use a word for G-d's teaching which is numerically equivalent to 613? The rabbis say the reason for this is because when Moshe brought down the Torah to the Jewish people, he only brought down 611 commandments. The first two commandments of the ten commandments he did not bring down. The Jewish people had heard the first two commandments of the ten commandments at the foot of Mount Sinai. The commandments are: "I am the L-rd your G-d," and "You shall have no other gods besides Me."

In life we are confronted with two primary tasks. The first task is to have the necessary confidence in order to fulfill our role as G-d's partner in creation. Many times people become overwhelmed by the problems of life. They have no confidence in themselves that they would be able to make any worthy contribution to the world. They think they are no good. They think they are born no good and that no thing that they do could be good. They feel that they cannot make any kind of serious contribution to the betterment of this world. That is a false notion. G-d created each of us with the capacity to contribute something to the world. It is true we cannot all be geniuses. It is true we cannot all be Einsteins. We cannot all be great musicians. It is true that we cannot all be great athletes. It is true that we cannot all be great poets or even outstanding businessmen, but each of us in our own way can make a contribution to the world. None of us should ever feel totally helpless before the problems of the world.

That is why the first commandment is "I am the L-rd your G-d," which means I have created you and I want you to be My partner in creation. You all have a role to play. You should never feel that you cannot make any contribution to the world. You can contribute something. You are important and you can be somebody.

What was the blessing that Moshe blessed the Jewish people? The rabbis say that the blessing was, "May G-d's presence be felt in the work of your hands," which means that we must all feel that what we can contribute to the world is special and unique and what's more, is necessary and needed. Only we can be the best father or mother to our children. Only we can be the best son or daughter to our parents. Only we can fulfill certain tasks. The problems of every generation are unique in many ways. Only we can combat them. We cannot say that our parents can combat them or that our children can combat them; we have to combat them. When challenges confront us, it is up to us to use our talents, to use whatever abilities G-d has given us in order to overcome these problems. Yes, G-d had promised the Jewish people that if we would build Him a sanctuary He would dwell in our midst, but that is only if we are willing to assume our responsibility, then G-d will bless us. G-d has never promised us that we will not have problems. All He has promised

us is that He will give us the strength to overcome our problems. Many Jews don't want the responsibility of being G-d's partner in creation. They don't want to allow G-d to come into our lives, so that they could be G-d's partner in creation. Moshe's blessing was, I Know that G-d has blessed you, and that G-d has said that if you will build for Him a sanctuary He will inhabit it. Also, that G-d said that if you will make room in your heart to be His partner in creation, the He will help you and you will be able to achieve what you are supposed to achieve in this world. But the problem is that many people do not want to be G-d's partner in creation. Many people shy away from the challenges of the world. Many people retreat and do not want to even know about the challenges of the world. One of the unique qualities of most of the Jewish people is that we have always thought that we can change things for the better. We have been in forefront of almost every social movement in the last 200 years in the West. In every social action movement you will find some Jews, because we Jews believe that things can be changed, that we have the capacity to be G-d's partner in creation and that we have the power to change things for the better. So many times though many people feel that they can do nothing. They feel that they have to sit quietly and accept the injustices of the world and accept their own ignorance and even their own weaknesses. They feel that they cannot do anything about them. Yes, we can do something about them. Moshe's blessing tells us. We can do a lot, but we must put forth great efforts and we must want to do something about them. Moshe's blessing was that we should all want to change the world ourselves, that we should all want to let G-d in so He can help us be somebody and help Him change the world for the better.

The second part of Moshe's blessing was that we should not become intoxicated with our power. That is also a grave danger. Once we know that we have power, that we can be creative and that we can make a difference, we then are confronted with the problem of arrogance. We begin to think that we do not need G-d at all, that it is totally our power that does everything. That is why the second commandment was heard by every Jew, "And you shall not make false idols." Worshipping the works of our hands is the essence of idol worship. We think that we can do everything and that we do not need any help. We become haughty and arrogant and eventually we become self-destructive. Moshe said, " I bless you secondly that you should not only know that you have the power to change things, but also that you will always recognize that your power alone is not sufficient, even after you have accomplished great things, that you also need G-d's help. And that G-d's help can be obtained only if you act morally, justly and correctly. We all need Moshe's blessing even today. There are so many people in our own community who are overcome with depression, who are overcome with feelings of ennui who do not feel that they are important, who feel that they are useless. To them this blessing speaks. It says, remember you are a partner with G-d. G-d needs you and wants you. Let Him in. If you let Him in you can achieve great things. There are also many people who have become so intoxicated with their own power after they have achieved great things that they now keep G-d out because they think they have accomplished everything themselves. They do not think that they received any help from G-d at all. A wag once said that these self-made men sure have relieved G-d of a great deal of responsibility because they usually are very boorish and ignorant types of people who are also haughty and arrogant.

G-d has blessed us by assuring us that if we become His partner in creation, He will help

us, but we also need Moshe's blessing. Moshe blessed us by assuring us 1) that we do have the power to be G-d's partner in creation and that we can accomplish great things and 2) that after we have accomplished great things that we do not have to worship our power, the work of our hands, but that we can still be filled with morality and compassion, concern for the poor, concern for our fellow man. In this way, we will truly be blessed. By letting G-d in, G-d said He will cause us to be blessed, and by accepting Moshe's blessing, we will want to let G-d in and will not let our talents destroy us and become in themselves an idol. May we all be worthy of G-d's blessing and Moshe's blessing so the Mashiach will come quickly and in our day.

VAYIKRA

Relationships, Attitude Changes and Holiness

One of the most distressing problems of the modern age is the inability of many individuals to form relationships. There seems to be a widespread personality disorder

which seems to prevent young people especially from forming permanent relationships. There are so many people who just do not know how to form relationships. They are either much too aggressive or much too passive. They are frightened to death of any long-term commitment. They also feel alienated from other people and even from themselves for no good reason.

In the Torah portion Vayikra, we learn about sacrifices. In Hebrew, the word for sacrifice has an entirely different meaning from what it means in English. In Hebrew, the word sacrifice means "to come near, to grow near, to form a relationship." In the ancient days a person drew near to G-d by bringing a sacrifice in the Temple. In Hebrew, the word for temple is "Beis Hameekdosh - the house of holiness". Holiness in Hebrew means to separate yourself from things. You are a holy person if you separate yourself from intoxication, addiction, immorality, etc. A society is holy if it separates itself from callousness, hardness and cruelty, if it takes care of its poor and aged, sick and helpless. Then it can be called a holy society.

Judaism believes that in order to be a holy person, you have to be willing to separate yourself not only from immorality and destructive actions and influences, but you also have to be willing to separate yourself from some of your property and resources and give them to the less fortunate, so that they may live on a decent human level. In other words, in order to be holy you have to give up things. You have to give up vices and a life of ill repute, and you also have to be willing to give up some of your property in order to help others.

The rabbis say that the highest sacrificial offering was the peace offering. Only some blood and a few pieces of meat from a peace offering were actually offered on the altar. A small piece of meat was given to the priest and the rest of the meat was eaten by the person, his family, friends and guests. Since a person had to eat the peace offering within 36 hours, a day, a night, and a day, a person would have to invite many people to share this meal with them and this would include the poor, etc. To this day when a Jew is happy he invites people to share food. A peace offering was brought when a person wanted to celebrate a happy occasion in his family's life. The house of holiness, the Temple, was meant to teach us that in order to establish a relationship with G-d and with man, we have to give up something.

In the Torah portion Terumah, we learn how when the Jewish people were told to build a Tabernacle, a portable temple, it says "and they should take for Me an offering", and the rabbis all ask, why doesn't say "and they should take for me an offering"? Why doesn't it say "and they shall give an offering"? After all, they were giving their silver and gold and wool and fine linen, etc., to help make the Tabernacle. Why does it say "they should take"?

In ancient Israel, before a person could use his crop, he had to give 25 percent away: 2 percent was left for the poor, the corners of the field; 2 percent was given to the priests; ten percent was given to the Levites; another ten percent was in the third and sixth year of the seven year cycle given to the poor and in the other years, it was taken up to Jerusalem to be spent on food and drink for the individual, his family, his guests and the poor. An individual, before he could use his own crop, had to set aside the share for the priests. There was a two-step process involved in giving the priest his share. A person first had to take from his crop and set it aside. Then he had to either choose a Kohen or wait until a Kohen came and then give it to him. He first had to give up something before

he could even use the crop for himself. In order to be holy, the rabbis say a person has to be willing to give up things, and relationships are considered holy in Judaism. That's why marriage is known as Kedushin, or holiness. A person cannot establish a relationship, any kind of relationship, even just a friendship relationship or a business relationship unless a person is willing to give up certain things. A man has to be willing to support his family and give up his goods and silver, etc., and a woman has to be willing to give up her figure, at least for the nine months she is pregnant with a baby, in order to establish a relationship with a child, etc.

In the Torah portion Terumah, we learn after it says that the Jewish people shall take an offering of gold, silver, copper, etc., it says "oil for lighting, spices for the oil of anointing and for the incense, onyx stones, and setting stones for the Aephod and the breastplate". The rabbis all comment, how come it says what the oil is to be used for but it does not say what the gold and silver and copper, etc., are to be used for? We know that the gold was used to cover the ark, that the silver was used for the foundations, the sockets upon which the Temple rested, and that the copper was used for the altar, but it does not mention that. It just mentions what the oil and stones were to be used for, etc.

The rabbis explain that the reason for this is because when a person establishes a relationship, he knows that it is going to cost him his gold and his silver, but he does not always realize that there are other things that he also has to be willing to give up. If he is not willing to give these things up, he cannot have a relationship with either man or G-d. The oil for lighting, the rabbis say, stands for the distinction between light and darkness, that when you enter into a relationship you have to admit that you can be wrong, that you can make a mistake. Many people do not want to do this. Many people think that this demeans them, humbles them. They do not want to admit that they were ever wrong, that they could ever make a mistake. They try to fudge all those areas in which they have been wrong. They try to make them into gray areas, but there is a difference between light and darkness, and many times we are wrong. If we want to have any true relationships, we have to admit when we are wrong.

Secondly, the rabbis say that the spices for the oil of anointing stand for the difference between the holy and the profane. Not every time is like every other time. The things we do on Shabbos we do not do on the weekday, and the things we do on the weekday, we do not do on Shabbos; that in every relationship, there is a time to make demands and a time not to make demands. That, of course, is one of the underlying messages of the laws of Needah, of family purity. A husband cannot always make certain demands on his wife and a wife cannot always make certain demands upon her husband, depending on the circumstances. If a wife wants to attend a funeral of a beloved aunt or cousin, a husband cannot demand that she attend the theatre with him, even though by not using their tickets they will be out \$100, or conversely, a wife cannot demand certain purchases from her husband when his salary has just been cut. Relationships require that we know when we can make demands and when we cannot make demands.

The rabbis say that the oil for the incense stands for the difference between the Sabbath and the six days of creation, that everyone is called upon to grow in this world and as long as the person's growth is secondary to their relationship, then it should be allowed. A husband should never demand that a wife cannot go to school if it does not interfere with the running of the house, raising the children, etc., and a wife should never demand that a husband should never accept a promotion if it means they would have to move, as

long as she and the children are well provide for. In a relationship, we should never stifle growth. We must give up the idea that our spouse must always stay the way he or she is. Finally, the stones for the Aepod and the breastplate stand for the difference between Israel and the peoples. In order to have a solid relationship, we Jews must do Jewish things. A Friday night meal, a Seder, keeping Shabbos and Yontif enhance our relationships because one of the main purposes of Judaism's practices is to bring us closer to each other and to G-d. Many people today do not know this. They do not realize how keeping the Jewish traditions enhances and improves all of our interpersonal skills. Yes, perhaps it is true that we can have a satisfactory relationship without Judaism, but it is a lot harder thing to do.

Many people today are afraid of relationships because they do not want to give up anything. They want a relationship but they do not want to give up anything. This is impossible. Unless people are willing to give up something, not everything (after all, in ancient Israel we only gave up 25 percent of the crop) they will never be able to form any type of relationship. They especially have to be willing to give up: 1) the idea that they cannot be wrong; 2) the idea that they can make demands on the other party in their relationship any time they want and have them met; 3) the idea that they can prevent the other party in their relationship from growing, and; 4) the idea that they do not need a Jewish life-style in order to easily maintain a positive relationship.

Yes, most people realize that they will have to give up some of their income and some of their time in order to have a successful relationship, but many people do not realize that this is not enough. These people will also have to realize that they will have to give up some of their attitudes if they want to form a lasting relationship, otherwise they will continue to feel alienated and be unable to form lasting relationships. These people should not despair, though, because changing their attitudes is in reality not a sacrifice. It is in reality a drawing near to another person. That's why in Hebrew the word sacrifice means to draw near. Let's all hope and pray that especially our young people will learn how to make lasting relationships so that Jewish families will thrive and grow and so that none of our young people should ever feel alienated so the future of the Jewish people will be assured.

TZAV

The Holocaust, Israel and Menachem Begin

In the Torah portion Tzav, we learn one of the two special duties of the High Priest. We learn how the High Priest was every morning to dress in linen garments and remove the ashes, remove the embers from the fire of the Olah, the burnt offerings, which were on the altar and put them beside the altar. Then he was to change his clothes and dress in other clothes and take these embers outside the camp to a clean place.

In the next Torah portion, Shmini, we learn about the other responsibility of the High Priest, and that was to officiate at the Yom Kippur service, a service whose high point was when the High Priest took his censor and went into the Holy of Holies. When he went into the Holy of Holies, the cloud of incense would precede him so his vision would be obscured. The two duties, then, that are enunciated in the Torah for the High Priest are to officiate at the High Holy Day services and to remove the ashes from off the altar. We can understand why the High Priest would have the responsibility of officiating at the Yom Kippur service, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, how he would represent the people by entering into the Holy of Holies, how the clouded incense served to illustrate how our vision of the future is cloudy and how we need strong leadership in order to get from the present to the future unharmed, but what is all this about the High Priest removing the embers from the altar? The answer the rabbis tell us is that the High Priest's job was not just to represent the Jewish people before G-d and to steer the fate of the Jewish people to a safe harbor in the future, but his job was also to rekindle the embers, rekindle the fire which had banked in the hearts of many of the Jewish people, to make sure that their religious enthusiasm stayed fresh and alive. His job was also to make sure that the fire of the altar would be taken every morning to light the central shaft of the menorah, and that every evening from the light of the central shaft of the menorah, they would light all the other candles of the menorah. We can understand that the High Priest's job was not just to lead the Jewish people to the future, but was also to give them hope and comfort and dignity and strength in the face of the overwhelming problems of the present.

I have just returned from the land of Israel and while I was there, I learned many things I did not know before, I went on a rabbinic mission for the JNF. The JNF does not operate on the West Bank in order to protect its tax exempt status. The JNF has in its 90 years not only planted 190 million trees in Israel and not only built 3,600 miles of roads and not only built hundreds of parks, but right now it is engaged in a vast enterprise of building reservoirs throughout Israel so that when the occasional years of drought come, Israel will have enough water to support its agriculture and to support its people. We went from Jerusalem down to Jericho and then from Jericho up to the Golan Heights and then from the Golan Heights where we stood on the Syrian border to Neeskavan, which is opposite the Lebanese border.

We were accompanied by and lectured to all this way by a military expert who said that militarily Israel could never give up certain positions on the West Bank. There can be some sort of political settlement, but certain areas of the West Bank could never be given up. Why was the West Bank so crucial to the Israel security? One: early warning. With the outposts on the hills of the West Bank, Israel has two minutes warning of air attack. Israel always has pilots in their planes. They can get off, counterattack and shoot down attacking planes, but if they are forced back to the 1967 lines, they will have less than 30 seconds. Impossible! Two: tanks. There are only four passes, four ways to go up from Jordan to Israel. Jerusalem sits on a mountain pass. There are only four roads. With correct artillery placements, the tanks will never make it, but if the tanks are at the top of the ridge, there are hundreds of roads which go down to the coastal plains of Israel. Israel could be cut off in many places in a half an hour. Three: ketushas. From the West Bank, all of Israel's cities from Beersheba to Haifa are susceptible to ketushas and the havoc they could wreak would be stupendous. Four: water. This was not known before 1967.

There is an aquifer which starts in the West Bank and goes to the coast. This aquifer could be completely stopped up by the Arabs or could be poisoned and Israel would literally dry up.

He also told us that things are not always the way they seem in the Middle East. King Hussein has eaten ice cream in Tel Aviv many times. There is a special house on the border between Jordan and Israel where high ranking Israeli and Jordanian officials meet all the time. Also, thanks to Jordanian help, there have been hardly any infiltrators across the Jordanian border, while between 1967 and 1970, over 200 Israeli boys lost their lives pursuing terrorists across the border. Since Assad of Syria signed his agreement with Israel in 1974, there have been no deaths on the Syrian border, although there have been 32 deaths across the Egyptian border, even with the peace treaty. He also told us that Assad is not considered to be a Moslem by the rest of the Moslems. Although he rants and raves at Israel, he perhaps is not so upset to find that there is another foreign entity in the Middle East besides himself and his allied group who control Syria. Also, the South Lebanese Army is not a Christian army like we thought. Over 60 percent of its members are Shiites who live in the villages along the Israeli border. They want peace, too.

Begin knew that you cannot rely on others. You have to rely on yourself. We all know that if Israel retreats to its 1967 borders, it would be vulnerable and it quickly would be attacked. It is doubtful whether the United States would come to its aid, but even if the United States would want to come to its aid, where are they going to amass the 500,000 soldiers that it took to free Kuwait? In Egypt? In Syria? In Jordan? Nations act according to their best interests. The United States did not help the Kurds when they were persecuted after the Gulf War, or the Shiites. They did not support Viet Nam after the Paris Accords although they had promised to. The United States has a long record in South America and Central America of not always supporting its friends. The United States supports its interests, not its friends, and Begin knew that. Not everybody in Israel knows that. Not everybody in Israel is acquainted with American history. Just ask the Indians how many treaties and promises the United States broke. Begin knew that the people of Israel have to stand on their feet in order to navigate the murky future, and he also knew that they needed comfort and support if they were to bounce back after the Holocaust. He was able to supply both to our people. He was a beloved figure in Israel, greatly admired and greatly revered. He was a man who knew and who always propounded that the Jews must take care of themselves because nobody else will. We must rely ultimately only upon ourselves and upon G-d. He was a religious man who said that the highlight of his life was when he took out a yarmulka, put it on and recited the Psalm of Thanksgiving for the return of the Jews to the land when he signed the Egyptian treaty. He knew that G-d will always help us as long as we are willing to help ourselves first.

We also read in this Torah portion how the High Priest was inaugurated. He was inaugurated by having a drop of oil and a drop of blood put on his earlobe, on his thumb, and on his big toe. The rabbis ask, why did he need the drop of blood? The drop of oil should have been enough. After all, the Kohen Godol stood for light, for the light of Judaism. He was the one who had symbolized the Jewish message to the world, yet, a drop of blood was also put on his ear, and on his hand, and on his foot. The answer they give is that in order for the Jewish people to be a light unto the world, they first have to live. We are also flesh and blood. The Jewish people if they do not live cannot be a light

unto the nations. We must always remember that Jewish blood should never be allowed to be shed freely. We Jewish people must first be secure in our homeland Israel if we are to be a light to the nations. If the Jewish people have a secure home, then you can rest assured that the teachings of Sinai will be promulgated and we will be a light unto the nations. Menachem Begin understood that. He understood that before we could be a light unto the nations we first had to be secure. He was a great man, a beloved figure, a man whose shadow will always be felt in the hearts of Jews for countless generations because of his strength of character, sincerity, and love for his people. May his memory always be a blessing. Amen.

SHMINI

Facts and Enthusiasm Need Understanding

How is it that two so-called experts can look at exactly the same facts and come out with such opposite conclusions? This happened often during the Gulf War. Two knowledgeable experts with the highest academic credentials got on CNN and on the other networks and made all sorts of statements about how the war would go or not go. In most instances, their statements were diametrically opposed. Even ex-president Carter, based on his wide experience in foreign affairs, made all sorts of dire predictions which diametrically opposed the predictions of President Bush. Thank goodness, President

Carter was proved wrong. All these experts knew the facts. The facts, for the most part were not in dispute. Iraq had so many soldiers and tanks and the United States had so many soldiers and tanks, but it was in the interpretation of the facts that they differed. Some of them had real insight into the situations they addressed, while others did not. Those who did not were either blinded by their prejudices or prejudgments or failed to take into account intangible factors: moral, motivation, etc.

When we are confronted with making decisions, facts are not enough. You also have to know how to interpret the facts. The Torah tells us that the High Priest wore a breastplate and on this breastplate were four rows of three stones each. Upon them were written the names of the children of Israel. The High Priest also wore a stone on each of his shoulders. The rabbis differ as to whether these stones were the Ureem and Tumeem or whether the Ureem and Tumeem was the name of G-d which was inscribed in the folds of the breastplate, but, when issues of national importance to Israel needed to be decided, the High Priest could ask the Ureem and Tumeem questions and the stones on his shoulders or on his breastplate would answer. Some rabbis say that the stones on his shoulders would flash, one shoulder for yes and the other shoulder for no. Others say that the answer came only from the stones of the breastplate. On these stones were engraved the names of the tribes and also on the breastplate were inscribed the names Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaacov. The names of all the tribes do not contain all the letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Also, even including the three fathers, the letter Tet was still missing, so also inscribed on the breastplate were the words Shiftay Yeshurun, the tribes of Yeshurun. After a question was asked, the appropriate letters would flash. Only the head of the Sanhedrin, the king, or the High Priest could address a question to the Ureem and Tumeem. The head of the Sanhedrin or the king would relay the question to the High Priest, who would ask the question, or the High Priest would ask his own question and the letters on the Ureem and Tumeem would flash the answer. The appropriate letters would light up.

However, this would still not be enough in order to get a proper answer. The rabbis say that in order to interpret what these letters meant, the High Priest or others would have to have Ruach Hakodesh, would have to be endowed with spiritual insight. They tell the story about how when Chana, Shmuel's mother, went to pray at the tabernacle at Shiloh, Eli saw her silent and shaking with only her lips moving. He consulted the Ureem and Tumeem to find out what kind of woman she was. The Shin Kuf Raysh Hay began to glow. He read these letters as Shikra, which in Hebrew means drunk. When he accused Chana, she immediately retorted by saying that he had lost his Ruach Hakodesh, his spiritual insight. He should have read these letters as Ksora, like Sara, or Keshaira, a kosher one, a fit one. You can know all the facts but still know nothing. You can have all the details down pat and still arrive at a false conclusion. We saw this on CNN throughout the Gulf War. Unfortunately, the way the problems in the Middle East have been viewed is the way Eli looked at Chana. The problem is not the Palestinians. The problem has always been that the Arab states will not make peace with Israel. If the Arab states would make peace with Israel, the Palestinian problem could be solved overnight. Many times in life we put the cart before the horse. We do not put things in proper perspective and, therefore, we come to false conclusions. There is a Jewish law which says that if we have a wound or a sickness, we are not allowed to say Pezukum from the Torah or Tehillim, verses from the Psalms, over it to cure it. What we are supposed to do

is go to a doctor. We are not supposed to rely on sentences from the Torah or verses from the Psalms to cure our illness, yet, in the Talmud we find how when a certain great rabbi got sick, he said Tehillim. He recited Psalms. How is this possible? We have a clear Halacha which says that we are not allowed to do this and he did it. The answer the Talmud gives is that this rabbi did not say Tehillim in order to be cured from his disease but in order to keep away the evil spirits. Evil spirits is the Talmud's way of saying depression. When we get a disease, we get two diseases. We not only get the physical disease but we also can be overcome with panic, and sometimes this panic is worse than the disease. That is why the doctors always change the names of illnesses. When someone has cancer, they do not many times want to tell him that he has cancer. Instead they tell him that he has a tumor or an oncological problem because they do not want him to be overcome by panic. This rabbi, by saying Psalms, was able to control his panic and, thus, was able to find the strength and courage to overcome his disease. In life, we have to make distinctions. We can know all the facts. We can know that Halacha says that it is prohibited to say Psalms over a sickness, but not know how to interpret this Halacha. We cannot rely on reciting Psalms in order to cure our disease, but we can say Psalms in order to control our panic. When we recite Psalms, we better realize that G-d is there to help us and that G-d will help us control our panic so that we will not lose hope and faith. We can know all the facts and still misinterpret the situation entirely.

In the Torah portion Shmini, we also learn about this. We learn how Aaron's two eldest sons brought a strange fire before G-d and were struck down. The rabbis give many reasons for their desire to bring a strange fire, one of which was that they wanted to have a soul-stirring experience without doing the hard work that Judaism says attaining such a soul-stirring experience requires. They wanted to get close to G-d by stressing their feelings. Feelings are very dangerous. In America today, we seem to think that all feelings come from the soul, that if you feel something is good, it must be good, that it is the inward soul of man which prompts him to have certain feelings, and since a person has these feelings, he should act on them. These feelings, though, can lead to bloodshed and violence as well as to goodness. The Arab male nurse who killed four innocent women standing at a bus stop with a butcher knife justified what he had done by saying that he had to protest the terrible conditions of the Palestinians and, therefore, he was justified in doing what he had done because he felt it was the only way to get Baker's attention. Feelings do not always spring from the soul. Feelings spring many times from the imagination of the heart and, as the Torah says in Bereishis, many times the imaginations of the heart are evil.

A true soul-stirring experience requires more than feelings. It requires discipline. A musician who can produce soul-stirring music has to spend many years disciplining himself by hard practice. A composer, before he can compose, has had to spend many years learning his craft and learning how to change his feelings into the soul-stirring music which touches us all. Native and Avihu did not understand this. They did not understand that you could not just by offering enthusiasm and fire, get close to G-d. You also had to have understanding and discipline. Knowing all the facts of a situation is not going to allow you to evaluate accurately what these facts mean, unless you also have understanding and discipline. Many people are blinded by their prejudice and prejudgments as was President Carter. Others are blinded by their desires and feelings. In this Torah portion, we also have the only time that G-d spoke to Aaron alone, without

Moshe, when He told Aaron, "Wine and beer you shall not drink, you and your sons, when you come into the tent of meeting lest you will die." Wine and beer cloud the judgement. They may stimulate feelings but when Aaron and his children have to distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the clean and the unclean, when they have to teach the people the laws of G-d, they must do so not just with feelings and not just with facts but with understanding. Understanding comes from empathizing with all those around you. Understanding comes after you have jettisoned the prejudices and prejudgments you have made. Understanding comes only when you submit your ideas to the rigorous moral analysis of the Torah. The male nurse's excuse for killing the four women can never be justified. It was not a protest; it was murder.

Also in the Torah portion Shmini, we learn how Moshe berates his brother Aaron after he found out that after Aaron had offered the goat of the sin offering, he had not eaten it, but had burnt it all. Moshe angrily says, "You should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary as I commanded," but Aaron replied to his brother and said, "After these things have happened to me (the death of his two sons), if I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been pleasing in the sight of the L-rd?" Moshe had not talked with understanding. Aaron was right and Moshe admitted it. Based on what happened to Aaron that day, how could he have eaten the sin offering? How could he have participated in a joyous meal? Moshe, in most instances, knew everything, but here he knew nothing.

In life it is not enough to know all the facts. In life it is not enough to have enthusiasm and great vibes about something. We must also have understanding. This understanding can only come to each of us if we discard our prejudices and prejudgments and if we subject our feelings and our analysis of the facts to the moral scrutiny of the Torah and to an empathetic understanding of all the people and circumstances around us. Let us all hope that we will have this proper understanding so that truly we will be able to understand what is happening about us and, therefore, be able to serve as G-d's partner in creation so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

TAZRIA

Bris, Talents and Integrating the Physical and Spiritual

In the Torah portion Tazria, we learn about giving birth and we learn also about a Bris, about a circumcision. The rabbis all ask the question, why is it that this Torah portion is called Tazria? After all, that is not the first significant word in the Torah portion.

Usually, every Torah portion is named after its first significant word, but here we have many significant words before the word Tazria. We have the word Moshe. We have the word Yisroel. We have the word Dabair, Eesho, etc., yet the rabbis have seen fit to call this Torah portion Tazria. What's more, why is it that the Bris is to be held on the eighth day? Why can't the Bris be held at an earlier time?

Also, Rav Similai, when he comments on this Torah portion, says that just as the human being was created last of all the creatures that G-d has created, so too, when it comes to legislation, the animals are dealt with first. First we learn about the animals, what makes them clean and unclean, and then we learn what makes man clean and unclean. Also, later on in this Torah portion, we learn about the laws of leprosy. We can understand why Rav Similai said that man was created last because that is what the Torah teaches in its very first chapter. The rabbis say that the reason man was created last is to teach us that we should not feel overly proud, that when we begin to feel arrogant, we should realize that even a gnat was created before us. Besides that, the rabbis say that man was created last so that he should not say that he created the world. G-d created the world and put him in it so that he should be able to fulfill the will of G-d, the commands of G-d. G-d made the world. It is true that G-d made the world 98 percent, 97 percent, 96 percent complete so that we would have a role to play, but G-d created the world. The rabbis also say that this is also emphasized by the fact that man was created on Erev Shabbos. Man was created on Erev Shabbos to teach us that we should do mitzvahs. The first man was to get ready for Shabbos, and G-d brought us into the world, so to speak, as a guest. We are supposed to take care of what G-d has given us. Everything was prepared for us. All we have to do is manipulate it and put it in the right categories. When a scientist makes a discovery, he actually does not discover anything new; he just discovers how things work. He discovers how we can use what is already there for our own betterment. So we can understand why Rav Similai said that man was created last.

But why did he say here that as far as legislation was concerned that man, too, comes after the animals. The rabbis say that the reason why Rav Similai said that was because when we learn that what differentiates an animal from a human being is that an animal only becomes unclean when it is dead. When it is alive, it is not unclean, and an animal becomes only unclean when you touch it or carry it, but a human being can become unclean even when he is alive. A human being as we learn in the Book of Psalms can be a little lower than angels, but a human being can also be a lot lower than the animals. The human being does not stand at the bottom of a ladder with everything going up. A human stands in the middle of the ladder. He can make things worse as well as better.

Unfortunately, in America today we do not realize that. Unfortunately, in America today we believe that if a person finds that something or some relationship is not working correctly that he is better off destroying it and starting anew because new things and new relationships can only be better. But that is not true. That's why all our politicians when they run for office adopt the outsider role. They run against Washington. They are going to have to tear down all the bureaucracies that went before and then build something new. They claim they are not interested in improving different programs but in proposing new ones, although they in actual fact, that is what they actually do when they get into office. The mind set of America is, if something does not work, destroy it. Don't try to fix it. Build something new. If a marriage is not working, destroy it. Start a new marriage. If a factory is not producing goods the way you like it, tear it down and build a new one. If a building does not seem to suit your purposes, tear it down and build a new building. If relationships are not the way you like them, forget about them. Scrap them. Start new relationships. In America today, the idea is that you can always scrap what you have and start new. This, of course, is not the Jewish position. The Jewish position is that man should try to save that which is savable and build upon that. What's more, we all know

that each of us is given certain talents. We cannot be somebody we're not. We must build on our strengths. Our talent is there and each of us has G-d-given tasks to do and we should build on what we have by developing the talents we have, not by trying to develop talents we don't have.

That is why the rabbis say, too, that the Bris was on the eighth day. Why is it on the eighth day? Because each of us lives in seven dimensions. We live in space, up, down, north, east, west, south, and we also live in a spiritual dimension. We not only need space but we also need spiritual qualities: love, dedication, devotion, compassion, mercy.

These qualities occupy no space but we know that these qualities are even more important than space. We have to develop these qualities. Man has a responsibility. He has a responsibility to hallow the space in which he lives. He has a responsibility to hallow the time in which he lives, and he has a responsibility to hallow his own being, his own person. When a person comes into this world, he comes into a certain space with a certain family, and he is called upon to hallow it. All his relationships should be refined, dignified, correct. Man also has an obligation to hallow the space in which he lives, to make sure that this country is a holy country, a good country, a country which does not cast out its poor and does not throw away its aged and which takes care of the helpless and the homeless. A man also has a responsibility to hallow his time, those things which do not occupy space but which occupy time.

The first six days of the week stand for: hallowing space, making the place in which we live a better place, making sure that our buildings are safe, that our environment is healthy, making sure that we have air and light and fuel and food, etc. On Shabbos, we are to develop the things of the spirit. We need the things of the spirit in order to better our relationships, to make them firmer and stronger. By concentrating upon learning Torah, we also learn much about ourselves. We learn more about our responsibilities, we learn more about our role in the world. We sharpen our perceptions of the world and we add meaning to our lives. This allow us to become more loving, caring, merciful, devoted and dedicated individuals. A person who knows that there is meaning in life acts entirely different than one who doesn't. We are not only physical beings but also spiritual beings. Our spirituality also affects our physical health. That's one of the reasons why we have a Bris on the eighth day.

We first have to have a week pass. The six days of the week and Shabbos teach us how to sanctify space and to sanctify time. The physical and the spiritual must each be given their due and we all must realize that they have to be integrated one with another. The body and soul affect each other. They must work together to create a whole and holy individual. That is why at a Bris we say that we hope the young man being circumcised will grow up to the study of the Torah, to stand under the Chupa, the nuptial canopy, and to a life of doing good needs, Maaseem Toveem. To the study of Torah means that our prayer is that his life will be filled with spiritual values, that he will understand the importance of mercy and compassion, love, dedication and devotion. Not all cultures put a premium on these values. To stand under the Chupa means that our prayer is that he will also sanctify the physical things of life, that he will sanctify space. A Chupa stands for his home, that in his home not only will his physical needs be taken care of, but that also he will have a home in which the values of Torah will be paramount. To a life of good deeds, Maaseem Toveem, means that our prayer also is that he will want to make sure that the society in which he lives is just and kind and that he will give charity and

volunteer his services, and that he will be there for other people. A Bris has to be on the eighth day because the eighth day symbolizes the integration of the physical and spiritual and their mutual dependence on each other. Torah needs Chupa and good deeds just as good deeds need Torah and Chupa and Chupa needs good deeds and Torah.

We all know that each of us is given abilities but the gift of talent is not enough. We have to develop these abilities. We have to nurture them so that their potential can become actual. Abilities, alone, without effort are nothing. They will never get developed. How many times do we see people who have such great abilities, but because they do not practice, because they do not devote themselves to their abilities, their abilities never get developed. That's why we learn here that this Torah portion is called Tazria, because when a woman becomes pregnant, she potentially can have a child, but it is only a potentiality. For nine months, if she wants a healthy baby who will be born at full term, she will have to take care of herself so that the baby grows in the proper and correct way. She will have to eat the right foods. She will have to do the right exercises. She will have to stay away from the harmful effects of smoking, drinking, etc. Then after nine months, if she does these things she in most cases will bring forth a healthy baby. Then that which was hidden will be made manifest. Because the mother cared and did the things she was supposed to do, she produced a healthy baby. Her job though is not done. She wants her child to grow up to be an upstanding, moral adult who will know how to develop his abilities. She must continue to teach him how to integrate the spiritual and physical in life, how to live a life based on Torah, Chupa and Maaseem Toveem.

The same thing is true of all our abilities. Our abilities are only potentialities. How many people do we now who have frittered away their abilities and have ended up as alcoholics or on drugs or ended up as absolute misfits because they never learned how to be diligent about their abilities, how to develop them, how to make something of themselves. They never learned how to integrate the spiritual with the physical.

That is why Rav Simlai said that man is not like an animal which depends upon his instinct. Man can develop himself. He can make himself into something. Each of us has different talents, but these talents will not produce any fruit unless we know how to integrate the physical with the spiritual, unless we learn how to live a life of Torah, Chupa, and Maaseem Toveem, unless we learn how to sanctify space and time in our own person. If we learn how to sanctify space and time, then we will be able to use our abilities in the correct way and we will produce fruit that will be able to benefit not only ourselves, but all humanity.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who was a bank robber. He was being tried on a bank robbery charge. After the prosecutor presented the case, his defense lawyer came up and said, "My client has been accused of being a degenerate criminal who has no saving social graces, but I will prove that this is not so." The judge asked how he was going to prove that. The lawyer said, "Well, I am going to prove it by showing that the note that he gave to the teller in which he said he was robbing the bank, was written on recycled paper." Unfortunately, that is what many people think is all that is required in order for them to develop their talents, but more is demanded of them. What is demanded of them is to learn how to integrate the spiritual with the physical, how to sanctify space, to sanctify time, so that as a whole person he can pursue his talents with diligence and contribute greatly to this world.

METZORAH

Family, Trust and the Four B's

In the Torah portion Metzarah, we learn how a leper is cleansed. We learn how after a leper becomes cured, he goes through a special ritual, how the Kohen directs him in what he should do. It was a disease that was brought upon a person because he talked Loshan Hora. He talked loosely. He spoke evil gossip about somebody. This does not necessarily mean that he said something that was not the truth. He could have spoken the truth, but the truth that is spoken with bad intent beats all the lies that you can invent. I am reminded of the time about a year and a half ago when I attended a party of teenagers. A young man came over to a girl. He must have been about 17 and she was about 16. He said to the girl, "When did you get out of the insane asylum?" The girl, of course, broke into tears and fled from the room. It was not a lie. This girl had just been released from

Shadows Glen or some other psychiatric institution. The girl, though, was shattered. She never made an appearance for the rest of the evening, and I believe she dropped out of that youth group. The boy told the truth, but he told the truth at an inappropriate time. Many times people tell the truth to hurt others. It is no excuse just because it is the truth. The truth that is told unnecessarily to hurt people is a greater sin sometimes than telling a lie. Now, of course, if someone had called that boy up and had asked for a recommendation to hire the girl for some type of a job which depended on emotional stability, then he might have been justified in talking about the girl's past history, but at a party in front of her friends, to do such a terrible thing was a terrible abomination. That, of course, is why the leper was punished by being forced to live outside the camp. Also, we know that it was not the doctor who cured the person and it was not the Kohen who cured the person. The leper had to live outside the camp until he became cured and then he came to the edge of the camp and the Kohen went out to meet him and investigate whether or not he had been cured. He cured himself by examining his life and determining that from now on he would not speak Loshan Hora. He would not indulge in loose talk.

We also learn in this Torah portion that there were two other forms of leprosy. There was a form of leprosy which attacked a person's house. We also learn there was a form of leprosy which attacked a person's clothing. The rabbis teach us that first the leprosy attacked a person's house, and then if the person did not change, it attacked his clothing, and then still if a person did not change, it attacked his person. We see, too, in our society that a house refers not just to a physical house, but also to institutions. In fact, in Hebrew this is very clear. The word Bayit is not only a person's home, but Bayit also means an institution like a synagogue, a Beit Keneset. Beit Keneset in Hebrew means literally the house of assembly, or it is called Beit Tefila, a house of prayer, or Beit Medrash, the house of learning. A school is also known by the name of Bayit, Beit Sefer. In fact, in Hebrew the word for a wife is also Beit-Tee, my home, my house.

When a society is based on false principles it is the institutions of that society which are plagued first. There is a breakdown in marriage. There is a breakdown in all its institutions, schools, government programs, law enforcement agencies, etc. All those institutions which the society has set up in order to help maintain a morality and order, disintegrate. Unfortunately, today, too, we are seeing the breakdown of the institution of marriage. America now has a huge divorce rate. Not only that, but we see how people's personalities have been affected. The clothing of a person reflects their personality. Many of today's styles are lewd and violent. They reflect that many people do not know how to relate anymore in a gentle and nice way. All you have to do is look at the movies and see the terrible violence and the terrible language. I do not know how people can actually have HBO or any other movie channel on, what with all the violence, cruelty and bad language that is shown on it. You can even look at the Academy Awards. Which movie has won an Academy Award recently? Who was it given to? It was given to a movie which talks about serial killers. This is a terrible situation. At first when people do not know how to relate well to others, institutions are attacked, marriages are attacked, different types of community structures are under attack. We can see this even in the politics of this country with all the negative campaigning that is going on. If a person runs for public office, he risks losing not only the office but also his reputation. People want to tear down everybody and everything. By doing this, they are also tearing down

trust in government. The most important thing in any society is to maintain trust. If you do not have trust in society, then how can society function? The evil that a person does who speaks Loshan Hora is that he destroys trust. When trust is destroyed, not only are society's institutions rendered impotent but the individuals in society lose the ability to develop their personalities. They become alienated from everybody and everything. Alienation leads directly to drugs and alcohol because if a person cannot trust anybody or anything, there is no one or no institution he can turn to for help or comfort.

Today is also Shabbos Hagodol. On Shabbos Hagodol we prepare for Pesach. We know that the symbol of Pesach is the family. It is the institution of the family which has preserved Judaism. Without the family, G-d told us He would not even have given us the Torah. The number four predominates at the seder because the number four stands for family: father, mother, son and daughter. We know that at the seder, all the generations are supposed to dialogue. A seder is not a seder unless you have grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren, that a seder is meant for the generations to dialogue one with another. In fact, the theme of Shabbos Hagodol is to turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons and the hearts of the sons to the fathers. We know that Pesach is a holiday which Jews celebrate because it is a holiday which reaffirms Jewish commitment. Jewish commitment can only be strong if the institution of family is strong, only if the Bayit is taken care of, only if the house is taken care of. Only if there are strong bonds between spouses and between spouses and children can Judaism thrive and grow.

In fact, not only does the number four predominate at the seder, but the number four also predominates preparing for the seder. We know on the night before the seder, we have Bedikas Chometz. We search for the chometz. We search for those things which will impede our relationships. When we search for the chometz, we also go through a four-step process. We first say the Brocha, and after we say the Brocha, the blessing, we do the actual Bedika, the searching, and then we come to Bitil, the voiding of the leaven we have not found. We void the leaven which we could not find, the leaven which we cannot remove. We then come to Biyur, the removal or burning of the leaven.

In order to establish any type of relationships, we also have to go through these four steps. In order for two people to get together and establish a family, they have to go through these particular steps. They first have to realize that they are a blessing to each other. They have to feel that marriage, itself, is a blessing. There are all sorts of rough spots in a marriage, and in order to get through a marriage, you have to be committed to marriage, itself. You also have to believe that your marriage partner increases your ability to solve life's problems, that the marriage causes you to develop, that the marriage is not a constricting, terrible institution which thwarts your ability to develop yourself, but actually that marriage is a necessity if a person is to really develop him or herself. That is why our tradition teaches us that it is impossible for a man to be without a woman and woman without a man. A person has to be married in order to have developed him or herself.

The second is thing that we have to search ourselves for those things which may impede our marriage and not allow us to form a strong marriage. One of the errors that young people make when they come to a marriage is that they try to replicate their own parents' marriages. Of course, the only marriage that a woman knows is the marriage of her own parents, and the only marriage that a man knows is the marriage of his own parents, but you cannot duplicate the marriage of your parents. Every marriage is unique and special.

Many times a woman will say to her husband, "But my father used to do that," or a man will say to his wife, "But my mother used to do that." Yes, but I tell this couple, but your parents had to have a different relationship. They began their marriage in different times. We all have to work hard to search out those parts of our own character which will impede the growth of the marriage, which will not allow our partner to develop, which will not allow us to be a giving and a willing partner in all aspects of our marriage. Next, we must also have Bitil. We have to avoid those aspects of our character which get in the way of the marriage. Of course, we all know that a man can be attracted to more than one woman and a woman can be attracted to more than one man. After all, adultery has been going on since the earliest recorded history, but we have to void all those other types of relationships and make sure that they do not exist. We have to ignore our attraction to other members of the opposite sex and remain faithful to our spouses. Finally, you have to have Biyur. Biyur means burning but can also mean the type of burning that Moshe saw when he beheld the burning bush. The Torah says, "The bush was burning but not consumed." In order to have a fire which always burns but does not consume, in order to have the passion of the marriage stay whole throughout a marriage without burning itself out or destroying the marriage partners, we must buttress the marriage with all sorts of acts of kindness and appreciation. We cannot take each other for granted. In marriage, if one of the spouses takes the other for granted, then the marriage will soon wither and die. One of the spouses cannot say, "Well, my spouse likes to do these things. That is why he is doing them. He's not really doing them for me." Or, "My spouse is only fulfilling his own need." But this is false. No spouse does things for his or her spouse just to fulfill his or her need and soon if a spouse is not appreciated, he or she will stop doing these things.

In order to have a marriage, we have to have the four B's, Brocha, Bedika, Bitil and Biyur. Notice that each one of these things starts with a B, just as the word for house in Hebrew starts with a B - just as the word Bayit or house which stands for marriage, itself, also starts with a B. All these four B's must be taken care of if there is to be a strong and happy family. If there is a strong and happy family, then we can rest assured that the Jewish people will survive and we can also rest assured, too, that if people recognize the importance of family and how much relationships mean to them, then people will be very careful in guarding their loose tongues, as well.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who was walking along the beach and he found a bottle. He rubbed it and out came a genie. The genie said, "I have been trapped there for 5,000 years. I will give you any wish you want." The man said, "Well, I do have one wish. I would like to get a job that no man has ever performed successfully and that, in fact, no man has even attempted correctly." The genie said, "You have it." Poof! And immediately he was changed into a housewife. It is important that each spouse recognize the importance of the other's duties and responsibilities. It is important that each spouse consider the other a blessing and that each spouse recognize that their marriage is unique and special, and that they appreciate each other every day and that they avoid all those problems which would cause their marriage to fail. Let us all hope that we will have strong marriages and strong community institutions so that trust will be maintained and negativism and alienation will not be our lot. Let us hope and pray that this will occur soon so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

ACHARE MOS

Caring, Communities and Individual Responsibilities

In the Torah portion Achare Mos, we learn about the laws of Yom Kippur. It is interesting to note that always around Pesach time we learn about the laws of Yom Kippur. Why should this be so? Probably because each of these holidays has a unique message which applies in a certain way to the other one as well. On Yom Kippur, we are concerned about getting our heads together, about changing ourselves from the inside out. We are not really concerned so much about community. What we know is that we have to take care of our inner life. On Pesach, on the other hand, we are concerned about our outer enemies and we know that in order to combat our outer enemies we have to join together in groups and synagogues and federations, etc. That in order for the Jewish people to survive, we need community. We are interested more on Pesach about our external enemies. On Yom Kippur, we are interested more in our internal enemies so that we should always feel needed and wanted and should not fall prey to alcohol and drugs.

We want to make sure that we have gotten our heads together on right, but we also have to realize that in order to get our heads on together right, we also have to relate to other people. On Pesach, we also have to learn that in order to combat our external enemies, we also have to deal with our inner problems as well. We have to make sure that we give each of our children and our adults a sufficient Jewish education so that they are able to handle the ordinary problems of life.

It is interesting to note that the Yom Kippur service revolves around two goats. The Kohen Godol was to buy two identical goats which not only looked alike but which also weighed the same. There was to be no difference between these two goats. One of them was to go onto the altar and the other was to be sent out into the wilderness. The rabbis explain that the symbolic meaning of these two goats is that we have free will, that each of us can choose whether to make our life a holy life in which we sacrifice our talents on G-d's altar by becoming G-d's partner in creation, by helping Him perfect this world, or we can be like the goat that is sent into the wilderness who just wreaks havoc and destruction. Free will is given to us. Why, though, do the goats have to be identical in every single respect?

Also, in this Torah portion, we learn about blood, how we are not to eat blood. Why is it that the Jews are not allowed to eat blood at all? That is why, of course, we kasher or salt our meat before we eat it to remove the blood. Also in this Torah portion, we learn that when we will enter the land of Canaan, we should not do as the Egyptians or like the people of Canaan did. The Torah says, "My laws you shall do and My statutes you shall esteem." Why does it use that expression that "My laws you shall do and My Chukeem [statutes] you shall esteem"?

The rabbis answer by saying that actually there are different types of laws. There are laws which are logical, which we, ourselves, understand and which we would enact even if G-d would not have given us the Torah. For example, thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, etc. Of course, when we apply these laws in practical situations it becomes very difficult. We are now engaged in a great controversy in America whether or not abortion is murder (Judaism says it isn't but doesn't approve abortion on demand), and, of course, we know that in certain instances we do shoot and kill people. If we are attacked, if we are in the army, we do shoot and kill people.

In fact, even cannibals agree you should not kill and eat anybody. It is only enemies and certain times of the year, etc., that you kill them and eat them. We all know that these types of laws are basically logical. They appeal to our minds and, therefore, they would be enacted even if the Torah would not have been given, but there are other laws called Chukeem which we would not enact. For example, laws like not eating pig, keeping the Shabbos and the incest laws that are mentioned later on in this Torah portion. These are not laws that we would come to by the use of logic. These are laws which are, so to speak, imposed from without, and although the Torah says that eventually we will understand the reasons, for most of them we do not understand all their reasons now. We understand many more of the reasons for the kosher laws today (especially about not mixing milk and meat and not eating pig) because we understand much more today about fatty tissues, cholesterol, and HDL and LDL and lipids in the fats, etc. The kosher diet is a very healthy diet, but in those days they did not know anything about those things, and even today, we do not understand everything about all these Chukeem.

We have to understand, though, that we have to keep these Chukeem in high esteem. The

ordinary laws we will keep in high esteem because they are logical. They appeal to our logic even though we do not know how to apply them exactly in every given situation, but when it come to these other laws, they do not appeal to our logic and we may treat them lightly and tread them underfoot and not bother keeping them. Therefore, the Torah says that "My laws you shall do and My statutes you shall esteem." Don't condemn them and don't hold them in contempt. Don't tread on them lightly because they are very important for you. The rabbis say that these Chukeem are indicative of the human mind because the human mind is not only logical; it is also illogical. Human beings act many times in illogical ways, and we have to understand that humans do many times act illogically. We do not always act in our best interests, and sometimes the lesson has to be driven home to us, that even those things that are a part of our character that are illogical we have to control and, therefore, we are constantly being made aware when we do these particular laws of the illogical nature of our own being. For example, a little baby when he gets mad at his mother will start hitting his head against the wall. That does not hurt the mother physically, although it does cause the mother much mental anguish and mosttimes the mother will immediately run and stop the child from banging his head. A child that gets mad many times acts illogically and begins to hurt himself. Not only do babies act this way. We know that many times we flare up and do things that are not in our best interests, but we feel we have to do them. For example, I remember the story that one of my economics professors who was only about 5 feet, 1 inch liked to tell. He told how in World War II he was in a battalion in which his sergeant was a 6 foot, 6 inches fellow and was terribly anti-Semitic. This sergeant was always making terrible comments to him and was always razzing him and was always trying to embroil him in fights. He just stayed away from him, but once he just could not stand it any longer. When the sergeant said, "Hitler should have killed all the Jews," this small economics professor attacked him and hit the sergeant as hard as he could. Of course, the sergeant hit him back and eventually subdued him. Four soldiers then grabbed him and put him in the stockade and he was court-martialed, etc. and put down at a lower rank. He had to serve some time in the stockade but he said, "You know, it was all worth it." He did a very illogical thing. The sergeant could have killed him. The four soldiers who grabbed him could have maimed him for life, and by throwing him in the stockade, he got a criminal record that could have hindered him in his college career. We all know that we do not always do things that are logical. We all know that there are things in life that cause us to act in ways that are not in our best interests.

That is why the rabbis teach us in the same portion about blood, because what does blood do? Blood is a carrier. It is the thing which holds the body together. It takes oxygen and gives it to the cells and removes the cells' waste. Without the blood, no cell could exist. It is the thing which binds the body together. We know that in society that which binds society together is trust. When you break trust, then you are going to have people acting illogically. We witnessed this week when the jury in the trial of the four police officers who beat Rodney King voted to acquit the officers. Does anyone of us believe that if they had beaten up a white man they would have been acquitted? Nobody believes that. They were acquitted because Rodney King was black. Of course, when people no longer felt part of society, they acted illogically. The black community of Los Angeles burnt down their own neighborhoods. They attacked all sorts of other minority groups, the Koreans, etc., who had stores in their neighborhoods. They acted completely illogically. Trust was

broken and, therefore, they flew off the handle. I am not saying that they did the right thing. Human beings act illogically, and, of course, the black community has much to own up to also. They have problems of drugs and alcohol, fathers abandoning children. They are not controlling their youngsters. We know that nobody would venture into the fifth ward or even the fourth or third ward at night in Houston. Their streets are not safe, but, yet, we do know that the blacks have been the victims of racism for many, many years. All you have to do is listen to the jokes. We know that they do not have equal opportunity in America. If we want to complain in America about what the blacks do, we have to first make sure they have equal opportunity. We know that they do not yet have equal opportunity.

That is why when the two goats were brought they had to be brought identical because they symbolized free will. A man has to choose. A man has to have the ability to choose to be a holy person, to have his life dedicated to helping G-d better this world or to choose to live his life destructively. But in order for us to have this free will, the two goats have to be identical. Everybody has to have equal opportunity. We all know that in this society, equal opportunity has not been given to the blacks. We know that in the last 25-30 years, things have actually gotten worse proportionally for many blacks. The minimum wage should be \$5.50, not \$4.25, if it was the same proportionally as it was 25 years ago. We know there has been almost no low income housing built since 1980. All the money that was supposed to go for low income housing went for golf courses and the S&L crisis. We know that job programs have been cut, social programs have been cut. Unemployment insurance has been cut. The past ten years, very few jobs have been created.

And there have been no programs to create new jobs. It is important that if you want people to choose the right path, they have to be given equal opportunity. The goats have to be identical. If not, then society will fall apart. There will be no sense of community. True, the blacks have much to do themselves. They have to improve their family structure. They have to improve their raising of their young. They have to curb the terrible violence within their community, but they are not the only people who have to work on things. Society has to work to be more just and to make sure that there is equal opportunity. We have to make sure that trust is not broken. Human beings are not always logical. Human beings will burst forth in all sorts of illogical actions unless trust is maintained in a society. It is not enough just to talk about prejudice and how they are for equality, but then they do nothing whatsoever. That, of course, is what has been happening lately. People have been doing nothing, and because they have been doing nothing, these problems have been allowed to fester and grow. We need both Pesach and Yom Kippur, community action and individual responsibility.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who went to a florist shop. On the sign on the florist shop it said, "Say it with flowers." He looked at the owner and said, "Give me one rose." The owner said, "One rose?" The man said, "Yes, I am a man of few words." It is more important that we do the right deeds rather than say the right words. It is not enough just to say the right things. Let us hope we will do the right things so our streets will be safe in all neighborhoods, that the blacks will do their share, the whites will do their share, the Hispanics will do their share, and that all religious groups will do their share so that truly we will have caring communities and individuals who responsible so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen .

KEDOSHIM

Holy People or Holiness in the World

In the Torah portion we read this Shabbos, we read the double Torah portion Achare Mos-Kedoshim. Why is it that the rabbis have seen fit to combine these two Torah portions? It is true that in certain calendar years, we have to combine Torah portions, otherwise we will not be able to finish the Torah in one year, but why do the rabbis see fit to combine Achare Mos-Kedoshim? They could have combined other Torah portions, some of which they never combine. Also, why is it that Achare Mos begins with the words, "And G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they grew near before G-d and they died"? Why do we have to mention about Aaron's two sons here at all? The subjectmatter of most of Achare Mos is Yom Kippur, so why don't we just start out by talking about Yom Kippur? Why do we have to talk about "after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they grew near before G-d and they died?" What does Nadav and Avihu's death have to do with Yom Kippur? What's more, why is it that in both the Torah portion Achare Mos and Kedoshim, we have a mixture of ritual matters and moral matters? After all, in the Torah portion Kedoshim, we have the very important statement that you should love your neighbor as yourself. We also learn about not

cheating people, not stealing, not keeping the wages of the worker with you until the morning, about not cursing the deaf, about not putting a stumbling block before the blind. We also have mixed up in that all sorts of rules and regulations about sacrifices. We have a jumble of both ritual and moral laws. We learn about how a man should revere his father and mother and "keep My Sabbaths." Why do we have this mixture of both ritual and moral teachings?

What's more, in the Torah portion Kedoshim, we learn about the law of Orlah. We learn how when the Jewish people would come to the land of Israel, they were not supposed to eat of the fruit of any tree that they planted for the first three years, that for the first three years, any fruit they grew were not to eat, and on the fourth year, you were to take this fruit up to Jerusalem. To get it there the Torah says, "In the fourth year it should be all its fruit holy, praiseworthy to G-d." It does not actually mention Jerusalem here because the designation of "the holy city of G-d" had not been finalized yet, but we know that a person had to take the fruit of the fourth year and to take it up to Jerusalem and eat it in a state of holiness. Then it says, "In the fifth year, you should eat its fruit to increase for you its produce, and I am the L-rd your G-d." In other words, after the fourth year, on the fifth year, you can eat it and when you eat it you will increase the fruit, that the fruit will yield more richly than it would ever do before.

Now this is hard to understand. We can understand how the first three years you should not eat it and the fourth year you should bring it up to Jerusalem, where it would be holy and how because you ate it there in a state of holiness, your fruit will increase and you will be blessed, but it does not say that. It says only that when you eat it in the fifth year will the fruit be blessed. Why is it that you will only be blessed on the fifth year after you eat it? You would think that since you did a holy act that you should be blessed at the end of the fourth year, but the Torah teaches us something very important, that in Judaism it is important to be holy and do things holy but that that is not the prime mission of man. The prime mission of man is to bring the holy into this world.

The sin of Nadav and Avihu was that they confused the prime mission of man. Nadav and Avihu were overcome with religious impulses, the desire to cling to G-d or the desire to be holy. They did not want to bring the holy into the world. Their desire for holiness was basically a selfish act. They wanted to get close to G-d, and because of this some rabbis say that they entered into the Holy of Holies drunk because they thought by getting inebriated, by taking drugs, they could reach and get a spiritual experience faster. Other rabbis say that they did not get married and refused to have children because they thought that would hinder them from getting a holy experience. Other rabbis say that their sin is that they did not have confidence that G-d would send down fire to light the sacrifices dedicating the Temple so they brought their own fire. In other words, they were looking for shortcuts for spiritual experiences.

Unfortunately, we see that in our day, too, that self-absorption, even in religion, is the keynote of our age, that a man is supposed to do anything that brings him happiness. Happiness in our age is equated with holiness. Happiness will bring you in touch with the Eternal. If by shedding your wife of 45 years, by abandoning your children, by forgetting about your responsibility to the community by going away to some South Seas island to achieve happiness, then you should do it. Whatever makes you happy, whatever causes you to find meaning in life, that is what you should do. Judaism says no, that is not what you should do. That is a false type of religious impulse. The religious impulse must bring

you back to life. You cannot be so self-centered with a so-called religious impulse that you cut yourself off from life, that you cut yourself off from all responsibility. That is not a true religious impulse.

That is why we learn about the death of Nodov and Avihu right next to Yom Kippur because Yom Kippur is the supreme religious experience of the Jew. We do not eat that day, we do not drink that day. We spend the day in prayer. We reach out to G-d, but, yet, we have to come back to the world and we have to bring the lessons we learn on Yom Kippur back to the world. If we do not, then our physical experience is not worth anything.

This, of course, is exactly what we learn about in the Torah portion Kedoshim when we learn how after we plant a tree, we cannot eat its fruit for the first three years. On the fourth year, we take the tree's fruit and eat it in Jerusalem. Yes, for three years you should study and learn, not be involved in practical things. And on the fourth year you should bring the fruit up to Jerusalem. You should devote yourself to holy things. You eat the fruit in a holy state, but that is not the end of the story. The end of the story is that on the fifth year, you should bring back what you have learned into the world. You should eat the fruit at home. You should try to implement these teachings you have learned in the real world. There is a very famous Chassidic story they tell about the Baal Shem Tov. Before he was acclaimed a great leader, he used to go to the different villages and ask the villagers how they were doing and they would tell him how they were having children or how their business was flourishing or how they were doing this mitzvah or that mitzvah, how all the different facets of the Jewish community, the Shule, Talmud Torah, Yeshiva, Gemillos Chesed Society, etc., were doing. Finally, he came to one town and there he saw a man who sat in a corner of the synagogue hardly eating or drinking anything. He had been there for 50 years studying Torah. He went up to him and said, "How are you?" The man pushed him aside and said, "Don't bother me. I'm learning Torah. Can't you see I'm busy?" The Baal Shem Tov looked at him and said, "How come you're not allowing G-d to inhabit the world?" The man asked him what he was talking about. He said, "How come you are not allowing G-d to inhabit the world? What good is all your learning if you are not taking this learning and employing it in the service of G-d in the world? It is not enough for you just to be holy and to learn Torah without implementing its teachings in the world, without helping people implement its teachings in all their life, in all their mundane matters, and that they should be better businessmen because of Torah, so that they should be better wives, husbands, parents, children. You are not implementing the teachings of the Torah in the real world. You are not allowing G-d to inhabit the real world."

Unfortunately, in our day the Jewish people are split. The Jewish people know because they have been taught it over and over again that it is *Lo Hamedrash Halkar Elah Hamaaseh*. It is not the study that is the main thing but the subsequent actions. Yes, we have to learn how to do things. For three years we have to study and the fourth year we have to learn how to bring the fruit up and enjoy it in holiness, but then we have to take this holy experience and bring it back to the earth. We have to bring our teachings and implement them in all our mundane activities. If we do not, something is wrong.

Unfortunately, in our day those Jews who are imbued with Jewish values are sitting in ivory towers. They are not going out to implement Jewish values in the real world, and those Jews who know that the mission of the Jew is to implement values in the world are

going out in the world to change things, but they are not changing things according to Jewish values. After all, the family is paramount in Judaism. How could any Jew advocate alternative life-styles? How could any Jew be against strengthening the family? How could any Jew be for any type of tax gimmicks which would break down business ethics? How could any Jew be in favor of any type of rules and regulations and laws which would hurt the poor? How could any Jew be against helping the poor, sick or aged? How could any Jew be for certain policies which would eventually destroy Israel? How could any Jew be working for these things? The answer is because many Jews are not filled with Jewish values. How could Jews advocate a life-style based only upon individual happiness without regard for anything else? How could any Jew advocate breaking up marriages for no real reason? How could any Jew advocate that we should give up everything to fulfill certain ambitions? How could any Jew believe that he could betray his children, betray his community, in order to fulfill his so-called destiny? Jews who feel this way are not filled with Jewish values. One of today's tragedies is that many of those Jews who do have Jewish values are not going out into the world to implement them and many of those Jews who are going out into the world trying to implement values are not filled with Jewish values.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a CIA agent who went to Russia. He learned beautiful Russian and went to Moscow and bought clothes there so he looked just like a Russian. He went up to a village several miles away from Moscow and met a village elder there and he asked him, "Tell me, how many refrigerators do you have in this village?" The elder said, "Well, just about everybody has a refrigerator." He then asked how many people had TV sets. The elder said about half the people had TV sets. He then asked how many had VCRs and the elder said a few had them. Then he looked at the man and said, "You're from the CIA, aren't you?" The man said, "How did you know? I speak perfect Russian, I bought my clothes in Moscow." The elder said, "I know, but we don't have any electricity in this village." Unfortunately, there are many Jews who are working hard to implement values, but these are not Jewish values, and, on the other hand, there are Jews who have Jewish values but who are still stuck in Jerusalem eating the fruit. They have not come to the fifth year yet. Let us all hope and pray that all of us will be imbued with Jewish values and go out and try to implement them in the world so the Mashiach will come quickly and in our day. Amen.

EMOR

Dreams, Society and Strength

Why is it that certain people and certain groups in society are so susceptible to drug and alcohol addiction? What is it that causes these people to succumb to this problem while other individuals and groups seem to be much more immune? Why is it that the drug campaign, "Just say no", has been so unsuccessful? One of the principal reasons why a negative campaign like "Just say no" can never succeed is because most people will not stop taking drugs just because they have been told all the negative consequences of taking drugs. They will only stop when they are convinced that the taking of drugs will interfere with their attainment of altruistic goals which benefit not only themselves but also society as a whole. If they are convinced that drugs are going to stop them from attaining their dreams, then they will stop taking drugs, but not until then.

The problem of our modern society is that it fails to give our youngsters positive dreams. It does not tell them how they can join with others to make this a better world. The dreams that it postulates are general selfish dreams. Do this or that so you can make more money or drive a bigger car or wear fancy clothes, etc. Since these dreams refer only to the individual and not also to society, they can be easily set aside for other dreams which also refer to the individual, like getting high on alcohol or drugs. The selfish dream of becoming rich so you can be somebody can be realized much quicker by selling drugs or by getting others to sell drugs.

In Judaism, we know that individual dreams are not enough. An individual's dreams must connect him to others and benefit not only himself but also his family and his people.

Dreams which cause an individual to improve himself, improve his family, and improve his people are dreams which can cause an individual to forsake momentary pleasure in order to achieve goals which are bigger than himself. An individual will defer his self-gratification when the essence of his dream is not self-gratification but is the betterment of his family, his people, and ultimately, the world.

That's why Pesach is listed first among the Jewish holidays in the Torah portion Emor, right after we learn about Shabbos, because Pesach speaks about the Jewish dream, a dream which postulates a time when everyone will be free, a time when justice, peace, and harmony will reign supreme, a dream which postulates that every Jew can help bring this redemption about. In order for a Jew to be a Jew, he must have this dream. He must believe that Judaism is something that is necessary for the redemption of the world, and he must believe that he has a role to play in bringing about this redemption. That's why on the first two nights of Pesach we have a seder. We affirm that our dream of freedom is intertwined with the dreams of freedom for our family, for our people, and for the world. That's why when we read in the Haggadah about how G-d keeps His promise to the Jewish people, we talk about that promise stemming from "the covenant between the pieces," time when Abraham was not even yet circumcised. Abraham, though, had already demonstrated his loyalty to G-d by leaving his home and coming to Canaan. He had a dream and he was willing to follow it. This dream gave him the courage and the strength to stand against all obstacles and to withstand all temptations. We Jews throughout centuries have always had this dream. We knew that the continued existence of the Jewish people was important for the redemption of the world, that if we would not remain Jews, the very redemption of the world was at stake. This gave us the courage to withstand all temptations and the strength to endure all persecutions. Even to this day, more Jews celebrate Passover by having a seder than come to shul even on Yom Kippur. We Jews know that we must have this dream if the world is to be redeemed and our life is to have meaning.

That's why at the very beginning of the Haggadah, we say, "All who are hungry, let them come and eat, and all who are needy, let them come and celebrate the Pesach with us." Why do we have this redundancy? The answer is that "all those who are hungry, let them come and eat" refers to our physical needs, while "all those who have a need, let them come and partake of Passover" refers to our spiritual needs. Rav and Shmuel debated whether at the seder we are celebrating our physical redemption or our spiritual redemption. Shmuel says that we are celebrating our physical redemption. That's why the Haggadah states right after the Ma Nishtanah, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." Rav, however, maintains that we are celebrating our spiritual redemption, that since the time we were rescued from Egypt, every Jew has had spiritual freedom. No Jew after Egypt has ever believed that he was inferior to anyone. We knew even when we were persecuted in the Middle Ages and during the Holocaust that we were the equal of every human being. It is this spiritual redemption that we are celebrating Rav says.

There are many people within the United States who actually feel inferior to others. They will not let their children advance. There are also certain sub-groups who if any of their members try to get ahead by doing well in school, they are beaten up and mocked by their peers. They are made to feel that they are uppity and are quickly brought down to the common denominator. They are made to feel that they are not worthy to participate in the dream of redemption. They are made to feel that they do not have what it takes to

help G-d perfect the world. They are made to feel that they really deserve the bad lot that they have been forced to endure. Therefore, it is no wonder that they take their frustrations out on each other and that they are easy prey for those who peddle drugs and alcohol. They do not have any dreams of the future. There is no reason for them not to dissipate their strength and even endanger their lives by taking drugs and alcohol because their taking of drugs and alcohol will not stop them from achieving their dreams. They do not have any positive dreams.

Most Jews know that in order to live decent, good lives we must be part of the process of redemption. This includes Jews who are very far from traditional observances but who still are very active in trying to better the world because they have not given up on the Jewish dream. Other Jews, though, who no longer believe in the Jewish dream, have difficulty maintaining their equilibrium and are susceptible to all sorts of nefarious influences and are prey to drugs and alcohol.

The rabbis in the Gemora Brochas teach us that a dream has to have three components in order for it to be a dream that can come true. They say that a dream has to be one that is close to morning, one that repeats often, and one whose interpretation is found within the dream. What does this mean? This means that a dream that can come true must talk about dawn, be close to morning. It must be a dream which allows a person to visualize a new day for not only himself but also for the world. It must be an insistent dream, a dream which motivates a person to act, and it must be a dream which is translated into a practical program which can be implemented by the individual. The reason why Hertzl was able to galvanize the Jewish people when he founded the Zionist movement, in a way which no other movement which advocated the return to Israel could, was because only Hertzl had a practical program. It turned out to be a false program, but at the time it seemed very logical. Turkey was the sick man of Europe. It was cash desperate. Hertzl hadan idea. He would buy Palestine from Turkey. The Jews in Western Europe were wealthy. He would get them to pay the Turkish sultan for Palestine, and then he would transfer the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe to Palestine. It was a logical program. The only problem was that the Turkish sultan would not sell.

Each person must have a feeling that he is part of the redemption process and that he can do positive things to make this process come about. The realization that you are important and that you are needed and that G-d is counting on you will give you the strength and courage to overcome all obstacles and withstand all temptations.

In the Torah portion Emor, we learn, "In the first month on the 14th day of the month from noon until nightfall is Pesach to G-d and on the 15th day of this month is the holiday of matzos to G-d." The rabbis argue when Pesach really is. It is the 14th when the paschal sacrifice was offered, or is it on the 15th when we sit down to the seder? The Jewish people when they sacrificed the lamb were rejecting spirit worship. During this time of the year when the sign of the zodiac is Aries (the ram or lamb), the evil spirit Aries was believed to be incarnate in the lamb and anybody who would harm a lamb would cause havoc to rain down on Egypt, while on the other hand, anybody who worshipped the lamb could control that spirit for Egypt's greater glory. It took a great deal of courage for the Jewish people to take that lamb and slaughter it. It required a willingness to stand up and take a risk, but taking a risk alone is not sufficient, the rabbis say. It is a good first step but what was necessary in Egypt and what is necessary even now is that each Jew band together with other Jews to help further the Jewish idea of

redemption. Many people today take risks in order to further personal goals like being a drug pusher or being a member of a gang, etc. Sometimes the risks are formidable, but just taking a risk is not enough. You have to take a risk for a worthy cause, for a cause which does not just bring you gratification and cash in your pocket, but which also will lead to a better life for others.

The rabbis say that the real Pesach is the 15th, when we with our families and friends gather at the seder and once again dedicate ourselves to the Jewish dream of bringing redemption to the world. That's why we have the cup of Elijah. Elijah is the harbinger of the time when the whole world will be free, when the whole world will be redeemed. On Pesach, we put forward the Jewish program for saving the world, for making the world into a place in which peace, harmony, brotherhood, compassion, and friendship will predominate, where all the nations will eventually come up to Jerusalem to worship G-d, each in his own way. We know that this is the work of the generations; however, each of us has tasks to do that are clear and defined: the mitzvahs, and some that are not so clear and defined: participation in the struggle to make sure that the world becomes a better and more just place with each passing generation. Those who are committed to this dream do not have any problem with drugs or alcohol. They know that drugs and alcohol can only get in the way of this dream, and it is this dream which gives meaning to their lives. Let us all hope and pray that each of us will do our part in achieving this dream so that the Mashiach may come quickly in our day.

BEHAR-BECHUKOSAI

Dignity, Peace, and Blessings

The Torah portions Behar and Bechukosai are always combined in the years when we must combine Torah portions. The Jewish calendar can have anywhere from 353 days to 384 days, so many times we have to combine Torah portions. The rabbis have seen fit to combine the Torah portions Behar and Bechukosai. Why is it that these two Torah portions should be combined? There are many other Torah portions which are never combined. It would seem that the subject matter in these two Torah portions are completely distinct. In the Torah portion Behar we learn about the sabbatical year. We learn about redivision of property. We learn about the rules and regulations about buying a house. We learn about how we are supposed to support the poor and not let our brother become destitute and sell himself into slavery. In the olden days when a person became destitute his only recourse was to become an indentured servant. In fact, this same institution was carried over into colonial America where, although an indentured servant had certain rights, he had to work for this person to whom he was indentured to for seven years as almost a quasi slave. We then learn also about the jubilee year, etc.

In the Torah portion Bechukosai we learn about the blessings that will come upon the Jewish people if they keep our religion and the curses that will come upon them if they do not. We see that the subject matter of these two Torah portions do not seem to be at all similar, so why is it that the rabbis have seen fit to combine them in years when we have to combine Torah portions? What's more, the last sentence of the Torah portions Behar seems problematical. It says, "My sabbaths you should observe and My sanctuary you should revere. I am the L-rd." Why do we have this sentence here? We can understand when it talks about the sabbaths; perhaps it is referring to the sabbatical year, the jubilee

year, but why does it mention G-d's temple? In the whole Torah portion Behar we never talk about the temple at all.

Also, why in the beginning of the Torah portion Bechukosai when we read about the blessings does it say that, "If in My statutes you will walk and My mitzvahs you will observe?" This seems very redundant. Also, why are the blessings that are given to the Jewish people so few and the curses so many? What's more, the blessings seem to be out of order. First prosperity is promised. Then the Torah says that you will sit securely in your land. In other words, you will be free from fear. Then it says, "And I will give peace in your land and you will then be able to chase away your enemies and then you will prosper and you will sit secure. (Your population will increase) and finally G-d's presence will dwell among you." In other words, one, prosperity, you will sit secure; two, no one is going to make you afraid; three, peace; four, you will be able to chase away your enemies; five, you will increase; six, G-d's presence will be felt among you. This order seems strange; if you have peace, then why do you have to chase your enemies? First you should be able to chase your enemies and then you will have peace. Why is peace mentioned before chasing your enemies?

It seems to me that the answers to these questions can be found in that last sentence that we read in the Torah portion Behar. It says, "My sabbaths you should observe and My sanctuary you should revere." In the Torah portion Behar we learn about the sabbatical year, and we learn about the jubilee year. These institutions limit man. They tell us that we can't do anything we want with our property, that ultimately it belongs to G-d. This is true in all spheres of life. Man cannot do anything he wants. The weekly sabbath teaches us the same thing, only this time about our talents. On Shabbos we are man the mediator, man the appreciator, rather than man the creator. On Shabbos we can't use our talents to change nature. Obviously it takes more effort to walk to shul than it does to strike a match, but when we strike a match we are impressing our will upon nature. Shabbos teaches us that man should sit back once a week and appreciate what he has created. It also teaches us that there are limits even on our G-d given talents. In the economic sphere the same thing is true. We have to learn how to limit our greed, otherwise we will destroy our economic system. All wealth will flow to one percent of the population and the rest of the people will become destitute and the economy will stop growing and everything will grind to a halt. That, of course, is what has happened in South American and in other countries. We have to be careful in this country, too, because already one percent of the population controls forty percent of the wealth. Periodically we have to redistribute wealth to make sure people do not have too much power over everybody else. Economic power is the basis of political, social, and other power as well.

The phrase, "My sanctuary you shall revere," is not referring to a temple or synagogue. It is referring to each of us. "And you shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell among you." G-d has told us in the Torah portion Terumah we are the sanctuary of G-d. We become G-d's dwelling place when we build the sanctuary, when we are interested in holy things, when we are interested in living holy lives, then we become G-d's sanctuary. Every human being has dignity and has to be treated with respect. That, of course, is what the Torah portion Behar is teaching us. When your brother becomes poor, help him. Do not let him sink to the level where he has to sell himself into slavery as an indentured servant. Make sure that he is able to sustain himself and retain his self-respect.

Unfortunately, there are many people who like to wield power over others and make

them twist in the wind. They like to see how high they can make them jump. This is wrong. We all know that each one of us has a piece of G-d in us, our soul. G-d dwells in each of us and we have to treat each other with dignity and respect. We cannot take advantage of anyone. Just because we have power over someone doesn't mean that we can take advantage of him or make him twist in the wind or make him do things that make him squirm. Instead, we always have to treat everyone with dignity and respect. That is exactly what we learn in the Torah portion Bechukosai when we read, "If in My statutes you will walk." The word used for statutes is the word Chukeem. And what are Chukeem? Chukeem are things that cannot be proven, like the equality of mankind. There is no way that you can prove that all men are equal. All people are not equal. Some are tall, some are short, some are talented, some are not talented, but we are all equal because we all have a soul. G-d has given each of us a soul and, therefore, we have to treat everybody with dignity and respect. That's why it says, "If in My statutes you will walk." If you will treat everybody with dignity and respect and not try to twist them and manipulate them and make them feel bad about themselves, then "And My mitzvahs you will observe..." This is not a redundancy. You can observe all the mitzvahs formally, but, if you treat people in a degrading fashion, if you make them lose their respect, if you make them grovel, then you are doing a terrible thing and these blessings will not come upon you. First you have to treat people with respect and dignity and then you can observe the mitzvahs. If you observe all the mitzvahs but you do not treat people with dignity and respect, then all the calamities that are enunciated in this Torah portion will come upon you. Why are there so many calamities and so few blessings? Because we all know how to treat people with dignity and respect. It takes very little. We have to consult them, treat them as equals, treat them with consideration, and not try to trick them or try to manipulate them or use fear or force against them. But when it comes to harming a person's dignity there are hundreds of ways we can slight and hurt a person, making them feel bad about themselves. That is why we have the order of the blessings that we have. We talk about prosperity first because it is prosperity which gives a person a sense of self-worth. Remember, it is rich people who create revolutions, not poor people. It is middle class people who always create the revolutions. Lenin, Nehru, Gandhi all came from middle class families. This is also true of the American Revolution. Every single one of the patriots was a wealthy person. George Washington was a landowner. Thomas Jefferson was a big landowner. John Adams also was a rich man, etc. All of them revolted because England treated them disrespectfully, England did not treat them with dignity. England started to tax them without representation. The people in the colonies were used to self-rule, to self-government. England, true, had an input, but England would always consult the colonists and the colonists always had to ratify what England wanted. They had had this power for many years, and when England yanked it from them, they immediately revolted. America's founding fathers were willing to sacrifice their prosperity for their dignity. This has been true throughout all human history. People are always willing to sacrifice their prosperity for their dignity. If people have to choose between their dignity and their prosperity, they always react by choosing their dignity. People do not want to be treated like they are dirt, like a piece of nothing. They want their dignity to be respected. That is why it says, "I will bless you with prosperity and there will not be anybody to make you afraid. You will be able to sit secure." People are not going to be able to twist you in the wind. People are not going to try to take advantage

of you. People are not going to threaten your livelihood if you do not do this or that. We all know that although Federal judges are appointed by the President of the United States and although we taxpayers pay their salary, they are not our employees. We cannot tell a judge how he has to decide a case. If a President would tell a judge how to decide a case, the President would be guilty of usurpation of authority or corruption or bribery. He would be impeached. The same is true of all our elected officials. You may be the biggest campaign contributor to a congressman, but you cannot tell him how to vote. You can suggest and you can tell him what you think but he has to make the decision. You cannot demand that he vote certain ways because you gave him money. That is bribery. That is selling your vote. That is illegal. The same is true of a rabbi. A rabbi, although he may be paid by his congregants, is beholden only to uphold the Torah. Congregants cannot tell him that he must decide certain things in certain ways. He is not an employee. True, you are paying him. You are paying him to be there, to decide cases, to be on time, to do what he is supposed to do, but he has to make the Halachic decisions and you cannot tell him what to do. If you try to tell a rabbi what he has to do in a Halachic matter, in a matter of Jewish Law and custom, then you are violating his conscience. You are trying to take away his dignity and respect.

This is true in every other field as well. You have to respect a person's expertise. You have to respect a person's dignity. You cannot treat a person callously and try to take advantage of him. You cannot be like a college professor I know who had his graduate student mow his lawn because he knew that he would be afraid to refuse. Because if he refused, he may not get his Ph.D. You cannot demand that an employee, who you know would have a hard time getting another job, work extra hours for you without pay. He would be afraid that he would lose his job if he did not do it. You can't sexually harass your female employees. You have taken advantage of them. You have trampled on their dignity. This also explains why the blessings in Bechukosai are in the order they are. One, you will have prosperity, you will have a job, etc. You will feel secure. Two, no boss or authority figure will make you afraid, will trample on your dignity. Three, you will have peace. This refers to internal peace. If we have institutions where everybody is treated justly and rightly, then we will have internal peace. If we have families where people are treated fairly, then there will be peace, and if you have peace, then you will have unity, and if you have unity, then you will be able, four, to chase away our eternal enemies. Five, then we will also increase, we will also grow. And finally, six, G-d's presence will be felt in our midst. The key to all these blessings is the internal peace which can only come about if we treat each other with dignity and respect.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a salesman who came into a building after most of the people had left. There he finds a big dog who is emptying wastebaskets into a big bin. He looks incredulously at the dog. The dog says, "What are you looking so incredulous at? This is my job." The salesman was just amazed. He said, "You also talk. What a prize you are to your master! What a prize you are to your boss!" The dog said, "Shh. Not so loud. He doesn't know that I can talk. If he would know that I could talk, he'd start making me answer the phone." When we deal with people we have to deal with them with dignity, respect, and kindness. People should not feel that they are being used. If people feel that they are being used, then they are going to resent you and will fight, and everything that has been built will be destroyed. In Judaism the definition of a G-d-fearing person is not one who prays or even learns Torah all day. The definition of a G-d-

fearing man is one who does not take advantage of anyone, even when he can get away with it. Let us all hope and pray that we will all be G-d-fearing so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

BECHUKOSAI

Yaakov, Galut, and Redemption

In the Torah portion Bechukosai we learn about all the blessings that will come upon the Jewish people if they follow the laws of the Torah, and in it we also learn about all the curses that will come upon the Jewish people if they do not follow the laws of the Torah. The curses and blessings that are mentioned here in this Torah portion refer to the nation of Israel. We do not really understand why it is that the righteous sometimes suffer and the evil sometimes prosper. In fact, in the Pirkei Ovos, the Ethics of our Fathers, Rev Yanai makes the famous statement, "We do not understand the ease of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous." However, when it comes to the people of Israel there is a direct relationship, as we learn in this week's Torah portion, between their fulfilling the laws of the Torah and whether or not they are going to stay in the land of Israel and whether they are going to be blessed or cursed. G-d has made an unconditional promise to the Jewish people that we will always exist. However, He never said that we will not suffer losses or that we will not endure persecutions.

In the blessings that are mentioned in this Torah portion we mention six distinct blessings. The first blessing is prosperity. The second blessing is security. The third blessing is peace. The fourth blessing is that we will be able to pursue our enemies and that they will fall before us. The fifth blessing is that we will increase in the land. The sixth blessing is that G-d's presence will be felt among the Jewish people. The order of these blessings seems strange. After all, if the third blessing is peace, why do we need the fourth blessing, that we will then be able to pursue our enemies? If we will have peace, we will not have any enemies, so why should we have to pursue them? Also, when it mentions the curses it says something very interesting. It says that, "they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers whereby they have acted treacherously against Me and even that they went against Me contrariwise and even I will go against them contrariwise and I will bring them into the land of the enemies and then their

uncircumcised hearts will be humbled and then they will repay the punishment of their sins." This seems strange. It just said that they had confessed their sins. We would think that since they had confessed their sins that, therefore, G-d would no longer punish them, but the Torah says that G-d is going to punish them even more. After that, the Torah says, "And I will remember My covenant with Jacob and even My covenant with Yitzchak and My covenant with Abraham, I will remember." Notice that it lists the forefathers backwards. We read Jacob and then Yitzchak and then we say Abraham. Jacob should be last, not first. Yaacov is written with a Vahv. It is written Yud Ayin Kuf Vahv Bet. We do not normally write Yaacov with a Vahv. Why do we write his name with an extra letter, a Vahv, here?

Perhaps we can understand the answer to these three questions if we look at another expression, which is used throughout this Torah portion, Ga-al, which means to be disgusted at. G-d says that "even while they are in the land of their enemies I will not despise them and I will not be disgusted with them to completely wipe them out." If we look at the word Ga-al, we will notice that this word is basically the same word for Galus, exile, and that this word is also connected to the word for redemption. The word for exile, disgusted at, and redemption all share two common sounding consonants. The silent letters in them are different, but the words are sounded alike. Yaacov is mentioned first when G-d speaks about keeping his covenant with Israel, because Yaacov is the symbol of Galus, exile. Yaacov spent so many years in exile. He spent 22 years of his life in Mesopotamia when he had to flee from his brother, and the last 17 years of his life he spent in Egypt in exile. This exile was caused because his sons could not get along, because they sold Joseph into slavery into Egypt. Galus, exile, is caused because of senseless hatred among our people. The silent letter Ayin, which is in the middle of the word which means to be disgusted, also means to look at someone with hatred (does the word or the letter mean to look at someone with hatred?). When the Jewish people look at each other with hatred, calamity results. It ends in exile. The rabbis say that the Temple was destroyed because of Sinas Chinam, because of senseless hatred between Jews. The word redemption also has a silent letter in it. That letter is an Aleph and it stands for unity. When the Jewish people are unified, we do not suffer exile and we are blessed. Yes, we can have disagreements. Yes, we can look at problems from different angles, but we cannot turn these disagreements into hatred. When Ayin creeps into our word, when we look at each other with hatred, then calamity ensues. We need to have an Aleph in our words, then we have unity, strength, and blessing. That is why, when the Torah says how "they confessed their sin and the sins of their father," it means that they only paid lip service to their sins, especially the sin of senseless hatred, but that they had not taken any steps to correct them. How often do we find even in so-called religious circles (where they are always constantly talking about the evils of Sinas Chinam) that allsorts of acrimony is being spewed out against other Jews, religious and not? That should not be. That is wrong. When G-d said here, "I will remember My treaty with Jacob," He did this to have us concentrate on what caused Jacob to go into exile the first time. It was caused because of the hatred that Esau had for him and the second time because of the hatred that ten of his sons had for another of his sons, Joseph, when they sold him into Egypt. This type of hatred must stop. If there is to be redemption, there has to be unity. That, of course, too, is why peace is mentioned as the third blessing. You can have prosperity and security buy you also have to have peace, internal peace, in order to chase your enemies.

There the peace that is referred to is internal peace. As Ibn Ezra has said, "peace among you." There has to be peace among the people if Israel is to be strong and avoid exile. The people of Israel always have to recognize the limits of internal conflict, the limits of internal arguments. They cannot carry any argument too far. We must have peace among ourselves, and if we have peace among ourselves, then we will be able to pursue our enemies and they will fall. Not only that, our rabbis teach us, but they will fall even before we get there. Let our enemies fight among themselves. Then, after that, we will have a great increase in the land. The population will increase. The land will be filled with people who will cause great developments to take place. Let us hope and pray that we see this in our own day with the ingathering of the Ethiopian and Russian Jews and Jews from other countries into Israel.

Finally, the last of the blessings is the blessing of a religious revival in the land of Israel. Why is the name of Yaacov spelled with a Vahv in this Torah portion? Because Vahv in Hebrew represents the letter E. In Yaacov's name the Vahv stands for the six stages of redemption. Just as Yaacov was the symbol of Galut, exile, Yaacov also had within him the qualities that are necessary in order to bring about the Geula, the redemption. The six stages of redemption are found in his own name. Also, the rabbis say that there are five times in the Tenach, in the Bible, that the word for Elijah the prophet, Eliyahu, is written without a Vahv, and there are five times in the Torah that Yaacov is written with a Vahv. This teaches us, too, that when Elijah will come, he will bring peace throughout the Jewish world and throughout the general world. The main mission of Elijah is to return the heart of the fathers to their children, to make sure that there is peace in Jewish families. He will also bring peace between Jews, related or not, and he will bring peace between the Jewish people and the nations of the world. Besides that he will bring harmony between the environment and man, and he will bring harmony between G-d and man. He has a fivefold mission to perform, and we know that this will come to be, that the Jewish people will be united so that the Jewish people will be able to overcome all their problems. Unfortunately, there are many Jews who become fearful, who, when they see anti-Semitism raise its head, say, "Oh, they are only against those kinds of Jews but not our kind of Jews," but we should realize that that is not so, and that anti-Semites are masters of pitting one Jew against another in order to further their purposes.

I just returned from a meeting of the UJA, an organization which says we are one, which really believes in Clal Yisroel, which really tries to help all Jewish people. We know that this organization stresses the fact that we Jews have to be united, that we Jews cannot blame each other for our different kinds of problems, but that we have to work together, and that it is foolish to pit one Jew against another. We Jews have to rely first and foremost on ourselves. When we Jews are popular, then other people swarm about us, asking for favors. But when we are not popular, like we are not on the college campus today (on the college campus today, Israel is blamed for all the moral ills of the world), then those people who are in power or who are trying to gain power will again use us to deflect the anger of the majority who are having a hard time making it in the world. Yes, the redemption will come, but we have to be united. That is why G-d said He will remember the promise to Jacob. Jacob was the symbol of Galus. He remembers His promise to take us out of Galus, and when He takes us out of Galus, He will make sure, too, that He will remember Yitzchak and Avraham. He will remember the dedication of Yitzchak. He will fill out hearts with a sense of mission and dedication for our people, as

I witnessed in the UJA conference, and He will also fill our hearts with the dedication of doing Tzedakah, of doing charity, which was the hallmark of Abraham, which I also saw at the UJA conference. If Jews will continue to help Jews, then surely the redemption will come soon.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who took a first aid course. He was so proud of it that he went to his friend and said, "You know, that first aid course I took really helped me a lot. I just yesterday witnessed an accident. A woman got hit by a car and she fractured her skull and her face was all bleeding and her leg was all twisted up." The friend said, "Oh, really, it helped you?" The man said, "It sure did. I immediately went and sat down on the curb and put my head between my knees. I did not faint." All that person was interested in was himself, not in helping the victim. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people like that who are only interested in making sure they are not hurt. They do not want to help the victims of injustice, etc. They are not interested in helping their fellow Jews who are suffering. This is not unity, and this will not bring the redemption, but if we are willing to help each other no matter what, then we can rest assured that the redemption will come soon. May it come soon. Amen

BAMIDBAR

Singing, Burdens, and Jewish Survival

In the Torah portion Bamidbar we learn how G-d ordered that the Jewish people should be counted again. The Jewish people were counted three times within the first thirteen months after their exodus from Egypt. They were counted immediately after they had left Egypt, they were counted again after the sin of the golden calf, and they were counted once again one month after the Tabernacle was erected. The Tabernacle was erected on the first day of Nisan. After that, the Jewish people were counted only once more while they wandered in the desert right before they entered the land of Israel. It seems strange that G-d commanded that the Jewish people be counted three times within the first thirteen months of their exodus from Egypt. How could the numbers of the Jewish people have changed so greatly within these thirteen months that G-d would have wanted them to be counted so many times?

Also, the first two times they were counted (after they had left Egypt and after the sin of the golden calf) only Moshe was commanded to count the Jewish people, but here in the Book of Bamidbar, in the Book of Numbers, Aaron was also commanded to count the people along with Moshe. Why was Aaron also commanded to count the people? Also, later on in this Torah portion we learn how the Levites were counted separately. They were counted from one month and up, while the rest of the Jewish people were counted from twenty years and up, and the Torah says that when the Levites were counted, "They were given and they were given." In other words, they were given over to serve in the Tabernacle to assist the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, in the duties in the Tabernacle. The firstborn had forfeited their right to officiate as priests because they had participated in the sin of the golden calf.

We also know that this Torah portion is always read before Shavuot and that the Torah was given with fire, water, and in the wilderness. What does this mean? It seems to me that we can understand the answers to these questions if we look at the word that is being used in this Torah portion to count the Jewish people. It is not the normal word. The

normal word is "Manah," to count, but here the word used is "Pokad." Pokad means not only to count, but it also means to visit and to assume responsibility. The modern Hebrew word for a job is a Tatkeed. If you are given a job to do, you are given a Tafkeed. In the army you are given a Pekudah, which is an order. A pahkeed is a clerk, a member of the bureaucracy who has a job to do. Pokad does not just mean to count. The word also means to assume responsibility, to be entrusted with a job. It means that when the Jewish people were counted three times after they left Egypt, it was not just to know how many people there were, but it was also in order to ascertain if the Jewish people wanted to assume different responsibilities, if they wanted to be counted as part of the group who were going to change the world.

In fact, when the Jewish people were counted here, they were counted not only as individuals, but also as members of families, because we all know that families are very, very important in Judaism. In Judaism there is always attention given to both the individual and to the family. It is not like in America today, where we have wholly discounted the importance of the family and have only stressed the role of the individual. We have even proclaimed in our high school curriculums, etc., that the family is something you have to rebel against, that the family is something that hinders progress, that the family is something that gets in the way of your developing your abilities. In the literature we teach in high school, *You Can't Go Home Anymore* or *Look Homeward Angel*, etc., the message is constantly proclaimed. We know that it is impossible in America to really have the same sense of family that we had in Europe and that we had throughout Jewish history because family actually has no place in America. The family exists in law only perhaps for inheritance, but a brother is not responsible to support his sister. Grandparents have no legal responsibilities for their grandchildren. Even a parent's responsibilities legally are very limited after a child becomes eighteen. Families as a legal entity almost do not exist in America. Now, it is true that you can go to the opposite extreme, too, and you can squash the individual entirely by just stressing family. That is, of course, what happened in many Italian families when they came here to America. Truancy laws had to be enacted in America because many Italian families would not send their children to school. They wanted their children to help them out in their businesses. We all, of course, know how in Mafia families, if a person does not listen to the dictates of the family, he is killed.

We know that in Judaism the family is important and the individual is important. We have to balance them out. Of course, Jewish law very clearly states that the family cannot tell you who to marry. The family cannot tell you what business to go into. Yet, you have responsibilities to your family and your family has responsibilities to you. The strength of Judaism has always been that we have always had strong families which still leave a place for individuals. When our families weaken, then, of course, we disappear.

We see this clearly here in America where the rate of assimilation is so high. There is one scholar who says that if all the Jews would have remained Jews who came to America as Jews and their families had remained Jews, there would be over sixty million Jews in America. My brother has a shul in Charleston, South Carolina, and a few years ago the Charleston South Carolina Jewish community celebrated the 350th anniversary of the first shul founded there. Only one family still remains a member of that shul from the original families of that shul. The members of the anniversary committee decided to knock on all the doors of the leading people in town who they knew, after checking the

genealogical records, were the descendants of the original founders of the synagogue and ask them if they would like to participate in the 350th anniversary celebration. They all slammed their doors on them and said, "Don't you dare!"

Family is important in Judaism and the individual is important in Judaism. The purpose of the three counts of the Jewish people during its first year of freedom from Egypt was to ascertain whether the people were willing to assume the responsibilities to be part of a group who would further Jewish aims, who would further the aims that G-d had set out for the Jewish people. They were counted first when they left Egypt because they were going into a wilderness and they were going without adequate provisions. They were going based upon the covenant of Abraham, a covenant which stated that G-d wanted them to be His chosen people, a people whose job would be to spread morality in the world. Did they want to be counted in, be part of that enterprise? Did they and their family want to be part of the Jewish people who would further this type of an enterprise? They were counted, too, after the sin of the golden calf because not only did they have to make a declaration that they wanted to be part of this enterprise, but they also now had to make a declaration that they would not use pagan means in order to further Jewish goals, that they would reject entirely the negative influences of paganism. Did they want to be counted in on that? Finally, they were counted a third time a month after the Tabernacle was constructed to know whether or not they wanted to not only reject pagan views, but also if they wanted to positively, in their family life and in their personal life, propagate Jewish values. Would they personally make a commitment? Would they be counted in? Would they accept this responsibility? G-d waited for this third count until after a month after the Tabernacle was erected to make sure that they understood what it was that they were actually committing to.

That's why, too, Aaron was also included with Moshe in the last count, because this last count required a positive commitment from both an individual and his family. It required not just leaving Egypt and going into a wilderness where he and they could start all over again. It required not just a negative rejection of pagan values, but it required a positive assertion of Jewish values. This meant that they would have to work cooperatively to further Jewish religious values. It would not be enough just to be interested in the social values and the community values in which they lived. They would also have to be interested in religious values if they wanted the Jewish dream to become a reality. Of course, we all know that when the Jewish people left Egypt they all had to be willing to cooperate on a community level, otherwise they could not have survived in the desert. It would have been impossible for them to have survived in the desert. We also know that if the Jewish people would not have been willing to reject pagan influences, there would have been terrible divisions among them and the Jewish message would have been lost. The Jewish people cannot survive unless it also is willing to sacrifice for positive Jewish values.

When our parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents, the original Jewish immigrants, came to this country, they came to a spiritual and physical wilderness. They knew that they had to help one another if they were to physically survive, and they did help one another. Families did help one another. It was taken for granted that you had to help the members of your own family. They also knew that they had to reject the negative stereotypes of the Jewish people which were being foisted upon them by a culture which was not too friendly to them. They had to make sure that they stood tall and proud and

that they themselves were not taken in by the lies that were being told against the Jewish people. They founded all sorts of Jewish organizations, A.D.L., etc. Of course, we know that certain Jews melded into the population. It was not enough, though, just to stand up as proud Jews. We also had to stand up as Jews who stood for positive Jewish ideals, and for that you needed not just a society, a H.I.A.S., etc., that would help you, and not just individuals who would help you, but you also needed a family, especially a spouse who would stand by you and be with you and allow you to propagate spiritual values together. Because it was only if you and your family were sure in your spiritual values that you would be able to withstand the blandishments and the temptations of the society around you. We believe, of course, that we should participate fully in American society. We should contribute our full share to the economic well being of our country and participate fully in all the civic organizations like the Masons and the Elks, etc., but we should also realize that we have a unique spiritual message to give to the world. We have to also make sure that our religious practices are sacred and kept, that our Rosh Hashonna, Yom Kippur, Pesach, Shabbos, all our holidays play an important part in our lives and that our children should know about them and be proud of them and observe them along with all other Jewish practices.

That is why, too, this Torah portion says that the Levites were given twice. They were given to bear the burden of the Mishkan when it was transported from place to place, and they were also given another job, the job of singing. The job of maintaining yourself and Jewish institutions in a new country is important, but the job of maintaining the spiritual joy of Judaism in your private and family life is also important. You must always practice Judaism with joy and singing. Those Levites who were not willing to bear the burden could not sing, and those who would not sing could not bear the burden either. Without joy and singing Judaism is too heavy a burden to bear. You have to physically support Jewish institutions. You have to give of your means. You have to be there serving on committees and helping and doing things, but you also have to feel the joy and the happiness of Judaism. Only by doing both will the continuity of the Jewish people be assured. The third count was necessary in order to assure that we would be able to positively propagate the message of Judaism.

We read this Torah portion before Shavuot, the holiday on which we got the Torah, because this Torah portion teaches us what we need in order to make sure that the Jewish people as a people of Torah can continue forever. The Torah was given with water and with fire and in the wilderness. Yes, the Torah was given in the wilderness to teach us that we can exist in a wilderness, that if we go to a new place, if we have to make new beginnings, the Torah is not a hindrance but a great help. The Torah was given with water to teach us that we are supposed to take the water of Torah and, with it, squelch the pagan ideas that might erupt in our hearts. We are supposed to stay cool and not get enthusiastic about these fake ideas. The Torah was also given with fire. We are supposed to be enthusiastic about our own religious practices, about our own religious ideals, so that they will continue forever. Yes, it takes this type of optimism, this type of fire, if we are to overcome all the obstacles put in Judaism's path. It is only this type of optimism which gives you the ability to squelch the ideals that are false, which can only lead to violence and hatred, and which also gives you the ability to propagate Judaism with enthusiasm in a new place and in a new time and under new circumstances. This has always been the faith of the Jew, that the Torah is not just for one place and one time, but

that the Torah can even be lived in a wilderness. Judaism, if lived with enthusiasm, can have you singing as well as willing to bear its burdens. You cannot just sing without bearing burdens, without building its institutions, but without the singing, you will not have the strength to bear its burdens, but with both, Judaism will thrive. Judaism has enough within it to squelch all the ideals of paganism, violence, and hatred, and it also has within it the necessary enthusiasm to make sure that its own ideals can be propagated in any place and time.

I am reminded of the story they tell about twins. One was terribly pessimistic and the other was overly optimistic. The one who was pessimistic was afraid to cross the street because maybe a car would hit him. The one who was optimistic would cross the street assuming no car would ever hit him. The parents were concerned so they went to a psychiatrist to find out what they could do for the boys. The psychiatrist advised them that on their next birthday they should get the pessimist a real nice present and they should get the optimist a real crummy present. They woke up the boys on their birthday and told them to go to the garage where their presents were. There, for the pessimist, was a beautiful ten-speed bicycle and the boy started to cry. There, for the optimist, was a pile of horse manure and he was laughing and singing. The father asked the pessimist why he was crying. He said, "I'm crying because I am afraid to ride the bike. It may break." He asked the optimist why he was so happy. The boy said, "Well, listen, if there is horse manure around, there must be a pony. I'm going to go look for that pony." We see that it is this type of optimistic enthusiasm which will allow us to overcome all of our problems. Even if we are willing to assume responsibilities, it is not enough. We have to be willing to enthusiastically assume them. We are required to sing as well as to bear Judaism's burdens. If we are willing to do this, we have been assured that Judaism will survive. Yes, in the Russia of the last century life was hard. Yes, in many ways physically it was a very bad place, but it was spiritually developed. It was not a spiritual wilderness. People knew what to expect and Judaism flourished. When the immigrants came to America, they came to a spiritual wilderness. They had to start all over again. The Torah has assured us that we can do the job. Judaism can flourish in America, too, but it requires our cooperating together, our rejection of false ideas, and our joyous assumption of our Jewish responsibilities.

I am also reminded of the story they tell about a woman who came to Moscow where she knocked on the door of a couple she knew and she said, "Is your daddy home?" The little girl said he was not. She asked when he would be home. The little girl said he would be home in 8 hours, 45 minutes, and 35 seconds. The woman asked how she could be so exact.

She said, "My daddy is a cosmonaut and that is when he lands." The woman then asked her if her mother was at home. The little girl said she was not. The woman asked when she would come home. The little girl said she did not know. The woman said, "What do you mean, you don't know?" The little girl said, "Well, she went out to buy bread." Yes, in Russia things were uncertain physically for the Jew, but spiritually they were whole for the Jewish people. In America we had a great chance to succeed physically, but spiritually it was a wilderness. It still is spiritually hard for the Jews in America, but if we assume our responsibilities with joy, if we realize that we can squelch the negative ideals of the golden calf and of paganism by the ideals of the Torah, and if we also bring out the enthusiasm that is within each of us, we can rest assured that the Torah will flourish also

here in American. Let us hope and pray that the Torah will continue to thrive in American so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

NASO

Reading Others, False Impressions, and Harmony

One of the major difficulties in life is the problem of reading people. People who have the gift of reading people have a much easier time in life than those people who cannot. One of the major reasons why some students do very well in school without seeming to have to work is because they know how to read their teachers, while one of the reasons that some students, even though they work very hard, hardly pass is because they do not know how to read their teacher. Students who figure out what their teachers want and then give it to them do much better than students who only concentrate on the subject matter. Students who do not know how to figure out what their teacher considers important and what he does not do not adequately prepare those topics which the teacher wants them to know in depth, and so when they take a test, they hardly pass.

The same applies throughout life. It is very important that a person learn how to read others. If you can psyche out what a person wants, what a person really means when he says things, then you will have a much easier time in life. You will have an easier time in life because you will not be fooled most of the time by what people say. You will know what they really mean. People give all sorts of clues as to what they really mean when they talk. People speak not only with words, but also with body language, intonations, and gestures, and even the choice of their vocabulary gives important clues as to what they really mean. It is true that some people intuitively can read people while others have a very difficult time reading other people. People who cannot read others either take everything they hear at face value or they become completely befuddled by another person's responses to their own seemingly innocent remarks or gestures. They also are easy prey to false impressions. So often they are misled by false impressions. They will misunderstand when other people will praise them effusively or when other people will condemn vicious, terrible acts directed against them. They will, based upon this praise or condemnation, feel that these other people are willing to lend a hand, but in many instances this excessive praise or excessive expression of concern is nothing more than a cover-up for these other people's inaction. They do not want to get involved and they never wanted to get involved. All they wanted to do is stay out of the way.

It is very important that we all learn how to read others. So many tragedies in this world

have occurred because people have misread the intentions and actions of others. How many girls have been misled as to a boy's intentions by his compliments and smile? He had one thing in mind; she had another. How many nations have been deceived by other nations whose words and offers of brotherly support were only used to cover up a planned vicious attack? How many rebellions against tyranny and oppression have been started by people who thought the democratic countries would come to their aid, only to learn to their horror that these countries had no intention of doing anything, and how many family disputes have occurred because in-laws or children thought they were going to be taken into the business or that the property was going to be divided a certain way when in reality nothing of the sort was intended?

It is important that each of us look beneath the words, that each of us put our impressions into context. When we go to a ball game and hear the crowd yell, "Kill the umpire," or when we go to a football game and hear the crowd yell, "Give him the axe, the axe," we could think, especially if we are from a foreign culture, that the umpire's life is at stake or that the opposing team was about to be hacked to death. We all know that nothing of the sort was meant. On the other hand, many times when people come to America they are overwhelmed by what they feel are friendly responses, especially when people say, "Why don't you come over to my house," etc., only to be terribly disappointed. They do not realize that none of this American friendliness is ever really meant. It is important to know with whom we are dealing and in what context we are dealing in order to determine what is really meant and what is not meant.

This whole tragedy of the Kurds and Shiites in Iraq lays heavily on the conscience of America. From our President's statements it seemed obvious to them that we were going to help them. Maybe we were, but Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Syria did not want us to. In America, effusive comments of solidarity with the oppressed have many times turned out to be nothing more than hyperbole. Our inaction during the revolts in eastern Europe in the 1950's and 1960's are a testimony to this.

In the Torah portion Naso, we have illustrated this concern for being able to read people, this concern for being able to understand institutions and concepts in contexts. We always read the portion Naso around Shavuot. Shavuot is the holiday upon which we received the Torah. There are no major ceremonies connected with the holiday of Shavuot, probably because we have to learn that there is no substitute for the Torah, that the Torah can only be appreciated if it is studied and understood. Participation in elaborate ceremonies which would somehow reenact the giving of the Torah would falsify the Torah. Shavuot in our tradition is not known as the time when the Torah was given but is known in Jewish tradition as the time of the giving of the Torah, present tense, not past tense. Each of us must look into the Torah and understand what it says every day. Facile interpretations, which on the surface seem plausible, turn out, upon reading the Torah carefully, to be not only inaccurate, but also foolish. Several illustrations come to the fore from the Torah portion Naso.

In this Torah portion we learn how a person could become a Nazirite by vowing to abstain from wine, to not cut his hair, and to not come into contact with a dead body. At first glance we would think that the institution of the Naziriteship, which was open to both men and women, was a glorious institution which the rabbis would seek to enhance. However, on careful reading of the text we learn that after the completion of the period of Naziriteship, the Nazirite had to bring, among other sacrifices, a sin offering. The

rabbis ask, why did the Nazirite have to bring a sin offering, and the answer given is because he denied himself some of the pleasures of the world which he could have enjoyed, and this, the rabbis say, was a sin. If because of a tendency for drunkenness or lewdness or vanity he took upon himself this Naziriteship to cure a blemish in his character, it was allowed, but generally a person should not prohibit to himself those things which the Torah permits. More is not always better in religion. Religion is a lot like chemistry or cooking. It seeks to combine many desperate elements into a harmonious whole. It seeks to harmonize our conflicting needs and desires. Putting too much salt or too much sugar in a recipe will ruin it, it will not make it better.

Immediately after we learn about the Nazirites we learn about the priestly blessing. We might think that the blessing for peace and harmony would be the first blessing, but actually it is the last blessing because it is the crown of all other blessings. Unrestrained wealth is a curse as well as is unrestrained power. The Torah wants us to create individuals and societies who work together in such a way that all our conflicting desires and goals are in harmony, one with another. That is why the rabbis interpret the word for heaven, Shamayem in Hebrew, as water and fire working together in harmony.

Opposites, when they work together and complement each other, can produce heaven on earth.

The same can be said about the different offerings that were brought by the princes on the days the Tabernacle was consecrated. At first glance these offerings seem identical and they are, but the point is that in order for these princes to bring these identical offerings they had to mold and shape their characters in different ways so that they could achieve the inner harmony and integrity which these offerings represented. We do not all start from the same place in life. In order to mold and shape our characters into the kind, caring, compassionate people the Torah demands before our offerings can be accepted, we have to do a lot of work. We must learn how to harmonize our violent and passive instincts. We must learn how to balance our ambition with concern for others, etc. Just concern for others without our having any ambition is wrong, too.

We also learn in this Torah portion about maintaining family life. The ritual of the bitter waters, which the suspected unfaithful wife had to undergo in Temple times, was not meant to cause pain because, after all, divorce was always an option. It was meant to reconcile husband and wife so that they could continue to live together in harmony. If the man had been unfaithful, the whole process would not work. The purpose of much of this Torah portion is meant to give clear signals as to what types of relationships and attitudes Judaism values. People who send false signals, people who pretend to be something they are not, destroy the very harmony of the world. Many times they alibi and say, "Well, I didn't do anything. I didn't tell him to do it. All I did was mention certain possibilities." But these false signals or false impressions wreak havoc with relationships and the harmony of the world. We all have to learn that what we say or do not say means something. We all have to know to whom we are talking when we address remarks or body language. We all have to be aware that there are cultural differences. We must never give false signals or false impressions. We may think that it is cute or that since we are not legally culpable it is all right. It is not. False impressions lead to violence and hatred. The Torah wants us to live in harmony with ourselves, with others, with the environment, and especially with Him, the Holy One, Blessed be He. The only way we

can do this is by learning not to give false impressions and also by learning how to read others correctly. May we all learn to do so, so that harmony may come quickly to this earth so the Mashiach will come in our day soon. Amen.

BHALOSCHO

1991 Love, Hate, and Merging

One of the most puzzling aspects of life is how quickly we can all swing in our closest relationships from love to hate and then back to love and then back again to hate, etc. As has been stated many times, there seems to be a very thin line between love and hate.

Why should this be, and why is it that if you look at the many conflicts, both on a personal, ethnic, and national level, the worst conflicts are always between the people or groups who are the closest? Family spats, we know many times, lead to the worst kinds of violence. Religious disputes within a particular denomination or religion are generally much more severe than between rival religions. Disputes between friends and neighbors are much more likely to become vicious than disputes between strangers.

At first glance it would seem that love and hate are poles apart, that they are complete opposites, and that they have nothing to do with each other, but actually this is not the case at all. How often does it happen that a child who does not get something he wants or who feels that he has not been listened to will blurt out to his parents, "I hate you," but then a few minutes later, he will run to get a hug and kiss? How often does it happen that a loving spouse, because he or she feels terribly put upon and is filled with resentment, will actually express the same sentiment as a frustrated child, although probably not using the words, "I hate you," but then a few minutes later will be so overcome with remorse that he or she will want to make up? Why are love and hate so closely interwoven?

It seems to me that the reason why love and hate are so closely connected is because they really flow from the same basic human need. We all as individuals feel incomplete and alone. We know that in order to complete ourselves we must, so to speak, merge with others. We need to relate to others and to G-d. When we successfully merge with others, we produce love; however, when we unsuccessfully merge with others, we produce hate. Since all relationships are dynamic things, we must constantly adjust them. Hatred comes when we do not merge correctly, when we overstep the bounds of each individual's personality or when we feel or are in fact rejected. Judaism differs from eastern religions. One of the main purposes of eastern religions is to allow the individual to merge with the Divine so completely that he loses his individuality, so completely that his personality no longer exists. To Judaism that type of merging is anathema. We always want to maintain our individuality. Merging with others and with G-d should cause us to enhance our personalities, not to destroy them or attenuate them. When one party in a relationship

tries to dominate the other and tries to destroy the other person's individuality, hatred is the inevitable result. According to Judaism, when personalities merge, they must respect the independence of each other. This holds true in all relationships, parents and children, spouses, friends, etc. Even though we know in Jewish law we are supposed to respect our parents, yet there are limits to what parents can tell grown children. Grown children are not obligated to listen to the advice of parents when it touches upon their own personality and vital interests. Spouses, too, must be careful not to overstep the bounds of their spouse's inner integrity. If they do, hatred will inevitably result. Being snubbed, being refused the opportunity to engage in a friendship also causes great hatred. It is those with whom you wish to merge who can hurt you the most by either rejecting you or by wanting to establish a relationship based only on domination or on an identity of views. It is very difficult to be close and distant at the same time, but that is what a relationship demands. It is very difficult to maintain a good relationship. When feelings of resentment and hatred start to creep into a relationship, then you know that something is wrong and you had better start to correct it before it blows up into naked hatred. How often do we find in families brothers and sisters who do not talk to each other, or former good friends who will not even shake hands with each other because of some trivial incident that happened in the past? The incident looks trivial, but behind that incident are feelings of betrayal, feelings of a merger which went astray.

One of the most common dysfunctions in merging is the idea that unless the person with whom you want to merge shares your views identically on all subjects, he is rejecting you. It is impossible for many people to realize that relationships are not and cannot be built on the basis of identical views. People who have identical views with yours are nothing more than mirror images of yourself and cannot help you grow. You can only grow when you are able to assimilate the added perspectives of other people. Their views may overlap yours but they will not be identical and cannot be identical to yours. Each person has had different experiences. Each person's views must differ. Unfortunately, many people cannot accept the fact that other people with whom they want to have a relationship can have differing views. They want so much to have their views accepted as a sign of a perfect merger that they turn against those people with whom they should be the closest. That's why it often happens that members of the same religious denomination end up in the worst battles and why the worst fights are often between family members. In order to be successful in any relationship, each individual's views must be allowed to be expressed and, paradoxically, the closer a person's views are to our own, the more we may demand complete identity of these views. We can put up with differences of opinion when they are expressed by strangers, but not by loved ones. This is wrong.

In the Torah portion Behaaloscho we learn how G-d took from the spirit of Moshe and anointed with it seventy elders among Israel. Two of these elders, Eldad and Maydad, began prophesying in the camp. When Joshua learned of this he became very angry, ran to Moshe, and told Moshe that he should jail them. Moshe, though, answered, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all G-d's people be prophets." Joshua did not like what these prophets were prophesying. The Medrash says that they were prophesying how Moshe's leadership was not what it should be and how Joshua would take his place. Moshe knew that even though these views were antagonistic to him, they still may have some truth in them and, therefore, he should not shut these people up. They were calling it the way they saw it, even though from Moshe's perspective they were wrong.

Demanding identity of views, demanding no criticism from people with whom you wish to have a relationship, only destroys that relationship irreparably; it does not build it. We also learn in the Torah portion Behaaloscho how even the closest of relationships can be ruined when the dynamics of merging go astray. Who could have been closer to Moshe than his sister Miriam? After all, according to the Medrash, it was only thanks to Miriam that Moshe was even born. Before Moshe's birth, Pharaoh had come out with his nefarious decree to murder all the Jewish boys who were born by throwing them into the Nile. Amram, Miriam's father, was one of the leaders of the Jewish people and he decided then and there to divorce his wife so that they would not produce any more children. After all, why produce children who are only going to be killed? Because of Amram's importance, many people followed Amram's lead. When Miriam saw this, she went up to her father and said, "Father, Pharaoh decreed only against the boys, but you have decreed also against the girls." Amram saw that his daughter was right, and he immediately remarried his wife, as did all those who had followed him earlier. Subsequently, Moshe was born. When Moshe was placed in the reed grass along the shores of the Nile, it was Miriam who watched over him. It was Miriam who helped Moshe lead the Jewish people. It was Miriam who helped Moshe lead the Jewish people. It was Miriam who lead the women in song at the Red Sea, but, yet, it was Miriam who seemed to instigate a campaign against Moshe because of the Kushite woman whom he had married. Miriam had overstepped the bounds of their relationship. She somehow felt that she and Aaron were Moshe's equals and that Moshe had no business acting the way he did, perhaps because she felt she would have to emulate him or because she felt he did not take proper cognizance of her advice. G-d intervened Himself and told both Miriam and Aaron that although they were great people, Moshe was greater than they were. Then Miriam was stricken with leprosy, a disease which immediately would cast its sufferer out of the camp. Miriam would then have no hope of merging with anyone. Her friendships would be severely limited. Aaron turns to Moshe and says, "Please forgive us," and Moshe, being the kind of man he was, immediately prayed for her this beautiful prayer, "G-d, please heal her now." Miriam stayed outside the camp for seven days and then was healed. Moshe had no quarrel with his sister. He loved his sister, but somehow her love for him had become dysfunctional. There is not doubt that Miriam loved her brother Moshe. She had done so much for him, but somehow in the latter years the dynamics of this relationship had soured and her love for him had turned to resentment. G-d intervened before it turned to hatred.

Each of us must be very careful that in our relationships we do not reject others foolishly or try to dominate or try to distance ourselves too much from those we care for, otherwise their love will turn to hate. The little boy who screamed at his parents, "I hate you," is, of course, immature and has to be dominated to a great extent by his parents until he learns how to make decisions, but once a child learns how to make decisions, the parents, in most instances, must respect his individuality unless he makes life threatening decisions or decisions which will impair his future. After a child is 18 or leaves home, the decisions are his to make. Parents may still advise, but the ultimate decision lies with the child. Later on we find in the Torah portion Korach how the sternest challenge to Moshe's leadership came primarily from his own family. Korach, his cousin, and 250 Levites rise up against him. They do not understand why Moshe has excluded them from serving in the Temple as priests and given this job solely to his brother. Their great love for him had

turned to resentment and hatred. "How could you do this to us?" , they, in effect, say. "Aren't all the congregation holy? Why do you lift yourself up above this congregation?" Moshe had a real tough time with this rebellion and it was only because of G-d's intervention that he was able to put it down. Moshe could not understand why the Levites especially were so upset. They, after all, did have some role in the Temple. He did not understand that they felt they were being betrayed because they felt they had been denied the opportunity to merge their personality with G-d and others by serving as priests. Moshe had to explain to them that this was not so, that acceptance, merger with G-d and others, had nothing to do with those priestly tasks. In all relationships, too, we should never confuse outward trappings with the reality of the relationship which is an inner thing. It is not true that the bigger the diamond, the better the relationship. Love and hate are very difficult emotions. They are really intimately connected because they both actually stem from the same source. When we merge correctly, when we form relationships and maintain them in the correct way, they enhance our lives and add great love and happiness to them. However, when we form relationships faultily, dysfunctional, then hatred ensues. We must in every relationship not only desire to merge, but also to respect the other person's individuality. Love and respect must go together, otherwise hatred will follow. Let us all hope and pray that all our relationships will be filled with only love and not hate because each of us has learned to respect each other.

SHLACH

1992 Israel, G-d's Promise, and Holiness

Many times I have been asked, why is it that the State of Israel means so much to American Jewry? Many non-Jews especially ask this question. They cannot understand why the State of Israel means so much to most American Jews. Many American Jews, too, do not understand why they have such deep feelings for the State of Israel. Why does Israel mean so much to us? The obvious answer is that after the Holocaust every Jew needs an insurance policy. We all know that if the Holocaust could spring from Germany, the most educated, enlightened country in Europe, then it could happen anywhere. After all, it was not from the uneducated, the ruffians, the red-necks of society that the perpetrators of the Holocaust came; it was from the university trained. It was they who filled the ranks of the S.S., that special elite unit whose job it was to kill Jews. Most of the members of the S.S. were either lawyers or doctors. In order to get into the S.S. you had to have had a university education. You had to have come from a good family and to have had certain physical traits, etc. This is all true, but our need for Israel as a place to escape from anti-Semitism really does not explain the deep feelings most Jews have for Israel.

Israel is a sign, a symbol, for almost all Jews, whether they realize it or not, that G-d has not forsaken His promise to the Jewish people, that G-d's promise to the Jewish people still lives, that all the sacrifices that countless generations have made for 3500 years have not been in vain. After the Holocaust it seemed that perhaps G-d had forsaken us and no longer wanted to keep His promise to us. The birth of the State of Israel showed that G-d still wants to keep His promise to the Jewish people, that in spite of our losses, in spite of the persecutions, the concentration camps, G-d's promise to the Jewish people still stands firm. If anything would happen to Israel, G-d's promise to the Jewish people would again be called into question for the overwhelming majority of Jews. What's more, Israel represents to most Jews the hand of G-d working in history. Seven empires had to be destroyed before Israel could come into being: the Turkish Empire, the Russian Empire, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the German Empire, the Italian Empire, the French Empire, and the British Empire. So many unlikely things had to have happened to bring Israel into existence. The United States and Russia had to have cooperated in 1947, something which they did not do on any other issue, to pass a UN resolution which approved the creation of the Jewish State. Stalin, in spite of his rabid anti-Semitism, helped Israel come into being. He did this because of his desire to see the British expelled from the Middle East. He approved the shipment of large quantities of captured German

war material from Czechoslovakia to Israel. This enabled Israel to win its War of Independence. Ever since, Israel has benefited from a whole series of unlikely events. Who would have ever thought that communism would die so quickly in Russia with so few casualties and that 400,000 Jews would come out of Russia in just two years? Israel demonstrates to all Jews that G-d's hand is still moving in history, that G-d has not abandoned the world, and especially that He has not abandoned the Jewish people. To my Christian friends, when they ask, why does Israel mean so much to the Jewish people, I always answer them with a comparison which is not 100% correct but is something that they understand immediately. I tell them the Holocaust was our crucifixion and that the State of Israel is our resurrection. They immediately understand and from then on, they no longer question Israel's central role in the American Jewish religious consciousness. They understand that Israel is not just a place, but a symbol of G-d's concern for the Jewish people and for the world.

Israel is also important to the Jewish people as a symbol of what it means to be holy in the world. Many people have questioned how it could be that Israel is the Holy Land. When Mark Twain went to Israel a little over a hundred years ago and wrote a book about his experience called *Innocents Abroad*, he wrote that the Land of Israel was one of the most G-d-forsaken places he had ever seen. It was filled with malaria and wretched, sick, poverty-stricken human beings who could hardly scratch a living from the desert soil. He could not understand why anybody could consider this G-d-forsaken land a holy land. It was a wasteland, not a holy land. That, though, is precisely why Judaism has always considered the land of Israel a holy land. It is a holy land because everything is there but it is in the wrong place. There is a lot of water in the north, but the best agricultural land is in the south. There are all sorts of soils in Israel, but many of them need fertilization and great care in order for crops to be grown on them. Israel contains many different climatic zones. It may be snowing in Jerusalem, but just 45 minutes away by bus in Tel Aviv it may be 65 or 70 degrees. Jerusalem itself is only 30 miles from the Dead Sea. On a winter day in Jerusalem when the temperature is freezing, it might be 90 degrees in the Jordan Valley or along the Dead Sea. The lowest point on the earth is only 30 miles away from the highest spiritual point on earth, Jerusalem, just a half hour's drive by car. This, of course, teaches us that from the lowest point of physical degradation one can still rise up to the spiritual heights. G-d has even provided an Ein Gadi, a source of fresh water near the Dead Sea, to allow us to make the ascent up to Jerusalem, to spirituality. In Israel also, almost any plant or tree in the world can be grown because there are so many different climatic zones in it, but man has to work hard to produce them. Water has to be brought from the north to the south. Soils have to be properly conditioned. Man can turn Israel into a veritable Garden of Eden, but it takes hard work and constant cooperation between all segments of society. Everybody has to participate in turning the desert into a verdant blooming garden.

That, of course, is what holiness is in Judaism. Holiness requires each of us to work together to make this a better place, a better world. In Judaism a person is not considered holy who separates himself from the community, who tries through mystic contemplation or study to achieve closeness to the Divine. This Jewish Idea of holiness is stressed in the Torah portion *Shlach Lecha*. The Jewish people are poised to enter the land of Israel. They send twelve spies to seek out the land. Ten of the spies return with an evil report. Only two of them return with a positive report. The spies not only bring an evil verbal

report about the land of Israel, but they also bring some of the fruits of the land of Israel. These fruits are beautiful and large and show how the land is productive and good. However, when the ten evil spies give their report, they say that "the land which we have passed in it to spy it out is a land which eats its inhabitants." What could this possibly mean, a land which eats its inhabitants? Here they had just brought some of the fruits of the land which were huge and beautiful and which showed how productive the land was. How could they say that the land was not productive, that the land did not produce enough to support a population, that those who lived on it were, as Mark Twain said, wretched and poverty-stricken.

The word *Yoshveho* can also mean in Hebrew not just those who inhabit it (the land), but it can mean those who sit in it, those who are not active, those who are passive. In Israel you cannot be passive and expect to benefit from the land. Everyone has to be active. Everyone has to be willing to work together. Everyone has to be willing to devote his time and energy to make things grow. Maybe occasionally men of great energy and strength can produce something from the land, but most common people can produce nothing unless they are willing to mutually help and support each other. This the ten evil spies did not think was proper for the Jewish people to do. They had wandered in the desert for forty years learning Torah. All their physical needs were taken care of. All these ten spies wanted to do was stay in the desert and learn Torah. They did not see any need to reenter history and to try to make Jewish ideals come alive in the real world. They also knew that there were great risks if Judaism would reenter history. There was a chance that some of its ideals and values would be polluted by the pagan world and that there would be losses among the Jewish people. Some might be tempted by the paganism of the Canaanites. They did not want to take this chance. They totally disregarded the traditional Jewish view that the whole purpose of creation was to have the Jewish people enter the world and sanctify it. Basic Jewish doctrine teaches that when G-d created the world, He had to contract Himself in order for there to be a place for the world to be created, but when G-d contracted Himself, He left little pieces of Himself in everything, so that when we do mitzvahs, we release these sparks and are drawn closer to each other and to G-d. It is our job to release these sparks. This we can only do if we enter the real world.

It is interesting to note that when the spies returned, they brought back fruits of the land of Israel with them. The fruits of the land of Israel have special rules and regulations, most prominent among them is the law of *Orla*, which says that for the first three years of a tree's growth you cannot use the fruit of that tree. The fruit of the fourth year of a tree's growth you must take up to Jerusalem and there you can eat the fruit, but only if you are in a state of ritual purity. This fruit is called holy for giving praise to G-d. In the fifth year you can eat from the fruit of the tree anywhere you want, whether you are ritually pure or not. The Chassidim base much of their philosophy on the interpretation of the laws of *Orla*. They say that the first three years stand for the first three of the five stages of a man's soul. They stand for *Aseeah*, *Yetzeera*, and *Bereeah*, for the creative impulses within man. Every human being wants to leave his mark on the world. Every human being knows he is unique and special and wants to leave behind something that shows that he has lived, that shows that he was important. The fourth level of the soul is *Atzeelut*, which stands for spiritual development, for getting close to G-d by learning how to become a moral human being, but this is not the highest level of the soul. The

highest level of the soul is Keter. That is the fifth year when a man comes back to his own society and tries to implement in it everything that he has learned, to put into practice the moral ideals of his study. He is to take his creative impulses and make them positive. Creative impulses can also be destructive. We witnessed this in the riots of Los Angeles. People, if they have no positive channels for their creative energies, will instead channel them in negative directions. Everyone wants respect, and if people feel that they are not getting respect, they will channel their creative energies negatively. Each of us must learn how to channel our creative impulses positively, but just learning how to do it is not enough. We must return to society and use what we have learned to sanctify our creative impulses and make them benefit all humanity. That's what holiness is: taking the ideals we all cherish and, by working together with others, making them work in society. We cannot do this alone. We need the help of others. Zionism actually sprang out of this Chassidic idea, which was implied in all of Judaism's basic texts. We cannot just think about Zion. We cannot just study about a Jewish society which will be a light unto the nations. We have to try to bring it about. We have to, by all Jews working together, fulfill the dream not only of the ingathering of the exiles, but also the dream of making Israel into a model state which will embody the ideals of our faith and allow it to serve as a light unto the nations.

The State of Israel is the beginning of this process. To a Jew it signifies that Jewish ideals and values are real. They are not just fairy tales. They can actually be implemented in life. They have to be implemented in life if the world is to be saved from another Holocaust, if the world is to be saved from the recurring barbarism which periodically destroys all moral values.

In the Kedusha which we say in every Musaf we chant, "Holy, holy, holy is the L-rd of hosts; the whole world is filled with His glory," and then we say, "The ministering angels ask one another, where is the place of Your glory?" We have just said that the whole world is filled with G-d's glory. Why are we now saying that the ministering angels are asking where is the place of His glory? The answer is that the world is filled with the potential glory of G-d, but it is up to us to reveal it. It is up to us to make the world holy. Yes, Israel is the symbol of the effort of the Jew to make this world holy. Yes, Israel means a lot to all of us. It is not just our insurance policy, although if it would be only that, it would still be important to us. It is primarily the symbol that G-d's promise has not lapsed, that G-d keeps and continues to keep His promise to the Jewish people, and it is also the symbol of the Jewish mission in the world to reveal G-d's glory by making this world a holy place. This we can only do if we all work together to bring forth the potential holiness in everything. Let us all always be worthy of everything Israel represents.

KORACH

1992 Division, Ambition, Representation, and Unity

One of the paradoxes of modern democracy is that we have to accentuate differences before we can have unity. The basis of democracy is that all points of view should be expressed so that when a consensus is reached, everyone will accept this consensus because everyone has had a hand in forming it. However, even in our modern democracy it is agreed that there are certain things that can never be decided by consensus, for example, religion, personal matters, etc. For example, the state cannot tell you who or when or even if you have to marry, or that you have to take a certain job, etc. The underlying theory in a modern democracy is that unity can best be achieved by airing differences. Sometimes, as during election time, these differences can be accentuated to such an extent that many times it is very hard to understand how after the election these same people who had voiced such terrible predictions as to what would happen if a certain person or his ideas would triumph could ever work together again. That's why usually the first thing that happens after an election is that the winning candidate praises the loser and states who we all have to come together to work for the good of the country. Differences, though, if they are fanned indiscriminately and if they are allowed to become too personal, can result in hatred, and hatred can destroy everything and make it impossible to unite. When we accentuate the differences we have with others, we must never let these differences become personal and turn into hatred.

We learn this from Abraham. Abraham was the first Ivri, or Hebrew. Ivri in Hebrew means, according to the rabbis, that he was on one side and the whole world was on the other side, that even though Abraham disagreed with everyone, he was also noted for his kindness and generosity to everyone. He knew how to disagree without becoming disagreeable.

In the Torah portion Korach, we learn how Korach led a rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu. His purpose was not to raise issues so that the people would unite on a higher level. His purpose was just to divide. That's why in the Aramaic translation of the Torah, the Targum Unkulus, this Torah portion does not begin with the words "Korach took" but instead, it begins with the words "Korach divided." Dividing to destroy or just to divide is never considered a good thing in Judaism. This is emphasized in the very first chapter of the Torah when we read about the days of creation. Every other day of creation is referred to as a good day, but not the second day. The rabbis ask why. They answer, because the Torah says, "And He divided between the waters that are under the firmament and between the waters that are on top of the firmament." Because the second

day does not talk about the reuniting of these elements on a different plane, this day is not referred to as a good day. On the third day, by contrast, where it says, "Let the waters be gathered from under the heavens to one place," it says, "And G-d saw that it was good." Good comes not when we divide, but when we bring things together, when we unite. Of course, we all know that it is very important to analyze and divide things into their component parts, but only as a prelude to reuniting them on a higher level. Children are commanded to separate from their parents so that they can cling to their spouses. This we also learn in the Torah portion Bereishis, "Therefore, shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife." We divide, separate, in order to reunite on a different level, but separating in order to just separate or to destroy is evil.

We see this today. The Soviet Union has been separated into its components. We hope and pray that they have not separated in order to do battle and destroy each other but in order to reunite on a higher plane, a plane of cooperating independent nations. We have all seen the tragedy of Yugoslavia where the separation of its republics did not lead to a reuniting on a higher plane, but instead has led to terrible destruction where separation has been used to destroy, not to build.

Throughout this Torah portion Korach, we read continually about separation and unity. Korach lambastes Moshe. He says, "Why have you lifted yourself above this congregation?", and Moshe, when he replies to the sons of Levi who have joined in the rebellion because they felt that Aaron and his sons were given the duties of the priests when they should have been given to them, says, "Is it a small thing that G-d separates you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to Him? The separation was to bring you nearer to Him... To stand before the congregation to serve them." The Levites' separation, although not as great as the priest's separation from the congregation, was meant to elevate them and the congregation. This also applied to Aaron. Differences themselves are not divisive as long as we realize that we need each other. Duties are divided so that we can have a greater whole. If everybody in a factory has exactly the same job, could anything be produced? If we were all doctors, who would produce the tools that the doctors need? Who would produce the offices that they have to practice in? Who would produce the food that we all need to eat? We divide in order to create a greater unity. Korach divided in order to conquer, not to form a consensus or higher unity. He wanted his and only his view to totally prevail. Korach did not realize that he needed Moshe or anybody else's perspectives as well as his own. That's why at the end the earth swallowed him up. He was out to destroy. His view was either my way or no way. Even the name Korach signifies that. Korach in Hebrew means to uproot. He was not interested in building; he was only interested in controlling. He left no trace on the earth. He was swallowed up.

However, the 250 Levites who joined him and who were struck down when they offered incense to G-d did leave behind something. Moshe was commanded by G-d to take the firepans of these men who had sinned at the cost of their lives and have them beaten into plates to become a cover for the altar. They had usurped the functions of the priests and were punished, but their motivations, the rabbis say, were pure. They were taken in by Korach. They thought that they were dividing in order to reunite on a higher plane. They were dupes. They did not realize that Korach was motivated by hatred and envy.

In our own day we see people who vote for candidates like David Duke, who are filled with hatred. They are taken in by the arguments of people like David Duke because of

their own troubles or ambitions. They do not take a David Duke's hateful message seriously. They only want their problem solved. They act like the 250 Levites. These people eventually pay. The German people, by voting for Hitler, saw their country prosper for a while, but they paid when their country was destroyed and divided after the Second World War. Still one-third of their country is in Polish hands. Many times when people are overwhelmed by ambition or problems they can be taken in easily by people who make all sorts of promises to them, promises which blame their problems on others, promises which say that if we will divide and destroy, everything will be all right. These people follow in the footsteps of the 250 Levites. They believe these promises because they want to believe the Korachs of their day.

Problems have to be aired and solutions have to be arrived at which do not divide but which instead unite. The burden of solving a country's problems must fall equally and fairly on all segments of society. Perhaps one of the greatest failures of America today is that because of the high cost of television, only people who have money are represented by candidates. Candidates need money to run and win elections, and those who give campaign donations to candidates have an inordinate amount of influence over them. The candidate knows, even though it is not stated, that if he does not listen to his campaign contributors, they will not give him money next time when he runs. Society is now divided between those who can give and do give campaign contributions and those who cannot give or who can only give very little campaign contributions. Those groups who cannot give or who can only give very little have slowly lost their voice in American. Korach's complaint against Moshe was actually a badge of honor. Moshe, because he was able to lift himself above the congregation, was able to represent all the people, not just a narrow segment of society. Later on, this idea is repeated. After the Jewish people had become disheartened, when they had seen how Korach's rebellion had been put down and how the 250 Levites had been struck down and had gathered against Moshe and Aaron, G-d tells Moshe, "Lift yourself up in the midst of this congregation." The only way this congregation can be saved is if they feel that you, Moshe, represent all their interests, not just your own interests or the interests of your brother. Therefore, when a plague breaks out, Moshe tells Aaron to run into the midst of the congregation with an incense burner. Aaron literally stands between the living and the dead. When the people see that Aaron is in the midst of the congregation, they then finally realize that what Moshe and Aaron do, they do for the good of the total congregation and not for just a small part of the congregation, and the community is saved. The word incense in Hebrew can also mean to be connected. When the people know that Moshe and Aaron are connected to all of them, then the plague stops, the plague of disunity which can only lead to destruction. In America today, many people feel that their leaders do not represent them. They feel that their leaders only represent the country club set or big business or other special interests, and that their leaders are not connected to the whole people. Yes, we have to have divisions in society. Yes, there have to be disparate views voiced if our nation is to be strong and problems faced squarely. However, our leaders must represent all of us, not just some of us. G-d told Moshe to have Aaron and the princes of each tribe place their staffs into the Tabernacle. The next morning when the staffs were brought out, only Aaron's had flowered. The other staffs represented only their tribes. Aaron's staff represented all the people and, therefore, it flourished. We find that when the Jewish people did enter Israel, the Levites and priests lived scattered among all the people. They

did not live in just one tribal region. The tribes represented their interests; the Levites and the priests were to represent the total community's interests. Therefore, they were supported by the community and did not own any land.

Democracy needs all points of view to be represented if it is to be strong, and it needs a national leadership which represents all the people. Originally when the framers of the Constitution of the United States, who were greatly influenced by the Bible, gathered together, they intended that the Congress would represent the interests of each individual state while the President would represent the entire people. Korach only represented his narrow interests. Although he was the richest man in Israel, he wanted more. He wanted total control. Moshe and Aaron represented the whole people and, therefore, they were deserving to continue to be the leaders of the Jewish people. Yes, there were princes who represented the tribes of Israel. Yes, all views had to be represented. Yes, we divide in order to reunite on a higher plane. Moshe and Aaron represented that higher plane. Let us all hope and pray that when we discuss things in the Jewish community as well as in America, we will always realize that it can never be either my way or no way, but that we should always be prepared to ultimately represent all the people and not just our own narrow interests.

CHUKAS

Dependence, Independence, and the Torah

In the Torah portion Chukas we learn about the laws of the red heifer. We learn how Miriam died. We learn about the sin of Moshe when Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock. And we also then learn about the death of Aaron, and then we learn a very puzzling episode. We learn how the Jewish people, when they journeyed from Mount Horeb by way of the Red Sea to circumvent the land of Edom, became impatient because of the harshness of the way, and they spoke against G-d and Moshe, saying, "Why did You bring us out from Egypt in order to die in the desert, because there is not bread and there is not water and our soul loathes this light bread." In other words, even though they really were well fed and they did have water, they complained. They complained against G-d and against Moshe, and G-d sent a plague of burning snakes against them. Then the people came to Moshe and said, "We have sinned because we have spoken against G-d and you. Pray to G-d that He shall remove from us the snakes." Moshe prayed for the people, and G-d said to Moshe, "Make for yourself a Serof, a fiery serpent, and put it on a banner and anybody who shall be bitten shall see it and live." Moshe made a Nachash, a copper snake, and he put it on the banner, and everybody who would be bitten by a snake, if he would look at this copper snake, he would live. This seems a very strange story. What is it doing in this Torah portion that had talked about Moshe's sin and Aaron's death and Miriam's death and the red heifer? Why was it put in this particular Torah portion?

If we look at this incident, it seems at first glance that the Jewish people had learned nothing in the forty years of their wandering in the desert, because when they had left Egypt, they had also complained. "Why did You bring us out of Egypt to kill us in the desert?" It seems that even though there was a new generation, the Jewish people were repeating the old mistakes. What's more, what is this whole business about making a copper snake and looking up to it? Judaism does not believe in these type of remedies. There are certain religions that believe that if you are sick or harmed, all you have to do is pray. They do not believe in doctors, but we are the opposite. We say that it is against the law to live in a city that does not have a doctor. We do not believe in these superstitious types of remedies. Of course, we believe that G-d helps and we have to pray, but we also believe that we have to go to doctors. What is this whole rigmarole of looking up at a copper snake? It seems to be so un-Jewish. Their cure, it seems, did not depend upon normal human remedies, but instead, it seems to be based upon some sort of magical act.

Immediately after this, we learn about a song that the Jewish people sang. When the Jewish people left Egypt and the Egyptian army had been destroyed on the Red Sea, the Jewish people sang a magnificent song, the Shira, which we repeat every day. Here, too, after this plague of the snakes, etc., and after they had begun to circle in Transjordan in

order to prepare to enter into the Land of Israel, they sang another song. What did they sing? They sang, "Spring up, O wells. Sing ye unto it, the well which the princes gave, which the nobles of the people had delved with their scepter and with their staves." What is this song doing here? What does it mean? Why should the Torah have put this song here?

I think that if we look carefully at this whole Torah sedra, we will see that the problems that were confronting the Jewish people now were different from the problems that had confronted them when they left Egypt. The problem that had confronted the Jewish people when they left Egypt were those that were connected with their being a slave people. They were completely dependent. They did not have the necessary confidence in order to strike out and be independent. Moshe's job was to goad them and push them, to show that they had the talent in order to fulfill all their ambitions, that they could accomplish things, that they did not have to be dependent. In fact, in the Torah portion Beshalach, we learn how Moshe is actually told to strike the rock because when the Jewish people left Egypt the major problem was that they were too narrow. Therefore, the rock is called Tsur, which in Hebrew also means narrow. The people then were confronted with the problem of how they could assume responsibility. How could they be independent when they were so used to being dependent? Moshe, here in our Torah portion, sinned because he thought the people were suffering from the same problem, when actually they were not. When the first generation which had come out of Egypt had complained to Moshe, they had said, "Why did you take us out from Egypt to kill us in the desert?" There was a major difference between these two generations. The previous generation wanted to be dependent. This generation wanted to be independent. This generation's problem was not that they did not feel they had the necessary talent and confidence in order to conquer their problems. Their problem was that they wanted to be completely independent. They didn't want to be dependent on anybody. They didn't want to be dependent even on the Torah or even on G-d. Therefore, they complained about the manna because the manna stopped them from being independent. The manna made them dependent upon G-d for their bread. They were also dependent upon G-d for their water. They wanted to do things the natural way. They wanted to go out and be independent. In fact, most people want to be independent. Most people hate being dependent. Therefore, when you help somebody and make him dependent on you, you make them end up by hating you because you have taken away their pride and dignity. The Jewish people now in this Torah portion wanted to be independent. That is why in this Torah portion we learn about the red heifer, too. Because most of the time when you became ritually impure you could purify yourself. All you had to do was dip in a mikvah, but when you came into contact with the dead, you could not become ritually pure by yourself. You had to then be sprinkled with the ashes of the red heifer on the third day and on the seventh day by a Cohen. This teaches us that even when we are very independent in everything else, we still are dependent upon others for solace and comfort during the rough spots of life. Moshe did not understand that the people at this time wanted to know why there had to be death. The people needed Moshe to explain to them, to give them comforting words. They were independent people. They did not have to be goaded and pushed and beaten in order to do what they had to do. They wanted to understand problems like death, suffering, and pain, etc. Moshe should have given them words and not have beaten the rock which here is called Selah, which stands for the

problems of life, like death, which can only be overcome by silence and comforting words. Here, too, we see that the Jewish people wanted to be independent, not dependent on other people, but they couldn't.

In this particular Torah portion, what the people were really complaining about was that they did not want to be dependent anymore. They wanted to be independent. Moshe should have known this. They no longer had Aaron and Miriam to lean upon and they didn't need any replacements for them. Moshe should have known that he could not really be the leader of the Jewish people anymore because he had been the leader whose job it had been to teach them how to be independent. Now they were independent. Now they needed a different type of leader. But the people now made a fundamental mistake. What was their fundamental mistake? It was that they thought since they now were independent and were able to make all their own decisions in life, they didn't need G-d or the Torah, that since they had such confidence in themselves, they could only make correct decisions, G-d and the Torah had no place in their decision making. They didn't need G-d or the Torah. They had to be independent of both of them. That was their great mistake.

When they complained against G-d and Moshe, G-d sent against them the fiery serpents. Notice that when G-d told Moshe to make them a serpent and put it on a banner, He used the word Saraf. But when Moshe fulfilled G-d's command, he made a Nachash. What does Nachash mean in Hebrew? It means not only a serpent, a snake, but it also means assumptions. They had made bad assumptions in life. They thought that now that they were independent, they no longer needed family, that they no longer needed to follow the elementary rules of moral behavior, that everything would be okay because they were in charge, but it was not. Human society turned into a snake pit. That is, of course, what has happened throughout history when human beings defy the laws of morality. Today in America we have just about destroyed the family. Divorce is so easy. A person in America can get a divorce in sixty days. The other spouse does not even have to agree. Brothers have no responsibility to help sisters or sisters to help brothers, grandparents to help grandchildren, etc. There is no family solidarity. There is no feeling of family security from which children can sprout and grow. Even vis-a-vis charity, rich people who in the past have set high standards of giving are giving a lot less charity than they did before, even though their incomes have doubled in the last ten years. The middle class, whose income has actually shrunk, is giving a little bit more charity. We see that when it comes to the values of society, we cannot be independent of the Torah. People cannot believe that they can be unfaithful in marriage and that their marriages are still going to be secure. Today, of course, with birth control pills, it is not only men that are fooling around, but women also who are fooling around. People feel that since they are independent, they can make any type of choice that makes them happy. Well, it may make them happy for the short run, but for society it is devastating and for them, too, in the long run it is devastating and will make them terribly unhappy. When people only choose their short term happiness, society turns into nothing more than a snake pit. G-d told Moshe, "Take a Saraf." A saraf does not only mean a snake in Hebrew, it also means an angel. Tell the Jewish people that they have a mission in this world, that they have to be G-d's partner in creation. Remind them that they have a job fit for an angel, to participate in the serious enterprise of perfecting the world and for this they will have to have strong families. Moshe did not take a Saraf, he took a Nachash, because he thought

that it may be too hard for the people to understand this message. Instead he took a Nachash, which means assumptions. He showed them how their assumptions were wrong, how they were hurting themselves, how because they did not want to be bound by any moral law, their children would not be bound by moral law either. How by their choosing short term happiness they no longer would have the will to enforce moral law upon their children, because they themselves knew they were flaunting the moral law. They were not saying to their children, "I am breaking the moral law, but I know I'm wrong, please forgive me, but I cannot help it." Instead they were saying to the children, "I am right to break the moral law." Therefore, their children felt that they also were right to break the moral law. Therefore, Moshe showed them that these assumptions can only lead to disasters. Yes, be independent, make your own decisions, but realize that you are still dependent on the Torah, its values, and upon its morality.

That's why, immediately after, we learn how the Jewish people sang a song. What is the song that they sang? They sang about a well. When they came out of Egypt, they sang about the sea cascading back over the Egyptian army, which meant that at that time they were completely dependent upon G-d for their salvation. Now they dug a well. They were now talking about a well, human effort. Human effort is very important in life. It is necessary. We all know that G-d helps those who help themselves. The world is a partnership between G-d and man. Yes, we have to be independent to a large degree, but we still need G-d and the Torah. We are born dependent and independent. G-d helps those who help themselves. But even when we help ourselves, we are still dependent upon the Torah. The word well in Hebrew also refers to the Torah. Torah is referred to as Mayim, water, throughout all Jewish literature. We see from this that the Jewish people had learned to be independent. They now could make their own way, but they still needed G-d's help. They had to be independent vis-a-vis other human beings, but they still were dependent upon G-d's help and upon G-d's Torah. This, of course, is something that we should all realize. Our independence does not mean that we should ever be independent of the Torah and its values.

I am reminded of the story they tell about two truck drivers who were driving down the road when they saw a sign that said "Clearance 10'-2"." They got out of their truck and measured their truck, and they saw that their truck was 10'8". They decided that they would look both ways and see if there were any cops around. One turned to the other and said, "Ah, I don't see any cops. Let's make a run for it." Of course, their truck was squashed. You cannot violate the moral laws, the laws of the Torah, and have a good society. You will only end up by hurting yourself and by making society a snake pit. Let us all hope and pray that all of us will remember that although we should always be independent, we are still dependent upon the values of the Torah and, by doing so, let us create wonderful societies so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

BALAK

Choice, Teshuva, Leadership, and Blessing

In the Torah portion Balak we learn how Balak, the King of Moab, hired Bilam, a soothsayer, to curse the Jewish people. He knew that if he could have the Jewish people cursed, if he could cause the Jewish people to question themselves, if he could cause the Jewish people to fight among themselves, he would then be able to overcome them.

Bilam, the rabbis say, was a prophet on the same level as Moshe Rabbeinu. But he used his gift of prophecy to hurt people, not to help them. He sold his talents to the highest bidder. We all know how we can take almost any situation and reframe it in such a way as to cause a person to look bad. We can take any incident and phrase our questions in such a way as to make a person look bad no matter which way he answers. For example, as they teach in law school, if a person is asked, "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?", no matter what he answers, he's damned.

Bilam was an expert spin doctor. In politics today, spin doctors, experts in public relations, are hired to spin, to reframe all issues, so that their candidates will always be viewed very favorably, while their opponents will always be viewed unfavorably. Words are turned and twisted, or spun, so that vicious innuendo can be used against an opponent. Bilam was a person who could use words this way. He could turn everything around and make people whose motives were only pure and right look terrible, look very villainous. Bilam offered his talents to the highest bidder. Bilam wanted to go with the officers of Moab, who were sent by Balak to hire him to curse the Jewish people, but G-d initially prevented him from doing so. Finally G-d consented to his going, but He told Bilam that he could only say what G-d would instruct him to say. Bilam still had hopes that he would somehow be able to finagle and turn, spin the words around so that the Jewish people would be cursed, so that the Jewish people themselves would look askance at themselves. For example, in our own day many journalists go to Israel with the intent of blackening Israel's name. They somehow manage to turn the good things that Israel does around. For example, they say, yes, Israel is a democracy and has democratic elections, but there are Arabs only in the Knesset, not in Cabinet posts. No Arab has been appointed Minister of Defense, etc. They always seem to try to turn everything around against Israel, even though in the end they are forced, because of the facts, to give Israel credit for the many things that she is doing right now.

We learn that after Bilam had obtained permission from G-d to go back with the officers of Moab, he himself saddled his own donkey and proceeded to travel to Balak. Where did the officers of Moab go to? The text doesn't say. All it says is that Bilam's donkey saw an angel of G-d standing in the road with an unsheathed sword in his hand. The donkey was afraid to go further, so he turned from the road and went into the field. Bilam hit the donkey to turn him back to the road, but to no avail. Then, while the donkey was in the field between two rows of the vines, he saw the angel again with his unsheathed sword.

Since there was a fence on one side and a fence on the other side, all the donkey could do was squeeze by the angel. In the process, he pushed Bilam's leg against the wall. Bilam again hit him. Finally the angel stood right in front of the donkey. This time the path was very narrow and the donkey could not move at all, so the donkey just sat down. Again Bilam hit him with his staff. G-d then opened the mouth of the donkey and the donkey said to Bilam, "What is this that I did to you that you should hit me these three times?" Bilam answered the donkey and said, "Because you have mocked me, I would have, if I had a sword in my hand, killed you." What's going on here? The Rambam explains that this was actually just a dream. After all, we have heard many times about people who, when they opened their mouths, sound like donkeys, but it is not very often that we have heard about donkeys who, when they open their mouths, sound like human beings. This whole episode was to teach us a very important lesson.

The rabbis tell us that in this episode we are being taught what is necessary in order for the Jewish people to be blessed and not be cursed. What is necessary for the Jewish people to be blessed is for the Jewish people to recognize that the Jewish people's uniqueness rests upon the virtues of the three fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That was why the angel confronted Bilam's donkey three different times, to remind Bilam that the Jewish people have three unique characteristics which demand that they be blessed. The word for donkey here also is not the normal word for donkey, Chamor, but Asson. Asson in Hebrew can also mean you. Bilam was going to try to destroy the people by dividing them against themselves. He was going to talk about you this and you that, instead of talking about we. He was going to talk about you over here did this and you over there did that. He was going to try to set one group against the other within the Jewish people. This was his plan. That's why when the Torah says that he saddled his donkey, it uses the word Asson for donkey and continues to use this word Asson throughout the whole episode. He was going to try to use this technique to divide the Jewish people. But an angel confronted him three times, reminding him that a people who had the virtues of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had to be blessed, not cursed. What are these qualities exemplified by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that forced Bilam to bless the Jewish people?

The first quality is that we have free will, we can change, we are not subject to fate, as many ancient people believed. We can make tomorrow better than today. The second quality is that our past choices do not bind us forever. We can do Teshuva and choose a new path. The third quality is that the Jewish people have always had leaders who are interested in all the people and not just in some of the people. In fact, later on when we learn how Bilam spied out the Jewish people from three different locations, from Bamos Baol, from Tsofeem, and also from Peor, he was forced to bless them because these three places also indicated the three different qualities of the forefathers. Abraham believed that we can take our destiny in our own hands, that we, as a people, can make choices that will determine whether we have a good future or a dismal future, that it is up to us. We have the power to change things. Unless we believe that we have the power to change things, we are not even going to try. That, of course, is one of the reasons why we Jewish people have risen to such prominence in every society in which we have lived. If we look in the newspapers, we will always find that the names of Jewish people are very prominent, especially in the arts and sciences. This is so because we feel that we can change things. Things can be made better, and we can help make them better. Our destiny

is, to a large measure, in our hands. This belief is a distinctly Jewish idea, and that is what Abraham stood for. Abraham was alone against the whole world, but he believed that he could change the whole world. That's why we learn in this Torah portion that an angel was in the middle of the road and the donkey veered off into the field. Abraham had two sons originally. One son, Yitzchak, believed in that principle that we can all make choices, but Ishmael was a wild man. Ishmael believed only in fate. He did not feel that he had any control over anything. He just had to follow his impulses, whatever they were, because that was the way it was fated to be. We do not believe that. When Bilam came to Bamos Baol to spy out the Jewish people, he saw that they were at the heights of Baol, which can mean that they were at the height of ownership. They were owners of themselves. They had the ability to make choices, to make moral choices.

The second quality the Jewish people needed in order to be blessed was the realization that even if we make bad choices, these bad choices can be rectified. If we have the power to make choices, sometimes we are going to make bad choices. G-d will still come to our aid and still help us as long as we realize that these were bad choices and we are willing to do Teshuva to return and make good choices. We all have to make choices. G-d says, yes, make all the decisions you want but if you make bad decisions, don't feel that you have to stick to these bad decisions. Change these bad decisions to good decisions. That's what I expect of you. When Bilam came to Tsofeem to spy out the Jewish people, he was looking for their weaknesses. Do the Jewish people think they can never do any wrong? Or do they expect that they may have to change some of their decisions?

Tsofeem means to expect. Bilam, after looking at the Jewish people says, "You did not see any iniquity in Jacob or perverseness in Israel." What does this mean? Israel never sinned? Israel never made any bad decisions? No, Israel had made bad decisions. Israel had sinned. But when we sin, we are willing to rectify these sins. When we see that we have made bad decisions, we are willing to change. That, of course, is a very basic Jewish position. We must believe in Teshuva in order to be worthy of a blessing. We cannot say that just because we have made a bad decision in the past, we can never change that decision. We have to change that decision. Obviously, in Bilam's time the Jewish people sinned and made wrong choices, but when they realized that they were wrong choices, they did Teshuva. They changed these decisions. That's why it says G-d did not see any sin among Israel.

Therefore, we learn here, too, that when the angel stopped the donkey the second time, the donkey was forced to push himself against the wall, crushing Bilam's foot in the process. Here this incident refers to Yitzchak. Yitzchak had two sons. One son was, of course, Yaacov, who believed that in this world you get to make choices and if you make bad choices, you still have the ability to rectify them. There is still Teshuva in the world. Esau, on the other hand, was a person who believed we had choices but once we make choices, we are stuck with them. We could not do anything about it. That, of course, is wrong.

Finally, we learn when the angel stopped the donkey for the third time, the donkey could not go anywhere at all. He had to lie down. This incident refers to Yaacov and to the third quality which a people must have in order to be blessed. A people must have leadership which is interested in all the people and not just part of the people. All of Yaakov's children remained Jews. Originally Yaacov's sons were fighting, one against the other. They made fun of the sons of the concubines. They sold Joseph into slavery. Soon

though, they realized, because of Yaacov's influence, that they were wrong, as is proved by how they acted when they were accused of being spies before the Viceroy of Egypt who turned out to be Joseph. They had to be for each other. When they had made a decision now, it could not just be in the interests of a few of the brothers but had to be in the interests of all the brothers. That is why Bilam, when he goes to Peor to spy out the Jewish people, says, "How beautiful and wonderful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel." Peor means to reveal yourself. The Jewish people revealed that they were interested in the whole people, not just part of the people. That's why this statement is in the plural. This statement concerns the whole people. The Jewish people, even when they reveal themselves, even when they reveal what their true motives are, always reveal that they are concerned about the whole people and not just about certain Jews. The leader who separates the people and says you and you and you, instead of saying we, that type of leader cannot bring blessing to the Jewish people. Bilam was forced to bless the Jewish people because the Jewish people had three great qualities: one, that it believed that we can choose, that we can be better tomorrow than we are today; two, that it believed our past choices do not bind us forever, that there is Teshuva in the world; three, that it insists that its leadership always be interested in doing what is good for the total people and not just for certain segments of the Jewish people. We all hope and pray that in Israel and in the United States these three principles will always be adhered to, so that both the United States and Israel will be greatly blessed because the people have made sure that these three qualities will always guide them and their leaders. I am reminded of the story they tell about the president who got elected in November. Shortly after his inauguration, he slipped on a bar of soap and hit his head and was unconscious for three and a half years. When he finally awoke, he turned to his vice president and said, "How are things going in the country?" The vice president said things were going very well. We have peace and prosperity. Then the president turned to his vice president and said, "You know, I want to send a personal letter to all the voters in America telling them that I am now well and can resume my duties. Can you tell me how much it costs to mail a letter these days?" The vice president looked at him and said, "Three hundred yen, Mr. President." Let us hope and pray that the United States and Israel will never lose their bearings but will remain strong and prosperous and blessed because they understand the principles of choice, rectifying wrong choices, and making sure that we have a leadership which is concerned about all of the people and not just some of the people. Amen.

PINCHAS

Betrayal, Trust, and Holiness

One of the hardest experiences in life to endure is the experience of being betrayed. Betrayal is a very serious thing because it destroys trust, and without trust there can be no relationships. Without trust society cannot function, families cannot function, institutions cannot function, and most certainly a marriage cannot function. Betrayal shakes a person to his core because it ruptures his ability to trust. Why, though, do people betray others? What causes them to betray the trust that has been placed in them?

The rabbis tell us that there are three main reasons for a person's betraying the trust placed in him. The first reason is excessive ambition, greed, lust, or passion. When a person cannot control his desires and is overcome with greed or lust or excessive ambition, betrayal becomes not only a possibility, but also a desirable course of action. A dope addict will always betray the trust placed in him because his need for the dope is so overpowering. It is greater than any sense of loyalty, integrity, or honesty he may have. A person's need to be successful, to drive a fancy car or live in a fancy house may also become so overpowering as to cause him also to betray the confidence placed in him. It may cause him to steal, embezzle, or misuse information given to him in confidence. Overpowering sexual attraction may also cause a person to betray his marriage, etc. Passions, lust, ambition, greed all can cause a person to betray others.

There is a second reason, though, which can cause a person to betray others, and that is a feeling that betrayal is necessary in order to achieve a greater good. Betrayal in this instance is not considered an evil but instead is considered a holy act. A person may feel that in order to save another person's soul, he must and should betray him. This is what the spies who Moshe sent to spy out the land of Israel did when they came back with an evil report. They felt it would be better for the Jewish people not to enter the land of Israel. Idolatry was too strong there. It would be much better for the Jewish people if they would stay in the desert and learn Torah and be supported by G-d's manna and water, instead of going into the land of Israel, where they would be subjected to all the temptations of a licentious, immoral pagan culture. They betrayed their trust partially, at least the rabbis explain, because they were worried about the spiritual welfare of the Jewish people. How many times has it happened that overzealous missionaries have tried to seduce the Jewish people by betraying a trust? I personally remember how once, as a child, I came out of Hebrew school and was accosted by a man wearing traditional Jewish clothes with a big black hat on his head. He told us boys he needed us for a minyan. We followed him into his parked trailer and then he locked us in and forced us to watch a movie about his religion. He completely betrayed us. Needless to say, after we left his trailer, we did not think much of him or his religion. The communists, too, felt that they could betray their closest allies and friends because they were engaged in a holy cause. They were engaged in saving humanity. Therefore, they felt no qualms about betraying others. In fact, some of their leaders even betrayed themselves, claiming at the 1930 Stalin show trials that they had committed terrible offenses which they knew they

had not committed. They had been convinced by brainwashing techniques that by betraying themselves, by claiming that they had committed these terrible crimes, which they had not committed, they would bring the day closer when the purported ideals of communism, equality, and justice would be realized.

The third reason the rabbis give why people betray their friends and family and group is because they like to prove how smart they are. Many human beings like to play with other human beings. It gives them great pleasure to be puppeteers. They like to see other people twist in the wind. They like to manipulate other people's lives. It gives them a great deal of pleasure to prove how much smarter they are than ordinary people. It especially gives them so much pleasure to prove how much smarter they are than so-called educated people. They like to just stir up trouble. They feel that by doing, they can not only prove how smart they are, but they can, by eventually stepping in and solving the problems they have created in the first place, be acclaimed, not only as a genius, but as a great peacemaker.

In the Torah portion Pinchas, we see how all these three reasons for betrayal motivated Zimri Ben Saluh, the man who, right in front of Moshe, Aharon, and in front of the Tabernacle, took a Midianite princess and performed a licentious pagan sexual rite. Zimri was a president of one of the clans of Shimon. He was a great man in Israel. Even his name, Zimri, demonstrated this. It means the choice, the best. He was the son of Saluh. Saluh in Hebrew means to weigh. He came from a family who knew how to weigh things carefully, who did not take precipitous action. He had all the qualities necessary to be a great leader, talent, education, good family background, but, yet, he betrayed Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish people by performing despicable licentious pagan rites in front of everyone. He knew that the pagan god had no power. This is demonstrated by the name of the Midianite princess he chose to consort with. Her name was Kozbi Bat Tsur. Kozbi in Hebrew means a liar. She was a liar. The daughter of Tsur in this connotation means trouble.

What motivated Zimri to do what he did? He certainly did not believe in the pagan god. What motivated him, the rabbis say, was both a feeling that he had to do it for the good of Israel, passion, and also because he wanted to show how smart he was; in other words, all three of the reasons which the rabbis give for betrayal. That's why the rabbis say that when Pinchas saw what was happening, he took a spear in his hand and he went after Zimri into the Kubah, tent in English, and pierced both of them through the Kovah, the belly. The words Kubah and Kovah come from the same root. Neither is the usual word for tent or belly. This word Kovah is unusual and can mean either of three things: a tent, a stomach, or to curse.

Zimri had a holy motive for doing what he did. He felt that the Jewish people had to acculturate. They had to adopt the worship styles of the Canaanites. They were about to enter the land of Israel. He knew that these Midianite and Canaanite practices were lies and deceptions and that they could bring trouble, but the Jewish people had to be like other people if they were going to make it in this part of the world. They had to give up their unique worship and life styles. They could maintain some different Jewish ideals, but practically they had to become like the peoples around them, otherwise they would have nothing but trouble. What's more, he felt he was on solid ground, because didn't Moshe Rabbeinu live as a Midianite for many years? Wasn't Moshe's wife a Midianite? Didn't Moshe even agree to raise his oldest child as a pagan? What he was doing was best

for the Jewish people. Unless they assimilated into their environment, they would know nothing but wars from the people around them. They should not stand out as a sore thumb among the peoples of the Middle East. That's why the word Kovah is used for tent. The word tent in Hebrew means also study halls and, of course, it is the word which is used for the Tabernacle, which is called the Tent of Meeting.

Zimri was also motivated by lust. That's why the word Kovah is used for belly. Kozbi was a beautiful woman. He was also motivated by a desire to manipulate, to prove how much smarter he was than everyone else. That's why the word Kovah was also used. This is the same word that Bilam used when he said in the Torah portion Balek, "How shall I curse whom G-d has not cursed?" Bilam, of course, liked to curse. He liked to manipulate people. Zimri, by doing what he did in front of Moshe, was trying to manipulate Moshe. How could Moshe say anything since he had a Midianite wife, since he had married a daughter of a pagan priest? The truth of the matter is that the Torah says that after Zimri had taken the Midianite woman in the sight of Moshe and in the sight of all the congregation, that they wept, Moshe and the congregation, at the door of the Tent of Meeting. Moshe momentarily did not know what to do. All he could do was weep. Zimri's cynical disregard of law, order, and common decency had completely unnerved him. He had been successfully manipulated by Zimri. It was at this point that Pinchas took the Law into his own hands and slew Zimri and Kozbi. The rabbis were not happy with Pinchas's action and if G-d Himself would not have intervened, they would have severely punished him, but his act allowed Moshe to regain his equilibrium and stop the people from leaving the Torah and adopting Canaanite practices.

Betrayal is also terrible because it causes the person who has been betrayed to question his ability to trust again. It maims those who have been betrayed. It causes them to question their own judgement. How can they have been so taken in? It destroys their own self-confidence. That's why immediately after we learn about the betrayal of Zimri, we learn how another census was taken of the Jewish people to teach us that just because there were a few who did betray them, the overwhelming majority of the people would never do such a thing. Yes, there are betrayers. Yes, there are traitors and will be traitors, but they are a very distinct minority.

Let none of us ever lose our confidence or our ability to trust others because of these few. That's why even in the midst of this counting of the Jewish people, when we learn of the sins of Doston and Aviron and Korach, who, too, betrayed Moshe, it mentions "and the sons of Korach did not die." Individuals betray us but this is no reflection on the rest of their family or upon the rest of their tribe or upon the Jewish people as a whole. Human beings are human beings, and sometimes certain individuals for either one or all of the three reasons mentioned above feel that they must betray others, but they are a distinct minority. Let us hope and pray that they will always be few and that we will always be able to maintain our trust in others so we can continue to work together to build a better world so the Mashiach will come soon. Amen.

MATOS-MASSEY

Reality, Painful Decisions, and the Supernatural

The Torah portions Matos and Massey are often combined. In the Torah portion Matos, we learn something very strange. We learn, "And G-d spoke to Moshe saying, 'Avenge the Bnei Yisroel against the Midianites and after you shall be gathered to your people.'" When Moshe relayed this message to the Jewish people, he said, "Arm yourselves for war and give the vengeance of G-d against Midian." Moshe spoke about the vengeance of G-d; G-d spoke about the vengeance of the sons of Israel. Why? Also, why does it say that after Moshe would avenge the sons of Israel against the Midianites he would die? What does his death have to do with the Midianites? Secondly, when the soldiers returned from the war, the Torah says, "And Eliezer the Kohen said to the men of the army who came to war." He should have said who come from the war or who returned from the war, but instead he says who came to the war. Why also does Eliezer tell the people who are coming back from the wars about how the laws of ritual purification should apply to themselves and to their booty and not Moshe. After all, Moshe was the lawgiver, not Eliezer.

Finally, in the Torah portion Massey, we learn about the cities of refuge. We learn how if a person killed somebody he had to flee to a city of refuge where it would be determined by judicial hearing whether or not he killed intentionally. If he killed someone intentionally, he would be tried as a murderer. If he killed somebody by accident without any negligence on his part at all, he would be free to return home. If it was ascertained that he was guilty of contributory negligence, then he would have to stay in the city of refuge until the Kohen Godol died. After the Kohen Godol died, he could then return home. Also in the Torah portion Massey we read, "Ye shall not pollute the land that you are in because blood pollutes the land." The word for pollute in Hebrew can also mean to flatter. You should not flatter the land. What does this mean?

If we look carefully at these questions, I think we can see that they are all intertwined. The Jewish people were about to enter into the land of Israel. As long as the Jewish people wandered in the desert, they were taken care of supernaturally. G-d caused the manna to fall, which provided them with food, and G-d arranged for a special well to accompany them, which gave them all the water they needed. Even their clothes did not wear out. G-d saw to it that their enemies stayed away from them. They were protected by G-d, and with the exception of a skirmish with Amalek at the very beginning of their wandering in the desert and the war of Sichon and Og at the end of their wandering in the desert, the Jewish people really had no hostile contact with any other people. They were, so to speak, given a forty year grace period in order to throw off the ways of slavery and become free men.

They were now, though, having to enter the land of Canaan and they could no longer rely upon the supernatural intervention of G-d. G-d would still be there to help them, but He normally wouldn't intervene supernaturally. G-d wanted them now to spread the ideas of Judaism in a natural way. He wanted the Jewish people to realize that the Jewish ideas were not only the match of every pagan idea but that they were superior to them. This was so, not because the Jewish people were superior to other peoples or because they

were special or a different type of human beings, but because the ideals they espoused were unique and special. In America today we feel the same way. We feel that our system of government is the best because we have discovered a way of organizing society that allows all peoples to live in harmony and which allows great economic progress to be made. We do not say that we as individuals are better than everybody else, but we as a nation have ideas, especially in political organization, from which the world can learn much. If the world would only learn about democracy and implement it as we have lived it and have implemented it, then we believe the world would know prosperity, peace and harmony, and all wars would be eradicated, etc. We Jews believe much the same things. If the world would only adopt Jewish ideas, the world itself will be a much better place. The Jewish people were now ready to enter the land of Israel. They would have to contend with other peoples and their pagan ideals. The Jewish people now would have to overcome them in a natural way. G-d was going to, so to speak, step back. He was not going to intervene anymore routinely in a supernatural way. Moshe was the leader of the Jewish people when the Jewish people relied on the routine supernatural activities of G-d, but that reality was now changing. The Jewish people had been coddled. Now they had to go out into the real world if the Jewish ideas were to prove relevant to the peoples of the world. The Jewish people had to prove that Judaism was not just a utopian dream, but that Judaism could work in the real world, that Judaism was not just something for a people who were ensconced in the desert, that Judaism was not just a summer camp. We know that today many of our youngsters go away to summer camp and in that total Jewish environment they become very enthusiastic about Judaism and very enthralled by our principles and our ideals, but when they come back to their homes and want to implement them they run into great difficulties. It is difficult in the real world. Moshe, at this stage of his life, was a leader who could not really cope with the real world. Moshe was now concerned about only ideals and perfection. He was concerned only about G-d's command and not the people and the people's struggle to keep G-d's command. Even in this week's Torah portion it seems that Moshe went beyond what G-d had commanded when he also ordered the death of the male children of the Midianites. We see that many times Moshe went beyond what G-d had commanded when he also ordered the death of the male children of the Midianites. We see that many times Moshe would become excessively angry with the people, like when he struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock, and when he yelled at the people, "You rebels!" Moshe could only now handle situations in which he could be assured that G-d would deal with the people supernaturally. G-d though at this time wanted the Jewish people to act in the natural or real world. In the real world you have to make compromises. You have to aim for perfection, but in the real world you will never achieve it. Joshua was now going to be the leader of the Jewish people, just as Eliezer had already taken over from his father, Aaron, and become High Priest. It was Eliezer who instructed the returning soldiers on how they were to become ritually pure and how the booty that they had brought back had to be ritually purified. The returning soldiers, even though they had done as they were commanded and had fought a just war, had become, in a ritual sense, unclean by the very fact that war entails death. They were coming to war, to a different type of war, a war against the cruelty which the deaths of war puts in our hearts. Many times we have to do things that we do not like. They may be moral and they may be just, but we wish they wouldn't be necessary and that we shouldn't have to be involved. If there is a death

penalty, then there has to be a hangman or executioner. The hangman does the duty of society, but we do not want to be hangmen. Many times we had to do things that are very hurtful. They are just and right, but they are still very hurtful. Sometimes we have to fire people because they are incompetent or dishonest or maybe even worse, because our business is losing money, we have to layoff good people. When we have to layoff good people for no fault of their own, it hurts, but we still have to do it if our business is to survive. Or if we are a teacher, we have to fail students. A parent has to discipline his child. Life is difficult. Life is not easy. Life is not a summer camp.

In the real world we cannot rely on the supernatural to extricate us from the very difficult problems of life. It is hard though to face them. Sometimes our religious principles are very sorely tested because of the problems we find ourselves in. It is not usually our enemies that make life difficult for us, but our friends. We know that our friend at work needs us on a particular Saturday to help him finish a project, but how can we go on Shabbos and violate the Shabbos? It is a very difficult situation; he doesn't understand Judaism and our religious scruples. But if we want to practice Judaism, we will have to gird up our energies and explain the situation to him. Many times also we have to tell our kids no, because we just don't have the money. Our kids want to go to camp and we have to tell them that they cannot go to camp because we don't have the money. We only have enough to buy them books and proper clothes for school. We would be an irresponsible parent if we did anything else, but it hurts us to tell our children that they cannot go to camp. Many times our wives will want to entertain friends and we will have to tell her that it is not in the budget and she cannot do it. She is a good woman and does not make many demands on us, but we have to tell her no, and vice versa. Sometimes the wife has to tell the husband no. He wants to go to a ballgame and he deserves it. He has worked hard all week, but there is not money for it. Life is difficult and life causes us to make many decisions which hurt.

That is why at the end of the Torah portion Massey, when it talks about the Jewish people entering the land of Israel, it teaches us that when the Jewish people enter the land of Israel, they will not perfect it. The Jewish people have been prepared in the desert to be an independent people, but they also have to realize that the society they are going to establish is not going to be perfect. The Mashiach has not come yet. There are still going to be murderers, even in the land of Israel. We say in Psalm 28, "May G-d bless you from Zion and may you see the good of Jerusalem." We should all always see the good thing in Jerusalem and Israel, but we should always realize that Judaism never promised us that our society will be perfect; it only promises that it will be better than the societies around. When it comes to life, we should never misrepresent what things are. There will always be problems, the world is still not redeemed, but we should never give up just because there are problems. We know that Israel is not a perfect place, even though it's much better than most countries. We know the United States is not a perfect place either, but this doesn't mean that because the United States is not perfect we should try to destroy her. Unfortunately though there are some Jews who become so irate because Israel is not perfect that they say maybe Israel shouldn't exist anymore. It is true that many of Israel's policies could be improved and there are some criminals in Israel. But so what? The same is true of the U.S. Israel is a wonderful place compared to most places in the world, even the United States. It surpasses the world in the number of scientists and artists per capita. It is way ahead of the world in child care, etc., but it is not perfect, so you should not

flatter the land. If you flatter the land you give a false image of Israel and you will be terribly disappointed. On the other hand, you should not lambaste Israel and try to destroy her because she is not perfect. That, of course, is what the Torah portion Massey teaches us. It teaches us that we do not live in a supernatural world. We live in the real world now. Moshe was the leader of the Jewish people when G-d's supernatural protection was upon us, but in the real world we need leaders who will face the facts with love, who will face our problems with love, who will rebuke with love, who will realize that many times in the real world we are forced to do things that we do not like to do. The choices we may be forced to make may even be right and just, but they may also be very hurtful. Life thrusts upon us many hard choices. Let us always hope and pray that they will also be moral choices. If they will be right and moral choices, then G-d will, we pray, send the Mashiach, and once again we will live under His supernatural protection. And then things will be perfect. Until then we will have to struggle in the real world, making painful decisions which many times will force us to compromise with the reality around us. Let us hope and pray that we will always make the right decisions.

I am reminded of the story they tell about an artist who called up the gallery which was displaying his paintings and asked them, "Well, how are my paintings going? Is anyone buying them." The lady who ran the gallery said, "Yes, I have some good news and some bad news. A man came in and asked me whether an artist's works will appreciate after he dies. I told him that they will appreciate. He immediately bought fifteen of your works." The man asked what the bad news was, and the gallery owner said, "Well, the man was your doctor." In life there are many hurtful things that we have to do. When a doctor has to tell a patient that he is dying and there is no hope, or when a doctor has to tell parents that their children have a very bad illness, it is a very hurtful, hard thing to do. Life gives us no easy solutions to its difficult problems, but we know that with G-d's help eventually we will be able to overcome there problems and the world will be perfected and the Mashiach will come. May He come soon. Amen.

DEVOREEM

Confrontation, Diplomacy, and Survival

It is very difficult to know what is the right way to solve our problems. Sometimes we must confront them head on. Other times we must be flexible, diplomatic, and be willing to zig and zag and maybe even backtrack a little in order to solve them. It is very difficult to know when we should hold fast and not give an inch and when we should bend so we should not break so we will be able eventually to achieve our goals. The rabbis say that the reed grass is many times much stronger than the mighty cedar because when a fierce north wind comes, the cedar can be overturned because it cannot bend, while the reed grass, because it is supple, can bend almost to the ground without breaking. The reed grass will bounce back after the wind has gone and will resume its upright position, while the cedar, which has been totally uprooted, can no longer function as a viable entity.

When must you be strong and confrontational, and when must be supple and diplomatic? It is very difficult to know. The Torah portion that we read on the Shabbos before Tisha B'av is always Devorim, and the Haphtorah that we always read on this Shabbos comes from Isaiah, Yeshayahu. This Shabbos is called Shabbos Chazon because the first word in this Haphtorah is Chazon. In this Haphtorah we learn about the destruction of Jerusalem. We learn how Israel was to become desolate, its cities burned with fire, etc. At the end of the Haphtorah we learn how "Zion Jerusalem shall be redeemed with justice and how through Tzedakah we will come back from exile to rebuild her." It seems strange though, that we read on the Shabbos before Tisha B'av, the day which commemorates the destruction of the first and the second temple, a passage from Yeshayahu. It would have seemed much more appropriate to read a passage from Jeremiah, Yermeyahu, because, by and large, Yeshayahu was much more a prophet of hope than of destruction, while Yermeyahu was much more a prophet of destruction rather than of hope. Besides, in Yermeyahu's time, Jerusalem was actually destroyed while Yeshayahu almost single-handedly saved Jerusalem. Yeshayahu prophesied during the reign of King Cheeskeeyahu. The Assyrians were the world power of that day. They had swooped down in the year 721 B.C.E. and had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and had taken the ten tribes into captivity. In the year 701 B.C.E. they surrounded Jerusalem after having defeated the mighty empires of the world. It did not seem possible that Jerusalem could survive this vicious assault. After the city had used up all its provisions, things looked hopeless and everybody, including many false prophets, counseled that Jerusalem should give up and submit to the Assyrian yoke. Yeshayahu, though, counseled Cheeskeeyahu to keep fighting, that G-d would deliver the city. He was the only one who urged Cheeskeeyahu to keep fighting. He turned out to be right. A terrible plague broke out among the Assyrian army, which is written about even by Herodotus, the Greek historian, and Jerusalem was miraculously saved. Here we see that the prophet counseled confrontation. Do not give an inch, and he was right. Afterwards this led the people to mistakenly believe that G-d would never let Jerusalem be destroyed, that Jerusalem was impregnable. One hundred and fifteen years later, when Yermeyahu prophesied in 586 B.C.E., he told the people to submit to Babylonia, not to fight. He even went around with a yoke on his neck. In his day the false prophets were telling the people to fight like Yeshayahu had done, but in Yermeyahu's time the correct counsel was to submit. If the people had submitted to Babylonian rule, Jerusalem would have been spared, but they did not listen to Yermeyahu and it was destroyed.

It would seem more appropriate that we should read a Haphtorah from Yermeyahu on the Shabbos before Tisha B'av and not from Yeshayahu because in Yermeyahu's time the temple was actually destroyed. Here were two prophets whose messages were diametrically opposed. Yermeyahu said to submit and Yeshayahu said to fight, and they were both correct, based upon the circumstances of their day. It is very difficult to know when we should fight for the last inch and when we should be willing to compromise. In the Torah portion Devorim, we learn also about how the Jewish people murmured in their tents when the spies came back from the land of Israel. Ten of them came back with a bad report and only two of them came back with a good report. We know that the two spies who came back with a good report were Yehoshua Bin Nun and Kolaiv Ben Yefuna. In the Torah portion Shlach Lecha we learn how before Moshe sends these spies he takes Yehoshua, who was his personal aide, as well as the head of the army, aside and changes his name. He changes his name from Hoshea Bin Nun to Yehoshua Bin Nun. Hoshea means "G-d helped." Yehoshua means "G-d will help." He also blesses Yehoshua and prays that we will not be overcome by the counsel of the ten evil spies. The question is asked by the rabbis, why didn't Moshe also bless the other good spy, Kolaiv Ben Yefuna, before he sent him off with the other spies. Also, after this incident when we learn how G-d rewards Kolaiv Ben Yefuna by telling him that he would inherit Chevron and the neighboring hill country, G-d says that He is rewarding Kolaiv because he had another spirit. What does this mean, that he had another spirit?

The rabbis say that Kolaiv Ben Yefuna was a diplomat. Kolaiv Ben Yefuna came from the Tribe of Judah. Judah knew how to exercise leadership. Most times leadership requires diplomacy. Without diplomacy you cannot bridge the widely divergent views that are found even among people who share the same goals. Diplomacy is non-confrontational. It tries to look at the points of agreement and not the points of disagreement in order to gain an agreed upon course of action. Judah, when he wanted to save Joseph, argued that it was not right that the brothers should have Joseph's blood on their hands. Instead, let them sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites who would take him down to Egypt. Everyone knew that slaves did not live very long in Egypt. Yehoshua Bin Nun, on the other hand, came from the Tribe of Joseph. He was chosen to represent Ephraim, one of the two tribes which came from Joseph. Joseph, at least in the beginning, was not noted for his tact or diplomacy. He told his brothers his dreams even though he knew that this would infuriate them. Yehoshua believed in confrontation. When Eldad and Maydad prophesied in the camp, Yehoshua wanted Moshe to imprison them. Moshe, of course, would have nothing at all to do with that suggestion. He was happy to dialogue with them. Moshe knew that Yehoshua would be at risk when he traveled with the other spies because he would constantly confront them and infuriate them. Kolaiv, on the other hand, was a diplomat. He could state his views without confronting them and infuriating them. Diplomacy is very important in all human relations. If a wife is very excited because she has just bought a new dress and she puts it on and shows it to her husband, he can, even if he does not like the dress, tell her that he does not like it in a nice way. For example, he can say, "That's a very interesting dress, but I think you should save it for another occasion," or he could become confrontational and say, "That dress looks terrible. Take it off." In one case he would hurt and infuriate his wife. In the other case she would understand that he did not care too much for the dress but she would not become infuriated. Diplomacy requires reframing issues, putting them in a little different context.

We see that, too, when people bring up new ideas at a meeting. They can either be shot down and told that they are stupid, or they can be told that their ideas have some merit but that because they were not put on the agenda for this meeting, that they will be given to a committee to be brought up at the next meeting. Diplomacy, though, has its pitfalls. You can become so flexible that you end up giving away everything.

That's why the rabbis teach us that when the spies went into Israel it says, "And they went into the Negev and he came until Chevron." Why does the Torah change from the plural to the singular? The rabbis answer that only Kolaiv Ben Yefuna went to Chevron to the cave of the Patriarchs in order to pray and make sure that in his zeal for diplomacy and compromise, he would not give away basic Jewish values.

We also learn that after the spies came back with their evil report, the people became very upset and clamored against Moshe and Aaron. Yehoshua tried to calm the crowd, but he was not able to. He was not able to because, one, Yehoshua confronted them directly, and, two, since he was a general, the people thought that like all professionals he wanted to practice his craft and, therefore, he welcomed war. Kolaiv Ben Yefuna, on the other hand, was able to silence the crowd because he agreed with them that there was danger, etc., but he told them that they could still prevail. He did not minimize their fears. He, too, it turns out, was unsuccessful, but at least the crowd gave him a hearing.

Jewish history is filled with examples of both types of leadership. Sometimes what is required is confrontation and sometimes what is required is diplomacy. The Maccabees had no choice. They had to confront Antiochus and they were right. On the other hand, the Zealots were wrong in confronting Rome. We know that there were two schools of Zionism that sprang up in the 1930's, one led by Chaim Weitzman, who championed diplomacy. After all, it was he who through diplomacy won for the Jewish people the Balfour Declaration. The other school of Zionism was led by Zev Jabotinsky, who said that the times demanded confrontation. There are many who say that if we had followed Zev Japotinsky's counsel, many of the six million Jews who perished in Europe could have been saved. However, others say that without Chaim Weitzman the British would have totally discontinued supporting any Jewish claim to Palestine. Therefore, without diplomacy we would have lost all of Palestine and the Jews in it, too. There would not have been any place for the six million to go. We know that Ben Gurion throughout most of his career favored diplomacy, but even he in 1948 chose confrontation with the Arabs by proclaiming Israel's independence. It was he who during certain periods of the British Mandate had the Haganah confront the British. On the other hand, Menachim Begin mostly favored confrontation throughout his career, from the time he headed the Irgun to the time he was Prime Minister of Israel, but it was he also who championed diplomacy when he gave up the Sinai and made peace with Egypt. Sometimes we must stand firm and not give up an inch, otherwise we will be destroyed, and other times we must be willing to be flexible in order that we can survive and prevent terrible destruction.

The world today has changed. There is no longer a cold war. The Soviet Union no longer stands as Israel's greatest enemy, using the Arabs as her puppets to gain control of the Middle East. It was important many times in the past few years for Israel to stand firm, otherwise she would have been destroyed. Perhaps now is the time for diplomacy.

Yehoshua eventually became the leader of the Jewish people because there was no way to deal with the Canaanites except through confrontation. However, Solomon, Shlomo, the wisest of all Jewish kings, never used confrontation throughout his forty year reign.

He only used diplomacy.

Let us hope and pray that as we enter a new era with a new government taking over the reins of power in Israel, that it will be able to correctly determine whether or not now is the time for diplomacy, and that if it is, this new government will be blessed with diplomatic skills of Kolaiv Ben Yefuna. G-d blessed Kolaiv and even gave him a special inheritance because he knew how to utilize diplomacy correctly. Kolaiv espoused flexibility and diplomacy, but his flexibility and diplomacy never compromised Jewish existence or basic Jewish values. Even his name indicated this. Kolaiv Ben Yefuna in Hebrew can mean someone whose heart can cause even enemies to be turned into friends. Let us hope and pray that soon all of Israel's enemies will be turned into friends.

VAESCHANAN

Reflecting Light, Deepening It, Temple, and Torah

We always read the Torah portion Vaeschanan after Tisha B'Av. The Torah portion Vaeschanan has a special Haftarah which is known as Nachamu, comfort. This Shabbos

is known as Shabbos Nachamu, the Shabbos of Comfort. This Haftorah opens with the words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your G-d. May Jerusalem take heart and proclaim unto her that her time of service is accomplished, that her guilt is paid off, that she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." The rabbis ask, why does this Haftorah state "nachamu, nachamu" twice? It would have been sufficient just to say nachamu once. Some say it states nachamu twice because when we read the Book of Lamentations on Tisha B'Av, we say, "Cry you will cry, " and since we say cry twice, it is good that we say comfort twice. But this really does not stand up to scrutiny because "Cry you will cry" uses two different verb forms while nachamu nachamu is the same verb form. Some rabbis say that the reason we say nachamu nachamu twice is because we need to be comforted for both Temples, the first Temple that was destroyed on Tisha B'Av and the second Temple that was destroyed on Tisha B'Av. But why should this be so? After all, the true comfort to our bereavement is the building of the third temple. We pray for that in our prayers every day, and we hope that soon there will be such a spiritual revival in Israel that the third temple will be built. Therefore, the comfort for the first Temple and the second Temple is identical. We only need to have one comfort, and that is the comfort of the building of the third temple. Why then does the Haftorah have to say nachamu nachamu twice?

The rabbis teach us that there were several differences between the first Temple and the second Temple. In the first Temple there were more sacred objects. The ark of the covenant was present in the first Temple but in the second Temple it was not there. In fact, before Titus destroyed the second Temple he ran into the Holy of Holies to see what was in it. After he entered the Holy of Holies, he was convinced that all the Jews were atheists because when he opened the curtains and peered into it, he saw absolutely nothing. The Holy of Holies was completely empty. There was nothing in it at all. The first Temple, the rabbis say, had more of G-d's light and radiance in it than the second Temple. However, the rabbis say that the second Temple was much larger than the first Temple, especially after Herod had completed his expansion work. The first Temple lasted about 350 years and the second Temple lasted much longer, so the rabbis say that there were significant differences between the first Temple and the second Temple. The reason that we say nachamu nachamu twice is we need to have both the qualities of the first Temple and the second Temple.

We know that even before there was a temple there was a tabernacle. There was a difference, though, between the Tabernacle and the temples. The Tabernacle represented G-d's light in the world, but it was not confined to a particular place. When it moved, the place upon which it stood was no longer holy. This was different than the first and second Temples, because their spot in Jerusalem was always holy whether a temple was standing on it or not, whether the temple was whole or destroyed.

There are really two aspects to the light of G-d in the world. The Torah is the light of G-d in the world. We know that many times people revere this light. They think that the Torah is wonderful and they are willing even to give huge sums of money to house the Torah in museums or in synagogues which they rarely visit. They make fancy arks for them, but in their personal lives they do not ref

lect the light of the Torah at all. When we put a Torah in the ark in a shul, we put it, in Hebrew, in an Oron HaKodesh, a holy ark. Why does the word oron also mean in Hebrew? It also means a coffin. We put the Torah in a holy coffin, because a Torah, if it

is only the object of admiration, is dead. It does not accomplish what it should. What the Torah is supposed to do is to cause us to reflect its light throughout the world. The temple is supposed to reflect the light of G-d in the world.

The first Temple was supposed to reflect the ideals and mitzvahs of Judaism throughout the world. The people who came to the Temple were supposed to keep the ideals of the Torah. The Temple was not supposed to be venerated. It was supposed to encourage the people to keep all the principles of the Torah, not to give them an alibi to violate all its principles in practice. The first Temple was destroyed because the people failed to reflect the light of the Torah. The people committed the cardinal sins of Judaism: idolatry, murder, sexual immorality. In the second Temple this was not so. The Jewish people did, by and large, reflect the values of the Torah. They did not sin with idolatry, murder, and sexual immorality and incest, etc. They did not engage in child sacrifice, sexual worship rites, and other pagan rites that the Jewish people had adopted during much of the first Temple period. The first Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people no longer reflected Jewish ideals. The light was there but it was not reflected in their lives. In the second Temple the light was reflected in their lives. It is true that there were some scattered individuals who obviously were murderers and who worshipped idols, individuals who were immoral, but on the whole, the Jewish people did not countenance these things. In America today we see that criminals are admired. Look at the movies. Many of the movies are made about the Mafia and gangsters. It would seem that America has a love affair with criminals, even though they are attacking the warp and woof of American society. In the second Temple this was not so.

The second Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people did not go beyond the letter of the law. Everyone insisted on getting everything that was coming to him. No one was willing to compromise. That is what led to the destruction of the second Temple, because it was caused by *sinas cheenam*, senseless hatred. We all know that when we have to apply the principles of the Torah in practice, many times conflicting Torah principles will be involved. We know that we are commanded to educate our children and also to take care of our parents. What should we do if we only have enough money to do one or the other? Most of the time we do not choose between good and evil but we are forced to choose between conflicting goods. We have to have enough knowledge to know how to do this. We have to know that in certain circumstances we have to give and take. The Jewish people at that time did not seem to be able to do that. They also did not know how to correctly estimate the new forces with which they had to contend. They confused Imperial Rome with the Syrian-Greek Empire. They had to apply themselves to see how the Torah insights could apply throughout all life and in every age. They could not just box the Torah into one age or one portion of their life. The second Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people did not know how to deepen the light of the Torah. They did not know how to expand it to all situations in life. They did not know how to reflect it adequately throughout all their daily activities in the face of Roman pressure. They did not know how to reconcile the Torah's wonderful principles to the nitty-gritty of life without becoming either a fanatic or a quisling. When the new temple is to be built, it has to be composed of both these qualities. It has to reflect the light of the Torah and it has to also have the quality of deepening this light and allowing us to apply it to all facets of our life, no matter the outside pressure. The second Temple was destroyed, the rabbis say, because of the way the Jewish people acted towards one another, because of outside

pressure. The Zealots in Jerusalem even burned the stores in Jerusalem so the people would fight Rome harder. Some of them attacked other Jews who they thought were not being patriotic enough. This, of course, was an abomination and what caused the second Temple to be destroyed. In the Shma, which is found in this Torah portion, we learn "you should love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, and these words which are commanded to you today should be upon your heart." We know that we are to put these words upon our heart. We are to reflect them throughout our daily activities. We are to utilize them throughout all our life. The rabbis teach us that when Solomon built the Temple, it was as if the light of the moon came into the world. The rabbis ask, what does it mean "the light of the moon?" The moon has no light. That's true. But the man reflects a higher light, and so we have to reflect the light of G-d's Torah throughout our life. That too is what the Temple represented. And that too is how we should love the L-rd our G-d. How do we love G-d? By reflecting His light with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might, by reflecting this light in all aspects of our life. They should be on our heart. We should think of how we can apply the Torah's light in a deeper and more meaningful way. When we do not do that, then we commit the sin of the second Temple.

When two people get married, they should reflect each other's light; that's what love should be. They should know that they need each other and that the good qualities that each represent should be reflected in each other's life. They are, so to speak, the moon to each other, but, yet, they should do more than that. They should also create together a new light. That is why it says, "And you should teach them to your children and speak of them when you lie down in your house and when you go on the road and when you lay down and when you get up." In other words, from their mutual light a deeper light should be produced, a more meaningful light. That is, of course, what we do when we produce a family. When a couple realizes that it needs each other's light, that together they can accomplish so much more than when they are alone, and that together they have added wisdom and a greater sense of well-being that allows them to go and do great things, then they will have a good marriage. Yes, there will be tensions, yes, there will be arguments because they each see things through a little different light, but together they can accomplish great things. They know that when they are separate they are not as good. Their judgement is not as good and they are lonely. They are not as whole as when they are together. When their light is joined together, it deepens and they are able to produce many beautiful things.

Today, unfortunately, people do not get married because they want to reflect another person's light. They get married only to fulfill their own needs. Many times when they feel their need is not being fulfilled they get rid of their marriage. In order to have a successful marriage you have to believe in the institution of marriage. Because marriage has its ups and downs, you have to believe the institution of marriage is so important that you will be able to tough it out through the hard times in order to make it to the good times. It is easier in America today to get a divorce than it is to get counseling. Marriage counseling costs a lot more than a divorce. We know that many divorces today in America are absolutely unnecessary. A young couple came to me recently and said they were getting a divorce. I asked if they fought a lot. They said that they never fought, so I asked why they were getting a divorce. They said because they were bored. I said, "Why don't you fight? Then you won't get bored." People get divorces for the wrong reasons.

They should realize that they need to reflect each other's light, that together they can produce a shining light, an inner happiness, an inner joy which is good for them and which will produce a wonderful family. This light they can only produce if they are willing to reflect each other's light and, of course, be willing to reflect in their relationship a higher light of G-d and Torah.

We hope and pray that the third temple will soon be built, that all the Jewish people soon will realize that we all must reflect a higher light, and that we must all deepen this light by applying it to all aspects of life. May all our young married couples realize too that their life is going to be enhanced and enriched and beautified because they are reflecting each other's light, and that together when they reflect each other's light they will be able to produce even greater light which will cause them to have naches and joy and inner contentment for many years to come. May this be so, and may the Mashiach come soon. Amen.

EKEV

1991 Rituals, Love, Enthusiasm, and Personal Participation

The Haftorah for the Torah portion Ekev is the second of the Haftorahs of Consolation. It begins with the words, "And Zion said, 'G-d has forsaken me; G-d has forgotten me,' to which G-d replies, 'Can a woman forget her second child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget but I will not forget you.'" In last week's Haftorah we read, "Comfort, comfort My people, says your G-d." In last

week's Haftorah G-d spoke to the prophets and told them to comfort the people. In this week's Haftorah the people tell G-d that they do not want the prophets to comfort them; they want G-d to comfort them, and G-d assures them that a woman would forget her sucking child before He would ever forget Israel.

In last week's Torah portion we read about the first paragraph of the Shma, "And you shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your soul, with all your heart, with all your might," and in this week's Torah portion we learn about the second paragraph of the Shma. The second paragraph of the Shma is almost the same as the first paragraph of the Shma. Why is it that we should have two paragraphs of the Shma which are almost identical? In the first paragraph in the Shma we learn about putting these words on our hearts and we learn about the same thing in the second paragraph. We also learn about binding them for a sign on our hands and on our doorposts and about teaching our children about them, etc. Why this repetition?

The rabbis note that there are certain differences between the first paragraph of the Shma and the second paragraph of the Shma. The first paragraph of the Shma is in the singular. The second paragraph of the Shma is in the plural. In the first paragraph of the Shma it says that "you should love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." In the second paragraph of the Shma it says, "You shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, " but not with all your might. Also, in the first paragraph of the Shma it uses the word for teach - V'Shenantam, while in the second paragraph of the Shma it uses the word V'Leemadtem. Also, in the second paragraph of the Shma it talks about hearing: "And it shall be if you will hear, if you will listen to My Commandments." In the first paragraph it does not say anything about hearing. The first paragraph of the Shma in the Torah comes right after the Ten Commandments. The Jewish people had themselves witnessed G-d's revelation. The whole keynote of the Torah portion Vaeschanan is seeing. Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to see the land of Israel. The rabbis say that Reah, seeing, is not like Shmeea, hearing. In other words, seeing something is not the same as hearing about it. Seeing something has an immediate impact on a person. We all know that by the expression, "A picture is worth a thousand words." It has an immediacy which imbeds itself in a person's whole being. Hearing about something does not have that effect. Being at the site of an accident is different than hearing about it.

I remember how when the State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948, everyone was very excited. It was such an extraordinary event that it gripped everyone's imagination who lived at that time. I remember the celebrations. I remember how my sister and I, on the first anniversary of the celebration of the State of Israel, participated in an Israeli dance group on the stage of a big theater that was rented in Seattle. People were still excited even after one year. The experience had left its mark, but gradually that experience began to fade, too, and great effort was needed in order for it to be recaptured. Today the celebration of Israel Independence Day is a rather prosaic affair. Those who remember the first celebrations are still filled with enthusiasm, but it is still not the same, while those who were born after Israel had become a State hardly notice the great change that has taken place in Jewish life. When you witness an event yourself, it becomes a part of you.

That's why in the first paragraph of the Shma it says "with all your might." Since you experienced it yourself, you do not really need any rituals and ceremonies to trigger up

that memory, and that is why in the first paragraph of the Shma it says "you should teach your children," and then it talks about binding them on the hand and binding them on the doorpost because the experience is so fresh and your enthusiasm is still so great that you can actually even hire others to teach your children. Shenantam means that you can teach them through a teacher and the rituals can come later.

In the second paragraph of the Shma we are talking about hearing, about experiences that you have heard about; you have not actually witnessed them and in that case the ritual must come first: binding on the hand and the doorpost. They must come first and in this instance it says "V'Leemadtem - and you shall teach them," which means that you must teach your child yourself because there is no direct impact of an experience upon you. Also, when this experience of hearing about fades in time, you must get actively involved, otherwise you will fail to recapture enough enthusiasm in order to stir your family and friends.

The first paragraph of the Shma is in the singular because it is an experience which you have personally experienced and it will stay fresh in your mind for several years before it starts to fade, but even here you cannot transfer the feeling that you have to your children unless you have rituals and ceremonies, even in this case where you have enthusiasm, you must have ritual, too. Nostalgia cannot be transferred. Many Jewish people come into a synagogue and all they have to do is hear the beginning of the tune of one prayer and immediately their mind is flooded with experiences, but unless they have given their children the experience of the whole davening, their children will never be able from just hearing a word or two to feel what their parents feel. Nostalgia cannot be transmitted. In the second paragraph of the Shma we learn that if we are to recapture experiences which we have heard about and keep them from fading and teach them to people who have never had them, we must stress hearing. Hearing requires at least two people. That's why the second paragraph is in the plural. Friends, relatives, rituals, ceremonies are all necessary in order to keep these memories alive. It is the interaction of the different generations around the seder table which has allowed the Jewish people to remember the slavery of Egypt, even though we have not been in Egypt for 3500 years, but we must personally participate if we want to give our children this hearing about experience. In the second paragraph of the Shma we speak about the love between G-d and Israel and how the immediacy of that love affected the first generation. In order to transfer that feeling of love to subsequent generations, we need rituals and ceremonies and personal interactions. Love is a great gift that G-d has given mankind. The paradigm for the love between man and G-d is the love between a man and woman in marriage. The love between a man and a woman is a gift and it, too, must be protected if it is to endure, as the love between man and G-d must be protected. The immediacy of the experience when love first blooms is overwhelming, and many times it is thought that it will last forever without any help, but this is not so. As the immediate experience fades, it must be revived and protected so that it will endure throughout a lifetime. This can only be done if certain rituals and ceremonies are observed which protect it and enhance it. It requires communication and respect and the involvement of other people. The couple must know that there are certain limits beyond which they cannot go, otherwise their love will diminish and eventually fail. They have to treat each other with respect and realize that when they have arguments, there are limits beyond which they cannot go. They must not harm the other person's essential personality. They cannot trample on their individuality.

They have to be willing to make compromises and treat each other always with kindness and respect. Their love, too, is enhanced when they show love to their family, especially their children. Love can be continually renewed and refreshed and reinvigorated, but it requires communication, family support, and little rituals.

The Jewish religion has as one of its main purposes the strengthening of the love between husband and wife and between the couple and their family. It is necessary that the couple have certain processes and procedures which will deflect their anger and frustration and which will allow them to continue to love and care for each other.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a teacher who asked the children in her class to draw a picture of their father's profession, and the teacher, based on the pictures, would tell the students what their father's profession was. One little boy drew a fire engine, and the teacher said, "Oh, your daddy is a fireman." The little boy said that she was right. Another little boy drew a picture of a gun and a badge. The teacher said, "Oh, your daddy is a policeman." The boy said that she was right. A little girl drew a picture of a circle. The teacher said, "Why did you draw a circle? I know your daddy is a doctor." The little girl said, "Because that's my daddy making rounds." In order for love to blossom and bloom and be continually reinvigorated, it needs the interaction of the couple with themselves, with their family, and with their children. It needs a sense of limitations and a set of ceremonies and rituals to keep it ever fresh and new. May the young couples today ever have these things so their love will be ever fresh and new. Amen.

RE'EH

Arguments, Unsolvable Problems, and False Prophets

Arguments are inevitable in life. Life is filled with many contradictions. In life we need many things that are diametrically opposed to each other. We need both mercy and justice. We cannot have one without the other. Strict justice will destroy us as will unbounded mercy. The folk maxims of every people demonstrate this. They abound with life's many contradictions. "He who hesitates is lost. Look before you leap. A stitch in time saves nine. I will cross that bridge when I come to it." Countless examples can be cited of contradictory folk sayings. These contradictory folk sayings are both right. That's

why there are enshrined in the common wisdom of humanity. What maxim to act upon depends upon the facts of every given situation. Even in the matter of character contradictions abound. People are told to be brave but not to be foolhardy, to be patriotic but not to be jingoistic, to be studious but not to be bookish, to be quick but not to be precipitous, to be faithful but not to be obsequious, to have self-esteem but not to be arrogant, etc. Every situation demands careful study before we know which folk saying to apply. Are we to bend like a reed or be strong like a cedar? Are we to cross that bridge when we come to it or are we to charge ahead?

Life is filled with problems that can never be solved. Every single situation demands that we review all the options before we can come to any solution. We should not worry and become upset because we cannot solve problems permanently and forever. In fact, anybody who proposes that we can is a false prophet, a very dangerous person.

In the Pirkei Ovos, the Ethics of the Fathers, we learn in the fifth chapter, section twenty, "Any controversy that is for the sake of heaven, its destiny is to remain while any controversy which is not for the sake of heaven, its destiny is that it will no remain." In other words, arguments that are for the betterment of mankind can never really be solved. One generation may stress one side of the argument and another generation the other side of the argument. There is never really any way of solving the problem of justice and mercy. What is the correct mixture depends on the situation. We all know that there has to be exceptions to every law. Mercy must always be taken into consideration, but if there is too much mercy, if there are too many exceptions to the law, there is no law, and people, especially poor people, will have no protection from the whims of others, from the arbitrariness of their rulers. Their resulting feelings of injustice and resentment will inevitably lead them to great violence. Every person who has ever tried to handle a group of youngsters knows this. You can make a rule that anybody who misses a practice will be kicked off the team, but you know that there have to be exceptions to the rule. What happens if a youngster has to attend a grandparent's funeral? Should he be kicked off the team? On the other hand, what happens if a child said he missed practice because he had to see a movie which, unless he saw it that day, he would not be able to see it because it was the last day it was playing? Obviously, in this case you would have to enforce the rule or all the rest of your players will never obey it either.

The definition of a true conflict in Judaism is a conflict that will endure throughout all generations. It is a conflict which can never be permanently resolved and which has nothing to do with personal power or ambition. That's why the Pirkei Ovos continues by saying, "The conflict of Hillel and Shammai is a controversy for the sake of heaven." We are still studying the many hundreds of disputes of Hillel and Shammai in the Talmud. In practice we almost always follow Hillel, but we still study Shammai's point of view because in certain instances we decide like his school but, more importantly, because there is much truth in his position and his position helps us elucidate Hillel's position. He just stressed one aspect of a dispute in which both sides are right.

People should not be upset if in their marriages there are continual disputes because both partners in a marriage are looking at the same problem from a different vantage point and they are both right. That's why the rabbis say that the original Adam was created androgynous, hermaphrodite, both male and female. G-d just split the first Adam in two and since then man has needed a woman and woman has needed a man in order not just to fulfill themselves physically but also to fulfill themselves spiritually and mentally.

They need the other's input in order to fully grasp the complexities of any situation. The husband will claim that they do not have enough money today for all the things the children want, and the wife will claim that the children need these things, not just want them. Some sort of compromise will have to be worked out for the children's needs or wants that day, but the problem will not be solved. Throughout their marriage the wife will probably look more at the needs and the husband will probably look more at the resources. Somehow the needs will have to be prioritized and the resources rationed to fill the most important needs. Obviously, a child's needs are very high on the list; his wants are not.

The section in Pirkei Ovos continues by saying that "a conflict which will not endure . . . that is the conflict of Korach and his company." It is strange that it does not say a conflict between Korach and Moshe. It says a conflict of Korach and his company. The reason for this, the rabbis tell us, is that Korach's controversy was not really against Moshe. His controversy was about power, unscrupulous ambition. Korach was not seeing to do good. Korach was just seeking to feather his own nest. He tried to peddle the false news that he could resolve all conflicts now. His argument was against the human condition. He promised that since all the people were holy they could solve all of life's problems once and for all. All they had to do was make Korach their leader. He was a complete demagogue because he promised something he knew he could never deliver. His argument was not for the sake of heaven. His argument was based on a lie and was only put forward to further his own ambition.

Unfortunately, in our day, too, we have many people who peddle false panaceas, false solutions to all the problems of the world. The truth of the matter is that there are no complete answers. There are at best only partial solutions to all the problems of the world. Every solution brings in its wake new problems. This does not mean, though, that partial solutions are wrong or should not be tried. After all, the problems of too much food are much better than the problems of hunger. The problems of getting along with a spouse are much better than the problems of loneliness. The problems of raising children are much better than the problems of not having any children, but in this life there will always be problems. The world has not been perfected yet.

Hillel and Shammai recognized that we live in an imperfect world. That's why we need the Torah. The Torah allows us to balance our conflicting drives and allows us to balance the conflicting values by which we must live. It allows us to prioritize things and it allows us to know when to stress justice and when to stress mercy. Within the Torah community there will still be disagreements, but they will mainly concern emphasis and to a large extent will revolve around evaluations of outside circumstances. We believe that when G-d appeared to Moshe on Mount Sinai He balanced all of life's conflicting forces for us in a real life situation, and it is our job to maintain this balance even though circumstances change. This means, of course, that when circumstances change, in order to maintain the same balance, we may have to stress different things. Korach would have none of this. To him, all the problems were readily solvable. The communists in our day, too, thought they also had the solution to all of the problems of mankind. They did not, and when they realized that they did not, communism collapsed.

In the Torah portion Re'eh we learn about these things. The Torah portion opens with a singular word, "Re'eh - see," and it quickly goes to the plural when it says, "See, I give before you today a blessing and a curse." In life, G-d gives many views to people. As

long as these views are put forth in an effort to maintain the Torah's balance in the world they are legitimate. Many perspectives are needed in order to balance the unsolvable conflicts of life in every life situations.

That's why later on it says, "To the place which G-d your G-d will choose from all the tribes to put His name and you shall seek His habitation and you shall come individually there." Again the plural and singular are used to emphasize that, although we must choose in every situation one view over others, we must seek many opinions in order to arrive at G-d's chosen place in order to live a satisfactory and correct life.

Later on, we learn in this Torah portion about the false prophet. This false prophet may even do miracles, the Torah tells us, but if he pulls you away from the Torah and its mitzvah's with some sort of false promise of paradise on earth, with some sort of false promise of his being able to solve life's irreconcilable problems, with some sort of false promise that since he has come all arguments can be stilled, then you know that he is a false prophet. Until G-d sends the Messiah there will be unsolvable problems in the world. The arguments will continue. Only G-d is one. Therefore, we should never be upset if there are arguments as long as they are the L'Shaim Shamayim, for the sake of heaven, as long as they recognize the contradictory nature of the human condition and do not propose permanent solutions for every problem and as long as the arguments do not become personal attempts to destroy opponents or other people. Korach tipped his hand when he personally attacked Moshe and Aaron. Personal attacks are used most of the time just to obscure a controversy. The people who advance them know that their claims are false so they shift the argument away from the subject at hand onto individuals. Since no one is perfect, it is much easier to point out these imperfections rather than make a case based on claims which you know are false.

Yes, arguments will continue, but so what as long as they are conducted with dignity and respect and as long as the purpose of the argument is not to destroy others but to arrive at the truth in every given situation. The Arabs to this day do not want to sit down and talk to Israel. They just want to destroy her. They feel that all their problems will be solved if Israel disappears. How tragic and wrong! The arguments that we have to worry about are not the arguments that will endure but the arguments that will not endure, the arguments that try to destroy people today. They will not endure but they can cause lots of pain. Let us hope and pray that like Korach and his company, these arguments, too, will quickly pass away.

SHOFTEEM

Pain, Lies, Truth, and Renewal

Human beings are susceptible to different kinds of pain. We all know about physical pain and we all recoil from it, but there is a pain that is deeper and more searing than any physical pain and that is spiritual pain, a pain which strikes at the very heart of our being. The pain of being rejected by friends and family is more searing than the physical pain of cutting your finger or of burning part of your body. The pain of being falsely accused is a pain which can break a strong man, and the pain which comes from confronting your own inadequacies and sins is the worst pain of all. People will do almost anything to cover up this type of pain. People will pay large sums to have someone tell them that those things which they have done and which they know are evil are really good. False prophets

abound in every generation who are willing to tell us that we should not feel guilty for the things that we really should feel guilty for.

The only way to overcome this searing spiritual pain is to confront it and determine never to do again those things which caused it, which caused us to lose our self-respect, which caused us to contract such a pain. Most people, though, would, instead of confronting their pain, try to hide it, some by drink and by drugs, others by violence, and still others by trying to lie to themselves. The worst lies are the lies that we tell ourselves because eventually we come to believe them, and once we begin to believe our own lies we are lost, first of all, because since we have never confronted the truth we will not be able to correct our deficiencies, and, secondly, because since we refuse to recognize the truth we will never be able to rid ourselves of the searing pain within us. It will pierce through all our rationalizations and our excuses, and, suddenly, unexpectedly, will slap us in the face. We will suddenly become ashamed of ourselves all over again. We will become disgusted with ourselves once again.

In the Torah portion Shofteem we are told, "Judges and officers you shall give for yourselves in all your gates which the L-rd your G-d gives to you for your tribes and they shall judge the people with righteous judgement." It is curious that the Torah uses the singular here, "Judges and officers you shall give for you , L'cha." We would expect that the plural for you in Hebrew, Lachem, would be used since this is talking about judges that we must appoint for the total community. The rabbis ask, why is this? They say because not only is the Torah enjoining us here that we are to appoint justices and officers over the community, but we are to appoint judges and officers over ourselves. We all need to always critically examine everything that we do, that one of the most important aspects on leading a decent, humane life is to be self-critical, to be rigorously honest with oneself, not to deceive oneself with words or thoughts.

In politics candidates have paid assistants who they call spin doctors. Their job is to always try to put everything that happens in the best possible light for their candidate and to cast their candidate's opponent in the worst possible light. Words, concepts, and ideas are all juggled in order to make black white and white black. If unemployment figures are released which show a high level of unemployment, it is pointed out that unemployment always rises just before a recovery. If inflation jumps up, it is pointed out that this is a sign of high demand, and prosperity must be on its way. Everything can be made to look good and everything can be made to look bad. This, of course, is why politicians many times have a bad name in the community, because we know that what they are saying is not what is really the case. We know that what they are doing is putting up a false front. They are trying to make a purse out of a sow's ear. This will just not wash. People eventually demand honesty. They eventually demand the truth even if the truth hurts, because we cannot live with lies. They corrupt us and cause us great pain.

That's why synagogues are filled on the High Holidays. Each of us has to confront the truth about ourselves and our lives at least once a year. We need to do Teshuva. We need to recognize where we have failed and how we can improve. We learn in the Torah portion Shofteem, "Justice, Justice you shall pursue in order that you shall live." We must pursue justice whether it is to our own profit or loss. We must recognize that each of us has dignity, that each of us is deserving of respect, that when we trample on another person's dignity and self-respect we create the most painful of all hurts. Each person is a world unto himself. Each person has a divine soul. Each person needs to be recognized as

important. The rabbis say that shaming a person is akin to murder because when you take away a person's self-respect you break him and cause him to be demeaned even in his own eyes. We also must be careful never to destroy our own self-respect by covering our deeds with lies. We must pursue justice on two levels. That's why it says, "Justice, justice you shall pursue in order that you shall live." We must pursue justice vis-a-vis others and we must pursue justice vis-a-vis ourselves. We cannot lie to ourselves. We cannot inflate our accomplishments and we also cannot shortchange them. Many people, because they suffer from such terrible inner pain, actually loathe and hate themselves. They become terribly depressed many times because they refuse to confront their own inadequacies and try to overcome them.

On Rosh Hashonna we blow the shofar. The shofar is a cry from the heart. It is an unvarnished note. It signifies the truth. We have to get through all the layers of rationalizations and excuses in order to get to the truth. The unvarnished truth must spring forth. Then we can deal with it. That's why on Rosh Hashonna the keynote is truth: "And you shall purify our hearts to serve You in truth because You are a G-d of truth and Your word is true and endures forever." The hallmark of G-d, according to Judaism, is truth. G-d and falsehood cannot stand together. Unfortunately, throughout the ages fanatics have arisen throughout the world who have proclaimed that their ideas are so pure that they can use even falsehood and lies to achieve them. That, of course, is what the communists said. The truth must be sacrificed for the furtherance of the communist idea. Judaism has never believed that, and those Jewish groups who are willing to sacrifice to truth in order to gain some momentary advantage or in order to avoid difficult problems of faith are not following the Jewish tradition. They are falsifying our faith and in the end they will do more harm than good.

That's the way the rabbis explain that when it says in the Torah portion Shofteem, "You shall not recognize faces, you shall not take a bribe," it refers to doing a mitzvah. A person cannot say that since what he is doing is for a worthy cause, he can, therefore, lie. Before we can be forgiven for our sins on Yom Kippur, we must recognize the truth about ourselves on Rosh Hashonna. The shofar is a painful sound. True, it starts our strong and loud as a Tekiah, but it quickly turns into a Teruah and a Shvrim. Teruah in Hebrew means also an alarm. It is meant to frighten us. It should make us look into our moral mirrors and have us ask ourselves, is this the kind of person we want to be? It also turns into Shvrim, which connotes brokenness. The truth is many times very painful, but we cannot shirk from it if we are to live decent lives, lives which are not seared with the pain of moral failures. G-d gives us all another chance and we can wipe the slate clean, but we have to first recognize what we have done wrong. We have to confront it and determine not to repeat it. The root for the word break, Shever, in Hebrew can also mean hope. Hope breaks forth when we no longer have to live with the lies we tell each other and with especially the lies that we tell ourselves.

Joseph came out of prison on Rosh Hashonna because he knew how to tell the truth. He did not shirk before Pharaoh and try to curry favor with him by making up explanation for his dreams which he thought Pharaoh would like. He told him what he thought the truth of his dreams were, just like before when he heard the dreams of the butler and the baker he had told each one of them the truth as he saw it and did not try to curry favor with them. He just dealt with the truth.

In America today people do not want to hear the truth. When politicians especially try to

tell the American people the truth they do not want to listen and they cast these politicians aside. They are not doing themselves any favors or the country any favors because eventually the truth has to be faced.

In this Torah portion Shofteem, we also learn about false prophets, those who tell the people just what they want to hear. They do not serve the people, they do not serve themselves, and they make everything worse. At the end of this Torah portion we learn about how if a body of a murdered man is found between two cities and nobody knows who killed this man, the elders of the city nearest this murdered man must perform a special ceremony, and they must say, "Our hands have not shed this blood nor have our eyes seen it. Forgive, O L-rd, Thy people Israel whom Thou hast redeemed and suffer not innocent blood to remain in the midst of Thy people Israel." Surely no one is accusing the elders of killing this man, but the truth is that if murder becomes rampant, as it is today in the United States, there is something wrong with the policies of the elders of the land. Why don't people get as excited about the 25,000 people who are murdered every year in America as they do about the people who die from different types of diseases whose death toll is far less? Why aren't the people of America as upset about the 25% of the children in America who live in poverty as they are about raising taxes? Why aren't the people in America as concerned about the easy divorce laws which are ruining family life as they are about gun control? The truth must be faced even if it is painful. It must be faced on both an individual and a national level, otherwise it will destroy us individually and nationally.

Let us all hope that each of us in the coming year will face the truth on the individual level and the national level so that truly we will all be worthy of a happy, healthy, prosperous, and self-fulfilling New Year. On behalf of myself, my wife, and my family, I wish you all a Shana Tova.

KI SATZAY

Weariness, the Inner Life, and Religion

One of the strange facts of modern religious life is that usually the richer a person is the less religious he is while the poorer a person is the more religious he is. It seems strange that those who are blessed should be less religious than those who can barely make it.

This seems to hold true for countries, too; the poorer the country the more religious, the richer the country the less religious. We also notice this among Holocaust survivors.

Holocaust survivors, in the main, are much more religious than those who did not go through the Holocaust. Most of the Chassidim in Brooklyn and in Israel are Holocaust survivors. Even in our communities Holocaust survivors attend synagogue in much greater numbers proportionally than native-born Americans who never suffered the Holocaust. Why should this be?

In Hebrew there are two words for weariness. One word is "Ayaif" and the other is "Yageah." In Hebrew the word "Ayaif" means the weariness that comes from defeat. In other words, the weariness that comes to an individual after he has tried his best but still failed, the weariness that comes to a farmer after he has done everything right, plowed his field, fertilized his crops, put out pesticides, weeded, but the rain does not come, or it is the weariness that a person feels when a relationship fails, a relationship in which he did everything to preserve it but which failed in spite of all he did because it takes two to tango, or the weariness which comes to a person because of tragedy, a sudden death for no real reason, a business loss, a serious illness. This type of weariness can lead to a terrible sense of futility and can lead to a terribly depression. A person who suffers this type of weariness can lose his faith in G-d. He can just feel that he has to give up, that nothing is worth anything.

The second word in Hebrew for weariness, "Yageah," is the weariness that comes from success. It is the ennui and boredom of the rich. This weariness comes to a person who realizes that his success is hollow. It does not satisfy him because it is basically selfish. It does not satisfy his inner needs. He feels that his success has been due solely to his own efforts. G-d had nothing to do with it.

In the Torah portion Ki Saeitze we learn about Amalek. We learn how we are to "remember what Amalek did unto thee on the road when you went out from Egypt. Amalek met you on the way and he smote the hindmost, all that were enfeebled in your rear, and you were Ayaif and Yageah. You were weary and feared not G-d." From the text it is not clear who did not fear G-d. The text also speaks about meeting on the way all those who are already enfeebled. The ideas of Amalek are the antithesis of Judaism. Amalek does not believe that the world is going anywhere. Amalek believes what you see is what you get and what you will get. The world is a jungle. It is everyone for himself. It is the survival of the fittest. If you can take it, grab it. There is no such thing as mercy or compassion or Rachmones in an Amalekite view of the world. Amalekites view this world in a one-dimensional way. They see only the life of the outer man.

In Hebrew the word for "life" is plural, "Chayim," because each of us lives two separate lives. We lead an outer life and we lead an inner life, and many times these two lives are not at all congruent or even compatible. It is not enough to have a fancy outer life, to have a fancy house and a car and a swimming pool. It is not satisfying unless a person also has a rich inner life, an inner life which is filled with meaning and purpose, an inner life which says that he is important and that what he does is important, that other people count on him and need him and that G-d counts on him and needs him, too. Many times we find people who have nothing, who do not have much of an outer life but who are very happy because they have a rich inner life. They have wonderful relationships. They know they are needed and have never lost their integrity. Recently a very rich man in the community came to me, protesting how his life now was meaningless, how the happiest times of his life were his student days when he had nothing, when he was never even sure that his money would last until the end of the month, but then his life was filled with dreams and hopes. He had a goal. His parents were counting on him. He was the pride of his family. He was going to do so much good in the world. The material privations did not matter because he had such a rich inner life. In order for us to have a rich inner life, we have to know that we are needed. We have to know that G-d counts on us, that we are somebody, that our life makes a difference.

That's why marriage is stressed so much in the Jewish tradition, because we all need to be needed. When you marry someone, you are telling that person that you need him or her physically, emotionally, spiritually. If in your marriage you do not act like you need the other person, you will jeopardize your marriage. Both parties must acknowledge they need each other. If only one party feels that he or she is needed, the marriage will not work. Knowing that someone needs you and counts on you gives you a rich inner life. That is why the rabbis say it is impossible for a man to be without a woman and it is impossible for a woman to be without a man and it is impossible for both of them to be without G-d's presence. They have to know that they need each other and that G-d needs them both in order for Him to make this world a better world. They need each other and G-d's help to be complete and G-d needs them in order for the world to become complete. Amalek is able to hurt the Jewish people only when the Jewish people have become enfeebled, have become weary, have lost their inner life. That's why the text reads "and Amalek met you on the way," which means that you, Israel, were already very susceptible to receive the Amalekite message because you were enfeebled. You had become weary of life. You no longer felt that you were needed, either because you felt you were a failure and you could no longer hold up your end of the bargain, or because you felt that G-d was a failure because He did not hold up His part of the bargain, or because you did not need anybody. Poor people know that they need help. They know they are harassed. They know they are persecuted but they know they are needed by their family and G-d. A wag once said, "G-d must surely love the poor people, because He made so many of them." Religion teaches poor people not to take all the credit for their failures and not to consider G-d a failure either. Religion teaches poor people to value the inner life. It teaches them that love, dedication, devotion, compassion, care, and concern are more important than things. Religion also teaches us all that ultimately material success is fleeting, that worldly goods come and go, that only the things that you have in your heart and your mind stay with you forever, that relationships are more important than money. Holocaust survivors learned that very well. Money and position could not save them. Believing in material things alone is a very thin reed indeed.

In the Torah portion Nitzavim we are told "and you shall choose life in order that you should live, you and your children." Life, or course, here is plural. We do not denigrate the material things. In fact, we say it is nice to have them if we can have them, but remember the most important things are the inner things: to love the L-rd your G-d, to listen to His voice, and to cling to Him. In order to have a rich inner life we must also have dignity and self-respect. We must be able to look into the mirror and not be ashamed of what we see. Rich people many times want to take credit for all their success. They proclaim that they do not need anybody and, because they do not need anybody, their inner life is attenuated. They did everything themselves. G-d did not help them. They do not need G-d and they do not need morality. They have power and they can use it any way they like. If people do not like it, that's too bad. Poor people know that they need help, especially G-d's help. Rich people many times think they do not need any help, especially G-d's. They can solve all problems, even the problems of death and pain and interpersonal relationships. Unless you feel you need help, you cannot be religious. Poor people and poor nations know they need help; rich people and rich nations many times do not.

On Rosh Hashonna we blow the shofar. The shofar is a cry from within. It is not a

polished sound. It reminds each of us that we have to take care of our inner life, otherwise our outer life will not mean anything either, otherwise the material things we have gained will bore us and cause us great weariness. Why is it that the masses overthrew the rich French and Russian feudal lords? The reason is because the nobility of Russia and France were actually tired of their riches and did not feel it was worthwhile defending them. Many of them felt guilty about having them, and others felt they were useless. The same thing is happening today in the communist countries. The communist elite does not believe in their ideals anymore and, therefore, they cannot fight for their privileges because their inner life is gone. They do not believe communism will really lead to a better life.

Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur speak to our inner life. They tell us, get your priorities straight. Make sure you do not sacrifice your inner life to achieve things of the outer life because if you do you build on sand and everything will fall apart. That's why in the famous poem Moshe spoke to the Jewish people before he dies, G-d is referred to as "Tsur," or "rock." Unless we build on a solid foundation everything will tumble down. Jewish life in this country is suffering because its foundation is tottering. Too many people are only concerned about the outer life and too few about the inner life. In order to have a satisfying inner life we must know that we are accountable because if we are not accountable to G-d, then we do not count, and if we do not count, then all our riches do not matter either.

We also must always remember that we cannot defend our inner life by doing immoral and unjust things, otherwise we will lose our integrity, and if we lose our integrity, we cannot be counted on, and if we cannot be counted on, we do not count. Paradoxically, poor people know that better than rich people. Rich people and rich nations who are only concerned with the outer life forget that it was the rich inner life, one of whose components is integrity, which made their present prosperity possible. The other component, of course, is family. It was only because of strong Jewish families that the Jewish people were able to make it so big in America. If we do things in our pursuit of wealth which destroy our integrity or which destroy our family, then our rich inner life and everything we have constructed on it will totter and fall. Let us hope and pray that as we hear the call of the shofar this Rosh Hashonna we will always realize that it is our inner life which makes us what we are. Let us hope and pray that each of us in the coming year will nurture those things, integrity and family, which ensure a rich inner life so we will truly have a good year. On behalf of my wife and myself, I wish you all a Gemar Chaseema Tova.

KI THAVO

Declarations, Joy, Morality and Israel

In the Torah portion Ki Thavo, we learn about the special declaration that a person had to make when he brought his first fruits to the Temple. We learn how the declaration begins with the words, "An Armenian wanted to destroy my father and he went down to Egypt and he lived there few in number and he became there a great nation, mighty and great, and the Egyptians treated us badly and they afflicted us and put upon us hard work and we cried to the L-rd, our G-d, and G-d heard our cry and saw our affliction and our trouble and our oppression and G-d brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm and with great terribleness and signs and with wonders, and He brought us to this place and He gave to us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and now, behold, I bring the first fruit of the land which You gave me, G-d." This seems a very strange declaration. After all, what is the person saying here? He is reviewing Jewish history. He is not saying, "Thank you, G-d, for giving me the rain and an insect-

free year. Thank you, G-d, for giving me good soil. Thank you, G-d, for giving me the family to help raise these crops." Instead, he reviews Jewish history, specifically the history of Jacob, how Jacob was persecuted by his uncle Laban, who was also his father-in-law. Then we learn about the oppression in Egypt. Finally, we talk about the fruits. Why do we have this type of declaration? Also, why don't we mention Esau here? After all, Yaacov had a great battle with Esau, until they were reconciled, at least an inner battle, so why isn't Esau's name mentioned? Why should every Jew make this type of declaration every year when he brought up his first fruits to Jerusalem?

What's more, right after this we learn about another declaration that a person had to make every three years, a declaration which stated that he had paid all his charitable obligations, that he had given the correct percentage of crops to the cohen, to the levites, to the poor. He had to say, "I have removed the holy from my house and I have given it to the Levi and to the stranger and to the orphan and to the widow as all your commandments which You commanded me, and I did not violate your commandments. I did not forget and I did not eat when I was in mourning. I did not remove it when I was ritually unclean and I did not give from it to the dead. I listened to the voice of G-d, my G-d, and I did everything which You have commanded me." This, too, seems a strange declaration. We understand that a person has to pay his charitable obligations, that it is important. In our synagogue, too, unless a person has paid his dues, he cannot participate in the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services, so it is important that there should be an end point by which time a person should have paid up all his charitable obligations. But why does he say here, "I did not give from it to the dead and I did not eat from it in mourning". Why do these particular points have to be mentioned?

What's more, in this Torah portion we have recounted the ceremony that took place on Mount GREEZEEM and Mount ABEL, how half the tribes stood on one mountain and half the tribes stood on the other mountain, and how the Levites stood in the middle with the Kohanim and how they turned to Mount GREEZEEM, the mountain of blessing, and said, "Blessed be the man who honors his mother and father," and everybody said, "Amen." Then they turned to Mount ABEL, the mountain of curses, and said, "Cursed by the one who makes light of his father and mother," and everybody said, "Amen." The blessings and curses mentioned here concern commandments which are not within the purview of a court. They are private things that can be hidden. For example, giving bad advice. We are not supposed to give bad advice. But why is this ceremony mentioned here? After all, this subject was introduced in the Torah several Torah portions before, in Re'eh. Why wasn't this ceremony recounted there? Why is it recounted here?

It seems to me that if we look carefully at these questions we can see that they have a common answer. What is it? That the Jewish people, even when they are in Israel, should always remember that part of the Jewish character was molded in the Galut, in the exile, the Diaspora. The Jew, even when he is in Israel, has to remember that his relationship vis-a-vis the peoples of the world are dictated primarily by the experiences of the Jew in exile, that the Jewish character, to a large extent, was molded in exile. Jacob's character, to a large extent, was molded in exile. Why wasn't his encounter with Esau mentioned in this declaration? Because, after all, Esau was a Jew. He was perhaps not too good a Jew (later on we learn that his children left Judaism entirely, even though the rabbis say that Esau came back eventually to Judaism) but Esau was still a Jew. It is true that part of Jacob's character was molded by the conflict with his brother Esau who was also a Jew,

but what is stressed in this declaration is that even in Eretz Yisroel the Jew has to remember that how he relates to the nations of the world has already been determined by his relationship with G-d. The Jewish people's relationship with the peoples of the world is completely different from the relationship that one nation normally has with another nation. The Jewish people are not to be and never have been a normal people. One of the underlying premises of at least part of the Zionist movement, was that if we would have a land of our own with our own police force, our own army, our own farmers and factory workers that the world would love us and anti-Semitism would end. They believed that the reason there is anti-Semitism in the world is because we as a people were too top heavy professionally. We had too many lawyers, doctors, professionals. Of course, that theory has proved to be 100 percent false. The truth of the matter is that we Jews have been hated throughout history because we have been the representatives of G-d on this earth. We stand for the values of Sinai, and Sinai in Hebrew, the rabbis say, is very close to the word Sina, which means hatred. The rabbis teach us that since the time of Sinai here has been hatred for the Jewish people, that since the time that these values were enunciated on Mount Sinai, the nations of the world who really do not want to live by them have blamed us for foisting these values on them. Besides, the nations of the world really do not love anybody. They only love their own interests. The Jewish people have to be careful never to feel that the world loves us. The world does not love us. Laban pretended to love Jacob, all the while swindling him. The Egyptians in the beginning thought the Jews were great. They made Joseph the viceroy, but when it suited their purposes, they enslaved us. Nations have interests; they do not really have friends. Look at what even the United States did to South Viet Nam, and look how the U.S. has treated many of its other friends. Look at Taiwan, at other friends that have relied on the United States. They have not fared too well when the United States' interests have shifted because of different circumstances. Look what happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This peaceful country was attacked and no nation really did anything about it because it wasn't in any of their interests to do so. There is no oil there. Nations have interests, they don't have friends. They do not really care about other nations. They are also not going to come to Israel's aid if it is not in their interests. It reminds me of the story they tell about a man who called up a doctor's office. He talked to the nurse and said, "I have to see the doctor." The nurse looked at the appointment book and said, "Well, we can fit you in, in two weeks from now." The man said, "I may be dead in two weeks." The nurse said, "Well, that's okay. Just have your wife call and cancel the appointment." This is the concern that one nation has basically for another nation. Nations are not concerned really with moral issues. They are concerned only in pursuing their own interests. The Jewish people have to recognize this. They have to recognize that this has typified our relationships with the nations of the world since the time of Jacob. A Jew especially in Israel gains nothing by kowtowing to the gentile nations. If he wants to be respected he has to be a Jew and proud of his Judaism and practice it. He should not be dependent upon the other nations of the world, either for their flattery or for their false gifts which almost always turn out to be harbingers of coming oppression. That's why, too, the Jews says when he states how he has fulfilled his religious charitable obligations he says, "I did not eat in mourning from these holy things," because even today, some Jews in Israel will say that the Jewish religion is only for the Jews in the diaspora. It is for the Jews who have to handle programs and mourning. We do not really need it in Israel. That is not

true. In Israel, we need the Jewish religion even more. There was a movement afoot in some left wing circles in Israel to try to ban Israel from sending its high school students to Poland to look at the concentration camps because in the past, when these students came back to Israel, they had become 'right-wingers'. They had come to believe that Jews have to defend themselves and be suspicious of nations who said that they would protect us. They no longer were interested in the semi-pacifist philosophy of these left wingers. These left wingers live in a never-never land, a fairy land. They do not realize that the Jewish people have to take care of themselves. No nation is going to sacrifice their interests to take care of the Jewish people. Also, Judaism gives us such joy and dignity. We have nothing to be ashamed of vis-a-vis other nations or religions. Judaism is not just "doom and gloom" that helps Jews overcome pogroms and other problems of the diaspora. No, I did not eat the holy in mourning. We are not a religion of the dead and doom and gloom. We are a religion of the living. Our religion gives us such joy because it stresses self-reliance and empowers us to solve our problems. We, when we practice our religion, will capture this joy. When we practice Judaism, we will be joyful, especially in Israel. In fact, in the curses that are mentioned later in this Torah portion, the Torah says that one of the main reasons that many of curses will come upon the Jewish people is because they will not have served G-d with joy. We also need religion and the religious perspective in order to have a moral society. It used to be that many different types of crimes, especially violent crimes, were never heard of among Jews because the primary purpose of Jewish education was always to teach us to want to do what we ought to do. The primary purpose of Jewish education was not to teach us just Hebrew, different types of customs and ceremonies, history and familiarity with texts, etc. Yes, it was supposed to teach us those things, too, but its primary purpose was to teach us that we should want to do what we ought to do, to be Mentschen, to be moral people. Without religion and the religious perspective, man will not naturally act morally. We do not believe that man was born good. We do not believe man was born evil either. We believe that man was born neutral, and that we have to teach him if we want him to be good, otherwise he will choose the path of least resistance. Therefore, the ceremony that took place on Mount GREEZEEM and Mount Abel was placed here to teach us that the religious perspective of the Jew is essential if there is to be prosperity in Israel. The Jew in Israel has to know that Judaism is not just about how to handle persecution and pogroms in exile. It is necessary in order to feel the great joy that comes from living an independent life in Israel and also that it is essential if Israel is to have a moral, crime-free society. We have to educate our children in the moral principles of Judaism. Otherwise, crime will spread. Unfortunately, today there is some crime in Israel, not like in the United States, but there is crime in Israel today. That, of course, is a shame. We cannot turn our back on religion and say that our religion is only for the Galut and that we want to be a normal people. A normal people means crime. Our religion makes us different. It makes us joyful and by-and-large, free from violent crime. The main reason the Agudat Yisroel broke away from the Zionist movement in 1912 was because many in the Zionist movement proclaimed that we should be a normal people like all other peoples. Agudat Yisroel said that that was blasphemy, that the Jewish people are not supposed to be a normal people. We are supposed to be a light unto the nations. Mizrachi agreed with that, too, but felt that it could work within the Zionist movement.

Finally in this Torah portion, we learn how the Torah says that if we will follow the mitzvahs of the Torah, blessings will overtake us. What does this mean? This means that we do not have to run after blessings. They will overtake us if we make sure that we understand the joy that our religion causes us, the moral principles that our religion can teach us and also if we understand that the nations of the world will only respect us if we are true to our religion. If we understand these things, then we will never have to worry. G-d's blessings will flow upon us and we will live happy lives, satisfying lives, and we will have good relationships with our neighbors. Let us also always realize that the nations of the world do not like other nations who are dependent upon them. They want Israel to be independent and strong. If we become totally dependent upon them, they will quickly turn against us. Let us all hope and pray that we will learn these lessons of this Torah portion so that Israel will truly be a nation that stands up with pride, a nation that understands the joy of our religion, and a nation that is moral and filled with Mentschen. May Israel become all these things so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

NATZAVIM-VAYELECH

Children, Community and Jewish Survival

What is it that allows a minority culture to continue? How can it be culturally transmitted? What is it that is necessary in order for a minority to continue to live among a majority? In America today, we are seeing the rapid disintegration of the Jewish people. According to a recent study, a Jew today is more likely to marry a non-Jew than he is to marry a Jew. This is indeed startling since just half a century ago the rate of intermarriage hovered around five percent. A dramatic shift has taken place in the American Jewish people's perception of themselves. A person from a very prominent Jewish family recently came to me very upset. He had just gone to three family weddings within eight days and every one of them had been an intermarriage. More Jews convert out than gentiles convert in. The number of Jews who convert out is small, but the truth of the matter is that in most instances the grandchildren of Jews who intermarry are lost completely to the Jewish people. Intermarriage does not mean the marriage of a Jew to a convert but the marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew who maintains his own religion. We are self-destructing before our very eyes. Why is this happening? Why has the modern

American Jew decided to do what no persecution could do - destroy the Jewish people, at least in America.

Perhaps the answer to this question lies in the basic thought pattern of American Jewry, which is that I must do everything that is good for myself before I do anything that is good for the community. The order is myself, my children, and then the community. This is the mindset even of religious people. Secular people, by and large, stop with the priority of myself. Whatever makes me happy is what I should do. If this means sacrificing my children, so be it. Those who are still religiously attuned to Judaism but not the full Jewish message also include their children, but they do not in many instances go further to include the community. Traditional people used to think that what is good for the community is good for myself and for my children because ultimately if there is a strong community and a strong sense of community, the children will have the complete support systems they need in order to be able to remain Jews and to confront all of life's problems. In America, though, we destroy institutions for the sake of our children. In previous generations, Jewish religious institutions especially had to be changed to more match the majority culture in order that we should not lose our children. Today, we hear the same cry among certain circles that we have to change our institutions to adopt practices and customs which were extreme even in Europe so that we should not lose our children. Schools in certain communities have been divided, congregations split, rival organizations set up all for the sake of the children. Because the parents are afraid to lose their children, they have fought for things which are either against Jewish tradition or which are very divisive and which have never been in the mainstream of the Jewish tradition. The Jewish community has suffered as a result. It is only in those countries where a sense of Jewish community is strong that the Jewish people have been able to withstand the onslaughts of assimilation and self-destruction.

On the holiday of Rosh Hashanah, we read about the Akedah, the binding of Isaac. We read how Abraham was willing to sacrifice his child for G-d. We know that G-d does not want human sacrifice, but we also know that we are not allowed to sacrifice G-d either for our children. Rosh Hashanah proclaims that the Jewish people can only live if the Jewish people are willing to sacrifice for Judaism. They must think that Judaism is worth sacrificing for. They must believe that the world needs the values that are contained in Judaism. That is why on Rosh Hashanah we first pray for the world and then for the Jewish people and then for ourselves. We must feel that we are part of a people whose continued existence is necessary for the redemption of the world.

That is why we say that if the Jewish people would not have accepted the Torah on Mount Sinai, then the world would have been destroyed. The Jewish people must stay alive so that the values of the Torah will eventually be found throughout the world. The Jewish people must hear in their lives, in their mind, the call of Sinai. When they can no longer hear the call of Sinai, they stop being Jews. The call of Sinai demands that the Jewish people form strong communities. That is why we read in the Torah portion Nitzavim that, "you are all standing today before G-d, your heads, your elders, your little ones, your wives, your converts, from the hewer of wood to the drawer of water." We must all be included in the covenant. No one must be excluded. When Jews exclude other Jews, when Jews do not want to associate with other Jews whose observances they feel are inferior to theirs or superior to theirs, then there is no community and the covenant is not complete.

In the Torah portion Vayelech, too, we learn how all the people were to be gathered together, the men, the women, the children, the converts, to hear the Torah read once every seven years to them by the king in the Temple Court on Succos. The Jewish people were to be told that in many instances the welfare of the community must come before their own welfare, that unless there is a willingness to sacrifice for the community, Judaism cannot endure.

That's why before Moshe Rabbeinu launched into his final poetic song to the Jewish people in the Torah portion Haazinu it says that, "Moshe spoke in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song." Even in these three Torah portions which speak about Teshuva, about repentance, about an individual's return to G-d, the concept of community is stressed over and over again. The problem with American Jewry is that there is no sense of community. In Israel with all its problems there is a deep sense of community. People are willing to sacrifice for the Jewish people. Even the most secular recognizes this fact. Dangerous volunteer positions in the army are always oversubscribed. It is considered a shame in most circles in Israel if your child has not served in the army. National service of one kind or another is required from everyone. People in Israel know that they must sacrifice if Israel is to be strong, and they have readily absorbed just this past year alone hundreds of thousands of Jews into Israel. This inevitably has meant that their own living standards have been lowered, taxes raised, etc., but they know this is necessary if Israel is to be strong and endure. That's why we must all help them by contributing to Operation Exodus.

The Akedah teaches us that our children must be called upon to sacrifice for the community, too, that we should never put what our children want to do before the needs of the community as we do here in America. On Rosh Hashanah we blow the shofar. The shofar stands for not only the call to Sinai and the call of the future redemption, but it also stands for the ram which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son. Ayil, ram, in Hebrew also means power, strength, a tycoon. We many times have to sacrifice our ambition and our desires in order to maintain our religion. After all, why did Abraham have to sacrifice anything after G-d told him not to sacrifice his son? Abraham had to demonstrate to his son that although G-d does not want human sacrifice, He does require sacrifice from our children and from ourselves. He requires us to many times sacrifice power and ambition and even love. The word Ayila can also mean a lovely woman (as in the expression, Ayelet Ahaveem). In order to make sure that the Jewish people stay strong, G-d wants more from us than to just write a check. When Abraham lifted his eyes, the Torah teaches us he saw behind him a ram caught in the thicket with his horns, but this can also be translated as, "and he saw another power that was caught in the complexities of his own power, might and dignity." By sacrificing the ram, Abraham was telling his son, "G-d does not demand that you offer your life up to Him, but He does demand that you sometimes sacrifice that which in a particular point in your life you may think gives you strength, dignity, power, love, etc."

Judaism cannot exist without a sense of community. Many people leave Judaism and Jewish values because all they care about is themselves. They have bought hook, line and sinker the idea of rampant individualism. Others damage and destroy Judaism by trying to make Judaism into anything they think their kids think it might be. "We do not want to lose our children, so we have to change this and change that," they continually say. Unfortunately, they end up by losing their children anyway because their children do not

have any respect for something which can be changed at their whim and, in the process, they destroy the Jewish community. Judaism can only survive if we hear the voice of Sinai. The original shofar blowing at Sinai was done before the whole community, not just before individuals, and on Rosh Hashanah it is preferable to hear the blowing of the shofar in the synagogue.

We know that Rosh Hashanah is also known as Yom Hazikaron, the Day of Memory. Memory is more dependent on hearing than on seeing. Seeing has an immediate impact on a person, an impact, though, which gradually fades as the years go on. An immediate experience cannot be transmitted except by words, words which must be encased and surrounded by ceremonies and rituals. The impact of Sinai has been able to be felt throughout in every generation by the words and ceremonies and rituals that we perform. However, once we stop performing these rituals and stop saying the words, the Sinaitic experience is completely lost and our children no longer hear the voice of the shofar. If they no longer hear that our strong Tekiah, our ambition, must be modulated by the sacrifices that bring the sobs and complications of the Teruah and the Shvrim, then they will never be able to get to the Tekiah Gedola, to the great Tekiah of personal ambition which is tied to the Jewish community. A culture can only live, a people can only survive as a minority within a majority if it believes that it reflects a higher truth that is worth sacrificing for.

May our youngsters soon realize that their personal hopes for a fulfilling and joyful life are not to be found in doing what they want to do exclusively but in doing what they want to do in conjunction with the traditions of our people, in conjunction with the necessary sacrifices that are essential in order to maintain family and community. If they do, they will not only assure the continuance of the Jewish people, but they will ultimately have a better life themselves. Being tied to a people and tradition of such wisdom, compassion, enlightenment and beauty will not only enrich their lives but will also allow them to feel that they are bringing redemption closer, to feel that their lives have ultimate meaning. May they all soon be attuned to the call of the shofar so that our people will live in America.

HAAZINU

Heaven, Earth and Marriages

Today we read the Torah portion Haazinu. The Torah portion Haazinu starts out by Moshe invoking heaven and earth by saying, "Give ear, O heaven, and I will speak and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech will distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender grass and as showers upon the earth." Moshe Rabbeinu here is calling heaven and earth to witness that the words he is going to speak to the Jewish people are true. When bad things come upon the Jewish people, they should read this poem and then they will understand why these bad things came upon them, but they should also take heart from this poem because this poem speaks about the future redemption of the Jewish people. The Jewish people exist in the world to proclaim G-d's message. Many times Jews do not want to proclaim G-d's message. They do not want to proclaim the message of the Ten Commandments, but the world knows that we are representatives of this message in the world. Therefore, the world many times directs its hatred toward us. Hitler was very specific when he said he hated that semitic G-d with His thou shalt and His thou shalt not. That's why it is very important that the Jewish people continue, because if the Jewish people would ever be

destroyed, it would mean to the peoples of the world that the Ten Commandments are not applicable in this world, that G-d has no concern at all with this world.

That's why it is such a pleasure to see young Jewish people get married. In Judaism, there is no such thing as an alternative life style. There is only one life-style and that is marriage. The couple not only needs to be married for themselves but also for the Jewish people. That is the reason why a young couple gets married in public and why we need a minyan. This proclaims that the Jewish people are going to continue, that biologically the Jewish people are not dead, but that they will continue. That is one of the reasons we all rejoice so much. We also rejoice because the young couple has found each other.

According to Judaism a person is not complete until he is married. Originally, Adam was hermaphrodite, both male and female. He was lonely. The rabbis ask, why was he lonely? They answer he was lonely because he had nobody who needed him. The angels would give him anything he wanted but he could not give anything back to the angels.

Therefore, G-d split man in two and from then on a man needs a woman and a woman needs a man, not just physically but also spiritually and mentally and emotionally. Men and women look at problems from different viewpoints, and one of the miracles of marriage is that two people who look at problems differently can somehow compromise their differences and create their own harmonious whole. It is difficult and it requires a great deal of communication.

These first sentences in the Torah portion Haazinu talk about this communication. They say, "Give ear, O heaven, and I will speak." A couple must share common values. Unless they look up and see the same things, they will not be able to communicate. It has happened so many times that young couples come to my office and the reason they are having problems and disputes and fights is that one of the spouses wants a fancy home and fancy things and is willing to give up moral and religious values in order to attain these things, while the other spouse is not. Moral and religious values mean a lot to this spouse. Therefore, they cannot compromise. A couple must know what their values are. They must look up to heaven and see the same things. Also, even if they share common values, they have to be willing to communicate them to each other. If they are not willing to communicate them to each other, then they are going to have a lot of difficulty. They have to be open to each other, just as the sky is open to all of us. They have to be careful not to hurt each other. By the time a young couple gets married, they know each other so well that they know each other's weak spots and it is easy for them to hurt each other. They must not do that. They must steer away from those aspects of their spouses innermost being that they know will cause great hurt. They must always express their concerns in a nice way, but they should speak openly. Unless they speak openly and communicate then they are going to have trouble projecting a unified image of themselves to the rest of the world and they are going to constantly fight. There is the famous story about a man who saw his wife for the first time in curlers. He looked at her and said, "What's the matter with your hair?" The wife answered, "Oh, I have just set it." The husband replied, "Well, what time is it going to explode?" I am also reminded of a famous story they tell about the stages a couple goes through. When a man courts a young woman he does the talking and she listens. After they are engaged, she talks and he listens. After they are married, they both shout and the neighbors listen. It is important, though, that the couple get their problems out into the open. If they can do that, and discuss how they are going to achieve their common goals, then the earth will

listen to the words of their mouth. In other words, they will be able to function in this world. They will be able to function as a couple in the real world with all its concerns and cares and problems and they will be able to overcome all the problems of the world because they have communicated with each other.

The second lesson we learn from these opening verses of this Torah portion is when the Torah says, "My doctrine shall drop as rain and my speech shall distill as the dew." This verse "my doctrine shall descend as rain" means that in a marriage, there should be no surprises. Rain has no effect on ground unless it is first tilled. If rain falls on untilled ground, then all you end up with is mud. A couple must not surprise each other. A spouse must not come and do things that the other spouse is totally unaware of. For example, what happens if a wife decides she is going to spend \$500 on clothing when the budget calls for only \$10. When she surprises her husband with this, there is going to be a big fight, especially if the money situation is tight. If the woman would explain that she needs this extra money for a wedding outfit or for something else in her family, then they can together work something out; but it should not be a surprise. At the same time, the husband should not come home with a paycheck that is \$100 short because he lost it gambling on a football game. There should be no surprises.

Furthermore, when the verse continues by saying, "my doctrine shall distill as the dew," it purposely stresses dew because dew is good for everyone, even though the moisture dew brings is not as great as is rain. Dew is quiet and steady and revitalizes all the plants. This means that one spouse should not demand of the other spouse that he or she do something the other spouse wants with a full heart. If one of the spouses is willing to do just a little bit, just like the dew is just a little moisture, it should be enough. In other words, if the wife knows that her husband does not really want to do what she wants him to do, but he is willing to do it anyway because he loves her, that should be enough, or vice versa. If a wife is willing to go to a football game even though her husband knows she is not doing it with a full heart, so what? Doing something because you want to please the other person is one of the reasons for marriage. The rabbis say one of the reasons for marriage is so that we can do Chesed all day. We can do kindness all day. We do not have to do things with a full heart. The wife should not say, "Oh, you do not want to go to the ballet with me, so stay home." If he is willing to go, let him go. He does not have to love the ballet. In fact, in Jewish life we know that if you are commanded to do something and you do it because you are commanded to do it and not because you want to do it, it is a bigger mitzvah. That is why when I always ask my Hebrew school class a certain question, they always get it wrong. I ask them which person did the greater mitzvah. It happened that a little old lady came up to a person and asked him for \$10. He reached in to his pocket and gave it to her with a smile. Once it happened that a little old lady asked a person for \$10 and he also reached into his pocket and gave it to her with a smile, but he just did not want to do it but the reason he did do it was because he remembered the lessons of Hebrew school. He remembered what his parents taught him. He remembered what the Torah has commanded. Which is the greater mitzvah? The class always says the first case in which the person gave the \$10 with a full heart is the greater mitzvah, but that is not Judaism's answer. Judaism answers that the bigger mitzvah is when you do something you do not really feel like doing but you do it because it is the right thing to do. That is what it means to be a mensch, to be a human being, whether or not you can assume responsibility even when you don't feel like it. If the baby is crying in

the middle of the night and you do not want to get up but you do get up because you know you have to get up, you are doing a big mitzvah. A spouse should not demand from the other spouse fullness of heart before he or she is willing to accept what the other party is willing to do for him or her.

It is important that a marriage get off to a good start. It is important 1) that the couple communicate to each other, 2) that they have shared values, 3) that they are willing to work out any problems they have practically on how to implement their shared values and goals, 4) that they must pull no surprises on each other, and 5) that they accept their spouse's willingness to do things for him or her even if they know that their spouse really does not want to do them and is not doing them with a full heart. Implementing these principles will ensure that a marriage will endure. Let us all hope and pray that there will be many marriages in Israel so that the Jewish people will biologically be strong and that all these marriages will be strong, happy marriages which will be based on Jewish principles so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

ZOS HABROCHA

Why Do We Pray?

In the Torah portion Zos Habrocha, we learn how when Moshe blesses the tribe of Judah he says, "Hear G-d the voice of Judah". Even though Judah had the political leadership of the Jewish people, Moshe emphasized that Judah still needed to pray. Why, though, if Judah had all this power did he need to pray? What is prayer and why do we need to pray?

Prayer is a cry for help. Unless a human being believes that he needs help, he cannot pray. Most of the time when we make decisions in life we make them blind. Man is, by his very nature, limited. The most important decisions in our life we make intuitively: who to marry, what occupation to enter, even where to live. We do not interview 2 billion members of the opposite sex before we determine our marriage partner. We do not look through the hundreds of occupations listed by the United States Department of Labor before we choose our occupation. Most decisions we make in life are judgment calls. There are 50 reasons for doing a particular thing and 50 reasons for not doing it. We all need G-d's help in order to make the right decisions. We are not in control of all the factors in the world. When we pray, we, in effect, say, "G-d, I do not understand

everything about this world, but I know that You do. I need Your help. Please help me as You have helped our fore bearers in the past. Please make sure that I make the right decisions. There is so much pain and evil in the world. Please allow me to cope with whatever life throws at me. I know that goodness will eventually triumph, and I know that I have to live a righteous life so that I can help You bring this triumph about. Please give me the strength and courage to help You. I also know, O L-rd, that You have never promised us that if we will follow Your commandments we will not have problems, that You have only promised us that You will give us the strength to overcome these problems if we follow Your commandments. Please, O L-rd, give me this strength." This is the underlying message of all Jewish prayer. This is what it means to daven. In order, though, to make these assertions there are certain underlying beliefs that we must hold. We must believe that G-d is the creator, that G-d has the capacity to act and that it is proper to pray to Him; that G-d is the revealer, that G-d wants to have a personal relationship with us, and that He has given us the Torah so that we can help Him perfect ourselves and the world; and that G-d is the redeemer, that He wants this world to be perfected and that He wants us to help Him do this job. All Jewish prayer revolves around these three themes.

In the morning service, we first proclaim that G-d is the creator. This we do in the first of the two blessings we recite before the Shma. This blessing opens with the words, "Blessed art Thou, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates all things." It concludes with the words, "Blessed art Thou, O L-rd, Creator of the lights." In the second blessing before the Shma, we declare G-d to be the revealer. We proclaim, "Our Father, our King, for the sake of our fore bearers who trusted in Thee whom Thou didst teach laws of life, be gracious to us and teach us likewise to observe, do, and fulfill gladly all the teachings of Thy Torah." It concludes with the words, "Blessed art Thou, O L-rd, Who has graciously chosen Thy People Israel." We then recite the Shma which proclaims that G-d is one. In the Shma, we testify that we have accepted upon ourselves the responsibility to be G-d's partner in perfecting the world, that we have accepted upon ourselves the yoke of the commandments. We then say the blessing after the Shma which proclaims that G-d is the Redeemer, that G-d not only created the world and revealed His will to us but also wants to perfect this world and wants us to help Him. We then say the silent Amidah in which we ask specific things of G-d. The rabbis tell us that there can be no interruption between the Ge'ula and the Tefila, which means between the last prayer which proclaims G-d as the redeemer and the silent Amidah in which we ask G-d's help. This emphasizes the point that first we must believe G-d can help and will help before we can ask G-d for His help.

Jewish prayer reaffirms over and over again this threefold message: G-d can help, G-d wants to help, and G-d will help us if we turn to Him. In the introductory prayers of the morning service, called Pesuke Zemira, we sing G-d's praises, not that He needs these praises but in order for us to realize (1) that we are not alone, that we are grateful to Him for having given us this opportunity to be His partner in creation; (2) that we never have to be alienated, that G-d loves and cares for us and because of this love, we have self-respect and dignity; (3) that we can go beyond ourselves and touch the godly within ourselves and outside ourselves; (4) that G-d has given us a Neshoma, a soul, which yearns to be in G-d's presence. It is impossible to pray (1) if we do not feel that there is a

G-d to whom we can pray; (2) If we feel that the G-d to whom we pray is not interested in us; or (3) if we feel that G-d to whom we pray cannot help. In order to pray with a full heart we must believe that G-d has the capacity to help, that G-d wants to help, and that G-d will help if we turn to Him. It is not really important whether or not we know what the prayers mean word for word. Of course, it is better if we do. What is crucial is the attitude we have when we pray. We cannot be passive when we pray or daven. We must actively participate, which means we must say the words with our lips. We must feel what we say. We must feel we are talking to G-d.

In traditional Jewish worship, there are two distinct parts to the service. There is prayer, in which we talk to G-d, in which we pour out our hopes, aspirations, pain and doubts to Him, and there is learning Torah, in which G-d speaks to us. Prayer, in a certain sense, is almost a form of self-hypnosis in which we continually reminds ourselves (1) that it is not might that makes right but right that makes might; (2) that our lives do make a difference; (3) that our suffering is not for nothing; (4) that we are important; and (5) that we can help G-d make this a better world.

All Jewish prayers are in the plural because we do not pray just for ourselves. We pray for our people, our family, and the whole world. We know that we are part of a larger whole. That's why, too, we cannot say Kaddish and certain other prayers unless we have a minyan. The minyan testifies to the fact that we come closest to G-d when we all work together as a community. Davening with a minyan is a form of identification and reaffirmation. We all draw strength from seeing that each one of us is in the same boat, that we all need help, and that we all must acknowledge that we need help. We know that life is difficult, that many things in it are incomprehensible, painful, even absurd, but we also know that in the end, G-d's kingdom will come and the world will be better if we will all work together. We do not all have to walk in locked step to bring this about. What we have to do is what we do in a minyan where everyone prays individually but together. Each of us is called upon to make our own positive contributions but in harmony with others. We do not have to sacrifice our individuality in order to be part of the minyan. We just have to coordinate our activities.

Davening reaffirms our basic Jewish belief that if we will all work together we can go beyond ourselves. We can make this a much better world, and, at the same time, because we have drawn closer to each other we can realize the godly within each of us.

The mechanics of prayer

We pray three times a day: Shacharis, the morning prayer; Mincha, the afternoon prayer; and Maariv, the evening prayer. The rabbis teach us that we have these three prayers based on the experiences of our fathers. Abraham instituted the morning prayer, Yitzhak instituted the afternoon prayer, and Yaacov instituted the evening prayer. We need G-d's help both day and night. When the Jewish people wandered in the desert, a pillar, a cloud, was above the Tabernacle by day and a pillar of fire by night. During the daylight when man has great success, sometimes he forgets why he has had this success. He forgets that he has a silent partner Who has allowed him to make the right decisions. He forgets that his vision is cloudy, and he feels that he has done it all himself. We have to remember during the day when we begin an enterprise and when we conclude it, both in Shacharis and Mincha, that we have been blessed by G-d, and therefore, we have been able to succeed. Abraham blessed G-d when he rose early in the morning. Yitzhak blessed G-d in the afternoon when he was walking in the field and saw how his labors were coming to

fruition. We also must bless G-d at night when the darkness surrounds us, when things do not go our way. We also must thank G-d for giving us the opportunity to rectify bad decisions and for allowing us to still have hope even when all looks lost because He is there to help us. Yaacov, when he ran away from his brother, Esau, alighted at a certain place, which the rabbis explain was Mount Moriah, the Temple site, and fell asleep after the sun had set and had a magnificent vision of angels ascending and descending a ladder into heaven. Even at night when personal troubles overwhelm us, we should never give up but realize that G-d's protection and help is always available.

The rabbis also tell us that the prayers we have today are based on the ancient Temple services in which there was a morning communal sacrifice and an afternoon communal sacrifice. When we come to pray in the morning, we first put on a tallis, fulfilling the Biblical commandment to look at the fringes of our garments so that we shall not go astray. The tallis, the rabbis say, is equivalent to all the 613 commandments. The word, "tzitzit" or fringes in Hebrew stands for 13. When we wrap ourselves in our tallis we set the mood for prayer. We put ourselves in the correct frame of mind. It is preferable to pray in a synagogue for the same reason because when we enter a synagogue, we have expectations of meeting G-d there. G-d exists, of course, all over, and we can pray in every place, but when we enter a synagogue we expect to find G-d there. When we don a tallis, we put ourselves in the right mood for prayer. We also remind ourselves that in life we cannot do everything we feel like doing. We must pursue mitzvahs. In this way, we will assure our happiness.

The Jewish view of life is similar to the American view, but it is not identical. In America we believe in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In Judaism we believe in life, liberty and the pursuit of mitzvahs. By pursuing mitzvahs, we will ultimately be happy because we believe happiness is a by-product of doing mitzvahs. We do not believe you can be happy by pursuing happiness directly. The tallis reminds us that we have responsibilities not only to ourselves, but to G-d and to our fellow human beings.

On a weekday we also put on tefillin. One of the main meanings of tefillin is that it is a symbol of the marriage between G-d and Israel. The seven windings on the hand stand for the seven marriage blessings. The tefillin on the head stands for the marriage veil, and the three windings on the finger stand for the marriage ring. Putting on tefillin signifies that we believe that G-d has singled out Israel for the unique mission of spreading His morality in the world. It also teaches us that great truth which Judaism continually proclaims in all its practices, that ideas must be concretized in order to affect man's conduct. Our head, our hand, and our heart must be linked together if we are to be able to do great things. If we are right-handed, we put tefillin on our left hand. If we are left-handed, we put the tefillin on our right hand. We always put the tefillin on the weaker hand to demonstrate that we must never utilize all our power in a given situation, that we must never take advantage of the weak and the helpless. We do not believe in the killer instinct. We must continually bind our strength to the laws of morality. Our strength, our minds, and our feelings must be totally in the service of G-d. That's why the tefillin on the arm is opposite the heart, and the tefillin on the head is opposite the brain. When we pray we acknowledge that there are limits to what we can do. We cannot do what we want when we want. We cannot say that the strong, intelligent and talented deserve everything and others deserve nothing. This survival of the fittest type of thinking is not Jewish. It is actually the foundation of Naziism.

After we put on our tallis and tefillin, we then thank G-d for allowing our bodily functions to work. We in Judaism do not believe that the body is evil and the soul pure. We believe that the body and soul are a unity and meant to work together to help perfect this world. We then thank G-d for giving us the opportunity to learn Torah, which teaches us how we are to act in the world, how we are to balance the conflicting forces upon us. We then learn a small piece of Torah from the Book of Numbers and then from the Mishnah Peah and then from the Talmud Berachot, in which we proclaim that G-d has given us a soul that is pure. We affirm again the fact that we are important, that G-d loves us, and that we yearn to be in G-d's presence because our soul itself is part of G-d. We then thank G-d for giving us intelligence, for making us a Jew, for clothing us, providing for our needs, etc.

We then review the service as it occurred in the ancient Temple, and then we launch into the Pesuke Zemira, in which we thank G-d for creating us and again reaffirming the three basic Jewish beliefs that G-d has power, that G-d wants to relate to us, and that G-d wants to redeem the world and have us help Him do it. The morning service then continues with the two blessings before the Shema, the blessings after the Shema, and the Amidah, the silent standing prayer. In the Amidah we have 19 benedictions. The first three and the last three we say every time we say the silent Amidah. The Amidah is known in the Jewish tradition as "Hatfila" - the prayer. It is only in the Hatfila that we can ask G-d for anything. It is in the middle 13 benedictions that we ask G-d for things. You can tell what Jewish priorities are by studying what we ask for. We ask (1) that we be granted knowledge. Without learning and knowledge, a human being cannot elevate himself and cannot come close to other human beings and G-d. (2) That we all realize that we have self-worth, that no human being is bad or damned. We all have dignity and are important. (3) That no matter how much we have sinned, we can restore our dignity and self-worth by repenting. G-d will forgive us. (4) That we all need G-d's help in life. We can do everything right and still fail, like the farmer who plows and seeds but then there is a drought. We all need G-d's help. (5) That we all need good health. We can always rebuild and regain our fortune but once we lose our health, we are in a very bad position. (6) We ask G-d for material prosperity, that the crops should be full and bountiful. (7) We ask G-d for our freedom, that Jewish people should be assembled once again in Israel. (8) That we should once again be able to judge ourselves by the Torah, that we should not be subject to tyranny, false judges, etc. (9) That the slanderers and enemies of the Jewish people should be humbled. (10) That G-d's mercy should be felt by all who trust in Him and they should not be put to shame. (11) That Jerusalem should be rebuilt. (12) That the Messiah should come speedily in our day. (13) That G-d should hear our prayers and not turn us away empty-handed.

On Shabbos and holidays, we do not ask anything from G-d in the silent Amidah. On Shabbos and all holidays, except for Rosh Hashanah, we have only seven benedictions, the first three and the last three and a middle benediction which speaks about Shabbos or the holiday. On Rosh Hashanah we have nine benedictions: the three middle ones speak about the holiday of Rosh Hashanah. The first three benedictions of every Amidah speak about our forebearers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, about G-d's kindness in supporting all who fail, healing the sick, and reviving the dead and about G-d's holiness. The last three speak about the hope that G-d will always be pleased with the prayers of Israel, that all living things shall praise Thee, and that we will be blessed with peace. We hope and pray

that G-d will bless Israel and the world with peace. Peace is the crown of all the blessings.

On Shabbos and holidays, there is a special Mussaf which again confirms the fact that in the ancient Temple there was a Mussaf in which we thanked G-d for giving us the holidays. Again, each holiday represents a basic Jewish belief. Pesach stresses the fact that G-d is the redeemer; Shavuot that G-d is the revealer; and Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Succot that G-d is the creator. On Monday and Thursday and Shabbat mornings and afternoons, as well as the holidays and Rosh Chodesh, we take out and read the Torah. On Mondays and Thursdays and Mincha of Shabbat, we call three people to the Torah. On Rosh Chodesh we call four. On Pesach, Shavuot and Succot and Rosh Hashanah, we call five people. On Yom Kippur, we call six and on Shabbat, seven. When a person is called up to the Torah, he thanks G-d for giving us the Torah. After being called up to the Torah, a mishebirach may be made. Mishebirach means literally "May the One Who blessed our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, bless so and so who has come to honor G-d and the Torah. May the Holy One, Blessed be He, protect and deliver him from all distress and illness, and bless all his efforts with success together with all of Israel, his brethren, and to this let us say amen." A mishebirach, or blessing, may also be said on behalf of a sick person or may be said to bless one's family or on many happy occasions: for example, the naming of a newborn daughter, a wedding anniversary, a birthday, etc.

Kaddish is an affirmation of belief. It expresses our faith that eventually the Kingdom of G-d will come, that all pain, suffering, and inhumanity will cease. The Kaddish was chosen to be said by mourners because to express such faith at a time of such pain requires great courage. It is also considered a great merit to parents to have raised such children who can, in such a painful time, reaffirm their belief in the ultimate goodness of the world. The greatest thing that we can accomplish in this world is to leave behind good children, children who follow in the traditions of our faith. When someone rises in the congregation and affirms once again the faith of Israel, a faith which states that we all can help bring about a better world, he does a great thing. Of course, it goes without saying that if a person leads an immoral life in which he cheats and harms others, saying Kaddish is to no avail. But if the Kaddish is a symbol of our determination to help better the world, an affirmation of our belief in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, which we back up with righteous action, then the saying of Kaddish is in itself a power stimulus to righteous living and a powerful link between the generations.

A Kiddush is actually part of the davening experience in Judaism, too. The origin of the Kiddush is the ancient Shlomeem or peace offering which was sacrificed in the Temple. Only a few drops of blood or piece of fat were actually placed on the altar. The rest was eaten by the family and their friends with the exception of a few pieces which were given to the priest. Sharing food has always been a way of expressing joy and happiness in Judaism. Sharing food in the synagogue shows gratitude to G-d and to friends and relatives for all their help in allowing the person of family to celebrate this happy occasion.

Prayer shows that we are grateful to G-d for giving us the opportunity to help Him perfect this world and for giving us the friends and relatives to help us perform this task. Prayer is a meaningful experience which encompasses more than the lips. It encompasses the heart, the mind and the body. In fact, when we say Hatfila, the silent Amidah, we

actually take three steps back and then three steps forward in order to remind ourselves that we are encountering G-d, coming into His presence. We do the same when we finish the Amidah. Prayer signifies to a Jew that he is always in G-d's presence, that G-d is accessible to him, that G-d will help him, and that he is not alone. We are grateful to G-d for giving us life, and we want to continually express this. May we all be worthy and want to stand in His presence. Amen.

SHABBOS HAGODOL

Ethnicity, G-d and Jewish Survival

In the Hagaddah we have a strange statement. Right after we learn about the four sons and about how the seder takes place on the 15th day of Nisan at night, we learn how our forefathers were idol worshipers. It says, "Long, long ago our forefathers were worshipers of idols. Now the Eternal is our G-d and we worship Him. In the days of old your forefathers lived beyond the river that is Terach, the father of Abraham and Nochor. They worshipped other gods." What does this have to do with Pesach? Why bring it up? Why put it in the Hagaddah?

After all, we all know that what we are celebrating on Pesach is our exodus from Egypt. What we are celebrating is our freedom from slavery. What relevance does the fact that we were originally idol worshipers have to do with the exodus from Egypt?

There is an argument in the Talmud between Rav and Shmuel. Shmuel says that what we are celebrating is our exodus from spiritual slavery, that the real danger in Egypt was not that the slavery would eventually eradicate us physically, but that it would destroy us spiritually, that if the slavery would have gone on much longer, we would have lost our

religious identity as Jews and would have become just like the Egyptians. The rabbis ask the question, why is it that we do not make a brocha before we read the Hagaddah? After all, before we do any other mitzvah we make a brocha, even before a mitzvah that has been decreed by the rabbis, like Chanukah candles or like reading the Megillah, but when it comes to the Hagaddah, which is decreed by the Torah, we do not make a brocha. We only make a brocha at the very end of the reading of the Hagaddah, right before we drink the second cup of wine and before we eat the matzah. The blessing we make is, "We will offer up to you a new song on your deliverance and on the redemption of our souls. Blessed are You, G-d, Who redeemed Israel." The rabbis say that we do not make a brocha when we start the Hagaddah because the Hagaddah starts with Genai, with degradation, and ends with praise. We do not make a brocha at the beginning of the Hagaddah because it speaks about the Jewish people's degradation, and we do not bless G-d for the fact that we were degraded. We only bless G-d on our redemption, on our liberation from this degradation.

Rav and Shmuel disagree on what this degradation was. Shmuel says that this degradation was caused because of our physical slavery. This slavery so ground us down that we did not feel any more worthy of being G-d's partner in creation. We lost our self-esteem. The slavery, itself, tore out our souls. One of the hardest things to do is to take the slavery out of the slave. Many times you can take a slave out of slavery but you cannot take the slavery out of the slave. Many times the first thing a slave does after getting his freedom is to look for a new master. That is, of course, what the Russians did after the Russian Revolution. They traded one dictatorship, the czar, for another dictatorship, communism. Today, the great fear is that they will once again trade the dictatorship of communism for another dictatorship.

Rav, on the other hand, said that the degradation of the Jews was not caused so much by slavery but by the fact that the Jews in Egypt had begun to admire the Egyptian culture so much (because they had lost contact with so much Jewish learning) that they were rapidly assimilating. They were reverting to the status of their ancestors. They were becoming idol worshipers. There is nothing in the Jewish character which prevents a Jew from becoming an idol worshiper. As the Hagaddah said, originally our forefathers were idol worshipers. The great degradation of Jewish people in the beginning of the Hagaddah was that they had almost become idol worshipers and that if G-d had not saved them when He did, all the Jews once again would have become idol worshipers. The Jewish memory was attenuating and gradually disappearing.

The rabbis speak contradictorily about the Jews of Egypt. They say that the Jewish people were at the 49th level of tuma, that if they would have stayed in Egypt any longer, they would have been complete idol worshipers. They only had one more rung to go. At the 50th level they would have been complete idol worshipers. On the other hand, the rabbis say that the Jewish people were worthy to be saved from Egypt because of four things: they kept their Hebrew names, they kept their distinctive dress, they married among themselves and they helped each other. If they had all these qualities, how could the rabbis say that they were on the 49th level of tuma?

The answer is that these four qualities had allowed them to maintain their identity as an ethnic group, but it would not prevent them from religiously assimilating. Soon after their religious values would have totally disappeared, their ethnic identity would too have disappeared. They would have changed their names and their dress and they would have

stopped marrying primarily among themselves and they would have stopped helping each other. Ethnicity can only maintain Jewish identity for so long. We see this with Russian Jewry. For approximately 75 years they were denied access to Jewish learning, to the practice of the Jewish religion. Yet they were able to maintain their ethnic identity at least in a tenuous fashion up to now. However, everyone is in agreement that if the great miracle of our generation would not have happened, that if communism would not have fallen and that if Russian Jewry would not have been allowed to leave, in another generation they would have all assimilated. This was the condition of the Jews in Egypt. Their Jewish memory was attenuating. Their Jewish memory was disappearing. The purpose of the Pesach seder, the Torah tells us, is so that we will remember the Exodus from Egypt. The rabbis all ask the question, what is unique about the seder on Pesach? After all, a Jew is supposed to remember the exodus from Egypt every day. In fact, in the third paragraph of the Shma, we have the line, "In order that you will remember and you will do all My commandments and you will be holy to your G-d, I am the L-rd your G-d Who brought you out from the land of Egypt." The third paragraph of the Shma primarily deals with the tzitzis, the fringes on the tallis. We all know that we do not wear a tallis at night because it says, "You shall see them." The rabbis tell us that this means that you should see them by natural light. The only reason why we read this third paragraph in the evening Shma is because in it we remember the exodus from Egypt and we are supposed to remember the exodus every day and night. If that is so, what's so special about Pesach? What's more, in the Book of Shmos we learn twice more about remembering the exodus. We learn in Chapter 13, verse 8, "And you shall tell to your son on that day saying . . ." and we learn in verse 13, "And it shall be when your son will ask you saying . . ." What's this "and you shall tell him, 'With a strong hand G-d brought us out from Egypt' " ?

There are three different types of memory. The memory that we experience every day when we mention the exodus in the third paragraph of the Shma is a memory of a distant event. It is an intellectual memory. It does not really shape and mold us. It is like many things in life. We perceive them but we really do not know them with understanding. It is like the person who knows that it is dangerous to his health to smoke but he keeps puffing away anyway. Intellectually he knows that it is wrong but he really doesn't not know this with understanding. If he did he would not smoke. The second level of memory is the memory of immediate experience. That is the type of memory the seder is supposed to give us. That's why it is a positive commandment of the Torah to tell your children about the exodus from Egypt at a seder. At the seder you involved all the senses. All the senses become involved and the memory is not only a memory of the historical event but is a memory which shapes and molds you, an immediate experiential memory which gives you values. After a Jew has attended and participated in a seder, he cannot help but feel the importance of freedom and the necessity of helping the enslaved. Many Jews who themselves are very assimilated feel the Jewish message of freedom in their bones because they have experienced a seder. However, unless the memory also reaches into the future, unless the message also instructs you how you can implement Jewish values in the days and weeks ahead, the memory has not done its job. That's why it says, "When your son shall ask you tomorrow . . ." Memory must not only allow you to recognize your past, to give you an identity, and memory must not only allow you in the present to understand your values today, but memory must also point to the future, to

what tasks which you have to assume in the days ahead.

Unfortunately, much of Jewish education today is only geared to give our children the first two levels of memory. So many Jews were so ignorant of our past and so many Jews felt inferior to others because they did not know about our past that all our efforts had to be made to give them a past, to restore to them their past so they could be proud of themselves. It was necessary to explain to them how it was our past which gave them the human compassionate values we all cherish, but that is not enough. Our memory must also lead us to the future and point us out the tasks that we have to do. The problem with the Jews in Egypt was that they were losing their memory just as the problem with the Jews in Soviet Russia was that they were losing their memory and did not have the ability to recapture it. We Jews in the United States, too, suffer from a loss of memory, but we have the ability and the freedom to recapture our memory if we want to .

Ethnic identity is not enough. Ethnic identity will not save the Jewish people. It is only a belief in the religious ideals of our people, a belief in G-d Who can save us and Who will save us and Who will help us save the world which will allow Judaism to persevere. There is a very strange Halacha. The Rambam says that if anyone eats matzah erev Pesach, that person is deserving of stripes. The Jerusalem Talmud and Tosafos in the Babylonian Talmud say that a person who eats matzah erev Pesach is like an engaged man who has intercourse with his fiancée. What has this got to do with Pesach? In the old days, the engagements were not engagements. They were really marriages. However, the couple did not live together as husband and wife for sometimes up to a year so the man could go out and get the money to support his wife. After he obtained the funds to support her or the profession to support her, they then had a second ceremony and lived together as husband and wife. Before he could demonstrate that he could support her the rabbis forbade him to have intercourse with his engaged bride. It is interesting to note that the three major symbols of Pesach each have a double meaning, but it is only the positive meaning which is spoken about in the Hagaddah. The Korban Pesach stands for both G-d's deliverance and for the Jewish people's rejection of idolatry. When the Jewish people rejected idolatry by slaughtering the lamb at 12 noon the day before G-d delivered them, they were, so to speak, in the same situation as an engaged bride. They had rejected all other suitors but G-d had not proven that He could take care of them. Matzah also has a double connotation. Matzah stands for Lechem Oni, the bread of affliction, the bread of slavery, and also stands for the bread of freedom. The Jewish people so trusted in G-d that they were willing to leave Egypt with only matzah. It was called in the Zohar Michla Dehamnusa, the food of faith. Again, until G-d redeemed them it became the bread of faith. The Maror also stood for bitterness, the bitterness of slavery. The bitterness of slavery was not just hard work. The bitterness of slavery was the killing of children, the separation of husband and wife, the entombing of workers as bricks if they did not fulfill their quota. This bitterness was terrible, but the bitterness that is talked about in the Hagaddah is the bitterness of hard work. Hard work itself is not bitter. That is why we dip the Maror, the bitter herbs, into the Charosis, the symbol for bricks. The Charosis is sweet. Hard work is only terrible when you are forced to do it, but working hard after deliverance is a joy.

The Hagaddah stresses the fact that after the redemption, the Jewish people's soul was forever free, that no matter what the future persecutions, the Jewish people would never feel that they deserved slavery. We would never feel that the idols of their oppressors

were true and correct because G-d had proven that He can take care of us. He had redeemed us from Egypt, and to every Jew that proves that G-d takes care of us. That is why the Rambam says that anybody who eats matzah on erev Pesach, before the redemption, deserves stripes, and why the Jerusalem Talmud says that a person who eats matzah on erev Pesach is like an engaged man who has sex with his fiance. This bond between the Jewish people and G-d could not be based upon the confidence and faith in G-d's redemption until G-d actually redeemed us. Eating matzah before the exodus just reminded us of our slavery, not of G-d's redemption. Jewish identity cannot be based solely on ethnicity. The negative reasons for being a Jew, because the Egyptians persecuted us, because the Egyptian gods are false, because the Egyptians fed us the bread of slavery will not allow us to maintain Jewish identity. Yes, persecution can maintain us for a certain period of time, but eventually, as Shmuel taught, slavery will grind us down as a people and we will disappear as all other slave people have. They all eventually lost their culture and language. As Rav has said, slavery will cause us to spiritually disappear. It will cause us to adopt the idols of our masters. Those people who pin their hopes on Jewish identity by stressing the suffering of the Jewish people will not succeed. The Jewish people can only survive if we recognize that it is the G-d of Israel Who redeemed us and makes our continued existence possible. The Jewish people could not eat matzah on erev Pesach because G-d still had not redeemed us. The Jewish people are compared to the bride and G-d to the groom. The groom had still not provided for us. Yes, it is important that we maintain Jewish identity any way we can, but ultimately we Jews will only survive because we have recognized that it is the ideals, the values, the way of life of the Jewish religion that has allowed us to persevere and continue. It is only when we stress our relationship to G-d, His deliverance, and His giving us a role individually as His partner in creation that we will be able to maintain our identity. Rav and Shmuel are both right. Persecution will destroy us physically, ethnically as a nation and spiritually as a nation. That's why in the blessing we make when we conclude the first part of the Hagaddah, we say, "And we will offer up to You a new song on our redemption and on the redemption of our souls." It is by recognizing not only the ethnic quality of the Jewish people but also our religious mission that we can maintain our freedom and the freedom of our souls. How do we know that? Because as the blessing continues, "Blessed are You, O G-d, Who redeemed Israel." The Egyptian experience taught us then and throughout the ages that the Jewish people can survive everything and can fulfill their mission on this earth because G-d saved us from Egypt and will continue to help us as long as we are willing to be His partner in creation. The Jewish people will survive as long as we believe in the Jewish religion and believe that G-d is there to help us. May we all recognize this and thus assure our survival so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

PESACH

Cataclysmic Events, History, and the Jews

Life does not progress in small increments. There used to be a philosophy of history which was very popular which stated that progress was inevitable and that, because progress accrues steadily bit by bit each year, it was very easy to chart history. All you would have to know is the number of years that have passed and multiply them by the small amount of progress that is made each year, and you will be able to extrapolate into the future how much progress human society will have made by any given year. Naziism destroyed forever that theory. There is no such thing as inevitable progress in human affairs, and it is impossible to chart the course of human events. Life goes up and life goes down. We do not start at the bottom of a ladder stretching to heaven but in the middle. We can go up but we also go down. History does not grow in small incremental bits toward the desired goal of world peace, harmony, and brotherhood. It must be nudged and sometimes it heads in the wrong direction.

History is much more a record of man's reaction to a series of cataclysmic events which, true, many times are caused because of small incremental problems which have not been taken care of, but which usually is a record of man's adjustment to unpredictable cataclysmic events. It is these events which have forged mankind's direction. Scientists now say that this is true also of natural history. Unpredictable cataclysmic events have occurred which have forced different species to adapt to them immediately. If they could not, they were almost immediately destroyed by them. Dinosaurs, scientists now say,

were destroyed by the impact of a comet which hit the earth 65 million years ago. The dinosaurs could not adapt to the new conditions and disappeared. The small mammals who could adapt to the new conditions thrived.

In our day we saw how the collapse of the Soviet Union did not occur gradually. True, the situation has been brewing for many years. The Soviet people, by and large, no longer believed in communism. The Soviet state could not provide its citizens with a standard of living which was on par with the United States or with Western Europe. The internal contradictions of the Soviet Union became too great and with the rise of television, the Soviet people could now see how the westerners lived, and the Soviet Union collapsed. It could not longer compete economically or militarily. It could not adapt to new situations. Collapse usually occurs rapidly in human society. Unless the small little fissures are taken care of immediately, they quickly multiply with a ferocious speed, and the whole house totters and falls.

We have just celebrated one holiday, Purim, and we are going to celebrate another holiday, Pesach, which speaks about this problem. On the surface these holidays seem so different. Purim is a frolicking, seemingly carefree holiday in which we don masks, drink and eat too much, and read from the Book of Esther, a book of the Bible which does not even contain G-d's name. What's more, the hero and heroine of this book have Persian names, Mordechai and Esther. It is a holiday which seems to belong to antiquity, what with its palace intrigues, drunken, fun loving king, and record of palace mores. Yet, the rabbis say Purim is one of the most profound of all the holidays and at the end of days when the Messiah will have come, the rabbis teach all the holidays will be abolished, except for Purim. The word Esther, although a Persian name, also has a Hebrew meaning, to be hidden. When we read the Megillat Esther, what we are saying is that we are revealing that which is hidden. G-d works throughout the Purim story secretly behind the scenes. Coincidences occur which you and I know are not coincidences. The king cannot sleep. Haman just happened to be in the antechamber when the king had just read in his chronicles how he had not rewarded Mordechai for saving his life, etc. G-d acts without seeming to act. Even the name Purim signifies this. Purim is a Persian word, not a Hebrew word. The word for lots in Hebrew is goralot.

There are two types of people in this world who, working together, can cause evil to take over a society, who can reverse completely all the progress that has been made toward creating a society based on love, harmony, peace, and brotherhood. The first type are the Hamans. They possess what all of us would consider proper middle class values. They are hard working, ambitious, family oriented people who are devoted to their work and to their country, but who are consumed with hatred. When problems strike them, they must blame other people for them. Also, because they are so consumed with ambition, they will always do everything they can to get ahead, even if this means maligning and hurting others, even a whole nation. They believe that the strong have the right to take what they want and the weak have the right to die. These people are a very small percentage of the population. We have them here in American, too. David Duke is a prime example.

The other type of person is one who could not care less either way. All he is interested in is doing what is good for himself. He wants someone who can solve his problems. If that means that the person who can solve his problems also hates other people and groups, he does not care as long as he can solve his problems. This is what happened in Germany. Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany democratically, not because most Germans

were anti-Semitic, but because most Germans felt that he could solve their problems. They really did not care about his bigoted views one way or another. As long as he got them a job, reestablished what they considered proper family values, restored German pride, gave them a thriving economy and pride in themselves, he was okay. They just wanted somebody to solve their problems. This was Achaverosh. He, like the German people and many people today in the United States, did not really have a firm sense of right or wrong. All he cared about was that he have someone who could solve his problems. Achaverosh was a playboy type king. He liked to party. As long as Haman was running the affairs of his kingdom efficiently and leaving him alone, letting him do anything he wanted, then everything was okay. It was only when Haman's hatred touched someone the king loved, Esther, that the king was stirred to action, and when Esther told him and when he himself was convinced that Mordechai could run the affairs of state just as well as Haman, he became a veritable friend of the Jews. If it was good for him, everything was all right. If it would be bad for him, watch out.

It is up to us Jews to always remove the mask of evil people, to show that evil people will harm not only Jews but also the total society, that they will hurt not just the Mordechais, but also the Achaveroshes. We Jews, in order just to maintain society where it is, must be ever vigilant. That's why the rabbis explain that the very strange law which states that you have not fulfilled the mitzvah of reading the Megillah if you read the Megillah backwards has an entirely different meaning than its literal meaning. It does not mean reading the words of the Megillah literally backwards. Who would do such a thing? It means that the events of Purim did not happen only some time back in history. They are happening every single day. G-d has told us that if you remove the mask of these evil people you will be able to maintain history on an even keel. The Achaveroshes of the world will be on your side and not on the side of the Hamans. Many Jews do not realize that. They would rather pretend that evil people do not exist or they would rather rationalize away the comments of these evil people or try through flattery and even bribery to get these evil people to change their mind. This will not work. The only thing that will work is to remove the mask from them.

Purim is a joyous holiday because we can unmask evil people. G-d has told us we can do it because He will help us. If we could do it in Persia (that is why the Persian word Purim is used), we can do it in any diaspora country.

Pesach speaks about history going forward, not just maintaining itself on an even keel, not just thwarting the evil designs of a Haman. It talks about the cataclysmic fall of kingdoms who are built on evil. All these evil empires will fall of their own weight. We must never give in to them. We must silently and stubbornly persist until they are no more. In our own day this is what Russian Jewry has taught us. Continue the best you can under these types of regimes. Never give up. They will totter. It will eventually be evident to the whole world that these regimes cannot endure. When it comes to Pesach, G-d's name is mentioned over and over again. We must never give up hope that moral principles are stronger than iron whips. All these empires eventually bring plagues upon themselves, and the Jewish people will go free. However, here, too, we have a role to play. We must not succumb to the blandishments of the pagan philosophies which undergird these evil empires. We Jews must heroically reject the gods, the philosophies of these empires. If we do not, then history will not move forward. What usually happens in revolutions is that the only thing that changes is who is persecuted and who is doing

the persecuting. The story of Pesach comes to teach us something else, that the whole concept of persecuting others must change. Jews who become free just to implement the pagan philosophy of persecution have not become free. That's why we celebrate Pesach with a seder. We relive slavery so that we should not enslave others. We also are to remember slavery so that we will do our best always to make sure that we are never enslaved again. History moves forward when we can implement the concepts of Sinai, when we can teach the world that we all should relate to each other as brothers.

Therefore, the purpose of the Exodus was not just for us Jews to be free, but for us Jews to be free so that we could serve G-d on Mount Sinai, so that we could adopt an entirely different value system from the value system of Egypt and serve as a role model for the whole world. The rabbis tell us that the Jewish people in Egypt had sunk to the 49th level of Tumah, that if we would have sunk any lower we would have been unredeemable. On the other hand, the Medrash tells us that we were redeemed from Egypt because we still had strong families who were willing to help each other and because we did not change our names, our dress, and our language. The Jewish people retained the desire to, as a nation, implement the teachings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had, however, because of the slavery, become very confused as to how to do this. Pesach teaches us that the first thing a Jew must do in order to cause history to be propelled forward is to support strong family values, and to retain our identity, and the second and even more important thing we must do is to make sure that we understand that our values must reflect Sinai and not other cultures.

Purim and Pesach teach us about the Jewish role in history. In the diaspora, because we are subject to the whims of local governments, Purim teaches us that it is our obligation to make sure that we always unmask the Hamans so that history will not sink lower and lower into the abyss of hatred and bigotry, and Pesach teaches us that when evil empires fall, it is our responsibility to create a Jewish society which will propel history forward by being based on the moral and ethical and religious values of Sinai. In our own day with the collapse now of all the 19th and 20th century empires, Israel has come into being. It is our hope and prayer that as Israel Independence Day approaches, Israel will, after she has finally achieved peace with her Arab neighbors and will no longer be afraid of being destroyed by them, build a society which will truly serve as a beacon of light to all man and cause history to move forward toward the goals which were enunciated at Sinai, the goals of peace, harmony, and brotherhood.

FIRST DAY SHAVOUT

Compassion, Teshuvah, Unity and Torah

Today we read the Ten Commandments. When we begin our reading by saying, "In the third month of the going out of the Sons of Israel from the land of Egypt, in this day they came to the desert of Sinai." It says the third month. It does not even say the date, just the third month. Why does the Torah stress so much the third month?

Also, if we look at the personalities that are associated with the holiday of Shavuot, we will find that three personalities have been designated to be associated with this holiday. One is Moshe, the second is David, and the third one is the Baal Shem Tov. In fact, the rabbis say that it was on this day, the day of Shavuot, that Moshe was placed in the bulrushes. His mother had hid him successfully for three months, but after three months she could no longer hide him. The Egyptians could count, and, although she had hid her pregnancy for her first three months, they knew that now she had to have a baby. The pillow had to come out, and so on this day Moshe was placed into the bulrushes along the Nile and was found by the daughter of Pharaoh, Bithia. Many Jewish women are named after Bithia, Pharaoh's daughter: Bessie, Bassa, Bashie. These are all names that derive from the word Bithia, because she showed such Rachmones, such compassion. She violated her father's order, and she took the young Hebrew baby into her own house and raised him as her own. That is the reason we have greenery in the shul on Shavuot, according to some rabbis, to remind us of the bulrushes, the reed grass in which Moshe's ark was placed.

Kind David is also associated with this holiday. David was born on Shavuot and he died on Shavuot. Of course, one of the reasons we read the Book of Ruth is because Ruth was

his great-grandmother. Notice that here, too, Rachmones is stressed. She was such a compassionate person. She refused to leave her mother-in-law when it would have been in her best interests to do so. She came with her to a strange land and she worked hard and helped her. She had so much Chesed, so much kindness, so much compassion. Finally, we have the Baal Shem Tov, a much later figure who is associated with this holiday. He died on the holiday of Shavuot. He too was a person who had compassion, especially for the lowly Jew. He was a person of Rachmones, a person who, the rabbis say, was chosen to be a great leader in Israel because he came from a family which would never turn a Jew away. Even when an irreligious Jew came to his father's house on Shabbos and even violated the Shabbos in his house, his father did not say anything but still fed him. The Baal Shem Tov was a person who was filled with Rachmones. It is interesting to note that in the back of all these men was a woman. Bithia, Pharaoh's daughter, who saved Moshe, is remembered on this holiday. Ruth, the great-grandmother of David, is remembered. Eidel, the Baal Shem Tov's daughter, who was one of the powers behind the Chassidic movement is also remembered on this holiday. She sat in on all the councils of the Chassidic movement. In fact, it was the Chassidim who actually elevated the position of the women in the Jewish community after the status of women had, under the influence of Christianity, been denigrated somewhat in the centuries before. In fact, you can always tell a Chassidic family because their family name is named after the woman. You have Sorkin, which is Sarah's children. You have Rifkin, Rifka's kin; Laiken, Leah's kin, etc. Also, among Chassidic families, especially Lubavitch, the women were taught Talmud at its highest level, with all its commentaries. Why should Moshe, David, and the Baal Shem Tov be associated with the holiday of Shavuot?

What's more, why is it that when we say in our prayers, we say, "This is the time of the giving of the Torah," and not, "This is the time of the receiving of the Torah"? It seems to me that all these questions can be answered when we realize that the Torah was given to all the Jewish people, but not everybody could accept it the moment it was given. There were preconditions before each of us could accept it. What were these preconditions? First, each of us had to have Rachmones. If a Jew was not filled with Rachmones, then he would not be able to accept the Torah. Yes, the Torah was given, but he could not accept it yet. He could not accept the Torah until he was first filled with Rachmones. Of course, in Egypt we had to have Rachmones for each other just to survive. We learn, too, that G-d took us out from Egypt with great Rachmones. G-d Himself showed great mercy and kindness and compassion when He saved the Jewish people. That is, of course, why Moshe is associated with Shavuot. Moshe stands for Rachmones, how Bithia showed such Rachmones by saving him.

David teaches us that we also have to believe in Teshuva. David teaches that the Torah is not just for saints and people from good families. In order to accept the Torah, the Jewish people had to realize that the Torah was not just for saints and for people from the finest families. After all, if you look at David's genealogy, all of David's ancestors came from questionable families. On one side of his family, he is descended from an illicit relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar. Of course, Judah did not know that he was having intercourse with his daughter-in-law at the time, but, still, it was an incestuous relationship. On the other side of his family, David is descended from a Moabite woman, and there was great doubt whether Moabite women could become Jews.

There are only two peoples who were banned from becoming Jews, the Ammonites and the Moabites. Later on, after Sennacherib's conquests, this prohibition fell away because we could no longer know who were Moabites and Ammonites and who weren't. David, though, throughout his life, was plagued with critics who said that, not only was he not fit to be a king, he was not fit to be a Jew. David is associated with the holiday of Shavuot to teach us that the Torah was given to all Jews, even those who are not saints, even those who did not come from the best lineage, because everyone can do Teshuva. What's more, David himself was not a saint. David himself did things that were questionable. David himself at one time pretended that he was fighting against the Jews for the Philistines after King Saul chased him from his court and tried to kill him. We know how David sinned with Bathsheba. Even if he did not technically commit adultery, he certainly did sleep with a woman who was married to another man, whom he had sent into battle to be killed. David afterwards said, "I sinned." He recognized that he sinned and he did Teshuva. In Judaism you do not have to be a saint in order to be a Jew. We believe in Teshuva, repentance. In addition to Rachmones, before a Jew could accept the Torah, he also had to believe in Teshuva. David HaMelech tells us that not only do we have to have Rachmones in order to be able to accept the Torah, but we also have to believe in Teshuva. The Torah is meant for everybody. It is not just meant for saints or for people from the best families.

Finally, we have the Baal Shem Tov. The Baal Shem Tov teaches us all that you have to believe that the Torah connects one Jew to another. The Torah connects all Jews together. The Torah also connects us all eventually to all humanity. When the Jewish people received the Torah, it says, "And they all camped together." They were all like one person with one heart. It wasn't this tribe was on this side and this tribe on another side. Instead they were all together. They realized that they had responsibilities, each one to the other. We Jews still act this way. One of the most heartwarming events in modern Jewish history is how American Jews are saving other Jews with whom they really have very little in common, Ethiopian Jews, Russian Jews. American Jews have given billions of dollars to save their fellow Jews, Jews who they really cannot even talk to. They do not understand their languages, but they recognize that we are together. One of the most despicable experiences I ever had was when I went to Israel with a group and we went into a shop that sold religious articles. A distinguished looking gentleman with big payes and beard sold a mezuzah to one of the members of our group. As we went out I said, "Let me see the mezuzah." I looked at the mezuzah and it was treif. I went back to the distinguished looking gentleman and said, "How come you sold him a treif mezuzah?" He said, "Listen, for him it is good enough. He is not frum." What kind of monkey business is that? What kind of despicable business is that? Of course, I made him exchange it. That is not right. What do you mean, there are first class Jews and there are second class Jews? We are all Jews. We have to treat each other, all Jews, as first class Jews. That is the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov, that a Jew, before he receives the Torah, as to realize that he is part of one people, that we are all connected one to another, and we have to realize also that we are part of all humanity. Unless we realize these things, then we could not accept the Torah. The Torah was given, but we could not accept it. That is, too, why the Torah stresses so much the third month, because in the first month we saw G-d's kindness, we saw Rachmones. G-d took us out of Egypt. G-d saved us. G-d brought us into a desert and fed us. The second month the Jewish people had one

complaint after another. Not only were the Jewish people saved in Egypt, but they were saved at the Red Sea, and they said, "G-d is G-d and we believe in Moshe and G-d," but, yet, just a few days later they were complaining about this and that, but, still, the Torah was given to them because the Torah is not given to saints. The Torah believes in Teshuvah. The Torah believes you can change. You have to believe in Rachmones and Teshuvah. Finally, it was given in the third month because there was a third principle and that principle is the principle of the unity of the Jewish people. Ultimately, too, you must believe in the unity of all humanity, but first you have to believe that one Jew is connected to another. There are not first class Jews and second class Jews. You cannot accept the Torah that way. The Torah is meant for all Jews. We all have to work together. If we do not work together, then we can rest assured that the Torah cannot be received by the Jewish people.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman who went to visit her son in college. Her husband gave her an automatic teller card. It was the first time she had ever had it. She went to visit her son and spent a little bit of money, and then she asked her son, "You know, I have never used an automatic teller card before. Can you come with me and show me how it works?" Her son said he would. He assumed she had spent all her money and wanted to get more money. When they came to an automatic teller machine, she said, "Son, I want to make a deposit. I brought a little extra money and I want to make a deposit before I go home. I don't want it stolen." Her son said, "Make a deposit? That I don't know how to do. A withdrawal I know how to do." Before the Jewish people could receive the Torah, before they could take it, so to speak, from the hands of heaven, they first had to make a deposit. They first had to understand the concept of Rachmones, the concept of Teshuvah, and the concept of Jewish unity. Only then could they be deserving of the Torah. Let us all hope and pray that the Jewish people will always be deserving of the Torah so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SECOND DAY SHAVUOT

Navigating Life's Light and Darkness

On the second day of Shavuot we read a very frightening Haphtorah. We read a Haphtorah from the Book of Habakuk. The Haphtorah opens with the words, "In wrath Thou rememberest to be merciful." We learn how there seems to be a terrible war taking place on earth or several terrible natural catastrophes taking place. "We see before Him pestilence and fiery bolts flash forth in His steps. He took His hand and rocked the earth. He looked out and made the nations quake and the eternal mountains were shattered, the everlasting hills bowed low to make for Him pathways in the world." We learn how the Jewish people were delivered from the evil nations around them, and we learn how the "mountains solidly trembled, the waters overflowed," but it is a terrible Haphtorah because, even when the Jewish people were saved, it says that "in the land of Israel the fig trees shall not blossom and there shall be no fruit on the vines and the labor of the olive trees shall have failed and the fields shall have yielded no food." It concludes on a happy note, though, "And I shall find happiness in the L-rd. I will exalt in the G-d of my salvation. G-d, the L-rd, is my strength." Why should we read such a Haphtorah like this on the holiday of Shavuot, on the holiday in which we received the Torah? It is a very frightening Haphtorah because it speaks about G-d's deliverance coming about in spite of pain and suffering, just like a new baby is born in spite of blood and pain. When new eras are ushered in there is pain, suffering, and natural catastrophes and man-made catastrophes. Of course, we do know that the Torah itself was given amidst thunder and lightning and great darkness, but why should we read this Haphtorah at this time? Secondly, why in the Torah portion that we read on the second day of Shavuot don't we read anything about the giving of the Torah? In the Torah portion for the second day of Shavuot, when we read about Shavuot at all, all we read about is, one, the seven weeks

that we should count between Pesach and Shavuot, two, the bringing of free will offerings to G-d, three, the mitzvah of being happy before G-d, four, the mitzvah of helping the widow and the orphan, and, five, the mitzvah of remembering that we were slaves in the land of Egypt. We do not mention at all about the giving of the Torah. What's more, in the Ten Commandments, we do not have any extra words, yet in the second commandment when the Torah states, "You should not bow down to idols and you should not serve them because I am the L-rd your G-d," it adds, "A zealous G-d remembers the sin of the fathers on the sons of the third generation and the fourth generation to those who hate Me, and He does kindness to the thousandth generations to those that love Me and watch My commandments." Why does the Torah have to add these lines?

Perhaps the answer to these questions can be found in what several Medrashim have to say about what part of the Torah and Ten Commandments the Jewish people heard at Mount Sinai. These Medrashim seem to disagree about how much the Torah and the Ten Commandments the Jewish people heard. The Medrash Rabba claims that the Jewish people heard the whole Torah at Mount Sinai. In the Mechilta it says that they heard only the Ten Commandments, while the Medrash Azeres Hadeebros claims that they heard just the first two commandments, especially the phrase which states "I have brought you out from the land of Egypt and the house of servitude." Menachim Mendel of Reminoff claims they only heard the very first letter of the Ten Commandments, the aleph. The Medrashim really do not disagree with one another. They just are talking about different types of Jews. Some Jews heard the whole Torah, some Jews only heard the Ten Commandments, some Jews only heard the first two commandments, and some Jews only heard the first letter. These Medrashim are just emphasizing the point that life is difficult. Everybody takes knocks in this life. It is not easy. There are all sorts of things that we do not understand. We all endure all sorts of pain and suffering. It is so hard to maintain an even keel in life. We can maintain an even keel only if we follow the words of the Torah, only if we follow the words of the Ten Commandments. Life is filled with darkness, thunder, and lightning. The Torah itself was given amidst thunder and lightning and darkness to teach us that if we follow its ways we can still maintain ourselves as compassionate, moral people in spite of life's darkness and pain.

That's why we read the Haphtorah we do, to teach us that, in spite of the problems that we will face, in spite of the terrible suffering that many of us will feel, in spite of the losses that we Jewish people will endure, we can still be kind, compassionate people. The Torah will allow us to maintain our emotional stability so that we can still navigate the shoals of life without becoming frustrated, violent people who feel that we must lash out. In spite of all the violence, we Jewish people can still live happy and successful lives filled with compassion and love. Even when we are surrounded by so many enemies who hate us and want to kill us, we can still maintain a life based on principles of justice and dignity and compassion. However, it is not easy. And it will never be easy.

That's probably why we do not mention the giving of the Torah when we talk about Shavuot in this Torah reading for the second day of Shavuot, because the rabbis say that on Shavuot, not only was the Torah given, but this day was also the day when Noah came out of the ark. This was also the day when Noah sacrificed to G-d and when he was given the seven commandments of Noah. And it was also the day upon which he was shown the rainbow. The rainbow is a mixture of water and light, of tears and joy, and that

is what the world is about, a mixture of tears and joy. How are we going to navigate ourselves in such a world? It is important that we learn Torah so that we can maintain our balance in this world of light and darkness. Some Jews learn Torah and know how to relate its principles to their lives. That's why it says in the Ten Commandments, "I am a zealous G-d." The rabbis explain that in Hebrew this phrase does not mean that G-d is zealous; it means that G-d is a G-d Who knows how to control zealotry, that G-d knows how to control His passions. We, too, if we will learn Torah and will follow in its pathways, will be able to control our passions. We will be able to lead a life that is free from the terrible frustrations that lead to great violence and hatred. This point is further emphasized when, in the second commandment, the Torah says that G-d remembers the sins of the fathers on the sons to the third generation. This phrase does mean, as the English translation states, that G-d will visit the sins of the fathers on the sons. Instead, the rabbis teach us that it means that if the Jewish people will remember how their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, dealt with the light and dark of life, how they were able to raise their children, in spite of all the great problems that He presented to them, and still maintain their moral equilibrium, so can we. Abraham had problems with Ishmael. Yitzchak had problems with Esau. Jacob had problems with his sons. One son was sold by the other sons into slavery. Yet somehow they were all able to make it through life and to still maintain compassionate relationships.

The rabbis teach us that those people who stood at Mount Sinai and who heard the whole Torah were able to navigate the shoals of life and were able to overcome its thunder and lightening and darkness. The Torah gives us the perspective to successfully navigate through darkness, the necessary courage and strength to get through the difficult times of the Habakuk, the prophet that we read as the Haphtorah this morning. Yes, those people who heard the whole Torah know not just the principles of the Ten Commandments, but also how our forefathers implemented them in real life. That is what this group learned. The second group of Jews only learned the Ten Commandments. They learned the principles of Judaism, but somehow they cannot implement them in life. They have a more difficult time. Then there is a third group, who all they heard was, "I am the L-rd your G-d Who brought you out from the land of Egypt from the house of servitude." These are Jews who are interested in social justice, about making this a better world, but they cannot seem to handle their personal relationships. Their personal relationships are running aground. Darkness encompasses part of their lives. Yes, G-d wants us to be concerned about social justice, but He also wants us to live holy lives within our families, too. Then there is the fourth group of Jews, who all they heard was the aleph. They know life has some meaning, some purpose, but they are not sure exactly what. It is these Jews, unfortunately, who are wandering aimlessly. It is these Jews who cannot deal with the difficulties of life. Many of them are prey to assimilation, cults, and alcoholism and drugs, etc. All of us every day must strive to receive the Torah. Because the Torah helps us all retain our morality and compassion in a world filled with light and darkness. I am reminded about the story they tell about Dr. Barry Lerner who was a resident in the North Bronx Hospital. He was very excited because he was called in to assist Dr. Mattias, a very famous surgeon. He wanted to be an infectious disease specialist. He greatly admired Dr. Moore, the head of the infectious disease department of that hospital, and he was so pleased that he had recommended him to Dr. Mattias to assist with a very tricky operation. A young six year old girl, Esta, was having her third heart operation. She was

born with a congenital defect. This was a special case, and all the doctors and nurses were very worried because she had contracted the syndrome. She had an immune deficiency, and people were all afraid that perhaps her blood would spatter on them or perhaps a needle that had punctured her skin would puncture their skin. Many were not too anxious to participate, but Dr. Barry Lerner was anxious to participate.

When he came to the operation, he was made an errand boy, basically. He was hoping he would be given the opportunity to sew up afterwards, but this was not to be. This was too difficult an operation. He was asked to fetch different instruments, to bring the pints of blood necessary, and once, when the mask slipped off her face, the anesthesiologist asked him to assist him by helping him put the mask back on. He was also asked to straighten up the needle that was going into her arm. He noticed as he fixed the mask back on her face what beautiful golden brown hair she had and what glistening eyes she had, although now they were glazed by the anesthesia. After the operation, it was his job to take care of her. He would come in every day and take her blood pressure and see how she was doing. He immediately fell in love with her. She was such a bright, happy girl, even though she lived most of her life indoors, this being her third heart operation. He noticed, too, that her parents were from Jews. They were Jews who lived their Judaism. He himself had come from a frum background and had gone to a day school, but he had sort of gotten away from it. Every day when he would come visit her, she would tell him stories about the weekly parsha and she would make a picture for him to take home. In fact, there would always be a mock argument between her and her parents, especially her mother, who said that she wanted to take the picture home. But almost always Esta said, "I want my doctor to have it, because I want him to tell the stories of the parsha of the week to the other children he visits." She rapidly improved and was quickly discharged, although everyone knew that she would be back.

Sure enough, within a few months she contracted a form of pneumonia which is very rare among ordinary people but which is common among people with this syndrome. This was, of course, 1982, and people were not as familiar with how this syndrome worked as they are now, and there was still a great deal of anxiety, but Barry Lerner persisted in treating this girl. She came back one time, two times, three times, four times. The fifth time she was very weak, but still she had that smile and still she kept telling Dr. Lerner about the weekly parsha every time he visited her and she always gave him his picture. She knew, though, that things were not the way they should be, and she asked him once when he was there, "Will you come and visit me when I live with Hashem? Will you still use my pictures when you tell the other children about the weekly parsha?"

He had a hard time leaving her that day, but it was before Memorial Day and he had a family simcha. He told her that he would see her when he came back, and he assumed that she would be released, but he knew that she would be back a sixth time. After he came back from the family simcha the day right before Shavuot, he bounded up the stairs to see her. She was on the second floor, but her room was empty. He asked the nurse what had happened. She told him that there would not be a sixth time. He asked her if she had any final words for him, and she said, "Yes, she said, 'Remember, please, to continue to tell the stories of the weekly parsha that I told you to the other children, and, please, take my pictures along with you when you do. I'll be waiting for you with Hashem until your time will come when you will come to live with Him, too, so I can see you again.'"

This made a very big impression on Barry Lerner. Not only did it make an impression

upon him but upon all those who had helped her during those final few months. Her faith, her beauty, her innocence affected them all. Barry decided that from then on he would devote his life to finding a cure for AIDS. Yes, it was learning the stories of the weekly parsha which allowed Esta to continue and her family to continue. Let us all hope and pray that the darkness of life will soon be dissipated and that because we have all learned the stories of the parsha of the Torah and that because we have all lived compassionate and good lives, trying to ameliorate the evils of this life, that G-d will send the Mashiach soon so that there will be no more darkness in life but only light. Amen.

ROSH HASHONNA

Determining Which Beliefs are True

On Rosh Hashonna we read about the akedah on the second day. Why is it that the akedah, the binding of Yitzchak, should be considered Abraham's greatest test? After all, it was not Abraham who was to be sacrificed on the altar; it was Yitzchak. What's more, Yitzchak was 37 years old. Why shouldn't this be called the test of Yitzchak? Why is it called the test of Abraham? After all, it was Yitzchak that was going to be slaughtered, but, yet, this is considered by our tradition as Abraham's greatest test. Continuously throughout the davening we refer to it as Abraham's test, and hardly any mention is made of Yitzchak's anguish.

What's more, why is that on Rosh Hashonna we have to blow the shofar in a certain order? We have to glow the Tekiah and then the Shvorim and then the Teruah, and, if we would blow first a Shvorim and then a Tekiah and then a Teruah, we would not have fulfilled the mitzvah of blowing the shofar. Why does the shofar have to be blown in a certain order? What's more, why is it that on Rosh Hashonna we have to say the special prayers for the musaf service in a certain order, too? We have to say the Malchuyos and the Zichronos and the Shofros in that order. The Malchuyos, which declares G-d's majesty, that G-d is the creator of all things, the Zichronos where we stress how G-d remembers all His promises, and then the Shofros, which speaks about the giving of the Ten Commandments and about our future redemption, have to be said in precisely that order. We cannot deviate from this prescribed order. If we do, then we will not have fulfilled our obligations.

In our prayers on Rosh Hashonna we also say, "Teshuva, Tefila, Tzedakah Ma'avereem Es Roah Hagezairah" - that repentance and prayer and tzedakah nullify the evil decree. Why should these three things nullify the evil decree? Perhaps we can understand the answer to these questions if we look at the keynote of the holiday of Rosh Hashonna. The keynote of the holiday of Rosh Hashonna, which we find in the main prayer (the Kedushas Hayom), which describes Rosh Hashonna, and in the kiddush, is Emes, truth.

Rosh Hashonna is primarily a holiday of truth. "Because You are a G-d of truth, and Your word is true and exists forever..." The theme throughout the Rosh Hashonna davening is truth; Rosh Hashonna is a holiday of truth. We cannot repent, we cannot face who we really are and come back to our true selves unless we are truthful, especially with ourselves. Man has the capacity to rationalize. We can make right wrong and wrong right. In fact, sometimes the most brilliant people have the hardest time with truth. They are so brilliant that they can always create a scenario which allows them to believe that they are right even when they are really wrong. It is great men who have great sins. I remember what happened to a friend of mine in high school who was given a very fancy sports car. One day, as he was going up a mountain pass near Seattle with the car going ever faster and faster, he noticed a big semi-truck ahead. He put his foot on the brake a little bit too late, and he plowed right into the truck in front of him. There was quite a bit of damage so the insurance company decided the case had to go to trial. As it came closer and closer to the trial, my friend kept getting madder and madder. "How was it possible," he kept saying, "that the state should have allowed a truck driver to hold a license who goes 60 miles an hour backwards on a mountain pass?" He had convinced himself of certain facts and that is what he believed. The worst possible thing that can happen to a person is to believe his own rationalizations, to believe his own lies. It is bad enough that he tells them to others, but, if he believes himself, then he is in for trouble. The keynote of the whole holiday of Rosh Hashonna is truth, because you cannot engage in self-examination unless you are willing to face the truth.

But how can we determine what is the truth? The truth is so difficult to determine. That is why the akedah was Abraham's greatest test because all of Abraham's life had been built around the truth. He had forsook paganism and stood against the whole world. That is why he was known as an Ivri, a Hebrew. Ivri in Hebrew means "side." The world was on one side, and he was on the other side. He stood alone for the sake of truth, no matter what. Now here G-d was telling him to do something that could not be true. After all, wasn't this the same G-d that had told him, "From your seed, from your son that you are going to have from Sarah, a great nation, progeny would spring, who would perpetuate G-d's word." How, if He was going to sacrifice Yitzchak, would this be possible? How could this be true? The Talmud teaches us that, if we hear a prophecy that contradicts the word of G-d, then we should know that the prophecy is false. G-d cannot ask us to do something that is against His own morality. Abraham was in a quandary. How could this command to sacrifice his son be true? Of course, it turned out that this command, as Abraham had interpreted it, was not true. G-d did not want Abraham to literally sacrifice Isaac. He wanted Abraham to uplift his son, not to sacrifice him. The Hebrew word for sacrifice used in G-d's command was V'ha-alahu, which can also mean to uplift.

In life it is very difficult to determine which beliefs are true. How are we to determine which beliefs are true? The rabbis say that on Rosh Hashonna we learn how we are to determine which beliefs are true and which are not. Beliefs that are true must, first of all, give us a sense of dignity and freedom. Man must feel that he has some control over his life. Man must realize that he has power. We are created in the image of G-d, and, as we all know and as the Malchuyos section of our prayers stresses, G-d has power. Man, therefore, has power, too, not complete power over everything, but he has power to do things. We are not like other religions who believe that man is powerless in the face of sin, that man is born with a genetic defect, that, given a choice, six times out of ten man

will choose evil. We do not believe that. We believe that man is born pure, that he is born with the power to overcome sin. He may not always use it, but we believe that we are in the same position as those people in other religions who believe that they have gained the power to overcome sin by believing in someone or by doing some act and who may or may not use their power. We also know that we all sin. There is no man alive that has never sinned. We know that we need G-d's forgiveness after we have sinned, but we still have the power to do good. We cannot alibi and say that we do not have the power to do good, that we cannot do good things. We all have dignity. We all have a certain amount of control over our lives. That is what the Malchuyos section of our Rosh Hashonna prayers speaks about.

True beliefs must also allow us to form relationships. We must be able to form relationships with G-d and with man, to be able to enter into a marriage and to be able to freely assemble in groups and clubs and to worship G-d. Man must be able to form relationships. That is what the Zichronos section of our prayers is about.

Finally, beliefs which are true must be able to help us alleviate the suffering of the world. If we pursue beliefs which we feel are the truth, but by pursuing them we end up acting cruelly, by harming people, then the beliefs which we claim are the truth cannot be the truth.

G-d has assured us that we can determine what are true beliefs. These beliefs have to meet three criteria: they have to give us dignity and the ability to control at least parts of our life, they must give us a certain amount of freedom; they must also allow us to establish relationships; and they must also allow us to help alleviate the sufferings of the world. Communism in our day collapsed not because of economic reasons or military reasons. Russia still today is a very powerful country, and it still has a two trillion dollar economy. Russia collapsed because its people no longer believed in communism. The Russian people, in order to uphold and to sustain the great sacrifices they had endured and were continuing to endure, had to believe that communism was right and beneficial. They had sacrificed a lot these past 70 years for communism. They had sacrificed their freedom. They had sacrificed their ability to control their lives. They had also sacrificed their ability to form associations and churches and synagogues in order to reach G-d and in order to serve other human needs. Why did they do that? They did that so they could alleviate the suffering of their people. They knew that their people were suffering because the wealth of Russia was not equally distributed. Their people were starving and in ill health, so, in order to alleviate the suffering of their people, they were willing to forego their freedom and their ability to form relationships, but, as it turned out, the people in western Europe and in America who had not given up their freedom or their ability to form relationships were suffering much less than their own people were after they accepted communism. The standard of living in western Europe and America was higher, and their poor were being better taken care of there than in Russia. They had sacrificed for nothing. They no longer could believe in communism as a vehicle for alleviating the suffering of mankind. It collapsed under its own weight. It was no longer true in their eyes. Russia is still a powerful country, but communism collapsed because the Russian people could no longer believe in it. Communism took away their freedom and their right to form relationships, and then it did not even alleviate human suffering as much as the capitalistic West did.

We must have freedom before we can form relationships, and we must be able to form

relationships before we can help to alleviate the suffering of mankind. They must come in this order. The sounds of the shofar also must be sounded in a certain order. The sound of the Tekiah is a sound of freedom, a sound of dignity, a sound which proclaims that we do have control, that we can do things, that we can change things. The sound of the Shvrim is the sound of relationships. It proclaims that we can form relationships. The communists even sacrificed their family on the altar of alleviating human suffering. The sound of the Teruah is the sound of human suffering. We are supposed to hear the pains and suffering of the world and try to alleviate them. Unfortunately, our country, too, in 1932 almost collapsed, because we believed then in only freedom and relationships but not in the necessity of trying to alleviate human suffering. If it would not have been for the reforms of FDR, this country could have completely collapsed. We did not have social security or unemployment insurance. People were literally starving. There was 25% unemployment during the Great Depression, and people then were saying, "Let the poor suffer. Let them die."

Teshuva, Tefila, and Tzedakah - repentance, prayer, and tzedakah, charity, avert the evil decree because they together constitute what is necessary for us to live good lives.

Teshuva reminds us that we have control over ourselves. We can change. We are not a pawn. We do have a certain amount of control over our lives. We are not a slave to different habits. We can change. Tefila says that we can have relationships, a relationship with G-d and a relationship with man. Tzedakah, charity, says that we can help the poor. We can alleviate human suffering. We need all three simultaneously, otherwise we, too, will do evil. A man who wants to have control may sacrifice his family and others just so he can have control. That, of course, is wrong. Another person could decide that his family is all-important and he will not give a dime to charity to try to alleviate the suffering in the world. That is wrong, too. Arriving at beliefs which are true is very difficult. We have to work at it. There are many contradictory truths in life. That, of course, is what modern science has taught us. How light can be both a particle and a wave is a physical impossibility, but it is nevertheless true. In order for us to lead a good life, we have to have beliefs which are true, beliefs which allow us to have freedom, relationships, and help others. We must always ask ourselves, do our beliefs give us dignity and control over ourselves or at least partial control? Do our beliefs allow us to have relationships? Do our beliefs help alleviate the suffering of the world? If they do, then, according to our religion, these are beliefs that can be relied on and which we can use in human affairs.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman who was telling her friend how she had decided in the past year not to eat any food that had additives or preservatives.

What's more, she went on, she was not going to eat any food that came from any animal that had either been chemically sprayed or had eaten chemically sprayed food. Her friend said, "Well, that's marvelous. How do you feel now?" The woman looked at her and said, "Hungry."

Let us hope and pray that in the coming year the things that we believe will all be true. We have witnessed miracles. Communism has collapsed, and Russian Jewry is being allowed to leave Russia. Let us all hope and pray too that this coming year will also be a year of miracles, a year of miracles because we will live by things which are true, that our beliefs will be true because they allow us to assume control over our lives, to establish relationships, and to help us alleviate suffering of mankind. Let us hope and

pray that this will be such a year.

ROSH HASHONNA

Uncertainty, Faith, and Charity

Why is it that we blow a shofar on Rosh Hashonna? From the Torah it is not clear what type of instrument we should blow. The rabbis reason in the Talmud that, since the Torah teaches us that on the Yom Kippur of the Jubilee Year, when all the slaves are to be freed, we are supposed to blow a shofar; therefore when we are freeing ourselves from the sins of our past, we are also supposed to blow a shofar on Rosh Hashonna. We know that in the Temple they blew both a trumpet and a shofar, with the shofar, of course, being the most important instrument. Today we blow only the shofar, but why should we blow a shofar? If the purpose of the shofar is to call us to repent, if the purpose of the shofar is to remind us that we stand this day before G-d in judgement, then why don't we blow an instrument that has a more sure note? A shofar is a very difficult instrument to play. It is very uncertain many times whether or not any note will actually come out. Many times it has happened that the Ba'al Tekiah, the shofar blower, has tried to blow the notes of the shofar and nothing has come out, or it has happened that it was impossible for him to make the right note and he has to take another shofar and another shofar and try to blow them until finally someone else has had to come forward to take his place. It is a very chancy thing, blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashonna. The notes do not always come out right. Why then should we blow this uncertain instrument? Why shouldn't we blow on an instrument where notes are always sure?

What's more, why do we read about Hagar and Ishmael on the first day of Rosh Hashonna? The Torah reading for the first day of Rosh Hashonna concentrates basically upon Hagar and Ishmael and how Abraham, at the insistence of Sarah, sent them out of the camp. We learn how, although Abraham had probably given them an adequate supply of food and water, they had gotten lost and had run out of supplies. Hagar could not stand to see her son die, so she put him some distance away from her, and she started to pray. Ishmael, her boy, prayed too, and an angel of G-d appeared to them and said, "Hagar, open your eyes. There is a well of water," and she was able to find the well of water. She and Ishmael were saved. Why do we read about this on the first day of Rosh Hashonna? Thirdly, why is it that in the Haftarah for the first day of Rosh Hashonna we read about

Chana? We read how Chana did not have children and how she went up to the Tabernacle every year with her husband. One year, overcome with pain and sadness, she prayed for children. Elie, the high priest, saw her swaying, her lips moving, and he accused her of being drunk. She denied that she was drunk. She told him that she was upset because she could not have a child. She went on to say, "I promise G-d that if I will be given a child, that I will dedicate this child to G-d, that this child will serve in the Tabernacle with you, Elie." And so it happened. She was blessed with a child and that child became Shmuel, the great prophet. He was a Levite and he assisted the priests in the Temple. But why do we read about this on Rosh Hashonna? What does that have to do with the Day of Judgement?

Finally, why is it that we say that Tefila, prayer, Tzedakah, charity, and Teshuva, repentance, remove the evil decree? Why only these things? Why not building synagogues, giving free loans, studying Torah?

It seems to me that one of the principle reasons, perhaps the main reason, that all of us come to shul on Rosh Hashonna is because we all know that life is very unpredictable. We do not know what is in store for us. We do not know what will happen in the future. Life is so unpredictable. We think we can spot trends, but we do not know what is really going to happen in life. Nothing turns out the way we expect. The unexpected is what we should expect. After all, if I would have told you in 1990 from this bema that communism would be banned in 1991 Russia, I am sure you would have looked at me and thought I was crazy. If I would have told you that Russia was going to be divided into its 15 constituent republics, you would have looked at me and said that I was working too hard and that I needed a rest. If I would have told you last year that 330,000 Jews would have left Russia within 18 months for Israel, you would have told me to stop dreaming. Life is so unpredictable. Who knows what is going to happen?

We think we know what is going to happen, but we really don't. So many things happen that we cannot predict, in our personal life, in our people's life, in our nation's life and throughout the world. Nobody knows what is going to happen next. I remember visiting Seattle a few years ago, my home town, and going into the kosher bakery. There behind the counter was a woman I recognized who was working for minimum wage. I had known her when we both had grown up in Seattle. She came from one of the richest families in Seattle. She even went to finishing school in Switzerland. It turned out that her family had lost all their money, she had had a bad marriage, she now had children to support, and she was working for minimum wage. Who would have thought that this could have happened to her, of all people? We all know of many people in Houston who have lost everything. There are also many other people who have had nothing and all of a sudden they have become rich. Life is filled with surprises. We do not know exactly what is going to happen, and that is why we are here today. We all need G-d's help in order to find the strength to cope with all the surprises in life. Some are good surprises and some are bad surprises. It is wonderful, the news that is coming out of Russia, but we also have to realize that there is bad news in America. We Jews are committing suicide at a great rate, not physical suicide, but spiritual suicide. A study that was just released by the Council of Jewish Federations shows that a Jew today in America is more likely to marry a non-Jew than a Jew. We are not talking about marrying gentiles who convert to Judaism, because they are considered Jews, but we are talking about a Jew marrying a gentile who maintains his/her own religion. If this continues, soon there will not be many

Jews left in American. What should we do? Should we give up? Should we sanctify these marriages? Of course not. We must continue to fight as the Russian Jews fought for 75 years, never giving up hope. Yes, there was a certain group in Russia that did give up. There were 2 million hard-core Jews who kept the name "Jew" in 1989 before Jews were allowed to freely leave Russia. The chief rabbi of Moscow told us at a recent Rabbinical Convention there are probably another 3 million Jews who passed, somehow got their papers forged to state that they were of a different nationality. He also told us if you count as Jews people who have at least one grandfather or grandmother who is Jewish, then there are probably 12 million Jews in Russia.

The whole keynote of Rosh Hashonna, like the uncertain sound of the shofar, is found in Chana's prayer to G-d after He gave her Shmuel. She said, "There is none holy like the L-rd. Indeed, there is none besides him. There is no stronghold like our G-d. Do not indulge in proud talk, let no arrogance come from your mouth. The L-rd is a G-d of knowledge and by Him actions are summed up, the strongmen's bows are broken while the feeble are girded with strength. Those who had plenty have hired out for bread while hungry people have to toil no more. The barren mother has 7 children now, while the mother of many is desolate. The L-rd causes death and bestows life. He lowers to the grave and brings up. The L-rd makes poor and rich. The low he also raises up. He lifts the poor out of the dust. He raises the needy from the rubbish and makes them sit next to nobles." Life is unpredictable. G-d knows what He is doing, but we many times do not understand what He is doing. That is why we read about Hagar in the Torah, reading Hagar was ready to give up. The angel said, "What's the matter with you, Hagar? Open your eyes. Grab hold of the boy. Don't give up." That's why Tefila, Teshuva, and Tzedakah will remove the evil decree. Tefila, Teshuva, and Tzedakah are acts of faith which a person can do by himself without an organized community. Building synagogues, opening study halls, giving free loans requires organization. Hostile authorities can ban these activities, but they can't ban what goes on in your heart: prayer, repentance, and personal acts of charity. A person has to have faith to continue. We must never give up.

Why is it that we pray? We pray to G-d so that we will make the right decisions. In life we can not know all the facts. We can only make the best decisions we can, based on the facts we have, but most decisions in life we make blind. Who are we going to marry? Do we interview 2 billion women? The occupation we select. Do we look through the thousands of occupations listed by the Department of Labor? No. We make decisions when we have to make decisions, and we pray to G-d that he has helped us make the right decisions. We do not know everything. In fact, we can know everything and still know nothing. That was what happened to Elie. When Chana was praying, Elie, the High Priest, thought that she was drunk. Why? Because he had the Ureem and Tureem on. He had these special lights on his breastplate which would give him the answers to his questions. His breastplate contained the names of all the tribes plus the names Abraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, and the words Shiftai Yeshurun so that it contained the letters of the alphabet. Whenever he would be puzzled he would ask a question of G-d and G-d would cause the correct letters of the alphabet to light up. He asked G-d, "What about this woman?" And G-d gave him the letters, "Shin, Kuf, Raysh, Hay," which he read as Shikra, a drunk, but which he should have read as Kesora, she is like Sarah. She is a kosher woman. She is a good woman. Therefore, we can have all the facts and still know nothing. We have to know how to interpret the facts. Therefore, we need faith. When

things are bad, we should never give up. The Russian Jews never gave up. We must reply to every challenge. We cannot say there is nothing we can do about our situation and act like Hagar did, wait for the boy to die. We must open our eyes. We must see what we can do. We can't accept the evil around us.

Finally, we must do personal acts of charity, Tzedakah. We must make sure that there is a level below which nobody can fall, because if people fall below that level, then they will be tempted to lose their faith. Things will get worse, not better. We must help each other and support each other so we can get through a catastrophe. In American today we are in some danger. The top 1% of the population in wealth controls as much wealth as the bottom 40%. This is a figure worthy of a third world country. If this continues, we are going to be in terrible trouble. We must make sure that everyone's basic needs are taken care of; otherwise there could be great violence in American. We have to help each other, not only for altruistic reasons but for our own self-interest. If we all will face the challenges of life with faith, with prayer, and with a determination to change those things which are unjust (Teshuva) and with a determination to help each other, then we will overcome and eventually be able to prevail. Russian Jewry prevailed because they never gave up and they helped each other. They helped each other even in the worst times in Russia. They faced every challenge the best way they could. That's what we must do, too. We can never give up and we should never give up.

Of course, the Russian Jews are not out of the woods yet, because what has taken the place of communism is nationalism, and we all know a Jew is not a Russian. A Russian will never consider a Jew a Russian. We all know that, if there is starvation in Russia, somebody will have to be blamed. We have to do everything we can do to get the Russian Jews out of Russia. I am reminded of the story they tell about how an announcement went out in a town in Russia that meat was going to be delivered that day to that town, so everybody gathered together in the town square at 7:00 a.m., when the mayor of the town appeared and said, "The meat is a little delayed. All Jews go home." Then at 8:00 a.m. he said, "The meat is still delayed. All Ukrainians go home." At 9:00 a.m. he said, "The meat is delayed. All Lithuanians go home." Then at 11:00 a.m. he said, " All Latvians go home." Finally, at 12:00 he said, "My fellow Russians, you understand, don't you? We are having difficulties. There is not going to be any meat today." One Russian looked at the other and said, "Huh! Those Jews. They always get special treatment. They got to go home first."

We all know that the Jews of Russia are in peril. We all know there are many challenges ahead in life which we can't even envisage now. We all know that many things are unpredictable, but we also know, when we hear the call of the shofar, no matter how unpredictable future events will be, we can overcome all our challenges. All we need is faith, we need to face the challenges resolutely, and we need to help each other. If we do these things, then we will be able to overcome everything, just as we have been able to overcome communism in our day, and just as we have seen many miracles during the past year. Who would ever have thought that Saddam Hussein could have been defeated so easily? Who would have ever thought that, after all those SCUDS landed in Israel, so few people would have been hurt? G-d will help us, but we have to have faith. We have to help each other, and we have to reply to every challenge. May we always do so, that we will truly be worthy of a happy year, a healthy year, a prosperous year, a self-fulfilling year, and especially a year of peace in Israel and in the world. Amen.

Universality, Jewish Identity, and Continuity

In the past we have talked about the shofar and about the three notes of the shofar, but yet, there is another question that we can ask about the shofar. Why is it that every time we make a Teruah or a Shvrim or a Shvrim Teruah, we bracket it with a Tekiah? There is a Tekiah in the front and a Tekiah in the back. Why should this be? What's more, if we look at the davening of the Rosh Hashonna, we will notice that, in the prayer that is special for this holiday, we pray for all the peoples of the world. We know that in every Amidah we recite the same first three blessings and the same last three blessings, whether it is a weekday, holiday, or Shabbos. On Shabbos and holidays, we recite a middle blessing between the three beginning blessings and the three ending blessings in which we have the Kedushas Hayom, the sanctity of the day, where the main themes of the day are talked about, whether it is a Shabbos or holiday, etc. In the Kedushas Hayom of Rosh Hashonna, we also talk about the main themes of Rosh Hashonna, even though in the Mussaf of Rosh Hashonna we do something we do not do on any other holiday or Shabbos. We add three other prayers, the Malchuyos and Zichronos and Shofros, in which we amplify the themes we mention in the Kedushas Hayom. What though is the central theme of this Kedushas Hayom? The central theme which is found in this Kedushas Hayom is, "L-rd, our G-d, put Thy awe upon all that You have made." In other words, Rosh Hashonna is a day which is not just for the Jewish people but for all peoples, for all human beings. We continue by praying, "Let Thy fear be upon all that Thou hast created, that they shall fear You, and that they shall worship before You, and that they all be made one band to do Your will with a full heart." We see here that the very first thing that we pray for in the main prayer of Rosh Hashonna should be recognized by all the peoples of the world. We do not pray that G-d should be worshipped identically by all peoples. We pray that all peoples should be made into one band. A band is composed of many strands. Afterwards we pray for all the peoples of the world, then we pray for the Jewish people. We do not pray that the Jewish people should disappear. We pray that the Jewish people should make great contributions to the other nations of the world. "May the righteous see this and rejoice, the upright exult, and the godly thrill with delight." We first pray for all nations. Then we pray for ourselves as Jews and as individuals. This is true for the entire holiday of Rosh Hashonna. The universal is stressed throughout Rosh Hashonna, but never at the cost of Jewish identity and continuity. In the Torah portion for

the first day of Rosh Hashonna, we read about Hagar, who was not a Jew, and her son Ishmael and how they were sent out of the camp because they threatened Jewish continuity and how G-d rescued them. Then we learn about the treaty that Abraham made with Avimelech. Why should such a Torah reading have been chosen for the first day of Rosh Hashonna, if not to stress Rosh Hashonna's universal aspect?

We can see that on this holiday we learn that really it is wrong to segregate yourself, to divide yourself off from the rest of humanity. Humanity is composed of various strands that must work together if the world is to be perfected. Judaism does not believe that people should divide themselves for the sake of being divided, that people should be separate for the sake of being separate. Judaism believes that people should divide in order for them to reunite on a higher plane. Judaism believes that, because we have some separate goals and values, we have to be separate from others, but we also have to still realize that, in spite of these differences, we share many goals and values with all humanity and that, in spite of any difference, we must maintain an ability to interact with them, to eventually be ready to reunite with them on a higher level, while maintaining our own unique identity. That, of course, is what the rabbis are teaching us here on Rosh Hashonna. On Rosh Hashonna separation is wrong. Unity is right, and it is the preferred condition. We should all strive to unite on a higher level.

The rabbis also tell us that Rosh Hashonna is the birthday of Abraham. Abraham, when he was 99 years old, was commanded by G-d to circumcise himself. But the rabbis teach us that, before Abraham circumcised himself, he went to all his friends and asked them whether or not he should be circumcised. All his friends said no except for Mamrai. Mamrai said, yes, he should do it. Abraham was terribly afraid that, if he would be circumcised, he would no longer be able to relate to the peoples around him. He thought that, if he would be different from the people around him, he could no longer have any influence on them, but Mamrai told him that was wrong. After all, if you want to learn to play the harp, you do not go to a person who does not know how to play the harp. You go to a person who is different from you, a person who knows how to play the harp.

Therefore, Abraham, if you want to stand for morality and for G-d's rule in the world, then it is only right that you be different. People will come to you because you have something to offer them. You are different. Because Mamrai gave Abraham this advice, the rabbis tell us the Torah says that G-d appeared to Abraham in the oaks of Mamrai. We also learn in the very beginning of the Torah itself that division is wrong. At the end of all the days of the creation, the Torah says that they were good except for the second day. On the second day G-d divided the waters, and He did not reunite them on that day. He only gathered together the waters again on the third day. Therefore, it says twice, "it was good" on the third day, once because G-d gathered together the waters and the second time because He created on that day grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit trees.

Division is wrong. Division is what Korach tried to do when he tried to divide the Jewish people by instigating a revolt against Moshe so he could get more wealth and more honor. That is, unfortunately, what many politicians today try to do, too. In order to get elected they try to divide the people instead of trying to unite them. They try to pit one group against another. When Korach yelled at Moshe and said, "Why do you set yourself up above the people?", he was, according to the rabbis, actually giving Moshe a compliment, because Moshe was able to rise above parochial interests and see the interests of all the people. He was able to work for all the people to make them into a

harmonious whole. The problem, though, is that many times we know that we have to separate ourselves in order to develop our own ideals and programs, before we can unite on a higher level. The problem is that many times the mechanisms which will allow us to reunite on a higher level break down. Israel would like to reunite with the Arabs in the Middle East and form some sort of bonds with them, commercial bonds, cultural bonds, which include cultural interchanges of people's scientific studies, especially in medicine and agriculture, etc. We could be a big boon to them in helping them cope with the desert and everything that entails. But, because of historical circumstances, the mechanism for this reuniting has broken down. We know that in life, as children grow older, they have to rebel. They have to separate themselves from their parents so they can have their own identity. Many times the better the parent, the harder the separation, because a parent who loves his child does not want to see his child make a mistake, but sometimes you have to let your child go. You have to let your college age children choose what they want to be and how they want to live their lives and what they want to accomplish in life, but it is very difficult sometimes to make peace with their choices. Parents hope and pray that, just as they had to separate from their parents to establish their own identities but they later reunited on a higher level with them, so their own children would do the same thing, too. Unfortunately, in our society today there is no mechanism for children to reunite with their parents on a higher level. They separate but they do not reunite. Especially when it comes to the Jewish values, many of our children do not know how to reintegrate them into their lives after they establish their own identities. They have not had enough of a Jewish education to allow them to differentiate between what are the real Jewish values that they need for their own lives and the customs and idiosyncrasies of their parents' home. Many of them end up by throwing out the baby with the bath. Also, when they interact with the rest of the world, because they know so little, they can be seduced by the values of the secular world. In order for our young people to reunite with our Jewish tradition on a higher plane and in order for them to incorporate Jewish values in their lives, we must help them. The most critical period for transmitting our Jewish values to the next generation is the college age period. Young people determine their identity at that time and determine by what values they will live. If you do not fund programs for this most crucial time in a person's life, the time when they are establishing their own values and when they choose their spouse, then we will have lost them. They have now broken with their parents and their parents' values, and we have provided them with no mechanism to reunite on a higher level with the Jewish tradition. Youngsters from religious homes are not immune either. I advise parents not to send religious youngsters to any college. I advise them first to send their youngsters to a Jewish college, Yeshiva University, Touro, Stern. If that is not possible, then I advise them to send them to a college where there are many, many Jews, which has a minyan, kosher facilities, etc. Send them where they can reunite with their heritage easily. Unfortunately, this is not happening. Unfortunately, we see that, many times, parents, because they are interested in their children going to the best schools, send their children to schools which have little Jewish programming, or they send them to college when they are too young, when they have not yet become emotionally mature. Therefore, they assimilate, acculturate, and intermarry. In college their heads are filled with adult secular ideas, with no adult Jewish ideas to combat them, because we have provided no mechanism for our young people to reunite with our values and traditions. We see that, too, with singles and divorced people.

There is no mechanism in our community to bring them together. In fact, when people stay single in their twenties and thirties, their ties to Judaism get more and more tenuous each year. We have to figure a way to integrate our single people into our community so that they will retain their loyalty to Judaism and to the Jewish community. That is a huge task, but we must, when we divide, divide on condition that we are ready and willing to reunite on a higher plane.

We learn, too, about Jacob on Rosh Hashonna, because Jacob was able to interact with everyone. He had an extensive and positive Jewish education. He was able to interact with Laban, with Esau, with the people of Canaan, even though there was that tragic episode with his sons and people of the city of Schem, without losing his identity. He was able to interact with the people of Egypt and still retain his identity, because he knew how to reunite on a higher plane with them, without surrendering his own individuality. This he also taught to his children. This is something that we all need to know how to do and how to teach to our children. It is very important that we all know how to divide, not to divide to be divided, but divide in order to reunite on a higher plane.

I am reminded of the story they tell about an actor who could not hold a job because he could not remember his lines. One director had pity on him, and he decided to give him a job. He gave him one line to memorize. He told him, "Listen, immediately after the cannon goes off, say Hark, the herald comes." He practiced and practiced. The play was a good play and was supposed to run for 20 weeks, so he would have a job for almost half a year. The big day came, and he went out on the stage. The cannon went boom, and he turned around and yelled, "What the heck was that?" Unfortunately, that is what many of our young people do when they go off to a college campus. They look at everything that is around them, and, when people try to remind them about Judaism, they say, "What the heck was that?" They forget all about it. That is one of the reasons we have such a soaring intermarriage rate. That's why we have such a problem maintaining the Jewish community. It is not just youngsters either. The older people, too, when they get widowed or divorced, do not choose a Jewish spouse. Therefore, we have to recognize that, when people are divided from the community, we have to make sure that we have established mechanisms which will integrate them on a higher level, into our community. We have to pour more resources and thought into developing these mechanisms. Let us all hope that we will develop such mechanisms so that quickly we will reverse these terrible intermarriage statistics and so that quickly our Jewish people will once again regain its equilibrium, that it can truly be a light to the nations. We can only integrate with all the nations of the world on a higher level if we are able to maintain our own identity. We are still Jews. Let us all hope and pray that the day will come when G-d's name will be one and He will be recognized throughout the world as one. When all nations will band together in one band to serve His will. Let us hope that that day will come soon. Amen.

ROSH HASHONNA

Yitzchak and the Gifts of the Inner Life

Yesterday between Mincha and Maariv we all went out to Tashlich. We all went to the banks of the bayou, and we symbolically cast our sins into it, asking G-d to make us clean. In the prayer that we said during Tashlich, we said, "Give truth to Jacob and kindness to Abraham." We left out Yitzchak completely. In fact, in the Selichos that we said before Rosh Hashonna and the Selichos that we are going to say after Rosh Hashonna, we do the same thing. We leave out Yitzchak. Why should we leave out Yitzchak?

Secondly, if we look at Rosh Hashonna, we will notice that Yitzchak predominates, that the Torah reading we read today had to do with the binding of Yitzchak, and we will note that even the Torah reading from the first day really had to do with Yitzchak because Hagar was sent out of the camp because Sarah thought they were a menace to Yitzchak. Also, in the Mussaf prayer in the Zichronos, we mention over and over again about the binding of Yitzchak. In fact, we even end the Zichronos section with the words, "Thou Who doest remember all forgotten things for there is no forgetting before Thy throne of glory, mayst Thou on this day merciful remember the binding of Yitzchak in favor of his descendants." Why is it that Yitzchak has such a prominent role on Rosh Hashonna and that we do not mention him in Tashlich at all and we do not mention him in the Selichos? We mention Avraham and Yaacov.

Thirdly, in the Malchuyos prayer, a verse from the Book of Bamidbar is mentioned which seems to be incomprehensible. "And he did not see any iniquity in Jacob and he did not see any perverseness in Israel." How can such a thing be said? Unfortunately, there is no dearth of sin among Jewish people, too. We do say that Judaism makes you better but it does not make you perfect. We have sinners. How can this verse say that he did not see any sin in Jacob and did not see any perverseness in Israel?

Finally, we notice that the word Chayim is plural. There is no singular for the word life in Hebrew. It is always plural. Perhaps we can understand the answers to this question if we look at a special medrash. There is a medrash which says that, because of the three mornings, Judaism can sustain itself, that Judaism can be renewed. "And a new dawn came to Judaism because of the three bokers." The first boker was the boker of our redemption from Egypt, and that is alluded to in the Malchuyos section of the Rosh Hashonna mussaf, when the Jewish people sang the Shira, the song of praise, and in it

they said, "G-d will rule forever and ever." They sang this praise because now they were physically secure. In order for there to be a Jewish renaissance, Jews have to be physically secure.

The second element that Jews need to renew themselves is Parnoso. They need to be able to make a living, and in the Zichronos section of the Rosh Hashonna mussaf we learn about this need. It is hinted at when it states that it was considered a great merit for the Jewish people when they went out after G-d into the desert, into a land that was not sown. In fact, Jeremiah, the prophet, said that this was considered such a great merit to the Jewish people, that when they were in the desert, G-d gave them manna because of it. So the second requirement for the Jewish people, in order to have a renaissance, a reawakening, a dawn, is to have Parnoso, the wherewithal to earn a living.

The third requirement, which is mentioned exclusively in the Shofros section, "And in the third day, in the morning, there was thunder and lightning, and a dense cloud was upon the mountain, and the voice of the shofar was very strong." That morning occurred when we received the Ten Commandments and the Torah at Mount Sinai. There are three elements which are needed for Jewish survival. We need to be able to have 1) a certain amount of physical security, 2) a way to earn a living, and 3) we must have Jewish values.

If we look carefully, we will see that each of our forefathers stood for primarily one of these three requirements. Abraham stood for Jewish security. He was a fighter for the idea of monotheism. He was punished for it. He was thrown into the fiery furnace of Nimrod, and, later, when he came into the land of Israel, he had quarrels with Avimelech. He had to go down to Egypt. He quarreled with Pharaoh. He went back to Israel and he had to separate from Lot and then he had to save him from a coalition of armies. He even saved the Sodomites at the same time, and he did not ask anything from them. He returned all the people to the King of Sodom and all their property, too. Abraham was a symbol of a successful fight for Judaism, fighting to stay alive. He was a proud fighter for Jewish beliefs.

Then, of course, there was Jacob. Jacob is primarily known for his struggle for Parnoso. He was a person who had to struggle to earn a living. He had to work seven years for Rachel, and then he was swindled and had to work another seven years for her, and then his father-in-law, Laban, changed his wages many times, and then, after he was settled in the land of Israel, he was forced to leave that land because of a famine. His was a struggle always for Parnoso. On Selichos, when we ask G-d to forgive us for our sins, we mainly mention Yaacov and Abraham, because usually a person sins when he tries to protect himself, fighting for his beliefs and when he is trying to earn a living. Sometimes people misrepresent their business deals, sometimes they engage in sharp tactics, sometimes they are very cruel to their business enemies or their perceived business enemies. That is why the Bible says, "Give truth to Jacob." Jacob was always honest in his business dealings. He maintained his honesty and integrity, even though it was difficult. Abraham, the fighter, was always kind to his enemies. After all, Abraham gave everything back to the King of Sodom. Abraham was magnanimous. Abraham even made a treaty with Avimelech, even after Avimelech's servants had stolen his wells. Abraham never let his basic goodness be thwarted or distorted by his enemies. Therefore, he is a good example for us to follow, because many times, when people are hurt in the struggles of life, they bear grudges. These grudges turn them inside out, and they, themselves,

become hating and hateful people, but this was not Abraham. Life's struggles did not turn him into a hating or hateful person.

Yitzchak, on the other hand, stood for inner life. That is why, in Hebrew, the word Chayim is plural, because each of us has an inner life and an outer life. Many times our outer life seems to take precedence over our inner life, and people do all sorts of things for their outer life. They crave a 5 bedroom, 5 bathroom house with 3 cars and 2 swimming pools and all they seem interested in is money, money, money. Many times it happens that they forget that the most important things in life cannot be counted. Unfortunately, many people think that, unless you can count it, it does not count. Yitzchak was a person who we, at first glance, would think is a nebbish. After all, Yitzchak never left the land of Israel. He never fought. If he was confronted with people who wanted to fight with him, he retreated. He was born to wealth. Even his bride was chosen for him by his father's servant. He was, in many ways, blind to the world, but, yet, he had a deep, rich inner life, and it was this deep, rich inner life which allowed him to continue the Jewish tradition in spite of all the many temptations for him to just integrate and assimilate into Canaan. Just because a person is a fighter for Judaism does not necessarily mean that he is going to stay a Jew. There are many great fighters for Judaism in our community today who intermarry and who do not keep any Jewish rituals or customs or hold any Jewish beliefs, but they fight for the Jewish people. They storm the ramparts. They write letters. They call their congressmen. They are very active in Jewish causes. There are other people who, too, have gained great wealth, but that has not allowed them to stay Jewish. In fact, many of the most prominent families in River Oaks in Houston have Jewish roots. This applies to many of the rich families in other parts of the United States as well. Being a fighter for Judaism or attaining great wealth does not necessarily mean that you are going to stay Jewish. What allows us to stay Jewish are the intangible things, the things that Yitzchak taught us: love of family, the ability to overcome suffering. Judaism give people the ability to say no, the ability to be different. Why are there so many great Jewish scientists and artists? Because they are willing to stand up for new ideas. Many times, when you propound a new theory, you have to take a lot of criticism, but Jews are used to being able to stand on one side while all the world stands on the side. That's what the Ivri means. The Jewish religion also gives us a mission in the world. It makes us feel that we are needed and wanted and that G-d wants us to help Him by being His junior partner in perfecting the world. We know that the world is not perfect. There are many philosophies and religions that say we should do nothing but just be passive in the face of the evils of the world, since this world is not the real world anyway. That is not the Jewish view. The Jewish view gives you hope and joy in this world. This joy comes daily from the teachings of our tradition, for its teaching that we do have power, that we can accomplish and do. Judaism not only gives us joy and purpose in life and the ability to withstand criticism and the ability to be creative and to overcome suffering, but it also gives us the tools to structure to have a strong family. Those people who observe the Jewish rituals end up by having very strong families. If you observe Shabbos, you are spending 24 hours with your family. When people give up the Friday night dinner, they are not just giving up the Friday night dinner in most instances; they are also giving up their family. When people come together for the holidays, when they are interested in doing things together to further Jewish purposes, this strengthens the family immensely. When the different rules and regulations of

intimate relations are kept in a family, the family is strengthened. Judaism allows us to feel the intangibles. It allows us to enhance the quality of our life. You cannot measure these things. Unfortunately, people are only interested in quantifying things. Even some religious people today want to quantify all the mitzvahs. They want to show off. That is unfortunate. In some communities, if you do not observe certain mitzvahs in an ostentatious way, you are, in effect, ostracized. That is foolish, because we are supposed to walk modestly with the L-rd our G-d. It has always been taught in our tradition that, if a person puts an extra religious obligation upon himself, he should do it quietly without anybody knowing it. There are many stories of great rabbis who, because of different difficulties or problems, took upon themselves a fast day, and then, at 4:00 P.M. or 5:00 P.M., they were invited to somebody's house to help solve a problem, and, while they were there, they were offered tea. They drank the tea, even though it meant they would have to make up that fast day, because they did not want to show off that they were more religious than their neighbor. Religion is not a game where you quantify the different observances. It is an inner thing, and it gives us a joy and a purpose and a meaning in life. Unfortunately, especially the organized Jewish community does not realize this. They do not realize that, unless you feel inwardly that Judaism enhances your inner life, you are not going to practice Judaism for very much longer. What is going to happen to the Jewish community in American when Israel no longer has any more economic problems? Is it going to fall apart? What cause are they then going to espouse? The Jewish community can only continue to exist if it ties itself firmly to Judaism. It must strengthen the Jews' tie to G-d and the Jewish tradition by supporting Jewish learning. Jewish learning is so important, because Jewish learning allows us to develop our inner life, to tie us to G-d, and to develop our G-dly nature.

That is what Yitzchak, the Patriarch, teaches us. Yitzchak was not a nebbish. Yitzchak has taught us what we must do when we live in an era where there are no more problems of physical survival or Parnoso. In his era there were no very serious problems with physical survival or Parnoso. Are we going to stop being Jewish if there is no anti-Semitism or Parnoso problems? Is being Jewish only a reaction to outside problems, or is being Jewish an opportunity to develop our inner life? We all know that Judaism develops our inner life. It can make menshen of us all. Yes, if we Jews will enhance our inner life, then everyone will see that there will not be perverseness in Israel. There will not be any sin in Jacob, that the Jewish people will flower and be a great light unto the nations. Yes, we will not eliminate sin and perverseness completely, but we will be able to shower the world with great gifts because of the richness of our inner life. You cannot quantify a beautiful song. You cannot quantify a beautiful relationship. You cannot quantify a wonderful love. You cannot quantify devotion, dedication, etc. They are all dependent upon a rich inner life. Jews knew in the past that Judaism gave them wonderful things, not material things but a wonderful inner life, and that is why they kept it.

I am reminded of the story they tell about an eight year old boy who ran away from a Cheder in Poland. His father ran after him to bring him back to Cheder. After a few hours he caught up with his son, and, as they were walking on a muddy road back home, filled with ruts and water, a big golden gilded carriage with a driver and a footman and a guard came speeding toward them. Inside the carriage was a rich nobleman with a beautiful gold trimmed suit, with diamond rings and a wonderful lacy hat and a jewelbox sitting

right next to him. As that carriage roared past the father and son, it spattered them with mud. The father looked at the son and said, "See, see, if you do not go to Talmud Torah what is going to happen to you. You are going to be just like that person." And he meant it, because, no matter how much glitter and gold that Polish nobleman had, it did not measure up in the eyes of that father to the joys and beauties of the Jewish tradition. The Jewish tradition would give his son such a rich inner life that he would not have to worry so much about outward material things. Unfortunately, in our life today, people do not prize the intangibles. The inner life is not appreciated very much. Let us hope and pray that the Jewish people will not suffer anymore from the problems of anti-Semitism or the problems of Parnoso, so that we will be able to concentrate on deepening our inner life, so we can bless the world with the rich gifts that a developed inner life can bring to the world, gifts of family, gifts of love and care and consideration, and gifts of creativity and joy. Let us hope and pray that soon we will be able to shower the world with these gifts so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

Teshuva, the Heart, and G-d

In the Rambam's laws of Teshuva, we learn in the very first paragraph of the first chapter all the commandments in the Torah, whether they are positive commandments or negative commandments, if a person violates one of them, whether on purpose or by accident, when he will do Teshuva and when he will return from his sin he is obligated to confess before G-d, Blessed be He, as it is said, "A man or woman when they will do any sin they will confess their sin which they have done." This is the confession of words. This confession is a positive commandment. How do we confess? A person confesses by saying, "Please, now, Hashem, G-d, I have sinned, I have missed the mark, I have willfully sinned, I have rebelled before You, and I have done so and so, and behold, I regret and I am ashamed of my deeds, and I will never return to do them again." If we look carefully at this statement by the Rambam, we see that a person must confess his sin by words. We see that a person is required to turn away from his sin, that he is required to confess his sin with words, and that he also must feel ashamed for what he has done and agree never to return to his misdeeds anymore. It is interesting to note that, from the words of the Rambam, it does not seem a person has to feel deep down in his heart that he has done something wrong. A person must just fulfill a certain type of formula. The formula is that he has to desist from his sin. He has to confess and say that he is sorry for his misdeeds and agree never to return to do these misdeeds again.

It is true that there is an argument among the rabbis whether or not repentance, Teshuva, needs Kavona, intention, or not. We know that, when it comes to doing most mitzvahs, you do not have to intend to do the mitzvah, but if you just perform the act which the mitzvah requires, then you have fulfilled the mitzvah. For example, if someone gave you a piece of matzo at the seder, and you did not really intend to fulfill the mitzvah of eating the matzah, but you ate the matzah, according to most authorities, you have fulfilled the mitzvah of eating matzah. This same thing applies if someone gave you a lulav, and you shook the lulav on Succos, even though you really did not have any intention of fulfilling the mitzvah when you shook it, or if you happened to have jumped into a mikvah even though you did not really intend at that time to go into the mikvah to fulfill a mitzvah, you have fulfilled the mitzvah. Mitzvahs, of course, are different from criminal offenses. It was Judaism which told the world that you cannot be convicted of a crime unless you intended to do the crime. This is different from what the Greeks believed. The Greeks

believed that if you committed a crime, whether you intended it or not, you were guilty. That is the whole point of the story of Oedipus Rex. This is a story about a young man who was sent away from his village because of a prophecy that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother. When he grew up, he left the village to which he had been sent and, when he was on the road, he was accosted by a man bent on killing him. He defended himself, and he killed the man. That man was the head of the next village and, as he later learned, his real father. In those days it was customary for a person, after he had killed the head of a village, to take over his harem, so he took over that man's harem, and he slept with his mother. Of course, he did not know that that was his father when he killed him, and he did not know that that was his mother with whom he slept. According to Jewish law he would be free from any punishment, but he was punished severely, according to the Greek story, because he did what he did. It did not make any difference whether he intended to do it or not. Of course, on the other hand, you can have intent, according to Jewish law, but if you did not commit any crime, though you intended to, you are also not guilty, which is different from some Christian sects, which believe that all that counts is your intent, that if you intended to do something, even if you didn't succeed, you are also guilty. So if I intended to shoot somebody, but I was a bad shot and missed, I am not guilty of murder. I may be guilty of intended murder, but I am not guilty of murder. In criminal offenses, intent is important, which is different from civil offenses. In civil offenses, if I damage somebody's property, even if I did not intend to do so, I am liable. If I had an automobile accident, even though I did not intend to hit the other person's car, I am still liable. But what we are talking about are mitzvahs, ritual acts primarily. Do we need intent or not? According to the majority opinion, we do not need intent to do most mitzvahs. However, there are certain exceptions. One is mourning. If you take off your shoes and sit on a little stool, etc., and you do not feel brokenhearted, then you have not really fulfilled the mitzvah of mourning. Usually this is not much of a problem. Usually you are feeling so brokenhearted because of the death of a close relative that removing your shoes, sitting on a stool are truly outward manifestations of your grief. The same thing is true when we are commanded to rejoice on the holiday. If you sing and dance but do not feel happy inside, then you have not fulfilled the mitzvah of rejoicing on the holiday. But, again, the holiday atmosphere usually makes us all feel very joyful.

The question is, what of prayer? What happens with prayer? Prayer, too, is service of the heart, and there, most authorities would say, you have to have intent when you pray, otherwise you have not really fulfilled the mitzvah of prayer. There is a difference between the Peula of the mitzvah and the Keeyum of the mitzvah. The Peula of the mitzvah means you have done the act, but have you really fulfilled the mitzvah? Now when we eat matzah on Pesach or shake the lulav on Succos, the doing of the mitzvah and the fulfilling of the mitzvah are simultaneous. You are doing the act of the mitzvah and fulfilling the mitzvah at the same time. They do not have to touch our heart. But when it comes to prayer, are the doing of the mitzvah and the fulfilling of the mitzvah the same? Here there is a difference of opinion, but most rabbis agree that you actually have to intend to pray to G-d for our prayers to have fulfilled the mitzvah of praying. You cannot just be saying words without intending to pray to G-d in order to fulfill the mitzvah of prayer.

Does the same thing hold true for Teshuva? Do you have to have a deep feeling in your

heart that you really want to change? Is that really important here? Of course, you can make the distinction here between prayer and Teshuva by saying that, since you are intending to do things differently in practice when you do Teshuva, you do have intent, even though you don't feel it in your heart. You are intending not to return to this sin. Your intention is to never do it again. Is that sufficient intent?

The Rambam, in the second chapter of his Laws of Teshuva, says in the second paragraph, "And what is Teshuva? That is when a sinner will leave his sin, and he will determine in his heart that he will not do it anymore." So here the Rambam says that a person says that he will determine in his heart. Why did the Rambam say here that he will determine in his heart, but, yet, in the first chapter the Rambam did not say anything about the heart? Also, if we look at the very first paragraph of the second chapter, we will see that the Rambam says something a little bit strange. He says, "What is considered complete Teshuva? This is when the opportunity to sin comes again to the person, and it is possible for him to sin, but he separates and does not do this sin because of his Teshuva, because he sees that is wrong, not because of fear and not because he is weak." The Rambam gives an example. What happens if a person has intercourse with a woman in sin, which means she is a married woman, and, after a time, he is alone with her and he still loves her and he is still in the same place where he got away with it before, and he separates from her and does not sin? Then he is considered a complete Ba'al Teshuva. Then the Rambam goes on to say, what happens if he, however, is bodily weak or has gotten old, and therefore it is impossible for him to do these things? Even though this is not the highest form of Teshuva, it still helps, and he is considered to be a Ba'al Teshuva. So here we see that the Rambam makes a distinction between two different kinds of Teshuva. He is talking about a Teshuva which is a complete Teshuva and a Teshuva which is acceptable but which is not a complete Teshuva. We see here that there are different categories of Teshuva.

What's more, we notice that the Rambam, in the end of the first chapter, also talks about the fact that Teshuva sometimes is not enough. He says that even though Teshuva sometimes brings atonement and that sometimes even the day of Yom Kippur itself forgives, there are different kinds of sins which are forgiven immediately and other kinds of sins which are not forgiven until after a period of time. Then he gives some illustrations. He says if a person violates a positive commandment, he does not hear the blowing of the shofar, he does not build a succah, he does not put on tephillin, but he does Teshuva, then he is immediately forgiven. What happens if he violates a negative commandment? If this commandment does not have as its punishment excision, which means that he will be punished by the Heavenly Court, and there is no death penalty which can be levied against him by an earthly court, and he does Teshuva, then his Teshuva is suspended and the next Yom Kippur forgives him for that sin. Then he says, what happens if he violates a commandment which has the death penalty with it, either a death penalty from the Heavenly Court or a death penalty from an earthly court, and he does Teshuva? Teshuva and Yom Kippur suspend the punishment but pains will come upon him, which complete his Teshuva, and then he will be forgiven. From the text of the Rambam we see that Teshuva is not always immediately efficacious in forgiving sin. But how can this be, because the Rambam himself, in Chapter Seven, says in praise of Teshuva, "If a person does Teshuva, it immediately brings those who are far near, that last night a person was hated before G-d, he was detestable, he was estranged, he was

abominable, but today he is beloved, he is a friend, he is beloved of G-d"? How is that possible if we just said before that sometimes Teshuva is not immediately efficacious? The Rambam had said that it is only efficacious immediately in positive commandments, and most of the time we violate negative commandments and, many times, commandments which have within them heavenly death penalty; how can we say that if a person does Teshuva he will immediately be forgiven, last night he was hated and this morning he is beloved? We see from this then there must be two different types of Teshuva.

There is a Teshuva which comes from fear, and there is a Teshuva which comes from love. In fact, we learn about this in the Gemora in Yomah, which speaks about Yom Kippur, where Rosh Lokesh says that if a person does Teshuva, immediately his deliberate sins will be turned into accidental sins. We also learn just a few sentences later that Rosh Lokesh also says that if a person does Teshuva, his sins will be turned into merits. How is that possible that there could be such a blatant contradiction within just a few lines? How could Rosh Lokesh say that your deliberate sins will be turned into accidental sins and then a few sentences later say that your deliberate sins will be turned into merits?

The answer, the rabbis explain, is that if a person does Teshuva from fear, then his sins will be turned into accidental sins, while if he does Teshuva from love, then his deliberate sins will be turned into merits. What does that mean? In Jewish life generally, you could never bring a Korban, sacrifice, unless you did an unwitting sin. If you purposefully killed someone, if you purposefully harmed somebody, you could not bring a sacrifice. Sacrifices were only for unwitting sins, with very few exceptions, like embezzlement or where you were a witness to an event and you did not step forward, things that were really doubtful whether or not you did what you did on purpose or by accident. Generally, though, for those things that you did on purpose, you could not bring a sacrifice. Why, though, should you have to bring a sacrifice for something you didn't do on purpose? You had to bring a sacrifice because nevertheless, you would feel guilty for things you caused even if they were caused by accident, especially if there was some contributory negligence involved. You did not mean to do what you did. Therefore, you want to make it right. It is just like in a civil suit. You hit somebody with your car. You did not mean to do it, but you caused an injury, and you have to make up for it. That's why the Rambam in the very beginning of the Laws of Teshuva says that you also must confess for sins that you have done accidentally. You did not mean to insult the person. You had no intention of insulting the person, but you did insult the person so, because that person feels bad, you have to make up for it. If we do Teshuva, we have been promised that, even those things that we did on purpose, G-d will consider them as if we did them by accident. We really did not mean to do them. We were blinded momentarily by selfishness or desire. G-d takes into account our circumstances and will change our deliberate sins to accidental ones if we do Teshuva.

In Judaism there are three categories of sin, Chait, Avon, and Pesha. When we say that we have committed a Chait, that means that we have missed the mark. We meant to say what we said, but we did not mean to cause the great harm that we did. When we say that we have committed an Avon, it means that we meant to do what we did, but we did not think it was right when we did it. The girl was just too beautiful. The money was just too tempting. When we say that we have committed a Pesha, it means that we have, on

principle, done something that was wrong, but we had claimed that it was right. It is the Jewish communists who used to have Yom Kippur balls. They did not even like to dance, but they purposefully chose Yom Kippur to show their disdain for the Jewish religion. That, of course, is a higher form of sin. When a person sins because he is overcome by his desire, that is a lower level of sin. If a person does Teshuva, all these three categories of sin, even though he did them deliberately, will be changed by G-d to be considered as if he did them accidentally. They will not be changed into merits but be considered accidental sins if he does Teshuva from fear.

What is the difference between doing Teshuva from fear and doing Teshuva out of love? Psychologists who investigate religion claim that there are really two types of religious people. There are some people who are religious because they have made a deal with G-d. To them religion is an insurance policy. G-d, I will do this and this for You if You do this and this for me. The second type of religious person is the person who is religious because he wants to get close to G-d. He has meaning and purpose in his life, because he knows that G-d counts on him. He counts because G-d is counting on him. Religion to him is not an insurance policy. Judaism has never promised us that if we are religious we will not have any problems. All Judaism has ever promised us is that G-d will give us the strength to overcome our problems if we are religious. We will not lose our dignity or humanity. We will still be able to be a mensch, even in Auschwitz. We will be able to sing Anei Ma'ameem, even when we are being led to the gas chamber. That is what Judaism promises, that we will be given the strength to overcome our problems, that we will be able to maintain our integrity and our humanity in spite of everything. Now those people who believe that religion is an insurance policy, who believe that, if they keep G-d's commandments, G-d is going to be good to them, are going to be disappointed many times. They are going to flare out at G-d and they are going to feel that G-d has let them down. They have kept their end of the bargain, why hasn't G-d kept His. They then throw out religion completely from their lives. Many times, after they have thrown out religion completely from their lives, I ask them, "Well, are you happier now?" They invariably say that they are not, because religion had given them the strength to overcome their problems. We do not understand G-d's ways. We have faith that at the end of days we will, but we do not know how G-d rules the world. Our knowledge of how G-d rules the world is similar to the difference between quantum mechanics and Newtonian physics. Newtonian physics, in which everything seems to be cause and effect, does not work on subatomic particles. It works only in large planetary systems, etc. We know that on a large human scale, when it comes to nations, evil nations disappear and are overcome. Communism could not last forever. Naziism was overcome, but, on the level of individuals, we do not know how G-d's justice works. In quantum mechanics, we do not know how the individual atom will react. We do not understand how G-d works, but we do have faith that eventually we will understand. We do not understand what is beyond death. We do not understand what came before our birth. A person who is religious because he wants to get close to G-d serves G-d from love. The other type of religious individual serves G-d from fear. He makes deals with G-d. He does Teshuva because he is afraid that he has not kept his part of the bargain. G-d's wrath will descend upon him. He also may be afraid of other people's reaction to his sin. Maybe her husband is in town. Maybe he is afraid of the IRS. Is his Teshuva still efficacious? Has he done a good Teshuva?

The Rambam, in the very first paragraph of his first chapter of the Laws of Teshuva, does not mention anything about the heart because he really is talking about Teshuva from fear. It is still a good Teshuva, even if it is only from fear, but it is more a surface type of Teshuva. It does not really involve the heart. The only thing that is required to make this type of Teshuva efficacious is to stop doing this deed, to confess it before G-d, to agree never to do it again, to admit that what we did was wrong. We have to acknowledge that there is a right and a wrong. We can't, as many people today say, "There is no right and wrong. It all depends upon your morality. Whose morality are we talking about, Rabbi?" That is wrong. We have to believe that what we did was wrong. Before we do Teshuva, we must admit our guilt. Many people come to me and want me to make them feel not guilty for many things for which they should feel guilty. They did not pay child support. They did not treat their wife right or their parents right. They are wrong. The only way they can get relief is to admit their guilt. If they do not admit their guilt, then they can never get relief. Therefore, what the person has to admit, especially to himself, is that what he did was wrong. He has to confess in words. He has to realize that G-d is there before he sins and G-d is there after he sins. The pangs of conscience that he feels is G-d's voice within him which tells him to return, return, return. Nobody has gone so far that he cannot return. Even Achar, the great rabbi of Elisha Ben Avuya, who forsook his people and went over to the Romans, even though he should have known better because he was such a great scholar, a contemporary and a friend of Rabbi Akiva, had his Teshuva accepted at the end of his life. G-d was still there, waiting for him to do Teshuva. What we have to do to have our Teshuva accepted is to confess that we have done these things, that we are ashamed of them, and that we will not go back to them again. Even if we do this only out of fear and it is only a surface type of Teshuva, G-d will still accept this type of Teshuva. It may not be the best type of Teshuva but it is still Teshuva, the Rambam tells us in his first chapter.

That's why the Rambam waits until the second chapter to tell us about the Teshuva of the heart. The Teshuva of the heart comes because a person has had a complete reorientation. It is as if he is reborn again. He does not want to do evil. He does not want to do any of these bad things anymore because they are beneath him. How can he have a relationship with G-d if he is going to do these kinds of things? The Gemora gives an illustration of this. They say there are three types of people who cannot become witnesses. One of them is a person who professionally gambles with dice, another is one who earns his living by racing birds, and the third is one who loans money with interest to the poor. The rabbis ask, what happens if the gambler says that from now on he will not play dice for money but just for fun? Or the person who races pigeons will only race them for fun in the desert but not race them for money in the city. Or if the person who loans money on interest to poor people says he'll not take the interest from any of those loans, but he'll keep the poor people's notes around to play with. These types of people may have done Teshuva because they have forsworn their previous activities, but their characters have not changed. They do not really realize that their relationship to G-d must be different. These people have done Teshuva from fear, not love. If they had reoriented their lives to get close to G-d, they would not even be interested in those things anymore. If they are still interested in them, there is a possibility that they will backtrack and return to their old ways. G-d says, "Listen, on this day of Yom Kippur, I accept this Teshuva. I accept the Teshuva from fear even though it is not a complete Teshuva, even though it is not a

complete reorientation of the heart, even though it is not a complete, so to speak, born again experience." G-d will accept our Teshuva from fear and turn our deliberate sins into accidental sins. We also know that just by coming to the shul on Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur, we effect Teshuva as a Jew. There is another type of Teshuva which is talked about on Yom Kippur, that is Teshuva as a Jew. To do Teshuva as a Jew, all we have to do is come to shul. We can sin as a Jew without sinning as a human being. When we give a lot of charity to non-Jewish charities and nothing to Jewish charities, we sin as a Jew but not as a human being. When we come to shul on Yom Kippur to reattach ourselves to our people, we are forgiven for our past misdeeds to our people. As human beings, we still have to do Teshuva for our misdeeds that we have committed against individuals. We have to make restitution and we have to say that we will never do these bad things again. We have to confess and agree that what we did was also wrong before G-d. If we do that, G-d will forgive us even though we have not reoriented our whole personality, even if our Teshuva is only from fear. It is still Teshuva. It may not be from our whole heart but it is still Teshuva. Let us all hope and pray that our people will at least do this Teshuva from fear, so G-d will forgive us for all our sins and the Mashiach will soon come, but, better yet, let us all hope and pray that as many of us as can will do Teshuva out of love from our whole heart so that we truly will be shining lights not only to ourselves and to our family, but to the whole world, so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

YOM KIPPUR DAY

Memories, Jewish Survival, and Parents

On Yom Kippur we stress memory. We mention over and over again, especially in the Selichos, to remember. "Remember Your mercies. Don't forget us. Remember, remember, remember." We say, "Remember us for life, G-d, and inscribe us in the Book of Life." Why do we say remember first and then say inscribe us in the Book of Life? Why don't we just ask G-d to inscribe us in the Book of Life? We say, "Remember us, G-d, for good." Over and over again we use the word remember. Also, we say, "Remember the covenant of the fathers that You spoke, and I will remember My covenant with Jacob and even My covenant with Isaac and even My covenant with Abraham I will remember." Why do we reverse the chronological order here? Why do we say Jacob first, then Yitzchak, and then Avraham? It should be the opposite. It should be Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov. Why do we reverse them here?

What's more, why is it that only on Yom Kippur do we say aloud the phrase, "Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and forever." In every traditional shul every time after we say the Shma, we say this phrase only in undertone, before we go on to the Ahafta. Only on Yom Kippur do we say this phrase out loud. Why should this be so? We know that there are actually four different types of memory. There are negative memories. Remember Amalek. There are negative memories of the persecution that we have suffered as a people, how we have been hounded, how we have been attacked, how we have been mercilessly slain, pillaged, looted, and raped. These are negative memories, and not all Jews can stand up to these negative memories. There are many Jews who opt out because it is hard to be a member of a people who has been victimized so often. Many Jews feel that they would rather not be part of a people who has been victimized for so long. It makes them feel very inferior. They feel we must have been persecuted for some reason, that something must be the matter with us. These negative memories turn many Jews off. They cannot continue to be Jews. This has happened throughout all history. Many Jews fell away even during the Golden Age of Spain, many Jews fell away throughout the Middle Ages. Many Jews throughout the medieval period decided that they would rather pass than remain Jews. This happened in our day, too, in Communist Russia. These are negative memories.

There is also a memory that we use in order to bring to mind ideals and values. This is

the type of memory that we allude to in the kiddush when we say, "Remember the Exodus from Egypt." It is the memory that we allude to in the third paragraph of the Shma when we remember how G-d brought us out of Egypt. In fact, we are only allowed to say the third paragraph of the Shma at night because of that allusion. We do not put on tzitzis at night, so the third paragraph would not really apply except that in this third paragraph, as well as learning about tzitzis and how it is supposed to remind us not to stray after our eyes, we also learn about the exodus from Egypt. This memory is a memory which touches us only peripherally. It touches only our mind. We know about it and hear about it, but it really does not touch our lives.

Then we have to remember the Sabbath, and that is an experiential memory, a memory in which we relive every week the creation so it makes an impression upon us, that we know that there is a beginning and there will be an end, that we are called upon to be G-d's partner in creation to make this a perfect world. This is an experiential type of memory, which makes an impact, not only upon our minds, but upon our feelings and our being.

Finally, we have the didactic memory. The didactic memory is a memory in which you transfer the memory to your children. That is what we do at the Pesach Seder. You are open to their questions. You both share the same experience. You share memory with your children. That is a didactic memory.

If we look here at the order Yaacov, Yitzchak, Avraham, we will see Yaacov is first, because of all the patriarchs, Yaacov kept his children; his twelve boys and one girl all stayed Jews. Yitzchak only kept one out of two. Yaacov stayed a Jew; Esau did not. Avraham had eight children, one by Sarah, one by Hagar, and six by Ketura, a second wife. Only one stayed Jewish, Yitzchak. Avraham was a man who transferred negative memories to his children. Avraham was a fighter. The word Ivri in Hebrew means he was on one side and everybody else was on the other side. Not all his children could take this. It was tough. Abraham was thrown into the fiery furnace, the medrash tells us. Abraham had to confront Avimelech. He had to confront the King of Egypt. He had to fight to rescue Lot. He was a fighter, a confronter. He suffered for his religion. He was persecuted for his religion. He was hounded for his religion, and he transferred these negative memories on to his children, but not all his children could appreciate these types of memories. He also transferred ideals to his children, but he did not really share his experiences with his children. He did not give an experiential type of memory to his children. It was Sarah who gave an experiential type of memory to Yitzchak. Ishmael had the negative memories and he did remember the ideals of his father, so he did come back to the Jewish people at the end of his life, but all the rest of Abraham's children left for good, never to return.

Yitzchak was an experiential man. He was not really a fighter. In his days he did not have to fight too much. He had one encounter with Avimelech and that was about it, but he was blind. He did not interact very well with his children. He did not know them very deeply. Yes, he gave them experiences, but he did not really share these experiences with them. He did not give them didactic memories. His children saw him doing things and Yaacov did continue in his father's traditions. But Esau thought that most of Jewish living was not really for him. Yes, he knew about the great ideals of Judaism. He had a historical memory, a type of memory which allows a Jew to realize that he is as good as everybody else. When we look at history, we see that the Jewish contribution has been

proportionally greater than any other people. When we see all the great ideas and great people that have come from the Jewish people, then we can be proud. Esau was proud of being a Jew. He had a historical memory and the memory of the ideals of his father. He saw how Judaism was practiced, and he always showed a great respect for Judaism. When he came home he kept kosher and wore Jewish clothes and looked like he was part of the Jewish people, but outside his home he thought Judaism was completely irrelevant. Yes, he was proud of his past, just as today there are many Jews who are very proud of their past. They have a historical memory. They know that a Jew is as good as everybody else and because a Jew is as good as everybody else and is not inferior to anybody, he can then intermarry. He can marry with everyone else, too. We can live just like everyone, too. This is the position of most Jews today. A generation ago we had many, many self-hating Jews, Jew who couldn't stomach the negative memories of being Jewish. Hemingway writes about these types of Jews, Jews who would deprecate their own past and their own people. In fact, I personally have heard more anti-Semitic jokes from other Jews, self-hating Jews than from gentiles. Thank G-d, we seem to be past that era, and most Jews now are proud of their past, but that does not mean that they are still going to be Jews because now, since they believe that they are as good as everybody else, they can then mingle and mix with everybody else.

Yaacov, though, was different. Yaacov not only transferred to his children Jewish ideals, a historical memory, and an experiential memory, but he also transferred to his children a didactic memory. Of all the Patriarchs, only Jacob was called Zoken. Only he bore that title. It is hard to understand why he alone should have borne that title, the old man, because he did not live as long as the rest of the Patriarchs. Abraham lived to 175. Jacob only lived to 147, yet, he was called the old man. The rabbis say the reason for this is because he interacted with his children and with his grandchildren. He not only gave them a living example of his faith, and he not only gave them a historical memory along with the negative memories, but he also gave them a didactic memory. He did religious things with his children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, today parents do not do religious things with their children. They do not bring them to shul. We have services here twice a day. They do not bring them to Mincha. They do not bring them to study classes. They do not do things religious with them. It is true that education is important, and I have talked many times about how we should give our children the most intensive Jewish education that we possibly can, but that is not enough. Yitzchak have his children an education. Avraham gave his children an education, but you must also do things, religious things, with your children. How many of you learn with your children? How many of you come to shul regularly with your children? Unless they see that you also need G-d and need G-d's help and that you also are bothered by different religious questions and that you also find inspiration in the text of Judaism to help solve these questions, then they will not have your memories. When you grew up in your home, you did things with your parents. You built the succah together, you made the seder together, you did things together. How many Jews have these religious memories? I am not talking about memories of going to ballgames or mowing the lawn. I am talking about religious memories. It is important to have these religious memories. Without these religious memories, the Jewish people cannot survive. Only Yaacov was able to keep all his children, because he did religious things with them. That's why on this day we say out loud, "Blessed by the name of this glorious kingdom forever and forever," because on

this day we are all together with our children. What do the rabbis say is the origin of this expression anyway? They tell us that when Jacob was on his deathbed, he called all his children together, his 12 boys and one girl, and he asked them what they believed in, and they said the Shema. Many people think the Shema is a prayer, but it is not. The Shema is a statement that was directed to Israel, or Jacob. "Hear, O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is one." Hear, Father Israel, we believe like you do that there is one G-d; there is one right and wrong. We have to live by it, and when Jacob heard that he said, "Blessed by the name of his glorious kingdom forever and forever." We can only say the Boruch Shem Kavod, etc., on Yom Kippur, because only on Yom Kippur is the whole family participating together in a religious experience. Unfortunately, we Jews today do not share religious experiences with our children. It is only through Jewish learning, learning together, that the bond of Jewish memory can be cemented, and if you cannot learn yourself, you can bring the children to shul to learn. You can learn together with them in the different classes in the shul. It is very important. Religious memory can only be transmitted if there is an interaction between the generations.

In a little while we are going to say yizkor. We are going to recall the memories that we have retained of our loved ones who have gone on. We are going to remember the religious interaction that we had with our parents, and that is why many of us are here. I am reminded of the story they tell about David Winchester. Winchester does not seem like a Jewish name. It seems more like the name of a gun than of a rabbi, but David Winchester was born in Poland and he came to Chicago at a young age. In 1924 Rabbi Moshe Epstein of Lithuania decided to open his yeshiva in Hebron in Israel. Hebron is a city that had been almost continuously occupied by Jews since the time of Abraham. Only for a few short years during the Crusades were there no Jews there, and the reason for that was that when the Crusaders entered Hebron they took all the Jews and put them into the city's main synagogue and there they burned them all up alive. But the fact remains that Jews have lived in Hebron almost continuously for 3500 years.

Rabbi Moshe Epstein decided to open his yeshiva there after the Lithuanian government decided to no longer give draft deferments to theological students. This was considered an important event, such an important event that it was even announced in the British Parliament. Moshe Epstein had a world renowned reputation. Soon he had 265 students. Hebron was a city in which the Jewish people were totally integrated. There was a Jewish city councilman sitting among the Arab city councilmen, there were Jewish policemen. The Arab-Jewish relationships were excellent. They were always conferring. When there was a rumor that maybe Rabbi Moshe Epstein would move his yeshiva to someplace else, the Arabs came and begged him not to do so. They knew that not only was it a very good moral influence in the city, but it was also economically very beneficial to the city.

In 1927 as Jewish immigration continued to pour into Israel, Arab nationalism flared up and there were some scattered demonstrations. However, it was not until August 21, 1929, that things got bad. A young Jewish child was stabbed to death in one of the outlying settlements by a nationalistic Arab. Because of this, the Jewish community got alarmed, and throughout Israel the Haganah, which had been organized after the 1920 and 1921 riots, decided to defend all the Jewish communities. In Hebron, though, it was thought that this was not necessary since the Jewish community's relationship with the Arab community was so excellent. In fact, a delegation of Arabs even came to the Jewish city councilman and told him not to worry, that everything was going to be all right.

Later on it was learned that the pogrom in Hebron had been well planned and this was just a piece of misinformation.

On August 23, a Friday afternoon, a gang of Arab nationalists burst into the yeshiva and there they were confronted by one student. Since it was Friday afternoon, all the students had gone home to get ready for Shabbos. They accosted him and stabbed him to death. When this was made know, the Jews turned to the British police and asked them for protection. The British police told them to just stay home on Shabbos. Nothing was going to happen to them. The next morning, groups of Arab nationalist young men from all over Hebron launched a pogrom. Two hours later 67 Jews were killed and many, many were wounded. Among them was David Winchester. He was stabbed 13 times. That Tuesday, all the Jews of Hebron were evacuated by the British. Thus, this is how one city on the West Bank became free of Jews.

David Winchester came home to Chicago to recover from his wounds. He said, it was reported, that he made a vow that, if he would recover from his wounds, he would devote his life to doing Chesed, to doing kindness. Some people would have thought that that vow was totally unnecessary since he was already known for doing Chesed before he was attacked. They tell how when a terrible contagious disease struck two boys of the yeshiva, they had to be quarantined. The head of the yeshiva used to leave their meals on the floor by their door and then go away, and they would then come out, pick up their meals, and eat them. The head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Moshe Epstein, felt very bad that he had not seen these boys since they had gotten ill. He knew that they had a terrible contagious disease, but he decided that it was his responsibility to go see them, so, with fear and trembling, he went to see these boys. He opened the door and who did he see inside feeding them but David Winchester.

David Winchester was known throughout all Chicago as a man of great kindness. He would give everything he had to other people. Many times it happened that on a cold Chicago day people would see him shivering without an overcoat, and they knew exactly what had happened. He had given his overcoat to someone who did not have an overcoat. The shul in which he worked never gave him his salary. Instead, the shul gave it directly to his wife, because, after all, his wife and children had to have clothing and food, too. They knew that if they would give it to him, he would give it all away. He was a man, though, who would not take any gifts. He would refuse them all, so when people wanted to give him money to help him in his charitable enterprises, he would say that he would take it as a loan but not as a gift. In this way he amassed a huge amount of debt, but people got wise to him. People gave money to him, knowing that they would never get it back, because they wanted him to do good things with the money they gave him. They knew that he would use this money well. He kept borrowing large sums of money many years to help people. When he died, thousands and thousands of people came to his funeral. A strange announcement was made at his funeral. An announcement was made that a special committee of the friends of Rabbi David Winchester had been formed in order to pay back all his debts. "Anybody to whom David Winchester owes money, please submit your bill and we will pay it." Two months passed, three months passed, six months passed, and nobody submitted a bill. Finally, at the end of a year and a half, the account was closed. Nobody has ever come forward to ask that his debt be repaid, because everybody knew that David Winchester had given more than he had taken. Everybody knew that David Winchester had paid them back many times by the great

amount of Chesed, kindness, that he had done.

This is the same way that we pay our parents back. How do our parents expect us to pay them back? By doing good things for our children, their grandchildren. Have our parents ever submitted us a bill for the food we ate when we were a youngster? Have our parents ever submitted a bill for the clothes they bought for us as we were growing up? Of course not. They do not expect us to pay them back. They expect us, though, to pay them back by doing things for our children. They expect us to have religious memories with our children, too. They expect us to be able to say that all our children have remained Jewish. They expect us to be able to say, as Jacob did, "Blessed by the name of this glorious kingdom forever and forever." This we can only do, my friends, if we share ourselves with our children. This we can only do if we remember, so they can remember. This we can only do, my friends, if we will dedicate ourselves to perpetuating our parents' memories by sharing their memories and our religious memories with our children. May we all do this so Judaism will live and so that our memory will live and so that, when the time will come for our passing from this earthly life, people will come to shul to remember us at yizkor because we remembered together. Remember, remember, remember.

KOL NIDRE

Yom Kipurim, Purim, and Strong Jewish Families

Tonight is Yom Kippur. We all know that tomorrow is Yom Kippur, too. However, in our prayers, this day is not referred to as Yom Kippur. This day is referred to as Yom Kipurim. The rabbis ask, why is this day called Yom Kipurim? One of the answers they give is because Yom Kippur is a day K'Purim, a day like Purim. How can the rabbis say that today is a day like Purim? After all, on Purim we eat and we feast and we even drink a little too much. Today we are fasting. We are not eating or drinking at all. How can Yom Kippur be compared to a day like Purim? Besides, Purim is a carefree, happy, frolicking holiday in which we wear masks and put on plays, etc. It is not a solemn holiday like Yom Kippur, so why should the rabbis say Yom Kippur is a day like Purim? What's more, right after we said the Kol Nidre, we also read the sentence, "Pardon the iniquities of this people, according to Thy abundant kindness, even as Thou hast forgiven His People ever since they left Egypt." Why should we mention Egypt? After all, doesn't Jewish history go back further to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs? Didn't Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Sarah and Rebecca and Leah sin? Why does it just say, "Pardon the iniquities of this people as You have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt"? What's more, why is it that, when we as individuals say the Selichos after the silent Amidah, we launch right into the Selichos without any lengthy introduction? We do not sing happy tunes. We just confess our sins. But, when the cantor repeats the Amidah, he does not just launch right into the recitation of Selichos. Instead, there is a lengthy prologue in which he reminds G-d of His promise to the Jewish people, how G-d promised He would redeem us, how G-d has promised the Jewish people that we will be an eternal people. We sing many happy tunes because we are Your children and You are our Father . . . and then after that we make our confession of sins. Why should this be?

Perhaps we can understand the answer to these questions if we look at the ritual ceremony which went on in the Temple when the Temple stood. We are going to read about it in the Torah portion that we are going to read tomorrow, and we will also read a poetical rendition of the ceremony in the Mussaf of Yom Kippur. What did the ceremony consist of? First of all, it consisted of choosing two goats who were exactly identical in color and weight and size, and then, after we had chosen these two goats, we drew lots and decided which one was to be sent out into the wilderness and chased until it ran off a cliff, while the other one was to be offered on the altar. The choice between which of these two goats would be offered on the altar and which one would be sent out into the wilderness was to be made by lot, by Goral. Also, when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies, he would not enter the Holy of Holies without anything in his hand. He would hold in his hand a smoking sensor, so that the sight he beheld was murky. It was

not clear. It was smoke covered. Why, if the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies just one day of the year, would he enter the Holy of Holies holding a sensor which would obscure his vision?

The reason the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies this way is because life is so unpredictable; we cannot see the future. We do not know exactly what is going to happen. That's why Yom Kippur is a day K'Purim because Purim talks about man's vulnerability. It talks about how one day Haman is on the top and then how on the next day Mordecai is on the top, how our fate keeps flip flopping. One day we are in mortal danger of being completely destroyed and on the next day we are ruling the kingdom for Achashverosh. That is why Yom Kippur is like Purim because Purim talks about our vulnerability as a people and Yom Kippur speaks about our vulnerability as individuals. We do not know what is going to happen. Who can predict the future? Who could have predicted that the Soviet Union would collapse with the death of only three people? Who could have predicted a year ago that interest rates would be at a 30 year low? Who could have predicted, when George Bush's popularity was 90% in August 1991, that, by the time the election came in November 1992, it would be 38%? Life is filled with all sorts of variables which affect our personal lives, too. All of a sudden, banks refuse to renew loans and businesses collapse. People are struck down with illnesses. A young man in our congregation, only 23 years old, was struck down right after Rosh Hashonna in an industrial accident. Nobody knows what the future has in store for us. On Purim, we are told to tear away the masks from evil so we can confront it and overcome it, while on Yom Kippur, we are told to tear away the masks from our own faces so that we can look at ourselves truthfully and clearly and change for the better.

We offered two goats on Yom Kippur. One was for the wilderness and the other one was for the altar. Why is it that evil can sometimes take over a country so quickly? We have seen this in our own day when Hitler took over Germany. Hitler did not take it over in a putsch. Hitler was elected democratically. The Chancellor of Germany asked him to form a government because his party had the most seats in the German parliament. Not all those Germans who voted for Hitler were anti-Semitic. There are two types of people that are needed for evil to take over a society. The first type is a type you would never suspect. He is the person who would be the perfect neighbor, a good family man, a Haman, who loves his children, who asks his wife for advice, a man who is ambitious, who is always reliable, who is trustworthy, who, when you give him a job, will always carry it out. He is totally responsible. That is why Achashverosh liked Haman. He was the perfect bureaucrat, the perfect manager. What was the problem with Haman? He was filled with hatred, and his goals were evil, like we find here in our country as well. Who would ever have thought that a David Duke would have ever gotten so many votes when he ran for governor in Louisiana? Who would have ever thought that Patrick Buchanan, who made all sorts of anti-Semitic statements, would be a featured speaker at the Republican National Convention? These are people who are very ambitious and very hard working, but these people are evil people. Look at Hitler. Hitler was reputed to be a vegetarian. He never took a penny from the state. He did not fool around with other people's wives. He was true to Eva Braun. He was a man who loved animals, but he was an evil man.

The second type of person is the person whom we find in most societies, the average man who does not really care what a person stands for as long as he is going to solve his

problems. He wants to make sure that he has food on his table, that he has housing, that he can provide the other necessities for his family. He wants a job that gives him some sort of satisfaction. That type of man does not care about the other hateful views of the person he supports. All he wants is someone who is going to solve his problems. That's why so many people voted for Hitler. That is your Achaverosh. Achaverosh did not care about Haman's anti-Semitic views as long as it did not harm him personally, but once he started to hurt him personally, then he reacted. When it touched his beloved queen, Esther, then he got angry and he hanged Haman, but until then, he was perfectly happy. Later on, when he found that Mordecai, Esther's cousin, a Jew, was just as dedicated and devoted as Haman and could do just as good a job, he was doubly happy. It is our job as Jews to tear away the face of evil, to show the Hamans for what they are, to reveal the man behind the mask. It is our job to show the majority of the people in any culture that, if they go along with the Haman types, it is going to hurt them worse than if they would not go with them. It is true that in Germany, when Hitler came to power, he initiated policies which caused full employment, which harnessed inflation, which lifted the morale of the average German. The Germans were no longer looked down upon by the other nations of the world, but Hitler led them into war and 6 million Germans died, as well as 6 million of our own people. We have to show the majority of the people that, by following evil people, they are going to end up worse than before. That is the goat who roams free. He looks like he is free and happy, but he ends up being thrown off a cliff. We have to be careful of those people who are dedicated and devoted and who seem to be working for G-d but who are really not. Purim tells us that we have to unmask them. Why do we mention Egypt on Yom Kippur? The rabbis tell us that the Jewish people in Egypt had sunk to the 49th level of Tumah, that they had almost become assimilated. If they had stayed in Egypt any longer, they would have been identical to their gentile neighbors, but they were worthy to be redeemed still because they had strong families and they were willing to help each other and they were proud of their Jewish identity. They still believed in the message of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were just confused as to how to implement it. They were, though, willing to help each other. They were willing to do things for each other. That is why we read about Egypt on this day of Yom Kippur. As long as the Jewish people are willing to help each other, as long as they are proud of their Jewish identity, then they are still worthy of being redeemed. They can still change. They can still once again assume all the moral and religious values of our faith. They can still tear away from themselves the masks of the assimilated practices which they have surrounded themselves with. They can once again assume Jewish values as long as they have strong families.

Unfortunately, here in America we see that many Jewish families are not strong any more. It is no source of pride to us that our divorce rate is rapidly approaching the divorce rate in general. It is no source of pride to us that our young people are talking about alternative life-styles. Because we have mocked the institution of the Shadchen and have made no provisions for an alternative institution, our children are not getting when they are 21, 22, 23. And the later they get married, the less likelihood they will marry Jews. When we go to buy a piece of property, we get a real estate agent, a lawyer, maybe a banker. We get many people involved, but when it comes to making matches, to getting young people together, for some reason we feel that it is not right for anybody else to get involved, so young people have to meet in bars or in other sordid places. There is not

organized effort to make sure that our young people meet each other. There is also no real backup for young families getting started. There is no real community support. There is no help for the nuclear families, because extended families by and large don't exist any more. Our young people are left on their own. It is no secret that young people do not respect their parents the way they used to. We even see that people are not saying kaddish any more for their parents. The family is not what it used to be. In order for the Jewish people to be worthy of redemption we have to maintain strong families and we have to be willing to help each other. Even religious people have been caught up in this denigration of family and of failing to consider helping other fellow Jews, one of their major responsibilities.

When I have asked several people in our community who are supposedly religious to help me with this project or with that project, what have they told me? "Oh, let somebody who likes Kovod do it." This type of reply does not bring redemption. It will never cause the Jewish people to be redeemed. We have to be willing to help each other, we have to be proud of who we are, and we have to have strong families. If we have these three qualities, G-d has told us that He will redeem us. We as a people and as individuals will be able to make it through the next year. We are all vulnerable and we all need each other's help.

That's why on Yom Kippur many times certain people who understand the prayers of Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur which speak out about the human condition will burst out crying because they know that we are all vulnerable. They know that we are all subject to all sorts of forces that we do not understand. G-d has not promised us that we will not have problems in life if we are religious. All He has ever promised us is that we will be given the strength to overcome our problems if we will be religious. I am sure that our ancestors, our grandfathers, and great-grandfathers in Europe when the pogroms occurred in the 1880's and 1890's and especially in 1905 and in 1916, could not understand the terrible thing that was happening to them, but it was these pogroms which drove them to America, and, if they had not gone to America, they and their children and grandchildren would have all probably been killed in Europe. In my family alone, my father tells me, over 100 of our relatives were killed in Babi Yar. G-d has promised the Jewish people that we will be eternal and, therefore, the hazzan, when he repeats the Amidah, can sing happy tunes. He reminds G-d of His promise to the Jewish people. But G-d has not promised us as individuals that we will be eternal. He has never promised us that we will not have problems. Therefore, when we say the Selichos, we launch right into our sins. We ask G-d to give us a happy year. We ask G-d to give us a good year. It is difficult, though, to face life, because life is filled with so many ups and downs. Yom Kippur reminds us of that because Yom Kippur is truly a day K'Purim.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Merwyn Goldstone, a rich Jewish Texas millionaire. His shul had organized a trip to Israel and he went with his shul's group to Israel. When the Israel Bond organization found out that Merwyn Goldstone, one of their big supporters, was in Israel, they called their famous tour guide, Chaim Steinberg, to go pick him up in a rented taxi and to drive him through the land, hoping that it would encourage him to purchase another large quantity of Israel Bonds. Chaim picked up Merwyn Goldstone. Merwyn Goldstone gave him \$500 per piece of luggage to put in the trunk of the taxi and then Merwyn got into the taxi. After Merwyn entered the taxi, he put his legs over the front seat, showing his \$1000 boots, his \$1500 suit, his \$500 cowboy

hat, and his \$25,000 diamond ring. Then he pulled out a very expensive cigar and started to smoke. Chaim, in self defense, took out a cigarette to smoke because he could not stand the cigar smoke. When Chaim pulled out a cigarette, Merwyn reached into his pocket and pulled out a Dunill lighter to light his cigarette. As he did it, his shirt went up his arm and Chaim saw numbers on his arm. He looked at these numbers and he almost fainted. He drove to the side of the road to regain his composure. Merwyn looked at him and said, "What's the matter with you? Haven't you ever seen numbers before?" Slowly his southern drawl melted away and he said, "Yes, I was born in Europe and I was sent to a concentration camp and there all my family was killed. At the end of the war I remembered I had a distant cousin in Texas. He called for me and I went to live in Texas where I made it big. I am a respected member of my synagogue. I work for my community, and now I am here in Israel to see how my people live in this Jewish State." Chaim looked at him and said, "Listen Merwyn, I have something I want to show you." Merwyn said, "Go ahead. Show me." Chaim took his taxicab and turned it in another direction and headed for the Sea of Galilee.

Chaim's name was really not Chaim. It was Gary. Chaim was actually an American, too. He had come to Israel just after college, backpacking through Israel, trying to see all the sights. He ran out of money and decided that he would get into the kibbutz volunteer program. What is the kibbutz volunteer program? It is a program whereby college age and older young men and women do all the menial work in the kibbutz that the kibbutzniks do not want to do in exchange for room and board. The kibbutz that he applied to had a lot of orchards and they sold fruit. People will not buy bruised fruit so Chaim's job was to take all the bruised fruit and throw it into a hopper where it would go down into a grinder and be turned into juice.

One day he decided he wanted to go that afternoon to the city to see a friend of his so he got up early to get all his work done before 1:00 p.m. There was still dew on the ground when he began to work and his leather sandals got wet. As he was pouring the bushel baskets of fruit into the hopper, he slipped, and, the next thing he knew, he was in the hopper. He tried to get out, but his shoes were slippery and he kept sliding to the grinder. He started to scream, but everyone was still sleeping. He kept getting closer and closer to the grinder until finally his foot touched the grinder. Just at that instant, Zalman, who had a carpentry shop across the way, came down with his strong hand and pulled him out. The numbers on Zalman's hand were emblazoned in the mind of Chaim: 4101. Chaim, of course, had to be taken to the hospital. Zalman had decided to get up early to seep out his carpentry shop because he had a new project to start that day. It was just by a fluke that he heard Chaim.

Chaim had to have part of his leg amputated, and there, while he was in the hospital, he fell in love with his nurse. They were married and he decided he would become an Israeli citizen. The same day that Israeli citizenship papers arrived he moved into a new apartment. Lo and behold, the last numbers of his citizenship were 4101, and, not only that, when his phone was installed the next day, his phone number, too, was 4101, Chaim's celestial number. When he saw that, he felt it could not just be a coincidence, so he picked up the phone in order to call Zalman to thank him once again for saving his life. He really did not know what to tell Zalman, but he knew he had to call him, so he called him and mumbled some words of thanks. Zalman said he was welcome and hung up the phone.

The taxi quickly entered into the kibbutz by the Sea of Galilee. It was raining and muddy. Chaim stopped the cab, pulled Merwyn out from the cab, in the process getting his cowboy boots all dirty, and then he pulled Merwyn's luggage out from the back, smearing it with mud. By this time, Merwyn was furious. Chaim had to grab Merwyn and pull him to the carpentry shop. Then he rolled up Merwyn's sleeve and pushed it against Zalman's arm. There was a number on Merwyn's arm, 4102. Merwyn looked at Zalman and said, "Is that you, Zalman?" Zalman looked at Merwyn and said, "Mendel, you are not dead." My friends, we are not dead, and we are not dead because we have a synagogue. What is the one institution which allows the Jewish people to survive? What is that one institution which allows us to deal with life's vagaries, life's ups and downs? It is the synagogue. That's why a synagogue is called Beis Tefillah, a House of Prayer. Why did the High Priest go into the Holy of Holies with a sensor? Because we do not know what the future brings. Why do we pray? We ask G-d to help us make the right decision because we do not know when we make a decision whether it is right or not. If you would have opened up a business in Houston in 1979, you would have made a fortune. If you would have opened up a business in Houston in 1985, you would have lost your shirt. Oh, G-d, we pray, help us to make the right decisions. A synagogue is also a Beis HaKeneses, a house of assembly. We need to assemble to organize to tear away the mask off of Haman's face. We have to show the people of the world who is an evil man and who is not an evil man. We have to convince the Achaveroshes of the world that, if they follow evil people, it is going to be worse for them than ever for us. The synagogue is also known as a Beis HaMedrash, as a place of Jewish learning about values where we learn what is necessary to preserve our Jewish identity, where we learn how to create strong Jewish families, where we learn how to apply Jewish values to our lives. My friends, the Jewish people in America is not dead. We will live. We will live as long as we come together in synagogues, as long as we are willing to help each other, as long as we are willing to do those things for each other that we know have to be done. The synagogue is the most essential organization in Jewish life. Even the Jewish federations are recognizing this fact now, too. They recognize that those people who are synagogue members are much more likely to be active in the federation, that from a synagogue comes a Hebrew Free Loan and a Chevra Kadisha and day schools and all those values which we need to order to live Jewish lives.

We are alive. Mendel, you are not dead. We are alive because we still have synagogues. Let us Jews always band together to help each other because life has many ups and downs. Life is not predictable. Life is like Purim, but G-d has told us that He will help us, He has assured us that He will give us a good year. Yes, we have to tear away the mask from people who pretend to be good but who are really evil in this world, but we also have to return to our Jewish values. We must make sure that we have strong families who are willing to help each other, who have strong Jewish identities, and who are willing to put more and more Jewish values into their lives. If we do that, then we can rest assured that G-d will help us by giving us a good year and a happy year, a healthy year and a prosperous year. Amen.

SHABBOS OF SUCCOS

Creation, Succos, and Creativity

On the Shabbos of Succos we read a portion of the Torah which does not really seem to have anything to do with Succos. After G-d had forgiven the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf, Moshe says to G-d, "You said to me, 'Bring up this people,' and You did not let me know who You will send with me, and You said, 'I will know you by name and also you have found favor in My eyes.'" This is a mystical passage. G-d answered him by saying, "My presence will go with you and I will cause you rest," and Moshe replied and he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with me, do not take us up from here." It seems very confusing. What is this reply referring to? Moshe then continues by saying, "How will I know that I have found favor in Your eyes, I and this people? Isn't it when You will go with us and we will be distinguished, I and Your people, from all the nations that are on the face of the earth?" In other words, if the Jewish people will have a lot of prominent people in the sciences and the arts, if the Jewish people will have produced many personages who have received international recognition, then truly that is the proof that G-d is with us. But what does this all have to do with Succos, and how can we understand this whole passage?

What's more, on the holiday of Succos we bring seventy bullocks. On the seven days of Succos we bring a total of seventy bullocks. On all the other holidays we never do such a thing. Why do we bring seventy bullocks? The rabbis say that we bring them for the nations of the world, that on Succos we pray for the nations of the world. Why should we pray for the nations of the world on Succos?

Finally, why is it that on Succos we take only natural material? The schach that we use for the succa has to be made from natural material. If the schach is made out of mats of reeds, etc., it is not good. If the schach is the product of human ingenuity, plastic that has holes in it, etc., it cannot be used for schach. It has to be natural material. When we take the lulav and the esrog and the willow and the myrtle, they have to be natural. Why are we concerned about natural materials on Succos?

It seems to me that the answer to this is found in the Ramban, Nachmonides. The Ramban says that there are actually two holidays which celebrate the creation of the world. One holiday is the weekly Shabbos in which we remember how G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. The other holiday is the holiday of Succos. That's why there are seven days of Succos corresponding to the seven days of creation. The Ramban learns many other things from the holiday of Succos which corresponds to creation.

There are actually two parts to creation. There is one part of creation which only G-d can do, only G-d can create out of nothing. There is a second part of creation in which we can

participate with G-d. G-d created a world with everything in it, but not everything has been finished. G-d has initiated a process which entails the unfolding of the many possibilities of creation. He has asked us, man, to help Him complete this process of creation. G-d, for His own purposes, has made us His junior partner. He has created the world 95% complete, 96% complete, maybe 98% complete, and He has given us the responsibility, with His help, to finish the job. He said, "I have given you all the physical and moral materials necessary. You go ahead and finish the job." The Ramban says that this is what the whole holiday of Succos is about. G-d is telling us that we should continue the process of creation which He has initiated. It is our job to complete His creation.

We know now from modern science that the Biblical recital of creation and the scientific view of creation can be easily reconciled. There are several new books that have clearly demonstrated this. Because Einstein's Theory of Relativity tells us that time is not constant throughout the universe, it is possible that fifteen billion years can equal seven days for someone viewing events from the edge of the universe. Time is relative. G-d created the world by creating the basic building blocks of the universe. That was the act of creation. Then G-d initiated a process, the process of completion of creation, which is still going on to this day. It is our G-d-given job as human beings to help G-d complete the creation of the world. And we must start with ourselves. That is, of course, what circumcision for a male is all about. And that is what the breaking of the hymen at marriage is all about. We have to perfect ourselves before we can begin to perfect creation. That is our main job here on earth.

That is actually what Moshe Rabbeinu was talking about in the Torah portion we read on Chol Hamoed Succos, the Ramban continues. Moshe is now speaking to G-d after the sin of the golden calf. This conversation bears a striking parallel to the conversation which Moshe had with G-d when he was first called by G-d at the burning bush. There, too, he wanted to know what G-d's name would be. Moshe, at the burning bush, was given a mission, a mission to free the Jewish people and to bring them to Mount Sinai where they would get the Torah. That was Moshe's mission. Moshe, at the burning bush, wanted to know, G-d, how are You going to help me fulfill this mission? When the children of Israel shall ask me what is Your name, what shall I say to them? G-d told him, tell them that My name is, I will be Who I will be. That means that G-d told Moshe that He will actively participate with him in the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt, that G-d's mercy toward the Jewish people will be felt there. Now after the Torah had been given to the Jewish people, Moshe's mission was complete. Now G-d is giving Moshe another mission. G-d is telling him that his new mission is to lead the Jewish people into the land of Israel, which will cause the Jewish people to enter history. The Jewish people as a people can now begin to help G-d perfect the world. Moshe does not really know if he should take this job. Just as he was hesitant whether or not to take the first job of freeing the Jewish people from Egypt, he did not know whether or not he should take this job of bringing the Jewish people into the land of Israel. Therefore, he said, "And You did not let me know who You will send with me, and You said I will know you by name." What name are You going to be? Are You going to come with us as the G-d Who is going to help us, as the G-d Who is a symbol for mercy, like You helped us in Egypt? G-d in Egypt caused the plagues. G-d helped Moshe take out the Jewish people from Egypt. That is what Moshe is telling Him here now. He says, "If You will not want to come with

us and participate in this mission of causing us to enter the land of Israel by helping us actively, then do not take us up from here." The rabbis say when G-d first answered Moshe by saying, "My presence will go and I will cause you rest," Moshe was not satisfied with that because that would mean that G-d would only be an observer but not an active participant. G-d's judgement, but not his mercy, would be shown to the Jewish people. Moshe therefore says, "No, if Your presence does not go with us, don't take us up from here." How do we know that G-d's presence is with us? We know that G-d's presence is with us when we have distinguished people, people who are making many positive contributions to the world.

Why is it, though, that on Succos we go out to nature and take natural things? Because G-d has put everything in nature that we need in order to perfect the world but we have to find it. We have to learn how best to utilize everything in nature. We have to discover all the things in nature which will help us create a paradise on earth. We have to discover the medicines and the energy sources and the techniques to give our people good health, to allow our society to function correctly, to give us the tools in order to create a paradise on earth. But there is a problem. The problem is that man cannot only take the discoveries that he makes and use them for good, but he can also use them for bad. That is one of the symbolic meanings of the esrog. The rabbis say that the forbidden fruit that Adam and Eve ate in the Garden of Eden was not the apple but the esrog. The esrog is the symbol of the knowledge of nature which man can use to make this world wonderful and beautiful but which also can be used to bring destruction and evil to the world. The more advances we make in chemistry the better food products we can produce, but also the more efficient chemical weapons we can manufacture which can then be put on missiles and destroy whole cities and civilizations. The more efficient we become in physics the better power sources we can create, but also the better atomic bombs we will be able to make. We now can modify the genes of a woman while she is still pregnant. If a baby has faulty genes and they can be corrected while the baby is still in the womb, the baby will be spared a life of sickness. Is this permissible according to Jewish law? Of course it is, because a future human being's life and health is involved. We are also in favor of all in vitro fertilization and other fertilization techniques, because having babies is a great job and mitzvah. It is important that people be able to have babies. However, the same techniques that can create health in a sick baby can also, in the future, create monsters. Probably in the not too distant future, we will be able to create human-animal creatures just as we find in fairy tales and in ancient myths. We will be able to change the genetic code of human beings and make them into monsters. The very techniques that can be so good and so wonderful and so beneficial can also be so evil and so destructive.

That is, of course, why we pray on Succos for the nations of the world, because there has to be peace in the world. If there is not peace in the world, mankind will take the inventions that we invent and the discoveries that we discover and use them for war and destruction. The better discoveries, the more power we give to people to destroy and to kill and to maim and to hurt. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu said, "G-d, I need Your help. Yes, I will accept this job to lead the people to Israel so that they can make the many contributions that are necessary in order to make this world into a paradise, but, G-d, I will not go up unless You go up with us. You have to actively help us. You have to make sure that eventually there will be peace in the world so that when we discover all these things they will not be turned into instruments of destruction and evil." That, of course, is

what the lulav stands for. The lulav teaches man that he must stand tall. It is okay for man to have self-respect, but he should not become arrogant. The willow stands for the mouth. Man needs to know how to communicate. It is good to increase our communication skills and to develop all sorts of communications equipment, but these types of communications equipment can also be used to spy on people, to take away their freedom of speech and intimidate them. The same thing is true of the myrtle, which stands for the eye. It is very good that we create all sorts of devices, microscopes, cameras, telescopes, which will allow us to discover all the secrets of nature, but these same types of equipment can destroy all human freedom and all human dignity by constantly keeping us under surveillance. We can turn everything upside down. We create also with our cameras all sorts of terrible horror movies filled with violence, deviant sex, murder, and mayhem which will drive our people to do all sorts of terrible things. Everything in this life can be used either for good or for bad, even our striving for greater and greater creativity.

I am reminded about the story they tell about two friends. One drove an MG and one drove a Rolls Royce. The Rolls Royce had just about everything in it. One day the guy with the MG called his friend with the Rolls Royce and said, "You know, I just put a new car phone in my MG. It has thirty different channels. The other guy in the Rolls Royce sounded crestfallen on the phone and said, "Oh, I haven't even got a phone." Two days later he called his friend in his MG on his phone from his Rolls Royce and said, "You know, I have just installed a car phone. Not only does my car phone have thirty channels, but it is also voice activated." The other guy said, "Just a minute, now my other phone is ringing."

Yes, it is okay to be creative and to want the latest invention, but our zeal for the newest inventions should not lead us to hate others or lead us to war. If it does, then our very progress will destroy us. Our progress will just give more power to ruthless people to destroy those they envy. We have to be very careful that we do not destroy what we are building. That is what the holiday of Succos is talking about. It is talking about the progress that comes from harnessing nature. Things in their natural state are many times not beneficial at all. But if we take them and process them correctly, they can benefit mankind and nature itself. We can make this world into a veritable paradise. But we have to make sure that there is peace. If there is no peace, then everything that we discover will be turned into terrible instruments of destruction and would be better off not discovering nature's secrets. Therefore Moshe pleads, "G-d, don't desert us. When we begin this journey of perfecting this world and perfecting society and perfecting ourselves, be there with us to help us maintain the correct moral standards so that our advances do not end up destroying all of us. If You will not come with us, G-d, if You will not help us, then do not even let us attempt this journey. If you will not help us, G-d, then this journey can only end in terrible destruction." Let us all hope and pray that G-d will always be with us, so that all the discoveries that we will discover in the future will be only for the good of mankind, and so that truly our world will be crowned with peace so that we can truly create a veritable paradise on earth so that Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SUCCOS

Punishment, Happiness, and Relationships

Why is it that we have just completed circling the synagogue, chanting all the way, "Help us, O L-rd, help us, O L-rd"? I thought this was Yom Simchaseinu, the Day of our Joy. What kind of joy is that that we should all take our lulavs and esrogs and march around the synagogue chanting, "G-d, help us, G-d, help us." That is what the Hebrew word Hoshanna means. We implore G-d to "Help us for Thy sake, our G-d, our Creator, our Redeemer, we beseech Thee, help us." How can this cry for help be reconciled with a supposed day of joy? Also, if Succos is such a day of joy, why is it that we go out to a succah? After all, a succah can be a very uncomfortable place. The sun can be hot, there can be insects there, it can be cold, it can be terribly humid. Why is it such a joyful thing to go out to a succah? Finally, in the Torah portion that we read today about the holiday of Succos, we mention the holiday twice. The first time, the Torah says, "Speak to the sons of Israel saying, 'In the 15th day of this seventh month is a holiday of Succos, seven days for G-d,'" and a few sentences later it says, "In the 15th day of the seventh month when you will gather in the crops of your field you shall celebrate the holiday of Succos for seven days." Why this repetition? Why does the Torah have to tell us that Succos comes on the 15th day of this seventh month? After all, how many seventh months do we have? Why does the Torah have to say this seventh month?

This rabbis answer and they say the reason that the Torah says this seventh month is to teach us that Succos is tied, not only to the other two pilgrim holidays, Pesach and Shavuos, but also to Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur. Pesach celebrates our exodus from Egypt. Shavuos is tied to the exodus because it is always fifty days after Pesach and we are commanded to count these days. Succos, which commemorates our wandering in the desert for forty years, is tied to the exodus because that's when our wandering began. The reason again that the Torah says this seventh month is to teach us that Succos is not only tied to Pesach and Shavuos, but also to Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur. The rabbis also ask the question, why is it that we celebrate Succos in the fall? Why shouldn't we celebrate it in the spring? After all, we began wandering in the desert immediately after we went out of Egypt. We wandered first for fifty days before we came to Mount Sinai and received the Torah there. The holidays should be in a different sequence: Pesach, then Succos, and then Shavuos. The rabbis answer, no. It is true that our wandering began after we left Egypt. But it was supposed to be of a short duration. But because we worshipped the golden calf and later especially because we refused to enter the land of Israel, we were punished by having to wander for 38 years more. One of the main reasons for Succos is to teach us that even though the Jewish people were punished by having to wander in the desert, they will could lead a happy life. They could still be happy even

though they were forced to wander. Even if we are punished for our sins, we can still be happy. Our punishment and especially our Teshuva have wiped away our sins. That, of course, is one of the main lessons of Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur.

Succos teaches us something else, too, that G-d does not demand perfection. G-d only demands that we attempt to be perfect. That's another reason why Succos is tied to the holidays of Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur also teach us that G-d will forgive us if we try to do good. Many times we will miss the mark, but, as long as we try, G-d will forgive us. Therefore, that's why it is so important that Succos be tied to Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur, to teach us that we can be happy with ourselves, we can love each other even if we are not perfect. Many times I have seen how otherwise good people will withhold their love from other people because they feel that these other people are not perfect. We especially find this in blended families where there are stepbrothers and stepsisters. Sometimes the stepmother will be so hard on her stepchildren. She will indicate that her stepchildren do not deserve her love unless they are perfect, while vis-a-vis her own children, she will not make this demand. This is almost a subconscious thing. It is not true that a person has to be perfect in order to be loved. That's why on the holiday of Succos we take the esrog, which is a symbol of perfection, in the left hand, and we take the lulav, with its imperfect species, the myrtle and the willow, in the right hand, to teach us that we should strive for perfection, but we should not be disappointed if we do not achieve it. We should strive to be like the esrog, but if we don't make it and are only like the palm or the myrtle or the willow, that's okay, too. As long as we are trying to be perfect, trying to improve ourselves, that is all that counts. The most important thing is that we are still together, like the lulav and esrog, that we still love each other, care for each other, and help each other. Succos really teaches us what is important in life. It teaches us that relationships are important in life, not things but relationships, that if you have good relationships, you can be happy. If you do not have good relationships, you cannot be happy. A person can have the biggest house in the world, but if he has no satisfactory relationships, he is going to be lonely and miserable. Many times if you have wonderful relationships, you will sell your houses to continue the relationship. If your spouse or child is sick, you will sell your house to help them. How many times have the Jewish people had to give up their homes because they wanted to maintain their relationship with G-d, because they did not want to change their religion? How many times have people given up their homes because there was a better career opportunity for their spouse? How many times have people given up their homes because they know that they have to financially help children or they know that they have to help an aged parent? We see here that the most important thing in life is relationships. It is not your houses or the material things you own which will make you happy. You can even live in a succah to be happy if you have good relationships. The lulav teaches us how we can maintain these types of relationships, how we can cause our relationships to flourish and grow so that we can all be happy.

The first requirement is that we have to be able to admit when we are wrong. The palm, the lulav itself, teaches us that we have to admit when we are wrong. The palm is usually straight, but it can bend. We have to learn how to bend when we make a mistake. When we shake the lulav on Succos, the lulav bends. This shows that we are admitting that we have made mistakes. Sometimes people just cannot say those four words. I made a mistake. They just cannot do it. Because of that, they make all sorts of excuses and it is

terrible. In every relationship mistakes are made. There is no rabbi in the Talmud that the halacha always goes according to. Nobody is perfect. We all make mistakes. Yes, we should aim for perfection, but that's why we have the esrog in the left hand; nobody is perfect. If you want to have a good relationship, you have to admit when you make a mistake.

The second thing is that you have to be flexible in a relationship. That is what the willow stands for. The willow is a very flexible thing. The willow is flexible, which means that we cannot make unreasonable demands on our spouses, children, etc. You cannot demand, for example, that your wife accompany you to the opera right after she learned that her favorite aunt died. She wants to go to the funeral, but you tell her, "Well, you can't go because we have opera tickets, and if you do not come to the opera with me, I am going to lose the money for the tickets." Or a wife cannot demand of her husband that he buy her new clothes or furniture when he has lost his job or taken a pay cut. We have to be flexible in our demands.

We also have to let each spouse grow. That is what the myrtle stands for. How many times has it happened that a husband will not allow his wife to go back to school in order to grow? If it will not interfere with the family, he has no right to do so. Or vice versa, how many times has it happened that a wife will not let her husband take a higher paying job because it means moving out of town? We have to allow our spouses to grow. If we will, one, learn to admit our mistakes, two, be flexible in our demands, three, allow the other party in the relationship to grow, then we are going to have strong relationships. And if we have strong relationships, then we are going to be happy. That is why we march around the shul with our lulavs and esrogs chanting, "G-d, help us, G-d, help us." We want G-d to see that our community is united, that between the families there are good relationships. G-d has promised us that, if within our families and between our families, there are good relationships, he will help us.

Why do we march in a circle? Because everyone is included in the circle. Everyone can be included in the circle. A circle can always be expanded with everyone still equidistant from the center, equidistant from G-d. We all go toward the same place and coming back to the same place. We all share our experiences with each other. This shows G-d that we are united, that we have good relationships, and, if we have good relationships and we are united, G-d has promised us that He will help us. Let us all hope and pray that we will all have such good relationships so that G-d will truly help us so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SUCCOT

Types of People, Peace, and the Ushpizim

The rabbis tell us that there are seven mitzvahs that are connected with Succot, that if we would be able to observe these seven mitzvahs fully, we would be able to bring peace to the world, peace to our country, peace to our home, and peace to all our institutions. The seven mitzvahs associated with Succot are the succah itself, the citron (esrog), the palm branch (lulav), the myrtle (hadas), and the arova (willow), the mitzvah of simcha, or rejoicing, and the mitzvah of hageega, a formal ceremonial type of rejoicing which referred especially to the bringing of sacrifices in Temple times. The rabbis also tell us that there are seven types of tzadikim which have to be in the world, who have seven unique types of talent that are necessary if there is to be peace in our societies, peace in our institutions, and peace throughout the whole world. The rabbis also teach us that there are also seven types of people: 1) those who are comparable to the sun, 2) those who are comparable to the moon, 3) those who are comparable to the firmament, 4) those who are comparable to the lightning, 5) those who are comparable to the stars, 6) those who are comparable to the menorah that was in the Temple, and 7) those who are comparable to a rose, who must exist in the world if there is to be peace in the world, peace in our institutions, and peace in our homes.

We all also know there are seven guests (ushpizim) that we invite into our succah, one for each of the seven days of Succot. We invite into our succah Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Yosef, Moshe, Aaron, and David. If we look carefully at the lists of seven: the seven mitzvahs of Succah, the seven types of tzadikim, the seven forms of illumination, we will see that they are each telling us something very important. They are telling us about what we need to have in society if we are to have peace. Each of these seven guests (ushpizim) who we have invited into our succah each day had these special qualities. There are, of course, many other great people in Jewish history, but they were not included. Only these seven were included, because they were the archetypes of the different types of traits which are needed if a society is to have peace with the ability to endure.

First of all, you have to have people who stand out, who are beacons. Avraham is known as Har, as a mountain. He would be the lulav, which stands out above all else. Abraham would be the sun who illuminates the world with his wonderful ideals. A person who promotes ideals can be very dangerous to the ruling authorities. They are afraid that they will be implemented in the real world. They therefore many times attack those who stand for ideals like brotherhood, justice, compassion. Abraham and Sarah stand for these ideals. We need ideals, and Abraham was a fighter. Everybody could be on one side and he could be on the other side, but he was going to stick up for his ideals. That, of course, is what the word Ivri means: he is on one side and everybody else is on the other side. In addition to ideals, we also have to have the moon, those people who reflect ideals,

those people who are similar to Yitzchak, who do not make a big noise in the world, but who live day in and day out the ideals of Abraham in real life situations. This is similar to the willow, the Arovah. The Arovah does not smell or taste, and you would think that it is not really needed, but it is needed. It stands for the foot soldiers of a moral society. These are the people who live the ideals of Judaism in their daily life without making a big noise. They are not great scholars. They are common, ordinary people who cannot give big charitable donations. They do not have it, but they are good family people. They keep the moral code. Day in and day out, they do what is required in this world. Unfortunately, we see that this group is diminishing in America today. I know from being in the rabbinate for more than thirty years that there are an awful lot of good people in the world. I especially see that when I prepare for funerals and visit with the families. You can see how different individuals have contributed day in and day out to their families, going to work every morning, giving their paycheck to their wife, being a good father, being there when they are needed. They have not written any big books, nor made any big discoveries. They were not outstanding leaders, but outstanding leaders alone will not form a just society. Yes, we need Abrahams, but we also need a lot of Yitzchaks. We need a lot of people who just do their duty, day in and day out, unsung heroes. Unfortunately, today we see that that is not fashionable. Also, in our economic climate today, ordinary, plain, hard working people, factory workers, low income workers who are just making ends meet, have a difficult time maintaining Jewish values in our society because it costs so much more today to be a Jew.

The third strata in our society that we need is the strata of the firmament. The firmament is what diffuses light throughout all the world. The light of the sun hits the atmosphere and is diffused throughout the whole world. That, of course, is Jacob. Yaacov went from one end of the known world of his day to the other, from Egypt to Mesopotamia, and in every place he was able to maintain himself as a Jew. He was able to maintain himself as a Jew, because he was always excellent in everything that he did. He stood out in what he did. That, of course, is what they myrtle, the hadas, stands for. That, of course, is what we have to do in America to keep Jews. We have to have Jews who have an excellent Jewish education and an excellent secular education so that they can excel in the world. We see that we have produced a fine group of educated, religious young people in America, a small but visible minority. This is even reflected on television where in one of the most popular TV shows, Rosie O'Neil, Rosie O'Neil's boss wears a yarmulke all the time. We see that in order to make it in America you have to have an excellent secular education and an excellent Jewish education; otherwise it is almost impossible to make it and still remain a religious Jew. This is the reason why we Jews in America will have trouble maintaining our religious life. We do not have religious parents who want their children to be the kosher butchers, teachers, shamuses, or sofream that we need to maintain Jewish life here. They do not even want their children to be rabbis or cantors. Also this means that in order to be a religious Jew in America, you have to be very smart and you have to be rich, you have to be part of the elite. We need people who will diffuse light throughout the world, we need this strata of society, but we also need the foot soldiers and the man of high ideals, too.

We also have a fourth type of person who are compared to lightning. These are the unusual leaders who come out of nowhere, like Yosef. Yosef was a person of great intellectual attainment, of great intuition, who was able to stand up against the pressures

of an alien society. He was an exceptional person who stood out. Ben Gurion, Hertzl, Great rabbinical scholars like Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, are people whose brilliance seems to come out of nowhere. We do not know where our next great leaders will come from, but G-d always supplies us these types of leaders. They are exceptional. They come out like flashes of lightning in the sky. This, of course, is what the esrog stands for. The esrog is apart from the rest of us, but it is always held close to the lulav. The esrog has a beautiful, great fragrance. We can feel the presence of the esrog even before we see it. All of a sudden some people will come out of nowhere, whom we feel are great. They are truly exceptional. We do not know when they will come or from where they will come, but we recognize them when they arrive. We need to have this type of leadership, too.

Then we have the fifth category of persons who are represented by Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe Rabbeinu stands for the teachings of the Torah, teachings which encompass like a succah and allow us to overcome the problems of the world. We have to have people who immerse themselves in Torah, who understand the way the Torah operates, and who are willing to teach the common people. They do not stay in ivory towers. They are like the stars at night. They are readily available to everyone. They go out among the people and are willing to teach them. Unfortunately, we have a dearth of people who are willing to go into teaching, into teaching our children. It is very difficult to get good teachers. It is very difficult even to get people to be rabbis, but we need these type of people who are willing to spend their lives trying to teach the people and elevate their religious practices. In addition to that, we have to have impressive ceremonies that draw people to Judaism, that pull at the people's heart strings. People need ceremonies. People need to see the menorah. People need to feel important, and that, of course, was the role of Aaron and that is the role of the Hageegah. Unless people have these impressive ceremonies, they will be drawn to war, because war also makes a person feel important. It gives him a uniform, a rank. It tells him that he is doing something for the sake of his family, for the sake of his nation, for the sake of his ideals. All the pageantry that surrounds war makes a person feel important. We saw this with the Gulf War. People love a parade and being made to feel that they are needed and thus important. This is one of the problems of human nature. Unless we give man a substitute for this type of camaraderie and feeling of importance that was gives him, he will revert to war in order to gain it. It is a known fact that in wartime mental illness goes way down. People feel they are part of something greater than themselves. That, of course, was Aaron's role and the Hageegah role on Succot.

Then we have the final type of person which society needs and which is symbolized by the rose. The rose exists among the thorns. We need people who, by their personal example, give us the faith to overcome all of our problems. David had so many problems. Yet it was David who, in spite of his many problems, managed to produce the Book of Psalms, that great book of the Bible which speaks so directly to the heart of all mankind. A rose always grows among the thorns. We have to have a group of people who, no matter what the problems they face, know that there is hope. We can overcome our problems. We do not have to feel we are outcasts or alienated. We do not have to start revolutions or take out our vengeance on society by crime and violence. We can overcome the problems and inequities of life and all the other bad things that have happened to us. We can overcome them. We can make something better of ourselves. We

can look at all the problems of life as challenges and not as terrible put-downs and not as excuses for doing terribly destructive acts against others.

These are the seven types of people that we need in every society if that society is to have peace. We need these types of people throughout the world. Unfortunately, there are many nations in the world today who are still drawn to war. They feel that the only way they can unite their people is through war, that the only way they can bring society together is if they have someone they can hate. This is what has happened in the Middle East where the Arabs are suffering from great problems. They are confronting modernity. They do not know how much of their traditional culture they can save and how much of modernity they can absorb without destroying their culture completely. They are in turmoil. Instead of concentrating on these seven types of people in order to make their society just and right, they have instead latched onto Israel as the scapegoat for all their problems. Jews, not as individuals but Jews as a nation, are now thought of as the source of all the Arabs' problems. It is important that we all remember that there probably will never be peace between Israel and her neighbors until the Arab countries become democratic. And this cannot occur until all the seven types of people we enumerated above are incorporated within Arab society.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a computer salesman who goes up to heaven. He gets to the gate and Gabriel looks at his record and says he can go to either place. The man said he did not know where he should go. Gabriel said he would show him a video. He showed him heaven and how everybody was sitting around with white coats on and singing songs. It looked pretty dull. Gabriel then showed him what was going on down below. It looked like a real hot place, but everyone was eating, singing, and dancing there in some sort of bars. It looked more enjoyable so he decided that he would go down below. Immediately when he got below, he was grabbed by a bunch of devils and was forced to work in these terribly hot pits. He turned to these devils and said, "What's going on here? That's not what I saw in the video." They said, "Oh, you must have seen one of our demo videos." There is no shortcut to peace until every society has these seven types of individuals. Let us hope and pray that these seven types of individuals will soon be found in every Arab country so that they can quickly make peace with Israel.

SHMINI ATZERES

Scattering and Listening to the Hidden Things

In a few minutes we will say yizkor. We always, according to the Ashkenazic rite, say yizkor on Shmini Atzeres. Shmini Atzeres, the rabbis say, is a holiday all by itself. It is a holiday which is distinct from Succos. It is a holiday, though, which really has no outward observances. On Succos we have the succah, the lulav, and esrog. On Shmini Atzeres we have none of these things. It is true that in the Golah we still eat in the succah, but we do not make a brocha when we sit in the succah because we have a doubt whether this is the seventh day of Succos or this is Shmini Atzeres itself. In Israel they no longer even sit in the succah. Shmini Atzeres is even distinct by the number of sacrifices offered on it. On Succos we offered many sacrifices, 70 sacrifices for the nations of the world, but on Shmini Atzeres itself, we offered only one bullock. This holiday is devoid of almost all outward ritual. The rabbis tell us that this holiday is distinguished by Pzar K'shav, an acronym, which actually means scatter and listen. They say the Pay stands for the fact that, since there was only one sacrifice on the holiday of Shmini Atzeres, the Kohanim would draw lots to see who would make this offering on Shmini Atzeres. The word for lot is Payis. In Israel they now have lotteries to benefit various educational institutions and they are called Payis. The rabbis also teach us that on Shmini Atzeres, because it is a separate holiday, we have to say Shehechayanu, and the second letter of Pzar is Zeman. The third letter Raysh stands for the fact that this holiday is a unique holiday so, if a person was buried before Succos and the Shiva is cut by Succos, that in counting the Shlosheem, the thirty days of mourning after a death, Shmini Atzeres is counted as seven days like Succos itself, so for the ways of the mourning it is considered a special and unique holiday also.

We know that the most important things in life actually cannot be seen, love devotion, dedication. We cannot see these things, but we can feel them when they are present. This holiday celebrates the unseen things. It celebrates the ties that bind one generation to another, that tie spouses and children together, that tie parents, children, grandchildren, grandparents, and great-grandparents together. This holiday teaches us how we are to react one to another. On this holiday we are supposed to bring out the best in ourselves. If we bring out the best in ourselves, then we are truly fulfilling G-d's will and we are truly going to make a lasting impression on this world.

That is why the second word, the rabbis say, is K'shav, listen. It teaches us how we are to raise good children. It teaches us how we are to strengthen the ties between generations. It teaches us that if we want to raise good children we have to have these three characteristics. The first characteristic is Korbanes. We have to be willing to sacrifice for the future. If children see that their parents are sacrificing for them, then they would have such great respect for their parents that they could not do anything which could possibly harm or shame them. In the tenements in which the immigrant generation lived, their children saw how much their parents sacrificed for them, how much their parents were willing to do for them to make sure they got an education, how they sent them to college

even though they had to subsist on black bread and herring themselves. This diet was called Kishkegelt. When Jewish youngsters saw how much their parents loved them, cared for them, and were devoted to them, they could not do anything to shame their parents. They saw their parents' great love and they wanted to reciprocate. That is, of course, what is required from one generation to another, the willingness of the present generation to sacrifice for the future generation, the willingness of the present generation to delay their own self-gratification in order to see that their children get an education. But Korbanes also means something else. It means that parents much teach their children that they, their children, must also be willing to sacrifice, that there are things that are greater than success, that their children must be taught that there is a G-d who demands that we be moral in order for them to lead a good and a decent life. Unless a person believes that he is accountable for his actions, he will not have the capacity to sacrifice his immediate desires for future goals. He himself will not be able to do what he should do in order to lead a moral and successful life. It is impossible for youngsters to just say no if they believe that everything in their life is just for their benefit. After all, if a person really wants to make a lot of money it makes a lot of sense to be a drug pusher. Just get little kids on your block to sell your drugs on the street while you take your commission off every sale. You will become rich very fast and you will be able to satisfy all your needs. We all know that the basis of many of the Irish fortunes in America were the taverns where Irish immigrants themselves sold liquor to their compatriots. They amassed a fortune. That is how the Kennedy's amassed their fortune. If you want children to be willing to just say no, then they have to thing that their life is worth something. They will have to work not just for themselves but for a holier purpose. They will need to feel that their main purpose in life is to help G-d perfect this world, to help G-d make this world a veritable paradise, to help G-d bring peace, harmony, and justice to everyone in this world, to help G-d make this world a paradise by discovering the secrets of nature, etc.

The second letter of K'shav is a Shin, which stands for song. There has to be a song in a person's life. Parents have to give their children a sense of optimism, that no matter the problems that will beset them, they can overcome everything. The Jewish people have always been an optimistic people. Our religion is one of the most optimistic in the whole world, because we know and we feel that times are going to get better. Eventually the Mashiach is going to come. We have to give our children a feeling of optimism. Finally, the third letter is Beis, which stands for Brocha, a blessing. We have to make our children feel that they are our greatest blessing in the whole world. We also have to teach them that relationships count more than anything else, that they are the source of the greatest happiness in life. If children know that they are loved and if they know that their parents want them and desire them, then they have no identity crisis. They know who they are. They then can go out and achieve great things because they know that no matter what they do or do not do they will always be loved and accepted by their parents. They will have no problem knowing who they are or what they are. They will know who they are and what they are. They will be willing to take risks then, too, to better themselves and to better the world because they know they always have a place to come back to, their parents' home.

Yes, Shmini Atzeres teaches us that, in order for us to live the good life, we have to bring out the best in ourselves and the best in everybody around us, especially our children. We

bring out the best in ourselves when we create close bonds between ourselves and our spouse, between ourselves and our children, between ourselves and our grandchildren. This causes us to feel secure about ourselves and thus be able us to devote our energies to help make this world a better place.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Moshe Spektor. Moshe Spektor had just come out of the hospital. He did not know what to think. He had just been told by the doctors that his 2 year old girl, Chani, had a tumor on her lungs. He and his wife had been very concerned about Chani's coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. They had just today brought her to the hospital. They were told the bad news. Moshe did not know what to think. He had sent his wife home earlier. She was very tired. He stayed with his little Chani until another relative could come to relieve him. His relative had just come. It was now past midnight and he knew that he had to go home and tell his wife the bad news. He did not want to tell her on the phone. He had to go home and tell her directly that it had been 100% confirmed that their little Chani had a tumor on her lungs.

As he walked into the street, he tried to hail a cab, but they just whizzed by him. He then did something that he normally would not do except that he was so confused and upset. He went down into the subway. Nobody in New York would even think of taking a subway at that time of night because it is so dangerous. As he got onto the subway car, he noticed that there were two teenagers at the end of his car with a jam box blaring and there was a drunk at the other end. He sat himself a few seats away from the drunk and sat down thinking about all the terrible things that had just happened to his Chani and wondering how he was going to tell his wife about the tumor. At the next stop the two boys from the ghetto got off and he was about ready to change his seat. After all, the drunk smelled terrible. His clothes reeked of filth and he himself looked cadaverous. As he was about to leave, the drunk stuck his face in his face and he looked at him and said, "Professor, is that you?" Moshe stepped back, shocked. He recognized the drunk. It was Binyamin Chaim Green, one of his classmates at the yeshiva. He looked at him and said, "Benje, is that you?" Benje looked at him and said, "Yes, it's me." Moshe, aghast, said, "What are you doing here?" Benje replied, "Well, I often ride the subways. After all, I need to get money for my habit. I am here to snatch purses." Moshe, horrified, said, "Benje, have you sunk that low?" Benje, glowering, said, "Yes, I have sunk that low. Alcohol and drugs are my life," then he grinned. Moshe remembered Binyamin Green. He remembered how he had entered yeshiva from a violent home environment. His grandparents had thought if they sent Binyamin Chaim Green to the yeshiva that he would improve, that he would get better, that he would overcome his bad home environment. He was a poor student, though, who was big for his age and had a tendency to bully people. Moshe had tutored him and tried to help him, although they had not been very good friends because Binyamin, when he did not get his way, had a tendency to get violent. Binyamin looked at Moshe and said, "What are you doing here?" Moshe poured out his heart, telling him about his daughter Chani. A few months ago she started to look sickly and just this evening he had been told that she had a tumor on her lungs. Binyamin looked at him and said, "Well, that's too bad." Moshe looked at him and said, "Binyamin, you have to do something for yourself. You have to help yourself. You have to go to a drug rehabilitation center." Binyamin looked at him and said, "Ach, I have already been to those places." Moshe pleaded, "Please, please, do it for me. Do it for Chani. Maybe it is because of the Zechus that I met you here and you to return to your former self, that

Chani will be cured." Benje laughed and said, "Oh, you still believe in those things?" He got up to leave, and Moshe looked at him and said, "Please, please, for the sake of my daughter, get well. Return to your former self." He wrote down his phone number on a piece of paper and put it into Binyamin's hand. As Binyamin left, reeking of alcohol, he waved his hand and said, "Maybe, maybe."

The next few days, Moshe frantically called all the different rehabilitation centers in New York. None of them had a record of Binyamin Chaim Green. Finally he called Waverly, the drug rehabilitation center of the last resort. It was for the most advanced cases, and sure enough, Binyamin Green had checked in. Moshe asked the nurse in charge if he could go see him. The nurse said, "He is going through hell right now becoming detoxified. Wait a week or two and then call, and we will let you know if you can see him then." He waited another two weeks; it was now three weeks since he had seen Binyamin. Meanwhile his daughter Chani had had the operation. The doctors came in right afterwards and told Moshe and his wife that the tumor was benign. "Thank G-d," Moshe said. He immediately went to the phone and called the Waverly Center to tell Binyamin. The doctor answered the phone and said, "Yes, Binyamin Green is doing much better. However, I want you to know that his liver has been affected and that his heart is very, very weak." He asked to speak to Binyamin, and he told Binyamin the good news. Binyamin said that he was going to be released the next Monday and he would like to come and see him. Moshe, elated, said, "By all means, come and see me and my daughter and my wife. Please come." Binyamin said first he was going to stop off at his mother's and see her and then afterwards he would come and see them. He told him to expect him about noon.

That Monday Binyamin was released from the drug rehabilitation center. He was given a new set of clothes and looked entirely different. He got onto the subway, and there he sat opposite a woman who was holding her purse very lightly in front of her on her lap. He thought to himself. "I need money. I have no money. I will just snatch this person's purse and then I will be all right." As he was thinking about it, waiting for the opportunity, all of a sudden a voice inside said, "Don't do it. Don't do it. You are a different man now. Don't do it. Don't do it." All of a sudden the lights in the subway went out. A few minutes later when they came on, Binyamin saw a pickpocket grab the purse of that very woman. He immediately threw himself upon that man, crying out, "I didn't steal it and you are not going to steal it." The man, who was a much stronger man than Binyamin, hit him in the face and, with his elbow, hit him hard in the chest. Binyamin fell to the ground. A policeman happened to come through the subway car and nabbed the purse snatcher. Then he saw Binyamin on the ground.

Moshe waited until 3:30 p.m. and still no Binyamin. He decided that he would go to Binyamin's mother's house on 9th Street. Perhaps he was engaged in a long conversation with his mother. As he approached the house, he noticed that there were a lot of people standing around outside. He asked them what happened. They said the police had just left. They had informed Mrs. Green that her son had been killed trying to stop a mugger on the subway and that, as he was trying to stop the mugging, he had said something unintelligible, "I didn't steal it and you are not going to steal it." Moshe felt terrible. He went in and consoled Binyamin's mother. A year later Moshe and his wife were blessed with a son. Moshe and his wife decided to call the boy Binyamin Chaim Spektor. People asked him why they were calling him that. No matter how many times they asked, he

would not tell them directly. All Moshe would tell them was, "I am repaying a debt. I have given my boy this name to repay a debt."

When we live up to the best that we can be, we cause the world to be a better place. Our own actions influence not only the actions of our friends and relatives, but they also influence future generations. They learn by our example how to live a good, moral, and decent life. That is what Shmini Atzeres teaches us. It teaches us that the hidden things, dedication, devotion, love, caring, compassion, etc., count more than the things that we can see. On this day when we remember those who have gone before us, let us remember that the future of the Jewish people lies in our hands. Statisticians predict that 70% of the Jewish people will intermarry by the year 2000 in America. This does not have to be. It is all up to us to see that the Jewish people live. This we can do if we will take care of the hidden things. It is true that we are all going to scatter, but we need to listen to the hidden things. Even if our parents live in the same towns as we do, they will eventually die. That's why it says in the Psalm that we read from the first day of the month of Elul until today, "Although my parents forsake me, G-d will never forsake me." Our parents have died. They did not want to die, but they have died. But they will have left behind a legacy of love and devotion and care and concern which will shape us and mold us. If the hidden things in each of us reflect Jewish values, the Jewish people will live forever. Let us make sure that the hidden things within us reflect Jewish values so that the Jewish people will live forever in America as well as throughout the world. Amen.

PURIM

Man, the Holocaust and G-d

Many people have asked me, "Rabbi, how can you believe in G-d after the Holocaust?" This is indeed a hard question, but I believe theologically that the Holocaust raises no more questions about our relationship with G-d than does the violent death of any innocent person by another human being. How can G-d allow it? I believe, though, that the Holocaust was a unique event because it raised the question, "Rabbi, how can you believe in man after the Holocaust?" It shattered forever our belief in man. It really has in no way affected our relationship with G-d. It may have intensified our questions about G-d but the questions were there from before the Holocaust.

Until the Thirty Years War in Europe, which ended in 1648, most intellectuals in the Christian world believed that by being pious they could bring salvation, peace and harmony to the world. The Thirty Years War, which took place primarily in Germany, was a war between Protestants and Catholics. It was such a vicious war that almost all the male population of Germany was exterminated. The Catholic Church for quite a few years after that war winked at polygamy so that Germany's population could regain its numbers. This war destroyed forever the idea among the intellectual of Christian Europe that religion could ever bring salvation to this world. After all, they saw how supposedly religious people could carry their hatred of each other so far that they were willing to wipe out whole populations. The intellectuals of the west no longer could believe that religion could bring salvation to this world. It might be good for the next world and it also might be important for organizing society and for assuring an individual's honesty and for promoting group solidarity, but they no longer believed that it could bring peace and harmony to the world.

The results of this war were the reason secularism took hold in the west and why there is still such a strong feeling in this country for the separation of church and state and why religious tolerance is stressed so much in America. The intellectuals of the west no longer could believe that religion could bring peace and harmony to the world. They now believed that if man would only trust himself and concentrate on the sciences and the arts, he could alleviate human suffering and gradually bring peace and harmony to the world. The Holocaust shattered forever this belief. Germany, after all, was the most enlightened nation in the world. Her people were the most highly educated and cultured. Her accomplishments were the envy of the world. It was precisely that nation that produced Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Schiller, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, etc. and many other great scientists which produced the Holocaust. It was Germany, the leader in the arts and sciences, who harnessed the latest psychological and scientific advances in order to exterminate six million people instead of using these latest advances to benefit mankind. The shock of the Holocaust is still reverberating within our culture.

Intellectuals who cannot believe that religion can bring peace and harmony in the world cannot now believe that man can bring peace and harmony to the world.

This is especially true now when the Holocaust is coupled with the collapse of communism, with the confirmation that millions of people were killed in communism's name. Communism was a movement which trusted totally in man. If we cannot trust

religion to bring peace and harmony and we cannot trust man, who can we trust? Many people, of course, try to deny that man failed or try to deny that religion has failed in the past. The intellectuals who had believed in man are having a terrible time reconciling man's actions with their faith since it is clear to everyone that neither the Catholic Church nor the Protestant Church was directly involved in the Holocaust and that many of the leaders of the Nazi movement were at best only formally religious.

This, however, does not answer the question, where was G-d during the Holocaust? The answer, to my mind, is that G-d is where He has always been. For some reason popular religion in this country seems to think that G-d only promotes life, health and well-being in this world, but this is not what Judaism teaches and what reality bears out. In the Amidah that we say three times a day, we say not only does G-d bring to life but G-d also kills, or as the prophet Isaiah said, "G-d creates light and creates darkness; He makes peace and He creates evil," or what we consider evil. G-d, for His own reasons, has created an imperfect world in which there is death, pain and suffering. G-d did not have to create such a world. G-d is omnipotent. He could have created a world without death, pain or suffering. He chose to create this type of world. We do not know why, but we have perfect faith that at the end of days we will understand, but we do not understand now. Those philosophies which try to say that G-d is just like an automobile manufacturer who, after he has made a car and delivered it to the dealer, has no control over it, are spouting ideas which are foreign to Judaism. They let G-d off the hook. I do not want to let G-d off the hook. G-d owes us an explanation. As Abraham said when he tried to convince G-d not to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, "Will the Judge of the whole world not do justice?" We are only partners with G-d in promoting life; we are not partners with G-d in creating or promoting death. G-d rules alone over death. One of the reasons why we do not want the body to be touched after death, unless, of course, it is to save life, is because our business is life, not death. Just as G-d has removed the soul from the body, let Him also cause the body to decay. That is not our business. Our business is to promote the well-being of the body and the soul.

We believe that we do not share any physical characteristics with G-d. G-d does not have a body. We also believe that G-d does not share our mind. G-d's mind can comprehend things our mind cannot. We cannot understand how we can have free will and how G-d can know everything, but since G-d is not bound by time and since we know that time is not constant in the universe, many things are possible to G-d that are not possible to us because we are bound by time. It is impossible to see two sides of a mountain simultaneously unless you are in an airplane above it. G-d is not bound by earthly restraints. We do share a common morality with G-d. This morality is expressed in the Torah. G-d cannot ask us to do things that violate the Torah. We also expect G-d to obey the morality of the Torah. It does not seem that He is. G-d seems to have exempted Himself from the laws of the Torah. He does kill. He has arranged the world in such a way that all of us are going to die. He allows innocent people to be killed. In Houston alone last year close to 1,000 people were killed. Officially there were 681 homicides. Most of these people were completely innocent. Some were just bystanders who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. How can we explain their deaths? We cannot. True, in order for man to have free will we must be able to good as well as evil, but since nothing is impossible for G-d, why do innocent people have to be killed in order for us to have free will? We do not know. We have faith that in the future we will

know but that we will have to wait for Messianic times.

The problem of the Holocaust is the same problem as the death of an innocent person. G-d has never promised us that innocent people will not be killed. We do not know what is beyond life and we do not know what came before life, and so, ultimately, we cannot judge what is truly moral even by the Torah's standards from G-d's point of view. From our point of view, we can judge what is right and wrong and we must. We can never condone murder, but the truth of the matter is that now, almost 50 years after the Holocaust, most of the people who were killed in the Holocaust would have died by this time except, of course, for the million and a half murdered children. Most of the four and a half million adults' deaths would have been caused by G-d. Many of them, too, would have suffered terrible deaths, deaths from cancer, emphysema, gangrene, and many virulent diseases. Ultimately, we believe G-d will tell us why it was necessary for Him to create a world in which there is death, pain and suffering. Right now we do not know. The questions that the Holocaust poses vis-a-vis G-d are the same questions that we have had vis-a-vis G-d since the beginning of the Jewish religion. We do not know how we can reconcile the morality we are bound to by the actions of G-d. All we know is that G-d can never ask us to do immoral things and that G-d will eventually explain to us how His actions are moral. G-d wants us, though, to constantly challenge Him. He wants us to always be on the side of life, not death. He has given us very few cases in which we can take another person's life. We are allowed to kill in self defense. We are allowed in some very limited circumstances to judicially impose the death penalty, although it is well known that if a Jewish court in Temple times put to death anyone once every seven years, or some say, once every seventy years, it was considered a bloody court. Our job is to make sure that life flourishes on earth, that peace, harmony and morality reign. What G-d does in other areas is His business. We only ask His help to help us make sure that life expands, that peace, compassion, brotherhood and fellowship grow.

In the Torah portion Ki Sissa, we learn how after the Jewish people worshipped the golden calf, G-d speaks to Moshe while he is still on top of Mount Sinai. Moshe is totally unaware of what is going on below. G-d tells him, "Leave Me alone and My anger will burn against them and I will destroy them and I will make you a great nation." Moshe immediately turned to G-d and started to argue with Him telling Him that He should spare the Jewish people, that he is not interested in being the father of a new people. The rabbis all comment on where did Moshe get the audacity to argue with G-d? They, of course, say that this tradition came from Abraham when he argued to save the people of Sodom and Gormorrah. However, they go even further by saying that G-d explicitly hinted to Moshe that he was supposed to argue with Him when He said, "Now, leave Me alone." The rabbis say, what does this mean? Was Moshe holding G-d down? It means that Moshe was not to leave G-d alone. Moshe was to argue with G-d. Moshe was to plead for his people. This is similar to the case when a husband or wife are arguing about something and one of the spouses says, "I don't care. You can do what you want to do. Leave me alone." We all know that the spouse means just the opposite. The other spouse had better not do what the other spouse says was okay to do if they want their relationship to continue. Leave me alone means I cannot argue with you anymore, but it would hurt me terribly if you did what you said you were going to do. G-d wants us to continue to work for all those values which promote life. He wants us to support all those causes which expand compassion and caring in the world. He wants us even to challenge

Him so life can be expanded and made fuller and better. G-d also has another agenda but that agenda is His alone. He not only produces life; He also causes death. In fact, the whole animal kingdom is based on death. One animal lives by eating another. That's why we say that in Messianic days this will cease. One animal will not live by having to eat another.

The story of Purim emphasizes this point. It is our job to save lives; it is our job to defend ourselves. G-d has promised that the Jewish people will be eternal. He never promised us that we will not have losses. Esther went before the king knowing that it was dangerous. G-d has told us that the Jewish people will always exist but He expects us to help Him make this promise come true. He never said there would not be any Holocausts or threats of Holocausts. He has created a world which because it is imperfect contains evil. We Jews many times like to sugarcoat this world and proclaim that there is no such thing as evil, but Haman was evil and Hitler was evil. In Esther's time, we were able to avoid a full-blown Holocaust. We suffered very few losses. In our time, Hitler did not succeed but he killed one-third of our people. Why G-d had to create such a world we do not know. Obviously, righteous people die. They die not only in Holocausts but they die in automobile accidents, from cancer, and other diseases, and we all die eventually. Nobody lives more than 120 years. We do not know why. Our Holocaust, of course, killed not just individuals but the future generations who might have sprung from these individuals. It also killed the Yiddish-speaking culture of Eastern Europe but Judaism did not die and the Jewish culture based on the Talmud and the Bible did not die, but one aspect of Jewish culture did. Why the Holocaust happened we do now know. We owe a lot to the victims of the Holocaust, especially to the survivors. They showed us that we are a tough people. I do not know of any other people who, if it would have been subjected to a Holocaust, would have had any survivors. The survivors especially, by rebuilding their lives, having children, and by continuing to believe that ultimately we will understand G-d's ways, have helped us make a great Kiddush Hashem, sanctification, of G-d's name in the world. We do not know why there was a Holocaust. We do not know why innocent people are murdered. We have faith, though, that when the Messiah comes, we will.

SELICHOS

Prayers, Joy, and G-d's Acceptance

In a few moments we will be saying Selichos. We begin the Selichos with Ashrei, "Happy are they who dwell in My house, forever they shall praise Thee. Happy is the people who are so situated. Happy is the people whose G-d is the L-rd." These two opening sentences are appended to the 145th Psalm. We say the 145th Psalm with these two sentences appended three times a day. The rabbis say that if a person says this Psalm three times a day then he is worthy of the world to come. Of course, the rabbis did not mean that just by saying this Psalm you become worthy of the world to come. You also had to implement its teachings. The main teaching of this Psalm is that we are to imitate G-d. Just as G-d clothes the naked and feeds the hungry and upholds those who fall, so should we do the same thing. But why is it that we read the Ashrei as the first prayer of the Selichos? Why did the rabbis see fit to have us read Ashrei as the first prayer of Selichos? What's more, if we look at the Selichos we will see that the Selichos are always said at night, that the first Selichos is always said on Motzei Shabbos, on the night after Shabbos. Why should this be so? We know that we have to say Selichos at least four days before Rosh Hashonna because the sacrifice that was offered in the Temple had to be inspected for four consecutive days before it could be accepted as a sacrifice for the Temple. We also know that when the Torah speaks about Rosh Hashonna, we ourselves are the sacrifice. We ourselves have to be willing to offer ourselves up to G-d like Yitzchak did at the Akedah, like Yitzchak did when he was bound up to be sacrificed. We know that G-d does not want us to actually sacrifice ourselves to make sure we are truly worthy of being G-d's partner in creation. But why is it that we must start on Motzei Shabbos? Why don't we just start four days before Rosh Hashonna, whenever that occurs?

The keynote to the Selichos prayer is the phrase, "Adoshem Adoshem El Rachum," "The L-rd, the Eternal, is a merciful and gracious G-d, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness and truth, giving mercy for thousands of generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin and acquitting all those who truly repent." The main Peezmon, the main hymn of the first night Selichos service is the Peezmon whose refrain is to "listen to the joy and to the prayer." We say, "By means of Thy power perform on our behalf deeds of might for the sake of Isaac who was willing to be bound on the altar at Moriah and in whose stead a ram was sacrificed, shield His descendants we implore Thee this night. Hear our joy and prayer." What is this about joy? "We tremble at the approach of Thy judgement awaiting Thy verdict. We suffer pains like a woman in childbirth, cleanse all this stain of our guilt that we may sing of Thy wondrous deeds. Hear our joy and prayer." Again we mention joy. What does joy have to do with Selichos?

Finally, in the second most important prayer in the Selichos, the Shma Kolaynu, "Hear our cry, L-rd our G-d, and have mercy upon us and receive with compassion our prayer." We say, "Don't cast us out from before You. Your Holy Spirit do not take from us." And then immediately afterwards we say, "Don't cast us out at a time of old age. When our strength fails, do not desert us." Why do we have to repeat, "Don't cast us out at a time of old age. When our strength fails us, do not leave us"? We have already said, "Don't cast us out before You. Your Holy Spirit do not take from us."

It seems to me that the answer to all these questions revolves around a person who, like us, got up at night to pray and to study, Dovid HaMelech. Dovid HaMelech got up every

night to pray and to study Torah. The Talmud tells us that he had a harp hung over his bed. This harp had ten strings, and when the wind blew out of the desert at midnight, the wind twanged the strings of this harp and David awoke. He then began to study Torah, to pray and to plan how to do deeds of loving kindness. The rabbis teach us that when David died and came before the angel Gabriel, Gabriel asked him, "What are your good deeds?" David answered, "I learned Torah. I gave charity. I visited the sick. I attended funerals. I went to the synagogue." Gabriel wanted to know in what gate of heaven David should go based on his good deeds. David answered, "Open to me the gates of righteousness." Because David had done all these mitzvahs, he was found worthy to enter into all the gates of righteousness. The rabbis ask, what really were the ten strings on David's harp that twanged and which aroused David to learn Torah and prepare himself to do good deeds? They answer that these were the ten items that were listed in the Mishnah in Peah. "These are things that have no measure, the corners of the field which you give to charity, the first fruits, the special sacrifice that you brought every time you came to the Temple, the giving of loans, and the study of Torah." The text then continues, "These are things that a man eats the fruit of in this world but the principal remains for him in the world to come. And these are they: honoring your parents, giving free loans, coming to shul morning and evening, entertaining guests, visiting the sick, dowering the bride, attending funerals, praying with devotion, bringing peace between man and his fellow man, and studying Torah." These ten items correspond to the ten strings of David's harp. David's desire to do good deeds prompted him to get up early.

The reason we read Ashrei, Psalm 145, at the very beginning of the Selichos service is to declare to G-d that it is our intention to try to live our life according to this psalm. We recognize by reading this psalm that the prime purpose of man is to imitate G-d, that just as G-d is kind and compassionate, so should we be kind and compassionate, that just as G-d helps the poor and feeds the hungry and clothes the naked and upholds those who fall, so should we try to do the same thing. We do not always succeed. Many times we fail, but we should always try. That is the mark of a good man. We say that it is not good enough just to say the right things. We must also act to implement them in our lives. That's why, too, in our Selichos prayers we say, "The neshoma is yours and the body is also Your work." "The soul is Yours and the body is Yours, too." When we come before G-d, we come before G-d saying that we have tried our best to do the right thing. We have not just mouthed the words of kindness. We have actually tried to put them into practice. The Torah portion that we read this morning, Vayelech, begins with the words, "Vayelech Moshe" - "and Moshe went." Nowhere does it say where Moshe went. Some of the rabbis explain that it means that Moshe went into the heart and mind of all the Jewish people. Moshe, from that time on his last day, was beloved by the Jewish people. Other rabbis explain that now, after Moshe had handed over power to Yehoshua, the people were no longer coming to see him, since he could not do anything for them anymore, so Moshe had to go to them. On this sentence we also have a strange Rashi. Rashi quotes the words, "Vayelech Moshe," and then he makes no comment. That is very strange because when Rashi brings down a text from the Torah he immediately makes a comment on it, but here he says nothing. Some commentators on Rashi explain that Rashi is making a very profound comment here. Rashi is saying, "Vayelech Moshe," means that Moshe went and did exactly what he said he was going to do, that Moshe always followed his own words. Throughout the Torah we always read, "And Moshe said." Now

here we read, "Vayelech Moshe," "And Moshe went." This teaches us that Moshe did whatever he commanded others to do. It was not just "Moshe said" but also "and Moshe did." The same thing can be said about David. David got up in the middle of the night and he implemented the teachings of the Torah. The ten strings of the harp stood for the ten wonderful mitzvahs that David delighted in performing.

When we come before G-d, too, on this night of Selichos we listen to the joy and to the prayer. G-d, we are bringing you not just our prayers, our good intentions, but also our joy because the rabbis teach us that when we do mitzvahs, when we dower the bride, when we help one another, when we give free loans, etc., we gain a great inner joy. Judaism believes that we fulfill ourselves when we assume responsibility for ourselves, for others, and for the world. Our greatest sense of fulfillment, our greatest joy comes when we assume responsibility for ourselves and others. The rabbis teach that that is the mark of a Jew. A Jew is a person who realizes that what gives life meaning is assuming responsibility. That's why the greatest joy in Jewish life is marriage, because when a person gets married he assumes responsibility for another human being. Each spouse assumes responsibility for the other. If within a marriage one of the spouses does not want to assume responsibility for the other, then the marriage is doomed. When one of the spouses feels that the other spouse is not out for what is in their best joint interests, but is out only for her or himself, etc., then the marriage, too, will fail. Assuming responsibility for yourself and for others and for the world is how Judaism teaches that you can become happy. George Bernard Shaw's prescription for living a happy life, "Wear yourself out in a good cause," is also a good Jewish teaching. When we know that we are needed and when we know that we are counted on, then we know that we count and that makes us happy. Therefore, it is a great joy to be involved with the community, to honor our parents, to give free loans, to visit the sick, to dower the bride, to bring peace between man and his friend, to study Torah.

In our Selichos prayers tonight we say many times, "G-d, listen to our joy. Listen not just to our prayers but also to our joy, our deeds." It is true that our deeds are not always sufficient. It is true that we could all do more. It is true that as human beings we have failed to meet all the challenges of life. That is why we have to do Teshuvah, but "G-d, You are a gracious G-d. G-d, You are filled with kindness and are forbearing and You forgive sin and iniquity." That, too, is why we recite the thirteen attributes on Selichos night because these are the qualities of G-d that we are called upon to emulate in practice also. We know that, because we are trying to emulate these qualities by doing deeds of kindness throughout our life, G-d will forgive us. Therefore, we say in the Shma Kolaynu, "G-d, do not cast us out at the time of our old age. When our power is diminished to do deeds of kindness, so not desert us." The worst possible thing in the world for a Jew is to be rejected by G-d, that is one of the lessons we learn in the very beginning of the Torah from the story of Adam and Eve. Many times when we feel we are going to be rejected we say, "We are going to reject you before you reject us." That is what Adam and Eve did after they sinned. They went and hid, G-d had to look for them, He even called out to them, "Where are you?" G-d knew where they were, but G-d wanted to tell Adam and Eve that He did not reject them. He rejected their evil ways but He would never reject them. The same thing happened to Cain, too. Cain felt very rejected by G-d because G-d did not accept his sacrifice the way He had accepted Abel's sacrifice, but it was Cain's fault. He had failed to give the proper sacrifice, he had failed

to bring himself. He thought his money was enough. But G-d told Cain, too, that he would never completely reject him. G-d reiterated this teaching even after Cain had killed his brother Abel. At the beginning Cain denied his guilt and he said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Later he said, "My sin is too great to bear." In other words, he did Teshuva. He did better than Adam. He admitted his sin. The mark of Cain in the Jewish tradition is a sign of G-d's reconciliation to Cain, not a sign of punishment. His punishment was to wander.

We have this same theme recounted in the story of the Tower of Babel. That generation feared that they were going to be rejected just as G-d had seemingly rejected the generation of the flood, but G-d had not rejected them. He had saved Noah, but the generation of the Tower of Babel did not want to look in their hearts and correct their faults. They just wanted to make sure they were not rejected, so they decided that they would reject G-d before G-d could reject them. But G-d reassures them that He will never reject them, that they do not have to worry about rejection. What they have to do is to correct their faults and to try to do deeds of kindness. Bring Me your good intentions, your tefila, and bring Me your deeds and that is all I ask of you, G-d tells us everyday. That's why we prayed, "Do not cast us off at the time of old age. When our power diminishes to do good deeds, do not desert us." When we get older, we cannot do as many good deeds as we did before, but as long as we do our best that is all that G-d asks of us. The term old age does not just refer to a time of life, but it refers to any time we cannot do as many good deeds as we would like because we are either sick or beset by all sorts of problems so that we cannot do so much as we would like in order to meet the challenges of the world, in order to assume responsibility for ourselves, for the world, and for our families. G-d tells us that we shouldn't worry, G-d will never reject us. When our strength ebbs away, He will not desert us. G-d will never desert us as long as we try our best, as long as we do not give up. We should never give up but always try to do our best. We should continue to bring our prayers and our joy, our deeds of loving responsibility to him and He will accept them and us.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a young man who suffered years ago from polio. He was paralyzed over most of his body. He went to college and there one of his classmates looked at him and said, "Isn't college too hard for you? Aren't the courses too difficult for you? Why did you come to college?" The man replied, "It is my body that is paralyzed, not my heart." We are all called upon to be courageous, to do the best we can. We know that if we bring our prayers and our joy, our deeds of responsibility to G-d even though they may not be as many as they should be or as they were when we were in full possession of all of our physical and mental strength, that G-d will never reject them and that G-d will never reject us as long as we will have tried to do our best. May we all do our best so that we will truly be worthy of a Shana Tova Umesuka, of a good and sweet year. May we all know only good health and good things in the coming year, and my the Mashiach come soon, so there will be peace in the world. Amen.

