SHABBOS SHUVAH

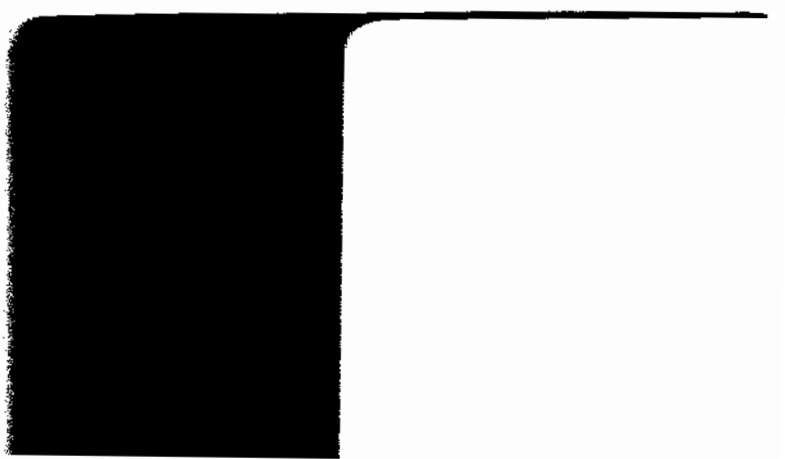
Choices

According to Ben-Azai, the reward for a mitzvah is the opportunity to do another mitzvah, and the punishment for a sin is the increased likelihood of committing another one. (Avot 4.2.) Isaac Bashevis Singer, for instance, has good people cover up a minor misdemeanor with a felony, and then commit an even greater sin to cover up the felony. Once a person starts walking on the wrong path, he or she may end up on a dangerous cliff.

We all would like to attain certain goals, but the way we go about achieving them is almost as important as reaching our destination. Many factors must be taken into account: family obligations, the needs of children, the standing of parents, communal loyalties, the respect of friends, the importance of compassion and kindness, and the value of a good reputation. Many people try to reach the top by trampling over all their other duties. They may reach their goal, but their victory will be hollow. They may succeed in their profession or business, but along the way they may lose their family, their friends, and their integrity. It is great to be President of the United States, but is that position even worth the price of a tattered reputation? Those who follow in an upright path may not achieve all their hopes, but they will retain the love of their family, the respect of their friends, and, most of all, their integrity.

This is one of the main messages of the Ten Days of Repentance. We are not masters of our life, but accountable to God. We do not set standards of behavior; He does. Only if we pursue the road that God sets out for us will we find true satisfaction, fulfillment, and success. That is why we wish each other a "good year," not a "happy year."

Robert Frost said it well:
"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
"I took the one less traveled by.
"And that made all the difference."



Death, Hope, Teshuva, Ugliness, and Redemption

We learn in the eighth section of the eighth chapter in the Mishnah Yoma the famous statement of Rabbi Akiba: "Happy are you, Israel. Before Whom are you purified and Who purifies you? Your father in heaven, as it is said in the prophet Ezekiel, 'And I will throw upon you pure water and you shall be pure,' and as it is said in the prophet Jeremiah, 'The mikvah of Israel is G-d.' Just like a mikvah purifies the unclean, so does the Holy One, Blessed be He, purify Israel."

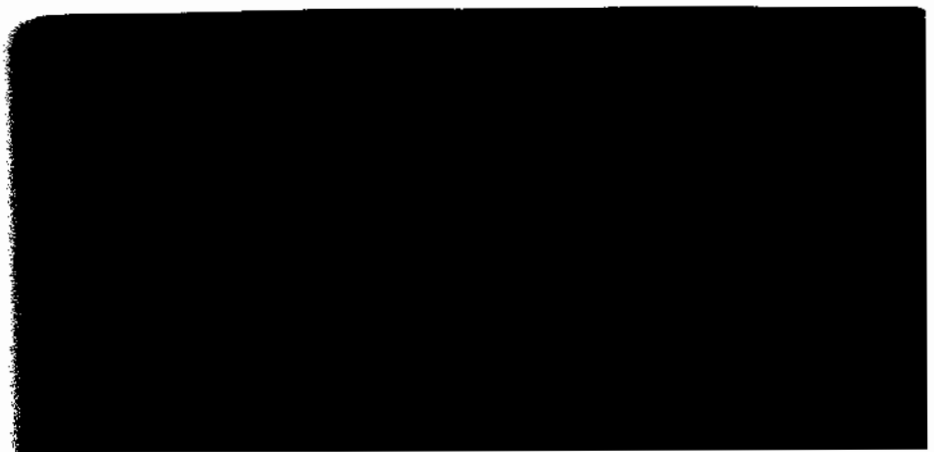
There are two distinct levels of uncleanliness in Judaism. When we encounter the ugliness of the world, as personified by dead rodents, weasels, etc., we can purify ourselves by going into a mikvah. We, through our own efforts, can purify ourselves. However, when we come into contact with human death, we cannot purify ourselves unaided. We need the help of others. Ritual impurity in Judaism is really a psychological state. It has to do with our giving up hope, with our becoming depressed. That's why the word mikvah in Hebrew means not only a pool of living water in which we immerse ourselves, but it also means hope. When we see the ugliness of the world and we despair, unaided we can turn our despair into feelings of optimism and challenge and can view the difficulties ahead of us as opportunities to better ourselves and the world. However, when we come into contact with the death of loved ones, the depression becomes too much and at that point in time we need the warmth and presence of others to allow us to regain hope.

That's why Rabbi Akiba says first that G-d says, "And I will throw upon you pure water." In temple times, when a person came into contact with human death, they had to have the ashes of the red heifer mixed with water and sprinkled upon them on the third and seventh day before

they could become ritually clean, before they could regain the optimism necessary to be G-d's partner in creation. Other challenges we can overcome by jumping in the mikvah ourselves. G-d has given us the Torah and the inspiration of the heavens and the earth to regain our sense of joy and continue to be His partner in creation. Many times we, as individuals, are overcome with our own sense of despair and guilt because of the sins we have committed.

On Yom Kippur, G-d, as we say in the Neila, extends his hand to posheem. Posheem means people who sin on principle, not because they are weak but because at the time they want to challenge G-d and all morality. On Yom Kippur, G-d reaches out to us. All through the year we can do Teshuva, but it is hard during the rest of the year since we have to take the initiative. The air is not filled with ideas of returning, Teshuva, ideas of changing. Then even if we are only chatoyim, which means people who basically miss the mark, whose intentions are good but who just always seem to say the wrong thing and always seem to hurt people; even then we have to take the initiative. It is a paradox that even though during the year we say that G-d is L'Ayla, above, on Yom Kippur we say that He is L'Ayla L'Ayla, very high above, even though he is closer to us now than the rest of the year. We recognize His demands on us more during this period of the year. That's why He is very high, but He is very close to us during this time of year, beckoning us to return, closer than during the rest of the year.

We all know that in Jewish law there are two distinct periods of mourning. There is the first period during the time of the death until the burial. A person is then called an onen. During this period of time, a person does not have to fulfill any positive commandments, only the negative commandments. He does not put on tephillin, he does not pray, he does not say a brocha before his meals or bench after. Judaism recognizes that at this time, it is hard for a person to see the justice in the world. A person feels that his life is nothing more than that of an



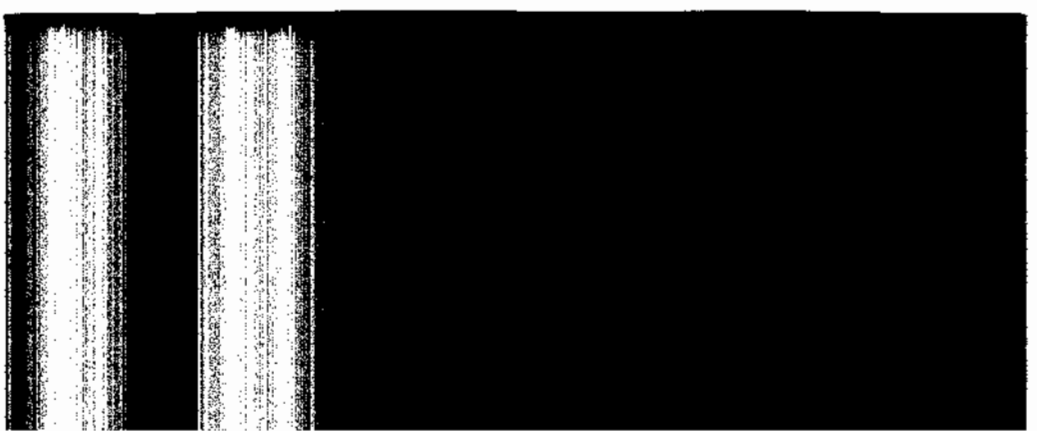
animal life. We come and we go. Can we really accomplish anything? Do our lives really make any difference? It is hard to feel that our lives have meaning at this time. Everything seems so senseless. We all felt this way when Gil Epstein was murdered, a brilliant young man with his whole life in front of him, murdered for a few cents in a robbery. It was terribly depressing. Hope seems to disappear.

Judaism does not demand that we conjure up energies to express things we really cannot feel. This period of mourning lasts until the grave is filled in before the mourner says the Kaddish. There is nothing in the Kaddish about death. Kaddish speaks about G-d's coming kingdom when all pain and death and suffering will be overcome. The reason a mourner says Kaddish is because after his loved one is buried, he should never feel that his loved one's life was useless or senseless. His loved one contributed to the coming perfection of the world. His life played a part in bringing the future redemption in which even death will be overcome. All pain and suffering will end and we will understand G-d's plan in the fullest. Each of us has a part in this plan because each of us is a part of the community of Israel.

That's why in our prayers on Yom Kippur we say, "G-d, Who forgives and atones for our sins and for the sins of the House of Israel and our guilt He removes every year." Each of us has two kedushas, one as a Jew and one as a human being. We ask G-d to forgive our sins and allow us to continue in the coming year, and we also ask Him to forgive our sins as a part of the House of Israel. We are G-d's partners in trying to bring about the redemption of the world. Anyone who has played a part in this, trying to bring this redemption, his life has meaning. We say, "And He shall remove our guilt." What does this mean? It means in Hebrew destruction. As individuals, we may be destroyed in this world, we may vanish from the scene in this world, but the people of Israel live on. The Jewish people is indestructible. When we attach ourselves to it by trying to lead just and good lives, we, too, gain

immortality, not physical immortality, but our efforts count. They will not be lost. Life has meaning. There is hope. Death does not destroy all hope.

That's why we say that we need others to overcome human death. When we are together with others who believe as we do, that fortifies us and allows us to realize that the loved one made a contribution to this world. Other ills and ugliness in the world we can overcome unaided. We can attain hope by ourselves, but death requires a community to overcome. We know that our lives are not meaningless if we attach them to high moral purposes and a life of good deeds. May each of us continue to do so that we will all be blessed with a happy, healthy, and good year. Amen.



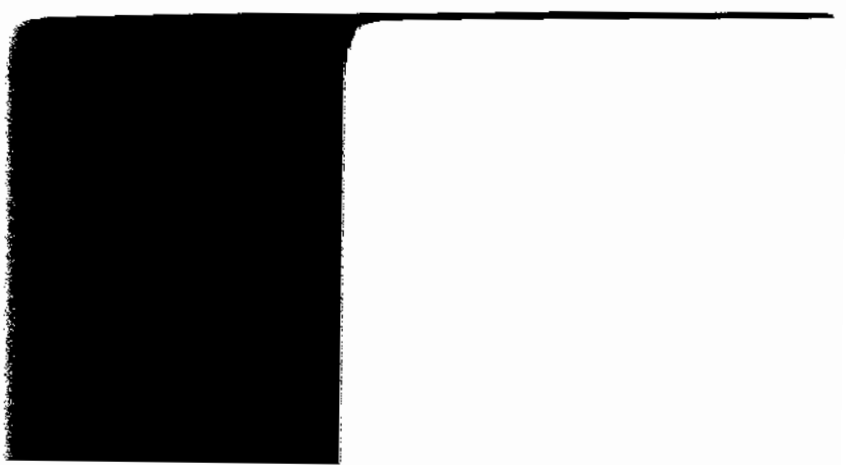
YOM KIPPUR

Recapturing Our Potential

Why do we all come to shul on Yom Kippur? After all, there is no kiddush. There is no big celebration, but we all know that we have to be in shul on Yom Kippur. In the Torah, Yom Kippur is referred to as "the Sabbath of Sabbaths it will be for you, while the weekly Sabbath is described as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths for G-d." We need to come to shul on Yom Kippur because we all need to know that we can overcome our problems.

Why is Yom Kippur a day of forgiveness? The rabbis teach us that on Shavuos, Moshe received the first tablets amid thunder and lightning. Even nature stood still, but when he came down the mountain and found the people cavorting in front of the golden calf, Moshe threw the tablets to the ground and they splintered into a million smithereens. He then went up the mountain for a second time to pray for the Jewish people, and then he went up a third time on the first of Elul to receive the second tablets. The second tablets were different than the first. The first tablets G-d hewed out for him and wrote the Ten Commandments on them. The second tablets Moshe had to hew out for himself and then G-d wrote on them. When Moshe received the second tablets, there was no thunder and lightning. Nature did not stand still, but when he came down the mountain on Yom Kippur with the second set of tablets, his face glowed. He was able to gain forgiveness for the Jewish people and to allow them to recapture their potential. That's why from then on, Yom Kippur was a day of forgiveness.

All of us need to know that we have power, that we can overcome our problems. In the Torah portion Ki Savo, we learn about a confession. It is called a Viduee Masur. It is a very strange confession. We all know that on Yom Kippur we confess our sins. We confess them to G-d by saying, "We have sinned before Thee by acting callously, by looseness of talk..." We all know that a confession means that we admit we have



done something wrong and are sorry for it and are going to try not to repeat it. This Viduee Masur that we find in the Torah portion Ki Savo is an altogether different kind of confession. We do not confess any sins. In fact, it seems like we are boasting. We say, "I have removed the holy from the house and I gave to the Levi and the stranger and the orphan and the widow, like all that You have commanded me." Every three years, a Jew had to say this confession telling G-d that he had paid up his charity obligations. This does not seem like a confession at all; this seems like a boast. The rabbis tell us that this is a confession. Why is it a confession? Because a person is saying, "I have the power to change."

Many times people will know they did wrong and are even sorry that they did wrong, but they also say, "That's just me. I can't do anything about it. That's who I am and that's how you have to accept me." In fact, there are many religions that say man cannot do anything about his sinfulness. One of the main differences between Christianity and Judaism is that Christianity runs around the problem, where do I get the power to be good? That is why when you hear ministers preach on television, they are always talking about getting the power to be good. If you believe in their savior, you will have the power to do good; if not, you will not. Judaism runs around a different problem. It runs around the problem, I have the power to do good, but what is good? Therefore, we stress study. Your wife wants you to do one thing, your mother wants you to do a second thing, your father wants you to do a third thing, your children want you to do a fourth thing, your boss wants you to do a fifth thing, and you want to do a sixth thing. What should you do?

In Judaism, we believe that we have the power to do good already. That's what G-d told Cain. "Sin crouches at the door, but you can rule over it." In this confession of the Viduee Masur, we are saying we have the power to change. We can do things. We are not helpless, hopeless

creatures. We can change. We can recapture our potential. We do not have to stay in a rut.

That's also why one of the main images of Yom Kippur is that of a cloud. A cloud separates us from the sun, but it also brings us rain which releases vitality and energy to the world. In fact, in our prayers we say, "I have removed like a cloud sins." A cloud separates us from light and heat, but it also brings us energy and vitality. That's why the Talmud teaches that a Baal Teshuva, someone who sins and repents, stands in a higher place than someone who has never sinned. How is that possible? The rabbis explain that when a person has negative emotions, they are usually much stronger than positive emotions. When you hate a person, you really hate him, and many times you go out of your way to harm him. On the other hand, if you love a person you will help him when you see him, but usually you will not go out of your way to find something good to do for him. That's why it's called the evil impulse, while the good impulse is just called a good impulse. A Baal Teshuva knows how strong the negative impulses can be, and he is urged to take the same energy that he used for negative things and use it for positive things. We can be all we can be. We can recapture our potential no matter how much we have failed and we can recapture our tradition no matter how far we have strayed from it.

That's what Yom Kippur teaches us. Yom Kippur teaches us that we have the power to be good. Yom Kippur teaches us that we can recapture our innocence. You have the power to achieve your potential. Use it. It is there. It is not lost. This is a Shabbat for you. On Yom Kippur, we rededicate ourselves to be everything we can be morally. We can be the person that we know we should be.

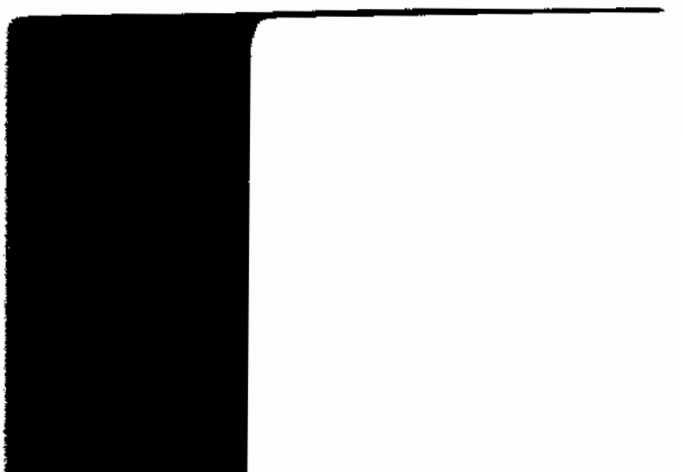
I am reminded of the story they tell about Dina, who one day was preparing for a dinner party that evening. She already had four salads and she was thinking of making a fifth salad. After all, her boys were

not going to come home for another half an hour, her four boys who were going to a day school, but then she thought maybe it would be better if she made a dessert. She already had four desserts, too, but maybe a fifth dessert would be better. All of a sudden, she heard a knock on the door. It was Mr. Scher, a Russian Jew who had recently come to the United States. It was cold outside and he was shivering, without a jacket. He looked at Dina in a very chagrined way and said, "Please, I need help." She said, "Of course," and started to reach for her pocketbook. He said, "No, no, I don't need charity. Please, let me come in. I must talk to you. Don't worry, when I came here I was so upset I forgot to wear my jacket." She really did not want to talk to him now because she was worried about her dinner party, but she said, "Okay, come on in, what can I do for you?" He said, "It's my wife. She is very ill." Dina said, "Can I call a doctor? Is there something I can do? Do you need any medical supplies?" He said, 'No, no, I have taken her to a lot of doctors. She has been to all sorts of psychiatrists and neurologists and internists. The last two weeks she has stopped talking and just stays in bed all day almost crying, hardly ever even mumbling anything. You must come and help me. You must come with me." Dina said, "But my boys are coming home." He said, "I know your boys are coming home. They come on the school bus, but they won't be here for half an hour." She wondered how Mr. Scher knew about that, but then she figured that an old man with nothing much to do probably looked out his window and noticed that the school bus came at a certain time every day. He said, "Please come. I know that you are a religious woman. Your children go to a Jewish school. I need your help very much," She said, "Okay," and went to get her coat. She crossed the street to the apartment building across the street.

They went up to the third floor and into an apartment, which was shabbily furnished but which was nice, with an exotic smell to it, and there she heard a voice saying, "Oh, oh, oh." Mr. Scher said, "Oh, Myra's up. Let's go see her immediately." She went in to see Myra and

had a start. Right there next to Myra's bed was a picture of her youngest son, Shmueli. She looked at the picture in which he was wearing his favorite t-shirt with a helicopter on it and his name on it. She looked at Mr. Scher and asked, "How did you get this picture?" He said, "Well, you see, I was walking the street a few weeks ago, and I saw your four sons, and I asked them if I could take a picture of your youngest boy, Shmueli, and the boys said I could, so I did. I had their permission." Dina vaguely remembered how a few weeks ago her boys had told her how Mr. Scher had stopped them in the street and asked to take a picture of Shmueli. She then noticed how Mr. Scher was looking at his wife and his wife was beckoning for the picture and took it and started to cover the picture with kisses. Dina did not know what to think about this. Mr. Scher said, "See, my wife is so sick. Could you please bring Shmueli over tomorrow to see my wife? I think it would help her." Dina did not know what to do. After all, this woman seemed to have a morbid fascination with her son, and she did not want her son to be involved in some sort of a psychiatric problem, while, on the other hand, this woman obviously thought a lot of her son, but this was her son and he was an independent boy and did not let anybody kiss him or touch him. She did not know what to do. She said, "I'll talk it over with my husband, and I'll tell you tomorrow."

She went home and the dinner party was a great success. In the middle of the night they heard an ambulance. The next morning the neighbors told her that Mrs. Scher had died. She felt very bad because she had not gotten around to asking her husband, but she thought maybe that was the way it was meant to be. Two weeks later, she saw Mr. Scher on the street. She went over to offer him condolences. He looked at her and said, "Oh, my wife did not die." Her heart stopped but they were able to revive her in the ambulance and she has been in the hospital in a very serious condition for two weeks." Dina looked at him and was really filled with compassion. She said, "Do you still want her to see my Shmueli?" He said, "Yes, that would be very nice." She said, "Okay.



tonight my husband is coming home and we'll go tonight and I'll bring Shmueli with me." Mr. Scher said, "Please, could I also come with you? I have been at the hospital for two weeks and just came home now to get a few things and the hospital is across town. Could I go with you?" She said, "Of course." That night Shmueli and Raphael, Dina's husband, and Mr. Scher went to the hospital. The doctors told her that Mrs. Scher was in critical condition but allowed them to enter the room. When they saw Mrs. Scher, her eyes were closed and she was motionless. Dina was shocked to see all the tubes in her. She turned to Mr. Scher and said, "Please, tell me Myra's Hebrew name and I will say Tehilin for her, based on her Hebrew name." He said, "Sure," and gave her Myra's Hebrew name. All of a sudden, Myra's eyes opened and she saw Shmueli. She motioned him to come to her. He came to her and she touched his hand and said, "Didi, Didi, Didi." Shmueli smiled at her and said, "I hope you get better," and she caressed his face saying, "Didi, Didi, Didi." At that moment all the machines started to go wild and the doctors made everyone leave the room. Only Mr. Scher could stay. As they left the room, Dina noticed her husband had turned white and was shaking. She did not know what was happening. She turned to her husband and said, "Raphael, what's wrong?" He said. "Please, do me one favor. Could you go into the room and ask Mr. Scher to come out so that we could ask Mr. Scher what that woman's Hebrew name is." Dina turned to her husband and said, "But I know. Her name is Miriam Raisel." He said, "Miriam Raisel?!" and almost fainted. He said, "That's the name we would have given our daughter if we would have had a daughter." Dina looked at him and said, "Well, maybe that's why we did not have a daughter yet." Then he again looked paler. She did not know what to do. She said, "Raphael, please, please." He said, "It's all right." She did not want to ask any more questions.

The minute they got home, Raphael went to his study and made a call to his parents, Rabbi Dovid and Rochel Donzinsky. When he left the study, it looked like he was crying. Dina did not know what to say.

Raphael, though, told her the story that his father was known as Didi. The next day his father and mother flew in and they went to the hospital again. The doctor was puzzled because he knew that much of Myra's condition was probably psychological as well as physical. He did now know whether to let the family in but decided he would. He said only Shmueli and Rabbi Donzinsky would be allowed in the room first. Myra immediately recognized Shmueli and said, "Didi, Didi, Didi," and she reached out her hand to caress him. Rabbi Donzinsky looked at Myra and said, "Mama, Mama, don't you recognize me? I am your Didi. I used to look just like Shmueli, my grandson, when I was his age. When we went to the camps, Mama, we were separated. I went with Aunt Gertie. I did not know, Mama, that you were still alive. Mama, I am your Didi Mama. I am your Didi." Myra looked up at him and said, "Didi. I found my Didi. Didi, you weren't lost. You are my Didi. Didi, come here. I found my Didi."

None of us is lost. All of us can find within ourselves the power to achieve our potential. G-d has given each of us the capacity to be what we can and should be. Let us all hope and pray that we realize all of us will learn to be the best that we know we can be, so that G-d will give us a happy, healthy, prosperous, and self-fulfilling New Year. Amen.

Rachmones, Forgiveness, Marriage, and Hardheartedness

On Yom Kippur day we read from the Torah portion, Achare Mos. We read about all the rituals that went on in the Temple, about the sacrifices, the scapegoat, how the high priest had to immerse himself in the mikvah five times, how he changed his clothes five times, etc. It is strange, though, that this Torah portion starts out by telling us, "And G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Abraham and they grew near before G-d and they died." Why do we have to read about that on Yom Kippur? Why couldn't we just start with the next sentence?

Also, we learn how the high priest, before he made atonement for the Jewish people, had to make atonement for himself and for his home. The rabbis explain his home meant his wife. In fact, the rabbis teach that if a Kohen Godol was not married, he could not serve as the high priest, as the Kohen Godol, on Yom Kippur. They even went so far as to designate a second wife for him on Yom Kippur eve in case his wife would have a heart attack and die during the night. Why was it that the high priest had to be married in order to function as the high priest on Yom Kippur?

Also, why is it that in the Torah reading for Yom Kippur, we learn about all the marriage laws, who can marry whom, etc.? On Yom Kippur, too, we read yizkor. We remember those who have gone before us. Why do we do this on Yom Kippur?

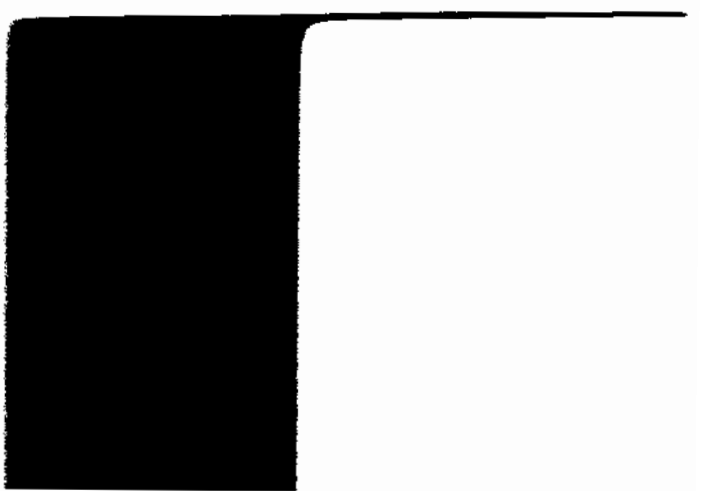
Finally, on the Selichos that we recite during the High Holiday season and especially on Yom Kippur, we many times mention Jacob first. After all, usually when we mention our forebears we mention them in the order of their birth, Abraham, Yitzhak, Yaacov, but in the Selichos we say, "I remember My covenant with Jacob," first. In other places, we say, "You shall give truth to Jacob and kindness to Abraham." Jacob is mentioned first.

Nodov and Avihu, Aaron's two sons, are mentioned another time in the Torah in the Torah portion Mishpotim. We learn there how it says that "Moshe, Aaron, Nodov, Avihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up the mountain and they beheld the G-d of Israel and under His feet was like a sapphire brickwork like the essence of the heavens for purity and they saw G-d and they ate and they drank." Nodov and Avihu had a vision of G-d, so to speak, sitting on His throne and below Him was a sapphire brickwork. The rabbis say that each of these sapphire bricks represented a soul of a Jew who had lost his life because of the persecution and beating and terrible pressures they had to endure as

slaves in Egypt. When Nodov and Avihu saw this brickwork, they sat down and ate and drank. This was different than the prophet Ezekiel, who had a similar vision. He looked up and saw the brickwork and saw G-d on His throne above the brickwork and he began to cry and yell for mercy. This was completely different than Nodov and Avihu. Nodov and Avihu were hardhearted.

They saw history through G-d's perspective. They looked down from G-d's holy throne and they saw the sapphire brickwork, which represented the suffering of individual Jews, and they did not protest. They said this is all part of G-d's plan. They acted like some people today who say, "Well, the Holocaust was good because it gave us the State of Israel." G-d could have given us the State of Israel another way. We never should be hardhearted and believe that we have to accept suffering and death and persecution for the betterment of the world. It is true sometimes we will suffer and sometimes there will be casualties, but we are not looking to make casualties. We do not say that G-d had to sacrifice his son to save the world; that's another religion. Abraham was commanded not to sacrifice his son. Nodov and Avihu never married, the rabbis say, and that is one of the reasons they were hardhearted.

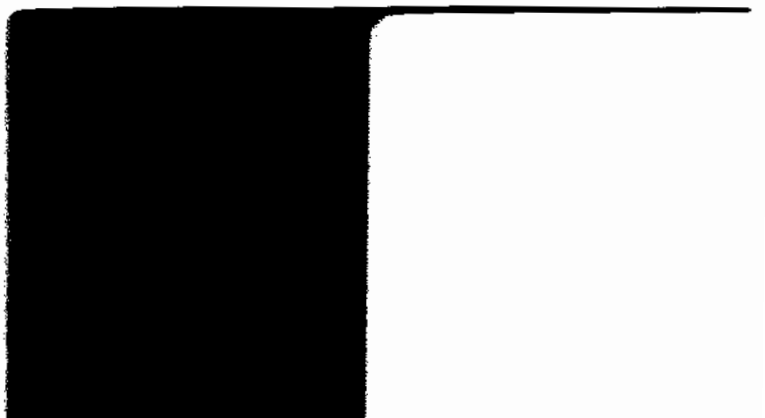
That's why we learn that the Kohen Godol had to be married in order to officiate on Yom Kippur. If a person is hardhearted, he cannot stay married long. No parent ever says, "Oh, it is good my son or daughter got cancer because now scientists can experiment and find a cure." No husband ever says about his wife, "Oh, it is good my wife had a stroke because now we will be able to learn how the brain operates better." In order to stay married for any period of time, we must have Rachmones. The key to being a Jew is to have Rachmones, is to empathize and feel with the people and not dismiss their suffering as inevitable and trivial. If a husband comes home from work after a hard day at the office and his wife immediately accosts him with all the terrible things the kids



did during the day and how the repairman didn't show up, etc., the husband has to be understanding and sympathetic. His wife deserves a sympathetic ear. And vice versa, too, if a wife had a hard day with the kids and the husband comes home after being yelled at by his boss and threatened with a pay cut and he yells about how terrible his job is, etc., she has to be sympathetic. She cannot say, "You have to put up with it; otherwise, how are we going to live?" In order to stay married, you have to practice chesed. You have to be there for each other. You cannot say, "Well, it's inevitable that people get sick or inevitable that your parents died. Don't make a big deal of it." A hardhearted person like that cannot stay married.

G-d tells us on this day that He will forgive us according to our words. If we display Rachmones, mercy, He will display Rachmones to us. That's why we learn about the marriage laws on Yom Kippur to remind us that in order to have a successful marriage, we cannot be hardhearted like Nodov and Avihu, and we cannot demand G-d's mercy if we are not merciful to each other.

That is, too, why we say yizkor on this day. We are who we are because of our parents and, for the most part, Jewish parents always had Rachmones on their children. I know there was one individual who I would not talk to for a while because he told me he beat his son every Friday night, not for anything he caught him doing but for those things he was sure he did not catch him doing. I told him he was not a Jew. The rabbis teach us that a person can observe everything, but if he has no Rachmones, he is not a Jew. Those parents who punish their children for taking a cookie off the coffee table have no Rachmones. They are tempting the children. If the children climb up and take it from the cabinet, that is a different story. We do not believe in teaching character by brutality. One of the problems with blending families is that stepparents many times feel their stepchildren have to earn their love and if they are not one hundred percent perfect, they do not deserve



any love. They do not treat their own children that way. They have Rachmones and they say, "Oh, boys will be boys," or "It's just a girlish adolescent mood." We are here today because almost all of us came from good Jewish families with parents who were understanding as well as demanding. That boy whose parent beat him never talked to his father again when he left home.

Why is Jacob mentioned first? Because Jacob almost lost his Judaism three times. The first time is well-known. When Jacob left Mesopotamia, he had a dream of angels descending a ladder up to heaven. After he had been in Mesopotamia for 20 years, he dreamed about one sheep mounting another sheep. This, of course, meant that all he dreamed about was money. The more sheep he had, the more wealthy he was. If all Jews think about is money, money, money, they will not stay Jews for more than three generations. The second time Jacob almost lost his Judaism was when Laban overtook him after he fled Mesopotamia to go back to Israel. Laban insisted that a heap of stones should be erected as a sign of a covenant between them that Jacob would not harm his daughters and grandchildren. This was, of course, just a face-saving effort by Laban to justify his mistreatment of his son-in-law and children and grandchildren. Laban insisted that Jacob take an oath not only by the G-d of Abraham and Isaac, but also by his god. Jacob refused, but when Jews say all religions are the same and there is no difference between them, why should we Jews take the hard road? Why not take the superhighway that everybody else uses?

Jews who say that there is no real difference between religions will remain Jews for maybe two generations. Jacob almost lost his Judaism a third time, and this is not as well-known. When Rachel was barren and she cried out to Jacob, "Give me children or otherwise I will die," Jacob got mad at her and said, "Am I G-d that I have withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" In other words, he gave her a very sharp reply. He said, "Remember, Rachel," and this was the woman he had

worked to marry for 14 years, "am I stopping you from having children? After all, I have children from my other wives. It's not my fault. It's yours." He was hardhearted. The rabbis say that he almost lost his Judaism then. If Jews are hardhearted, they cannot even last one generation as Jews. The rabbis say that if you meet a Jew who has no Rachmones, doubt whether he is a Jew.

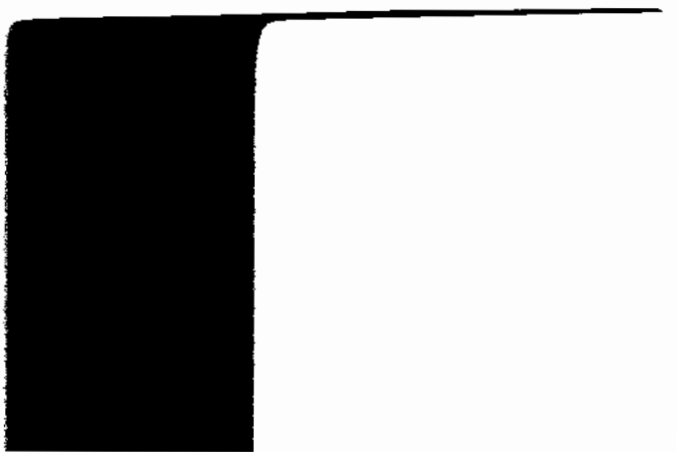
I am reminded of the story they tell of Bernard Gottfried, who was in the Lomza ghetto in 1943. Rumors were circulating that the ghetto was to be liquidated, but the Nazis were a very tricky and deceptive group of people. They always tried to give the Jews false hope before they went through with their actions. They organized a work detail to go to a work camp some distance away in which there was a warehouse full of potatoes. They told the people that they were going to increase their rations and needed a work detail to get the potatoes. Bernard doubted that when he came back there would be any Jews in Lomza, but he was happy to go because he knew that his father was at that work camp. They came to the work camp and into the warehouse and started to load potatoes on the truck, being beaten all the time. Bernard did not see his father. Just as he put the last bag of potatoes on the truck, he noticed his father marching out of the woods with a group of men surrounded by guards. He gave his father a little wave, and then his father responded by reaching his hand in his pocket and taking out an egg and throwing it to him. As he did that, the guard beat him to the ground with his gun. Bernard reached out to grab the egg but it slipped through his fingers and splattered on the ground.

Two years later, Bernard was working in a mine 300 feet below the ground. The Germans were building an aircraft plant there. He was on the elevator going down when one of the Polish guards reached his hand in his pocket and gave him an egg. He could hardly contain his excitement. He had not had an egg in over two years. He had to work eight hours and then he was given a 15-minute break to eat a few crumbs

of bread, and then had to work another four hours. He decided on his break he would peel and eat his egg, savoring every morsel. At the end of eight hours, he went to a corner to eat the egg. Suddenly a woman came over to him and insisted that he give her the egg. Her sister was sick and needed it to live. What could he do? He gave her the egg. He then worked another four hours and made his way to the elevator to go up. There on his right every day was a pile of dead bodies of people who had been beaten or starved to death. There on top of the pile was the woman who had asked him for the egg. He asked who she was and they said that she was a former concert pianist in Warsaw and that her sister had died two years ago. He did not know whether the egg had been poisoned and that was why she died, or whether she was beaten to death, or the egg was too much for her body to assimilate.

Twenty years later in a suburb of Chicago at a Lag B'Omer picnic, Bernard and his 14-year old son were playing in a contest with other fathers and sons. They were throwing a raw egg back and forth to each other. If they were successful, they moved back a few feet and did it again. It was now the last round. It was Bernard and his son and another father and son. Bernard's son threw him the egg and it went right through his hands and splattered on the ground. His son remonstrated with him, asking him why he dropped the egg. He remembered then how his father had taken a terrible beating by throwing him an egg, how his father's Rachmones touched him to this very day, how he had given an egg to a woman who said she needed it for a sick sister. Bernard wondered now would his son have Rachmones or would all his son worry about was winning a contest? An egg can be fertilized and grow or an egg can be filled with nothing more than dead matter. Rachmones is what fertilizes the Jewish soul, which assures a Jewish future.

In Judaism, we say that in order for anything positive to grow in human relationships, we have to have Rachmones. That's why statements of the previous government of Israel calling those who were killed by



terrorists "sacrifices for peace" grated on our nerves. We believe in Rachmones. We must have Rachmones if we are to continue to be Jews. Let us all hope and pray that on this Yom Kippur day G-d will have Rachmones on us because we learned from our parents how to have Rachmones and we are teaching our children, too, that they also must have Rachmones.

Guilt, Time, and Repentance

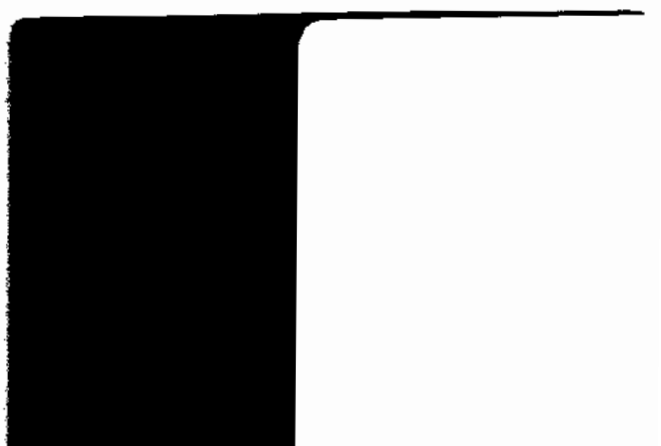
Why is it that Yom Kippur has such a hold on the Jewish mind? Even those who are far from Judaism feel they have to celebrate or at least recognize Yom Kippur in some way. Many Jews who do not go to shul on Yom Kippur still fast, and even those who are far from Judaism will desist from their normal activities and somehow mark the day. In Israel, there is hardly a Jewish-owned car on the road on Yom Kippur, all the restaurants are closed and even the television and radios are silent — this in a country which contains a substantial minority of Jews who disdain almost all Jewish religious observances.

Yom Kippur is a day that speaks to the Jewish soul, because it is based on the Jewish perception of life. Yom Kippur is the culminating day of the Yamim Noraim, the Days of Awe, when each of us is judged, when our fate during the coming year is determined. It is very significant that we be judged, for otherwise much of what we do would lose its meaning. We are called to account because how we act and what we accomplish is important to the world and, therefore, to G-d. Unless we are counted on, we do not count at all. Judaism postulates that G-d needs us, that the Almighty depends on each one of us to make this world a little better place than we found. All of us are G-d's junior partners in the continuing process of creation.

Our very importance, however, should lead to an assessment of our actions and failures, and for most of us, to a feeling of guilt. How poorly we have done! To honestly weigh our achievements against our possibilities is to admit that we have done less than we could. Yet guilt is a terrible thing. It can ruin our well-being and even destroy us. How then can we get rid of it? How can we possibly undo the great damage that we have done? Perhaps part of the answer lies in the fact that while history treats time as linear, living people are affected simultaneously by their recollections of the past and their vision of the future, as well as by the circumstances of the present. In human consciousness, time is not linear. Often, we will experience something that will recall an occasion from our past, some future anticipated event. Our stream of consciousness is not timebound. We constantly use the past to direct us toward our future, and we constantly use our future goals to reemphasize our present aspirations and even revise our past judgments.

We have seen this phenomenon in Israel in recent years. Not too long ago, settlers on the barren government-owned land in Judea, Samaria, and the Golan were considered heroes by most of the Israeli population. They were modern-day chalutzim who were making Israel more secure; they were Israel's first line of defense. Now, to a great many people in Israel, they are the enemies of the peace, the chief impediment toward the reconciliation of Arab and Jew. The past has not changed, but the attitude of the Israeli public toward it has. When Likud's Shamir gave way to Labor's Rabin, there was a radical shift in the Israeli government's opinion of what was necessary for its security and growth. The sacrifices that the settlers made and endured remained the same, but the understanding of their value has been revised. Now that Likud's Netanyahu is at the helm, there will be a new reappraisal of the significance of the settlements.

Apparently, we can employ the past either as a tool to teach us how to be better or use it as an excuse to avoid our responsibilities and wallow

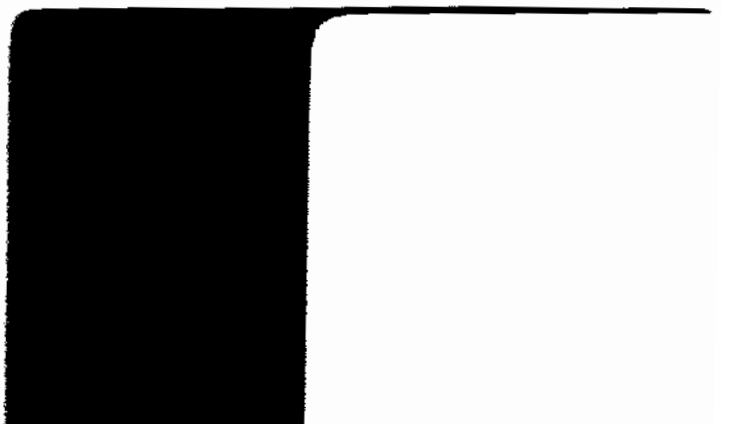


in self-pity and despair. Teshuva, repentance, teaches that we must use our past as a learning device that will lead us to a brighter and better future. One of the descriptions of Rosh Hashonna is that it is Yom Hazikaron, a Day of Memory. One of the three additions to the Musaf prayer on Rosh Hashanah is called Zichronot, memories. Throughout the numerous Selichot recited on Yom Kippur we constantly beseech the God of our forefathers to remember His covenant with them and pardon and forgive our iniquities. Memory is crucial if we are to do Teshuva. It may well be that the difference between the old and the young is that the old concentrate on the past while the young look forward to the future; the old are filled with recollections while the young are brimming with anticipations. Jews, however, are commanded to be both young and old at the same time. We are expected to live in the present but make sure that it leads to a future that is based on our past.

There are three ways of dealing with our misdeeds. One is to do what Susan Smith attempted: deny that she had done it. Few of us will ever be able to reach that measure of schizophrenia. A second method is to vindicate our activities. They were really not harmful, perhaps even beneficial in some measure, or they were justifiable to view of what the other party did to us. Unfortunately, deep down we know better. The result is a festering wound that never heals completely. A third way of dealing with guilt is to acknowledge it and use this admission to motivate us to do better in the future. As Reish Lakish put it: "Sins can become merits." (Yuma 86b.) This miraculous change can be accomplished by seeking the deficiencies that caused the sin and trying to remove them; by making whatever psychological and monetary restitution is possible; and by channeling the energies that were once utilized for evil into doing good.

Most of us make mistakes, and serious ones, at one time or another. To err, after all, is human. The Ten Days of Repentance teach that the

good person will not seek to deny the bad that he has done but acknowledge it and try to use the weakness thus exhibited as a stepping stone to self-improvement, greater love, readiness to forgive others, and a change in values. The present understanding of the errors of the past can lead to a brighter future and a shana tova.



SUCCOS

Shabbat, Creation and Process

The rabbis tell us that we have the holiday of Succot to celebrate the fact that when the Jewish people wandered in the desert for 40 years, G-d protected them. Some rabbis say that it actually represents the clouds of glory that protected the Jewish people all during the time they wandered in the desert. Everybody knows about this association of Succot with the time the Jewish people wandered in the desert, but according to the Ramban, there is actually another meaning for Succot. Succot also celebrates the creation of the world. In other words, there are two holidays which actually celebrate the creation of the world. One is the weekly Shabbat in which we remind ourselves that G-d created everything, and the other is Succot. The Rambam, on the other hand, does not agree with this. He says that the only holiday that celebrates the creation is actually Shabbat. Of course, we know that if we look at the two sets of the Ten Commandments given to us, one in the Book of Shemos and in the Book of Devarim, we will see that there are actually two different reasons given for the Shabbat.

In the Book of Shemos, we learn that Shabbat is to remind us of creation, and in the Book of Devarim, we learn how the Shabbat is to remind us that we were slaves in Egypt, to remind us of the exodus. The Rambam and the Ramban have different views as to why is stated this way. According to the Rambam, Shabbat really celebrates the creation of the world, with G-d the creator. In Devarim, when it mentions the Shabbat, in connection with the Jews being slaves in Egypt, according to the Rambam, this is just an illustration that G-d is the master of all creation and can make miracles and can bring us out of Egypt. The Ramban, on the other hand, says actually the Shabbat signifies the fact that G-d created the world out of nothing, but that when we mention Shabbat again in the Book of Devarim, it is talking about another aspect of creation. We all know that when we talk about creation, there are

really two parts to creation: creating the objects in the world, and creating a process. We all know that from having children. When children are born, they exist as little teeny infants, but they have to continue to grow and we have to make sure they grow in the right and proper way. So creation is not the end but the beginning of a process. This is what the Ramban said. The first act of creation was when G-d created the world out of nothing, but then there is a process, a process which has to unfold in which everything reaches its potential. This is what we are actively involved in.

That is why there is a Medrash which says that the people who celebrate Succot are partners in creation with G-d. Why do we say that? They answer by saying that the succah is formed in the shape of a Beis. A kosher succah has to have three sides and looks like the shape of a Beis. We are not concerned about what went before creation. We are concerned about the process of the world, about how to make this world a better place. We are concerned about unfolding all the potentialities of the world. In fact, the word "world" in Hebrew means hidden. It is our job to reveal the hidden possibilities in the world, to bring them to fruition. This is what Succot is. Succot is seven days, like the seven days of creation. On Succot, we go back to nature because we start with the building blocks of the world, and try to figure out how to use these things in a different way. We know that when we try to develop this world, we have to observe the Ten Commandments. That is the basis of everything. On the other hand, we have to work within our 120 years and do the best we can. According to this Medrash, too, the 120 Focheem stand for 3 times 40, for the three times Moshe went up to Mount Sinai. Once he went up to get the Ten Commandments, then he went up again to ask for forgiveness, and he went up a third time to get the second set of Ten Commandments. This shows us that this process of unfolding all the moral potential and physical potential of the world sometimes has its ups and downs, but we should never give up. That is our business: to make sure that the process of creation continues to unfold.

Why is the letter Beis a good illustration of that? Because the letter Beis stands for two, and it takes two to create a child, to raise a child correctly, and if two work together they can create marvelous things in this world. In fact, there is a famous story about when does life begin. They asked a priest, and he said, "Well, the Pope says life begins at conception." They asked a minister and he said, "Life begins at the moment of birth." They asked a rabbi, and he said, "Life begins when all your children have graduated from college." We have to develop a child's potentiality until they, themselves, can become partners in creation. We have to further this process of creation by creating good families, good human beings, and also by making our contribution to the world. This, of course, we can only do if we have excellent communication. We can only solve things if we bring our problems to the fore. A family can only be strong if there is communication and problems get solved.

We all know in Jewish life that there is a difference between a chupa and a succah. With a chupa, we have a top but no sides. A succah has real sides but no real roof. The reason for this is that to be a partner with G-d creation, to fulfill the mandate of the Ramban that the Succot is a symbol of our partnership with G-d in creation, we have to recognize two things. One is that a couple has to have common values and aspirations. That's why we say there is a roof on their head when they get married. On the other hand, we also have to realize there will be problems and we need G-d's help to solve the problems. G-d is always there. Many times we feel we are in a box. That's how the succah is, a box, but we can look up and see that G-d is there and can help us. He wants us to be His active partner in completing the creation process. That's what makes a marriage work, too.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a young lady who was asked to write a story about Benjamin Franklin. She wrote, "Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston. He later moved to Philadelphia and became a

printer. He then met a very nice young lady and together they continued to make electricity all their life." May we all be blessed by realizing that G-d is there to help us and that we should continue the process of creation, that Succot teaches us that creation is not just a one-time event but a continual process. G-d has given us the tools. G-d has given us the children, and we have to develop them, as we have to develop the world, so that eventually peace and harmony will reign over all the world. We all hope and pray that G-d will spread over us a succah of peace. May it happen soon. May the Mashiach come quickly in our day. Amen.

Trying Your Best, G-d, and Happiness

We all know that Succot is a very happy holiday. In fact, in the Talmud when we refer to the holiday, a chag, it always refers to Succot. Yet on this holiday, we take our lulav and esrog and circle the synagogue chanting, "Hoshannah, help us, G-d, help us." Why on this happy holiday do we march around the synagogue saying, "G-d, help us?" What's more, when we make a blessing on the lulav and esrog, we do not mention the esrog at all. We only mention the lulav. We also hold the lulav in the right hand and the esrog in the left hand. Why should this be so? After all, the esrog is considered the goodly fruit. It represents the perfect Jew who is interested in doing mitzvahs and learning Torah. Why shouldn't we make a blessing on the esrog? Finally, why do we come into the succah on this holiday? After all, many times it can be unpleasant. The sun could be too hot or the succah could have insects, etc. It is true that if we become very uncomfortable, we do not have to stay in the succah, but why should we have to go into the succah at all since we are always going to be more comfortable in our house.

It seems to me that the answers to these questions flow from the fact that in life we are always going to have problems. That's what the

succah represents. Life is never going to be perfect. No matter how carefully we plan, something is always going to go wrong. Very, very frequently we have to do things over more than once. If you have a painter paint your house, you always have to call him back because he missed a spot. The succah is symbolic of real life. There are many unpleasant things about life. It is true that we can live with them and they do not make us exceedingly uncomfortable, but things are not perfect either.

One of the reasons we hold the esrog in the left hand and not in the right hand and we do not make a blessing over it is because the esrog stands for perfection, and in this life you are not going to achieve perfection. We should always aim for perfection, but we should not be surprised if we do not achieve it. The esrog is our goal. We should not be disappointed if we do not reach our goal if we tried our best. Succot is a holiday of happiness because it teaches us that we can be happy even if we do not achieve all our goals as long as we have tried our best, and have not harmed anybody, and have worked together with everyone.

That's why we make a blessing over the lulav, because the lulav is composed of three species which are bound together. Happiness depends more upon our attitude than upon anything else. We should always have a positive attitude, and we should always realize that unaided, we cannot achieve all our goals. We need G-d's help. That's why we parade around the synagogue saying, "G-d, help us. G-d, You know we are trying to achieve Your goals. G-d, You know that we are working together to achieve these goals. G-d, You know we are aiming for perfection. G-d, help us achieve these goals. We know, however, that as long as we try our best, that is all You require of us. We, therefore, are very happy because we know that You will help us, and that we will try our best." This is not like the story they tell about a man who loaned his friend $100. The friend said he would pay him back the next

week after he sold some merchandise he was expecting to receive at the flea market. A week passed and the man was not paid. The man asked his friend where his money was. He said he never got the package. This went on for six months. Finally, the friend came and gave the man his $100. He said his package had finally come. The man looked at his friend, refused the money, and said, "For $100, it's not worth changing my opinion of you."

All G-d requires is that we try our best. As long as we do, He always has a good opinion of us and we should be happy. May we all try our best so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

Attitude, Joy, and Success

We know that on Succot, we welcome the Ushpeezim to our succah. These are special guests. Every day, we emphasize the visit of one of them. The Ushpeezim are Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Yosef, Moshe, Aaron, and Dovid. The rabbis say that these seven guests refer to the seven commandments of Succot. The seven commandments of Succot are taking the four species; the fifth one is the succah; the sixth one is simcha, the commandment to be happy on Succot; and the seventh one is Chageega, the commandment to have formal ceremonies on Succot. The question, though, can be asked, why is it that Eliahu is not one of the Ushpeezim? After all, we remember him every Shabbat when we make Havdallah. We set a special cup for him on the table during Pesach, yet on Succot, we do not mention him. The rabbis tell us that Eliahu cannot be one of the Ushpeezim on Succot because he was always castigating the people. He did not show them through deeds of lovingkindness how they could achieve the right path. He did not understand until G-d told him that G-d's power is in the still, small voice. That's why he had to turn over leadership to Elisha, who actually made a revolution in Israel because he understood that you change people from the inside out, not the outside in.

Succot is a holiday in which we learn about the joy of our religion, about how it spiritually uplifts us. Everyone of these Ushpeezim taught us what we need to know to lead uplifting, joyous lives.

Abraham and Sarah, of course, taught us the importance of hope, of never giving up. They eventually would settle in the promised land and did have a son together. Hope is a necessary ingredient to be a religious Jew. Yitzchak and Rivka taught us how you must be willing to be different, how what people think is not as important as what you think about yourself. Rivka came from a family of idolaters and crooks, and, yet, she was different. Yitzchak was willing to pursue the mystical ways without being concerned about what other people thought. Yaacov and Leah and Rachel taught us the importance of the spiritual over the material. Yaacov did not have to leave Mesopotamia. He was becoming richer and richer, but he knew he was losing his spirituality. Yosef taught us the importance of repentance. Unless you can forgive people, unless you can look to the future instead of the past, you cannot be a religious person. Moshe taught us about the importance of study and action, that we must put into practice what we teach and learn. Aaron taught us the importance of ritual and ceremonies, because they bring people together, like today, we are in the synagogue together because we want to observe certain rituals. Dovid taught us about happiness, happiness in spite of problems and setbacks. The seven commandments of Succot stand for these things.

Abraham is the lulav, which sticks up high and gives us hope. Yitzchak and Rivka stand for the willow, which draws its strength from the water and does not have to bend to each passing wind. Yaacov stands for the myrtle, which stands for spirituality because it also stands for the eye, the eye which looks into books and not into possessions. Yosef stands for the succah, itself. He was able to transform Egyptian society and make it better, while, at the same time, not forsaking his Jewishness. Moshe stands for the esrog, a person whose learning and deeds were

unsurpassed. Aaron stands for the Chageega, the rituals we all need to bring us together and lead richer lives; and Dovid stands for simcha, for the true joy which flows from the inner man and which cannot be destroyed by adversity. We all have this inner joy if we will just look for it.

There is a famous story of Yitzhak, the son of Reb Yonkele, who had a recurring dream that in the city of Prague, several hundred miles away, there was a huge fortune under a pillar of the bridge, and that he should

Children, Ushpeezim, Talents, and Education

On the second day of Succot, we read the Haphtorah in the Book of Kings in which we learn how Solomon dedicated the Temple. He took two weeks to dedicate the Temple. He finished on Shemini Atzeres. This is the only year in Jewish history in which Yom Kippur was not celebrated as a fast day since it was a day devoted to the dedication of the Temple. In this Haphtorah, we learn how they brought up the Ark which contained the Ten Commandments and placed it in the Holy of Holies along with all the other vessels they placed in the holy part of the Tabernacle. It says, "And the priests brought the Ark of the Covenant of G-d to its place, to the holy part of the Temple, to the Holy of Holies under the wings of the cherubim because the cherubim were spreading their wings to the place of the Ark and the cherubim shaded over the Ark and over the bars from above." The bars that were put through the rings at the side of the Ark were never removed. These bars were necessary since the Jewish people moved about so much. The Ark had to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites and they were kept even when the Temple stood, to teach us that everyone must shoulder the Ark always, not just rabbis or special elites. The cherubim were spreading their wings over the Ark. The rabbis tell us that the cherubim had faces of children, one male and one female, and when the Jewish people did well, they looked at each other, and when they did not, they turned away from each other.

The same root, which means succah, is also used here to describe how the cherubim shaded the Ten Commandments. All our children must soar like the cherubim on high. They must develop their talents to the utmost. However, they must always be based on the Ten Commandments and the Torah. All their achievements must be based on Torah and mitzvahs. They can soar on wings as high as they can go, but their wings must always be shielded by the Ten Commandments

Judaism really turned around in America because all those who worked for day schools. All those who worked for day schools really deserve a big yasher koach because without their efforts, Judaism would not be what it is today. Our children's lives must be firmly rooted on Torah. However, many parents make a fundamental mistake when they raise their children. They do not stress their children's strengths or their weaknesses. Not all children are good in music or sports. Not all children can work with their hands. Not all children have mathematical aptitudes. Unfortunately, many parents try to force their children to develop talents they do not have and cause them to neglect the talents they do have. It is true that children should have minimal competency in all fields, but why should parents force a child with no musical ability to develop their musical ability while denying him the opportunity to develop their computer skills? Why should parents force children to develop talents they do not have? Not all children are the same. Some are very sensitive, and some are very insensitive. Some are good athletes, and some are not. Some have great intellectual skills, and others do not.

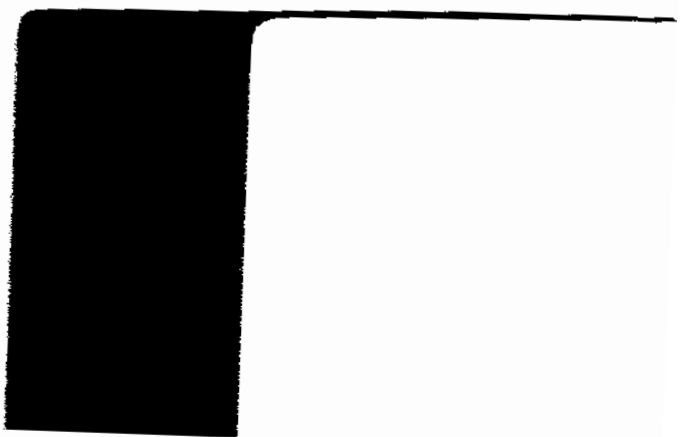
The rabbis tell us that there are seven Ushpeezim, seven guests, that visit our succah on the seven days of Succot. They are Abraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Yosef, Moshe, Aaron, and Dovid. The rabbis also say there are seven classes of righteous people which every society needs to function. They are compared to the sun, the moon, the atmosphere, lightning, the stars, the menorah in the Temple, and a rose. Why is it that the rabbis chose only these seven guests? After all, why didn't they choose Solomon since he built the Temple, or some of the great prophets, or Joshua who conquered Israel? The rabbis say these seven people also represent the seven mitzvahs of Succot and also are representative of the seven classes of people we need to have a good society. The seven mitzvahs are the four parts of the lulav, the succah, the mitzvah to formally celebrate Succot, and the mitzvah of simcha, inner joy.

Abraham represents the lulav and also the sun. Abraham was a beacon, a man of new ideas and insights. He drew people to him. He was an extrovert, a communicator. He is an important type to have in society.

His son, on the other hand, Yitzchak, was an introvert. He would not draw people to him. He was a mystic. Every time he encountered a problem, he withdrew. He stubbornly persisted in following his father's traditions, but he left only a few teachings. In our shul, we have many people who have stubbornly kept to the Jewish ways even though they are not great intellectuals, even though they cannot articulate why they do it. We need these types of people. They helped preserve Judaism when the intellectual climate was against it. We need these people. They are compared to the moon. They reflect the light of previous generations. They are compared to the willow, which does not seem to have any taste or smell but performs an important function. They allow Judaism to continue.

Then you have Yaacov, who is compared to the myrtle, which is luxurious. He was able to raise a full family because he created the right atmosphere. The atmosphere shields the earth from the sun's radiation. It diffuses the light. It allows us on the dark night to see the stars. He was able to mitigate the harshness of the environment, and, although his children were not perfect, they all stayed Jews. Jacob was compared to the atmosphere. The astronaut, Dr. Hoffman, told me that when he was in space, he could tell immediately where space started. There was a clear demarcation. Even in the dark times, the atmosphere has some light.

Joseph is the esrog, the brilliant child, the flash of lightning in the sky. Unfortunately, brilliant children are many times picked upon and set upon by their peers, and many times forfeit their talents because they cannot stand up to the ridicule and harassment of their peers. I know a friend of mine who was a terrific piano player, but at age ten he told his



parents he would never play again. Why? Because his friends were harassing him. It was only many years later that he found out why they were doing that. It was because their parents would not buy them a piano to play. It is very important to shield the brilliant child and allow him to develop his talents.

Then there is Moshe Rabbeinu, who is compared to a succah. The rabbis say a succah is equivalent to all the mitzvahs of the Torah. Why should that be? It is an easy mitzvah. All you have to do is walk into it. That's true. It is all-encompassing, like the Torah is all-encompassing. It should give us moral direction, no matter what we do in life. Moshe was like the stars, too, because you can set your course by the stars. We need people who are wholesome role models in all their endeavors.

Then there is Aaron, who is compared to the menorah of the Temple and the mitzvah of Chageega, of formal ceremonies. As I have mentioned many times before, it is forms which create feelings, not feelings which create forms. If a person wants to feel good, he first has to exercise and eat right and quit smoking. He might want to feel healthy, but he will not really feel healthy until he does the forms, the exercise, etc. There are some youngsters who specialize in forms, in manners, although they may not be the greatest intellectuals.

Then there is David, who was such a sensitive human being. His Psalms speak about this sensitivity, but not everybody can be susceptible. Some people are so preoccupied about themselves and their ambitions that they are not sensitive to other people. True, they should develop at least a minimum level of feelings, but they are never going to be sensitive people, and allowances should be made for them if they are engaged in worthwhile and productive activities.

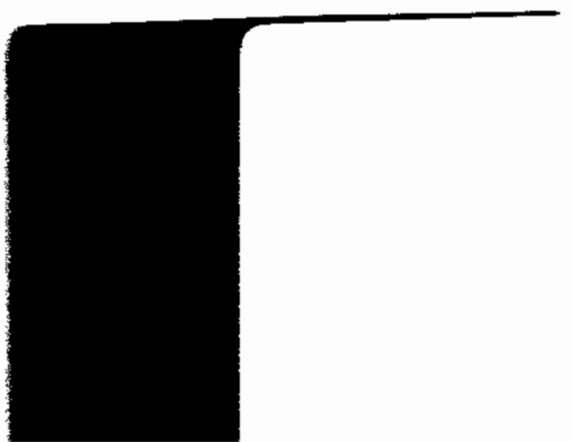
Succot teaches us that we need many types for our society to function correctly. As long as they are all based on the Ten Commandments and

the Torah, it is okay. Unfortunately, many of our yeshivas do not realize that. They think that there is only one mold and one type of person. Some stress only the intellectual type. They forget about the persistent, stubborn individual who does mitzvahs day in and day out, never even knowing exactly why. Others stress only this type of an individual and are not interested in intellectual pursuits. Others slight the gifted or the wholesome individual or the sensitive one. We need all these types. Our educational system should have room for all of them. There are many who are very poetic, to whom a rigid intellectual program would not fit, and vice versa. Let us make sure that all our children are able to get an education based on Torah and mitzvahs, even though they are utilizing different models in their own life. There is room for different models. There are seven Ushpeezim.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman whose husband died. She missed him very much. After three years, she decided to contact a medium so she could talk to her husband. He was a waiter in a restaurant. After the restaurant closed, the woman came with the medium to the restaurant. The medium was able to conjure up her husband. Her husband said, "Sadie, is that you?" She answered, "Herman, I can hardly hear you. Come closer. Come closer." He said, "I can't, I can't." She asked why not and Herman said, "Because you are not sitting at my table."

We have to make sure that all our children can sit at their own table and develop their own talents and strengths the way they need to, always, though, based on Torah and mitzvahs.

May we be able to do this so our children will grow up not hating what they studied, but appreciating it and loving it, and may they, by living committed Jewish lives to allow them to still develop their own personalities and talents, create a society that will allow the Mashiach to come quickly in our day. Amen.



SHEMINI ATZERES

Joy, Torah, Bonding, the Past, and the Future

Today we say yizkor. It is hard to understand why we say yizkor on Shemini Atzeres. After all, Shemini Atzeres is a nondescript holiday. It has no major celebrations. There is no shofar or succah or lulav or matzah, although it is true in the Diaspora, we sit in the succah on Shemini Atzeres because it is possible this is the last day of Succot and the next day will be the real Shemini Atzeres. However, we know that there are no real symbols on Shemini Atzeres. In the Temple on Succos they offered 70 bullocks for the 70 nations of the world, but on Shemini Atzeres we offered one bullock. Shemini Atzeres is a nondescript holiday, but, somehow, Shemini Atzeres has come to be a time of great and overwhelming joy After all, the second day of Shemini Atzeres is Simchat Torah. There is no Simchat Torah, really, that is mentioned in the Talmud. In our prayers, we do not mention Simchat Torah. We mention Shemini Chag Hatzeres. Why was this great amount of joy attributed to Shemini Atzeres?

What's more, on Shemini Atzeres, we pray for rain. What does rain have to do with yizkor? If we look at our prayers, we will notice that when we insert the prayer for rain, we do it in the prayer that talks about the resurrection of the dead. The rabbis say that on this holiday, it is as if G-d was saying to the Jewish people, "Stay with Me one day longer. I cannot stand to part from you." This is really a day of love, a day where G-d says, "You worked hard on Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur and Succot. Now just stay with Me. I want to enjoy your company." Shemini Atzeres is really a holiday in which we show our love by just wanting to be together. In fact, you can tell when a couple really loves each other. It is when they really do not have to do anything. They just stay together. In fact, I know that many times people have come to our house and my wife is reading a book in one corner, and I am reading a book in another corner and they say, "Don't you ever

talk?" Of course, we talk, but we like to just be in each other's company. We are comfortable with each other. We like to be with each other, and this is what Shemini Atzeres is all about. It is about the joy of knowing that you are part of a family, part of a group, part of a religion. Everyone has an equal part.

It is interesting to note that the holiday in which we celebrate the Torah is not Shavuot. Why shouldn't it be Shavuot, the day we received the Torah? Shavuot requires intellect, learning. Not everybody has the head for it, but on Simchat Torah we all rejoice with the Torah, whether we have learned it or can learn it or how deeply we have learned it, because the Torah is the bond which binds us together, and we all believe in the ideals of the Torah. Of course, we all know that to establish this bond, we have to go through the different holidays, from when we have received the Torah on Shavous until Simchat Torah. Tisha B'Av teaches about the inevitable problems of life, but we can overcome these problems. There are always going to be problems in marriage, problems between parents and children, problems in the community, but we can overcome these problems if we work at them together. Rosh Hashonna teaches us that we have to be honest with ourselves and apologize for things we have done wrong, and we have to learn how to forgive other people who have wronged us.

We know that in any type of relationship, there are going to be ups and downs, but the relationships are going to be fine and strong as long as we forgive each other. We can work together on things. That's what Yom Kippur teaches us. Succot is working together as a family and community. We know that if we do things together, the bond of comfort and association and love entangles us all and brings us all together and makes us all feel good just to be together. That's why we can have this great joy, this Simchat Torah, because we are all together. We are not just together with ourselves. We are together with our memories, the memories of our homes where we were taught certain customs. We

know we can still smell the Friday night in our parent's home. We know that they gave us certain values of how to react in different situations. We are comfortable today when we remember them because they are part of us. They make us feel comfortable with whom we are and with whom we know we should be and could be. They make us comfortable with our Jewish ideals, although we know we have not achieved them all. At certain times, we may feel the sting of not having achieved everything we could for them. We know, too, that these memories from the past influence our future.

That is why we pray for rain on this day, because rain comes from one spot on the earth and is deposited on another spot. The waters vaporize up, usually from the ocean, and then condense down in another place. We need it. We need the past. We need the vapors of the past. History speaks about a certain type of spirituality, and so does rain. It speaks about drawing from faraway places, drawing from the past, so to speak, and making sure we have the courage to continue on to the future. It fructifies our present, and assures that we have a future. We are all comfortable together. We are all as a community bound together, and it is the Torah which gives us this great joy, this great comfort. If we know that we are part of a group, if we know that we are part of a family, if we know that we are loved by G-d, if we know that we have a Torah which helps us in this life, we are filled with great joy, and that is what Simchat Torah is about. It is about this feeling of comfort, though intangible, is real. It is not like a shofar or a lulav or matzah, but it is real and it throbs in our hearts, and it is what has brought us here today. It is the wonderful memories that allow us to continue.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Max. Max was one of those whiz kids who knew a lot about computers. He invented many things about computers, and within a very short time was a millionaire before he was even 23 years old. Unfortunately, for him, he was a better inventor than he was a businessman. After he had built his business up

very quickly, the business started to slide backwards. When he was 26 years old he was losing everything. He knew he had to do something to save his business. He began selling his paintings and cars and everything he had to try to save his business to pay off his bank loans; the banks were calling in his notes. He noticed that he had a small sefer Torah that had a scroll wrapped around its outside. He thought that it might have some value, so he took it to one of the girls he knew. He, himself, did not have much of a Jewish education, but this girl did. She looked at the scroll that was wrapped around this little Torah, and began to read it. She read that this scroll was the possession of Max's great-grandfather, who had served in World War I. He had been assigned to a unit on the western front to confront the Germans who were attacking Russia through Poland. He was with a group of Cossacks.

The Cossacks had a peculiar habit; they liked to go into the Jewish villages where there were a lot of Jewish girls and take them and have their way with them, and who knows what else? When Bentzion, Max's father, heard about this, he organized the other Jewish boys in that brigade and decided he would protect the Jewish girls of the village they were camped next to. The Cossacks heard about this and began to attack these Jewish soldiers. The Jewish soldiers had taken all the girls and put them in one building they decided to guard. They fought all night. There were wounded, and who knows, there could even have been some deaths. The Cossacks were ready to break into the building when suddenly, the commanding general of this division, who happened to like Bentzion, sent in the other soldiers to disperse the Cossacks. He remonstrated Bentzion by saying, "You aren't no Napoleon." Bentzion, of course, was grateful to the general, but the rabbi of the village was more grateful to Bentzion. He gave Bentzion this little Torah and wrapped this scroll around it in which he recounted the bravery of those boys and in which he also gave him his blessing. He also said, "Through the merit of their great act, they would see children and grandchildren who would follow the ways of the Torah." Bentzion really had no place

to put the Torah, so he put it inside his shirt and bound it tightly to his chest. The next week, they were engaged in a ferocious battle with the Germans. He was hit by a bullet and left for dead on the field. In those days, of course, boots were very valuable. Scavengers would go into the field to pull off the boots of the soldiers and use them themselves or sell them to others. When they came to Bentzion and started to pull off his boots, they noticed he was still alive, and, therefore, called for help to take him to a hospital. It turned out that the bullet had grazed the Torah, lost much of its force, and then ricocheted off his lung and out of his body. Infection set in, but he did recover. This was the story that was recounted to Max by his own father, who had died a few years before. He had gotten that scroll from his father who had gotten it from his father. Max remembered this story and the letters of that little Torah gripped his imagination. Soon he began to study it, and to take it seriously. He gave his business over to a professional, and devoted most of his time to perfecting software for his computer and to studying Torah. The scene now shifts a year later to Max's engagement party. He is engaged to the girl who translated this little scroll around the Torah for him. He met her grandmother and began to recount this story of how they met, how the scroll and the little Torah had brought them together. All of a sudden, this grandmother let out a yell. He said, "What's the matter?" She said, "The person you are talking about was my grandfather. He was the rabbi of that village, and one of the women whom your great-grandfather saved was my mother.

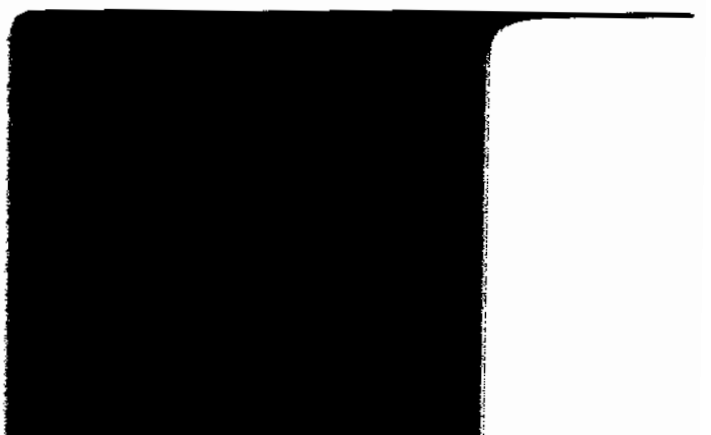
Max knew now that the Torah had saved not only the life of his great-grandfather, but also made a new life for him. It had saved the life of the great-grandmother of his bride, and it had also made sure that Jewish life would continue even into the future. We all know that the Torah brings us together. We all know that the Torah gives us Jewish life. We all know that when we are comfortable with each other and with our tradition, Judaism thrives. May Judaism thrive so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

Blessings, Struggles, Hope, and Defeat

In the Haphtorah that we read on Shemini Atzeres we learn how Shlomo, when he finishes praying to G-d, after dedicating the temple, blesses the people. However, the Haphtorah emphasizes that he stood up. "And he stood up and he blessed the congregation of Israel." Why does it say "and he stood up?" It already said he got up from before the altar. Why doesn't it just say that he blessed all the congregation of Israel? Also, when he blesses the people, he says, "Blessed be G-d asher Who gave rest to His people Israel like all which He spoke." Why does it use the word asher there? It is a superfluous word.

Also, at the end of this Haphtorah, it says, referring to the people, "And they blessed the king and they went to their tents happy and good hearted from all the good which G-d did to David, His servant, and Israel, His people." Why does it say here "all the good which G-d did to David, His servant"? After all, it was Solomon who built the Temple, not David. What's more, why was it that Solomon chose the two weeks preceding Shemini Atzeres to dedicate the Temple? In the year Solomon dedicated the Temple, Yom Kippur was not celebrated as a fast day. This was the only time in Jewish history when Yom Kippur was not celebrated as a fast day. Why did Solomon want the dedication to end on Shemini Atzeres?

Perhaps we can understand the answers to these questions if we look at the name Shemini Atzeres, Shemini Chag Hatzeres. This is not called the holiday of Shemini Atzeres, the Holy of the Eighth Day of Assembly. It is called the Eighth the Holiday of Assembly. We all know that we live in six dimensions: north, east, west, south, up, and down. We also know that we live in a seventh dimension, spirituality, and we know that we have to create this spirituality. That's why the number seven is



so important in Judaism. The seventh month is filled with holidays: Rosh Hashonna, Yom Kippur, Succot, etc. The seventh day is the Sabbath. Seven times seven leads to the Jubilee Year. We have the seventh Sabbatical Year. We know that the number eight in Hebrew stands for something which is above nature, something which is given to us as a gift. Shemini Atzeres is a holiday which signifies this gift, and that is the gift of hope, that no matter how bleak and bad things look, we should always look for the silver lining. We should never give in to an inexorable fate. Nothing is inevitable. Everything can be overcome.

That's why on this holiday we pray for rain. "The winds blow and the rains fall down." The winds do a lot of destruction, as we know the terrible destruction that hurricanes bring, but they also bring rain, which can seem devastating, but which rejuvenates the reservoirs and allows future crops to grow. When we pray for rain, we mention five individuals in the Jewish people. We mention Abraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Moshe, Aaron, and the Jewish people. We mention them so that none of us should ever give up hope. We, as individuals, may eventually succumb to different forces. After all, all doctors are failures. They have never saved a patient forever, but the fact that they save them for five or six years or even one year is a success, because during these years many things have been and can be created.

We learn about Abraham because he fought a lonely struggle. He was on one side and the whole world was on the other. He was even thrown into the fiery furnace. He dug wells and his neighbors contested him over them, but he persevered. His son, Yitzchak, should never have even been born. After all, who ever heard of a woman 90 years old giving birth? Even today with our modern techniques., it is doubtful that a 90-year old woman could give birth. Yitzak was a man, too, who was blinded, the rabbis say, by the Akedah, itself, yet he was able to stand up to those who were pushing him around. When he dug wells

and they contested his right to these wells, he moved on until eventually they recognized his right.

Then we have Yaacov, who ran away from his brother with nothing, who, when he saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, pushed the rock himself away from the well. He, too, had an impossible task. How could he reconcile himself with his brother, and wrestle all night with an angel made out of fire and water, according to the Medrash. His mission seemed impossible, but he did make peace with his brother.

Moshe, too, should never have survived. A decree was in effect which ordered the killing of all the Jewish males. His mother was able to hide him for three months, but then she had to put him in a basket made out of bulrush and put him in the Nile. What were his chances for survival? Another mother would not have even tried, and not only was he saved, but he became the leader of the Jewish people.

Again, too, we read about Aaron because he was the high priest. He dipped in water five times on Yom Kippur. Water in Hebrew is the symbol of hope. The word mikvah in Hebrew means not only the gathering place of water but also hope. He symbolized the fact that although we all sin, we can overcome sin, that although we many times do things beneath us, we can arise and overcome our deficiencies.

Finally, we learn about the Jewish people, how after they left Egypt, they were trapped on a peninsula with no way out. Yet they did not give up hope and the waters of the Red Sea split and they were saved. None of us should ever give up hope. The whole symbol of this holiday is hope. Solomon wanted to dismiss the people on a holiday of hope. He wanted us to stand tall and move out.

I am reminded of the story that Rabbi Maurice Lamm writes about in his new book, *The Power of Hope*. We all know Rabbi Maurice Lamm.

He wrote the famous books, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* and *The Jewish Way in Marriage*. He tells the story which happened in March 1993. He turned to his wife and said, "Give me your hand." They were in the Hartsfield Airport in Atlanta, a huge airport close to 50 square miles. Fifty million passengers pass through it every year and more than four million every month. There are over 37,000 employees who work there and 20,000 parking spaces alone. They were a happy group marching through that airport. Rabbi Lamm was holding his wife's hand on one side and his daughter's hand on the other. His daughter was holding her baby when they met her daughter's husband and six other children. There was great joy as they strode through the corridors of Hartsfield Airport. Even passersby noted this joy.

Eighteen years before when the Rabbi's daughter, Judith, was seventeen years old and studying in school in Jerusalem, she noticed when she was putting on a necklace that she had a lump under her armpit. She called her parents and they asked her to return to Los Angeles immediately. She returned and after a series of tests, it was determined that she had Hodgkin's Disease. She underwent extensive radiation treatment and the doctors thought they had eradicated all the disease, but they told her that she had to undergo chemotherapy, too. She had a return ticket to Jerusalem, and she asked the doctors if she could go and take her chemotherapy in Jerusalem. They have good doctors in Jerusalem, so the doctors in Los Angeles gave their permission. Besides, she had a return ticket. She went and started her chemotherapy there but things did not go well. She got terribly sick. Her mother and her sister came to Jerusalem to be with her. Gradually, she improved, she completed her year in Jerusalem, and returned to Los Angeles. When she was 24 years old, she met a nice young man who shared her passion for teaching Judaism. It was her lifelong ambition to teach children Judaism. They married and moved to Atlanta. When she was pregnant with her seventh child, her mother and father noticed that her voice sounded terrible and she, herself, noticed that she was losing all her strength. Her baby was born prematurely and she did not feel good at

doctors found a huge mass in back of her heart. Her heart had masked it and they did not see it before. This mass was bigger than her heart. She was now suffering from recurrent Hodgkin's Disease. The doctors told her she would immediately have to go into a strict regimen of chemotherapy. Her three-year old child stayed with her, and her husband watched the four older children in Atlanta where he had to work. Every two months he would come out to see his wife and children.

Thank G-d for fax machines, Judith said. They were able to correspond almost hourly. Her mother was to take care of the three children. She hired someone and devoted her energies to make sure that Judith never lost hope. She made sure that every time Judith went out, especially to her chemotherapy, she looked nice and dressed well. She was not going to let her daughter look frumpy. She also insisted that her daughter walk after the chemotherapy to the gift shop and her mother would buy her something. Judith, too, wanted to do something to keep her family's spirits up, and decided that she was going to make costumes for her seven children and herself for Purim because she knew that the nine months of chemotherapy would end just before Purim.

Near the end of the nine months, she sent her other two children to be with her husband and she and the baby and her mother and father battled together against this disease. It was a beautiful day in March when they landed in Hartsfield Airport. It was Judith's 35th birthday. It was just a few days before Purim. When Judith marched down holding her father's hand with her baby in her arms to meet her children, everyone was overcome with joy and happiness. She had beaten the disease, at least for now, but no matter what will happen, she had produced seven beautiful children. She had taught at least six classes of two- and three-year olds about Judaism. She had caused so many blessings to happen to others, so many people had been inspired by her. Her fight against the inevitable had caused so many good things to happen. Purim came quickly and she and her seven children came as Snow White and the

Seven Dwarfs. There was never a happier Purim like that in her home. As she met her family at the airport, and after they had hugged and kissed, she turned to them and said, "Troops, stand tall and move out."

That's what King Solomon was telling us on Shemini Atzeres. Life is hard. Life is full of storms, but stand tall and move out. When G-d blesses us with the word asher, it means we are blessed just because we have never given up hope. Our struggles against the inevitable bring blessings. We are here today because our parents and grandparents never gave up hope. They may have lost different battles and eventually, of course, they lost the battle against old age and sickness, but they created blessings on the way. That's why the people thanked G-d for all the good which G-d did to His people, Israel, and to His servant, David. David did not build the Temple, but it was his struggle against the inevitable which made it possible for Solomon to do so.

None of us should ever give up hope. All of us should stand tall and move out. Eventually, different forces may defeat us individually, although they can never defeat the Jewish people completely because G-d has promised the Jewish people will be eternal; no struggle is in vain. We all create blessings. Judith created seven children and inculcated Judaism into the hearts and minds of maybe seven times 100 Jewish children. All of us should never lose hope. We should always stand tall and move out. May we, by always standing tall and moving out, be worthy to have the Mashiach come in our day. Amen.

CHANUKAH

Time, Chanukah, Renewal, and the Future

Time is very important in Judaism. We are a religion that revolves around time. We know that if you are even one second late, you cannot light the Shabbat candles. That's why we always list candle-lighting time for Shabbat and holidays 18 minutes before sunset so we will have a cushion. We know, too, that a bris has to be made on the eighth day; if a bris is done earlier than the eighth day, it is not a kosher bris. The baby will then have to have, at a later date, a drop of blood drawn to give him a kosher bris. We know, too, that every month, we go outside to bless the new month, Kiddish Levanah. However, if for some reason we are delayed more than 15 days after the start of the new month, we can no longer do so.

We are constantly being made aware of time. We know that even in our daily prayers, we have to say Shema before a quarter of the day has passed. We know that preferably we should say the evening Shema before midnight. Water cannot touch flour for more than 18 minutes if that flour is to be matzah and not leavened bread. We are constantly reminded of time throughout the day by the earliest and latest times we can daven Shacharit, the morning prayers; Mincha, the afternoon prayers; and Maariv, the evening prayers. Life has a rhythm, and those who follow the Jewish religion live according to an almost preset rhythm. Studies made of religious Jews in Israel have found that they live a lot longer than nonreligious Jews. This is probably because they live life according to a set rhythm, and also because they have strong support groups.

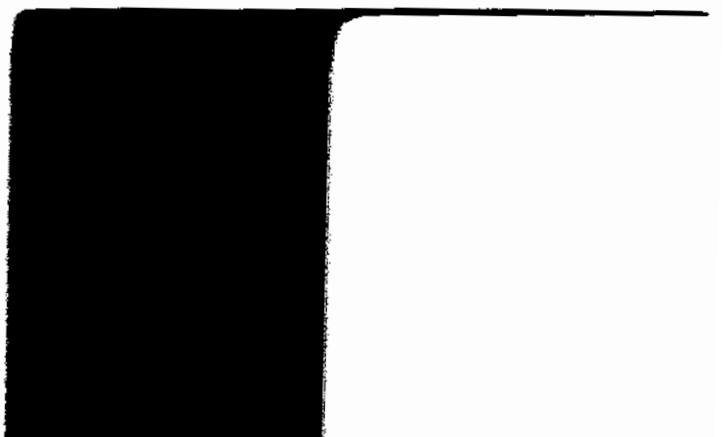
We also know that one of the worst sins in Judaism is Bitul Zeman, wasting time. In a certain sense, we are all nothing more than time clocks. In certain periods of our life, certain hormones turn on and we grow; later, other hormones turn on and we feel the need to start a family. Even later, other hormones turn on and we lose our power and

strength; finally, our hormone processes cease and we die. We all live within time. Time is one commodity we cannot purchase. Every time in life is special and unique, and we are called upon to take advantage of the opportunities that youth, adulthood, middle age, and old age afford us. Every period of life is special and unique and has its special joys and special sorrows.

We all know that we live in the past and the present and the future. According to Judaism, the most important of the three is the future. We know that the past is important because life is based on the past. We know that the present is important because we can only act in the present. However, the future is most important because it determines what our attitude to the past will be and what we will actually do in the present.

Chanukah has been so arranged that it is our longest holiday. No other holiday lasts eight days. Succot, from the Torah, is only seven days and so is Pesach, but Chanukah, even in the land of Israel, is eight days. Chanukah always has at least one Shabbat in it, and in many years, two Shabbatot. Chanukah also always has in its midst Rosh Chodesh. We all know that we do not celebrate Purim during the time when the events actually occurred. The same could have also been true of Chanukah. The rabbis could have chosen another time of year, as they did for Purim, to celebrate the events of Chanukah, but they did not.

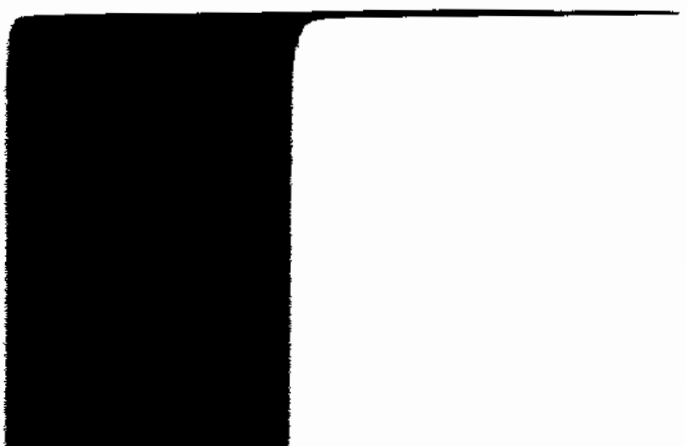
We know the Syrian-Greeks wanted to destroy the Jewish religion. They especially banned the mitzvah of bris milah, circumcision; the mitzvah of Shabbat; and the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh, of declaring and blessing the new moon. They did this because these three mitzvahs stood for the three main ideas upon which Judaism is based. The first one, bris milah, circumcision, signifies the ability to be different and to stand against the crowd; two, the second, Shabbat, teaches us that spiritual things are more important than material things; and, the third, Rosh Chodesh, teaches us that we can always renew ourselves. We can always come back no matter what. Every month, the moon seems to



disappear, but then it comes back. That's why the moon is symbolic of Judaism–we can always come back.

That is also one of the reasons Chanukah is eight days, to remind us of the bris milah, which must take place on the eighth day, unless, of course, the baby is sick. It can never take place before the eighth day, and it is why there has to be at least one Shabbat in Chanukah, and why Rosh Chodesh also has to be in Chanukah. Chanukah is the holiday par excellence of Jewish renewal. After all, we know exactly when the Temple was built, but there is no holiday in the Jewish calendar for when the Temple was built and dedicated. However, we do have the holiday of Chanukah when the Temple was rededicated. Anybody can build a Temple when in the midst of a religious fervor, but can they rebuild the Temple after their ardor has seemingly dissipated?

Many Jews in the time of Antiochus IV felt that Judaism and Jewish culture were much inferior to the Hellenistic religion and culture. In fact, they even petitioned Antiochus to make Jerusalem a Greek city like Antioch. They wanted to establish a gymnasium in Jerusalem that would include Greek worship and Greek athletic events. These were always done in the nude and were part of Greek worship. There were even many Jews who went so far to deny their Jewishness that they tried to reverse their circumcisions. The high priesthood was up for sale. It was bought by a man named Menalaus who was not even a Kohen. He told Antiochus he would pay more money than anybody else for the privilege of being high priest. It looked like Judaism had no future. These Jews assimilating to the Greek culture were, I am sure, proud of their past, but they said the Greeks had caught up with us. Now, we Jews must be like them. No one thought it would be possible to rededicate the Temple. Time was against the Jewish people. The trend was in favor of assimilation, not in favor of greater dedication to Judaism and its principles. Time was against us. Some Jewish forms might remain, but the inner spirit of Judaism was flickering and going out, especially, they said, among the young people.



That's one of the reasons the rabbis stressed so much the miracle of the oil, because this was also a metaphor for the Jewish flame which was almost flickering out in the hearts and minds of especially the younger generation. Almost everyone was convinced that there was not enough inner energy to keep this flame burning until a new generation could arise to restore this flame to its full glory. This new generation is symbolized by the bris milah. Could this generation persevere in spite of all the blandishments of the Greek culture? How could they persevere strong enough and hardy enough to transmit the flame of Judaism to the next generation? Could there be a renewal of Judaism? After all, most people thought Judaism was dead; like the moon, it had disappeared. Could Jewish spirituality, symbolized by the Shabbat, once again seize the imagination of the Jewish people?

That's why the Maccabees felt they had to light the Chanukah menorah immediately. After all, why didn't they just wait another eight days until they could get the oil? Also, why didn't they do what was always done in the Temple? The menorah had to burn all night. In the winter, the nights are long; in the summer, the nights are short. Why didn't the Maccabees just adjust the wicks in the menorah? That way, the oil would last the eight days naturally. On a long winter night, the priests used to put in a big heavy wick, but on the short summer nights, they would put in a thin wick. Why didn't the Maccabees just take a regular wick and put only an eighth of it in the oil every night? They did not because they were afraid that a watered down flame would never inspire the young people to continue.

Our youth must feel the full warmth of Judaism and feel its real light; otherwise, they will not accept it. They will not renew their lives and rededicate temples and Jewish institutions to perpetuate it. The future is the most important dimension in Judaism because if we believe in the future, we will act differently in the present. The Hellenistic Jews felt there was no future, and they gave up. They even were willing to

compromise basic Jewish principles. If they would have believed in a Jewish future, they would never have done this.

In our day, too, we have seen how certain groups have used all sorts of devious means to discredit Jews who do believe in a Jewish future. We have read recently how even the Shin Bet employed provocateurs to discredit especially the Bnai Akiba youth in Israel who were considered up to that time the finest youth in Israel. Why did they do such a thing? It was not only undemocratic and uncalled for, but it was very destructive of the Jewish future of Israel; however, as in the days of the Maccabees, what is past is past. Just as the Maccabees were not interested in looking back but in looking toward the future, and having fashioned a policy which included all Jews, even those Jews who had lost heart and had been willing to accept idolatrous practices of Greek culture, so should we.

In Judaism, we are taught not to look back. In fact, it is very difficult to even do Teshuva if you are constantly looking back and ruminating over the past. How can I be a good person? Look what I did to that person a year ago. Look what I did to that person six months ago. Look how I used to mock my own parents and was cruel to my wife and children. It is true that you should admit what you have done and determine never to do it again, but the past is the past, and you should concentrate on the future. If do not repeat your past mistakes, you should feel good about yourself and be happy about your future.

The same goes for the Jewish people. Chanukah teaches us there is renewal. There is always a new generation. Jewish spirituality is out there for us to grab onto. We are not interested in what some individuals or groups did in the past. We are only interested in the future. Let these individuals and groups join us in rededicating the temple and renewing Jewish spirituality so that the light and flames of Jewish commitment and learning will grow even brighter and brighter. Let the future color

our acts of the present, and let them only be positive. May we all, Jews of every stripe and opinion, work only toward Jewish unity and greater Jewish commitment, understanding, warmth, and fellowship, so truly the flame of Judaism will grow brighter and brighter every day.