

KOL, SPIRITUALITY, CONNECTIVENESS,

JOY & RESPECT

We have just finished the High Holidays. During the High Holidays, we have reattached ourselves to G-d. We have acknowledged that we need a spiritual base in our life. Our life must stand for more than just a fleeting moment in the universe. It must have some cosmic purpose. During this period of the High Holidays and in the Torah portions immediately preceding the High Holidays, the word Kol, meaning voice or call, reverberates. This voice, Kol, is mentioned in the first Torah portion, Bereishis, which we read immediately after the High Holidays, and stands for spirituality, our connection to G-d.

On Rosh Hashonna we spoke about Leeshmoa Kol Shofar: to hear the voice of the shofar. We stressed in the Torah reading on the first day of Rosh Hashonna that G-d heard the Kol: the voice of the boy, referring to Ishmael. We learned how Abraham was commanded by G-d to listen to Sarah Shema B'Kolah: to listen to her voice. And, in the prayer, "G-d is King, G-d was King, G-d will always be King," we ended every stanza with the word B'Kol, with voice.

On Yom Kippur, too, we stressed Shema Kolaynu, "Hear our voice, O G-d." We said this prayer many times throughout the services. We said also, "Listen, B'Kol, to the voice of our pleading. Listen to the voice of our cries." The word voice, could have been omitted in all these prayers on Yom Kippur, but we stressed them.

On Succot, too, we stressed the word Kol, voice. We stress Kol especially on Hoshanna Rabbah. When we say the Hoshannas, we proclaim, "The voice of the herald proclaims," and we repeat it over and over again: "Kol M'Vasair M'Vasair." Why is there this stress on Kol, on voice? How deeply do the spiritual dimensions of Kol run? G-d, of course, is involved with every facet of Mankind, but how does Kol relate man to G-d?

If we look at the Torah portion, Bereishis, we read that after Adam and Eve sinned: "And they heard the Kol, the voice of G-d walking in the garden in the spirit of the day, and Adam and his wife hid from before G-d in the midst of the garden." Adam and Eve, by sinning, had estranged themselves from G-d. They no longer felt that they were worthy of having a close relationship with Him. They knew that they had disappointed Him. The word Kol, signifies a spiritual relationship. This spiritual relationship was present in the Garden of Eden. Metaphorically, it was walking about in the spirit of the day. In other words, spirituality was there to grasp, but man -- Adam -- was too ashamed to grasp it. He had become alienated from the source of his being. He felt naked, physically and spiritually. "And G-d called to Adam, and He said to him, "Where are you?" Didn't G-d know where Adam was? Of course He knew, but He was asking Adam, where are you? What happened to you? Adam responded, "Your call, Your voice I heard in the garden," meaning Your closeness, Your spirituality, "and I was afraid because I was naked so I hid." People who are ashamed of themselves hide. People who do not feel they are worthy of having a relationship with other people hide. In fact, the word that is used for I, Anochee, in the expression, "I hid," is the expression which G-d uses when He starts

the Ten Commandments, I, Anochee. In other words, Adam was saying, "I am the only one now who can love myself, relate to myself because I have let everyone else down."

The Kol on Rosh Hashonna taught us that Adam was wrong. G-d is king over us, even after we sin; G-d still wants a relationship with us, even if we have not done the right thing. If we want to return, He will always accept us. In fact, we learn that the whole story of Adam and Eve happened on Rosh Hashonna. G-d created Adam and Eve on Rosh Hashonna, they sinned on Rosh Hashonna, and they received forgiveness on Rosh Hashonna. We should never feel we are so unworthy that G-d will turn His back on us. G-d will never turn His back on us.

That is why we read in the Selichos, which we said over and over again on Yom Kippur, "Adoshem Adoshem." We repeated the word Adoshem twice, which the rabbis explain we do because G-d is our G-d before we sin, and G-d is our G-d after we sin. He is always looking for us to return, to do Teshuva.

We blew the shofar on Rosh Hashonna to remind us that G-d is both the creator and the revealer. G-d wants us to have not just a platonic, ethereal relationship with Him, but to have a vibrant partnership-relationship with Him. He has told us that He wants us to perform mitzvahs, that He wants us to be His partner in creation. That is the voice of Sinai, which we read about on the High Holidays, the voice of the shofar that blew loud. The voice of the shofar also stands for the inner cry of every man not to be left alone, the cry of every man to be heard, the cry of every man to be part of the community. We want people to listen to our cries.

At the end of Yom Kippur, we also blew the shofar. We sounded the Kol, the voice of freedom. On every Jubilee Year on Yom Kippur, at the sound of the shofar, all the slaves would go free, and all the land would return to its original owners. Each of us yearns to be free to reach out to Hashem. The voice of the shofar speaks to each of us.

It is the Kol, the voice that we also read about in the Torah portion, Nitzavim, where we say, "And you shall return, and you shall listen to the voice of G-d, and you shall do all His commandments which I am commanding you today." When we return, we establish a relationship with G-d. Then, we must follow through on this relationship by acting as moral, kind, and compassionate people.

Finally, on Succot, we must listen to the voice of the future, to the voice of the herald who will proclaim the coming of the Mashiach. We must always be optimistic. We must always joyfully do what we have to do to help G-d redeem this world. Three qualities of being can be ascribed to Kol: our relationship with G-d; a joyful acceptance of the responsibilities that this entails; and a serious, joyful commitment toward the future, toward helping G-d redeem this world. These threefold meanings of Kol help us explain the order of curses that we read in the Torah portion, Ki Sova. We first learn that if we will listen to the voice of G-d, to observe all His commandments, we will receive certain punishments. This means that though we do not observe all the commandments, we do observe some joyfully and respectfully. The second and harsher level of punishment the Torah says will come upon us because we did not listen to the voice of G-d, we did not serve G-d with joy. The third level will come upon us because we failed to listen to

the voice of G-d by not fearing His great and awesome name. We would think, at first glance, that the punishments should be reversed. If a person joyfully observed all the commandments of G-d, but without the proper respect, he belittled the commandments or made fun of them -- that would be a punishable offense, though a light one. Secondly, we would think that if a person observed all the commandments of G-d, but did not do so joyfully, would be a bigger offense. The punishments would be harsher, with the harshest punishments reserved for those who did not observe all the commandments. The commandments, however, that were observed, were done so joyfully and respectfully. We see though, that it is the exact opposite. The lighter punishment comes to those who do not observe all the commandments, but those they do observe with joy and respect. The harsher punishment goes to those who observe all the commandments with respect but without joy; the harshest goes to those who observe all the commandments joyfully but not respectfully. We see from this that the most important thing is closeness with G-d.

We can understand this from the marriage relationship, which is, according to the rabbis, the paradigm for the relationship between man and G-d. A husband may not do everything that he should, because perhaps, he is away from home a lot. When at home, he treats his wife and children with respect, and he does this joyfully. A wife would probably put up with a husband like this because, after all, when he is home, he is wonderful. In a second example, the husband does everything he is supposed to, but does it grudgingly, without joy. A wife would probably put up with this, too. Here too, he is doing everything he is supposed to do. In a third example, the husband does everything he is supposed to do, and even does it with joy. However, he belittles his wife all the time, makes fun of the children, and shows no respect to his wife or children. This marriage is probably doomed.

We have learned G-d wants us to have a joyful, respectful relationship with Him. Even if we sin, He wants us to maintain this relationship. We will have to work harder, but He will not countenance our belittling this relationship, or our making fun of the mission of the Jewish people, or our acting mean spiritually toward others, or our adopting a pompous, supercilious attitude.

Let us hope and pray that we all have a wonderful relationship with Him, with our spouse, with our family, with everyone in the community because His Kol has penetrated our very being so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

RACHMONES, THEORIES & THE GENERATIONS OF THE FLOOD AND TOWER

What does Rachmones mean? We hear the expression quite often. How many times have we heard someone referred to as "a real mensch, filled with Rachmones." How frequently have we been admonished by Yiddish speakers to "hob a biselah Rachmones?"

Does Rachmones mean pity, sorrow, remorse? Are such qualities as tenderness, consideration, and feelings part of the makeup of one with Rachmones? Custom and usage have interchanged these values. Actually, Rachmones means mercy, kindness, and empathy. It means sympathy and empathy enacted in a kind, merciful way. The rabbis teach us that if a Jew does not have Rachmones, then doubt that person is Jewish. If a Jew fails to act with Rachmones, then the basic Jewish message has not penetrated his being.

One of Judaism's main purposes is inculcating within us feelings of Rachmones so that we may see not only our side of an argument but the other person's side as well. Thus, if a person resorts to yelling and shouting without provocation, he has alienated himself from Rachmones. This vocal assailant through his yelling and shouting has demeaned, debased, degraded, insulted, and embarrassed the object of his tirade. He has at once become a thief because he has robbed the other person of dignity and self-esteem. He has failed to consider the other person's feelings, the other person's viewpoint.

Also, an individual who is abrupt, curt, and short with another person's plea for help has failed the test of Rachmones. This individual, especially if he is in a position of authority, only aggravates the situation when he resorts to vocal pyrotechnics to prevent the other person from getting help. He, too, is estranged from Rachmones because he has abandoned mercy, kindness, sympathy, and empathy. Rachmones means that we are willing to help people even if they are not legally entitled to this help because we sympathize with their plight.

The rabbis explain that the letters in the word Gever, mensch in Hebrew, stands for three things: The Gimmel stands for Gemilas Chasodim, for a person who does deeds of kindness; the Beis stands for a Baishon, a refined individual; and the Raysh stands for Rachmones. A person can do deeds of kindness and even be refined, but if he is not empathetic and sympathetic, he is not a mensch. We need all three characteristics.

In the Torah portion Noah, we learn how G-d commanded Noah to build a Taivah. This is a very unusual word. We would think that G-d would have commanded Noah to build an Oneah or a Safeenah, both of which mean a ship. Instead, Noah was told to build a Taivah. The word Taivah in Hebrew also means a "word". Interestingly, the word for "speech" in Hebrew, Lashon, spelled Lahmed Shin Nun, equals 380 numerically. The dimensions of the ark were 300 by 50 by 30, also equalling 380. G-d was telling Noah to use language in such a way that the people understand that they could still save themselves if they would only learn how to be sympathetic and empathetic to each other's needs.

The Targum explains that man is a talking animal. That man can talk is not what distinguishes man from all other animals. It is not just communication which separates man from the other animals. After all, other animals can communicate, too, if on a lower level. What we are referring to when we say that man is a talking animal is that he can think abstractly. Man can formulate goals and express them. Man can formulate theories about life. The Targum was talking about this type of speech when he wrote that man was the talking animal. We human beings formulate values and goals and theories of how to live, and then we try to live by them. This is what often gets us into trouble.

The generation of the flood formulated a theory of self-development which stated that you should do what is good for you and your career, regardless of its effects on others. In other words, they had no sympathy for others. They had no Rachmones for others. If others got in their way, they had to knock them down. The generation of the flood was completely self-centered.

Words also got the builders of the Tower of Babel in trouble, too, but their words at least were not completely selfish. They were the survivors, second, third, and fourth generations after the flood. They had to deal with this great tragedy, with this great destruction. The rabbis explain that when the text says, "And there was in all the land one language and one word," it means that they had a common purpose. Their purpose was to make sure they could survive another flood. They, therefore, organized society to facilitate the construction of a tower to keep them above the flood, and if that was not possible, they would then at least leave behind a name. They were blinded by this purpose, and they created a society in which bricks were more important than people. If a brick would fall, everyone would mourn, but if a person would fall, no one would pay any attention. The words they used, their abstract theories, did them in. Their theories were not as bad as the theories of the people who lived before the flood. After all, the people of the Tower of Babel at least worked together and helped each other achieve a common goal, while the people before the flood were only interested in themselves. They were even willing to steal and to use violence to achieve their goals.

The words we use and the goals we express to our children are very important. If we do not give them proper values and goals and theories about life, we will end up creating either terribly selfish or terribly slavish human beings.

The rabbis argue whether Noah would have been considered a righteous man in any other generation. Rav Yochanan explains that because the text says Noah was a righteous, wholehearted man in his generation, in another generation he would not have been considered righteous. Resh Lokesh disagrees, and says that if Noah would have lived in Abraham's generation, he would have been even more righteous. What they are arguing about is whether Noah had Rachmones. Some compare Noah to a Tzadek in Pelz. In other words, there are two ways you can get warm if you are cold. One is to put on a fur coat and warm yourself, and the other is to light a fire so you not only warm yourself, but also others. Noah spent 120 years building his ark, and he was constantly remonstrating with the people to do Teshuva and repent, especially when they asked him what he was doing. He tried to formulate words to tell the people that he understood their problems, but they continued to lead selfish lives. However, Noah

failed in one thing: He did not argue with G-d. He should have argued on behalf of the people. As the Torah says, "And Noah did all which G-d commanded him so he did," but he did not plead with G-d. He did not do as Abraham had done or as Moshe had done when they were told that G-d was going to destroy certain cities or the Jewish people.

Resh Lokesh claims that Noah did show Rachmones, because Rachmones is shown when giving a person the benefit of the doubt. As the Pirkei Avos says, "Don't judge a person until you have reached his place," or as the Sfas Emes cautions, "Even though a person acts wrongly in certain areas, you also have to consider the good traits that outweigh the bad. When you judge someone, regard him as a whole and consider all his good and bad traits together." Noah did that. Others disagree. They say Noah was only interested in saving himself and his family.

Later on, we learn that after the flood, G-d gave a sign to humanity that He would never destroy the world again. The sign was a rainbow. G-d gave us this sign because a rainbow is basically composed of two things: water and light. G-d was telling us that we should pursue our intellectual insights, our theories, but that we should pursue them with tears, with Rachmones. The trouble with some people is that they are so intent upon achieving their goals, their theories, that they forget about the suffering of individual human beings. This was the sin of the generation of the Tower of Babel and especially the problem of the people before the flood. The rabbis comment that G-d is telling us here, pursue your intellectual insights, your theories, but always take into account the suffering of individuals. In other words, have Rachmones.

G-d told Noah to build a Taivah, to build a word, a theory. It had to be 300 by 50 by 30. It had to be Loshon. It had to be a speech which would lead to sympathy and empathy. A Taivah, a word can save us all. We need to couch our words with sympathy and understanding. If we do that, then we truly will be able to create a kind and just society and overcome many of the problems of our day.

May each and everyone of us "hob a biselah Rachmones." May we, by exhibiting sympathy and empathy, all become menschen so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

TZEDAKAH, FAITH, PERSEVERANCE &

HEROISM

One of the main themes which underlies the Torah portion, Lech Lecha, is that of faith: the faith to persevere, the faith to believe and to continue even though you know that probably you cannot achieve the goals for which you are striving in your lifetime, and also the faith to continue to believe even though the cause seems hopeless.

After Lot separated from Abraham and went to Sodom, and after Abraham rescued Lot, G-d appeared to Abraham and told him, "Do not fear, Abraham. I am your shield and your reward is very great." Abraham said, "G-d, what can You give me? I am childless. The steward of my house will inherit me," and G-d said, "No, he will not inherit you. Only one who will spring from your loins will inherit you." Then He took Abraham outside and He told him, "Look to the heavens and count the stars. If you are able to count them, and so will be your seed." Then Abraham believed in G-d, and it was considered for him a Tzedakah, a righteousness. Why should this be considered for Abraham a Tzedakah, a righteousness?

We learn that Abraham was tested ten times, and never does it say that after he passed these tests, it was considered a righteousness. According to the Medrash, he was thrown into the fiery furnace at Nimrod's orders for not renouncing G-d. We all know about the akedah, the binding of Isaac. We all know he was told to leave his family and land; yet in none of these instances is it referred to as a Tzedakah, a righteousness. Why in this case when he believed that he was going to have a child, even though he was almost 100 years old, was it considered a Tzedakah?

The answer the rabbis give is because the tests were instances of Gevurah, or heroism, but not of faith necessarily. Abraham displayed great heroism in overcoming these tests, but he had the power to overcome these tests. However, when it comes to faith, one may not have the power to overcome. You have to trust in G-d that eventually these things will come to be, as G-d promised. It was considered a Tzedakah for Abraham because unaided, he could not overcome. To father a son when he was 100 years old was absurd. Being a Jew is to require we believe in things that are absurd: that right can make might, that there will be world peace, that the Mashiach will come, that we Jews will have an independent existence in the land of Israel. Many people have such faith, but at the first setback, they quit believing. They say it is enough; it will never be.

What happened to Lot? Why did he act the way he acted? After all, when Abraham left the land of Mesopotamia, Lot was on the same level as Sarah. It says, "And he took Sarah, his wife, and Lot, his nephew, and all their possessions which they possessed and the souls which they made at Charon." He was a true believer. Abraham did not come to the land of Israel alone. He came with all those converts he made. However, immediately upon his arrival in Israel, a famine struck, and he was forced to leave and go to Egypt. There his wife was taken, and although G-d protected Sarah and Pharaoh expelled Abraham from Egypt with great wealth, Lot lost his faith. How could G-d have promised Abraham the land of Israel and have told him to go there, and immediately caused Abraham to leave? What kind of promise was that?

When they left Egypt, it says, "And Lot went with them to the Negev." No longer was Lot on the same level as Sarah. He no longer believed in G-d's promise. That's why he allowed his shepherds to use unethical business practices, and that is why Abraham told him to leave. He chose to go to Sodom and Gomorrah, which the Torah says were like the land of Egypt. He just wanted to make money. He wanted to be like the Egyptians. He chose Sodom and Gomorrah because it was like Egypt. Just like today, many Israelis come to America because they have given up on the dream of Zion, and they just want to make money.

To be a Jew requires belief, even though the belief seems absurd. In fact, Proust, who was Jewish himself, when he wrote his book Remembrances of Things Past at the turn of the twentieth century, considered world peace inevitable. After all, Europe controlled the world, and the leaders of western European countries were intermarried. It would be impossible for there to be more wars. However, in his book a Zionist is a synonym for a fool. How could a Jew believe he will ever be a light to the nations, especially when Jews were persecuted so much in the Middle Ages? How could a Jew ever believe that he would get back to Israel, and that Israel would be an independent nation? How could the Jews still be G-d's tool or instrument to perfect the world when they are so hounded and so maligned? It takes great trust to believe these things.

We know that in 1942 the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Isaac Herzog, was in America. It was before the Battle of El Alamein. Rommel was streaking across Africa. The people of America told Rabbi Herzog not to return to Israel but to stay here because, after all, if Rommel would win the Battle of El Alamein, every Jew would be sent to Auschwitz. Rabbi Herzog told them that the land of Israel is promised to us three times in the Torah portion Lech Lecha. Twice we will be exiled, but the third time we will come back, and we will stay forever. We have nothing to fear. He, therefore, went back to Israel.

The history of G-d's fulfilling His promises, though, are filled with many ups and downs. It is not a straight line. Even Abraham was told, after he was promised the land of Israel at the Treaty of Pieces, that the Jewish people would be enslaved for 400 years and only then get the land of Israel. Faith requires perseverance in spite of setbacks. G-d never said He would fulfill His promises in a progressive way. There are always forward movements and backward movements, but to the Jews the covenant G-d made with Abraham is eternal, and we know that eventually it will be kept. Sometimes there are zigzags along the way, but it will be kept. The Jews are under two covenants: the covenant of Abraham and the covenant of Sinai. Rabbi Soloveitchik writes a lot about this. There are many Jews who believe wholeheartedly in the covenant of Abraham. They support Israel; they help Jews throughout the world; they believe that the Jewish people is and will be a light unto the nations; but they do not know too much about the covenant of Sinai, about Jewish observances. They have great faith, though, that the Jewish people have an important role to play in the world. This is considered a Tzedakah. They express their great faith by giving Tzedakah, large sums of money to help their fellow Jew. This is indeed a demonstration of faith and is a Tzedakah. Jews need heroism to overcome the trials they endured, but more than that, they need perseverance and faith. We cannot be like Lot and all of Abraham's converts who give up at the first setback. After all, where were all the converts that went down to Egypt

with Abraham? They stayed there. They did not have the requisite faith. Lot went back with Abraham because he was his nephew, but he lost his faith, too.

Unfortunately, throughout the generations many Jews have lost their faith and left our people. So many anti-Semites have arisen who make it hard for our people to still believe, and many times the blandishments of advanced civilizations have left their mark also. The Jewish people have persevered and will persevere because there are always Jews who believe in the covenant of Abraham and are willing to sacrifice for it.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Pat Buchanan, who lately is making vicious anti-Jewish statements. He was standing on a pier of the Potomac River talking to three kids aged eight and nine when he stepped back off the pier and fell into the Potomac. He almost drowned, but the three kids jumped in and saved him. He turned to the first boy and said, "What can I give you? Anything you want." The boy replied, "I would like a new bicycle." He then asked the little girl, "What would you like?" She replied, "I would like to be on 'Crossfire'." He said, "It is done." He asked the last little girl what she wanted. She said, "I want to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery." He asked, "Why did you ask for that? You are only 9 years old." The little girl replied, "When I come home and tell my mother who I saved, I'll probably need it." We all know that there are ebbs and flows in Jewish history, but that we Jews will remain constant. We will continue to have faith in G-d's promise, and we hope and pray because of this, the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

THE HAPHTORAH BROCHAS & FAITH

We all know that when we are called to the Torah, we say a brocha before the reading of the Torah and one after the reading of the Torah. However, when we read the Haphtorah -- the reading from the prophetic books -- we say one brocha before reading the Haphtorah and four after the reading. Why should we say one brocha before we read the Haphtorah and four afterwards?

Also, note that we say the brocha before the reading of the Haphtorah in the minor key, but we say the four brochas after the Haphtorah in the major key, just like the brocha we say before and after we read the Torah. In the brocha before the Torah and in the brocha after the Torah, we thank G-d for selecting us from all peoples to receive this Torah, and we thank Him for planting eternal life within us. In the blessing before we read the Haphtorah, sung in the minor key, we thank G-d Who has chosen good prophets, and Who was blessed with His words which were uttered with truth. Of the four blessings we say after the Haphtorah, the first one speaks about G-d being trustworthy Who speaks and Who fulfills, Who keeps all His promises. In the second blessing, we ask G-d to have mercy on Zion, for He is the source of our life, and Who has been humiliated, and Whom we ask G-d to gladden Zion by bringing our children back to her. In the third blessing, we ask G-d to gladden us with Elijah, His prophet, and with the kingdom of David. Elijah, of course, heralds the Messiah, and the Messiah comes from the house of David, and we ask that His throne quickly be reestablished. In the fourth blessing, we thank G-d for the opportunity to read the Torah; to read our prayers; to read from the prophets; for the Sabbath, and we ask that His name be blessed forever. The last blessing is actually similar to the blessing we say when we complete reading the Torah. The first three are different. Again, why should we have three extra blessings when we finish the reading of the Haphtorah, and why is G-d's faithfulness and trustworthiness singled out?

In the Torah portions Lech Lecha and Vayera, we learn about the vicissitudes of Abraham and Sarah, how G-d makes them promises, and, at first glance, does not seem to keep them. He tells them to go to the land of Israel, and then immediately they have to leave because a famine is in the land. He tells them they will be blessed with children and nothing happens. Abraham has a child by Hagar, and that child turns out to be a wild man. Abraham eventually gets a son, and then Abraham thinks he is told that he must sacrifice his son. At the last minute, his hand is stayed because G-d does not want human sacrifices. Abraham displays great faith. He is told that he is to inherit the land, yet Avimelech continually breaks the treaties Abraham made with him. Abraham knows that somehow everything is going to work out. He does not know how, but he knows that he has to continue doing the best he can. The road is never straight. You take three steps forward and two steps back. He also knows, because G-d has told him that not all the promises that G-d made him will be fulfilled in his generation, but will be fulfilled to his progeny, to his descendants. After the Akedah, G-d blesses him and He says, "Because I will surely bless and greatly increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens and the sand on the shore of the sea, and your offspring will inherit the gates of his enemies, and they will be blessed by your seed, all the nations of the earth." In other words, eventually all the promises G-d has made will be fulfilled. However, when that will happen is left up to G-d. We just must trust in G-d.

We generally do not read in the Torah, with the exception of the Tochacha -- rebukes in the portions Bechukosai and Ki Savo -- any promises directed toward the total Jewish people. We do know that the Jewish people are an eternal people, and this eternal quality is secured by our studying the Torah. Yet the Torah really does not speak in any great detail to Jewish history, its ups and downs: It teaches us how to perform the will of G-d, and how to live good lives here and now.

In the Books of the Prophets, on the other hand, we are told about the vicissitudes of Jewish history. We are reminded over and over again that if we do not keep the words of the Torah, we will be exiled and bad things will happen to us. However, we are also informed that G-d will relent and will bring us back to the land of Israel. The Torah brochas are in the major mode because they speak basically about our present life as individuals. The first blessing for the Haphtorah is in the minor key to remind what the prophets tell us: that we will be exiled and punished for our sins. They also tell us, though, that G-d will bring us back to the land, and that Jewish history will end with the Jewish people being free and independent in their land. We say that just as the exile has occurred, so will the redemption. That's why the brochas after the Haphtorah are in the major key -- they stress how G-d does and will keep His promises. We have no doubt about it. G-d is a faithful G-d. G-d will redeem Zion and G-d will send redemption to the Jewish people and establish a Jewish kingdom in Israel. The reason we say the four brochas for the Haphtorah in the major key is that we are asserting this as a fact. We want to make sure everybody understands that this is going to happen, that it is inevitable. The fourth blessing, of course, thanks G-d for giving us the prophets and Shabbat and services, etc. The key to being Jewish is to believe that we are the tools of Hashem, that He will redeem us and the world, and that we have a role to play in this redemption. May we all play this part so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

THE NECESSITY OF COMMUNICATION

In the Torah portion, Chaye Sara, we learn about human communication. We learn how things can have more than one meaning. We learn about the intricate negotiations that Abraham conducted with Efron, the Hittite, to purchase a grave for Sarah. We learn how things were left purposely ambiguous so either could pull out of the deal without his losing face.

We also learn how Eliezer, Abraham's servant, went to Mesopotamia to find a wife for Yitzchak. The story of his adventure at the well and how he met Rivka was told several times. Each time, a different result was wanted so the story was emphasized in a different way. The first time, Eliezer wanted G-d's help. The second time he wanted Rivka to agree to come with him back to Israel. The third time, he had to convince Rivka's father and brother to let her go.

In the Haphtorah, too, the same story is repeated four times. We learn how Adonijah set himself up as king while David was still alive, although very sick. Nathan tells Bathsheba that she had better go to the king and tell him what was happening, and ask him to reconfirm his promise that Solomon would be king. Nathan also says that he will, after she leaves, go to the king and confirm her story. The telling of the same episode four times -- one by the narrator to tell you what Adonijah did, the second time by Nathan to prod Bathsheba into action, the third time to prod the king into confirming his promise to Bathsheba, and the fourth to ensure the king would publicly tell Nathan he still was going to have Solomon succeed him -- demonstrates to us all that the same facts and the same words told with different emphasis can lead to different actions.

We all know that the way you tell something is many times as important as what you say. If you say the wrong things in pursuit of a good goal, you are not going to achieve your goal. It is important that we all know how to talk to each other without causing confrontation. It is also important we realize that the same words put in a different context can lead to the exact opposite results.

We know this from just a cursory glance at different mourning practices that we do during shiva, and at the way we celebrate Pesach and Succot during Chol HaMoed. We know that we are supposed to bring food to a mourner and encourage him to eat and drink. We also know that during the period of mourning, except for absolutely necessary garments, the mourner does not wash any clothes. The same is true during Chol HaMoed. Here the exact opposite emotions are being evinced. During shiva, sadness holds sway, and the food and drink is meant to assuage the sadness. No unnecessary work is done also so that the person can recover from his grief. On Chol HaMoed, the exact opposite emotions are being elicited -- joy and happiness; anything which does away from a person's joy and happiness is put aside for a while.

Life is filled with ambiguity, and we have to make clear the context in which we say certain things or do different symbolic acts. To do otherwise, we will put across the wrong message. Abraham and Efron were able to come to a deal, even though they talked very indirectly, because they were on the same page, and they were not afraid that either would be embarrassed. Eliezer was able to fulfill his mission because he

knew how to speak in such a way that those to whom he spoke would want to go along with him. The same thing goes for Nathan and Bathsheba in the Haphtorah.

We must learn how to communicate. Communication is actually the key toward harmony and progress, obtaining a happy and satisfying family, and a peaceful community.

I am reminded of the story they tell about one of the forced debates in which Jews were compelled to participate during the Middle Ages. It once happened that a bishop in Spain wanted the Jews to send forth a representative to debate a local prelate upon the respective merits of Christianity and Judaism. If the Jew would win the debate, he probably would be exiled, but the Jews would be allowed to remain. On the other hand, if the Christian prelate won the debate, the Jews would have to convert immediately, or leave. No Jew wanted to enter this debate, which was rigged anyway because the bishop was going to ask the questions. Finally, one simple Jew said he would do it. The bishop, to make it more interesting, decided the debate would use sign language. He had the prelate shake his fist at the Jew. The simple Jew took two fists and shook it back at him. The bishop then had the prelate take one finger and point it at the Jew. The Jew then took his first two fingers and pointed back at the prelate. The bishop then had the prelate take out an apple and eat it. The Jew then took out a piece of matzah and ate it. The bishop was astounded. He said, "These are wonderful people. I see that he knows all the answers to my questions, and he answered them in such a nice way that I decree that all the Jews can now remain in our town and that we will live forever in peace and harmony." After the debate, the prelate went to the bishop and said, "Why did you have me shake my fist at him?" The bishop said, "That meant G-d created everything in the world." The prelate asked, "Why did you have me point my one finger at him?" The bishop said, "That meant that there is one way to get close to G-d." The prelate asked, "Why did you have me eat the apple?" The bishop said, "That was to demonstrate that all our problems in the world come because of original sin." The prelate asked, "What was the Jewish man's answer?" The bishop said, "When you shook one fist and the Jew then shook two fists, it meant everything was created by G-d, even the good inclination and the bad inclination. When you stuck one finger out and the Jew replied with two, it meant there are many roads to G-d, and when you ate the apple saying the evils of the world come by original sin, the Jew answered the evils of the world come upon us because one man is persecuting another." When the simple Jew came back to the synagogue, the rabbi asked him, "Why did you answer the way you did?" The simple Jew said, "When the prelate shook his fist at me indicating that he was going to beat me up, I shook two fists back at him indicating I was going to defend myself. When he stuck his finger out indicating he was going to poke out my eye, I stuck out two fingers indicating I would poke out both his eyes. When he took out the apple to eat lunch, I took my matzah to eat lunch." The rabbi was astounded. Somehow the simple Jew had given all the right answers, even though he misinterpreted the questions completely. G-d was on the side of the Jewish people that day. Communication is a difficult process, and unless we learn how, destruction is almost inevitable without G-d's intervention. Let us all hope and pray that we will all communicate correctly so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

PROTESTS & VIOLENCE

ANTI-SEMITISM, WITHDRAWAL,

How should a Jew respond to evil directed at our people? What methods should a Jew employ to confront this hatred, intimidation, manipulation, and violence? Should a Jew do anything at all, or should he just sit back and say G-d will take care of everything?

We know that when the Jews left Egypt, they were trapped on a peninsula jutting out into the Red Sea with the Egyptian army pursuing them. Different groups within the Jewish people responded to this threat in different ways. Some said, "Let us return to Egypt." Some said, "Let us commit suicide." Some said, "Let us protest." Others said, "Let us go forward into the waters." Each group could make its case, but none of them were right. Moshe told them all to be quiet and to see the salvation of Hashem. G-d then caused a strong east wind to blow all night, and the sea became a dry land, and the waters were for them a wall on the right and a wall on the left. The Jewish people were to move forward into the sea. The rabbis explain that the people were unsure that the waters would split; Nachshon Ben Aminodov had to go up to his neck until it was apparent to everyone that the waters had split. Sometimes danger comes from the right, and sometimes from the left, and we have to know how to handle it. Our response may vary from generation to generation, and while instinct must prevail to a great degree, we must judge each situation on its merits.

After all, during the time of Yishayahu, King Cheeskeeyahu was told by Yishayahu not to give up even though the Assyrians had besieged Jerusalem for many months, and the situation looked hopeless. Cheeskeeyahu followed Yishayahu's advice, and an unusual occurrence caused the Assyrian army to flee. The city was saved.

In the time of Yirmeeyahu, King Tzeedkeeyahu was told to surrender to the Babylonians. The situation was hopeless. Tzeedkeeyahu did not listen to Yirmeeyahu, and not only was Jerusalem captured but the Temple was burned.

We all know that Jewish law is case law, that every case is different, and that how we determine the law depends upon the circumstances. We also know that life constantly changes.

What is good in one situation may be bad in another. For example, in our day, two Orthodox groups, the Naturei Karta and the Satmer, still have not recognized the State of Israel. They feel the State of Israel is a blasphemy because human beings created it, and especially because the human beings who created it were not particularly observant of Jewish law. They feel G-d has to send the Messiah on a white horse to create it.

This flies in the face of all Jewish tradition. We pray in the Shemone Esrah that G-d give us a Parnassah, a way of making a living, but we do not sit home waiting for G-d to find us work. We also pray that G-d give us good health, but this does not mean that we do not go to doctors. We pray that G-d will restore the Jewish people to the land of Israel, but this does not mean that we should not attempt it. Of course, in the Middle Ages, to attempt such a thing would have been suicide. Only a few individuals were

allowed to go to Israel, but mass immigration would have been met by an army and we would have been slaughtered. In the Middle Ages, we could not go up to Israel. We had to wait for G-d to help us. G-d did help us. We obtained the Balfour Declaration. Seven empires who coveted the land of Israel were destroyed: Turkish, Russian, Austrian-Hungarian, German, Italian, French, and British. The League of Nations confirmed our right to have a Jewish homeland; so did the United Nations. We also were able to obtain the weapons to fight for it. The Satmer and Naturei Karta refuse to change. Halachically, they are on very thin ice; they say they are waiting on G-d, as they did in the past. They say things have not changed.

In order to determine what our actions should be in the future, we must ask ourselves, has there been a change? Should our response to the current situation be different? If there has been no change, then, of course, we continue on our present course. If there has been a change, we should alter our response.

We know that in our day, that the whole issue vis-a-vis Arafat and the PLO is, "Have they really changed? Do they really want peace?" If so, then Rabin, Barak, and Peres are right. If they have not changed, then the Likud and other nationalist parties are right. Our response depends on the circumstances.

This explains why, in the Torah portion Toldos, Yitzchak wanted to give the blessing to Esau and not to Yaacov. Yitzchak was a passive man. When he was confronted with overt anti-Semitism and hatred, he did not respond; he just left. When famine wasted Israel, he was commanded to remain in the land of Israel, so he went to modern-day Gaza. There, he obtained some land and became very wealthy. The Philistines became jealous of him and even Avimelech, who had invited him, said, "Go out from us because you have become too mighty and too rich."

This is the pattern of anti-Semitism which has repeated itself over and over again throughout Jewish history. First, the rulers of a country invite the Jews in, and then when the Jews succeed, the rulers become very angry and expel them and harass them and hound them. We Jews were invited into Poland and for 500 years, until 1648, had a wonderful life there. Then the Cossacks, who were Greek Orthodox, rebelled under the leadership of Chelminitsky against their overlords, the Catholic Poles. The Cossacks killed one-third of the Jews of Poland, and Poland lost lots of their territory because of this rebellion. The Poles, under Jesuit influence, blamed the Jews, and since then Jewish life in Poland has been filled with virulent anti-Semitism.

Yitzchak responded to Avimelech by leaving. He went into the Negev and dug wells. The people of Gaza, hearing about this, came after him in the Negev, claiming that these wells were theirs. Once again, Yitzchak did not protest; he just left and dug other wells further out in the Negev. Once again, the people from Gaza came against him, and claimed these wells were theirs. Yitzchak once again left his second set of wells, and dug a third set of wells, and he named this site Rechovot, which means ample. He hoped that by so doing the Gazans would see there was room for everyone.

Avimelech, the King of Gaza, now saw that everything Yitzchak did was successful, and he came to see Yitzchak. Yitzchak said, "Why do you come to me? You hate me. You

sent me out from your midst." Avimelech told him, "Listen, if we wanted to do bad with you, we would not have sent you out; we would have killed you. Let us make a treaty of peace between you and us." Yitzchak knew, however, that this was not the end of the story. He knew that this Jew hatred had not ended with the treaty he made with Avimelech. He knew that his children would have to face it. He knew that people would always envy Jewish success and hold in contempt Jewish ideas, and that they would always feel justified in striking out against Jews. His way of handling the problem was to withdraw. He did not confront Avimelech, but he was also not obsequious. He had said to Avimelech, "Why are you coming to me? You hate me." His way of handling anti-Semitism was to always make sure to have wealth and position, and never openly confront an anti-Semite. He knew that when people need Jews, they will put up with them.

Yitzchak knew that things change, and his way of dealing with anti-Semitism may not work always, that sometimes protests are in order, and sometimes even physical violence is needed. Yitzchak never thought that Yaacov would be capable of protesting or organizing a defense to save himself or his family. He favored Esau over Yaacov because he felt Esau was more capable of causing the Jewish people to survive in a cruel anti-Jewish world. He was wrong, because Yaacov proved that he knew how to protest when later he did so against his father-in-law, Laban. Upon returning to Israel after 20 years, he organized a defense when he thought Esau was going to attack him. True, he preferred quiet diplomacy, but if that would not prevail, he was prepared to use other means as well.

It is difficult to know when to use what means. Sometimes, we must use quiet diplomacy, sometimes we must organize protests, and sometimes we must be prepared to defend ourselves physically. Esau could not be a leader of the Jewish people because all he knew was violence or assimilation. Yaacov could be a leader because he always tried quiet diplomacy, gifts, persuasion, and protests, and only after all these failed would he think of organizing a defense and pursuing violence. Not always are the tried and true methods correct. Quiet diplomacy would not work on Hitler, and only because of boycotts and protest and quiet diplomacy did Soviet Russia allow a few tens of thousands of Jews to leave.

We are soon to celebrate Chanukah, and will recall the Maccabees who had no choice. They had to use violence. Judaism was threatened. The time for quiet diplomacy had passed. Jews would be killed if they did not become pagans. They were killed for keeping Shabbat and studying Torah. The Temple was desecrated. The only appropriate response at that time was violence, a revolt. We laud the actions of the Maccabees because that was the right response at that time. Antiochus could not be swayed. If the Maccabees had not revolted, Judaism would have been lost, and we and our descendants would all today be pagans.

In our day, the Arabs only began to think of peace when Israel had such a strong army that the Arabs knew they could never defeat Israel militarily. Let us all hope and pray that we will not seek to end anti-Semitism through assimilation, as Esau was thinking to do, or by violence alone, as he also had wanted to do. Rather, we will always imitate the steps of Yaacov and realize that all approaches are valid. First, however, we must

always try diplomacy and point out the economic advantages for peace; always choose the appropriate means to protect our people; always realize that conditions constantly change. We, on the other hand, though, must not believe that things have changed when they have not changed.

May we always make the right decisions so that the Jewish people will thrive and continue to grow. May we have the insight, stamina, and strength to recognize the problem, confront it, and choose a correct course of action so that we and our children's children will always be secure. May we do this so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

FEELINGS, DISCIPLINE, SPIRITUALITY,

SUCCOS, RACHEL & LEAH

One of the prime heresies of our day is, if it feels good, it must be good. So many people have told me, "Rabbi, I did it because it just felt good. I knew it was the right thing to do because it felt good." Feelings are very amorphous. They come and they go, and many times, mislead us. How many people have gotten married to someone who they knew rationally was not for them, but felt they just had to do it. In their heart of hearts, they knew that it was wrong, but their feelings overwhelmed them. How many people have risked all they have on a foolish business enterprise because they just felt they were going to hit it big? Look at all the little old ladies who are being swindled by these fake sweepstakes. They are sure they are going to win, that they have spent all their life's savings on these contests.

Dependence upon feelings alone to guide us and to direct our actions is rife with peril. Our soul craves reason and intellectual challenge together with positive feelings. We need both feelings and reason. Without both, we cannot function. One of the errors of the western world is that it has tried in the past to suppress all feelings to produce a Prussian mentality. However, this will not work. If you suppress feelings enough, they will, like a capsteam engine, explode and wreak great havoc. The Prussian mentality will inevitably lead to Nazi excesses. On the other hand, feelings and unchecked emotions running wild, will create havoc.

This is how the rabbis explain the contrast between the generation of the flood and the generation of the Tower of Babel. The generation of the flood was an unbridled one -- everyone wanting to do what he wanted to do when he wanted to do it, if it felt good. The generation of the Tower of Babel, on the other hand, was a disciplined generation. All the energies of all the people were concentrated on building the Tower. An overriding goal and reason lent purpose to their existence. Human life, in this situation, was secondary. If a person fell off the Tower, so be it. Work continued. If a brick fell, everyone mourned.

Succot is a holiday of emotions. It also exemplifies the delicate balance between emotion and reason; e.g., when the holiday of Succot comes on Shabbat, we do not take up the lulav and esrog, even though the Biblical command to take the lulav and esrog only applies outside of Jerusalem on the first day. The other days are rabbinic. The rabbis were afraid that we would violate Shabbat if allowed to take the lulav and esrog. The rabbis, though, allowed us to sit in the succah on Shabbat. Why should this be? After all, a part of the succah could fall down, and we could be tempted to hammer it back in place.

Seven mitzvahs are associated with Succot: taking the four types; sitting in the succah; rejoicing on this holiday; and bringing a special sacrifice to the Temple when we came, called a Korban Chageega. We also greet seven guests in our succah on Succot, called the Ushpeezeem: Avraham; Yitzchak; Yaacov; Yosef; Moshe; Aaron; and Dovid. The lulav stands for Avraham. Avraham was a beacon, a symbol of hope. The arava, or willow, stands for Yitzchak. The arava draws its sustenance from rivers and lakes and pays no attention to the rest of the environment. Yitzchak was willing to be

different, to stand out. The hadas, myrtle, stands for Yaacov. Hadas represents the eye, and Yaacov stands for study, for the fact that spiritual things supercede the material. After all, Yaacov was a rich man in Mesopotamia and could have grow even richer, but left when he realized that staying in Mesopotamia would endanger his spiritual nature and especially that of his children. The esrog stands for Moshe Rabbeinu, who represents learning and good deeds. Moshe Rabbeinu's whole life was filled with good deeds and learning. The succah stands for Yosef, because the succah is all inclusive and all embracing. Yosef forgave his brothers and included everyone in his loving care. He saved Egypt and the whole world from famine. Aaron stands for the chageega, or special sacrifice, since he officiated over the sacrifices. King Dovid exemplifies the seventh mitzvah of happiness. Dovid loved to sing and dance, and his Psalms today are the basis of most Jewish religious songs -- happy, joyous tunes.

Shabbat encompasses five of these mitzvahs, so they are not needed when the first day of Succot falls on Shabbat. Shabbat is the symbol of hope. We learn and do many mitzvahs on Shabbat. It is a taste of the world to come, so we do not need to take the lulav and the esrog.

When it comes to judging whether or not our feelings are correct, we must judge them by the seven mitzvahs of Succot, especially the mitzvah of joy and the mitzvah of the succah. Do the feelings that we have give us hope? Do they allow us the ability to be different and be inner directed? Do they allow us to put the spiritual over the material? Do they allow us to continue to learn and to do good deeds? Do they allow us to participate in community celebrations? Do they allow us to participate in community celebrations? Do they make us joyful, and are they inclusive?

Admittedly, Succot is a holiday of emotions. It is known as Zeman Simchaseinu, the Time of our Joy. Succot is, more than all the other holidays, a holiday of feelings. These feelings are wonderful. They culminate in the joyous celebration of Simchat Torah, but they must be feelings which unite us and not which divide us. They must be feelings which allow us to grow. They must be feelings which, when combined with reason, allow us to reach out to others.

The Torah portion, Vayetze, deals with some of these same concerns. We learn how Yaacov marries two sisters. This is completely against Halacha. A man is not able to marry two sisters when they are both alive. After one sister dies, you can marry the other one, but you cannot marry two sisters while they are both alive. Some of the rabbis say this was permissible because the Torah had not yet been given at Mount Sinai, so Yaacov could marry two sisters. Others say that Rochel and Leah were only half sisters, and, therefore, marriage to both was allowed. Another interpretation is that G-d told Yaacov to marry these two particular women because He wanted to teach the Jewish people something very important -- how to balance emotions and reason, how to balance spiritual and material concerns. Rochel symbolizes emotion. Upon seeing Rochel at the well when he first comes to Mesopotamia, Yaacov falls head over heels in love with her; he wants desperately to marry her, and even agrees to work seven years without pay just to do so. We all know how he is tricked and marries Leah instead, and has to work another seven years to marry Rochel. Rochel is a stunning beauty with bright, shining eyes. Leah's eyes are dull, and she is plain. Rochel is the symbol of

materialism and passionate love. Leah is the symbol of spirituality. Interestingly, it is Leah who is buried with Yaacov and not Rochel. Rochel produced a son, Yosef, who saves the Jewish people materially by providing them with food during famine, by providing them with political cover, by knowing how to deal with the authorities. Rochel was the symbol of earthiness, feelings at their finest. Leah, on the other hand, was the symbol of yearning spirituality, of dogged determination. She knew she had to win the love of Yaacov by hard work. Even the names she gave her children denote faith and spirituality: Reuven - G-d sees; Shimon - G-d hears; Levi - accompany Me; Yehuda - praising G-d. She produced a child, Levi, from whom Moshe and Aaron sprung. The greatest teacher in Judaism, Moshe, and the Levites and priests of the Temple all sprung from her son, Levi.

We also have the concept of two Mashiachs, one the Mashiach Ben Yosef, Who is a descendant of Rochel, Who is going to begin the process of redemption by taking care of the material conditions of the Jewish people. Then we have the concept of the Mashiach Ben Dovid, the Messiah Who comes from Levi -- Leah's son, Yehuda. He completes the process by bringing a higher spiritual dimension to the Jewish people. Judaism requires both material and spiritual things. It requires emotions and earthiness, as represented by Rochel, and reason and spiritual longings, as represented by Leah. That is also one of the meanings of the succah: inclusiveness, the combination of emotion and reason. Indeed, the Messianic era is described as G-d spreading over us His succah of peace.

Next time we say that something feels good, let us hope "that something" includes all the necessary elements to make it a positive rather than a negative; that it gives us hope; gives us the courage to be different, and that it allows us to do deeds of kindness; to learn with an open mind; to participate in all the affairs of our family and community; and that it gives us joy. It also must be inclusive of everyone and contain both reason and emotion. Let us all hope and pray that we will not just act on feelings alone, but that we will always combine our feelings with spirituality, reason, and learning; that we will truly be able to do positive things so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

EMPATHY, CONTROL & REALIZING WE,

TOO, CAN DO EVIL

In the Torah portion, Vayishlach, we learn about Jacob's encounter with a man who the rabbis explain was the guardian angel of Esau before his encounter the next day with his brother, Esau. It says, "And Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn, and he saw that he was not able to overcome him, and the man touched the socket of his thigh." The rabbis all are amazed by this episode. They do not understand what it means. Why did Jacob wrestle with someone before he met his brother?

The Rambam explains that it was all a dream, and he said that Jacob was really wrestling with his conscience. After all, he knew that he had cheated his brother and deceived his father. He had to come to terms with this. Other rabbis say, no, that this was a real struggle with the guardian angel of Esau, and that the enemies of the Jewish people are going to attack the Jewish people in two ways. One, they are going to persecute and hound us, which is one of the meaning of wrestle, saying that this comes from the word Avak, which means dust, and when you wrestle with a person, you try to fling him down into the dust. Other rabbis say, no, this means to embrace. Some people want to destroy the Jewish people by embracing us, by assimilating us. Even today, there are certain missionary groups who want to biologically assimilate the Jews by telling their adherents that they must marry Jews to make them Christians. The question, though, remains, why was it that Jacob had to wrestle before he met Esau and went to the land of Israel?

The Kabbalists say that the reason the socket of Jacob's thigh was moved was because this indicated that before Jacob would enter the land of Israel, he would have to suffer severe losses. The thigh, of course, is the area of procreation, and only then would he be able to enter the land of Israel. Others say, no, that the reason Jacob had to wrestle before he met Esau was that he had to come to grips with an important truth which we all must come to grips with even today, and that is that Jacob and Esau were twins, which means that they had the same genes, and that they were raised in the same home. Their nature and nurture were the same, yet, they turned out different. Jacob had to realize that he was like his brother, Esau, that he had all the traits of his brother, Esau, and that potentially he could be Esau. He could do all the things that Esau did, even though they are contrary to Jewish law and morality. He had to realize that he potentially was the same as Esau.

There are only three mitzvahs that are given in the Book of Bereishis. They are: one, to be fruitful and multiply; two, the mitzvah of circumcision; and, three, the mitzvah of not eating from the sciatic nerve in remembrance of the fact that Jacob's thigh was struck. The first two commandments are positive commandments, but this commandment of not eating from the sciatic nerve is a negative commandment. Why should this be so? Why shouldn't we precisely eat from the sciatic nerve? In order to demonstrate the fact that we realize that we potentially could be an Esau. For us to have the correct empathy and sympathy and understanding when we meet with other people, we have to realize that we are like them. We do not condone or approve what they have done, but we understand how and why they could have done it. Unless we

have this empathy, we cannot relate to other people.

One of the most heartbreaking things which I see in the rabbinate is when I see how parents abuse their children. Usually, it is not physical abuse, but verbal abuse. Many times, I see a mother or father constantly picking on a child using sarcasm on him, destroying his self-esteem. Invariably, the child who is being picked on is the child who is exactly the same as that parent. A mother will pick on a daughter that has exactly the same traits that she has, and a father will pick on a son that has exactly the same traits that he has. Why is this so? Because the parent cannot accept the fact that he has these traits. He hates these traits and tries to pretend he does not have them, and he lashes out at his child. What a terrible thing! It is like a person who feels inferior and tries to act superior. This child abuse breaks my heart. Many times a parent does not even realize that he is doing it. The parent must accept the fact that he has these traits. There is nothing wrong with having these traits as long as you do not act on them, as long as you use them for good and not for bad. A miser should become the treasurer of a shul, for example, but, unfortunately, the parent tries to destroy the child because the child is like him, and he does not want to recognize his own traits.

Before Jacob could meet his brother and be reconciled with him, he had to understand his brother and have empathy for his brother. This does not mean that he condoned or approved of what his brother did, or most of what his brother did. All it means is that he understood him. Jacob had to look at his own character and realize that he, himself, could do things like his brother, and, in fact, he did do a bad thing when he deceived his father and cheated his brother.

We are commanded not to eat the sciatic nerve to stress the fact that we do not do everything that we could do. Because we follow the mitzvahs in the Torah, we will not let our base instincts get control of us, even though we know we have them. That is probably the meaning of why the commentaries stress that Jacob followed the 613 commandments even when he lived with Laban. He was able to control his base instincts, but he still knew that he had them, especially after his encounter with what the Rambam says was himself.

We have to be understanding. We cannot say, "Well, we would never do that. We would never even think of doing that." It is not true. We might think of doing that, but we are not going to because we follow the Torah and the mitzvahs. This is especially important when dealing with people.

I had a friend who was a wonderful student, a genius, in fact, but he lasted in the rabbinate only six hours. He was invited to take a pulpit in upper New York. The day before he was to go to this pulpit, the president of the congregation had a terrible accident and was in the hospital. The vice president of the congregation met my friend and brought him straight to the hospital. This rabbi friend of mine looked at the man and said, "What terrible thing did you do to deserve this?" Obviously, he was not hired. He now, I think, sells insurance. It is important that we become sympathetic and understanding. Only when Jacob understood this was he able to be reconciled with his brother. He did not condone or approve what his brother did, but he understood his brother because he was also his brother. He had the same genes and same nurturing.

I am reminded of the story of a seven year-old boy who came up to his rabbi and said, "Rabbi, when I grow up I am going to make lots of money and give some to you." Rabbi said, "That's very nice, but why do you want to do that?" The little boy replied, "Because my Daddy says you are the poorest rabbi in town." Obviously, this rabbi did not know how to empathize and sympathize with others. Let us all hope and pray that we will all learn how to empathize and sympathize so we will be able to have good relations with everyone so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

LOVE, MERGING, ATTACHMENT, & THE SOUL

One of the hardest words to define is -- love. What does the word love, mean? One wag has offhandedly commented that love is the urge to merge. Poets and songwriters have popularized love to the extent that we know its symptoms, but find its actual definition wanting. We know love is that elixir that allows us to fulfill the need to be attached to others, and to be attached to beliefs and ideals. But what and where is the source of love? We can realize one answer found in the prayer we recite before putting on tefillin: "...and upon the head opposite the brain, so that the soul that is in my brain..." The soul within the brain controls the functions of thinking and willing and feelings -- determining all behavior. Indeed, our rabbis teach us that our soul is composed of two parts: an intellectual and an emotional part. The human soul is what differentiates human beings from the rest of G-d's creation. It is a gift from G-d which enlivens the mind, senses the truth, and rules the body. Just as the mind loves to know and the body loves to be satisfied, the soul loves to feel. Love is a feeling of attachment. The soul is that part of us which yearns to be part of a greater whole. The soul, we believe, is ultimately a piece of G-d. Each of us has a piece of G-d in us, and since we have this piece, we want to join with others so we can complete these pieces and ultimately feel one with our creator.

The rabbis teach us, too, that a soul, when it comes down from heaven, is split in two, one entering a male and one entering a female. That's why love at first sight can be so strong -- because the soul recognizes its other half. Sometimes, though, the soul makes a mistake and does not recognize its true soul mate. Then friction occurs. A Roman matron once asked Rabbi Yosef Ben Chalafta, "What is G-d doing since He created the world?" Rabbi Yosef Ben Chalafta answered by saying, "He is making matches." She said, "Is that all He is doing? I can do it, too. I can take 1,000 of my male servants and stand them in a row opposite 1,000 of my female servants, and they will be married." She did so. The next morning, this one had a broken leg; this one had a black eye; this one was missing a tooth. She went back to Rabbi Yosef Ben Chalafta and said, "Your Torah is true." In fact, we learn that G-d considers making a successful match more difficult than splitting the Red Sea.

The soul has two components, mind and emotion; if the soul is not filled with positive things, then it will be attracted to negative things since it must be attached to something. Mark Twain once said, "The more I love mankind in general, the more I hate him in particular." Although I am sure Mark Twain was saying this somewhat tongue in cheek, he meant the more he attached himself to an ideal vision of man, the more he found that the individuals with whom he was dealing were so far from the ideal that they did not deserve his desire to associate with them. Not only does our soul crave ideals, ultimate visions of man's progress, Utopian visions, but also immediate warmth and positive feelings. All our creativity really stems from the soul because we want to change things so that they will confirm to our vision of what the future should look like. Animals do not want to change anything. They have only a low level of soul, and they want to exist as they are. We want to merge ourselves with our ideals and with others. Sometimes these two aspirations conflict. The Communists were so enthralled by their vision of the future that they were willing to kill millions of people to achieve it. They failed to realize that all our souls are bound up one with another; that if we destroy anybody, we are diminishing the complete soul mosaic we all need to get close to G-d. We daven in a minyan because it is so much more satisfying than davening alone. When we come to shul and find hundreds of people there, how much easier it is to pray!

That's why the worst thing in Judaism that a person can do is kill another human being. A Kohen is disqualified from duchaning, from blessing the congregation, if he killed anyone, even by accident; and we know how the death penalty was made impossible to effect in Judaism. We did not want to diminish the soul mosaic of the world. If people feel rejected and do not find acceptance, they become very bitter and even hateful. In fact, much of the violence of our current society can be racked up to the fact that certain people cannot accept rejection at all. Their souls so yearn for acceptance and attachment, and when they have nobody with whom to merge, they go berserk. People need friends. They cannot be made to feel that they are nerds or social misfits.

Love between a man and woman has sexual connotations, an actual physical merging, but love in families and between friends is also very important. It speaks about an attachment of souls. In fact, we learn about Rabbi Choni Hamagel who was the Rip Van Winkle of the Talmud. When he woke up after 70 years and went to the study hall and saw that his grandchildren and great-grandchildren studying with their compatriots, he found no one his own age with whom he could share his thoughts and feelings. "Better death than a life with no friends," he said. We need interaction with those whom we have been attached to for years, even in an adversarial capacity. How often have elderly people in our congregation told me, "Oh, yes, that person was an opponent of mine at board meetings, but I miss him so much. We were on opposite sides of the problem, but at least we were talking about the same problems."

In the Torah portion, Yayerhev, many of these issues are discussed. We learn how Judah, lonely after his wife died, sought out a prostitute. A temporary attachment, it did not really assuage his loneliness. It turned out that she was not a prostitute at all but his daughter-in-law, the widow of two of his sons demanding her right to have a child by Judah or his other son.

We also learn how Yaacov loved Joseph. We learn how his soul was bound up with that of his son's. They had a bond together. They loved to be in each other's company. Unfortunately, Joseph's brothers did not understand that, and thought that their father was shutting them out. Their father was not shutting them out. One can love people in different ways. Different levels of attachment exist, but the brothers felt rejected. They felt they were no longer attached to their father, and violence ensued. They almost murdered Joseph, and they did sell him as a slave to Egypt. While in Egypt, Joseph was almost seduced by Potiphar's wife. Hers was a failed marriage because there were no feelings there. Like many marriages that fail, Potiphar's and his wife's lacked a sense of attachments -- physical, spiritual, and a yearning to work toward common goals. Potiphar's wife sought affection and attachment in an immoral way. Just at the crucial moment, Joseph saw his father's face, and so bound was his soul with that of his father's, he was able to pull away. Joseph's love for his family and for his father saved him in Egypt.

Love, paraphrasing my earlier wag, is the urge to merge on many levels. On Chanukah, we celebrate attachment at the highest dimension. The pious Jews of the generation of the Maccabees could not bring themselves to worship idols because doing so would sever their attachments to G-d and to the Jewish people. The Maccabees, under Judah's leadership, gained the strength and courage to do what they did because of their love for G-d and the Jewish people. They did not want to sever that relationship. They wanted the Jewish people's relationship to continue forever with G-d.

Love is a dynamic and wonderful force as long as we realize that it must satisfy both aspects of

our soul. It must cause us to act in a rational and moral way. It can be a very destructive force if it does not. The root of love is Hav, which means to give. To attach ourselves to others or to ideas, we must give and give and give of ourselves. Let us hope and pray that love will only be a positive force in our lives, and that we will truly attach ourselves to positive goals and to others so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

CHANUKAH, CANDLES, SELLING YOUR SHIRT, & HOPE

Syria has agreed to meet with Israel on a future treaty. Whether it will actually come to fruition, we do not know. It was on Chanukah that our ancestors reached an agreement with another Syrian despot which allowed us to rededicate the Temple. It was not a perfect treaty. Syrian-Greek troops were stationed in a part of Jerusalem, but we did get the Temple, and we did get freedom for a while. The Syrian regent, Lycius, after he took care of an usurper in the East, came back against Judah, and Judah knew that he was going to do this. He even made a treaty with Rome. In the year 161 BCE, Lycius did get an army against Judah. This time, he told all the Jews that he had no intention of making them pagans. He was going to let the Temple alone. Many Jews decided that if they had autonomy, it was enough, and they did not back Judah. Judah went out with a very small army, and was defeated by Lycius. Not until 142 BCE did we receive our full independence. The process, though, did begin on Chanukah, and we hope that there will be a full peace between Israel and Syria without any subsequent bloodshed, as in the case of Judah Maccabee.

There is a strange law about Chanukah. If a person does not have enough money to buy Chanukah candles, he must sell the shirt off his back to do so. However, this is not true of any other positive commandments, including Torah-based positive commandments. If you do not have enough money to purchase tephillin, you do not have to sell the shirt off your back to do so. If you do not have enough money to buy a mezuzah, you do not have to sell the shirt off your back to do so. If you do not have enough money to buy a lulav and esrog, you do not have to sell the shirt off your back to do so, but you do for Chanukah candles. Why? After all, lighting Chanukah candles is only a rabbinic commandment; it is not a Torah commandment.

The answer the rabbis give is that the Chanukah candles stand for the Jewish soul, for our potential. We must never let that light go out. We must always feel we have potential and that we can cope with our problems. Therefore, we must light the Chanukah candles even if we do not have any money.

This is the same reason why the Maccabees lit the menorah, even though they only had enough oil to last one day. They could not chance that it would go out. The people must always feel that they have the potential to solve their problems, that they can overcome. We must always realize that we have the potential to go forward, even though we know there are going to be a lot of problems.

This holds true for the peace initiative President Clinton just initiated. We know there are going to be problems. We know that if a peace will be signed with Syria, it will only be more like a cold, non-aggressive pact. That's what it is like today with Egypt and Jordan. A Jordanian journalist who visited Israel was expelled from his union and had to apologize before he could rejoin and practice his profession. Two Israeli Arabs were arrested in Jordan, and no lawyer in Jordan would defend them. We know that the government-controlled Egyptian press is terribly anti-Semitic. The cartoons in the Egyptian press are even worse than those in the German Nazi press. The most popular book in the Arab world is Hitler's Mein Kampf. We, though, have to keep on trying, hoping that eventually there will be peace. Israel is having to make all the concessions, all the overtures.

This is similar to Joseph when he reconciled with his brothers. He had to make all the overtures.

They were afraid of him all his life, and his relationship with them was very shaky. After his father, Jacob, died, his brothers came to him and said, "Our father, Yaacov, commanded before his death saying, 'Please forgive the sins of your brother.'" The rabbis say that Jacob never said that. He did not even know that the brothers had sold Joseph. There was never really true peace, but at least there was no more hatred or warfare.

We hope, too, the same will happen in the Middle East even with Assad, who lambastes Israel, accusing her of every crime in the book, even the crime of ritually killing children so their blood can be used for matzah. We hope that he has changed. However, his regime is a very shaky regime. He is a sick man. He belongs to an Alawite minority of about 10% of the population, which most Moslems do not consider Moslems. There is already a succession fight going on. It is hard to know that if Israel would make peace, that the peace will last. However, we must try. We must light the oil, but we must be conscious of all the differences and not rush into something detrimental to us. We hope it will turn out all right, and, with G-d's help, we know that it will if not now, a few years from now.

I am reminded of the story they tell about an Amish fellow whose family went into the city for the first time. He and his son went into a building and saw an elevator. They had never seen an elevator before. They saw an old woman go into the elevator. They saw the doors close, and then two minutes later, they saw the doors open again, and a beautiful twenty-year-old woman came out of the elevator. The Amish man turned to his son and said, "Quick, get your mother." We hope and pray that Assad has truly changed, that he will go into the elevator and come out a new man. We should never give up. The Jewish soul needs to always try to make things better. Let us hope and pray that this will truly be so now so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

GUILT, TESHUVA & MOVING ON

In the Torah portion, Vayigash, we learn how Joseph and his brothers reconciled. The word Vayigash and its derivatives are used throughout this Torah portion to signify that you can only reconcile if you grow close to each other, if you talk to each other, if you communicate with each other. It mentions, too, how Joseph approached his brothers when he revealed himself to them, and told them to approach him. This theme of approaching is found even when the Jewish people go down to Egypt when it says they came to the land of Goshen. Goshen is the same word as approach. This was the exact opposite of what the brothers did before they sold Joseph. They did not want to get near him. They wanted to keep as far away from him as possible. That's why the text says, "And they saw him from a distance." We cannot establish peace with anybody unless we approach them and are close to them.

It is good that Israel is speaking with Syria, although as I pointed out last week, it is hard to see how this can lead to peace since Syria is ruled by an Alawite minority of only about 10%. The Sunis are the majority and do not even consider the Alawites Moslem. In fact, to many Moslems, there are two non-Moslem countries in the Middle East now: Syria and Israel. That's why Syria needs Iran's support so much because if Iran says you are a Moslem, you are a Moslem. It is just like the Satmar or the Netura Kartz, ultra orthodox groups saying you are a Jew, then you must be a Jew. Syria is risking Iran's support if she makes peace with Israel. Besides which, Assad is sick and the struggle for succession is already taking place. There have been battles between supporters of Assad's brother, Rifat, and one of Assad's sons has shot and wounded Assad's son-in-law. Even if Israel makes peace with Syria, there is no guarantee that it will be kept. After all, when Israel made peace with Lebanon, with U.S. support, it did not last at all after the Phalangist leader was murdered. We all know, though that it is better to talk than not to talk.

When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, it says, "Now, do not be sad and do not be angry in your eyes because you sold me here, because in order to save a life, G-d has sent me before you." He repeats it a sentence later when he says, "And now, you did not send me here but G-d." The question can be asked, why do we have to stress the word "and now," and why did Joseph say, "Do not be said and do not be angry?" Also, why is Joseph exculpating them? They sinned. They sold him to Egypt. He, in fact, mentions that they sold him to Egypt. It turned out all right, but they did not know that it would when they sold him. G-d can take anything we do and turn it to good. We cannot thwart G-d's plans. If we follow His will, if we keep His commandments, if we act as moral and decent people, then we will not suffer when G-d fulfills His plan. However, if we do not follow His will, if we act immorally, G-d's plans will still come to fruition, but we will suffer. There is a scientific theory called the theory of chaos which says that everything comes back to the same point that it is supposed to, even though many routes can be taken to achieve that point. We know that in winter it is going to be cold, and in the summer it will be hot, but how the individual temperatures will be every day until we reach the cold of winter or the hot of summer varies every year.

Joseph was telling his brother that they did not have to be sad or angry because although they intended to do bad, it turned out good. It was not that it turned out good

which exculpated them, but the fact that they had done Teshuva. They need not feel sad or angry because they had repented. Judah stepped forward and offered to be a slave in Benjamin's place, but the question remains, why does it say, "and now" after they had repented?

We all know that depression is a terrible thing. There are many people today in shul who suffer from depression. Depression is usually caused because a person is angry at himself. If any of you are depressed, you should see a psychiatrist or psychologist immediately. Depression is a serious disease. Many times, when people do the wrong thing, they either become angry at themselves and become depressed, or they become angry at others. They made me do it. The girl was too pretty. The objects were too tempting. The store owner should have put them behind a case, etc.

Joseph was telling his brothers, "And now, since you have done Teshuva, let go of the past. Do not be angry at yourself. Do not be depressed, and do not be angry with each other." In fact, when he sends them back to Egypt, he tells them, "Do not become angry on the way," and Rashi explains that, "Do not be occupied in Halachic matters so you should become angry on the road," which means do not try to figure out who was Halachically responsible for selling me. Was it Shimon who started the whole thing? Was it Reuven who threw me into the pit? Was it Judah who sold him? Was it the other brothers who enthusiastically went along with all these plans? Don't worry about the past. Move on to the future.

Too many people cannot let go. They feel they have to punish themselves or punish others. I once had a friend who was going with a girl. A second friend of mine did not know that my first friend was going with this girl. He took the girl out, they fell in love, and got married. My first friend was furious. He had wanted to marry the girl, although he never told the girl that. My second friend inherited a small inheritance from his grandfather, \$20,000 or so. My first friend was a stockbroker. My second friend, not knowing that my first friend was mad at him, gave him his money to invest. My first friend tried every which way to cause my friend to lose all the money. However, the stock market, being what it was, he achieved the exact opposite goal. My second friend became a millionaire. In gratitude for this, he gave my first friend a brand new Cadillac. He felt so guilty he did not know what to do. He actually became very depressed. I tried my hardest to tell him to let go. He regretted what he did. He truly repented. He should look forward.

The same thing applies to everyone in life. So many people are mired in the past. If the Arabs are really Baal Teshuvahs, then we should move forward. The problem is, have they really repented? It is true that Sadat was really a Nazi during the Second World War, but he truly repented. It is hard to see whether Arafat or Assad are in the same category. It is important, though, to move on. So many people give the wrong diagnosis to their situation. They feel that even though they regret what they have done, they have to continue punishing themselves or being angry at others for making them do it, the devil made me do it syndrome. This is wrong. Once we have done Teshuva, we should move on. That is the Jewish position. That is something Christians do not understand about Judaism. They think Jews are always weighed down under the power of terrible guilt, that they have no way out. That is not true. You

know it, and I know it. Once we do Teshuva for the sins of our past, G-d forgives us, and we can go on. Our guilt is lifted as long as we determine never to do these things again. It is important that now after we have repented we should move on. We should not be depressed, and we should not be angry at others.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who went to the doctor and said, "You know, every time I touch my forehead it hurts terribly, and every time I touch my cheek, it hurts terribly, and every time I touch my stomach, it hurts terribly." The doctor said he thought the man needed to see a specialist. A week later, the man returned to his doctor. His doctor asked, "What did the specialist say?" The man replied, "He said that I have a broken finger." We all have to make the correct diagnosis. We should not be angry at ourselves or angry at others. We should move on. If we will move on then we will be able to live good lives so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT, HARMONY

& JEWISH CONTINUITY

In the Torah portion, Vayechi, we learn how after Jacob's death, Joseph's brothers approached him and said, "This is what our father commanded us before his death, 'So you shall tell Joseph: 'Please forgive the sins of your brothers;'" Please forgive the sins of the servants of the G-d of your father. The Torah goes on to say that when Joseph heard this, he cried. Joseph is the one person in the whole Book of Bereishis who cries. Others may cry after a death, but he cries when he hears certain things or sees certain things. The brothers, of course, according to the Medrash, made this statement up. Nowhere do we ever learn that Jacob knew about the brothers' sin. He may have suspected it, but thought a wild animal had attacked Joseph, and then Midian merchants found him wounded and brought him down to Egypt.

The rabbis learn from this that to preserve peace, it is permissible to tell a lie. We know that this is true. If the Nazis had knocked on a righteous gentile's door and asked if he had any Jews, he should lie; otherwise, he and the Jews would be killed. Joseph's response to his brothers' saying to each other after he took Shimon hostage so they would bring back Benjamin, "We are being punished because of what we did to our brother," was to cry. Joseph cried when he saw Benjamin. Joseph cried when he saw his father. Joseph cried when he revealed himself to his brothers. Joseph was an emotional man. He had a great intellect and was a great administrator, but he was emotionally involved with his brothers and his family.

In this Torah portion, we learn that Jacob became sick. Joseph then took his two sons, Ephraim and Menasheh, with him to see his father. When Joseph saw these two boys, he said, "And now the two of you boys who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you, they are mine. Ephraim and Menasheh will be like Reuven and Shimon to me," and he blessed them. However, he put his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Menasheh, even though Menasheh was the oldest. Then Jacob said, "By you Israel will be blessed saying, 'G-d should make you like Ephraim and Menasheh.'" To this very day, every Friday night every father blesses his children and tells his boys, "G-d should make you like Ephraim and Menasheh," and he tells his girls, "G-d should make you like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah." There does not seem to be a symmetry here. After all, why should we say when we bless our girls that they should be like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah, and when it comes to our boys, we do not say they should be like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov? Why aren't the patriarchs cited as the matriarchs are?

Perhaps the answer is that the patriarchs did not do such a good job keeping their children Jewish. Abraham had eight children, and only one of them remained Jewish. Yitzchak had two children, and only one of them remained Jewish. Yaacov had 13 children, 12 boys and one girl, and they all remained Jewish. Why shouldn't we say on Friday night that G-d should make you like Yaacov to the boys? The answer is that although Jacob was able to keep all his children Jews, he was not able to prevent hatred and envy and jealousy to run amok among them. That's why when he says, "By you Israel will be blessed," the you really does not mean Ephraim and Menasheh because this B'Ha in Hebrew is singular. It means because of you -- Joseph. It is

because of you, Joseph, that the children of Israel are going to be blessed every Friday night that G-d should make their sons like Ephraim and Menasheh. Joseph was able to keep all his children Jewish and to do it without jealousy and hatred. Even though Ephraim, the younger son, was obviously more qualified than Menasheh, the older son, they did not fight about it. Each one chose his own field of endeavor. Menasheh was an assistant to his father, an excellent administrator, and Ephraim was a genius at Torah. That's why Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Menasheh. However, he did it in such a way as not to embarrass Menasheh. Menasheh was placed at Jacob's right side, and Ephraim was placed at the left side so Jacob had to cross his hands, and Jacob did not insist that they be moved. Joseph really wanted his father to put his right hand on Menasheh and his left hand on Ephraim, but he deferred to his father.

One of the underlying themes of the first book of the Torah, Bereishis, is a protest against primogenitor. The first born should not get everything just because they are the first born. Yitzchak, who was not first born, was preferred over Ishmael, Yaacov over Esau, Joseph over Reuven. It was not until the generation of Menasheh and Ephraim that peace and harmony reigned, even though Ephraim, the younger, got the preferred blessing. Jacob was able to keep his children all Jews because he did not do like his grandfather, Abraham, who when his children disappointed him, gave them a gift and sent them away, or like his father, Yitzchak, who did not see any evil in his children. Jacob, when he saw his children doing a bad thing, reprimanded them, but he did not throw them out. He was able to keep them Jews, but he could not keep them as a harmonious family. Even after he died, the brothers were sure Joseph was going to take his revenge. There was never that warmth of feeling, of brotherhood, that should have been between them. That's why Jacob said that the Jewish people, every Friday night, should bless their sons by saying that they should be like Ephraim and Menasheh because Joseph was able to raise a family who loved each other, cared for each other. They not only remained Jews, but they also remained friends.

How was Joseph able to do this? He was able to do this because he knew how to cry. He was emotionally involved with his children. He cried with them, he laughed with them, he interacted with them. I know that in my previous congregation, we had professors, both husband and wife, who were prominent in their fields. However, they did not have any time for their children. They would give them everything, but failed to give them one thing, and that was themselves, and these kids hated their parents. They felt their parents were not emotionally involved with them. The parents really did not love them; otherwise, they would spend time with their children.

This is true with all relationships. You know what destroys a marriage almost inevitably? It is not fighting. Some couple love to fight. Of course, I am not talking about physical fighting. What will kill a marriage is silence. When one partner withdraws and there is no emotional involvement, then the marriage will end soon. Joseph was able to keep his children Jewish and friends because he was emotionally involved. His children may have looked like Egyptians, dressed like Egyptians, talked like Egyptians, enjoyed Egyptian culture, but they stayed Jews and acted as Jews. Although many of Jacob's sons and grandsons dressed differently, spoke a different language, were culturally separate, they did not always act as Jews. Joseph and his

children always lived up to Jewish moral values. He kept his children Jews. They may have looked foreign, but they were not. They did not fight among themselves. They did not sell a brother. They were menschen. Because of this, we bless our children every Friday night, "May you be like Ephraim and Menasheh."

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who went into a restaurant and ordered a spice soup. There were all sorts of spices floating in it. He noticed two objects that did not look as if they belonged. He said, "Waitress, look at these foreign objects. What are they doing here?" She replied, "They aren't foreign objects. They live here." Joseph raised his children to be completely Jewish because not only did they remain Jews but they acted like Jews, even though they may have looked foreign to the rest of the Jewish people. Let us all hope and pray we will all be able to keep our children Jews and have them live Jewish lives, that they will all be menschen so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

RECOGNIZING THE TRUTH, TORAH &

THE SOUL

How can we recognize when something is true? In a democracy, we all believe that if you tell the people the truth, they will recognize it. That's why free speech is so important. Without the free flow of ideas, how can people learn the truth? How can people recognize the truth? Is something true because many people say it? Is something true because it is said often? Is something true because the government says it, or the opposition says it?

We all know about Nazi Germany's big lie. They said if you tell the people a big lie long enough and loud enough, everyone will believe it. Thank goodness, this is not so. People saw through the Nazi lies, as they also saw through the Communist lies. Absolute control of the media does not mean absolute control of a people's thinking process. People are not stupid; after a certain period of time, people will stop believing in the media if what they read or watch does not coincide with what they see in person.

In the Gemora Berochas, we learn how a Bas Kol, a heavenly voice, is attributed to what the majority of the people think on a given issue. In other words, if the rabbis are in a quandary over what the Halacha is in a given situation, they should look to the people. In fact, this is what actually happened in the time of Shemaya and Aftalyan and Hillel. During their time, Erev Pesach came out on a Shabbat. The Halacha was clear that you still slaughtered the paschal lamb on Shabbat, but how were you supposed to transport the knife to the Temple court? Shemaya and Aftalyan did not know. Hillel said, "Look at what the people are doing." The people had put the knife in the wool of the sheep, and the sheep carried the knife into the Temple courtyard. A humbled Shemaya and Aftalyan then resigned as heads of the Sanhedrin in favor of Hillel.

In Judaism, we believe that we all have a soul, and somehow our soul, which is actually a part of G-d, recognizes the truth. Sometimes, there are many layers over our soul, and we have difficulty in reaching the truth. Yet when large numbers of people look at the same issue, most of the time the majority will get it right when it does not deal with matters about the fundamental rights of an individual, as taught in our Torah.

How to recognize truth is a very old problem. The rabbis tell us that before a baby is born, he or she is taught the entire Torah. Then at the moment of birth, an angel lightly slaps the baby on its mouth, and the baby forgets consciously all the Torah he has learned. However, the Torah still remains in his unconscious, and upon seeing the truth, the adult is able to recognize it, at least its general outlines.

This explains why Pharaoh did not accept the interpretations the advisors gave him when he told them about his dreams of the seven fat cows, the seven skinny cows, the seven full ears of corn, and the seven bedraggled ears of corn. They told him that he would have seven daughters, and they would die, that he would conquer seven kingdoms, and then lose them. When Pharaoh woke up, it says, "Vatipotem Rucho, and the spirit was troubled." The word Ruach in Hebrew also means soul. The answers of his advisors did not quiet his soul.

It is important that we look at problems both with our mind and our soul. There are many people who are empathetic, who can feel a problem, yet cannot actually express its answer in elegant, intellectual terms. On the other hand, many people are bona fide geniuses, have a great intellectual grasp of the problem, but do not really feel all its ramifications, and, therefore, are ineffectual in solving it. President Jimmy Carter is a bona fide genius, while Ronald Reagan, although a smart man, is not in Jimmy Carter's intellectual league. However, Reagan had an empathy and a grasp of problems which, because of his empathy, was greater than that of Jimmy Carter. When we look at problems, we have to look at them both intellectually and empathetically. Our souls, so to speak, must be involved, too.

In the Torah portion, Shemos, we learn how Joseph was completely forgotten. A new king arose. How was it possible for Egypt to have forgotten Joseph, the man who saved them? Joseph was not a warm, engaging figure. He did not seem to have that empathy which is needed to elicit not only respect but love and devotion. His brothers were frightened of him to the last days of their lives. Joseph was a very good man, the only one by whose name the word Tzadik is always appended in Jewish tradition. Not even do Avraham, Yitzchak, or Yaacov have the word Tzadik appended to their names. Joseph, however, could not somehow elicit the warmth and love and devotion of those around him. He was useful. He was intelligent. When he spoke, people realized he spoke the truth, but Joseph did not have the empathetic nature to solve human problems. He solved engineering problems. He solved agricultural problems. This lack of empathy is why he and his tribe were not chosen for leadership of the Jewish people. The leadership went to Judah who, in spite of his flaws, had an empathetic nature. He elicited warmth and love and devotion in his relationships with others.

We have just finished celebrating Chanukah. Chanukah has a very strange law: When it comes to all other positive commandments, even Torah-commanded positive commandments, you do not have to do them if they require money and you do not have any money. For example, if you do not have money to buy tephillin, you do not have to sell the shirt off your back to buy them. If you do not have the money for a mezuzah, you do not have to sell the shirt off your back to buy it. If you do not have enough money for a lulav and esrog, again, you do not have to sell the shirt off your back. When it comes to Chanukah, however, you have to sell the shirt off your back to buy the candles.

Why should this be so? After all, lighting Chanukah candles is only a rabbinic commandment. The answer is that the Chanukah candles stand for the soul of the Jewish people and the soul of each individual Jew. Lighting a candle stands for the soul that each of us possesses. That's why we light a candle on the yahrzeit -- to remember the souls that have departed. Each of us needs to nurture our soul. Each of us needs to realize that we can fulfill our potential, though it looks like we cannot. The Maccabees lit the oil knowing the oil would only last one night; that to get new oil would take eight days. The lit oil did last eight days. The Maccabees could not wait for the new oil because that would mean they would not have the capacity anymore, figuratively, to sense the truth and to relate empathetically to those around them. The Jewish soul must always shine through. It cannot be buried and covered over with material things or even hectic tasks. It must always be there bright.

When Moshe was chosen to be the leader of the Jewish people, he was chosen at the site of the burning bush, a bush which would constantly burn and burn and never go out. That is the symbol of the Jewish people. Our souls, if imbued with the knowledge of Torah, will allow us to recognize the truth and allow us to relate to others empathetically. It can never be extinguished. It will overcome all adversity. True, there will be setbacks. There will be complaints, but the soul will shine through, and the problems will be overcome. Oh, occasionally mistakes will crop up because we would not have been attuned to everything around us, but the soul will sense the truth and will rectify them.

Moshe could not have been chosen the leader of the Jewish people until he realized that the bush, Sneh, had the same first two letters as the word Sinai in Mount Sinai. The third letter in each word has half of G-d's name. In the word Sinai, we have half of G-d's name, the Yud, and in the word Sneh, which stands for the soul of each Jew, we have the other half of G-d's name, the Hey. The Jewish people, every time they look at problems, have half of G-d's name within them; the other half of G-d's name is in our Torah. We can recognize the truth and solve our problems when we use our soul and the Torah. This is what has enabled us to remain an eternal people. Yes, recognizing the truth is hard. Yes, even people who have much Torah make mistakes; but, everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike, can -- if they apply the moral teachings of our faith with the inner prompting of their soul -- arrive at truthful decisions. Decisions will enhance peace, compassion, love, and harmony in the world. Let this be so, and let this happen so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

G-D, ISRAEL, MARRIAGE, PHARAOH, & RATIONALIZATIONS

In the Torah portion, Vaera, we learn how G-d said to Moshe, "I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaacov with My name El Shaddai, but My name Yud Kay Vav Kay I was not made known to them." This really is not true because G-d did appear to our forefathers with the name Yud Kay Vav Kay. The name Yud Kay Vav Kay signifies the different approaches to G-d. Abraham found G-d through science, through the study of nature. Yitzchak found G-d through his own personal experience of G-d. Yaacov found G-d through Jewish history. G-d was telling Moshe that the total realization of My name Yud Kay Vav Kay will only be filled by this generation of Jewish slaves in Egypt. The plagues and the overturning of the waters of the Red Sea will prove that nature serves G-d. Each slave will have a personal experience of G-d at the Red Sea when they feel G-d's presence. In fact, the rabbis say the lowliest handmaiden at the Red Sea had a greater apprehension of G-d than all of the later prophets. They also felt G-d in history because who ever heard of two million slaves being freed by their masters? He told Moshe, "Do not be discouraged. These slaves will have such an intimate close experience with Me, Hashem, that this will last for thousands of years. Their freedom will resound throughout Jewish history." We mention it every day in our prayers when we remember the exodus from Egypt. Moshe heard what G-d said, but was still discouraged. When G-d spoke to Moshe and said, "Speak to Pharaoh," Moshe answered, "Behold, the sons of Israel do not listen to me. How will Pharaoh listen to me?"

The rabbis tell us that this is one of the instances of a Kal V'Chomer, which means you learn from a lesser to a major thing. In other words, if something is prohibited on a holiday, most certainly it would be prohibited on Shabbat since Shabbat is stricter and holier than the holidays. All the commentaries, though, ask, how could Rashi in the Talmud say that this is a Kal V'Chomer, because a Kal V' Chomer talks about two things which are equal in almost all respects except that one may be a little stricter than another? In this case, however, we are comparing apples and oranges. The Jewish people did not listen to Moshe Rabbeinu because, as the Torah says, "of the shortness of spirit and hard work." They were broken. They just could not take any of this type of freedom talk. They were afraid their lot would become worse. They could not think clearly. We understand why the Jewish people were impatient with Moshe and did not listen to him, but Pharaoh's spirit was not broken. Pharaoh could have listened to him. Why did Moshe say, "The sons of Israel will not listen to me. How will Pharaoh listen to me?"

Today we have an oif ruf. A young couple is about to get married. We note with interest that a couple gets married under a chupa. There are actually two parts to the marriage ceremony. At one time, they were separate. The first part is called Erusin or Kedushin. That is the part where the man gives a ring to the woman, and, by her accepting the ring, they become married. The ring signifies the fact that he has agreed to support her and her children forever. And, by her accepting the ring, she agrees that in exchange for sexual exclusivity, he will support her forever. In Jewish law, the ring is not a symbol of love, but a down payment on support. In ancient times, the man would then go obtain the wherewithal to support his wife, and the wife would stay in her parents' home. The second ceremony, Nesueem, would then take place, after which she would move into her husband's home. Because Jews were persecuted throughout Europe, about 1000 years ago the decision was made to combine these two ceremonies. too often that a man would go look for his livelihood and not come back, and the woman would never be able to marry. Interestingly, though, when we state the marriage blessing, we say, "Blessed be G-d, Who sanctifies His people, Israel, through chupa and through kedushin." Notice, we say chupa

first. This seems strange because chupa symbolizes the home, and the man did not bring his bride into his home until after the second ceremony, so we should really say kedushin first and chupa second. Even today, we bring the couple under the chupa and then the man gives the girl a ring. It should be the opposite. The rabbis tell us that the marriage between a man and a woman is similar to a marriage between the people of Israel and G-d. Indeed, every day we proclaim this marriage relationship when a man puts on tephillin. He wraps the tephillin seven times around his hand to signify the seven marriage blessings. He makes a ring around his finger and says, "I will marry You forever." The tephillin of the head signifies a marriage veil, and the tephillin of the hand are opposite the heart. The marriage between G-d and the Jewish people is a paradigm for the marriage between a man and a woman.

In fact, in this week's Torah portion, we learn that G-d says He is going to take the Jewish people out of Egypt, "And I will take you to be My people and you will be for me as a G-d." The word in Hebrew for take also means to marry. The Jewish people are going to have a wonderful relationship with G-d. "Do not fear, Moshe," He was telling Moshe. Do not be discouraged. In the next sentence, He says, "And I will bring you to the land. I swore to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a Morasha, as an inheritance." The word Morasha, though, is different than the word Yerusha, which also means inheritance. The word Yerusha means to get an inheritance by doing nothing. You are just a son or daughter of somebody, and you get the property, but a Morasha means you have to work at it. People have told me, "My grandfather was a great rabbi," but the person is a big ignoramus and does not know anything about Judaism. Obviously, he has the potential to become a great scholar, but he will not become one unless he works at it. Our relationship with G-d is a Morasha. We have to continually work at it, and this is the same with our relationship with our spouse. We have to continually work at it. It just will not happen, and we have to learn how to work at it.

It is true that when Moshe said, "The people of Israel will not listen me, how will Pharaoh listen to me?" he was speaking a true Kal V'Chanuch. Why couldn't the Jewish people listen to him? Because they could not concentrate. They could not think clearly. They could not evaluate their situation objectively. The same thing was true of Pharaoh. He believed all the lies that were told him, that he was a god. He even timed his going down to the river for his ablutions, so the tides would start to rise and he could claim he caused the tides to rise. Pharaoh could not think clearly either because he was too filled with rationalizations.

A couple, too, sees the world with different eyes. The rabbis teach us that the first man was androgenous, man and woman, that G-d split Adam in two to make our current man and woman. Man and woman look at the world through different eyes. Therefore, disputes are going to be inevitable. The way we can resolve these disputes is by understanding the other spouse's position, by not trying always to look at where you are now or by wallowing in your own rationalizations.

I am reminded of the story of a man and woman who were fighting. The man looks outside the car window and says, "See, that mule. It must be a relative of yours." The wife replied, "You're right -- by marriage." The Seforno said that Pharaoh could not analyze his position correctly. It was only after all the plagues that he could do so. A young couple must always try to look at the situation from all sides, especially the spouse's side, to be able to understand each one's position, too, and thereby come to an understanding. We, too, in our relationship with G-d do not understand everything, but we crave that relationship with Him, and we want it. The same

thing is true between spouses. They should always try to understand each other and not let their lack of analytic ability or their belief in many of the lies they have told themselves to interfere with their relationship.

I am reminded of the story about a man and woman having an argument. The man said, "Well, at least the kids have my brains." The wife replied, "You are right because I still have mine." Let us all hope and pray that we will always understand each other, if not agree with each other, so we can have good marriages. The rabbis teach us the reason we have the chupa before the kedusha is because the marriage of every young couple is like the marriage of the Jewish people and G-d at Mount Sinai. G-d held the mountain over the Jewish people signifying the chupa, and then He gave them the Torah, which signifies kedushim, the giving of the ring. To maintain our relationship with G-d, though, we have to work at it, and we have to learn Torah. The same thing is true between a young couple. They have to work at it, and understand where each of them is coming from. Let us hope and pray that this will be so with our young couples so they will raise good families so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

THE IMPORTANCE OF JOINING

MORALITY TO SPIRITUALITY

In the Torah portion Bo, we learn how the Jewish people were commanded to put blood on the doorpost and lentils of their homes so the Angel of Death would pass over their homes. We know that the Jewish people, to warrant redemption, had to display courage. They had to announce boldly to the world that they rejected idolatry. There is a disagreement among the rabbis whether the blood was inside or outside their homes. Rashi says it was inside, and other commentaries say it was outside. Then as now, the Jew must know inside his heart and display to the world that he was not and is not inferior, that the ideas of Judaism are more than a match for the ideas of the outside world. Those Jews who feel inferior, of course, quickly assimilate and disappear.

When G-d commanded Moshe to tell the Jewish people to put the blood on the doorpost, He commanded him to tell them to put the blood on the two doorposts and then on the lentils, but Moshe told the Jewish people to put the blood on the lentils first, and then on the doorpost. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu change G-d's order? We all know that there are two prime heresies which have afflicted the Jewish people over the course of history. One heresy is that you can approach G-d even if you are not moral. The prophets railed against this heresy. They said, "What good are your sacrifices or prayers? G-d will not hear you if you mistreat the poor, etc." There is another heresy which is common in our day, that says that all religion is morality, that people do not need spirituality. They do not need to get close to G-d. We all know that is false, too, because we all need meaning in our lives. Without meaning, our lives become unbearable. The least upset destroys us. We need to be close to G-d. We need spirituality. The twin pillars of Judaism are morality and spirituality. The mitzvahs bring us close to G-d. However, we all know that when it comes to saving a life, all mitzvahs are suspended except for three: murdering someone; idolatry; and incest, sexual immorality. The very act of saving lives has such a great spiritual connotation that it overwhelms the need for all other mitzvahs.

We know that in our day the Jewish people has been threatened. The imperative of the last hundred years has been to save Jewish lives. Everyone knew that Jewish life in Eastern Europe was very tenuous. Rabbi Soloveitchik explains that the whole Zionist enterprise should be looked at as a case of saving life, Pikuach Nefesh, and when people are involved in saving lives, they are free from other mitzvahs.

As you know, I just returned from Israel. A big change has taken place the last few years. Israel is now becoming a regular, normal country. The drive to settle Jews and absorb them, the building of a state -- the great Zionist goals have been largely achieved. There are now approximately five million Jews in Israel, with the standard of living approximating the people of Europe, \$16,000 per person. There are many millionaires in Israel. One young man 29 years old just sold his computer business for 50 million dollars. We visited a kibbutz, Ravivim, in which Golda Meir's daughter lived and to which Golda Meir used to go on weekends, etc. We met an American woman who has been there since the early 1960's. She raised her children there, but none live on the kibbutz. They are all in Tel Aviv. The great goals which motivated the people and which substituted for spirituality have largely faded. Yes, in times of crisis, there is

a great response, but the people feel that they are no longer in the category of saving lives, and they need spirituality. Unfortunately, they are looking in all sorts of directions except, for many of them, into their own Judaism. Judaism has been painted for years in a grotesque way, and, of course, many of our Ultra Orthodox brethren have added fuel to the fire by either making statements about the State or by failing to participate adequately in all its institutions, making them an easy target. After all, Agudah Yisroel testified against the establishment of the State of Israel in 1946. Later, they changed their mind and are now active in the government. Even the National Religious Party, whose young men and women actively take part in all state activities, have been stigmatized. There is this great divide in Israel between those who are supposedly acting morally by saving the Jewish people and those who are only concerned with their own selfish spiritual survival. I remember in 1972, I was offered a job in Israel, but when they found out I was an Orthodox Rabbi, they retracted their offer. In fact, that year when we visited Israel, good friends of ours we had entertained in Lafayette, Indiana and had told us that if we ever came to Israel, they would really treat us. They really did. They ignored us, because they did not want their friends to know they were keeping company with an Orthodox Rabbi. In Israel today, though, the moral force is gone, and people are only interested in pursuing their own careers basically. However, this leads to feelings of selfishness. People need to feel they believe in something greater than themselves. There is a great opening now for spirituality in Israel, a great need for it. Unfortunately, the religious have been painted as medieval, and secular have been painted as blatantly anti-religious. There needs to be a coming together. Judaism has always had two pillars: morality and spirituality.

G-d told Moshe to have the people sprinkle each of these basic pillars and then the lentil, but Moshe knew something about the people. He knew they would have to put blood on the lentil first. They would have to connect the moral with the spiritual. Morality in Israel today has just degenerated into making a lot of money for your family, which is not enough; the spiritual has degenerated into building as high walls as you can so the secular world will not impinge upon you. Spirituality without taking care of another is a perversion. Dr. Braverman, the president of Ben Gurion University, said that in today's climate in Israel, great national goals, like the water carrier, would never have been able to be completed because people are not willing to sacrifice for the common good. He lamented this fact that there was not a coming together of spirituality and morality. He said that Ben Gurion University was even going to form a faculty of Jewish thought to make sure their students understood the importance of Judaism. He had criticism for the religious and the secular. He, too, knows that we have to concentrate on the link. We are going through a period of change in Israel. That's why all the political parties are reshaping themselves reflecting the new realities of Israeli society.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a person who took his friend into a synagogue for the first time. His guest asked, "What is the meaning of the hats people wear?" The man answered, "To teach us there is somebody above to whom we are responsible." The guest asked, "What's the meaning of the tallis?" The man replied, "The tallis means we have to be wrapped up in our religion and observe it everywhere." The guest asked, "What's the meaning of the Torah?" The man answered, "It teaches us how G-d wants us to live." The guest then noticed it was time for the sermon and he saw the

rabbi take off his watch. He asked, "What's the meaning of the rabbi taking off his watch?" The man replied, "It doesn't mean a darn thing." May morality and spirituality be joined so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

BROKEN PROMISES, G-D &

RELATIONSHIPS

We all are faced with the problem: How can we deal with someone who has let us down? We have all experienced occasions when we have been promised certain things; but when the time comes to fulfill them, nothing happens. We also have counted on certain people to do certain things. They have told us they will do them, but they can or will not. Should we never again have anything to do with these people? Should we break all contact with them? Or should we figure out some way to deal with them despite their letting us down?

This happens especially in political situations. We count on people to support us on certain issues that come before the shul or our community. They tell us they are going to support us, but then they cut our legs off. They even support the other side. Should we not have anything more to do with them? We know, too, in social situations that some people pretend to be our best friend. Yet, when it is socially advantageous for them, they forget they ever knew us. They even thumb their noses at us.

We know, too, in marriage sometimes one spouse will say he or she will do certain things, but then not do them. Should this cause a divorce? Or should we learn instead to understand that some people are incapable of being on time, or that some people want to do more than they really can? Sometimes, the people who fail to keep their promise do so because they want to please us. They promise more than they can deliver. Sometimes a store manager will promise to donate certain things to a good cause, only to be overruled by the regional manager. He should not have promised until he got the okay from the regional manager, but he really thought he could get the okay. Sometimes a husband wants so much to please his wife that he promises her that they can buy certain furniture; or go on vacation. He made the promise hoping a bonus would come through or that the boss would give him the time off. The boss, however, did not give him the time off, and the bonus did not come through. He should not have raised his wife's hopes, but he did.

How are we to act in these situations? Do we give people second chances? Do we make allowances for these people who always cut in half what they promised, knowing that they meant well but could not follow through? A friend of mine once contracted to buy a piece of land on which he was going to move his business. Everything was arranged. Unfortunately, at the closing, the real estate agent had to advise my friend the title was not clear on this land, and the deal could not go through. However, the real estate agent told him he had an alternative piece of land just as good, and maybe he would like to inspect it. My friend got very angry at the man and said, "You are an incompetent nincompoop and I would not ever deal with you again," and he threw him out. Unfortunately for my friend, if he would have bought that alternative piece of property, he would be a multimillionaire now. The property was smack in the middle of a massive urban renewal project a few years later, and the people who did buy it multiplied their money by ten times. My friend, by his stupid burst of anger, not only stymied moving his own business by two years, costing him a lot of money, but also lost a fortune.

The problem of dealing with people is very complex. We would hope that everybody keep their word precisely, but circumstances do intervene. People get sick; they lose their jobs; deaths occur in a family; economic circumstances change; even world events impinge upon a person's ability to fulfill a promise. Governments change regulations; people get called up for reserve duty or are drafted. Certain things are beyond our control. Other things, however, are within our control. Many people suffer from either cultural or psychological handicaps. In certain cultures, if a wedding invitation says 5:00 p.m., rest assured it will not start until 8:00 p.m. Certain people are habitually late. They have no sense of time. If you invite them for 6:00 p.m., they will come at 7:00 p.m. Other people are braggarts or want to please so much they make promises they know they cannot keep. In certain cultures, you are supposed to promise and offer things, and the person who is offered them is supposed to reject them. It is part of a polite dialogue. I know many times I have had to intervene in very spirited arguments, especially between a person from the Middle East and a native American. The person from the Middle East offered to do all sorts of things. The American did not understand he was supposed to refuse these offers, and that the offered items were only meant as we Americans use the expression, "How are you?" We do not expect people to really tell us. It is only politeness. In the Middle East, people offer all sorts of things they do not mean, especially if you are a guest in their home.

Learning the difference between what people mean and what they say is one of the hardest things to do in interpersonal relationships. In fact, when a person gets a new job, that is the hardest thing to learn. You not only have to learn what people say, but you have to learn what they mean. You have to learn whom to trust and whom you cannot trust. You have to learn on what issues you can rely wholly on someone, and on what issues you cannot rely on someone. We know that everybody fudges a little, and that there are some people who just chronically say everything they do not mean. Most people, though, are between 0-100%, and we have to figure out where they are on that scale. That is what is necessary to get along with people. We need to know that this particular individual talks a lot but does not mean half of what he says; while another individual always means what he says; while a third individual means what he says on this subject but not on another subject. We also need to know that we cannot depend upon certain individuals at all, while we can sometimes depend on other individuals and always on other individuals.

The thing we cannot do is demand people be what they are not. In an ideal world, we could hope that everybody would be 100% reliable and mean everything they say, but that is not reality. If a person comes through on the major things, and even if he or she is late or unreliable on minor things, the relationship should still be solid. We all know that when we call out a workman, we always have to call him out a second time to finish the odds and ends. Almost any time we, ourselves, do a job, we take a second effort to make it really 100% right. We cannot really expect more from others. To do a thing right, it may take them three or four times.

In the Torah portion, Beshalach, we learn many of these lessons. We learn how in the earlier Torah portion of the Book of Shemos, Pharaoh is constantly promising to free the Jewish people, but he always reneges. Moshe does not give up and keeps coming back and getting more promises. Finally, after the plague of the firstborn, Pharaoh does

fulfill his promise and kicks the Jewish people out. Once again, however, he has a change of heart and pursues them. He feels that the Jewish people are not leaving Egypt to pursue a higher ideal. As it says in the Torah, "And it was told to the king that the people had fled." They had just fled persecution. They were not going toward anything. They were just escaping from something. Pharaoh feels that because the Jewish people did not have a goal, they would not be willing to fight to stay free, and he could recapture them. He especially was heartened because they seemed to be floundering. They had turned around and had retraced their steps, coming to a halt at Baal Sefun, the only idol that had not been destroyed before the exodus. There was, of course, no dealing with this man, Pharaoh. He had broken his word so much that G-d destroyed him and his army after they pursued the Jewish people.

However, in this Torah portion we also learn how G-d takes into account different circumstances. We learn how after the Jewish people were saved, they sang a song of praise to G-d. It says right before they sang this song that, "The Jewish people feared G-d and they believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant." Three days later they are complaining against Moshe because they had no water. Apparently, they forgot all about their belief in Moshe. At the very first upset, they seemed to forget all about G-d and the future, and a few days later they even said, "If only we had died by the hand of G-d in the land of Egypt as we sat by the pot of meat when we ate bread to satiety." They even wanted to go back to Egypt. Maybe Pharaoh was right. They did not seem to have a higher goal. The suffering of the desert made them long for slavery. What happened to their promises? G-d, though, understood. When they complained about water, He gave them water. When they complained about food, He gave them the manna. The Jewish people were told, too, to keep the Sabbath and they agreed to do so. Yet when the manna came down, even though they were told no manna would fall on the Sabbath and that on Friday they would receive a double portion, many still went out to try to find manna on the Sabbath. Shortly after, they were thirsting for water, and G-d had Moshe strike the rock and water came out. Still, the Jewish people complained by saying, "Is G-d among us or not?"

Life is very difficult; to keep everything in perspective is very hard. The Jewish people, who had witnessed such miracles, still had problems keeping their promises and still had problems being reliable and dependable.

At the end of the Torah portion, we learn how Amalek attacked the Jews; but when Moshe's hands were raised to heaven, the Jews were victorious. If his hands would drop, though, they would be defeated. One of the interpretations of why Moshe's hands had to be raised to heaven is that if we look up to G-d and see how He deals with the Jewish people, we will be successful here on earth in our interpersonal relationships.

G-d has patience. Unless we are a Pharaoh who always breaks promises 100% of the time, G-d will work with us. We, too, should learn how to work with each other. Knowing with whom we are dealing should prevent us from expecting 100% from everybody. We should hope for total reliability, but not depend on it. G-d works with each of us. He allows us to continue and grow and spread His ideals in the world, knowing that we are not perfect. We, too, when dealing with our fellow human beings, must display patience. We know also that we many times do not keep our word, and

that sometimes we are not reliable. We should always try to be 100%, but we should not demand it from others. When we understand what they mean and not what they say, and when we make allowances for what we know are going to be inevitable slipups, misunderstandings, and unkept promises, we can get along.

G-d works with us; we should lift up our hands to Him metaphorically and treat others as He treats us. Only in the case of a Pharaoh should we completely cut ourselves off from another person; otherwise, we should work with each other, understand each other, and make allowances for each other so we can build the better world G-d wants us to build. Let us all hope that we will do so together. Amen.

INTELLECTUAL CONSISTENCY, CONTRADICTION, JUDAISM & AMERICA

One of the major problems that intellectuals face today, especially in America, is that intellectual consistency is not very important. Intellectual consistency, the desire to live in harmony with believed principles without contradiction, is not considered very important in America today. We Americans are willing to live with contradiction, with inconsistency. We no longer think it is very important, as did the Europeans for many years, to live by and even to construct intellectual schemes which explain life and the various aspects of life and how they all mesh together. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds adored by little statesmen and philosophers and diviners." This attitude is what has distinguished American intellectual effort from European intellectual effort. Intellectual consistency is not considered very important in the American scheme of things.

This can explain why Thomas Jefferson, who championed anti-slavery and who even tried to get anti-slavery laws passed by the U.S. Congress and the Virginia Legislature, had slaves until the end of his life. That attitude, too, can explain why some of the staunchest proponents of integration in the public schools have sent their children to private schools. This does not mean they are hypocrites; this means that their decisions are made based on different factors and are not tied together by any intellectual consistency. Jefferson was always teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. If he would have gotten rid of his slaves, he would have certainly gone bankrupt. He probably figured that by maintaining his lifestyle the way it was and his position in society the way it was, he could exert so much more influence to achieve his goals; however, he seemed to be negating these goals in his own personal life.

The same can be said about many liberals in our day who advocate the rights of minorities but who would become very upset if a minority family bought a home next to them. The reason is clear: They believe everyone should be able to buy a home anywhere, but they do not want their property values to go down.

In the religious sphere, we see this often. We see how people proudly proclaim that they believe in traditional Judaism and then they falsify that belief in the most atrocious ways. I remember in 1964 being called to a meeting in the home of a prominent lay leader who wanted to strengthen traditional Jewish practices, especially in the synagogue and community. At this meeting, he also lambasted in the strongest terms people who he thought were taking too liberal positions, even though those positions might be Halachic. When refreshments were served, I noticed that there were shrimp in a prominent place. I immediately walked out, and the next day called him and asked what was going on. My comments did not seem to faze him one bit. He said, "Rabbi, what I do in my home is one thing, and what I do in the synagogue and community is another." I said, "I can understand that, but why did your wife serve shrimp knowing that I and others there would consider it a terrible violation of Jewish law?" To that he had no answer.

The truth of the matter is that when we, proponents of Orthodox Judaism, put forward our case against others who try to defend their positions intellectually, we almost always

win. However, in real life we almost always lose. We win the battle but lose the war. The reason is that people are not intellectual machines. We are not consistent in what we do or say; most people in America do not even think that is a worthwhile goal. In Europe the intellectuals think it is a worthwhile goal. If you are a Socialist, you do not go to synagogue. If you are religious, then you have to observe everything. There does not seem to be a middle ground. Unfortunately, for a long time that was true in Israel, too, because intellectuals in Israel were influenced by the intellectuals in Europe. Whether you can reconcile every part of science with every part of religion is not important in America, except for perhaps fundamentalists.

In America, we can compartmentalize. We can live with contradiction. That, in a certain sense, is the basis of democracy. If I believe someone is a heretic who is endangering my existence by his beliefs, don't I have to act? America says no. Not only can you not act, you should not act. The Protestants and Catholics learned this through bitter wars. We know that traditional Judaism, too, has been able to live with contradictions. We know that on every given issue there are many opinions, and they are all right as long as they conform to morality and the Halachic method. We say the Torah does not have one true interpretation, that the Torah has 70 faces.

We know that modern science, too, has had to learn to live with contradiction. After all, how can light be both a particle and a wave at the same time? It is impossible. We also know that scientific laws are probabilities, that the very act of observing something changes it - the Van Heisen Principle - which means that we can never really know anything absolutely. We also have the theory of chaos, which says there are many ways to arrive at the same destination. The laws of subatomic physics are counterintuitive. They do not seem to make any sense, but they work. Modern science, as opposed to the science of the early part of this century, must also learn to live with ambiguity and contradictions.

We, too, have to live with ambiguity and contradiction. One of the great dangers facing Orthodox Judaism in America today is that many are trying in the face of tradition to make a homogenous type of Judaism which has only one viewpoint and one correct way of looking at a text and at life. From the commentaries, we know this is not so. Many contradictory interpretations of the text are given by great rabbis; the tradition says that all are right. Many contradictory views of what the Halacha should be in any given situation are numerous. Even in the Shulchan Orech, we have Yaish Omreem, which means another opinion exists in this matter. Judaism has never been monolithic. It never tried to impose either an intellectual or Halachic uniformity on everyone. No one would ever say that the Sephardic Jews are not Halachic, even though they differ in many of their rulings from the Ashkenazic Jews. Within Ashkenazic Jewry there are many different forms of even prayer. There were different Nusachs. Of course, it is true we are limited to the amount of contradiction we can live with, just like in science the contradictions must be able to be proved experimentally. Science does not believe in contradiction for contradiction's sake, and we certainly do not believe that the more contradictory your life is, the better Jew you are. We do believe, however, that different views and opinions occur using the Halachic method, and some of them do contradict each other. However, you are a good Jew if you live morally and fulfill all the mitzvahs between G-d and man, and man and man based on your best reading of the sources.

This reading could be contradictory, however. You may choose one rabbi in one area and another rabbi in another area. Even the Talmud says that we follow Schmu'el in civil matters and Rav in ritual matters. No rabbi is followed always.

In the Torah portion Yisro, in which the giving of the Ten Commandments is recounted, we have spelled out for us many of these concepts. We learn that before the Jewish people heard the Ten Commandments, Moshe brought them the words of G-d that they should observe His covenant. The people all answered and said together, "All which G-d spoke we will do." Moshe then, after three days of preparation, led the people from the camp, and to the foot of the mountain where they stood. All Mount Sinai was smoking like the smoke of a furnace. Moshe went up to the mountain. The people were told to stay below. They then received the Ten Commandments. Afterwards, the people became afraid and told Moshe to receive the rest of the Torah lest they would die. It says, "And the people stood from a distance and Moshe approached the thick darkness where G-d was." Life is not easy. This thick darkness symbolizes the fact that our minds are not the end all and be all of the world. The intellectual assumption of people throughout all the ages has been that our minds can grasp everything; that we can, with concerted intellectual effort, know everything and construct consistent intellectual edifices to explain everything; and, therefore, we can then arrange all aspects of our life so that they will be harmonious. This assumption is false. Some things only G-d can understand. We do not share G-d's mind, just as we do not share His body. G-d has given us great intellectual power, but not total intellectual power. All we share with G-d is a common morality. G-d has said that He is bound by the same rules of morality as we, even though that is hard to see many times in our daily lives. We believe, though, that we will, eventually, in the times of the Mashiach.

Later on in the Torah portion Mishpatim, we learn how G-d was not satisfied with us until we would say that we would act and understand. In the Torah portion Yisro, we said we would act, but we also have to understand, understand as much as we can. We have to act morally and act correctly, whether we understand the importance of the mitzvahs or not. We have to act uprightly and not harm anyone, but we should constantly also try to understand; understanding will make us even act better.

People become Orthodox Jews because they realize that the lifestyle is so compelling and beautiful. It spiritually elevates them. Orthodoxy enriches their family relationships, and although it does have a great amount of intellectual consistency, we never claimed it was totally consistent. Questions always remain. Even in the Talmud, many discussions end with the word Teiku, which means that we will only know the answers to these questions when Elijah will come heralding the Messiah. People do not become traditional Jews because the tradition is intellectually consistent; they become traditional Jews because Orthodoxy represents life with all its ambiguities and its questions. Traditional Judaism does not have the answer to all the questions. We make a mistake when we think that if we will only solve the contradictions of religious belief with modern science, we will win over the hearts and minds of the next generation. Modern science is no longer a threat to Judaism. It has even more ambiguities than Judaism. The only way we are going to win over the minds and hearts of the younger generation is if we show them that Judaism uplifts their lives, that Judaism is not only satisfying intellectually, morally, and emotionally, but also spiritually.

The Jewish people, when they received the Ten Commandments, saw the thunder and heard the lightning. How can you see the thunder? They saw the thunder in their mind's eye, and they heard flashes of lightning also in their mind's eye. The thunder affected their emotions; the lightning affected the ideas of their minds. Notice, the thunder is first. Intellectual consistency is not as important as touching the hearts and souls of a human being. The darkness, the ambiguity, the contradictions of life will always be there. However, armed with Judaism, we will be able to overcome them, especially by studying the Torah that Moshe brought down through the darkness to us. May we all become better Jews, despite the ambiguities and contradictions of life, by not denying them, but by admitting them and overcoming them by a lifestyle based on morality, compassion, and caring so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

TORAH, HALF SHEKEL, HOLINESS &

APPEARANCE

Today we took out two Torahs because today is Parshas Shekolim. Almost always Parshas Shekolim falls on the Torah portion, Mishpatim, which opens with the words, "And these are the laws that you should place before them." Rashi explains that the words "before them" means that you should present them before them as a set table. You should present them to the Jewish people so they can understand them with all the reasons and explanations. The laws of the Torah should be presented to the Jewish people like a set table. That's what the word Shulchan Orech means: a set table. In fact, the commentaries pick up this theme and the added commentary to the Shulchan Orech, which made the Shulchan Orech compatible with Ashkenazic customs, is called the Mapah, or the tablecloth. Other commentaries are called the golden candlesticks, etc. What we are supposed to do is make the Torah understandable to people. We are not supposed to make it an esoteric thing.

I remember a few years ago we had Adin Steinsaltz come speak to us as a scholar-in-residence. After his series of four lectures, someone came to me and said, "You know, I don't think Adin Steinsaltz is a great scholar." I asked why, and he said, "Because I understand everything he said. He went logically from point to point, and I did not have any trouble understanding him." A few months later, another speaker came to the JCC. When you went to this speaker, you needed to have an unabridged Webster's Dictionary; he used so many big words and his arguments seemed so disjointed. Afterwards, this person came to me and said, "Now that is a real scholar. I could not understand anything he said." This is not the way Judaism should be presented. It should be presented in understandable terms.

One of the reasons I believe the rabbis saw fit to have Parshas Shekolim fall during the time we read the Torah portion Mishpatim is because what Shekolim talks about is that everyone needs to have a part in the Torah. Everyone has a part in the Jewish people, just like we learn in the Torah portion, Mishpatim, when it says, "Anshei Kodesh Tiyu Li - holy people you should be to Me." Everyone of us can be holy. None of us can be left out. That's why holiness is connected with the basic drives of a human being: food, sex, power. That's what many psychologists say are the basic drives of human beings, and what we know now, the drive for meaning.

The Jewish people were commanded every year to give half a shekel to the Temple, to be used to buy the communal sacrifices offered twice a day on behalf of the Jewish people. The Jewish people, Knesset Israel, was greater than the sum of its parts. Each of us was to be part of this Jewish people on an equal basis. Everyone was to give half a shekel to symbolize that we were one people with one faith worshipping at one Temple in one land. Whatever was not used during that year from this fund was used to refurbish and restore the Temple, because it was on Pesach that the great throngs came up to the Temple. A Roman emperor once demanded that the kidneys of the lambs be counted, which were slaughtered for the Korban Pesach. The total was 600,000 kidneys. If there were ten people per seder, that's three million people, if you count two kidneys per lamb, and if you count one kidney per lamb, it is six million people. The call for the money was made by 1 Adar, and all of it was to be collected by

25 Adar, so the Temple could be in tip top shape by 15 Nisan, when Passover started. The rabbis all ask the question, though: Why was only half a shekel given? They give three basic answers.

The first answer was because all of us need each other to amount to anything. We have to be able to communicate with each other directly and to make ourselves understood so we can form a greater whole. Each of us unaided cannot accomplish much, but if we are bonded together in a family and a community and a nation, we can accomplish great things. This binding together creates the Jewish people.

The second reason they give is because the women did not participate in the sin of the golden calf. Women know the difference between appearance and reality much better than men. Women know that a little powder and paint makes a gal what she ain't. Men are more susceptible to fantasies and to the idea of saving face. Women know the way you prepare something is very important, the way you present it, because preparation and presentation can have a profound impact, especially on men. Therefore, women are usually much more particular about how food is served, about personal dress, etc.; women know the distinction between reality and appearance. Men many times forget it. You have never seen a woman go into a bar and say, "Drinks for everyone." You can tell the difference between a women's organization and a men's organization. In a men's organization, you have many officers with a chief eagle and second eagle, etc. Women's organizations, on the other hand, have a hard time even getting officers. The dynamics are different. Men like to be needed, to feel important. The same is true in marriage. Women like to feel secure emotionally, financially, sexually, etc. Men like to be made to feel important. That's why the dumb blonde gets her man many times because she makes the man feel important. She needs him so much. The men worshipped the golden calf because men like to worship the work of their own hands, but they also felt they needed a leader, and Moshe was gone. When the battle flag falls, all the men run away, although the reality remained the same. It appeared, though, they were losing. Leadership seemed to be lacking, although Aaron was there. The appearance seemed devastating. The men panicked. The women had a steadier faith. Men cannot stand to lose face. In the olden days, they would even kill each other because of it with duels, etc. To women, it is not as important. Appearance is the function of a mirror. To men, many times appearance became reality.

The third reason the rabbis answer why only half a shekel was given is because we are only half responsible. G-d is half responsible because He created the Yetzer Hora, the evil inclination. Many times, even when we do good things, we do them in bad ways. As Dr. Menachem Kellner pointed out, he knew communism would fail because its meanings were so much out of harmony with its goal. Its goal was from each according to his ability and to each according to his need. They believed in harmony and brotherhood and peace, but they killed 20-40 million people trying to achieve this goal. There is something very wrong between their ends and their means. It was too big a gap. It had to fail. Many times, we find that people have wonderful goals, but they use such terrible means to achieve them.

I remember when I was in college, someone wanted me to sign a petition saying I was a pacifist. I said I could not do it because I was not a pacifist. He said, "If you don't do it,

I'll beat you up." Something was wrong with his means and his ends. So many times, it has happened that people come to me with good causes, but the means they are going to employ to attain their goals are so terrible that it takes all my self-control not to throw them out of my office. We know this happens even to religious people. We have to employ only proper means to achieve good goals. To have a good community, we have to have people who are able to speak directly and understandably to all of us, people who are willing to attach themselves to their community and give of their effort and time, and people who know the difference between appearance and reality; who understand human nature; who do not fly off the handle or panic because of momentary upsets; or their fantasies have been punctured, even though the reality remains the same. We also need people who can talk nicely to others, who are not only organized and are able to express themselves correctly, but who do not try to take immoral shortcuts to achieve moral goals. This is what Parshas Shekolim teaches us, and that's why it occurs most of the time in the Torah portion Mishpatim. To build a good community, we need people who are well organized, speak directly, are totally devoted to the community, know the difference between reality and fantasy, and are willing to work with everybody in a moral fashion. Let's all hope we will have these people always.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a person who went on after his 120 years, unfortunately not to heaven. He was met by one of the devils and told he could choose a place to stay, but once he left he could not go back. In the first room, everyone was standing knee deep in mud. He said, "That's not for me." In the next room, everyone was standing in cow manure. He said, "This is terrible. I don't want this." In the next room, everyone was standing in murky water. He said, "Okay, I'll take this." After a few minutes, he heard a voice say, "Rest period over. Everybody back on their heads." We need people who know how to evaluate every situation properly, who do not make snap judgments, and who are be totally devoted to the community. Let us all hope we will have these people so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SYNAGOGUES, HOLINESS, REFINEMENT, MERCY & GOOD DEEDS

What do we mean when we say that someone should be a mensch? We all know that in western culture many men aspire to be called macho, even though macho connotes aggressiveness and recklessness as well as strength. The Jewish view of what a mensch is the exact opposite of macho. The rabbis say that the Hebrew word Gevir which means man, teaches us what it is to be a mensch. The three letters of the word Gevir, are Gimel, Beis, and Raysh. The Gimel stands for Gimelas Chasodim, for a person who is willing to do personal deeds of kindness. Beis stands for a refined individual, and the Raysh stands for a person who has Rachmones -- mercy and compassion. To be a mensch, one needs all these three qualities. One must be willing to do deeds of kindness, to have refinement, and to have Rachmones.

When studying the construction of the Tabernacle, we learn how these three qualities had to also be associated with the Tabernacle if it was truly to serve as a holy place. We know today that our synagogues are an extension of the Tabernacle and Temple, and that they, too, must have these three qualities if they are to be considered a holy place.

We learn in the Torah portion, Terumah, and in the Torah portion, Vayakhel, how the Tabernacle had to have a middle bar which surrounded the walls of the Tabernacle and allowed it to stand firm. We learn, according to the Targum, Yonasan, that this bar was the same bar as held together the tent of Abraham. Abraham was known for his Gemilas Chasodim, for his deeds of personal kindness. He even, in the Torah portion, Vayaira, told G-d to wait a minute - when he was talking to G-d - so he could help some poor Arabs who did not even have shoes on their feet.

The basis of a synagogue must be the doing of deeds of kindness. A synagogue is not a country club. A synagogue, to be holy, has to be open to everyone. We do not ban people because they do not smell right, because they are poor and cannot afford much, or because they do not have a good education or do not speak English well. A synagogue is open to everyone, and everybody should be able to belong, even if they are unable to pay anything or very little. The synagogue also must display Rachmones, compassion and sensitivity. It cannot disregard the individual needs of its members who sometimes go through all sorts of crises, whether it be family problems, death, bankruptcy, mental breakdowns, etc. A synagogue must show compassion to all its members.

We learn how King David was not allowed to build the Temple, that only his son, Shlomo, was allowed to build it. Two reasons are given for this. The first is because David had blood on his hands. He had fought many wars; of course, they were defensive wars, but, G-d did not feel that he was fit to build the Temple. It could be argued that David only did this to save the Jewish people, so why should he be barred from building the Temple?

There is, however, a second reason. David had collected money to build the Temple. After he collected almost the total sum required, a famine struck. Everyone asked

David to release the money so food could be bought for the people. David refused, and because he refused, he was not allowed to build the Temple. The people's needs are much more important than bricks and stones. The shul must display Rachmones. In fact, we learn that to free captives, the shul is allowed to sell its Sefer Torah.

The third element that must always be displayed in a synagogue is refinement, and this applies to individuals, too. There are many good people who, unfortunately, are coarse. There are many who do good deeds, but who do not have sympathy and compassion. They are like the proverbial cow who gives milk in great quantities, and then kicks over the full bucket. There are people who go out of their way to help people, and then say, "It's about time you got a job," or make some other hurtful comment that makes the person who received the aid cringe. They do good deeds, but they have no Rachmones. There are other people who do good deeds and have sympathy, but they are coarse. They always make smutty remarks filled with sexual innuendos, which make people feel uncomfortable. They lack a certain refinement.

In the Tabernacle, there were three objects which contained a Zair, a crown, around them: the ark, and the ark cover resting right inside that crown; the table, symbolizing the food we eat and the material prosperity of the Jewish people; and the incense altar, symbolizing the pure worship of the Jewish people. These three objects correspond to the three characteristics the rabbis tell us we need to be a refined individual so we can approach G-d. First, our table must be pure, which is the purpose of kosher laws --to make us into a refined people. We cannot deal with the material world in a gross way, always flaunting our material possessions, especially the food we eat. Second, our speech should be refined. The ark cover was known as the Mishkavay Hashem, the couch of G-d. Here G-d spoke to Moshe. We should not use smutty language. We should not make people uncomfortable by insulting remarks or sexual innuendos or by always seeking confrontation. I do not understand how some of our organizations can have on their program a comedian who makes all sorts of smutty comments. These comments are totally inappropriate. I have even had to walk out of several affairs lately. It is all coarse, like some teenagers that have just learned that the same organs that produce filth produce life; they are very uncomfortable with this, and must make all sorts of comments.

Finally, to be a refined person, a person cannot worship idols. What are idols? The worship of oneself. So many people worship their own talents, their own egos, and their own accomplishments. They are complete bores. I am reminded of what George Bernard Shaw once said when talking to someone next to him at a dinner party. He said, "Between you and me, we know everything. You know everything except one thing," said Shaw. The fellow said, "What is that?" and Shaw replied, "That you are a bore."

The Tabernacle was constructed in such a way as to remind us that we must all act like menschen in it if the Tabernacle is to be a holy place. We must all be what the word, Gevir, teaches us to be. We must be willing to do deeds of kindness, which means that we have to give of our means to our houses of worship, but that is not all.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a chicken and a pig walking down the road.

Suddenly, the pig spied a restaurant which had a big neon light saying "Bacon and eggs." The pig started to run away. The chicken said, "Why are you running away?" The pig replied, "From you they only want a donation, but from me they want a commitment." A synagogue to be a holy place, requires a commitment. Of course, it requires donations, but it requires each of its members to be menschen.

Soon, we will be celebrating Purim. Interestingly, Achashverosh was a man who did do Gemilas Chasodim because he eventually wanted to repay Mordechai for saving his life. Also, he was merciful in that he allowed the Jewish people to defend themselves. However, he was a coarse individual. Haman was a refined individual, but had no mercy, no Rachmones, and did not believe in doing any good deeds, unless they would benefit him. Mordechai and Esther were true menschen. Mordechai displayed this by taking care of Esther, thereby showing his penchant for doing Gemilas Chasodim. He was a refined individual, and he was filled with mercy. Even the Megillah states that he was only acceptable to a majority of the Jewish people, but he treated them all well, and he treated all the peoples of the Persian Empire well. Esther was renown for her refined character. She could have hidden her identity forever and escaped the Jewish fate, but she had Rachmones, mercy, on her brethren, and she was always known for doing deeds of kindness. Being a mensch has always assured Jewish survival, and being a mensch has always made our synagogues holy.

Let us all hope and pray that our synagogues will be such places, filled with only menschen, with refined people, with people who have Rachmones, and with people filled with Gemilas Chasodim. May our synagogue, by becoming such a place, enhance the spiritual life of all its members and all those who come into contact with it so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

MIXED EMOTIONS, JUDAISM, GUILT & CONTRADICTION

One of the most difficult things to deal with in life is mixed emotions. None of us ever feel one emotion entirely in our lives. Our emotions are always mixed. This brings with it great guilt. Why on my marriage day am I also sad and happy? How can I both love and hate my spouse? How can I both love and hate myself and my children? How can I love and hate my parents? People go to great lengths to pretend that they only love. Judaism teaches us that we must learn to live with emotional contradiction just as we must learn to live with intellectual contradiction, with the fact that our minds cannot know everything. Therefore, even in the scientific realm, especially in subatomic physics, we are forced to live with logically impossible concepts. For example, how can light be both a particle and a wave?

This applies to religion as well. We cannot understand how a good G-d permits suffering and death. We cannot understand evil. We have faith that we will understand these things at the end of time, but now we cannot. Judaism postulates that we have to learn how to live with intellectual contradiction. In fact, the very word, question, in Hebrew, Sheailah, has the word G-d in it. The word G-d is surrounded by a Shin, which stands for Shalom, peace; Sinah, hatred; Shteefus, which means addiction, greediness; and Sholem, wholeness. The last letter Hay can stand for He'ora, which means light, and Ha'afala, which means darkness. To have a relationship with G-d, we do not stifle questions; we encourage them. Anybody who thinks they know all the answers is either a faker, a fool, or a person who believes in magic and superstition. We do not have all the answers, but we have enough of the answers to allow us to attach ourselves to G-d; and we have faith that at the end of days, we will see the justice of His ways and obtain the proper answers.

In the emotional realm also, we live with contradiction. Judaism recognizes this. We are commanded to honor and to respect our parents, but not to love them because at times, especially in the teenage years, to love our parents is almost impossible: that is the time a person is fashioning his/her identity. This happens even later in life, too. The Shulchan Orech even says that parents cannot demand that a child marry a certain person or enter a certain profession. Even the word Ahava, love, speaks about the difficulty in loving anyone. The middle of the word is Hav, which means to give. If you love someone, you want to give to them, to help them, to be with them. However, the first letter, Aleph, of Ahava also stands for Aeva, which means hatred, or Oyeiv, which means enemy; the last letter again means to lighten or darken, while the Aleph also means to desire, to want.

In our relationships with each other, we always have mixed emotions. It is our job to make sure that the correct emotion is supreme, not to deny that we have other emotions. In fact, we even symbolize that at the wedding when we break a glass at the end. We all know that this stands for the sadness we feel because the Temple is still destroyed, that people are still suffering in the world, and that sadness exists even in the midst of our joy. There is great joy because we are now embarking on an adult enterprise, but there is also sadness because we are leaving our youth behind. People cry at weddings, not just because they are happy, but because all their relationships now have to change. You are not just adding a new relationship. The wife should be number one to the husband, and the husband should be number one to the wife. Parents, siblings, friends are no longer number one. They may now be two, three, four, five depending on the number of children the couple has. All relationships are changing.

The same is true at a funeral. At a funeral, everyone is overcome by sadness, and we say Baruch Dayan Emes, blessed be the true judge, but we also know that there are mixed emotions there, too. If a person inherits property and position, he or she is to say Shecheyanu or Hatov V'Hanaitiv. Why should anybody say Shecheyanu at a funeral? The answer is that especially in the old days, a person could not amount to anything until his father died. If you were a prince, you could not become a king until your father died. The same was true in business. You could not develop yourself to the utmost until your father died. Judaism recognized this, and did not want people to feel guilty because of it. Of course, the major emotion is terrible, overriding grief; yet, some feeling of relief or joy appears because now you are able to do your own thing, wield power, manage property, etc. This is one of the reasons why people always complain about doctors or nursing homes after a person dies. They want the world to know that they really wanted their relative to live, and it was because of the neglect of the doctors or nursing home that they died. They do not want anybody to suspect they were worried about the inheritance, or that visiting their relative was becoming difficult, etc.

An illustration of mixed emotions can be found when Yisro comes to join the Jewish people after the destruction of the Egyptian army at the Red Sea and the war of Amalek. It says Vayeechad Yisro, which can either mean that Yisro rejoiced, or he shuddered. The rabbis say he rejoiced over the Jewish people's salvation, at their escaping from slavery. On the other hand, he had been an advisor to Pharaoh. The rabbis say that when Pharaoh asked his three advisors whether they agreed with his plan to throw all the Jewish boys in the river, Yisro objected, resigned, and left Egypt. Job kept quiet. He did not agree or disagree. Bilam enthusiastically agreed. Yisro felt close to the Egyptian people, and hated to see them suffer, though he knew that Pharaoh and his army deserved it. He predominantly felt joy over the Jewish people's salvation, but he shuddered at the Egyptian people's destruction. Many times in life, we have mixed emotions.

Life is filled with mixed emotions. We all must learn how to live with contradictions. Some people feel so guilty that they literally go insane. Judaism teaches us that we should not feel guilty about having mixed emotions if we act appropriately.

We learn in the Torah portion Tetzaveh that Moshe was commanded to appoint Aaron to be the high priest, and to appoint his children to be the Kohanim, the priests of Israel. The rabbis say that Moshe did not like this. He wanted his children to have these positions. He loved his brother and admired him, but had mixed emotions about appointing him. This Torah portion, by the way, is the only Torah portion after Moshe's birth in which his name is not mentioned. One of the explanations for this is because Moshe really did not want to appoint his brother. He wanted G-d to do it directly. He did it, however, though he had mixed emotions. Moshe Rabbeinu throughout his career suffered from mixed emotions. He loved the Jewish people, yet castigated them and called them stiff necked. In fact, another interpretation of why Moshe's name is not mentioned in Tetzaveh is because he said to G-d - when G-d told him that He would wipe out the Jewish people and start a new people from him - "G-d, if you do this, wipe me out from Your book." G-d did not destroy the Jewish people, but He did wipe out Moshe's name from one portion of the Torah.

Mixed emotions are nothing bad if we do not act on our negative emotions, but only on our positive emotions. Many marriages flounder because couples cannot deal with mixed emotions. A man will take his wife out for dinner for her birthday and shower her with gifts, but then say, "You know, I am really missing a lot of work by doing this." The wife will feel like throwing

the food in his face, but what he said was true. He should not have said it, but his body language probably would have said it anyway. We have to understand that we always have mixed emotions. There is nothing wrong with this. We just cannot act on our negative emotions.

That's one of the points of the story of Purim. Achashverosh always acted on his negative emotions. He got rid of Vashti. He listened to Haman. He was a man who could not evaluate correctly his emotions. He could not appropriately determine which ones to discard and which ones to keep. The Torah wants us to act on our positive emotions. It does not say that if we are pious Jews, we are not going to have mixed emotions. Of course, we are. We are going to love and to hate at the same time, but so what? It is not having mixed emotions that is bad; acting on negative emotions is bad. Having negative feelings in different situations probably prevents us from overreacting in any one direction, but it does not mean we should act on them. If we see that our children are doing something they should not be doing, the negative emotions spur us to correct them; although we should always do it with love and never with hate. We must all learn to live with contradictions, both in the intellectual sphere and in the emotional sphere. Let us not be surprised by the fact that we have contradictory emotions, but let us act only with the appropriate emotions in each situation. Let us all hope we will do so, so we will have good families and a good community so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

MAINTAINING CONTACT, PASSIONATE

BELIEFS & UNDERSTANDING

How are we to deal with people who have wronged us? How should we interact with people who we know are violating established norms, who are engaged in moral or criminal behavior. Especially how should we deal with people who have, because of different circumstances, turned their backs on basic Jewish values like family, G-d, the Jewish people, etc.

In the Torah portion Ki Sissa, we learn how after the Jewish people sinned by worshipping the golden calf, Moshe went down from the mountain, and saw the people reveling before it. When he saw this, he threw the tablets of the Ten Commandments on the ground, smashing them into many pieces. After he punished the offenders, G-d told him to hew out two more tablets, and to ascend Mount Sinai. Before G-d inscribed the Ten Commandments again on the tablets, G-d taught Moshe a prayer. In fact, the Gemora in Rosh Hashonna says that G-d, as it were, when He taught Moshe this prayer, wrapped Himself in a tallit like one who leads a congregation in prayer wears, and said, "Whenever Israel sins, let them perform before me this order of prayer, and I shall forgive them." This is the famous prayer that we say over and over again on Yom Kippur, and that we say especially in the Selichot prayer before Rosh Hashonna: "Hashem, Hashem, G-d, compassionate and gracious..."

The rabbis aver that the reason we say Hashem Hashem twice is to teach us that G-d is with us before we sin, and G-d is with us even after we sin. We can still feel G-d's presence after we have sinned, so we can return. Perhaps that's why the Gemorah says that G-d wrapped Himself in a tallis to tell us that we should wrap ourselves in as many mitzvahs as we can after we have sinned, and not feel that we have forfeited our rights to do mitzvahs because we have sinned.

The Baal Shem Tov stressed the fact that G-d is with us everywhere, even after we have sinned. The Vilna Gaon took exception to this comment of the Baal Shem Tov, and thought it bordered on heresy because the Baal Shem Tov continued by saying that a person cannot even lift up his little finger without G-d being with him. To the Vilna Gaon, this seemed to imply that the Baal Shem was making G-d an accomplice to a person's crimes. The Vilna Gaon probably felt this way because of the Chassidic belief that we had to redeem the sparks, which means that in everything lies a spark of divinity. Each of us has a soul, and in everything animate or inanimate is a spark of divinity. This belief stresses that we have to redeem these sparks. However, this idea, if carried too far, and can lead to terrible excesses as some groups did, especially the Frankists. They believed that we had to redeem the sparks even from evil, and they purposely performed evil acts, like incest, to redeem the sparks. This is a great sin. The Communists did this in our own day when they killed millions of people in order to better, so they said, this world. They did evil things to bring redemption to the world. They claimed they were just removing the husk so that the light of redemption could be seen. The Baal Shem Tov, though, did not mean that we should do evil things so we could redeem the sparks. He was talking about something completely different. He was saying that G-d was an understanding G-d, that no one could ever be so far cut off from G-d that he could never return. G-d may not approve of what we have done, but He will never cut off His relationship with us to prevent our return.

The question is often asked, why is it that Moshe was chosen to be the leader of the Jewish people? After all, he never spent a day of his life in slavery; he did not know Hebrew; he intermarried, even agreeing, according to the Medrash, to raise his first son as a pagan.

The rabbis tell us that Moshe was a shepherd. In other words, Moshe understood the lowest of the law. A shepherd in Jewish law was considered the lowest of the low, because he usually grazed his sheep on other people's property, and because as a shepherd, he lived a lonely existence. He was, therefore, suspected of buggery. Moshe, of course, did none of these things, but he understood the lot of the shepherd. When Moshe was first chosen to be the leader of the Jewish people, the Torah says, "And he led the sheep after the desert, and he came to the mountain of G-d, to Chorev." The word Acher, or after, is superfluous. "And he led the sheep after Bamidbar," can mean either "the desert" or it can mean "as a leader." The word sheep in Hebrew, Tzom, can also stand for sheep, and for the three types of people a leader has to lead: tzadikim, righteous people; anoshim, ordinary people; and nophlim, sinners. Moshe has to view each of these types of people sympathetically, putting himself in their shoes. He had to be Acher, another person, looking at their situation from their vantage point and not his vantage point. Moshe had to understand where they were coming from. This he could do. This was his greatness. However, just because he understood the people and their foibles did not mean that he would agree with their commission of these foibles, or even condone them. It meant, though, that he understood them, and the people knew that he understood them. He empathized with them. The Torah goes on to say that an Angel of G-d appeared to him in a blazing fire in the midst of a bush. The bush burned with fire, yet was not consumed. Moshe not only understood the people, but he had passionate beliefs, and those beliefs could never be consumed. His job was to lift the people up, and bring them close to his standards.

Moshe Rabbeinu was chosen to be the leader of the people because he had these two qualities. He had passionate beliefs, which he would not compromise, and he understood where the people were and never broke off contact with them, so he could raise them. This is how G-d deals with us all. He is with us in our troubles, even those we have brought on ourselves. We all know that the Medrash teaches us that after the Temple was destroyed and we were sent into exile, G-d's Shechina went into exile, too. Even though we were exiled because of our sins, G-d was with us. G-d is with us before we sin, and G-d is with us after we sin. He does not cause us to sin, and He is not our accomplice in sin. We do that on our own. He never breaks off communicating with us; He never breaks off His relationship with us. He is always there helping us to return.

We, too, should never break off contact with those who have wronged us. We should not, though, ever violate our standards by committing an immoral or criminal act to win them back. We then would, in effect, be lowering ourselves to their level instead of bringing them up to the proper level. We should welcome contact with them, if it does not mean compromising our standards. Shunning people, institutions, movements, or nations are not the ways to go. G-d taught us that when He gave us the prayer Hashem Hashem, and by His choosing Moshe Rabbeinu to be our leader and highest prophet. Let us all hope and pray that we will all remember this lesson so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

BEAUTY, RACHMONES, JUDAISM &

SYNAGOGUES

Today we read the Torah portions, Vayakhel and Pekude. In the Torah portion, Pekude, we learn it is said over and over again how the Jewish people built the Mishkan as G-d had commanded Moshe. This is mentioned 18 times. The rabbis tell us that this is because it is possible to build a Mishkan, but not as G-d has commanded. We learn, interspersed among the laws of building the Mishkan, the laws of Shabbat. The rabbis ask why, and answer because the Jewish people were not allowed to build the Mishkan on Shabbat. If they would have built the Mishkan on Shabbat, even though all the pieces would have been correct architecturally, they would not have built the Mishkan according to the way G-d had commanded Moshe. It is not enough to have a perfect structure. The intangibles are much more important than the structure itself. What we cannot see and measure are much more important than the physical tabernacle. Devotion, dedication, love, and caring for each other are more important than the bricks and stones and wood.

When we read about Shabbat, it says, "Vayechulu -- and they were completed the heaven and the earth." It also says, "Vayechal -- and Moshe completed the work." However, the word, Vayechal, means completed, and not finished. The heaven and earth were finished, but were not completed until G-d created the Shabbat. A building can be complete, but it is not finished until there are services there and a warm feeling there and people getting along one with another. The important thing is not the building, not whether every brick shines and every nook and cranny is polished; the important thing is that the people have a place to express themselves to G-d in harmony. If the people are at each other's throats, or are treated as visitors, though a beautiful showpiece, this is not a house of G-d; this is a museum. A synagogue must also be open to everybody. It cannot be a place in which people who cannot afford fancy clothes or people who have low IQs are told they have no place. Everyone has a place in the synagogue.

When Moshe called for donations, he called for donations not only in monetary terms, but also in terms of volunteers. Everyone's volunteer service was accepted, not just from people with genius IQs, but even from people below average. Beauty has never been a prime Jewish value -- only a secondary value.

I am reminded of the story of the Athenian general who went over to Sparta and fought against his own city-state. He inflicted huge casualties upon his own brethren. Eventually, he was captured and brought before the Senate in Athens. The prosecutor detailed all his treachery when he went over to Sparta, and that he had caused so many casualties. After the prosecutor was through, the general stood up in his own defense. All he did was to take off his robe. He was immediately acquitted because no one so beautiful could do anything so bad. Beauty is only a secondary value in Judaism. The most important thing is to have Rachmones, love, and concern. A synagogue that is only interested in being beautiful and having beautiful members is not a synagogue; it is a country club.

We also learn how upon the golden altar in the tent of meeting, they offered incense, as G-d had commanded Moshe. The problem with this is, how? You could only create the incense in a tabernacle already dedicated, but the tabernacle had not been dedicated yet. The Ramban answered this by saying that this was a special circumstance. Just as Moshe had served as the high priest for the seven days of inauguration, even though he was not a Kohen, so he was able

to make the incense. Normally, you could not do so until you had a dedicated tabernacle. The Ramban goes on to ask, why, though, did you need incense at all? Let them have the services without the incense, and then make it after the temple was dedicated. The answer is no. The incense was essential. The altar could be dirty, the other appurtenances did not have to shine, but without the incense, the service was null and void. The rabbis say the incense was so strong it could be smelled in Jericho. Jericho is not that far from Jerusalem, probably only about 25 miles, and it is down in a valley so the wind would carry the smell. However, the point is the intangibles; what you cannot grasp is much more important than the tangible. Without the intangibles of love and care and concern no tabernacle, no temple, and no synagogue exist. If nastiness, backbiting, excessive negativism prevails, then a synagogue is not worth anything, and the services are null and void. With love and care and concern for everyone, then the services are acceptable, then they will make a sweet smell unto the Lord.

One of the spices that was used in making the incense was actually a foul-smelling spice, but it, too, had to be included because the temple represented everyone. Our love and concern must go out to even those who do not bathe so much, even those who do not have fancy clothes, even those who may be retarded. The most important thing is that there should be a good atmosphere, a sweet smell in the synagogue and house of worship.

Moshe, too, the rabbis teach us, made a mistake. We learn how after he called for all the people to come and bring their work to the tabernacle, the artisans who were building the tabernacle were overwhelmed. The people had volunteered for so many things, and had brought so many works of their own hands. Moshe then commanded that a voice go out through the camp saying, "Do not volunteer anymore." The people listened to him, and not only did they stop volunteering, they stopped giving donations. No more gold and silver came. When you refuse to accept people's volunteer work, even though it may not be professionally high caliber, they will stop giving to a synagogue. We need people to volunteer and to help and to work in the synagogue. Without this work, the synagogue is nothing more than a museum or a country club or a sterile place. A good feeling in a synagogue, even if it is not in 100% tip top shape, make it a place of G-d. I would rather worship in a hovel where people care for each other than in a beautiful place where everybody is nasty to each other. Beauty is not a prime Jewish value; it is a secondary value. Sure it is nice to have a beautiful place, but only after the intangibles are taken care of. Substance is more important than image, and substance has to do with devotion, dedication, love, and Rachmones.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a doctor who was treating three Alzheimer's patients. He asked one of them, "How much is three plus three?" The patient answered, "157." He asked the second patient, "How much is three times three?" The patient replied, "Tuesday." He then asked the third patient, "Tell me, how much is three minus three?" The patient said, "Either nine or ten." The doctor said, "Tell me, how did you come to that answer?" The man replied, "I subtracted Tuesday from 157."

So many people mean well, but they have their values inverted. They really do not know what is important. They think beauty is more important than anything else. Love, dedication, devotion, and Rachmones are primary. Let us all hope we will all realize this so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

CHAZAK, CHAZAK, V'NISCHAZAIK

Today, we finished the second book of the Bible, Sh'mot, and we all stood and said "Chazak, chazak, v'nischazaik," which means "Be strong, be strong, and may we all be strengthened." We start with the word "chazak," which is singular, and we end with "nischazaik," which is plural. We say this phrase every time we finish one of the first five books of the Bible.

It is interesting to note that every one of the first five books of the Bible ends on an incomplete note. Bereshis ends with Joseph's death. The slavery of the Jewish people is still ahead, as is the redemption from Egypt. The second book of the Bible ends with the completion of the Tabernacle and with the glory of G-d filling it. The Tabernacle was still not dedicated, and no services had been performed in it. The third book of the Bible, Vayikra, talks about tithing. The Jewish people had not even entered Israel yet, so they could not yet tithing. The fourth book of the Bible talks about inheritance in Israel, and again the Jewish people had not yet entered Israel. The fifth book of the Bible ends with Moshe's death. Moshe had a dream of entering Israel, but the dream remained unrealized.

When we say "Chazak, chazak, v'nischazaik," we are in effect saying we will be strong and do our best, even though we know we cannot finish the job. As Rabbi Tarfon said, ours is not the completion of the task, but neither are we free to desist from it. We should be trying, and we should be strong. Eventually the job will get done.

In the last Torah portion, Pikude, in the book of Sh'mot, we learned how the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle. There is a redundancy, though in the last few verses. It says, "And a cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle, and that Moshe was not able to come to the Tent of Meeting because a cloud rested on it, and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle." Why does the portion say twice that the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle? Ramban says because the portion is talking of mystical things. Cassuto says that it is because everyone was excited, and the Torah wanted to show that excitement. These answers are not completely satisfactory. The next sentence goes on to say, "And when the cloud went up from on the Tabernacle, the Jewish people traveled on their journey, and if the cloud didn't go up, they did not travel until the day the cloud went up, because the cloud of G-d was on the Tabernacle by day, and fire on it by night, before the House of Israel would journey." What do the journeys of the Jewish people have to do with the completion of the Tabernacle, and why say all the House of Israel, and not the Children of Israel?

The rabbis asked why the Jewish people needed the Tabernacle at all, and say that it was a portable Sinai. The Jewish people encountered G-d at Sinai, and they wanted to perpetuate that experience, to have a spiritual life, to continuously meet G-d. The Jewish people had met G-d before: in Egypt with the plagues, at the Red Sea, at Marah, but not continuously. They needed a continuous uplifting of their spirits. Some rabbis, Rabbi Kanotpsky especially, say that the words "the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle" are mentioned twice because the Jewish people needed a continuously spiritual uplifting experience. Judaism is meant to uplift our lives at all times. But how do we find a spiritual experience? By traveling in the right direction, constantly seeking spirituality. Our direction must be positive, unlike a few generations ago in America, when people fled the Jewish experience and had extreme inferiority complexes. They changed their names and their noses. I remember how my father suffered because he believed in the Jewish religious practice. He was scoffed and mocked by fellow intellectuals. My father was a

college graduate and an intellectual himself. They said it was impossible to be a Jew and to be a modern man. Science would not allow that. Today, we know this is not true – science backs religion. The Big Bang theory, quantum mechanics, etc., all back the religious perspective. More scientists, now, are religious than liberal arts graduates, since there is a 50-60 year lag between the sciences and the liberal arts. We must always look to enhance our spiritual life by Jewish learning.

Why were the words "House of Israel" used, as opposed to "Children of Israel?" "House of Israel" refers to all Jews, even those who have gone before us. When we try to enhance our spiritual lives, we must do so based upon the teachings of Avrohom, Yischak, and Yaakov, not based on the teachings of Indian or Buddhist gurus. Spiritual growth is based on tradition. That's why when we end a book of the Bible we say, "Chazak, chazak, v'nischazai," which means be strong, move forward. "Chazak," forward based on Jewish tradition. And then "v'nischazaik," strength, which means a good education for our children, so that they can continue the Jewish quest for closeness to G-d – so that the glory of G-d can fill the Tabernacle. That's why a Jewish education is so important. We can be strong, but unless we give our children a good education, the future is in jeopardy. We have to be strong, move in the right direction, base our spirituality on tradition, and be sure our children get a good education.

I'm reminded of a story about the Vatican. The bells at the Vatican were broken, and the only place they could be fixed was in Israel. The bells were fixed and returned to the Vatican. The Israeli ambassador went to the Pope and asked him what he thought of the bells. The Pope told him, "They're wonderful, except for one thing: every time they ring, they ring 'goyem, goyem, goyem.'" We should be proud of our heritage, and head in the right direction based on tradition. May our bells always ring "yehudim, yehudim, yehudim." May this be so, so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

GETTING CLOSE, LOVE & RESPONSIBILITY

In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we learn how G-d calls to Moshe. The sentence reads, "And He called to Moshe." We assume G-d is calling. The second part of the sentence says, "And G-d spoke to him," and we assume that the "him" is Moshe, although it does not say so. In the second sentence, it says, "Speak to the Sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'Adam, when he will sacrifice from your things.'" It is interesting to note that the word for sacrifice in Hebrew means to draw near, to come near. It does not have the connotation of just giving something away as it does in English.

We all know that to draw near to somebody, you have to be willing to give, give of your time, give of your means, give of your very being. The purpose of the sacrificial system was to draw near to G-d. The question, though, can be asked, why does it say Adam? There are four different words for man in Hebrew; there is Eesh, Gever, Enosh, and Adam. All of them have a plural but Adam has no plural.

Finally, when we learn about the sacrifices, we learn first about the cattle and then it says, "And if from the sheep will be his sacrifice." Rashi tells us that the "and" here is to tell us that Moshe was given time between the instructions concerning the cattle and the sheep to scrutinize between each parsha. Moshe was to learn how to apply these lessons to the sacrifices throughout all life. He was to understand the inner meaning. These sacrifices were not just a time bound exercise which would only exist while the Temple existed, but on the contrary, they were to teach us vital lessons on how to live throughout the ages.

When this Torah portion opens, it says, "And He called to Moshe," we know that this refers to G-d, but it also refers to everybody. We all want people to be close to us. We all need friendship, even those who seem to want to live as hermits. They just do not know how to reach out. They do not know how to call. Everybody really wants people to be close to them.

Why does it say, "And He called to Moshe?" According to the rabbis, Moshe had ten other names. One was Yered because he brought down the Ten Commandments to the people. Another was Tov because it says when his mother saw him, she saw that he was Tov. Why, though, does the Torah always refer to him by the name Moshe?

The answer the rabbis give is because it was Pharaoh's daughter who gave him that name; Pharaoh's daughter, Bithia or Basha or Bessie, in its derivative forms. She violated her father's orders and showed humanity, and, therefore, the name she gave Moshe was the name that stuck. When we call, we need this same basic humanity. We need to reach out to each other's basic humanity. Each of us needs love and caring. However, love demands responsibility. It is not just enough to want love. You also have to respond to this love by being responsible human beings. Vayikra is a soft term, "And He called to Moshe." He said, "Moshe, be close to Me. Draw near Me," but the second expression, "And G-d spoke to him," speaks about responsibilities. Speak is a harsher term, and it means that coming close to a person means you have to be there for that person, even if it means costing you money, even if it means costing you time. You cannot draw close to people without assuming responsibility. You cannot say you love your children and not be willing to do anything for them. You cannot say you love your spouse, but everything has to be 100% your way, that you do not budge one inch. If that happens, there can be no marriage. A husband sometimes has to give in to his wife, and a wife

has to sometimes give in to her husband. Love requires responsibility, doing things for each other, giving up many times your plans and your ideas so you can work together. If you are not willing to do so, then divorce is inevitable. We all know, too, that sometimes you have to let go. Sometimes, parents hold on too long to children. They do not allow them to grow up. Sometimes, it is hard to hear that you can no longer do certain things you used to do. Sometimes, you have to stop making the seder and go to your children's home for the seder. I know a shul that fell apart because the president would not step down. He was president for 15 years, so the members left and formed their own shul.

Why does it say, "And Adam?" Precisely because Adam had no plural. The original Adam was unhappy, but why should he be unhappy? The angels would give him anything he wanted, and he could talk to the angels. However, they did not need anything from him. He had nobody to whom to give. He had nobody to whom to relate. He needed to be able to get close to others so he could learn how to get close to G-d. The rabbis tell us that the paradigm for getting close to G-d is how we get close to each other, especially close to our spouses. The word Adam comes from the same word as ground. If a person only gets close to his things, he will have no relationships. The ground is dust and dirt. The word Adam also means I can be similar to G-d. I can imitate G-d, and just as G-d wants to be close to us, we should want to be close to each other.

That's why it says, "And Adam when he will become close from among you." When a person learns how to get close to other human beings, he learns how to get close to G-d. Love is wonderful. Love brings us close to others, but we can only have love if we assume responsibilities. Love is not just to fulfill our needs. G-d says, "Come, I want your love, but remember there are responsibilities." The same is true for each of us as individuals. We all need love. We all need to grow close to each other, but the only way we can make this love endure is if we assume responsibilities.

I am reminded of the story they tell about two little boys who watched as a fire engine passed by. They noticed two dalmatians sitting in the passenger seat. One little boy said, "I know why those dogs are there. They are for crowd control." The other little boy said, "That's not right." The first little boy said, "What are they there for then?" The second little boy replied, "They are there to show the fireman where the fire hydrants are." Many people feel that love is only to fulfill their own needs. Others feel that love is only for the purpose of getting children. They are both wrong. Love is to allow us to get close to each other so we can fulfill our purpose on earth. Let us all hope we will all realize this so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

PERFECTION, HUMILITY, THE RED HEIFER, & RITUAL IMPURITY

Today, we took out two Torahs, and we read in the second Torah, from Parsha Chukas, about the red heifer. The ashes of the red heifer were used to spiritually purify people who had come into contact with the dead so they could then enter the Temple. This was especially important before Pesach. Every Jew wanted to be able to come to the Temple and offer the paschal sacrifice. To do this, he or she had to be ritually pure.

The rabbis are very troubled by the whole concept of the red heifer. It looks like witchcraft. It seems to be the antithesis of what Judaism wants. In fact, it once happened that a gentile came to Rabbi Yochanan and asked him to explain this whole concept of the red heifer. He looked at him and said, "Well, you know when a person has a certain disease, they pour all sorts of incense on him and sprinkle him with different concoctions. This allows him to be cured from his disease, so, too, when afflicted with ritual impurity, we are commanded to sprinkle ourselves with this concoction of the ashes of the red heifer and water." The gentile went away satisfied. The students of Rabbi Yochanan, though, looked at him and said, "Rabbi, what kind of an answer was that? We would never be satisfied with this type of answer." Rabbi Yochanan said that they were right, and he said, "A corpse does not cause contamination, and the ashes of the red heifer do not cause purity. We do not understand these laws at all."

As Rabbi Munk writes in his book, The Call of the Torah, the essential message of the red heifer is that each of us has limited knowledge. We cannot know everything. In fact, this whole ceremony of the sprinkling of the ashes of the red heifer would look like a form of witchcraft except that we all know that the ashes of the red heifer purify the impure and make impure those who have a hand in preparing the ashes of the red heifer. In other words, it purifies the impure, and contaminates the pure.

We all know since the scientific revolution of the last 60 years that man's knowledge is limited. How can a light be both a wave and a particle? Einstein could not understand this. That's why he made his famous statement, "G-d does not play dice with the universe." It is true many things are paradoxical in the world that we just must accept, that is the way they are. Even in Halacha, many things are paradoxical. After all, how could a mother nurse her baby? We know that blood is forbidden to be eaten, and a mother's milk comes from her blood. Modern science has taught us that there are things such as black holes, which by their very nature, are unknowable. The Van Heisenberg Principle says the act of observing something changes it, so we cannot understand everything perfectly.

The whole symbolism of the red heifer is that it had to be perfect. It had to be without blemish. It had to be at the perfect age. It had to have all red hair. Even one white hair in the tail would disqualify it. There were only nine red heifers in all of history. Recently in Israel, they thought they had found another one, but it turned out to have a few white hairs on its tail. Contamination comes to the world when people think they are perfect, when people feel that they have all the answers. One of the meanings of the ceremony of the red heifer was to teach us humility, to teach us that we do not have perfect understanding. The perfect animal, so to speak, was slaughtered. No one can grasp the whole truth.

In the Talmud, we have hundreds of arguments between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel. The School of Hillel wins in almost all cases. The rabbis ask, why is it that the

Halacha is decided almost always according to the School of Hillel, and they answer in the Talmud Eruchin, the reason is because the students of the School of Hillel would study the opinions of the School of Shammai, but the students of the School of Shammai would not study the opinions of the School of Hillel. Hillel's students were polite and tolerant to Shammai's students, but Shammai's students were not tolerant and polite and respectful to Hillel's students. Hillel's students knew that they could only deepen their understanding of their own views if they studied the views of the School of Shammai. Shammai's students thought that they did not need to deepen their understanding, even of their own views, that they had perfect opinions.

That's why those who prepared the ashes of the red heifer, themselves, became impure. They became impure because many times they would become arrogant. They would think that they had the perfect truth. It is true that when people come into contact with the dead, they become depressed and say, "Why should I go on? Nothing counts anyway." I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who attended a lecture given by an astronomer who said that in 12 billion years the world was going to be destroyed. The man said, "What did you say?" The astronomer said, "In 12 billion years the sun is going to explode, and the world will be destroyed." The man said, "Thank goodness, I thought you said 12 million years."

The job of the people who prepared the ashes of the red heifer was to give a positive message to those who came into contact with the dead, to let them know that we do accomplish things to help perfect this life, and, more importantly, that there is a future life. They were to convey this message to him or to her. However, they should never become overbearing because they, themselves, do not know the full details of this perfection. The message of the red heifer is to teach that none of us is perfect, that all of our views are subject to criticism. There is no rabbi in the Talmud whose views are always determined to be the Halacha. We need to be tolerant and open to the views of others. We need to listen. We need to know that we are not perfect. The red heifer may have been perfect, but we are not. We also need to know that we can work for perfection, and that eventually it will be achieved. We need to know that if we work together, we can create a better and better world so eventually the Mashiach will come and the world will then be truly perfect.

SILENCE, VENTING, EMOTIONS & REASON

In the Torah portion Shemini we learn how on the day that Aaron was inaugurated as high priest, his oldest two sons, Nodov and Avihu, were struck down when they brought strange fire to G-d. The sentence says, "And Moshe said to Aaron, 'This is what G-d spoke saying, "With those who are nearest Me, I will be sanctified, and before the whole people I will be honored," and Aaron was silent.'" Why was Aaron silent? Why didn't Aaron say something? Aaron, because he was high priest, had to continue on with the services. However, he did not eat from the sin offerings that he brought as he was supposed to do. Moshe reprimanded him for this, and Aaron said, "If I were to eat from the sin offering today, would it be good in G-d's eyes?" And Moshe heard and it was good in his eyes. In other words, Moshe said, "Aaron, you are right. I was wrong to reprove you." Why, though, was Aaron silent when Moshe first talked to him after the death of his sons? He could have said many things. For example, "You must accept G-d's justice," or he could have said, "Why, G-d, did You punish them for one offense? Why didn't you give them another chance?" Instead, Aaron was silent.

We all know that we live with two realities, the objective reality outside and our feelings about the reality. Many times, we must moderate our feelings so that we can maintain peace with our fellow human beings. At every little slight or insult, we cannot take offense; otherwise, we could never get along with anybody. However, there is such a thing as saying the right words and meaning them. Sometimes it is better to remain silent. Aaron's feelings were very strong. How could he say anything publicly against G-d; yet how could he support G-d's actions? These were his children. Many times we cannot understand G-d's ways and we have a right to argue with G-d. After all, Abraham argued with G-d, Moshe argued with G-d. We are not called upon to tell G-d things we really do not believe or feel.

We all know that the Torah tells us that at the time of the destruction of the first Temple, Jeremiah omitted the word Gadol from the Shemoneh Esre. We know that Shemoneh Esre starts out by saying, "Blessed are You, G-d, our G-d, and G-d of our fathers, G-d of Abraham, G-d of Isaac, G-d of Jacob, the great mighty, awe inspiring G-d." Jeremiah could not call G-d the great G-d anymore because the temple was now destroyed. Still later, we learn that Daniel did not call G-d the mighty, awe-inspiring G-d because the Jewish people were suffering in the Babylonian exile. Later on, when the Jewish people went back to the land of Israel, the men of the great assembly restored these words. It is very difficult to deal with our feelings. When should we use reason, and when should we depend on our feelings? Our feelings many times can mislead us. They may be true, and they may cause us to neglect our duties as human beings. Many rabbis say that the reason that Nodov and Avihu brought strange fire was not because they were rebelling against G-d, but because they loved G-d too much. That's what Rabbi Naftali Berlin said. He said they were G-d intoxicated. That's the reason they did not want to get married and have children. All they wanted to do was love G-d. This, the rabbis say, was wrong.

In fact, there is a very famous story of a yeshiva bochur who was considered one of the best students. He would learn all the time. One day, his rosh yeshiva came to his house to learn with him. While they were learning, his wife came and said to him, "Honey, the garbage is full up. Please take it out." He looked at her and said, "It's not right for me to take out the garbage. I am studying the Torah now," at which point his teacher, the rosh yeshiva, got up and said, "Don't worry, I'll take the garbage out now."

We must know when to balance emotions with reason. Some people are so sensitive. They wear their emotions on their sleeves. The least little thing upsets them, or they overreact with too much joy and too many compliments. A person who is too sensitive will always be unhappy because nothing can be perfect. There are always going to be little comments to upset you. You have to put everything in perspective. So many divorces should not have happened, but did because of blown up incidents; so many friendships destroyed because of supposed insults. It is true that, by and large, our words should reflect our feelings, but we all know from Aaron, who pursued peace and ran after peace, you have to let things go. You cannot get up in a huff over every little thing.

This incident, however, was traumatic and Aaron, although he remained silent, could not participate in a joyful sacrificial meal, and Moshe said he was right. People, though, who display too much emotion, people who give you too many compliments, you can rest assured something is wrong. I remember when I first came to this synagogue, that there was a man who just showered me with compliments, so much so that my wife's face got red and my face got red. A few days later, he was committed to an insane asylum. His feelings, even though they were positive feelings, were out of line. It is true that we have to vent our feelings, and it is good to have friends to listen to us. Many times, we are hurt, but just talking about our hurt is enough.

Many times, we have complaints against G-d. We do not understand why He has let things happen. We have faith that at the end of days, we will know, but now we do not know. Who can explain the Holocaust? We have a right to vent our feelings if we do not act on our feelings, if we realize that we have to go on. We must balance our feelings with reason. In fact, women know that much better than men. Women know that after they vent their feelings and someone validates their feelings, they feel much better, even though they are not going to act on their feelings. They just want someone to tell them that at that particular time they are right to feel hurt or joy and resentment. They are still going to act as rational human beings and go on. They have no interest in nursing grudges, but they felt that way at the time.

I remember someone who came to me with a problem. They had been in an accident and had a wound which would heal in six weeks, but they were going on and on about the wound and possible scar. The problem was that this person had cancer, which is a much more serious problem. She never mentioned the cancer. The wound was a momentary problem. It would end quickly. The cancer was something else, but she had to vent her feelings about this wound and went on and on. Afterwards, I am sure, she put it in the correct perspective.

All of us must learn how to balance our reason and emotions. Emotions are crucial for life. Feelings are part of the language of the soul, and our words should reflect, by and large, our feelings. However, for the sake of peace, we can moderate our feelings so that we do not perpetuate or create wrongs or insults or hatred. Feelings, passion are part of life. We just have to know how to deal with them.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a boy in class who said a very naughty word. The teacher said, "Robert, where did you hear such a word?" The little boy said, "My daddy said that word." The teacher said, "Even if your daddy said that word, you shouldn't say it if you don't know what it means." The little boy said, "I know what it means. It means the car won't start." Let us all hope and pray that we will all say the right things and use the right words, but not at the expense of our deepest emotions. When it comes to G-d, we cannot fool Him. When it

comes to our fellow human beings, we should try always to deal with our feelings in such a way so we do not create hatred, or hurt, or destroy those relationships which we all need – those we truly want to maintain. May we do this so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

PAIN, SHARP WORDS & FORGIVENESS

In the Torah portion, Tazria, we learn about childbirth, and we learn about the different rules and regulations of a woman after childbirth. We also learn about circumcision. In fact, based on a verse in this Torah portion, we learn that circumcision has to be on the eighth day, and that it overrides even Shabbat. The question has been asked many times, why is it that this Torah portion is not called Eesha, woman? After all, the first most significant word in this Torah portion is the word Eesha, or woman. Instead, this Torah portion is called Tazria, which means, "when she will conceive." Also, why are these rules of childbirth stated right before we learn about leprosy? This leprosy was not the disease which we call today leprosy. It was a spiritual disease which came upon a person principally because he spoke ill about others. He gossiped and spread stories about other people. He said things he should not have said.

In the laws of childbirth, we learn how a woman had to bring a burnt offering when she came to the Tabernacle 40 days after giving birth to a boy and 80 days after a girl; and also a sin offering. The rabbis ask, why did she have to bring a sin offering? After all, having a baby is a very great mitzvah. It is the first mitzvah in the Torah, and in Judaism sex is not considered to be a concession to the flesh, or a sin. It is considered a big mitzvah.

The rabbis explain that the reason she had to bring a sin offering, and you could only bring a sin offering if you did things unwittingly, is because during the time she was pregnant and especially during childbirth, she would say things she really did not mean. They were like unwitting statements, but her pain made her say all sorts of things that she would later regret. After all, morning sickness is not pleasant, and the last few months of pregnancy for some women are so difficult because they can hardly move. Of course, the pain of childbirth is excruciating. Because of these things, she may have said all sorts of things to her husband which she did not mean, like, "I will never let you touch me again." Because she is unhappy, she will accuse him of all sorts of things, or maybe she will be terribly short with him, etc. He has to understand this, and he should forgive her for these statements, just as G-d, too, will forgive her for any statements she has made against Him during this time.

The reason the Torah portion does not start out with the word "woman" is because it is not only women who will say things when they are unhappy. We all know that in periods of great change, we say many things we do not mean because of tensions. Even in our shul, we have had many changes and people have said things that they did not mean. We should learn to forget about these words and to move on.

That's why we learn about leprosy immediately after the childbirth because it was brought on by loose talk. G-d caused this leprosy to occur, but He would remove it when the person realized that he did not have to engage in this type of loose talk. Curiously, when the Torah says that a person is totally covered with this disease, he is pure and not unclean, because obviously what he said was meant just as a joke. Everybody could see that these words were not to be taken seriously. It is when a person's words appear deeper than they are or they reveal a raw nerve that he is declared to be a leper. We know that this disease only occurred in Israel when the

Jews were at an elevated state. The Jewish relationship with G-d was a spiritual relationship, just as a marriage is a spiritual relationship predominantly, and we have to make sure that we maintain the spiritual quality of this relationship.

In fact, we learn in the Torah portion, Naso that when the Jewish people completed the Tabernacle it says, "And it was on the day that Moshe finished to erect the Tabernacle." Rashi, though, comments that the word Kalos means that the day the Tabernacle was completed, the Jewish people were like a bride entering the chupa. Why does a young couple get married under a chupa? One reason is that the couple remember that their marriage is similar to the marriage that G-d has with the Jewish people. Just as the Jewish people received the Torah when the Mount of Sinai was held over their head, so the young couple gets married with a chupa over their head.

One of the reasons given why there are different periods enumerated after a woman gives birth is because during the first seven days, she needs to make peace with herself and her new condition. There is something called post partum blues, which can be devastating. The eighth day, if she has a boy, she once again reunited, so to speak, with her family, with her new son and husband, and at the end of the fortieth day, she joins the community. The period is doubled if she had a girl because girls are important, too. She and her husband should not feel they have to immediately produce a boy. The whole relationship between a husband and wife is to maintain a spiritual level, which means that words are important, too, because words can damage spirituality. At the bris or baby naming, we bless the youngster by saying, "May he or she grow up to a life of Torah, chupa, and good deeds." Why do we say chupa in the middle? After all, a person would do good deeds before the chupa. Most people do not get married until they are in their 20's. The answer is that it is many times hard to understand about the necessity of doing good deeds until one is married. One of the reasons the rabbis teach us G-d created marriage is so we could do Chesed every day to each other. It is hard to do kindness if you are not married. You have to be there for your spouse every day. Interestingly, also, there are two words for joy in Hebrew, Simcha and Sos. Sos refers to the joy of the past. Sometimes, we say we rejoice at a bris using the word Sos because we are happy the baby was born, but we refer to a bris also as a simcha and a wedding as a simcha because we are looking to the future. Simcha means the joy we expect to get in the future because we have maintained a high spiritual level.

We read about childbirth and family responsibilities because we have to remember that to have this future, we must speak nicely to each other. We must not only love each other, but must express this love in fitting language.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman who complained to her mother, "My boyfriend is spending so much money on me. I feel bad about it. I want him to stop." Her mother replied, "Marry him."

We know that this should not be the case. We should all want to share and do things for each other throughout our married life using fitting words.

I am also reminded of a story they tell about a boy who went to Hollywood. He got a big part in a movie. He called his father and said, "Daddy, I got a part in the movies, and

I'm playing a husband just like you." His father said, "Oh, son, I am very disappointed." His son asked why. His father replied, "Because I was hoping you would get a speaking part."

Let us all hope and pray that we will all use good language. However, if we slip and do not because of pain and suffering, like a woman has to endure during her pregnancy, let us be understanding and forgive each other, even as G-d forgives. We have to remember that when we come under pressure, we say all sorts of things we really do not mean. Let us hope we will understand this, that we will be able to create peaceful communities, so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

GOOD REASONS, INSTITUTIONS & LIGHT OF DAY

This week we read the Torah portion Tazria-Metzora. We learn about leprosy. This disease is really not modern leprosy, but a disease which beset a person because of spiritual defects. The rabbis say that the disease came upon a person because he spoke Loshan Hora. Loshan Hora does not mean that you tell lies about a person, but that you tell the truth about a person when you had no need to do so. Unless a person has a need to know, there is no purpose telling others about what they have or have not done except to destroy them and mock them. The rabbis teach us that unless you are inquiring about a marriage prospect or are thinking about giving someone a job or a loan, the people you ask have no business telling you negative things about another person. In fact, we even learn that you are not supposed to talk negatively about yourself.

The story is told about the Chofetz Chaim who built his reputation by teaching us how and when we can say things about others. He once came to a town to give a lecture. He was picked up by a teamster. He asked that this teamster drive him to the hall where he was going to speak. Along the way, the teamster told the Chofetz Chaim how excited everyone was in town because that great man, the Chofetz Chaim, was coming to speak. The Chofetz Chaim said, "Well, he is not such a great man." The teamster got very excited and kicked him out of his wagon and proceeded to the lecture. The Chofetz Chaim came to the hall tired and muddy, and started to speak. The teamster was sitting in the front row and recognized his passenger. He apologized profusely. The Chofetz Chaim said, "There is no need to. A person should not even speak bad about himself." The truth of the matter is that when people run themselves down, they almost always do so to enable them to run down others more easily.

The rabbis teach us that there were three types of leprosy: a leprosy which attacked a person's person; a leprosy which attacked a person's clothing; and a leprosy which attacked a person's house. We learn in the Torah portion Metzora, how it says, "When you will come to the land of Canaan which I am giving to you as a possession, and I will put the plague of leprosy in the house of the land of your possession." This is very strange wording. It does not say that if you do such and such a bad thing, it is going to happen, but it says, when you will go to the land. When it talks about a leprosy of a person's person or his clothing, it does not say when. The Torah continues by saying, "The one to whom the house belongs will come to a Kohen, and he will tell the Kohen saying, 'Something liked a plague has appeared to me in the house,' and the Kohen shall command and they shall clear the house before the Kohen will come see the plague." The rabbis explain that a person is not a very good judge when he is personally involved, and even if a scholar, he should not say this is a plague. He should wait until an objective third party says it is a plague.

The story is told of the Taz, who was one of the greatest commentators on the Shulchan Orech, who had a complaint against his tenant. He knew he could not judge him himself, so he brought the tenant to the local rabbi, who was much inferior to the Taz in scholarship. The Taz presented his case, citing source after source. The poor, illiterate tenant could only state his case in a very simple sentence. The rabbi found in favor of the tenant. The Taz was amazed. He approached the rabbi and said, "On what source did you base your ruling?" The rabbi said, "I based it on the ruling of the Taz who wrote such and such in a similar case." The Taz had forgotten his previous ruling because he was so involved in his own case.

Human beings are composed of three elements which correspond to the tributaries of the Jordan:

a judgmental faculty; a need for relationships and love; and drive and ambition, which can lead to violence. These correspond to the River Dan, the River Shneer, and the River Chermon, which combine to form the River Jordan. Unless adequately integrated, they will just run to the Dead Sea and leave nothing behind; but if integrated correctly, they will leave green patches, fertile fields along the River Jordan.

We all know that we can try to justify everything. The Torah is telling us here, when you come into the land of Canaan, you have to be very careful because your institutions, your houses are going to be afflicted with a plague. People are going to try to rationalize all sorts of things which should not be. Therefore, the Kohen is to take everything out of the house into the light of day so everybody can see what is going on. No person can say whether the person is giving his real motives or just rationalizing unless everything is taken out of his house. Many people say they cannot give charity because they have nothing, and then we see their houses are filled with gorgeous items; or a person says he cannot participate in the community because he has no strength, and then all his sports equipment is shown. Institutions, too, can try to justify what they do by all sorts of reasons, but if everything is out in the open, then many times things are seen in a different light.

I am going to tell you a true story about what happened in Houston. One of the largest synagogues here had a rabbi and a cantor. The cantor had health problems and the cantor's wife had health problems, so some of the members of the congregation decided to buy the cantor a car. When the board heard about it, they decided either these members take back their car; or they also buy the rabbi a car; or the board was going to subtract the value of the car from the cantor's salary. Of course, many logical reasons were given, but the upshot was that the cantor quit and so did half the congregation, and many of the other half of the congregation who remained decided they would not accept any dues increases and would not give any donations to the synagogue except for their dues. The synagogue, of course, folded a few years later.

Nobody has to belong to a synagogue. In this community, nobody has to send their children to Jewish schools. Institutions have to make sure that they are not afflicted with the plague of Tzoras, leprosy. If the decisions of an institution cannot stand the scrutiny of all its members, then something is wrong with that decision. I know many times people have very good reasons, but these reasons must be able to stand the scrutiny of the whole community. How many youngsters do I know who do not have a Hebrew education because of some things which happened in the community, and how many institutions have suffered because decisions have not been corrected? We can always give good reasons, but these reasons do not comfort us. They cannot hide the fact that things just do not smell right. We all have to balance our judgmental faculty, our ambition, and our need for relationships. If we do not look at things with our heart and with our head and with our ambition, we will be in great trouble.

I am reminded of the story they tell about an airplane that was taxiing for takeoff. The pilot aborted the takeoff and went back to the gate. After an hour and a half, the plane started to taxi again. A voice came over the intercom and said, "When we were taxiing one and a half hours before on this runway, the pilot heard a strange noise. It took us an hour and a half to get a new pilot." Not all reasons are good reasons. Let us hope that all the decisions we make can stand the scrutiny of the community so that our institutions can remain strong and can never be afflicted with Tzoras.

VOLUNTEERS, ENTHUSIASM, OPPOSITION & FRIENDSHIP

Why does it so often happen that some of the hardest workers for a synagogue or for other charitable organizations will be suddenly turned off, and will no longer have anything to do with the institution for which they have worked so hard? Good people who seem to be so totally dedicated and devoted to these organizations will one day stop showing up and will have nothing to do with these organization ever again. We all know that when working for a charitable organization, one is subject to abuse. It is well known that people will say and do things when they work for a synagogue or church or other volunteer organization that they would never do in their own business, or with their employer, or with their closest friends. The reason is because if they did, they could lose their business or their job. They could forfeit any hope of getting a loan if they talked that way to a banker. Their employees would quit, or they would be fired if they worked for somebody else. They have to keep their ego in check, and make sure they relate in a positive and not a confrontational way.

However, when one works for a volunteer organization, what is he going to lose? Is he going to lose his house or his family or his closest friends? He can afford to let his ego hang out. He can say and do things he normally would not do. He can act like a big man, so to speak, and damn the consequences.

This attitude is evident especially among people whose only motivation is the Kovod they are going to get. They are not really interested in the total good of the organization, but only in wielding power and obtaining honors. This sets up a situation where they feel that it is either my way or no way. If I do not get my way, I quit. What's worse, is that many times they demonize those who disagree with them. They feel that they cannot be friends with people who either ideologically or policy-wise disagree with them. They feel that those people who disagree with them are obviously nincompoops, and not only are they nincompoops, but their wives are stupid, their children are unruly, and their dog stinks. They do not understand that you can disagree with a person and still be friends. Many of these people have no patience with process. They feel that since they are right – and they are right because they know they are right – they can take the law into their own hands, so to speak. They can do what they want and forget about obtaining a consensus or a board decision or the agreement of an executive board. Unfortunately, when they do not get their way, they personally attack others, and sometimes the people they have attacked become so hurt that they quit all their activities in a synagogue. So many times you lose two people: you lose the person who has been attacked, and you lose the attacker because he could not get his way.

One must have enthusiasm when working for an organization. It is very important to come up with good ideas, but we all have to sell these ideas. Sometimes it takes years. You have to plant seeds, and eventually they will sprout. However, it is important to bring the people along with you. You just cannot give orders or even do the work yourself, even if you are right, and expect the people to follow you. It is like raising teenage children. You know what is good for them, and you can make all sorts of arrangements for them, but if you have not consulted them, they are going to refuse to go along. There are going to be some very big fights. You cannot trample on a person's sense of independence and self-esteem, even if as in the case of teenagers, only fledgling independence is asserting itself. Sometimes, you will have to force teenagers to do things that they may not want to do even if they are consulted. Anyway, at 18, they will do what they want, and you have little control.

The Torah reveals many situations where a passionate enthusiasm can be misdirected, where confrontational and adversarial relationships result from one person being unable to consider another person's ideas. In the Torah portion, Shemini, we learn how the two eldest sons of Aaron even confronted G-d and were struck down when they offered strange fire to G-d on the very day that Aaron was inaugurated as high priest. It says, "And they offered before G-d a strange fire which He did not command them, and a fire went out from before G-d and consumed them." They felt they were right and took the law into their own hands.

The rabbis teach us that fire is a very important tool for mankind. Without fire, we could not fulfill our role of being G-d's partner in creation. Therefore, when the Sabbath concludes, we make Havdolah. We use a multi-wicked candle at Havdolah to remember the fact that G-d gave us the gift of fire when He expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden on the first Saturday night after creation. This fire was to enable us to conquer the physical world. We need fire to be man the creator, to subdue the world, and to rule over it.

However, fire is a two-edged sword. It can uplift us, and it can destroy us. Uncontrolled fire can destroy cities. Without fire, we cannot build, but unless we control the fire, it will destroy everything, including us. This also applies to the spiritual fire that we have been granted.

What was the strange fire that Nadav and Avihu brought? Some rabbis say this fire resulted from their heartfelt comments: "When will Moshe and our father, Aaron, die so we can take over and do the job right?" They were impatient with process. They also did not want to get married, the rabbis say, because they could not brook the inevitable disagreements and distractions from what they considered their important mission of implementing their wonderful ideas. Their enthusiasm had turned into a wild passion, and the rabbis teach us that the passions of the mind are the hardest to control. We have seen in our day how passionate belief in communism led to millions of deaths. The Khmer Rouge killed a million Cambodians because of their belief in a pure agrarian society.

The rabbis teach us that one of the ways you can tell whether your passions have gotten out of hand is if you can be friends with the people with whom you disagree ideologically or tactically. If you cannot, then your passions have gone too far. You can disagree with someone and still be their friend. We are not talking about people who take positions that to kill innocent people would be all right. We are talking about the people we work with in volunteer organizations in our community. No people in these organizations espouse evil ideas. We are talking about genuinely heartfelt disagreements about ideological policy or tactical positions. No reason exists that your opponent should demonize you and consider you unfit and unworthy, or for you to do the same to him. This is strange fire.

In the Torah portion, Achare Mos, we read about the service in the Tabernacle on Yom Kippur. This service is prefaced by the words, "And G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aaron." Why do we have to mention the two sons of Aaron here? The answer is that one of the duties of the high priest on the day of Yom Kippur was to seek atonement, not only for himself, his family, and for the Jewish people, but also to provide atonement for the sanctuary. What could that possibly mean, to seek atonement for the sanctuary? What sins can an inanimate object perform? The answer is we did not seek atonement for the sins of the sanctuary, but for the sins of the Jewish people who did these sins in the name of the sanctuary.

Many times, people working for the sanctuary thought they were doing the right thing for its service and for its maintenance, but they sinned.

One of the mindsets, also, of many people who work for volunteer organizations is, "I am not doing it for myself. Since I am not benefiting at all; therefore, I can do certain things I would not normally do." We have heard of cases where different rabbis have falsified enrollment figures so they can get more support from certain government programs which are open to Jewish schools, like obtaining textbooks or buying computers, etc., depending on the state. They can always claim, "I am not personally benefiting. It is the children who are going to benefit." This is strange fire, and for this we need atonement. It is important to have enthusiasm. It is important to have dedication and devotion, but this enthusiasm, devotion, and dedication cannot get out of hand. It cannot become strange fire.

We need enthusiastic workers. We need people who are dedicated and devoted, but they must be willing to understand that they cannot do it all by themselves. They have to sell their ideas. They cannot just impose them through fiat or ridicule. They also must realize that those who oppose their plans are not evil people. They must realize that they can still be friends with people with whom they disagree. If their ideas are worthy, they will eventually be accepted. Let us all hope and pray that our Jewish organizations will be run by people who have enthusiasm and good ideas, who are filled with fire, but not strange fire. May we all always realize that we need the help and agreement of the majority of the people we are working with to implement our good ideas.

This, too, answers the question, why didn't G-d just take the Jewish people out of Egypt? Why didn't He just send a thunderbolt against Pharaoh and his chief officers, or cause an earthquake to destroy Pharaoh's palace, and let the Jewish people escape in the ensuing chaos? Why did He want Moshe to try to gain Pharaoh's consent for the Jewish people to leave? He could have had the Jewish people leave without Pharaoh's consent. In the very end, Pharaoh not only consented, but he actually threw the Jewish people out of Egypt. G-d wanted us to learn from the very first moment of our history as a nation that when we deal among ourselves or with others, we must always strive to honor process and try to obtain agreements. Let us hope and pray we will do so, so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SELF-ESTEEM, VIOLENCE & LOVING YOURSELF

In this week's Torah portion, Kedoshim, we learn the very basic Jewish concept, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord your G-d." All the rabbis ask, why does it say, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself?" Why doesn't it just say, "You should love your neighbor?"

The answer is, if you do not love yourself, you cannot love your neighbor. This week, we witnessed a terrible incident in Colorado at a high school where two teenagers shot up the school. They killed 13 people besides themselves, and wounded 24 more. They singled out especially athletes. It seems that they could not take the barbs of others. They could not stand that others hated them, so they responded with terrible violence. When others rejected them, all their self-esteem vanished. Their self-esteem seemed to come only from the outside, not the inside. It is noteworthy that all these shooting incidents in schools around the country have been done by white Caucasian young men who have been raised as good Christians. Why should this be so? To me, the reason for this is because blacks and Jews and other minorities know what it is to be hated, but they shrug it off because they know that their inner worth comes from themselves. They do not need the validation of other people to know their worth. Unfortunately, many people only feel they are worth something if people accept them. If they are ever rejected, if they perceive they have no self-worth, they feel they must respond with hatred and violence.

This was the difference between Yaacov and Esau. Yaacov was a simple man, a man of the tents. His self-image came from within himself. He did not need a peer group to validate his self-worth. Esau, on the other hand, did. Unless others said he was valuable, he did not think he was. He had to participate in macho behavior to feel he was worthwhile. He could not stand rejection. That's why he acted so violently when he heard that his father had given his blessing to his brother. His self-worth did not come from within himself, but from outside himself.

That's why the rabbis teach us that the Torah commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. If we do not have any inner self-esteem, we cannot love our neighbor. We would be filled with hatred and anger, like those two young men at Littleton, Colorado. One had been rejected by the Marines. Neither could stand the barbs of the jock types, the athletes. They had no inner self-esteem. Unlike blacks or Jews, they did not understand that self-worth comes from within. The outside world can say what it wants, but blacks and Jews know they have value because G-d has created them.

That's why the sentence ends, "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord your G-d." G-d did not make any mistake when He created us. If we have no feeling of self-worth, then it is as if we are saying G-d made a mistake when He created us. G-d made no mistake. No matter what other people say, we are valuable. We have self-worth. There are so many youngsters now in eastern Europe who are just finding out that they are Jews. They are exploring their roots. Their parents fled Judaism. Most Jews, after World War II, just fled Poland, but some Jews fled Judaism. They did not want to be Jews anymore because of the Holocaust. It did not work. People have to come to peace with who they are. They have to have feelings of inner self-worth. Many of these young grandchildren of Holocaust victims are returning to Judaism. A grandmother on her dying bed will tell her family that they are Jewish. It is important that they recapture their roots and know who they are. We all need to realize that

we have self-worth. We all have to be like Jacob. It does not matter what the world thinks of us. We have to know that G-d thinks that we have potential and can be somebody.

Let us hope and pray that as Ben Gurion said when he was referring to how the Jewish people were going to build up Israel, that this will also apply to the Jews of eastern Europe, too, that they will be built up yittel by yittel. Let us hope and pray that all of us will have self-esteem, especially our young people, so that tragedies like what happened at that Colorado high school will happen no more. Let us hope and pray that we will truly be able to love our neighbor so that we will have self-worth so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

HOLINESS, HOPE, & OVERCOMING DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

In the Torah portion, Emor, we learn how G-d is always telling us that we can be holy. Later, it also, referring to the Kohanim when they are bringing the sacrifices, says, "I am G-d Who has made them holy." We also read in this Torah portion about all the holidays, that they are called holy convocations. In fact, the word for holiness used is Moed, which actually means an encounter with G-d. Right before we learn about the holidays, we read that, "I will be sanctified among you, Children of Israel, because I am the Lord Who has made you holy." Why is there this stress on holiness in this Torah portion?

Also, there is a basic problem with this Torah portion. It opens with death. It teaches us how the Kohanim are not to contaminate themselves by coming into contact with the dead except for seven relatives. Death mocks the Jewish view of the world. We are called upon to be optimistic. We are called upon to be G-d's partner in creation, and to be filled with enthusiasm for the future, but death teaches us seemingly that all is futile, that we are never going to enjoy completely the fruits of our labors, that everything we do or are going to do is going to end in destruction. Death destroys our ambition and our hopes for the future. The futility of death is very depressing. Anyone who has come into contact with a dead body knows this. The first time a person does a Tahara it is very unnerving. It makes you feel, what is the sense of all this? Even when you do subsequent Taharas, the feelings are mitigated somewhat, yet you are still depressed.

That's the principle reason why we say that death makes a person ritually unclean. It destroys a person's hope. It takes away his optimism. It saps his strength and his ambition. How very strange that in a Torah portion which opens with death, we have all the holidays. The holidays have the opposite message. The holidays have the message of hope, the message of freedom, of the ability to improve ourselves, of the ability to be G-d's partner in creation. Why is it that in the same Torah portion we have death, we also learn about all our holidays?

Our religion being one of hope, faith, and regeneration, the priests were not to deal with death. They were only to deal with death when it touched them personally. Why is it then that holiness is mentioned so much in this Torah portion? Because in the Jewish view of things, holiness is tied up with optimism. When a person is depressed, he is liable to do terrible things, including killing his own children, committing suicide, etc. In the Jewish view of things, you cannot even worship G-d unless you are happy, unless you are optimistic. That's why when the Temple stood, a person who had contact with the dead was ritually unclean and could not come into the Temple until after he was cleansed. He had to regain his composure. He had to once again have the capacity to be optimistic. As the Baal Shem Tov taught, only an optimistic person can serve G-d, or, as the Kotzker Rebbe said, despair is the worst sin because then a person will never try to improve or try to extricate himself from difficult circumstances. We all know that we are never to give up hope. As the Talmud teaches us, even if a sword is resting on our neck, we should not give up. This has always been the trait of the Jewish people – never give up. That's why the grandson of Chaim Vilozney said in his book that the holidays were placed in this sedra on purpose to teach us never to despair, that even in the face of death and destruction, we should still hope, and we should still be optimistic. That has always been the source of our strength.

Today, we are dedicating two beautiful pieces of artwork in our synagogue, one dedicated to remembering the Holocaust, and the other dedicated to the reemergence of Israel and the

regeneration of the Jewish people. We are able to go from generation to generation because we have hope. Death is real. Death exists, but we can overcome it through our children and our good works. What we accomplish is meaningful and based on it, future generations will grow.

Why does this Torah portion mention holiness so much? Because the rabbis teach us there are many levels of holiness. In the land of Israel there are ten levels of holiness, which begin by just being in the land of Israel and then proceed all the way up to the Temple Mount. We should always aim for the next rung. We should keep in mind our final goal, but we should be happy when we have achieved the first rung of holiness. We should continue to be optimistic when we achieve just the first aspect of our goals. Even though things look black and bleak, we should strive for a little victory here and a little victory there until eventually we are able to overcome and regenerate ourselves.

Today, we are honoring David Mitzner and his family. This motif of never giving up, of always looking to the future, of always being optimistic is the story of David Mitzner. He came from an extended family of 60 in Poland before World War II, and after the war, there remained only himself and his sister, Rosa. He tells the story of how he was a courier from the Warsaw Ghetto to other groups outside the ghetto. He spoke Polish well and could comport himself like a Polish Catholic. One day, riding on a train, he was seized by the Gestapo and brought to the colonel. The colonel said, "We will see if you are a Jewish boy. Remove your clothes." Poles were not circumcised. David took off his shirt and his pants, and then his undershirt, all the time maintaining his composure. All of a sudden, the colonel's adjutant burst into the railroad car and said, "Colonel, you have a call from Berlin." The colonel looked at David and said, "You can go." David never gave up hope. He maintained his faith, even in this trying circumstance. His is the spunk of the Jewish people, which is eloquently displayed in the story they tell about a class in a German school before the Jews were kicked out. There was one Jewish boy in the class. It was after Hitler came to power. The teacher asked the students, "If you were Hitler's son, what would you like to be?" One student said, "A stormtrooper and bring honor to Hitler." Another student said, "A messerschmidt pilot and bring honor to Hitler." The Jewish boy said, "I would like to be an orphan."

We Jews have survived because we have never given up hope. It is our optimism and our hope and our faith which allows us to be holy because it stops us from becoming depressed and sinking into alcoholism and violence and crude behavior. We know with G-d's help we can overcome, and G-d has promised us that we will overcome. The Holocaust was a cruel blow. It took one-third of our people, but we Jews do not give up. Every day you read in the newspaper about a Jew who is involved in some cause to improve the world, because Jews believe they can make a difference. Statistically, we are insignificant. If there are 13 million Jews in the world, that would be a lot. After all, there are 5 billion people in the world. We make our mighty contributions because we do not give up. We know we can make a difference. We know that in spite of death, our contributions will remain.

It takes spunk. It takes courage to believe in the face of death and destruction that we can overcome. Anybody can build, but it takes faith, courage, hope, optimism to rebuild. That's what sanctifies the Jewish people, this faith, hope, courage, and optimism.

I am reminded of the story they tell about three anti-Semites talking who were planning where to go on their vacation. One said, "Let's go to Jerusalem and see the holy sites." The others say,

"No, there are too many Jews there." The second said, "Let's go to Miami." The others said, "No, there are too many Jews there." The third said, "Let's go to New York." The others said, "There are certainly too many Jews there." A little old lady heard them and said, "Why don't you go to hell. There aren't too many Jews there."

We Jews have always existed and we will continue to exist because we have hope for the future. The Holocaust may have devastated us, but it did not destroy our spirit. Even after we have absorbed such a hard blow, we persist and we have regenerated Jewish lives, especially in Israel. May we always maintain this spirit of optimism and hope so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

MARRIAGE, LAND OF ISRAEL, JEWISH PEOPLE, HUMILITY & CONTROL

In the Torah portion, Behar, we start off with the expression, "And G-d spoke to Moshe Behar Sinai, at Mount Sinai." The rabbis explain that the reason the term Mount Sinai is used here is to teach us that all these laws of the Sabbatical Year, the Jubilee Year, and the way we organize society were all given at Mount Sinai. Some people think that religion should just be a personal matter, that it has nothing to do with society, but we know this is not true. The way you organize society is crucial. Why in America do we have great wealth, while in Mexico there is great poverty? The reason is the way we organize society. We make sure that everybody has equal opportunity. We had the Homestead Act, which divided the land up. Therefore, we have given many people the ability to develop their talents. In Mexico, just a few people control everything. The purpose of the law here is to make sure that property is redivided at least every 50 years so everybody has an equal chance.

The rabbis teach us that one of the reasons the Jewish people were sent into exile and the first Temple was destroyed was because they did not keep the Jubilee Year. They allowed the gap between the rich and poor to grow too big. They did not redistribute the land. Because of this, the society became very corrupt and unjust. The rabbis tell us, though, that when the Jewish people were exiled from the land of Israel the first time and the second time, the land, itself, deteriorated because only the Jewish people could make the land flourish. In fact, in our own day we saw that this was true. Mark Twain in 1887 made a pilgrimage to Israel, and he wrote how this was the most G-d-forsaken land he had ever seen, filled with malaria, with hardly any people in it, and those people were living wretched lives. Since the Jewish people have come back to the land of Israel, it has become a flourishing land, providing food not only for itself but for export. The land of Israel and the Jewish people are like lovers. They are married to each other. When they are together, they are both better – the land and the people.

That's one of the secrets of marriage. If each spouse knows that he is better because of the marriage, that he can do more and accomplish more and be more because he is married. In that case, rest assured you have a successful marriage.

The rabbis ask the question, why is it that this Torah portion is called Behar and not Behar Sinai, in the mountain of Sinai? They explain that Behar signifies resoluteness, strength, even sometimes arrogance, while Sinai symbolizes humbleness. After all, the Torah was not given on the imposing Mount Lebanon or Mount Herman but on the smaller Mount Sinai to signify that we should be humble. However, it was not given in a valley either because that humble we are not supposed to be. We are not supposed to be trampled on.

The rabbis tell us that in our interpersonal relationships, especially in a marriage, we have to be humble. Unless there are important matters of principle, we should be willing to compromise. After all, what difference does it make if the bathroom is this color or that color? We have to be willing to compromise. On certain matters, we have to be unyielding. For example, if a wife finds that her husband is stealing in business, she should stand on principle and make him stop. If a wife is on drugs or alcohol, the husband should insist she get treatment. Violence, of course, has no place in a marriage.

When it comes to crucial issues, then you should be like a mountain, strong and resolute, but on other issues, you should be humble like Mount Sinai. You should not be like a valley and be

trampled on, but there should always be give and take. Unless there is, a marriage will be doomed. I have seen so many wedding ceremonies ruined because the bride, but most often the mother of the bride, is furious over the flowers being red instead of pink. What difference does it make? You should enjoy the wedding. This is a matter of Sinai, not of Har. It is very important that we learn to be humble, that we not demand we control every last detail, especially in a marriage.

We learn here in the text, "You shall call freedom in the land to all its inhabitants." The rabbis ask, what does that mean? After all, there were very few slaves in the land of Israel. What does this mean? They explain that when you have slaves, you are a slave, too. To keep a person in the mud, you have to get down in the mud with him. A marriage relationship is not a slave relationship. Each party must retain his or her integrity and ability to make decisions. Yes, somehow you must work out the issues you have together. However, when a man will not let his wife have her own checking account, or sign on the checking account, makes her bring every item of clothing she buys for his approval, or does not allow her to have her own opinions or friends – that wife is in danger of being abused. In a marriage, there must always be areas of freedom and separateness. In fact, it is these areas of separateness which make a marriage exciting. There are always new things you learn about your spouse even if you have been married 50 years.

It says in the text also, "And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year." What does sanctify mean? It means that you are separate, that there is a certain area of freedom which is inviolate. This word, "sanctify," is the same word as marriage in Hebrew, Kedushim. In marriage, we are working together and merging. However, we are not giving up our individuality totally. We have individualism within a marriage, just like when we pray. We are individuals in a minyan. We are together but in certain ways, we are separate. We make kiddush before Shabbat. Shabbat is part of the week but it is also separate. The holidays are part of the year, but they are also separate. To have a successful marriage, we must maintain this separateness within togetherness, and one party should certainly not try to control the other person completely.

In today's Haphtorah, we read how Jeremiah was ordered by G-d to redeem a field of his relative. This seemed very strange because G-d had just told Jeremiah that that village next to Jerusalem would be destroyed and captured by the Babylonians. Why was he to go and now redeem the field? He was to do it as an act of faith, to show that the Jewish people were going to come back to the land of Israel after the exile. When he redeemed the field, he did it with a revealed document and a sealed document. The revealed document everybody could read. The sealed document was hidden away, and indicated that when the Jewish people would come back, it, too, would be revealed.

In life, we start out with all sorts of givens and revealed circumstances. However, life always changes in unpredictable ways. Who could have ever conceived of the Internet even 20 years ago and how large an impact it would have on our lives? Who could have imagined that the Soviet Union could have collapsed 10 years ago? Who would have thought that some of the prime professions in America would disappear, like manufacturer's reps, etc.? Life is filled with hidden surprises. If a young couple is to be able to cope with life's many hidden surprises, they are going to have to have a sound relationship. They are going to have to realize that they are better together than if they would be separate, that they have to be humble with each other and to be willing to compromise, only standing tall on matters of moral principle; and they should never

try to control each other absolutely. They will not only destroy the person they are controlling, but they will also destroy their own interest in that person and their marriage will be a complete ruin. The couple must also realize that many times what they are criticizing in their spouse are their own defects. How often does a person who is shouting at the top of his voice say, "I hate people who shout"? Many times, a person who is a procrastinator will also complain about his spouse not doing a job on time, etc.

We all hope and pray that all marriages, and especially the marriages of our young people, will be stable because they know they are better together than apart, that they are humble with each other, and that they do not try to control each other, and that they recognize that the things they criticize in their spouse are many times faults that they have.

I am reminded of the story about a man who went to an ear doctor. He said, "My wife can't hear. I have to bring her in." The doctor said, "Why don't you test her?" The man went home and stood 15 feet behind his wife and said, "What do we have for dinner?" There was no answer. He moved 10 feet behind her and again asked, "What do we have for dinner?" There was no answer. He got 5 feet behind her and again asked, "What do we have for dinner?" Finally he stood directly in back of her and said, "What do we have for dinner?" She replied, "I have already told you chicken four times." We now know who is deaf. Let us all hope and pray that all the marriages in our community will be stable so we will have wonderful families so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SILENCE, INTELLECTUAL & EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

We all perceive things in two different ways. We intellectually know many things, but we also know these same things emotionally from the inside out. These two ways of knowing do not always correspond. Many people know intellectually that smoking is very unhealthy, both for themselves and for other members of their family. Smokers can damage the lungs of not only themselves, but those of their wives and children; smokers can even give their family cancer, but somehow this intellectual knowledge does not register. Emotionally, they feel that nothing is going to happen to them.

In 1973, the leaders of Israel knew that the Arabs were planning a war, but they could not emotionally believe the Arabs would do so, so they were not prepared. Today, intellectually, the Arabs should make peace. No Russia is there to back them up, but emotionally, they cannot accept a Jew as their equal. Judaism recognizes that a great gap between what we know about a subject intellectually, and what we know about a subject emotionally, could exist.

We discover this very clearly in the Torah portion, Shemini, where we learn how, on the very day that Aaron was inaugurated as the high priest, his two eldest children, Nadav and Avihu, were struck down when they offered strange fire to G-d. Rabbi Naftali Berlin says that they offered this strange fire, not because they were defiant, but because they wanted to get close to G-d. They wanted to feel a higher form of consciousness, like some of our young people who have taken drugs and alcohol to feel more the essence of the universe. They are sinning with their souls, but not with their bodies. They want their souls to reach up and feel the very essence of the universe. Many cultic groups have tried to achieve this same high. By so doing, they actually destroy their souls; they do not elevate them.

Upon seeing how Aaron's two eldest sons died, Moshe tried to comfort his brother by saying, "Of this did G-d speak when He said, 'I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me. Thus will I be honored before the entire people.'" In other words, he was saying to Aaron, the reason your children were killed was because they were really super righteous; G-d held them to a higher standard, to be an example to others. If they would have been lesser people, they would not have been punished so harshly. The text goes on to say, "And Aaron was silent." Rashi then makes a strange comment. He says, "And Aaron received a reward because of his silence." The reward he received was that G-d spoke to him alone when He gave the commandment to all priests and judges that they were not to enter the Temple or render legal judgment if they had imbibed any liquor. Throughout the Torah, G-d speaks almost only to Moshe alone. Sometimes, He speaks to Moshe and Aaron together, but this time He spoke to Aaron alone. G-d wanted to emphasize here the point that many times when our intellect and our emotions are at odds, we should remain silent. Otherwise, we are liable to do terrible things, to mock everything we believe in, or to pervert all our ideals.

We learn in the Gemorah Yomah that after the Temple was destroyed, Yeermeeyahu could no longer say in the Shemoneh Esre prayer the words, "the great, mighty, and awesome G-d." He had to leave the word "awesome" out because if G-d was so awesome, how was it that the Babylonians destroyed the Temple? The Gemorah then goes on to tell us how Daniel could not refer to G-d as a mighty G-d because now the Jewish people were subject to Babylonian persecutions. When the Jewish people returned to Israel, the men of the great assembly restored the words "awesome" and "mighty"; after all, those events actually strengthened the Jewish

people and allowed them to be better people after they built the second Temple. Didn't Jeremiah and Daniel also know that these events would eventually be beneficial? Maybe intellectually they could believe this, but not emotionally.

Judaism does not ask us to lie. When the pain is raw, we do not expect a person to pretend it does not exist. It is like telling a young couple who just lost a baby, "Oh, you are young. You can have another one." That is a terrible, cruel thing to say. They loved their baby. It was their baby. It is irrelevant if they can have another one. Judaism recognizes that our feelings are real, and that we have to deal with them in a real way, and G-d considers this so important that He even honored Aaron for his silence.

Sometimes, people talk too much. In the Pirkei Avos, the Ethics of our Fathers, we learn how a person should not try to appease his friend in the time of his anger; we should not try to console him when his dead lie before him. We are not to question him about his vow at the time he makes it, and we should not attempt to see him at the time of his degradation. In other words, sometimes you have to let time pass. The emotions are so raw that we should let the person vent his feelings, and only afterwards can we try to help him make some intellectual sense of them.

We live life on two planes, the intellectual and the emotional, and many times they are at odds. Many times, marriages break up because a spouse will judge himself or herself intellectually and his spouse emotionally, or himself emotionally and his spouse intellectually. Therefore, he will not forgive his spouse for emotionally spouting off, because, intellectually, she should not have done it. He, in turn, will forgive himself for emotionally spouting off because that is the way he feels. Many times, too, to justify our emotional responses, we rationalize and come up with all sorts of intellectual theories and ideas which are false, just to justify our emotional response. It is much better if we had just been quiet.

Many arguments take place because people confuse their emotional and intellectual responses, and will not allow any of those with whom they deal to have an emotional response, although they, themselves, can have one. We also know that when it comes to events like the Holocaust, the best response is silence. There are so many different Jewish groups who blame the Holocaust on this fault of the Jewish people or that fault, but our response should be one of silence. Maybe we will be able to understand this event more clearly 100 years from now. Soon, we will celebrate Yom Hashoa, Holocaust Remembrance Day. Our best response is still silence. We do not know why G-d saw fit to allow the Holocaust to occur. We should never blame each other for it or try to find the specific faults why it occurred. We do know, though, that we Jews have to be careful because there is evil in the world, and we are the special targets of evil people.

In the Torah portion, Bechukosai, we learn about the terrible tragedies that came upon the Jewish people when they left the teachings of the Torah, when they began to act immorally. After the first group of punishments, wouldn't the Jewish people have realized that they were heading on the wrong path, and that they should return? As the text says, "And if with this you will not listen to Me, and you will go with Me, B'Keri, casually," which means that you will not emotionally realize that these punishments have come upon you because you acted immorally. You might intellectually think about it, but you would quickly come to the conclusion emotionally that this is all happenstance, accident. G-d warns us that if we come to these conclusions, more severe punishments will come upon us.

It is our business to recognize things both intellectually and emotionally, and when there is a gap between them, we should stop, and we should be silent until we sort things out. We should not blunder ahead doing what we have been doing, and, on the other hand, we should not act precipitately. We should carefully think things through so we will come to the right conclusions, as Aaron eventually did when he came to terms with the deaths of his two sons. It was a slow process, and one which left him with many questions. Many times, our emotional response does not represent our true response, but our true response can only come when we curb our emotional and intellectual responses. Our intellectual response, too, is many times not the true response. We are one soul, and our soul is composed of both an emotional and intellectual part. They both must work in harmony if we are to get a true picture of reality, if we are to react in the proper way, so we can fulfill our job as a partner of G-d in creation.

Let us all hope and pray that all of us will learn how to respond intellectually and emotionally as one, and when we cannot do so, to learn how to remain silent until we can. Let us hope that by so doing, we will enhance our lives and the lives of all those around us so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

LEADERSHIP, SKELETONS, DISTINCTIONS, CLOSENESS & STANDARDS

What is required of a leader? To lead is very difficult, requiring one to balance many traits, abilities, and skills at the same time. Difficult, because if the distance between the leader and the people he wants to lead is too great, he will have no influence. People will consider him to be at most a symbol, but they will place no credence in what he says. He will have very little influence. If, on the other hand, a leader is too close to the people, he will not have the moral authority to lift up the people and lead them in a direction they may not want to go. They would just look at him and say, "Who are you to tell us to do these types of things? You, yourself, have done demeaning things. How can you demand that we raise our standards when your standards were once so low?"

In the Talmud, Yomah, however, we learn that one should not appoint a leader for the people unless that person has a sack of reptiles hanging behind his back, the Hebrew way of saying, unless he has skeletons in his closet. As Rabbi Yaacov Yosef of Polnoye explains, sometimes it is the very weakness of the leader which enables him to connect with the people. If the righteous man would always be perfect, people could not connect with him.

On the other hand, the Maharasha maintains that the quote in the Talmud says that unless he has skeletons hanging behind his back. In other words, that his problems should not be publicly obvious because a blatant deficiency disgraces his leadership. The rabbis went so far as to say that the reason why the leadership of King Saul did not last was because he had no fault in his family history. That made him arrogant. He could not understand faults in others. Therefore, he began to lord it over others. This brought his reign to an end. A leader must understand the people, and the people must understand that the leadership is struggling with the same problems they are. Sometimes the leader will be successful in overcoming these problems, and sometimes not so successful. The important thing is that the leaders and the people share a common vision of human nature and the problems that have to be overcome. A leader who cannot sympathize with the people, while trying at the same time to have them meet certain standards, cannot be their leader. If a leader cannot understand that sometimes he, too, might succumb to different problems, he cannot be their leader.

That's why after the people sinned at the golden calf, G-d told Moshe, "Raid," which in Hebrew means, "Go down to the people." As Rav Cook said, "A leader must be compatible with the people. Even though his soul is far above the masses, there must be some connection between them." When Israel was on a high level before sinning at the golden calf, Moshe, too, was on a high level; but when they sinned, Moshe could not possibly lead them if he remained where he was. Therefore, he had to descend from his greatness so he could lead the way on a lower level. A leader must also be able to draw distinctions, to show people that some things said in one context may not be true in another context.

Unfortunately, in our day and age, people sometimes fail to make proper distinctions, and leadership's job must show the people why these distinctions make a difference. True, certain leaders of the Jewish people are not demanding full compliance with the

whole Jewish tradition. However, they are making demands on the people, and without their leadership, the people would be in much worse shape. Unquestionably, if you tell Jews today that they have to fully comply with all Jewish tradition or they might as well convert to another faith, they will convert to another faith. Leadership today demands that we approach the people and try to raise them to a higher level. It does not mean cutting off large numbers of Jews. This will accomplish nothing.

G-d reprimanded Elijah the prophet when he gave up on the Jewish people. In his generation, only 3000 Jews had not bowed to Baal. G-d told him not to worry, the Jewish people would come back. His disciple, Elisha, did such a good job bringing the people back that he wrought a revolution.

Teaching our Jewish people how to make clear distinctions is indeed imperative. One of the most disheartening occurrences in the last few years is how many Jewish intellectuals have defended those who deny the Holocaust by citing free speech and by saying that anybody who prohibits these deniers access to their libraries, etc. is practicing censorship. As David Myers said in his brilliant lecture to us this past month, "Censorship can only be done by a government, not by individual institutions." After all, an engineering school can refuse to have in its library a book containing faulty information on the building of a bridge. If people would follow that book, all their bridges would fall down. Or a library can refuse to have hardcore pornography saying that this demeans women.

We know that libraries throughout the United States would not accept a book that denied slavery occurred in America. No one would raise the specter of free speech to protect a book like that. A book which also set forth practical ways for one to kill people he did not like would also not be found in a school library. We all know that free speech is not absolute in the United States. The government in the 1970's banned the publication of a magazine containing plans for making an atomic bomb, and this was upheld by the Supreme Court. In my own home, I can exclude any book I want. Local institutions can do the same. Perhaps they cannot ban selling them and producing them, but they can ban having them in their libraries and schools. Censorship means that all publication and distribution of a book are to be banned. This can only be done by a government which has the power to enforce such a rule.

Leadership demands that we explain to the people the differences, sometimes very subtle differences, in conflicting principles and how we apply them. Shavuot is the holiday of leadership. We learn that on this holiday, King David was born. He also died on Shavuot. This is also the holiday upon which Moshe was saved from Pharaoh's decree. According to the rabbis, he was born on the 7th day of Adar, and three months later, on the 7th of Sivan, was placed in a reed basket on the Nile and saved by the king's daughter, Basya. Moshe led the Jewish people out of Egypt, and he also led them to Mount Sinai where they received the Ten Commandments and the Torah.

Moshe was a very unlikely leader. He never spent one day in slavery. He was raised as an Egyptian. One of the interpretations given for Moshe's stuttering speech was that he did not know Hebrew very well, and his stuttering referred only to his Hebrew. Later, of course, he mastered Hebrew perfectly. Moshe even fled the Jewish people after he

saw how they were quarreling among themselves, and he said, "Achain Hadover Nodah," which means, "Surely this thing is known," which the rabbis interpret to mean that now he understood why the Jewish people deserved slavery. It was because they quarreled among themselves, and when he tried to break up a fight between two Jews, they said, "Do you want to kill us like you killed the Egyptian?"

Moshe married the daughter of a pagan priest, and, according to the Medrash, even agreed to raise his oldest son as a pagan. This was the man G-d chose to lead the Jewish people. He needed Aaron, though, because Aaron had stayed in Egypt. Aaron understood the people. Aaron spoke Hebrew fluently. Moshe had less patience with the people than Aaron, because Aaron understood better the suffering they had gone through.

That's why in the Torah portion, Bamidbar, which is always read before Shavuot where the Jewish people had to prove that they had families before they were worthy of being given the Torah, it says that not just Moshe should count them but also Moshe and Aaron. Later on we learn in the same Torah portion, in speaking about the offspring of Aaron and Moshe, only the offspring of Aaron is mentioned. Why? Because, as the rabbis say, Moshe was the teacher of Aaron's children. Aaron's children could not relate as well to their father as they could to Moshe, because he was an uncle who had been at the top pinnacle of world culture; a prince of Egypt, who had rejected Egypt; and then had gone on to marry the daughter of a pagan priest. Yet, he came back to the Jewish people and Judaism. He showed Aaron's children that the true worth of the pagan cultures in which he had been immersed was nothing in comparison to Judaism and Jewish culture. Aaron could not convey that message because all Aaron knew was Jewish culture and Judaism. G-d told Moshe to speak to all the congregation of Israel saying, "On the 10th of this month they shall take each man a lamb for the house of their father." When Moshe conveys G-d's message to the Jewish people, the Torah says, "And Moshe called to the elders of Israel and he said, 'Draw and take for you a sheep from your families.'" G-d had told Moshe to speak to the congregation of Israel, that they should take a lamb to the house of their fathers. Moshe knew that if you are to influence the Jewish people, you had to do it through leaders. If everyone is responsible, no one is responsible.

Leadership many times demand unpopular stands. I remember when my grandfather, Abe Silver, along with Rabbi Wohlgelerenter and Moshe Genauer, started a Hebrew day school in Seattle. Many people ridiculed them and claimed that they were un-American, but they persisted. If they would have followed what seemed to be the overwhelming majority's opinion, the day school would never have been founded. We all know how important day schools are to the future of Judaism in America. Leaders must have vision, but they must be close enough to the people so that they can draw the people. G-d said, take a lamb; Moshe said, take a sheep. Moshe knew that leaders must demand sacrifices, too. He knew that it would also take their assets as well as their current income. The sheep stood for the future. They had to be willing to sacrifice some potential future wealth to do those things necessary that the Jewish community survive.

Also, G-d said, "your extended family;" Moshe said, "your family," your nuclear family.

Even if you do not have all the support you should have from your extended family, and even if you do not have an extended family, you must make sure that your family gets the proper education and Jewish atmosphere. A person cannot say, "My grandfather made a Seder, and I enjoyed it, but I just cannot do it." You have to do it. Jewish leadership puts the responsibility for Judaism in the lap of every nuclear family. Moshe understood the people; Aaron understood them even better. Moshe was an example for the people because he came from the outside, so to speak. By his return, he showed the people that what they had was better than anything Egyptian or Midianite culture could offer them. Aaron understood them close up. He knew their problems. He had walked in their shoes. He had been a slave, too. Moshe's job was to raise the people. They would follow him part of the way up Mount Sinai because they could identify with him. He would go the rest of the way. The people had confidence that he could take them through the murky, ambiguous problems of life. He could differentiate for them problems so they could see them in the proper perspective. They heard the Ten Commandments, but they did not know how to apply them correctly. Moshe would tell them. Moshe would teach them, and Aaron would understand them.

Shavuot is also the holiday of the birth and death of King David, a man who had many problems in life. He lived in an era of great confusion. The people were terribly confused. The Philistines had captured Shiloh, destroyed the Tabernacle, and captured the ark of the covenant. The system of judges which had ruled Israel for 400 years did not work anymore. There was need for a central authority. David encountered great opposition, but he was ultimately able to prevail because he was close to the people. He had human foibles. He did not lord it over the people, as Saul did. He came from humble origins. His great-grandmother was a Moabite. He was short and had red hair and loved to dance. To elevate the people, you have to be close to the people. You cannot feel that you are above them. You must know that you are part of them. You also need a vision of where you want to take them. Moshe knew that he had to take the Jews to Mount Sinai where G-d would give them the Torah. David knew he had to unify them and prepare them for the new millennium they were entering. A leader need not be perfect. In fact, it is probably a detriment if he is perfect. He has to be respected and thought of as a human being like the people he is leading, or, as Rabbi Yehuda Nasai said, "A generation is as good as its leader," while the sages who argued with him said, "The leader is as good as his generation." Let us hope and pray that our people will always have leaders who can relate to the people, leaders with whom the people can identify, so that they and their leaders can rise to greater heights of spirituality and morality. Amen.

PRIESTLY BLESSING, ETHICS, NEVER

ALONE & SPIRITUALITY

In the Torah portion, Naso, we have the priestly blessing. This is the most famous blessing in the whole world. Many religions throughout the world use it. It consists of three verses: The first verse has three words; the second five words; and the third seven words. The rabbis explain that the first blessing, which says, "May the Lord bless you and keep you," refers to material possessions. May G-d bless you with them, and may you possess them, and may they not possess you. So often, the possessions we have end up possessing us. We will do anything to maintain our them.

The second blessing, "May G-d shine His face upon you and be gracious unto you," speaks about intellectual attainments and about a pleasing personality.

The third blessing, "May G-d lift up His face to you and give you peace," speaks about wholeness and spirituality and feeling attached to others. Strange that this priestly blessing is found in this Torah portion. After all, this Torah portion starts out by teaching us about two subclans of the Levites, how they were counted and what their duties were in disassembling and reassembling the Tabernacle. It also speaks about the importance of confessing our sins, and teaches us about the wayward wife suspected of adultery. Then we learn about the Nazerite, then we have the priestly blessing, and then, finally, we have the offerings of all the princes, the chiefs of every tribe of Israel on the day the Tabernacle was dedicated. Why should, right in the middle of all these things, the priestly blessing be plopped, so to speak?

There are three main reasons why we need to believe in G-d. The first one is ethical monotheism. Without a belief in G-d, any ethics cannot exist in the world. Kant was wrong; ethics do not flow from the autonomous man. Each person independently will not come up with an identical set of ethics. Hitler proved that to us all. His cabinet was composed of geniuses except for one. Everyone in his cabinet except one had a Ph.D. The hotbed of Naziism was not the red necked community but the university community. We need G-d to anchor morality. We can rationalize everything away if we want, but the Ten Commandments stands outside man. That's why the rabbis say they were given on stone because stone you chisel from the outside. Heat from the inside molds and shapes metal. In fact, Spinoza calls his book on religion Ethics, and, by and large, in America that is how we define religion. We have adopted the civic religion of Spinoza where the purpose of religion is not to bring us closer to G-d, but to make us ethical and moral. Judaism, too, agrees that we have to be ethical and moral, but that is only the first step. The first line of the priestly blessing teaches us that we have to be ethical. Our possessions should not possess us so that we are willing to do unethical things to keep them. Three words appear in the first blessing because any time we have a business transaction, we are involved, another person is involved, and G-d is there.

The second reason we need G-d is because we are never alone if G-d is with us. I am reminded of the story they tell about a young boy who went sailing with his father. They were shipwrecked. The boy was knocked unconscious. The father made it to the shore and carried the boy to a safe haven on the beach. When the boy recovered, he asked his father to show him the beach. His father did, but the boy could only find one set of

footprints. The boy asked his father, "How did I make it to this grassy place since my footsteps are not on the beach?" The father answered, "Because I carried you, my son." G-d always carries us. No matter what problems we have, He is always there with us. When a person goes into the operating room, his family can only go so far, but he is not alone; G-d is with him.

One of the reasons why I believe that these tragic shootings are taking place in our high schools is that our youngsters cannot stand to be alone. They cannot stand to be rejected by their peers. They do not realize that they are never alone. If they are right with G-d, that is all that counts. Curiously, these types of problems have not affected Judaism, which does not believe suffering is redemptive, but only instructive.

We believe that G-d sometimes make us suffer to show we made a mistake, and we must correct what we are doing. Suffering is instructive, like the brilliant young man I met who decided he was not going to study this past year. Although he had very high SATs, he could not get into college because he had such bad grades. He was crestfallen. However, he has the opportunity now of studying at summer school, and I believe he will do well. His suffering was very instructive.

Other religions which believe you cannot approach G-d unless you suffer believe suffering redeems. Obviously, many Christian churches are not teaching this lesson to these youngsters shooting up schools because they cannot stand any suffering at all. They do not realize that they are never alone. G-d is always with them. G-d shines His face upon us and make us gracious. Even if others do not see it, G-d sees it. There are five letters in this second blessing, which stand for the five books of Moses. If we uphold the five books of Moses, if we feel we are right with G-d, that is all that counts. G-d will never desert us. G-d tells us don't be afraid of the barbs of your peers. Don't be afraid of persecution or discrimination. You know that G-d loves you and cares for you, and that is all that counts.

The third blessing is, "May G-d lift up His countenance to you and give you peace," seven words. Seven, of course, is the number of spirituality in Judaism. We live in six physical dimensions: north, east, south, west, up, down, but we need a spiritual dimension because that is where we live. That's why the seventh day is holy, and that is why the seventh month has Rosh Hashonna, Yom Kippur, Succot, Shemini Atzeres, and Simchat Torah. We are not alone; we are part of a greater whole. We are a link in a chain which is going to bring ultimate redemption to the world. Our life spans are very short. We cannot solve all the problems of the world as individuals, but working together with others, we can make a big difference. We have to always realize that we may not be able to accomplish everything, but if we try our best, that is all that counts. We must make sure that our link in the chain is strong, and that the next generation is trained to take up the reins from us, that they will be a strong link in a chain also.

The priestly blessing is placed in this Torah portion because it teaches us the three reasons we need G-d. We learn how we are to confess our sins, especially if we have robbed and cheated someone. G-d gives us possessions, but He also wants to guard us from these possessions. We must be ethical. We also learn about the Nazerite, who the rabbis say many times became a Nazerite to overcome different character defects.

We learn about the wayward wife, who was found alone with a man, although there were not sufficient witnesses to prove that she had done anything wrong. She does not even have to go through the process of drinking bitter waters. She could just get a divorce, but she knows she has done nothing wrong, and even though others may accuse her, she knows G-d is with her and nothing will happen to her.

We all need each other. Spirituality binds us to each other and elevates us. The priestly blessing teaches us that we have to be ethical, that we are never alone no matter what the world says about us, and that we are always part of a greater whole. I am reminded of the story they tell about a famous professor who went to catch a train. Two students accompanied him. They became engaged in an animated conversation. They suddenly noticed the train pulling out of the station. The young man ran and jumped on the train. He held out his hand and grabbed the hand of the young woman who was talking with them and swung her onto the train. Unfortunately, the professor missed the train. He grew very despondent and downcast. A woman standing beside him told him not to worry. After all, there would be another train in an hour. He looked at her and said, "Lady, you don't understand. These two students of mine just came down to see me off." Sometimes, too, we get carried away. We forget that the purpose of life is to help G-d redeem this world. This we can only do if we are ethical, if we realize that G-d is always with us, and if we realize we are all part of a greater whole. Let us hope and pray we will all realize this so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

DESTRUCTION & JUDAISM

HOPE, OPTIMISM, DEATH,

What is the essential stance that Judaism takes toward life? Undoubtedly and indisputably, Judaism stands for optimism, for hope: No matter how great the setbacks, we Jews never give up. We always go forward, never letting even the most horrible events deter us from trying to make this a better world. Look at the calendar of the past few weeks. We commemorated the Holocaust by marking Yom Hashoa, and a week later celebrated Yom Ha'Azmaut, Israel Independence Day. It was as if, as my daughter, Devora, pointed out, we first had to sit shiva for the terrible events of Europe before we moved on to the future, to the day of one of our greatest triumphs in 2000 years - the proclamation of the State of Israel! We refused to linger in despair and in hopelessness.

In fact, according to the Kotzker Rebbe, who paraphrased the Baal Shem Tov, the worst sin is that of despair. We never despair. The Gemora teaches us that even when a knife is pressing on our throat, we should still hope. How many stories of the Holocaust teach us this lesson? In our own congregation, we learn how David Mitzner, one of only two survivors of an extended family of 60, was a courier in the Warsaw Ghetto to other groups outside the ghetto. He spoke perfect Polish and looked like a Christian Pole. He was once apprehended by the Gestapo, while he was on a train, and taken to the colonel in charge. The colonel told him to take off his clothes, since Polish boys were not circumcised. He took off his shirt and his pants, his undershirt, all the time retaining his composure, when, all of a sudden, an adjutant burst into the car and said the colonel had a call from Berlin. The colonel looked at David and said, "All right. Go about your business," and let him go. We Jews have always believed that life was worth living. We stress life, not death.

In the Torah portion, Beha'aloscha, we read how several people became very upset because when Moshe commanded the Jewish people to celebrate Pesach the year after leaving Egypt, they were not allowed to do so, having come into contact with the dead. They had done a great mitzvah. According to some rabbis, these people, cousins of Moshe and Aaron, had removed the dead bodies of Nadab and Avihu from the Tabernacle. Others say they were the bearers of the coffin of Joseph. These people had done a great mitzvah, but they had come into contact with the dead. They came to Moshe Rabbeinu complaining, "Just because we are ritually unclean because we came into contact with the dead, does that mean that we are not able to celebrate Pesach? Why should we be diminished by being unable to offer G-d's offering at its appointed time among the Children of Israel?" No one who came into contact with the dead was able to enter the Tabernacle because we believe we must serve G-d with joy, with optimism, with hope.

Death makes a mockery of everything we try to achieve. After all, we can say, "Why should we try to do anything? We are going to die and not enjoy what we have achieved." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, most people work full time no more than 35 years. People go to school. They become disabled, etc. Life goes by very quickly, and anybody who has come into contact with the dead knows how depressing it can be. The contact makes you think: why should I do anything in life?

What good is it? Am I ever going to enjoy it?

Judaism rails against this attitude. It says we should rejoice in life. We should feel that we have the ability to turn things around, if not for us, then for our children and our children's children. One generation cannot do the whole job, though they certainly can move the job along.

That was why those people who approached Moshe were so upset. Moshe consulted with G-d, and G-d told him that these people were right: They should not be denied the opportunity to bring the Pesach offering. However, they should do it the next month after they had become ritually clean. None of us is to stay in a state of mourning forever. After our period of ritual impurity is through, we should continue with life. We should not stay captured by the past. We should always remember the past, but not let it trap us.

That's why I was personally so pleased to see the splendid artwork that the Mitzner Family donated to our synagogue was not just a memorial to the Holocaust, but also a testimony to the rebirth of the State of Israel and to the commitment of the Jews to the future. One of the art pieces says, "Remember;" the other says, "In every generation and generation," which means that in every generation we will continue, no matter what the obstacles, to be optimistic and hopeful and creative.

In the Torah portion, Emor, we learn the same lesson. It starts out with death, by telling us for whom a Kohen can mourn because the Kohanim, the priests of ancient Israel, were not to be involved with death, unless it was for a personal family member. They were to uplift the people. In this Torah portion, we learn over and over again, "I am the Lord, Your G-d, Who has made you holy." The rabbis explain that holiness here means optimism. It means to separate yourself from depression and thoughts of futility and death.

Why in this Torah portion do we also learn about the holidays? The holidays are meant to uplift us, to cause us to reach higher than ourselves. They are meant to imbue us with a positive feeling, to imbue us with ideas of freedom and spiritual ambition and refinement of character. They are meant to give us courage, resolve, the exact opposite of what happens when one comes into contact with death. If any of you have ever done a Tahara, washed a dead body, you will know what I mean. The first time you do it is especially hard, and every time you do it, death stares you in the face and seems to mock all your efforts. Judaism says no. We transcend death. We overcome it by working for the future. We never give up. These holidays sanctify us by giving us the necessary hope to go on. Judaism honors the dead, but it teaches us that in spite of death, we and our children can accomplish great things, just as our forefathers did. We can gradually build a better and better world.

We are today in the midst of counting the Omer. Shavuot completes our counting of 50 days. Why should we count? We count because we cannot transform ourselves and the world overnight. We have to work at it, and there are going to be setbacks. That's probably the reason we do not say Shecheyanu before we count the Omer on the first

day because of the inevitable setbacks. We have not reached the stage where we can be completely joyous until we get to Shavuot. After all, during this period, many tragedies occurred. We know about the tragedy of the deaths of Rabbi Akiba's 24,000 students during the revolt against the Romans under Bar Kochba. We know how the communities along the Rhine River were decimated during the Crusades, and, of course, we have Holocaust Day during this period. Jewish history is not a straight line. It goes up and down. Eventually, we know everything is going to be all right.

The same thing is true of our lives. We have ups and downs, but if we face our problems with courage and hope, everything is going to be all right. This is what the Torah promises us. That's, too, why Shavuot is probably not called the time of the giving of the Torah because to achieve the Torah and to implement the teachings of the Torah and to internalize the teachings of the Torah, we must strive mightily. Many ups and downs are going to occur in any good marriage. In this case, we are talking about the marriage of the Jewish people to the Torah, and each of us individually to the Torah. It takes a lot of work, but at the end, it is all worthwhile. We never give up.

The rabbis tell us there are many levels of holiness. The Mishna describes the ten levels of holiness in the land of Israel, starting with the land of Israel, itself, until the Temple Mount. Each level is worthy of achievement, but we never give up, and we won't until we achieve the maximum level. We should be proud, though, of what we have achieved up until now. If we approach all our problems with optimism and hope, if we realize that no matter what happens, we will never give up, we will eventually achieve our goal. The Jewish people has been counted out many times, but have always come back with G-d's help. May G-d help us as individuals and as a people that we will be able to continue to be His partner in creation, and eventually see the day when the world will truly be redeemed, and light, happiness, joy, and peace will engulf the whole world.

TORAH, PERFECTING THE WORLD &

SELF-ESTEEM

We all know that one of the main teachings of Judaism is that we be G-d's partner in creation. We are to help Him create a better world. Our job is not to end all the evils of the world, but is to end as many of them as are within our power to do so by being the best at what we do: the best citizen, the best spouse, the best parents, the best child, the best doctor, the best lawyer, the best accountant. By using those talents and abilities G-d has given us in the most positive way, using them with maximum effort, can we cause

G-d's name to be elevated in the world. We then fulfill our job to end as much evil as possible in the world.

There are two different kinds of evil: physical evil and moral evil. Moral evil refers to the harm one human being does another, but even if we would all act like angels and never harm each other, evil would still exist in the world. The very basis of the animal kingdom is violence -- one animal eating another. G-d has promised us that after we have ended as much moral and physical evil as we can, then He will send the Mashiach to finish the job.

We have made great strides in ending physical evil. We have learned how to conquer disease; how to live comfortably in the most hostile environments by creating efficient heating and air conditioning units. We have also diminished much moral evil by creating societies like the United States in which hundreds of millions of people live together in reasonable harmony. We have not, however, by any stretch of the imagination ended all moral evil. Look at the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and Indonesia, the terrible repression in large parts of Africa and China. And we have not ended all physical evil. We are still beset by many terrible diseases, like cancer, heart attacks, AIDS, etc. Nevertheless, clearly, our responsibility is to end as much evil as possible in the world.

We must, though, start with ourselves. We do not believe that man is born good. We also do not believe that man is born bad, like other religions do. We believe that man is born neutral. He will, like water, take the path of least resistance. Therefore, we all have to study Torah to learn how to be good. Naturally, man will not always do the right thing. Judaism does not believe that natural man is a good man. Sometimes, we must combat our natural instincts. We cannot do what we feel we want to do. We have to realize that limits exist. Jewish education should make us want to do what we ought to do. Unfortunately, many people believe today that if you feel something is good, then it must be good, and if you want to do something, and people will not let you do it, then these people are evil and should be vanquished.

The Torah also teaches us that our self-worth comes from within, not from without. Those two teenagers who shot up their high school in Littleton, Colorado had no feelings of inner self-worth. They could not take rejection by their peer group. They hated jocks because these athletic types hurled barbs at them. Judaism teaches us that our self-worth comes because G-d created us. That's why we learn, "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am G-d." Why should this admonition say love your neighbor as yourself? Just say you should love your neighbor. The answer is, if you do

not have any feelings of self-worth, if you do not love yourself, you cannot love your neighbor. If a person hates himself because other people hate him, or for whatever cause he believes that G-d has made a mistake creating him, this is wrong. G-d does not make any mistakes. G-d has created each of us because He needs us and wants us to help Him perfect this world by removing all moral and physical evil. Interestingly, all these cases of shooting up schools have been perpetrated by white middle and upper class young men and women who have been raised as Christians. I do not think that this is any accident. Jews and other minorities know what it is to be hated, and they do not need the good opinion of others to validate their self-esteem or their person. They know they are worth something even if they are hated.

That was actually the difference between Yaacov and Esau. Yaacov was a man of the tents. His self-worth came from within himself. Esau's self-worth, on the other hand, came from outside himself. It had to be validated by a group. He, therefore, turned to violence because violence brought him the approval of his peer group. We all know that unless our children get an education grounded in Torah, there is no guarantee that they will grow up to be moral and upstanding people. Many, of course, will, and even a few among those who receive a Torah education will go morally astray, but the chances are very slight.

There is a problem, though. The problem is that many people who study Torah may decide to shun the world -- a conflict between the study of the Torah and our duty to perfect the world. After all, the world is filled with all sorts of immorality. The outside world is very seductive. Some Jews, even if they have studied Torah, may succumb to its blandishments. How, though, can we fulfill our mandate to be G-d's partner in creation and help Him perfect the world if we seal ourselves in isolated Torah communities that have no contact with the world?

This was indeed the sin of the spies. In the Torah portion, Shelach, we learn how Moshe Rabbeinu sent 12 spies to tour the land of Canaan. Ten of them brought back an evil report. Only Kolaiv Ben Refuna and Yehoshua Ben Nun came back with a good report. The people listened to the report of the evil spies. When G-d punishes the evil spies, He calls them and He refers to them as "HaEda HaRa-ah, this evil congregation." These ten spies were actually great men. When Moshe first sent them, he referred to them as Anoshim, great leaders. What was their error? Their error was that they did not feel that the Jewish people would be able to withstand the blandishments of the Canaanite civilization. When they brought back the report, they used the term, "Az HaAm - but the people are strong." The word Az in Hebrew can mean strong. It can also be the abbreviation for the words Avoda Zora, which means idol worship - "but the people are idol worshippers". In other words, the Jewish people, even if they had Torah, could not withstand the Canaanite civilization and would succumb to idol worship. If the Jewish people stayed in the desert, received manna and water from G-d, and studied Torah, they could lead moral and decent lives. True, they would have no influence on the world; but maybe eventually the news of a moral community living in the desert would reach civilized people, who in turn would emulate this isolated community.

We can be somewhat puzzled learning about the necessity of having a minyan when we

read in the Torah portion, Emor, "Vaneekdashti B'Soch Bnai Yisroel - and I shall be sanctified in the midst of the Sons of Israel" -- it does not say what constitutes a community of the sons of Israel. We learn that from the Torah portion, Shelach, where the ten spies are called an evil congregation. From here, we learn that a minyan has to be ten, that a minimum congregation in Israel is ten. These leaders knew the importance of learning Torah, and, therefore, they were worthy of being called a congregation.

In fact, the rabbis teach us to shun no Jew because he can be counted in a minyan. The original minyan was called an evil congregation, yet it was still a proper congregation. Every Jew, even if he has done things which negate different religious teachings, has the potential to come back. Every Jew should be treated with respect. We know that G-d has always seen fit to put the Jewish people in the cockpit of history. We have not been kept in some faraway place removed from the major powers of history. Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome, England, Spain, France, Germany, Poland, Russia at the height of their powers always had Jews mixed in the highest echelons of their power. We were expelled, persecuted, but we always made our presence known, both physically and intellectually.

The same is true today. Israel is in the forefront of all international events. One would think Israel was a super power the way the media dotes on it, but G-d wants us to be in the center of everything. You cannot find a modern day cause in which Jews are not mixed. At most, only 13 million Jews abound in the world, but the Jewish presence is felt all over. Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State, and Yevgeny Primakoff, the former Prime Minister of Russia, have Jewish roots. We Jews have been called upon to try to make this a better world. Some Jews fail, but Jews cannot shun the world. Unfortunately, many Jews have failed to learn enough Torah to bring the Jewish message in its fullness to the world. Conversely, other Jews who learn Torah have decided to shun the world. Both approaches are wrong. The Jews are part of the world and apart from the world, as Rabbi Soloveitchik taught us. As he said, "We have always been considered an inseparable part of humanity and we were ever ready to accept the divine challenge, 'Fill the earth and subdue it,' and the responsibility implicit in human existence. We have never proclaimed the philosophy of contemptus or odium seculi. We have steadily maintained that involvement in the creative scheme of things is mandatory."

We must always remember that as a Jew, we must do everything in our power to rid the world of physical evil and moral evil. This means that we must not only be concerned with perfecting ourselves as individuals and perfecting ourselves as the community, but we must also be concerned about perfecting the world as a whole. We have to balance these demands. There are some who are so concerned about perfecting the world that they forget about perfecting themselves or their families or their communities. Others are only concerned about their families. The Torah teaches us that we must be concerned about not only ourselves and our families and our communities, but the world as a whole. We, though, must start from ourselves and work upwards. We cannot neglect our families for the world, and we cannot neglect our families for our people. We must first start with ourselves, then go to our families, then to our community, and then to the world.

That's why the Torah begins by teaching us about one man first, then one family, then one people, and finally the world. The spies made a mistake. They wanted to stop just with their people. The brothers of Joseph made a mistake. They wanted to stop just with their family. They did not want to have anything to do with changing times and Joseph's dreams. As Jews, we must try to end as much evil as possible. We cannot short-circuit any step. If we do, we will not succeed in our G-d-given mandate. Let us hope and pray that we will succeed so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

LIES, HOLINESS, & POTENTIALITY

In the Torah portion, Korach, we learn clearly that the best lie is the one laced with lots of truth. We saw that in our own day with Communism. The theory of Communism seems beautiful -- from each according to his ability, and to each according to his need. It seems to be based on altruism. On the other hand, Capitalism seems to be based on greed.

Altruism, we learn from the story of Abraham, is not always good. The people in the old days sacrificed their children to save the community. The father sacrificed his son to save the country. What is greater altruism is there than that? That resonates in our own day, when the major religion in our country says that the father killed the son to save all of mankind. And in our own day, too, we send our young men to fight to save our country.

People make a mistake when they compare Communism and Capitalism because they pit Communism's theory against Capitalism's theory, adding that altruism is always better than greed. They should have compared the results of Communism to the results of Capitalism.

Korach also had a lot of truth in his arguments. When he said to Moses and Aaron "It's enough for you because all the congregation is holy and G-d is in their midst. Why do you exalt yourself above the congregation?" Korach was absolutely right -- all the congregation is holy. After all, don't we learn in the Torah that we are an Am Kadosh, a holy people, and a Momleches Cohanim, a priestly kingdom? Didn't G-d tell us "You will be holy?" What's the matter with Korach's arguments? Aren't we a holy people?

The answer is that we Jews live under three covenants. Korach got these covenants mixed up. Even Martin Buber talks about Korach's insolent assertion.

The first covenant is the Covenant of Noah. All humanity lives under this covenant. We all, every human being in the world, has a relationship with G-d. We Jews, however, have two additional covenants. We have the covenant G-d made with Abraham, the Ancestral Covenant, the Brit Godol. As Rabbi Solavachik said, "According to the Brit Godol, every Jew is called upon to help G-d perfect this world. We all are part of a holy people whose job is to be a role model for humanity, a light unto the nations."

However, that doesn't mean that on an individual basis we are all equal in spiritual attainments. Some are more holy than others, some are more spiritual than others. That's what the second covenant, the Covenant of Sinai, is about. It teaches us how to individually become holy. But we have to learn how to be holy, to be better people, to do more mitzvot. This requires effort. Not everybody is on the same level. If everyone were, we wouldn't need teachers, rabbis, and spiritual guides. Some Rabbis are even consulted by other Rabbis. We see this in the secular field too. No doctor specializes in everything. Each consults one another. True, the Jewish people as a whole are holy because they accepted the mission from Abraham, under the covenant of Abraham. However, to fulfill this mission, we have to use the means given to us at Sinai. To implement these means, we have to study Torah and learn. We all are potentially holy, but not all of us are at the same place.

I remember at my previous synagogue a man who never came inside the synagogue. He sat in his car while his wife attended Kaddish or holidays, but he never left the car. Finally, one day I

convinced him to come in. Soon he was one of our most faithful congregants, coming on Friday nights and holidays and even during the week. He was more pious than his wife! He complained to me “Rabbi, why didn’t you tell me about all of the beautiful principles of Judaism when I first came here?” I replied to him, “I did, but you weren’t listening. It’s like a radio broadcast station – they can broadcast as much as they like, but if your radio isn’t on, you won’t hear a thing.” This university professor had great spiritual potential, but he hadn’t developed it. When he turned on his radio, he grew.

Each of us has spiritual potential, but we have to develop it. We have to grow. We are not all on the same level of holiness. Some are on a high rung, and some look as if they are on a high rung but have given up and are sliding down, not going up. Korach was wrong. He assumed everyone was on an equal level because we are a holy people. That is not true -- each of us can rise to a high level of holiness, but not everyone puts out the necessary effort to climb that high, and only a few actually get there. Korach’s lie had a lot of truth, but it was still a lie.

I’m reminded of a story they tell of a young lady who brought her boyfriend home to meet her parents. He had a ring in his nose, a ring in his ear, a leather jacket, boots, tight pants, and a motorcycle. After he left the mother turned to the girl and said, “I don’t know, he doesn’t seem nice to me.” The girl replied, “What do you mean he doesn’t seem nice? He’s doing 5000 hours of community service!” Each of us has the potential to rise to great spiritual heights, but not all of us are equal in our attainments. Let’s hope and pray we will all rise to great heights so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day, Amen.

MEETING YOUR EXPECTATIONS & THE

RED HEIFER

Today we read a double portion, Chukas and Balak. In the Torah portion, Chukas, we learn about the laws of the red heifer. We learn how all those who had a hand in preparing the ashes of the red heifer, used to purify ritual uncleanness, became themselves, paradoxically, unclean. True, they became unclean for only one day, but they became unclean. Why should this be so?

We also learn in this Torah portion about the death of Miriam, and we learn about the sin of Moshe, how he strikes the rock instead of speaking to it. In the Torah portion, Balak, we learn how Balak hires a Mesopotamian soothsayer to curse the Jewish people. He hopes that through the curses of this soothsayer, Bilam, the Jewish people would be destroyed. Why should these two Torah portions be combined, and why is Moshe's sin talked about right after we learn about the red heifer and Miriam's death?

It seems to me that one of the underlying themes of these two Torah portions is that people always fulfill your expectations by either living up to them or by living down to them. Miriam had just died. The rabbis say that the reason there were three leaders of the Jewish people is that there are three different aspects to the Jewish religion. Moshe gave people meaning in their lives. That's why for the merit of Moshe, the manna came down. Manna in Hebrew means what is it. Aaron stressed ethics. For his merit, the clouds of glory covered the people. Ethics allows a society to exist without violence and protects it from any sort of harm. Miriam gave the people hope. When people are faced with death and pain and suffering, religion gives them hope. For her merit, water was given to the Jewish people because hope is the water of life. After Miriam died, the Jewish people clamored for water. Interestingly, the text said, "And there was not water for the Aida, and they congregated (using the word Kahal) against Moshe and Aaron." It then says, "And Moshe and Aaron came before the Kahal, the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and G-d spoke to Moshe saying, 'Take this staff and gather the Aida.'" Moshe took the staff and Moshe and Aaron gathered the Kahal. It does not say he gathered the Aida. Moshe then said to them, "Hear, please, rebels."

The rabbis tell us that the difference between an Aida and a Kahal is that the Aida represents what the Jewish people can be. Aida comes from the same word as witness. It means that the Jewish people can be the witness for G-d in the world. We can lead such moral and decent lives that the world will want to emulate our morality. The word Kahal, on the other hand, just stands for congregation, a group of people. We all know that in English there is only one word for congregation; in Hebrew there are two. For example, we have in Houston Congregation Beth Yeshurun, Congregation Beth Israel. Of course, we are known as United Orthodox. In my brother's city, a congregation known as the Kehila Kedosha, a holy congregation, has the implication of being an Aida. When G-d talked about the Jewish people, He talked about them as an Aida. When Moshe talked about the Jewish people, he talked about them as only a Kahal. Moshe could no longer see the potentialities in the Jewish people. He had grown jaded.

The Torah says there was not water for the Aida. The Jewish people were still an Aida, but because Miriam was no longer present, they no longer had the hope and optimism that they should have. Moshe only saw the Kahal, and he screamed at them, "Hear, you rebels." Moshe was bitterly disappointed in the people because he thought he had made no progress in his lifetime. When first leaving Egypt, he led a slave people out, and G-d actually told him to hit the rock. He knew he had to goad and push them. There, the word for rock is Tzur, which means to be narrow. Here the word for rock is Selah, which means pause. The people needed words of comfort to deal with their pain and suffering. The people were no longer a slave people. This was the second generation. They had to be talked to. Things had to be explained to them. Moshe could not see this. He could not see that he was dealing with an Aida. He thought he was dealing with a Kahal. His expectations of the people were very low, and, therefore, he could no longer be their leader.

We always have to look at people with high expectations. We have to expect the best from them, not the worst. If we always expect the worst, we will get the worst. People fulfill our expectations of them. The nations of the world expect the Jewish people to act according to higher standards than the rest of the world, and they always chide us if we do not. I am sure Israel is going to be blamed and has already been blamed, especially by France, for bombing the power plants of Lebanon because Israel was shelled by Ketusha rockets. However, NATO bombing the power plants in Yugoslavia, was greeted with almost universal applause. We Jews are blamed for everything. Three synagogues were fire bombed in Sacramento because of the U.S. government's treatment of the Serbs, supposedly. It is true, though, that we Jews expect ourselves to live up to higher standards. We are supposed to be a light unto the nations, and we know that if we expect little from our children, we will get little from them, but if we expect more from our children, we will get more.

I had a friend who used to be terribly negative with his boy, always criticizing, never complimenting him. I took him aside one day and said he was doing the wrong thing. His boy was failing in school and getting wild. I told him he should be positive with him. To my surprise, he took my advice and praised him and called him "my tzadkel". The boy responded wonderfully. He wanted to live up to his father's expectations. His grades shot up to A's. His father expected him to be good and praised him. Of course, if he did something wrong, he criticized him, but he usually praised him and the boy responded wonderfully. We should always be positive with people, especially with our children.

The Kohen who prepares the ashes of the red heifer, himself, became ritually unclean for several reasons. One, to teach us that when you get involved with people on a lower religious level, you may become tainted. It is a worthwhile thing to do, however, and should be done. Another reason given is the Kohen should be sympathetic to others who have become ritually unclean and understand their problems. The main reason given, though, is people who deal with so-called tainted people can never see their potentiality. They treat them in a condescending and, many times, derogatory way. They do not feel that these people can ever rise to amount to anything.

A terrible case of this is reported in the press this week in Houston, where a black judge

was jogging in the Woodlands. Accosted by two policemen and told to stop because they wanted to question him, the judge refused. He was not doing anything wrong. What did they think he was doing? Speeding? They arrested him, and put him in jail. After a few hours, though, he was released from jail since no charges could be preferred against him. He is going to sue the city for a large sum, and he should. He was only accosted because he was black.

We also have these themes repeated in the Torah portion, Balak, where Bilam is hired to curse the Jewish people. He is to make the Jewish people believe they are inferior, to destroy their Tzipor Nefesh, their feeling of respect and dignity. Anti-Semites throughout time have tried this. If Jews can be convinced that they are nothing but vermin and trash, then they will act that way, and thereby be easy to destroy. Bilam, of course, failed. He was first forced to say, "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel." We Jews, except for rare occasions, have always believed we can be more, not less, than we are.

I am reminded of the time when I was a youngster and was taken to a Federation meeting. The president of the Federation said, "I am sorry that I was born a Jew, but since I was born a Jew, we should help other Jews who are in need." It is this type of attitude which Bilam tried to instill in the Jewish people. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, you do not hear these types of comments anymore. Jews are proud of who they are, and know that they can achieve great things. We must always be careful to treat everyone positively and expect good things from them, because people will live up to our expectations. If they are low, they will meet them; if they are high and positive, they will meet them, too.

Our president, Danny Gold, does many mitzvahs as an eye doctor. He visits the prisons and prescribes glasses and attends to the vision of the inmates. After he had gone to these prisons for several years, he noticed they were expanding and getting many more inmates. Danny asked one of them, "Why is this prison getting so many more inmates? Why are they building so many more units?" The prisoner looked at him and pointed to his t-shirt. Danny looked at the t-shirt, and it read, "If you build it, we will come." We must always remember to set high expectations and always be positive with the people with whom we come in contact, especially with our family. If we do, then rest assured, our community will reach new heights and, by so doing, we will create even better communities so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

IDOLATRY, PARTIAL VALUES, DEATH &

THE RED HEIFER

Why has so much violence and hatred, persecution and killing occurred during the past 100 years? The Twentieth Century is the bloodiest century on record: the Holocaust; the Communist gulags; Russia and China; World War I; World War II; etc. It is strange that the Twentieth Century was the bloodiest of centuries seeing as how it was also the most educated. Why should this most educated of all centuries have also been the bloodiest? We can claim that the reason is because we now have the tools to kill and maim and persecute and oppress peoples which we did not have before. After all, modern communication and modern weapons have made it easier for a dictator to retain power. In the past, when all dictators had were basically swords, spears, and horses, people could easily revolt. The ruler knew the limits of his power, but this alone cannot explain the ferocity of the killing of our century, the Cambodians killing a million of their own people for no real good reason, the Hutus killing half a million Tutsis, and Hitler killing six million of our people. It does not make sense.

However, if we look at the underlying philosophical position of many people in the Twentieth Century, we can understand perhaps what caused this terrible violence. Rabbi Soloveitchik teaches us that idolatry occurs when we elevate a partial value to an absolute value. After all, what is idolatry, and why does the Jewish religion abhor idolatry so much? Because it elevates a partial value to an absolute value. When the pagans used to worship the elements of nature, they were, in effect, elevating a partial value to an absolute value.

Unfortunately, for the past 150 years, that has been the story of our civilization. When either nationalism, socialism, communism, capitalism, or Naziism is elevated to an absolute value, then idolatry and evil occur. Look what happens when we elevate a partial value to an absolute value -- we then feel that we can either kill actively or passively to bring this value about. That's what happened to Communism. Its leaders felt that since the Communist ideals were so lofty and noble, since they would improve the lot of the common people, they could kill millions to achieve this goal. Their killing was not only justified but was also a holy act. The Nazis felt the same thing. Killing Jews was a holy act. Were not the Jews in league with the devil? Therefore, if you get rid of the Jews, you get rid of evil. When the pagans engaged in human sacrifices, they felt they were doing a mitzvah, a wonderful thing because they were ensuring the safety of their people. Even an absolute belief in capitalism caused millions of people to die during the Irish Famine in the 1850's. The British had lots of food in their storehouses, but they refused to give it to the Irish because they felt doing so would violate the laws of capitalism. Even today, we find people who do not want the government to help poor people or sick people. They feel that the government should never be involved. We know how the evils of nationalism and tribalism have wreaked untold misery and millions of casualties on the world in the past century. Partial values, even if beneficial and, by and large, correct, can never be elevated to absolute values; otherwise, they will end up as idolatry.

We know this in a marriage as well. When one of the parties is always standing up for principle, we know that this marriage is not going to last because every partial value will

be raised to an absolute value. "My freedom is important, and I do not have to go with you to the ballgame or the ballet." "It is a matter of principle", one spouse will tell the other. A marriage without compromise is doomed.

The Torah portion, Chukas, deals with this problem. It opens with the laws of the red heifer. The laws of the red heifer are incomprehensible. We are commanded to take a complete red heifer without blemish, upon which a yoke has not come. We are to take it outside the camp and slaughter it. We are to burn the heifer entirely. While the heifer is burning, we take cedar wood, hyssop, crimson thread and throw it into the fire. The ashes from this fire we then mix with water, and we sprinkle it upon a person who has come into contact with the dead on the third and seventh day after he has become defiled. Then the person who was sprinkled with these ashes of the red heifer would go into a mikvah so he could become ritually pure again and enter the sanctuary. Everyone who had a hand in preparing these ashes became ritually impure. Therefore, the ashes of the red heifer purified people who had become defiled, and defiled those who were engaged in preparing it. The laws of the red heifer are called chukim, which means laws whose reason seems beyond us.

These laws of the red heifer speak about the paradoxical nature of many things in life; how we cannot extrapolate partial truths to absolute truths. This is especially true when we deal with people. We cannot extrapolate from their backgrounds. After all, Ruth, the epitome of kindness, came from Moab, a hard-hearted and merciless people; Abraham came from a pagan priest, etc.

In the Medrash, Pesukei D'Rebbe Eliezer, we learn how the rabbis taught that the rites of the red heifer were ordained to forgive us for the sin of the golden calf. The Jewish people had committed the grave sin of idolatry when they made the golden calf, and, so to speak, another cow, the red heifer, was ordained to remind the Jewish people of the evils of idolatry, and to bring about the forgiveness of the Jewish people for the sin of idolatry. The red heifer teaches us that we can never elevate a partial value to an absolute value. The Jewish people at the time of the sin of the golden calf thought they needed to have an intermediary between them and G-d. They thought this because Moshe had disappeared. They thought that unless they had this golden calf, they were lost. This, too, is one of the reasons why the red heifer was red.

Red is a symbol of blood. How do we know when we have made a partial value into an absolute value? When blood is running, when death is occurring. People who came into contact with the dead had to realize that they were not to use death as a weapon to rectify society, unless it was explicitly stated in the Torah. Even then, we know that the death penalty was rarely enforced. A court that ruled someone once in seven years, or some say seventy years be killed, was considered a bloody court. Those who prepared the red heifer themselves became impure. The reason for this was that many times people exempt themselves from leading balanced lives. They say, I am special. I can do all sorts of things other people cannot do. After all, here I am preparing the means of purification; therefore, I am exempt from normal behavior, and I can fulfill my goals by doing improper things. We find many times this type of insensitivity among people who should know better. These people say that since I understand the rules of interpersonal behavior, I am exempt from them, and I, therefore, can, with impunity, break all rules of

interpersonal behavior. They can manipulate people, cheat people, be unfaithful, etc.

Immediately after the sin of the golden calf, we learn about Moshe's sin. He struck the rock instead of speaking to it. According to the Ramban, based on Rabbi Chananiel, Moshe sinned not because he struck the rock, but because he said, "Shall we bring forth for you water?" He should have said, "Shall G-d bring forth for you water?" According to the Ramban, his sin was that he elevated himself to the level of G-d and risked having the people worship him. This is not an uncommon occurrence. Many times, people will justify immoral and bad acts because they say that their religious leaders require it. We know in Judaism that we are supposed to respect and give due deference to the opinions of rabbis and other learned people, but we are not to turn their opinions into absolute values. When they rule on a halachic matter, we should follow them, but on other matters, their views are the same as those of the rest of us. If we turn their views into absolute values, then we are changing Judaism into a cult, and we are making them the objects of worship.

Jewish nationalism is also only a partial value. We learn in this Torah portion that Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to sue for peace, even with Sichon and Og, before he conquered Transjordan. Sichon and Og would have none of his peace overtures, and attacked the Jewish people. We know that before Joshua entered the land of Canaan, he had to sue for peace also. We should remember that partial values elevated to absolute values wreak havoc on the world. That's why we need the Torah. The Torah teaches us to balance our values so we do not go overboard in one direction or another. That's why the study of Torah is so important. That's why the Torah is called mayim, water. We all know that the purest water is odorless, tasteless, and colorless. It does not have the exciting or stimulating taste of sodas or alcoholic beverages, yet we know that we can live without sodas and alcoholic beverages, but we cannot live without water. Water is an absolute necessity of life. That's why, paradoxically, Holocaust survivors are more likely to be religious than are those who did not go through the Holocaust, because they have seen firsthand the evil that men do when they let partial values become absolute values. They know they cannot trust men; they can only trust G-d. They know that we need Torah. Almost all the Chassidim in Israel and in New York are Holocaust survivors. We must always live balanced lives, and not allow partial values to become absolute values; otherwise, we will bring destruction to the world.

Let us hope and pray that the terrible, horrible, violent, deadly excesses of the past century will not be repeated in the Twenty-first Century; that we will learn to curb our idolatrous impulse of raising partial values to absolute values so that truly we will be able to create a society in which peace and harmony will reign; a society in which we will all be able to balance life's values so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

COMMUNICATION, REALITY, EXPECTATION, & FANTASIES

In the Torah portion, Balak, we learn how Balak ben Zepor tried to destroy the Jewish people. In fact, the word Balak itself means destroyer. The word Zepor can mean the essence of a person. You can destroy a people two ways: by weapons and by getting them to no longer believe in the worthiness of their cause. For example, in our day Communism was destroyed not through war, but because the people in Russia no longer believed in Communism. They felt Communism was wrong, and therefore no one was willing to die for it, no one was willing to defend it.

Also, the Apartheid regime in South Africa ended without a shot being fired because the people in South Africa no longer believed in Apartheid. Even the Dutch Reformed Church came out against it. Destroy a person's essential belief in his cause and it will disintegrate. We see that in Israel today, where many Jews no longer believe in Zionism. They, in fact, believe Zionism is wrong. Similarly, in Russia and South Africa, people believed their ideas were wrong and so these regimes fell. These people who believe Zionism is wrong, also believe that, therefore, the Jewish state should fall.

Balak hired Balaam to curse the Jewish people. He wanted Balaam to convince the Jewish people that their cause was not worthy, and if successful, they would, therefore, cease to be a threat. To accomplish his goal, Balaam tried to cause the Jewish people to lose their will to exist by confusing the different levels upon which they communicated. We communicate on a level of reality, a level of expectations, and a level of fantasies. That's why Balaam tried to curse the Jewish people from three different places. First he went to Baal Bamos, which represents the point of view of reality. Then he went to Tsofim, which means expectations. Finally he tried Paor, which stands for fantasies.

We learn in the Ethics of Our Fathers that anyone who is generous, possesses a humble spirit, and a meek soul is a student of Abraham, our father, and anybody who has the evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul is a student of the wicked Balaam. The Gemorrah explains that the difference between Abraham and Balaam was that Abraham prayed at the same place every day, but Balaam did not. In other words, Abraham tried to see the whole picture and didn't try to confuse the people's level of communication, while Balaam did. We can see how destructive this is by what is going on today between Israel and the Arabs. Israel wants peace, real peace, the type of peace there is between Canada and the United States. But the Arabs don't want peace -- they want victory.

We Jews have never thought victory was important, in the conquering sense. When Jacob wrestled the Angel, he did not want to defeat him. He only wanted the Angel to bless him. Today, too, we do not want to defeat the Arabs; we just want them to bless us. We are communicating on the level of fantasies. Arafat's textbooks are filled with anti-Semitism and hatred for Jews. He extols suicide bombers and tells people they will destroy Israel by stages, just like Mohammed destroyed the Jewish Koraish tribe in Saudi Arabia with whom Mohammed, while weak, made a 10-year treaty. Then after two years, when stronger, he attacked the Koraish tribe and wiped them out.

We Jews shouldn't feel the Messianic era has arrived. We must know what reality is. Many Jews, in their zeal for peace, say Arafat has a case. After all, the UN originally gave Israel 55%

of the land. After the War of Independence we gained 78% and after the Six Day War, we had 100% of the land. Arafat says willingness to take 22% is a big compromise. The problem is that when you start wars, you should expect to lose land. Germany started World War II, and no one said Poland and Russia had to give German land back. If you say Arafat has a case, then you are lost. We can make a peace agreement and give back some land to Arafat, so that we no longer have to rule over the Arabs, but Arafat has no case. We should take into account not just our fantasies, but the reality of the situation and Arafat's expectations. Otherwise, we will find ourselves facing tanks, artillery, and airplanes right next to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Marriages also flounder because the couple is unreal in their expectations of each other. We all know advertisers make a fortune for their clients by appealing to our fantasies. If you use this toothpaste, all the boys will fall head over heels for you. If you use this deodorant, all the girls will flock to you. Unfortunately, many people believe the fantasies and act on them, many times in synagogues and other institutions as well.

If we are to maintain ourselves with integrity and decency, we cannot confuse reality with expectations and fantasies. In marriages, the wife should not expect her husband to act like her father, and the husband should not expect his wife to act like his mother. In synagogues, we should not expect the human beings who make up the membership to suddenly be without human foibles. They should be better people because they are members, but they won't be perfect.

Balaam, when he blessed the Jewish people, said, "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel." Sages and rabbis have determined this verse to mean Balaam praised the synagogues and study halls of Israel. They have also explained the verse to mean that Balaam praised the fact that the entrance of one Jewish family's tent did not open opposite the door of the tent of the family living across from it. This stressed the value of privacy. Another explanation is that we are not to look into another tent to define how we act.

The Jewish people shouldn't worry about what the world thinks when a threat to the existence of the Jewish people persists, and especially when a threat to the existence of the state of Israel looms. We should not let the Balaams of the world confuse us, or convince us that Zionism is wrong and the Arabs don't want to destroy us. We must make sure we have the means and the territory to defend ourselves.

I'm reminded of a story they tell of a woman who came to see a lawyer. "I want a divorce," she said. The lawyer said, "Do you have any grounds?" and the woman replied, "Yes, I have an acre and a quarter." Then the lawyer asked her, "Do you have a grudge?" and she said, "No, a carport." The lawyer's next question was, "Does he beat you every day?" and the woman answered, "No, I'm up at least 15 minutes before him every morning." Finally the lawyer said, "Why do you want a divorce?" And the woman said, "We can't communicate." We all must communicate and on the same level. We cannot mix our levels of communication or we will destroy our marriages, our institutions, and our people. May we all hope and pray we do these things, so Mashiach will come quickly in our day, Amen.

PINCHAS, NODOV, AVIHU & ACTING

ALONE

In the Torah portion, Pinchas, we learn that Pinchas was rewarded for his act of zealotry. Curiously, his reward is not found in the same Torah portion as is his act. The Torah portions, Chukas and Balak, are many times combined. The Torah portion immediately after Pinchas, Mattos and Massey, are many times combined. Pinchas is never combined with any other Torah portion. This means that the reward for the zealous act of Pinchas can never occur on the same Shabbat we read about his act. The rabbis frown on zealotry very much, and only in unusual circumstances can it ever be condoned. In fact, they explain that if G-d would not have intervened and given Pinchas His covenant of peace, Pinchas would have been tried for his act, and some people say even excommunicated.

Note that the Yud in the name Pinchas is written very small, which is just the exact opposite of the Yud added to Yehoshua's name. The rabbis elaborate that Pinchas did not consult with anyone. He just did what he felt he had to do. Joshua, on the other hand, consulted with everyone, and, therefore, almost always received approval for his acts. In Pinchas' case, very rarely do the rabbis condone his act of zealotry. As a result, and perhaps as a punitive measure, he has such a little Yud in his name. Also, we know a letter is cut in this Torah portion, the Vav of the word Shalom, peace. Usually, when a letter is cut, the Torah is considered possel, unfit. In fact, almost every year I am called by a Torah reader to look at the Torah to decide whether I should declare it unfit since the Vav is broken. This, however, is done in this case on purpose, and the Torah is not unfit because this word Shalom can be read two ways: either as Sholaim, perfect, or Shalom, peace. Pinchas did not know how to reconcile the quest for perfection with peace. That's why he could not be the leader of the Jewish people, even though originally Moshe thought he would be. Joshua knew how to do that. Therefore, he was chosen to be the leader of the Jewish people, and the Yud of his name was spelled large.

The question, though, can be asked, why was Pinchas treated differently than Nodov and Avihu? Nodov and Avihu brought strange fire to G-d, and they were struck down. Many rabbis conclude that the reason they were was because they did not consult Moshe and Aaron. They acted on their own. But here, too, Pinchas acted on his own. Why wasn't he struck down? We can say that Nodov and Avihu were struck down because they falsified our religion. What was happening was that Moshe and Aaron were waiting for G-d to send fire down from heaven. They kept going into the Tabernacle, coming out of the Tabernacle, blessing the people, etc., but nothing was happening. The fire was not coming down. Nodov and Avihu felt that the people would lose all their faith if they did not act, so they falsified the religion. They brought the fire so the people would not lose faith. This was a great desecration of G-d's name. We must always tell the truth, even if we are not sure that the people will understand. G-d requires us to act truthfully, not to make the people religious through trickery.

Pinchas, on the other hand, came to stop a moral breach. The people were suffering from a plague, and he had to stop it. This situation compares to that where an airline

pilot goes berserk. You may have to slap him across the face or even worse to regain control of the airplane so it will not crash.

Today, too, we see a leader of the Jewish people, Barak, acting all alone. He did not even consult the leadership of his own party. He did not have the support of his own coalition. He did not even tell them his plans. He acted alone. He is embarking on a very dangerous course. After all, Arafat is still preaching to his people, and especially the young people in his schools, the most anti-Semitic message: the idea that Israel has to be destroyed. How can Barak make such concessions? People say if he does not, a war will result, but to have a war now benefits Israel more than five years from now when Arafat will have tanks, planes, and artillery poised above the hills of Tel Aviv. How can Barak rely on Clinton? Clinton will be out of office in three months, and he is a lame duck. We do not know what Gore or Bush will do. Also, America is not a very reliable ally. If things are not in America's interests, we forget about our obligations. Look what happened in South Vietnam or the treaties we made with the Indians, etc. Besides, Americans only admire people who fight back, who are willing to fight for themselves. Netanyahu understands Americans more than Barak does. He went to American schools. Experience has taught us if you do not fight a bully, nobody will help you. We all hope that Barak will reach a lasting peace, but if he cannot, no agreement is better than a bad agreement. He is gambling Israel's land and resources and security against a very nebulous peace. If Arafat would only preach peace to his people, that would validate Barak's methodology, but as of now, Arafat is not doing it. Barak is acting like Pinchas, and the Yud in Pinchas is very small.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a young man working in a bank. He was coming to work in a chauffeur-driven limousine, he lived in a penthouse, and dressed in expensive suits. The president of the bank was suspicious and thought the young man was embezzling. He called him in and said, "Young man, are you a rich man?" The young man said no. The president asked, "Are your parents rich?" The young man said no, that he was an orphan. The president asked, "How much do you make a week?" The young man said he made \$500 a week. The president asked, "How is it possible that you can live so well, even better than I, on a salary of \$500 a week?" The young man said, "Well, you see, I am running a lottery." The president asked what he was raffling off? The young man said, "My paycheck, and since there are 1000 employees in the bank, they pay \$10 each, so I can live the way I live." Barak is gambling the Jewish people's paycheck. Let us hope he will come out with a good agreement or no agreement at all that Israel will continue to be strong so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

IF THINGS HAVE CHANGED, HOW

SHOULD WE REACT?

One of the underlying themes of the Torah portion Mattos-Massey is handling change. The Torah portion, Mattos, opens up with a discussion of vows. In Judaism, words are very important, and a person is expected to keep his vow. In fact, the Targum articulates that what makes man unique is his ability to talk. We are the talking animal. It just does not mean that we are able to communicate, because, after all, animals can communicate, too. What it means is we can name things. We also can prohibit things by our words when we take upon ourselves a vow. We are like G-d in that sense. G-d also, according to our tradition, creates by words, and G-d also prohibits and permits by words. We know in the Torah He tells us what is kosher and what is not kosher, and we, too, by words can prohibit and permit. Chetsa Asura -- we can make things prohibited. We know, too, that we can have our vows annulled. How can we possibly, after having uttered a solemn vow, have it annulled?

The rabbis learn this from a sentence in Vayikra, chapter 5, verse 4, "If a soul when he will swear to express with his lips either for bad or good to all which the man will express by an oath." It uses the word Ha'Adam. The rabbis warn that when a person takes an oath, he must have done so when he is Ha'Adam, when he is a man, meaning that he knew all the consequences of his acts. If, for example, I took an oath that I would not enter the JCC anymore because of some policy they adopted, and then decide I have some very important business meetings in the JCC, I am able to go before a rabbinical board of three and have my vow annulled. Had I known about these meetings, I would not have made the vow. The rabbis explain that a man is responsible for his actions, and if at the time he made his vow, he did not know the consequences of his actions, he would not be considered a man.

Rabbi Twersky said that the name we give to human beings, homo sapiens, is not really correct because man is not just a thinking animal. Five traits distinguish a human being from an animal: one is a human being can learn from history; second, a human being thinks about the goals of life; third, a human being seeks to improve; fourth, a human being can control his biological urges and is not a slave to them; fifth, a human being is responsible for his actions.

In the Torah portion, Mattos, we learn about change. We are advised that when things change, we have to react differently to this change. We learn how Moshe Rabbeinu really can no longer be the leader of the Jewish people because he loses his temper for a second time. The people with whom he is dealing now is not the slave generation that left Egypt, and he does not know how to handle them. He loses his temper at the army which defeated Midian because he felt they did not obey his directions, when, in fact, he had not given explicit directions. He also does not understand how the tribes of Reuven and Gad would want to stay in Transjordan.

The Torah portion, Massey, instructs how things are constantly changing, and that we must always reexamine our position depending upon how things have changed. In our modern day, there are two orthodox groups who even fought Zionism, the Netura Karta

and the Satmer. In the Middle Ages, Jews could not go up to the land of Israel. We had no means to do so. We would be slaughtered. Therefore, the correct thing was to wait, but when an opening occurred, we were supposed to go. After all, in the Shemoneh Esre, we pray that G-d should provide for us, but that does not mean we should not work. We say G-d should cure us, but that does not mean we should not go to doctors. We should go up to Israel when we have the opportunity to do so. Situations have changed. It is no longer an almost 100% life-threatening situation now, especially after the Balfour Declaration, the United Nations pronouncement, the winning of the War of Independence. When situations change, we have to face the change in a Halachic way, just like in the Torah portion when we discover how the daughters of Tzlacha could inherit land. However, they had to marry within their tribe so the land would not be alienated.

In our day, too, we have many women's issues which are different than before. After all, we now have birth control pills. Women have a greater life expectancy. More education is available to women, both secular and religious; with these changes, women, within Halachic parameters, must be given more opportunity, even in the synagogue.

The political argument in Israel today is really, has Arafat changed? Has the PLO changed? If they really have changed, then we have to relate to them in a different way. Peres, Rabin, and Barak are not bad people. They are good people. They have a certain perception that change has occurred. Others feel that change has not occurred. Camp David, I believe, has demonstrated that if Arafat has changed, he has not changed enough, but I, personally, know Peres and Barak and knew Rabin, and they are good people. We must treat all Jews with respect and love because in dealing with change, one must initially know if a change has occurred, and we must listen to everybody's viewpoint carefully with love and understanding.

That's why when we learn about the 42 different places the Jewish people travelled in the desert, right in the middle we are advised of Aaron's death. There was change when we travelled, and we had to deal with this change, but always with love, as Aaron did. He pursued peace and loved peace. When it comes to change, we, first of all, have to determine whether there has been change. In many instances, no change has taken place. Second, if there has been change, we have to know how to respond to it, and there will always be difficulty in knowing how. However, if we deal with each other with love and respect, even if we disagree how we are to respond, then we will be able to deal with the change itself in a positive way, as Aaron did. May we all be able to deal with change correctly and positively so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SUFFERING, AT MOST, INSTRUCTIVE,

NOT REDEMPTIVE

Suffering is a problem that all religions must face -- why does Man suffer? Why is there so much suffering in the world? Why did G-d have to create a world of pain, death, and suffering?

We really do not know the answers to these questions. We do have faith, however, that at the end of days, we will. Some religions say that suffering is redemptive, that only through suffering can people get close to G-d, a closeness we all crave. People who do not suffer, they contend, will forever have a barrier between them and G-d. Judaism, of course, does not believe this. We do not believe that suffering is redemptive. At the most, we believe that suffering is instructive. We do not want to suffer. We do not think that suffering is necessary to get close to G-d. We are told that if we suffer we should examine our deeds. Perhaps we are doing something causing us to suffer. We all know that the different pains we suffer are warning us that something is wrong in our body or in our behavior; that we should check them out. In fact, a Jewish law states we are not allowed to live in a city that does not have a doctor. We have always believed that one of our main goals in life is to relieve pain, especially the pain of others. Suffering instructs us that things are wrong and some things have to be corrected.

The Gemorah in Brochas goes through a whole list of things we should look at to determine why we suffer. The list ends by saying that sometimes we cannot determine the cause of our suffering, and we must just accept our suffering, as in the case of Job. Nevertheless, that does not mean that these pangs of suffering should be welcomed or sought after. We are not an ascetic religion. We do not look to flagellate ourselves and to hit ourselves until blood flows, as other religions do. We do not believe that we need to suffer to get close to G-d.

In fact, Judaism teaches that many times suffering distances us from G-d. The Book of Proverbs states two tests: the test of poverty and the test of riches. Poverty grinds a person down until he has no strength to worry about being moral or reaching up to G-d. Riches, on the other hand, can cause a person to become so arrogant that he thinks he did it all on his own, and that he does not need G-d or morality. As the rabbis say, if you burn ore and there is no gold in it, everything will burn up; if there are some pieces of gold in it, the fire will bring it out. Unfortunately, not everyone is pure gold, innately a tzadik. Suffering does not always bring out the best in people; sometimes it brings out the worst.

Judaism says we do not want to suffer. We want a life that will be good, filled with simchas, as we say, filled with joy and naches and happiness. Inevitably, though, we will all suffer. We will all get sick and we all will die. We all will have pain, some worse than others. Many times, we can correct the pain that besets us, because this pain indicates something is wrong, and we should correct what is wrong. We must probe very deeply within our spiritual makeup as well as within our physical makeup to see what is giving us our spiritual and psychic pain. Many times, we can find the source of this pain, alleviate it, and even eliminate it.

That is actually the purpose of Jewish fast days, not to give us suffering. We do not believe that G-d is a cruel G-d Who delights in our suffering. Although He is ultimately the author of all our suffering, He does not delight in it. We believe that our suffering must serve some greater purpose, but we are not to afflict suffering ourselves for no reason. In fact, to do so is a sin. The Nazirite, in agreeing not to cut his hair and not to drink wine, had to bring a sin offering at the end of his Naziriteship because he had limited his enjoyment of the world. This we should not do unless G-d has told us to do so.

On the fast days, we say V'Eeneesim Es Nafshosaychim - and you shall afflict our souls - which means that the purpose of our fasting is not to afflict our bodies. It is to make us neglect everything else so we just concentrate on the defects of our spiritual life, on the defects of our moral character, as the rabbis comment on that portion in the Book of Jonah we actually read on Yom Kippur and that speaks about the people of Ninevah who repented. G-d did not look at their fasts or their sackclothes, but at their deeds. Our fasting is meant for us to look at our deeds so we can change them and become better people. If we just fast, no matter how much the fast makes us suffer, G-d will give no heed to that suffering. G-d will only give heed to our deeds, that by our neglecting our physical side and by concentrating only on our spiritual side, we have improved our deeds, and have determined to continue to improve our deeds. Just as we are not partners with G-d in death, we are not partners with G-d in suffering. We are not to cause other people suffering nor cause ourselves suffering. We are only partners with G-d in life and in enhancing life. Our job is to help G-d perfect this world, to help Him make this a better place. This we can only do if we are whole in body and whole in spirit.

That's why Judaism decries slavery and persecution and discrimination -- they diminish our ability to act as G-d's partner in creating a better world. This also explains why we Jews protested so vocally against the Soviet Union's persecution of our people; why we demonstrated and tried everything to free our refuseniks from the gulags. On the other hand, Billy Graham, when he went to the Soviet Union, did nothing to relieve the suffering of his fellow Baptists held in the gulags of the Soviet Union. More Baptists were in the gulags than Jews, but when Billy Graham preached his sermons in Soviet Russia, he said nothing about this suffering. In fact, he did not protest against the suffering. Instead, he told his fellow Baptists to submit to it, and quoted a text which said, "Resist not evil," etc. To him, the Baptists of the Soviet Union were being given a greater opportunity to be closer to G-d than were the Baptists in the United States. Their suffering was bringing them closer to G-d. He, in effect, told them, "Endure, this suffering will pass, and you will spiritually be the better for it." He was right. The suffering did pass. The Soviet Union is no more. I do not know if these Baptists are the better for it, though.

We Jews also cannot understand why the Pope has not spoken out more forcibly against the persecution of the Christian Maronites, who are Catholics, in Lebanon. But, again, to many Christians, suffering is a blessing. To Jews, it is almost always a curse. It is only at best instructive, but it is not redemptive. We know that if suffering comes upon our people, we are told that we must investigate our ways that we can improve,

that G-d sends suffering to the Jewish people that we will not repeat the mistakes of the past but learn from them.

This is the reason Tisha B'Av is considered a Moed, a semi-happy time. How can Tisha B'Av be considered a semi-happy time so that we do not say Tachnun and other sad prayers? After all, we sit on the floor on Tisha B'Av. We fast for 25 hours. We sit in semi-dark synagogues. We chant dirges. We read the Book of Lamentations. It, though, is considered a semi-happy holiday because the suffering that comes upon our people is instructive. If we learn well the lessons of Tisha B'Av, we will recover as a people, and we will be worthy to be brought to the land of Israel and never again to be exiled. We all hope and pray that we have learned the lessons of Tisha B'av: that in modern day Israel the terrible dissension that wrecked the Second Temple will no longer appear among our people, and that the third commonwealth will last forever.

In the Torah portion, Devorim, which we always read before Tisha B'Av, we learn again how Moshe upbraids the people because they failed to enter the land of Israel and heeded the words of the evil spies. They were forced to wander in the desert for 40 years. Their suffering in the desert for these 40 years was instructive. It was meant to teach them and future generations never again to give up hope, never again to doubt if they had the spiritual stamina to enter into the real world. A small sect of Jews called the Naturei Carta, basing their philosophy on the 53rd chapter of Isaiah and other texts, believe that we Jews must be the suffering servants of G-d. True, we have been the past 2000 years the suffering servants of G-d. The Holocaust proves it. However, they say that it is sinful for Jews to ever assume power and to have their own state because we are meant to suffer. That is our role in the world. Normative Judaism rejects this view. We are to alleviate all suffering, our suffering as an individual or as a nation or a people. We do not know why we suffer. That only G-d knows, but we do know that not through suffering do we get the closest to G-d. Suffering is not redemptive. Much suffering is instructive, and by learning the lessons of why we suffer, we can alleviate it. It is a great mitzvah to alleviate all suffering. One of our purposes on earth is to end as much suffering as we can.

Let us all hope and pray that in the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental realms, we Jews will continue to be in the forefront of removing all pain and suffering from humanity. Let us also hope and pray that our people will finally in this generation have founded a state that will allow us as the Jewish people to escape most national and peoplehood suffering, and let us hope that by all our continuing effort, G-d will send the Messiah Who will announce that G-d from now on has ended all suffering. Amen.

JERUSALEM & OUR TEMPLE

WE WON'T ACCEPT COMFORT FOR

Tisha B'Av is the day of national mourning. We commemorate the destruction of two Temples, the destruction of Baitar, the last fortress of the Bar Kochba rebellion, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and many other calamities. We mourn for the loss of our Temple the same way that we mourn for the loss of an individual. We sit on the floor on low stools, remove our shoes. We are not allowed to learn the happy parts of the Torah.

There is a difference, though, when it comes to an individual loss. Right after the burial, we begin the process of consolation, the reconciliation of ourselves to our loss. In fact, immediately after the grave is filled in, we say a special kaddish which goes, "Extol and hallow be the name of G-d in that world which He is to create anew and to revive the dead and to raise them to an everlasting life. Then will the city of Jerusalem be rebuilt, the Temple will be erected therein, the worship of idols eradicated, and the only true heavenly worship restored to its dignity. O, may this happen in your lifetime and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel speedily and without delay, say ye amen." A mourner then goes through the first three days of mourning, which are called the days of crying. They are included within the shiva, the seven days when a person stays home and has minyans in his house morning and night. The first three days are more intense, and if, because of poverty a person has to go to work, he should at least keep the first three days. Then, of course, we have the 30 days of mourning for every one of the seven people for whom we are obligated to mourn: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, spouse. We must mourn 12 months and say kaddish 11 months for father and mother.

The recitation of kaddish is actually something relatively new. It began after the terrible pogroms of the Crusades where entire Jewish communities were wiped out. Before that, kaddish was only said by the mourners at the grave side, with the special kaddish previously mentioned being the kaddish recited. The kaddish was originally composed to be said after a rabbi's speech. Perhaps it meant, "Thank G-d, he is done." It was thought to be so beautiful that it was chosen to end every part of the service.

Sometimes, we only have half a kaddish. That signifies a semicolon, not a period. After the Crusades, the Oleinu was added to the prayers since this prayer was originally only used on Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur. This is the prayer the Jews sang as the Crusaders were putting them to death. It was decided that mourners would say some of the kaddish in the service to indicate that in spite of their pain, they still believed. This is considered a great merit to one's parents or friends who so instilled in them the concept that the world will eventually be redeemed, that they can still believe the concept after they having suffered terrible loss. An individual goes through a process of reconciling himself to the loss, and the Talmud teaches that people who extend the shiva or the 30 days or the year are doing the wrong thing. They should accept comfort, Nechoma, and eventually get back to living a full life.

This is different on Tisha B'Av. On Tisha B'Av, we offer no words of comfort. On Tisha B'Av, we are not to be comforted. We are not to reconcile ourselves to the fact that the Temple has been destroyed. We need, however, to try to have it rebuilt if possible. We

are not supposed to wait until the end of days. True, the Temple will be rebuilt for sure after the dead are revived, but we should not have to wait that long. That anyone wants to return the old city of Jerusalem to the Arabs seems inconceivable to me., especially to the PLO. They forget that in spite of what it said on paper, Jews were banned from going to the western wall for 19 years, fifty-two synagogues were completely destroyed, and the headstones of the Mount of Olives were used to pave roads and for latrines. We Jews have prayed three times a day for the restoration of Jerusalem. Why any Jew would be willing to give it up is beyond me.

In the Torah portion, Devarim, we learn how it says, "You will inherit this land." The word "this - Zos" adds up to 408, and the rabbis say that this is the same word that the Torah uses when it tells Aaron that he should enter into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. It said, "B'Zos - with this - you should enter." What is the word "this" in the word B'Zos mean?

On Tisha B'Av, we read about the Areezai Lavonon, the ten rabbis who were martyred by Hadrian after the failure of the Bar Kochba rebellion. We also read about these same ten rabbis on Yom Kippur in the Eskera Asorah Harugai Malchus. Why do we have to read about them twice: once on Tisha B'Av and once on Yom Kippur? We learn how Hadrian approached them and said, "Didn't the brothers of Joseph kidnap him and sell him?" The rabbis said yes. Hadrian said, "Isn't the punishment for this death?" The rabbis said yes. Hadrian said, "What punishment were the brothers of Joseph given?" They answered, "None." Hadrian said, "You then will be put to death in their place." Rabbi Yishmael appealed to heaven, and he heard a heavenly voice come down saying, "B'Zos - with this - Neelkadain - you are trapped. You are trapped with this because you are continuing the same sins as the brothers. You are not treating each other with respect."

24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva died in the Bar Kochba rebellion because they did not treat each other with respect. We read about the death of these rabbis on Tisha B'Av to remind us that we can rebuild the Temple only if we will treat each other with respect and dignity, and on Yom Kippur we read about this to remind us that we have to work with each other and forgive each other to prevent terrible calamities from coming upon our people. On Tisha B'Av, we remind ourselves that we should never be reconciled to the destruction of the Temple. We can live to see it rebuilt. Jerusalem can come back to its full glory.

I remember someone in our synagogue refused to say the special prayer on Tisha B'Av about Jerusalem being destroyed, because he said, "How is it possible that we can say this prayer today when 300,000 Jews live in Jerusalem?" The answer, of course, is they are still trying to take our western wall from us. They are still trying to take the city from us. The Temple has not been restored. Our rights to Jerusalem have not been granted legitimacy. When they have been, maybe then we can stop saying the prayer. We will never accept comfort for Jerusalem. Instead, we want it rebuilt under our recognized sovereignty.

When a loved one dies, we have to accept the inevitable. It is hard, but we have to accept comfort. We have faith that when the dead are revived, that in the next world we

will see each other, but now we cannot. We only have memories. That is different from the Temple. The Temple will be built in the here and now before the end of days. We will not accept comfort. We hope and pray that eventually it will come to pass soon, maybe even in our day. Actually, enough room exists on the Temple Mount for a temple to be rebuilt without harming in any way the mosques that are now there.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a professor who brought a white carnation and a red carnation to class. He then took a potion and put it on the carnations, and they became black. He showed them to his students. They responded, "That's wonderful, but do you have another potion to turn them back to red and white?" The professor replied, "Yes, but I won't use it." The students asked, "Why not?" and the professor replied, "Because I do not believe in reincarnation." We Jews have never been reconciled and never will be reconciled to the loss of our Temple until it is rebuilt.

I am also reminded of a story they tell about Napoleon, who was passing a synagogue on Tisha B'Av. He noticed the Jews crying and wailing and sitting on the floor. He asked, "What happened? Did a distinguished rabbi die?" The Jews answered, "No, we are mourning over the loss of our Temple in Jerusalem 1700 years ago." Napoleon looked at his chief officer and said, "A people that mourns over their Temple which was destroyed 1700 years ago will surely see it rebuilt." May it be rebuilt in our day. Amen.

TRAGEDY, DEPRESSION, MISSION,

HOPE & LOVE

How should tragedy affect us? We all know that death and suffering will come to each of us personally and to our loved ones. We have all lost a relative at a young age, been betrayed by friends, suffered through natural disasters, etc. How should we handle these tragedies? When tears fall unashamedly inside our hearts or outwardly on our face when describing a particular event or occurrence, what emotions and resolutions for the future should course through our minds?

Tragdy unifies. We become one with another -- one soul touches another -- when we grieve with others. The tragedy of others kindles our individual talents and causes us to want to help fulfill their personal needs. Do we not all weep over the death of a loved one? Are we not shocked when Nature levels an entire city, or children's faces mirror disease and famine? Are we not incensed over job layoffs, business failures, and a trusted friend's beguilement? And do we not lose all sense of humanity when unabated hatred kills six million of our brother human beings?

As Americans, we have had to deal with the defeat in Viet Nam, the rising tide of violence -- especially teenage violence; the breakup of more than half of our marriages; and the plague of drugs, etc. How are we to deal with these problems? They so overwhelm us. They depress us. They make us sit down and want to give up.

We have just concluded the fast of the 9th of Av. The 9th of Av speaks about tragedy. It encapsulates all the tragedies of the Jewish people: the destruction of the First Temple; the destruction of the Second Temple; the destruction of Beitar, signaling the defeat of the Bar Kochba rebellion; the Inquisition; and, in our day, the Holocaust. Gloom smothers us. We mourn the entire day. We sit on the floor on low stools in the synagogue. We dim lights. We pull back the outer parochas from the Ark. We chant in a plaintive tune, Eicha, the Book of Lamentations, and continue with Kinot, heartfelt elegies. We do not even put on tallis or tephillin in the morning. The only Torah we learn are the sad parts found in it. After midday, the gloom lifts, and at Mincha, we put on tallis and tephillin. We fast, like Yom Kippur, the only other 25-hour fast day. On this day, a Jew cries. The rabbis say a person who has not cried on Tisha B'Av for the rebuilding of the temple and the ingathering of exiles will not be worthy of rejoicing when the Temple is rebuilt and the exiles are brought back to Israel.

From Maimonides' Thirteen Principles, we learn, "I believe in perfect faith in the coming of the Mashiach, and even though He may tarry, nevertheless, I will wait for Him that every day He shall come." Many rabbis have asked, what is the difference between believing and waiting? They answer that believing is an intellectual exercise. Waiting is an emotional exercise. You can believe in your mind that certain things will happen, but unless you cry for them and about them, these things have not really penetrated your psyche. As Rabbi Soloveitchik has taught us, the soul is composed of two parts: the mind and the emotions; and we must feed both parts of our soul. We must feed our intellect with beliefs and ideas and ideals, and we must feed our emotions with positive, correct feelings, depending on the situation. If a person cannot dance at a wedding and cry at a funeral, something is the matter with him. We do not believe in the Prussian

ideal of suppressing your emotions. These emotions will eventually explode like a pressure cooker. The Prussian officer will commit terrible atrocities, as the Germans did during World War II, especially to our people. We must know how to handle our emotions as well as our ideas. Ideas, too, can be misapplied, taken out of context, turned into terrible theories of hatred. It is true that not all people have equal talents, but this does not mean that certain people are sub-human, as the Nazis would have us believe. True, too, we have to take care of everyone's needs, as Communism says, but that does not mean that we cannot allow individuals to develop their own needs. Everyone's nature is different. We are not cut from the same cookie cutter.

We always read the Torah portion, Vaeschanan, after Tisha B'Av. This Shabbat is called Shabbat Nachamu, the Shabbat of Consolation. Named after the Haphtorah, it starts out with the words, "Comfort, comfort My people, says your G-d. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her time of exile has been fulfilled, that her iniquity has been conciliated, for she has received from the hand of G-d double for her sins. A voice calls in the wilderness. Clear the way of Hashem. Make a straight road in the plain, a highway for our G-d. Every valley shall be raised, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The crooked shall become straight, and the rugged a level lowland." We are to deal with tragedy by gaining added strength to attack the problems at hand. We should realize our job is to be G-d's partner in creation; that history is not a straight line; that there are constant ups and downs; that a voice calls out to us from the wilderness, from the wilderness of our own depression, from our own hurt, telling us, "Make a straight road in the plain, a highway for our G-d." G-d wants us to continue. We do not understand everything about life. We do not know why we were born, and we do not know where we are going after we die. We do not understand why G-d had to create the kind of world He did. He is omnipotent. He could have created a world without death and suffering. We do not understand why He created us. Why does He need us? He needs us, He said, to help Him perfect this world. He, of course, could have done it Himself, but He wants us to help Him. The world is maybe 95% complete, and He wants us to help Him finish the job. To do this, we have to gird up our loins and keep trying. We never give up, and we never will give up. The miracle of the survivors of the Holocaust is not that they survived, but that they never gave up. Also, after the War, they were not interested in revenge. They were interested that the world should not forget of what evil man is capable, they were interested in life, in creating a better life for everyone. They were still filled with hope. Their underlying belief that the world could still be redeemed gave hope to them and to all of us. They took their broken lives and repaired them, and had great success by remarrying, having children, and rebuilding. That act of rebuilding answered Hitler. Hitler could never destroy them or us.

The question is asked, why was Moshe so upset in the beginning of the Torah portion, Vaeschanan, when he says, "Let me pass, and I will see the good land on the other side of the Jordan." After all, Moshe had the highest of all human experiences. He communicated with G-d, so to speak, face to face, but Moshe knew the highest task in life is not to communicate with G-d, but to fulfill the task which G-d has given us: to complete this world. He knew that if he was unable to go into the land of Israel, he could not help G-d complete this world anymore.

In this Torah portion, we also have the Shema, addressed to Israel and not to G-d, which says, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one." This means that we must take upon ourselves the responsibility to see that this world is perfected. If we lose sight of this responsibility, we will fall into the abyss of deep depression and even violence and hatred. To have clearly in our minds that our responsibility is to help G-d perfect the world, despite the many obstacles thrown in our way, then we will be able to overcome any tragedy. We know G-d has given us a wonderful tool to fulfill this responsibility, and that is love. "And you should love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might." Love means that we are connected, that we are not alone. We can overcome because we are part of something greater than ourselves. There will be defeats, but so what?

When love is first mentioned in the Torah, we learn how Yitzchak loved Rifka -- how love can overcome tragedy. Though this was an arranged marriage, Yitzchak deeply loved her, and although they had trouble communicating, and although they had trouble between their children, Jacob and Esau, their love endured. The love Yitzchak had for his wife, Rifka, allowed him to overcome the pain he felt at the loss of his mother. "And Yitzchak brought Rifka to the tent of Sarah, his mother, and she became for him a wife, and he loved her."

The second time we learn about love is when Jacob loved Rachel. The first time he saw her, it says, "And Jacob kissed Rachel." When he arrived to work for her, it says, "And Jacob loved Rachel." We also learn about how Rifka loved Jacob, how Yitzchak loved Esau.

We next learn about love in the Torah in the Book of Vayikra where we read, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We see from here that the love of G-d is mentioned last in the Book of Deuteronomy. First, we learn about the love of a wife, then about the love of children, then the love of your fellow human being, and then the love of G-d.

What is spirituality? Spirituality is the need to be connected. We believe that the world is not complete without us, and we are not complete unless we attach ourselves to a family, to a people, and to G-d. A child learns to love G-d when he sees how his parents love each other, and love him, and other human beings. The Sevas Emes tells us that we must constantly learn how to love each other better because this will give us the strength to love G-d better. Love is like a deep spring of pure water, which must be carried up to the surface. Unfortunately, many times, the pipes become rusty and filled with dirt, and the love is not pure and giving. We must make sure that the pipes are always pure. Rabbi Akiva, before he prayed to G-d, always said the sentence, "And you should love your neighbor as yourself."

Tragedy, unfortunately, will befall us all. We can overcome tragedy, though, by realizing that G-d needs us and loves us, in spite of everything. We can connect to G-d's love if we learn to love others. We must, though, know that G-d wants us to help Him perfect the world, and that we will be able to do this only if we are filled with hope and love, a hope and love we learned from our parents, our relatives, and our friends. May we love our spouses, our children, and our fellow human beings more and more so we can love G-d more and more, so we can overcome all tragedies, so the Mashiach will come

quickly in our day. Amen.

GLORY, PERMANENCE & THE

PROMPTING OF THE SOUL

Today is Shabbat Nachamu. It is called Shabbat Nachamu because of the Haphtorah which adjures, "Be comforted, be comforted, My people," says your G-d. "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her time of exile has been fulfilled, that her iniquity has been conciliated for she has received from the hand of Hashem double for all her sins."

The question can be asked, why does it say Nachamu twice? Once would have been enough. The rabbis answer because we say it to assuage the loss from the destruction of the two Temples; even then we could say that you only need one "comfort" since, after all, all the First Temple had more grandeur than the Second Temple. The First Temple had all the holy appurtenances in it. It had the ark with the Ten Commandments. The Second Temple did not have the ark and the Ten Commandments. The First Temple was more splendid. The rabbis elaborate that it is true that the First Temple was more glorious, but the Second Temple was more permanent. They say that the holiness of the First Temple lapsed after the Temple was destroyed, but the holiness of the Second Temple never lapsed.

Solomon crated the First Temple, taxing the people heavily and demanding that they work constructing the Temple several months out of the year. The free will offerings of the people built the Second Temple. They asked Cyrus the Great to give them permission to build it, and then had to struggle to build it against the designs of the Samaritans. It was not as big as the Second Temple. Later, Herod expanded it, but his expansion did not last very long, maybe 70 years. The First Temple, to a certain extent, was imposed on the people, although they paid the taxes and did the work gladly. The Second Temple came from the inner prompting of the people.

This was similar to the Ten Commandments. The first set of the Ten Commandments were given with thunder and lightning, and all Moshe did was receive them. G-d hewed out the rocks and carved out the letters on the rocks. The first set of commandments did not last very long. Moshe smashed them into smithereens when he saw the people worshipping the golden calf. The second set of the Ten Commandments was given in silence. There was no thunder and lightning, and Moshe had to hew out the rocks himself. G-d did hew out the letters, but not the rocks on which the letters were carved. This second set of Ten Commandments lasted forever, like the second Temple, whose holiness existed and exists on Mount Moriah even after it was destroyed.

In this Torah portion, we read the Ten Commandments. There are two sets of tropes, or musical notes, which are indicated in our Chumash. One of them we read at public occasions, and the other we use when we read the Ten Commandments at home. Why should we have two sets of notes?

Also, you will notice that the Ten Commandments here in Devarim are different than the Ten Commandments given to us in Shemos. Actually, the words "Ten Commandments" are wrong. In Hebrew, the Aseras Hadibros mean the "ten statements," and, in fact, the rabbis say that you can derive from these ten statements

all the 613 commandments. In Hebrew, these ten statements are not known as the Ten Commandments. In the Book of Exodus, we learn, "Zochor - remember - the Sabbath." In the Ten Commandments in the Book of Devarim, we have, "Shemor - observe - the Sabbath." Why should we have these two words? In Lechod Dodee, which we sing every Friday night in shul, we say that Shemor and Zochor were said simultaneously. G-d sort of stereophonically said these words. In Zochor, we have something of a more public nature. Zochor means to make kiddush in front of people. In fact, we learn from this word that even women are supposed to make kiddush, even though making a kiddush is a time bound commandment.

There are two reasons why we do things. One is because our culture demands that we do it, our parents demand that we do it, our peers demand that we do it, the group to which we belong demands that we do it. In other words, the first reason that we do things is because outside forces coerce us into doing these things if we want to belong, if we want to be part of something. We are other-directed.

The second reason we do things is because we have an inner prompting of our own soul. We feel we just have to do these things. Many times, our parents will tell us to perform certain tasks, and after a while, we internalize what they have told us, and we want to do them, not because they have told us to do them, but because we really want to do them. In fact, that is the purpose of Jewish education: to make us want to do what we ought to do.

The First Temple signified the fact that we built it and worshipped at it because we were directed to do so. It was more glorious than the Second Temple because it was bigger and had all the holy objects, but it was not permanent. Once the Temple was destroyed, its holiness was gone. The Second Temple signified the people, from the inner prompting of their souls, wanted to build it. It might not have been as glorious or splendid as the first Temple, but it had permanence. Its holiness lasted even after the Temple was destroyed because it was built through the promptings of the people's Jewish soul.

We see that, too, in our neighborhood. Thank G-d, so many nice young couples have moved into our neighborhood, and Shabbat is a pleasure, but what happens if a person is transferred to a small town? Will he or she still want to keep Shabbat in the same way? Does it come from the inside? Are they keeping Shabbat because of the wonderful neighbors and friends and atmosphere? Does this ritual come from the inside, or does it come from the outside?

This is the same reason we have two different musical notes -- tropes -- for the reading of the Ten Commandments. When we read it publicly, we talk about the fact that the Ten Commandments were outer-directed. G-d wants us to do these things. When we read it in the privacy of our home, it is inner-directed. We want to do it, even though nobody around forces us to do it, either by peer pressure or social obligation.

In the Book of Shemos, when we use the word Zochor, we are talking about the public proclamation of the Shabbat; in the Book of Devarim, we are talking about the private keeping of Shabbat in our own home where nobody knows what is going on. It is

important that we have both.

That's why we say Nachamu twice. We want the glorious atmosphere of the First Temple, but we also want the permanence of the Second Temple. We should have this wonderful atmosphere, like we have in our shul on Shabbat, but it should be internalized by all our members so that even if transferred to other places, they will still want to keep the Shabbat. All our Judaism, its moral principles, its ceremonies and rituals must be internalized by all of us so they will always be permanent, and so we will be able to transmit them to our children. To have a glorious atmosphere is pleasing, but this inner prompting of our souls is more important to have. Let us hope and pray that all of us will always feel the inner urge of our soul to keep Judaism in all its moral and ritual manifestations so we can lead uplifting lives.

I am reminded of the story about an IRS agent who called Rabbi Schwartz. He asked, "Rabbi Schwartz, do you know a Chaim Segal?" The rabbi said he did. The IRS agent asked, "Is he a member of your congregation?" The rabbi said he was. The agent then asked, "Did he give you \$10,000 last year for your building fund?" The rabbi replied, "He will." It is important that all of us have internalized the lessons of our faith so that our religion will influence not only us but also our children. May we do so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

CONTROL, RELATIONSHIPS, AWE, G-D

& YOM KIPPUR

Yom Kippur celebrates a historical event. On this day, G-d forgave the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf. This day became at that moment and for all time the day of forgiveness. For in that act of forgiveness, G-d irrevocably and irretrievably asserted that no matter how far we may have gone astray, we can always be forgiven if we admit our errors, and determine never to repeat them. We can return, and we can have a close relationship with Him. We can continue to be partners with G-d, and once again lead uplifting, spiritual lives.

How the Jewish people could have worshipped the golden calf a scant 40 days after they had an encounter with G-d defies reason and logic. After all, each had heard G-d speak to them when He uttered the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. Each of them felt the overwhelming presence of G-d. Even those rabbis who say that the Jewish people heard only the first two commandments and not the rest, continue to maintain the Jewish people still heard and felt G-d's presence. The Jewish people were at the height of closeness with G-d. Yet, just 40 days later, they worshipped the golden calf.

Perhaps we can understand this if we read the Torah portion, Yisro, closely; how right after hearing the Ten Commandments, the Jewish people came to Moshe and said, "Speak with us, and we will hear, but do not have G-d speak with us lest we will die." Moshe tried to calm them down by saying, "Do not fear, for to elevate you has G-d come so that the awe of Him should be on your faces so you shall not sin, and the people stood at a distance, and Moshe approached to the darkness where there was G-d." When the Ten Commandments were given, it says, "And all the people saw the thunder and the lightning and the voice of the shofar and the mountain smoking, and the people saw and trembled, and they stood from afar." Here the Jewish people had prepared for three days for this encounter with G-d, and then when the time came, they flinched. They could not take the fear of G-d, the uncertainty of their situation. Instead, they asked Moshe to enter into the thick darkness and get G-d's word and bring it back to them. They stood from afar.

In the Torah portion, Ekev, we learn, "And now Israel, what does G-d ask from you? Only to fear Him, to go in all His ways, and to love Him." The fear that is expressed here is that of awe. We do not know G-d's ways. G-d's ways are murky. We cannot predict what G-d will do. Our mind is not G-d's mind. What G-d chooses to do, we may not have chosen to do. After all, G-d chose Moshe Rabbeinu to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt to the land of Israel. How could He have chosen such a leader? Moshe was a man who spent not one day in slavery; a man who was raised as an Egyptian prince, who hardly spoke Hebrew. In fact, that is how some rabbis explain Moshe's stuttering: he could hardly speak in Hebrew. He deserted his people and married a Midianite girl, and even, according to the Midrash, agreed to raise his eldest son as a pagan. How could he have been chosen to lead the Jewish people? It is similar to today when some people cannot understand how Hertzl and Ben Gurion were chosen to be leaders of the Jewish people. G-d's ways are mysterious.

The Jewish people, at the time of Mount Sinai, could not understand a G-d Who was not under their control. They wanted to control the relationship they had with G-d. That is the essence of paganism and magic. Magic says that if you say certain things in a certain order, G-d has to obey you. It is similar to a computer today. If you push exactly the right letters and dots, the computer has to come up with the right answer. However, if you miss one dot, you will not get the right answer. Magic means you can force the gods to do what you want. Pagans, too, believed if you gave the gods the right sacrifices or you had them incarnate in the right vessels, you could control them.

Judaism believes that you can never control G-d. You cannot force G-d to do anything. G-d has said that He wants justice and kindness and love and mercy, but He never said that if we have these qualities we would have no problems. He only promised us that if we have these things, He will give us the strength to overcome our problems. We cannot force G-d to do anything. Religion is not an insurance policy whereby if we do certain things, G-d will do certain things. We have perfect faith that if we will observe His commandments and laws, life will be good for us. It will be good for us internally, spiritually. We will have a happier and better life because our attitude will be better. We know that we are only a link in the chain: G-d has promised that the Jewish people will be redeemed; that the Mashiach will eventually come; and the world, itself, will be redeemed through our redemption. His promises will be kept. However, how we fit into this scheme is difficult to know. Our time is limited. Each of us will die. Each of us, though, in his own way, has to cause this dream to continue, if by doing nothing more than educating our children to believe in this dream, and working for it. Any relationship we have with G-d has much ambiguity in it. We are not to stand from afar, as the Jewish people did at Mount Sinai. We are to enter into this ambiguity, as Moshe did.

In no relationship can one party control the other. Those who seek a marriage relationship of complete control find that they have no relationship, or have one that has become abusive. Each of us must risk rejection, repudiation, or being run roughshod over. We cannot control another person and have any relationship with them that has meaning. This does not mean, though, we should shy away from relationships.

One of the meanings of the fear of G-d is that we cannot predict what G-d will do, and how He will do it. We love Him nonetheless. We know that everything He does, He does ultimately for our own good, even if at the time we cannot perceive it. Even the persecutions and the Holocaust that our people endured must serve some purpose, although we do not know what it is ultimately. We do not know where we have come from, and we do not know where we are going, so we do not have the whole picture. We do know, though, that in this world, we are partners with G-d.

That is the theme of the High Holidays. That's why we blow the shofar. The shofar is an uncertain note. It is not only a call to repent, but it also reflects our situation. We do not have control. Sometimes we cannot even get a note out of the shofar. The sound of the shofar, itself, is tenuous. We have not only the straight note of success, the tekiah, but we also have the shevorim and the teruah because in life we have also sobbing and moaning sounds.

On Yom Kippur, we stand before G-d proclaiming, "G-d, we know that we have to

provide for ourselves. We have to provide food and water. We have to take care of our bodies and propagate to make sure there will be a next generation. However, ultimately we rely on You. We need Your help. You have to provide the conditions which allow us to help ourselves. G-d, we need You to provide the opportunity for us to obtain our food and our clothing, our shoes and our future, and our health. We know we cannot control our relationship with You. However, let us continue to be Your partners in creation. Let us, through prayer and charity and repentance, annul the stern decree." In Unsane Tokef we say, "Let us tell how utterly holy this day is, and how awe-inspiring. It is a day in which Your majesty will be exalted and Your throne shall be established in mercy, and You shall sit upon it in truth." The great shofar is sounding. A gentle whisper is heard. The angels, quaking with fear, say, "The day of judgment is here to bring the hosts of high to justice, and, indeed, they are not guiltless in Thy sight."

This is the message of the High Holidays. G-d is awesome. We are but a cog in the machine, a link in history, but we know that G-d needs us. G-d wants to have a relationship with us. We are important because of this relationship. We have a part to play in bringing redemption to the world. However, we cannot force G-d to do anything. We have perfect faith that all G-d does, He does for our own good. If we follow all the commandments, we have not been assured that we will become millionaires. We have not even been assured that we will be free from problems, but we have been assured that we will be given the strength to overcome them and be people who will be able to lead useful, purposeful, meaningful lives.

Yom Kippur reminds us that the sin of the golden calf was that the Jewish people then did not want to have a real relationship with G-d. They wanted to be able to control G-d. They flinched when G-d offered them a relationship, and said, "Send Moshe into the darkness, into the ambiguity." They wanted to stand from afar. We know that if we pray, do teshuva, and give charity, our lives will be uplifted, and we will be able to have a wonderful relationship with G-d. Heaven on earth, according to the Jewish tradition, is when you are close to G-d, and hell on earth is when you are far removed from Him.

Let us all hope and pray that this Yom Kippur we will renew our relationship with G-d, and, thus, be granted a New Year of health, happiness, prosperity, and spiritual upliftment. On behalf of my wife and myself, I wish you all a Gemar Chaseema Tova.

SEEING & THE BENEFITS OF OUR

RELIGION

The Torah portion, Re'eh, begins with the word Re'eh, which means see. Strange that this word is used because the word that should be used is hear. The Jewish people were listening to Moshe Rabbeinu's last speech. Why is the word see used here? "See, I am giving before you today a blessing and a curse." The rabbis tell us that Shmeeya is not like Re'eh, that hearing is not like seeing. Seeing makes an immediate impact on a person. In fact, in Jewish law, if a judge saw a certain event, he cannot be a judge for that case, because the impact of his seeing the event is so strong that no matter the testimony, he would never change his mind. Too, sometimes we do not see everything exactly the way it is. Certain things such as optical illusions, etc. arise.

Here, Moshe is telling us, if you observe the laws of the Torah, you will see a direct benefit in your life. "See, I am giving before you today a blessing and a curse." We can turn our lives into a blessing if we follow our religion. Our religion really fulfills three purposes in our lives. Of course, the main purpose is to connect us to G-d, to show us that there is hope, to allow us to feel needed and wanted, to give meaning and purpose in our lives.

The second purpose of our religion is to give structure in our lives. Some people would say this structure is actually detrimental because it makes us smug and self-satisfied and does not allow us to become the moral, loving, sensitive people we should be. All we would concentrate on is structure, and although this structure gives us security, it does not allow us to fulfill the first purpose of our religion, which is to be sensitive, moral, kind individuals who know that we can only attach ourselves to G-d if we are moral, kind, and sensitive. This is not true because the very structure of our religion forces us to make correct moral decisions.

The third purpose of our religion is to bring us closer to each other by having us support and participate in synagogues, schools, and communities. To be a religious Jew, you must be part of a community. This forces us to make correct moral choices. If a person does not give charity, does not educate his children, does not treat his spouse right, he will not be respected in the community. The very structure of the religion stresses family and giving. The Friday night dinner, the Shabbat dinner are family affairs. All the holidays stress the importance of helping the poor, etc. This does not mean that individual Jews do not try to compensate in one area for their lapses in other areas, but these efforts are quickly seen through. We all know that slum lords and crooked businessmen cannot make up for their sins by giving more charity or praying more fervently.

The Torah portion, Re'eh, speaks about these benefits that come to you if you observe the religion. We learn about the blessings that will come upon us, and the curses that will come upon us if we do not observe the Torah. We say in the beginning, "See, I am giving (singular) before you (plural) a blessing and a curse." In other words, we can turn whatever situation in which we find ourselves into either a blessing or a curse. Every situation can be both a blessing and a curse. It is up to us to turn it into one or the other.

Jacob, on his deathbed, cursed Shimon and Levi, and told them they would not have land in Israel. Levi turned this curse into a blessing. Because he was scattered throughout Israel, his tribe became the source of teachers and leaders of Israel. Moshe and Aaron were from the tribe of Levi. Shimon, on the other hand, just ended up with a few cities in the tribe of Judah. Levi turned his situation into a great blessing. Shimon left his curse a curse. Each of us, when we are faced with difficult situations in life, can turn them into a blessing or a curse. Religion helps us to this.

In this week's Torah portion, we learn how G-d says that we can eat meat. Originally, when we were in the desert, we could only eat meat if we brought a sacrifice. After all, who gives us the right to take an animal's life? An animal has a soul; true, a lower soul than a human being, but it is only with G-d's permission that we can eat meat. After the Jewish people were to settle in the land of Israel, they would have to make too long a journey to come to the Tabernacle every time they wanted to eat meat. G-d then gave us permission to eat meat, if we would slaughter it as He had commanded. The sentence reads, "And you shall slaughter from the cattle and sheep which G-d gave to you as He commanded you." The problem is nowhere in the Torah do we learn where G-d has commanded us about the laws of ritual slaughtering. This is one of the proofs for the oral law. We believe that G-d gave us not only the written law, but the oral law, which interprets the written law. G-d has commanded us to keep the Sabbath, but does not explain how. G-d has commanded us to make a succah, but does not tell us how. The same thing is true for the lulav and esrog. The oral law fills in these gaps.

Most interestingly, we note that from the laws of the shochait do we learn how we are to treat each other, and how we are not to become prying, distrustful people. The laws of kosher slaughtering are very complicated. A rabbi must study these things before he gets smicha. There is a principle, though, in Jewish law that when it comes to money matters or capital cases or sexual misconduct, you need two witnesses to either get your bill paid or to get someone convicted of a criminal offense. However, for the ritual laws -- kosher and needah and things like that -- one witness is enough to verify something is kosher. For example, we trust the shochait. He is only one person. If he says he did a good job, he did a good job. His knife was smooth, his motion was also smooth. He cut the windpipe and trachea in just the right place, etc. He inspected the animal correctly. We do not require two witnesses to substantiate that he did the right thing. His word is good. Indeed, a Talmudic principle states the majority of our Schochteem do their jobs correctly, so we believe them. We go after the majority. Even if one witness claims the Shochait did not do his job right, we do not listen to him. We need to have two witnesses. When it comes to ritual matters, we trust people. We are supposed to feel that everyone is going to try to do the right thing. Our religion is to bring us together, not to divide us.

In this Torah portion, Moshe stresses the three aspects of religion -- how our religion gives us hope, how we can live blessed lives by practicing it, and also how we can structure our lives through keeping the holidays, keeping kosher, and giving charity.

We also learn about the second tithe that was eaten in Jerusalem four out of seven years. You had to take ten percent of your crop and spend it for food and drink. Our

religion sensitizes us and by its very structure forces us to be giving individuals. A person could not possibly spend ten percent of his crop on food and drink just for himself. He had to invite other people. It is true that there are individuals who do not need structure to lead moral, good lives. However, the majority of us do. The beauty of Judaism is that it creates moral communities, not just moral individuals.

One of the main themes of this Torah portion is that our religion fulfills three goals that we all need. It allows us to have hope and meaning and purpose in life. Two, it gives us structure so we will become caring and giving people, and, three, it draws us closer together by making community so very important. Unfortunately, in our day many people do not believe structure or community are important. They are having a hard time leading sensitive, caring, giving lives filled with meaning.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman who called her Social Security-age husband who was driving on the freeway. She was very excited. She just heard on the radio about some nut driving 60 miles an hour against traffic on the freeway her husband always took. She got her cell phone and said, "Sam, please be careful. There is a crazy nut driving the wrong way on the freeway." He said, "Darling, you are wrong. There is not one person driving the wrong way on this freeway; there are hundreds." Unfortunately, there are many people who do not know the benefits of our religion, and they are going the wrong way. Let us hope and pray all of us will know the benefits of our religion that we will truly lead fulfilling, meaningful, caring lives so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

ANTI-SEMITISM, THE LIMITS OF FREE SPEECH & THE EGLAH ARUFA

ANTI-SEMITISM, THE LIMITS OF FREE

In the Torah portion, Shoftim, we learn how society is organized. We learn about the setting up of courts, about the duties of a king. We learn about cities of refuge, etc. It is very important the way societies are set up. Why do we in the United States have a thriving economy while in Mexico the economy lags behind? It is not because our people are more ambitious or more intelligent or want better things than people in Mexico want for their children. It is basically the way the society is structured.

In America, people have much more opportunity. This is probably thanks to Abraham Lincoln. He not only freed the slaves, but also passed the Homestead Act, which meant that anyone who wanted to plow 160 acres could gain them. He created a strong middle class. In Mexico, everything is owned by a few landlords. A few people control everything. The poor do not have much of a chance. Of course, times change in America, and to give everybody an equal opportunity, we need education, etc. Also, in many societies what counts is who you are, not what you can do, but who your parents are and what class you belong to. Even in Israel, they had something called protexia, which until recently hindered many people's development. The Ashkenazic people were favored instead of the Sefardic, etc. Thank goodness, this has changed.

America has been successful because we are judged by what we can do, not who we are. The way society organizes itself is important. Society can basically also organize itself around two principles: one is fear, and the other is love or the withholding of love or approval. Dictatorships, Communism, Fascism, etc. are based upon fear. If you do not do what the dictator or state wants, you are thrown into jail. The secret police will knock on your door. That is one way society can control its members. The other way is through withholding love. For example, in America, no body is going to knock on your door and throw you into jail if you do not want to learn English or get an education, but you will not be able to get ahead. You will not get a good job. You will not be able to live in a good neighborhood. You will be unable to fulfill many of your ambitions. You can always be a peddler or construction worker, etc.

America does not punish anybody for not conforming to its norms. It just does not allow them to get ahead, at least economically. That has been the big problem of Jewish survival in America. We Jews wanted to be able to get ahead. We Jews want to be accepted, but to get ahead and to get acceptance, we have to conform to certain norms. The need to assimilate really symbolizes our desire to get ahead through acceptance. We can only exist in America if we are able to be willing sometimes to have love withdrawn. We have to be able to say, "If a country club demands I violate Shabbat to belong, I'll not belong. If a certain job demands that I give up Jewish holidays, I will not take that job."

Up to now, it has been very hard for Jews to say no. Something, though, is breaking down in America. Until the recent wave of societal upheaval, we have always felt that the lure of the American way of life and its ideals would be so attractive that nobody would want to hold differing ideas on equality, democracy, etc. First, they would be rejected and ostracized. Then they would not be able to get ahead. Now, because of

the violence among teenagers in America the last two years, we see that America's hold on the imagination, especially of our youth, is not what it used to be. Judaism teaches us that the purpose of education is to make us want to do what we ought to do. We know that a good Jewish education is not one necessarily which teaches a person perfect Hebrew or how to read the Talmud in the original, but one who makes its students a mensch. Events of the past two months have demonstrated that there is something wrong with the American approach now. Two months ago, three synagogues were burned in Sacramento. A month ago, six Jews were gunned down after they came out of a synagogue in Chicago. This week, five Jews, among them three children, were gunned down in a Jewish community center in California. These acts were all perpetrated by avowed Nazis, Jew haters. Three incidents in such close proximity create a presumption in Jewish law. Hateful and terrible ideas thrive out there. Perhaps the Internet has given them legitimacy -- there are over 2000 Internet anti-Semitic sites.

In America, we know that there is a pure food and drug law. You cannot say anything about a product that you want. This does not violate free speech. If one in a million people would be harmed by a specific drug and get cancer, that drug would be banned from the market. On the other hand, we know from psychological tests that pornography creates one or two serial killers for every 100,000 people who watch it, but nothing is done about pornography. Why?

We know, too, that these Nazi groups flagrantly promote their ideas. The Aryan Nation is well known. The man who shot up the Jewish Community Center in California was an officer in the Aryan Nation. He even married the widow of one of their so-called martyrs. People are now trying to say that he was, after all, crazy, but I doubt that. He, along with countless thousands of others, have been inculcated within these ideas of hatred. He gave himself up, probably because he wanted a trial. Already, CBS has featured his mentor, who proclaimed all synagogues are of Satan, and that they are at war with the Jews and must kill every last one of them, just like Hitler said.

In the Torah portion, Shoftim, we learn that if a dead body is found between two cities and nobody knows who killed him, then the elders of the city closest to this dead body must come forward and enact a special ceremony. They must wash their hands over a heifer that was axed in an unsown valley, and they shall say, "Our hands have not spilled this blood and our eyes did not see. Atone for Your people that You have redeemed, O G-d. Do not place innocent blood in the midst of Your people, Israel." The rabbis ask, why should these elders do this? After all, they are not suspected of killing anyone. The answer is they are not suspected of killing anyone, but they, by either acts of omission or commission, have allowed an atmosphere to develop in which murders like this might take place. The Gemorah also teaches us that if the murderer is known, then they do not have to go through the ceremony. Why? The answer is because then we can correct the errors of omission or commission. We can ask the murderer what prompted him to do what he did.

Fifty years after the Holocaust, who would think we Jews would still be faced by this type of anti-Semitism, but we are, and it is serious. Up to now, these people could not lift their heads up; now they can. Now they feel justified in doing what they are doing.

America should respond. This is not the work of just a few crazies. We should ban hate literature. We should ban these types of groups. This is no more a violation of free speech than is openly and vocally banning poison food from our market shelves. We cannot brush this under the rug. These groups have to be infiltrated and the government has to prepare cases against them, and we have to be on the alert. Classical anti-Semitism has not died. It is flourishing here in America.

Not to end on such a chilling note, I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who wanted to be a race horse. His wife went to the psychiatrist very upset. She said her husband ate only hay and rolled in the barn all day. He wore spikes on his shoes and dressed only in white gowns. The psychiatrist said, "Yes, I think I can cure him, but it is going to cost a lot of money." The wife said, "Oh, that's no problem. He has already won his first two races." We should not shrug these people off as just a bunch of crazies. They have organization and they have money. We have to be constantly vigilant. We cannot allow these groups to gain power and do to us here what Hitler did to us in Germany. May we all be vigilant so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

Three Times Zochor, Amalek, Miriam, & Shabbat

In the Torah portion, Ki Saitzai, we have more Mitzvahs than in any other Torah portion, seventy-four to be exact. This Torah portion also talks about how we are to remember Amalek. How Amalek attacked the stragglers of the Jewish people after leaving Egypt. Amalek believed in a Nazi-type philosophy. He believed that the strong have a right to take anything they wanted. The poor and the weak did not deserve to even live. He believed in the survival of the fittest. His hero was the warrior. This is the antithesis of Judaism. We judge the society by how well it treats the poor, the widow, the orphans, and the helpless. We must always remember Amalek. Although the nation of Amalek no longer exists, his philosophy does and in every generation arises those who say that the poor deserve nothing and the strong have the right to take everything.

The Hebrew word for "remember" used in the Torah portion is Zochor. This word Zochor appears in two other places in the Torah: in reference to Shabbat and in our Torah portion in reference to Miriam. G-d has told us, through the prophet Zecharia, that the Jews will always exist as a unique people even if we don't want to. We will either be forced to remain Jews because of anti-Semitism, because of the Amaleks of the world who have singled us out for special hatred, primarily because they look at us as the bearers of the Ten Commandments. (Hitler said this when he spewed forth his venom denouncing the Jewish people with their Semitic G-d, and His thou shalls and thou shall nots.) Or we can remain Jews because of Shabbat, realizing that Judaism elevates our lives and gives us special meaning.

In this week's Torah portion, we also learn how the Ammonites and the Moabites cannot convert to Judaism because they refused to even give us bread and water in the desert, although they were related to us. What's more, they even hired Bilaam to curse the Jewish people. Of course, today there are no Ammonites or Moabites, and everyone can become a Jew. Bilaam tried to curse the Jewish people from three different vantage points, but couldn't. He tried to do it from Baal Bamos, which means reality. He looked at the Jewish people from the aspect of how they dealt with reality. He then tried to curse them from Tsofeem, which stands for expectations -- how they dealt with their expectations. Finally, he tried to curse them from the Peor, which stands for fantasies -- how they dealt with their fantasies. We all know that we constantly mix reality, our expectations, and our fantasies. In fact, one of the greatest causes of conflict between individuals, especially in marriage results from this action. Amalek stands for these people who just deal with reality. He has no expectations of an afterlife or of such concepts as justice. He says, "I am strong, I can do anything I want." Amolek deals with just the present reality.

When we learn about Miriam and use the word Zochor, we learn about expectations. Miriam expected something from Moshe for which she had no right. True, it is only thanks to Miriam that Moshe was even born. Pharaoh had decreed that all the boys were to be thrown into the Nile. Amram separated from his wife and said, "What is the sense in even having children?" Miriam told her father, "You are stricter than Pharaoh. Pharaoh decreed only against the boys. You decreed also against the girls." Immediately, Amram agreed and took back his wife. Miriam, of course, was the one who arranged for Moshe's mother to be his wet nurse, etc. Miriam, also a prophetess, couldn't understand why Moshe was separating from his wife. Miriam had certain expectations of Moshe, which were not true. G-d actually punished Miriam for her criticisms of Moshe. You have to always remember that our expectations of others should be grounded in reality, and in accordance with the circumstances.

I know from marriage counseling that one of the biggest mistakes a young couple makes when they get married is trying to replicate their parents' marriages, the only experience in marriage they have. The husband expects his wife to act like his mother, and the wife feels the husband should act like her father. These are impossible expectations. Every marriage is unique and special. Many times, when a beautiful courtship ends and the marriage begins, serious problems erupt, often because the couple fails to understand the uniqueness of every marriage. We must make sure that our expectations are in line with reality. We have a right to expect people to be moral, kind, and compassionate. But we cannot expect certain behavior patterns from others, which don't flow from their background. We get so insulted because we expect something from somebody and we don't get it. Many times, also, people expect something from others without ever telling them what they expect. This, too, can only lead to bitterness. You have to tell people what you expect from them.

The third level is that of fantasies. We all have fantasies. If you only use this type of hair cream, all the girls will fall all over themselves for you. Wear a certain type of make-up and you will be the most popular girl in the world. You know about all these sweepstakes swindlers who especially prey on the elderly. It is good to have fantasies and dreams, but we can't get them mixed up with reality and rational expectations. Shabbat symbolizes Jewish fantasies. We say that Shabbat is a taste of the world to come, where peace and harmony will reign, and we will be able to enjoy the fruits of our labor, etc. We know that the world is not yet the world of peace and harmony. We hope that it will become one soon.

One of the underlying themes of this Torah portion concern how we reconcile our fantasies, our expectations, and our realities. The Torah portion starts out with a captive woman — in effect, a war bride. A man is filled with all sorts of fantasies about her. That is why he has to bring her home and let her cry about her parents, and after a time discover what he really expects from her. When he confronts the reality of their future existence, he may change his mind. Then he must let her go free. We also learn how you have to be fair with children, even if you would want to favor the child from the favorite wife. Throughout this Torah portion, we learn how we must constantly balance fantasy, expectations, and reality in order to have a good life.

I am reminded of a story they tell about a man who found a bottle on the beach. He rubbed the bottle and out came a genie. The genie said, "I'll give you only three wishes." The man said, "Put a million dollars in my bank account." Poof, it was done. He then said, "Give me a five million dollar house by the beach." Poof, it was done. Finally, he said, "Make me irresistible to women." Poof, immediately he was turned into a box of chocolates.

We have to learn about the three Zochors. We can't live in reality alone; then we would become Amalek. We can't live by expectations alone; then we repeat the sin of Miriam. We can't live in fantasies alone; then every day would be Shabbat, which the rabbis say is impossible. Let us hope and pray that we will learn how to balance reality, expectations, and our fantasies, so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

MEN, WOMEN, PHYSICAL NEEDS,

MARRIAGE & HOLINESS

Why is marriage in so much trouble today? In a recent survey of teenagers, only 60% of them thought that they would be married to one spouse throughout their lifetime. Many of these same teenagers do not even think that marriage is a good idea. A recent survey Rutgers University conducted revealed an alarmingly high percentage of teenagers - one out of three - view marriage with pessimism. The number of marriages are down 43% from forty years ago. 53% of teenage girls think that having a baby out of wedlock is all right. What has caused this revolution in teenage thinking and in America generally today? The number of married households has consistently declined since the 1950's. What has caused marriage to become less and less attractive to many people?

To me, what has happened stems from that the power relationship between men and women having changed drastically during the past 100 years, but especially during the past 50 years. Women basically no longer need men. Firstly, the birth control pill has liberated women from the fear of pregnancy, and they now can be sexually active. Pregnancy implies that you need someone to take care of you while you are pregnant and to help raise children. In fact, because of artificial insemination, a woman can even have a baby without a man. Secondly, the accessibility to a gun has made the woman the physical equal of any man. A strong man could always take a knife away from a woman. Women no longer need a man's protection. A gun is a great equalizer. Thirdly, the modern economy also makes it possible for a woman to support herself without the aid of a husband. Women know that they can perform highly skilled jobs, which require brain power and not brawn power, the equal of a man; therefore, they can command higher salaries than they ever could before as doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, etc.

Women marry mainly to fulfill security, emotional, physical, financial, and psychological needs. They need to build nests to raise their children. Men, on the other hand, marry to be made to feel important, to feel needed. Not for nothing are so many plays and movies written about how the dumb blond always gets her man. The man feels so important doing things for her, helping her, etc. Men also are biologically programmed to sow their seed, just as women are biologically programmed to build a nest. Men usually need and want sex much more than women. Women's interest in sex usually wanes after they have a child. True, they can be aroused, but in the main, they are satisfied with a little sex. Men want it almost all the time.

Many women feel that a man is not necessary in the household to raise children. She can do a better job herself. In fact, the man may get in the way on how she wants to raise her children. Statistics prove that women-headed families are not as successful as those where a female and a male form the basis of the family. The children statistically usually do not turn out as well, but that means that society needs a two-parent family, not that the woman needs to be married.

For most Jews, however, a plan exists to show the significance of marriage - the Torah. Purposely, the Torah teaches us that "a man should leave his father and mother and

cling to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Notice, it says that a man shall leave his father and mother, not that a woman should leave her father and mother. Love, primarily a combination of emotional and sexual attraction, may bring a man and woman together. It cannot keep them together, however.

Traditionally, Jewish marriages have managed to resist to a great degree the troublesome path marriage has been travelling, mainly by redirecting its priorities and emphasizing the spiritual. That's why marriage is called in Hebrew Kidusheen, holiness. The purpose of marriage is not just fulfilling physical needs, but spiritual needs, too. We do this without diminishing the needs of the Jewish man or the needs of the Jewish woman. An unwritten pact prevailed for many, many years in Jewish history, whereby the woman controlled the sex and the household budget, while the man got an aliyah. This pact seems no longer to hold sway. Men were publicly recognized, and women exercised real power while staying in the background. That was the man's payoff for supporting his family and deferring to his wife in private.

The mikvah gave the women control over sex. Women throughout Jewish history were allowed to own property and manage businesses and have professions, but the ceremonial roles were given to the men; thus, a division of power was effectuated. In marriage, in many Jewish homes, the woman was actually the dominant figure; however, the man was given public honor.

The Talmud states this quite clearly when it says, "Let a man ever be careful to honor his wife because G-d's blessing is only found in a man's house because of his wife," and it goes on to say, "He who loves his wife as himself and respects her more than himself and leads his sons and daughters on the right path, upon him does the verse in Job refer when it says, 'And you shall know peace in your tents.'" We also learn, "If your wife is short, bend down and listen to her advice."

The Jewish woman always had dignity, and although there were always and still are neurotic and psychotic men among the Jewish people, wife abuse was at a minimum in the Jewish home. Many judges have commented to me how unusual it is for them to have a case of wife beating come before them when a Jewish man is involved. Jews did not get drunk every Saturday night and come home and beat their wives. That does not mean that there were not cases of verbal abuse, etc., but physical abuse was the exception, not the rule. In England until 100 years ago, to beat your wife was legal if you did not beat her with a stick wider than your thumb. It was called the rule of the thumb. We never had such laws in Judaism. It was always against Jewish law to beat your wife. Not that some men did not do it, but it was always against the law. Women throughout history have put up with the vagaries of men because it was always thought that a bad husband was better than no husband. This is not true today. A woman does not need a man anymore. Why should she put up with a man's abusive or demanding or nuisance behavior? She does not need him. She can get along without him. Physically, she can do okay without him, and as previously noted, marriage is not just a physical relationship but also a spiritual one.

The rabbis teach us in the Zohar that, "When G-d creates the human soul, He creates a male and female as one soul, but as it descends into this world, it becomes divided into

a male and female. A complete soul is a combination of male and female. That is why
the male and

GUILT, RESPONSIBILITY, COURAGE &

DOING GOOD

The modern world thinks that one of the worst things a person can experience is guilt. It feels that guilt is a disease, especially since the birth of psychoanalysis, and has waged war on guilt, as we have on such diseases as polio and smallpox. Many in our community have shifted the blame for wrongdoing away from the individual and have attributed it to every other possible factor -- including upbringing, peer pressure, genetic predisposition, teachers, etc. -- just so we should not feel guilty. Even criminals, according to this view, need not feel guilty about their crimes, because if they do, they will not be able to be rehabilitated.

This flies in the face of the Jewish view. Judaism advocates that a person should feel guilty for the bad deeds that he has done; otherwise, how is he ever going to improve? Of course, Judaism also does not believe that we should wallow in our guilt. Instead, we should use our guilt as a springboard to do good, and we most certainly should not let out guilt be an alibi for our not doing good in the future.

In our modern society, the only thing worse than feeling guilty is making somebody else feel guilty. That's why many times you will hear people say, "Don't lay a guilt trip on me." Many times people come to my office so that I should not make them feel guilty for certain things that they have done. After hearing their stories, I do the exact opposite from what they expect. I tell them that they should feel guilty. They should not have treated their parents the way they did. They should not have treated their spouse the way they did. They should not have treated their children the way they did. We seem to be living in a guilt-free society, and we should not want to live in a guilt-free society. Living guilt-free liberates one from responsibility for anything he has done, will do, and does now.

Judaism means responsibility. We believe the assumption of responsibility completes us and makes us into full human beings. That's why a marriage is the most joyous event in Judaism: When a person gets married, he and she are taking on responsibility for each other. They are completing themselves.

Guilt can be the most debilitating of all emotions. Sometimes, a person filled with guilt can hardly live. Instead of channeling his guilt productively to prevent his falling into wrongdoing again, that person wallows in his guilt, or, worse, projects his guilt on somebody else. He really glories in his guilt, like a criminal who loves to return to the scene of his crime. This guilt frees a person from any sense of responsibility to others. He is too sick; he is too self-engrossed to help anyone.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter used to recount the story of a man whom he spotted on the eve of Yom Kippur, so engrossed in thinking about his own sins and guilt that he snubbed everyone around him, including his wife and children, lashing out at them in a cruel way. Rabbi Salanter pointed out that as a result of this man's obsession with his sins, he, in effect, committed one of the greatest sins: hurting other human beings.

Judaism does not recognize free-floating guilt, which the ancient world knew and which

Christianity took over as original sin. We only believe that we should feel guilty for the things we have done wrong, not because G-d has favored us with different gifts. We should not feel guilty because we are well-fed while people in our community are starving if we have given charity and helped the poor. We should not feel guilty because we have musical talent or other talents if we have been willing to share them with everyone. This includes material gifts. We should be willing to share our money, our talents, and our time for the benefit of others. We need only bear the guilt for the harm we cause others. We do not feel guilt when others misuse the talents we have helped develop. We need not feel guilt for teaching a neighbor's child how to play ball, and then that child proceeds to get hurt in a ball game. We need, though, to feel guilt if we purposely threw a ball at a child, knowing he could not catch it, and it harmed him. We should feel guilt if we threw a child into the water knowing he could not swim. Guilt, though, is not the end of the story; it is the beginning. Because we feel guilty, we should do something about what we have done wrong. We must go beyond guilt. Guilt is just the wake-up call. We should not wallow in it.

That's why the rabbis teach us, "Turn from evil and do good." In the Torah portion, Nitzavim, we learn that there are two aspects to doing Teshuva. One is to turn to your heart, to recognize that you are guilty; then to turn to the Lord your G-d and listen to His voice. Forget what you did in the past after you have made restitution and then continue to do good. Admitting your guilt is only half the job. Doing good must follow.

As the first rabbi of Ger said, "If one dwells on the wrong he has done in the past, his sin is alive. Repenting is impossible. This only leads to depression. To dwell on one's past, to say yes, I sinned, no, I did not sin, is useless. In the time one spends thinking about sins, one can really do something for G-d. What does it mean to turn from evil? It means to get away from one's evil. Do not think about it. Rather, think about what you can do for G-d." Yes, in the beginning, we have to acknowledge our guilt. Guilt is productive, but then we must turn from it.

We read in the Torah portion, Nitzavim, "See, I gave before you today the life and the good, the death and the evil, and I command you today to love the Lord your G-d." You should choose life. G-d wants us to continue, in spite of our guilt, and He wants us to use our guilt to show us that we have potential. We did not have to do the evil things that we did. We have the capacity to do good. We have great spiritual potential. The verse, "My sin is always before me," does not mean that we should always be depressed and discouraged. It means that a person should not be proud when dealing with others, but rather remember how he, too, sinned. Therefore, he can better tolerate the foibles of others. He should remember that he, too, was capable of slipping. He knows that he is only human and should make allowances for others, realizing that they, too, are only human. He also should not wallow in his sin.

In the Torah portion, Vayelech, we read how it says, "And Moshe called to Joshua and he said, 'In the eyes of all Israel be Chazak, strong, and be Amatz, courageous.'" Why does Moshe have to use both words Chazak V'Amatz? Why do we need both expressions? The answers assume Joshua as a leader must know that two elements make a nation strong. One is the actual implements of war, weaponry, etc., and the second is the will of the people to fight, to die for their cause. Communism died even

though Russia had thousands of atomic bombs because no one was willing anymore to die for Communism.

As a leader, Joshua had to instill in his people the knowledge that their cause was just, and he had to make ensure the people had the means to protect themselves. More than this, Moshe was telling Joshua that as the leader, he was going to make mistakes. Moshe had made mistakes. Moshe had listened to the people and had sent spies into the land. Moshe had struck the rock, etc. Joshua had to have the strength to admit his mistakes, to own up to his guilt. But after owning up to his guilt, he must move on. He must display courage. He must, in spite of his mistakes, continue to make decisions; continue to pursue mitzvahs; and to plan programs for the nation. To have the strength to admit you are wrong is not enough. You have to go beyond it and forge ahead.

This is the same for every individual. To be responsible human beings, we require guilt. A guilt-free society leads to violence, anarchy, rising crime, family desertion, abandonment of children by mothers and fathers, etc. Guilt is necessary, but only as a first step. The presence of guilt reminds us that we can do better. Guilt propels us to repentance, and, as Rav Cook advises, "Repentance does not come to embitter life but to sweeten it."

Let us all hope and pray that none of us will deny our guilt when we are guilty, because then our guilt will fester and destroy us. Rather, we should forthrightly admit what we have done, and then move on using our guilt to sweeten our lives; not to embitter them. On behalf of my wife, myself, and United Orthodox Synagogues, I wish you all a Gemar Chaseema Tova. May we, in spite of our mistakes, continue to work as partners with G-d so we will truly see the Mashiach in the coming year. Amen.

WHAT DOES FORGIVING & BEING

FORGIVEN MEAN?

Forgiveness.

What do we mean by forgiveness? Does forgiveness mean the slate is wiped clean, that we all start fresh? Does it mean the that past is completely wiped away? The Jewish conception of forgiveness differs from the Christian conception of forgiveness. I have often wondered why after the Pope was attacked and almost assassinated, he never actively, until now, tried to find out whether his attacker was sorry, and if he was sorry, why he didn't try to get his attacker freed from jail. After all, he had forgiven him. The answer is that in the Christian view of things, when you forgive someone you remove the barrier between your attacker and G-d: that person who has wronged you has erected a barrier between himself and G-d, which only you can remove. By forgiving him, according to the Christian view, you have removed this barrier. He can now once again approach G-d, but this does not mean that you do not want him punished, and this does not mean that you do not want him to stay in jail. You can still believe justice has to be done; even in states like Texas which have the death penalty, you could still want him executed, even though you have forgiven him.

In Judaism, this is not what forgiveness means. To forgive a person means you no longer hold a grudge against him. As Rabbi Israel Salanter said, "Once one forgives his fellow man, it is forbidden to bear a grudge. If he still finds himself feeling angry toward the person who offended him, it is as if he has given a gift or forgiven a debt and is now demanding it back." Since man is created in the image of G-d, we have the ability to act G-dly. Just as G-d forgives us and allows us to start fresh, we should do the same thing. After the sin of the golden calf, G-d originally forgave us, but He said that His presence would no longer go in our midst. Moshe remonstrated with G-d and said, "We will not go up unless You are in our midst." G-d relented, and He agreed to go with them. When the Jewish people sinned by heeding the words of the spies, G-d once again forgave them at Moshe's behest, but He said this time they had to wander in the desert for 40 years, not so much a punishment as a necessity. The people were slave people, and they had to learn the art of freedom before they could enter into the land of Israel. This was a learning experience.

Today, too, we can, after we forgive someone, demand that they take courses or learn in other ways how to improve where they have fallen down. For example, we can demand a drug addict go through a treatment program. We can demand an abuser attend classes.

A difference also lies between individual forgiveness and the community's forgiveness. An individual may forgive a person entirely, but for the sake of society, we must incarcerate or punish a person. G-d can forgive a person immediately because He knows what is in his heart. We cannot. Society, to exist, demands justice; otherwise, anarchy will take over. However, as individuals, we can still forgive people, but they must have changed. A wife who forgives her abusing husband acts foolishly and sinfully if he has not actually changed. We do not believe in forgiveness without restitution and change. The Pope's forgiving a person who shot him was done without that person ever repudiating his deed, showing remorse or regret, or offering restitution.

In fact that person has never expressed regret, and he has even said that he would do it again.

As the Rambam says, "However, when man sins against his fellow man by cursing him or robbing him, he is not forgiven until he has paid his debt and appeases the injured party. Even after he compensates for the damage he has done, he must appease him and ask him for forgiveness. Even if his offense was only verbal, he must persevere until the offended party forgives him. If the injured party refuses to forgive him, the offender should appear before him with three of his close friends and ask for forgiveness. If he still refuses, he should repeat the process a second and third time. If he still refuses to forgive, you should leave him, and a person who refuses to forgive becomes himself a sinner."

Notice that forgiveness must be sought by the guilty party. We just do not willy nilly say a person is forgiven. Forgiveness must be asked for by the guilty party. He must feel within himself that he did something wrong. If he does not feel that he did anything wrong, and if he has not made restitution, then most certainly he is not deserving of forgiveness. If, however, he acknowledges his error, and asks for forgiveness -- as Maimonides again said, "It is forbidden for a person to be merciless and not grant forgiveness. One should rather be easy to calm down and slow to anger. When someone asks you for forgiveness, you should grant it with a full and sincere heart. Even if the sinner has caused great injury to you, you should forgive him, and it is forbidden to take revenge."

In the Torah portion, Haazinu, we have many of these concepts laid out. We learn that none of us ever loses our access to G-d. Even if we are the greatest sinner, our way cannot be blocked to G-d, even by people we have wronged. We say, "Because the name of G-d I will call, give greatness to our G-d." We can all call on the name of G-d.

The first words of this Torah portion are, "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and the earth, hear the words of my mouth." This is the exact opposite of what Isaiah said in his statement, "O, hear, O earth, and listen, O heavens." It is true that Moshe Rabbeinu gave the Jewish people ideals. He wanted also to give them a land, but he could not. We know that Moshe Rabbeinu, because he received the Torah, fleshed out the covenant that was originally given to Avraham Oveinu. We all know that we Jewish people have two special covenants with G-d. We have a covenant that was given to all mankind by G-d to Noah. Therefore, we believe that all human beings are in a covenantal relationship with G-d. That explains why we do not feel compelled to convert anybody to our religion, since they all have access to G-d. We also believe that we have had a special covenant with G-d from the time of Abraham to be G-d's partner in bringing redemption to the world, to help G-d perfect the world. This covenant was expanded at Mount Sinai when Moshe Rabbeinu brought down the Torah to us. He gave us the means to implement the covenant given to Abraham. Moshe's poem, which makes up most of the Torah portion, Haazinu, demonstrates that if the Jewish people desert the values and means which Moshe gave us through the Torah, we will be expelled from the land.

The question still remains, though, why did Isaiah first say, "Give ear, O earth," and

then, "listen, O heavens?" Isaiah knew that the people accepted the ideals of the Torah. They just were not implementing them. Isaiah lived during the time of King Cheeskeeyahu, a very righteous king, who pushed Jewish education and stressed Torah. He himself, however, did not want to participate in the real world; he said he did not have to get married and have children. He did this because: (1) his job was to concentrate only on Torah -- a wife and family would distract him; and (2) because, being a prophet, he knew he would produce an evil son. When Cheeskeeyahu grew deathly ill, Isaiah told him that was going to die because he did not get married and have children. Cheeskeeyahu remonstrated with him and said, "How can I get married? My son is going to be an evil man." Isaiah told him that was not his business. He was supposed to get married and have children, and leave the rest up to G-d. Isaiah even went so far as to say that he would give Cheeskeeyahu his daughter's hand in marriage. Cheeskeeyahu prayed to G-d, and G-d forgave him for his arrogance in thinking he should not act like other people, that he should not get married and have a family. Isaiah did give him his daughter, and they did have a son, Menashe. A very wicked king, he ruled for over 60 years.

In the Gemora Sanhedrin, we learn that many rabbis say Menashe did not deserve to enter the world to come. Later, in the same Gemora, we learn that since Menashe did teshuva, other rabbis felt that he would get to enter the world to come. Menashe had a difficult task. He lived in the time of the Assyrian conquests, and to placate his conquerors, and to make sure Israel could stay independent, Menashe had to let idol worship enter his kingdom. The Rabbis in the Talmud who asserted that Menashe was not worthy of the world to come were castigated by other rabbis who said, "If you had lived in the time of Menashe, you would have picked up your skirts and would have run after him." Menashe, though, did do evil things. He killed his own grandfather, Isaiah, yet, G-d forgave him when he did Teshuva, and most rabbis say that because he did Teshuva, he was worthy of the world to come.

Menashe, though, had to ask for forgiveness. He had to take the initiative. To be forgiven, we all must take the initiative. We cannot hold back. We have to admit our guilt. We have to make restitution. We have to seek out the people we have wronged. However, there is also a duty on the people we have wronged to forgive us if they see we are sincere. The person who seeks forgiveness must be like one who immerses himself in a mikvah, where one's entire body is surrounded with water at one time. We cannot say, "Well, I'll ask for forgiveness for cheating him, but not for talking bad about him." This will never do.

Moshe said, "Listen to the heavens and hear the earth." For both our spiritual and material sins, we have to want to be forgiven. Isaiah stressed the material over the spiritual because many times people will mouth the spiritual truths, but forget about implementing them. We must seek forgiveness ourselves, and we must give forgiveness to others. When someone asks you, "How can I repair the damage I have done to our relationship," you should not answer, "You made the problem, you fix it." Instead, we should work to repair the relationship. When man sins against G-d, G-d, Himself, clears up the mess that man creates and repairs the relationship. When someone offends you and asks for your love back, have compassion and give even more love than you had before. This is what forgiveness means. However, the person

must want to change, and have changed.

Let us hope and pray we will all seek forgiveness and give forgiveness in the coming year; that we will determine never to do those things again which hurt others; and that we will accept the sincere forgiveness of others who also determine never to repeat those things which hurt us. May we, by so doing, deserve to be granted a year of health, happiness, spiritual growth, and prosperity. Amen.

TORAH VALUES, THE EEMOS & THE OVOS

In the Torah portion, Zos Habrocho, we learn how G-d gave us the Torah. We read, "From his right hand He presented the fiery Torah to them." Today, we have all come together to dedicate a Torah. When the Torah was originally given to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai, the rabbis tell us that Israel was like a bride and G-d was like a groom, and the Torah was like the marriage contract.

The Jewish people are known as Yisroel. The name Israel, Yisroel, is composed of the names of all the fathers and mothers. The Yud stands for Yitzchak and Yaacov, the Raysh stands for Rachel and Rivka, the Shin stands for Sora, the Aleph stands for Avraham, and the Lahmed stands for Leah. Yisroel signifies values. The values of the Ovos and the Eemos must be ours if we are to fully observe the Torah.

Avraham stands for charity, for Gemilas Chasodim. Yitzchak stands for Yeera, for Avodah, for a personal relationship with G-d. Unfortunately, today in America many good Jews are very charitable, but do not have a personal relationship with G-d. They do not come to daven in shul because it is boring. Yes, davening is very boring if you do not believe that there is a G-d to whom you can pray and who listens to your prayers. We must have not only charity in Judaism, but a personal relationship with G-d.

Finally, there is Yaacov, and Yaacov stands for truth. The Torah is true. It is not just a bunch of folklore and folkways. It is not just a bunch of customs. True, by following the Torah we lead better lives, lives with which we have the necessary courage and strength to overcome our problems. G-d never promised us that if we follow the words of the Torah we will not have problems. All He promised was that if we follow the words of the Torah, He will give us the strength to overcome our problems.

The Torah adds to our lives. It enhances our lives. It makes the quality of our lives much better. We are much better able to form relationships, to overcome our problems, to face life the way it is and not the way we hope that it should be. The Torah gives us hope.

Sara, Rivka, Rachel, Leah also stand for Jewish values. Sara stands for the value of the home. She knew that her home had to be pure and had to reflect in all its aspects Jewish values of morality and decency. She could not allow any Ishmaels in her home. Rivka stood for sacrifice. To have a Jewish home, sometimes you have to sacrifice. She sent Yaacov away from the home, and she did not see him for 22 years. In fact, some say she never saw him again. She had to sacrifice to preserve Judaism. Finally, you have Leah. Leah was a woman who had to combat the treachery of the world. Even though she was a beneficiary of the perfidy of the world, in one respect, she always had to combat the prejudice and the terrible treachery and double-dealing of the world. Her father made her go to Jacob on her wedding night pretending to be Rachel. She had no choice. She had to live with this deception throughout all her life.

We Jews have been subject to persecution and the betrayal, duplicity, and conspiring of others, and many times we have been forced to do things that we really did not want to do, but we still had to maintain our equilibrium. We had to continue to maintain our dignity and our strength. We still had to try to overcome the treachery of the world and lead lives of decency and morality.

Rachel was special. Rachel also stood for primary values, for the primary value of living Jewishly in the world no matter what. When the Temple was destroyed, Avraham Ovinu came before G-d and said, "G-d, You have to save the Jewish people. G-d, I was willing to give up my life for the Jewish people. I was willing to fling myself into the fiery furnace." G-d told Avraham to sit down. Yitzchak came next. He said, "G-d, I was willing to stretch out my neck at the Akedah for you, to sacrifice my life for you. You have to save the Jewish people." G-d told him to sit down. Then Yaacov came and said, "I was even willing to fight my brother, to give up my life for the Jewish people. You must save the Jewish people." G-d told him also to sit down. Moshe came and said, "I was willing to die for the Jewish people, too, to have You wipe me out from Your book." And G-d told him to sit down, too. Then Rachel came and pleaded, "When my sister was going to be embarrassed because she was forced by her father to marry Jacob, I gave my sister the secret signs that Yaacov and I agreed upon because we knew that my father might pull a dirty trick on us, but I did not want my sister, Leah, to be embarrassed so I gave her the secret signs. G-d, You have to save the Jewish people because I was willing to live for Judaism, not just to die for it. I was willing to implement it in all aspects of life, even when it would be hard and hurtful, even when I had to surrender the man that I loved to my sister." G-d said, "For your sake I will save the Jewish people." Therefore, we know that Rachel was not buried at Maavas HaMachpela, but at Bethlehem, that when the Jewish people would go into exile, she would cry for them and pray for them. "Oh, my son, my precious son, Ephraim."

The Jewish people have always survived because we have upheld the values of the Torah, the values that the fathers and mothers lived and delineated. The rabbis tell us that when Moshe Rabbeinu dedicated the Mishkan, he blessed the Jewish people. The rabbis ask, what does it mean that he blessed the Jewish people? G-d had already blessed the Jewish people.

The rabbis explain that the word, Torah, is composed in Gematria of 611 -- the Tof is 400, the Raysh is 200, the Vav is 6 and the Hay is 5, therefore 611. When teaching us the Torah, Moshe gave us only 611 of the 613 commandments. Two commandments G-d gave us Himself, the first two commandments of the Ten Commandments. G-d blessed the Jewish people with the Torah, by having Moshe teach us 611 commandments. We can lead lives now of dignity and self-respect. We can enhance our lives by living according to the Torah, but we have to want to. We have to want to keep the Torah. This is the blessing that Moshe gave the Jewish people, that we should want to keep the Torah. G-d gave us two commandments which should prompt us to want to keep the Torah: 1.) "I am the Lord Your G-d." 2.) "You shall have no other gods before Me." We must always realize this so that we have the desire within us to fulfill the Torah in all its aspects. Then our lives will be enhanced and we will lead much better lives. The Jewish people will not necessarily be richer in material things, but they will be richer in spiritual things. We all know what a great blessing the Torah can be for each of us.

That was Moshe's blessing. It is such a happy event to be at an occasion where we are dedicating another Torah for the community. May we all live up to its values. May we all, as Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Sara, Rivka, Rachel, Leah, be true Jews in all aspects of that term. May we be worthy sons of Israel because we have practiced Gemilas Chasodim, because we have a personal relationship with G-d, and because we know that the Torah is true. May we all be willing to keep a pure Jewish home, and may we all be willing to sacrifice for our religion, and may we all be willing to deal with the treachery of the world, so the Mashiach will come

quickly in our day. Amen.

MORDECAI, CONFRONTATION, EVIL &

POLICY DIFFERENCES

Purim almost always comes after we read the Torah portion, Tetzaveh. Not always, but if it is not a leap year, Tetzaveh is read before the holiday of Purim. Originally, the rabbis did not want to include the Book of Esther into the Biblical Canon. They felt the events of Purim were unique, and that only events that had lessons to be taught for the future would be recorded and placed in the Biblical Canon. Besides, a lot of rabbis disagreed with what Mordechai did. They could not understand why Mordechai did not bow down to Haman. After all, Haman was the vizier and was entitled to respect, although some commentaries claim that Haman had an idol on his person. However, this was not a reason to prevent one from bowing down to him because, clearly, that person was bowing down to the vizier and not to an unseen idol placed somewhere in Haman's trousers.

Esther, herself, presents a problem. First of all, she withheld her identity. Is that what we want Jews to do, deny they are Jewish? What's more, according to some opinions, Esther was really married to Mordechai, and when later in going to the king willingly, she was, in effect, committing adultery. Before then, those aware of the situation can claim she was taken forcibly so anything that happened was not adultery. The charge of adultery results because Esther went willingly to the king. Many people in Mordechai's time actually condemned him for not bowing down to Haman and for allowing Esther to deny her Jewishness. In fact, the Megillah ends by saying only a majority of the Jews accepted Mordechai.

Mordechai reasoned he was a descendant of Benjamin, and Benjamin never bowed down to Esau. When Yaacov came back to the land of Israel and confronted Esau, he, all his wives, and all his children bowed down to him. However, Benjamin had not been born yet. Therefore, he never bowed down to Esau. As many of us know, Amalek was a grandson of Esau, and Haman was a descendant of Amalek.

As an aside, a good book by David Rohl called Pharaohs and Kings shows that the common accepted chronology of Egyptian pharaohs is wrong. He says that Ramses II was actually the pharaoh who plundered the Temple at the time of Solomon's son, Rehovom, and that the exodus occurred 1447 BCE. He also writes that after leaving Egypt, the Jewish people fought the Amalekites as they were entering Egypt. The Amalekites conquered Egypt, which was defenseless since the Egyptian army had been destroyed, and ruled it for 150 years. That's what gave the Jewish people breathing room to establish themselves in the land of Israel. For many years before the Jewish people conquered Israel and even afterwards, the land of Israel was actually a satellite of Egypt.

The rabbis relented and included the Book of Esther in the Canon. Rabbi Soloveitchik avows the story of Purim teaches us four things that apply for all generations. One, man is capable of demonic acts, that each contains within us the ability to act evilly. Was not Amalek the great-grandson of Yitzchak? We saw that just this past week in Jasper where Mr. King, who participated in the killing of a black man by dragging him behind a pickup for three miles, showed no remorse whatsoever. We must be careful

not to encourage the demonic within man. That's why moral teaching and religious education are so important.

Second, the Jewish people seemed to attract all these demonic personalities. The rabbis say that the word Sinai is related to the word Sinah, which means hatred. Since the time of Sinai, when the demands for moral responsibility from humanity emerged, the Jews have been hated because they symbolize this morality.

Third, Jews must learn that this hatred is directed against all Jews, not just some Jews, not just pious or assimilated Jews, but all Jews. The Jews in Shushan who had just attended the banquet of Achashverosh were sure that they were loved. They even allowed themselves to be ridiculed. The utensils of the Temple in Jerusalem were used at this banquet. That's why the story of Purim states they were so confounded and confused when the decree went out against them. They were sure only those non-assimilated Jews would be hated, not the modern Jews like them.

Fourth, G-d chooses human beings to work His will in this world. G-d's name is not mentioned once in the whole Megillah. G-d works through us, and understanding whom He chooses sometimes becomes a perplexing problem. G-d will always save the Jewish people, but the means He uses to do it differs in every generation. Mordechai admonished Esther that if she did not go to the king, G-d would find another way to save the Jewish people, but she and her progeny would be cursed forever. Many rabbis in Mordechai's generation did not understand Mordechai and Esther. They did not understand why Mordechai did not bow down to Haman, why he tried to provoke him. They did not understand why he had Esther not tell anyone she was Jewish. Mordechai replied that he tried to avoid Haman, but it was impossible. The rabbis say that Mordechai was born in Israel, and returned when Cyrus permitted the Jewish people to do so. When Mordechai heard about Haman's ascendancy, he quickly came back. Many commentaries say that Haman's primary motivation was that he did not want the Jewish people to return to Israel and rebuild the Temple. Mordechai had to confront Haman. He had known him from before and knew what he was like. There have always been differences among the Jewish people on how to confront the problems of every era. These differences, though, are policy differences. Do we protest or don't we protest? Rabbi Soloveitchik was very clear in declaring that the only time we are bound to rabbinic opinion is when there is a Halachic matter. He would tell his students that when it came to policy, it was up to them to decide. He did not believe in the concept of Das Torah, which says that rabbis, whatever they expound upon, even policy matters, have to be followed blindly. This, he said, was not a correct position.

Today, many policy differences prevail in the Jewish community. I remember there was a big policy difference whether to protest on behalf of Soviet Jewry or not, on issues surrounding Israel, land, government policies vis-a-vis religion, women's issues, etc. These policy differences are legitimate; in his day, Mordechai felt he had to confront Haman. Others did not want to confront him. It turned out that Mordechai was right, but he was still only accepted by the majority of the people.

In our day, too, we cannot put our heads in the sand. Sometimes we have to protest. In the Torah portion, Tetzaveh, we learn that the olive oil was beaten for the light, which

means that the first drop of oil could be used for the menorah, but it was not beaten for the meal offerings. You could use any oil for the meal offerings. Many rabbis have interpreted this concepts to mean that we can allow ourselves to be beaten to ensure Torah is preserved, but we must not allow ourselves to be beaten just to make others feel we are inferior. We have to stand up for ourselves. A Jew should not be excessively bold, but he should not be excessively lowly either. We cannot hide our faces against impending evil. It will not work. Those who put their heads in the sand vis-a-vis Hitler only made Hitler's job easier. A Jew has to confront evil.

I am reminded of the story about a fellow who was always worrying about everything. He was a real worry wart. One day his friend met him when he was acting very carefree. The friends looked at him and said, "What happened? Why aren't you worried anymore?" The man answered, "Because I hired a person to do all my worrying for me. I pay him \$1000 a week." The friend said, "\$1000 a week? How do you pay him?" He replied, "That's his problem. Let him worry about it." All of us have to worry about the evil in the world. There may be different approaches on how to deal with evil, but unless we do, evil will overcome us. Let us hope and pray that we will deal with it correctly so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

PURIM IS TIED TO PESACH

We know that the day before Purim is Tanes Esther, the Fast of Esther. However, from the Megillah, we know that the Fast of Esther did not take place the day before Purim. The fast that Esther asked all the Jewish people to do occurred right before Pesach and on Pesach. In fact, all the events of Purim really happened on Pesach. Esther and the Jewish people fasted on Pesach, and the two parties to which Haman and Achashverosh came happened on Pesach. Also on Pesach, Haman was actually hung on the gallows he prepared for Mordechai.

Also, when we have a leap year, as we have this year, and have two Adars, we place Purim in the second Adar, not in the first Adar. Usually, a principle stresses we are supposed to do the mitzvahs zealously as soon as possible, so we would think that Purim should be in the first Adar and not in the second Adar. We place Purim in the second Adar because Purim and Pesach are tied together. We cannot fast normally on Pesach. It is against Jewish law, unless a life threatening situation occurs, as during the time of Esther and Mordechai. We remember their fast, though, by fasting on the day before Purim.

On Purim, we do not say Hallel for three reasons. One, is because we read the Megillah in its place. The second reason is because we only say Hallel for miracles that happened in the land of Israel. This argument is hard to sustain because we do say Hallel on Pesach, and all the miracles of Pesach happened outside Israel. Some people maintain, however, that this rule of not saying Hallel for miracles outside the land of Israel did not begin until the Jewish people entered the land of Israel under Joshua. This could be contested, though, because the Jewish people did live in the land of Israel before the Egyptian bondage. Our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, lived there. The third and final reason we do not recite Hallel on Purim is because the miracle of Purim was really not a miracle which brought a change in the Jewish condition. The Jewish people were totally dependent upon Achashverosh before the miracle, and they were still totally dependent upon Achashverosh after the miracle. All Purim did was restore the condition of the Jews the way it was before Haman's decree, but nothing fundamentally change. Another Haman could arise and make another decree. Pesach, on the other hand, saw great change in the Jewish condition. Jews were no longer slaves. They had been redeemed. Purim really speaks about the precarious condition of the Jewish people in exile.

The events of Purim are tied to Pesach because Purim is incomplete. The events of Purim just gave us another chance to try to achieve true redemption. Just to return to the status quo is unfulfilling. Purim is incomplete without Pesach. The events of Purim happened on Pesach to teach us that we need to work, not just to maintain the status quo or to return to the status quo, but for the redemption. We must all work to make this world a better place. Let us all hope and pray that we will always remember that. Just to have the status quo leaves a void; we must go forward. Hopefully, if we will go forward with the correct dedication and devotion, G-d will see this and the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

MATZAH, CHOMETZ, CREDIBLE EFFORTS

& BEING A GODOL

Today is Shabbos Hagodol, and we read the Torah portion, Tzav. The rabbis teach us that Shabbos Hagodol is so designated because on this day, the Jewish people took a lamb, tethered it to their bedposts, and said that in four days they were going to slaughter it. This was a great act of courage because the Egyptians believed that at this time of year, the spirit of Aries incarnated in the lamb. This meant anybody touching a lamb would bring catastrophe on Egypt. The Egyptians were being told that in four days the Jewish people were going to slaughter this lamb. We know that in India today, anyone who touches a cow, will be killed. In many places in India, one can find old folks homes for cows, but not for people. The Jewish people did not know what the response of the Egyptians would be. A great miracle occurred, and the Egyptians did nothing, but the Jewish people did not know that in advance.

We do not read about these events on Shabbos Hagodol. Last week, on Parshas HaChodesh, we read about the Jewish people being commanded to take the lamb. At first glance, this Torah portion, Tzav, ostensibly has nothing at all to do with Shabbos Hagodol. Why should it be that the rabbis have seen fit to have us read this Torah portion, Tzav, on many of the years in which Shabbos Hagodol occurs?

Rabbi Soloveitchik explains that the reason this is called Shabbos Hagodol is not just because a big miracle happened, but also because it was on this day that the Jewish people had to act like adults. They had to assume responsibilities for themselves and for their future. A bar mitzvah becomes a godol. He assumes now responsibility for his own actions and for his future. Up to this time, the Jewish people had been one who was Somech al Shulchan Aviv, one who is relying on the table of his father. In other words, G-d had done everything up to now. G-d made the plagues. G-d, through Moshe, told Pharaoh that the Jewish people had to be let go. Now the Jewish people had to assume responsibility for their own fate. They had to act like a godol. They were now like one who was Somech Al Atzmo, one who has to rely on himself. As we in Judaism believe, G-d helps those who help themselves. G-d told the Jewish people, "If you want to be free, you have to act like a godol. You have to start to assume responsibilities for yourself and for your future."

That's why Rabbi Soloveitchik said this is called Shabbos Hagodol -- this is when the Jewish people became an adult nation. They now assumed responsibility for themselves, a most courageous act because they did not know beforehand how the Egyptians were going to react.

There is a connection between Shabbos Hagodol and Tzav, although initially this does not seem obvious. The connection concerns the thanksgiving offering brought to the Temple as a sign of gratitude. If a person came through a dangerous situation safely, like surviving a desert trek, or in our day an automobile accident; if a person crossed the sea; if a person was released from jail; if a person recovered from a serious illness, he was required to bring a Korban Todah, a thanksgiving offering. This offering was different from all other offerings of the Temple. You not only had to bring an animal, but also 40 loaves: 30 were made out of matzah, and 20 were made out of leavened bread. Chometz, or leavened bread, was never offered on the altar. On Shavuot, when two loaves were offered, they were only waved on the altar, and then were eaten by the Kohanim. The only sacrifice that was brought with chometz loaves was the Korban Todah, or thanksgiving offering.

That's why on Pesach, we do not say the special Psalm we recite daily, Mizmor Lesodo, because it contains chometz. I often as a kid wondered why they only had a song for a soda and not a milkshake. The flour for this Korban was divided in half. Thirty matzah loaves were made from half of it, and ten chometz loaves were made from the rest. Chometz loaves are different from matzah loaves because matzah loaves will last a long time, while chometz loaves become stale almost immediately. Many times, I get calls from people who want to use last year's matzah or sealed boxes of Pesach mixes, etc., and they ask me if it is allowed. I say it is allowed kosher-wise. I just hope it is not spoiled. Bread loaves, of course, will spoil almost immediately, certainly within a week.

Why was it that a person had to bring both matzah loaves and chometz loaves? The answer given is because the chometz loaves stand for man's endeavors; the matzah stands for G-d's endeavors. When we left Egypt, matzah was the symbol of G-d's help, of G-d's deliverance. G-d is telling us, "When you are in difficulty, do not just sit passively by. You must make efforts, even though your efforts may not succeed, but if you make credible efforts, then I will help you." That's why the flour is divided in half, because G-d wants us to be His partner. We know that our efforts, though, compared to G-d, are very small, so we only offer ten chometz loaves; the thirty loaves stand for G-d's efforts. G-d has promised that He will extricate us from all troubles, just as He extricated us from Egypt. He just asks that we make credible efforts. If we do, G-d will help us succeed, even if our efforts are based on a mistake.

Zionism over 100 years ago, galvanized the Jewish people and allowed the State of Israel to come into being, but it was really based on a mistake. Theodore Hertzl saw that the Jews of Eastern Europe were suffering. They were not allowed to own land, to be in the professions, to be university professors, to even open a business without a gentile partner. The people in Eastern Europe wanted to get rid of the Jews. The Jews in Western Europe were rich. He thought to go to the Sultan of Turkey and buy Palestine from him. Turkey needed a lot of money. This was not unreasonable. After all, Russia had sold Alaska to the United States 30 years before. Everyone thought it was a wonderful idea, but the Sultan would not sell. That's why Hertzl turned up with a plan to buy Uganda, which the Zionist Congress turned down, but eventually the Zionist movement did create the State of Israel with G-d's help.

G-d tells us that when in trouble, we should not give up hope. We should assume responsibility and make our best efforts. He will make sure we succeed. We must always act like a godol.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a 25-year old man who proposed to a 25-year old woman. She said, "I love you, but I cannot marry a man who has only \$500. I need a man with \$500,000." The young man went away to a big city, and came back five years later. He asked the woman, "Will you marry me now?" She asked, "How much money do you have?" He replied, "\$600." She said, "That's close enough." We should all make sure we assume responsibility for ourselves and put forth credible efforts. If we do, we know G-d will help us. Let us all hope we do so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

RESPONSIBILITY, SYMBOLS & THE

SOUL

On Pesach, we read from the Haggadah. However, we do not make a brocha when we begin the reading. Why should this be? When we read the Megillah, we make a brocha. When we take the lulav and esrog, we make a brocha. When we blow the shofar, we make a brocha, but we do not make a brocha when we read the Haggadah.

Second, why is it that the Haggadah, itself, is based on three and a half sentences from the Torah portion, Ki Sovo, in Devorim, which talks about a person bringing up the first fruits. Why isn't it based on Exodus where the whole story of our freedom from Egypt is recounted?

Third, why do we have the statement in the Haggadah, "In the beginning our forefathers were idol worshippers, and now G-d has brought us close to Him?" Why do we have to mention that in the beginning we were idol worshippers?

Fourth and last, why is it that the seder plate is composed of two inverted triangles? You have the shankbone and egg, and then in the middle the bitter herbs, and then we have the harosis and parsley. Why this particular order, and why these particular symbols?

If we look at Pesach carefully, we see that we are celebrating three different deliverances. We are celebrating the deliverance of G-d's name. After all, the Jewish people refer to this holiday as Pesach, which can also mean limping. If we look around us, we can see that evil flourishes. It looks like G-d is limping. Pesach proves that G-d is not limping. He is active in the world. The eggs stand for the Jewish people. Pesach celebrates the redemption of the Jewish people from slavery. Just as an egg becomes harder the longer you boil it, so the Jewish people became stronger, the harder they were persecuted. We have a part in our redemption, and if we do not assume responsibility, we will not be redeemed. If we would not have taken the lamb, we would not have been redeemed. We may be aware that the day of the week of the first night of Passover is the same day of the week as Tisha B'Av in that year. This year, the first seder is Wednesday night, and Tisha B'Av is also Wednesday night. This confirms the fact that unless we act responsibly, we can lose our freedom. The bitter herbs stand for the personal problems we all face in life -- sickness, death, disappointments. These, too, can be ameliorated if we attach ourselves to our people and to our G-d.

The symbols of Pesach have a double meaning. The lamb stands for idolatry and also for G-d's deliverance. The Jewish people, by slaughtering the lamb, the Egyptian god, rejected idolatry. They took responsibility for themselves. That's why Rabbi Soloveitchik says Shabbos Hagadol is so called, because on this Shabbos, the Jewish people became a godol, an adult. They assumed responsibility for themselves. They also put the blood of the lamb on the door. G-d passed over the Jewish people and delivered them from the plague of the slaying of the firstborn. The Jewish people, when they slew the lamb, did not know that the Egyptians would not react violently. They assumed responsibility for their actions, no matter what the result. The lamb stands for G-d's protection, and reminds us that G-d does act in this world, even though it looks as

if He is limping. We have to know that to help redeem G-d's name is up to us. We had to take the lamb. We had to put the blood on the door, and then G-d's name is redeemed.

Life is filled with bitterness, sickness, death, problems, but with hard work we can overcome everything. That's why we take the bitter herbs and dip them into the harosis. Our personal problems can be lessened, or mitigated, or overcome if we will take the initiative and not wallow in self-pity. The Holocaust survivors of our day pointed this out to us. They did not say, "We will stay in camps forever, and you should support us for all the suffering we have endured." Instead, they went out into the world and married and had children and started businesses, helped build the State of Israel, and helped build the American Jewish community and others throughout the world. They took their bitter experiences and dipped them in the harosis. They did not just sit back but assumed responsibility.

We also must assure the future of the Jewish people by dipping the greens into salt water. The greens stand for new life, as does the egg. The salt water stands for our tears. Many people, when eating the egg, also dip it into salt water to proclaim again that with our tears we can create something positive. We can redeem the Jewish people, but it means assuming responsibility.

Why is it that we base the whole Haggadah on the three and a half verses from the Torah portion, Ki Sovo, instead of some verses from the Book of Exodus, where our redemption from slavery is recounted? Remember, everything in Exodus is in the third person, while in the Torah portion, Ki Sovo, everything is said in the first person. We have to assume responsibility, each one individually, to bring redemption for ourselves, for our people, and for G-d's name.

This portion also speaks about the first fruits, advising us that if we will assume responsibility, we will have fruits. We will be able to make positive contributions to the world. In the Haggadah, we learn how in the beginning, our forefathers were idol worshippers. Why? There is an argument in the Gemora between Rav and Shmuel. Shmuel declares that what we are celebrating today is our freedom from physical slavery, while Rav states we are celebrating is our freedom from spiritual slavery. Shmuel maintained the slavery was preventing the Jews of Egypt from being observant, religious Jews, but by removing the slavery, the Jews would immediately snap back and once again be religious. Rav retorted he was not so sure. The Jewish people were immersed also in spiritual slavery. They had adopted their masters' ways, including their religion and idols. The rabbis say that the Jewish people were on the 49th level of Terumah. If they had sunk any lower, they could not have been redeemable. Rav did not believe that any difference prevailed between the Jewish soul and any other soul. In fact, I vehemently deny those in our tradition who say that the Jewish soul is different from anybody else's soul. This is a Christian doctrine. The Christians proclaim that Jews are subhuman because their soul is defective. That's why it was so easy for German Christians -- after all, the Nazis were either Protestants or Catholics -- to make the Holocaust.

If we, too, would believe that a Jewish soul is superior to other people's souls, then we,

too, could be, under the right circumstances, driven to kill people for no reason. True, I believe the Jews have developed their souls' potential better because of the truths we have, just like in the United States we have developed a superior form of government, not because Americans are superior, but because our truths are better. Because of the truths in the Torah, we Jews have been able to develop our souls better. Nothing in the Jewish soul prevents a Jew from becoming an idol worshipper. Remove the slavery and you still have a problem, according to Rav. Jews will not automatically become religious and observant Jews. They have to be taught. We find this is true of Russian Jews who suffered under 70 years of Communism. When Communism lifted, some did come back, but most have to be educated. Each of us has the responsibility to educate one another.

Why, then, don't we make a brocha before we begin the Haggadah? Because we are not sure that we are going to be able to assume responsibility for ourselves, for each other, and for G-d's name. It is a huge undertaking. On this Shabbos Hagodol, we are urged to become religious adults, to assume our responsibilities. We can do it. G-d said He will help us, but we have to take the first steps. We have to take our bitterness and put it in the harosis. We have to maintain hope in spite of our tears. We have to show courage, and we have to assume responsibility not only for ourselves but also for our people and for our G-d. Let us all hope we will so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SONG, BITTERNESS & MECHANISM FOR

RENEWAL

We all know that today we did not say the full Hallel. The Talmud, which quotes Rabbi Yochanan, explains the day when the Egyptian army was drowned in the Red Sea, the angels of G-d started to sing, and G-d said, "How can you sing when My creatures have been destroyed?" We Jews have never gloated over our enemy's defeat. We do not want to destroy our enemies. We want our enemies to bless us.

That is, of course, what we learn from Yaacov. When Yaacov wrestled with the angel of Esau, he did not want to defeat him but wanted the angel to bless him. That's why, too, when we recite the ten plagues at the seder, we place our finger in the cup and remove a drop of wine every time we mention a plague because the suffering of the Egyptians prevents our cup of joy from being full. True, we generally do not celebrate the days of our victory. We celebrate the day after our victory when we can practice our religion fully. We defeated Haman and his cohorts on the 13th of Adar, but we celebrate on the 14th because the important thing is that now we can practice our religion. Our goal is to practice our religion and be free, not to defeat our enemy.

As we all know, today we read the Shira. We may not say the full Hallel, but we definitely sing a song to G-d thanking Him for destroying the Egyptian army. Moshe and the sons of Israel sang this song to G-d, "I will sing to G-d for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea." We do sing, but we sing in praise of G-d. This song does not dwell upon the cruelty of the Egyptians, but rather upon the fact that G-d saves us. Also, G-d used nature to save us, and that not only did He destroy the Egyptian army, but caused terror to grip the dwellers of Philistia and trembling to beset the powers of Moab. We talk about the fact that G-d is going to be with His people. He is going to bring them to the land of Israel and have them build a sanctuary. This song is a song of hope, a song not of gloating over an enemy's defeat, but a song which teaches every Jew that G-d is there to help us; in spite of all problems, G-d will help us to help Him redeem the world. Judaism requires a song. Only a song will allow us to overcome the problems of inevitable shadows which will come into all our lives.

In the Haggadah, we learn in the poem, "And it was in the middle of the night," about how Abraham defeated the kings who had kidnapped his nephew, Lot. We learn also how the Assyrian armies who were besieging Jerusalem were stricken down on the seder night. Sanhereb had surrounded Jerusalem and the situation had looked hopeless. Hezekiah had just about given up, but Isaiah told him to hold on, and then a great miracle happened. Nobody knows exactly what it was, but the whole Assyrian army panicked and fled. In the Egyptian chronicles, it is called the night of the mouse. Maybe the Assyrian camp was attacked by rodents, or maybe a meteor in the shape of a mouse landed close by, but, in any event, the Assyrian army fled. Hezekiah, the rabbis say, was supposed to be the Mashiach. He was such a righteous man. However, he was not appointed the Mashiach because he failed to sing a song to G-d about this great deliverance. The rabbis relate Hezekiah enacted many religious reforms. He brought the people back to Judaism from their idolatry. He instituted a wonderful educational system. In fact, according to the Talmud Sanhedrin, he placed a sword at the entrance to every school and said, "Those boys and girls who do not study will be hit by the sword." The rabbis say that he was so successful in educating them that no children from Dan to Beersheba failed to know the most intricate laws of ritual purity and impurity; yet, nothing stuck. This education did not turn these youngsters into pious people. After Hezekiah died, they reverted to idol worship. Even his

own son, Menashe, became an idol worshipper. In fact, they tell the story that before his son was born, Hezekiah had a vision that his son would not turn out right. Therefore, he did not want to get married. G-d was displeased with this, and Hezekiah was struck by a disease and was on his death bed when Isaiah came and said he was afflicted because he did not get married. Hezekiah said, "How can I get married if I am going to have a son who is wicked?" Isaiah said, "That's not your job. Your job is to have children. Leave the rest to G-d." Isaiah even gave him his daughter. The rabbis say that after Menashe gained the throne following his father's death, he killed his grandfather, Isaiah. The rabbis ask, why is it that Hezekiah failed to raise another generation who was devoted to Judaism? After all, they had the knowledge.

The answer is, he did not give them a song. He did not show them the beauty of Judaism and how it was relevant to their lives. Without this song, Judaism cannot live. We are not Prussians. We cannot exist by the motto of just obey. We have to feel that our religion helps us overcome life's problems, that it gives us a song. At the Red Sea, it says that the Jewish people sang the song, "And they believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant," but three days later we learn how they came to Maror and were unable to drink the water because it was bitter, and they complained against Moshe. G-d showed them a tree, which He told them to throw into the water; doing so sweetened the water. He also gave them three specific commandments: Shabbat; honoring their parents; and civil laws; some say also the law of the red heifer. He told them that, "If you will listen to these mitzvahs then all these diseases which I put in Egypt I will not put upon you." What does this mean? This means that G-d gave them vehicles for renewing the Jewish song. When bitterness would come upon them, they would in the midst of this bitterness celebrate a Shabbat. The Shabbat would allow them to renew the song. In the midst of their bitterness, they would gather with their family and their song would be renewed. In the midst of their bitterness, they would take pride in their civic institutions and their song would be renewed. We renew our song when we gather together on Shabbat, when we gather together with our family, when we gather together with our people. It is not enough to have a song. This song can peter out unless you have a mechanism for renewing it. The Chassidic commentaries say that the disease of Egypt was that people believed that there was no G-d and there was no way for things to get better. That's why it says that, "If you will keep these things, I will remove the disease of Egypt from you because I am G-d, Who cures you." It is so easy for dreams to peter out. We need to have mechanisms to renew them.

In fact, we see today that Israel is celebrating its 50th anniversary. There are many to whom this celebration does not mean anything because they no longer dream Jewish dreams. They would like Israel to be like Norway or Sweden or the United States, and since it is not, they are disappointed and do not feel like celebrating, but others who still see the song, in spite of the difficulties, feel compelled to celebrate. Others look only at the difficulties and do not want to sing. If they do not sing, they are in danger of losing everything, like the students in the schools of Hezekiah. For Judaism to survive, we need to have a song. Things are never going to be perfect. It is almost always in the middle of the night. Abraham had to act in the middle of the night to save Lot. The Jewish people gathered together for their seder in the middle of the night, but with a song, we can overcome everything. Night can be overcome, but we need more than a song. We also need the mechanism to renew our song. Shabbat, family, and identifying with the Jewish people will allow us to renew our song.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a kindergarten teacher who was out of class for six weeks having a baby. When she returned, she asked her class, "How did you like my

substitute?" One little girl said, "She was okay, but she wasn't as smart as you." The teacher asked, "Why do you say she wasn't as smart as me?" The little girl replied, "Because she needed two hands to play the piano." We all need two hands to secure the future of the Jewish people. We need a song and we need a mechanism to renew the song. Let's all hope and pray that all of us will realize the importance of Shabbat, family, and the Jewish community so that our song will never die but will always be renewed so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

THE DOVE, TOUCHING THE SOUL,

BELIEFS & PRACTICES

We all know that Judaism is composed of two parts: beliefs and practices. True, to be a Jew, all you have to do is be born of a Jewish mother. However, to be a religious Jew, you must conform to Jewish beliefs and practices. No one forces you either to believe something or to do something. You just will not want to participate in the Jewish religion unless you share certain beliefs and practices. It is possible not to share certain basic Jewish beliefs, yet, participate in certain Jewish practices. For example, you could stop believing in a personal G-d, but find a Pesach seder very enjoyable, something which ties you to the Jewish people. On the other hand, you can subscribe to Jewish belief but feel that Jewish practice is just too difficult for you to be successful in your profession. You could agree that we are supposed to keep Shabbat and believe in it, but, because keeping it would make it very difficult to have a successful business, you may not keep it.

Judaism has always been composed of beliefs and practices. The truth of the matter is, we have always stressed practice over belief. The mark of an observant Jew has been one who keeps Shabbat. Very rarely does anyone ask anyone else what their beliefs are. However, if a person does not hold certain beliefs, he will not keep certain practices. If a person does not believe in a personal G-d, how can he pray to Him? If a person does not believe that G-d gave us the Torah, why should he study the Torah, unless he is a scholar of ancient literature?

About 150 years ago, Jewish belief died for many Jews. Many Jews could no longer believe in a personal G-d. They swallowed hook, line, and sinker the Newtonian idea that everything was cause and effect, and that G-d could not intervene in the world, even if He wanted to. He may have set the world in motion, but He now is retired and could not affect anything in the world. At best, He could give you some strength, but He could not solve your problems. There was no point in praying to Him. To others, G-d became a force of history Who took no cognizance of man at all. If you wanted to lead a fulfilling life, you got in line with the forces of history. If not, they would smash you. These laws of history were like the laws of nature. This is what Communism was about.

In the 1880's and 1890's, the yeshivas of Eastern Europe emptied. Many of the young men who studied there could no longer believe in the beliefs of Judaism, but they still kept its practices. The practices had great meaning for them. In fact, most of the pioneers of the State of Israel were ex-yeshiva bochers. That's why they could so easily revive the Hebrew language -- they knew Hebrew. Many of them also loved Jewish practices, even if they no longer believed in them, but they were emotionally tied to them. It takes two or three generations for the practices to die after belief has died. A number of them no longer believed in the Jewish religion, but they still believed in the Jewish people, and some even believed in G-d, but not a G-d Who would reveal His will directly to the Jewish people.

The Jewish people are like a dove, the rabbis say, which flies with two wings; sometimes, though, in emergencies, it can fly with only one wing. For many years, it seemed that the majority of Jewish people were flying with only one wing. They had

given up many Jewish beliefs, but they were still keeping many Jewish practices. I remember, when I first went into the rabbinate, how pious people would tell their children, "Don't worry about kosher. I'll keep kosher for you." Or, "Go to the dance Friday night. I'll go to shul for you." Or, "Don't worry about giving charity. I'll give it for you." In other words, these were Jews tied to Jewish practice, but not very strongly to Jewish belief; otherwise, they would have wanted their children to keep these beliefs, too.

Something miraculous has happened in the last 60 years. Jewish belief has come back almost at the same time that Jewish practice was coming to an end. Before the Second World War, when Jewish belief was at its lowest ebb, Mordechai Kaplan tried to redefine Jewish belief completely in a heroic effort to save Jewish mitzvahs: he wanted to derive a system whereby Jews would still keep kosher and Shabbat without reference to traditional Jewish beliefs. His effort was a huge failure, because you cannot keep the mitzvahs for more than three generations without Jewish belief. Science changed. We know now that G-d can act without seeming to act. Scientific laws are probabilities. Black holes speak about the limits of knowledge. The very act of observing something changes it. The Big Bang Theory came into favor. It has proved scientifically that the idea of creation is possible. Quantum leaps in subatomic physics point to a force beyond the universe. Chaos Theory shows a person can reach a goal more than one way, but the goal is inevitable. An unseen hand seems to be pushing us toward these goals. Jewish belief has come back just as Jewish observance almost disappeared. Perhaps in three generations Jewish practice will come back, too.

Jews, no matter what their synagogue or denomination, stress the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people. G-d is a personal G-d. The Torah is a divine document. Many interpretations now exist about what this means, but the Torah has been elevated once again to a source of divine knowledge. All Jewish religious movements today acknowledge man's quest for holiness; Jewish ritual observances have surfaced in the most unlikely places. Man's need for spirituality is universally recognized. For too long, even in Ultra Orthodox institutions, talk about G-d and the realization that the purpose of all mitzvahs is to bring us close to G-d, were hardly discussed. Without the idea that the purpose of Judaism is to bring us close to G-d, nothing really makes sense in Judaism.

We know that on Pesach, we all were freed from Egypt, and we know that we have a Seder the first few nights of Pesach in the Galut to proclaim the importance of freedom. We know that the Jewish people sacrificed for this freedom, that they endangered their lives by sacrificing the lamb, the god of Egypt, at this time of year: The Egyptians believed that the spirit Aries incarnated in the lamb, and that anyone touching a lamb would bring great harm to Egypt. We know also that the Jewish people recognized they had to be positive Jews, and, therefore, the rabbis say, they circumcised themselves before they going out of Egypt. The rabbis further asserted that the blood on the door to prevent the Angel of Death from entering their houses was a combination of the blood of the lamb and the blood of circumcision to show they had rejected idolatry, and they wanted to be positive Jews. However, just a few days later, after having left Egypt, upon seeing the Egyptian army bearing down on them, and seeming to be trapped on the Red Sea, they said to Moshe, "Is it because there are not any graves in Egypt that

you took us out to die in the desert? What's this that you did to us to take us out of Egypt? Didn't we tell you while we were in Egypt, 'Leave us alone and we will serve the Egyptians because it is better to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.'" What happened to the people's belief? Why did they panic so?

The answer is because they really did not have a song in their hearts. They did not believe fully in G-d and in the importance of being free. That's why the seventh day of Pesach is a holiday: On that day after the Egyptian army drowned in the sea, the Jewish people sang a song, a song we repeat every day, the Shira, a song which speaks about how the Jewish people believed now in G-d with their whole souls. Without this song, Jews would not have been able to make it. Before they sang this song, G-d would not give any of the laws of Judaism to the people. He first had to make sure they had this song, that their souls were attuned to Him, that they had spirituality.

Three days later, the Jewish people left the Red Sea. They had no water and were complaining. There at Marah, G-d gave them the laws of Shabbat, the laws of honoring parents, and civil laws, and some even say the laws of the red heifer. G-d would not have given them any laws before they sang the Shira, before they had this song in their hearts. What has saved the Jewish people throughout the generations is that even when many Jews have seemed to have lost their faith, their beliefs, they still had this song in their hearts. They had felt that it was important that they remain Jews. Unless the Jew first has a sense of spirituality, unless he has a strong sense of belief, he will not keep the mitzvahs for long. It is possible to have Jewish beliefs and not to practice the mitzvahs of Judaism, and it is possible to practice the mitzvahs of Judaism and not to have Jewish beliefs. However, this is only a temporary situation and cannot last. You can teach children about all the mitzvahs you want, but that does not mean that they will want to do them; you can teach them all about Jewish beliefs, but that does not mean that they will believe them. However, if you can open their souls so that they want to get close to G-d, so that they will realize that the Jewish way of life elevates them, then they will hunger to understand Jewish beliefs better, and they will want with all their hearts to practice Judaism. This does not mean that they will not encounter vicissitudes, that they will not have problems, that they will not have doubts. But they will have such a strong inner yearning for Judaism that they will never want to give it up, no matter what; no matter the questions they have; no matter the persecution they have been under -- because they know that Judaism elevates their lives and allows them to have a richer, more beautiful inner life.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who was driven out of Spain and then Portugal because of the Inquisition. While at sea, pirates captured the ship and took his wife and children away. He was sold as a slave in Morocco. He was able to escape from his masters and wandered off into the desert. While wandering, he put his hand up to G-d and said, "G-d, no matter what You do, You cannot make me stop believing in You."

Pesach teaches us the urgency of the Jewish people seeing that G-d saved them when he sent the Angel of Death to slaughter the Egyptians. Pesach also teaches us that it was important the Jewish people displayed courage and actively demonstrated their desire to be Jewish. However, all that would have been to no avail if they would not

also have had a spiritually uplifting experience at the Red Sea. The rabbis say that the lowliest maidservant at the Red Sea had a higher prophetic vision than did all the later prophets of the Bible, like Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc. We must open the souls, especially those of our children, if we want them to be practicing Jews. They must feel Judaism in their inner being. That's why stories and music are so important. Shlomo Carlbach especially taught us this.

Touch a person's soul, and the beliefs and practices of Judaism will always be secured. Then the dove of Judaism will always fly with two wings; if for some reason we cannot touch the souls of our people, then at best one wing will work. Some beliefs will endure, some practices will endure. One of the messages of Pesach is that we want both wings to endure. We want the beliefs and practices of Judaism, symbolized by the Seder, to be strong, and for that to be, we need the song of Judaism. After the Jewish people sang the song on the seventh day, their souls were touched, and the Jewish people were secure. Yes, they would encounter many problems, some very severe, but the Jewish people would be able to overcome them and persevere. Let us hope and pray that we will always keep the song of Judaism alive in our own lives so that we will be able to touch the souls of our children so that Judaism will persevere and the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

JEWISH DREAMS, BYWAYS &

PROGRESS

In a few moments, we will remember those who influenced us and continue to influence us. We still think, every time we make a decision, what would my mother or father or grandparents think? What would those who have passed on think about what I am going to do?

In the Haphtorah from the Book of Isaiah that we read today, appears the famous line we sing every Shabbat at Havdallah, "Uvshaftim Mayim Bishason, and you shall draw water with joy from the springs of salvation." Every Shabbat after we make Havdallah, we sing Eliahu Hanovi. We sing about Elijah the prophet. At the Seder, too, it is Eliahu Hanovi who is the dominant human being and not Moshe. Why should this be? Why do we have a cup for Eliahu and open the door for him and sing Eliahu Hanovi?

Eliahu was really a failure. He tried hard to get the Jewish people to repent, to change their ways, but he did not succeed. He was a man who set high standards, and became very upset when people could not achieve them. He tried through theatrics to get the Jewish people to come back to G-d, but failed. He fled to the desert, but G-d told him that He was not in the whirlwind, He was not in the mighty storms and fire, but He was in the still, small voice. Eliahu then anointed as his successor Elisha, who actually made a revolution in Israel. Through one act of kindness after another, he wielded great influence and changed the whole course of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

We remember Eliahu at Havdallah because we remind ourselves that Eliahu's goals were correct, but take generations to achieve. Every generation must try to solve its problems and bring the world a little closer to the goals Eliahu enumerated. Sometimes, that is a difficult task, but that is the task that G-d gave us on Motzi Shabbat when Adam and Eve made the first Havdallah and G-d gave them fire. The rabbis tell us that Adam and Eve were created on Friday, they sinned on Friday, and they were forgiven on Friday. G-d, being merciful, allowed them to stay in the Garden of Eden for Shabbat, but when Shabbat was over, He told them that they had to leave. Rightened, they questioned, "How can we leave? It is dark outside." G-d said, "Do not worry. I will give you a perfect tool, the multi-wicked candle with which you can turn this wild world in which you are going into a paradise."

At Havdallah, we smell the spices, the scent of the Garden of Eden. Our goal is to make this world a Garden of Eden. The Havdallah candle differs from the Shabbat candle because the Shabbat candle signifies warmth and light and comfort. The Havdallah candle, though, being composed of many wicks, possess many colors -- blue and green and red and white, and signifies the Aburvia, the confusion of life. With life so difficult, with so many variables, making correct decisions becomes almost impossible. To comprehend good defies definition. In the Garden of Eden, good and evil were clearly delineated, but not so in our world.

G-d has told us that we have the power to do good, but it is hard to determine what is good. That's why we have to study. That is one of the main differences between Judaism and Christianity. Christianity runs around the problem: "I know what is good,

but where do I get the power to do it?" Judaism, on the other hand, runs around the problem: "I have the power to do good, but what is good?" Every generation must work at making this world a Garden of Eden.

It is interesting to note that when we conclude the Hallel prayer at the seder, we do not end it with the Yehalalucha, the normal way. The blessing that we usually say at the end of Hallel says, "All Thy works, O Eternal, shall praise Thee...Blessed art Thou, Eternal King, extol and praise Thee." Why should we sing this blessing only after we have said Psalm 136, and the prayer Nishmas Kol Chai, and the Shochain Ad.

During the Seder, we have four cups of wine. Rabbi Tarfon suggests a fifth cup of wine. This fifth cup of wine stands for the future when the whole world will be redeemed. Our job is not just to redeem the Jewish people, but through their redemption bring redemption to the whole world. This is the same Rabbi Tarfon who in the Ethics of the Fathers, exhorted, "It is not our obligation to finish the job of perfecting the world, but it is our obligation to try to continue the process toward perfection." Psalm 136 has the refrain, "His loving kindness is for the world." The blessing in Nishmas starts with the words, "The soul of every living thing shall praise Him." The Shochain Ad, too, urges the whole world to praise G-d. Our job is to tell Eliahu that we are making progress, that we are trying to make this a better and better world.

Our parents wanted us to have a better life physically and spiritually than they did. When we see the candles lit Friday night and smell the smells of Shabbat, we know that we still are working to fulfill their ideals. Sometimes, we meet ups and downs, but each generation must try to attain the goals of Eliahu. We cannot achieve them overnight or in even one or two generations, but we can make progress.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a Bobover chosed named Moshe. He loved to go and sit at the Bobover rebbe's table in Poland, and he especially loved the song that the Bobovers would sing when they made Havdallah. They would sing it the first time around the sholosh seudos table, and then sing it when they made Havdallah. In 1941, the Germans took all the young able-bodied men and shipped them out of Lavov. Moshe was only 14 years old. He did not know that that same day, the Nazis took the Bobover rebbe and many of his older followers and shot them in a trench at the edge of town. As they were being led to the trench, the Bobover rebbe said, "Let none of us despair because we are the sacrifices which are going to bring in the Messianic era." The rabbis in the Talmud said, "Let the Mashiach come, but I do not want to see Him," because they feared the birth pangs of the Messiah, but we, who are living in these days, should accept our fate with joy.

Moshe was transferred from one camp to another. In December 1944, he was sent to Monthausen. There the prisoners were told to get into the shower, a cold shower, and then to go outside in the freezing weather. There, a Zailapel, a head count, was taken. For some reason, the head count did not match the numbers the Nazis thought should be there, so they kept them in the freezing weather, counting them over and over again. Ice formed on many of them, and they fell. Moshe felt himself about ready to fall also, but remembering the tune of the Bobover at Havdallah, he began to sing it under his breath, and his legs began to go up and down. He felt the ice crack as his legs beat to

the music. Finally, the Germans relented and they let them go into the barracks.

Moshe survived the war, and came to America where he settled in Monsey, New York. He made a lot of money in the stock market, and with the money decided to endow a yeshiva in Israel. He helped them put up a building and provided operational funds for them. They did not know what to do for him. They wanted to honor him, but he said no. He said, 'I have an only daughter. Maybe some day you could be of service to her.' In 1988, he died. He had meanwhile gone on aliyah with his daughter.

His daughter, however, turned her back on her religious heritage, and got involved with a drug-taking crowd. The rabbis tried to approach her, but she rebuffed them. Now 1999, one of the boys at the yeshiva at his break spied a hearse driving in the countryside. The sight of no one following the hearse was appalling. The hearse looked as if it were lost. The young man decided that he should do a mitzvah and follow the hearse. After all, to follow the dead to the grave is a mitzvah. He got together 200 boys, and they followed the hearse to the grave. When the hearse stopped, a rabbi stepped out, looked at the boys, and asked, "How did you know she died? How did it happen that you came to the funeral?" The boys looked at the rabbi in astonishment. They told him, "We just saw the hearse and we came to fulfill the mitzvah of accompanying the dead, and only just for the mitzvah." The rabbi looked shaken and said, "Boys, do you know this woman?" They replied no. The rabbi continued, "This is the daughter of your benefactor. This is the daughter of the man who built your yeshiva."

One of the rabbis from the yeshiva who had accompanied the boys said, "We had lost all contact with her. We heard she was in and out of mental institutions." The rabbi who conducted the funeral added, "That is true, but she left instructions that those who would attend her funeral should take care of her little boy who was born out of wedlock. Furthermore, they should make sure that her little boy got a Jewish education, which would make her father proud. Especially, he should be taught the tune from the Bobover Havdallah service that her father loved to sing."

We Jewish people many times may take a wrong turn, but we all can come back. We always should hear the tune that Eliahu sang for us which goes back to the tune that Moshe sang at the Red Sea. Let us hope and pray that our generation, as with succeeding generations, continue to work to make the dreams of Eliahu and of our parents and of all Jews since the time of Moses and Avraham a reality so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

COULD WE BE ENSLAVED AGAIN & STORIES

We all know that at the Seder we have to eat matzah. The question has been asked by the rabbis, what would happen if we only had enough matzah to eat before the meal when we are supposed to eat matzah, or for the afikomen at the end of the meal? What should we do? Should we save the matzah until the end of the meal for the afikomen, or should we eat it at the beginning of the meal, in which case we would not have any for the afikomen? What should we do?

The Tosfos and the Rosh say that we are supposed to eat the matzah at the beginning of the meal, while the Rambam and the Rif maintain we should eat the matzah at the very end. This argument really seems to be a throwback to that argument about if the Jewish people were being tried physically or spiritually by eating the manna while in the desert. The Eben Ezer said that the eating of the manna was a very severe test. This was a very severe test because the Jewish people did not know whether the manna was going to come every day. They could not save it, except for one day -- Friday, when they got a double portion to prevent their gathering on Shabbat, a form of work and thus prohibited. We have two challahs on the table on Shabbat to remind us of the double portion of manna. Therefore, the Eben Ezra says that this was a great test of faith because the people were worrying every day whether they would have manna, food for the next day. They couldn't save manna for more than a day because it would rot, becoming inedible. This was then a great test of their faith in G-d.

The Orhot HaChaim, on the other hand, says no. He says that the Jewish people got used to the manna coming every day. It was like the sun rising every day, but the test was not a physical test but a spiritual one. In other words, they were sure they were going to get food every day. However, because they got food every day, would they now turn to G-d? After all, if they were satisfied, what did they need G-d for? In fact, poor people are usually more religious than rich people. Poor people do not want to take credit for their own poverty. They feel it must have some purpose. Rich people want to take credit for all their success. Therefore, they say they do not need G-d. So in Eben Ezra's case, the problem was that this was a physical test. How could they be spiritual when they were worried all the time about their next meal? On the other hand, the Orhot HaChaim asks, how can they be spiritual since they were sure of getting another meal, and therefore, did not need G-d?

In a certain sense, this is the argument between the Rosh and Tosfos and the Rambam and the Rif. The Rambam and the Rif say that the true test of the Jewish people occurs when they are safe and secure, and they really do not understand slavery at all. Slavery is something that is far away, and they feel that they do not need all this religion and ritual. They do not really need G-d's help because they are beyond any type of slavery, while the Rosh and the Tosfos say something altogether different. They say slavery is real and can occur overnight, that the slavery like we had in Egypt could return. Therefore, they declare we have to eat the bread of slavery at the very beginning.

Of course, they both agree that slavery can occur again, that indeed it can happen overnight. Look at what happened in Kosovo, where people were sitting in their homes and were given just a few hours to leave. We know that during the Holocaust, the Jewish people were taken out of their homes at a moment's notice. The Rosh and the Tosfos seem to be saying, let's remember that, that things can change overnight. Meanwhile, the Rambam and the Rif are trying to say slavery is real and has to be understood. However, let's not disturb our holiday atmosphere by

overstressing the fact that it is real. Let's eat the matzah, the affliction of Egypt at the end. Yes, it could happen again here, too, but let's not overemphasize it, while the Rosh and the Tosfos want to emphasize it, want to say that things could change overnight. Communities ostensibly secure can, in the flash of an eyelash, be turned into great areas of poverty and destruction and slavery. That is what they are declaring here. We all know that discussing these issues requires great care because the stories themselves, of what has actually happened, take on more importance than just theoretical analysis.

The rabbis instruct us that the mitzvah of saying the Haggadah is based on the word Heegadatah, and you should tell the story about the exodus from Egypt. The Haggadah states, "It is a mitzvah upon us to tell about the exodus from Egypt, and anybody who increases to tell about the exodus from Egypt, that person is praiseworthy." Then it relates a story about Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon, who were sitting in Bnai Brak. The Haggadah actually says they were sitting and talking all night about the exodus, but it does not just say that they were talking about it. It declares, "And they were telling the stories of the exodus from Egypt," because to impress upon a person's mind the eternal truths of the exodus, you tell stories. History can give you dates and facts, but if you hear real stories of real people and how they reacted, how they were treated, then it touches your heart and your soul and enters into your whole being. We saw that today with the refugees of Kosovo, how hearing their stories affects you — that story of the 10-year old little boy whose parents were shot and who wanted to save his little sister screaming in the burning house but, having been shot in the arm, was unable to hold on to her. When we come to the story of the exodus of Egypt, we have to understand these stories. These stories happened before and, like the Rosh and Tosfos warn, they could happen again. On Pesach night, the Halacha admonishes us to eat the matzah at the beginning of the meal, not at the end of the meal, even if this will upset somewhat the holiday mood. Our own prosperity could possibly be overturned overnight, however, we have to learn how to be compassionate. We have to learn how to transfer these stories to our children and grandchildren. We have to allow these stories to influence us and cause us to become empathizing and sympathizing people.

The rabbis also instruct us in the importance of learning Halacha, but more than half the Talmud is Aggadah, which means stories. Even in the Halacha we learn case law. The rabbis teach us that if we want to gain faith, to enlarge ourselves, we should study Aggadah. The Talmud does not come up with conclusions in most cases. It does not give the Halacha in most cases. It just gives all the different possibilities. Different rules and regulations of how to learn the Halacha out of the Talmud exist, though it does not say so explicitly. That's why many people say that it is the study of Talmud which develops our soul because it is composed of Aggadah. Therefore, many people used to form groups and just learn the Aggadah part of the Talmud.

Some people say they are not interested in teaching girls Talmud, that they should just learn the Halacha, just what they have to do, practical matters. I think, however, that if girls want to learn Talmud, let them learn Talmud. Their soul, too, should have the opportunity to be touched if they want to learn the Talmud. The stories of the Talmud mold us and shape us, as have the stories of our history. In fact, we probably learn more about the love of Torah from the story of Hillel than we do from all the Halachas of the love of Torah. We all know that Hillel was a Babylonian, that he came from Babylonia to Israel to study with Shammai and Aftalian, but did not have enough money to pay for the lectures. So he used to go up on the roof and listen through the skylight. Snow and cold filled Jerusalem in the month of Teveth, and Shammai and

Aftalian looked up and said, "The roof is getting very dark." They noticed the shape of a man on the skylight, and quickly sent someone to bring him down. They revived him because he was almost frozen to death, and seeing what a thirst he had for Torah, taught him for free, and allowed him to come to the academy.

We know that in the first book of the Bible, Bereishis, almost no Halacha appears. It is filled with stories. We learn from Avraham Oveinu how to entertain guests and the importance of entertaining guests. From Yaacov, we learn of the necessity to maintain business ethics even in a climate where everybody is trying to cheat you; i.e. how Yaacov did not emulate Laban's terrible business practices. So the whole essence of transmitting Judaism comes down to stories. We have to know how to transmit the stories.

Actually, the word story itself, Supor, comes from the word for sapphire, Sapir, which reminds us of the brickwork under G-d's feet that we learn about in the Torah portion, Mishpatim. The rabbis explain this brickwork was the souls of those who had lost their lives in Egypt. Everyone had a story. Even in the Shmoneh Esre, we talk about the remnants of the scholars and the righteous and the pious, and the rabbis exhort us not to read the word as scholars, but as stories.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a wonderful wedding that took place in Israel, and one of the couple was the grandson of Rabbi Menachem Zimba in the Warsaw Ghetto. We know the revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto took place on Pesach. Rabbi Zimba was a great Torah scholar. He also believed that the Jewish people should fight back. When all the stories came about what was happening in Auschwitz, he issued a decree even in January, that the Jewish people should be prepared to fight back, that they should take as many Nazis with them as they could. The Nazis, though, tried to pretend that when they were shipping Jews off, they were going to wonderful work camps. Rabbi Zimba told the people that this was not so. The Jewish people know that the Nazis were eventually going to round them all up, so he told them to prepare, and, eventually, on the eve of Pesach 1943, he noticed the policemen starting to mount the walls of the ghetto. The Jews knew what that meant. Rabbi Zimba sat down to the Seder; he always kept a little piece of matzah in his pocket on erev Pesach because he did not know if he could make a Seder. Inevitably, the news came that the Nazis were starting to penetrate the ghetto. He quickly told them all to disperse to their battle stations. He had told them before that they should prepare hiding places in the cellars and attics. He, himself, had prepared a hiding place in his attic. He took out that little piece of matzah from his pocket and made the brocha, then told all to disperse. The sadness of a very abbreviated Seder that day was somewhat lessened when the Germans were repulsed with heavy casualties.

To retaliate, the Germans then decided they were going to burn the Jewish people out, so the next day they not only entered with tanks, but pounded the ghetto with phosphorus bombs, setting the tenements afire. On the fifth day of the battle, on the fifth day of Pesach, Rabbi Zimba's building was burned. Although they tried to put out the fires, they had to go down from the attic to the basement. Looking out, they noticed the next building was clear. They thought the Germans had gone, as did a scout team sent ahead. Rabbi Zimba, holding his little grandchild, let the people out, only to be cut down by the bullets of the Nazis. He was able, though, to save his little grandson. He threw him back into the building. The Jews waited until dark, when they could go into the next building, but Rabbi Zimba's life was lost.

I also remember the story of Zev, who in 1984 decided to have a Seder. He was a refusenik. It

was dangerous to have a Seder in those days, because if you were a university student, you would be immediately conscripted to the army. If you were the parents of small children, you would immediately be accused of feeding them anti-Communist propaganda, a felony, and be sent away to a gulag, away from your children. Also, if you were a worker, you risked losing your job and also being sent to a gulag. A very dangerous thing to do, 40 people decided they were going to have a Seder at a dachau outside Moscow. Zev and his friend, though, having never attended a Seder, decided that they had to practice for it. A few nights before Pesach in their home, they used their plates as matzahs, cups of water as wine, and practiced the steps of a Seder. They did not have any Haggadahs, but they remembered snitches and snatches of things.

All of a sudden, the doors burst open and dogs and seven KGB people came in shouting that Zev and this friend were distributing anti-Communist propaganda; that they were Zionist hooligans, religious medievalists, and shouting all sorts of evil epitaphs at them. They searched the house thoroughly, but, of course, did not find anything because nothing was there. Zev, though, was not intimidated and decided to go ahead with this Seder. All 40 people came with different packages to this dachau. The women baked some matzah. People came with different pages of the Haggadah. Others brought wine. Some brought cups. Everything was arranged the way a Seder should be, and they went through the Seder, trying to piece it together from what they had read.

One man, though, named Shimon, had been at a Seder 50 years ago, and he went around telling them how a Seder should be conducted. Just as they were coming to the part of opening the door for Elijah, Zev noticed shadows outside. He closed the shutters more tightly, and pulled the curtains closer together. They were about ready to open the door, when Zev said, "It is not really necessary to open the door now." Shimon say, "Yes, it is," and he started to get up. Zev stared him down so that he did not do it. They finished the Seder, and everybody was instructed to leave the dachau. Those with small children, or university students, or other who might draw suspicion left immediately. Just a few people stayed at the dachau with Zev. At a quarter to seven in the morning, all of a sudden the dachau was invaded again, this time by ten dogs and fifteen KGB officers. They searched up and down and back and forth, but since they could not find anything they left. The next night, the group held a second Seder, only this time Zev had them open the door to Elijah, and this time they sang the Eliyahu Hanovi twice instead of once. The year became 1994. The grandson of Rabbi Zimba of the Warsaw Ghetto and the daughter of Zev, who was at that Moscow Seder in 1984, met and were to be married. They had decided they were always going to have a piece of matzah in their pockets. The first night of Pesach they would not open the door for Elijah, but the second night they would open it wide, and would sing Eliyahu Hanovi not once, but twice.

What has kept our families together has been these stories of our families. The stories we recount at our own Seders allow the tradition to be passed on. It is the stories of who sings what and how we sing and what went on which allow the Jewish people to always be strong, in bad times and in good times. True, our prosperity and good times could be overturned overnight, but now is not the time to contemplate such a problem. We just have to remember that we have overcome catastrophes in the past, and we have confidence that we will have the faith to overcome them in the future; that what is important is we maintain this faith so that we will always have it whenever and however we need it. It is important that we remember that. We hope and pray that we will always have good times, and we hope and pray that our faith will allow us to overcome all problems that will come our way. The legacy the stories of our

tradition and the stories of our homes and the stories of our parents have given us the courage and faith to overcome all our problems. Let us hope that we will always have this courage and faith so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

TURN FROM EVIL & DO GOOD

Today, we read the Shira, the great song that Moshe sang after the Egyptian army was drowned in the Red Sea. This song speaks very little about the Egyptian army being overturned. It speaks mainly about G-d's greatness. "This is my G-d, and I will praise Him." Not until the ninth verse do we read how the enemy said, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide, plunder, I will satisfy my lust with them. I will unsheathe my word. My hand will impoverish them. You blew with your wind. The sea enshrouded them. The mighty one's sank like lead in the waters. Who is like your army, the heavenly powers, Hashem?"

The last part of the song really is concerned with how the peoples of Canaan were gripped with terror because G-d was going to bring the Jewish people into the land of Israel, and how G-d was going to reign for all eternity. Half of the song is not even dedicated to the drowning of the Egyptian army. It is mentioned in passing in the beginning, "and the enemies boast," but the main thrust is that G-d is powerful and mighty and protects the Jewish people and will bring them into the land of Israel. We Jews do not celebrate victories over enemies; we rejoice in the opportunity to once again perform our religion.

In fact, we do not celebrate Purim on the 13th day of Adar when we defeated our enemies; we solemnize Purim on the 14th of Adar when we had the opportunity to once again freely exercise our religion. We do not celebrate the days on which the Maccabees had their great victories over the Syrian Greeks, but we honor the day on which the Temple was rededicated. To us, that our enemies were defeated carries little if any importance. That was only a necessary precondition so we could freely practice our religion, that once again it uplifts us.

This is similar to the argument that the rabbis have as to what day should be called Pesach. Some maintain Pesach should be on the 14th of Nisan when we actually brought the paschal lamb, the day upon which the Jewish people in Egypt slaughtered the lamb. Other rabbis say, no, that Pesach is the 15th of Nisan, the day we went out from Egypt. The rabbis who hold that Pesach should be the 14th of Nisan base their opinion on the phrase from the Torah portion Massey which states, "And the Jewish people traveled from Ramses in the 15th day of the first month on the morrow of Pesach." In other words, Pesach was the 14th and they went out on the 15th. Other rabbis reply, no, basing their opinion on the Haphtorah we read on the first day of Pesach from the Book of Joshua, in which we learn, "And they ate from the grain on the morrow of the day," and we know that they could not eat from the grain until the 16th, so, therefore, Pesach must be the 15th, not the 14th. Why? Because the 14th was the day the Jewish people rejected evil.

The lamb was a symbol of evil. The Egyptians believed that the spirit of Aries incarnated in the lamb, and anybody who would touch a lamb would bring great harm on Egypt. This suggests how today some people believe in spirits, as displayed in the movie, "Ghostbusters," or in the legend of the genie where after trapping a spirit, you can manipulate it and gain great power. If you harmed a lamb, though, the power will turn against you. We reject that. We reject the idea that being good or moral has no

relevance.

We were enslaved under the sign of the lamb, but the rabbis did not want us to stress the evil we rejected, but, instead, to stress the exodus, the good that resulted from our going out of Egypt. We concede that if a person becomes obsessed by evil, they become captured by evil. We know all about those vice officers who work so hard to catch dope sellers and keep down prostitution, etc., and who, themselves, pretty soon are opening drug dens and houses of prostitution. We recognize the Elmer Gantry types who become so obsessed with evil that they, themselves, do evil. The rabbis admonish us that we should go on, do good, do not harp on the evil that has been done to you. So many people who come to me for counseling are obsessed by what their mother or father did to them years ago. They are already 50 years old. They should move on. Sometimes, the tragedy is they are doing the same thing to their kids that their mother or father did to them. We should remember to get past what happened and move on.

That's, too, why the Shira is written in a very special way with one short brick over a long brick, the long brick over a short brick. It is written differently than other parts of the Torah. Its 30 lines are unique. It looks like a wall. One of its meanings could be that it represents the wall of the sea as the Jews passed through the Red Sea. Another meaning could be the walls they were forced to build in Egypt. Another is to teach us to wall off the unpleasant part of our life. Yes, remember it, but do not harp on it.

We do not start the Haggadah with a brocha like we do the Megillah or when we read the Torah, because we do not want to emphasize the fact that we were slaves. We only have a brocha at the end of the telling of the story of the exodus when we were redeemed. We also do not say a brocha before Hallel because the first part of Hallel deals with our slavery in Egypt. We only say a brocha on Hallel at the end when we speak about our freedom.

Today, we also read about how Moshe took the bones of Joseph with him. Why did Moshe have to take the bones of Joseph with him? The word in Hebrew for bones also means strengths. The strength of Joseph was his ability to forget all about his earlier troubles and all the house of his father, not his father, but all that his brothers did to him in the house of his father. He did not dwell on it. He looked forward to the future, just as we should. We should not look for revenge. We should look to the future. We should be glad for the victories we have that we can then have a better future, but to stay in the past, to dwell on the injustice of the past, can only cause us trouble. We need to sing about the future, as Moshe sang about the future. In fact, the whole Shira begins with the future, "Then Moshe will sing this song." We urgently should turn from evil, even evil that is done to us, and do good. Yes, we will always remember, but in the back of our minds. We should not be obsessed over the past.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man accosted by a thief. He wrestled with the thief for an hour. The thief finally overcome the man and took \$1 from his wallet. He said, "You wrestled for a whole hour for \$1?" The man said, "No, I thought you wanted the \$50 in my shoe." We should always look ahead to the future and not be concerned with the \$1 in our past. We should turn from evil and do good. That's the

best way to overcome evil. May we all do as Moshe, and although we will remember the past, we should be more interested in singing about the future. May we so do so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

INCLUDING ALL JEWS IN THE JEWISH

MESSAGE

In the Torah, we are commanded three times to remember the exodus from Egypt. In Deuteronomy 16:3, "In order that you should remember the days of your going out from Egypt all the days of your life." In Exodus 13:3, "Remember this day every year on which you went free from Egypt." In Exodus 13:8, "And ye shall tell your children on that day." The Rambam tells us we repeat the third paragraph of the Shema at night because in it, we mention the exodus of Egypt. This paragraph principally deals with tzitzis, and as we do not wear tzitzis at night, this paragraph would be superfluous if we did not also mention the exodus from Egypt.

The sentence in Deuteronomy enjoins us to remember the exodus every day and night of our lives. This remembering is an intellectual thing. The second remembering in Exodus 13:3 uses the word Zochor, the same word we use when enjoined to remember the Sabbath. Just like the Sabbath is an experience and not just an intellectual remembering, so remembering the exodus must be an experience. It must touch our whole being, and that, of course, is what the Seder is all about. We must know things, not just with our head but with our emotions and our whole body. We know how people can know things with their head but remain untouched by them emotionally. Look at how many people still smoke even well aware it will cause them and their loved ones cancer. The third sentence is, "And you shall tell your children on that day." We must to remember the exodus in such a way that we can transmit its teachings to the next generation -- those who are children, if not physically, at least spiritually. In fact, we are all considered children. We are called the children of Israel, and we refer to each other as our brethren, the children of Israel.

Today, we have a great opportunity. All the isms have died. No Jew today believes in Communism or Socialism. No ideology which has grabbed the Jewish mind, especially the mind of college-age students flourishes. In Israel the secular intellectuals know this, and that is why they are so much afraid of religion. They attack the Ultra Orthodox mercilessly and unjustly. Even Moment magazine, a liberal Jewish magazine, has written how the Ultra Orthodox are being maligned. Quite frankly, the secularists are afraid. They have no ideology. What they are trying to do in Israel today is make Israel like America, but America also has no ideology. America advocates nobody can impose their beliefs on you, but no positive American beliefs exist. You have to supply the beliefs. That's why to a certain extent, America always feeds off immigrants. In the first half of the 20th century, popular music fed off Jewish music, when Hebraic melodies meshed with Negro harmonies to produce jazz. Composers Harold Arlen and Irving Berlin were sons of Cantors. George Gershwin and Jerome Kern were steeped in Jewish sacred music. America does not tell you what to do. It only says nobody can interfere with what you want to do. Because the religious in Israel are under such attack, many of them have thrown up walls around themselves rather than realize that the secularists are attacking because they are weak and afraid.

The Haggadah speaks to all Jews. It tells us that we can transmit the message of Judaism to all Jews, no matter what their position. In Israel today, 99% of all Jews have a Seder of some sort. We read in the Haggadah, "Blessed be the place." Some people

explain that means G-d. Others say, "Blessed be the place we are in today because we have the opportunity to influence our people to come back to the Jewish message and embrace it."

The Haggadah speaks about four sons. One of them is called the wise son. He is not the opposite of the wicked son; otherwise, he would be called the righteous son. He is the intellectual. He wants to know. He is the searcher. Today, the youth in Israel are searching. That's why they go to India and other places. They want to get a spiritual experience. We need to treat their intellectual searching seriously. We have to explain to them patiently every last detail. We must show them Judaism's intellectual treasures.

The opposite of the wise son is actually the Tam, who is usually explained as the simple son, but the Tam does not mean that. Yaacov is referred to as a tam. Tam means a man of faith. There are many Jews who have no learning basically, but have great faith. In fact, when I came to this synagogue 24 years ago, some of the most stalwart members of this congregation did not have much Jewish learning, but had great faith. That's why it did not bother them that they were going against the tide intellectually. It took a great deal of courage and an intellect to believe in those days, especially in the 30's, 40's, and 50's. Blind faith, though, is not always enough. We must also have explanations and reasons and Torah learning.

The evil son is not actually an evil son. After all, he is at the Seder. He may be mocking, but he is at the Seder. In fact, they answer the evil sons, "Because of this which the Lord did for me when I went out from Egypt for me and not for Him." This really does not make sense because you are talking to the fellow. You should say for me and not for you, but the text does not say that because the evil son really has a spark of Jewishness in him. This third person in him is rejecting Judaism, but the you inside him, not the him, is really ready to accept the Torah if presented in the right way.

In the Haggadah, we sing the Dayanu. The Dayanu speaks about the stages that the Jewish people went through from the exodus of Egypt until they entered the land of Israel. We cannot expect people to change overnight. They have to go through stages, and we have to be patient. We should not expect that they will accept a Torah position overnight. That's the real meaning, according to the rabbis, of Dayanu. We should be satisfied with a little progress if the direction is in the right direction.

We also read in the Haggadah about the plagues, "And G-d brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm." The rabbis explain that the strong hand was the cattle plague, and the outstretched arm was the slaying of the firstborn. Were there only two plagues? The rabbis declare, no, that there is a big difference between the first nine plagues and the last plagues. The first nine plagues did not affect the Jewish people at all. They were exempt from them. They saw all the Egyptian cattle being destroyed, but nothing happened to their cattle. A big difference between a minor operation and a major operation exists. A minor operation happens to somebody else, and a major operation happens to you. The Jewish people had to protect themselves from the last plague by putting the blood on the door.

Today, many of our people thought that we were immune from all sorts of plagues that

affect society, like juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, abuse, etc., though the truth of the matter is, we are not. The Torah helps us overcome these problems. We have a great opportunity now to present the Torah position to Jews, no matter what their level. We can fulfill the second remembering of Pesach by telling it to all our children, no matter what their age, to all our brethren. We should not be deterred by the attacks because they are attacks out of weakness, not strength.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a teacher who was retiring and all the students brought her a present. A young lady whose father was a florist brought her some roses. A young man whose father was a baker brought her a cake. A young man whose father owned a liquor store brought her a big box which was leaking a little bit. She said, "Is it champagne?" She tasted a drop. She asked, "Is it wine? What is it?" The little boy said it was a puppy. Things are not always what they seem. Let us all hope and pray that we will be able to seize this opportunity to truly communicate to all our brethren so that the values of the Torah will be the basis for their lives, and the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

WE MUST SEE HOW THINGS CAN BE

We all know that we have three matzahs on the Seder table. Of the many interpretations of the three matzahs, the most common signifies they stand for Kohen, Levi, and Yisroel. Actually, the rabbis argue whether we should have two matzahs on the table or three. We know that we break the middle matzah so that before we actually make the blessing on the matzah we have two and a half, and those that claim we only need two actually only have one and a half before they make the blessing.

Every Shabbat and Yontif, we are supposed to have Lechem Mishna on the table, which means two complete loaves. This reminds us of the time we wandered in the desert and were supplied by G-d with manna. On Friday, we were given a double portion so that we would have food for Shabbat when the manna did not fall. The manna fell on a layer beneath and had a layer of dew on top. That's why on our Shabbat table we have a tablecloth underneath and a white cover over the loaves.

On Pesach, Rashi, the Tosfos, and the Rosh say that we need two and a half matzahs. We need the two matzahs for the Lechem Mishna, and we need a half a matzah to remind ourselves of the bread of affliction, about the brokenness of spirit that we endured in Egypt. The Rambam, on the other hand, says we need only one and a half matzahs. After all, if we have two and a half matzahs, we will have more than we would have on a normal holiday, and how can this depict deprivation? We know that on a normal Shabbat and holiday, if we use matzah as one of the loaves, we have to make sure it is not even cracked, and here they are only using a half a loaf.

The same argument applies as to whether you have to eat one or two olives' worth of matzah at the beginning of the Seder. According to Rashi and the Tosfos and the Rosh, you have to eat two: one olive's worth for the normal Lechem Mishna; and one for the matzah. According to the Rambam, and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, who actually follows the Rambam, you would only need one olive's worth. We are not concerned about the Lechem Mishna on Pesach; we are only concerned about the broken matzah, about the bread of affliction. What is the philosophical basis of this disagreement?

It seems to me that the Rashi and the Tosfos and the Rosh and 95% of the Jews agree with them, understanding that to get out of a broken condition, a person has to have a sense of wholeness, unless they have a vision of how things could be and should be and can be. A person found in a broken position will be unable to overcome unless they have a vision of wholeness. We find that here in America where upper middle class people are broken by the least problem because they have no vision of a future, while immigrants who come here with nothing are undaunted by the problems they face because they have that vision.

We must have a vision of the future to get out of trouble. Rabbi Soloveitchik said that the purpose of the exile and slavery in Egypt was to teach the Jewish people to have Rachmones, compassion. However, this basically only works if we have a vision of a better future. Other people will say, "I had to suffer, you should suffer even more." We find that among people who have been hazed at fraternities, etc. They are going to treat the incoming freshmen even worse than they were treated. Unless a person has a vision of how things can be and should be, he can't handle his present troubles.

Today, we read Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs. We learned about the love that the Jewish people have for G-d, and that G-d has for the Jewish people, how the Jewish people were willing to go out of Egypt without any provisions, just matzah. They had faith in a better future. We learn how the women of Egypt were sitting under an apple tree convincing their husbands to have children and to continue the Jewish people. Love is a difficult thing. People think falling in love is easy, but it is not. So many doubts arise and prevail. Is he marrying me for my money? Is she marrying me because she wants security or a green card? Does he just want a job with my father? Can I be open with him? Am I going to be hurt? Love opens you up to be hurt. It makes you dependent, but it can exhilarate if you have a vision of the future.

Marriage, too, brings many problems. After all, we say G-d made the original Adam both male and female, and then divided him in half, so men and women are supposed to see the world through different eyes, which means they are supposed to have arguments. These arguments, though, are meant to lead to greater understanding, not less. Do we have a vision of marriage where both parties can grow and everybody flourishes? So many marriages founder because of small reasons. He does not put away his clothes right away. She is a lousy housekeeper, etc. We know that we can be overwhelmed by the little things if we do not see the big picture. We need to see that big picture.

Rashi and the Tosfos and the Rosh say we need two and a half matzahs. Even in our broken condition, when we have problems, we have to see the whole picture the way things can be and could be because then we will work to overcome our problems. Otherwise, we will sink in them and not be able to rise above them.

Why do we have harosis at the Seder? After all, the rabbi in the Talmud who said that harosis is a mitzvah was overruled. The Gemora decides that harosis is not a mitzvah, but, nevertheless, we all know that we must dip our bitter herbs in the harosis by custom because we must be able to see even in our most bitter experiences the sweetness of life. In the beginning of the Seder when we invite the poor people in, we say, "This is the bread of affliction," We do not mention anything about the Korban Pesach, and we do not mention anything about the bitter herbs. Why? Because we know that if we can see the Lechem Mishna, the wholeness in life, G-d will help us as He did with the Korban Pesach, and we will be able to overcome all our bitterness. Yes, we see the brokenness of life, the broken matzah, but we know in our heart of hearts the condition lasts temporarily. We can overcome, and we will overcome if we have a vision of what could be, what ought to be, and what can be.

I am reminded of a story they tell about a young man who after he married his bride was given 40% of his father-in-law's company. His father-in-law put him in shipping and everything was shipped to the wrong place. He put him in billing and all the bills were mixed up. He put him in manufacturing and all the machines broke. He said, "Son, what am I going to do with you?" His son-in-law replied, "Dad, buy me out." All of us can overcome. All of us can, if we have a vision of the future, survive everything as the Jews who survived in Auschwitz did, and build a good future as they did. We must always, though, keep in mind what life can be and should be. May we all do this so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

RELATIONSHIPS DEMAND

UNDERSTANDING

Today, we acknowledged having received the Torah on Mount Sinai. That is the main reason we celebrate Shavuot. Strange, however, that we do not have a party on Shavuot. Why don't we have a party on Shavuot like on Simchat Torah when we take out all the Torahs and march around the synagogue and sing and dance? After all, it was on Shavuot that we received the Torah, not on Simchat Torah. On Simchat Torah, we finished reading the Torah and started it over again, but we did not receive it on Simchat Torah. When we have a birthday party, do we not make it on the day of our birthday? If we have an anniversary party, do we not make it on the day of our anniversary? We received the Torah on Shavuot, not on Simchat Torah.

Why, also, do we not have a special Mesechta of the Talmud dedicated to Shavuot? We have one for all the other holidays. There is a Mesechta called Shavuot but it deals with oaths. Shavuot in Hebrew also means oaths, as well as weeks. We know that Shavuot is tied to Pesach because we count 49 days from the second night of Pesach until we come to Shavuot, which is the 50th day. We know that we had to elevate ourselves to be worthy of receiving the Torah.

On Shavuot, we received the Ten Commandments. Moshe was given the Ten Commandments on two tablets. Why did we need to have two tablets? One would have been sufficient. In fact, the number two predominates on Shavuot. We have the two loaves that are waved on the altar; the Akdomas, the special prayer is a double acrostic.

The rabbis answer Shavuot is a holiday of relationships. Shavuot is the holiday upon which the Jews promised that G-d would be their G-d, and G-d promised that Israel would be His people, not to the exclusion of other peoples, but that the Jews would have a more intimate relationship with G-d. This relationship approximates that of a person choosing a spouse. He or she has a more intimate relationship with their spouse, but it does exclude being friends with others. He or she does not forsake his family for this relationship. Shavuot talks about how to make relationships permanent.

That's why some people declare the Mesechta of the Talmud called Shavuot really does deal with Shavuot, although it never mentions it. The Mesechta is composed of 49 folios. Every Mesechta starts with page two to prevent our boasting we know everything. We have not even learned the first page, but, more importantly, we become aware that the very act of learning is a social experience. To learn with someone profits us better than to learn alone. The Mesechta Shavuot goes until folio 50; the 34th folio, which corresponds to the 33rd day between Pesach and Shavuot, talks about Rabbi Shimon Ben Yechoy. On the 33rd day of the Omer, Lag B'Omer, Simon Ben Yechoy died. This illustrates why the celebration of Lag B'Omer in Israel includes making bonfires -- to remember the great enthusiasm that Rabbi Shimon Ben Yechoy had for Torah and for teaching Torah to the Jewish people. To have a relationship, the rabbis teach us, we must have communication. In fact, the rabbis instruct us that if there is no conversation between a man and a woman before they get married, that marriage cannot last. A future husband and wife must talk to each other and understand each

other before they get engaged.

Now, why isn't there a big party on Shavuot? Understandably, because the Jewish people had just now learned what G-d expected of them, and they had told G-d what they expected of Him. They needed time to communicate with each other. On Simchat Torah, we would have the big party. The Jewish people have to understand what G-d demands of us. So often, people do not comprehend what other people are telling them, much less what G-d is telling them. We have to understand each other so we can work together to do G-d's will.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a Scotsman who left home. His mother was very worried about him. She called up and said, "How are you? How does it feel to be out on your own?" The man said, "Everything is fine." His mother asked, "What about your neighbors?" He replied, "Well, one neighbor on one side bangs his head against the wall all day, and the other neighbor moans all day." His mother was aghast and said, "Stay away from those people." He said, "I do. I just stay home all day playing my bagpipes."

Shavuot inculcates relationships are important. To have proper relationships, we have to understand those with whom we want to have a relationship and we must be sensitive to them. G-d is telling us on this holiday that He wants a relationship with us, and that we must recognize what He demands, as He discerns what we need. Let us all hope and pray that we will understand these things so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

THE TORAH: AN ENTITLEMENT OR A

BASIC NEED

Today is a holiday on which we celebrate the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people. A Medrash speaks about the fact that when Moshe went up to receive the Torah, the angels did not like that G-d was giving the Torah to Moshe. We read in the Gemora Shabbos, when Moshe ascended heaven the ministering angels said to the Holy One, Praised be He, "What is this man doing among us?" G-d replied, "He came to receive the Torah." They complained before G-d, "A reserve treasure that had been reserved with Thee 974 generations before the world was called into being You desired to give to mortal man." (The rabbis advise us that actually 974 generations of humanoids came before Adam was created.) As Psalms 8:5 asks: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? Set Thy glory above the heavens."

The Holy One, Blessed be He, directed Moshe, "You answer them." Moshe responded, "Master of the World, I am afraid lest they will burn me with the breath of their mouths." G-d instructed, "Grab hold of My holy chair and answer them." Moshe asked of G-d, "Master of the World, the Torah that You are giving me, what is written in it? I am the Lord your G-d that brought you out from the land of Egypt." Moshe then told the angels, "Did you go down to Egypt? Did Pharaoh enslave you? What do you need with the Torah? It is also written that there should be no other gods. Do you angels live among nations that worship idols? Again, it is written, remember the seventh day to keep it holy. Do you angels work that you need to rest on the Sabbath? Again, it is written in the Torah, you should not bear G-d's name in vain. Do you do business among yourselves that you should take false oaths? Again, it is written, honor your father and mother. Do you have a father and mother? Again, it is written, you should not commit adultery, you should not steal. Do you have jealousy among you? Is the evil inclination among you?" Immediately they admitted to G-d that He was right in giving the Torah to the Jewish people. As it is written in Psalms 8: "O Lord our G-d, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth." Immediately, every one of the angels became Moshe's friend and transmitted to him another part of the Torah.

We can ask on this Medrash many questions which may baffle and intrigue us: Why didn't G-d, Himself, answer the angels and tell them that to whom He gave the Torah was none of their business? Why did He have Moshe answer the angels? Continuing, why did Moshe give the answer that he did? Why did Moshe, in effect, tell them we need the Torah. That's why we are getting it, but you do not need the Torah. You do not have conflicting drives and emotions. You do not have to learn how to handle problems such as suffering, pain, death, etc. We do. Therefore, we need the Torah. But why didn't G-d give this answer to the angels?

The reason is because G-d wanted to see what kind of an answer Moshe was going to give the angels. G-d wanted to see whether Moshe understood what the Torah was all about, and what the relationship between Him and the Jewish people was all about. If Moshe had said, "We should receive the Torah because we deserve it, because we are entitled to it -- after all, look how we suffered in Egypt -- look how we are willing to proclaim G-d's name in the world, so, therefore, we are entitled to the Torah -- G-d would not have given the Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah is not a reward. It is

not an entitlement. The Torah was given to us because we need it. We cannot exist as moral, spiritual creatures unless we have the Torah. The angels can. Without it, we cannot balance our lives correctly.

Unfortunately, many people today perceive the Torah as just an added adornment, like a diamond. You can live without one. You really have no need for one. Rich people feel they are entitled to them, especially wives of successful career people. Many times, to deal with people becomes particularly burdensome when they feel they are entitled to things. For example, I once had a teacher who was extremely poor, and although I did give the other teacher a raise of 3%, I gave this poor teacher, who was really struggling, a raise of 10% so that her salary would be the equivalent of the other teacher who got the 3% raise. This other teacher became irate. How dare I raise the other teacher 10% and not her? I tried to explain that the other teacher really needed it. She stormed out of my office saying she was quitting. She felt she was entitled to as much as the other one. Eventually, though, she did not quit.

We learn this from the story about Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva did not have any knowledge until he was 40 years old, and then decided to study. What made him decide to study? Curiously, when he saw a drop of water make a cavity in a hard stone. Drop by drop, that water made the stone a habitable place for life, for moss, for lichens, etc. Water is a very soft thing. It is very refreshing and does not harm the hand when it is touched, but it makes a lasting impression on our hearts. Rabbi Akiva did not come to Torah because of some dramatic incident like lightning split a rock. He came because he saw that water on the hardest rock can create a place for life.

Rabbi Akiva also gave his life for Torah. After the Bar Kochba rebellion was put down and all Torah teaching was banned, he still taught Torah saying, "It is true it is very dangerous to live with Torah, but it is impossible to live without Torah." He even gave smicha to his disciple, Rabbi Yehuda Ben Bova, even though both of them could have been killed for doing so, and, in turn, Rabbi Yehuda Ben Bova gave it to the five rabbis who later saved Judaism. Judaism can only survive if we Jewish people accept the Torah as absolutely necessary for our existence.

We do not need a lot of symbolism on Shavuot because we know that we must internalize the Torah. Everyone knows I am in favor of women's prayer groups and of taking the Torah through the women's section. I have observed, though, that some Jewish feminists do not want to assume different Torah obligations which have been in the past reserved for men because they feel they need them, but rather because they feel they are entitled to them. They just want the opportunity to do them whenever they want to do them, but not necessarily do them on a daily or weekly basis. The rabbis would never approve this type of feminism because men and women have different needs. If, however, women feel the need for a special mitzvah, then I think the rabbis would give them every opportunity to perform it. The Torah, though, is not an entitlement. It was not given to us to be an extra bauble. It was given to fulfill the basic needs of our natures -- both men's and women's.

I am reminded of the story they tell about two men during Communist days in Russia. One had a pass to be in Moscow and one did not. They noticed a KGB man was

behind them. They knew they would be asked for their passes. The one with the pass started to run. The other one melded into the crowd and disappeared. The KGB man chased the running man, finally catching him after two miles. The KGB man demanded, "Show me your pass." The man immediately took out his pass and showed it to him. The KGB man queried, "Why were you running if you had a pass?" The man said innocently, "Because my doctor said it is good for my health to run." The KGB man retorted, "Didn't you see me running after you? Why didn't you stop?" The man replied, "Because I thought you go to the same doctor."

We all have a need for the Torah. The rabbis teach us that the Torah helps us balance our conflicting drives, that it will allow us to live higher spiritual lives. We know we can only appreciate the Torah if we realize that we need it. Too often, Jews in America have just dropped off their children at the synagogue and then gone on to the movies because they do not need Judaism, and because they believe Judaism only teaches morality, and they are already moral. This is the wrong attitude. We all need Judaism to teach us how to live on a higher spiritual level. Let us hope we will all live on a high spiritual level so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

G-D, ISRAEL, CHILDREN &

POTENTIALITY

On Shavuot, when the Temple stood, the Jews did not bring a sin offering. This is very strange because a community sin offering was brought on Pesach, on Succot, on Yom Kippur, and on Rosh Hashonna. Only on Shavuot was the sin offering not brought in the community's.

Today, we read the sacrifices for Shavuot and the sin offering was omitted. Why? Also, we know that the written law is known as Rayshit in the beginning, and the oral law is known as Acharit. We got both the written and oral laws on Shavuot. Some people say that the word Acharit actually stands for the special things we do on Shavuot: Akdomos, we read the poem Akdomos; Chalev, we eat milk foods; Ruth, we read the Book of Ruth; Yerek, we put greens in the synagogue; and Tikun L'Shavuot, we stay up all night learning Torah on Shavuot. Also, no Mesechta of the Talmud is devoted to Shavuot. A Mesechta of the Talmud is devoted to Pesach, to Succot, to Rosh Hashonna, to Yom Kippur, even to Purim. A Mesechta Shavuot has to do with oaths, not Shavuot. So few ceremonies and rituals are connected to Shavuot that we do not need to have a special Mesechta of the Talmud. All the special customs can be summarized in the word, Acharit.

What's more, why is it that we say yizkor on Shavuot? We can understand why we say yizkor on Pesach. Pesach is a family holiday, and we are missing our family members. We can understand why we say yizkor on Yom Kippur because we say both the living and the dead are judged on that day. We can understand why we say yizkor on Shemini Atzeres because this is a day of love. We are leaving G-d's presence. The High Holiday season is over, and, therefore, G-d asks us to stay another day because of His love for us, and we remember our love for our parents, etc., but why do we say yizkor on Shavuot?

We can answer the question if we understand that the word, Shavuot, does not mean just weeks but also oaths. In fact, the word Shavua is feminine and the correct plural is really Shavuot. On the other hand, the word week, Shavuo, is masculine. Note that all the important words in Hebrew are feminine: Torah, mitzvah, Eretz Yisroel, Shabbat, etc. This holiday is really about oaths. The Mesechta about oaths really deals with Shavuot, too, because Shavuot deals with the marriage oath between G-d and Israel -- G-d promised that the Jewish people would be His people, and the Jewish people promised that G-d would be our G-d. What's more, in the Mesechta Shavuot, there are 49 folios similar to the 49 days we count between Pesach and Shavuot, and interestingly enough, on the 34th folio, which is really the 33rd folio since every Talmud starts on page two, Rabbi Shimon Ben Yechoy is mentioned, whom we remember on Lag B'Omer, the 33rd day of the Omer.

Shavuot is really a holiday about the love of G-d for Israel, and the love of Israel for G-d; indeed, a marriage of the Jewish people to G-d and G-d to the Jewish people, with the Torah as our Ketuba. G-d has revealed He will never give up on us. True, sometimes He will allow us to be punished, but we will never be completely destroyed. We have promised that invariably some Jews will believe and worship Him, even though many

Jews fall away. G-d has always said that He will look at our potential on this holiday. He will forget about our sins. His love for us is unconditional, just as ours must be for Him. This relationship simulates that of a parent and a child. A parent has to believe always that a child has potential, and that a child can achieve something. A parent should never give up on the child. Sometimes, a teacher will tell a parent that his child is having difficulty, and should be tested. This does not mean that a parent should not listen to the children's teachers because the parent believes in his child. The parent should; if the teacher says the child needs testing, get the child tested so the child can live up to his or her potential. In our Montessori School here, a tragic thing happened. We pointed out to a parent that a child needed testing, and the parent refused to do so. At the time, we suggested the child be tested, he had a minor hearing problem. A few years later, the parent finally tested the child, and the child had almost gone deaf. That could have been prevented. There are many children who have learning difficulties, but they can be helped. They can be brought to fulfill their potential, but it takes effort. G-d has sworn to us that He will help us achieve our potential.

Today, we remember our parents who helped us reach our potential. We should not give up on anyone. We should always try to reach our potential, no matter what the circumstances.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Gina. Gina was 11 years old when she was taken from her home with all her family to a Nazi concentration camp, Polonki. Her mother told the people in charge that her daughter was not her daughter but her sister. Gina would have selected immediately for death had the mother told the guards that Gina was her daughter. Gina had to work like an adult, and that was very hard for her the first year. A German who had been sent to the camp for his Communist views liked her and gave her lighter jobs. However in 1944, she and her mother were sent to Auschwitz. Gina had a hard time in Auschwitz. Her mother recognized one of the fellow inmates as her cousin, and asked her to help with Gina. The cousin replied, "My daughter died. Your daughter can die, too." Gina contracted the measles and got a high fever. Her mother did not know what to do. She brought Gina out to the daily count propping her between herself and another woman. One day, she got so bad, the mother did not take her out of the bunk. Miraculously, that day, the head count was not taken. That night she had a dream. Her father appeared to her and said, "Don't worry. My only granddaughter will live." The next morning, her fever broke and slowly Gina got well.

On January 27, 1945, the Russia troops liberated Auschwitz. Gina had survived, but her grandfather and all the rest of her family, except for her mother, had gone up in smoke. Gina and her mother moved to the United States. Gina was 30 years old and not married. Her mother was frantic. She was the only survivor of the family. She begged her to go on another blind date, but Gina protested. She told her mother she would do something else. She said she would go to Israel to the gravesite of Rabbi Yonason Ben Uziel in Amuka in the Galilee. He was one of the rabbis of the Mishna who took it upon himself to make matches, and the thought throughout the centuries was if someone came to his gravesite and prayed to G-d, a match would be made soon for that person. Gina went to Amuka. It was like a synagogue, with the men on one side and the women on the other. She was actually not a 100% observant Jew, but she

was very traditional. After she prayed a short prayer, she looked up and saw a young man on the men's side. Their eyes met, and although usually she was very modest and lowered her gaze almost immediately, this time they must have stared at each other for three minutes before they broke eye contact. She said another short prayer, and then tried to find the young man, but he was gone. She did not know his name or where to look for him, so she decided to go back to Tel Aviv to the house of her aunt on her father's side's.

Her aunt related that she and her husband had survived the war by a miracle, hiding in the woods. In Israel, they found their neighbor, who had lived right next to them in their village in Europe, and now lived right next to them in Tel Aviv. Her aunt told her perhaps she would remember the only surviving boy of that family of nine. He had been the sickest of all of them, suffering with a terrible asthmatic condition, but his mother never despaired. She took him to the best doctors who said there was not much they could do for him. She then took him to the Sochover Rebbe. He looked at the boy, took out some very bitter tea which he told the boy to drink, and advised his mother he would recover, but that he would live through severe and hard times. He did recover, and was drafted into the Polish army, which saved his life. He became a marksman and was captured by the Germans. He was put in a prisoner of war camp, but later when they found out he was Jewish, transferred him to a concentration camp. The number put on his arm was 145053, and he knew the rebbe was right, and that he would survive because 145053 comes out to 18, chai.

He did survive the war, and, miraculously, his mother and father did also, although all his siblings were killed. After the aunt told Gina the story, the door opened and a young man carrying a package for her aunt came in. He was wearing a short sleeve shirt, and on his arm were the numbers 145053. Gina let out a gasp. This was the young man she had seen at Amuka. This was also the young man, Schmuel, she had gone to help nurse when he was sick as a child. She had helped his mother, although she was the same age as Shmuel. Shmuel, too, let out a gasp. Two months later they were married, and a year later a child was born to them, who they named after Gina's grandfather. The parents of Gina and Shmuel never gave up hope. They always wanted to make sure that their children would be able to fulfill their potential.

We, too, must never give up on our children, and we, too, must always make sure that they can reach their potential. G-d never gives up on us. That's the message of Shavuot. On Shavuot, we do not worry about our sins or the sins of our people. We know we can overcome them. Therefore, we do not mention anything about a sin offering on this day. Instead, we concentrate on the love we should have for each other, and the love our parents and grandparents and G-d have and had for us so we can be who we are today. Let us all devote our potential to the utmost, never disappointing them so we should be worthy to see the Mashiach come in our day. Amen.

SHAVUOT, GIFTS & OUR PARENTS

In the Talmud, Shavuot is never called Shavuot; it is called Atzeres. This is similar to Shemini Atzeres, the final day of Succot. Here, we take leave of Hashem after spending many days at the Temple, and G-d, in effect, tells us, "Stay one more day." Shemini Atzeres signifies G-d's love for us and our love for Him. We also at this time ask Him for a parting gift, rain.

The rabbis tell us the reason we count 49 days from Pesach to Shavuot is to connect the two holidays, to remind us that Shavuot is really concluding the holiday of Pesach. Moshe had told Pharaoh he wanted the Jewish people to go free so they could serve G-d. G-d, so to speak, came down to see us on Shavuot, and gave us gifts: the Ten Commandments and the Torah. He also gave we Jewish people the gift of being a driven people, a people who always want to try to excel, a people who even when they are far from Torah know they have to make this world a better place. G-d's Yera, or awe, has always been upon us since that time.

On Shavuot, we learn that a Jew just cannot do certain things. It poshniht, as they used to say. It is not right for a Jew to do certain things. He would besmirch his own self-image as a person if he did, while seeking to improve the world, to better humanity. Atzeres is the concluding holiday of Pesach, according to the rabbis, but, more than that, it is the holiday on which we, so to speak, take leave of G-d and on which He leaves us gifts as He metaphorically ascends to heaven.

The question is often asked, why is Shavuot called Zeman Matan Torahseinu, the Day of the Giving of the Torah, and not Zeman Kabales Torah, the Day of our Receiving the Torah? The common answer is because the Torah is constantly being given. We have to receive it. We do not know if each individual is going to be prepared to receive it, but the word Matan has the same root as the word for gift in Hebrew, Matana. This is the time when G-d has given us gifts.

In Hebrew two words are used for the word inheritance. One is Yerusha and the other is Morasha. What is the difference between Yerusha and Morasha? Yerusha is an inheritance with which I can do anything. My father leaves land worth \$100,000, and I can spend it, invest it, gamble it, do anything I want with it. It is mine. Morasha, on the other hand, is something different. I become like a probate executor. I am only a steward for the property. I can use it, but cannot sell it. I have to maintain it in working order.

The first sentence we are supposed to teach our children is Torah Tziva Lanu Moshe Morasha Kehilas Yaacov. Moshe was commanded to give us the Torah, a Morasha for the congregation of Jacob. In other words, the gifts we got at Mount Sinai are ours to keep, but only as stewards. We are supposed to pass them on to the next generation, just as a probate executor passes an estate on to the next generation. Morasha in Hebrew also means potential inheritance. In other words, G-d has given us the opportunity to learn Torah, to learn all these things, but we have to make the effort. Just because your grandfather was a rabbi does not mean you are going to be a learned Jew. You are only going to be a learned Jew if you work at it. Our parents and relatives

have given us great gifts. These were gifts of love. These gifts were entrusted to us to give to the next generation.

Parting from our parents and relatives was and is heart-rending. We yearn to talk to them and be with them. However, they left us these wonderful gifts that we know we have to pass on to future generations. How does one pay back his parents and his grandparents? By being good to his own children and grandchildren.

I am reminded of the story of a bar mitzvah party. Everyone was having a good time. In the middle of each table was a beautiful music box. Right before dessert, the host told everyone to open the music box. Everyone did, and all of a sudden, springs and little pieces of metal were all over the table, and on the bottom of each box were some coins and some official looking papers. Everyone was amazed.

Moshe Adler, the host, the bar mitzvah boy's father, got up and said, "Guests, I want to tell you a little story. You all know that Miriam and I come from a small town in Hungary called Vak, a city about 20 miles north of Budapest, where we and our six children eked out a living. I was a shoemaker and used to joke that the only thing that lasted longer than my shoes was my accounts receivable. Once, one of my lady customers gave me a pair of shoes to fix. I told her that this was the 26th time I was repairing these shoes, which she had bought from me 19 years before. I said these shoes lasted longer than the skin of the cow from which they came. My wife was a seamstress. One day, a Hebrew teacher named Shmuel Stern, who had originally come for six months but had stayed 17 years, decided the time had come to go on to Budapest. We decided to make a Seudas Prayda, a farewell party for him. At the party, we gave him a little gift. He got up to speak, but began to cry, at which time everybody started to cry. I said G-d has made a lot of things that we should be unhappy about, but this was not one of them. From this Seudas Prayda, a custom developed that when anyone in this small town left, Miriam and I made a farewell party for them. Some people went on aliyah to Eretz Yisroel. One lady went to live with her sister in Krakow. Another went to America.

"It happened a kosher butcher named Yitzchak Adler lived in this town, the exact opposite of me. He was cynical, glum, and seemingly angry all the time. In fact, his favorite story, which he told often, was how the Jewish people, when they came out of Egypt, looked up to G-d and said, 'Is it because there are not enough graves in Egypt that You brought us to this place?' That he was a butcher was a good thing, because by stabbing and banging the meat, he was able to get rid of a lot of his frustration. Once the rabbi came to see him and said, 'I know you have been the community's butcher for three generations. However, another three butcher shops have opened, and we have decided to start a Vaad Hakashruth. We want you to join.' Yitzchak asked, 'Does that mean I have to pay for a mashgiach?' The rabbi said yes, and Yitzchak rejoined he did not want to pay. He said, 'My family has had a butcher shop for years. You know we have always been trustworthy. I hardly make a living for myself. How can I pay a mashgiach? It is an insult, and I will not do it.'"

The rabbi explained the need for a the Vaad Hakashruth was not for him, but for the new stores. He still refused, so the rabbi warned the others would get a certificate, but he would not, and people would stop coming to him. Yitzchak was adamant, and, sure

enough, people stopped coming. My wife still went to him, but most people transferred to other butchers. He saw he was not making a living and decided to go to America.

"My wife was then confronted with a problem: Should she make him a farewell party? After all, he would not go along with the rabbi. She asked the rabbi who responded, 'By all means, make a party.' They did, and gave him a nice farewell gift. The rabbi got up to talk and said how his family were butchers for three generations and how they were trustworthy. Yitzchak got up and declared he did not blame anybody for his business going bad. At this point, someone yelled, 'Cut the bull,' and Yitzchak said that was what he intended to do in America. It was a nice party, and everyone left satisfied.

"This was 1938. In 1941, Hungary joined Germany in the invasion of Russia. Prime Minister Kalle tried to withdraw many of his forces since they were taking such losses. The Germans did not trust the Hungarian government. They were constantly pressing them to send the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. The Hungarian government refused, although they put very severe restrictions on the Jews. Times were getting very bad. One day, my wife's friend, Goldie, came to her with a set of golden Shabbat candlesticks, and told Miriam she had to sell them. She just got her papers from her brother in America, but she did not have enough money to buy a ticket. Miriam told her the golden candlesticks were worth much more money, but that was all she could get from her friends who were living in an impoverished state. Miriam told me and I said, 'How can we give her the money? How are we going to escape?' Miriam said we only had money for one person and needed money for eight. She said, 'Let me give her the money and take the candlesticks.'

She made Goldie promise one thing: After arriving in New York, she would send us a phone book. Sure enough, three months later, we got a package, which we could tell had been sealed and unsealed many times. In the package were worthless trinkets, but wrapped around each trinket was a page from the New York phone book. We spent three days and nights writing letters to every family named Adler in New York. After two months, we got four letters back, two very sympathetic and the other two containing a total of \$7. One day, however, we got a package from New York from Yitzchak Adler. We opened the package, and there was a music box. I was so disgusted that I threw the box against the wall. Suddenly, some springs, wheels, pieces of metal flew out. I looked inside the box and found some coins and some official looking papers. There was also a note which said, 'I hope that you have found the secret of this music box. I hope there is enough money in it, and that the papers are correct so you and your family can join me in New York. When you come, I will help you as much as I can.' We were overjoyed.

"This was February 1944. In March, the Germans took over the Hungarian government, and 450,000 Jews died in Auschwitz." Returning to the bar mitzvah, Moshe then called Yitzchak Adler to say a few words. As usual, Yitzchak started out by saying, "You know what the most important thing the Jews said when they came out of Egypt? G-d, weren't there enough graves in Egypt that you had to bring us to this wilderness?" Moshe interrupted and said, "There are enough graves in Europe, but you, Yitzchak, saved our lives and the lives of my children. You gave us a great gift."

Our parents, too, have given us great gifts. Our job is to pass them on to the next generation. They gave it to us as a Morasha which we must hand over to our children. They gave us many parting gifts. Let us hope and pray that we will give our children gifts, too, beautiful gifts as G-d gave us on Mount Sinai on this day of Atzeres so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

ON THE YOMEM NOREEM G-D OPENS

THE DOORS

Many of us know that we gather together four days before Rosh Hashonna to say Selichos. At least four days are required. We always start the Shabbat before Rosh Hashonna. Today, we have four days before Rosh Hashonna. In those years we do not have four days, we start Selichos the Saturday before Rosh Hashonna. Strange that we should always have to start on a Saturday. The rabbis determine we have to have four days because on all the other holidays Jews are admonished, "And you should offer an offering to G-d," but on this holiday they say, "You should make yourself the sacrifice." We know that on Rosh Hashonna, Yitzchak was willing to make himself the sacrifice. G-d does not want human sacrifice, but wants us to learn how to sacrifice. Abraham, after he took Isaac off the altar, still offered an Ayil. Ayil in Hebrew means a tycoon, a powerful person. It can stand for ambition, a love. To be a Jew, we have to sacrifice those things that are dear to us to maintain our Judaism. We have to ensure we marry within the faith, and we must curb our ambition if it will lead us to do immoral things. We have to know that we must sometimes say no to the world. That sometimes becomes a very hard sacrifice.

We also know that when we recite Selichos we recite it because we know that we have sinned. We know we are not perfect. We have to examine ourselves for defects, just as those charged with the responsibility have to examine a sacrifice for defects before it could be offered. The rabbis teach us that in a certain way sin is like Terumah, ritual uncleanness. We read in Selichos, itself, "G-d, cast water upon us, sprinkle upon us water and You should purify us as it is said, 'And I shall sprinkle upon you pure waters and you should be pure from all your uncleanness and from all your abominations will I cleanse you.'"

We recognize two types of ritual uncleanness. In one type, we, ourselves, do all the actions. When we come into contact with the ugly things of the world, when we come into contact with a dead rodent, with things that disgust us, then we know we have to immerse ourselves in a mikvah to regain freshness. The second type is when we come into contact with human death, though, cleansing ourselves in the mikvah does not suffice. We also, in the days when the Temple stood, had to be sprinkled with a mixture of the ashes of the red heifer and water on the third and seventh days. We could not cleanse ourselves. The rabbis explain that ritual uncleanness really has nothing to do with immorality. It concerns losing the verve of life, depression.

When a person confronts the ugliness of the world, many times he could feel he has to give up. He can do nothing to change the world. The world is too ugly. The world is too filled with violence. Nothing can be changed. People get filled with a sense of deep depression. This confrontation is, of course, multiplied when coming into contact with death because death mocks all our activities. You mean that after we have lived a good life and done all these mitzvahs and helped all these people, we are still going to end up dead and in the grave? Is this the way things should end up? Is this right? We could be overcome with depression and proclaim nothing can be changed, but that is not the Jewish position. Jews maintain you have to be filled with joy and hopefulness and optimism. You could not enter the Temple unless filled with this optimism. This is the meaning of the symbolism behind going to the mikvah. You can, through your own efforts, transform your depression into optimism. You can look at life with joy again. That's what the Baal Shem Tov tells us, only a happy person can serve G-d. We know a person filled

with depression could not serve G-d. Coming into contact with the dead almost paralyzes one's senses and sensibilities. I remember for 13 years I performed every Tahara, along with others, in my previous shul. I experienced enormous difficulty the first few times I did it. Even later, twinges would occasionally upset me. You are confronting your own morality and getting filled with hopelessness and helplessness and depression. We are not supposed to be that way. We are supposed to be filled with joy and optimism. Certainly, we are all going to die, but we can leave behind something worthwhile upon which future generations can build, and eventually, the world is going to be redeemed. Sometimes, that message defies understanding and comprehension. That is what we learn through the different types of uncleanness. When we become unclean because of the world and the problems of the world, we have the inner power to transform ourselves, but coming into contact with death differs from world-created uncleanness. We need the community to help us. We need to come out of our depression.

This is actually the difference between Yom Kippur and the rest of the year when G-d is waiting for us. In fact, that is even what we say when we pray G-d is waiting for us to come back to Him, that He is going to forgive us. He is just waiting for us. He is waiting for our knock on the door. Our Selichos prayers say, "He opens the gates to those who knock unto repentance," but on this holiday between Selichos and the end of Yom Kippur, it is not the same. We are asking G-d to help us, to take us out of our problems, to extend His hand to us first. At the very beginning of Selichos, we say, "Because your right hand You have stretched out to receive all those who really want to repent." That is an aspect of the difference between the Yom Kippur season and the rest of the year. The rest of the year, Teshuva is efficacious, but we have to take the initiative. The rabbis ask what we do when we sin. We become alienated. We cannot, so to speak, look G-d in the face. When we harm someone, we are ashamed in their presence and try to escape. In fact, often the spouse who harmed the other spouse wants the divorce because they feel so guilty. They just cannot live with the other person because they did so many bad things to them. Even though the injured spouse is willing to forgive, they just cannot do it because they have become estranged and alienated.

Sin, too, causes us to become terribly depressed. It is hard when we are overcome to come back to G-d with our own power. Of course, we can. "Seek G-d when He can be found," which is all the time. That is what we read in the Haphtorah on a normal fast day throughout the year. However, on Yom Kippur, G-d is uplifting us. He tells us, "Listen, I can help you. Let Me in." He is not waiting for us to knock on the door.

There are different kinds of sin. One comes to us because we trip. It is an accident. Another much more serious problem is the sin we commit because of something within us. Sometimes, we sin by external causes from something or some force outside ourselves. We really did not look to do this particular sin. That is why it says here, "We will search our ways and examine and return to You because Your right hand stretches out to receive those who return, and not with kindness and not with good deeds do we come before You, but like poor people, needy creatures do we knock on Your doors." G-d has two doors here. One is for the people who sinned because of circumstances. They did not sin out of rebellion. We sin many times because of circumstances beyond our control. As mentioned in one of the oldest parts of the Selichos, we say, "The G-d Who answered Abraham, our father, at Mount Moriah, should answer us." Abraham was in a quandary. G-d had promised him that the Jewish people would continue through Yitzchak, and now G-d was asking him to sacrifice Yitzchak. How could this be? How could he sacrifice his son? It was a terrible quandary. He was beset by circumstances. That is

what happens to many people. G-d sent Abraham an angel to tell him not to sacrifice his son but to uplift him.

We also learn about who answered Joseph when he was in prison? Joseph was in prison because he resisted the seductive blandishments of Potiphar's wife. He could have succumbed. He was a man who did the right thing, and was punished. He spent 13 years in jail, and were it not for G-d's help, he would have had a miserable existence there. As we know, that was preparatory for him becoming viceroy of Egypt. How are we to know these things? Many times we are sorely tempted by ideological sins. We know people are tempted to do bad things for good causes, people who launder drug money to get money for their yeshivas, not for gain. Certain sins are caused outside of us, and those we can overcome by ourselves throughout the year by going to the mikvah, by looking inwardly and saying we will do better. On the other hand, there are sins that are ideological sins, sins which mislead us entirely because they convince us that what we are doing is right -- it is for a good cause. These people, when they want to repent, can feel completely lost. They do not believe they can come back, but G-d says, "I will sprinkle upon you the pure waters and you will be pure from all your uncleanness and from all your abominations." You can always come back. G-d has two doors, and on Yom Kippur, especially, He is looking for those people who perhaps ideologically thought they could not be Jews anymore because they desecrated G-d's name, became Communists, etc. He wants them all back. You can come back.

That's what Rabbi Akiva tells us. He tell us that G-d, on this holiday, is ready to purify us. Therefore, G-d is the Mikvah Yisroel. G-d helps us not only by opening the doors after we knock, but also puts within our hearts the desire to come back. That is why we say, "Adoshem Adoshem," twice, because G-d is there before we sin and after we sin. He is waiting for us throughout the whole year to knock at His door, but on Yom Kippur He opens the door and tells us, "Come in. Come in through both doors. I know that your understanding is finite. I know you are beset many times by circumstances, but you can make it. You can come through the door. You can be a better person. You can shed your depression. You can come close to Me and be close to others because I am there to purify you." Let us all hope and pray that we will all want to be purified during the coming year, and that we will lead good lives, better lives, so that truly the Mashiach will come quickly this year. Amen.

NO GOALS WORTH SACRIFICING

FAMILY

On Rosh Hashonna, we learn about four people who could not see what was right in front of them. We learn about Hagar, who had been expelled from the camp by Sarah and Abraham because Ishmael had been taunting Yitzchak, and Sarah was afraid that Ishmael would kill him. Somehow, Hagar must have gotten lost because she exhausted her supply of water. She put the boy Ishmael under one of the bushes, and she sat a bowshot away from him, weeping, saying, "Let me not see the child die." G-d heard the cry of Ishmael, and an angel of G-d called to Hagar from the heaven and said, "What's the matter with you, Hagar? Come pick up your boy." G-d then opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, filled the bottle, and gave the boy a drink.

In the second day's Torah reading, we read how Abraham went with two boys on the way to the akedah. These two boys did not go with Abraham to the mountain of G-d. They could not see it was the mountain of G-d. It was right in front of them, but they could not see it. Abraham, too, misunderstood G-d's instructions and in his zeal to follow them, almost sacrificed his son. He did not see the ram in front of him. Abraham lifted up his eyes after an angel of G-d told him to stay his hand, and then saw the ram. In his fervor to perform what he thought was a command of G-d, he could not see what was right in front of him.

Today is Shabbat, and because it is Shabbat, we do not blow the shofar, we do not say Ovinu Malkeynu, and we do not do Tashlich. What is Tashlich? Tashlich occurs when we go to a river and cast our sins in it symbolically. Why a river? The rabbis teach us that a river has three characteristics. It has direction. It has a goal. If a river would not have direction, it would be a lake. A river also must have water, energy. If a river bed has no water, it is just a dry canyon. A river must also have depth; otherwise, it is nothing more than a swamp. Also, depth stands for learning, knowledge. To overcome our sins, we must have goals. Without goals, people become despondent and fall into deep despair, even if they have what they think they need to be successful. A doctor came to me a few years ago complaining how nobody liked him. He was terribly depressed. He had been through three marriages, and made a lot of money, but he told me his happiest days were when he was in medical school, and he had goals. Today, after double-crossing everybody, he was left basically alone, and he was miserable.

To change, we need positive goals. We need energy, and we need knowledge. Why, though, don't we say Tashlich on Shabbat? The reason for this is although on Rosh Hashonna we are supposed to concentrate on change – the word Shana, itself, means to change, to repeat, and to learn – we are not to just willy nilly change. We are to change in such a way that we do not destroy what we have built. Shabbat is a day of family when the family gets together, when we learn Torah, when we get a taste of what things will be like when we have helped G-d perfect this world. Shabbat teaches us that there are no goals in the world that are worth destroying our family or our institutions or our community. We cannot pit one person against another just so we can achieve our goals. We are not like the communists who pitted the parents against the children. We are not to spy on one another. On this day, we emphasize the fact that we should not destroy what we have to achieve even worthy goals.

Hagar had to open her eyes, not give up so easily. She should not have said, "I don't want to see the boy die," and cast him aside. Her goal of not seeing her boy cry over what she thought was his imminent death might have been compassion in her eyes. We do not sacrifice our family

because they might cry.

The two boys who went with Abraham could not see the spiritual splendor in front of them. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his family for what he thought was G-d's command. His religious zeal was misplaced, although his motives were pure. We, too, should never sacrifice what is in front of us to achieve what we think are worthwhile goals. How many families have sacrificed the Friday night meal, the time when the family gets together, to earn just a few more dollars? How many people have sacrificed their family in pursuit of an ambition which turns out like my doctor friend to be hollow? We are not to sacrifice those things that make us what we are. We need loyalty. We need attachments. We need memory.

This holiday is known as Yom Hazikaron, the Day of Remembrance. Throughout the prayers, this name Yom Hazikaron is stressed over and over again. Memories imply relationships. We are not to sacrifice our relationships to achieve our goals. Shabbat is a day of relationships. In our prayers, we say Zochreinu L'Chaim before we say Kosvei L'Chaim. Zochreinu means memories, relationships. "G-d, remember, You have a relationship with us. Write us in the Book of Life." It is this relationship which allows us to be strong, and eventually to change but in the correct way. Let none of us ever throw away our relationships. There is no cause, no goal which is worthy of destroying our family, our friends, our institutions, or our community.

I am reminded of the story they tell about the man who went to a bar mitzvah on the moon. When he returned home, he was asked how it was. He replied, "The bar mitzvah did okay. The rabbi spoke too long. The food was so so, but the bar mitzvah had no atmosphere." It is the atmosphere of our family and our friends and our relationships which gives us the strength to do good things. Let us all always maintain that atmosphere so we will truly be worthy of a Shana Tova and so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SHABBAT, BALANCING EMOTION &

REASON & PROBLEMS

Last night, I talked about the fact that we do not blow the shofar today or do Tashlich today or say Ovinu Malkeynu today because it is Shabbat. Why is it, though, that we do not blow the shofar today? Yes, the Gemora says that we do not blow the shofar today for fear someone is going to carry it to a teacher to learn how to blow it on Shabbat. This, true, is a reason, but it is difficult to understand that this is the only reason because after all, what with eruvs in the Jewish community since the time of King Solomon, carrying has virtually ceased to be a problem. So why worry? In those places that have an eruv, it should be all right.

What does the shofar teach us? The shofar is composed of four notes: the Tekiah; the Teruah; the Shevorim; and the Shevorim Teruah. The Tekiah is a long note. It stands for reason. The Teruah, the Shevorim, and the Shevorim Teruah all stand for emotions. We have to learn how to balance reason and our emotions if we are to correctly solve our problems and change in the proper way. Reason alone is not enough. Reason can many times mislead us if based on false premises. It would seem reasonable that we should get rid of all the old people, everyone over 80. They are a drain on the economy. We should do like the Eskimos and put them on an ice floe, but we know this is wrong. These are our parents. These are people to whom we owe a lot.

Emotions, too, can mislead us. We can be filled with an excessive amount of love or hate and lose our judgment. In fact, we all know about the cases of people who love too much. For example, the tragedy of Susan Smith. Her lover did not want her children, and, afraid of losing his love, she drowned her children. This is not a unique situation. Look how many women turn aside when their children are abused because they do not want to lose their husband's love.

We know, too, that we all have mixed emotions. We know that we never have one complete, whole emotion. At weddings, we cry, not just because we are happy. We cry because all our relationships have to change now. Our parents, our friends, our siblings are not number one now. Our spouse may be number one. We cry also because we have left our youth behind. We now have to assume responsibilities. At funerals, although we are more than 90% sad, there is some happiness there. In fact, the Shulchan Orech says that if we inherit property, we are supposed to say Shecheyanu. How can this be?

The answer is that we do not hold people accountable for having emotions if they do not act on the wrong emotions. Especially in the old days, when a person could not amount to anything until his father died, some feeling of relief and happiness prevailed. After all, a prince could not become a king until his father died. A person could not inherit the farm until his father died. Even today, sons cannot inherit the business usually until the father dies. That explains why sometimes the family is so bitter at the nursing home or at the doctors because their father or mother died. They are really relieved. Visiting the nursing home was hard, and the money was frittering away. Of course, they are 90% sad, but they want to make sure nobody thinks they are relieved so they take it out on the doctors and nursing home.

We all have mixed emotions, and the shofar teaches us we have to bracket these emotions with reason. We start with the long note of reason, the Tekiah. Then we hear the many types of emotions we have, the Teruah, the Shevorim, the Shevorim Teruah, and then we end with the Tekiah. We make sure that our reason and our emotions are balanced. We do not need to blow

the shofar on Shabbat because Shabbat, itself, is a day of balance. Also, on Shabbat, we cannot act. We are supposed to enjoy what we have already created. We are not going to act wrong reason or wrong emotions.

We do know, though, that today is also Rosh Chodesh, not just Rosh Hashonna. It is the first day of the month. We do not mention it at all in our prayers except for one fleeting reference. Why, though, should we not mention it? Perhaps because the moon renews itself automatically. We will not be renewed automatically. We will only be renewed if we work on it. However, for Rosh Chodesh there is a special law: we can break Shabbat to declare the new moon. This means that in the old days when the new moon was declared on the basis of visual sighting by two witnesses, these two witnesses could violate the Shabbat by even riding on a horse, by violating the Shabbat boundaries to come before the Beis Din to say that they saw a new moon. In fact, that is why we have two days of Rosh Hashonna, even in Israel, because the court was never sure that the witnesses would come on the first day. If they would not come, the second day would definitely be Rosh Hashonna, and if they would come late on the first day, there would not be time to tell the people so. Therefore, you would still have to have a second day of Rosh Hashonna.

Why should we be able to break the Shabbat to declare the new moon? It is only a question of one day. So you wait a few hours. The Torah tells us, however, we have to break the Shabbat to declare the new moon. What is so important about that? Many times we Jews feel that we live only in Shabbat. Shabbat is a taste of the way the world will be after it is redeemed. Some Jews do not perceive any problems. Everything is Shabbat. The world today is not Shabbat, but they have these illusions.

In America, many Jews feel that anti-Semitism could not raise its head. After the events of the last three months, they should rethink this. We have to act. We cannot just sit back. Three synagogues firebombed in Sacramento, six Jews shot up leaving a shul on Friday night in Chicago, five Jews shot up in a JCC in Los Angeles, a synagogue firebombed on Long Island. Beauford Furrow represents thousands. He was hoping that many would come forward and kill Jews, emulating his act. I do not understand why free speech protects these people. This is conspiracy to murder. If I got together with a group of friends to kill somebody, I would be arrested. They should be arrested. In Egypt, the government-controlled paper had an article praising Beauford Furrow and praying G-d would give strength to all people like him to kill all the Jews in America. Why didn't Mubarak's government stop this? This is the true face of the Arabs. People should have no illusions about the peace process. Israel will only have peace if it is strong. Once Israel is weak, they will pounce. Mubarak has never visited Israel except for Rabin's funeral, and he will not. The Israeli Arabs drove two suicide car bombs. They failed and were killed because the bombs exploded prematurely, but these were Israeli Arabs. Everyone said Israeli Arabs were on the Israeli side. We have problems of drugs in the community, problems of assimilation. There are problems of the destruction of the family. We cannot sweep everything under the rug. We cannot pretend everything is Shabbat. We have to solve these problems now.

The rabbis say that it is as wrong to make a weekday Shabbat as it is to make Shabbat a weekday. We need Shabbat. It shows us the goal we are working toward, but during the week we have to work hard. We cannot shut our eyes to our problems. We have problems of people playing games, like I can out-frum you, problems of Jewish education. We know that the only

thing that is going to save Jews in America is intensive Jewish education, yet all the leaders want to do is make another study and another study. We have problems. We have to act.

I am reminded of the story about a tavern owner who closed his tavern at 2:00 a.m. He went home and fell asleep. At 3:30 a.m., the phone rang. A drunk man said, "You have got to come and open up your tavern." The owner recognized the voice of one of his patrons. He said, "You're drunk already. I'm not going to open up the tavern. I'll open at 10:00 a.m." The man replied, "You don't understand. I don't want to get in, I want to get out."

It is important for all of us to keep the ideals of Shabbat to balance our emotions and our reason, but we cannot stay in Shabbat. We must, during the week, get out and solve our problems. Let us hope and pray that we will try to solve our problems so that we will be worthy of a sweet and good year so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

VALUES, THE HIDDEN THINGS &

SOLVING PROBLEMS

Yesterday, I spoke about the fact that we must recognize we have problems. There are still people in the United States who have the Nazi philosophy: They believe the Jews are the children of the devil, and that if the world is to be redeemed, every Jew must be killed. This was exactly Hitler's philosophy. He could have won World War Two if he had not diverted so many resources to ship Jews to Auschwitz. If he had used these same resources to ship ammunition to his troops, he probably would have defeated Russia.

Israel faces terrible problems now with the Israeli Arabs who are sending suicide bombers. If it were up to me, I would not give up any more of the West Bank and, instead, I would give the million Arabs who live in the Galilee to the Palestinian authority. We have problems with our youth. We have problems with people who do not want to face any of our problems.

In the special reading right before the Shemoneh Esre of Maariv, which is repeated in the Malchuyos section of the Mussaf, we say, "Blow in the new moon the shofar B'Keseh, a statute for Israel and a law for Jacob." The word B'Keseh has a double meaning -- both hidden and revealed. Keseh can mean when the moon is hidden or it can refer to a full moon. When we say blow in the month the shofar, we mean blow so we will renew ourselves. Chodesh can also mean renew, and shofar can also mean to improve, to beautify ourselves. We should renew and beautify ourselves B'Keseh, when things are both revealed and hidden. This can be interpreted to mean that in judging others, we should judge by what is hidden. In judging ourselves, we should judge by what is revealed. What does this mean? It means that many times we are quick to take insult at what other people do, not realizing that they had no intent to harm us. They did not know our father died, or we just lost our business, etc. On the other hand, when we judge ourselves, we judge ourselves by our intentions, not by our actions. We say, "Well, I did not mean it, so it's okay."

However, there is another interpretation for the word B'Keseh. The rabbis teach us that not only were Adam and Eve created on Rosh Hashonna, but also Joseph got out of prison on Rosh Hashonna. Joseph's Egyptian name was Tsophnes Paneach, which means the revealer of hidden things. Joseph was different than his brothers. He did not look like a Jew. His brothers did not recognize him when they came to Egypt. He spoke another language. He dressed differently, but the hidden things, the values of Judaism he kept. The Rosh Yeshiva explained that Tsophnes Paneach means to be at rest and at motion at the same time. Joseph rested on the values that he learned at his home, but he actively participated in society to solve all its problems. Joseph may not have looked like a Jew, but he acted like one. His brothers, on the other hand, kept their beards and their dress, but they did not act like Jews. They, first of all, sold their brother into slavery. They cavorted with prostitutes. They treated the sons of the handmaidens in a bad way. They did not act like Jews.

We learn also that on Rosh Hashonna, we remember the exodus of Egypt because on this day the work of the Jewish slaves stopped. There was so much chaos in Egypt

because of the plagues that the slaves were no longer worked, even though they were still slaves. We also say in our prayer that, "You brought us near to Your service and You have called Your great and holy name upon us."

In other words, Jews are looked upon as G-d's witnesses in the world. That is the reason why we put on tephillin. Tephillin is the sign of G-d upon the Jews. When we put on tephillin, though, we put it on the left hand, not the right hand. We do this because we are not to have killer instincts as Jews, but, more than that, G-d is telling us that He will help us, but we have to take the initiative. We have to act. Our right hand must be free. That's why if a person is left handed, he puts his tephillin on the right hand because his strong hand must be free to act.

This is similar to Chanukah when we are commanded to put the menorah on the left side of the house and the mezuzah on the right side. The mezuzah contains the hidden values of Judaism. We are to act to make sure that these values are implemented in the world. G-d has promised to help us. The symbol of the menorah is that G-d does help us. If the hidden things are okay, then G-d wants us to use our right hand to solve our problems. This is what Joseph did. Joseph not only interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh; he also gave him a solution. He acted. That's why Pharaoh was so impressed and appointed Joseph as viceroy. We Jews are not just to study problems and study problems; we are to solve them.

The sentence, "Blow in the month the shofar when it B'Keseh," means we are to renew ourselves with the hidden things by doing revealed things, by acting. It says, "Chok L'Israel, a statute for Israel." What does this mean? It means that G-d has promised us that we will be eternal. We will be eternal, though, only if we follow Mishpotay Israel. Mishpot are sensible laws, laws we would come to by our own reason, like not killing, not stealing. Chok is a supernatural law for which we do not know the reason. G-d has promised that there will always be those among our people who will continually struggle with G-d and man to make this a good world. That is what Israel means. However, we have to analyze our problems and direct our emotion the correct way so we can overcome all our challenges. That's what Joseph did, and that is what the Maccabees did.

G-d never promised us that all Jews would survive. In fact, we know that before the Holocaust in Poland there were three million Jews. Only 10% survived. 150,000 of them left Poland, and 150,000 of them left Judaism. Many of them are now coming back. Their parents never told them that they were Jewish. We are called upon to solve our problems, based on Jewish values, like Joseph did. We cannot pretend these problems do not exist. We cannot say we are waiting for the Mashiach. We cannot sacrifice these values to solve our problems. Otherwise, we will disappear as Jews, and we also certainly cannot impute to our enemies Jewish values, like those today who say this about the Arabs. They do not love us. They may respect our power, but they do not love us. We have to renew ourselves. We have to solve our problems with our right hand. G-d has promised He will help us if we will but begin the process.

I am reminded of the story about a rabbi sitting in the woods. A bear came up. The rabbi got up and started walking. The bear followed him. The rabbi started running,

and the bear ran after him. The rabbi ran faster and faster. So did the bear. Finally, the rabbi was blocked by a cliff. He lifted his hand to G-d and said, "Oh, G-d, please make this bear a Jew." The bear stopped, raised his hand, and said, "Blessed are You, O, G-d, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the ground." We cannot impute to our enemies Jewish values. We must base what we do on Jewish values. May the hidden things always be correct, and may we always act to solve our problems so that we may we have a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

GRASPING REALITY & THE HAPPY,

GOOD LIFE

So often, to tell what reality is tries our powers of perception. So often, we are mistaken. We know that in Houston in 1985, they were predicting \$50 a barrel oil. It never happened, and in 1986, Houston went through a severe economic recession. Many times in life, we anticipate certain outcomes, and things happen just the opposite. One of the reasons we are here is because life is so unpredictable. Who could have predicted in the 1980's that a million Jews from the Soviet Union would come to Israel in the 1990's? Who could have predicted in the 1970's how the computer would take over all industry and commerce in the 1990's? True reality definitely defies explanation.

On Rosh Hashonna, we read Torah and Haphtorah readings which seem very strange. Why do we read the readings that we read? If Rosh Hashonna is the birthday of mankind (everyone agrees it is not the birthday of the world), why don't we read about the creation of Adam and Eve? Instead, we read on the first day how Hagar got lost in the desert, and in the Haphtorah of the first day how Elie misjudged Chana. On the second day, we learn how Abraham was mistaken, how he misinterpreted G-d's command. He was supposed to elevate, not sacrifice his son. In the Haphtorah, we learn how Rachel refuses to be comforted for her children, but she should be comforted, and she will be comforted because her children are going to go back to the land of Israel.

In other words, we read how all these important people made mistakes. They did not perceive reality correctly. Hagar had given up. She had thrown her boy away from her so she should not see him die, even though there was a well of water close at hand. An angel came and pointed out to her that there was a well of water close at hand. Elie saw Chana praying at the Tabernacle at Shiloh. He did not know what to make of her. Actually from Chana do we learn how to pray. He consulted the Ureem and Tureem and the letters Shin Kuf Raysh Hay flashed, and he read these letters as Shikra -- she is a drunk -- when he should have read them as Kesora -- she is like Sarah. He was predisposed to think that a woman who was swaying, etc. must be drunk. Abraham made a mistake when he brought Yitzchak to be sacrificed, and Rachel refused to be comforted.

We blow three notes of the shofar on Rosh Hashonna: the Tekiah, which can stand for truth, the Shevorim, which can mean hope and can stand for potentiality, and the Teruah, which can stand for empathy and kindness. We also say that teshuva -- repentance, which demands truth, tefilah -- prayer, which demands recognition of potentiality, and tzedakah -- charity, which demands kindness, remove the evil decree. It is interesting to note that when we say the sentence, "And I will remember My covenant with Jacob and My covenant with Yitzchak and My covenant with Avraham," that we mention Yaacov first. Yaacov was the epitome of truth. He never tried to fool himself. Even when he tricked his father, he knew he was doing wrong. He even told his mother that. Reality requires that we look the situation squarely in its face, that we do not try to fool ourselves. However, sometimes we can still make a mistake, like Yaacov did later on when he blew up at Laban for accusing him of stealing Laban's gods. He knew Laban well, and he knew how Laban would always make false

accusations, only this time Yaacov was wrong.

To determine reality, we need three elements. First, we have to look at a situation through our experience and our knowledge of human nature. This, though, can lead us to become cynical. We cannot grasp reality completely by only looking at what we think is the truth by looking only at what we think past experience teaches us. This is what led people to say at the turn of the century that it would be impossible for man to fly, etc.

The second element we need to determine reality is the recognition of potentiality. Yitzchak saw potentiality in everything. He saw great potentiality in his son, Esau. The problem was he never saw any potentiality for evil in anyone. He never could conceive that Yaacov could trick him. Our dreams of potentiality can get away from us, though. People who live a life based on potentiality are many times hurt very badly. abused woman who always says her husband is going to change is almost always disappointed.

In Israel, today people think that Arafat has changed. They want peace so much, but he has not changed. He is still making speeches about destroying Israel in stages. The textbooks still talk about the destruction of the State of Israel. They speak about liberating Tel Aviv and Haifa. They say Allah brought the Jews to Israel so they can be destroyed all at once. It is good to dream of peace, but we also need the practicality of a Yaacov to balance it.

Finally, we have Avraham. Avraham is the epitome of kindness. If coming to conclusions about what reality is, we say that the people have to suffer, that is just the way it is, then these conclusions are wrong. In the 1850's, the British let the Irish starve because to help them would violate the rules of capitalism. The communists killed 30 million people because this was necessary for the laws of communism. If the conclusions you come to are cruel and make people suffer, then something is wrong with your conclusions. That is not a true reality. Saying that in the United States we cannot provide health insurance for everyone or that the homeless are condemned to wander the streets or that it is impossible to help the mentally afflicted, then something is wrong with our conclusions.

This is one of the reasons we have these three notes of the shofar. The Tekiah stands for truth, for practicality, but it has to be moderated by the Shevorim. Shevorim in Hebrew means also hope. We have to have hope and dreams. The Teruah stands for kindness, for the busy activities of trying to help others. If we have these three qualities, we can get to the Tekiah Gedola. This is why we say that teshuva, tefilah, and tzedakah remove the evil decree. Teshuva means to rigorously examine ourselves and the world. It has to do with practicality, truth. Tefilah has to do with potentiality, prayer, possibility, and tzedakah has to do with kindness. If we will make sure that we have these three things, we can then grasp reality, and unless we grasp reality, we cannot have a happy and a good year. We need, though, to be careful to use all these three elements because, as we all know, truth requires a context; dreams require us to also be earthbound; and kindness, alone, can cause us to make other people dependent and cause them to lose their self-esteem. We need all three things.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a 55-year old man who was being urged by all

his friends to play golf. He never wanted to, but one day he showed up at the clubhouse, and stayed out for two hours or so. He came back and said, "Gentlemen, today I scored a 68." His friends were amazed and said, "This is the first time you are playing and you scored a 68? Why, that's what the pros score. We don't believe you." The man said, "All right, ask my caddy." They asked the caddy, "Did he score a 68?" The caddy said, "Yes, and tomorrow we're going to play the second hole."

Our appreciation of reality depends upon truth, dreams, and kindness. Let us all hope that we will combine them correctly in the coming year so that we will be able to grasp reality so we will be able to live a good life, a happy life so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

KNOWING WHICH EMOTIONS ARE RIGHT

Last night, I talked about the fact that to have a happy and good life, you need to be able to grasp reality, but that is not enough. You also have to learn how to handle your emotions. You have to know which emotions are right, and which emotions are wrong.

Today is Shabbat, and today we do not blow the shofar. In Vayikra, we read, "Speak to the sons of Israel saying, 'In the seventh month in the first of the month it shall be for you a sabbath, a remembrance of the Teruah.'" Even though the Torah commands us to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashonna, the rabbis have seen fit not to allow the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashonna lest it will lead us to violate the Shabbat. A person may take the shofar and carry it to a teacher to teach him how to blow the shofar. He would thereby violate the prohibition of carrying on Shabbat. It is hard to understand this since almost all Jewish communities since the time of David and Solomon have had an eruv which allow one to carry. Other rabbis say, although that is a reason, we do not blow the shofar on Shabbat because it says Zicharon Teruah -- remember the Teruah. We do not actually blow the Teruah sound, which stands for our emotions, but we remember it. We know that it is memory which makes us a human being. Without memory, we cannot be a human being. We cannot have relationships. We cannot establish a family. We cannot have a community. That's why Alzheimer's is such a devastating disease. There is a terrible joke about Alzheimer's which says the only good thing about Alzheimer's is that you are constantly making new friends. Memories are important, and memories come from the intellect and the emotions. A highly charged emotional experience will be retained for many years, especially the experience of observing a Shabbat. We retain such an experience because we believe that on a Shabbat, we have an extra soul. As Rabbi Soloveitchik has taught us, the soul is composed of two parts: an intellectual part, and an emotional part, and we must feed both parts of our soul. We must feed our intellectual part with stimulating ideas, and we must feed our emotional part of our soul with positive emotions. Otherwise, our soul will seek out any kind of emotions, even very negative ones. Just like if we do not feed our body good food, it will seek out junk food.

On Shabbat, we create emotional bonds with our family and with G-d. We are supposed to be happy, sing songs, drink wine, eat meat, be friendly with our spouse, etc. On Rosh Hashonna, seven personalities are very prominent: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Yosef, Moshe, Aaron, and Dovid. These, incidentally, are the same persons who are called the Ushpeezeem, the guests, and who are invited into our succah. Also, on this holiday Rachel is very prominent. These personalities stand for different qualities to which we must subject our emotions. Our emotions must reflect Shabbat Zicharon Teruah, and they must reflect these persons who are prominent on Rosh Hashonna.

Avraham stands for hope. If our emotions lead us to feel hopeless and depressed, something is the matter with that emotion. We have to get help.

Yitzchak stands for inwardness. He was not moved by peer pressure. He paid no attention to his environment. Yes, he was a good citizen, but did not let his peers control him. Unfortunately, today there are many people who let peer pressure force them to give up their own identity. Now that Joseph Lieberman has been nominated for Vice President of the United States, no Jew should feel strange being Orthodox in America. If Joseph Lieberman can run for the second highest office in the land, every Jew should feel that he can function as an Orthodox Jew if he

wants to. We have seen in some of our high schools that students are actually shooting their classmates because they are filled with rage that their peer group has rejected them. They want revenge, but their identity should not be dependent on their peer group. They should be able to stand on their own. If your emotions will not allow you to stand alone, if they force you to always be herd-directed, something is wrong, and you should get help.

Yaacov stands for the spiritual over the material. He was a multi-millionaire in Mesopotamia. He should have stayed with Laban, but he knew it was bad for his children, so he left Mesopotamia. It cost him a fortune. Today, we know we must put the spiritual over the material if we are to survive, and our children are to survive as Jews. That's why we send our kids to day schools. True, we must do something about the cost of day schools. Though nobody's fault, to send a child to day school, even with a scholarship, costs a fortune. If your emotions lead you only to the material, to drink and drugs, something is wrong; get help.

Yosef stands for inclusiveness. The rabbis teach us that on this day Yosef got out of prison. Yosef was always inclusive. He included his brothers, even though they had wronged him. He included all Egypt in his care and concern. If your emotions lead you to hatred, to always divide the world into us and them, something is wrong. Recently, I met a person who said, "I love to hate." Something is wrong with that person. He needs help.

Moshe stands for learning and good deeds. If your emotions lead you to become a recluse and prevent you from doing good deeds or from studying, you need help.

Dovid stands for joy and happiness. In spite of all his problems, he could still sing and dance. If you cannot sing and dance, something is the matter with you. You should be able to sing and dance. If you are so shy you cannot do these things, you need help.

Rachel, in our tradition, was the symbol of emotion. After all, she had beautiful eyes, a real good figure, and when Yaacov saw her, he fell head over heels in love with her. He even kissed her immediately, something which gives the rabbis in the yeshivas fits trying to explain. He worked for her for 14 years, so he was either passionately in love or crazy. She was passionate in anything she did. She yelled at her husband when she was childless, saying, "Give me a child or I will die." She stole her father's idols in a passionate act. Her sister, Leah, was the opposite of her. She was spiritual. You can see that even in the way they named their children. Leah called her children G-d saw, G-d heard. She even named her fourth son Yehuda, which means thank G-d. Rachel, on the other hand, named her son Yosef, hoping G-d would add to her another child. She named her son Binyomin, the son of my affliction. She died giving birth to Binyomin. She is given prominence because she was able to balance emotions with spirituality. Her sister was more spiritual than her, and she was buried in the Cave of the Machpelah. She, though, taught us that we have to balance earthiness and emotion with spirituality.

Interestingly, in our tradition we have two Mashiachs: the Mashiach Ben Yosef, who is going to conquer the land, and who will be killed in the process; and the Mashiach Ben Dovid, actually a descendant of Leah, who is going to restore Israel's highest form of spirituality. Shabbat is a day of spirituality. Shabbat is a day when we have an extra soul. On this day, we are to reflect whether our Teruahs manifest the values of Shabbat. Do our emotions give us hope? Do they allow us to maintain our identity, regardless of our peer group? Do they allow us to have the spiritual take precedence over the material? Are they inclusive? Do they allow us to study and

to do good deeds? Do they allow us to sing and dance? If they do not, then we are in for a lot of trouble. In fact, negative emotions can become self-fulfilling prophecies. If we always dwell on negative emotions, they will take us over.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a dentist who went to a prison to help the inmates. The second year he went, he saw many new buildings there. The third year, there were even more new buildings. He asked an inmate, "Why is this?" The inmate pointed to his t-shirt which read, "If you build them, we will come."

Let us hope and pray that we will only have positive emotions in the year ahead so we will grow spiritually and be able to live spiritually uplifted lives, that we will truly have a happy and good year, and so the Mashiach will come also.

RELATIONSHIPS, RACHMONES & THE HAPPY, GOOD LIFE

On the first night of Rosh Hashonna, I said that to have a happy and good life, we must grasp reality. On the first day, I said that we also need to have positive emotions; we could grasp reality and have positive emotions, but we need something else. We also need relationships. Without relationships, we cannot have a good life, a happy life. We learn about relationships, especially in the Zichronos section of the Mussaf service for Rosh Hashonna.

We have three additional prayers on Rosh Hashonna: the Malchuyos, which stands for G-d's power; the Zichronos, which stands for G-d's wanting to have a relationship with us; and the Shofros, which stands for G-d's wanting us to be His partner in redeeming the world. Of special significance, we note the prominence given to Noah in the Zichronos section which talks about relationships. Strange, because Noah was not Jewish. He was the father of all of us, but he was not Jewish. True, in the Zichronos section we mention the Akedah, the binding of Isaac. We mention it, though, because just as G-d stayed Abraham's hand and prevented Abraham from destroying the Jewish people – because if Abraham had killed Yitzchak, there would be no Jewish people – so G-d should stay the hand of all our enemies that the Jewish people should survive. Also, in passing, we mention the exodus from Egypt, but we do not mention all the other salvations that G-d has done for us. However, we do stress Noah.

It says, "And also Noah with love You remembered and You remembered him with the word of salvation and mercy." Why does it say "with the word of salvation and mercy"? It continues to go on by saying, "When You brought the waters of the flood to destroy all flesh because of the evil of their deeds, therefore, their memory came before You, G-d our G-d, to increase his seed like the sand of the sea." It further says, "And G-d remembered Noah and all the animals which were with him in the ark, in the Tayvah." This is a strange word, Tayvah, because it is not the ordinary word for ark. The word Oneah or Sfeenah would be more common words. Also, the word Tayvah means word.

Later on, we also learn, "And G-d remembered His treaty with Abraham and His treaty with Yitzchak, and His treaty with Jacob." Why did it say His treaty? Why didn't it say G-d remembered Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

Also, on this holiday we are commanded to listen to the Kol Hashofar, the voice of the shofar. Why not the shofar? We also know that a mensch in Hebrew is called a Gevair. The rabbis explain that the letters of the word Gevair define a mensch. The gimmel stands for Gemilas Chasodim, one who does deeds of kindness. The beis stands for a Bayshon, a refined individual. The raysh stands for Rachmones, somebody who has empathy and sympathy for others. We all know people who do good deeds, but they ruin it with a bad word. They are like the proverbial cow who, after filling a pail with milk, kicks over the bucket. A person will give a person a loan or charity, and then say, "Why don't you get a job?" Also, there are many people who are refined, but are not charitable. Other people are boorish, crude, but very charitable. In fact, sometimes we have to ask people who are not refined to help our shul. Being willing to do deeds of kindness and being refined are not enough. We also have to have Rachmones. We have to know how to relate to people with empathy and sympathy, how to relate to people with a kind word.

This is why we stress Noah so much. There is an argument between the rabbis whether Noah

was a righteous man. How can there be an argument? It says in the Torah that he was righteous in his generation. Rabbi Yochanan said, "It is true he was righteous in his generation, but in any other generation he would not have been righteous." Resh Lokesh, on the other hand, says, "No, he would have been more righteous in other generations." Rav Yochanan said he was not righteous because he did not pray for the people. He did not ask G-d to not punish them. True, he built the ark and it took him 120 years. During this time, people would come to him, and he would tell them to repent, but he did not really have Rachmones. He did not really have sympathy and empathy for the people. Resh Lokesh said that he did have empathy and sympathy because he did not judge them. He tried to use a word. Words are very important. With words, you can move mountains, or you can destroy everything. The reason it says, "I will remember My treaty (bris)," is because a bris is always with words. We have to listen to the voice of the shofar. Words have to be appropriate and right. Sometimes, because we are tired or angry, we utter bad words, unsympathetic words. Rachmones means you are going to help people, even if they are not entitled to it. You will be able to put yourself in the other person's shoes. This does not mean that you sympathize with them so much that you self-destruct.

Unfortunately, in Israel today, there are some people who sympathize so much with the Arab cause that they think we Jews should not be in Israel. Some Jews at the time of Hitler thought that Hitler was right and sympathized so much with his cause that they committed suicide. That much empathy we are not supposed to have.

On Rosh Hashonna, we are to listen to other people's words, and we are admonished to see how our own words impact on others. Noah was commanded to build the ark 30 by 50 by 300. The word for language in Hebrew is Loshon, which, in Gematria, is also 30 by 50 by 300. Noah was to relate by word to others. When we say that G-d remembered him with the words of Yeshua (salvation) and Rachameem (mercy), we did not have to say that. We could have just said with salvation, but, instead, we said with the words of salvation and mercy. Our words must always have Rachmones if they are to bring help and salvation. Sometimes, our schools and our synagogues send out letters which are not meant to be nasty, but they still are hurtful. Because of the pressures of finances and other things, people do not realize that even though only a certain percentage of a person's income is requested, a big difference lies between a person earning \$30,000 and \$100,000. You cut to the bone asking a certain percentage from a person who earns only \$30,000, while a person who has a \$100,000 income has some excess. We must always deal with each other with sympathy and with Rachmones. We cannot be patronizing or insensitive.

Israel is the only country in the whole world where the capitalists vote labor and the working people vote for the capitalists. The reason for that is that in the 1950's and even today, some of the elite looked down on the Sephardim. They did not treat them with empathy and with sympathy. In fact, to this day, nasty articles in some of the Hebrew papers resulted when Katzav, a Sephardic Jew, got elected president, and when a Sephardic Jew named Mofaz got appointed chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces. I believe this rift is closing, thank G-d, but the rift was caused because Rachmones was lacking. If we are to have good relationships, we need Rachmones. We need sympathy. We need empathy.

We end the Zichronos section with the words, "With Rachameem You shall remember." Let us always deal with each other with Rachmones. Let us do good deeds, and let us be refined, but that is not enough to maintain good relationships. We also must have Rachmones, sympathy and

empathy.

A story was told to me recently by a person who purports it to be true. He said that a friend of his was very ill and called up his doctor's office and talked to the doctor's nurse who must have been new. He said, "I have to see the doctor. I need an appointment immediately." The nurse replied, "Well, the earliest appointment we have is in two weeks." The man said, "Two weeks? I'll probably be dead by then." The nurse replied, "Well if that happens, please have your wife call to cancel your appointment."

There was no empathy, no sympathy, no Rachmones. Let us all hope and pray that we will all have Rachmones in the coming year so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day, and that we will have a happy and good year.

TREATING EVERYONE WITH CHESED

On the prayers in the Yomem Noroyeem, we do not end the Amidah with the words, "G-d, Who blesses His people with peace, with harmony," but, instead, we end with the word, "G-d, Who makes peace." One of the ways in which America differs from Europe is that in America, by and large, we do not feel that it is important to be intellectually consistent. In Europe, people will seek out a group of principles and try to live their lives according to these principles. In America, as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Consistency is the hobgoblin of little men's minds." In other words, in America we do not think that intellectual consistency is an important value. Look at Thomas Jefferson. He led the anti-slavery forces in the United States, and tried to get the Virginia legislature to pass a law banning slavery, yet, he owned slaves to the very end of his life. How is this possible?

The answer many historians give is because he was always teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. He knew that if he would free the slaves, he would go bankrupt, and he probably felt that he would then have no influence. To stay rich, to fight this battle from a high social position appeared more efficacious.

This is similar to what happened 30 years ago when so many people that I knew fought for integration, but, G-d forbid, minorities should buy a house next to them. They still believed in integration, but did not want their property values to drop. We also know about many people who believed wholeheartedly in integrated schools, and then sent their children to a private secular school, and we also know the cases of many presidents who speak as moral paradigms, but in private life are far from it.

Life is filled with conflicting principles. We all suffer from conflicting drives. It is difficult to reconcile them all. Judaism teaches us that we have to live with conflicting drives and aspirations, and somehow we must reconcile them all. Jews have a hard time remaining Jews in America because America is so similar to Judaism. First of all, in Judaism we recognize the fact that deed is more important than creed. If someone would get up right now and say, "Rabbi, I don't believe in this and this," we would all tell him to sit down, but if he would say, "I will not pay my dues," we would tell him to get out. In America we do not care what you believe as long as you obey the law. We also have a Torah in America; it is called the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Some will say, "But it violates the Bill of Rights." They consider the Bill of Rights like a piece of divine legislation. Certain Achronim wonder where America got these principles? Were some of their leaders Jews? America has its prophets: Thomas Jefferson; Thomas Paine; Abraham Lincoln. We even have kosher laws; we call them the Pure Food and Drug Administration. America also says that we can live with contradiction, not in the same way we do in Judaism, but, America is not too concerned about intellectual contradiction, except for maybe the Fundamentalists. Even modern science says we must learn to live with contradiction. How could light be both a particle and a wave? This drove Einstein crazy. He did not want to accept this, but in Judaism we deal with deeper forms of contradiction.

Today is called Yom Kippurim in Hebrew, which is plural. Why should this holiday be plural? Many rabbis answer because we are talking about Din, justice, and Chesed,

kindness, and these two principles are very hard to reconcile. How can you be both just and kind at the same time? On Yom Kippur, we read the Book of Jonah. Jonah was one of the few prophets in the whole Bible who was successful. He went to the city of Ninevah, and he asked them to repent, and they did. He did not want to go to the city of Ninevah. He did not want the people of Ninevah to repent. He tried as hard as he could to escape this task. Why? My father, of blessed memory, used to always give this interpretation, which our speaker a few days ago, Sholom Paul, reiterated.

What was Ninevah? Ninevah was the Nazi Germany of its time. Ninevah was the capitol of Assyria. Assyria had destroyed the Northern Kingdom killing millions of Jews, and it also destroyed much of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was only by a miracle that the Southern Kingdom was saved. Here, Jonah was asked to go to the Nazis of his day, to Berlin of 1944, to ask the people to repent so G-d would spare them. He did not want to go. As the text states, he knew G-d was a merciful G-d and he knew that if they would repent, G-d would forgive them, and he did not want G-d to forgive them. He was a proponent of strict justice. How could You forgive these murderers? Even to this day, many will not buy products from Germany and will not travel to Germany, and this is already more than 50 years after Nazi Germany fell. Jonah wanted the people to be punished. This is not just a problem of his day. What about Arafat and the terrorists? Look how much innocent blood they spilled in Israel. Do they really mean it when they say they will never do these things again, and if they do mean it, should they be forgiven? We have the conflict between Din, justice, and Chesed, kindness.

The rabbis also tell us that Yom Kippurim means a day like Purim, and, of course, we know that we must drink on Purim until we cannot tell the difference between Mordechai and Haman. You really do not have to drink too much not to tell the difference. After all, Haman was a good family man. He had ambition and talent. He was a faithful servant of the king. He was reliable, and what about Mordechai? Mordechai was a good family man. He had ambition and talent, and was a faithful servant of the king. What, then, was the difference between Haman and Mordechai? Haman used all his talents to destroy. He believed the Jews were the source of all evil. He felt he had to do justice, just as Hitler did. Hitler could have won World War Two if he would not have diverted so many resources to kill Jews, and, instead, would have sent ammunition and more soldiers to the eastern front. He could have defeated Russia. Hitler was a vegetarian. He did not play around with other men's wives. He loved animals. He did not take from the state, but he was an evil man. He, like Haman, believed Jews were the root of all evil, and if he could eliminate the Jews, he would bring joy and happiness to the world.

We say also in our prayer on Yom Kippur that this holiday is a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt. How is this holiday a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt? We know that on Yom Kippur we were forgiven for the sin of the golden calf. It means that on Yom Kippur, we remember the generation who left Egypt, and how G-d had to forgive them.

The rabbis also teach us that Haman was a descendant of Amalek, and Amalek was the nation who attacked the Jewish people after they left Egypt. We learn that as long as Moshe held up his hands, the Jewish people were victorious, but the moment Moshe

lowered his hands, they were not. One of the interpretations is that when Moshe lifted up his hands, it meant that he was telling G-d, "Look, G-d, we Jews are going to treat each other the way You treat us. You have forgiven us so many times. You have given us so many chances. You have always preferred Chesed, kindness, over Din, strict justice." That is the essence of Judaism: to always stress Chesed. That's what made Mordechai great, and that is what Jonah did not want to hear. He did not want the people of Ninevah to be forgiven, but on Yom Kippur, we come before G-d realizing that G-d wants us to act like He does toward us. He wants us to stress Chesed. He wants us to be forgiving and kind to each other. Look how many chances G-d gave Pharaoh, until eventually Pharaoh, according to most commentators, was swept away at the Red Sea. We should learn how to treat each other with kindness and forgiveness. We should be forgiving when someone asks to be forgiven in our family life and in our community and in our shul. Chesed should always reign supreme. How many times have I had to intervene in family disputes because this one was not talking to that one. I solved many disputes by telling them to say, "The Rabbi said I have to talk to you." This, of course, allows them to save face. How many times do marriages break up for silly reasons? Of course, if there is violence or apathy, perhaps divorce should happen. How many feuds occurred in our community because people stressed strict justice instead of mercy?

On this day of Yom Kippur, we should learn not to be so judgmental. We should open our hearts to loving kindness, and we should treat each other well, forgivingly, especially if the other party is asking for forgiveness in a contrite way.

I am reminded of the story about three shoachim who were sent from Israel to Paraguay. Israel does not have huge areas in which to raise cattle, and the Jews in Israel, like the Jewish in America, like to have meat on their tables, especially on Friday nights. These three shoachim were sent to a slaughtering house in Paraguay. Everything was going well. One day, however, they were in the freezer inspecting some meat when all of a sudden they heard the door clang behind them. They were not too worried because it was only 2:00 and the plant did not close until 5:00. 2:00 passed, 3:00 passed, 4:00 passed, 5:00 passed, and nobody came. They were starting to get blue and the oxygen was diminishing. They screamed and yelled, but nobody heard them. They finally took out their Book of Psalms and began to recite them. Pedro, the plant manager, had checked the plant and did not see anybody there, and went to the gate to close up. There at the gate was Golya, the security guard. It was reputed Golya was a Holocaust survivor, but he did not associate with Jews. His family was in no way Jewish. When Pedro came to lock the gate, Golya said, "Do me a favor. Check the plant again. I think there is somebody in it." Pedro thought he would humor Golya, so he said okay. He was rather surprised because Golya had never spoken up before. He looked the plant over and said, "Golya, there is no one there." Golya was frantic and said, "You have to look it over again, and I want to go with you." Pedro was taken aback. He never saw this mild-mannered man so agitated. He decided he would accede to his request. Golya went through the building like he was possessed. He searched every machine and opened every closet. Finally, they came to the freezer. He opened it and, sure enough, there were the three shoachim on the verge of frostbite, gasping for air. Taken to the hospital, they quickly recovered. Pedro turned to Golya and asked, "How did you know they were there?" He said, "Well, every morning when

they came to work, they would always talk to me and ask how my family was and how things were going and how did my children do in school, and when they would leave, they would always talk with me and ask me what kind of day I had, and what were my plans for the evening, etc. Today, they did not stop by." When the shoctim got out of the hospital, they came to Golyia to thank him for saving their lives. He looked at them and said, "But you saved me spiritually. Ich bin in Yid, I am a Jew."

On this holiday of Yom Kippur, we should always learn how to treat each other with Chesed. That's what we are asking G-d to do, and that is what G-d wants us to do. If during the past year, I have offended any of you or insulted any of you, I hope that you will forgive me. I hope that we will all be forgiving toward each other and practice only Chesed that we will truly merit a Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous New Year so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

PARENTS, LIGHTS & INSPIRATION

In a few moments, we will say yizkor. We will remember those who came before us, those whose lives are still shaping ours. Many times, we will ask ourselves, "What would our parents or grandparents think?" if we would do such and such. They continue to live in our hearts.

Last night, we all lit a candle in their memory. Last night, I mentioned that this holiday is also Yom Kippurim, plural, and I gave two examples for it: one, how on this holiday we learn to balance Chesed, kindness, and Din, strict justice; I also gave a second explanation that the rabbis elucidate that this day is Yom Kippur, a day like Purim. A third explanation says that on this day not only are the living judged, but also the dead. The rabbis teach us a person is a success in this life if he or she has raised good children who are following the path of Judaism and its ideals. It is true that we are supposed to develop our talents in this life, but it is not whether you are a lawyer or doctor or accountant or plumber or a millionaire which makes you successful in Judaism, but rather that you raised good children. That's why a child goes to the synagogue to say kaddish for his parents. After all, why should a person come to shul to say kaddish? In the kaddish, there is not one word about death. The reason a person comes to shul to say kaddish is that it signifies that his parent or relative was a great success. He or she had instilled in this child the values of Judaism, that this child wants to further these values.

What does the kaddish say anyway? That we are all working for the day when the world will be perfect. G-d, Who makes peace above will make peace below. It says that right will overcome might. A person who comes to say kaddish is demonstrating that he believes in the ideals of his parents. After all, we are links in the chain which started from Abraham and will go forward until the time of the Mashiach. We note with interest that the Social Security Office figures a person only has 35 years of working life -- between 20 and 65. We all are on this earth for a short period of time.

We are here today demonstrating that our parents were great successes because the tradition is alive in us. Our parents should be judged very favorably. Whether our children will come to shul on Yom Kippur after we are gone is another story. We hope they will demonstrate Judaism is continuing in our family for another generation. G-d has promised us that the Jewish people will always exist, but He did not promise us that every Jewish family that exists now will still be Jewish in the future.

Five times in Judaism do we light a candle. We light a candle for yahrzeit because candles stand for energy, for the soul, and that which animates others and ourselves. We know that from one candle, we can light 100 candles, and the original candle is not diminished in any way. That's why learning is compared to a candle. If you teach someone, you do not lose anything; you even gain. Your own knowledge acquires even more depth.

We light a candle on Shabbat to teach us the warmth and joy of our religion, how it spiritually uplifts us, how it causes families to get close, how it causes relationships to improve. I know many people have told me that when their parents gave up the Friday

night dinner, they really gave up on family.

We also light a candle at the end of Shabbat for Havdallah. We all know why we light a candle for Havdallah. G-d created Adam and Eve on Rosh Hashonna, they sinned on Rosh Hashonna, and G-d forgave them on Rosh Hashonna. That year, Rosh Hashonna came out on a Friday. G-d had told them that on the day they ate from the forbidden fruit, they would surely die, but they did not die. They lived another 930 years because G-d had forgiven them, all of which tells us that death was built into the universe. Even if they would not have eaten from the forbidden fruit, they would have died. G-d was merciful, though, and let them stay in the Garden of Eden through Shabbat. However, when Shabbat was over, He told them they had to leave. Adam complained bitterly and said, "I can't go. It is dark." G-d said, "I will give you a gift, the gift of fire by which you will be able to tame this new world and make it into a Garden of Eden." We did not have to steal fire from the gods, as Greek mythology says. G-d gave us fire. This is also the reason why we smell spices at Havdallah, to smell the aroma of the Garden of Eden so we can work to make our own world like a Garden of Eden. We must use our energy not only to spiritually elevate ourselves, which the Shabbat candle stands for, but also to develop our talents and perfect this world.

We also light a candle the night before Pesach when we search for chometz. We must constantly search our inner being to make sure we are doing things the right way. Many times, people will work for good causes, but will engage in terrible tactics. In Judaism, evil is good that bursts its bounds. That's why G-d destroyed the world with water, to teach us that although water is a good thing, too much can destroy. This applies to everything. A person who is too ambitious can end up doing all sorts of immoral things. We must constantly search our heads and listen to our conscience.

The fifth light we light on Chanukah. This teaches us that we must use our energy not only for ourselves, but for our people and for our community. Were it not for the Maccabees, we would not be here today. They sacrificed everything to help save the Jewish people. You know what their reward was? Each of them died an unnatural death: four of them in battle; and one was poisoned, but they saved the Jewish people. We must always direct our energies in positive ways.

We light the yahrzeit candle to remind us that our parents instilled in us certain values, that they taught us our Neshoma is pure. We all know the rabbis say that our Neshoma or soul is composed of two parts -- an intellectual part and an emotional part. The intellectual part we fill and fuel by learning Torah, and the emotional part we fill and fuel by giving each of us positive emotional Jewish experiences. If we do not, our soul will seek negative, emotional experiences. Have you noticed that when you are driving on the freeway and an accident occurs on the other side, the cars slow down? They want to see the accident. So much violence and deviant sex appear on television because people want emotional experiences. If they cannot get positive ones, they will take negative ones. If we are not given good food, we will settle for junk food. If we are not given positive, emotional experiences, we will settle for junk, emotional experiences. We must have a Shabbat. We must be able to fulfill our ambitions. We must listen to our conscience, and we must be there for our people and be willing to help them. This is what our parents taught us, and that is why we are here.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a young couple, Sally and Jim Goldberg. When their baby turned six months, they got the terrible news. Their baby had an auto immune disease, which would not allow her to withstand infection. She had a disease very similar to the one that the child who was known as the Bubble Baby had, and who was in Texas Children's for many years. The baby had suffered from diarrhea and was losing weight and was very sickly looking. They heard that there was a treatment for this child at the Sloan Kettering Institute in New York, but how could they get the baby there? They could not take the baby on a commercial airplane because she might catch a germ and die, and if she did not die, when she got to the hospital in New York, she would not be in any condition to have an operation. She needed a bone marrow transplant. They learned an organization flew babies to New York, but you had to get to Denver, and they were in Tucson. How could they get to Denver? Sally did not know what to do. She thought maybe she could call up a private airplane company and fly with her baby to Denver, and then take this special plane to New York. She called up one of the companies and found it would cost \$18,000 for her and her husband and baby to fly to Denver. She did not know what to do. They were just a young couple starting up. Her parents were dead, and his parents lived in Europe. She decided she would go to the airport and talk to the owners. Maybe they would let them pay it off. She took her favorite siddur. It had been her grandmother's, who had died when she was ten years old. Her grandmother had used this siddur every day and it was tear stained. Ever since she learned about her baby's condition, she had prayed every day from this siddur. Before that, she had only used it on Shabbat or special occasions. She automatically put the siddur in her purse as she had been doing now for the last month, and at every opportunity she would take it out and say a prayer. She went into the private air service office, and while waiting, took out her prayer book. When the co-owner of the business turned to her, her eyes fixed on the prayer book, which was open to the first page where Esther Young appeared.

Jamie and her husband, Sam, were the owners of this air service. Jamie grew suddenly pale and looked at Sally and said, "Did this prayer book belong to an Esther Young?" Sally said, "Yes." Jamie looked and said, "Esther Young was my grandmother." Sally gave a start. This was her cousin, Jamie. She had not seen her since she was eight years old at her grandmother's funeral. She looked at Sally and said, "Are you Sally Young? I am Jamie Levit. My father was Milton Levit." Sally gave a start and said, "Jamie, I have not seen you in years." Milton, her father, had left the fold and the family had not seen each other for years. Jamie looked at Sally and said, "I have not seen you in years. I want you to know I married a Jewish boy." They, of course, took the baby to Denver, and the baby flew to New York where she had a bone marrow transplant. Four months later, she came home and grew into a healthy, strong, beautiful baby. Thanks in part to the grandmother's siddur, the baby had a new start in life.

Our parents and grandparents are constantly giving us inspiration to make new starts. Let us hope and pray that we will always inspire our children when we are living so they will be better people and better Jews when we are gone, so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

CHANGING OUR FATE INTO DESTINY

AS A PEOPLE & AS AN INDIVIDUAL

On this day of Yom Kippur, we repeat the Unsane Tokef in which we talk about the coming year, and in which we speak about, "Who will live and who will die." We know that our fate for the coming year has been inscribed on Rosh Hashonna and will be sealed on Yom Kippur. We all pray for a new year of life, health, and good things for ourselves and for our people, Israel, and for the whole world.

We know that we, the Jewish people, no matter what we do, are going to be blamed by the world. Arafat starts riots, and the UN blames Israel. Why is it that we Jews are always given the short end of the stick?

There are three reasons, to my mind, why Israel is being blamed now. First of all, Jews get in the way. We Jews should not be around anymore. According to the Christians, we did everything we were supposed to 2000 years ago, and according to the Moslems, we did everything we were supposed to 1400 years ago. We should not be around. We are a nuisance. What are we doing in the world anyway? The Holocaust tried to eradicate us, and most of the other peoples of the world look at us askance. We just cause trouble. We should not be here.

The second reason is that people look upon Israel as a colony, and, according to most people, colonialism is the worst sin of the 20th century. I am not sure that all the people in Africa today feel that way, given the wars and diseases, etc., but I am not defending colonialism. Israel, though, is not a colony. She did not set out to enslave the Arabs or use them as cheap labor. In fact, Israel did not want to use Arab labor at all at the beginning. The Jews were returning to their own homeland. They were not intending to enslave another people, but, in many people's eyes, Israel should be destroyed, as have been all the other colonies.

Third, much of the world has a different view of suffering than we do. They believe that suffering brings you closer to G-d, and people who are suffering are, by the very act of their suffering, on a higher ground and are more holy. I still remember how in the 1980's, Billy Graham went to the Soviet Union. At that time, we Jews were moving heaven and earth to free our fellow Jews from communism. So many Jews were in the gulags. Billy Graham came to the Soviet Union, and did not say one word about the Baptists in the gulags. There were more Baptists in the gulags than Jews. The communists could not countenance an organized group who had allegiance to anything else than the communist party. Similarly, in China today, the Fulan are being persecuted; even though not a political group, they are an organized group whose members owe allegiance to it instead of primarily to the Communist Party. When Billy Graham was asked why he did not protest how the Baptists were being treated, he said something like, "Resist not evil." He felt their suffering would bring them closer to G-d, that they were in a special place. Eventually, their suffering would pass, and they would be the better for it. Their suffering did pass since communism fell, but I do not know if they were the better for it. We Jews have always believed that suffering is at best instructive, but never redemptive. Many times, suffering makes us much worse rather than better.

That's why we learn in the Book of Proverbs that a person endures two tests: extreme poverty and extreme riches. Poverty can so grind you down that you cannot make correct, moral decisions. Suffering does not always elevate. In fact, many times, it produces the opposite effect. In the Gemora Berochas, we learn how when a person suffers, he should examine himself to try to determine why. We are not always going to find out why. Suffering can be instructive. For example, we suffer pain so we should go to a doctor to cure the disease causing the pain. We Jews do not welcome suffering. We want to end it. That's our job -- to decrease suffering, to desanctify suffering, to end suffering. This explains why so many Jews become doctors. However, suffering is inevitable. Why G-d had to create a world in which there is suffering and pain and death, only He knows.

Why do we fast on Yom Kippur? Not to punish ourselves. G-d is not a cruel G-d. He does not take pleasure in our suffering. On Yom Kippur, we say, "And you shall afflict your souls," not, "And you shall afflict your bodies." We fast to allow us to concentrate on our spiritual side; to allow us to remember the unpleasantness of suffering, and also to remind us that we should try always to overcome our suffering, not to wallow in it.

On Yom Kippur when the Temple stood, Jews used to sacrifice two goats, which had to be identical. The goat pound for pound is probably the most beneficial animal for man. It produces milk and meat and hair and skins and horns. A goat, though, has two defects: It has an uncertain temper; and it many times stinks. This is similar to a human being. One goat was sacrificed on the altar, and the other goat was left free to roam in the desert until it eventually ran off a cliff.

Rabbi Soloveitchik teaches us life has two aspects: fate and destiny. We have no control over fate. We are each dealt a certain hand in life, but destiny is what we make of it. I had a friend of mine who was afflicted with a mild case of polio when he was young, but he worked so hard on the muscles of his legs, etc. that he eventually became an NBA basketball player. He had turned his fate into a positive destiny.

On Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur, we are, so to speak, dealt a fate, but we say, "Teshuva and Tefilah and Tzedakah Ma'Aveerim remove the evil decree." Actually, the word Ma'Aveer in Hebrew does not mean to remove; it means to transform, like you are crossing a river. We can transform our evil fate. All of us can choose how we are going to react to the fate that is given us. The word for fate in Hebrew is Goral, the same as casting lots, and in the Temple when they chose which goat would go on the altar and which goat would roam free, they cast lots. Notice that both goats died. We are all going to die. We are all going to suffer. Every doctor fails. No doctor has saved a person forever. Of course, it makes a difference whether you die at 22 or 122. Doctors do a great work, but, inevitably, we are all going to get sick and die, even if we are charitable, even if we are good people. A woman once came to me the day after Yom Kippur and said, "Rabbi, I'm never coming to shul again, I'm not keeping kosher anymore, and forget about the Jewish holidays." I asked what happened. She said, "Well, my father, who was a very pious man and always gave charity and helped everyone died the day after Yom Kippur." I asked how old her father was, and she said he was 98. I said, "Madam, we are not meant to live forever."

Even in the Unsane Tokef prayer we say, "Who will die in his time and who not in his time." G-d never promised us that we will live forever, and He never promised us that we will not suffer. He only promised us that we can transform the evil decree. We can make it into something positive. The goat sacrificed on the altar added holiness to life, elevated the people. The goat who ran free to die falling off a cliff added nothing to life. We are called upon to change our fate into destiny as an individual and as a people. Many times, we cannot understand what has happened to us.

In fact, we are going to read also tomorrow the Torah portion which begins with the words, "And it was after the death of the sons of Aaron." We know that Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, died when they offered strange fire to G-d. This happened on the day that Aaron was inaugurated as high priest, and it says that Aaron was silent. He was dealt a crushing blow. G-d rewarded him for his silence by speaking only to him and not to Moshe in the next Torah chapter. Aaron was hurting, but he did not scream out. He did not try to offer some lame intellectual reason for the suffering. Moshe tried to comfort him by saying, "Your sons must have been great, righteous people, otherwise why did G-d have to make an example of them?" Aaron was silent. He could not accept these arguments. Just like today, the best way to deal with the Holocaust is to be silent. He, though, knowing he could transform his fate into destiny, renewed his energy by becoming an outstanding leader of the Jewish people as their high priest.

What does Teshuva mean anyway? Teshuva means to turn. When you are hurting, you turn to others for help and to help them. There is another word in Hebrew for repent. It is called Charata. Teshuva means more than repent. It means to turn, to turn to others and to G-d. Tefilah means not just prayer, but also to be connected. The word for prayer in the sense of asking for something is Bakosho, and the word Tzedakah does not just mean charity. It means righteousness. It means to do personal deeds of kindness and money. If we do these things, we can transform our evil decrees into positive experiences. I know that recently a 52 year-old man, who was never sick a day in his life, got a terrible disease. Instead of reaching out to others, he became mean and cruel, chasing away his wife and children. Another person lost his business, and instead of figuring out what to do, blamed all his friends. That is not going to help him. He is not changing his fate into destiny. It reminds me of the story they tell about an airplane taxiing down the runway. The pilot turned the plane around and went back to the terminal. After two hours, the plane once again started taxiing down the runway. The steward got on the intercom and said, "The pilot detected something wrong with the engine, so we went back to the terminal, and it took us two hours to get another pilot." We must learn how to turn our fate into destiny.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Sara Leah, who was not afraid of dogs or people, until the Nazis came. She was raised in Warsaw. Her father was an electrical engineer, and also a composer, having composed the most beautiful of melodies. Her mother also worked and since Sara Leah was an only child, her parents got her a dog, a Great Dane. She loved that dog, and the dog loved her. Many times, she would roughhouse with the dog, named Motek; the dog would growl, but she knew how to talk to it and calm him down. Her father's music used to fill her head. It was so beautiful, especially one piece. Her father told her to remember this piece, and it would give her

courage. The Nazis invaded Poland and stuck them in a ghetto. They shot Motek, and she and her parents were sent to Maidanek. Her parents were gassed, and she was sent to Treblinka. While there, she happened to be near a group of inmates who were quarreling. A shot rang out from the guardhouse, and the bullet went through her thigh, even though she had nothing to do with the quarrel. She recovered from her wound, but was not able to regain her strength. She suffered from many other diseases. She was down to 80 pounds. Periodically, they had a selection. She knew one was coming up soon. The commandant of Treblinka had a big, black and white Great Dane, which used to roam the camp. She became friends with that dog, and the dog responded by licking her and playing with her. She knew how to talk to that dog. In fact, the dog would let her have some of its dog food, which was better than the food she had. Of course, if a guard caught her, he would have shot her. The day for the selection came. She was chosen for death. However, the dog saw her, and ran up, and licked her. The commandant saw this, and he called the selection officer, and she was sent to the side of life.

She survived, and came to America. Here, she met a wonderful man, Reuven, and got married. Unfortunately, she could not have children. She adopted a Latin American boy, whom she called Menachem. He was her sunshine, her comfort, and she raised the boy loving him all the time, but a funny thing happened. She could not remember her father's song, which had sustained her during all that terrible ordeal in Europe. Everything was going well until the year after Menachem's bar mitzvah. He developed terrible pains one night, and the doctor diagnosed a terrible kidney disease, and he would need a kidney transplant. She immediately volunteered to give one of her kidneys, but how could she? She was not the biological mother. They tested her anyway. He had type B blood. Only 8% of the population has type B blood, and her antigen count was perfect. Only an identical twin or maybe his real mother could be a better match. She willingly gave one of her kidneys to Menachem, and he grew and became an excellent student. After he graduated from Yeshiva University, he decided he would like to go on aliyah. She, too, decided that she and her husband would go on aliyah, too. A short time after he came to Israel, he met a beautiful girl who was majoring in music. They planned their wedding, and the girl asked Menachem if at the wedding they could play this beautiful music that had been rescued from the Warsaw ghetto. He said of course. Sara Leah was holding on one side of Menachem and Reuven the other as they marched down the aisle when all of a sudden, Sara Leah heard the beautiful music of her father. Sara Leah turned her fate into destiny. She never let go of her past, but she reached out to her future, and in Menachem she had a wonderful future, and the songs and spirit of her father filled her soul.

As we say yizkor on Yom Kippur. let us remember how our parents and grandparents turned their fate into destiny, and how no matter what the world throws at the Jewish people, we have always been able to change our fate into destiny and make wonderful and beautiful contributions to the world. Let us hope that as an individual and as a people, we will continue to do so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

COMING HOME & HOW TO CHANGE

OUR FATE INTO DESTINY

Last night, I talked about how we must change our fate to destiny. At the end of the Unsane Tokef prayer, to mention Ma'Aveirim Es Roah Hagazerah, does not mean to remove the evil decree but transform it. We must learn how to take all the challenges of life, all the problems that life throws at us, and turn them into positive rather than negative experiences.

Last night, I talked about the fact that we Jewish people have always been looked at askance, but, yet, we have still been able to turn our suffering, our persecution into a blessing, not only for ourselves but for all humanity.

In the Torah portion this morning, we read, "And G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they approached before G-d and they died." Why do we have to read this sentence on Yom Kippur? Indeed, why is this the introduction to the reading, that concerns primarily the services on Yom Kippur in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple? The high priest had to officiate at this service. The text says, "And G-d said to Moshe, 'Speak to Aaron, your brother, and he shall not come anytime into the holy place inside the curtain.'" It goes on later to say, "B'Zos, with this, Aaron will come." We know that Aaron had to make atonement three times: first for himself and his wife and household; then, for the sanctuary; and finally, for all the people of Israel.

The reason why I believe we learn about the death of Aaron's two oldest sons, Nodov and Avihu before we learn about the Yom Kippur service is because Nodov and Avihu exemplified all the ways we are not to act if we are to turn our fate into destiny, if we are to turn the cards that G-d gave us into positive experiences. They, according to the rabbis, were interested only in obtaining a spiritual experience for themselves. Some say they tried to achieve this experience through drugs or alcohol. They did not want to get married, they did not want to have children, and they said among themselves, "When will these old people die," referring to their uncle, Moshe, and father, Aaron, "so we can take over things and do things right?" They did not believe in process, feeling they could do what they wanted. Their way could only bring disaster, even if their motives were pure.

On Yom Kippur day, we also read at Mincha about all the people we can marry, and all the people we cannot marry. Why? To teach us that turning our fate into destiny is so much better if we are married. In fact, Yom Kippur was considered the day on which to announce engagements. Yom Kippur is considered a white fast, not a black fast, because it is filled with hope for the future. The way to turn your fate into destiny is to believe in the future, and marriage, and having children definitely signals a belief in the future.

The second quality to change your fate into destiny is we must accept responsibility. That's why we read about Jonah. Jonah wanted to evade his responsibilities. He did not want to do what he had to do because, primarily, he did not want Ninevah to be saved. Ninevah was the Nazi Germany of the day. It had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and killed hundreds of thousands of Jews; Jonah did not want G-d to

forgive them. He did not want them to do Teshuva, but he had to do what he knew eventually was his responsibility. He knew that in his heart of hearts Ninevah turning into a peaceful country would help not hurt, the Jewish people. We learn that to turn our fate into destiny, we must be attached to our family and to our people. That's why it says, "Blessed are You, G-d, King Who forgives and pardons our iniquities and the iniquities of His house, the people of Israel." We have two responsibilities -- to ourselves and to our people. You can be a good human being, but a bad Jew. You can give charity, but no charity to the Jewish people. You can help everyone but your own people. To turn our fate into destiny, we have to be proud of who we are. We have to have self-esteem, both as an individual and as a member of a group.

We learn that Aaron had to come B'Zos, with this, into the Tabernacle on Yom Kippur. The word Zos in Gematria adds up to 408. The Zion is 7, the Aleph is one, and the Tof is 400. We also know that Teshuva, Tefilah, and Tzedakah are referred to in the Machzor as Momon Kol Tzon. Each of these three words stands for 136, and three times 136 is 408, which means we must come before G-d on Yom Kippur with fasting, prayer, and giving of charity. However, the rabbis also say that to turn our fate into destiny, we have to give Zeman -- give time to our family and to our people and to our institutions. We have to give Ahava, love, again to our family and to our people and to our institutions. We have to give Terumah, material offerings, instruction and the benefit of our experiences to our family, to our institutions, and to our people. That's why Aaron had to make three atonements, bring three different sacrificial atonements. One for himself and his family; (by the way, if not married, he could not serve as the high priest, the powers that be always had a wife in waiting for him in case his present wife had a heart attack and died erev Yom Kippur: Family is so important in Judaism); one for the institution of the Temple, itself, that he fulfilled his responsibility to it; and, finally, for all the Jewish people. We have to be willing to give time to each of them. Some people will do anything for their children except give them time. We have to also be willing to give money to our institutions. So many people are not willing to give of their resources. We also must be willing to listen and respond to the needs of our people.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Golya. Golya was born in Salonika. Salonika was a Jewish city. It was populated by Jews who had escaped the Inquisition, and were invited by the Turkish sultan to come into the Ottoman Empire. It was such a Jewish city that everything was closed on Saturday, even the Christian and Moslem stores. The port closed on Saturday because all the stevedores were Jewish. The Nazis, unfortunately, destroyed the entire Jewish community, and there are hardly any Jews left today in Salonika. Israel is a small country, and they do not have the wide open spaces to raise cattle so, therefore, they have to import their meat, primarily from South America. Rabbi Benvenisti, who was born in Salonika, was one of three Shochtim sent to Paraguay to slaughter meat, freeze it, and send it to Israel. He was not only a qualified Shochait, but because his mother tongue was Ladino, he could easily understand and speak in Paraguay since Ladino is really Spanish with some Hebrew words thrown in.

One day, the three Shochtim went into the freezer. They closed the door, as they did every day, but something happened to the freezer door. It jammed and they could not get out. They were not worried since it was only 2:30 and someone would come open

the freezer before closing. However, nobody came, and it was now past 4:30 p.m. They were starting to turn blue. They knew they could not last the night. They took out their Book of Psalms and started to recite Psalms.

Meanwhile, the plant manager locked up the plant and came to Golya, the security guard at the entrance. He said, "Golya, lock the gate. Go home." Rumor had it that Golya was a Jew, but nobody knew for sure. He said, "I can't lock up." The manager asked why. Golya said, "Because the rabbis have not left yet. They are still in there." The manager, to humor him, went back and took a look. He came back a few minutes later and said nobody was in the plant, but Golya was insistent. The manager did not want to aggravate Golya, so he went back and looked again and found no one. When he came back, Golya again insisted they had to be there. This time, the plant manager got mad. He said, "You go look for them, but I'll only give you one try." Golya went to look for them, and the plant manager trailed behind. The plant was never inspected as it was that day. Finally, Golya came to the freezer, and opened it, and there were the three rabbis, trembling from the cold. They quickly came out, and were taken to the hospital for an examination. Golya went with them. After the examination, Rabbi Benvenisti turned to Golya and said, "I want to show you something," and he took out a picture from his wallet. He said, "This is a picture of all my cousins that was taken in Salonika and used to hang in Nona's house. Do you recognize that boy?" Golya gave a start. That was him and the Nona he was referring to was his grandmother. He looked at Rabbi Benvenisti and said, "You are my cousin. Where did you get that picture? I thought that you had died, that the Nazis had killed you." Rabbi Benvenisti said, "Nona gave me this picture to deliver to an aunt in Athens. The Nazis rounded up all the Jews in Salonika that day after I left." Golya turned to his cousin and said, "I remember that day well. I hid in a stove, and they did not find me. After the war, I decided I had enough of being Jewish and wanted to go as far away from Salonika as I could. That's how I ended up here. I am glad that you are better now. Do you think Nona would have been proud of me?" Rabbi Benvenisti looked at his cousin and said, "Golya, she would have been very proud." Golya then looked at him and said, "I want to come home."

Pretty soon we are going to say yizkor, and each of us is going to, so to speak, come home. We are going to remember the experiences we had in our parents' and grandparents' homes, and we are going to take strength from them, and we are going to go forward, hoping to give our children and grandchildren the same type of experiences we had so they will want to come home. May we all come home, by once again reaffirming our values by attaching ourselves to family, to our people, so that we will truly turn our fate into destiny and act in such a way that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

THE SUCCAH, INCLUSIVENESS &

SIMCHA

Today is the first day of Succot, and normally we would take a lulav and an esrog in our hands and shake it and march around the synagogue. However, today being Shabbat, we do not take the lulav and esrog. We understand that this is similar to why we do not blow the shofar on Rosh Hashonna -- fear of violating the prohibition against carrying on Yom Tov and Shabbat. The rabbis were afraid that someone would carry the lulav on Shabbat, although this is hard to understand since we have had an eruv since at least the time of Shlomo.

Rabbis have the power to negate a positive or a negative commandment. They cannot negate, though, a commandment which is both positive and negative. Shaking the lulav is only a positive commandment. Unlike the blowing of the shofar, the second day of Rosh Hashonna is considered to be on par with the first day of Rosh Hashonna. Since the ancient times, whether the first day of Rosh Hashonna would be the first day of Rosh Hashonna was doubtful. That depended on when the witnesses to the new moon would come. However, that the second day of Succot is not comparable to the first day of Succot was unquestioned. According to the Torah, we only have to shake the lulav on the first day of Succot outside of Jerusalem. Rabbis since the destruction of the Temple, made it mandatory for us to shake the lulav on all seven days of Succot. We understand that the rabbis do have the power to overturn a positive commandment of the Torah. However, why is it that they allow us to sit in the succah on the first day of Succot if the first day is a Shabbat? After all, we very likely would try to fix the succah on Shabbat. Some schach may fall off, and we may try to do a forbidden work to put it back on, or a piece might fall off, and we might be tempted to hammer it back. Why do the rabbis allow us to sit in the succah when it is Shabbat?

We all know that there are seven mitzvahs that are connected to Succot. There is the mitzvah of taking the four types in our hand: the lulav; the esrog; the hadas; and the arova. There is also the mitzvah of sitting in the succah. There is the mitzvah of bringing a korban hageega, a calling card sacrifice at the Temple, and there is also the mitzvah of rejoicing, the mitzvah of simcha. The rabbis tell us also that we greet seven guests, ushpeeseem, on Succot. We welcome Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Yosef, Moshe, Aaron, and Dovid. The rabbis compare Avraham to a lulav. Abraham was a beacon. He stood for hope. Against all odds, he believed. He and Sarah believed they would have a son, even though he was 100 and Sarah was 90. He believed that G-d would give his descendants the land of Canaan, even though he was forced to flee because of a famine. He and Sarah stood for hope. The rabbis tell us that the arova, the willow, stands for Yitzchak and Rifka. The willow is a different kind of tree. It grows by water, and it is indifferent to the vagaries of the weather. It draws its sustenance from a river or lake. Yitzchak and Rifka were not afraid of being different. After all, Rifka came from a home of idol worshippers and thieves, and she was different. Yitzchak, too, was inner directed and did not care what people thought. When he was confronted over the wells he dug, he just withdrew. He did not mind being different.

The hadas, or myrtle, stands for the eye. The rabbis say it also stands for Yaacov and Rochel. They stood for spirituality. Yaacov was a rich man in Mesopotamia, and he

could have grown richer, but he realized that by staying in Mesopotamia, he was endangering his children; and he was becoming more and more like Laban. Rochel and Leah urged him to leave. The eye stands for study, for spiritual things over material things.

The rabbis say that the succah stands for Yosef because the succah is all embracing. It is inclusive, just as Yosef was forgiving and inclusive and all embracing. He forgave his brothers, and he included all the nations of the world, especially Egypt, in his vision. He saved Egypt from famine and ruled her in a very benevolent way as viceroy.

The esrog, the rabbis say, stands for learning and good deeds. Of course, the greatest of all our teachers was Moshe, who was filled with good deeds and learning. Aaron was the high priest, and, therefore, he presided over the sacrifices, the chageega, or calling card sacrifice. When you came to the Temple at Succot, you had to bring a sacrifice, and say, "G-d I am here." King David exemplifies the seventh mitzvah, happiness. Dovid loved to sing and dance, and his Psalms today are the basis of most Jewish religious songs -- happy tunes, joyful tunes.

Shabbat encompasses five of these mitzvahs. After all, Shabbat is a symbol of hope. It is a taste of the world to come, so we do not need to take the lulav. We learn and do many mitzvahs on Shabbat so, therefore, we do not need to take the esrog. By observing Shabbat, we are proclaiming that the spiritual is more important than the material, so we do not need the hadas. Also, by observing Shabbat, we are proclaiming that we do not mind being different. The Romans and others castigated us and called us lazy because we would not work on Shabbat. Shabbat is full of ceremonies, so we do not need the chageega. We do need simcha, joy, and the succah, which stands for inclusiveness and forgiveness. Many people make Shabbat only for themselves. They are not interested in including others. They are not interested in forgiving others. We need the succah even on Shabbat. The values of the succah are not taught on Shabbat. We need the values of Yosef HaTzadek. He is the only one in the Torah who is known in our commentaries as HaTzadek. Noah is known as a Tzadek in his generation, but only Yosef is known as HaTzadek, a Tzadek for all generations. To be HaTzadek, we have to be inclusive and forgiving, as Yosef forgave his brothers. As we say in our prayer, "And cast over us Your succah of peace, Your succah of harmony." We also need simcha, inner joy, and happiness; joy that comes from knowing you have tried your best; a joy which comes because you know that G-d loves you and cares for you and is counting on you, despite the outer circumstances.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who came to a psychiatrist. He was in a terrible depression. The psychiatrist recognized this and said, "Tomorrow we are going to start therapy, but tonight I have two tickets for you to see a comedian called Cornelius. He will cheer you up." The man said, "No, no, no. I won't go." The doctor asked why, and the man replied, "Because I am Cornelius."

We need to have inner joy and happiness. Many times, people try to mask their depression by pretending to be happy and by always cracking jokes, but they do it in such a painful way you know that inside they are not happy. You can celebrate Shabbat, too, by gritting your teeth and making it a day of gloom. You do not violate

any of the Shabbat laws, but it is not Shabbat. The rabbis knew that if a person observes Shabbat, he immediately would be filled with hope. He would know that spirituality was more important than material things. He would not be afraid of being different. He would study Torah and do mitzvahs. He would be involved in many ceremonies, but it is not clear that he would be forgiving or inclusive or filled with simcha. Therefore, the rabbis do not ban our sitting in the succah on the first day of Succot when this day would be Shabbat. All of us are called upon to be forgiving and inclusive, as well as being happy on Succot. All of us are called upon to help G-d spread over us His succah of peace. Let us all hope and pray that we will all do so so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

REACHING OUT TO OTHERS & MAINTAINING OUR OWN SENSE OF SELF

Today, we are going to take the lulav and esrog and march around the synagogue saying, "Save us for Your sake, our G-d. Save us for Your sake, our Creator. Save us for Your sake, our Redeemer. Save us for Your sake, our Teacher." We all know to be a religious Jew, we have to believe in three things -- to be a Jew, one just has to be born of a Jewish mother or be converted according to the laws of Judaism. However, to want to practice Judaism, to be a religious Jew, we have to believe that G-d is our Creator; that G-d has power; that when we pray to Him, He can help us. It does not mean, however, that He will help us in every instance; He can help us if that fits in with His plans and scheme. Many Jews do not go to shul on a regular basis because they do not feel that G-d has any power. It does no good to pray to Him. He cannot help anyway.

The second thing that we must believe is that G-d wants to have a positive relationship with us. That's why He gave us the Torah, not to harm us or test us or destroy us, but to give us the tools we need so we can help Him perfect the world. A religious Jew also believes that G-d is our Redeemer, that He created us for a purpose, and that He wants us to help Him perfect the world. That's why so many Jews belong to do-good organizations.

We take the lulav and esrog. We march around the synagogue, and we say, "May these words of mine which I have prayed before G-d be close to G-d, our G-d, by day and by night that He bring about justice for His servant and justice for His people Israel, so that all the peoples of the world will know that G-d is G-d and there is no other." In other words, what we must do is enunciate these concepts. We must communicate them to ourselves and to G-d. It only by and through communication that we can really be G-d's partner in creation. In fact, the Targum defines man as a speaking animal. We are the only creature in the world who can enunciate abstract thoughts and values and concepts to each other. True, other animals may communicate, but they do not communicate in complicated language with abstract concepts, etc.

To be G-d's partner in creation, we have to learn how to communicate with each other properly. That is one of the underlying themes of Succot. We communicate in many ways. We communicate with our lips. That is, of course, what the willow, or arava, represents. We communicate with body language, and that is what the lulav represents. We communicate with our eyes, and that is what the hadas represents. How many times in a family does a parent just have to look at a child, and the child realizes he did the wrong thing? Or, in our day and age, how many abuse suits have been filed because someone claimed someone was staring at them wrong in the work place?

We also communicate with our hearts, by letting our emotions come to the fore. After all, most men will never propose to a woman unless they feel they are getting the right emotional response. I know many beautiful women who have never been proposed to because they subdue their emotions so much that no man is sure he has a good chance of getting a positive response to his proposal. Also, so many beautiful women

are never asked out on dates because the men fear rejection. She is too beautiful for them. Also, if you deliberate over who you think is a beautiful or handsome person, you soon come to realize physical characteristics do not make a person beautiful, but rather the energy and bounce and personality they display. Many times people with perfect features are thought to be ugly because they are passive and filled with depression. On the other hand, people with average features -- because they are so full of life and so spirited -- are thought to be beautiful.

We have to learn how to communicate well. So many times wives have come to me and said, "If my husband really loved me, he would know what I want." I have to tell them, "They cannot know what you want unless you tell them." You cannot assume they know what you want. You have to communicate openly and straightforwardly. You have to use all your means of communication: your mouth; your heart; your eyes; your body. People must be attentive to others to catch what they are trying to communicate.

We know that a succah has to be made a certain way. You have to make the sides before you put on the schach. This means that you have to have a sense of self before you can go out and learn from others, that before you can see the stars and the spirituality and other people's visions, you must know who you are. You must know your own traditions. You must have a sense of your own self, what your limitations are and what you can do. However, the sides of the succah need not be solid. They do not separate you from others completely. In fact, there is a concept called livud, which means the boards of the side, if not more than nine inches apart, are considered a solid wall. Also, if you have at least a little more than three feet of wall, the rest of the wall, even though empty for the next four feet, is considered as if it is all the way up to the schach. We also have a concept of the curved wall, that with an overhang of not more than six feet, the wall attached to this wall, is considered kosher for the succah. In other words, your sense of self should not be so self-centered that it prohibits you from communicating with others. It is communication which allows us to work together to be G-d's partners in creation.

We circle the synagogue telling G-d, "Help us for Your sake. Help us to communicate better, to cooperate better, so that we can do Your work." Too often, people become distraught and do not communicate well at all. Many times, we misinterpret what they mean because we take things out of context. One of education's purposes is to help us see things in all contexts. To be G-d's partner in creation, we must learn to always reach out to others, although we still must maintain our own sense of self so that we can communicate and make this world a better place.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who called up an emergency room and said, "Help me, my wife is having contractions every three minutes. What should I do?" The doctor said, "Is this her first child?" The man replied, "Idiot, I am her husband, not her first child. Tell me what to do." Communication sometimes is a tricky business. Let us all hope we will communicate well so that we will truly be effective partners of G-d in creation so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

JOY, BANISHING FEAR, UNITY & THE

SUCCAH

In the Gemora, we learn that there are no happier days than Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av, yet, they are not called Zeman Simchaseinu, the time of our rejoicing. Succot is known as Zeman Simchaseinu, the time of our rejoicing. How can the Gemora say that Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av are the most joyous holidays when Succot is known in the prayers as the time of our rejoicing? What's more, why in the Torah is Succot referred to as Chag Ladoshem, as a holiday for G-d, as G-d's holiday? No other holiday is referred to as G-d's holiday. Pesach is not referred to as G-d's holiday. Shavuot is not referred to as G-d's holiday. Neither are Rosh Hashonna or Yom Kippur. Why should Succot be referred to as G-d's holiday?

Also, why do we read the Haphtorah that we do on the first day of Succot? It is all about war, a terrible war that is going to come upon the land of Israel. G-d is going to intervene by causing a great earthquake that will destroy the enemies of Israel. This does not seem to be an appropriate Torah portion to read on a holiday of our great joy.

Perhaps we can understand the answers to these questions if we realize Succot as a holiday of G-d's protection. G-d has promised that He will always protect us and take care of us. That's why this is G-d's holiday, because G-d will and has -- throughout history -- displayed His great love for the Jewish people by making sure that they endure. The Romans are gone. The Babylonians are gone. The Greeks are gone, but we are still here. However, there is one caveat: We must be united if G-d is going to give us His full protection. Otherwise, He will see to it that we survive, but He will not give us His full protection.

That is one of the major meanings of the succah. The succah is inclusive. It includes all Jews. All Jews can fulfill the mitzvah of succah together by just being in the succah. We say always in our prayer, "Ufros Succas Shlomecha -- and you shall cast your succah of peace over all the people." Succot is a social holiday. It brings us together, and if we are not together, and if we are not showing respect to each other, then G-d removes part of His protection. That's what happened during the siege of the Romans 2000 years ago. Jews were fighting among themselves. There were the Sicurai, those who went with their swords and assassinated those who did not agree with them. Jewish militias were also clashing in Jerusalem. G-d said unless the Jewish people are united, I cannot give them My full protection.

That's also the meaning of the lulav and esrog. We know that one of the meanings of the esrog refers to Jews who have Torah and mitzvahs, and it looks like a heart because, in addition to Torah and mitzvahs, Jews must have empathy. The lulav stands for those Jews who have Torah but few mitzvahs. The lulav has a taste but no smell. An individual learns Torah and tastes it for himself, but he does not spread around mitzvahs. The myrtle stands for those people who have mitzvahs but little Torah. Of interest note, the gematria of hadas is 69, while the gematria of lulav is 68, which seems to imply that to have a person who does mitzvahs and has little learning is better than to have a person who has a lot of learning but few mitzvahs. The willow stands for people who have neither learning nor mitzvahs. We hold them all together

and shake them all together, again as a sign of Jewish unity.

The succah, the rabbis teach us, represents not just the physical succah that the Jewish people built in the desert, but also the clouds of glory that protected the Jewish people. These clouds of glory protected everyone who wanted to stay within them, even the Danites, who were still idol worshippers, and the mixed multitude. G-d rejoices on this holiday because He wants to protect all the Jewish people, but He needs them to be united.

Today in Israel, Arafat and his group have shown their true colors. They want to kill Jews. They learned the wrong lesson from Israel's pull back in Lebanon. They think that if they can inflict heavy casualties on Israel, Israel will cave in and they will rule everything. They do not want Israel to exist. People should not be surprised by this. They should not be surprised by the stand the Israeli Arabs took. These are proud Arabs who do not want Jews there either. The Arabs cannot believe that the cowardly, dirty, slovenly Jews could have ever beaten them. It must have been American soldiers or British soldiers. Their self-image is at stake. Their manhood is at stake. Many Jews think they could be bought off by a job or fancy house, but this is absurd. Most wars and most fights within families or institutions have nothing to do with money. In fact, if money were the sole determinant, there would be no divorces. Divorce usually impoverishes both the husband and the wife, the wife more so.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man whose lawyer called and said, "I have good news and bad news. What do you want to hear first?" The man replied, "Tell me the good news first." The lawyer said, "Your wife found a picture that is worth half a million dollars." The man said, "Wonderful! What's the bad news?" The lawyer replied, "It's a picture of you and your secretary."

I know a man who made five fortunes, and lost them because he got divorced. I was often amazed why he bothered to get married. People fight because they feel they have been betrayed or their self-image is at stake, or they feel they have not been treated with sufficient respect, etc. Money is way down the list.

The holiday of Succot is truly our time of rejoicing because we are not afraid. We know G-d will protect us. It is the holiday which banishes fear. Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av have to do with individual events in a person's life which cause happiness, like marriage. On Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av, marriages were announced, and on Yom Kippur we know we have a fresh start. That's why everything is white. It is a holiday of personal joy, but it is not a holiday which banishes fear. Succot is a holiday which banishes fear, and, therefore, it is called Zeman Simchaseinu. The Talmud teaches us that three things enlarge a person's spirit: a beautiful home; a beautiful wife; and beautiful furniture. This really talks to self-esteem and the future, but notice it uses the expression "enlarge a person's spirit." It does not cause them to rejoice. When we take the lulav and esrog and march around the synagogue, we know that G-d will help us as long as we are unified.

Let us all hope and pray that in this time of crisis in Israel, that the Jewish people there will be unified so that G-d will protect us, fully, and that we, by living this united life, deserve to have the Mashiach come quickly in our day. Amen.

REBUILDING

In the benching the grace after meals, we have a special insertion for Succot which asks G-d to erect once again the succah of David that fell. This refers to the Temple. Why should the Temple be referred to as a succah? After all, it was a permanent structure. Secondly, why was it referred to as the succah of David? David did not build the Temple; Solomon, his son, did. Also, when we circle the synagogue with the lulav and esrog, we say the expression of which no one seems to know the meaning, "Anee Voho." Rabbis argue as to what this means. Rabbi Yeshmoel says, based on the verse, "This is my G-d V'Anvayhu and I will beatify Him," this refers to the decorations of the succah. Rabbi Abashoel says that this does not refer to the beautiful exterior of the Temple, but it refers to the qualities that we must have if we are to have a successful Temple. It says V'Ani V'huvayhu, which in Hebrew means "I and he", which Abba Shaul says means that just as G-d is merciful, I must be merciful, that just as G-d is compassionate, I must be compassionate. In other words, he said that it is not the exterior of a temple or synagogue which makes it a house of worship, but the qualities within it that make it pleasing to G-d.

We know that a Jewish house of worship is different than most other houses of worship in that the other houses of worship try to create a heaven on earth. They try to create a place where people can go to feel the joy and happiness of what will be in the future life. They, so to speak, are transported to heaven. They stand in awe of such a place because they know that in the rest of the earth there cannot be such a place.

In Judaism, though, religion is not an aesthetic experience. True, to have a beautiful place to worship is nice, but not essential. It is not a prerequisite for successful worship. What we try to do in our world is bring G-d down to assist in helping us solve our problems here and now. We do not want to be transported to heaven. We want G-d to come down and help us here. That's why the direction of prayer is from the people up, while in most other houses of worship, the direction of the prayer is from the altar down. What is important in Jewish prayer is that we have Jewish dreams, Jewish aspirations that we want to realize in this world; we need G-d's help to do these things because we believe that this is also G-d's dream. We know that many times our houses of worship will be destroyed or moved, but the dream will continue. Even our Temple in Jerusalem was not permanent. It was like a succah.

Why is this called the succah of David? Because David had the dream. He was not allowed to build the Temple because, as the Tenach said, he had too much blood on his hands fighting for the Jewish people in defensive wars; the second reason given is, when a famine struck, he would not use the money he had collected to build the Temple to alleviate the famine. He had a dream, and he transmitted this dream to Solomon. Therefore, it was still his dream. Jewish life has its ups and downs. Look at all the synagogues that have been destroyed throughout the ages, but the Jewish dream continues, and new synagogues are built. There was only one Temple site, and eventually the Temple will be built. We do not know when, but it will be. It may take another 1000 years, but it will be built. The dream exists. We know that our synagogues are important, but they are temporary mostly. I remember the synagogue

with 1250 seats in Seattle where I grew up. It was built in the Moorish style, and was beautiful. Now it is a community center. The neighborhood has changed. The dream stayed even though the buildings may come and went.

The Jewish dream of universal peace has now been adopted by the world. The words from Isaiah are on the building of the United Nations, although still, peace does not reign in the world. To realize dreams takes a long time, and a lot of effort and a lot of different types of people. To build the Temple took not only the dream of David, but the actual construction by his son, Solomon.

On Succot, we invited the Ushpeezim. We invite into our succah Abraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Yosef, Moshe, Aaron, and Dovid. The Medrash teaches us that there are seven groups of righteous people. It takes many types of people to keep the dream alive. One is like the sun, one like the moon, one like the lightning, one like the atmosphere, one like the stars, one like the menorah in the Temple. Another is like the rose. Avraham was like the sun. He was a beacon, with wonderful and fresh ideas. Yitzchak was like the moon. He reflected these ideals. He did not add too much to these ideals, but he preserved them in dark times. Yaacov refracted the light, like the atmosphere does. He had so many troubles, yet he could still see the light, even though it was refracted by his many problems. Yosef was like a streak of lightning. He saw things were changing, and he was able to adapt Judaism's teachings to a new culture without sacrificing the Halacha. He met great opposition, just like today. There was opposition to using English from the pulpit, although now the Artscroll uses English all the time; to educating women; etc. Moshe was like the stars. He gave us Jewish learning, which is always there. The stars are always there, though we have to make an effort to see them sometimes. Aaron stood for the light of tradition and ceremony, and Dovid stood for the rose, which blooms among the thorns. It gives off so much beauty, even though so much pain is involved, too. Dovid suffered much of his life, yet, he composed the beautiful Psalms. Despite his pain and suffering, he prevailed. Yes, it is correct to say, "And G-d, He shall re-erect the succah of David that has fallen," because the important thing is the dream. Though to have a nice place to pray is pleasant, though as Rabbi Ishmael said, it should be decorated beautifully like our synagogue now; though Abba Shaul said it has to reflect compassion and kindness if it is to be worth anything; and even though Rabbi Yosef said it should be a combination of both, it is only temporary. The important thing is the dream. If you have the dream it can be rebuilt.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man in Boston who was caught selling eternal youth pills. He was brought to the police station. They found he had a previous record. He had been arrested in 1632, in 1745, and 1848.

Our synagogues have been rebuilt all over the world, even though they have been burned down, as it happened today in France and Brussels and Syracuse, our dreams will never be destroyed. The succah of David will one day be erected in Yerushalayim. When, we do not know, but as long as we dream the dream, our synagogues will flourish, and the Mashiach will come, and then the Temple will surely be rebuilt. Amen.

LOVE, THE LITTLE THINGS & A GOOD

HEART

In a few moments, we will say yizkor. We will remember those who came before us who shaped and molded our lives. In the Sephardic tradition, yizkor is only said on Yom Kippur. Among Ashkenazi Jews, yizkor is said four times a year -- not only on Yom Kippur, but also on Pesach, Shavuot, and Shemini Atzeres. We can understand how this custom came about: When the crusaders and their mob of enthusiasts swept down the Rhine and throughout Europe on their way to Israel, destroying one Jewish community after another. Because of the terrible slaughter, Av Harachameem came into our prayer book as well as Oleinu. The Oleinu was the Ani Ma-amim of that generation. Just as the Jews during the Holocaust went to the gas chambers singing Ani Ma-amim, the Jews of the Crusades went to their deaths singing Oleinu. The universal custom of saying kaddish in shul for eleven months for parents and 30 days for other relatives, actually sprang up, too, from the Crusades. Before that, kaddish was only said at the burial.

We can understand why Ashkenazic Jewry felt the need to say kaddish at the holidays. They missed their families. Their families were not complete. They wanted to feel their family's presence with them at this happy occasion. It was very important to them to know that their loved ones were with them in spirit, if not in body. However, why is it that we say kaddish on Shemini Atzeres and not on the first days of Succot? We could do it on the second day of Succot or on Hoshana Rabbah. Why do we do it on Shemini Atzeres? Also, why is this holiday called Shemini Chag Atzeres, which means Shemini, the eighth, the holiday of assembly? Why isn't it called Chag Shemini Atzeres, the holiday of the eighth day of assembly?

We all know that we live in six dimensions -- north, east, west, south, up, and down. We also know that the number seven stands for holiness. The seventh day of the week is Shabbat, and in the seventh month of the year we have all the holidays. This holiness we create in partnership with G-d. However, eight in Hebrew stands for G-d's gifts to us, G-d's gifts of love and compassion and devotion. G-d gives us this gift of love, and we have to take advantage of it. The holiday of Shemini Atzeres is a holiday of love. G-d is telling us, "Stay one more day." During Succot, we pray for the 70 nations of the world, but on this day G-d says, "You have done your job. Stay with Me one more day." It is like a wedding. All the guests come, enjoy themselves, and then leave, but family members usually stay another day or two. They attend a Sheva Brochas or maybe two before going home. You linger a bit longer with someone you love. You do not want to leave so quickly. This is a holiday of love, and on this holiday, G-d is showing us His gift of love, love which comes from the heart. It does not have to be expressed in any physical way. Just a person's presence brings it out. How do we get this love? When we gather together as families, as communities. This is Shemini, the great gift of love where one heart touches another. We do it on this holiday when we assemble.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Chaim Goldberg. Chaim was 18, a student in Flatbush Yeshiva, a wonderful boy with such a fine character. He won the Baal Midas Award. He was an excellent student and did so many wonderful things for everybody.

One day, the school asked him to deliver some papers for the absent students of that day. The students would need them for the next day. He readily agreed. He got in his car and just a few blocks from school, a drunken driver driving a huge truck rammed into him. He was rushed to the hospital, but it appeared hopeless. His aunt was a nurse at the hospital. She looked at her sister and said, "We are going to have to make arrangements for organ transplants."

Leonard Shapiro was a successful dentist in Westchester County. He came from a very secular Jewish family and did not even have a bar mitzvah. He was married and the father of three children. He was also a health nut. He believed in jogging. His father had died from a heart attack when he was 50, and he was determined to beat his genetic makeup. He was 39 years old. One morning, while out jogging, he approached a gentle hill that he had many times run up without even catching his breath. This time, though, he collapsed. He was rushed to the hospital suffering from critical heart failure. He went from one hospital to another. Finally, they told him the only way his life could be saved was to receive a heart transplant.

His brother came bursting into his room. "They found a heart for you," he blurted out. He was operated on, and Chaim Goldberg's heart was placed in his chest. At the beginning, he had some problems. The body wanted to reject the organ, but after a few weeks, his condition stabilized. Meanwhile, it was a policy of the hospital and of most transplant organizations that the donor's family and the recipient's family do not know each other. A television crew happened to come by the hospital since transplants were relatively new at that time to interview the family. As one of the crew members left, he told Leonard's brother, "You know, your brother got a wonderful heart, a heart from an 18 year old." Leonard's brother put two and two together, and surmised that the heart must have been Chaim Goldberg's since the radio and television and newspapers had all played up how Chaim Goldberg was killed by a drunk driver.

Leonard recovered. He no longer now could practice dentistry since his hand shook. However, he got a job with the school of dentistry instructing future dentists. One day, he announced to his class that he was buying a new car, and that if anybody was interested, he would sell him his old cadillac cheap. One of his graduate students, Shmuel Bernstein, came up after class and said, "I'm interested in your car. Would you sell it to me?" They agreed on a price, and Shmuel said, "Drive me to my house in the Flatbush area, and I'll give you the money." Leonard got in the car and drove near the Flatbush Yeshiva. He made an offhand comment to Shmuel saying, "You know, the boy whose heart I have lived around here." Shmuel turned white, and uttered a cry. "Oh, my G-d, you have Chaim Goldberg's heart, my little brother's best friend." When they came to Shmuel's house, Leonard came in and Shmuel told his mother about Leonard. Shmuel's mother was the secretary of the school, and she told Leonard all about Chaim, how he used to take her home every day, only the day he was killed she had asked him to deliver some papers for the school to some absent students. She told him what a wonderful boy he was, what a good heart he had, how he related so well to everyone. She concluded by saying, "Leonard, you have a wonderful heart." She then gave Leonard the phone number of Chaim's parents.

Leonard decided to call them. They arranged to meet in the organ transplant office of

the hospital. Leonard came with his wife and children, and Sally and Ben Goldberg came with their children except for two of the girls who refused to come. They talked and hit it off immediately. In fact, one of Chaim Goldberg's sisters put her head on Leonard's chest just to hear her brother's heart. The Goldbergs were gracious and said, "At least Chaim's heart is still working and helping other people." They became good friends, and Leonard drew closer to Judaism. Leonard came to the Goldberg house and saw a Friday night dinner; he was with them for holiday celebrations, and he, himself, was becoming a better man. He had always been testy and sometimes aloof, but now he was so much more giving and empathetic. Even his wife commented on this. Finally, the day for the trial came when the drunk driver was to be tried. Leonard knew, of course, that he had to go.

He stayed with the Goldberg family throughout the trial. The man was convicted and sent to prison. After the trial, Leonard looked at the family and said, "Everyone is suffering here. A man got sent to jail, you lost a son, only I am benefitting. How is that fair?" Sally Goldberg said, "Don't feel that way. We don't know why G-d chose to have Chaim's life taken at such an early age, but we do know that you are doing so much good work. We are glad that you have his heart. We, of course, would rather he had lived, but if he is gone, it is good that you have his heart. Remember, when someone is loved, they are never lost." Leonard thanked them. He owed them so much. He said, "You have not only given me my physical life, but also my spiritual life. I am so much a better person now. Just know you has made me a better person." He went home and purchased a jewelry box, and on it he put the phrase, "When someone is loved, they are never lost," and he included in it a present for all the family.

When someone is loved, they are never lost. Our parents are not lost, our relatives are not lost. They are in our hearts forever. There is so much love that went between us. It is just like the holiday of Shemini Atzeres. It is the little things which count. On this holiday, we bring only one sacrifice, not 70 like on Succot, to emphasize that it is the little things which we do for each other which cause bonds to develop; which allow our hearts to feel the joy and happiness of another person's heart, the love which comes from being with each other, from remembering the many happy times and even difficult times we have spent together.

May we all remember to give of our hearts to our family and friends. If we will do so, we will create enduring bonds which will last forever and which will always be a source of strength to us and our families. May we establish these bonds so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

THE AROVA, FIVE THINGS & MERCY

Shemini Atzeres is the culmination of the High Holiday season. It is interesting to note that it is called Shemini Chag HaAtzeres, not Chag Shemini Atzeres. Chag means holiday. We call the other holidays Chag HaPesach, the holiday of Passover; Chag HaShavuot, the holiday of Shavuot; Chag HaSuccot, the holiday of Succot, but Shemini Atzeres we call Shemini Chag HaAtzeres. Why should be this so?

What's more, on Shemini Atzeres, we pray for rain. During all of Succot, we, when the Temple stood, poured water on the altar for rain, and on Hoshanna Rabbah, the day before Shemini Atzeres, we beat the willow five times on the ground, again imploring for rain. Why should we beat the arovas to get rain? Why is this necessary to do before Shemini Atzeres, in which we officially through words and prayer ask for rain?

The Kaballah teaches us that the willows, because they grow by water, are compared to Chesed, kindness and compassion, while the earth is compared to Din, or judgment. The willow tree bends and sways, but the earth is unyielding. Before, in the olden days, it had to rain hard so the people could plow the earth. They did not have the steel plows we have today. Rain is the symbol of mercy, and the earth is the symbol of judgment, and we bang the willows on the earth, or on things attached to the earth, to remind G-d to have mercy in His judgment so that we will be blessed with abundant rain. In the olden days, if there was no rain in Israel, people would actually starve to death because nothing would grow. We bang the willows five times. Why five times?

We all know that each of the parts of the lulav and esrog stand for a different type of Jew. We know that the esrog stands for a Jew who has Torah and mitzvahs. It is shaped in the form of a heart to teach us that a Jew needs more than Torah and mitzvahs; he also needs sympathy and empathy. The lulav stands for a Jew who has learned much Torah but does not have too many mitzvahs. The lulav, when cooked, tastes good but has no fragrance. The hadas stands for a Jew who has many mitzvahs but little Torah. The hadas has fragrance but no taste. When a person does mitzvahs, he spreads goodness around. It is interesting to note that the Gematria of lulav is 68, and the Gematria of hadas is 69, which seems to imply that doing mitzvahs is on a higher level than just learning Torah. The arova stands for those Jews who have little learning and do few mitzvahs. Why should we choose to bang the arovas five times? True, we take parts of the leaves of the palm and bind the other two species to the palm with it to indicate that the ideals of the Torah bind us together. However, why should we choose the willow to bang five times if it represents Jews who have no learning and few mitzvahs? After all, how is this going to arouse G-d's mercy? And, again, why fives times?

To me, the reason for the five times is because five holidays precede the banging of the lulav: Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashonna, Yom Kippur, and Succot. This common Jew knows five things, and it is because he knows these five things that G-d's mercy will be invoked. There has always been a conflict between the rabbis and the masses, who were not educated. In fact, in the Talmud, some very strong statements appear about these Jews who have little learning. I hesitate to mention them because they are so strong, but the conflict was there, and it will always be there. However, it is from these

semiliterate Jews that new rabbis spring and from whom inspiring Jews come.

We all know today about the Baal Teshuva movement. We should never disparage these Jews. Instead, we should reach out to them because they know five things which are very important. They hate to be told that they are not Jews. They want to be Jewish. They just do not always want to listen to the rabbis. In fact, I know that when I visited Israel, someone told me, "I love Judaism, but I hate the rabbis." I said I was a rabbi, and he said, "Well, you're different." I know in our own community, when there was a fight about who was a Jew, they wanted to cut all funding to our day school and the Torah Day School. I had a terrible fight. They did cut 25%, but not all, thank G-d. They were mad because they were told they were not really Jews. These Jews know five things, and as long as they know these five things, they can contribute mightily to our people.

The first thing they know is that Jews have to be free; that unless Jews are free, they have great difficulty keeping any mitzvahs. That's why they are all Zionists. Two, they know that Jews have a Torah, which they revere. They do not know too much about the Torah, and sometimes they treat it like a museum piece, but they know a Torah exists. Three, they know that they are accountable for their actions. They believe in the principle of Rosh Hashonna, that they have to do good things and give Tzedakah. Four, they know that they have to forgive others and accept forgiveness themselves. Five, they know about Succot. They know we need G-d's protection. They know about anti-Semitism. Because they know these five things, that Jews have to be free, that there is a Torah, that we are accountable, that we need to forgive and be forgiven, and that there is anti-Semitism, they deserve to be invoked so G-d should have mercy on us.

That's why we bang the arova five times. This is similar to rain itself. Water vapors go up from the oceans to the heavens, and then fall down on the earth. From these people can come great Jewish leaders or individuals who do particular acts of kindness, even though they are lacking in learning and mitzvahs.

I am reminded of the story of Reb Yosef Berel. He headed a yeshiva. He was known as a Masmid. He studied continuously and expected all his students to study continuously. He hardly ever gave them time off. Even during the summer, he barely gave them two weeks. The news came to his yeshiva that Tom Richmond had died. He gathered his students and said, "We are going to Tom Richmond's funeral." The yeshiva boys were all astounded. After all, Tom Richmond had not been their friend. Tom Richmond was a member of the state legislature. He was a Jew who believed in strict separation of church and state, and he fought giving any money to the yeshiva for computers or buses or secular tutoring, which other people thought was okay. The boys were astounded that Rabbi Yosef Berel would want to go to his funeral, especially since when another great Rosh Yeshiva in town had died, the rabbi told his students to stay learning while he would go to the funeral. It is true that Rabbi Yosef Berel had told his students that they should not be too upset with Tom Richmond. After all, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein agreed with him; he did not want the government to interfere with anything having to do with religion. He did not want the government to interfere with abortion laws. While Rabbi Moshe Feinstein did not believe in abortion on demand,

only if there was a reason for it, he knew that Jewish law demanded that the mother's life always come first. He was afraid government interference, would result in legislation that the child had preference over the mother, and that is against Jewish law. He remembered in Russia where the government interfered in everything, and he did not want it here. He also did not want the government to interfere in religious education. He did not want the yeshivas to take money from the government. In this instance, Rabbi Yosef Berel did not agree with Rabbi Moshe Feinstein.

The boys could not understand why he wanted them to go to Tom Richmond's funeral. Rabbi Yosef Berel told the boys, "Let me tell you a story. When Tom Richmond was 17 years old, he received a letter which told him that he inherited a lot of money. It also informed him that the woman he thought was his mother was not his mother, that his real mother was a Jewish woman who was his father's secretary. She had become pregnant and kept Tom for the first two and a half years of his life. She had taught him the Shema, but keeping him became too hard. She and her boss decided that he would adopt the baby. Perhaps he was the real father. He did, and raised Tom as an Episcopalian. Tom did not know he was Jewish. The only condition in his real mother's will was that he would say the Shema every day. For some reason, Tom had remembered the Shema, and every once in a while had said it. He did not know what to do. He turned 18 in 1941, and after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the army. He was sent to Europe, and there he stayed for the duration of the war. At the end of 1945, before he was released, he heard that many Jewish children had been placed in nunneries and cared for by the nuns. They had saved these children, but after the war they would not let them return to be Jews unless someone could prove that they were really Jews. Tom meanwhile had decided to return to his Judaism, not all the way, but he no longer considered himself Episcopalian. When he heard about what was happening in these nunneries, it touched his heart. He visited them all in his area, and began by calling out the Shema Yisroel as he walked through the halls. Children flooded around him. They, too, were saying the Shema Yisroel, thus proving their Judaism. He saved hundreds of Jewish children. Tom, after the war, came home and married a girl from a reform Jewish family. He attended temple on the High Holidays and special occasions, and identified as a Jew. He had even given Rabbi Yosef Berel money for his yeshiva, even though he staunchly opposed the government giving him money."

The boys all looked at Rabbi Yosef Berel and said, "That is a very nice story, but why should we go to the funeral?" Rabbi Yosef Berel said, "I was one of the children that Tom Richmond saved. Boys, we are all going to the funeral."

On Shemini Atzeres, we pray for rain, and just as rain draws its sustenance from one place and deposits it in another, so, too, we never know from where the great leaders of the Jewish people will come. We must reach out to all Jews. Many of us here came from families who, too, only knew five things. They were good Jews, and even though we may be doing more mitzvahs than they, we should always recognize that they stood up to be recognized as Jews. We should never look down our nose on any Jew. Just as we ask G-d to remember them because they know five things and have mercy, we should also look at them and remember that they, too, have made a contribution by having children who remained Jews.

May G-d have mercy on us all in the coming year, and may we all enjoy good health and good things, and especially may there be peace in Israel because of the merit of all those who have come before us, all those who are symbolized by the lulav and by the esrog. May we, by so doing, see the Mashiach come quickly in our day. Amen.