

Eitan Urkowitz

Bar Mitzvah Speech

Shabbat Shalom

Birshut harav

This morning I read from two Torahs, the first one Parshat Vayikra, which was the Torah reading for the week, and a part of the annual cycle to finish the entire Torah reading in one year.

The second one was a special Torah reading associated with Shabbat Zachor, which always occurs the Shabbat before Purim. This second Torah reading was chosen because it speaks about the surprise and vicious attack on the Jews by the nation of Amalek, just after the Jews had left Egypt in the time of Moshe. As a result,

living in Persia and Media during the period between the two Batei Mikdash, the two Temples. And the attempt by the wicked Haman, to destroy the Jewish people, until the Jews were saved by Queen Esther and her ^{relative} ~~uncle~~-Mordechai.

Each of these three readings has its own obligations which are tied to it, and I would like to discuss some of the similarities and differences between them.

For example, about a year and a half ago, when Tropical Storm Allison hit, I looked out the ^{several} window^s o'clock that morning and we saw a river between our house and the one across the street. We figured we would be staying in because it would be impossible to get to shul. But about an hour later, the water went down and we got ready to go to shul. However when we got to ~~the~~

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The answer is that ~~the~~ next week we would have had to read the Torah reading for the week which was missed and for the next week.

The reason for this is that there is an obligation for the public to have a continuous Torah reading, without interruption.

In Hebrew this is known as a ^{חובת} ~~חובת~~ ^{צרכ}. So that if a person is

sick one Shabbat and cannot make it to shul, he does not have to make up the Torah reading, because the Torah was still read in the shul for other people. The obligation for the individual to hear the Torah reading every Shabbat morning, or on Monday and Thursday mornings is called a ~~חובת~~ ^{חובת} ~~יחיד~~ ^{יחיד}.

closed and everyone would go to the synagogue for Torah reading.

This may be understood as follows: that the people did not go to the synagogue for davening, because there is no obligation for an individual to daven prior to the time of the burial. There is no

חובת יחיד. Rather they went to the synagogue for the Torah reading because the mourning which they were practicing does not override the public obligation to read the Torah. The **חובת צבור** remained

However, for the Torah reading of Parshat Zachor, we are not talking about an obligation which is there for the public, There is no **חובת צבור** but one which is there for every individual Jew, there is a **חובת יחיד**. The mitzvah is for each one of us to read parshat Zachor by ourselves, but the rabbis said that we can fulfill the mitzvah by hearing it read in the synagogue when there is a

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The third reading which I would like to deal with this morning is the megillah reading, which will be this Monday night and Tuesday morning.

The obligation for the Megillah reading is a combination of the weekly Torah reading and of Zachor. It is similar to the weekly Torah reading in that it is something which should be done publicly, as one of the mitzvot associated with the megillah is **פרסומי ניסא** publicly showing that a miracle had taken place. That

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I would also like to thank all of my teachers who care about me

They are always there with a smile for me, making me feel good, telling me jokes and so many other things. I really think that my Poppy is more nervous than I am about my Bar Mitzvah. I hope that after this speech, he will take a deep breath and relax.

Going from the most nervous to the one who has the most nachas at family simchot, I am so happy that my great grandmother, whom I call Grandma, is here with me and my family celebrating this weekend. Watching Grandma being happy is a pleasure to see. And this weekend for her is a special time, with two simchot, this morning, and tomorrow evening.

I would like to thank my cousins from Israel, Elishai, Tal and Or, for coming all this way for my bar mitzvah. From my cousins who came from the four corners of America, from the Northeast, southeast, northwest and west

I would like to wish my 92 year old young, grandmother in

And אחרון תביב Last but not least, would like to thank my dear, loving, and caring parents for everything, they are there not only for this day, but for everyday of my life. I thought it is hard being a kid, but it has to be even harder being a parent. I guess that my parents will have it even tougher when they have four, yes four, teenagers at one time.

I would also like to thank the whole Houston Jewish community for making growing up in Houston so much fun, and such a great place to be.

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Shabbat Shalom

MARCH 1981
 Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

by and large

One of the major problems of our day is the breakdown of any objective standard of what is right or wrong. Our society has bought ^{hook} ~~almost~~ ^{by and large} hook, line and sinker, the idea of subjective morality, the idea that if something feels good, it must be good, that how you feel about something determines completely its morality. This type of thinking is destructive of society and is even worse than the Greek idea which stated that if something was beautiful, it must be good. At least, with the Greek conception there was some objective criteria. Beauty had to have some form.

In our day and age, it all depends upon your feelings and even our art, music, and literature reflect this. They are almost all formless because feeling, itself, is amorphous. This idea of subjective morality, also, strips away from parents any authority over their children and, also, takes away from them their function as role models. Children can now say, "You are right, your particular life style may be good for you but, as for me, I feel another life style is much better". The trouble with subjective morality and the elevation of feelings as the sole repository of right and wrong is that human feelings can be very destructive. To some people, it may feel good to hit another person. To other people, it may feel so good to kill and, in fact, in the ancient world and in even modern India there have been cults of professional killers. Right now, crime is rising in our country at a ^{terrific} featful rate. This can be directly attributed, in my opinion, to the rise of the idea that if something feels good you should do it.

Philosophically, the underpinnings for this idea were laid out by Kant who talked about the autonomous man. Morality was to spring from man himself. Man, himself, was to determine what was right and wrong. No outside law could ever be imposed on man because this would limit his

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freedom. This concept ^{posited} ~~posited~~ the notion that every man, unaided, could arrive at the same standards of morality. This proved to be false and all we are left with, today, is the idea that each one of us has our own subjective, individual morality and that it is based upon how we feel about certain things.

Of course, there are problems with trying to live with objective standards that stem from outside ourselves. They sometimes seem to stifle us as individuals. They sometimes are not always the true expression of our inner state. They sometimes can lead to depression and neurosis if the concept of Teshuva ^{repentance} or ~~a second and third chance~~ ^{one} does not accompany it, but they will allow us to measure ourselves and to rise to higher, loftier levels. If a person falls short of the basic objective standards of honor and integrity as laid down in the Torah, he can still try again to reach them. It is wrong to say that all values depend only on feeling. There is a right and a wrong outside of each of us and we must always try to do what is right even though sometimes we may fail.

In Judaism, we try to combine subjective and objective morality by education. We try to educate people in values so much and so long that subjectively they would always feel that they must do only what is objectively right. That really is the purpose of Jewish education, to internalize Jewish ^{values} values, to make them second nature. We must work at it, though. That's what it means to be a "mentsch." Sometimes, though, in spite of our Jewish education, we may feel we want to do things that we know are objectively wrong. When this happens, we must heed the objective morality outside of ourselves and not our feelings.

This idea is expressed clearly in the very substance on which the Ten Commandments were given. The Ten Commandments were given on tablets of

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stone. Stone is a substance which, if it is to be shaped, must be shaped from the outside. Other substances are shaped from the inside. Iron and steel are heated and then they can be shaped. They, however, do not last. They rust. Stone, on the other hand, will last forever. That's why we make our monuments out of stone. Outside intervention is necessary. Internal conditions alone will never shape stone. This is true of human beings as well. We all need objective standards for us to achieve the proper values. Just depending upon how we feel about something will quickly lead to our destruction.

This, basically, is what we learn, too, from the conduct of Ahasuerus, the king of the Purim story. He was a man who based all his morality on how he felt about something. He got rid of Vashti. He married Esther. He was willing to let Haman kill all the Jews based only on his subjective feelings. He is a prototype of a fool in Jewish literature. He bends and sways based on his feelings. He is a drunkard whose feelings, themselves, depend on how much he has drunk. Purim, itself, is a carnival type holiday with costumes and revelry. We are supposed to drink so much that we cannot tell the difference between cursing Haman and blessing Mordecai. This, of course, should teach us all that our subjective feelings are very variable. They depend upon what we eat, what we drink, what has happened to us during the day, what someone said to us, what our finances are, etc. Great harm can be done by people who base all their reactions and policies on their feelings. They need to measure what they want to do against objective criteria outside themselves. Only then can they tell whether or not they are doing the right thing.

In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we learn about the necessity of sacrifice. We learn that a person could only bring a sacrifice when he ^{committed} did a sin

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unintentionally. ~~Almost never~~ ^{He} could ^{not} bring a sacrifice when he ^{committed} did a
sin intentionally. ^{with a few exceptions.} Many times we fail to realize the objective harm
that we do when we allow ourselves to be led only by our internal feelings.
Many times we claim that we did not intend to hurt another person. We
only were following our feelings. This type of attitude the Torah labels
a sin even though we did not mean to do any harm directly. We are told
that after we have made restitution in such a case a sacrifice is required.
It is required because, symbolically, we must recognize that many times
we must sacrifice our feelings in order to be good. Morality based on
"well, it feels good" can only lead to havoc. Let us all remember that
there is an objective right and wrong and let's try to live by it.

The Torah portion Vayikra begins with the statement, "Vayikra El Moshe" and He called to Moshe. This word Vayikra is not spelled the normal way. The Aleph at the end of the word is written very small. The Torah portion then continues by telling us that Moshe was told to speak to the sons of Israel and you should say to them "a man when he will offer a sacrifice to G-d". The Torah here uses a different word for man. It uses the word Adam. It does not use the normal words like Ish, or Enosh or Gever but it uses the word Adam. Adam, of course, not only means man but was also the name of the first man. We are taught here that everyone could bring a sacrifice to the Temple, Jew or non-Jew, that everyone must be willing to sacrifice for everyone if we are going to have a community. It could have just said when a Jew will bring but it does not. In our day and age there is a fallacy that is widespread that the only one that is worth sacrificing for is yourself. There is no feeling of community. Everyone is out for themselves. In Judaism we say that we owe a responsibility not only to ourselves but also to G-d and to our community. Today everyone would agree that we owe responsibility to ourselves and many that we owe responsibility to G-d but very few believe that we owe a responsibility to our community. The community is looked at as only a mechanism to further the individual. It is not looked at as an entity itself. The community, itself, is an entity with all the rights to it. It is not just a mechanism for the furtherance of our individual goals. We understand this well in business where we have created an organism known as a corporation. It is not identical to its shareholders or workers or managers. It has a separate identity and in effect never dies. We owe obligations to the community. We cannot do just what we want to do. To further ourselves we are not free to do anything we want to do. One of the reasons for the emergence of crime in our society is the breakdown of community. People feel they are justified to do anything if it is for their benefit. This week in Indiana we killed a man named Judy. We should have killed him. He pretended his car was disabled. A woman stopped to help him. He raped the woman, then killed her, and then drowned her three small children in a creek. When he was 13 years old he had attacked another woman, stabbed her 40 times, beat her on the head with a hatchet twice, and cut off her thumb. Miraculously she lived and he was out on parole in a few months. He had attacked over 20 other women. This man had forfeited his right to community. He did not recognize any restraints on

himself. We all have to recognize that we are one. We are all descended from Adam. We cannot do anything we want. This week's Shabbos is also known as Shabbos Zochor. We are told to remember Amalek. Amalek attacked the weak and the feeble. We are told not to hate Amalek but to remember him. There is evil in the world and we have to recognize it but this evil is in all of us. We can overcome it if we are educated, if we learn moral values but we must start when we are young. That's why the word Vayikra is written with a small Aleph. The letter Aleph stands for the Hebrew word Aleph which means to teach. We have to teach the children when they are young about moral values if we are to have a feeling of community. Unfortunately, in our day we just stress skills. Purim emphasizes this, too. There was very little difference between Haman and Mordecai. In fact, the words Bless Haman and Curse Mordecai have the same numerical value in Hebrew. Haman was an ambitious man, hard working, industrious, a good family man, who listened to his wife but he would do anything to get ahead. He was ambitious only for himself. He had no feeling for anything except his own ambition. He would have been a Phi Beta Kappa at a university today. He was willing to sacrifice a whole people to further his career. There are certain things we just cannot do to get ahead, or to get more money or to be more successful. We have to realize that all of us are a part of a community and have a responsibility to it. The story about a fellow who went to the health department to complain about his roommates. He complained that they had a terrible amount of pets. One had 5 dogs, one had 10 cats, another had 3 monkeys and the place just stank. The health official asked him, "Don't you have any windows?" He said, "Yes", and the health official asked him "Why don't you open your windows?" He said, "What, and let all my pigeons fly out?" Unfortunately, in our day and age people do not conceive of themselves as a part of the community. They only want to use a community to further their own interests. Special interests will eventually destroy a community not build it. We all must learn to sacrifice in order to have a community.

2A.
VAYIKRA 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Respect is very important in Judaism. We are supposed to both respect and love G-d. There is a perpetual tension between respect and love. A respect which is only based on fear is no good, and a love which is not based on respect will not last and will end up by creating terrible problems. In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we have the phrase "and He called to Moshe". It does not say who called to Moshe. We have afterwards "and G-d spoke to him". It does not say who the "him" is. It would have been much better if the sentence had just said "and G-d spoke to Moshe". Why this double language? What's more, we also use here the expression Odom, Adam, for man. Why don't we use the other expressions? Each of us has a yearning to be loved by G-d. Each of us wants to be loved. Each of us wants to give love. This is expressed by the phrase "and He called to Moshe". Within each of us there is a yearning, there is a call to love G-d and to love others. Immediately following we have the expression "and G-d spoke to him". Even though the expression for G-d which is used here is the expression which denotes G-d's attribute of loving kindness, yet it says "to him". It does not say to Moshe. There is always a certain distance which we must maintain between us and G-d and even between us and another human being. G-d is completely other than us. Each of us has a little piece of G-d in us. Each of us is an individual and deserving of respect. In our dealings with others and G-d it is not enough just to have love. We must also have respect. Love can many times lead to terrible things. For example, if you really love me you will give up your children and family, etc. Love of country, of course, can be perverted and lead to concentration camps and horrors. Love of ideology can, too, lead to great human degradation. Love has its limits. We must respect each other. We must never trample on each other's uniqueness. Even in the community we must not go for the jugular. Even when we are doing Mitzvahs we have to be careful that we respect the other person. That's why it says here "speak to the sons of Israel saying, 'a person who will sin by accident by doing all the Commandments of G-d which should not be done'". If it is a Commandment by G-d, why shouldn't it be done? The answer is you can do a Mitzvah but still do a lot of harm unless you do it in the right way. It is not enough just to do Mitzvahs. We must do Mitzvahs which will make sure that we will treat another person with respect.

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That's why Odom is used for man. The word Odom in Hebrew comes from the word Adamo, ground. Each of us are other than G-d. Our base is the earth. On the other hand, the word Adam can also come from the Hebrew word Dome which means similar and we can read it "I will be similar to G-d". We each need to love G-d and to respect Him. We each need to love each other and to respect each other. This especially applies in the family with spouses, children, grandparents, etc. Human beings must always balance the demands of love and respect.

SIN

- 1) feeling of inadequacy
- 2) acknowledge ^{burnt} sacrifice
Purser outside of ourselves
- 3) closeness with G-D, may ^{per se}
- 3) meal effort
Implement new insights
INT = Life

VAYIKRA 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In order to have ideals you must sacrifice for them. That's why the sacrifices are placed in the same book in which the loftiest Jewish ideals are recounted. (For example, love your neighbor as yourself.) Unless a person is willing to sacrifice his time, energy, and means for his ideals then he really does not believe in them. We Jews have never had a formal creed. We judge a person by what he does, not by what he says he believes. In fact, a person can get up and say I am not sure I believe in this or that and we tell him just to sit down. However, if a person fails to pay his charity obligations, his dues in a Synagogue, we kick him out. People when they say they believe in certain things and then do not even move in the direction of their beliefs by giving of their time, effort, etc., these people are just putting on a front. They are just trying to fool themselves so they will not suffer from guilt. Each of us must sacrifice for ideals otherwise we do not have any ideals. The question, though, can be asked, how can we know when the ideals we are sacrificing for are worthwhile. I much prefer a person who has no ideals rather than a person who has false ideals. There is no more evil person than a person who is willing to sacrifice for evil ideals. Hitler was a vegetarian. He did not chase other men's wives. He was not a glutton. He never took a penny from the State. All his income was based on the sale of his book Mein Kampf, but he was one of the most evil men who ever lived. Just being dedicated and devoted does not make you good. How do we know that the ideals we are sacrificing for are good ideals and worthy of our sacrifice? In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we have three criteria laid out. The Torah portion says "Vayikra El Moshe", "and He called to Moshe". The Aleph at the end of the word is written in small letters. The Rabbis teach us that this represents the children, that we are to teach the children. Are our sacrifices good for the children? Are they good for the future? If our ideals we espouse are not good for children or the future then they are false ideals. Second, the Torah tells us that Adam or man, when he will sacrifice for you (you plural), will sacrifice your offerings. The word in Hebrew for Adam, for man has no plural. There are three other words for man in Hebrew, Ish, Gever, and Enosh. They all have plurals. The Torah is telling us here that our ideals must always safeguard the individual. We cannot tramp on the individual and on the other hand our ideals must be good for the total community, for

everyone in it, not just for part of the community. Thirdly, our sacrifices must result in a Rayach Nachoach, in a sweet smelling offering. Our sacrifices must also create in each of us a wholesome sweet personality. If it does not then our ideals are missing something. Our ideals must be good for children, they must safeguard the individual, and be good for the total community and every group in it, and they must also produce wholesome sweet individuals. What are the requirements for a wholesome sweet individual? The meal offering was an offering that everyone could bring regardless of whether or not they had any money. It was composed of oil, matzah, salt, and spices. In order to have a pleasing and wholesome personality you must have enthusiasm symbolized by the oil, the recognition that we need others, that we are dependent on others which is symbolized by the matzah. We must also want to establish permanent relationships not just use people. We must possess a certain tact so that when we do nice things we do them in a nice way. If we have these things then we will have a sweet wholesome personality. Many times I ask people to help. Some people never turn me down, but they always say, "Rabbi, why do you have to ask me?". They make their giving very unpleasant. Others tell me, "Next time, Rabbi, when I get around to it". They really do not have the sweet wholesome personality we need. The story about a man who knocks on the door. The woman answers it and he says, "I am the plumber. I have come to fix your pipes." The woman looks at him surprised and says, "I didn't call any plumber". He looks at her and says, "Aren't you Mrs. Goldberg?". She said, "No, she moved a year ago". The plumber then looked at her and said, "How do you like that? They say it is an emergency and then they move".

2A...
VAYIKRA 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the headlines of this morning's Chronicle there was an item which claimed that the Israelis were harassing the American soldiers and making them lose their manhood. They were calling them chicken, not even an u chicken. If this whole thing wouldn't be so serious, it would be ludicrous. When I served as a Chaplain on an Air Force base, I saw many fights between the branches of the services. They called each other a lot worse names than chicken. There have been no casualties. No one has been hurt. This is a trumped up situation. The problem with this situation, and it is a very serious problem, is that once again the image of the arrogant Jew is being dredged up. In the Middle Ages a Jew could not walk on the sidewalk. He had to walk in the gutter. A Jew could not ride a horse. He had to ride a mule. The Jew was an upstart who always had to be put down. DeGaulle, after the 1967 War, when he wanted to curry favor with the Arabs, talked about the arrogant Jew. This concept has led to great danger for our people. It has caused us to be excluded from society and physically harmed. Its rebirth at this time is dangerous. We Jews in the past have never really cared what the outside world thought of us because we knew we had a satisfying way of life. Today, though, many Jews do not even know about their own way of life and this new campaign of the arrogant Jew is not only going to befuddle them, but will lead to self-hatred. In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we learn about sacrifices. Actually the word for sacrifice in Hebrew means to get close, to come near. The sacrifices were a mechanism which allowed the Jewish people to get closer to G-d and to get closer to each other. We Jews in the past have followed our religion because it fit. As Rabbi Steinsaltz explained when he was here, "You can either fulfill a religion just because it is commanded or you can do it because it is beneficial". However, both these reasons leave much to be desired. The main reason that most people follow the religion is because it gives meaning and reasons to life and it feels right. You were fulfilling the reason for which you were created. For example, if a person broke his wrist, he can still get along but it is awkward. The cast is heavy and he cannot cope as well. When the cast is removed and your wrist perfect for the task for which it was created you feel better. You are perfecting the function for which you are created. The same goes for the Mitzvah with the Jewish people. When you do them it just seems to fit. It makes for balance and a good life. In the Torah portion,

Vayikra begins with the Vayikra. It is written with a little Aleph at the end. The word Vayikra means with the Aleph "and he called " and with the Aleph it means "chance occurrence". The Aleph is written very small, much smaller than the other letters. This teaches us that just this little point of whether or not you believe you have been called and you are fulfilling your purpose or whether everything is just a product of chance can mean for your life. It seems like just a little thing but it is not. One makes your life fit and gives hope for the future. The other many times leads to drugs and alcohol and despair. We are told that we can get near to G-d and our fellow human beings. If we will do then we will see that they will fit. We are supposed to answer the call not to wait for chance occurrences. If we do so we really do not have to worry about what the rest of the world does. We will still be able to lead good fulfilling lives even though there may be danger. The story about the man whose house was on the flood plane. A big flood came. The waters came 10 feet into his house. A row boat came to save him. He said, "Go away, go away, G-d will help me". The waters came up to 20 feet and he was in the attic. The row boats came again to save him and once again he said, "Go away, go away, G-d will save me". Finally the waters rose to 30 feet. A helicopter came to take him off the roof. He said, "Go away, go away, G-d will save me". Five minutes later a huge wave came and knocked him off the roof and he drowned. He then went before G-d. He looked up at G-d and said, "What's the matter with you, G-d? Why didn't You save me? Why did You let me drown?" G-d looked at him and said, "Shlemiel, who do you think sent the row boats and helicopter?" If we want a fulfilling and good life we are not just to sit back and wait. We have Mitzvahs to do.

2A. VAYIKRA

LIMITS MAKE FOR LIFE

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

One of the most prevalent ideas today is that the worst thing a person can do to himself is to set limits for himself. Stifling one's potentiality is a crime and anybody who shuts himself out from any of life is doing a terrible thing. People should try to experience everything. We were meant to develop ourselves to the full. Anybody who limits himself stifles himself. Life is to be lived without limits, without fences. We should explore our sensuality, probe the depths of our feelings, let it all hang out. This will prevent us from becoming neurotic. We are to sacrifice everything, parents, children to pursue this great goal of self-fulfillment, a fulfillment which can only take place if we set for ourselves no limits.

This idea of life without limits has doomed many people in our generation to a great deal of trauma and unhappiness. It has caused broken families and destroyed lives. Limits are essential if we are to experience life fully. This is one of Judaism's basic teachings. It also is one of the main reasons why people today are afraid of Judaism. Trying to experience everything can lead to terrible results. This idea of limitless man is actually the basis of Naziism. Why should't I kill, rape, and pillage if I feel like it? I should be able to experience everything and if I have the power to get away with it, why not? This is also the basis of the drug culture. I should expand my consciousness and take mind altering drugs. I should be able to experience and feel all sorts of highs and ecstasies. We believe, however, that everything in life has limits. Even love has limits. There is a famous French story of a woman who loved a man. She had a child from a previous marriage. He told her that if she really loved him she would throw her child out of a six-story window. Her love for him was so overpowering that she did as he asked and, of course, the child died. Love of country can be perverted, and was by the Germans, and led to the concentration camps. Love of ideoloty can be perverted, and was by the Communists, and led and leads to the great human suffering and degradation of the Gulag 17's.

In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we have many of these ideas discussed. We read in it the strange sentence, "If any one of the people sin through err by doing one of the

