

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

TAZRIA-MESORA

Haftarah: Melachim II 7:3-20

APRIL 24-25, 2015 6 IYAR 5775 - DAY 21 OF THE OMER

DEDICATIONS: In memory of our great grandmother Farha Aziza Bibi

Friends – We need assistance a commitment for Friday nights –
 At your request, we will begin at 7PM and we will strive to complete services before 8PM
 Candle lighting Friday evening April 17 at 7:25 p.m. Mincha at 7:00, Shir HaShirim 6:45

SHABBAT: Morning Perasha Class with Rav Aharon at 8:00
 SHAHARIT at 8:30AM – Shema this week 8:43

Bobby and Hindy Mizrahi are sponsoring the kiddush to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Bobby's father BenZion and in honor of Mathew's birthday – Abal 120 Happy and Healthy years

Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one.
 Our weekly Kiddush will be subject to sponsorship. We would love to see the sponsorship board filled.
 Dairy Kiddush sponsorship will be \$300, \$400 for Deluxe and \$ 500 for Super Deluxe
 Meat Kiddush sponsorship will be \$400, \$600 for Deluxe and \$1000 for Super Deluxe
 Seuda Shelishi at \$100 for the class each week. And Sunday and weekday breakfasts are \$100 ea

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer
 Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/
 Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at Sephardic April and May at 4:30 PM
 Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:30

Class with Rav Aharon 6:25 PM - Mincha 6:55 PM
 Seudah Shelish at 7:25 PM - Birkat haMazon 8:05PM
 Arbit at 8:10 PM - Shabbat Ends at 8:25

DAILY MINYAN – Sunday followed by breakfast and class 8:00AM
 Monday , Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM
 Sunday evening – Mincha and Arbit at 7:25 PM

MAY 8 – Friday Night –
 Sheva Berachot Dinner at the Synagogue
 in honor of Rina and Danny
 \$20 per person
 \$15 per child 12 and under
 No charge for children 5 and under
 Reservations and payment must be received by Sunday, May 3rd
 RSVP to Rebecca 516-698-2863 or uft183@gmail.com

IN addition Danny and Rina would like to invite the community to join them for Kabbalat Panim and Chuppah
 Thursday, May 7 at 5:30pm. Temple Israel – 305 Riverside Blvd

The Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach will be hosting Chana Frumin, M.S.W. and the Director of the Jerusalem Narrative Therapy Institute (www.jnti.net) in Israel. Chana is an international teacher of beginning and advanced topics in narrative therapy practice with over 30 years of experience. Chana has taught experiential workshops in South Africa, Denmark, England, Israel, Australia, Canada and the US.

One Day Intensive Workshop in Marriage Therapy Techniques - Skill Building Course for those
 Advising/Counseling Couples
 Sunday May 10th 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Shortcuts to Shalom Bayit - How to Make Any Marriage Better - Experiential Couples Workshop
 Monday May 11th 6:30 PM - 9:30 PM

With gratitude to Hashem,
together with their families

Rina Maxine Limor

רינה יהודית



Daniel Meir Hirsch

דניאל מאיר

invite you to share in the simcha
of their marriage under the chuppah

Lag B'Omer - Thursday Evening
The Seventh of May
Two Thousand and Fifteen
Kabbalat Panim at 5:30
Chuppah at 6:00

י"ח באיר תשע"ה
קבלת פנים בשעה 5:30
החופה בשעה 6:00 בדיוק

Temple Israel
305 Riverside Boulevard
Long Beach, NY

Avi Limor Z"L and Stephen Hirsch Z"L

YOUR VOTE CAN BE WORTH MILLIONS!

Only 5 days left

APRIL
30

LAST CHANCE TO MAKE THE SEPHARDIC VOICE COUNT

DONT DELAY, REGISTER AND VOTE TODAY IN THE WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS

VOTE NOW

WORLD SEPHARDIC ZIONIST ORGANIZATION - OHAVEI ZION (SLATE #5)

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FOUNDED BY RAV OVADIA YOSEF ZT" L AND SUPPORTED BY LEADING RABBI'S AROUND THE WORLD

Make YOUR VOICE HEARD and VOTE NOW

To learn more go to www.OhaveiZion.com



Contact us: info@OhaveiZion.com
Facebook: World Sephardic Zionist Organization
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Editors Notes

Many of you have been emailing me and asking me how we are doing with the Zionist Congress elections. The answer is that I have no idea. With only one weekend left to vote, only about 40,000 votes have been cast in total. This means that had only 5000 families in our community all voted, we would have controlled the final coalition. Additionally there are about 4000 people registered who have not voted. I fear that many of those are from the 1000 plus people who originally registered in support of Ohavei Zion Sephardic Zionist party, but who may have never voted. That might be you. Please check your inbox for emails from AZM and please make sure to vote.

We owe tremendous Hakarat HaTov to many community members and if I had to mention one, I would say we should all thank Maurice Hedaya. Sadly though, most of our rabbinate, our schools and our institutions, those who would benefit the most from the hundreds of millions in funds we seek to control have been silent.

While the reform Temples and left wing organizations have been mobilizing and pushing their supporters to vote and to galvanize others to vote, what have we done? They promise to fight for this money to go to support an egalitarian Judaism of interfaith, female and transgender rabbis. They want to continue to steer funding towards promoting interfaith clergy, changing the definition of who is a Jew and studying transgender Jews. Their leaders are the same people who promote boycotting of Israeli products from Yehuda and Shomron. They want this education money to continue to teach kids that its OK to intermarry, that Halacha has no bearing on Judaism and that the Torah is not Divine in origin. And if you think their efforts will not affect our children, you are wrong. You must vote simply to make sure that they will not control this funding and to limit their influence on the Israeli government and state. Remember that this Congress represents worldwide Jewry and when it speaks, all of Israel listens.

At the same time we see that the support we hoped to get from our Rabbis, our institutions and our leaders has been given to the Religious Zionist slate by their supporters. Pretty much every Ashkenaz synagogue, yeshiva, community center and organization has been emailing day after day to their constituency to vote. I sometimes get four different emails in a day. Why have our organizations been so apathetic? Their rabbis speak week after week from the pulpit begging people to vote. Why haven't our rabbis done the same? They end classes asking people to take out their phones and guiding them

through the voting process. Why haven't we done the same?

The good news is that they have done that and perhaps all that will have made a huge impact on the election and hopefully we will have enough votes to make us an important part of a religious coalition. But that won't happen if we don't vote. This is our chance for a seat at the table,. This is our chance to have a Sephardic Voice for the first time in the history of the World Jewish Congress. If you have not voted, then vote. If you have voted than make sure everyone you know and everyone on your email list votes.

The window of opportunity is closing rapidly. To vote, please visit <https://www.myvoteourisrael.com/> and cast your vote for us - World Sephardic Zionist Organization – Ohavei Zion. Its time we had a seat and its time we had a voice

PS I repeated the following Torah Thought that was posted in the Bnei Yitzhak email this morning at the Safra Synagogue in Manhattan. It's a very short and very beautiful message.

In large part, our Parashah deals with the issue of Tzara'at, an unusual form of skin disease. Substantial print is spent describing it's different forms, diagnoses, and methods of "cure." Given that we do not experience this type of malady in contemporary times, one might be tempted to dismiss it as irrelevant, a "thing of the past" that has no message for us. That approach, ironically, might be superficial.

Probably the most crucial point the Torah makes about Tzara'at is that in both its diagnosis and its remedy, the Kohen plays a leading role. Essentially, appearance of Tzara'at in a person's life, in one of many forms, would drive a person to the Mikdash to seek the guidance and assistance of a trained professional. Inherent in this process is a simple but crucial value that should not be taken lightly. There are problems people face that they cannot and should not handle alone. Not only is it wise to seek sage counsel, it is the moral and right thing to do.

The America we live in was, in many ways, established upon the principle of "Rugged Individualism," which, in part, celebrates the individual who needs no one else. In reality, as our Parashah teaches, no such individual exists. We are all largely dependent upon others. There are times when each person needs the sage advice of a more experienced and/or knowledgeable person. This is true in all facets of life and particularly true when it comes to Torah living. Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading by NATHAN I DWECK

Tazria - Laws of Identifying Tsaraat

- 1- Toomah by a women who gives birth, Identifying Tsaraat on the skin known as baheret
- 2- Identifying tsaraat on the skin known as Seit
- 3- Shechin- Tsarat resulting from a blow
- 4- Michvat Esh- Tsarat resulting from a burn
- 5- Netek- One who has tsaraat on a place of hair (i.e., head or beard)
- 6- Laws of tsaraat on one's clothes - what qualifies as tsaraat
- 7- Laws of tsaraat on one's clothes - how one purifies himself

Metsora - Laws of purification from tsaraat (and other tumah)

- 1- Purification process of one who has tsaraat - includes the ingredients involved in the korban
- 2- Purification process of one who has tsaraat - korban, sprinkling blood and oil on the mesorah
- 3- The purification process / korban for a mesorah who cannot afford a standard korban
- 4- Identifying Tsaraat on the house, Purification from Tsaraat on the house
- 5- Halachot regarding a zav
- 6- Halachot regarding a baal keri, regarding nidah by a women, and regarding a zava
- 7- Purification process of a zava

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein: A Personal Reminiscence - Rabbi Menachem Genack

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, as I knew him, was not merely a giant of Torah, but also a giant of a man. He was a child prodigy—Rav Hillel Zaks, a grandson of the Chafetz Chaim and friend of Rav Aharon from Yeshivas Chaim Berlin, recounted that Rav Aharon stood uniquely above his peers even as a teenager. (In Yeshivas Chaim Berlin, his status as a child prodigy earned him the nickname “the babe,” a moniker which followed him to Yeshiva University.) Rav Aharon’s encyclopedic knowledge was matched by the incisiveness of his analysis, and he was a leading exponent of the Brisker method.

But aside from his genius, Rav Aharon was a man of great humility, kindness, yirat shamayim, and principle. When my father died I was still young, and Rav Aharon offered me great comfort and arranged many of the details of the funeral. He was a man of unsurpassed integrity, both in his intellectual pursuits and in his personal relationships and dealings. I remember in the summer of 1967, Rav Aharon, who was already a Rosh Kollel, playing a game of full-court basketball with other students of the Rav in

Onset, Massachusetts. At one point in the game, Rav Aharon turned to me and said, “It is not ethical to play just offense and not defense.” Although his comment was tongue-in-cheek, it reflected his forethought and seriousness with which he undertook his every action.

When I came to know him, Rav Aharon was already the Rosh Kollel of RIETS, but he still attended the Rav’s shiur. His comments during the shiur were always to the point, and the Rav was always very attentive to them. Whenever the Rav was searching for a source, he turned to Rav Aharon, who invariably supplied it. As is well known, Rav Aharon was a proponent of studying literature, because as he once wrote, “the humanities deepen our understanding of man: his nature, functions and duties.” When I was studying *Paradise Lost* in college, Rav Aharon said to me, “I envy you, because you can read Milton now for the first time.” Once, the Rav explained that the Rambam and Rashi disagree about whether Shir Hashirim is a metaphor for the relationship between the individual soul and God, or a metaphor of the relationship between God and the nation of Israel. Rav Aharon interjected that both meanings can be sustained, just as Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* is an allegory with several different layers of meaning. For all his love of poetry, it was the Shir Hashirim within his own soul which animated Rav Aharon’s life, the poetic song within his soul which melded the relationship of both the individual and the Jewish community with God.

A kaleidoscope of images helps capture his unique persona. Rav Aharon retained an eternal youthful quality, which I believe was a product of his unabated sense of discovery and openness to new learning. Upon his Aliyah to Israel, he developed a close relationship with Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, and on the death of Rav Shlomo Zalman, Rav Aharon tore his clothing as a son does for a parent, and as a devoted disciple does for a teacher. In his essay “The Source of Faith is Faith Itself,” we encounter Rav Aharon as one whose faith flowed from the example of his teachers in whom he saw the embodiment of the Jewish tradition—Rav Hutner, the Rav, and Rav Aharon Soloveichik—as well as from the divine encounter that Torah study itself provides. His eloquent words about Rav Aharon Soloveichik apply equally to himself: “I was simply enthralled by what he was—a remarkable fusion of mastery and simplicity, of vigor and humility and, above all, a pillar of radical integrity.” When a new translation of the Rambam’s philosophical magnum opus was published, Rav Aharon approved of the subtle change in title from *Guide for the Perplexed* to *Guide of the Perplexed*. The former, he believed, removed

the Rambam himself from among the rank of the perplexed, whereas the latter more accurately captures the notion that perplexity is not a contradiction to faith and leadership. This was in keeping with the lesson Rav Aharon learned from his mentors, "that it was not so necessary to have all the answers as to learn to live with the questions."

I remember that when Rav Aharon left America to join Rav Amital in heading Yeshivat Har Etzion, I did not understand how Rav Aharon was willing to sacrifice his undoubted future prominence as a leader of American Jewry. However, watching from afar, I saw how he and Rav Amital were able to have a significant impact on Israeli society as a whole. In addition to being responsible for introducing the Brisker derech and the thought of the Rav to the yeshivot hesder, Rav Aharon became renowned throughout Israel as a religious leader and thinker of the first rank.

I had the merit to speak to Rav Aharon on the phone one last time just a few weeks ago, as I called to wish him and Dr. Tovah Lichtenstein a Chag Sameach before Pesach and to receive a bracha from him. I will always cherish my memories of him.

The Daf Yomi on the day of Rav Aharon's passing, Ketubot 77, describes the death of R. Yehoshua ben Levi, the prime student of R. Yehuda Hanasi. Upon his entry into the Garden of Eden, he was heralded by Elijah proclaiming, "Make room for the son of Levi, make room for the son of Levi." The Talmud explains that R. Yehoshua ben Levi merited his exalted position in the world to come because, in contrast to his peers, he did not disassociate himself from the sufferers of a highly contagious and debilitating disease. Instead, "R. Yehoshua ben Levi attached himself to these sufferers and studied the Torah; for he said, 'Ayelet ahavim ve-ya'alat chen, a lovely hind and a graceful doe (Mishlei 5:19)—if the Torah bestows grace upon those who study it, would it not also protect them?'" These words of R. Yehoshua ben Levi are a fitting epitaph for Rav Aharon, who was the prime disciple of the R. Yehuda Hanasi of our times, the Rav. Rav Aharon, with his humility, drew close even those that others isolated, those distant from his coterie, and always through the Torah whose grace he radiated. And although this daf marks the end of the chapter Hamadir, the masechta goes on, just as Rav Aharon's legacy will surely continue through the example of learning, humility and grace he instilled in his extraordinary family and legions of students and admirers.

THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"When you enter the land of Canaan...and I will place a sara'at affliction upon the house." (Vayikra 14:34)

The Midrash remarks that this leprosy affliction on the house was actually a blessing in disguise. When the walls of the house were broken, in order to remove the afflicted spots, the Jewish owners often found treasures that the previous Canaanite owners had hidden. This brought wealth to the Jewish inhabitants.

Rabbi Ephraim Nissenbaum reveals a beautiful insight. In his last discourse before he passed away, Rav Avraham Pam observed that the poor Jew living in the house that would be afflicted in the future, could reside there for many years, perhaps barely eking out a living for his family. He would never realize how wealthy he was until the difficult circumstances resulted in his good fortune.

Similarly, the Rosh Yeshivah added, there are so many Jews with hidden treasures in their souls, abilities of which they are totally unaware. If only they could perceive them, without being forced to do so through difficult circumstances. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, clean birds" (Vayikra 14:4) At first glance, the need for the Kohen to "command" that the mesora (leper) purchase these birds is difficult to understand. We never find this requirement in the case of articles needed for other misvot. Instead, the Torah says that the person must do some act, and the person makes sure to have what he needs to do what is required. If he doesn't know what is needed, there are always people who can tell him. But here, it appears that he may not buy the birds unless commanded to do so by the Kohen!

The explanation is this: People often say that when it comes to matters about which they think the halachah is silent, they are wiser than Torah scholars, and they need not seek direction. This leads to their thinking that they are also expert in any misvot which are relevant to worldly things, such as priorities in charity distribution. People think that since it is their money, and their money cannot be taken without their willing agreement, this lay out the priorities for charitable giving, but in some cases it is actually forbidden for one to give. In all cases, there are laws governing how much and to whom to give, and the proper apportionment of funds. But almost nobody asks questions about this. Almost nobody asks about the proper relationship with their children or how to educate them. If people realized that halachah does regulate and provide instruction for the vast majority of "worldly" matters, they certainly would come and ask.

A mesora must repent of this shortcoming before becoming pure. Many of the sins which cause sara'at (leprosy) are those which people think are not regulated by halachah and are left up to them - such as lending utensils or money, or what we may or may not say about others. Therefore, the Torah says that for a mesora to repent, he must learn to consult Torah authorities in all matters - even the most mundane - until he knows what he needs to ask. To impress the lesson upon him, we require that he wait for the Kohen to tell him when and how to buy the birds for his purification. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

ETHICS OF THE FATHERS

"Do not condemn your fellowman until you have stood in his place," (Pirkei Abot 2:4)

Instead of "limeskomo, his place," why doesn't it say "limesaboo, his situation"?

"Mekomo, his place," does not mean your friend's place, but it means Hashem's place.

According to the Midrash Rabbah (Bereshheet 68:9) Hashem is referred to as "HaMakom – the Place," to emphasize that the world is contained in Him and not He in the world. He is not limited by space and therefore is everywhere.

The Mishnah is teaching that you should judge yourself and not others. The only time when you can judge your friend is when you reach Hashem's place. Then you will have before you everything of the past, present, and future, and be capable of passing judgment. Till then, however, do not judge your friend. (Vedibarta Bam)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR A Gossiper's Prayer

Parashat Tazria speaks at length of the laws of the Sara'at skin disease that would descend upon a person as a punishment for Lashon Hara – speaking negatively about other people. A person who was determined to have been stricken with Sara'at was quarantined, and was required to live in solitude outside his city. The Torah writes that as the person made his way from his home to his place of solitary confinement, he would have to announce, "Tameh Tameh!" ("Impure! Impure!" –13:45). On the simple level of interpretation, this announcement was required in order to warn people to keep away from this individual. People were urged not to come near the person stricken with Sara'at so that they would not become Tameh (ritually impure).

The Sages, however, noted an additional reason for this announcement. The Mesora (person stricken with Sara'at) would inform everyone of his condition so that they would pray on his behalf. Essentially, he

was saying, "Help me! I have Sara'at! Please pray to God that I will soon be healed!"

The obvious question arises, why doesn't the Mesora pray for himself? Why must he implore others to pray for him?

The Hafetz Haim (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, 1839-1933) explained, quite simply, that the Mesora's prayers cannot be accepted. Having contaminated his mouth through sins of speech, by speaking derisively about other people and indulging in gossip, he has lost the power of Tefila. The prayers that come from such a mouth are tainted and damaged; they cannot achieve the desired effect. For this reason, the Mesora has no choice but to ask others to pray on his behalf, until he corrected his sinful tendency and repented, thereby regaining his mouth's purity which we need for our prayers to gain acceptance.

This is also why we begin the observance of Yom Kippur with the "Kol Nidreh" service, in which we formally annul any vows that we had taken. Before we spend Yom Kippur praying for forgiveness, we must first ensure that we are not guilty of sins involving speech. Otherwise, our prayers are futile. If our mouths bear the stain of forbidden speech, then our prayers are ineffective.

A gossiper not only hurts the people he speaks about; he hurts himself. We all have difficult problems and concerns, we all desperately need the Almighty's help on so many levels. Nobody can afford to forfeit the power of prayer by contaminating his mouth. Let us ensure to keep our mouths free of sin, so that our prayers will have the desired effect and proceed directly to the heavens, where they will be lovingly and eagerly accepted by God.

Rabbi Wein

The Torah describes itself as a Torat chayim - a Torah of life and living. There are many possible interpretations of this phrase. It can refer to the fact that the Torah is eternal, vibrant and ever renewing, the source and fountain of life – that it is a living Torah. However to my mind, this phrase implies that it is also, if not even primarily so, the Torah of practicality and reality.

It is fashioned to fit the world that it preceded. It does not demand the impossible nor does it deviate from the norms of human and natural existence. It is not only a living Torah but also a realistic and practical guide to human life and society. Though the Torah is built upon the bedrock of faith it is not ideological in

nature. Though it espouses a monarchical system of government, it really advances no ideological political view, and no grand economic plan. Rather, it is humble in imposing set forms and ideas upon human society.

Throughout the biblical period, when there were many prophets who lived and guided Jewish society, they almost unanimously spoke of moral behavior, a sense of justice in government and society and the necessity for exhibiting kindness and tolerance to one another. They emphasized the practical dangers that the Jewish kingdoms faced and warned against hubris and provocations.

The prophets of Israel did not advance capitalism, socialism, communism, nationalism, universalism or other ideological doctrines or restraints. All ideologies, sooner or later, infringe upon individual rights and create tyrannical societies that propagate evil in the name of a higher good. We are painfully aware of where the ideologies of the past number of centuries have led us. Ideologues are always able to justify injustice in order to achieve their imagined perfect goal.

When ideology combines with religion and incorporates that ideology as part of the faith basis of that religion, that ideology becomes doubly lethal. Religious wars throughout the centuries have really been wars of ideology, territory, power, financial gain and dominance rather than being struggles of faith and soaring belief.

The Torah contains six hundred thirteen commandments. One would think that that would suffice. Nevertheless, in our time it has been overlaid with conflicting ideologies that have taken on the aura of becoming principles of faith. To the anti-Zionists amongst us, denigrating and defaming the state of Israel is equal in their eyes to observing the Sabbath and eating kosher food.

Their ideology has made them haters and hated. That cannot be the state of being that the Torah had in mind for Jews particularly and human beings generally. To many of the Zionists, settling on the land of Israel is the prime ideology that rules all else. It must be admitted that, in the extreme application of this ideology, it flies in the face of all current reality. And the Torah, if it is nothing else, is reality personified and applicable in all situations.

Now, human beings apparently cannot live without an ideology to sustain their political beliefs and societal programs. But care must be taken that ideology does

not fly in the face of reality. In instances when it does, no good occurs.

We see throughout the books of the prophets that reality was the lodestone that guided them. The prophet Samuel hesitates, even when commanded by God to go to the house of Yishai to crown the new king of Israel. He says to the Lord: "But King Saul will hear of this and will slay me for being disloyal to him." The Lord apparently takes this reality in account. He instructs Samuel to take animals with him to sacrifice them publicly in Bethlehem as a cover story for his real purpose in appearing there.

Throughout the books of the prophets of Israel this strong sense of reality enters into their words and dominates their views. In Second Temple times, most of the great rabbis of Israel did not support the rebellion against Rome, feeling that it was futile and that it would only result in the destruction of the Temple. The reality of Roman power overrode the ideology of the then present Jewish messianism. Sixty years later, most of the rabbis dissented from the ideology of Bar Kochba and Rabbi Akiva and opposed this further rebellion against Roman power, again being doomed to failure.

In our current world and in the situation that we find ourselves in we should be cautious not to confuse ideology – which is not necessarily a tenet of our faith – with the realities that we face. We should pray that the Lord give us the wisdom to be able to discern and apply this historical truth to our times.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Circumcision of Desire

It is hard to trace with any precision the moment when a new idea makes its first appearance on the human scene, especially one as amorphous as that of love. But love has a history.[1] There is the contrast we find in Greek, and then Christian thought between eros and agape: sexual desire and a highly abstract love for humanity in general.

There is the concept of chivalry that makes its appearance in the age of the Crusades, the code of conduct that prized gallantry and feats of bravery to "win the heart of a lady." There is the romantic love that makes its appearance in the novels of Jane Austen, hedged with the proviso that the young or not-so-young man destined for the heroine must have the right income and country estate, so as to exemplify the "truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." [2] And there is the moment in Fiddler on the Roof where, exposed by their children

to the new ideas in pre-revolutionary Russia, Tevye turns to his wife Golde, and the following conversation ensues:

Tevye: Do you love me?

Golde: I'm your wife!

Tevye: I know! But do you love me?

Golde: Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years, my bed is his...

Tevye: Shh!

Golde: If that's not love, what is?

Tevye: Then you love me!

Golde: I suppose I do!

The inner history of humanity is in part the history of the idea of love. And at some stage a new idea makes its appearance in biblical Israel. We can trace it best in a highly suggestive passage in the book of one of the great prophets of the Bible, Hosea.

Hosea lived in the eighth century bce. The kingdom had been divided since the death of Solomon. The northern kingdom in particular, where Hosea lived, had lapsed after a period of peace and prosperity into lawlessness, idolatry and chaos. Between 747 and 732 bce there were no less than five kings, the result of a series of intrigues and bloody struggles for power. The people, too, had become lax: "There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder" (Hos. 4: 1-2).

Like other prophets, Hosea knew that Israel's destiny depended on its sense of mission. Faithful to God, it was able to do extraordinary things: survive in the face of empires, and generate a society unique in the ancient world, of the equal dignity of all as fellow citizens under the sovereignty of the Creator of heaven and earth. Faithless, however, it was just one more minor power in the ancient Near East, whose chances of survival against larger political predators were minimal.

What makes the book of Hosea remarkable is the episode with which it begins. God tells the prophet to marry a prostitute, and see what it feels like to have a love betrayed. Only then will Hosea have a glimpse into God's sense of betrayal by the people of Israel. Having liberated them from slavery and brought them into their land, God saw them forget the past, forsake the covenant, and worship strange gods. Yet He cannot abandon them despite the fact that they have abandoned Him. It is a powerful passage, conveying the astonishing assertion that more than the Jewish people love God, God loves the Jewish people. The

history of Israel is a love story between the faithful God and his often faithless people. Though God is sometimes angry, He cannot but forgive. He will take them on a kind of second honeymoon, and they will renew their marriage vows:

"Therefore I am now going to allure her;

I will lead her into the desert

and speak tenderly to her . . .

I will betroth you to me forever;

I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.

I will betroth you in faithfulness,

and you will know the Lord." (Hosea 2: 16-22)

It is this last sentence – with its explicit comparison between the covenant and a marriage – that Jewish men say when they put on the hand-tefillin, winding its strap around the finger like a wedding-ring.

One verse in the midst of this prophecy deserves the closest scrutiny. It contains two complex metaphors that must be unraveled strand by strand:

"In that day," declares the Lord,

"you will call Me 'my husband' [ishi];

you will no longer call Me 'my master' [baali]. (Hosea 2: 18)

This is a double pun. Baal, in biblical Hebrew, meant 'a husband', but in a highly specific sense – namely, 'master, owner, possessor, controller.' It signalled physical, legal and economic dominance. It was also the name of the Canaanite god – whose prophets Elijah challenged in the famous confrontation at Mount Carmel. Baal (often portrayed as a bull) was the god of the storm, who defeated Mot, the god of sterility and death. Baal was the rain that impregnated the earth and made it fertile. The religion of Baal is the worship of god-as-power.

Hosea contrasts this kind of relationship with the other Hebrew word for husband, ish. Here he is recalling the words of the first man to the first woman:

"This is now bone of my bones

And flesh of my flesh;

She shall be called Woman [ishah],

Because she was taken from Man [ish]." (Gen. 2: 23)

Here the male-female relationship is predicated on something quite other than power and dominance, ownership and control. Man and woman confront one another in sameness and difference. Each is an image of the other, yet each is separate and distinct. The only relationship able to bind them together without the use of force is marriage-as-covenant – a

bond of mutual loyalty and love in which each makes a pledge to the other to serve one another.

Not only is this a radical way of reconceptualizing the relationship between man and woman. It is also, implies Hosea, the way we should think of the relationship between human beings and God. God reaches out to humanity not as power – the storm, the thunder, the rain – but as love, and not an abstract, philosophical love but a deep and abiding passion that survives all the disappointments and betrayals. Israel may not always behave lovingly toward God, says Hosea, but God loves Israel and will never cease to do so.

How we relate to God affects how we relate to other people. That is Hosea's message – and vice versa: how we relate to other people affects the way we think of God. Israel's political chaos in the eighth century bce was intimately connected to its religious waywardness. A society built on corruption and exploitation is one where might prevails over right. That is not Judaism but idolatry, Baal-worship.

Now we understand why the sign of the covenant is circumcision, the commandment given in the first of this week's parshiot, Tazria. For faith to be more than the worship of power, it must affect the most intimate relationship between men and women. In a society founded on covenant, male-female relationships are built on something other and gentler than male dominance, masculine power, sexual desire and the drive to own, control and possess. Baal must become ish. The alpha male must become the caring husband. Sex must be sanctified and tempered by mutual respect. The sexual drive must be circumcised and circumscribed so that it no longer seeks to possess and is instead content to love.

There is thus more than an accidental connection between monotheism and monogamy. Although biblical law does not command monogamy, it nonetheless depicts it as the normative state from the start of the human story: Adam and Eve, one man, one woman. Whenever in Genesis a patriarch marries more than one woman there is tension and anguish. The commitment to one God is mirrored in the commitment to one person.

The Hebrew word *emunah*, often translated as "faith," in fact means faithfulness, fidelity, precisely the commitment one undertakes in making a marriage. Conversely, for the prophets there is a connection between idolatry and adultery. That is how God describes Israel to Hosea. God married the Israelites but they, in serving idols, acted the part of a promiscuous woman (Hos. 1-2).

The love of husband and wife – a love at once personal and moral, passionate and responsible – is as close as we come to understanding God's love for us and our ideal love for Him. When Hosea says, "You will know the Lord," he does not mean knowledge in an abstract sense. He means the knowledge of intimacy and relationship, the touch of two selves across the metaphysical abyss that separates one consciousness from another. That is the theme of The Song of Songs, that deeply human yet deeply mystical expression of eros, the love between humanity and God. It is also the meaning of one of the definitive sentences in Judaism: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5).

Judaism from the beginning made a connection between sexuality and violence on the one hand, marital faithfulness and social order on the other. Not by chance is marriage called *kiddushin*, "sanctification." Like covenant itself, marriage is a pledge of loyalty between two parties, each recognizing the other's integrity, honouring their differences even as they come together to bring new life into being. Marriage is to society what covenant is to religious faith: a decision to make love – not power, wealth or force majeure – the generative principle of life.

Just as spirituality is the most intimate relationship between us and God, so sex is the most intimate relationship between us and another person. Circumcision is the eternal sign of Jewish faith because it unites the life of the soul with the passions of the body, reminding us that both must be governed by humility, self-restraint and love.

Brit milah helps transform the male from Baal to Ish, from dominant partner to loving husband, just as God tells Hosea that this is what He seeks in His relationship with the people of the covenant. Circumcision turns biology into spirituality. The instinctive male urge to reproduce becomes instead a covenantal act of partnership and mutual affirmation. It was thus as decisive a turn in human civilisation as Abrahamic monotheism itself. Both are about abandoning power as the basis of relationship, and instead aligning ourselves with what Dante called "the love that moves the sun and other stars."^[3] Circumcision is the physical expression of the faith that lives in love.

[1] See, e.g., C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960. Simon May, *Love: A History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011.

[2] The famous first line of *Pride and Prejudice*.

[3] *The Divine Comedy*, 33: 143-45.