

## SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE - EMOR

APRIL 27, 2013 17 IYAR 5773

Day 32 of the Omer - Haftarah: Yehezkel 44:15-31

DAVID WILL BE AWAY THIS SHABBAT – PLEASE PRINT COPIES FOR YOUR FRIENDS

For additional announcements please see the website BenaiAsher.Org or subscribe to  
[news@sephardicnews.com](mailto:news@sephardicnews.com)

Friday Night: Candles: 7:29 PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM

On Friday night a dessert reception will be held at the Young Israel Social Hall at 9:30 PM with Rabbi Paysach Krohn and all are invited.

Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM –Please say Shemah at home by 8:41 AM

11:00 - 12:00 Orah's will be here with our Shabbat Morning Kids Program upstairs in the Rabbi's study.

Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more . . . And Leah Colish will be babysitting down in the playroom

KIDDUSH SPONSORS: Kiddush this week sponsored by Lisa Gaon in honor of Esther Tova's Birthday and by Bobby Mizrahi in honor of Matthew and Hindy's Birthday. Abal 120 to all! We need sponsors for each weeks Kiddush and Seudah Shelishi

5:30 - Shabbat Afternoon Kids Program with Rabbi Yosef and Leah; Ice Cream, Stories, Basketball, Hoolahoop, Parsha Quiz, Tefillot, Raffles and Fun! Supervised play during Seudat Shelishit.

5:30: Ladies Torah Class at the Lemberger's 1 East Olive.

Minha: 6:45 PM –

Seudah Shelishi and a Class 7:15 – with Rabbi Aharon –

Evening Service (Arbith): 8:20 PM - Shabbat Ends: 8:29PM

Motzaei Shabbat a traditional bonfire will be held at 15 West Beech Street at 9:30 PM with singing and dancing in honor of Lag BaOmer

Lag b'Omer Fire & Forest Festival - Sunday, April 28th 10 AM to 6 PM  
Please speak with Rabbi Colish

### WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

### WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Daily 6:30 AM class – Honest Business Practices

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 7PM Monday night

LADIES: Wednesday Night 8PM with Esther Wein at the Grill Home 35 East Olive Street

Special Series of Classes with Rabbi Colish based on Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University. Many Rabbis have suggested this program for the community. This isn't your typical "money class." Financial Peace University is practical, entertaining and fun! Preview Class Tuesday Night April 30th 8:00 PM  
Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach - 161 Lafayette Boulevard Long Beach, NY 11561  
(Any questions – please call Rabbi Yosef Colish - 516-589-6102)

Save the date! May 3rd The Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach will be hosting an NCSY Leadership Shabbaton. If you would like to host out of town advisors, or teenagers, please speak with Rabbi Colish, Riki Waldman ....

So as not to conflict with the Wednesday class by Esther Wein, we'll start a Tuesday night class by the beach after July 4<sup>th</sup> when Rabbi Colish's series ends.

The sisterhood will once again sponsor lunch the second day of shavuo. Anyone who can help with the preparations and setup please speak with Rebitzan Ida, Tina or Patti

We are attempting to organize the shul and put things in their proper place. Please check the coat room to see if any of the items in there belong to you or someone you know. Any items still left there at the end of the month (Wednesday April 30) will be donated to a local charity

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100

### Editors Notes

**IF ITS IN PRINT, IN MUST BE TRUE:** You may have seen an article this week where former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin called for the invasion of the Czech Republic in response to the recent terrorist attacks in Boston. The article goes on to write, "We don't know everything about these suspects yet," said Palin, according to the Daily Curreant article. "But we know they were Muslims from the Czech Republic. ...I betcha I speak for a lot of Americans when I say I want to go over there right now and start teaching those folks a lesson. And let's not stop at the Czech Republic, let's go after all Arab countries".

Although it's obvious satire, I guess it sounded real enough to some people that a Polish newsweekly mistook it as true and reposted the article. According to one translation, its headline reads: "Let's burn Prague: Sarah Palin calls for the invasion of the Czech Republic."

Too often many of us assume that if it's in print, it must be true. If people can mistake satire for truth then how much more must we fear propaganda in its various sorts being confused for the truth? We are familiar with propaganda and what it can do after studying Goebbels' work during the Holocaust era. This same propaganda has been working its way through the Arab world for the last 50 years.

Some think we are immune and protected from it in America, but we're not.

Everything we read in the paper, everything we see on TV is skewed. FOX, CNBC and CNN show us the same story from different perspectives, and sometimes we wouldn't know they are the same story. We see a documentary quoting specific people and often fail to realize that what those people really wanted to say was left on a cutting floor. Piecing sentences together with images very often allows a director to make someone who said white, appear to say black.

Almost daily I get emails from people I know forwarding emails spewing utter nonsense. By accepting what we read without checking it and then

forwarding it to our lists, we become part of the problem.

So let's try to remember that if it's in print, if it's in the news, or if it's on TV, then it still may not be true.

### Ropes and Rocks

In our modern world, we've become very used to being connected. We can reach each other almost anywhere and anytime. We panic when our phones read, "no service". We are barraged with ads debating which carrier will provide us with better service; concerned with how many bars are visible and how fast and clear the connection is. In connecting though, we are often interrupted. We answer the immediate rather than the most important. Our ability to prioritize is often impeded.

This week's portion of Emor is about being connected. It details the duties of being connected as they relate to the kohanim – the priests. It discusses the responsibilities of being connected as they relate to the establishment of festivals and celebrating them, And the portion concludes with the consequences of becoming disconnected when we are told the story of the blasphemer.

At my nephew Alfred Sutton's Bar Mitzvah this past week, I was discussing the concept of points of connection as they relate to the commandments. We are connected by 613 strands which bind us from below to above as we do the misvot and from above to below as those strands transfer spiritual energy back to us.

But few if any of us can be bound by all 613 at the same time. And the cords that bind us vary in gage and strength directly proportional to the effort we exert in performing the tasks we have accepted.

A few years ago, we began a minyan, a quorum, in our office. During the winter months, we time the service to complete the afternoon and evening prayers together, and during the summer, we can only say the afternoon service, Mincha.

Possibly the shortest prayer service of the day, especially when my son Jonah leads the prayers, Mincha takes 10-to-15-minutes, but for much of the Jewish world, it has become almost a forgotten prayer. I believe this is due to the fact that it inconveniently falls in the middle of a busy work day. What do you mean, stop at 2 or 3 or 4 o'clock and run out to a prayer service? Impossible!

My teacher, Rabbi Abittan z'sl would say that because of this fact alone, Mincha can be considered the most important prayer of the day.

Rabbi Abittan would teach that we learn the prayer of Mincha from the story of when Rebecca, having left her father's home in Syria comes to the land of Canaan with Eliezer and the first time she sees her future husband Isaac, he is going out LaSuach BaSadeh, to converse in the field. To converse with whom, we ask? With G-d!

Of all the prayers, it is Mincha that is connected with conversation with G-d and with being in the field. The Rabbi would explain that we can say the morning prayer before we so to say, begin our day and the evening prayer, after we complete our day, but to pray Mincha, we need to stop in the middle of the field, in the middle of our day, in the middle of our activity, in the middle of our work and in the middle of our tasks.

The Rabbis understood that carving out time is difficult. My friend Sam Cohen who along with his son's Michael, Hymie and Joseph form the core of our minyan sent me an article asking why Mincha has neither the long introductory and closing parts of the other prayers. Rabbi Chaim Goldberger answers, "Because impoverished as this service appears . . . , it is the one which asks us to disconnect ourselves from our mundane and worldly mindset and retreat into a sudden and total encounter with the Divine".

We need to stop, step out and then step in. It is an opportunity to reconnect. It is a small block of time, carved out of a day with no spare blocks, to face and focus on what is really important and to establish priorities as "facts on the ground". In doing so, we reveal to Heaven that we know what comes first, but more so, we reveal it to ourselves. Rabbi Abittan and I often discussed popular theories of time management, diet, exercise and life management as espoused by the best selling books in your local Barnes and Noble. He often pointed out that many of these ideas were rooted in Torah, Mishnah and the works of Rambam and later scholars. Numerous theories could be traced back to Pirkey Avot, the Tractate we translate as Ethics of our Fathers which we study each week between Pesach and Shavuot and then into the summer. And as that Tractate begins, all of our wisdom traces back to Moshe at Sinai.

One thing we talked about many times was what we called "Filling the Time Jar". To illustrate, here is its story.

One day, an expert in time management was speaking to a group of business students. To drive home a point, he used an illustration those students will never forget. As he stood in front of the group of high-powered over-achievers he said: "Okay, time for a quiz." Then he pulled out a one-gallon, wide mouthed Mason jar and set it on the table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked: "Is the jar full?" Everyone in the class said: "Yes." Then he said: "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the space between the big rocks. Then he asked the group once more: "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was on to him: "Probably not," one of them answered. "Good!" he replied.

He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question: "Is the jar full?" "No!" the class shouted. Once again he said: "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked at the class and asked: "What is the point of this illustration?"

One eager student raised his hand and said: "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard you can always fit some more things in!" "No," the speaker replied, "That's not the point.

The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all.

It's up to us to decide what the big rocks are.

The Rabbi would quote Rambam from the Mishneh Torah, "make your work provisional and your Torah study permanent. Do not say: "When I have free time, I will study," for perhaps you will never have free time."

The fist rocks need to be, Torah, Family, Mivot, Maasim Tovim and taking care of your health. The Rabbi would remind me that this is one of our biggest tests and where we can show Bitachon and seeing a miraculous payoff from Bitachon. If we fill the jar with those rocks of Torah, Family, Mivot, Maasim Tovim and taking care of your health, first, then Hashem will handle the gravel, sand and water.

If I stop to pray, I might miss that call. I might miss that client. I might miss that question. I worry I might be losing money at the most opportune time of the day. But that's the test.

If we have Bitachon to commit to our side of the bargain, The Creator of the Universe will make sure that everything else is covered. We'll still need to work at it. We'll still need to make the effort, but the return will be beyond any odds or predictions.

If we sweat the little stuff (the gravel, the sand) then we'll fill our lives with little things to worry about. We'll dream about getting to the big rocks, but we'll find the excuses of "no time now", "later" and "eventually".

And the sad fact of life is that "eventually" often never comes before the sand of times runs out.

So, this coming week, recommit yourself to Mincha every day, bind that rope from below to above and G-d will bind you from above to below. Recommit to starting with the rocks! And with G-d's help, the rest will be easy.

Find a local minyan, start one or simply find a quiet spot where you can commune with Heaven for a few minutes. If you're in the neighborhood, join us at 4PM every day, Artistic, 979 Third Avenue, 17th floor, between 58th and 59th ... see you there!

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

PS ... A bit more on the Damascus Jobar Synagogue ... Thanks to my friend Alan Lee of London. ALSO No one commented on my note last week regarding the IDF. So let's not assume it's true.

### **Jewish sites in Syria are the latest front in propaganda war**

*Recent and contested reports that a synagogue outside Damascus was burned to the ground should be taken with a grain of salt, as Syria's Jewish sites are a battlefield for misinformation and half-truths by both the Assad regime and its opponents.*  
By Adam Blitz

Uncorroborated reports have recently appeared in both the Arab and Jewish press suggesting that the Jobar Synagogue, located in a suburb of Damascus, had been plundered and burnt by either the Assad regime or rebel forces.

This claim should be met with some skepticism, bearing in mind the disinformation wars that thrive in the Syrian conflict, but in any case Jobar's synagogue has certainly been desecrated once

before, during the Damascus Affair of 1840. As the Irish missionary J.L. Porter noted in his work, "Five Years in Damascus" (1855): "At one time the Jew would be the actual ruler of Syria, and then in a few weeks he would be stripped of fortune and perhaps cruelly mutilated or even murdered."

However, the fate of the Jobar synagogue, past and present, does not fully embody the 1200 years of co-existence between Jews and Muslims in Syria, nor the Jewish communities themselves that once thrived there.

Immediately before the onset of the Syrian civil war two years ago, there were only a handful of Jews left in Damascus. But many synagogues – over a dozen – were still standing, a testament to a once-diverse community composed of Syrian Jews of ancient local lineage, as well as 'recent' Jews who immigrated from Iberia and Italy from the 16th century onwards. The Al-Raqay synagogue (Iraqi) and the Franji synagogue (Senores Francos, a reference to Italian Jews of the 16th century) were familiar fixtures in the communal landscape.

Damascus' traditional Jewish Quarter, Harat Al Yahud, in the south-east of the Old City, remained derelict and largely abandoned for many years after its Jewish inhabitants left, especially after Syrian independence and the UN partition of Palestine vote in 1947, which triggered pogroms against Jews in Aleppo and Damascus.

Harat Al Yahud's demise should be seen in the broader context of a city experiencing mass Jewish emigration, negative population growth, and a lack of social policy to address urban decay. In a country where nearly 90% of the housing is owner-occupied, the task of reviving any of the residential quarters of the Old City on a private basis remained a challenge. Assad's regime attempted to re-house Palestinian refugees in and amongst the remaining Jewish population, and offered the refugees subsidized rents, but it was not until a decade ago that Harat-Al Yahud would be regenerated.

Change came in 2004 when the Syrian sculptor Mustafa Ali bought the Bukhais ancestral home. The family of silk traders had left more than fifteen years prior. By 2005 their residence had been restored to its former glory and transformed into an art gallery. In the course of time, forty additional artists followed Ali's lead and pitched camp in the Jewish Quarter.

Concurrent with the rise of an artists' colony was a government-sponsored program to restore the Old City's synagogues. This interest in minority affairs

was spurred by the secularist ideology of the Assad regime which, somewhat instrumentally, voiced frequent affirmations of a multi-ethnic Syria.

Despite this gesture, there still remained no scientific attempt to survey the synagogues (before the rapid restoration program) or to catalog their holdings. The last attempt to grapple seriously with the Jewish record in Damascus was in 1995, when the photo-journalist Robert Lyons produced a survey for the World Monument Fund's Jewish Heritage Program, which managed to cover 75% of the extant sites.

Still the question persists: How should the past be maintained once the Jews have gone? There have been examples of cooperation between Middle East authorities and their expatriate Jewish communities: The Beirut community in France engaged with the Lebanese government and secured the eventual restoration of the Magen Avraham Synagogue. There are other examples of Iraqi Jewish artifacts, once illegally confiscated by the Iraqi authorities, that are now on loan to institutions in the U.S.

Then there are examples of where cooperation has soured. The Iraqis are now demanding the return of the Jewish archive. In Egypt, the remaining Jews have voiced criticism of the state's involvement in the handling of their heritage sites – while this tiny community's monuments have received state protection from potential Islamist violence.

I myself have pleaded that Jewish artifacts in Damascus' synagogues should fall under the control of Syria's Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums. I have stressed the diligence of Dr. Abdulkarim, its director, and this has triggered discussions about the future of Jewish sites in both the free press as well as – surprisingly - Hezbollah's Al Manar, which accused the "Zionist intelligence agency", in coordination with al-Qaida, of stealing treasures from the Jobar synagogue via a commando unit to made up of combatants "of Arab origins: Iraqi, Moroccan and Lebanese, and were dressed in Islamist jihadists' uniforms."

Syria's synagogues are now a battlefield for misinformation and half-truths by both the Assad regime and its opponents, with YouTube videos purporting to show plundered synagogues and blame thrown at both sides. I simply do not believe that in the case of the Jobar synagogue the destruction has been as total as that put forward by these heavily edited and politically-engaged 'reports'. It is clear that several weeks ago the synagogue's exterior was shelled, but it seems equally clear that the resulting

press coverage has not differentiated between the exterior and the prayer hall across the courtyard.

What I do know is that the most recent videos in this media onslaught are composite pieces of propaganda. At a time when coverage of Syria's war is mediated by soldiers, outsiders and the protégés of various warring factions, the free press should not be so quick to respond to online claims made by interested parties.

This virtual world often consists of hearsay and at other times mere subterfuge; the Syrian reciprocal blame game operates for every site that is reported damaged, and terms like "burned" or "destroyed" are standard phrases on both sides. To the long list of the casualties of this most brutal war, it's clear that the first victim, as always, is the truth.

### **A Helping Hand At The Kotel**

A young Kollel family that lived in Bnei Brak was blessed with many children. They outgrew their tiny apartment. When their ninth child was on the way, it was evident that it was just not possible to live in the tiny apartment anymore. They desperately needed a larger apartment, but were just not able to afford one.

The father said, "I think it's time to ask our Father in Heaven for a new apartment." He then took a bus to Yerushalayim and went to the Kotel. The young father, while holding his Tehillim book in hand, started crying in prayer to his Father in Heaven. Page after page he continued to pour out his heart in tear full of prayer. "Please Hashem, help my growing family, allow us to live in a suitable place of living, so that we may continue to serve You constantly." All of a sudden, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around and he was asked by a compassionate man, "Why are crying? Is there anything I can do to help?"

The father answered, "I need Hashem's help, thank you."

The man with kind eyes smiled and asked, "Tell me what it is, let try and help you."

Hesitantly, the young father then began to tell over his problem. The man took him by the arm and said, "Come with me, I think I can help you."

They went to his car and drove to a real estate brokers office. The man asked the real estate broker if they have any open listings in Bnei Brak. The broker said they have a 5 bedroom apartment available. The man then signed the lease papers, wrote a check and gave the keys to the young father.

"How can I thank you? I don't even know your name."

The man smiled and said, "You turned to our Father in Heaven. He put me in this situation to do a Mitzvah and help you in your time of need. I am only a messenger, nothing more."

With great happiness, the father returned to his family to tell them the wonderful news. Word got around to the Kollel, about his success at the Kotel. Many other Kollel members then rushed to Yerushalayim for hopes of the same success. They ended up spending hours at the Kotel, but the only taps on their shoulders, were from beggars asking for money. They then all drove back to Bnei Brak.

The Rosh Kollel said, "The young father went to the Kotel to Daven to Hashem, so Hashem sent him this man as a savior. The others went to the Kotel looking for this man, so why should Hashem help them?"

#### **Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:**

1st Aliya: Specific restrictions for Kohanim and the Kohain Gadol pertaining to marriages, sexuality, and mourning.

2nd Aliya: Laws pertaining to physical blemishes of the Kohanim and who can and can not eat from the priestly gifts.

3rd Aliya: Laws defining what constitutes an acceptable and unacceptable blemish on an animal designated to be a Korban.

4th Aliya: The establishment of Shabbos, Pesach, the Omer, the counting of the Omer and Shavuoth.

5th Aliya: The establishment of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

6th Aliya: The establishment of Sukkoth.

7th Aliya: Laws of the Ner Tamid, the Showbread, the incident with the Blasphemer, and the penalties for Blasphemy.

This week's Haftorah is among the prophecies of Yechezkel 44:15 describing the third Bais Hamikdash. Yechezkel's prophesized after the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash in the year 3352-410 b.c.e.

In the Haftorah, Yechezkel instructed the Kohanim in their unique laws. It relates to this week's Parsha

which also details many of the laws imposed specifically on the Kohanim.

#### **EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN**

##### **"When I observe the Shabbat Hashem watches over me." (Zemirot of Shabbat)**

Our perashah discusses all of the holidays, but it starts first with Shabbat. Let's hear a true story about a hero and about Shabbat, as told by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman. Sam (Shimon) Zeitlin was born in Brooklyn in about 1945 into a non-religious home. His father passed away when he was five and his mother was often ill. Faced with these difficulties, young Sam always pushed himself to succeed.

In 1965 he joined the N.Y. State cycling team and became an instant sensation. Within a short period of time he won championships in the United States, Canada, Europe and Central America. As a cycling star, he became a target of anti-Semitism, some open and some hidden. Though Sam was not religious at the time, he was proud of his Jewishness and the hatred he was being subjected to was difficult to tolerate. It had been expected that he would join the U.S. cycling team in the forthcoming Olympic Games. However, Sam now decided that if he was going to participate in the Olympics he would do so as a member of the Jewish team.

Sam flew to Israel and joined the Israeli cycling team. He participated in the Maccabiah Games and it was predicted that he would win a gold medal at the Olympics.

One evening after a hard day of training, Sam decided to visit the Kotel for the first time in his life. At the Kotel he met some Rabbis who introduced him to Rabbi Noah Weinberg, who would later found Yeshivah Aish Hatorah in the Old City. Before long Sam was keeping all the misvot and experiencing a joy of life that he never felt before. He was still cycling and looked forward to participating in the Olympic Games that were fast approaching.

The Israeli Sports Federation announced that the cyclists' Olympic trials would

be held on Shabbat. Sam informed the committee that he would participate on any day but Shabbat. They were wholly unsympathetic, saying the date was fixed and would not be changed, knowing full well that he was the only Israeli cyclist who had a possibility of winning an Olympic medal.

Sam was devastated. He had spent hundreds of lonely hours training and now was being denied the opportunity to compete in the Olympics.

He did not have to think the matter over. He was grateful that Hashem had led him to people who made him realize that keeping Shabbat was far more important than his cycling career. He did not participate in the Olympic trials and as a result Israel did not send a cycling team to the Olympics.

The year was 1972. At the Olympic Games in Munich Germany, Arab terrorists abducted the Israeli Olympic team from their lodgings in the Olympic village and murdered all of them, Hashem yikom damam.

Sam would often say, "I gave up my Olympic dream for Shabbat and Shabbat saved my life." As we sing every Friday night at our Shabbat table, "Ki Eshmerah Shabbat Kel Yishmereni - When I observe the Shabbat Hashem watches over me." Rabbi Reuven Semah

**"An Israelite woman's son went out." (Vayikra 24:10)** The Torah tells us that a Jewish man went out and got into an argument and ultimately blasphemed the Name of Hashem. Where did he come from? What caused him to do this terrible act?

One of the opinions in the Midrash is that he saw what was written right before this episode. The Torah describes the baking of the Lehem HaPanim, the show bread, which was baked once a week and left on the Table in the Tabernacle to be eaten the following week. This blasphemer was turned off by the fact that the bread of G-d is one week old, rather than fresh bread, and this prompted him to curse the Holy Name.

The amazing thing about this is that it says there was an open miracle every week

that the bread stayed fresh for more than seven days and was still as tantalizing at the end of the week as if it was just prepared. How could this be the incident which triggered this man's outburst?

The answer is that he was looking for something to pick on and when he found a potential grievance, even though he should have been inspired from the miracle that was apparent, he chose to complain and look at it negatively. The lesson is obvious. We see many different events and situations but our outlook will depend on how we ourselves feel or what we want to look for. There are miracles out there which we choose to look at from a negative viewpoint and thus all we do is complain.

When we are feeling positive about ourselves, then we see the good that is really there. It all depends on the tint of our lenses. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### Rabbi Wein

Every day of life automatically brings with it a share of frustrations and disappointments. Very rarely do things turn out for us exactly as we planned and hoped that they would. Some frustrations are relatively minor even in our personal scheme of things – my inability to easily change a halogen light bulb or carry a tune for instance. Other frustrations such as health problems and financial difficulties and reverses take on a greater dimension in our lives.

One can easily say that our ability to deal with life's frustrations in a calm and measured way is the true test of character and mettle. Usually frustration leads to feelings of anger and anger leads to bitterness of spirit and even to violence. I have seen articles by professionals in the field of human psychology that advocate expressions of anger as often being a positive reaction to frustrations.

"Blowing off steam" is an understandable reaction to moments of extreme frustration. Yet the Torah and Jewish tradition militates strongly against such expressions of anger in almost all circumstances of life. Maimonides, who advocates moderation and a middle of the road approach regarding all human behavior traits, nevertheless advocates extremism in avoiding anger.

The Talmud is replete with statements denigrating anger as a response to the frustrations of life. Anger is a statement that there is no God present in the world. Anger by its very presence is heresy and a denial of faith. That being the case, how is one to deal with the inevitable daily frustrations of life? Are there no antidotes to the roiling emotions of frustration that fester within us so regularly?

One such antidote, that Jewish tradition advances, is the idea and sense of perspective in viewing life. If one is viewing a painting by a great impressionist or pointillist artist, one is advised to view the painting from a distance - not close up. When standing close up, the canvas appears to be composed of disconnected blotches of paint that carry forth no message or scene.

Standing ten feet away from the canvas the genius of the artist is revealed. Instead of seeing individual small blotches of paint one views a masterpiece of color and form. If in our lives we stand too close to the mundane occurrences that are our daily lot, we

are very prone to life's frustrations and all of the negativities that they produce within us.

Life must be viewed as a whole and being aware of the general picture can help us deal with the particular issues that confront us. The rabbis went so far as to teach us that a living human being should not complain about life's circumstances and problems – is it not sufficient that the person is still alive?

The Jew begins one's day by acknowledging the fact that one is still alive to live another day. In the overall scheme of such a view of human existence frustrations and disappointments are more easily borne and dealt with. Perspective is the key to mental health and spiritual strength.

Acceptance of one's inherent limitations is also a necessity in combatting the negativities that life's frustrations engender within us. There are many things that I simply cannot do. By finally realizing that I do not have that necessary skill, talent or ability, I am no longer as frustrated by my inability to accomplish that mundane act and goal that so baffles me.

Professional athletes always proclaim the mantra that they have to "play within themselves" and "not try to do too much." Bluntly put, this means that they recognize their limitations and concentrate on what they can do, and not fret too much over what they cannot do. This is a good lesson for all of us in all of life's circumstances.

Of course, acceptance of one's limitations demands a lowered ego. It is interesting to note that Maimonides, in discussing acceptable traits, links humility with the absence of anger. Someone who is haughty, arrogant and full of hubris will automatically live a life of frustration and anger. Things never go right for such people for everything that does not go right for them is perceived as a personal slight and as a blow to one's ego.

The great men of the Lithuanian Mussar Movement used one's reaction to life's frustrations as a litmus test of one's spiritual status. Serenity in life and in dealing with life's challenges became the hallmark of the truly pious Torah Jew. The prophet taught us that "the wicked storm is like the raging sea." King David blessed God for "leading him to the calm waters." Life is always replete with frustrations. How we deal with them is the true measure of our spiritual selves.

**Sir Jonathan Sacks**  
**Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations**  
**of the Commonwealth**

## Faith as a Journey

In its account of the festivals of the Jewish year, this week's parshah contains the following statement:

You shall dwell in thatched huts for seven days. Everyone included in Israel must live in such thatched huts. This is so that future generations will know that I caused the Israelites to live in sukkot when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your G-d.

What precisely this means was the subject of disagreement between two great teachers of the Mishnaic era, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva. According to the Talmud Bavli (Sukkah 11a), Rabbi Eliezer holds that the reference is to the clouds of glory that accompanied the Israelites on their journey through the desert. Rabbi Akiva maintains that the verse is to be understood literally (sukkot mammash). It means "huts" – no more, no less.

A similar difference of opinion exists between the great medieval Jewish commentators. Rashi and Ramban favour the "clouds of glory" interpretation. Ramban cites as proof the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the end of days:

Then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain. (Isaiah 4: 5-6)

Here the word sukkah clearly refers not to a natural but to a miraculous protection.

Ibn Ezra and Rashbam, however, favour the literal interpretation. Rashbam explains as follows: the festival of Sukkot, when the harvest was complete and the people were surrounded by the blessings of the land, was the time to remind them of how they came to be there. The Israelites would relive the wilderness years during which they had no permanent home. They would then feel a sense of gratitude to G-d for bringing them to the land. Rashbam's proof-text is Moses' speech in Devarim 8:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your G-d for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your G-d . . . Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your



heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your G-d, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery . . . You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your G-d, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, confirming his covenant which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today. (8: 10-18)

According to Rashbam, Sukkot (like Pesach) is a reminder of the humble origins of the Jewish people, a powerful antidote to the risks of affluence. That is one of the overarching themes of Moses' speeches in the book of Devarim and a mark of his greatness as a leader. The real challenge to the Jewish people, he warned, was not the dangers they faced in the wilderness, but the opposite, the sense of wellbeing and security they would have once they settled the land. The irony – and it has happened many times in the history of nations – is that people remember G-d in times of distress but forget him in times of plenty. That is when cultures become decadent and begin to decline.

A question, however, remains. According to the view that Sukkot is to be understood literally, what miracle does the festival of Sukkot represent? Pesach celebrates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt with signs and wonders. Shavuot recalls the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the only time in history when an entire people experienced an unmediated revelation of G-d. On the "clouds of glory" interpretation, Sukkot fits this scheme. It recalls the miracles in the wilderness, the forty years during which they ate manna from heaven, drank water from a rock, and were led by a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night (In 1776, Thomas Jefferson chose this image as his design for the Great Seal of the United States). But on the view that the sukkah is not a symbol but a fact – a hut, a booth, nothing more – what miracle does it represent? There is nothing exceptional in living in a portable home if you are a nomadic group living in the Sinai desert. It is what Bedouin do to this day. Where then is the miracle?

A surprising and lovely answer is given by the prophet Jeremiah:

Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem:  
 "I remember the devotion of your youth,  
 how, as a bride, you loved me  
 and followed me through the desert,  
 through a land not sown.

Throughout Tenakh, most of the references to the wilderness years focus on the graciousness of G-d and the ingratitude of the people: their quarrels and

complaints, their constant inconstancy. Jeremiah does the opposite. To be sure, there were bad things about those years, but against them stands the simple fact that the Israelites had the faith and courage to embark on a journey through an unknown land, fraught with danger, and sustained only by their trust in G-d. They were like Sarah who accompanied Abraham on his journey, leaving "his land, birthplace and father's house" behind. They were like Tziporah who went with Moses on his risk-laden mission to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. There is a faith that is like love; there is a love that calls for faith. That is what the Israelites showed in leaving a land where they had lived for 210 years and travelling out into the desert, "a land not sown", not knowing what would befall them on the way, but trusting in G-d to bring them to their destination.

Perhaps it took Rabbi Akiva, the great lover of Israel, to see that what was truly remarkable about the wilderness years was not that the Israelites were surrounded by the clouds of glory but that they were an entire nation without a home or houses; they were like nomads without a place of refuge. Exposed to the elements, at risk from any surprise attack, they none the less continued on their journey in the faith that G-d would not desert them.

To a remarkable degree Sukkot came to symbolise not just the forty years in the wilderness but also two thousand years of exile. Following the destruction of the second Temple, Jews were scattered throughout the world. Almost nowhere did they have rights. Nowhere could they consider themselves at home. Wherever they were, they were there on sufferance, dependent on a ruler's whim. At any moment without forewarning they could be expelled, as they were from England in 1290, from Vienna in 1421, Cologne, 1424, Bavaria 1442, Perugia, Vicenza, Parma and Milan in the 1480s, and most famously from Spain in 1492. These expulsions gave rise to the Christian myth of "the wandering Jew" – conveniently ignoring the fact that it was Christians who imposed this fate on them. Yet even they were often awestruck at the fact that despite everything Jews did not give up their faith when (in Judah Halevi's phrase) "with a word lightly spoken" they could have converted to the dominant faith and put an end to their sufferings.

Sukkot is the festival of a people for whom, for twenty centuries, every house was a mere temporary dwelling, every stop no more than a pause in a long journey. I find it deeply moving that Jewish tradition called this time zeman simchatenu, "the season of our joy". That, surely, is the greatness of the Jewish spirit that, with no protection other than their faith in G-d, Jews were able to celebrate in the midst of

suffering and affirm life in the full knowledge of its risk and uncertainty. That is the faith of a remarkable nation.

R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once explained why the festival of Nissan has two names, Pesach and Chag haMatzot. The name Pesach represents the greatness of G-d who "passed over" the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. The name Chag haMatzot represents the greatness of the Israelites who were willing to follow G-d into the wilderness without provisions. In the Torah, G-d calls the festival Chag haMatzot in praise of Israel. The Jewish people, however, called it Pesach to sing the praise of G-d. That, it seems, is the argument between R. Eliezer and R. Akiva about Sukkot. According to R. Eliezer, it represents G-d's miracle, the clouds of glory. According to R. Akiva, however, it represents the miracle of Israel – their willingness to continue the long journey to freedom, vulnerable and at great risk, led only by the call of G-d.

Why then, according to Rabbi Akiva, is Sukkot celebrated at harvest time? The answer is in the very next verse of the prophecy of Jeremiah. After speaking of "the devotion of your youth, how, as a bride, you loved me," the prophet adds:

Israel is holy to G-d,  
The first fruit of His harvest.

Just as, during Tishri, the Israelites celebrated their harvest, so G-d celebrates His – a people who, whatever else their failings, have stayed loyal to heaven's call for longer, and through a more arduous set of journeys, than any other people on earth.

## AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

### "For your favor" (23:11)

The acts which cause us to become more aware of Hashem are acts that gain for us Hashem's favor. The waiving of the Omer before Hashem is intended for the purpose of declaring that Hashem bestowed the grain, and that the grain is a miraculous substance, which elicits our amazement and admiration. If we respond properly to this declaration, and we recognize the wondrous process of the growth of the grain and we perceive the vastness of the miracles which the grain performs when we ingest it, the grain thereby becomes the great demonstration of Hashem's infinite wisdom and power and kindness. When men learn these lessons they thus fulfill the purpose for which they were created, and thus they deserve Hashem's favor.

The intention of gaining Hashem's favor should be emphasized and should be kept in mind while doing any Mitzvah and even any ordinary act. But "A man's food is more difficult (meaning: more miraculous) than the rending of the Sea of Suf" (Pesachim 118A).

The sunlight travels 93 million miles to aid the plant-chlorophyll to convert the carbon dioxide of the air into starch. The sun evaporates the surface of the sea and the vapor rises to the clouds, where the winds sweep the clouds inland to be condensed and to fall as rain to nourish the grain. Every grain kernel possesses some millions of bits of information recorded on the helix of the DNA molecule with instructions how to produce the plant and how the plant should function to produce the grain. As the materials from the atmosphere and from the soil pass into the plant and are processed, thousands of complicated steps must be performed in precise sequence so that the final result is achieved. But the truth of the intricacy of the production of food is vastly more complicated and purposeful than men will ever know.

The waiving of the Omer is a declaration of our endless gratitude and wonderment and admiration for the work of him that "gives bread to all flesh, for his kindness is everlasting" (Tehillim 136:25). Hashem created these miracles of Kindness in order that men should recognize Him. Therefore the waiving of the Omer to aggrandize and praise the gift of food is certainly deserving of Hashem's favor. "And he shall waive the Omer ...for your favor."

Thus the appreciation of food is a major means of gaining Hashem's favor. That is the reason that Birkat Hamazon is the sole blessing that is unanimously recognized as an original Torah obligation (based on the verse in Devarim 8:10). Quoted from "A Kingdom of Cohanim" by Rabbi Miller Z'TL

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