

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

TAZRIA-MESORA
APRIL 28, 2012 6 IYAR 5772

DEDICATIONS : In memory of Farha Aziza Bakal Bibi – 10 Iyar

Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach
Schedule and Announcements

Friday Night: Candles: 7:29PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM
Friday Evening - Count 21 days in the Omer

Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM
Please say Shemah at home by 8:39

We have a beautiful Kiddush this week, but we have no sponsors. So we'll give it in honor of Rabbi Dr. Meyer Abittan and Debbie and their family who along with Baruch and Michal will be with us this Shabbat. And in celebration of Yom HaAtzmaut. We look forward to a special Shabbat.

We need sponsors for the Kiddush each week as well as for Seudah Shelishi through the summer. Please speak with Rebetzin Ida tomorrow, let her know which weeks you can sponsor or email us.

Pirkei Avot with Rabbi Aharon at 6:00 PM
Childrens program at 6:00 with Rabbi Colish

Minha: 6:45 PM
Seudah Shelishi and a Class with Baruch Abittan at 7:20 PM
"Counting the Omer - The Spiritual Difference between Days and Weeks"
Evening Service (Arbith): 8:20 PM
Shabbat Ends: 8:30PM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00,
It seems Sunday, when almost everyone is around is the hardest day to get ten to come on time
Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Sunday Morning Halacha with Breakfast 9:00 AM
Kosher Kitchen Series 9:30AM – Led by Rabbi Colish

6:30 AM class – Shelah Hakadosh on the Perasha

Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30:
Basar BeChalav – With Michael and David

“Sephardic Women's Prayer” Tuesday nights. @ 8PM in the Synagogue with Rabbi Colish.
- deep insights, simple translations and a how to guide.

please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

Editors Notes

I owe you some stories from the communal Seder ... these will give you a glimpse into what it was all about.

When we came into the Synagogue on Friday morning, it was evident that the elves had been working all night. A "U" shaped table was magnificently set for 80 people with Seder plates placed strategically throughout, along with Matzah covers and Afikoman bags. In one corner was a giant sheep made from cotton balls roasting over a painted roaring flame, supported by branches. In the center of the U on the floor was a rendition of the Nile river and ancient Egypt created from carpets and props, with Baby Moses floating along in his basket. Around the social hall entrance were rows of red carnations with a verse in red above in Hebrew commanding the people to place blood on their doorposts. We had a magical cup for Elijah where the wine disappears when the door is opened. And we had plagues, lots and lots of plagues. The Seder is all about asking questions; well this room would get people to ask questions.

After Shaharit I stopped at the liquor store and loaded up the trunk with lots of wine. Then to buy candies for the kids (and the adults) and finally back home where everyone was waiting to burn the Chametz. My kids had this wonderful idea. The leaven is supposed to represent our own haughtiness, our own excess pride and all that we should rid from ourselves in anticipation of leaving our own personal Egypt (the things we have become a slave to). They wrote out the traits

and habits they hoped to become free from on slips and those slips would be burned with the pieces of bread we searched for the previous night.

As they came out we noticed the gardener was there working on the front and with the gardener was an older woman. She remarked to the gardener's son, "look they are going to burn the chometz". My kids stopped in their tracks. How did this older woman who looked like a hick from the sticks know what it meant to burn chametz. So we invited her to join us beyond the yard, on the beach by the fire pit. We thought that perhaps working in a Jewish neighborhood for so many years, she heard it said. We asked, "Do you remember burning the chometz as a child". And she recounted her grandparents and how she burned the chometz with her grandfather, but her father never wanted to. We asked about her Seders and again she recalled her grandparents and her mother and the memories, but she hadn't made one since her mother died. My kids looked at me as if to say, OK who's inviting her? And so we hinted to Chantelle and she convinced her to come. The woman came dressed up and was so elegant. She recalled the passages and told us about her youth and fully participated. She left at 1:30 in the morning telling us it was a night she would always remember.

Then there was the fine gentleman whose wife had been ill for many years and was being taken care of by a nurse. A friend came to me and told me that this man would surely be sitting home alone. Instead we begged him to join us. He sat between my daughters and niece and recounted for them stories of his youth in Baghdad. He had such a wonderful night and told us it was

done so beautifully, it reminded him of his own wedding. He too left at 1:30 with a big smile and was still talking about the night two weeks later.

These two stories represent the stories of those who joined us.

And everyone participated, whether by reading from the Hagadah in myriad languages to recalling memories of Passover in Moscow when it was forbidden, in Scotland, in Uzbekistan and making Matzah with the neighbors. We heard about Passover in Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city where there were but 1000 Jews and Sephardim and Ashkenazim didn't mix making the numbers seem even less. Experiences from around the world were brought to life.

We played split the frog with frogs flying everywhere and spread the lice (actually bubbles). And we ended it with a rendition of, Who Knows One, in Arabic which comes with acting out the parts as we do with my father each year and as we did in the Gindi house of my grandparents when we were but children. And the place was rolling.

We began with excitement and we ended with excitement. And although I told everyone that next year we were going back to Florida, eight families who heard about the evenings but were not there, already made reservations for next year. BeShanah Habaah BeYerushalyim.

And finally I want to thank all of you out there in Cyberspace who were so helpful and generous. And even if you weren't with us, a small part of you was.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Sunday night CBS reporter Bob Simon presented an episode of "60 Minutes" that was a pathetic excuse for objective journalism. He begins the segment by remarking on the tragic state of Christians in the Middle East, where violence against Christians has spiked during the recent regional turmoil which some have dubbed the Arab Spring. His remarks on Christian persecution in the Middle East last all of two sentences before he plunges into an attack on the only country in the region where Christians are safe: Israel. The irony of this story is remarkable.

The irony unfolds in the first 30 seconds of the episode as Simon says "... In Iraq and Egypt scores of churches have been attacked, hundreds murdered. In Syria, revolution seriously threatens Christian communities. The one place where Christians are not suffering from violence is the Holy Land." Simon then goes on to present a skewed narrative filled with misrepresentations and inaccurate facts, which ultimately paint Israel as the Villain. For those of us who feel deeply for the persecuted Christians of the Middle East, it is hard to comprehend what motivates a Journalist to casually gloss over the travesty of the ongoing annihilation of ancient Christian communities throughout the region, in order to attack the only country in the Middle East where the Christian population is thriving.

The damage that this piece of irresponsible reporting inflicts is two-fold. First, and most obviously – it paints the democratic country of Israel in a negative light in a blatant attempt to dislodge Christian support for Israel. Secondly– it deflects attention from the real tragedy befalling Christians all over the Arab world. The real news story

is that throughout the so called Arab Spring, the rapes, beatings, murders, looting and terror perpetrated against Christians in the Middle East have been endemic. At a time when Christians are being terrorized by Islamic extremists and complacent regimes throughout the entire region, "60 Minutes" chooses to vilify the only safe haven for Christianity in the entire Middle East.

Copy this URL: http://org2.democracyinaction.org/o/7196/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=10448 to write to CBS and tell them that this reckless, politicized reporting will not do! This is a poor example of news reporting and we expect more from a leading news network.

Secondly we encourage you to speak out now in support of persecuted Christians in the Middle East. Visit the website www.bethlehemfreedom.com which sends a message to Congressional leaders that US Aid of \$600 million to the Palestinian Authority is not acceptable, especially with its poor record of the treatment of Christians. On this site you can also learn the truth about who is actually persecuting Christians in the Middle East (which wasn't reported by CBS).

Shalom,

Willem Griffioen
Executive Director
Israel Allies Foundation

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: The laws of purity and impurity as they pertain to child-birth are discussed. The basic laws of Tzaraat involving the diagnosis of the Kohain and possible quarantine, as well as the laws of Tzaraat as it relates to

healthy skin and infection are stated.

2nd and 3rd Aliya: The laws of Tzaraat as it relates to burns, a bald patch, dull white spots, and the presence of a blemish on clothing is discussed.

4th Aliya: The purification process of the Mitzora involving two Kosher birds, a piece of cedar, some crimson wool, a hyssop branch, fresh spring water, a clay bowl, a Kohain, the Mikveh, seven days, a haircut and a Korban with its Mincha offering is detailed.

5th Aliya: The Korban of a Mitzorah who is poor is discussed.

6th and 7th Aliya: The laws dealing with blemishes that appear on a house are detailed. Following the laws of Tzaraat, the Torah turns its attention to various laws dealing with bodily discharges that render the individual Tameh. Male discharges, seminal discharges, menstruation, and other female discharges are detailed. Note that the basic laws of Family Purity are stated in verses 15:19-26.

This week's Haftorah is from Kings II Capt. 7. It took place during the reign of Yehoram who ruled over the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Yehoram was a sinful king whose actions resulted in Aram laying siege to the capitol city Shomron causing a terrible famine. The famine was so severe that mothers were eating their own children.

Yehoram confronted the prophet Elisha demanding that he bring an end to the siege and the hunger. Elisha told Yehoram that G-d would perform a miracle the next day and there would be so much food that the food market would bottom out.

There were four lepers (the most obvious connection to our Parsha) who had been banished too outside the walls of Shomron. Like the rest of the people, they were starving from the famine and decided to chance approaching the enemy camp in hope of begging some food or at the very worst, a quick death.

During the night Hashem had performed a miracle and the massive forces of Aram had fled during the night leaving behind their tents, horses, and supplies.

The Lepers returned to Shomron and informed Yehoram about the miraculous events. Yehoram investigated the report and confirmed the miracle. The people of Shomron were allowed out of the besieged city and plunder the vacated enemy camp. The massive amount of food was so great that the price of food immediately plummeted and bottomed out as Elisha had prophesied.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“This shall be the law of the metzora.” (Vayikra 14:2)

The purification process of the metzora is to take two kosher birds – one bird is slaughtered and used to purify the person who is the metzora. The second bird is used in the purification process but it is set free upon the open field. The Gemara comments (quoted in Rashi) that afflictions of leprosy come about because of malicious talk, which is an act of verbal chattering. Therefore, birds are required for the purification because birds are constantly chirping. It is important to

understand the meaning of the birds and why one is slaughtered and one is set free.

It is fundamental to know that the problem of leprosy comes from sinning and the purification must come through teshubah. This is why a kohen is required to identify the sickness. Since the kohen is a scholar and may even get Divine help, he is the one needed to point out the problem and help the person repent. Rabbi Abraham Schorr explains that the two birds are brought to teach us that it is not enough for him to repent for his sins. It's incumbent on him to help others also to repent for their sins. The slaughtered bird is to help him atone for himself and the live bird is sent out to the fields to help others. The true repentor loves Hashem and he wants everyone to come back to Him.

There is a famous Midrash that talks about a peddler who was selling a potion that gives life. He would announce, “Who wants life?” Rabbi Yannai said, “I want!” So the peddler quoted him the verse “He who wants life will guard his tongue from speaking evil.” One commented (Sefer Mei Hashiloah) that the Hebrew word for peddler is “rochel.” He was called a rochel because he sinned with the sin of rechilus (gossiping). But he made teshubah on that and now it became a badge of honor because he returned out of love for Hashem. So now he was dedicating himself as a peddler (a rochel) to sell the people the wonderful idea to stop talking evil.

May Hashem help us be his peddler to sell his wares. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“For the person being purified there shall be taken two live clean birds” (Vayikra 14:4)

The “leper,” one who has sara'at, after going to the Kohen and determining that his condition is cured, must bring certain sacrifices to purify himself. Among these are two birds, one which is slaughtered and one which is dipped in the blood of the slaughtered one and sent away. The Rabbis tell us that the birds, which chirp all the time, symbolize the cause of his leprosy to begin with. Most people are not careful with the way they speak, and end up speaking lashon hara, gossip, which brings on leprosy. The problem with many is that not only are they not careful with words, but they just chatter away, just like birds! If one constantly and continuously prattles on, with no thought to the fact that each word must be accounted for, he's guaranteed to get leprosy! So his purification is the bringing of birds, which remind him that as a human being, he must be watchful of his words and not chatter away without control! Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
Visit DailyHalacha.com,
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Childbirth and Eliyahu Hanabi

The opening section of Parashat Tazria deals with the topic of Tum'at Yoledet, the special status of Tum'a (impurity) that applies to a woman after childbirth. The Torah instructs that after delivering a baby boy, a woman has a status of Tum'a for seven days, whereas after the birth of a girl she is considered impure for fourteen days.

Why does childbirth result in Tum'a? Delivering a child is precisely what women are supposed to do; it is the most joyous and wondrous of events.

In fact, our Sages teach that Mashiah will come once all the souls in the heavens have been dispatched to the earth. Each birth thus brings us a bit closer to our final redemption. Why, then, should it cause impurity?

Another question that arises from this section is the inclusion of the Misva of Berit Mila. After mentioning that a woman is impure for seven days after a boy's birth, the Torah immediately adds that the boy must be circumcised on the eighth day. Why must this be mentioned in this context, amidst the discussion of impurity?

The answer touches upon the fundamental nature of Tum'a generally. Tum'a surfaces when something that had been endowed with holiness loses that Kedusha. Thus, for example, a human corpse has the most intense level of Tum'a, because it had contained within it a soul, which is part of God Himself. When something possessed such a high level of Kedusha and was then emptied of that Kedusha, the forces of impurity attach themselves to it, resulting in the status of Tum'a.

Our Sages teach that during pregnancy, the infant studies Torah with an angel. The body of a pregnant woman is endowed with extreme sanctity, as it is occupied by an angel who sits and teaches Torah to the child. This Kedusha is lost at the time of childbirth, and this loss is what results in Tum'a. A place that had been filled with high levels of holiness for nine months now loses that special quality, and for this reason the woman becomes impure.

Why, then, is the Tum'a period briefer after the birth of a boy? Why is a woman considered impure for fourteen days after the

birth of a girl, but only seven days after the birth of a boy?

The Torah itself answers this question by mentioning the Berit Mila in this context. A week after the birth of a boy, a Berit Mila is performed, and it is attended by Eliyahu Hanabi. As we know, it is customary to designate a special chair for Eliyahu at a Berit because he personally attends every Berit Mila ceremony. Eliyahu's presence has a profound purifying effect. Just as Eliyahu will come before the arrival of Mashiah to purify the Jewish people and prepare them for redemption, similarly, whenever he comes he brings purity to those around him. This is why, for example, many people try to position themselves near Eliyahu's chair at a Berit, so they could be as close to him as possible and come under the influence of his purification. More generally, this is why attending a Berit Mila is such a valuable and significant Misva, as it has a purifying effect by virtue of Eliyahu's presence.

This explains the distinction drawn by the Torah between the birth of a boy and the birth of a girl, and why the Misva of Mila appears in this context. The Berit Mila held a week after a child's birth has a purifying effect, and the mother's period of Tum'a thus ends at that point. Whereas the Tum'a following the birth of a girl lasts for two weeks, it lasts only one week after a boy's birth because of the Berit Mila. Eliyahu Hanabi's attendance at the ritual brings purity to everybody in the room, and especially to the child's mother, enabling her to conclude her period of Tum'a. The great prophet comes to the Berit and purifies the mother who had lost the great levels of Kedusha she had possessed during pregnancy, and at that point her purity is

restored through the powerful influence of Eliyahu.

Rabbi Wein

One of the more interesting points to note in this week's parshiyot is the fact that the Torah places the entire determination of purity or impurity in the decision making process of the kohein – the priest before whom the afflicted person appears. He alone decides the matter of the person's fate. And even though the Torah does describe for the kohein the standards and methods of diagnosis of the disease, it ultimately leaves the decision up to the kohein himself.

The kohein's determination of the matter ultimately is but a subjective one. It is the kohein who creates the impurity within the person afflicted and not, so to speak, the disease and its symptoms itself. This is truly a remarkable and necessary insight into the mystery of tzoraas particularly and halacha generally.

Though there are always rules, structures and limitations that govern the halachic decision making process, the ultimate decision on the particular matter in question rests in the subjective mind and hands of the halachic decisor himself. So that within the objective standards set by the Torah in halachic matters and issues, there is always space left for human thought, intuition and creativity. The person, garment or building is not impure until and unless the kohein declares it to be so. It is the kohein's declaration that decides the issue and that declaration emanating from human lips like all human decisions and declarations is of necessity a subjective one.

Over all of the centuries of Jewish life and law there has been

general agreement regarding the outlines – the so-called objective standards - of Jewish law, tradition and halacha. But there has always been differing opinions amongst the scholars regarding the actual details of implementing those general principles. This is because the Torah itself allows for human participation in the halachic process, for the debates and arguments that constantly construct and amplify the halachic process.

Many a great decisor and scholar in Jewish law has admitted to the fact that his intuition and/or bent of mind influenced his final decision. This thought process is then broadened further by the Jewish tradition and idea that human intuition in halachic matters is enhanced by aid from Heaven. "The Lord is with him" – the halacha is according to his opinion in all matters, is the succinct way that the Talmud phrased this idea.

A person who is devoted to Torah ideals and lives them in practice, and who is possessed of great Torah scholarship, subconsciously obtains a holy intuition that guides him in his decision making process. The Torah allows and indeed encourages human participation and its attendant subjectivity in the halachic decision making process. But it also will help that subjectivity to arrive at a correct decision on the matter at hand.

The Torah inherently promises the kohein that his subjective decision on the matter of purity or impurity at hand before him will be adjudicated correctly. This idea has been the under pinning of the halachic process of Judaism throughout the ages from the time of Sinai forward.

Ricky Cohen **The First Step to a Successful Career: Create a Bigger You**

April 25, 2012:

21 million Americans are unemployed or underemployed. 19.7 million College students will soon graduate and enter the job market.

24% of young adults ages 18-24 can't find jobs. If you happen to be African American or Hispanic the number is closer to 39%. This is the most challenging financial environment in recent history.

At the same time, 2008-2010 was the best time period for startups in modern history with over 2.2 million new entrepreneurial efforts launched. The majority of those startups were individual efforts – launched in basements and living rooms. As a point of reference, the following companies were launched in past recessions or bull markets: Apple, CNN, Disney, Exxon Mobil, Hyatt, Microsoft and Whole Foods. Today, like then, there's a lot more money in the market than good ideas. The traditional safe havens have been compromised, so there is billions of dollars of investor capital waiting for the next new idea.

"...there is no such thing as a silver lining. When one experiences professional setbacks, those setbacks are a platform for success greater than the success that preceded it. When one experiences personal setbacks, those setbacks are a platform for success greater than the success that preceded it. When one experiences both personal and professional setbacks the forthcoming success is unparalleled..."
(Talmud Tractate Yoma)

There's never been a better time to start a new business or begin a new career!

With this in mind, we will focus the next several articles on the tools necessary to identify and secure a successful career.

These tools have been taught to thousands of men and women, ranging from corporate management at JP Morgan Chase, to admirals at the United States Navy, and are based in ancient sources proven successful in these modern times.

The Risk to Win Series will be broken down as follows: First Segment: Personal Leadership Skills. Second Segment: Launching Your Career. Third Segment: Ensuring Ongoing Success.

Let's do a short quiz to kick things off.

The first step to a successful career is:

1. Looking at what's hot in the market
2. Articulating what you want to do
3. Writing up a business plan
4. Quitting your day job
5. None of the above

The correct answer is: None of the above.

The first step to a successful entrepreneurial or career effort is something rarely discussed in modern business literature, workshops, or seminars. It's the basis of successful educational efforts and the foundation of personal success. It is:

Giving to Others
Giving to others in this context has little to do with charity or generosity, and has less to do with the recipients of your kindness. Giving to others in this context has everything to do with: Shaping a Success Mindset. When you give to something outside of you, by committing time and/or resources to a greater good or to an individual in pain, you grow and change as a result of the experience.

The most important change is:
 You learn to stop judging
 In order to identify and attempt a
 new career, you have to suspend
 critical self-judgment and become
 more tolerant and accepting.
 There's typically a "judgment
 scale" that people employ. It goes
 along the following lines:
 We judge strangers.
 We judge neighbors and friends -
 more harshly than the strangers.
 We judge family members more
 harshly than that.
 We're most harsh in
 judging ourselves.

The tendency to judge yourself
 will hinder your ability to envision
 new possibilities and to act on
 those possibilities. Once you get
 started, the average new
 business takes three years to
 stabilize, and the average new
 career almost a year. Either of
 those efforts is fraught with
 dramatic highs and lows. To
 survive and ultimately thrive, you
 must allow yourself great latitude
 and understanding.

Giving to others by helping a
 person in pain or in need - without
 the suggestion of judging them,
 helps you become "judgment
 free". The suspension of the
 tendency to judge is the first
 essential tool in your quest for
 success.
 It's an unprecedented time. The
 financial pain experienced by
 millions of capable, successful
 people has never been greater.
 The opportunities are no less
 great.
 'Create a bigger you' by giving to
 others, and take the first step
 towards great success.

Next week: Step II: Thoughts are
 Things.

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

The sidrot of Tazria and Metsorah
 contain laws which are among the
 most difficult to understand. They
 are about conditions of "impurity"
 arising from the fact that we are
 physical beings, embodied souls,
 and hence exposed to (in
 Hamlet's words) "the thousand
 natural shocks that flesh is heir
 to." Though we have immortal
 longings, mortality is the condition
 of human existence, as it is of all
 embodied life. As Rambam
 explains (Guide for the Perplexed,
 III: 12):

We have already shown that, in
 accordance with the divine
 wisdom, genesis can only take
 place through destruction, and
 without the destruction of the
 individual members of the
 species, the species themselves
 would not exist permanently . . .
 He who thinks that he can have
 flesh and bones without being
 subject to any external influence,
 or any of the accidents of matter,
 unconsciously wishes to reconcile
 two opposites, namely, to be at
 the same time subject and not
 subject to change.

Throughout history there have
 been two distinct and opposing
 ways of relating to this fact:
 hedonism (living for physical
 pleasure) and asceticism
 (relinquishing physical pleasure).
 The former worships the physical
 while denying the spiritual, the
 latter enthrones the spiritual at
 the cost of the physical.

The Jewish way has always been
 different: to sanctify the physical –
 eating, drinking, sex and rest –
 making the life of the body a
 vehicle for the divine presence.
 The reason is simple. We believe
 with perfect faith that the G-d of
 redemption is also the G-d of

creation. The physical world we
 inhabit is the one G-d made and
 pronounced "very good." To be a
 hedonist is to deny G-d. To be an
 ascetic is to deny the goodness of
 G-d's world. To be a Jew is to
 celebrate both creation and
 Creator. That is the principle that
 explains many otherwise
 incomprehensible features of
 Jewish life.

The laws with which the sedra
 begins are striking examples of
 this:

When a woman conceives and
 gives birth to a boy, she shall be
 teme'ah for seven days, just as
 she is during the time of
 separation when she has her
 period . . . Then, for thirty-three
 additional days she shall have a
 waiting period during which her
 blood is ritually clean. Until this
 purification period is complete,
 she shall not touch anything holy
 and shall not enter the sanctuary.

If she gives birth to a girl, she
 shall have for two weeks the
 same teme'ah status as during
 her menstrual period. Then, for
 sixty-six days after that, she shall
 have a waiting period during
 which her blood is ritually clean
 (Vay. 12:2-5).

She then brings a burnt-offering
 and a sin-offering, after which she
 is restored to "ritual purity." What
 is the meaning of these laws?
 Why does childbirth render the
 mother teme'ah (usually
 translated as "ritually impure",
 better understood as "a condition
 which impedes or exempts from a
 direct encounter with holiness")?
 And why is the period after giving
 birth to a girl twice that for a boy?
 There is a temptation to see these
 laws as inherently beyond the
 reach of human understanding.
 Several rabbinic statements seem
 to say just this. In fact, it is not so,
 as Maimonides explains at length
 in the Guide. To be sure, we can

never know – specifically with respect to laws that have to do with kedushah (holiness) and teharah (purity) – whether our understanding is correct. But we are not thereby forced to abandon our search for understanding, even though any explanation will be at best speculative and tentative.

The first principle essential to understanding the laws of ritual purity and impurity is that G-d is life. Judaism is a profound rejection of cults, ancient and modern, that glorify death. The great pyramids of Egypt were grandiose tombs. Arthur Koestler noted that without death “the cathedrals collapse, the pyramids vanish into the sand, the great organs become silent.” The English metaphysical poets turned to it constantly as a theme. As T. S. Eliot wrote:

Webster was much possessed by death
And saw the skull beneath the skin . . .
Donne, I suppose, was such another . . .
He knew the anguish of the marrow
The age of the skeleton . . .

Freud coined the word thanatos to describe the death-directed character of human life.

Judaism is a protest against death-centred cultures. “It is not the dead who praise the Lord, nor those who go down into silence” (Psalm 114) “What profit is there in my death, if I go down into the pit? Can the dust acknowledge You? Can it proclaim your truth?” (Psalm 30). As we open a sefer Torah we say: “All of you who hold fast to the Lord your G-d are alive today” (Deut 4:4). The Torah is a tree of life. G-d is the G-d of life. As Moses put it in two memorable words: “Choose life” (Deut. 30: 19).

It follows that kedushah (holiness) – a point in time or space where we stand in the unmediated presence of G-d – involves a supreme consciousness of life. That is why the paradigm case of tumah is contact with a corpse. Other cases of tumah include diseases or bodily emissions that remind us of our mortality. G-d's domain is life. Therefore it may not be associated in any way with intimations of death. This is how Judah Halevi explains the purity laws in his work *The Kuzari*:

A dead body represents the highest degree of loss of life, and a leprous limb is as if it were dead. It is the same with the loss of seed, because it had been endowed with living power, capable of engendering a human being. Its loss therefore forms a contrast to the living and breathing (*Kuzari*, II: 60).

The laws of purity apply exclusively to Israel, argues Halevi, precisely because Judaism is the supreme religion of life, and its adherents are therefore hyper-sensitive to even the most subtle distinctions between life and death.

A second principle, equally striking, is the acute sensitivity Judaism shows to the birth of a child. Nothing is more “natural” than procreation. Every living thing engages in it. Sociobiologists go so far as to argue that a human being is a gene's way of creating another gene. By contrast, the Torah goes to great lengths to describe how many of the heroines of the Bible – among them Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah and the Shunamite woman – were infertile and had children only through a miracle.

Clearly the Torah intends a message here, and it is

unmistakable. To be a Jew is to know that survival is not a matter of biology alone. What other cultures may take as natural is for us a miracle. Every Jewish child is a gift of G-d. No faith has taken children more seriously or devoted more of its efforts to raising the next generation. Childbirth is wondrous. To be a parent is the closest any of us come to G-d himself. That, incidentally, is why women are closer to G-d than men, because they, unlike men, know what it is to bring new life out of themselves, as G-d brings life out of himself. The idea is beautifully captured in the verse in which, leaving Eden, Adam turns to his wife and calls her Chavah “for she is the mother of all life” (Gen. 3:20).

We can now speculate about the laws relating to childbirth. When a mother gives birth, not only does she undergo great risk (until recently, childbirth was a life-threatening danger to mother and baby alike). She is also separated from what until now had been part of her own body (a foetus, said the rabbis, “is like a limb of the mother” (*Babylonian Talmud Gittin 23b*)) and which has now become an independent person. If that is so in the case of a boy, it is doubly so in the case of a girl – who, with G-d's help, will not merely live but may herself in later years become a source of new life. At one level, therefore, the laws signal the detachment of life from life.

At another level, they surely suggest something more profound. There is a halakhic principle: “One who is engaged in a mitzvah is exempt from other mitzvot” (*Babylonian Talmud Sukkah 26a*). It is as if G-d were saying to the mother: for forty days in the case of a boy, and doubly so in the case of a girl (the mother-daughter bond is

ontologically stronger than that between mother and son), I exempt you from coming before Me in the place of holiness because you are fully engaged in one of the holiest acts of all, nurturing and caring for your child. Unlike others you do not need to visit the Temple to be attached to life in all its sacred splendour. You are experiencing it yourself, directly and with every fibre of your being. Days, weeks, from now you will come and give thanks before Me (together with offerings for having come through a moment of danger). But for now, look upon your child with wonder. For you have been given a glimpse of the great secret, otherwise known only to G-d. Childbirth exempts the new mother from attendance at the Temple because her bedside replicates the experience of the Temple. She now knows what it is for love to beget life and in the midst of mortality to be touched by an intimation of immortality.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"Rabbi Yossi says: ...and let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven" (Abot 2:12)

Rabbi Yossi was one of the five greatest disciples of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakai. He was a Cohen and was noted to be a "Haseed", who served Hashem in an extraordinary manner in all aspects of service. The Mishna lists for us three cardinal paths which R' Yossi lived by. In the final one he teaches us that we can practice having all of our actions done 'In order to serve You Hashem', and thereby reach high levels of perfection, through mundane as well as spiritual actions.

Rambam z'l wrote that this principle, of making all your

actions for the purpose of Heaven, is a "wondrous point". We can utilize this great principle in all facets of our lives and thereby elevate mundane activities into the spiritual realm of holiness and serving Hashem.

Prior to eating, walking, exercising, getting dressed, showering, opening then door to your place of work etc. just say the words, for example, "I am going to sleep tonight "To serve You Hashem". You have now elevated your sleep and transformed it into actual serving Hashem.

By making this "wondrous" practice a regular part of our everyday life it will bring us to Yirat Shamayim, Awareness of G-d, in all of our actions and it will transform the most physical and ordinary daily activities into acts of Serving Hashem.

"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (Mishle 3:4).

The Gaon of Vilna explains this as "Let all of your deeds be for the sake of Heaven".

This principle will also elevate our spiritual actions to a level closer to Hashem's will. When the women are cooking meals for their families or lighting candles...; When the men are putting on Tefillin; Even before a person is about to open a book to learn Torah; Say it, once a day: "I am doing this in order to be more aware of Hashem"

Make all your actions for the purpose of Heaven, "Leshem Shamayim"

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