

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

TAZRIA/HAHODSEH  
Haftarah: Yehezkel 45:18-46:15

APRIL 9, 2016 1 NISAN 5776

Rosh Hodesh Nisan will be celebrated on Shabbat, April 9.  
**DEDICATIONS:** In memory of Yaakov Ben Victoria – Jack Gindi – 2 Nisan  
Happy Birthday Chantelle

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A message from Eli Beer of United Hatzalah:  
We have an amazing family comedy show and  
concert with Jay Leno on April 10th at Jazz at  
Lincoln Center NY. It's a really big opportunity for  
United Hatzalah, and I'm trying to save money on  
advertising, so I need your help. I would love if  
you could share the website for the concert with  
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The concert website is  
[www.EveningForIsrael.com](http://www.EveningForIsrael.com) phone: 1-646-833-  
7108 e-mail: [office@israelrescue.org](mailto:office@israelrescue.org) It's Sunday  
April 10th at 7:30pm at Jazz at Lincoln Center  
Featuring Jay Leno and musical guests Lipa and  
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Check out Eli on Ted Talks

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## Editors Notes

### When a woman conceives and gives birth

This week's portion begins: "When a woman  
conceives and gives birth".

A friend came to visit the office this week, he noticed  
the portrait of Joseph A Bibi (my father's grandfather)  
on the wall and he asked about a story he had read  
in the book Nouri.

It was April 10<sup>th</sup> 1925, and the family was celebrating  
the second seder and the second night of Pesach.  
My great grandfather sat at the table with his wife  
Farha, and his sons Reuben – my grandfather,  
Morris, and Dave. My grandmother Esther excused  
herself as she was not feeling well. Her two little  
children, my aunt Lillian and my uncle Moe, may  
Hashem grant him health and long life, were  
beginning the night sitting quietly at the end of the  
table. To Yosef's left was my uncle Nouri, my great-



### Reuben Bibi and Family

Back Row – Left to Right: My father Joe R,  
aunt Lillian, my grandfather Reuben, my  
grandmother Esther, Uncle Ike and Uncle Moe  
Front Row: Uncle Ely, Aunt Florence Tawil,  
Aunt Sara Cain and aunt Charlotte Zeitounie  
Aunt Rita and Uncle Jack were not born yet

great uncle Selim and his wife Freida, their children  
Celia, Sophie, and Eddie. And along with all the  
Bibis, there must have been the Mizrahis and a  
house full of guests.

I can imagine the appreciation that Joseph Bibi had  
celebrating the Seder together with his family. It had  
been five years since they were all reunited and I am  
sure they never forgot the ten years they spent apart.  
Having his relatives, his family and his community  
join him in America, Joseph Bibi must have felt very  
blessed. America treated him very well. The nation  
offered new opportunities, but after crossing the  
country to San Francisco, opening a store there and  
spending years on the West Coast before settling in  
New York. Joseph more than anyone must have  
recognized that it would take tremendous effort to  
hold on to their heritage.

Just as Pesach is for us today, Pesach must have been even more of an island of tradition in a sea of modernity. Just as we who had never been in the old country felt connected each year during those two nights, they must have felt that they were back home, eating their traditional foods and singing their heartfelt pizmonim. For those two days, they could forget about the frenzied life they lead in America. I wonder if my great grandfather compared the hustle and bustle of New York to the more laid back life of Baghdad, Damascus, or even Lyon in France. I wonder how much he and my grandfather who literally worked seven days, often running back to the shop on Saturday nights in the winter moments after making Havdala appreciated the holidays and Shabbat.

I know that my great grandfather never regretted his move to America and appreciated that he was able to bring his entire family and so many others to join them. Although his heart must have mourned daily for his daughter who was murdered, he had her son Nouri at his side. And although he must have longed to see her other children, he must have been comforted to know they were living in the Holy land.

My great grandfather was a forward looking person. He focused on the future, rather than live in the past. He focused on what could and would be rather on what was and could have been. He was an appreciative person, a scholar and a man of incredible faith who lived a life as we all do filled with coincidences. He recognized the hand of G-d in all those coincidences and was ever thankful of the Almighty's Providence.

They tell us that at this particular Seder on this particular Pesach there was something that made them all look forward to their future in this land. And at the start of the Seder as my great grandfather lifted his cup to make Kiddush, I can only imagine the happiness reflected in each other's eyes. They must have been grateful that they were together, a growing family, celebrating around one table, united in their love for each other.

I try to transport myself mentally to that room at that time. I can see little children running around, and the adults valiantly trying to keep the older children involved. I can feel the magic and the warmth. I can hear the songs being sung and the words of Torah exchanged. Imagination is an incredible thing. I am there and in the midst of the talking, the singing, the running and laughing, I hear a wailing from the bedroom off to the side, and then a triumphant shout.

Mabrook!" cried the midwife, "it's a boy!"

I see my grandfather Reuben rushing in to see how my grandmother Esther was faring as the rest of the room explodes in joy. I see them taking the baby and handing the child for a moment to his grandfather Joseph who knew that this baby boy would a week later be named Joseph Reuben Bibi after his father and grandfather. They say that Joseph A Bibi was not emotional at all, but I find it hard to believe that sitting at that table with the wine and the matzah before him holding on to his new grandson, he did not shed a tear of joy and thanksgiving.

My father would be the first of many grandchildren and great grandchildren to bear the name Joseph or Yosef. And this Joseph too, would take the mantle, and continue the work of his father and grandfather before him. As I have faith that this generation's Yosefs, my son and my nephews and the others, all will carry on the work of their grandfather.

So what was my friend wondering? He asked if my grandmother really gave birth in the house. I responded that I imagine many people did then and I even have a friend whose wife gave birth in their home earlier this year so it's not such a strange thing.

What's stranger I told him is that 38 years later on the same date of April 10<sup>th</sup> at the same night we were celebrating the second Seder, another cry was heard and another baby was born, although this time, it was not at home, but in the hospital somewhere in Brooklyn. My wife Chantelle shares both secular and Hebrew birthday with my father. Happy Birthday Chantelle!

Pesach represents the birth of the Jewish people. Pesach is an incredible night to welcome a child into the world. As a newborn nation is full of potential, the birth of a baby brings tremendous potential that is only realized over time. And each new child joining us for the Seder brings with him or her, our hopes and dreams for the future.

This Pesach, Chantelle and I look forward to our new grandson Yosef joining us. And we pray that he will carry his name and with it the responsibilities that come with it. And with parents like Steven and Aryana, we know he will.

"When a woman conceives and gives birth". Within these words is the potential for everything we can become and everything we will be.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

## Yes, Anti-Zionism is Anti-Semitism JONATHAN S. TOBIN

The recent willingness of both the Board of Regents of the University of California and the New York State Legislature to consider action relating to the troubling growth of anti-Semitism marked an important step forward in recognizing the corrosive effect the BDS (boycott, divest, sanction) movement has had on the culture of higher education in this country. As I wrote earlier this week, at the heart of this debate is the connection between anti-Zionist activity and anti-Semitic incidents that are creating a hostile atmosphere for Jewish students at some institutions. In particular, the willingness of the Board of Regents in California to speak out against “anti-Semitic forms of anti-Zionism” angered many on the left who promoted the cause of BDS on college campuses and did not want to be identified as promoting hate.

The shift in the discussion from the BDS movement’s attempt to single out Israel for opprobrium and destruction to the anti-Semitic nature of their rhetoric and goals is an unexpected setback for the left. That’s because they were operating under the assumption that in an era where all sorts of opinions are repressed because they might conceivably offend some fragile student, Jews are the one minority group that are generally denied “safe space.” By focusing on the Jew-hatred that is inextricably linked to BDS activism, anti-Zionists are being stripped of their pose as defenders of human rights and correctly lumped in with hate groups.

The fight against BDS and anti-Semitism is one that ought to unite all supporters of Israel, whether they are supporters of the current government or its fiercest critics. But for some on the left, the pushback against a BDS movement that they claim, at least in some instances to oppose, makes them uncomfortable. Having made common cause in some cases with BDS activists, they find labeling their fellow leftists as anti-Semites to be a bridge too far for them. Thus, so-called “liberal Zionists,” such as writer Peter Beinart, have now stepped into the breach to denounce the effort to categorize anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism.

Writing in Haaretz, Beinart claims that the argument in favor of this link is bogus.

Beinart first claims that it is wrong to assert, as I have done, that anti-Zionism is a form of discrimination because opposition to the Jewish right to a homeland and self-defense is unique. He says that opposition to statehood for the Kurds or the Basques is not assumed to be a form of hate against those peoples. For the same reasons, he also says that opposing a

state just because Jews might need one in order to protect themselves is also not bias because no one would consider critics of Kurdish or Basque secession from other nations is based on hatred.

Next, he claims it is a misnomer to assume that all anti-Zionists want to abuse Jews because BDS groups welcome both individual Jews and anti-Zionist groups like Jewish Voices for Peace as allies.

Third, he says that just because anti-Zionists want to dismantle Israel — as distinct from opposing states that have not yet been created — isn’t discriminatory because of the precedent of destroying the Afrikaner-dominated Republic of South Africa.

Most importantly, he says that Israel’s policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians are inherently discriminatory, thus making at least some of the arguments of the Jewish state’s foes understandable if not justified. According to Beinart, who believes that Israel should be forced to give up the West Bank and Jerusalem to the Palestinians, it is the actions of the Netanyahu government that are justifying BDS and undermining the rationale for a Jewish and democratic state.

He’s wrong on all counts.

First, the comparison between the Jews and the plight of the Basques and the Kurds is complicated but far from analogous. While both of those peoples have fought for autonomy or statehood as well as for the survival of their national cultures against oppressive overlords, neither was ever subjected to the kind of mass ethnic cleansing that the Jews suffered in their homeland. Their cause was always a question of power sharing, not their physical existence. Nor, despite a history that includes discrimination, did they undergo the kind of treatment that Jews experienced during 20 centuries of anti-Semitism.

Moreover, while advocates for other nationalisms — be it Spanish, Turkish, Syrian or Iraqi — might dispute the right to separate sovereignty for Basques and Kurds, there is no worldwide movement that combines hate groups, ethnic rivals, and their intellectual auxiliaries dedicated to ensuring that they are not merely deprived of sovereignty but deprived even of national rights. Anti-Zionism is a form of discrimination because of the unique nature of its advocacy that serves a cause designed to ensure that the Jewish people remain not merely stateless but homeless.

As for the welcome mat laid out for Jewish anti-Zionists in the BDS camp, that is meaningless. The fact that some Jews are ready to join forces with

those urging the destruction of the Jewish state is not evidence that its attitude toward Jews is benign. Part of the psychosis of the Jewish existence in the Diaspora has always been a willingness to believe that all other peoples and faiths have rights to particularity that Jews should not have or exercise. Cynthia Ozick's quip that "universalism is the parochialism of the Jews," tells us a lot about the tension between the two differing yet ultimately compatible strains of thought in Judaism. But when applied to the battle for the existence of the state of Israel, the desire of some Jews to treat Israel as the one illegitimate ethno-religious state on a planet that has so many other similarly constituted nations is a testament to dysfunction on the part of this small minority of Jews. It tells us nothing about the toxic nature of the vile cause for which they serve as useful idiots.

As for Beinart's South African analogy, it is so specious that he even disassociates himself from it even as he urges us to consider it. Democratic Israel is not, as Beinart correctly states, remotely analogous to apartheid-era South Africa. But contrary to his argument, the Republic of South Africa was not an attempt to create an ethnic Afrikaner state. The Boer republics that did have that purpose were wiped out in the South African war waged by the British at the beginning of the 20th century. They were instead eventually replaced by a multi-ethnic (English whites as well as Afrikaners) nation that sought to impose the rule of a white minority on a black African majority. Their cause was rooted in racism and a desire to deny sovereignty to blacks. Zionism has always sought a Jewish majority state alongside neighboring Arab majority states.

Which leads us to his last argument in which he says the occupation of the West Bank without giving Palestinians voting rights in Israel makes the Jewish state an oppressor and gives legitimacy to those who wish to use BDS to force it out of those territories to create a Palestinian state. But the reason why a two-state solution has never been implemented is because the Palestinians have always refused any compromise that would have obligated them to recognize the legitimacy of a Jewish state no matter where its borders would be drawn.

The fallacy at the core of Beinart's argument blaming Israel and Netanyahu for both the lack of peace and the rise of anti-Semitism is that the anti-Zionist cause has always been tainted by the intolerance and Jew hatred that motivated the Palestinian Arabs who are the focus of their sympathy. Despite the rhetoric about human rights, anti-Zionism has never been a cause that sought to alter Israel's borders or to bring

succor to the suffering Palestinians. It is about the denial of rights, if not life itself, to Jews.

Had the Palestinians wished to accept a solution that would have shared the land with the Jews at any point in the last century, they would have gotten their separate state. But they have always refused to do so because their national identity is inextricably tied to the belief that Jews, whom they see as a despised non-Muslim minority that has forgotten their place, should never be given equal rights in the region.

But this doesn't just apply to Palestinian nationalists — both of the secular and Islamist varieties. It also applies to their foreign cheering sections that seek to do their part in the war against Zionism by crippling Israel's economy via BDS. The reason why BDS activists are so prone to anti-Semitic invective is that the passion that animates the pro-Palestinian cause around the world feeds off traditional anti-Semitic tropes about Jews. Without that anti-Semitic fervor injecting its maniacal passion into anti-Zionism, the BDS crowd would have as little support in the international arena and college campuses as supporters of Basque nationalism or Kurdish statehood. Which is to say that they wouldn't exist as a movement at all.

The overwhelming majority of Israelis would gladly give up almost all of the West Bank, just as they have already given up Gaza where an independent Palestinian state in all but name run by terrorists already exists, if it were in exchange for peace. But so long as the Palestinians' goal is to wipe out Israel and to dispossess its six million Jews, BDS is a cause in service to hate. Despite Beinart's efforts to exonerate it, the same must be said of anti-Zionism.

### Summary of the Perasha Tazria - Laws of Identifying Tsaraat

- 1- Tumah by a woman 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

**FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER  
"When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male." (Vayikra 12:2)**

This week we read the perashah of Tazria and next week we read the perashah of Mesora. The first discusses the ritual impurity of sara'at and the next one discusses its purification process. The name of the perashah is not a random choice, using the first word of the perashah, but rather its essential theme. In the case of these two parashot, however, we see an interesting phenomenon. The word "Tazria" relates to birth and discusses the affliction of sara'at. The word "Mesora" means "one who has sara'at," and describes the purification of the mesora from his condition.

Rabbi Reuven Wolf asks: It seems perplexing that the portion that discusses the illness is called "Birth" while the portion that discusses the healing would be called "Mesora." Shouldn't it be the other way around?

To answer this question, we first need to take a closer look at the general idea of punishment in Jewish thought. Is Hashem a vengeful G-d who wishes to exact harsh retribution from His Creations?

This is definitely not the case. In Judaism the role of punishment is to cleanse. We have powerful and beautiful neshamot that can accomplish amazing feats on this earth, and there are great things awaiting us both in the time of Mashiah and in the Next World, but along with all they accomplish on earth our neshamot pick up some "dirt" from the obstacles they encounter along the way. Just as a dirty plate needs rinsing before we place a gourmet meal in it, so too our neshamot require cleaning before they are fit to receive the truly amazing revelation of Hashem. And this is what punishment accomplishes – it fixes and cleanses the neshamah.

This principle of productive punishment is clearly illustrated in the case of the mesora. This affliction was primarily due to lashon hara. A person would have to sit in isolation for seven days, which was a fitting atonement for the fact that he or she socialized in a corrupt manner. The illness revealed the reality that he had a spiritual flaw that required fixing. So we see that the illness itself was really the first step of the healing process. This is why the first perashah is called "Tazria" (related to birth), because the illness itself is there specifically for the sake of the person's spiritual rebirth.

This also clarifies why the second section that discusses purification is called "Mesora," because if the perashah was called "Taharah," we might assume that the healing process begins only with the first step of purification. It teaches us that with the sickness, healing begins.

This is relevant today. We are in a long exile. Sometimes it seems long and futile, but now we learn that the "illness" of the exile is the precursor of Mashiah. The Mashiah himself is referred to as a mesora! (Sanhedrin 98b).

Rabbi Reuven Semah

### **"When the affliction has turned white, the Kohen shall declare him tahor." (Vayikra 13:17)**

The Torah stresses a number of times that if the plague of leprosy turns into white, it will become tahor, that is, no more impurity. The word lpyb (nehepach) means transforms or turns around, and the Rabbis say that if the letters of the word gdb (nega) which means plague, are turned around, it will spell out the word dbg (oneg) which means pleasure.

The lesson here is that even something so difficult as leprosy can be turned around into something constructive which will be a source of pleasure. If a person understands that the reason he has leprosy is because he spoke "lashon hara" (gossip) or some other sin, and resolves not to repeat it, he has "turned around" his life and become a new person. Even today, when we don't have leprosy, whatever happens to us should be viewed as Hashem communicating to us to improve. When we do, we then are transformed into greater people. The gdb (nega) becomes a source of dbg (oneg). May we always merit to see the good in everything that happens. Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### **HASHEM'S LOT**

"If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a se'et, or a sapachat." (Vayikra 13:2)

The Torah details various forms of sara'at, which is often incorrectly translated as "leprosy." It is a spiritual illness that manifests itself in the body by displaying white spots on one's skin, similar to leprosy. The Siftei Kohen posits that the words se'et and sapachat allude to two spiritual deficiencies which catalyze the sara'at. Se'et is connected to hitnasut, elevating oneself over others, raising himself above those around him. Such a person walks with an upright gait as if to "push up against the Shechinah" Who towers over everyone. Regarding a person like this, Hashem says, "I and he are not able to live together."

One who is arrogant eventually belittles himself and, in time, loses his distinction. Se'et usapachat; one who raises himself up ultimately become nifchat, diminished. Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, relates a conversation he had with the Ponevezer Rav, Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl. The Rav was a close student of the Hafess Hayim, zl. One day, the Hafess Hayim turned to his student, "You know, of course, that Hashem loves each and every Jew, despite the circumstances in which he finds himself. Once Harav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, was learning the Sefer Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu, and he came across a

passage in which the author cites the many attributes of Hashem. Among them he includes, sameach b'chelko, being happy with his lot/portion. He questioned this quality. Being satisfied with one's lot applies to a human being who, despite wanting more, settles for less and is happy with what he has. It will suffice. Hashem, however, does not have to settle. He can create anything that He wants. The concept of "settling" is foreign regarding Hashem. He either has it - or He will make it. This question so thoroughly troubled Rav Chaim that he decided to travel to Vilna to speak it over with his Rebbe, the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna.

The Gaon explained that Hashem's portion is Klal Yisrael. Yes, we are Hashem's portion. The Almighty wants His portion to be as perfect as possible, so that both the collective nation and each Jew individually should strive to be the paragon of perfection. Alas, it is not all in the hands of Heaven. Hazal teach: "Everything is in the hands of Heaven - except for fear of Heaven!" This is one quality that Hashem has given over to us. We are in control of our spiritual health. If a Jew reneges his opportunity to be a yarei Hashem, G-d-fearing Jew, he will not be compelled by Heaven to be observant. It is his choice. Therefore, Hashem is sameach b'chelko, is "pleased"/"accepts" each and every Jew as he is. Even when we were exiled from our own home, when we lost the Bet Hamikdash, Hashem accompanied us throughout the millennia. From adversity to misfortune; from degradation to humiliation; from the spiritual high of Yerushalayim with the Bet Hamikdash, to the spiritual impurity in which we have been subjected to make our home - Hashem came along with us.

"If this is the case," asked the Hafess Hayim, "if Hashem tolerates our degradation and does not forsake His commitment to us, despite our wallowing in the filth of spiritual impurity, why is it that He has zero tolerance for the arrogant person? What makes the sin of arrogance so egregious that it stands out above/below all of the rest?"

The Ponevezer Rav was stumped. The Hafess Hayim explained, "Hashem resides among the one who is tameh, spiritually contaminated, because for him there is hope; he can immerse himself in pure water and become purified. Likewise, the rasha, wicked person, can wake up, introspect, and realize that he has spent his life wallowing in the mire of sin; his life has been one big waste. This will impress him to get his act together, make spiritual amends and repent. For him, too, there is hope."

"The ba'al ga'avah is a tipesh, fool." The Hafess Hayim quotes the Ramban in his Iggeret, "With what should the heart of man arrogate itself? If because of wealth - Hashem determines who should be poor and who should be wealthy. Is it because of his glory? Glory comes from G-d (Only He has true

glory). Is it in his wisdom? Hashem can easily change that. In other words, whatever the ba'al ga'avah thinks he is really comes from Hashem. He, actually, has nothing. Why is he arrogant? Obviously, he is a fool. For a fool, there is no hope!" (Peninim on the Torah)

## SPINNING

There is usually more than one way to look at things. We all know that there are two sides to every story. But in the bigger picture, people usually have an outlook on life, a prism through which they view the world and all that happens. It's their personal spin.

Some people believe that the world owes them a living. This, they feel, gives them the right to demand everything from everyone. Madison Avenue preaches, "You deserve the best," and such individuals swallow the advertising bait whole. The problem is that when people feel this way, whatever they receive does not satisfy.

Others look at life from a different vantage point. "All that I have is a kindness – hesed – from Hashem. I don't deserve much and I am happy with whatever I do have" is their spin on things.

Esav proudly told his brother, Ya'akov Abinu, "I've got plenty," intimating that he still wanted more (Beresheet 33:9). Ya'akov answered, "I have it all," meaning he was satisfied with whatever blessings Hashem had showered upon him (Beresheet 33:11). When what you receive falls short of satisfying, ask yourself, "Is this an isolated incident when something isn't really enough to satisfy, or is it my spin on life that doesn't allow me to feel satisfaction?" Then do a spinning exercise by counting your blessings or maybe measuring how little you really deserve. Satisfaction comes easily when you appreciate what you have and do not dwell on what you are missing. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

## RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)  
Divisiveness Within the Family

Much of Parashat Tazria is devoted to the subject of Sara'at, a skin discoloration that would affect those who were guilty of speaking Lashon Ha'ra – gossip and negative talk about other people. In introducing this topic, the Torah refers to an individual stricken with Sara'at with the term "Adam" ("Adam Ki Yihiyeh Be'or Besaro..." – 13:2). Normally, the Torah uses the word "Ish" as a generic term for "person" when presenting a hypothetical scenario. Here, however, it chooses to use the word "Adam."

The word "Adam" is unique in that it has no plural form. The word "Adamim" does not exist in the Hebrew language. This is as opposed to the word "Ish", which becomes "Anashim" when it is used in reference to more than one person. The word "Adam" thus expresses the indivisible nature of Am Yisrael, the fact that no matter how many people we are, we are always a single "Adam," one undivided entity. We see this quality of Am Yisrael with our own eyes. Whenever a Jew anywhere in the world is in trouble, Jews across the globe mobilize to assist him. Even though they never met him, they treat him like a member of their family. This stems from the awareness of "Adam," the sense that we are all family, all together in the same close-knit group.

This term is used here, in reference to the gossip, to indicate the gravity of his sin. Speaking negatively about another person is not simply a crime committed against that person. Rather, it undermines the unity of the Jewish people. We are all part of the same family, and the gossip seeks to break up the family by turning some members against other members, and sowing strife and friction. This is why Lashon Ha'ra is treated with such gravity, to the point where the individual is stricken with Sara'at and then forced to reside outside the city walls, isolated from the rest of Am Yisrael.

The Torah requires a person with a skin discoloration to consult a Kohen, who looks at the infected skin and determines whether or not it is indeed Sara'at. It is specifically the Kohanim who are assigned the role of overseeing the process of Sara'at. The Mishna describes Aharon, the first Kohen Gadol and progenitor of all future Kohanim, as "a lover of peace and pursuer of peace, who loves people and brings them close to Torah." The gossip must go to a Kohen, a descendant of Aharon, to see a living example of this concept of "Adam," to witness firsthand how Jews are to look upon and treat one another. As he had sought to sow strife and divisiveness, he is now forced to speak with a Kohen and see what it means to be part of Am Yisrael. This experience would then inspire him to change the way he speaks about his fellow Jews, recognizing that they are all part of his family, and thus worthy of his respect, care and concern.

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein  
LOST IN CYBERSPACE**

To help me with my weakening eyesight I purchased an iPad last week. After having my resident expert set the gadget up with the necessary applications, I began to enjoy this new wonder of our age. One of the applications installed on my iPad is Microsoft Word. I like the keyboard of the iPad as I find it easier to see the letters than on my regular computer keyboard.

So I wrote my usual brilliant op-ed article for this week on my new iPad. Somehow, in spite of all of my efforts and technological genius, this finely crafted essay just simply, disappeared. Numerous experts on iPads and their uses attempted to help me find and restore the lost article. But it has all been to no avail.

Somewhere in cyberspace, a great article (about taxation) is floating around, inaccessible to all concerned. I wonder, where is it? Is it still in existence? Or perhaps it has disappeared forever, making no impression, of no value. as though it never was. My frustration at losing an essay that I had worked on for some time was great and I think understandable.

But as I reconciled myself to its loss and steeled myself to the task of writing another essay, my rabbinic bent of mind started to kick in. I, for one, always attempt to see if there is a deeper message hidden in apparently mundane and everyday occurrences. And so I began to ruminate about my essay floating somewhere in the heavens of cyberspace.

I thought to myself that this is perhaps what happens to many of our prayers. I am not certain that all of them reach their intended goal or are even recognized by Heaven. Since we are not always at the top of our game as far as daily prayers are concerned, it can very well be that many of them are just simply floating around in the ether of the universe, of little help or consequence. It could also be this is too pessimistic a viewpoint of the matter. After all, what do I know about Heaven and how it operates.

In Kabbalistic thought, one finds all sorts of references and images of ill formed angels that have been created by improper thoughts, actions and lack of concentration while reciting prayers. Perhaps many of our prayers seemingly go unanswered and somehow get "lost" in transmission because of our lack of concentration when those words of prayer are first uttered.

If this be the case, then there must be an awful lot of clutter in the unseen space before the gates of prayer. The rabbis have taught us that even if we are unsuccessful in entering those gates of prayer with our words, nevertheless our emotions and tears, which come from the heart and not just the eyes, will always arrive and be counted. One of the great liturgical poems creates for us the image of our tears being stored in a heavenly container that is eternal and of constant merit.

Losing our prayers in cyberspace is far more frustrating and sad than losing an article about taxation. Prayer is hard work and the fact that it is a thrice-daily activity makes it susceptible to the dangers of rote and habit. This is so true that in Chasidic and Kabbalistic thought, one of the tasks and abilities of the righteous, holy person, is the ability to somehow gather all of those lost prayers and to raise them, by his power of prayer, to enter the holy gates and become meaningful and effective.

Due to this type of thinking and worldview, prayer in the Chasidic world took on a role equal to and – according to its more radical wing – an even greater one than Torah study. In the famous quip popularized in the Lithuanian yeshiva movement, prayer is when we speak to God and Torah study is when God speaks to us.

Be that as it may, it is obvious that prayer is compared to archery, where the arrow must be well directed in order for it to reach its target. But, even the greatest archer sometimes misses. So too, at times our prayers require a greater sense of concentration than we accord them. Let us hope that, unlike my iPad essay on taxation, our prayers will not be eternally lost and will be able to enter the heavenly gates.

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Eighth Day**

Our parsha begins with childbirth and, in the case of a male child, “On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (Lev. 12:3). This became known not just as milah, “circumcision”, but something altogether more theological, brit milah, “the covenant of circumcision”. That is because even before Sinai, almost at the dawn of Jewish history, circumcision became the sign of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-14).

Why circumcision? Why was this from the outset not just a mitzvah, one command among others, but the very sign of our covenant with God and His with us? And why on the eighth day? Last week’s parsha was

called Shemini, “the eighth [day]” (Lev. 9:1) because it dealt with the inauguration of the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, which also took place on the eighth day. Is there a connection between these two quite different events?

The place to begin is a strange midrash recording an encounter between the Roman governor Tyrannus Rufus<sup>[1]</sup> and Rabbi Akiva. Rufus began the conversation by asking, “Whose works are better, those of God or of man?” Surprisingly, the Rabbi replied, “Those of man.” Rufus responded, “But look at the heavens and the earth. Can a human being make anything like that?” Rabbi Akiva replied that the comparison was unfair. “Creating heaven and earth is clearly beyond human capacity. Give me an example drawn from matters that are within human scope.” Rufus then said, “Why do you practise circumcision?” To this, Rabbi Akiva replied, “I knew you would ask that question. That is why I said in advance that the works of man are better than those of God.”

The rabbi then set before the governor ears of corn and cakes. The unprocessed corn is the work of God. The cake is the work of man. Is it not more pleasant to eat cake than raw ears of corn? Rufus then said, “If God really wants us to practise circumcision, why did He not arrange for babies to be born circumcised?” Rabbi Akiva replied, “God gave the commands to Israel to refine our character.”<sup>[2]</sup> This is a very odd conversation, but, as we will see, a deeply significant one. To understand it, we have to go back to the beginning of time.

The Torah tells us that for six days God created the universe and on the seventh he rested, declaring it holy. His last creation, on the sixth day, was humanity: the first man and the first woman. According to the sages, Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit already on that day and were sentenced to exile from the Garden of Eden. However, God delayed the execution of sentence for a day to allow them to spend Shabbat in the garden. As the day came to a close, the humans were about to be sent out into the world in the darkness of night. God took pity on them and showed them how to make light. That is why we light a special candle at Havdalah, not just to mark the end of Shabbat but also to show that we begin the workday week with the light God taught us to make.

The Havdalah candle therefore represents the light of the eighth day – which marks the beginning of human creativity. Just as God began the first day of creation with the words, “Let there be light”, so at the start of the eighth day He showed humans how they too could make light. Human creativity is thus conceived



in Judaism as parallel to Divine creativity,[3] and its symbol is the eighth day.

That is why the Mishkan was inaugurated on the eighth day. As Nechama Leibowitz and others have noted, there is an unmistakable parallelism between the language the Torah uses to describe God's creation of the universe and the Israelites' creation of the Sanctuary. The Mishkan was a microcosm – a cosmos in miniature. Thus Genesis begins and Exodus ends with stories of creation, the first by God, the second by the Israelites. The eighth day is when we celebrate the human contribution to creation.

That is also why circumcision takes place on the eighth day. All life, we believe, comes from God. Every human being bears His image and likeness. We see each child as God's gift: "Children are the provision of the Lord; the fruit of the womb, His reward" (Ps, 127:3). Yet it takes a human act – circumcision – to signal that a male Jewish child has entered the covenant. That is why it takes place on the eighth day, to emphasise that the act that symbolises entry into the covenant is a human one – just as it was when the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai said, "All that the Lord has said, we will do and obey" (Ex. 24:7).

Mutuality and reciprocity mark the special nature of the specific covenant God made, first with Abraham, then with Moses and the Israelites. It is this that differentiates it from the universal covenant God made with Noah and through him with all humanity. That covenant, set out in Genesis 9, involved no human response. Its content was the seven Noahide commands. Its sign was the rainbow. But God asked nothing of Noah, not even his consent. Judaism embodies a unique duality of the universal and the particular. We are all in covenant with God by the mere fact of our humanity. We are bound, all of us, by the basic laws of morality. This is part of what it means to be human.

But to be Jewish is also to be part of a particular covenant of reciprocity with God. God calls. We respond. God begins the work and calls on us to complete it. That is what the act of circumcision represents. God did not cause male children to be born circumcised, said Rabbi Akiva, because He deliberately left this act, this sign of the covenant, to us.

Now we begin to understand the full depth of the conversation between Rabbi Akiva and the Roman governor Tineius Rufus. For the Romans, the Greeks and the ancient world generally, the gods were to be found in nature: the sun, the sea, the sky, the earth

and its seasons, the fields and their fertility. In Judaism, God is beyond nature, and his covenant with us takes us beyond nature also. So for us, not everything natural is good. War is natural. Conflict is natural. The violent competition to be the alpha male is natural. Jews – and others inspired by the God of Abraham – believe, as Kathryn Hepburn said to Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*, that "Nature, Mr Allnut, is what we are put in this world to rise above."

The Romans found circumcision strange because it was unnatural. Why not celebrate the human body as God made it? God, said Rabbi Akiva to the Roman governor, values culture, not just nature, the work of humans not just the work of God. It was this cluster of ideas – that God left creation unfinished so that we could become partners in its completion; that by responding to God's commands we become refined; that God delights in our creativity and helped us along the way by teaching the first humans how to make light – that made Judaism unique in its faith in God's faith in humankind. All of this is implicit in the idea of the eighth day as the day on which God sent humans out into the world to become His partners in the work of creation.

Why is this symbolised in the act of circumcision? Because if Darwin was right, then the most primal of all human instincts is to seek to pass on one's genes to the next generation. That is the strongest force of nature within us. Circumcision symbolises the idea that there is something higher than nature. Passing on our genes to the next generation should not simply be a blind instinct, a Darwinian drive. The Abrahamic covenant was based on sexual fidelity, the sanctity of marriage, and the consecration of the love that brings new life into the world.[4] It is a rejection of the ethic of the alpha male.

God created physical nature: the nature charted by science. But He asks us to be co-creators, with Him, of human nature. As R. Abraham Mordecai Alter of Ger said. "When God said, 'Let us make man in our image', to whom was He speaking? To man himself. God said to man, Let us – you and I – make man together." [5] The symbol of that co-creation is the eighth day, the day He helps us begin to create a world of light and love.

[1] Quintus Tineius Rufus, Roman governor of Judaea during the Bar Kochba uprising. He is known in the rabbinic literature as "the wicked." His hostility to Jewish practice was one of the factors that provoked the uprising.

[2] Tanhuma, Tazria, 5.

[3] This is also signalled in the Havdalah prayer which mentions five havdalot, "distinctions", between sacred and profane, light and darkness, Israel and the nations, Shabbat and the weekdays, and the final "who distinguishes between sacred and profane." This

parallels Genesis 1 in which the verb lehavdil – to distinguish, separate – appears five times.

[4] That, as I have pointed out elsewhere, is why Genesis does not criticise idolatry but does implicitly criticise, on at least six occasions, the lack of a sexual ethic among the people with whom the patriarchs and their families come into contact.

[5] R. Avraham Mordecai Alter of Ger, Likkutei Yehudah

## AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z"TL

**“A plague of Leprosy “ (13:2)** As a preface to this important subject, we must note our dread of this fearsome malady and our sympathy for the man that experienced the symptoms of leprosy and the extreme hardships which he is forced to endure as a result of his sad condition. Hashem foresaw this reaction by the readers of the Torah, and He certainly intended to cause such a reaction by means of this Parasha. The fear of leprosy is a cause to Fear Hashem, and it generates gratitude to Hashem for protecting us from such sad misfortune.

Yet we must understand that the miracle of leprosy is actually a model for all forms of misfortune, which must be considered the work of Hashem. “When a man sees misfortune come upon him, let him search in his deeds” ( Berachot 5A ). The purpose of the plague and misfortunes in general, is to make me more Aware of Hashem and especially to remind them how great was Hashem’s Kindness hitherto.

Even if the leprosy had been sent upon a man for no sin that he committed, yet by his affliction he performs an important service to Hashem; for he provides a lesson and a warning to all men that they take heed and guard against evil-doing. Similarly, poverty is sometimes visited upon entirely virtuous persons for some purpose, such as “that we should be rescued by them from the judgment of Gehinom” (Baba Batra 10A) by aiding them.

Thus, although leprosy or poverty may be Hashem’s retribution upon a sinner, yet when an innocent man is similarly afflicted he may thereby be considered as one chosen by Hashem to perform an important service of teaching others by his suffering what could come upon them, for which he shall gain a great merit of reward. Quoted from “ A Kingdom of Cohanim “ by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT”L

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