

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

EKEB

AUGUST 10-11, 2012 23 AB 5772

Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach Schedule and Announcements
The Parnass – Rabbi David and Rabbi Colish are away this Shabbat

We are privileged to be hosting Rabbi Meyer Abittan – please come for his Derasha and class

Friday Night: Candles: 7:41 PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM

Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM –Please say Shemah at home by 8:44 AM

11:00 - 12:00 Orah's back! with our Shabbat Morning Kids Program for girls ages 4-8 upstairs in the Rabbi's study. Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more . . .

The Amiel Family is sponsoring the kiddush in memory of Sophie and Michael November z"l and Solomon Levinousky z"l and in honor of Ariella 15th Birthday (and in honor of my birthday even though I will be away Thanks Sarina and Kathy)

Pirkei Avot with Rabbi Aharon at 6:20 PM –followed by Minha: 7:00 PM –
Seudah Shelishi and a Class 7:40 – with Rabbi Dr. Meyer Abittan David –sponsored by Angela Rubin and family in honor of Julietta Dina Rubin who will starting Sackler Medical School in Israel. We wish her beracha vehaslacha

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

NEW MINCHA AND ARBIT SUNDAY – 7:40 PM – Lets see if we can make a minyan each Sunday for the Summer - ALSO MONDAY at 7:40 PM preceding Rabbi Yanai and Rabbi Colish's classes

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Daily 6:30 AM class – Shelah Hakadosh on the Perasha (Selichot Begin Monday August 20th at 6:15AM)

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 8PM Monday night

Hebrew Reading Crash Course – 8-9 PM and continuing Monday Nights throughout the Summer. Beginner and intermediate levels welcome! We would like to pray Mincha and Arbit first on Monday nights. 7:40PM

Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30: Basar BeChalav – With Michael and David –
Ladies Shabbat Class at the home of Tina Lemberger – each Shabbat at 5:30

Volley Ball with Daniel Wagner – Sunday mornings at the beach at 10AM All summer long.

Scholar in Residence for August 18th has been postponed – a new date will follow.

Cub Scout Troop. Please join us Tuesday Night August 14th at 7:30pm at the Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach Social Hall (corner of Lafayette and West Penn) to sign up. The Regional Boy Scout Director will be joining us for a 1 hr question and answer session for all interested parents. Please contact Rabbi Yosef Colish for more details @ 516-589-6102 or YosefColish@ECGResources.com.

Gitta J. Neufeld, Director of Education at The Allegra Franco School of Educational Leadership who was so well received on Tisha BeAv when teaching Megilat Eicha will be teaching the book of Jonah over four Tuesday beginning August 21st. Continuing on the 28th and the September 4 and 11 at 7:45. Men and Women

David and Michael's Halacha Class will be pushed to 9PM and we will explore practical Halachot relating to the Yamim Noraim – Elul, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot. Please plan on joining from 9-10:30

Spread the word: “Registration is underway for Sunday Funday Hoolahoop in for girls ages 6 and up in the Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach. Sunday mornings from 10:45-11:45. Spots are limited. \$15 per session, or \$10 per session with payment in advance for 10 sessions. Please contact Leah Colish to sign up.”

please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

Take a peek into Kosher Culinary Arts School in Jerusalem with my daughter Mikhayla who is going through a rigorous 6 month program. bitemebymik.blogspot.com

Editors Notes

Google lists About 1,720 news links for the term Siyum HaShas. News organizations around the world reported on the event last week. Articles were posted in the pages of newspapers ranging from the Sun Sentinel, the Atlanta Journal Constitution, the Salt Lake Tribune, the Star Ledger, the Washington Post and all the Israeli and Metropolitan New York papers. National magazines and all the networks reported as well. But one story stood out.

Most stories focused on

- a. The spiritual calling, a labor of love, a rich opportunity to connect with thousands of years of Jewish history and religion.
- b. The incredible dedication and effort it takes in "running" a marathon of study for seven and a half years – 2711 days without fail.
- c. On the unifying factor of Jews around the world united in what they are learning each day.
- d. The joy and satisfaction of those attending.
- e. The 90,000 present and the quarter of a million watching via satellite from more than 80 cities in 15 countries.

The New York Times though focused on the \$250,000 translucent curtain, made of green woven plastic, extending

for nearly 2.5 linear miles, and shielding the 20,000 women from view. The author found it so important to speak about distinct roles and woman as spectators and included this paragraph.

The curtain opened at 8 p.m., after the half-hour of prayer, allowing the women to watch and listen to the speakers, all men, give impassioned speeches in Yiddish and English, about Torah study, and sing celebratory songs. Most of the women wore stylish wigs, long skirts and modest sweaters, typical of the traditional Jews who call themselves Haredim, or those who tremble before God.

Instead of focusing on the joy of the crowd, the effort in the endeavor, the joy and satisfaction and unity, the author focused on her perceived separation.

Many people were upset with the New York Times, but that's nothing new. My sister in law Sherry though suggested, we shouldn't be too upset. For the writer unknowingly was echoing the blessing bestowed upon us by Bilaam. Mah Tovv Ohalecha Yaakov – How goodly are your tents Jacob. Bilaam came out to curse us but his curse became a blessing that we say at every wedding and that many repeat daily. The New York Times, never ones with good intentions towards us, unknowingly resonated the same blessing.

May Hashem always turn the curses to blessings. Amen!

PS ... Don't tell anybody but Malka Bina who heads Matan, an institute for women's Torah studies, where they celebrated their own Siyum was Chantelle's teacher and Mikhayla studying in HaRova also studies Gemarah. I think every woman should have a basic understanding of the study

of Talmud so that when her ten year old comes home from school and has a question and daddy's not home, mom can be there for him. For years on the LIRR where Rabbi Lerner taught the Daf, there was at least one woman participating.

PSS ... For all you business owners and sports fans out thereNY POST From a friend watching the Olympics: "How about that Michael Phelps? But let's remember he didn't win all those medals, someone else did. After all, he and I swam in public pools, built by state employees using tax dollars. He got training from the USOC and ate food grown by the Department of Agriculture. He should play fair and share his medals with people like me, who can barely keep my head above water, let alone swim."

Finally two articles a bit out of the ordinary for us follow. The first is by Abraham H. Miller and discusses President Obama's Continuing Jewish Problem. The second is on Menachem Cohen's major overhaul of the Tanach. I am really curious as to what the response of the Rabbis will be.

I'm planning on leaving Atlantic Beach this weekend to spend Shabbat with our family in Deal. Weather and host permitting I hope to be praying on Old Farm Road Friday evening, the Little Red School House on Shabbat morning and Deal Synagogue for Shabbat afternoon.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Obama's Continuing Jewish Problem, Abraham H. Miller

When Democratic National Committee Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz proclaimed Obama's support for Israel in a Pennsylvania synagogue, she was visibly shocked by the loud and vocal dissent from the audience. Unlike the sanitized pro-Obama Jewish events in Florida, where Jews who opposed him were prevented from entering, the Pennsylvania event was open to all.

Wasserman Schultz apparently so believes her own rhetoric and has been so insulated from the political change sweeping the Jewish community that for a few moments she seemed sufficiently shaken to be unable to continue her speech.

One group that has had its pulse on the political leanings of the Jewish community is the Republican Jewish Coalition. Playing on the theme of buyer's remorse — Jews who voted for Obama but will not again — the RJC has been running ads and videos with Jews who supported Obama in 2008 and are vocal about their intent not to do so now.

The Jewish Democrats will quickly point out that no one expects the majority of the Jewish community to vote for Mitt Romney. But they fail to see that this election will, by all current indications, be close. A predicted near twenty-percent shift in the Jewish vote in critical states like Florida and Ohio can devastate Obama's electoral vote count.

It is no accident that while Mitt Romney was on his way to Israel, Obama signed a security agreement giving Israel preferential access to American arms and munitions. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak was

quick to note how supportive the Obama administration was of Israel, and liberal Jews immediately seized on that as if it were something other than the expected response of a small country dependent for its military hardware on a large country.

More important to discerning observers of the Middle East has been Obama's flawed foreign policy in the region. It is no accident that Dennis Ross, veteran Middle East negotiator and 2008 Obama campaigner, will not be on the campaign trail this time. And Ross' assistant, Aaron David Miller, just published an illuminating article in Foreign Policy noting that Obama's view of the world does not include the scenario of an Israel surrounded by Arab states bent on its destruction. Rather, Obama's sympathies are derived from his leftist political socialization, and he does not see a concession that Israel should not be forced to make to the Arabs.

The exclusion of Israel from the anti-terrorism conference the Obama administration sponsored in Turkey, and the conference's refusal to acknowledge that Israeli civilians murdered in Israel at the hands of Islamic terrorists are terrorist victims, further underscores the leftist, pro-Muslim ideology of this administration. This is why its Department of State and press secretary are incapable of enunciating the words "Jerusalem" and "Israel's capital" in the same sentence. Mitt Romney had absolutely no difficulty announcing what every Israeli knows: Jerusalem is Israel's capital.

Jerusalem historically was never a divided city until the Arabs captured it in 1948 and prevented Jews from having access to their holy sites and burial places. East

Jerusalem is as much an historical fiction as was East Berlin.

Obama's thinking on Israel was best articulated by Thomas Friedman in a recent column that is as fatuous as it is banal. The object of Friedman's outrage is Mitt Romney's trip to Israel. Friedman characterizes Romney's trip as one of pandering to Jews for money — and then quips that Romney should have taken it to Vegas, where there is more than sufficient Jewish money and equally compelling photo opportunities. Friedman increasingly has fallen into the leftist routine of wrapping Jews in stereotypes, mostly about money.

Friedman goes on to argue for more American pressure on Israel, noting that the major obstacle to peace is neither Palestinian intransigence nor Palestinian terrorism but Israeli settlements. Someone needs to remind Friedman that terrorism existed long before the first settlement, and Israel's total removal of settlements from Gaza brought rockets and missiles, not peace. A similar outcome would await Israel's departure from the West Bank.

By experience and socialization, the Jews Obama surrounded himself with in his Hyde Park bastion of rarified, elite liberalism are Jews who think like Friedman. But these Jews are hardly representative of the views on Israel of the majority of Jews for whom Israel is an issue. These incestuous political contacts are what have and continue to shape Obama's thinking on the Middle East.

Israel itself, however, is only the most observable aspect of Obama's Jewish problem, for as Noah Pollak has so aptly noted, Jews, like other voters, are first

and foremost Americans and have the same needs and problems as other Americans. They are beset by a declining economy, fewer opportunities for their children, and an administration that never saw a new government bureaucracy that didn't need to be funded.

Political preference itself is a function of the interaction of a number of factors. Among these, as I have argued in the scholarly literature, is ethnicity acting as a catalyst that heightens and reinforces those factors. But political socialization is not political destiny, and as some Jews change their partisan preference, so too will both their Jewish friends and neighbors. Once the social stigma of voting Republican is removed, there will be more Jews willing to come out of the political closet, and others unable to admit it publicly but who will vote Republican nonetheless.

Abraham H. Miller is an emeritus professor of political science and a former head of the Intelligence Studies Section of the International Studies Association.

RAMAT GAN, Israel (AP) — For the past 30 years, Israeli Judaic scholar Menachem Cohen has been on a mission of biblical proportions: Correcting all known textual errors in Jewish scripture to produce a truly definitive edition of the Old Testament.

His edits, focusing primarily on grammatical blemishes and an intricate set of biblical symbols, mark the first major overhaul of the Hebrew Bible in nearly 500 years.

Poring over thousands of medieval manuscripts, the 84-year-old Cohen identified 1,500 inaccuracies in the Hebrew language texts that have been corrected in his completed 21-

volume set. The final chapter is set to be published next year.

The massive project highlights how Judaism venerates each tiny biblical calligraphic notation as a way of ensuring that communities around the world use precisely the same version of the holy book.

According to Jewish law, a Torah scroll is considered void if even a single letter is incorrect or misplaced. Cohen does not call for changes in the writing of the sacred Torah scrolls used in Jewish rites, which would likely set off a firestorm of objection and criticism. Instead, he is aiming for accuracy in versions used for study by the Hebrew-reading masses.

For the people of the book, Cohen said, there was no higher calling.

"The people of Israel took upon themselves, at least in theory, one version of the Bible, down to its last letter," Cohen said, in his office at Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv.

The last man to undertake the challenge was Jacob Ben-Hayim, who published the Mikraot Gedolot, or Great Scriptures, in Venice in 1525. His version, which unified the religion's varying texts and commentaries under a single umbrella, has remained the standard for generations, appearing to this day on bookshelves of observant Jews the world over.

Since Ben-Hayim had to rely on inferior manuscripts and commentaries, numerous inaccuracies crept in and were magnified in subsequent editions.

The errors have no bearing on the Bible's stories and alter nothing in its meaning. Instead, for example, in some places the

markers used to denote vowels in Hebrew are incorrect; or a letter in a word may be wrong, often the result of a centuries old transcription error. Some of the fixes are in the notations used for cantillation, the text's ritual chants.

Most of the errors Cohen found were in the final two thirds of the Hebrew Bible and not in the sacred Torah scrolls, since they do not include vowel markings or cantillation notations.

Cohen said unity and accuracy were of particular importance to distinguish the sacred Jewish text from that used by those sects that broke away from Judaism, namely Christians and Samaritans.

To achieve his goal, Cohen relied primarily on the Aleppo Codex, the 1,000-year-old parchment text considered to be the most accurate copy of the Bible. For centuries it was guarded in a grotto in the great synagogue of Aleppo, Syria, out of reach of most scholars like Ben-Hayim. In 1947, a Syrian mob burned the synagogue, and the Codex briefly disappeared before most of it was smuggled into Israel a decade later.

Now digitized, the Codex, also known as the Crown, provided Cohen with a template from which to work. But because about a third of the Codex — nearly 200 pages — remains missing, Cohen had to recreate the five books of Moses based on trends he observed in the Codex as well as from other sources, such as the 11th-century Leningrad Codex, considered the second-most authoritative version of the Jewish Bible.

Cohen also included the most comprehensive commentaries available, most notably that of

11th-century Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, known as Rashi.

The result is the completion of Ben-Hayim's work.

"It was amazing to me that for 500 years, people didn't sense the errors," said Cohen, who wears a knitted skullcap and a gray goatee. "They just assumed that everything was fine, but in practice everything was not fine."

He's not the only scholar to devote decades to the task. In 1976, Rabbi Mordechai Breuer published a version of the Torah based mainly on the Aleppo Codex. The Hebrew University Bible Project in Jerusalem has also been working on a scientific edition of the Hebrew Bible, but theirs is directed toward scholars, while Cohen's output is aimed at wider consumption.

Rafael Zer, the project's editorial coordinator, called Cohen's work "quasi-scientific" because it presents a final product and does not provide the reader a way of seeing how it was reached. He credits Cohen for bringing an exact biblical text to the general public but said it "comes at the expense of absolute accuracy and an absolute scientific edition.

With the assistance of his son Shmuel, a computer programmer, Cohen launched a digital version he hopes will become a benchmark of the Israeli education system. He said his ultimate goal was to "correct the past and prepare for the future."

As a former teacher, Cohen said he took particular pride in a sophisticated search engine that allows even novices to explore his work with ease. He called computers a "third revolution" to affect Jewish scripture, following the shift from scrolls to bound books and the advent of the printing press.

"I want the Bible to be user-friendly," said Cohen, a grandfather of eight. "Today, we can create sources of information and searches that allow you to get an answer to everything you are wondering."

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliyah: Moshe details the general rewards for following the Torah, and encourages the nation to have complete confidence in Hashem's protection. Moshe forewarns them of the dangers in being overly confident and commands them in the Mitzvah of Birkas Hamazon (8:10).

2nd Aliyah: Moshe warns them regarding the pitfalls of prosperity and idolatry, and exhorts them to remain humble in the face of their guaranteed victories. G-d is the one who deserves the credit!

3rd Aliyah: In order to illustrate his point, Moshe reviews the incident of the Golden Calf. He explains why G-d, being a G-d of Justice, will grant the Bnai Yisroel a victory over the inhabitants of Canaan. Not because the Jews are deserving, but because the Seven Nations deserve to be punished for their own evil actions. The actions of the Bnai Yisroel during the 40 years, such as the Golden Calf, should have resulted in the Jews' destruction. It was three factors which kept them alive and well so that they could inherit the land.

1. Hashem's promise to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.
2. The Chillul Hashem--desecration of G-d's name--that would have occurred among the other nations who would question G-d's ability to protect His nation.
3. Moshe's begging for Hashem's forgiveness.

4th Aliyah: Moshe finishes the story of the Golden Calf by retelling the giving of the Second Luchos.

5th Aliyah: Moshe poses the famous rhetorical question of, "What does G-d want... follow His ways..." and describes other instances of Hashem's demanding justice.

6th Aliyah: Moshe describes the nature of Eretz Yisroel as demanding and responsive to our following the Torah. The second Parsha of Shema is recorded.

7th Aliyah: Moshe promises the nation total victory if they listen to the Mitzvos and follow the ways of the Hashem.

In this week's Haftarah, Yishayahu 49:14 - 51:3 the Navi evokes a powerful image that is consistent with this week's Parsha. He describes our relationship with Hashem as a mother who can not possibly abandon or forget her children. Nothing that we will do, or that might occur, can result in Hashem being divorced from His People. In fact, even though G-d seemingly "hides His face" from us and allows other nations to dominate and oppress us, they will ultimately have to answer to Him.

Parents who appropriately punish their children are doing G-d's work and are rewarded for their expressions of love and caring. However, the "punishing nations" have never accepted their position as the extended hand of a loving G-d chastising and punishing His chosen people. Therefore, they will be punished, rather than rewarded.

The imagery is intended to focus us on the emotional and unbreakable bond that exists between us and Hashem. It is no

different than a mother who must cope with the child who ignores and disobeys her. However, in spite of the hurt and the responsibility to punish, the parent is incapable of separating herself from the love and concern she feels for her child, even more so at the time of punishment! It is therefore incumbent upon the child, not the mother, to recognize the parents' ever present love, and embrace, rather than shun, the relationship.

In the end, recognizing that Hashem has never and will never abandoned us, especially at the times of our greatest trials and tragedies, will reawaken our love for Hashem and bring comfort to the nation and Eretz Yisroel.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN **Rabbi Reuven Semah**

"And it will be because of your listening to these laws." (Debarim 7:12)

Did you ever see a penny on the sidewalk as you walked? Did you bother to pick it up? Chances are you didn't, especially if you were in a hurry. You might even have trampled on it as you passed by. But in some cases, even a wealthy man would bend over and pick up a penny, with the same thrill as finding a \$100 bill.

Rabbi Moshe Mizrahi suggests the following scenario. Suppose a wealthy man took his grandson to the park. Suddenly, they hear the ice cream truck passing by playing a merry tune, and the child asks for ices. It costs 45 cents, but the smallest bill in Grandpa's wallet is \$50, which the vendor will not accept. Digging into his pocket, he finds 44 cents. Now what will he do? Suddenly, he spots a tarnished penny on the sidewalk. A broad smile spreads over his face as he

bends over, picks it up with a flourish, and proceeds triumphantly to the truck.

Rashi, in the beginning of our perashah, cites the Midrash which says that many people trample on little misvot, thinking they are not worth the bother. Fulfilling "minor" misvot means things like observing a minhag, doing small favors, saying "shalom" to another Jew you might pass in the street, or standing up when an elderly person walks by. Some people ignore these misvot without giving them a moment's thought. That is what trampling on a little misvah means.

Our Sages teach us, however, that we are always to view ourselves as if our merits equal our sins exactly and we are hanging in the balance. In fact, we are to imagine that the entire Jewish nation's merits and sins are exactly equal. By bothering to fulfill one tiny misvah, we will shift the balance to the side of merit and life, for ourselves and for the entire Jewish nation. Instead of shirking a little misvah we should view it as the winning ticket to an eternal lottery, guaranteeing a lot more than strawberry-lemon ices.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

"For man does not live on bread alone, rather, by the word of Hashem..." (Debarim 8:3)

The simple meaning of this verse is that it's not the actual food which sustains a person, but rather it's the command that Hashem gives for people to be able to live. However, we can understand this in a novel way based on the verse "?????????????" "?????" which tells us to bless Hashem for the food that we eat. It's not the food that keeps us going; it's the berachot we say before and after eating

which provides the real nourishment for a person. If we would realize the effect that our blessings have on the world and all its contents, we would grab every opportunity to say a berachah. Indeed, Bircat hamazon, grace after meals, is the only berachah which is mentioned in the Torah, and its reward is truly unbelievable. But even a regular short blessing, which takes only a few seconds, can bring such bounty and prosperity to the one who says it. Let's start off by just one extra berachah a day and may we be blessed in return.

RABBI ELI MANSOUR **Putting Life Into Our Berachot**

Moshe Rabbenu tells Beneh Yisrael in Parashat Ekeb (10:12), "Ve'ata Yisrael, Ma Hashem Elokecha Sho'el Me'imach..." – "And now, Israel, what does Hashem ask of you..."

The Gemara in Masechet Menahot (43) tells of incident that took place during the time of King David, which relates to this Pasuk. A devastating plague ravaged the country, killing one hundred people every day. No medical cause could be found for the disease, and the situation seemed hopeless. David, with his Ru'ah Ha'kodesh (prophetic insight), came up with a solution. He enacted a requirement that is still observed even today – to recite one hundred Berachot each day. The people obeyed the new law and made a point of reciting one hundred Berachot on a daily basis, and the plague came to an end.

The Gemara adds that David found a Biblical source for this requirement – the aforementioned verse in Parashat Ekeb. The word "Ma" ("What"), the Gemara says, should be read as "Me'a" – "one hundred." Once we read "Ma" as

"Me'a," the Pasuk reads, "And now, Israel, Hashem asks of you one hundred..." God asks us for "one hundred," that we recite one hundred Berachot each day, and the Torah here thus alludes to the law enacted by King David in response to the deadly plague.

The question arises, what right do we have to add a letter to the word "Ma" to produce "Me'a"? The word "Ma" is spelled Mem, Heh, and the word "Me'a" is spelled Mem, Alef, Heh. Thus, in order to read "Ma" as "Me'a," we need to add the letter Alef. How can we add a letter to a word in the Torah?

Furthermore, it seems from this account that Beneh Yisrael did not recite Berachot until King David's enactment. How could that be? Weren't Berachot being recited already during the time of Abraham, Yishak and Yaakob? One answer is that people were reciting Berachot, but David instituted the requirement to recite one hundred Berachot. But there may also be a much deeper explanation.

True, the people had been reciting one hundred Berachot each day. But they were reciting Berachot without proper Kavana, without concentration. The Sages teach us that a prayer without Kavana is like a body without a soul. The Berachot being recited were "lifeless," they had no spiritual force, because they were recited quickly, robotically, without any attention or feeling. And David realized that these one hundred "dead" Berachot recited each day were the cause of the one hundred deaths the nation suffered each day. He therefore enacted that the people should ensure to recite Berachot with feeling and concentration, to counteract the effects of their "dead" Berachot.

The letter Alef, which has the numerical value of 1, represents God, who is one. The letter is therefore formed by a slanted Vav with a Yod extending from the bottom and another from the top. The combined numerical value of these three letters – Vav, and two Yod's – is 26, the numerical value of the divine Name of "Havaya." This letter, then, signifies God. David wanted to introduce this letter into "Ma," a word which denotes nothingness. His goal was to infuse the Berachot which were characterized by "Ma" – emptiness and lack of substance – with the people's spirit, their soul, which is a piece of God Himself. This is what the Gemara means when it says that David read "Ma" as "Me'a." This is precisely what he enacted – that the people should inject their otherwise lifeless Berachot with life and feeling, by reciting Berachot not only with their lips, but also with their souls, with the piece of Hashem within them. This injection of life and spirit into Berachot has the power to transform death to life, to avert catastrophe and save ourselves and our nation from harm.

All Torah observant Jews recite Berachot. On most days of the year, we don't even have to think about this requirement of one hundred Berachot, because we automatically reach this total through our prayer services and blessings before and after eating and drinking. Too often, however, these Berachot are lifeless, recited by rote, mechanically, without concentration. We mumble the words without thinking what they mean, and sometimes in our haste we fail to even enunciate the words properly. If we truly believed the power of a Beracha recited properly, how Kavana brings life and blessing to the world, our Berachot would be much different.

It does not take long to recite a Beracha properly. It takes just a few moments to pause, think about what we're saying, and enunciate each word correctly. These few moments are the difference between a "dead" Beracha and a Beracha with life and power. We must ensure to invest a part of our souls into our Berachot, and then, like in the times of David HaMelech, Hashem will protect us from harm and grant us life and prosperity, Amen.

Rabbi Wein

The parsha ties together the observance of the Torah commandments, especially the warnings against paganism and idolatry, with the earthly blessings of longevity and prosperity. Over the ages this has caused great philosophic debate and discussion, for this cause and effect relationship is not always apparent in the national or personal lives of the Jewish people.

Many commentators hasten to add that these biblical promises refer to biblical times when the Divine Spirit was palpably present amongst the Jewish community and the spirit of prophecy was also present and prevalent in the Land of Israel. This means that it was applicable to First Temple times only, for in Second Temple times the spirit of prophecy was absent in the Jewish commonwealth.

Perhaps this is an insight as to why the rabbis attributed the destruction of the First Temple primarily to idolatry – a fulfillment of the cause and effect system of justice as outlined in this week's parsha – while the demise of the Second Temple was attributed to social dispute and baseless hatred, an issue never specifically

mentioned in this week's Torah presentation.

It appears that different equations, moral gauges and causes affected the Jewish commonwealth's spiritual status during Second Temple times than were present in First Temple times when prophecy and Divine Spirit were current and abundantly visible. In any event, it is apparent that the direct cause and effect relationship between observance of God's commandments and blessings and prosperity and disobedience causing punishment and disaster has not always been evident in the annals of Jewish history and life, especially in our long years of exile and persecution.

The very fact that the Torah in this week's parsha makes this cause and effect relationship so patently clear, and in fact repeats it a number of times, raises the age old problem of why the righteous suffer and the wicked are rewarded, in this world at least. This basic faith dilemma has its biblical origins in the book of Iyov where the problem is raised, debated and thoroughly discussed, but basically left unanswered.

Over the long Jewish exile with its attendant difficulties and pogroms this gnawing problem of faith has always accompanied us in every generation and circumstance. The events of the Holocaust, almost unimaginable in its numbers and horror, has certainly been a test of faith for many Jews, even for those who themselves were spared that actual experience. Yet the faith of Israel is that somehow in the unfathomable system of God's justice, all will be set right.

In reality, this is the main message of this week's parsha. It informs us that our actions have

consequences and that there is a guiding hand to Jewish and world history and events that will eventually reveal itself. So our task remains, as it always was – to fulfill God's commandments and to behave morally and justly. The whole system of God's justice, opaque as it may seem to us to be, is simply to remind us of our potential and greatness, of the importance of our behavior in the grand scheme of things, and to reinforce our sense of destiny as individuals and as a people.

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

The Morality of Love

Something implicit in the Torah from the very beginning becomes explicit in the book of Devarim. God is the God of love. More than we love Him, He loves us. Here, for instance, is the beginning of this week's parsha:

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love [et ha-brit vet et ha-chessed] with you, as he swore to your ancestors. He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. (Deut 7: 12-13)

Again in the parsha we read: To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. (Deut. 10: 14-15)

And here is a verse from last week's: Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he

brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength. (Deut. 4: 37)

The book of Deuteronomy is saturated with the language of love. The root a-h-v appears in Shemot twice, in Vayikra twice (both in Lev. 19), in Badmibar not at all, but in Sefer Devarim 23 times. Devarim is a book about societal beatitude and the transformative power of love.

Nothing could be more misleading and invidious than the Christian contrast between Christianity as a religion of love and forgiveness and Judaism as a religion of law and retribution. As I pointed out in Covenant and Conversation to Vayigash, forgiveness is born (as David Konstan notes in Before Forgiveness) in Judaism. Interpersonal forgiveness begins when Joseph forgives his brothers for selling him into slavery. Divine forgiveness starts with the institution of Yom Kippur as the supreme day of Divine pardon following the sin of the Golden Calf.

Similarly with love: when the New Testament speaks of love it does so by direct quotation from Leviticus ("You shall love your neighbour as yourself") and Deuteronomy ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might"). As philosopher Simon May puts it in his splendid book, *Love: A History*: "The widespread belief that the Hebrew Bible is all about vengeance and 'an eye for an eye,' while the Gospels supposedly invent love as an unconditional and universal value, must therefore count as one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings in all of Western history. For the Hebrew Bible is the source not just of the two love commandments but of a larger moral vision inspired by wonder for love's power."^[1] His

judgment is unequivocal: "If love in the Western world has a founding text, that text is Hebrew."^[2]

More than this: in *Ethical Life: The Past and Present of Ethical Cultures*, philosopher Harry Redner distinguishes four basic visions of the ethical life in the history of civilizations. ^[3] One he calls civic ethics, the ethics of ancient Greece and Rome. Second is the ethic of duty, which he identifies with Confucianism, Krishnaism and late Stoicism. Third is the ethic of honour, a distinctive combination of courtly and military decorum to be found among Persians, Arabs and Turks as well as in medieval Christianity (the 'chivalrous knight') and Islam.

The fourth, which he calls simply morality, he traces to Leviticus and Deuteronomy. He defines it simply as 'the ethic of love,' and represents what made the West morally unique: "The biblical 'love of one's neighbour' is a very special form of love, a unique development of the Judaic religion and unlike any to be encountered outside it. It is a supremely altruistic love, for to love one's neighbour as oneself means always to put oneself in his place and to act on his behalf as one would naturally and selfishly act on one's own."^[4] To be sure, Buddhism also makes space for the idea of love, though it is differently inflected, more impersonal and unrelated to a relationship with God.

What is radical about this idea is that, first, the Torah insists, against virtually the whole of the ancient world, that the elements that constitute reality are neither hostile nor indifferent to humankind. We are here because Someone wanted us to be, One who cares about us, watches over us and seeks our wellbeing.

Second, the love with which God created the universe is not just divine. It is to serve as the model for us in our humanity. We are bidden to love the neighbour and the stranger, to engage in acts of kindness and compassion, and to build a society based on love. Here is how our parsha puts it:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awesome God who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. So you must love the stranger, for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deut. 10: 18-19)

In short: God created the world in love and forgiveness and asks us to love and forgive others. I believe that to be the most profound moral idea in human history.

There is however an obvious question. Why is it that love, which plays so great a part in the book of Deuteronomy, is so much less in evidence in the earlier books of Shemot, Vayikra (with the exception of Lev. 19) and Bamidbar?

The best way of answering that question is to ask another. Why is it that forgiveness plays no part – at least on the surface of the narrative – in the book of Bereishit?^[5] God does not forgive Adam and Eve or Cain (though he mitigates their punishment). Forgiveness does not figure in the stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel or the destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain (Abraham's plea is that the cities be spared if they contain fifty or ten righteous people; this is not a plea for forgiveness). Divine forgiveness makes its first appearance in the book of Exodus after Moses'

successful plea in the wake of golden calf, and is then institutionalised in the form of Yom Kippur (Lev. 16), but not before. Why so?

The simple, radical, answer is: God does not forgive human beings until human beings learn to forgive one another. Genesis ends with Joseph forgiving his brothers. Only thereafter does God forgive human beings.

Turning to love: Genesis contains many references to it. Abraham loves Isaac. Isaac loves Esau. Rebecca loves Jacob. Jacob loves Rachel. He also loves Joseph. There is interpersonal love in plentiful supply. But almost all the loves of Genesis turn out to be divisive. They lead to tension between Jacob and Esau, between Rachel and Leah, and between Joseph and his brothers. Implicit in Genesis is a profound observation missed by most moralists and theologians. Love in and of itself – real love, personal and passionate, the kind of love that suffuses much of the prophetic literature as well as Shir Ha-Shirim, the greatest love song in Tanakh, as opposed to the detached, generalised love called agape which we associate with ancient Greece – is not sufficient as a basis for society. It can divide as well as unite.

Hence it does not figure as a major motif until we reach the integrated social-moral-political vision of Deuteronomy which combines love and justice. Tzedek, justice, turns out to be another key word of Deuteronomy, appearing 18 times. It appears only four times in Shemot, not at all in Bamidbar, and in Vayikra only in chapter 19, the only chapter that also contains the word 'love.' In other words, in Judaism love and justice go hand in hand. Again this is noted by Simon May:

[W]hat we must note here, for it is fundamental to the history of Western love, is the remarkable and radical justice that underlies the love commandment of Leviticus. Not a cold justice in which due deserts are mechanically handed out, but the justice that brings the other, as an individual with needs and interests, into a relationship of respect. All our neighbours are to be recognised as equal to ourselves before the law of love. Justice and love therefore become inseparable.[6]

Love without justice leads to rivalry, and eventually to hate. Justice without love is devoid of the humanizing forces of compassion and mercy. We need both. This unique ethical vision – the love of God for humans and of humans for God, translated into an ethic of love toward both neighbour and stranger – is the foundation of Western civilization and its abiding glory.

It is born here in the book of Deuteronomy, the book of law-as-love and love-as-law.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI
AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
"And You shall bless Hashem"
(8:10)**

The word U'Berachta (you shall bless) is from Barech, derived from Berech (a knee). It literally means not "bless" but "to bend the knees" in humility of deep gratitude. When one receives a gift from a Donor to whom he is unable to repay, all that he can do is to demonstrate his humble gratitude ("bending the knee") to his Benefactor. We bend our knees (Amidah) to Hashem because we are weighed down with all of the blessings He showers on us and that we owe him for.

If you have a hard time thinking of what He is doing for you, just walk into an eye doctor's waiting room and take a look at the people sitting all around, one with bloody eyes, one with bandages, another wearing dark glasses; they are suffering. Did it ever occur to you how healthy your eyes are? Thank you, Hashem. "Baruch Ata Hashem pokeach ivrim", Who opens the eyes of the blind.

This principle of expressing our gratitude to our Benefactor is a cause of the greatest excellence in ourselves. "Sing, you righteous ones, to Hashem; for the upright, praise is befitting" (Tehillim 33:1). This means: for those who desire to be upright, it is for their benefit to praise Hashem. Those persons that develop the genuine attitude of appreciating Hashem's countless forms of kindness will thereby gain a love of the Benefactor. And as they continue to sing to Him and to express His praise, they come closer to Him and thereby gain excellence of mind and character.

The secret is to spend time to learn how to thank Hashem. But first we must learn why you should be Grateful to Hashem. For example: you have to learn to appreciate your shoes and even shoe laces. Remember how you felt when one of your laces broke and you didn't have a replacement? Did you appreciate the metal tips on the laces? Do you appreciate your belt? Do you have gratitude for the holes in your belt? Some of the holes are fore "before breakfast" and others are for "after breakfast". These, and thousands of similar items must be studied so that you can eventually learn to be grateful for them.

To attain the state of true Love of Hashem is the highest Perfection.

"He that sings (to Hashem) in this life is rewarded that he shall sing in the World to Come" (Sanhedrin 91B). "The righteous sit with crowns on their heads and enjoy the splendor of the Shechina" (Berachot 17A). "These crowns are the understanding of Hashem that they gained in this life" (RMBM).

Parts of this newsletter are courtesy of Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Project Genesis, and refer to learn@torah.org and <http://www.torah.org/>