

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE EKEB

AUGUST 16, 2014

20 AB 5774

**DEDICATION :** This week's newsletter is dedicated in memory of Rachel Bat Latifa who many of us knew as Lena Azizo Cymbrowitz. She represented NY State's 45th Assembly District. She was the first Sephardic Jew elected to state office. The Cancer pavilion at Maimonides Medical Center, is dedicated in her memory

## SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

Candle lighting Friday evening 7:34 p.m. Shir Hashirim 7:15 Mincha at 7:30 SHARP

SHABBAT Class at 8:30, Relevant Daily Halachot based upon the teaching of HaRav Ovadia Yosef Hashem Melech at 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:46 AM  
We will endeavor to keep it to the 7 aliyot, somech, samuch and maftir each week.

Kiddush sponsored by Jack and Patti Azizo in memory  
of Jack's sister Lena (Rachel bat Latifah) Azizo Cymbrowitz.  
And by Rina Limor who has recently joined our congregation from Florida  
In memory of her father and grandparents

Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one  
Anyone wishing to do a Dairy Kiddush with hot food must speak with Rabbi Colish in advance.

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30  
Ages 0-5 - in the Playroom/ Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at Benai Asher from 5:30 to 6:30

Pirkei Avot with Rav Aharon at 6:15  
Mincha at 6:55 – Followed by Seudah Shelishi at 7:25  
Seudah Shelishi Class with R' David  
Birkat HaMazon at 8:15 .... Arbit at 8:20 - Shabbat Ends – 8:33

### WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00AM, Mon and Thurs at 6:55, Tues, Weds and Fri at 7:00  
We have been having a great Sunday morning class with Sam Yusupov 9AM  
Looking for Breakfast sponsors

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE - Men and Women are Invited  
Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai 7:30

Daily class with Rabbi Colish - Weekday 6:30 AM (ADDITIONAL NEW TIME Sunday Mornings 7:30)  
Kaballah as a Guide to Spiritual Growth based upon the teachings of Likutei Moharan

Thursday Nights 8:30-9:30 Virtual\* Class facilitated by Rabbi Yosef Colish.  
Practical Laws of Shabbat for Sephardim

LABOR DAY BARBECUE – see flyer inside

YU is proud to announce an exciting semester of Women's Beit Midrash. This 6-week program will take place at the Yeshiva University Museum (15 West 16th Street) on Wednesdays, October 29 - December 3, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Sessions will feature Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik, Director of the Zahava and Moshael Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, Yeshiva University and Dr. Jacob Wisse, Director of Yeshiva University Museum and Associate Professor of Art History, Stern College for Women who will co-present on the topic of: "The Image and the Idea: An Interdisciplinary Seminar on Art History and Jewish Thought."

We encourage you to let members of your congregation know about this unique opportunity to learn from and with our renowned Yeshiva University faculty.

For more information and to register for the courses, please visit [www.yu.edu/sternlearn](http://www.yu.edu/sternlearn).

**BENAI ASHER  
SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH  
PRESENTS:**

# **LABOR DAY BBQ 2014**

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**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame. Mincha at 4PM through October 30<sup>th</sup> – Please join us! 212-289-2100**

**Rumors Abound but  
 God's Protection of Israel is No Fable  
 By Raphael Poch**

**“A land that the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.” (Deuteronomy 11:12)**

Over the more than month long Operation Protective Edge conflict between Hamas terrorists and the IDF, a strikingly few number of civilian casualties have been suffered on the Israeli side.

Over 3,356 rockets have been fired at Israel, with that number rising everyday, and only four people have been killed as a result of rocket fire. While Israel's Iron Dome is a wonder to behold and responsible for maintaining the safety of Israeli civilians from rocket fire, the numbers show that only 578 rockets were destroyed by Iron Dome Interceptions, or roughly 17 percent of all rockets fired at Israel.

Simple statistics show that there is something extraordinary occurring here.

Whether one chooses to believe that providence is behind the overwhelming number of misfired rockets or not, one must admit that the number of casualties should in theory be higher. After all, Hamas is quite experienced when it comes to rocket fire at Israel, having more than 14 years of experience.

Combine the above observation with the somewhat historical and biblical outlook of the Israeli public and military, and one is bound to come away with a viewpoint that at the very least recognizes the possibility of divine protection or intervention, thus setting the stage for the myriad of 'bonafide' stories telling of divine intervention sprouting forth like wildfire on social media networks in Israel.

Stories abound of mystical beings visiting soldiers while on duty in and around the Gaza strip and warning them of entering booby-trapped houses or buildings filled with explosives. These spirits prevent the soldiers from entering houses that were later to be found out had been booby-trapped and if entered would mean instant death for the soldiers.

Others tell of gusts of wind that blew rockets aimed at major population center off course after the Iron Dome counter-attack had failed numerous times. Some stories tell of good deeds done by the soldiers that had saved their lives such prayer or making a blessing upon food.

What these stories often have in common is an allocation of “hearing the story from the source first hand”, often from a close relative, former student, acquaintance or other relation who has returned from the war-torn Strip, but lacking a name.

When stories, even from multiple sites are looked into, the source often vanishes into air thinner than that of the supposed apparition. Another commonality is that almost all of these stories begin as Whatsapp conversations (text messaging) to groups or individuals and are spread like wildfire on social media networks without any other corroboration.

One story was traced back to an Ultra-Orthodox high school teacher who claimed that a former student of his, who is the commander of an Iron Dome battery told him that the hand of God blew a Hamas rocket that was aimed at the Azrieli Towers in Tel Aviv, into the sea after the Iron Dome failed to intercept the rocket three times. The story, like many others, was rife with inaccuracies regarding the technical operation of the IDF thus casting doubt upon the story's authenticity.

An online newspaper that picked up on the story wrote as follows:

“I witnessed this miracle with my own eyes. It was not told or reported to me. I saw the hand of God send that missile into the sea.” -Iron Dome Battery Commander

An earlier, unconfirmed report floating around the Internet had a Gaza resident attributing the lack of Hamas accuracy to Israel's God moving the rockets off-course to protect His people.

“We do aim [our rockets], but their God changes their path in mid-air,” a Hamas commander was said to have told someone who wondered why Gaza-based militants can't seem to hit their targets.

Whether or not that report is [true], an Iron Dome operator whose battery failed three times to down an incoming missile headed toward Tel Aviv last week, said the overall assessment is [accurate]."

"Suddenly, Iron Dome (which calculates wind speeds, among other things) shows a major wind coming from the east, a strong wind that...sends the missile into the sea. We were all stunned. I stood up and shouted, 'There is a God!'"

Another story includes a commander claiming that God's clouds of glory covered his soldiers.

Also last week, a commander of the Givati Infantry Brigade described a mysterious fog that favorably covered him and his troops as they advanced on an enemy position in morning light, after their nighttime raid was postponed. The commander labeled the covering as "clouds of glory."

There are many such stories traveling around the web. Some are fantastical, while others are more plausible. One even has a picture of a bullet being fired at a soldier and being stopped by a hand-grenade that the soldier had in his vest. The grenade miraculously did not explode.

In true Israeli fashion the soldiers themselves have begun picking up on this trend of miraculous storytelling and have begun jokingly creating new ones. One online forum member who claimed to have also been serving in Gaza wrote:

"A soldier friend who came out of Gaza told me today that his squad arrived at a house in Suja'iya and an old woman came to them and told them that she was the Biblical Rachel and that the house was set with explosives. So they went into the next house. They slept there all night, and upon waking in the morning realized that in actuality the woman was Leah."

This story spoofs one that is similar from the Second Lebanon War: "An old woman dressed as an Arab went up to a bunch of soldiers in Gaza, and told them that a certain house contained bombs and missiles. The soldiers located the house, defused the bombs and destroyed the missiles. When the soldiers asked the woman what her name was she said 'Rachel' and then disappeared."

The desire to believe these stories and find inspiration in them has become very common among those who seek out the hand of God in everyday events. The desire to poke fun at them has become

equally as great by those who wish to use humor as a protective shield to soften the seriousness of the conflict here at home.

But whether these uncorroborated stories may be true or whether they are false, one thing can be said for certain; the unusually low numbers in Israeli civilian casualties, is beyond surprising, and may very well point to some divine providence involved in protecting the lives of IDF soldiers as well as Israeli civilians.

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Here are some of the more popular stories being circulated:

God's Special Messenger

At a synagogue in Israel this week, a soldier who just returned from Gaza told this beautiful story. He and his army unit identified the home of a wanted Hamas terrorists, and made all of the arrangements to go and arrest him. They arrived at his house, hiding and undercover, early in the morning. They were about to enter the house, but then they saw a dove hovering overhead, which seemed very strange. They all stopped to watch the dove, and he landed on a tiny little string. A second after he landed on the string, the entire house blew up. The house was booby trapped, and the string was connected to the door. If the soldiers would have entered the house, they all would have been killed. God sends His messengers in all different shapes.

A Soldier's Personal Miracle

Two days ago when we went into the field, I asked my commander if I could take some sweets with me into Gaza that civilians sent us from all over the country and he agreed. I took a package of chocolate filled cookies (Argalot). After a day and a half of fighting with minimal amounts of food, we were enclosed in a house and I recalled that I had cookies packed with my gear. I opened up the box and saw a note in it from a young kid. It was written in exactly these words: "I know that you are protecting me, and this is a small token of my appreciation to you. I am still young, but I have one request, that you say a blessing over the food". The secular soldier did not know how to make a blessing over the food, but another soldier there who was his friend and was religious was in another corner of the house. The soldier crawled towards his religious friend to ask him what blessing to say and how to say it. When he was done saying the blessing, there was a HUGE explosion. An RPG rocket was shot and exploded exactly in the place he had been just a moment before crawling to his friend. The soldier was

wounded, but only with a few minor scratches. The soldier broke out with a heartfelt cry.

### Man of Fire

A group of soldiers were investigating a building when the two rear-guards saw an old man who stood between them and their compatriots. The old man opened his mouth and fire came out of it, and then he disappeared. The soldiers called to their friends to retreat. Immediately upon leaving the building it exploded.

### Israel, Hear My Cries!

A soldier coming out of Gaza reported that a woman approached their platoon and was about to blow herself up. The soldiers realizing the imminent doom, screamed out Shema Yisrael, upon which the women stopped where she was, put down the detonator, and told the soldiers that she was actually Jewish, but married an Arab man and was brought to Gaza against her will. The soldiers there upon disarmed the bomb, took her and her children to safety somewhere in Israel.

### EDITORS NOTES

#### **Ekev – Blessing on the Land**

The portion of Ekev which we read this week, makes numerous references to HaAretz – and Moses was not referring to the Israeli newspaper of the same name, but rather to the Aretz of the land of Israel.

We begin with Moses assuring us that if we “observe ... then Hashem will bless you .... On the land’. We continue some verses later with the pasuk we use as the basis for Birkat HaMazon or what we refer to as the “Grace after meals”. There we note that it says ‘you will eat and be satisfied, and bless Hashem on the good land’. There are a number of other references to the land. And then in Chapter 11, we find the second paragraph of the Shema which we read multiple times each day. Vehaya Im Shamoah - “If you observe the Mitzvot ..... In order that your days and those of your children will be long ... on the land that Hashem swore to your fathers to give to them.”

This morning we were discussing a point brought by the Arizal relating to how our tefilot when said in Eretz Yisrael are different from Tefilot said in Galut and how we relate to Hashem differently based on where we are. Thinking about the discussion, I

recalled many years ago, when I chatted about this point with my youngest children, Moses and Mariyah. At bed time each night we would review the perasha, section by section. They asked, “Does it mean that a person can only be blessed with long life while living in the land?”

At the time, my go to source was an excellent website called Torah Tots. Together we read the story as posted which is based on what the Talmud writes in Berachot page 8A. . I quote from the Torah Tots website:

*The Talmud relates that when they told Reb Yochanan that there were elderly people in Bavel, he was surprised, seeing as from the above posuk (verse) it is clear that longevity is restricted to "the land" which refers to Eretz Yisrael (the land of Israel), and not the Diaspora. But when they informed him that the elders of Bavel would arrive in shul (synagogue) early to daven (pray) each morning and stay there late into the evening, he understood that it was through their attachment to the shul that they merited old age.*

*The Kli Yakar points out that the question still remains. For when all's said and done, the Torah writes "on the land" etc., (referring to Eretz Yisrael) and the shuls of Bavel were not in Eretz Yisrael. And what is the significance of being in shul at early and late hours?*

*The Kli Yakar answers this question with a Talmud in Megilah (29a), which states that every shul is an integral part of Eretz Yisrael. The Talmud quotes Reb Eliezer, who says that the shuls in Bavel will one day be relocated to Eretz Yisrael. In that case, concludes the Kli Yakar, it is correct to refer to them as part of Eretz Yisrael, and a Jew who davens in shul is actually standing in the Holy Land. Those people who lived in the shul, so to speak, and who grow old, are people who are growing old in Eretz Yisrael.*

*One of the miracles that will occur during the final redemption is that all shuls and batei midrash (houses of study) will be flown to Eretz Yisrael.*

*The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisroel Meir HaKohain Kagan of Radin; 1838-1933) took this literally, as recounted by a Jew who lived in a small town where the shul had no floor, just a wooden frame built directly on the ground. Distraught by this lack of*

respect, the Chofetz Chaim came to the town, gathered the people and gave the following drasha (speech).

*"Chazal (our Sages) tell us that all the shuls of the Diaspora will be brought to Eretz Yisroel when Moshiach comes. What for? Do you think just the empty building will be taken? Of course not. All the people that daven in that shul will be assembled there, and the building with all its congregants will be lifted up and carried to Eretz Yisroel. But if there is no floor, the building will go, while its congregants will be left behind!"*

*Needless to say, the effect was electrifying, and the people fixed up the shul with lightning speed.*

*Thus, the Kli Yakar concludes, whoever rises early to go to shul and stays in shul late gives more honor to the house of Hashem. Therefore Hashem "prolongs his days ... on the land" because it is as if he spends the best part of his days in Eretz Yisrael.*

I was sitting with a client today. She is the wife of an esteemed Talmid Haham. She suggested that we need to recognize the changing world we are living in. Where generations passed often only dreamed of the land of Israel, today we can be there in a matter of hours. As I type this, my son Moses is on a flight back from Israel. People commute from Israel. And more so, we chat via iPhone or Skype or a myriad of other possibilities. We are so connected.

When we can't enjoy ourselves in the Holy Land itself and when we are physically not in front of the Kotel, we can still be there in a way. We have a transport device available to all of us. We can step into the transporter and instantaneously be in the presence of Hashem. We can step into Jerusalem, into the old city, to the temple mount, the temple and even into the holy of holies. The transporter is our local Synagogue and Yeshiva. They have the power to take us directly to holy of holies.

The thought makes us pause. How would I behave if I were the high priest on Yom Kippur about to enter the holy of holies? How would I treat the place? How would I care for the place? We should ponder the thought every time we step through the doors of the Synagogue. See you all in Jerusalem!

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

### 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.

Hashem's promise to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

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.

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.

**THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN**

"It will be that if you listen to My commandments."  
(Debarim 11:13)

In our parashah we have the second paragraph of the Shema. Hashem promises that we will be blessed with prosperity beyond the bounds of natural law, if we obey His commandments.

Rabbi D. Goldwasser asks, "Why does the Torah use the expression "Shema," to listen? Shouldn't it have said, 'If you perform My commandments?'" Rabbi Avigdor Miller comments that taking action is not always in a man's power, whereas listening sincerely with intention to do, certainly is. When one decides to listen to Hashem's commandments, he demonstrates his willingness and his genuine intention to perform them. It is according to the "listening," the effort to learn, that Hashem measures one's acceptance of the Torah, and therefore provides him with innumerable blessings.

We find an interesting halachah concerning a man who marries a woman on the condition that he is a complete sadik. Afterwards, if it is discovered that he was not a complete sadik the marriage is still valid. The reason is that we assume that he may have repented as he walked to the huppah, and therefore he was considered completely righteous. From this we see that sincere intent alone is considered equal to having performed an action. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem ask from you, only to fear Him" (Debarim 12:10)

The Gemara teaches us that one is supposed to say 100 berachot every day, based on the above verse. Besides reading it as "v'n, what," it can be read as "vtn, one hundred." In the course of a regular day, praying three times, eating three meals, we can usually come across 100 blessings. The question is, how is this law alluded to in this verse, since the words v'n and vtn are really different from one another?

The purpose of saying a berachah before or after we eat is to acknowledge that everything comes from Hashem. If we could say the berachot with a little concentration, it will bring us to a greater awareness of Hashem and His might and goodness. This is the method that the Rabbis saw as the best manner for acquiring fear of G-d. If a person lives his life with Hashem's Name on his lips, before and after eating, while praying and doing misvot, his fear of Hashem will develop and help him get close to Hashem. Let us make our berachot with a little more thoughtfulness so that we will acquire that most desired attribute: Yir'at Shamayim, Fear of Hashem. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR**

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[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)

**Nourishing the Soul**

The Torah tells us in Parashat Ekeb, "Ki Lo Al Ha'lehem Lebado Yihyeh Ha'adam" – "Man does not live on bread alone." On the simplest level of interpretation, Moshe here speaks about the manna with which G-d sustained Beneh Yisrael as they traveled through the wilderness, and he points to the fact that G-d has no limits in His ability to sustain us. We do not depend only on ordinary bread, because G-d proved that He is capable of sustaining us and keeping us alive even when we were in a situation where we had no food.

There is, however, a deeper interpretation of this verse, as well. Human beings are composed of two parts – a body and a soul; a physical dimension and a spiritual dimension. Our physical bodies, of course, are sustained by food and liquids. They provide our bodies with the vitamins and nutrients that they need to continue functioning properly. But how do we nourish and sustain our souls? Where do we find the spiritual sustenance we need to maintain the spiritual dimension of our beings?

The Zohar teaches that when G-d created the world, He had to inject His spirit, His Kedusha, into everything. Nothing in the universe can exist without G-d. As opposed to an artisan or craftsman, who makes something which can then continue existing long after he stops working and even long after he dies, G-d continues sustaining every single aspect of existence. If G-d would cease creating for a millisecond, the universe would cease to exist. And this is why we describe Hashem as "Oseh Ma'aseh Bereshit" ("Who makes creation"), in the present tense. He is constantly "creating" the world, and nothing can exist without His constant, ongoing infusion of His spirit into it.

The food we eat, then, contains not only the nutrients needed for our bodies, but also a spiritual component, an element of Kedusha. After all, as mentioned, nothing in the world can exist without that spiritual dimension, without G-d's spirit which sustains it. And thus while the nutrients in our food sustains our body, its Godly components sustain our soul.

But this does not occur automatically. We need to extract this quality of Kedusha from our food in order for it to sustain our souls. And this only happens if we recite the Berachot. Our recitation of a Beracha is required not merely as requesting permission from G-

d to derive benefit from His earth – though this is certainly an important aspect of Berachot – but also as a necessary means of nourishing our souls. We reap the spiritual benefits of food only by transforming the physical act of eating into a spiritual act, which we do by reciting Berachot.

The importance of Berachot is indicated elsewhere in this Parasha, as well. In fact, this week's Parasha introduces the only Beracha which is required on the level of Torah obligation – Birkat Ha'mazon – and also contains an allusion to the requirement to recite one hundred Berachot each day ("Ma Hashem Elokecha Sho'el Me'imach"). Parashat Ekeb should thus serve as a reminder to be especially vigilant with regard to this vital Misva which we often take for granted and neglect. Reciting Berachot over food is not merely a "nice thing," and is even more than a Halachic requirement; it is the means by which we sustain and nourish our spirituality. It thus behooves us all to constantly review the laws of Berachot, ask a Rabbi when questions arise, and be mindful of the requirement to recite Berachot, so we ensure that our food has the effect of not only maintaining our physical wellbeing, but maintaining our spiritual wellbeing, as well.

### **Rabbi Wein CONFUSING ROLES**

All people are duty bound to try and help other people in need of such help. Rabbis are especially called upon to be available to help others in their times of distress and difficulties. Nevertheless, it is essential for one to be able to recognize one's limitations and true role. Many a rabbi has gotten himself into deep trouble by acting as a psychologist, therapist, financial advisor, marriage counselor or business consultant when that rabbi had no particular training or real talent in that field or profession.

One does not consult one's stockbroker regarding medical issues just as one does not consult one's physician regarding which stocks to purchase. This seemingly logical and axiomatic lesson is nevertheless violated on a daily basis, often with sad and tragic results for all concerned. Especially in our very specialized world, it should be apparent that one should not undertake being seen as an expert in a certain specialty for which one has no training or education.

In biblical times Jews turned to prophets for advice and succor. But prophets disappeared from our world millennia ago. With the rise of the Chasidic movement in the eighteenth century, the figure of an all-knowing, almost omniscient, spiritual leader was

recreated. That person was consulted on all issues of life because it was felt that somehow he had a special connection to Heaven and to all that this entailed.

This concept, really rooted in certain kabalistic thought, soon spilled over into the general rabbinate. Though no matter how many rabbis attempted to avoid such an image and such practices, the idea of the rabbi as being an expert in all fields of life and available for constant consultation on all matters has taken current hold in the Jewish world. It has made life very uncomfortable for the ordinary communal/congregational rabbi - if there is such an "ordinary" creature.

A rabbi must, of necessity, possess wisdom and compassion. But that is true of every Jew, if not of every human being. There are many areas of life that a rabbi should abstain from ever giving advice about. One should avoid those issues that one is not well qualified professionally to render advice. Many of the difficult situations that have occurred over the past decade regarding rabbis and educators and their congregants and students are simply a product of the person in authority or the one being consulted. They confuse their role and play the professional or prophet when not really qualified.

It is easy to become sucked into the morass of other's problems and attempt to help. But oftentimes such help turns into harm and exacerbates problems instead of solving them. It is very difficult to say no to people who ask for one's help. But simple logic and clear honesty demands that one should never overstep one's boundaries or confuse one's role in society.

This does not mean that one should never be attentive to someone else's narrative of problems. But it does mean that one should be cautious and careful in one's response and to keep in mind that in most cases the wrong answer is far worse than getting no answer at all.

I come from a generation where rabbis were very reticent to advance solutions to people's personal issues and problems. The world has changed greatly since I observed my father's rabbinic behavior. But I still think that one should not expect one's rabbi, physician, financial advisor or even good friend to become one's psychological therapist. It just will not turn out well.

In a truly democratic society, the leaders and politicians are subject to public opinion. Nevertheless, they possess knowledge of facts that the public is



never privy to. That being the case, these leaders will often make decisions, which appear to be completely contrary to those of the constituencies that they were elected to represent. But that is pretty much what we pay them to do since political, diplomatic and military matters require experience, professionalism and wisdom.

Many times our leaders have made grievous mistakes, but certainly those who do not possess the requisite credentials for making such decisions should not be empowered to make those decisions. This is really the thin line dividing democratic governments from autocracy. All of the "divine" kings and dictators were at one and the same time all-knowing, great military strategists, economic geniuses and omniscient in every way. All of them led their countries into eventual ruin and suffered personal downfalls.

Confusing one's role is a sign of arrogance and indicative of a personality of hubris. The greatest of the teachers of Israel, from Moses till today, were and are people who can say "I don't know. Consult someone who perhaps does."

#### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks To Lead is to Listen**

"If only you would listen to these laws ..." (Deut. 7: 12). These words with which our parsha begins contain a verb that is a fundamental motif of the book of Devarim. The verb is sh-m-a. It occurred in last week's parsha in the most famous line of the whole of Judaism, Shema Yisrael. It occurs later in this week's parsha in the second paragraph of the Shema, "It shall be if you surely listen [shamo'a tishme'u] ..." (Deut. 11: 13). It appears no less than 92 times in Devarim as a whole.

We often miss the significance of this word because of what I call the fallacy of translatability: the assumption that one language is fully translatable into another. We hear a word translated from one language to another and assume that it means the same in both. But often it doesn't. Languages are only partially translatable into one another.[1] The key terms of one civilization are often not fully reproducible in another. The Greek word megalopsychos, for example, Aristotle's "great-souled man" who is great and knows he is, and carries himself with aristocratic pride, is untranslatable into a moral system like Judaism in which humility is a virtue. The English word "tact" has no precise equivalent in Hebrew. And so on.

This is particularly so in the case of the Hebrew verb

sh-m-a. Listen, for example, to the way the opening words of this week's parsha have been translated into English:

If you hearken to these precepts ...  
If you completely obey these laws ...  
If you pay attention to these laws ...  
If you heed these ordinances ...  
Because ye hear these judgments ...

There is no single English word that means to hear, to listen, to heed, to pay attention to, and to obey. Sh-m-a also means "to understand," as in the story of the tower of Babel, when God says, Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand [yishme'u] each other" (Gen. 11: 7).

As I have argued elsewhere, one of the most striking facts about the Torah is that, although it contains 613 commands, it does not contain a word that means "to obey." When such a word was needed in modern Hebrew, the verb le-tzayet was borrowed from Aramaic. The verb used by the Torah in place of "to obey" is sh-m-a. This is of the highest possible significance. It means that blind obedience is not a virtue in Judaism. God wants us to understand the laws He has commanded us. He wants us to reflect on why this law, not that. He wants us to listen, to reflect, to seek to understand, to internalise and to respond. He wants us to become a listening people.

Ancient Greece was a visual culture, a culture of art, architecture, theatre and spectacle. For the Greeks generally, and Plato specifically, knowing was a form of seeing. Judaism, as Freud pointed out in *Moses and Monotheism*, is a non-visual culture. We worship a God who cannot be seen; and making sacred images, icons, is absolutely forbidden. In Judaism we do not see God; we hear God. Knowing is a form of listening. Ironically, Freud himself, deeply ambivalent though he was about Judaism, in psycho-analysis invented the listening cure: listening as therapy.[2]

It follows that in Judaism listening is a deeply spiritual act. To listen to God is to be open to God. That is what Moses is saying throughout Devarim: "If only you would listen." So it is with leadership – indeed with all forms of interpersonal relationship. Often the greatest gift we can give someone is to listen to them.

Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz and went on to create a new form of psychotherapy based on "man's search for meaning," once told the story of a patient of his who phoned him in the middle of the night to tell him, calmly, that she was about to commit suicide. He kept her on the phone for two hours,

giving her every conceivable reason to live. Eventually she said that she had changed her mind and would not end her life. When he next saw the woman he asked her which of his many reasons had persuaded her to change her mind. "None," she replied. "Why then did you decide not to commit suicide?" She replied that the fact that someone was prepared to listen to her for two hours in the middle of the night convinced her that life was worth living after all.[3]

As Chief Rabbi I was involved in resolving a number of highly intractable agunah cases: situations in which a husband was unwilling to give his wife a get so that she could remarry. We resolved all these cases not by legal devices but by the simple act of listening: deep listening, in which we were able to convince both sides that we had heard their pain and their sense of injustice. This took many hours of total concentration and a principled absence of judgment and direction. Eventually our listening absorbed the acrimony and the couple were able to resolve their differences together. Listening is intensely therapeutic.

Before I became Chief Rabbi I was head of our rabbinical training seminary, Jews' College. There in the 1980s we ran one of the most advanced practical rabbinics programmes ever devised. It included a three-year programme in counselling. The professionals we recruited to run the course told us that they had one precondition. We had to agree to take all the participants away to an enclosed location for two days. Only those who were willing to do this would be admitted to the course.

We did not know in advance what the counsellors were planning to do, but we soon discovered. They planned to teach us the method pioneered by Carl Rogers known as non-directive or person-centred therapy. This involves active listening and reflective questioning, but no guidance on the part of the therapist.

As the nature of the method became clear, the rabbis began to object. It seemed to oppose everything they stood for. To be a rabbi is to teach, to direct, to tell people what to do. The tension between the counsellors and the rabbis grew almost to the point of crisis, so much so that we had to stop the course for an hour while we sought some way of reconciling what the counsellors were doing and what the Torah seemed to be saying. That is when we began to reflect, for the first time as a group, on the spiritual dimension of listening, of sh-m-a Yisrael.

The deep truth behind person-centred therapy is that listening is the key virtue of the religious life. That is what Moses was saying throughout Devarim. If we want God to listen to us we have to be prepared to listen to Him. And if we learn to listen to Him, then we eventually learn to listen to our fellow humans: the silent cry of the lonely, the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the people in existential pain.

When God appeared to King Solomon in a dream and asked him what he would like to be given, Solomon replied: *lev shome'a*, literally "a listening heart" to judge the people (1 Kings 3: 9). The choice of words is significant. Solomon's wisdom lay, at least in part, in his ability to listen, to hear the emotion behind the words, to sense what was being left unsaid as well as what was said. It is common to find leaders who speak, very rare to find leaders who listen. But listening often makes the difference.

Listening matters in a moral environment as insistent on human dignity as is Judaism. The very act of listening is a form of respect. The royal family in Britain is known always to arrive on time and depart on time. I will never forget the occasion — her aides told me that they had never witnessed it before — when the Queen stayed for two hours longer than her scheduled departure time. The day was 27 January 2005, the occasion, the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The Queen had invited survivors to a reception at St James' Palace. Each had a story to tell, and the Queen took the time to listen to every one of them. One after another came up to me and said, "Sixty years ago I did not know whether tomorrow I would be alive, and here I am talking to the Queen." That act of listening was one of the most royal acts of graciousness I have ever witnessed. Listening is a profound affirmation of the humanity of the other.

In the encounter at the burning bush, when God summoned Moses to be a leader, Moses replied, "I am not a man of words, not yesterday, not the day before, not from the first time You spoke to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Ex. 4: 10). Why would God choose to lead the Jewish people a man who found it hard to speak? Perhaps because one who cannot speak learns how to listen. A leader is one who knows how to listen: to the unspoken cry of others and to the still, small voice of God.