

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

PARASHAT RE'EH

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 54:11-55:5

AUGUST 18-19, 2017 27 AB 5777

**Rosh Hodesh Elul will be celebrated on Tuesday & Wednesday, August 22 & 23.
Selihot Begin Thursday morning**

DEDICATION: Le'refuat shelema Elisheva bat Esther

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EDITORS NOTES

Re'eh – See that I place before you a blessing and a curse. What is the blessing and what is the curse? In many ways, the blessing is being connected to Heaven while the curse is a disconnection. When we are connected, strange things happen, miracles we might call them; perhaps because that string allows us to experience the heavenly supernatural.

My uncle David Tawil passed away this week. My uncle was a guy who really dedicated each day to Torah. He was well versed in Tanach, Talmud, Zohar and especially in the Tefilot. For many years, he refused to engage in ANY conversation which was not based in Torah. He could and often did challenge the rabbis when they taught. Some were flustered, but most knew that when David Tawil was around, they truly had to be on their toes and know their stuff. Rabbi Mansour said, having David Tawil around forced him to know it better.

I wasn't able to get to Deal in time for the funeral. When I went to visit with my cousins, Joey, Ruby, Stevie and Jack, I heard an amazing story.

Joey explained that during the service they were having trouble with the microphone which is really needed especially for the separate room of the Kohanim. When Rabbi Raymond Beyda who is a Kohen, got up to speak from the other side of the glass and the microphone refused to connect, Joey said he decided since he had a loud voice to get up and speak off the cuff.

He recalled discussing with his father, the Psalms and why we choose certain ones to read during specific times. For example in a time of distress we read Psalm 20 which begins with the words Yaancha Hashem Beyom Sarah – May the L-rd answer you on

your day of distress. The Psalm concludes with the words, Yaaneynu BeYom Koreinu – answer us on the day we call.

David prays that Hashem should assist the soldier "from the sacred" and "from Zion" (verse 3), referring, of course, to the Beit Ha'mikdash, which is seen as the source of Hashem's blessing and salvation. He then pledges to sing and give praise to the Almighty upon the soldier's triumph. Towards the end of the chapter David seeks to allay the soldier's fears upon envisioning the enemy's arsenal and sophisticated weaponry. He assures him that the "Name of Hashem" which he represents and carries with him to the battlefield is far more powerful than any manmade ammunition and will assuredly grant him victory.

The Rabbis explain that this chapter ranks among the most familiar Psalms given its inclusion in the daily prayer service. The reason for its inclusion, perhaps, is that this Psalm provides hope and encouragement during times of crisis, assuring us of Hashem's ability to assist even under the direst circumstances. As we all confront difficult situations on one level or another each day, we recite this chapter as an appeal to the Almighty for assistance. As noted, this Psalm is commonly recited by individuals and communities in times of crisis, Heaven forbid. On festive occasions, such as Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh and holidays, this Psalm is omitted from the prayer service, as the aura of anxiety and tension reflected in this chapter is inconsonant with the joyous and cheerful spirit of these occasions.

Joey told the people that uncle David explained that the secret of this Psalm is in the word Yabok. You may recall that Yabok is the name of the river which Jacob crosses upon returning to Israel with his family before his encounter with his brother Esav.

For those studying Kabbalah, the word Yabok represents a secret code. It is in fact an acronym for Yichud ["unification"], Berachah ["blessing"], Kedushah ["holiness"]). Of the varying interpretations with regard to the three levels of this most fundamental idiom and teaching of Kabbalah–yichud, berachah and kedushah–the most often cited and

expounded is that the three concepts correspond to the three general ascending levels of the soul: nefesh, ruach and neshamah; or one's "world" of action—his ability to relate and unite with outer reality, one's "world" of emotion—the blessing of abundant emotive energy, and one's "world" of meditation—the experience of holiness as a transcendent connection with the realm of the Divine.

But how does this connect to Psalm 20? The word Yabok equals 112 in gematria (yud is 10, bet is 2 and kuf is 100). The first letters of the opening words, Yud, Yud, Bet, Sadi also total 112 - May the L-rd answer you on your day of distress. The first letters of the concluding words Yaaneynu BeYom Koreinu, yud, bet and kuf not only equal 112, they are the letters of Yabok – answer us on the day we call.

The rabbis explain the secret of 112. It is the combined value of the two Names of Hashem - Havayah – meaning the Yud, the Heh, the Vav and the concluding Heh which total 26 as we all know and Elokim which totals 86. (For a separate time for those who will write me – it is also the combined value of the three Names: Ekyeh (21), Havayah (26), Adnut (65), which themselves correspond to the three levels of Yabok). The name Havaya represents for us the aspect of Mercy – Rahamim while the name Elokim represents judgment or Din.

Joey explained that his father told him that the secret code of King David placed in this mizmor is that in order to be answered when we need Hashem and in order to be saved; Hashem should sweeten the Din or judgment and act towards us with mercy or Rachamim. We deserve nothing so we beg only for mercy.

Now let me tell you of the coincidence which we learned of which is absolutely beyond explanation. As is the custom Al Pi Sod after the funeral Joey and his brothers returned from the funeral home to the house while others took their father to the Bet HaChayim – the cemetery to bury him. Joey said he had given his son in law instructions, but when my brother Victor volunteered to go, he simply told everyone, "do whatever he tells you to do".

So those who would perform the misvah left with the body from New Jersey to Staten Island. For those who don't know, the Syrian Community in the 30's (I believe) acquired a large section within the United Hebrew Cemetery in Staten Island. Within this section community members are buried. There are no reserved or family plots (although on occasion when requested and under specific circumstances, a spot is held for a spouse). When a person passes,

they are simply given one of the available spots. And these days there are very few remaining places requiring the community to purchase a new cemetery in East Brunswick, New Jersey. Realizing that they never requested a spot for my uncle next to my aunt Evelyn when she passed away two years ago, no one expected they would be buried near each other given the passage of time and all those who passed. How surprised was Joey to receive an image of the plot from his son in law. In fact his dad was buried right near his mom although divided by a single plot. And what's written on the stone that separates them is the strangest part of this story.

See the image – On the left is the stone of Evelyn Bibi Tawil, on the right is the new plot where they laid David ben Rachel Tawil HaKohen to rest and in between is someone we did not know. Even stranger was that Joey spoke about my uncle teaching that the key to our prayers is that Hashem should sweeten and cover Din or judgment with Rahamim or mercy. Staring at them was a stone which for some unexplained reason reads Rahmin Rahmin (Mercy Mercy) – Mercy to the left where my aunt is buried and Mercy to the right where my uncle is buried. The double wording makes no sense although I am sure there is some story behind it which will now come to light.

Was it a coincidence that the microphone suddenly broke? Was it a coincidence that Joey decided to speak? Was it a coincidence that he chose to speak of Psalm 20 and this concept of 112 and the names of Hashem? Was it a coincidence that David Tawil be buried one over from his wife Evelyn although two years had passed? And was it a coincidence that the stone should read Rahmin Rahmin – Mercy Mercy where no one could fathom why?

It's another day where we see when you're connected, you're connected. May we all be zocheh and merit to be connected and be blessed

Uncle David, we will miss your wisdom, your uniqueness, your challenges to us and your lessons. May your merits stand for your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and all of us. And may your prayer for Mercy to sweeten Judgment be heard on behalf of all Am Yisrael.

Tehi Nafsho Serurah BeSror HaChaim

Summary of the Perasha

This week I was blessed to have a new found appreciation for the ability to see (interestingly enough Re'eh, "see", is the name of this week's parasha). On Sunday I had emergency surgery for a detached retina which if not treated right away could be very damaging. BH everything worked out great and I hope to have clear vision again soon. The experience definitely made me appreciate the beautiful gift of sight. And I hope it will do the same for you as well. The past few days of not being able to open my eyes fully has truly given me a new found meaning when saying the beracha of pokeyach ivrim every morning (tomorrow morning please try and take an extra 2 seconds to have kavana in this beracha). It is really a blessing to be able to wake up and see the blue sky, yellow sun, and the beautiful green trees. It is a blessing to be able to see our family and the smiles on our children's faces. Sometimes Hashem has to take something away from us for a short while so we can remember and appreciate what we have. Let us appreciate what we have without the need for a reminder. Nathan I Dweck

Re'eh - Mitzvot relevant to living in the land of Israel
 1- Benei Israel again is told they will get beracha if they follow the mitzvot and curses if they do not. The mitzvah to destroy the Gods of the goyim, korbanot in mishkan Shilo, laws of bamot before mishkan Shilo.
 2- Korbanot in the Beit Hamikdash. The heter to eat meat that is not brought on the mizbeyach.
 3- Avodah Zara; a warning not to follow the avodah zara of the goyim in Israel, false prophets, one who entices you to do avodah zara, laws regarding a city of avodah zara.
 4- Kashrout; the permitted and forbidden animals, fish, and birds, meat & milk
 5- The halachot of maaser sheni
 6- Canceling loans in the shemita year. The mitzvah of sedaka. Laws of a Jewish slave.
 7- Hekdesh by a bechor animal. Pesach, Shavout and Succoth, the mitzvah to make a pilgrimage to Yerushalayim

While the first 3 parshiot in Sefer Devarim generally dealt with Moshe's rebuke of Benei Israel and advice before they entered Israel the next 3 parshiot generally deal with mitzvot and contain the bulk of the mitzvot found in Sefer Devarim. Parashat Re'eh deals with mitzvot relevant to living in the land of Israel. Parashat Shoftim deals with mitzvot related to establishing a community / society. And Parashat Ki Teseh deals with mitzvot relevant to relationships.

Le'refuat shelema Elisheva bat Esther

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

The Torah tells that we should give a person "whatever he is lacking to him." Hazal learn from the words "to him" that we must give charity according to each individual's needs. If a person was wealthy and lived an extravagant lifestyle and then became poor, we must give him to the extent that he can live in accordance with his previous standing. If he used to drive a fancy car, we must get him that car. The question arises: if I would myself would never pay so much, why must I pay for him?

Rabbi Eli Scheller explains: An important factor in the act of giving charity is to ensure the emotional well-being of the beneficiary. When a person loses his assets, the emotional strain may be greater than the physical one. When a wealthy person loses his fancy car, the embarrassment is unbearable. It is equivalent to a pauper who is evicted from his apartment, even though the wealthy person can still live a normal life. Therefore, providing the wealthy person with his fancy car is literally giving him his life back just as much as paying the rent for a pauper.

It is for this reason that one who provides a poor person with money and adds kind words of encouragement receives twice as many blessings from Hashem for adding the kind words as he does for simply giving the money!"

It takes a special person to be able to recognize the emotional needs of another, especially one from a different background. The Talmud relates that Hillel, who was perhaps the poorest Torah scholar, raised money for a wealthy man who lost his money to purchase a horse to ride upon and a slave to run before him. On one occasion, he could not find a slave to run before him, so Hillel took his place and ran for three miles! Despite Hillel's poverty, he was able to understand the needs of a wealthy man – to the extent of personally providing those needs!

Shabbat Shalom Rabbi Reuven Semah

"If your brother entices you saying, 'Let us go and serve gods which you have not known.' (Debarim 13:7)

The Torah seems to emphasize that these other gods which are forbidden are not known to us. What is the difference or relevance whether the other gods are known or not?

The Hatam Sofer points out something which is especially important in our days. There are always

people who will propose ideologies which are considered revolutionary. Each one will make a claim that his way is unique, his way is novel and his way will be the answer to all of man's problems. Even though others tried it and failed, they will say that this is guaranteed success. The Torah predicted this from way back and showed how all these "new gods" are all false, just like the old ones. Just like we see new claims to dieting and other fads which are said to be easy and quick, and yet we know it's impossible to do anything without effort, so too when it comes to Torah. None of the "isms", the non-Torah ideologies have worked in the past and none will work in the future. There is only the true Torah way of life, which involves commitment, effort and perseverance, but ultimately brings with it success, happiness and blessing!

Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel
Choueka

Fair Game

"Life," some will say, "is a real rat race." Others declare, "It's a dog-eat-dog world." And perhaps the most often heard complaint? "Life is not fair!"

Are these statements true?

True or not, the life situations that prompt people to espouse the philosophy that underlies these clichés are what we all must learn to deal with. When we consider the uneven distribution of wealth in the world, we could say that life is not fair. Even the looks, intelligence, and special talents that Hashem gives graciously to some and denies to others give credence to the notion of unfairness. And anyone who has been involved in a highly competitive business transaction with a tough adversary has very likely felt, at some time, that it's a dog-eat-dog world – not to mention that life is a rat race.

But Hashem is fair. He does not expect from poor folks what He requires of wealthy individuals. He does not compare the success of people gifted with intelligence to the accomplishment of those who are not blessed with superior mental capacity. All people are measured against the standard of their own potential, according to the material and spiritual talents they were given for their journey through life – not against the accomplishments or failures of another.

When you get the feeling that the "rat race" of this "dog-eat-dog world" is "not fair," look at yourself and measure your performance against the bag of tools Hashem gave you for building a life. This perspective will free you from the depression of keeping up with the "race" and allow you to achieve to the best of your own ability. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

How's Your Credit?

A villager named David went into the city one day to buy merchandise to sell in his hometown. He went to his regular supplier, Judah, picked out some merchandise, and asked if he could take it on credit. Judah checked his books and saw that David hadn't paid yet for the last three purchases he had made over the last six months. He told David, "I'm sorry, but you keep telling me that you will pay your old bills, and you still haven't paid me." David promised to send the money for all the bills as soon as he got home. "That's what you said the last time you were here," said Judah. "In fact, even if you do pay me everything you owe me, I wouldn't give you anything on credit again. Your word is obviously not worth very much." David pleaded with Judah, but Judah would not give in. Another man in the store overheard the whole discussion and said to David, "There's no way he will sell you again on credit, but I have a suggestion. Buy only what you need right now, and pay for it in cash, and also pay some of your balance. Next time buy a little more and do the same. Keep doing that and eventually Judah will give you another chance."

In a little over a month from now, we will be praying to Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, and we will be asking Him to bless us with a good year filled with health, wealth and happiness. Hashem will then ask, "Why should I give these things to you?" We will answer, "So that we can do more misvot, learn more Torah and serve You better." "You said the same thing to Me last year and the year before that," Hashem will respond. "But you never changed your ways. You haven't paid up, and your 'credit' is no good."

In order to avoid this situation, we need to build up our credit in advance, before we make our requests. We should start with small changes like avoiding gossip and lies, or praying with a little more kavanah. Then, when Rosh Hashanah comes, Hashem will be more receptive to our requests. In only a few days, Rosh Hodesh Elul will begin the thirty-day countdown to Rosh Hashanah. If not now, when? (Sha'arei Armon)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal**

In the beginning of Parashat Re'eh, Moshe Rabbenu instructs Beneh Yisrael that after they enter Eretz Yisrael, they must go to the site of two adjacent mountains – Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. While facing Mount Gerizim, they must declare a blessing upon those who observe the Misvot, and while facing

Mount Ebal they must declare a curse upon those who disobey God's commands.

Our Rabbis teach that there are two kinds of angels – those who defend us before God (“Sanegor”), and those who prosecute against us (“Kategor”). Furthermore, different places in Eretz Yisrael have different spiritual powers. There are some places that are dominated by the quality of strict justice, where the prosecuting angels have greater power, and other places that are characterized by the quality of mercy, where the defending angels are stronger. Mount Gerizim is a site of divine mercy, whereas Mount Ebal is a site of divine judgment. Therefore, Beneh Yisrael proclaimed a curse upon those who violate the Misvot on Mount Ebal, the site of the prosecuting angels, and a blessing upon those who uphold the Misvot on Mount Gerizim, the site of the defending angels.

The strategy we must employ in trying to restrain the prosecuting angels is to draw them to our side. Imagine a court convening to try a defendant who is accused of various crimes, and the prosecutor begins by standing up and proclaiming that he believes the defendant is innocent. Quite obviously, the moment this happens the case is closed. If the prosecutor does not bring any charges against the defendant, then there is no case. And this is true in the Heavenly Tribunal, as well. If the prosecuting angels come to our defense, or if we can have them silenced, then there is no case brought against us.

This is what we seek to accomplish when we approach a Sadik for a Beracha. His job is to restrain the Kategor, and to bring him to our side so there will be no harsh judgment issued against us.

In order for the Sadik to do this, two things have to happen. First, we need to bolster our faith in God as the One who determines our fate. We often forget that our lives and wellbeing are in God's hands, and believe instead that we are in full control over what happens in our lives. We cannot receive Beracha from God until we reinforce our belief in providence, that our fate is in His hands. This belief is referred to as “Yihud” – belief in the Oneness of the Creator. Secondly, we need to cultivate Kedusha. Great Rabbis ensure before going anywhere that the people there are dressed according to proper standards of Kedusha, because they do not want to be somewhere impure. This is true of the Almighty, too; He will not be present in places where there is no Kedusha. Once we have achieved these two goals – strengthening our faith in “Yihud,” and establishing proper standards of Kedusha – then we can receive Beracha, God's unlimited blessing.

The first letters of these three words – “Yihud,” “Kedusha,” “Beracha” – are “Yod,” “Kof” and “Bet,” which have a combined numerical value of 112 – which is the same numerical value as the word “Ebal.” Through this process, of reaffirming our faith in divine providence and raising our standards of Kedusha, we are able to take “Ebal,” the prosecuting angels and forces of judgment, and bring them to our side. This is the secret to avoiding “prosecution,” to ensuring that God looks favorably upon us and grants abundant Beracha for us, our families and all Am Yisrael.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein
PEOPLE**

Standing on the corner of two major thoroughfares in midtown Manhattan recently I was struck by the number and variety of people walking past. There were hordes of them all purposefully heading towards some appointed place and event. They were a composite of all of humanity, representing every color of human skin, babel of languages, all social strata, faiths and ethnic origins.

When I was a blasé New Yorker twenty-three years ago I never noticed that all of these people existed and were parading before me. The anonymity of urban life allows one to ignore people as though they do not exist. We tend to see only what we wish to see, the people we can recognize and with whom we can identify, and we are oblivious to everyone else.

We see our world but avoid seeing God's world. And so the entire wonder of God's creation of humans escapes us. In so doing we fall victim to intolerance, hatred of others, war and violence. Abraham Lincoln once famously said that God must love the poor for He created so many of them. Well, God must love variety for He created such a variation in human appearance, culture and ethnicity.

So then why do humans decry such variety? Why do we crave conformity and governmental rule over individual freedom and self-assertiveness? Why do we long to restore civilization to the level of the generation of the Tower of Babel, of absolute unity of language and conformity of thought? Why, indeed?

The Lord apparently was displeased by the attitudes and behavior pattern of the generation that attempted to construct the Tower of Babel. He wished there to be a scattering of humans all over the globe with a wide variety of languages, cultures and folkways. This is the plain reading of the biblical narrative in the opening chapters of the Torah.

People were clearly meant to be different one from another. Only because of this can we justify and understand God's singling out of the Jewish people as being special and different than all other peoples, cultures and faiths. Jews represent the quality of difference that God planted within human society. It is the stubbornness of human beings to accept this idea of difference as being a Godly gift that has led to so many of the ills that have plagued human society over the ages. And, in the case of the Jews, it remains the root cause of anti-Semitism until this very day.

The slogan of the sinners of Israel over the millennia of our existence as a people has always been that we wish to be like everyone else, like all the other nations of the world. But that is contrary to the wishes and guidance of the Creator. Historical, racial and ethnical differences always arise to guarantee that the principle of human diversity always is present and active.

I know that this is an oversimplification of a very complex matter but I also hope that you will understand the basic point that I am trying to make. There is a reason that the rabbis instituted a blessing that states: "Blessed be God Who has made His creatures different one from another!"

We somehow fear people that are different than we are. They challenge our security and our very self-image. We see this in the cruelty of children to those that are physically different than they are. In the nineteenth century, Christian Europe was convinced that it was doing God's work in "civilizing" the human inhabitants of Asia and Africa.

The missionaries were convinced that they were teaching the true faith to the previously heathen masses. Current day historians and social scientists heatedly debate whether colonialism and imperialism were a boon or a curse to humankind then. But there is no question that hundreds of thousands and even millions of people were destroyed or enslaved, simply because they were different than those who were then temporarily more powerful militarily.

The inability to live and let live, which is the basic premise for allowing differences to exist and be

tolerated in human society, lies at the root of the bloody conflicts that so bedevil us currently. How to retain our own self-esteem and strong identity without having to demonize those that are different than we are is a major spiritual, psychological and social challenge. Most of human history details for us the unfortunate results of humankind's inability to rise and overcome that challenge. But, we have to keep on trying.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks
The Limits of Grief

"You are children of the Lord your God. Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead, for you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be His treasured possession" (Deut. 14:1-2).

These words have had a considerable history within Judaism. The first inspired the famous statement of Rabbi Akiva: "Beloved is man because he was created in the image [of God]. Beloved are Israel for they are called children of the All-present" (Avot 3:14). The phrase, "Do not cut yourselves", was imaginatively applied by the sages to divisions within the community (Yevamot 14a). A single town should not have two or more religious courts giving different rulings.

The plain sense of these two verses, though, is about behaviour at a time of bereavement. We are commanded not to engage in excessive rituals of grief. To lose a close member of one's family is a shattering experience. It is as if something of ourselves had died too. Not to grieve is wrong, inhuman: Judaism does not command Stoic indifference in the face of death. But to give way to wild expressions of sorrow – lacerating one's flesh, tearing out one's hair – is also wrong. It is, the Torah suggests, not fitting to a holy people; it is the kind of behaviour associated with idolatrous cults. How so, and why so?

Elsewhere in Tanakh we are given a glimpse of the kind of behaviour the Torah has in mind. It occurs in the course of the encounter between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Elijah had challenged them to a test: Let us each make a sacrifice and see which of us can bring down fire from heaven. The Baal prophets accept the challenge:

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they

danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. (I Kings 18:26-28)

This was, of course, not a mourning ritual, but it gives us a graphic sense of the rite of self-laceration. Emil Durkheim provides us with a description of mourning customs among the aborigines of Australia. When a death is announced, men and women begin to run around wildly, howling and weeping, cutting themselves with knives and pointed sticks.

Despite the apparent frenzy, there is a precise set of rules governing this behaviour, depending on whether the mourner is a man or woman, and on his or her kinship relationship with the deceased. "Among the Warramunga, those who slashed their thighs were the maternal grandfather, maternal uncle and wife's brother of the deceased. Others are required to cut their whiskers and hair and then cover their scalps with pipe clay." Women lacerate their heads and then apply red-hot sticks to the wounds in order to aggravate them.¹

(A similar ritual is performed by some Shia Muslims on Ashura, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the prophet's grandson, at Karbala. People flagellate themselves with chains or cut themselves with knives until the blood flows. Some Shia authorities strongly oppose this practice.)

The Torah sees such behaviour as incompatible with kedushah, holiness. What is particularly interesting is to note the two-stage process in which the law is set out. It appears first in Vayikra/Leviticus Chapter 21.

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: A priest may not defile himself for any of his people who die, except for a close relative . . . They may not shave their heads or shave the edges of their beards or cut their bodies. They must be holy to their God and must not profane the name of their God." (Lev. 21:1-6)

There it applies specifically to cohanim, priests, on account of their holiness. In Deuteronomy the law is extended to all Israel (the difference between the two books lies in their original audiences: Leviticus is mainly a set of instructions to the priests, Deuteronomy is Moses' addresses to the whole people). The application to ordinary Israelites of laws of sanctity that apply to priests is part of the democratisation of holiness that is central to the

Torah idea of "a kingdom of priests". The question remains, however: what has restraint in mourning to do with being "children of the Lord your God", a holy and chosen people?

[1] Ibn Ezra says that just as a father may cause a child pain for his or her long-term good, so God sometimes brings us pain – here, bereavement – which we must accept in trust without an excessive show of grief.

[2] Ramban suggests that it is our belief in the immortality of the soul that is why we should not grieve overmuch. Even so, he adds, we are right to mourn within the parameters set by Jewish law since, even if death is only a parting, every parting is painful.

[3] R. Ovadiah Sforno and Chizkuni say that because we are "children of God" we are never completely orphaned. We may lose our earthly parents but never our ultimate Father; hence there is a limit to grief.

[4] Rabbenu Meyuchas suggests that royalty does not defile itself by undergoing disfiguring injuries (nivul). Thus Israel – children of the supreme King – may not do so either.

Whichever of these explanations speaks most strongly to us, the principle is clear. Here is how Maimonides sets out the law: "Whoever does not mourn the dead in the manner enjoined by the rabbis is cruel [achzari – perhaps a better translation would be, 'lacking in sensitivity']" (Hilkhot Avel 13:12). At the same time, however, "One should not indulge in excessive grief over one's dead, for it is said, 'Weep not for the dead, nor bemoan him' (Jer. 22:10), that is to say, weep not too much, for that is the way of the world, and he who frets over the way of the world is a fool" (ibid. 13:11).

Halakhah, Jewish law, strives to create a balance between too much and too little grief. Hence the various stages of bereavement: aninut (the period between the death and burial), shiva (the week of mourning), sheloshim (thirty days in the case of other relatives) and shanah (a year, in the case of parents). Judaism ordains a precisely calibrated sequence of grief, from the initial, numbing moment of loss itself, to the funeral and the return home, to the period of being comforted by friends and members of the community, to a more extended time during which one does not engage in activities associated with joy.

The more we learn about the psychology of bereavement and the stages through which we must pass before loss is healed, so the wisdom of Judaism's ancient laws and customs has become ever more clear. As it is with individuals, so it is with the people as a whole. Jews have suffered more than

most from persecution and tragedy. We have never forgotten these moments. We remember them on our fast days – especially on Tisha B'Av with its literature of lament, the kinot. Yet, with a power of recovery that at times has been almost miraculous, it has never allowed itself to be defeated by grief. One rabbinic passage² epitomises the dominant voice within Judaism:

After the Second Temple was destroyed, ascetics multiplied in Israel. They did not eat meat or drink wine... Rabbi Joshua told them: "Not to mourn at all is impossible, for it has been decreed. But to mourn too much is also impossible."

In this anti-traditional age, with its hostility to ritual and its preference for the public display of private emotion (what Philip Rieff, in the 1960s, called "the triumph of the therapeutic"), the idea that grief has its laws and limits sounds strange. Yet almost anyone who has had the misfortune to be bereaved can testify to the profound healing brought about by observance of the laws of *avelut* (mourning).

Torah and tradition knew how to honour both the dead and the living, sustaining the delicate balance between grief and consolation, the loss of life that gives us pain, and the re-affirmation of life that gives us hope.

¹ Emil Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, translated by Karen Fields, Free Press, 1995, pp. 392-406.

² Tosefta Sotah 15:10-15; see also Baba Batra 60b.

Rav Kook on the Perasha Open Your Hand Generously

"When... any of your brothers is poor, do not harden your heart or shut your hand against your needy brother. Open your hand generously, and extend to him any credit he needs to take care of his wants." (Deut. 15:7-8)

Below are two stories which illustrate Rav Kook's remarkable generosity. Both incidents occurred during the years that he served as chief rabbi of Jaffa, from 1904 to 1914.

The Rabbi's Salary

Rav Kook's wife once appeared before the community directorate of Jaffa, headed by Mr. Meir Dizengoff, with a serious complaint. She had not seen her husband's salary for months and had no means of support. The leaders of the community

were shocked. After investigating the matter, however, they discovered that the rabbi himself was distributing his income to the needy.

The leaders asked Rav Kook how he could act in such a manner, caring more for strangers than his own household.

Rav Kook responded simply, "My family can buy food at the local grocery on credit. Others, however, cannot do so. Who would agree to give them what they need on credit?"

From that day on, the treasurer of the community was given strict orders to give the rabbi's salary only to his wife.

The Disqualified Guarantor

In 1907, the Jaffa correspondent for the *Chavatzet* newspaper published an article criticizing the Anglo-Palestine Bank (now known as Bank Leumi). Apparently, a man applied for a loan in the bank and was asked to provide eleven guarantors. The man managed to find fourteen people who were willing to sign, one of whom was Rav Kook. The bank, however, disqualified most of them - including the rabbi. The correspondent's conclusion was that the bank deliberately discriminated against religious Jews.

A few weeks later, a rejoinder appeared in the paper. The author, almost certainly associated with the bank, argued that the bank was justified in its rejection of Rav Kook's guarantees. He wrote:

"The rabbi is extremely good-hearted and gentle by nature. The poor cling to him. The only reason there are some beggars who do not knock on his door is because they know he has no money. If they only knew that they could get money in exchange for a small piece of paper, which he can always grant them, they would give him no peace."

"Besides which, [if the rabbi would be accepted as a guarantor], he would unwittingly put himself under the burden of debts, from which he would be unable to escape. Large amounts of money would be lost, and one of the following would suffer: either the esteemed rabbi — and it would be highly unpleasant for the bank to extract money from him — or the bank itself. Therefore, the bank decided unanimously not to honor the rabbi's guarantees."

(Adapted from *An Angel Among Men* by Simcha Raz, translated by R. Moshe Lichtman, pp. 344-346)

Statistics and Us
Jack M Hidary

An old adage: 'People are a product of their environment'.

Hence, take an ordinary, innocent cucumber.

Does it have any chance of not becoming a pickle once it's been immersed into pickle brine? No shot!

Well, look at us this way – we're (the Jews) the cucumbers, and America is the brine. Our innocence and Jewish purity are what's corrupted and compromised by living in these United States.

What are the results of the ingredients (the brine) which are deposited into the people's ears, eyes, psyches? This writer speaks of the America that we ingest; Popular music lyrics, movies, television, social media content, crude language, alcohol, junk food, too much food, vulgar fashion, accepted moral codes, insolent behavior, and more.

Indications of vital statistics drafted online tell a disturbing story. If these statistics were laid out as in a banquet table, the presentation would be disastrous – inedible, putrid, and rancid.

As stated above, we are the product of our environment. Below are the statistical results of the American social recipe;

<u>Pctge. of Population</u>	<u>Disorder, Dysfunction</u>	<u>Future Victims, of a 25-student classroom.</u>
18%	Emotional Anxiety and Depression	4
9	Eating Disorders	2
19	Tobacco Smokers	5
6	Gambling	1
25%	Infidelity Among Men	6
14	Infidelity Among Women	3
.12	Registered sex offenders (A crowd of 30,000 at a ball game would yield approx 36 child sex offenders!)	
➤	Suicide rate; 13 per 100,000. Suicide is perhaps the fastest growing ill, rate-wise.	
<u>For Those Who Regard LGBT a Disorder/Dysfunction</u>		
4%	LGBT; (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender), of entire adult USA population.	(see number '2' below)
7.3	LGBT (of post 1980 births, which reflects marked growth.)	2
30%	Alcoholism	7
27	Approx one in 4 will be divorced. For each 3 marriages conducted, one divorce is processed.	6
66.4	12 th graders (male and female) which have experienced sex.	16
7	Drug abuse	2

That totals 54 future victims in a 25-student classroom! An average of more than 2 dysfunctions per student. None of us should take these figures in lightly.

Firstly, our people's numbers will surely fare better than these national figures because we have locked in filters which reduce our share of the hazard – yeshivahs, mitzvot, kosher food (which keep our souls purer), brit milah (circumcision), mikvaot, and other things. These locked in filters *reduce* our share of the hazards, but surely don't eradicate them. As we all know, experienced, and have heard, our people have fallen victim to all the ills mentioned. Many of them in our own families, and some dangerously close to us. The ills cause us grief and anguish, as well as wreaking havoc in our lives.

But how much better do our numbers fare with our locked in filters? Not good enough without a conscious effort to resist and manhandle the social onslaught of corrupting agents in our midst.

Nobody is immune. We all need to be pro-active to keep our children's lives, our grandchildren's lives, and our lives in order. Never 'throw in the towel', or throw your hands up in defeated despair. Giving up is NOT an option. You can attempt and fail – but never give up. Efforts always end up (somewhere along the line) rewarded. Hashem is aware of our plights, and will be with us some way or other if we attempt to help ourselves.

The dysfunctions listed above have been recorded whether they've affected victims for a short or long while, according to the information supplied at the various statistical websites.

This article is firstly a secular, non-religious statistical teaching of the 'Living in America' ills. Secondly, you can apply religious doctrines as you see fit. It seems to be obvious that living in these United States in this era is quite dicey and treacherous. You can't combat the situation unless you realize that there is a serious situation. Don't accept the fact that you can't do much about it. As it's been poetically stated, 'Do not go gently into that good night'. (It's meaning as per a Googled site, is a strong invocation for us to live boldly and to fight. It implores us to **not** just 'go gentle into that good **night**' by quietly accepting death, but to rage against it. Even at the end of life, when 'gravely ill men' are near death, the poem instructs us to burn with life. The poem is life affirming.)

Therefore, DO recognize it, set up defenses (and fences) for yourselves and your families. Don't feel embarrassed and un-American to do so. Try to reduce or vanquish movie-going from your family's jaunts. Non-stop TV watching can numb one's brain and distort a decency standard from one's point of view, thereby misguiding him and his family. As a parent, be sensitive to the cryings-out of your children, and respond. If not, their frustration and misery can result in their minds and bodies going awry.

Hopefully, parents still have the objective to marry off a virgin daughter. Don't let America have you think that the virtue is antiquated, unnecessary, and hopeless. The rabbis teach us of the merit and berachah (blessing) in it.

There's no such thing as friendly alcoholism. It's sloppy, hazardous to one's career, desensitizes parents from spouse's and children's needs, and leads to immorality.

This writer has no psychological expertise, just the expertise of his 64 years of observation, and standard English and religious education. If you agree with this article, please roll up your sleeves, keep your antennas up, and *resist!*

If your opinions do differ, please reply whether anonymously or not. Our engagement with each other will bolster our efforts and increase our chances to succeed and make successful headway in our important endeavors. Replies will be circulated, *beli neder*.

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