

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

EKEB

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 49:14-51:3

AUGUST 26-27, 2016 23 AB 5776

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis

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Editors Notes

The Jewish world suffers a tremendous loss 2this week with the passing of Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis a”h, founder of Hineni and a pioneer in the world of kiruv. It was interesting how her name came up this week and the first time we met.

I was traveling this week and met up with my brother Victor in Atlanta on Wednesday night. We were discussing the concept of mountains and the additional meanings and messages conveyed for an upcoming Sod HaParsha article he was considering. I recalled that a few weeks ago, I gave a class (and we wrote) explaining an idea based on the Rashbam. At the end of the book of Bamidbar, Moshe defeats the giant Sichon and appears to have some fear of fighting Og. The rabbis explain that because Og warned Abraham that Lot was taken captive in the war of the four kings vs the five kings, Og retained merit. The Midrash suggests that Og lifted a mountain. The mountain represents his dependence on the zechut of the avot.

I then recalled a class (See Newsletter Aug 11, 2007) where we explained why a certain sinner looked to the mountains to testify in his defense. I used the words “do not read Harim – Mountains – Elah Horim – parents. The sinner was hoping that he could blame his actions on his parents, his genes, or the way he was raised. Furthermore, Tehillim says “Esa Einai el HeHarim M’Ayin Yavo Ezri (I lift my eyes to the Mountains from where does my help come), which Yalkut Shemoni interprets to mean “I lift my eyes to my parents from where does my help come.”

Victor asked where I first heard this and I remembered as clear as day with her unique accent, Eynah Harim Elah Horim, not mountains but parents.

It was the early 80s and I was not yet married. I traveled very often. In fact it felt like I was on the road

more days than I was at home and the Pan Am terminal at JFK was a sort of home away from home where I knew everyone by name. And the person I spoke to more than anyone else was my dear friend Charlie Zalta at Whiz Travel who saved me from getting stranded in places more times than I can remember. I was taking my regular flight to LA early one Monday morning and was auto upgraded to first class. I took my “permanent” seat in 4A and Rebbetzin Jungreis sat next to me. I don’t recall if I knew who she was. Her right hand and partner, Barbara Janoff sat on the other side of the aisle. I didn’t know who Barbara was, but with my long hair, heavy gold chain, Porsche gold sunglasses, Patek Phillippe watch and diamond name bracelet and obviously no kippah, she stared me down as if to say, “whoever you are, don’t mess with the Rebbetzin”. I guess one might wonder who this 21 year old kid was in first class who the stewardesses knew by name. Years later Barbara and I recalled the incident with a laugh.

Well surprise, surprise when after takeoff, I reached below my seat took out my bag and put on my kippah, wrapped myself in my tallet and proceeded to bind the tefillin to my arm. When I finished praying and put everything away, the rebbetzin introduced herself to me and asked me my name. When I told her David Bibi, she told me she knew my family and especially my great uncle Dave Bibi well. She stressed that with a great name comes great responsibility.

King David states, Esah Eynay El HaHarim, when I look at the mountains, I wonder, from where will help come. It will come from Hashem. She explained, “Eynah Harim Elah Horim”, not mountains but parents. When I wonder how can I live up the actions, the qualities, the accomplishments of my ancestors, I should know that with G-d’s help, I can. Those words in her emotional Hungarian accented voice still ring in my ears.

Years later, through the Pilevsky family, we built a very close relationship with the Jungreis family and we are definitely the better for it.

A little about the Rebbetzin from an article in Matzav. Esther Jungreis was born in 1936 in Szeged, Hungary, where her father, Rav Avrohom Halevi Jungreis zt”l, was chief rabbi.

Her father was deported with other Jews from Szegeed in a cattle car bound for Auschwitz. However, a relative who worked for Rudolph Kastner's office arranged that when the train from Szegeed passed through Budapest, the cattle car was opened and the entire Jungreis family was transferred onto the Kastner train to Switzerland.

In 1947, after experiencing the horrors of the concentration camps and the Holocaust, the Jungreis family arrived in Brooklyn, New York, where the Rebbetzin married a distant cousin, Rav Meshulem Halevi Jungreis zt"l. The newly-married Jungreis couple settled in North Woodmere, New York, where Rav Jungreis became the Rabbi of Ohr HaTorah.

The Rebbetzin and her husband embarked on a lifelong mission to combat the spiritual Holocaust that was occurring in front of their eyes in the United States. She waged a fierce battle against interfaith marriages, secularization, and other forms of assimilation, which she firmly believed was an existential threat to the continued existence of Klal Yisroel.

Due to her experiences as a Holocaust survivor, she became determined to devote her life to fighting assimilation. This led to the birth of the Hineni Movement in 1973. Hineni became a worldwide movement, with centers all over the world. As a result, Rebbetzin Jungreis spoke in locations such as the Hollywood Palladium, the Johannesburg Coliseum and Binyanei HaUmah in Yerushalayim. She also spoke regularly for the United States Army and Navy as well as for the Israel Defense Forces.

Rebbetzin Jungreis authored several best-selling books, including "The Jewish Soul On Fire," "The Committed Life," and "The Committed Marriage," all of which have been translated into many languages, with tens of thousands of volumes disseminated in every corner of the globe. Her latest book, "Life Is A Test," was widely acclaimed as one of the 10 best Jewish inspirational books of all time.

The Rebbetzin was a trailblazer for over a half century, crisscrossing the globe with her message of loving-kindness and hope. She was a teacher of Torah to Jews from every walk of life.

She spent her life showing the beauty of Yiddishkeit to Jews across the globe, bringing countless neshomot back to their roots.

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb writes: "I had the privilege of speaking from the same podium as

Rebbetzin Jungreis on numerous occasions. She was a tough act to follow. Her speeches were typically emotional but had firm grounding in Torah sources, in her amazing repertoire of Chassidic anecdotes, and in the personal relationships she had with her distinguished family. I will never forget her passionate plea to an audience of educators to "cease the heinous and indefensible practice of expelling unruly students—yiddische kinderlach—from our classrooms and schools."

"She was a Holocaust survivor who often spoke about the Holocaust and the challenges of spiritual survival. She was an inspiration to thousands of Jewish individuals in search of authentic Jewish spirituality. Her devotion to chesed and helping others matched her brilliant, often fiery, lectures and speeches.

"Just a few years ago, Chavi and I spent Pesach at the same resort as the Rebbetzin and her family. On that occasion, I had the opportunity to become better acquainted with her on a personal level. I was impressed with her broad range of knowledge, her awareness of and sensitivity to the challenges that face the Orthodox Jewish community, and her positive attitude to those challenges. She was an optimist beyond belief and was able to avoid machlokes and criticism in a most gentle and noble manner.

"She never resorted to the use of the newly devised rabbinic titles which are in vogue among some contemporary women seeking religious validity. She never needed to because her ability to convey profound and genuine Torah lessons with authority was all she needed to gain credibility and legitimacy. She was proud of her femininity and always dressed modestly but fashionably. As she told me that Pesach, the titles she was most proud of were "'Mother' and 'Grandmother'. These titles were good enough for Sarah and Rivka and Rachel and Leah," she said. "Why are they not good enough for today's woman?!"

"Some years ago, the Rebbetzin and I were invited, along with some other Jewish leaders with conservative political views, to a meeting with Senator Bill Frist of Tennessee. He was then the majority leader of the United States Senate and a serious candidate for the Republican nomination for President, to succeed George W. Bush. That entire evening calls for a long description, but suffice it to say that the Rebbetzin was the star of the show. She eloquently and movingly spoke of her appreciation of our great democracy and explained how honored she felt, as an immigrant and refugee, to be standing at

the epicenter of the American government, in the office of the majority leader, which then stood in a section of the Capitol that was not destroyed by the British in 1812.

"When Senator Frist asked her to say grace, she honored me with recital of the bracha but reserved for herself the privilege to, in her own words, thank God for the religious liberty that Jews, and all others, enjoy in the United States of America. At that moment, just as after every one of her public addresses, there was not a dry eye in the house. I am confident that there will be no dry eyes among all those who recall, now or in the future, her gracious and inspiring presence. May her memory be a blessing."

Chantelle and I extend our condolences to her children Chaya Sora Gertzulin, Rabbi Yisroel Jungreis, Slovi Wolff and Rabbi Osher Jungreis. And to her brothers Rabbi Yaakov Jungreis and Rabbi Binyomin Jungreis. Tehi Nishmata serura BeSror HaChayim.

**Shabbat Shalom,
David Bibi**

Summary of the Perasha

I wanted to point out a foundational pasook in parashat Ekev. Perek 8, Pasook 16 says "ha'maachilcha mahn bamidbar asher lo yedoon abotecha le'maan anotecha oo'lemaan nasotecha le'hetibecha ba'acharitecha (I fed you mahn in the midbar to afflict you and to test you in order to do good for you in the end)". The Torah is telling us here why Benei Israel suffered in the midbar and in general why we face difficulty in our lives. The afflictions we experience are to test us in order that Hashem can give us good in the end. Hashem wants to see how we react when things are not going smoothly. Hashem wants to reward us and thus he puts us in a position to earn greater reward. And so in this pasook Hashem is telling us how operates. And we should never forget this! Every challenge we face is uniquely designed by Hashem to give us an opportunity earn reward. It is the hesed of our loving creator. And we see it clearly here in our parasha.

Ekev - Moshe recounts the sin of the egel and tells Benei Israel if we follow the mitsvot we will have beracha in the land

1- Moshe reminds Benei Israel that if we keep our covenant with Hashem we will have beracha, destroy our enemies, and inherit a great land

2- Moshe warns Benei Israel that they will have success in Israel and forget Hashem and that if they

forget Hashem and worship other Gods they will get destroyed.

3- Moshe goes on to rebuke Benei Israel because they angered Hashem many times including the sin of the egel

4- The events following the egel. Moshe goes up to ask for forgiveness and receive the new luchot.

5- Moshe again tells Benei Israel to make sure to fear Hashem, love him, and follow in his ways, particularly because they personally witnessed the miracles of Hashem.

6- The 2nd parasha of shema (we will only see beracha from the land if we listen to the mitsvot).

7- Moshe again says that if we follow the mitsvot Hashem will drive out the nations of Kenaan and make the nations of the world fear us.

FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER

"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 ,gcau ,kftu" ,frcu" 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 Shmuel Choueka

Opportunity Knocks

Some people hate to cook, while others enjoy it but can't stand washing dishes. The odor of a dirty hand towel nauseates certain individuals and even the thought of using a handkerchief can be revolting to many.

Everyone has pet peeves and aversions. But just as every action has a reaction, and every measure, a countermeasure, so too, every repugnant task and distasteful object has a potential solution. Listen well, and you'll hear opportunity knocking when you least expect it.

For example: Hate to cook? You're not the only one. It must have been someone like you who

saw the possibilities and started the fast-food industry.

Don't want to spend time slaving over a hot stove? Buy pre-cooked, just-heat-'em-up dinners, and stick them into a...microwave oven! Not one, but two inventions to cut down your time in the kitchen!

Dislike washing dishes? Somebody already invented throw-away plastic and paper serving utensils!

Keep in mind that many of the inventions and developments in the world were introduced by Hashem to help us to do what we do. As Ben Zoma stated (Berachot, 58a), "Blessed is He who created all of these (people) to serve me."

Disgusted by those smelly kitchen towels, but don't want to wash them after each use? Try another clever innovation: paper towels! And while you're at it, try paper napkins, disposable diapers, facial tissues...in fact, check out the entire line of non-reusable, no-need-to-wash items. These are, most likely, the brainchildren of the "I-hate-laundry" brigade!

And how about sticky notes? Can't you just see the logic that might have led to their invention? Can't find a paper clip, hmmm let's see about getting one paper to stick to another without damaging either one!

When you encounter one of life's inevitable problems, look for the built-in opportunity. It might be that the issue you can't tolerate annoys many others, too. If you come up with a life-enhancing solution, this problem may be your vehicle for striking it rich. It only takes a minute to look past the problem and listen for the "knock." (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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As A Father Punishes His Child

Among the topics discussed in Parashat Ekev is the subject of "Yisurim"— suffering. This is a particularly difficult topic that many people are, unfortunately, forced to grapple with. Life can sometimes seem harsh and unfair; God occasionally brings upon people crisis, suffering and calamities, leaving us asking the unanswerable question of "why."

Moshe Rabbenu, in this Parasha, lays the foundation for the approach we should have toward Yisurim: "You shall know in your heart that it is as a father punishes his son that Hashem your God punishes you" (8:5). No matter what kind of punishment Hashem brings upon a person, he must know with full confidence that the punishment is dealt by our loving, caring father.

This means, first and foremost, that anything that happens is for the best. Seldom will we be shown how the suffering and hardships in our lives are ultimately beneficial, but we must have faith that everything God does is done out of love.

There was once a great Rabbi in Jerusalem named Rav Yosef Haim Sonenfeld (1849-1932), who was a towering scholar and righteous Sadik. Despite his unparalleled stature of piety, Rav Sonenfeld was subjected to unspeakable Yisurim: eight of his eleven children died during his lifetime. One of his sons, Shemuel Binyamin, was a promising young man who was stricken by typhus and died after two weeks of illness. After his passing, Rav Sonenfeld wrote a letter to his brother, expressing his pain and anguish, but also his unshakable faith in divine justice. He wrote that although he cannot understand why God took his son, the day will come when it will become perfectly clear how everything God does is for the best.

This son died on a Friday, just moments before Shabbat. Rav Sonenfeld had been by his son's bedside reciting Tehillim, but when his son died, Rav Sonenfeld rushed home to prepare for Shabbat, went to the synagogue, and observed Shabbat as usual, without any outward expression of grief. As soon as Shabbat ended, Rav Sonenfeld fainted from emotion.

The great Sadikim feel as pained by personal tragedy as anybody else, but their unquestioning faith in God empowers them to handle the most trying circumstances with composure, strength and dignity. They know with confidence that Hashem punishes them "as a father punishes his child," and this gives them the strength and fortitude to move on.

The concept of "as a father punishes a child" also reveals another critical point about Yisurim. During the seven weeks after Tisha B'Ab, we read as the Haftara on Shabbat prophecies of consolation that describe the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people. Rav Avraham Pam (1913-2001) explained this custom by noting that after a father punishes a child, he will soothe and console the child in an attempt to compensate for the pain inflicted. Even when punishment is warranted and necessary, the parent afterward feels remorseful and looks for ways to placate the child.

And this is true of God and the Jewish people, as well. Every calamity is followed by kindness and an opportunity for growth and prosperity. The exiling of the Ten Tribes of Israel by the Assyrian Empire was followed by the great miracle of the Assyrian army's

sudden death outside the walls of Jerusalem, an event that had the potential to bring the Messianic Era. Just several decades after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jews mounted a nearly-successful revolt against the Romans under the leadership of Bar Kochba, who had the potential to be the Mashiah. The expulsion from Spain in 1492 was followed by the spectacular flourishing of Torah in the city of Safed, a period which also had the potential to be the harbinger of the final redemption. Immediately after World War I, which wreaked havoc throughout the Jewish communities in Europe, England pronounced the Balfour Declaration which laid the groundwork for a sovereign Jewish State in Eretz Yisrael. The Hafetz Haim said at the time that this event had the potential to bring Mashiah. And after the devastation of the Holocaust, the State of Israel was founded, offering us yet another opportunity to bring our final redemption.

This is how we must approach suffering in our personal lives, as well. We must remember that every period of hardship is followed by a period of great opportunity for blessing and success. As a parent lovingly consoles a punished child, God lovingly consoles us, as well, and is guaranteed to shower us with blessing and good fortune after subjecting us to Yisurim. If we remember that God punishes us as a parent punishes a child, we will have the strength to overcome even life's cruellest challenges, and the fortitude to rebuild and recover from whatever hardships we are, Heaven forbid, forced to endure.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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This week we are including it**

HOLY OBJECTS TO SUBDUE EVIL

The Torah recognizes that the Satan and his colleagues have been given access to certain points or areas. To counter these - the Torah enjoins us to place competing forces in the form of Holy objects opposite these spots to subdue any negativity they might emit. These areas of susceptibility to the negative forces include the eyes, heart, heel and the entranceway to the home. Our parasha counts Tefillin and Mezuzot amongst the holy objects needed to counter the negative forces found in some of these areas. In addition based on the Midrash we also assert and advance that the zealous performance of the "lighter" misvot related to the area of the "heel" serve to counter some of the more evasive forces

associated with the Satan. We will see through the words of the written and oral tradition how the negative forces associated with these areas are systematically subdued specifically by the placement of the holy objects and fulfillment of these "contra" laws.

TEFILLIN AND SISIT

The Talmud (Menahot 43) cites a teaching in the name of R. Eliezer Ben Yaakov regarding the efficacy of Tefillin, Sisit and Mezuzah in warding off evil. "Whoever has Tefillin upon his head and arm, Sisit upon his garment and a Mezuzah at his entranceway there is the complete presumption that he will not sin." Evidently without surrounding oneself with these holy objects he exposes himself to the Satan who will cause him to sin. Apparently the wearing of Sisit will protect him from the negative forces that reside by the heart and the eyes - as the verse (Bemidbar 15:39) states "So that you do not follow your heart and your eyes." Similarly the Tefilah of the arm is to be placed by the heart - as the Sages (Menahot 37) learn from a verse in our parasha (11:18) "And you shall place these words on your hearts...and you shall bind them upon your arms." This is to counter the evil inclination who Rav (Berakhot 61) compares to a fly that lies between the two gateways of the heart. The Tefilah of the head is to be placed "between the eyes" to negate and put fear in any detrimental forces associated with that area. As it is written in Tehillim 36:2 "Evil speaks to the wicked saying let there be no fear of God before his eyes". Similarly the Talmud (Berakhot 6) relates that the forces of the world will see the Tefillin of the head and recognize that this is the object synonymous with the Divine Name.

MEZUZAH - TO OPPOSE EVIL STATIONED AT THE ENTRANCE

We saw in Beresheet 4:6 that Hashem said to Kayin "Why are you so furious and depressed? If you do good will there not be a special privilege? And if you do not do good - sin is crouching by the entrance way." Hashem notifies Kayin that evil resides by the doorway. The Zohar (Vaethanan 263-265) teaches that there exists an unholy force by the left side of the door way who is given permission to cause spiritual damage. The commentary Matok Midevash explains in the name of HaAri that this negative force is called תומ - death. The Misva to write and establish תורח - on the right side of the entrance serves to רר or banish this evil husk. The two parashiot written on the inside of the scroll along with the Holy Name שד"י that faces the outside serve to watch the home (Avodah Zara 11) as well as the ones entering and

exiting the door way. As the verse states in Tehillim יה - רמשי - The watcher is none other than the Shehina itself who is specifically placed at the beginning of the upper third area of the doorpost. This placement of the Divine is hinted at in the numerical value of הזוזמ - sixty five which is the same as י"נדא which as is known the Divine Name associated with the Divine presence. R. Hayim Vital writes (Lkute Torah - Taame Hamisvot) in the name of his teacher R. HaAri that when one exits his home and places his hand on the Mezuzah to kiss it - he should meditate at that time to be saved from the רצי - ערה - by considering that the final letters of the word רצי when spelled out ידצדוי are synonymous with the Divine Name י"דש associated with protection from Evil. This Holy name will thereby enter into his evil inclination and subdue it.

THE HEEL - KEEPING LIGHTER MISVOT

In Beresheet we are taught that in God's curse of the original serpent he acknowledged that the latter will retain the ability to attack Man via his heel. The verse 3:14 concludes בקע ונפוש התאו And you will retain the ability to strike him via the heel. Curiously our Parasha is named בקע after its opening words concerning this heel. ונעמשת בקע היהו - The Midrash Tanhuma cited by Rashi expounds on these lead words. Namely that it is pertinent that one be zealous to fulfill misvot that others might consider unimportant. Those laws upon whom people use their heel - ekev to trample on. The warning to keep these light misvot serves to protect the entrance of the Satan into our lives. King David acknowledges this and writes 49:6 "Why should I fear in the days of Evil when iniquity surrounds my Heel". The Satan often begins his work by getting us to sin by minimizing these misvot - and once he gets a foothold - he then proceeds to enter into all facets of a persons life. So here the Torah warns "You can protect against the negative force of the Heel by being zealous to keep the apparently unimportant misvot- or the commandments a person treads on with his heels. These will serve as his protection by severing any access by the Serpent into our lives.

THE SIN KILLS - NOT THE SNAKE

The Talmud (Berakhot 33) relates that there was a type of snake that would harm people. They came and told R. Hanina Ben Dosa - He placed his heel ובקע - over the mouth of the burrow - whereupon the snake exited and bit him and the snake died. He placed it upon his shoulder and brought it to the study hall and said "See my children it is not the snake that kills but rather the sin that kills." At that time they said "Woe to the man who is met by the snake and woe to

the snake that is met by R. Hanina Ben Dosa." It behooves to recognize that these obstacles or forces have been placed in prime areas of our lives. We have been given the tools to protect ourselves via the Misvot. We need worry about these forces - only as to their ability to gain strength via our sins. We are hence bidden to keep the misvot to attach ourselves to holiness above - as the verse in our parasha promises "Hashem will fulfill his covenant and bestow kindness upon you as he swore to our forefathers."

Rabbi Wein THE PICTURE

A number of months ago my wife and I paid a visit to friends of ours who just completed building their home near our neighborhood. I had known them from my years as being a rabbi in Miami Beach a half-century ago. During that time as a rabbi at Beth Israel Congregation, I taught Talmud daily to the young men of the eleventh grade of the local yeshiva high school. I did so on a voluntary basis since the school could not afford to hire anyone to do so. My congregation was kind enough to allow this to happen even though it meant that I was not on the synagogue's premises for a number of hours every morning.

In order to lighten the blow, I realized that in order to walk from the synagogue to the school building I had to cross the local public golf course. So I instructed the secretary at the synagogue to tell people who asked where I was in the morning, to respond that I was on the golf course. I knew that they would protest that less than if they were informed that I was somehow teaching at the boys' high school.

In any event, the husband of the couple that we were visiting had been in that eleventh grade Talmud class of mine. So while we were reminiscing about the good old days – they certainly are old and were probably less good than our nostalgia ascribes to them currently – he excused himself and went upstairs to his study and returned with a photograph of me taken while I was teaching that class.

I stared at the picture. Was I ever that young? Was my hair ever that black? Was I ever that thin? In fact, who is that clean-shaven, short-sleeved young man in the picture? I faintly recognized that it was actually me but to tell the truth I was shocked and taken aback by the photograph. My wife insisted that we must have a copy of that picture and our friends dutifully made such a copy and even framed it for display in our home.

So now that I view this picture daily, I have been subjected to a flood of memories of events and people about whom I have long forgotten. I am able to relive those years and to think about what I did right and not so right and of the accomplishments and accompanying frustrations of synagogue and communal life. But the memory I most treasure is that of the morning hours that I spent teaching Talmud to those young men in the Miami Beach yeshiva high school.

There are many advantages to age and experience, especially in the rabbinate and educational professions. But there is no substitute for the enthusiasm, optimism and strength of purpose that one has in one's younger years. I believe that I am a great deal wiser in the ways of the world – especially the Jewish world – then I was fifty years ago. But I no longer possess that wonder and creative energy – the belief that there was no student that I could not reach and influence and no topic that I could not easily explain – that exudes from that picture of a young professional teaching the ancient Talmud to a new generation of Jewish young men.

The cryptic and somewhat cynical statement attributed to George Bernard Shaw that "... youth is wasted on the young" certainly resonates within each and every one of us. The wisdom of life achieved through decades of experience and challenge cannot be taught to anyone in advance. Nevertheless, anyone that still retains the elements of youth – hope, optimism, a sense of adventure and ultimate self-confidence and self-belief – even until one's later years, has truly been blessed.

Seeing this picture of the young me encourages me to believe that somehow that there is still enough gas left in the tank to propel me forward in teaching, speaking and writing. Even though the old energy is no longer present, the urgency to do so can be rekindled and renewed. And if this article is any proof of the manner, that picture has served a greater purpose than just being a piece of personal memorabilia. The picture is a jolt from the past but it is also an inspiration – limited as it may be – for the future. Maybe that is why we all love to have pictures of ourselves, be they photographs or even oil paintings. It is certainly good to have such a picture around one's home.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Spirituality of Listening

It is one of the most important words in Judaism, and also one of the least understood. Its two most famous occurrences are in last week's parsha and this

week's: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," and "It shall come to pass if you surely listen to My commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul" – the openings of the first and second paragraphs of the Shema. It also appears in the first line of the parsha: "It shall come to pass, if you listen to these laws."

The word, of course, is shema. I have argued elsewhere that it is fundamentally untranslatable into English since it means so many things: to hear, to listen, to pay attention, to understand, to internalise, to respond, to obey. It is one of the motif-words of the book of Devarim, where it appears no less than 92 times – more than in any other book of the Torah. Time and again in the last month of his life Moses told the people, Shema: listen, heed, pay attention. Hear what I am saying. Hear what God is saying. Listen to what he wants from us. If you would only listen ... Judaism is a religion of listening. This is one of its most original contributions to civilisation.

The twin foundations on which Western culture was built were ancient Greece and ancient Israel. They could not have been more different. Greece was a profoundly visual culture. Its greatest achievements had to do with the eye, with seeing. It produced some of the greatest art, sculpture and architecture the world has ever seen. Its most characteristic group events – theatrical performances and the Olympic games – were spectacles: performances that were watched. Plato thought of knowledge as a kind of depth vision, seeing beneath the surface to the true form of things.

This idea – that knowing is seeing – remains the dominant metaphor in the West even today. We speak of insight, foresight and hindsight. We offer an observation. We adopt a perspective. We illustrate. We illuminate. We shed light on an issue. When we understand something, we say, "I see." [1]

Judaism offered a radical alternative. It is faith in a God we cannot see, a God who cannot be represented visually. The very act of making a graven image – a visual symbol – is a form of idolatry. As Moses reminded the people in last week's parsha, when the Israelites had a direct encounter with God at Mount Sinai, "You heard the sound of words, but saw no image; there was only a voice." (Deut. 4:12). God communicates in sounds, not sights. He speaks. He commands. He calls. That is why the supreme religious act is Shema. When God speaks, we listen. When He commands, we try to obey.

Rabbi David Cohen (1887–1972), known as the

Nazirite, a disciple of Rav Kook and the father of R. Shear-Yashuv Cohen, chief rabbi of Haifa, pointed out that in the Babylonian Talmud all the metaphors of understanding are based not on seeing but on hearing. Ta shema, "come and hear." Ka mashman, "It teaches us this." Shema mina, "Infer from this." Lo shemiyah lei, "He did not agree." A traditional teaching is called shamayta, "that which was heard." And so on.[2] All of these are variations on the word shema.[3]

This may seem like a small difference, but it is in fact a huge one. For the Greeks, the ideal form of knowledge involved detachment. There is the one who sees, the subject, and there is that which is seen, the object, and they belong to two different realms. A person who looks at a painting or a sculpture or a play in a theatre or the Olympic games is not himself part of the art or the drama or the athletic competition. He or she is a spectator, not a participant.

Speaking and listening are not forms of detachment. They are forms of engagement. They create a relationship. The Hebrew word for knowledge, da'at, implies involvement, closeness, intimacy. "And Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and gave birth" (Gen. 4:1). That is knowing in the Hebrew sense, not the Greek. We can enter into a relationship with God, even though He is infinite and we are finite, because we are linked by words. In revelation, God speaks to us. In prayer, we speak to God. If you want to understand any relationship, between husband and wife, or parent and child, or employer and employee, pay close attention to how they speak and listen to one another. Ignore everything else.

The Greeks taught us the forms of knowledge that come from observing and inferring, namely science and philosophy. The first scientists and the first philosophers came from Greece from the sixth to the fourth centuries BCE.

But not everything can be understood by seeing and appearances alone. There is a powerful story about this told in the first book of Samuel. Saul, Israel's first king, looked the part. He was tall. "From his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people," (1 Sam. 9:2, 10:23). He was the image of a king. But morally, temperamentally, he was not a leader at all; he was a follower.

God then told Samuel to anoint another king in his place, and told him it would be one of the children of Yishai. Samuel went to Yishai and was struck by the appearance of one of his sons, Eliav. He thought he must be the one God meant. But God said to him,

"Do not be impressed by his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. God does not see as people do. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

Jews and Judaism taught that we cannot see God, but we can hear Him and He hears us. It is through the word – speaking and listening – that we can have an intimate relationship with God as our parent, our partner, our sovereign, the One who loves us and whom we love. We cannot demonstrate God scientifically. We cannot prove God logically. These are Greek, not Jewish, modes of thought. I believe that from a Jewish perspective, trying to prove the existence of God logically or scientifically is a mistaken enterprise.[4] God is not an object but a subject. The Jewish mode is to relate to God in intimacy and love, as well as awe and reverence.

One fascinating modern example came from a Jew who, for much of his life, was estranged from Judaism, namely Sigmund Freud. He called psychoanalysis the "speaking cure", but it is better described as the "listening cure." [5] It is based on the fact that active listening is in itself therapeutic. It was only after the spread of psychoanalysis, especially in America, that the phrase "I hear you" came into the English language as a way of communicating empathy.[6]

There is something profoundly spiritual about listening. It is the most effective form of conflict resolution I know. Many things can create conflict, but what sustains it is the feeling on the part of at least one of the parties that they have not been heard. They have not been listened to. We have not "heard their pain". There has been a failure of empathy. That is why the use of force – or for that matter, boycotts – to resolve conflict is so profoundly self-defeating. It may suppress it for a while, but it will return, often more intense than before. Job, who has suffered unjustly, is unmoved by the arguments of his comforters. It is not that he insists on being right: what he wants is to be heard. Not by accident does justice presuppose the rule of audi alteram partem, "Hear the other side."

Listening lies at the very heart of relationship. It means that we are open to the other, that we respect him or her, that their perceptions and feelings matter to us. We give them permission to be honest, even if this means making ourselves vulnerable in so doing. A good parent listens to their child. A good employer listens to his or her workers. A good company listens to its customers or clients. A good leader listens to those he or she leads. Listening does not mean agreeing but it does mean caring. Listening is the

climate in which love and respect grow.

In Judaism we believe that our relationship with God is an ongoing tutorial in our relationships with other people. How can we expect God to listen to us if we fail to listen to our spouse, our children, or those affected by our work? And how can we expect to encounter God if we have not learned to listen. On Mount Horeb, God taught Elijah that He was not in the whirlwind, the earthquake or the fire but in the kol demamah dakah, the "still, small voice"[7] that I define as a voice you can only hear if you are listening.

Crowds are moved by great speakers, but lives are changed by great listeners. Whether between us and God or us and other people, listening is the prelude to love.

[1] See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, 1980.

[2] This appears in the opening pages of his work, *Kol Nevuah*.

[3] To be sure, the Zohar uses a visual term, ta chazi, "Come and see." There is a broad kinship between Jewish mysticism and Platonic or neo-Platonic thought. For both, knowing is a form of depth-seeing.

[4] To be sure, many of the great medieval Jewish philosophers did just that. They did so under the influence of neo-Platonic and neo-Aristotelian thought, itself mediated by the great philosophers of Islam. The exception was Judah Halevi in *The Kuzari*.

[5] See Adam Philips, *Equals*, London, Faber and Faber, 2002, xii. See also Salman Akhtar, *Listening to Others: Developmental and Clinical Aspects of Empathy and Attunement*. Lanham: Jason Aronson, 2007.

[6] Note that there is a difference between empathy and sympathy. Saying "I hear you" is a way of indicating – sincerely or otherwise – that I take note of your feelings, not that I necessarily agree with them or you.

[7] I Kings 19.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And you shall remember the entire journey that Hashem your G-d led you these forty years in the wilderness." (8:2)

When Rabbenu Yonah wished to point out the great importance of a Mitzvat Aseh (positive Commandment), he states that some of the most obligatory duties required by Hashem are expressed in the form of a Mitzvat Aseh. This verse is among the examples of such great duties and principles cited by Rabbenu Yonah (*Shaare Teshuva* 3:17): "The great virtues of remembering His kindnesses and of meditating upon them, as is said 'And you shall remember the entire journey' and it is said 'They meditated in the kindnesses of Hashem' (*Tehillim* 107:43)."

Thus we learn that this verse, "You shall remember", refers not only to the nation in general and not only to the journeys in the Wilderness. But, it imposes the obligation upon every individual to look back upon his own journeys in life and to spend some time meditating upon them in order to appreciate more greatly how much he must be grateful to Hashem for His many kindnesses.

In one's journey through life many perils and illnesses and misfortunes and evil influences hovered nearby, even though he was totally unaware of them. And Hashem continued to protect him as he journeyed from childhood to adolescence and on to adult maturity.

He must be grateful also for the continued well being of his wife and children. And, he must always be aware of the tragedies that others had suffered but from which he had been protected by Hashem. This is an example of the method of utilizing commandments to the nation in general as admonitions for each individual.

When R' Miller was asked by a grandchild to reminisce upon his youth, the Rabbi responded. "Talking about the olden days is a waste of time. However, in the context of 'you shall remember' (see above), it is a Mitzvah."

Remembering Hashem's Kindnesses in Your life"
30 seconds every night before retiring

Some benefits are:

- * Fulfilling a Positive Torah Mitzvah
- * Increased Awareness of the Divine guiding Hand
- * Increased Emunah & Bitachon/Trust in Hashem
- * Appreciation & Gratitude for what we received

Shabbat Shalom From your friends at Yeshiva Gedolah Founded by Rabbi Miller Z'L

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