

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TESSE

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 54:1-10

AUGUST 28-29, 2015 14 ELUL 5775

We would like to welcome Dana Yusupov's parents  
Brenda and Yair Ben-Zaken and family  
And all those coming to celebrate Shabbat Sheva Berachot

Minha & Arbit 7:00 PM -Candle Lighting 7:15PM  
Friends – We need assistance and a commitment for Friday evenings

Shabbat  
Class with Rav Aharon 8:00 AM – Latest Shema 8:53AM  
Shahrit 8:30 AM, Torah 9:45 and Musaf at 10:30  
Sam will be giving the morning Derasha

Kiddush this week is sponsored by Albert and Eleanor Yusupov  
And the Yusupov family in honor of Sam and Dana's wedding

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer  
Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/  
Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's program at Bach at 5:30PM –  
Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:30

Class with Rav Aharon at 6:15PM  
Minha 6:45 PM - Seudat Shelishit 7:15 PM  
The Chattan, Sam Yusupov is scheduled to give the class and we will have B'H Sheva Berachot  
Birkat HaMazon 8:00 PM Arbit 8:05 PM – Shabbat Ends at 8:15

SUNDAY MORNING Selihot at 7:15 and Shaharit at 8AM  
SUNDAY BARBECUE 4-7PM

See Flyer in the Newsletter - Bring your family & friends  
\$18 Per Person \$25 per couple - \$36 Per Family\* Children under 3 are free!  
AND BLOOD DRIVE 4-7PM – See Flyer

MINCHA FOLLOWS THE BARBECUE and BLOOD DRIVE at 7:15PM

DAILY MINYAN  
Selihot 6:20 AM

Monday, Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM  
Mincha and Arbit - Sunday at 7:30PM

LOOKING FORWARD:

HIGH HOLIDAYS  
Membership Dues

As the High Holidays are approaching,  
Please take the time to settle your outstanding pledges and obligations

To make a payment or donate on line  
Please visit  
<http://www.benaisher.org/donate-online/>

Congregation Sha'ar HaShamayim—Benai Asher—In memory of Rabbi Asher Abittan Z"SL

The Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach, Inc.

P.O. Box 567 · Long Beach, New York 11561 · (516) 431-3847

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Located at 161 Lafayette Boulevard at the Corner of West Penn

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August 26, 2015 — 11 Elul 5775

Dear Members and Friends:

Rosh Hashana 5776 begins in about two weeks. We begin by thanking all for everything you have done to help us do everything we have done. The year has been financially challenging. We are deeply grateful for his tremendous assistance, but we must all be aware that those funds are earmarked, so we really need your help. There is much we need to do this year and we look forward to members in good standing joining us for a general meeting to discuss and plan for the future. The meeting per by our by-laws is tentatively set for Sunday morning, October 11th and will be by invitation only .

We are preparing for the high holidays, which is also our time of membership renewal. Last year we again had at times Baruch Hashem a full house with standing room only. We need a more accurate idea of who will be with us to avoid seating problems. We would also like to set aside additional seats for unmarried children under 22 of family members this year and maintained the reduced cost of \$101. Please have your children over 21 purchase single memberships.

We look forward to a beautiful holiday with Rabbi Meyer Abittan, Rabbi Chaim Abittan, Dr Abie Abittan and Mr. Shaya Abittan. We also hope to have with us Rabbi David Azerad with his beautiful voice as well as Rabbi Asher Abittan and Baruch Abittan. Rosh Hashana begins at Sundown on Sunday, September 13th. Yom Kippur begins Tuesday evening September 22nd.

Our current dues remain the same are are noted below and have been set to partially cover expenses and budget needs. Most Synagogues charge much higher dues—typically three to four times what we charge. We always appreciate anything extra you can place in your envelope. This year has been particularly difficult for many families. Your support helps to ensure that no one in our synagogue family will be turned away because of financial hardship. Our current schedule of membership dues is as follows:

Table with 2 columns: Membership Type and Description. Rows include Family Membership (\$575), Single Membership (\$375), Single Child of a Member (\$101), and Non-member Seat (\$475).

Please make sure to pay your dues and past open amounts as soon as you can. To make a payment or donate on line, please visit http://www.benaiasher.org/donate-online/. If you have any questions, please speak with Ely Altarac at (516) 432-8197. On behalf of the Officers and the Trustees, we wish to thank all of you who have generously contributed to supporting our Synagogue over the past years. In so doing, we each take our places behind the founders of our congregation, following in their footsteps and merit. May the coming year be filled with blessings, health, happiness and prosperity for all of us.

Tisku LeShanim Rabot VeTobot

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ seats in the men's section of the synagogue and \_\_\_\_\_ seats in the women's section of the synagogue for us for the 5776 High Holy Day services. Enclosed please find our check for membership dues [check below]

Form with fields for Family Membership (\$575), Single Membership (\$375), Single Dependant Child (\$101), Non-Member Seat (\$475), and Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Please Print

(Please email us and pay on line or send this form or your statement with payment to the Congregation at P.O. Box 567 Long Beach, New York 11561)

Benai Asher  
Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach  
Presents:

# BBQ 2015

Sunday, August 30th  
4:00PM- 7:00PM

Hamburgers  
Hotdogs  
All the fixings!

Vegetarian food  
Available

Bring your family & friends  
\$18 Per Person \$25 per couple  
\$36 Per Family\*  
Children under 3 are free!

WOW, BBQ'S ARE SO COOL.



Rain OR SHINE

THEY ARE, WE SHOULD GO TO ONE ON THE  
CORNER OF LAFAYETTE BLVD AND W PENN ST AT  
THE SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

\*2 adults their kids  
under 14  
each additional child  
and/or grandchild \$10



Sponsored by The Sisterhood of Benai Asher

# Bloodstock Ariella Amiel In Memory of Mitchell Gross z"l Blood Drive



Sunday - August 30, 2015  
3:00pm to 8:00pm

161 Lafayette Blvd.  
Long Beach, NY

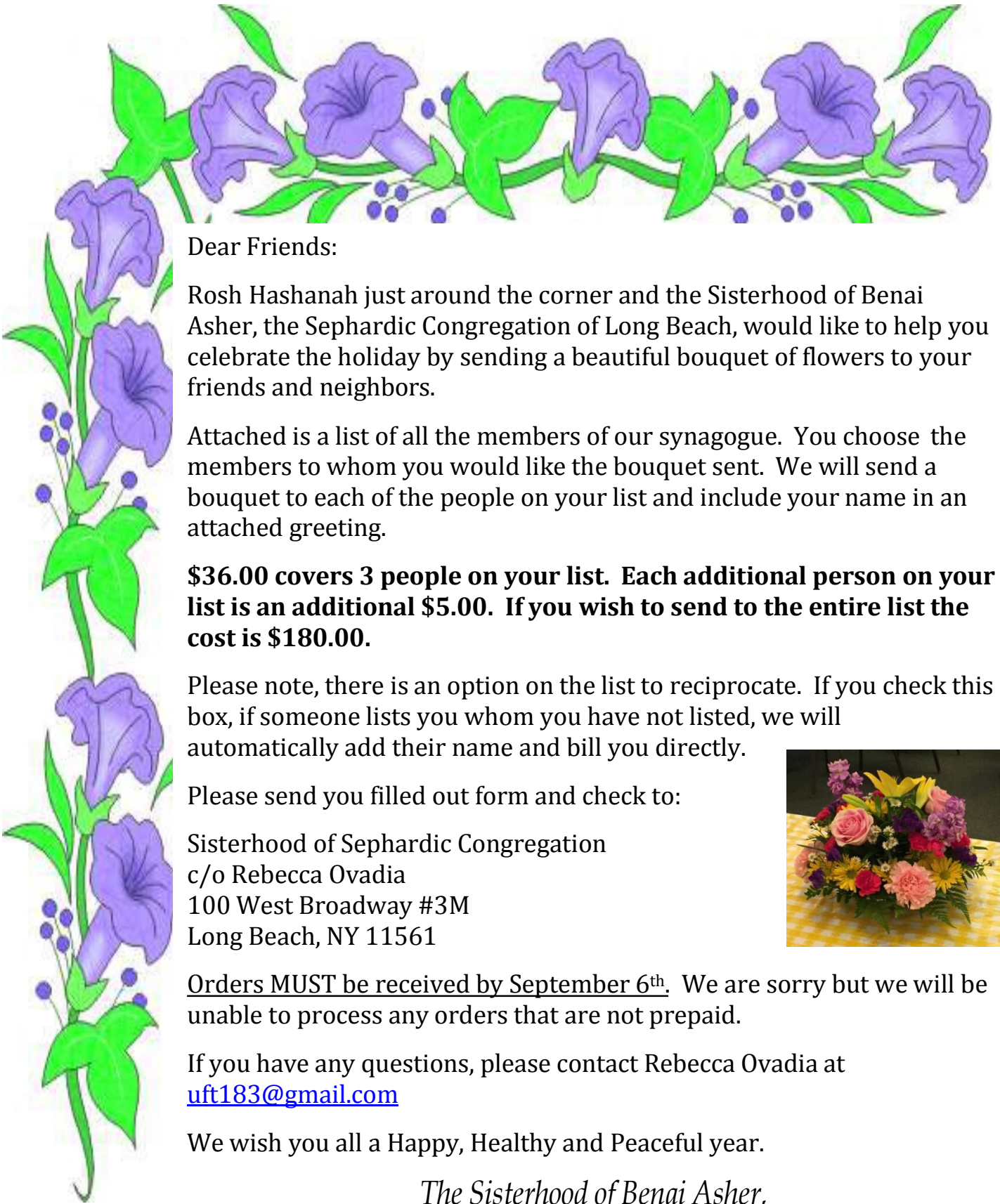
Your donation will help to **save up to THREE lives**. Our community hospitals need your help. Please share this lifesaving gift!

#### Eligibility Criteria:

- Bring ID with signature or photo.
- Minimum weight 110 lbs.
- Age 16 - 75 (16 year olds must have parental permission. Age 76 and over need doctor's note)
- Eat well (low fat) & drink fluids
- No tattoos for past 12 months

For questions concerning medical eligibility call 1-800-688-0900.  
For Additional Information, please call Sarina @ 516 322-4709

 **New York** Blood Center



Dear Friends:

Rosh Hashanah just around the corner and the Sisterhood of Benai Asher, the Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach, would like to help you celebrate the holiday by sending a beautiful bouquet of flowers to your friends and neighbors.

Attached is a list of all the members of our synagogue. You choose the members to whom you would like the bouquet sent. We will send a bouquet to each of the people on your list and include your name in an attached greeting.

**\$36.00 covers 3 people on your list. Each additional person on your list is an additional \$5.00. If you wish to send to the entire list the cost is \$180.00.**

Please note, there is an option on the list to reciprocate. If you check this box, if someone lists you whom you have not listed, we will automatically add their name and bill you directly.

Please send you filled out form and check to:

Sisterhood of Sephardic Congregation  
c/o Rebecca Ovadia  
100 West Broadway #3M  
Long Beach, NY 11561



Orders MUST be received by September 6<sup>th</sup>. We are sorry but we will be unable to process any orders that are not prepaid.

If you have any questions, please contact Rebecca Ovadia at [uft183@gmail.com](mailto:uft183@gmail.com)

We wish you all a Happy, Healthy and Peaceful year.

*The Sisterhood of Benai Asher,  
Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach*

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 Newsletter archives now at [BenaiAsher.Org](http://BenaiAsher.Org)

**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,  
 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us!  
 212-289-2100 – Mincha– The most important  
 tefilah of the day –Give us 11 minutes and we'll  
 give you the World To Come!**

### Editors Notes

Going forward, I will try to have my column ready each week on Monday for the Jewish Voice and thus can probably get the newsletter out earlier as so many of you have requested. I find that when I write on Friday its much more personal, but then the Jewish Voice readers are disappointed. Lets see how it goes. Rabbi Mansour's column was not ready, but we included an article from Halacha Yomit on the Prozbol as many requested. We will B'H include a form you can use next week. Many of you wanted more information on the proposed agreement with Iran, We included - Questions and Answers about the Iranian Nuclear Agreement, Brig.-Gen. Yossi Kuperwasser. I will be in Englewood with my new son in law to be Daniel and his wonderful family for Shabbat B'H; my first time there. If you are in Englewood, let us know. We'll hopefully give a class at some point,

### The Yefat Toar and our "Get" Problem From This Weeks Jewish Voice

What began as an exploration of the opening verses of this week's portion which discuss an Eishet Yefat To'ar – Woman Captured in War, quickly evolved into a discussion of woman's rights during divorce and the difficulties we still face of agunot – chained women and the deplorable stories of ransoming of the "get".

To better relate to the concept of Eishet Yefat To'ar - the woman captured in war, let's consider the news this past Friday. 1st Lt. Shaye Haver and Capt. Kristen Griest received their Ranger tabs, becoming the first women ever to successfully complete the U.S. Army's Ranger School at Fort Benning, Ga. — a grueling course that puts a premium on physical strength and endurance. The first question people asked was if this meant that for the first time in US history we would be sending women into combat. The answer wasn't really clear. As of January of next year, combat roles will open to women such as Griest and Haver unless there is a compelling reason to keep them out. If you ask to define compelling, nobody is answering that question which is understandable given the reluctance of many generals to even consider sending women into the battle at all.

War is a dangerous place. It's dangerous for soldiers and even more dangerous for women. Soldiers in war are often likened to animals. The words rape and pillage go hand in hand with battle. This is true throughout history and this is true today." ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape", read a number of stories this weekend coming out of the Middle East. We can only imagine the horrors a female soldier captured by ISIS would be subject to.

In ancient times, a woman caught in war became a prize to be taken or discarded, to be sold or kept. The ancient Hebrew soldier was given strict rules to follow if his passion sought to overtake him. He must bring her home, shave her head, and pare her nails. She is to remain there for 30 days mourning over her lost mother and father and only after that, if he still desires her can she become his wife. Not his concubine, nor his servant but his wife. The law is very clear bestowing upon her all the rights and status of a wife.

As a result, if he later decides that he does not want to remain married to her, he may divorce her as he would divorce a wife, and she goes from the marriage as a free citizen who can marry whomever she pleases.

If the Torah had not spoken at all, the natural assumption of the people would be that you could do with a captive whatever you desired. To the victor go the spoils, and this included sheep, cattle, vessels, gold, and captives. Captives would become slaves, and if there were a beautiful captive woman, then one could take her as a concubine or more likely as a slave or to employ as a prostitute. We must assume that was the the contemporary legal/moral-ethical climate and status quo at the time the Torah was given, We must appreciate the greatness of the Torah is coming to disabuse them of that notion and to grant the female captives certain rights unheard of in that day and age.

And as the discussion moved into these rights, I lamented on the sad state of affairs even in our community when it comes to women's rights in divorce. I have been asked to mediate on a number of occasions. I have always insisted that the Get or Jewish Divorce document not be part of negotiations. I always insisted that once the couple was separated and we were trying to work out the details, both financial and family, that the get be given prior to anything else. Recently though I was asked to assist in mediation and the husband was adamant that the giving of get is part of the negotiation. I was shocked. You left her? You want a divorce? There's no working

this out? You want to move on? Why do you insist on punishing her? I turned to other community Rabbis and those I spoke with took the side that the Get is part of the final settlement and would not back me up. This really bothered me and disappointed me. I have seen men demand six figures and more for a get from the wife's family and smaller figures are regularly paid. With the hatred and spite factors, I have seen at least one couple spend one million dollars on lawyers and court related expenses and still have neither a settlement nor a get.

One man told me that he would never give a get. He told me that holding back the get didn't prevent him from remarrying (and per Sephardic law he is correct), so why not ransom it? If his wife wanted it that bad, she would have to pay with her kids and her money. I don't think that this was what the Rabbis had in mind!

I also don't understand why every community wedding does not insist on a pre-nuptial agreement that would minimize a battle later on. Many of the Ashkenaz rabbis I know insist on the signing of this document. The Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) states that this pre-nuptial agreement is the single most effective solution to the agunah problem; and maintains a 100% success rate in preventing get-refusal in the context of a divorce following marriages where it was properly signed and notarized.

One rabbi was reluctant to use it as it names the Beth Din of America as the Beth Din to be used. I posed this question to another dear and respected rabbi who simply texted back that the form could be modified to stipulate a Beth Din of their choice. And that leaves me with another question.

We have an incredible community. But still we have this problem. Why don't we have our own form? Why don't we insist on its use? And why don't we do all we can to assist these women who are suffering terribly? Who are we afraid of?

The rabbis speak up about so many things, what happened to this one?

The Torah cautions us to treat a captive woman taken in war with respect and fairness and grants her legal rights. Why can't we grant the same respect to our mothers, daughters, sisters and wives?

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

PS ... The Beth Din of America notes that Rav Ovadia Yosef Z'SL endorsed the pre-nup agreement. I received a copy of the actual endorsement.

### The Enactment of the Prozbul

Any debt owed to someone which has been incurred by another as a loan is cancelled at the conclusion of the Shemitta year and the lender will no longer be permitted to claim repayment of such debts. If the lender nevertheless goes ahead and claims such debts once Shevi'it has passed, he has transgressed a Torah prohibition.

The Torah states (Devarim 15): "Beware that there not be a wayward thought in your heart saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release is at hand' and your eye shall be evil toward your needy brother and you will not give him; and he shall cry out against you to Hashem and you shall bear sin. You shall surely give him and your heart shall not be grieved when you give him because for this thing shall Hashem your G-d bless you in all your work and all that you put your hand to." This means that Hashem has warned us in his holy Torah that we not refrain from loaning money to the needy during the Shemitta year because we will be concerned that these debts will be lost at the conclusion of the Shemitta year. The Torah indeed speaks about this matter harshly, as is evident from the aforementioned verses.

The Mishnah (Shevi'it, Chapter 10, Mishnah 3) states that when Hillel the Elder saw that wealthy people refrained from loaning money to the needy during the Shemitta year and were thus transgressing the Torah prohibition of "Beware that there not be a wayward thought in your heart saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release is at hand' and your eye shall be evil toward your needy brother," he enacted the "Prozbul" so that debts would not be cancelled and people would once again loan money to one another (we shall soon explain what a Prozbul is). A Prozbul is nevertheless only beneficial nowadays when the cancellation of debts by Shevi'it is merely a rabbinic enactment and not by Torah law; however, during the times when the cancellation of debts by Shevi'it applied by virtue of Torah law, the Prozbul was not beneficial.

The idea behind the Prozbul is as follows: The Mishnah (Shevi'it, Chapter 10, Mishnah 2) states that debts one transfers to a Bet Din are not cancelled by Shevi'it. For instance, if one comes before a Bet Din and gives them all of the contracts written by all of those who owe him money in order for the Bet Din to collect these debts for him (as is done when the borrower does not wish to repay the debt and the lender turns to a legal authority in order to exact the

money from the borrower), such debts transferred to Bet Din in order to be collected by them are not cancelled by Shevi'it. Indeed, our Sages in the Sifri deduce this from the verse "And that which you have of your brother shall your hand release," that only a debt between two individuals is cancelled by Shevi'it; however, debts which have already been transferred to a Bet Din and the Bet Din subsequently claims repayment of the debt from the borrower are not subject to cancellation by Shevi'it.

In a similar manner, Hillel the Elder enacted that although every individual does not physically go to the Bet Din and transfer one's debts to them in order for them to collect them, nevertheless, every individual can write (or fill out) a contract whereby one transfers all of his debts to rabbinical judges in order for the individual to be able to collect them whenever he wishes. Two valid witnesses then sign on the Prozbul contract in order to validate it. This is indeed customary in any place where there is a large concentration of Torah observant Jews that rabbis and caretakers of synagogues make sure to afford all of their congregants with the opportunity to fill out a kosher Prozbul form in order that their debts not be cancelled by Shevi'it.

The meaning of the word "Prozbul" is composed of two Aramaic words: "Proz" meaning an enactment and "Bul" meaning for the wealthy. This means that the Prozbul is a great enactment for the wealthy in that they continue loaning money to the wealthy and thus not transgress a Torah prohibition.

The only kind of Prozbul that should be used is one which lists the names of three prominent Dayanim (rabbinical judges) who are acting judges in the city where they reside and enforce their judgments there. When Maran zt"l served as a Dayan (in the year 5719/1959), the Dayanim listed in the Prozbul were Hageonim Harav Ovadia Yosef, Harav Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg, and Harav Yosef Kapach. In the year 5750 (1990), Maran zt"l wrote a Prozbul in his own handwriting and recorded that he had transferred his debts to the Dayanim, Hageonim Harav Betzalel Zolty, Harav Mordechai Eliyahu, and Harav Yosef Kapach. This was indeed the custom for generations in that the most prestigious Dayanim of the city are those who appear in the text of the Prozbul and this is done with their consent so that people may transfer all of their debts to them via their signed Prozbul contracts.

Nevertheless, one may use a Prozbul which lists the names of prominent Dayanim even if they are judges in a different city and even if they know nothing of the fact that one is transferring one's debts to them. For

this reason, those residing in the United States may certainly fill out Prozbul contracts listing a Bet Din of prestigious Dayanim in Jerusalem or elsewhere, for one need not physically appear before the Bet Din and the Dayanim need not know of this at all, as we have explained. Merely reading the appropriate text from the Prozbul in front of witnesses and having the Prozbul contract signed by those witness gives it full halachic validity.

Next week we will include a copy B'H for you with more information.

### **Questions and Answers about the Iranian Nuclear Agreement** **Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser**

*Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser is Director of the Project on the Regional Implications of the Syrian Civil War at the Jerusalem Center. He was formerly Director General of the Israel Ministry of Strategic Affairs and head of the Research and Analysis and Production Division of IDF Military Intelligence*

#### **Is it a good deal?**

Even by the criteria that the Americans declared at the start of the talks and during them, it is a bad deal. The question, however, is tautological since, for the U.S. Administration any deal it accepts is a good deal by definition, since otherwise it would not have signed on it.

#### **Was a better deal possible? Is it still possible to achieve a better deal?**

Here the answer is subjective. One thing, however, is clear: the United States conducted the talks as if a deal had to be reached no matter what. It never challenged or threatened to upset the applecart, and an Iranian defector who took part in the talks said the U.S. team's main concern was to enable the Iranian team to flaunt the deal as an achievement. Such an approach to the talks accompanied the Administration's aspirations to prove that all disputes can be settled by dialogue and negotiations and its goal of strengthening the realist elements among the Middle East's radical camp.

Actually, in the run-up to the talks, the realist radical personalities among the Iranian leadership, particularly Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, thought that in light of the sanctions' heavy pressures more substantial concessions were in order. In opposition, the Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei thought the Americans could be bent to Iran's will. The United States ignored the realists' position and regarded Khamenei's as the decisive one.

A much better deal could have been attained by conducting the talks appropriately. It still can be



attained by rejecting the current one and adopting new U.S. sanctions.

**Would a military operation have achieved a delay more significant than the delay that the agreement provides?**

The logic behind the deal is a logic of containment. According to this logic, it is impossible to prevent Iran's nuclearization and hence the question is how to delay it as much as possible. Is this view justified? A successful military operation would probably delay Iran's nuclearization for a much longer time, and so far the threat of a credible military option is what has deterred Iran from racing to the bomb. Under the present conditions, a credible threat of a military option will continue to prevent Iran from attempting a breakout. But if Iran does attempt to breakout and military force is used effectively, then from Iran's standpoint there would be no point in rehabilitating the project since it would know that a decision to thwart its nuclear ambitions had already been taken once.

**What weight should be assigned to the deal's problematic ramifications for Israeli security? Is it possible to compensate Israel for the increased threat?**

President Obama himself claims that he can understand those who criticize the deal out of their concern for Israel, and that he also understands the concerns of Israel itself given the danger Iran poses from its standpoint.

At the same time, in his view none of this justifies voting against the deal, and Israel can be compensated for the increased dangers with weaponry and by boosting U.S. military aid and commitment to its security. In this context, Obama again stresses that he is the U.S. president who has bolstered military aid to Israel more than any of his predecessors.

And yet, if concern for Israel validates criticism of the deal, should it not also, from Obama's standpoint, validate opposition to it? Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, but it is also a Western liberal democracy and an important component of the array of democracies fighting to defend the existing world order and enlightened values against the assault of Islamic radicalism, a category that includes Iran. The assigning of secondary priority to Israel's needs reflects the weakness of the liberal-democratic camp as a whole. Moreover, no compensation can suffice for paving the way to a nuclear arsenal for a country that constantly reiterates its commitment to Israel's destruction.

**What will happen if the deal is not approved?**

Obama and his supporters claim that nonapproval of the deal will speed up Iran's march toward the bomb and hence lead inevitably to a war to stop Iran from

going nuclear. The assertion is, however, devoid of logic.

On the one hand, if the deal is voted down in Congress Iran will still have an incentive to abide by the spirit of the deal since Iran repeatedly declares that it has no interest in nuclear weapons, and the deal's implementation will likely lead to the lifting of at least Russian and Chinese sanctions and possibly those of other countries.

On the other hand, Iran will continue to fear that racing to the bomb now will lead to a military operation at a time when the threshold is still too distant and it does not have the capability to defend itself. It's worth remembering that what brought Iran to the negotiating table in the first place were the sanctions and what stopped it from racing to the bomb was its fear of being attacked, with Iran well aware of its limited ability to deal with the consequences. Ramping up the U.S. sanctions would probably cause Iran to show greater moderation and augmenting the credible threat to use force if necessary would probably keep deterring Iran from attempting a breakout. In the absence of these measures, it may be that President Obama is right. It should also be borne in mind that ultimately Europe, Japan, and other major countries, and perhaps even China and Russia, will probably prefer economic ties with the United States to ties with Iran; hence it is not clear to what extent the sanctions regime will actually collapse. So far, all of the Administration's prophecies of doom whenever measures were taken against Iran have turned out to be false prophecies. It is also worth recalling that the U.S. Administration strongly opposed the oil and financial sanctions and began to impose them only when, under pressure from Europe and Congress, it had no choice.

**Can one rely on intelligence to detect Iranian cheating?**

The confidence the Administration demonstrates on this issue is curious, and it is not clear what it is based on. In fact, so far the record of American intelligence when it comes to revealing foreign nuclear programs, including those of Iran, is far from impressive (one thinks of North Korea, Syria, Iraq, India, Pakistan). Such programs are pursued by the rogue nation under a special cloak of secrecy, and it is clear that Iran, too, keeps getting better at the game. Even if secret activity is revealed, the procedure for visiting a site requires first presenting the information to Iran – something intelligence agencies would likely not be eager to do.

## Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading

### Ki Teseh - 53 mitsvot that largely deal with relationships and sensitivity towards others

- 1- A soldier who desires a women in war, the hated wife, the wayward son
- 2- Various mitsvot including returning a lost item and sending away the mother bird
- 3- Forbidden mixtures, cases of forbidden relations
- 4- Holiness of the jewish camp, prostitution, interest, keeping vows
- 5- Laws of gitin (divorce)
- 6- Mitsvot largely dealing with what lenders can take as collateral
- 7- Various mitsvot including paying workers on time, sensitivity toward the convert and orphan, leket shicheha pe'ah, yibum and halitsah, honesty in business, remembering Amalek.

### EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

#### "Don't take the mother with the children."

The Torah commands us that if we see a bird's nest, do not take the mother with the children. Send the mother bird away first and then take the children. One of the explanations given for this misvah is that it's the mother bird's compromised position of being within arm's reach, due to her hovering over her children, that makes it possible for someone to take her. The Torah will not allow us to take advantage of the vulnerability which comes about through her self-sacrifice for her children.

Rabbi Dovid Kaplan tells an amazing true story of a mother. It was tough having a mother who only had one eye. Jeff was embarrassed when his friends would come over and he was embarrassed to be seen with his mom in public. True, she had a glass eye where her original one had been, but after a few minutes of looking at her, one could tell the eye wasn't real. Even after Jeff got married he still cringed whenever anyone new met his mother. Eventually, his mother died at the ripe old age of eighty-eight.

During the shiva, the family was reading some of the letters and notes she left behind. One of them was addressed directly to Jeff. "To my loving son, Jeff. I know I was a source of embarrassment to you and I always felt bad. Had I lost my eye in an accident, I wouldn't have felt guilty, as it wouldn't have been my fault. But you see, my not having an eye was entirely my fault. When you were born, you were missing an eye. The only way you would be able to have a functioning eye was if a human eye would be transplanted into you immediately, which would then give it a chance to grow as an actual part

of your body. I gladly allowed the doctor to remove one of my eyes so that you wouldn't have to suffer. I'm so sorry for causing you all that embarrassment. With all my love, Mom."

Children have no idea how much parents sacrifice for them. Jeff finally got it. I think he was far more embarrassed after she died than while she was alive. Rabbi Reuven Semah

#### "Our son is rebellious; he does not heed our voice." (Debarim 21:20)

Although the conditions necessary to punish a wayward and rebellious son with the appropriate punishment are difficult to come by, and indeed some say it never happened, we can learn some important lessons from this perashah. The Torah says that the parents say, "This is our son and he doesn't listen to our voice," emphasizing that the parents are united in their upbringing of their child and in the ultimate punishment. Then, they are entitled to bring him to bet din, since they have done the best they could, the fault being the son's.

This teaches us how important it is for both parents to be together in raising a child. If he hears two voices, rather than "our voice," he will get mixed messages and will quickly learn to manipulate one against the other to get his own way. Many times, parents might not agree on a certain point regarding their child, be it about permissiveness or about punishment, etc. They should discuss it between themselves first and come out with one voice to the child. Then, even if the child knows it's really the wish of one parent and not the other, he sees a unified front and won't be able to "divide and conquer." This is a well known rule which we may be very aware of, but if we take the time and energy to implement it on a regular basis, we will see more success in raising fine children. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

#### Rabbi Wein GRATITUDE

The month of Elul brings forth many different emotions, thoughts and insights. It is, after all, meant to be a month of introspection and serious self-analysis. And, one of the values that this month is meant to evoke in our minds and thoughts is that of gratitude. The rabbis of the Talmud saw gratitude as being one of the most basic values of Judaism.

Since nothing in life is perfect and we are constantly beset by annoyances, frustrations, dashed hopes and unending pressures, we naturally tend to overlook the positive and to dwell instead on life's negatives. In so doing, we become guilty of ingratitude and narcissistic selfishness.

Again, the rabbis of the Talmud stated that as long as one is alive there is no room for complaints and dissatisfaction. In that statement they meant to inform us that one must always see the large picture, the broad perspective of human life and not concentrate only upon the details that so often confound us.

I knew a person that tragically lost sight in one eye. Whenever I spoke to him he reminded me how grateful he was that he still had good sight in his other eye. I always marveled at him for that attitude, for most of us would find it difficult not to dwell upon the sad fact that one of our eyes no longer functioned properly.

Unless one has a sense of gratitude for what one has, one will always feel cheated and frustrated by what one does not have. And since all of us, at one time or another, always feel that we are lacking something, life takes on a very dim and dark hue. The old adage to count one's blessings, like most old adages, has a great deal of wisdom and truth to it.

The Jewish view of the human relationship with the Almighty is based on this emotion of gratitude. The experience of life is so precious, allowing for the development and expansion of our souls, that it is the supreme gift that can be granted to us. And that gift is given to us ultimately by our Creator.

The Jewish prayer book is filled with expressions of gratitude and feeling directed toward Heaven. The opening thoughts and words upon awakening in the morning acknowledge gratitude that one is still alive and that the Lord, so to speak, has renewed one's life for another day.

When we are young we have a tendency to accept life as a given. However, as we age and as we witness our generation slowly but inexorably departing this world, we no longer take being alive for granted. It is at this point in one's human existence that gratitude becomes a vital factor in one's thought processes and personality.

Elul is the closing month of the year. Because of our realization that it marks the end of something, we are able to devote ourselves to serious thought and sometimes painful self-analysis. Youth always faces forward while the old folks have the ability to look backwards as well and to place the events of their lives into a broader perspective and a more meaningful picture.

The relationship to teachers, parents, mentors, employers, even government itself, is based almost

completely on this value of gratitude. Our parents gave us life and raised us. We may remember their all too natural human failings, but in the main, this in no way diminishes the gifts that they gave us in bringing us into this world.

The Torah emphasizes this point time and again, in repeating the sacred commandment of honoring and caring for one's parents. It is seen as being a form of honoring and expressing gratitude to the Creator Himself. The same idea applies to our teachers and mentors who gave us an education, knowledge and in many cases, inspiration and direction. While the perfect teacher does not exist, as all human beings have weaknesses and failings, those people taught us the basic tools of intelligent life and are to be remembered with gratitude.

The great Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik would stand to honor his first grade teacher who taught him the Hebrew alphabet, even when Rabbi Chaim was world-famous for his genius, knowledge and depth of Talmudic analysis. The tendency in life is to often overlook those who may have helped us the most. We give very little thought to our first-grade teacher and many of us are unable even to recall the name of that person. Nevertheless, the month of Elul evokes within me these types of memories and the feelings of gratitude that accompany this process of thought.

#### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks To the Third and Fourth Generations**

There is, on the face of it, a fundamental contradiction in the Torah. On the one hand we hear, in the passage known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, the following words:

The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness and truth ... Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." (Ex. 34: 7)

The implication is clear. Children suffer for the sins of their parents. On the other hand we read in this week's parsha:

Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin. (Deut 24: 16)

The book of Kings records a historic event when this principle proved decisive. "When Amaziah was well established as king, he executed the officials who had assassinated his father. However, he did not kill

the children of the assassins, for he obeyed the command of the Lord as written by Moses in the Book of the Law: 'Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.'" (2 Kings 14: 5-6).

There is an obvious resolution. The first statement refers to Divine justice, "at the hands of heaven." The second, in Deuteronomy, refers to human justice as administered in a court of law. How can mere mortals decide the extent to which one person's crime was induced by the influence of others? Clearly the judicial process must limit itself to the observable facts. The person who committed the crime is guilty. Those who may have shaped his character are not.

Yet the matter is not so simple, because we find Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the two great prophets of exile in the sixth century BCE, restating the principle of individual responsibility in strong and strikingly similar ways. Jeremiah says:

In those days people will no longer say, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge. (Jer. 31: 29-30)

Ezekiel says:

The word of the Lord came to me: "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: "'The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die. (Ezekiel 18: 1-4)

Here the prophets were not speaking about judicial procedures and legal responsibility. They are talking about Divine judgment and justice. They were giving the people hope at one of the lowest points in Jewish history: the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of the First Temple. The people, sitting and weeping by the waters of Babylon, might have given up hope altogether. They were being judged for the failings of their ancestors that had brought the nation to this desperate plight, and their exile seemed to stretch endlessly into the future. Ezekiel, in his vision of the valley of dry bones, hears God reporting that the people were saying, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost." He and Jeremiah were counselling against despair. The people's future was in their own hands. If they returned to God, God would return to

them and bring them back to their land. The guilt of previous generations would not be attached to them.

But if this was so, then the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel really do conflict with the idea that God punishes sins to the third and fourth generation. Recognizing this, the Talmud makes a remarkable statement:

Said R. Jose b. Hanina: Our Master Moses pronounced four [adverse] sentences on Israel, but four prophets came and revoked them ...Moses said, The Lord ... punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." Ezekiel came and declared, "The one who sins is the one who will die." [1]

In general the sages rejected the idea that children could be punished, even at the hands of heaven, for the sins of their parents. As a result, they systematically re-interpreted every passage that gave the opposite impression, that children were indeed being punished for their parents' sins. Their general position was this:

Are not children then to be put to death for the sins committed by their parents? Is it not written, "Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children?" – There the reference is to children who follow in their parents footsteps (literally "seize their parents' deeds in their hands," i.e. commit the same sins themselves). [2]

Specifically, they explained biblical episodes in which children were punished along with their parents, by saying that in these cases the children "had the power to protest/prevent their parents from sinning, but they failed to do so." As Maimonides says, whoever has the power of preventing someone from committing a sin but does not do so, he is seized (i.e. punished, held responsible) for that sin. [3]

Did, then, the idea of individual responsibility come late to Judaism, as some scholars argue? This is highly unlikely. During the rebellion of Korach, when God threatened to destroy the people, Moses said, "Shall one man sin and will You be angry with the whole congregation?" (Num. 16: 22). When people began dying after David had sinned by instituting a census, he prayed to God: "I have sinned. I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family." The principle of individual responsibility is basic to Judaism, as it was to other cultures in the ancient Near East. [4]

Rather, what is at stake is the deep understanding of

the scope of responsibility we bear if we take seriously our roles as parents, neighbours, townspeople, citizens and children of the covenant. Judicially, only the criminal is responsible for his crime. But, implies the Torah, we are also our brother's keeper. We share collective responsibility for the moral and spiritual health of society. "All Israel," said the sages, "are responsible for one another." Legal responsibility is one thing, and relatively easy to define. But moral responsibility is something altogether larger, if necessarily more vague. "Let a person not say, 'I have not sinned, and if someone else commits a sin, that is a matter between him and God.' This is contrary to the Torah," writes Maimonides in the Sefer ha-Mitzvot.[5]

This is particularly so when it comes to the relationship between parents and children. Abraham was chosen, says the Torah, solely so that "he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." The duty of parents to teach their children is fundamental to Judaism. It appears in both the first two paragraphs of the Shema, as well as the various passages cited in the "Four sons" section of the Haggadah. Maimonides counts as one of the gravest of all sins – so serious that God does not give us an opportunity to repent – "one who sees his son falling into bad ways and does not stop him." The reason, he says, is that "since his son is under his authority, had he stopped him the son would have desisted." Therefore it is accounted to the father as if he had actively caused his son to sin.[6]

If so, then we begin to hear the challenging truth in the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. To be sure, we are not legally responsible for the sins of either our parents or our children. But in a deeper, more amorphous sense, what we do and how we live do have an effect on the future to the third and fourth generation.

Rarely has that effect been more devastatingly described than in recent books by two of America's most insightful social critics: Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute, and Robert Putnam of Harvard. Notwithstanding their vastly different approaches to politics, Murray in *Coming Apart* and Putnam in *Our Kids* have issued essentially the same prophetic warning of a social catastrophe in the making. For Putnam, "the American dream" is "in crisis". For Murray, the division of the United States into two classes with ever decreasing mobility between them "will end what has made America America."

Their argument is roughly this, that at a certain point,

in the late 1950s or early 1960s, a whole series of institutions and moral codes began to dissolve. Marriage was devalued. Families began to fracture. More and more children grew up without stable association with their biological parents. New forms of child poverty began to appear, as well as social dysfunctions such as drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancies and crime and unemployment in low-income areas. Over time, an upper class pulled back from the brink, and is now intensively preparing its children for high achievement, while on the other side of the tracks children are growing up with little hope for educational, social and occupational success. The American dream of opportunity for all is wearing thin.

What makes this development so tragic is that for a moment people forgot the biblical truth that what we do does not affect us alone. It will affect our children to the third and fourth generation. Even the greatest libertarian of modern times, John Stuart Mill, was emphatic on the responsibilities of parenthood. He wrote: "The fact itself, of causing the existence of a human being, is one of the most responsible actions in the range of human life. To undertake this responsibility—to bestow a life which may be either a curse or a blessing—unless the being on whom it is to be bestowed will have at least the ordinary chances of a desirable existence, is a crime against that being."

If we fail to honour our responsibilities as parents, then though no law will hold us responsible, society's children will pay the price. They will suffer because of our sins.

[1] Makkot 24b.

[2] Berakhot 7a, Sanhedrin 27b.

[3] Hilkhos Deot 6: 7.

[4] See Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, New York, Schocken, 1972, 329-333.

[5] Sefer ha-Mitzvot, positive command 205.

[6] Hilkhos Teshuvah 4: 1. The reference is of course to a son under the age of thirteen.