

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAET'HANAN

AUGUST 4, 2012 16 AB 5772

HATARAT NEDARIM- SATURDAY NIGHT!

Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach Schedule and Announcements

Friday Night: Candles: 7:48 PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM

Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM –Please say Shemah at home by 8:40 AM

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

11:30 - 12:00 Rethinking Your Judaism "Teenage Prayer Study Group" with Leah. Delicious Fruit Smoothies, iTunes card giveaway (after Shabbat), and open forum discussion, upstairs in the Rabbi's study.

KIDDUSH SPONSORS:

- * Jack and Patti Azizo in memory of Jack's sister Lena Azizo Cymbrowitz (Rachel bat Latifah)
- * Leon and Karen Sutton in memory of Leon's father Mordechai ben Avraham
- * Ernie Davidson, Leon and Karen Sutton and Vicki Unger in memory of Jeffrey Oberman

4:30 - 5:00 Learn to Read from the Torah with Rabbi Yosef - nusach Yerushalmi - Men and Boys -all ages invited.

5:00 - Shabbat Afternoon Kids Program with Rabbi Yosef and Leah; Ice Cream, Stories, Basketball, Hoolahoop, Parsha Quiz, Tefillot, Raffles and Fun! Supervised play during Seudat Shelishit.

Pirkei Avot with Rabbi Aharon at 6:20 PM –followed by Minha: 7:00 PM –

Seudah Shelishi and a Class 7:40 – with David –Sponsored by George and Sophia Davydov's celebration on the birth of their beautiful granddaughter Rinnah. Mazel tov to the proud parents, Lev and Lubov Elgudin.

Teen Seudat Shlishit upstairs in the Rabbi's study with Rabbi Colish

Evening Service (Arbith): 8:40 PM - Shabbat Ends: 8:47PM followed by Hatarat Nedarim – please join us

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

NEW MINCHA AND ARBIT SUNDAY – 7:45 PM – Lets see if we can make a minyan each Sunday for the Summer

ALSO MONDAY at 7:45 PM preceding Rabbi Yanai and Rabbi Colish's classes

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Daily 6:30 AM class – Shelah Hakadosh on the Perasha

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 8PM Monday night

Hebrew Reading Crash Course – 8-9 PM and continuing Monday Nights throughout the Summer. Beginner and intermediate levels welcome! We would like to pray Mincha and Arbit first on Monday nights. 7:45PM

Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30: Basar BeChalav – With Michael and David –

Ladies Shabbat Class at the home of Tina Lemberger – each Shabbat at 4:45

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

Reserve the date - Scholar in residence - We are pleased to have Rabbi Avraham Priel and his family join us as a scholar in residence, Aug 18, 2012. Rabbi Priel is a well known rabbi from the Sephardic Community, formally of the Sephardic Services at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, the Rabbi is the founder and director of Midrash Yosef Shalom. We will be having a Friday night dinner at the shul where everyone can meet Rabbi Priel and his family in an intimate setting. Rabbi Priel will speak both on Friday night and on Shabbat day after musuf.

To RSVP for the dinner please email Hindy Mizrahi hmizny@gmail.com or Patti Azizo pattif@netscape.com or call Patti 608-2320. Cost for the dinner: Children 3 and under free Children ages 4-10 \$10 Ages 11 and up \$18

Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach Schedule and Announcements

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

The Kosher Kitchen Class has been postponed until after the holidays. It's not too late to sign up! Please speak to Rabbi Yosef for more details.

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

Finally as next Shabbat both Rabbi Colish and Rabbi David will be away, we have the pleasure of hosting Rabbi Dr. Meyer Abittan who will give both the Derasha and the Seudah Shelishi Class.

please reply to ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

Follow us on twitter @BenaiAsher for a daily dose of Torah, Israel or something of interest
 Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

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

VOTING GIVES US THE POWER

1. To change and improve our government officials and their policies.

It the easiest way to improve out government policies, no revolution is required to change and improve national policies.

We can vote for the candidates that support our goals, on local, state and national levels.

We can vote to protect Israel, and for candidates who will protect us from Anti-Semitism.

We can vote for candidates who will work best to fix our economy.

2. To obtain the government services our community needs, including:

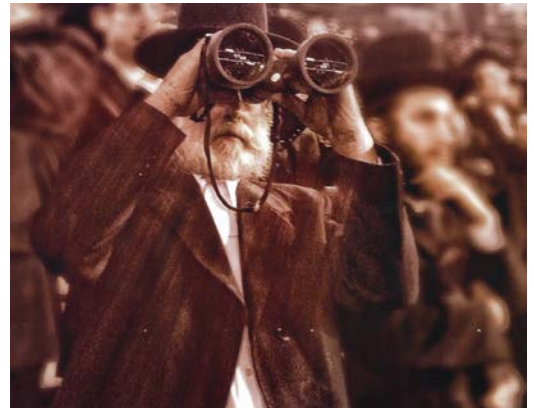
Improved schooling for our children
 Benefits for our elderly
 Better delivery of government services: Police, fire-rescue, hospitals, streets, street-lighting and safety, courts, public transportation,

3 You can register---mailing forms to address furnished on form for New York State-when you are 17 years old. Form will be delivered to Board of Elections when you are 18 an can actually vote.

Dear Friends ... It is important that we vote and that our families vote. Our community has a very low percentage of voters. Please make sure everyone in your household is registered. If you will be traveling or have children away at school, please fill out the absentee ballot form. Its your duty and responsibility.

Editors Notes

On Motsei Shabbat – Saturday Night, January 30, 1993, having returned from Europe the Thursday prior, I met my cousins Morris and David Sutton and my brother Victor at Kennedy Airport and we were off to Los Angeles. I would spend the week on the West Coast, but my brother and cousins would return to New York in 24 hours. The next day was Superbowl Sunday and Dallas



was scheduled to play against the Buffalo Bills in the Rose Bowl at Pasadena.

On the morning of the game, we were offered an exorbitant amount of money for our tickets. (Which by the way we never paid for as they were a gift from one of our clients who happened to also own an NFL team – lots of perks in the 80s going into the early 90s.) Since I needed to be in LA anyway, I would have taken the money and watched on the big screens set up all over the hotel lounge. David and Victor, both die hard Dallas fans could not be bought. So along with 98,374 other people and a few thousand workers, and media members, we took the freeway to Pasadena.

Seating at the Rose Bowl in those days (and maybe still today) was on flat backless benches. We

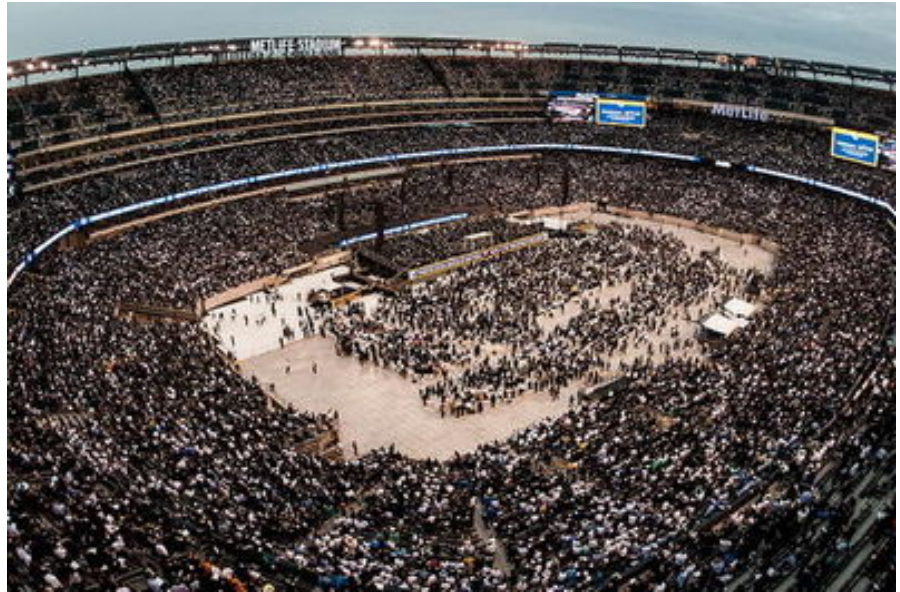
were given these souvenir padded seats to place over the hard stretches of wood. One could not have been less comfortable. At least the weather was nice.

Buffalo started out strong and I was worried that David Sutton would have a heart attack. He would get up, pace back into stadium and return. But then a wave of turnovers began and Dallas walked away with an easy victory. When checking the attendance, I noticed that Michael Jackson was the halftime performer although I have no recall of the halftime show.

I remember the trek among the crowds to the car and the crazy traffic from the stadium and thinking that we should have taken the cash! It was simply too many people for me. From that point forward, I don't think I attended more than one or two more football games. Football was better to watch on TV.

On Wednesday night, Jews throughout the world celebrated the Siyum HaShas – the 12th completion of the Talmud in a cycle established by Rabbi Meir Shapira, during the first General Assembly of Agudath Yisrael in Lublin, Poland, 1923. Over a seven and a half year cycle, participants complete the entire Talmud, page by page, along with their fellow Jews throughout the world.

I recall about 15 years ago when a cycle was beginning and we had been through the first tractate of Berachot and were halfway through the tractate of Shabbat, Rabbi Abittan spoke out against the idea. He thought that going through the Talmud so quickly, left us with nothing. I told him a story. I was on line for a movie the Saturday night prior and I saw Yehuda Isaacs who also attended



the Rabbi's classes. Yehuda asked me a question about that Shabbat's daf. Within seconds a half dozen other guys left their wives on line and we were standing aside and we spent the next 20 minutes discussing the daf. I shared with the Rabbi that although it may go in one ear and out the other, the study of the daf gave us a common language shared by Jews throughout the world. Wherever one traveled, one could find a daf yomi class and know that he could join (except where I walked in and they were learning in Yiddish) and be part of a class of people he had never met before. The Rabbi began learning the daf. For him it was a review, still where we may have put in 40 minutes a day, he put in hours. And the common language brought him closer to his students no matter what we studied, we were able to relate something to that day's daf.

So everyone expected that I would be at Giant Stadium or Met Life Stadium as they now call it on Wednesday night. Rav Yaakov Hillel mentioned that with 90,000 Jews together one could have a taste of what it was like at Mount Sinai. I planned to go. Picked out my tickets, but that week I decided not to. More than

anything it was a mild case of demophobia, a fear of crowds when we get close to the 100,000 mark. I kept imagining 100,000 people, most of whom who had never been to Giant Stadium, most of whom would arrive by car, most of whom who would have no idea where they were going. Some coming with wives or kids and splitting up between the men's side and the ladies side and then trying to find each other after. So when I learned that it would be streamed live, I decided to be a spectator rather than a participant. What's interesting is the one thing I would have liked to do, being part of 100,000 people saying arbi together really didn't happen as there were many break away minyans.

I attended a class that night and then watched the live stream. My younger children Moses and Mariyah sat with me a bit and asked what was happening. I asked Moses how long it would take him to finish a daf – a two sided folio of the Talmud based on his past studying. He told me about a month. When we talked about trying to finish a page, each and every day for a full seven a half years and not being able to skip even one page, Mariyah

mentioned that it takes commitment and consistency.

Commitment and consistency, two things we all could probably use a great deal more of in our lives.

My friend Jack Doueck sent a note which showed a recent email conversation. The note mentions how interesting it is that the Siyum HaShas which in the epitome of consistency in learning takes place in the same time frame as the Olympics the epitome of consistency in physical training. (Which brings to mind what we say at each Siyum, they struggle and we struggle, they make an effort and we make an effort).

When interviewed Michael Phelps was asked, and confirmed that he had trained EVERY DAY FOR 5 CONSECUTIVE YEARS leading into the 2008 Olympics. We all know that the 8 gold medals a record that he earned in 2008 combined with those he earned during the training period which included the 04 Olympics are simply an unfathomable testament to the benefits of unwavering consistency.

He then took 6 months off and admitted how difficult it has been to get back to his current swimming form. And although he now has earned more medals than any other Olympic Athlete, the time off certainly hurt him.

Jack commented that this reminded him of the story of Al Oerter. He has the record for the most gold medals in consecutive Olympics - 4 in a row. That means he was the BEST in the world for 16 years straight. They asked him once in an interview how he kept it up. He showed them a chart in his bedroom with 1460 boxes. Each box had a check mark in it.

He said: "Look, you see, there are 1460 days in 4 years (the time between Olympics). I just Don't Go To Sleep that day unless I can check the box and I don't allow myself to check the box unless I work out that day and EXCEED the day before in some way."

Working out 1460 days, every day - from the close of one Olympics, to the start of another, made him the best in the world at discus for 16 years. That's the ENORMOUS power of consistency.

The reward for consistency is gold medals for athletes. The reward for consistency in Torah is often much more.

Let me leave you with a story I saw in the OU newsletter told by Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss, the Rav of the Agudat Israel of Staten Island, a noted lecturer, and author of five books. Twenty two years ago, when Rabbi Weiss's daughter Chani was six years old, she ate tainted chopped meat, contracted a virus, and was admitted to the Intensive Care unit at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. The doctors put her on temporary dialysis and provided her with a blood transfusion.

The rabbi and his wife stayed with Chani around the clock. The only time Rabbi Weiss left his daughter was when he gave the daf yomi shiur in Boro Park. Despite his exhaustion and worry, he would sit in the ICU, prepare the daf, and make the trip. After five and a half weeks, the virus left her body.

"We would always say that in the great zechut (reward) of the daf hayomi she would get better," remembers Rabbi Weiss. "A year later we made a seudat hodaah (festive meal to give thanks to G-d) and I shared this amazing gematria (system of assigning

numerical value to words): the name Chana Weiss is exactly the same numerical value as the words daf hayomi.

Rabbi Weiss would say, "that is the reward in a nutshell for bringing daf hayomi in your life. It's the best health insurance for oneself and one's loved ones."

Today the ability to be part of Daf Yomi is at everyone fingertips. From Artscroll to classes in every town, from on-line sources including but not limited to www.dafyomi.co.il, www.dailygemara.com, www.dafyomi.org, www.e-daf.com, ouradio.org/daf, www.yutorah.org/daf.cfm, and for those that simply want to follow along without studying text, a daily synopsis and highlight can be emailed to you daily from www.dafdigest.org.

Should I have gone to the celebration? Probably! But although I was not part of the 90,000 in the stands, the miracle of streaming made me along with 250,000 others around the world part of the greatest celebration of Torah in quite a while. But unlike Michael Phelps record for medals which may stand for some time, we expect in 7 ½ years to have a celebration that will make this year's look small.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st & 2nd Aliyot: Moshe beseeched Hashem to enter the Land. However, he seemingly blamed the nation when his request was turned down. Moshe explained the foundation of our divine mission, which will be recognized by the other nations. Moshe stressed allegiance to

Hashem and the consequences to ourselves and our children if we do not keep the law.

3rd & 4th Aliyot: Moshe designated the Cities of Refuge, and reviewed the entire experience of Revelation.

4th, 5th & 6th Aliyot: Moshe stressed the reaction of the nation after the giving of the Torah, and forewarned them not to deviate from the Torah, either to the right or to the left. The first paragraph of Shema is recorded. (6:10-15) Moshe warned the people about the dangers of prosperity, and directed them to keep the commandments and remember the Exodus. Moshe forewarned them about the dangers of assimilation and told them to always remember that they are the Chosen People.

Isaiah 40:1 - 40:26 - This week's Haftorah begins the 7 Haftorah of Consolation selected from the Navi Yishayah. In the aftermath of Tisha B'Av and the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, Hashem embraces his children enveloping them in hope and love. It captures the imagery and emotion of a loving parent who after punishing a wayward child picks up the child and, with tears and hugs, kisses away the pain of distance and separation.

Yishayah paints a picture of the Creator's majesty in nature and history. Prophesying 190 years before the Churban, he described the triumphant resurrection of Tzion and Yerushalayim. The exiled will have returned and the very hills of Jerusalem will testify to the eternity of Hashem and his chosen people. Our ultimate redemption will be far more than a return to Land and nationalism. It will herald the dawning of our greatest accomplishment as we ascend to our rightful place among the nations.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"And He repays those who hate Him to his face." (Debarim 7:10)

A young man recently approached his Rabbi with the following question. During an upcoming business trip he would be staying for a day in an area without a minyan. Is he obligated to take a taxi – at a very considerable expense – and travel a long distance to pray with a minyan? Based on the specific details of the case, the Rabbi informed him that halachically he was not obligated to.

"However," the Rabbi added, "you should know that the Chatam Sofer teaches that the reward that a person receives for following a misvah correlates to how much the misvah is worth in his own eyes. Therefore, a person who shows that, when necessary, he is willing to spend a large amount of money and time in order to pray with a minyan will receive a far greater reward for all the other times he prays with a minyan as well."

This concept is found at the end of our perashah where the Torah says that Hashem pays the wicked people for their misvot in this world. The question is that we know that misvot are not paid off in this world but only in the next world. The merit of a single misvah is greater than the value of everything in this physical world. Therefore, it is impossible to reward a person in this world. However, since the wicked so greatly undervalue the misvot they perform, their reward is very limited and can be repaid in this world. The exact opposite is true on the positive side. If a person greatly values his misvot they become more valuable. Now we understand the Rabbi's response that a lot of money and time spent on a minyan will upgrade that

misvah for him always. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And you shall watch yourselves very carefully." (Debarim 4:15)

From this verse, the Rabbis teach us that it is a misvah to watch our health. Even though it may seem unnecessary to command us to protect our health, the Torah felt it important enough to emphasize that we guard our welfare. This should encourage us to watch what we eat in terms of our weight and in terms of nutrition, especially as we get older. The evil inclination doesn't mind if we indulge in the wrong food and drink and then are unable to serve Hashem the next day. This admonition should help us strengthen our resolve to stay healthy, for it provides us with a misvah every time we do something beneficial for our health. Not coincidentally, the Torah doesn't say, "Watch your bodies," rather, "watch your souls," which is learned out to mean our bodies, in order to explain that the main reason we should be healthy is in order to use our souls properly to serve Hashem. A healthy body and a healthy soul, what a combination! Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Attitude Matters

Parashat Vaethanan begins with Moshe recalling the impassioned prayer he prayed asking God to allow him to cross into Eretz Yisrael. God had decreed that Moshe would die across the Jordan River and not enter the Land of Israel together with the rest of the nation. Moshe prayed that the decree be annulled, but God declined his request. Our Sages teach that Moshe actually recited 515 prayers begging for permission to enter Eretz Yisrael, and God still denied his request. Instead, He told Moshe that he should climb to the mountaintop

overlooking Eretz Yisrael and take a good look at the special land which God would be giving to Beneh Yisrael.

At first glance, God's response to Moshe seems harsh, if not cruel. God of course had His reasons for denying Moshe's request, but why did He then instruct Moshe to gaze into the land? Wasn't this just a "tease"? Imagine after fasting an entire day somebody comes along and places a delicious, fresh pastry right in front of our eyes, and tells us we can only look at it. Wouldn't that be cruel? What purpose was there for Moshe to look into the land in which he so desperately wanted to live?

There is a concept in Judaism that a person can be credited for a Misva which he does not actually perform. If somebody truly wishes to do a certain Misva, but circumstances do not allow him to do so, he receives credit as though he performed that Misva. In light of the practical barrier that prevents him from doing the Misva, his sincere desire to fulfill the Misva suffices, and he is regarded as actually having done it.

The Gemara teaches that Moshe yearned to enter Eretz Yisrael not to enjoy its material benefits, but to fulfill the special Misvot that can be performed only there. And this might explain why God told Moshe to look into the land. Gazing into Eretz Yisrael would increase Moshe's desire to go there and fulfill the Misvot. God wanted Moshe to feel such a genuine longing for the Misvot of Eretz Yisrael that he would be credited with having done them, even though he would not be entering the land. This was not cruel; to the contrary, it was to Moshe's benefit.

It occasionally happens that a person is about to leave for an important Misva – such as Minyan, a Shiur, to help a friend, or to help out in a community event – and then something unexpected comes up. Maybe the car doesn't start, an urgent problem came up in the office, something breaks at home, etc. A person can nevertheless be credited with the Misva if he or she genuinely feels disappointed. If we truly wish we could do the Misva, then we receive the credit even if practically it does not work out.

When it comes to Misvot, attitude matters at least as much as the bottom-line performance. What's important is not just how much we accomplish, but how much we want and try to accomplish. And this desire comes from an appreciation of the inestimable value of Misvot, a realization of just how precious each and every Misva is. If we bear in mind the worth and significance of every Misva, then we will be sincerely driven to accomplish more – and we will then be credited even for the Misvot we are unable to perform.

Rabbi Wein

The basic declaration of Jewish faith - Shema Yisrael – appears in this week's parsha. This affirmation of the core principle of Jewish faith – the uniqueness and oneness of God coupled with our acceptance of God's sovereignty over us – according to Jewish tradition was first uttered by the children of Yaakov at the time of his passing from this life to a better world.

Throughout Jewish history, this became the final prayer of Jews passing from this life as well. It also became, because of our long and bitter history of physical persecution and martyrdom, the

symbol of Jewish tenacity and commitment.

When a Jew enters the world and is old enough to first speak, the words first uttered are, Torah tzivah lanu Moshe (Moshe has commanded us regarding the Torah.) But, after life has been lived, with all of its differing experiences, one of the last words that a Jew recites are Shema Yisrael.

Torah is intellect and a way of life, commandments, ritual and custom. Torah is particular and not general, parochial and not universal. It is the stuff of this world and its complexities, challenges, disappointments. Faith - the Shema Yisrael statement – is the stuff of eternity, of the better world, of a transcendent relationship with the Creator of us all.

It is universal and its message is directed to all, Jew and non-Jew, scholar and unlettered alike. Faith and belief alone, without actions and observances, is not sufficient for Jewish life to exist. But actions and observances without faith and belief eventually become meaningless, if not even hypocritical.

A Jew is bidden to recite Shema Yisrael twice daily, with fervor and concentration. One is to actually think about the words that one is reciting when saying the prayer. The rabbis called the Shema Yisrael a declaration - "the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven." In a world of idols and paganism, this declaration is what sets the Jewish people apart from the rest of the nations of the time.

In our world devoid of actual paganism but without faith and moral direction this declaration again stands as the line of separation between the Jew and the general society. The recitation

of Shema Yisrael regularly, twice daily, over and over again, carefully and lovingly with correct pronunciation, serves to reemphasize to us God's presence in our lives and in our world. It serves to remind us that we are not necessarily the free agents in life that we often think that we are.

Shema Yisrael inhibits our thoughts and behavior even if just for the moment. It focuses our hearts and minds on the good and noble that lies within each one to achieve and accomplish. And perhaps just as importantly it serves to unite us with all of the past generations of Jews, all of the way back to our father Yaakov and his children, to the origins of Shema Yisrael itself. When we recite Shema Yisrael it is as if we are speaking directly to our father Yaakov, to Yisrael himself. There can be no greater comforting thought for us on this Shabat of consolation than this reality of the bond of Jewish life over all of these centuries.

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

Near the end of Va'etchanan, so inconspicuously that we can sometimes miss it, is a statement with such far reaching implications that it challenges the impression that has prevailed thus far in the Torah, giving an entirely new complexion to the biblical image of the people Israel:

The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples. (Deut. 7: 7)

This is not what we have heard thus far. In Bereishit God promises the patriarchs that their

descendants will be like the stars of the heaven, the sand on the sea shore, the dust of the earth, uncountable. Abraham will be the father, not just of one nation but of many. At the beginning of Exodus we read of how the covenantal family, numbering a mere seventy when they went down to Egypt, were "fertile and prolific, and their population increased. They became so numerous that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1: 7).

Three times in the book of Deuteronomy Moses describes the Israelites as being "as many as the stars of the sky" (1: 10, 10: 22, 28:62). King Solomon speaks of himself as set among "the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number" (1 Kings 3: 8). The prophet Hosea says that "The Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted" (Hos. 2: 1).

In all these texts and others it is the size, the numerical greatness, of the people that is emphasized. What then are we to make of Moses' words that speak of its smallness? Targum Yonatan interprets it not to be about numbers at all but about self-image. He translates it not as "the fewest of peoples" but as "the most lowly and humble of peoples." Rashi gives a similar reading, citing Abraham's words "I am but dust and ashes," and Moses and Aaron's, "Who are we?"

Rashbam and Chizkuni give the more straightforward explanation that Moses is contrasting the Israelites with the seven nations they would be fighting in the land of Canaan/Israel. God would lead the Israelites to victory despite the fact that they were outnumbered by the local inhabitants.

Rabbenu Bachya quotes Maimonides, who says that we would have expected God, King of the universe, to have chosen the most numerous nation in the world as His people, since "The glory of the king is in the multitude of people" (Prov. 14: 28). God did not do so. Thus Israel should count itself extraordinarily blessed that God chose it, despite its smallness, to be His *am segulah*, His special treasure.

Rabbenu Bachya finds himself forced to give a more complex reading to resolve the contradiction of Moses, in Deuteronomy, saying both that Israel is the smallest of peoples and "as many as the stars of the sky." He turns it into a hypothetical subjunctive, meaning: God would still have chosen you, even if you had been the smallest of the peoples.

Sforno gives a simple and straightforward reading: God did not choose a nation for the sake of His honour. Had He done so He would undoubtedly have chosen a mighty and numerous people. His choice had nothing to do with honour and everything to do with love. He loved the patriarchs for their willingness to heed His voice; therefore He loves their children.

Yet there is something in this verse that resonates throughout much of Jewish history. Historically Jews were and are a small people: today less than a fifth of one per cent of the population of the world. There were two reasons for this. First is the heavy toll taken through the ages by exile and persecution, directly by Jews killed in massacres and pogroms, indirectly by those who converted – in fifteenth century Spain and nineteenth century Europe – in order to avoid persecution (tragically, even conversion did

not work; racial antisemitism persisted in both cases). The Jewish population is a mere fraction of what it might have been had there been no Hadrian, no crusades and no antisemitism.

The second reason is that Jews did not seek to convert others. Had they done so they would have been closer in numbers to Christianity (2.2 billion) or Islam (1.3 billion). In fact Malbim reads something like this into our verse. The previous verses have said that the Israelites are about to enter a land with seven nations, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Moses warns them against intermarriage with them, not for racial but for religious reasons: "they will turn your children away from following Me to serve other gods." Malbim interprets our verse as Moses saying to the Israelites, Don't justify outmarriage on the grounds that it will increase the number of Jews. God is not interested in numbers.

There was a moment when Jews might have sought to convert others (to be sure, there was one instance when they did. The Hasmonean priest-king John Hyrcanus I forcibly converted the Edomites, known as the Idumeneans. Herod was one of their number). The period in question was the Roman Empire in the first century. Jews numbered some 10 per cent of the empire, and there were many Romans who admired aspects of their faith and way of life. The pagan deities of the Hellenistic world were losing their appeal and plausibility, and throughout the centres of the Mediterranean, individuals were adopting Jewish practices. Two aspects of Judaism stood in their way: the commandments and circumcision. In the end, Jews chose not to compromise their way of life for

the sake of making converts. The Hellenistic people who sympathized with Judaism mostly adopted Pauline Christianity instead. Consistently throughout history, Jews have chosen to be true to themselves and to stay small rather than make concessions for the sake of increasing numbers.

Why have Divine providence or human choice or both, eventuated in the sheer smallness of the Jewish people? Could it be, quite simply, that through the Jewish people God is telling humankind that you do not need to be numerous to be great. Nations are not judged by their size but by their contribution to the human heritage. Of this the most compelling proof is that a nation as small as the Jews could produce an ever-renewed flow of prophets, priests, poets, philosophers, sages, saints, halakhists, aggadists, codifiers, commentators, rebbes and roshei yeshivot; that they could also yield some of the world's greatest writers, artists, musicians, film-makers, academics, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople and technological innovators. Out of all proportion to their numbers Jews could and can be found working as lawyers fighting injustice, economists fighting poverty, doctors fighting disease, and teachers fighting ignorance.

You do not need numbers to enlarge the spiritual and moral horizons of humankind. You need other things altogether: a sense of the worth and dignity of the individual, of the power of human possibility to transform the world, of the importance of giving everyone the best education they can have, of making each of us feel part of a collective responsibility to ameliorate the human condition, and a willingness to take high ideals and enact them in the real world,

unswayed by disappointments and defeats.

Nowhere is this more in evidence today than among the people of Israel in the state of Israel: traduced in the media and pilloried by much of the world, yet still, year after year, producing human miracles in medicine, agriculture, technology, the arts, as if the word "impossible" did not exist in the Hebrew language. When, therefore, we feel fearful and depressed about Israel's plight, it is worth returning to Moses' words: "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples."

Small? Yes. Still surrounded, as the Israelites were then, by "nations larger and stronger than you." But that small people, defying the laws of history, outlived all the world's great empires, and still has a message of hope for humanity. You don't have to be large to be great. If you are open to a power greater than yourself, you will become greater than yourself. Israel today still carries that message to the world.

RABBI FRAND

"And you shall not covet your fellow's wife, you shall not desire your fellow's house, his field, his slave, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to your fellow" (5:18)

Perhaps one of the hardest commandments to understand — let alone fulfill — is *Lo Sachmod*, not to be jealous.

As Ibn Ezra asks (Shemos 20:14), how can the Torah command us not to feel an emotion that comes naturally when someone has something

that we would like to have? When the neighbor redoes his house and builds a pool, how can a person be expected not to want to have a pool as well?

Ibn Ezra answers this question through a parable.

Imagine a commoner who visits the royal palace. As he is viewing the beautiful grounds, he sees the princess step outside in her royal garments. Though struck by her beauty, does he think for a moment, I want to marry her?

Most people wouldn't entertain that thought for a second. They realize that the king's daughter is out of their league. People desire something that they can conceivably have, not something that is totally out of reach.

The same should hold true for someone else's possessions, says Ibn Ezra. We should train ourselves to realize that since Hashem gave the pool to the neighbor, it is something that He wants the neighbor to have, not us. As such, it should not be within the realm of our desires.

The Ibn Ezra's approach has become the classical answer to this question, but Rav Simchah Zissel Brodie derives another explanation from a Ramban.

The Ramban cites the following Midrash: The Ten Commandments are all repeated in Parashas Kedoshim in some form or another. For instance, the verse, "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" (Vayikra 19:3) corresponds to the first commandment, and "Veilokei masei chah lo sa'asu lachem — and molten gods shall you not make for yourself" (ibid. v. 4) corresponds to the second commandment.

The parallel to Lo Sachmod, says Ramban cryptically, is "Ve'avavta

lerei'acha kamocho — Love your fellow as yourself" (ibid. v. 18).

Rav Simchah Zissel explains the correlation between the two.

Did you ever hear a father or mother wish that their children would have less material possessions just because they had less when they were at the same stage in life? No. Parents are thrilled when their children have more than they did. Why? Because they love their children as much as they love themselves — if not more — so they are happy when their children can afford anything they want.

If we would truly fulfill ve'avavta lerei'acha kamocho and love every Jew as we love ourselves, says Rav Simchah Zissel, we wouldn't feel jealous of them for owning possessions that we cannot afford. We would be happy for them, just as we are happy when our own children have more than we do.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"For who is such a great people that has G-d near to him as Hashem our G-d whenever we call out to Him?" (4:7)

These two verses (4:7, 8) declare that Israel is unequalled in greatness of two kinds:
1) they are unequalled in their privilege of calling to Hashem whenever they are in need
2) and they are without equal in the world because of the righteous laws that Hashem has bestowed upon them, Because of these two reasons, Israel is therefore the most important ("greatest") nation.

Two unequalled privileges are here pointed out. In the daily Shemoneh Esreh we say: "For You listen with compassion to the

prayer of Your people Israel". And here we see the source of this statement. "Who is such a great people that has G-d near to him as Hashem our G-d whenever we call out to Him". We are informed of a most exceptional status, that Hashem is most close to us and therefore grants His especial attention to the prayers of Israel.

In the following verse, we are informed of another unique privilege: "this Torah that I put before you today."

Although they are mentioned as two separate privileges ('For who is such a great people', And who is such a great people"). Yet fundamentally they both stem from the fact that G-d is near to Israel. But this nearness is due to the Torah that they accepted, and which they loyally study and fulfill.

Thus the Torah study is declared as the chief service of Hashem: "The study of the Torah equals all of them" (Peah 1:1).

The greatest nearness is to think the same thoughts, and by learning His Torah one thinks Hashem's thoughts.

Quoted from "Fortunate Nation" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L

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