

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

EKEB

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 49:14-51:3

AUGUST 8, 2015 23 AB 5775
Refuah Shelemah for Simcha bat Sarah**Minha & Arbit 7:00 PM -Candle Lighting 7:45 PM**
Friends – We need assistance and a commitment for Friday evenings**Shabbat****Class with Rav Aharon 8:00 AM – Latest Shema 8:41 AM**
Shahrit 8:30 AM, Torah 9:45 and Musaf at 10:30
Rabbi Baruch Simon will give the Derasha

Rabbi Baruch Simon is the Colonel Jehiel R. Elyachar Professor of Talmud at the Yeshiva Program/Mazer School of Talmudic Studies and a Rosh Yeshiva at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University.

Rabbi Simon is the author of divrei torah on the parsha titled Imrei Baruch, which has been published in numerous volumes. He has also published volumes of Imrei Baruch on Halakha, which discusses the laws of eruvin and reshuyos as well as on minhagim.

Rabbi Simon received semikha (rabbinic ordination) from RIETS in 1988. A graduate of Yeshiva University High School for Boys, Rabbi Simon earned his BA, magna cum laude, in Judaic studies from Yeshiva College, where he delivered the prestigious birkat preidah (farewell address), a singular honor given the Yeshiva Program valedictorian.

Rabbi Simon was a fellow of the prestigious Caroline and Joseph Gruss Kollel Elyon and a fellow of the Marcus and Adina Katz Kollel. Before teaching in the Yeshiva Program, Rabbi Simon was a member of the halakha faculty at the Isaac Breuer College of Hebraic Studies. Rabbi Simon has authored hundreds of published articles and has taught thousands of students across the globe.

Rav Aharon Siegel is sponsoring the Kiddush and Lunch this Shabbos in order to thank the Rabbi and President, the officers of the Synagogue and the congregation for the opportunity to teach Torah !
And Rav Aharon we thank you for Teaching each week !

Jennifer is away so there may not be a children's program in the morning which is typically ...
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 – We will confirm
Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:30

Class with Rav Aharon at 6:45PM
Minha 7:15 PM - Seudat Shelishit 7:45 PM
A special guest Daniel Reidler with Rabbi David is scheduled to give the class
Birkat HaMazon 8:25 PM Arbit 8:30 PM – Shabbat Ends at 8:44

SUNDAY MORNING at 8AM**DAILY MINYAN****Monday, Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM**
Mincha and Arbit - Sunday at 7:45PM**LOOKING FORWARD:**
Sisterhood meeting next Sunday Aug 9. 9 30 am**Save The Date - August 30th**
Sisterhood's End of Summer BBQ!
With community blood drive.
More details to follow!**To make a payment or donate on line**
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 Newsletter archives now at 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

On Monday night we had boys night out. It was really nice going to dinner with Daniel the soon to be son in law, Dr. Steven, Dr. Moses and Jonah at Le Marais where we caught up with Daniel who just came from Israel and took some time to discuss the perasha before Birkat HaMazon.

It looked like Monday night is really boy's night out for lots of folks. Many of the guys exhausted from the daily drive to and from the beach tend to sleep in the City on Monday nights and those who can make it out of the office at a decent hour often take the time to get together. I miss being in Deal for the summer, but I don't miss the drive. Driving out for a wedding Wednesday night took two hours and I hear that the morning ride is about the same. My son Jonah and his father in law Morris have a unique solution. They drive in at 4:50AM. Well actually Morris drives and Jonah sleeps. The trip is typically less than an hour and soon after arriving in the city Jonah texts the family an image of his just completed Central Park run before most of the city even wakes up. Its great to see Morris most mornings in the Synagogue on 63rd Street, not just because we love to see him, but because we need him as a Kohen.

One of the strangest things about the 7:15 minyan at Safra is the lack of Kohanim. This is something unheard of in a Syrian synagogue. I recall Rabbi Beryl Wein, the noted orator and historian coming to Deal Synagogue when it was first opened in the early 70's when Rabbi Schmidman of Asbury Park sat on the dais. Rabbi Wein commented that almost half the Congregants seemed to move forward for Birkat Kohanim where the Kohanim bless the people during the repetition of the Amidah. Investigating this phenomenon, Rabbi Wein suggested that prior to the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar exiled the aristocrats and the priests, many of the Kohanim settled in Aleppo which became a city of priests. The arrival of Spanish Jews in early 15th century and others in the 19th century certainly changed the composition somewhat, but overall the proportion of Kohanim in the Syrian community is certainly higher than almost every other community. Interesting enough, but the wedding we

drove to deal for on Wednesday is testament to this; the marriage of David and Carmela Tawil. The fathers of the bride and groom, my cousin Stevie Tawil (Our community Lulav Man) is a Kohen with a recorded and illustrious pedigree as is my friend Jack Cohen. (jack I'll leave out any Charles jokes here). More than that though, the mothers of both brides are Bat Kohanim. Sophia is a Dweck and Vicki is a Doueck.

All this makes our lack of Kohanim at 7:15 strange. They don't lack Kohanim at 8:00. So if you are a Kohen, be sure to visit! And I'm sure Morris, and Saul Tawil and Joey Allaham and Joe Cohen who all pray with us from time to time wouldn't mind sharing the dais or giving up the first Aliya with you. And especially for the rest of us on days when there is no Kohen, we invite you to do your job and bless us, because through the Kohanim we are blessed directly by hashem and there is no better blessing to receive.

So I started with our little discussion Monday night on the weekly portion and digressed a bit. Back to Ekev – which begins with the some of the most beautiful blessings in the Torah) and we'll leave you with this thought (with special thanks to Steven for his input and getting the discussion going).

The text begins VeHaya Ekev Tishmeun. We translate this as, "And it will be, because you will heed (these ordinances and keep them and perform, that the Hashem, your G-d, will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers"... continuing into the incredible list of blessings.) The work Ekev seems to be superfluous ... Vehaya and it will be Tishmeun that you listen Yet we will see that one seemingly superfluous word contains so many layers and layers of meaning.

Rashi asks the question and answers – Ekev עֵקֶב, literally translates as heel. He explains based on tanchuma - If you will heed the minor commandments which one [usually] tramples with his heels [i.e., which a person treats as being of minor importance], (then you will be blessed). The obvious question arises. What is a major and what is a minor commandment and who are we to decide? Reality dictates though that regrettably, there are some commandments that we in our ignorance dismiss as 'minor'. That inevitably leads some people to treat them with contempt, to sweep them under one's feet as their perceived inferior status means that they are accorded little or no significance. Pirkei Avot – Ethics of the Fathers – recognizes the possibility for this and The Mishnah encourages us to "Be as scrupulous in doing a 'minor' mitzvah as in a 'major' one". And

perhaps for that same person it offers a reason ("no one knows the reward given for respective mitzvot).

The solution probably lies in the need to study. When one examines and reviews and educates one's self, then what may have appeared as minor is no longer so. When we get to know something, we appreciate it and give it value. And when we value something, we would never think about stepping on it.

The Baal HaTurim, one of the great commentators of the Middle Ages who often elucidates based on the numerical value or gematria of a word explains that the numerical value of the word eikev is 172. The ayin is 70, the kuf is 100 and the bet is 2. He says there are 172 words in the Ten Commandments. The Aseret HaDibrot better translated as the Ten Statements have a special place in people's consciousness because these were the commandments that G-d Himself spoke at Mount Sinai. The rabbis teach that the entire Torah can be found within these Aseret HaDibrot. They are the basis of the revelation that makes the Jewish religion unique for at no other time did an entire people hear the voice of G-d and live to tell about it. The Baal HaTurim suggests that perhaps we can view the verse as follows. Vehaya – And it will be Ekev Tishmeun – If you will listened to these 172 words, these commandments, the revelation, the Torah then all the blessings will follow.

In learning this with Rabbi Abittan many years ago, we also noted that the number ten (the ten commandments) is represented by a Yud and kabalistically the Yud often represents the head. If one is filled with Torah from head to heel (the original term of head to toe), then all these blessings follow. And who is filled with Torah from head to toe? Take that Yud and attach it to the word Ekev and we have the answer – Yaakov Avinue, Jacob our father.

The image of Jacob is attached to the chariot of Hashem and this is the image we should strive for. To fill ourselves with Torah, to study and to learn and realize there are no minor misvot and nothing to trample, to recall the revelation and the 10 commandments and strive always higher and higher. So much in one seemingly superfluous words.

Read the blessings stated this week and may we all be blessed to receive them.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

PS One more on the word EKEV: THE OU
Posted: The Baal HaTurim presents a mini-mussar lesson based on the choice of the word EKEV, which

means "heel". The heel represents humility, in that it always follows the toes and the rest of the foot (and body). Since it does not initiate action, it does not run the risk of becoming arrogant. We must realize that humility is an important key in our following G-d's words. Thus, the opening words of the sedra can be saying: "If you are humble and follow G-d's commands, then..." (Note also that the it is the heels that support the entire body

See also Rabbi Mansour who relates Ekev to Keva or scheduling fixed times for learning

Nuclearizing Iran, Sabotaging Arabs by Bassam Tawil

Obama's solution? To let Iran have legitimate nuclear bombs in a few years, along with intercontinental ballistic missiles to deliver them to the U.S. -- or perhaps from America's soft underbelly, South America, where Iran has been acquiring uranium and establishing bases for years. Or perhaps launched from submarines off America's coast, which would make the identity of the attacker unknowable and a response therefore impossible. Incredibly, America's politicians do not even seem to seem to be concerned about that.

We have just sacrificed Sunni stability for American ideology: empty slogans fed to us by clueless, if well-meaning, American officials.

As we watched one stable Arab regime fall after another, we have allowed ourselves to be destroyed from within by these bungling diplomats -- from America, Europe, China and Russia. Instead of keeping our eyes on the real threat, we exhausted ourselves in wasteful, unending battles against the Jews -- meanwhile letting the Iranian menace slip out of sight.

Obama really does deserve a Nobel Prize, but it should have been awarded by the Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, in gratitude for America's surrender.

"Nation building" seems to have fallen into disrepute in the West, but it should not. It is vitally important -- as the successes of Germany, Japan and South Korea attest.

Over the past few years, in our foolishness, we in the Middle East swallowed the deceptive bait of "democracy" dangled before us, even though we knew that it could not, in the misguided way it was presented, be implemented in the Middle East.

The idea was superb, but here in the Middle East, possibly in being impatient to "get credit" before the diplomats' term of office were over, no one ever took the time to establish the institutions of democracy -- equal justice under law, freedom of speech, property rights, the primacy of the individual rather than the collective, separation of religion and state -- to show us in the Middle East how democracy actually operates, and to allow those institutions to take root before ever holding an election.

So eager were Western leaders to take credit right away that they refused "let the rice bake." Had the West introduced democratic elections to Japan and South Korea (where they eventually worked brilliantly) in the same way it muscled democracy into Iraq, it would never have taken root in those countries either. Had the Germans had been asked to vote right after World War II, they would most likely have reelected the Nazis -- that was what they knew. It took seven years to re-educate the public to understand and accept a Konrad Adenauer.

What seems clear is that we have sacrificed Sunni stability for empty slogans -- and for clueless, if well-meaning, American officials. As we watched one stable Arab regime fall after another, we allowed American ideology to destroy us from within. Instead of keeping our eyes on the real threat, we exhausted ourselves in wasteful, unending battles against the Jews -- meanwhile letting the Iranian menace slip out of sight.

If we try to look at the positive side of the Iran nuclear agreement, it is just possible that Obama looked at the Sunni Arab states, fractured and at each other's throats, and at the ruthless terrorist groups gaining ground in the expanding battle zones, and decided that we were too fractious for the U.S. to protect.

Sunni states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey have been worsening the situation in the Arab world by funding Sunni terrorist organizations, thereby putting it on a course of complete chaos. Despite Arab wealth and power, we have been dealing almost exclusively with the marginal issue of Palestine and the Jews, to excuse our inability to be effective in giving U.S. President Barack Obama what he really needs: regional stability.

Obama sees Iran and its terrorist organizations, which are all unified, organized and obedient, opposing the Sunni Arabs. Obama may be betting on Iran to bring order to the Middle East.

Imagine if we and our fundamentalist Sunni terrorist organizations had actually focused on stopping the

Iranians in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. Imagine if we had abandoned, even momentarily, the dream of the Muslim Brotherhood (what the West calls "political Islam") ruling the world. Imagine if we had stopped our stupid, useless acts of hatred, and could instead have focused on our common enemy, Iran. Our situation now would be immeasurably better. We would not be deviating from the teachings of Muhammad, because first we have to focus on the near enemy and then on the distant one. Iran is nearer and more dangerous than Europe and the United States, so Iran should have been -- and still should be -- the first Sunni target. We might have led Obama to adopt a different approach than allowing Iran to acquire a nuclear bomb in ten years or sooner -- but we did not, because of our weakness and distraction with marginal "causes." Thus Obama, from a desire to stabilize the Middle East, seems to be betting on the strong horse, Iran.

The truth, however, may be somewhat different. It is entirely possible that Obama, who won the Nobel Peace Prize, is employing a policy of "divide and conquer." In the U.S., instead of trying to improve how children in the inner cities are being educated, he has been busy stoking racial and economic conflict. The Arabs are becoming increasingly suspicious that he is a historic "divide and conquer" manipulator. He may deliberately be creating fitna (civil strife) in the Arab world by whipping up conflict with Iran, so that America will one again look like the big power-broker -- but at the expense of the Arabs.

We Arabs are expert conspiracy theorists, and interpret every political agenda as a hidden plot, but one only has to look at the Obama administration's fawning support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Turkey and Egypt, and how America supported the fall of Mubarak, and it immediately becomes obvious that the U.S. is trying to manipulate the fate of the Arabs.

Anyone following America's rejection of, and now only reluctant support for, the reformist regime of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi understands that the Americans prefer what they consider "backward Arabs": those controlled by regressive Islam.

That is the reason we see Obama's policies as backing both the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood and the theocrats in Iran. The ideologies of both the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran's mullahs would lead to most dangerous and regressive fate of both Sunni and Shiite Muslims around the world, as well as Americans at home -- and these are the Muslims most loved by the current American administration.

Or maybe, as many of us say here on the street, Obama is just trying to "get even" with the West and bring it to its knees, for being white, "imperialist" and non-Muslim. Obama's solution? To let Iran have legitimate nuclear bombs in a few years, with the intercontinental ballistic missiles to deliver them to the U.S. -- or perhaps from America's soft underbelly, South America, where Iran has been acquiring uranium and establishing bases for years. Or perhaps launched from submarines off America's coast, which would make the identity of the attacker unknowable and a response therefore impossible. Incredibly, America's politicians do not even seem to seem to be concerned about that.

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Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading

There is an interesting pasook in this week's parasha along the lines of what we said last week. Hashem/Moshe tells Benei Israel "ve'yadata iym lebabecha (you should know in your heart) kiy ka'asher yeyaser ish eht beno (just like a parent disciplines his child), Hashem Elokecha meyasereka (that is how Hashem disciplines us)". Just like a parent disciplines his child out of love and concern for his child, because he only wants what is best for him, so too that is how Hashem disciplines us. When a 3 years old runs in the street a parent hits his child, it is not because he is mad at the child. It is not a punishment. He doesn't want to hit the child. But he has to show the child that the street is bad for him. The child has to know the street is dangerous. And so the parent hits the child to cause him to stay away from a path that is bad for him. So too, that is how Hashem disciplines us. When, lo alenu, someone has a difficulty in business or in life in general, the Torah is telling us that this is Hashem trying to guide us and direct us down the right path in life. This is our loving father bringing us closer to him so he can give us good in the end.

Ekev - Moshe recounts the sin of the egel and tells Benei Israel if we follow the mitzvot 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 mitzvot).

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

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"There will be no infertile male or infertile female among you or among your animals." (Debarim 7:14)

The simple meaning of the verse quoted above is that when one keeps the laws of the Torah, there will be no infertility among the people and the animals. However, the Midrash takes these words and brings them to another level. There will be no infertility even among the people who are weak intellectually like an animal, and these simple people will be wise enough to counter and defeat heretics.

Rabbi Obadiah Yosef zt"l illustrates this with a beautiful story. It was well known that Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshitz zt"l was able to defeat all the Christian priests in his debates with them. One day the priests came to the king and said they have the ability to convince the simple people that theirs is the true religion. The king agreed to test it out and commanded to bring before him the first simple Jew they find in the street.

Soon after, the police found a Jewish wagon driver in the street, and brought him to the king. The priests turned to the driver and said, "I will give you this pouch of gold coins that is in my hand and I will guarantee you a great livelihood for the rest of your life if you just exchange your religion for mine."

The Jew looked at him and said, "Look sir, I am a simple person and I don't have the knowledge to debate with an intellectual and learned person as you. But, I will tell you what my father, who was also a wagon driver, told me. Before he passed away he told me a lesson for life. "My son, if someone comes to you and wants to exchange his horses for your horses and he will add some money to the deal, be very wary of such a deal. His horses might be sick and dangerously ill and he is willing to pay extra money just to rid himself of his horses.' So too, I will tell you sir, why are you willing to add a large sum of money just so that I give up my religion for yours? It

must be that your religion contains 'severe sickness and dangers' that can bring a person to lose his life and that's why you're willing to pay all of that money. Therefore, I'm not interested."

When the priest heard these words from the mouth of this simpleton, he was speechless and ran away. So once again the Jews defeated the priests and gained the upper hand. And that's the meaning of the Midrash, that even the most simple Jew knows how to defeat the vicious plans of the gentiles and the heretics. May Hashem always protect us!
Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"It will be that you listen" (Debarim 11:13)

The second paragraph of Shema, which we say every day, appears in this perashah. Since we say it so often we tend to overlook its important lessons. Hashem says to us, "If you listen to the misvot, the rains will fall correctly and your crops will be blessed, etc." Then, when we lower our voices a little it says, "If our hearts stray from Hashem, G-d forbid, there will be no rains, etc." and other events will happen which will make us realize our mistakes so we can come back to Hashem.

The lesson is, whenever something goes wrong, before we go around blaming the world, maybe Hashem is nudging us back to Him. The principle of Reward and Punishment is pivotal in our religion. When we do good, we deserve Blessing and G-d forbid, the reverse also happens. Although there are many other factors which may influence the Heavenly judgment, let us not forget the basic rule: Listening to Hashem brings berachah and going against Him brings problems! May we merit to bring on ourselves only berachah. Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

FOLLOW ME

"You shall teach them to your children to discuss them." (Debarim 11:19)

The words, *l'daber bam*, "to discuss them," are a key to understanding the essence of a father's obligation of *limud ha'Torah* to his son. In the Talmud *Baba Batra* 60b, Hazal relate the story of two litigants that came before Rabbi Yanai with a halachic dispute. One litigant insisted that Rabbi Yanai require his disputant to cut the branches of his tree which were encroaching on his property. The Sage heard their arguments and asked them to return the next day for his judgment. As soon as they left, Rabbi Yanai ran home to cut the branches of his own tree, whose branches were growing out into the public thoroughfare. The next day, both litigants presented themselves before Rabbi Yanai. He then ordered the owner of the tree to cut the offending branches. Upon hearing the verdict, the litigant said to Rabbi Yanai, "His honor also has a tree that hangs over the public

thoroughfare." Rabbi Yanai immediately countered, "I have already cut it down." This is what Hazal mean when they interpret the pasuk in *Sefanyah* 2:1, *Hitkosheshu va'koshu*, "Improve yourselves and improve others." First improve yourself - only then, are you prepared to improve others.

Self-improvement is a pre-requisite to teaching others. For the student to respond to the lesson, he must respect the lecturer. If one finds fault in his mentor, he will have a problem accepting his lesson. In his sefer *K'ayal Taarog*, Rav Abitbul, Shlita, interprets this idea into the above pasuk. If one wants to succeed in teaching his son Torah, he must first be *midaber bam*, the father himself must discuss Torah, be conversant in Torah, demonstrate his own love for the Torah. He does this as he sits in his home, his office, on the road - wherever he is. When a child sees how valuable the Torah is to his father, he will also accept it.

"Do what I tell you - not what I do" does not work. On the contrary, children tend to respect what their parents value, and disdain what their parents deprecate, either actively or subtly. A Jew once asked the Kotzer Rebbe, zl for a blessing that his young son learn Torah. The Rebbe said, "If you will study Torah, then your son will follow your lead and also study Torah. If you will be satisfied with seeking blessings (rather than activity pursuing the actual study), in all likelihood, your son will do the same."

A Jew who was a Torah scholar asked Rav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl, why he did not merit to have sons that were *talmidei hachamim*. His sons were fine upstanding laymen, but Torah learning was not their forte. This was in contrast to his neighbor, who was an unlearned milkman, who raised a family of distinguished Torah scholars. How did he do it?

Rav Shlomo Zalmen asked the man, "Tell me, when you heard a Torah lecture, with which you did not agree, what remarks did you make concerning the speaker?" "I probably commented that he did not know how to learn," the man replied.

"What would be your response when your Rav rendered a halachic decision that was unacceptable to you?" Rav Shlomo Zalman asked.

"I probably had a similar reaction, disparaging his ability to render a halachic decision," the man answered. Rav Shlomo Zalmen looked up at the man and said, "This is the difference between you and the milkman. When he heard a lecture, he returned home all excited, lauding the Rav who gave the lecture. Likewise, when the Rav issued a halachic ruling, he never complained. He accepted the decision with reverence, acquiescing to whatever was asked of him. His children grew up in a home where respect was accorded to the Rabbanim, where Rabbinic leaders, teachers, and whoever was involved in Torah dissemination were revered and

cherished. This motivated them to strive likewise for such a venerable pursuit.

"Regrettably, your children did not fare as well, because you acted in a manner unbecoming a talmid hacham of stature. Your children heard your complaints, your nullification of the revered status of the other Rabbanim. Like "good" children, they emulated their father. When they saw no respect, they followed suit and similarly showed no respect. Why would they want to pursue Torah scholarship if they had no respect for its disseminators?" (Peninim on the Torah)

ATTITUDE CONTROL

One of the most elusive goals in American society is true happiness.

While researching his book "Gateway to Happiness," Rabbi Zelig Pliskin asked a prominent Torah scholar to give him his thoughts on sadness. "The world is so beautiful," he replied. "How can anyone be sad?" Another person (not a Sage) was interviewed. "How can anyone be happy?" he replied. "The world is full of so much suffering and assorted problems!"

We have a tendency to believe that some people are sad and some are happy because of the circumstances they are dealt by Heaven. The fact of the matter is, two people can live in the same town and experience similar difficulties, and yet one can be very happy and the other very depressed. It is a matter of perspective. It's not the facts of life that determine the way you feel – it's your attitude. Rabbi Pliskin explains that since we have the ability to control our attitudes and thoughts, we have the choice of making ourselves happy or sad.

When something goes "wrong," remember that whether it will make you happy or sad depends on how you react to the situation. If you look at the total picture rather than one detail, you will develop a positive attitude. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Keeping to a Torah Learning Schedule

In the opening verses of Parashat Ekeb, Moshe promises that we will be rewarded "Ekeb Tishme'un" – in exchange for obeying G-d's laws.

While this is the plain meaning of the Pasuk, later scholars have uncovered for us deeper layers of meaning. One such interpretation suggests that this Pasuk alludes to the vital importance of maintaining a

consistent regimen of Torah learning. The letters of the word "Ekeb" can be rearranged to spell the word "Keba" – "fixed" or "consistent." Accordingly, the verse alludes to the famous exhortation of Shammai in Pirkeh Avot, "Aseh Toratecha Keba" – "Make your Torah permanent." We become worthy of the beautiful blessings described here by the Torah if we make our Torah study "Keba" – a fixed, permanent part of our schedule which we observe consistently and without fail.

The story is told of Rabbi Shelomo, a wealthy jeweler in Halab (Aleppo) who had a successful business appraising, buying and selling jewels. Each morning, he attended the morning prayer service, remained to study Torah, went home to eat something, and then opened his shop at around 11am. One morning, as he was walking to the synagogue for Shahrarit, an Arab merchant approached him and said, "I need to come to your store and show you something."

Rabbi Shelomo explained that he could not meet with him then, but he would be at the store at 11am.

"You don't understand – I am visiting in town for a short while, staying in this hotel," the merchant explained. "I have a precious jewel which I need appraised." He took off his turban from his head, carefully unwrapped it, and showed Rabbi Shelomo an exquisite jewel.

But Rabbi Shelomo explained that he must keep to his schedule. He bid the man farewell, and proceeded to the synagogue.

Afterward, as he made his way back, he was surprised to see an ambulance and a lot of commotion outside the hotel where that merchant was staying. After some inquiries, Rabbi Shelomo discovered that the merchant suddenly died, and as he had not paid for his hotel stay, the authorities were auctioning off his clothing to pay the bill. Rabbi Shlomo bid a small amount on the turban, and he bought it. He opened it up – and, sure enough, the precious jewel was still there. It now belonged to him.

When he refused to appraise the jewel at the expense of his learning schedule, it appeared as though he was losing business, but Hashem rewarded him in full.

A woman from Deal once called me in the wintertime and said she needed to meet with me to speak about a certain urgent matter. I informed her that I give a class in Deal every Tuesday during the winter at 12:45pm, and I'd be happy to meet her at 1:45pm.

She told me she wouldn't be able to meet me then, because at that time she played cards.

There is a lot for us to learn from this story. If this woman's card game was inviolable, and could not be missed even for an urgent matter, then certainly, we should keep to our Torah learning schedule and not miss any classes for trivial matters.

"Ekeb Tishme'un." If we ensure to make our Torah learning "Keba," and keep to our schedule regardless of everything else going on in our lives, we will then be worthy of Hashem's blessings and will be rewarded in full.

Rabbi Wein NOTHING ORIGINAL

I imagine that most blogs and commentary articles in the Jewish world this week will concentrate on the tragic and difficult events that occurred in Israel with the firebomb murder of a Palestinian infant and the slashing attack by a religious fanatic upon participants at a parade in Jerusalem.

It certainly makes sense that these events should be written about and commented upon for they expose the dark fringes that exist in human society and point out to us again that though we may be the chosen people, in essence we in our society are no different than others.

The combination of political or ideological extremism, with religious or national fanaticism is a witches' brew from which no good can ever come. There will be a great deal of 'I told you so' commentary regarding these events and there will also be the pious and partisan political comments from the leaders of our various factions. There is no need for me to echo their sentiments or to explain the underlying ills of our society, all of which are well known to us, though we are loath to admit their existence.

The truth of the matter is that the world is a violent place and societies harbor people who commit actions of violence. When combined with religious belief and/or ideological purity, acts of violence become holy and completely justified in the eyes of the perpetrators - and even considered necessary.

Violent behavior, somehow, has been the accepted norm in our society, Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and secular, for much of the past half-century. It has been condoned, if not even encouraged, by religious and political leaders who should know better. And in such an accepting society, violent people and violent acts flourish.

In this context, it must be stated that the value of human life has been denigrated over the past century. World War II consumed tens of millions of lives, most of which were those of innocent civilians. The purpose of winning the war at all costs overwhelmed the moral consideration of sparing human lives in the process.

Mass industrial murder such as the Holocaust and the Gulag became almost normal human behavior instead of being exceptional aberrations. The state of Israel has been forced to fight numerous wars in order to survive. Almost 60% to 70% percent of the Israeli population has served in the Army, knows and is equipped to fire weapons and is accustomed to violence, justified as that may be.

In the religious Jewish world, all of us know that over the past decades acts of violence against other Jews by small fringe groups of zealots occur on a regular basis. No one speaks about it and in reality no one takes any action against it either. But the spirit of violence is alive and well even among those who profess their loyalty to the Torah and to its values of harmony, tolerance and goodness from one to another.

Violence is somehow an accepted form of behavior against those who disagree and denigrate Jewish tradition and practice. The silence of the religious Jewish world over the past decades to this atmosphere of violence and antisocial behavior has been deafening and depressing. The events of last week only pour more fuel on this destructive fire that rages within our camp.

There is nothing new or original in the words that are being written here. As long as we are somehow satisfied with allowing violence to be an integral part of our religious community, these types of events will continue to occur. Simply because a Jew is observant of certain commandments of the Torah or wears visibly Jewish garb, it appears that that person's antisocial and anti-Torah behavior is to be ignored.

This is a sure recipe for future tragedies that will undoubtedly occur. Though governmental action will undoubtedly follow it will probably be ineffective in the long run. Societal changes are needed and have to come from inside and not from the outside. Our spiritual and rabbinic leaders, our educators and schools, need to address this issue in a strong, continuous manner.

Of what value is all of our knowledge and seeming accomplishments if our society harbors within it murderers, violent people, sexual predators, thieves and charlatans? We are taught in Psalms and throughout the words of the great prophets of Israel as well, that peace and social harmony require constant attention and pursuit. Being passive in the face of our weaknesses certainly will not help to correct them. Again, nothing that I write here is new or original. But I do feel that it is important and vital

**Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks
The Power of Gratitude (Ekev 5775)**

In the early 1990s one of the great medical research exercises of modern times took place. It became known as the Nun Study. Some 700 American nuns, all members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States, agreed to allow their records to be accessed by a research team investigating the process of ageing and Alzheimer's Disease. At the start of the study the participants were aged between 75 and 102.[1]

What gave this study its unusual longitudinal scope is that in 1930 the nuns, then in their twenties, had been asked by the Mother Superior to write a brief autobiographical account of their life and their reasons for entering the convent. These documents were now analysed by the researchers using a specially devised coding system to register, among other things, positive and negative emotions. By annually assessing the nuns' current state of health, the researchers were able to test whether their emotional state in 1930 had an effect on their health some sixty years later. Because they had all lived a very similar lifestyle during these six decades, they formed an ideal group for testing hypotheses about the relationship between emotional attitudes and health.

The results, published in 2001, were startling.[2] The more positive emotions – contentment, gratitude, happiness, love and hope – the nuns expressed in their autobiographical notes, the more likely they were to be alive and well sixty years later. The difference was as much as seven years in life expectancy. So remarkable was this finding that it has led, since then, to a new field of gratitude research, as well as a deepening understanding of the impact of emotions on physical health.

What medicine now knows about individuals, Moses knew about nations. Gratitude – hakarat ha-tov – is at the heart of what he has to say about the Israelites and their future in the Promised Land. Gratitude had not been their strong point in the desert. They

complained about lack of food and water, about the manna and the lack of meat and vegetables, about the dangers they faced from the Egyptians as they were leaving and about the inhabitants of the land they were about to enter. They lacked thankfulness during the difficult times. A greater danger still, said Moses, would be a lack of gratitude during the good times. This is what he warned:

When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery ... Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' (Deut. 8:11-17)

The worst thing that could happen to them, warned Moses, would be that they forgot how they came to the land, how God had promised it to their ancestors, and had taken them from slavery to freedom, sustaining them during the forty years in the wilderness. This was a revolutionary idea: that the nation's history be engraved on people's souls, that it was to be re-enacted in the annual cycle of festivals, and that the nation, as a nation, should never attribute its achievements to itself – "my power and the might of my own hand" – but should always ascribe its victories, indeed its very existence, to something higher than itself: to God. This is a dominant theme of Deuteronomy, and it echoes throughout the book time and again.

Since the publication of the Nun Study and the flurry of further research it inspired, we now know of the multiple effects of developing an attitude of gratitude. It improves physical health and immunity against disease. Grateful people are more likely to take regular exercise and go for regular medical check-ups. Thankfulness reduces toxic emotions such as resentment, frustration and regret and makes depression less likely. It helps people avoid over-reacting to negative experiences by seeking revenge. It even tends to make people sleep better. It enhances self-respect, making it less likely that you will envy others for their achievements or success. Grateful people tend to have better relationships. Saying "thank you" enhances friendships and elicits better performance from employees. It is also a major factor in strengthening resilience. One study of Vietnam War Veterans found that those with higher levels of gratitude suffered lower incidence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Remembering the many things we have to be thankful for helps us survive painful experiences, from losing a job to

bereavement.[3]

Jewish prayer is an ongoing seminar in gratitude. Birkot ha-Shachar, 'the Dawn Blessings' said at the start of morning prayers each day, form a litany of thanksgiving for life itself: for the human body, the physical world, land to stand on and eyes to see with. The first words we say each morning – Modeh/Modah ani, "I thank you" – mean that we begin each day by giving thanks.

Gratitude also lies behind a fascinating feature of the Amidah. When the leader of prayer repeats the Amidah aloud, we are silent other than for the responses of Kedushah, and saying Amen after each blessing, with one exception. When the leader says the words Modim anachnu lakh, "We give thanks to You," the congregation says the a parallel passage known as Modim de-Rabbanan. For every other blessing of the Amidah, it is sufficient to assent to the words of the leader by saying Amen. The one exception is Modim, "We give thanks." Rabbi Elijah Spira (1660–1712) in his work Eliyahu Rabbah,[4] explains that when it comes to saying thank you, we cannot delegate this away to someone else to do it on our behalf. Thanks has to come directly from us.

Part of the essence of gratitude is that it recognizes that we are not the sole authors of what is good in our lives. The egoist, says Andre Comte-Sponville, "is ungrateful because he doesn't like to acknowledge his debt to others and gratitude is this acknowledgement." [5] La Rochefoucauld put it more bluntly: "Pride refuses to owe, self-love to pay." Thankfulness has an inner connection with humility. It recognizes that what we are and what we have is due to others, and above all to God. Comte-Sponville adds: "Those who are incapable of gratitude live in vain; they can never be satisfied, fulfilled or happy: they do not live, they get ready to live, as Seneca puts it."

Though you don't have to be religious to be grateful, there is something about belief in God as creator of the universe, shaper of history and author of the laws of life that directs and facilitates our gratitude. It is hard to feel grateful to a universe that came into existence for no reason and is blind to us and our fate. It is precisely our faith in a personal God that gives force and focus to our thanks.

It is no coincidence that the United States, founded by Puritans – Calvinists steeped in the Hebrew Bible – should have a day known as Thanksgiving, recognizing the presence of God in American history. On 3 October 1863, at the height of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln issued a Thanksgiving

proclamation, thanking God that though the nation was at war with itself, there were still blessings for which both sides could express gratitude: a fruitful harvest, no foreign invasion, and so on. He continued:

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy ... I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States ... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity and Union.

What might such a declaration made today – in Israel, or the United States, or indeed anywhere – do to heal the wounds that so divide nations today? Thanksgiving is as important to societies as it is to individuals. It protects us from resentments and the arrogance of power. It reminds us of how dependent we are on others and on a Force greater than ourselves. As with individuals so with nations: thanksgiving is essential to happiness and health.

[1] See Robert Emmons, *Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

[2] Danner, Deborah D., David A. Snowdon, and Wallace V. Friesen. "Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80.5 (2001): 804-13.

[3] Much of the material in this paragraph is to be found in articles published in *Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life* @ <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>.

[4] Eliyahu Rabbah, Orach Chayyim 127: 1.

[5] André Comte-Sponville, *A Short Treatise on the Great Virtues: The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life*. London: Heinemann, 2002.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"In order to cause you to know that not by bread alone does man live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of Hashem does a man live." (8:3)

If this lesson was the purpose of the 40 years of Mann which deprived the nation of the pleasure of eating ordinary foods, then it is of the utmost urgency for us to study and to understand this principle.

Hashem denotes Being, and because His existence is the sole true existence, we understand that the existence of everything is the result of His will to cause things to exist. To believe that anything has existence of its own or even has power to cause others to exist is therefore a form of idolatry. That eating could transmit energy to a living person is a miracle of causing continued existence, and this miracle is solely the result of Hashem's will.

Thus eating ordinary foods results in sustaining the life of the eaters solely by the will of Hashem that such should be the result. But the constant use of foods has caused men to err into believing that the food itself is the cause of life; and thereby they slip into a form of idolatry. And even if they thank Hashem for the food, they are merely thanking Him for making available a force for maintaining life which their confused minds consider a separate and independent force.

Therefore when they no longer had recourse to ordinary foods, but solely to the Mann to which the mind of man does not attribute any power of sustaining life, they gradually became accustomed to the lesson that not food sustains life, but it is solely Hashem's decree that sustains life.

And although today we have gained a glimpse of the profoundly complicated cunning of the functions of life, it is again mere idolatry to credit these super-designed mechanisms with the power of sustaining life, both because of the immense wisdom which we perceive and which no power but Hashem could achieve, and also because of the need to recognize that all mechanisms could have been harmful rather than beneficial, in the countless steps and manners of their performance. Now that we see that 40 years of sustained effort were expended by Hashem on inculcating this principle of Oneness of Hashem's Power, then we can understand why this lesson became the most reiterated and most emphasized of all: "Hear Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One."

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

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