

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

SHOFTIM

AUGUST 10, 2013

4 ELUL 5773

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Florence Deutsch Farha Bat Esther whose Yahrzeit is 5 Elul

Candles: 7:43 PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:30 PM – We've moved the time to 7:30 as we've been waiting for guys to show up each week. Please show up by 7:30 sharp so we can have a minyan together. We did this last two weeks and it worked out perfectly. Please join us.

**Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM –Please say Shemah at home by 8:43 AM.
Tefillah will be preceded by a class at 8:30AM on Hilchot Shabbat with a Sephardic twist.**

**This weeks kiddush is sponsored by Bobby and Hindy Mizrahi
for the yahrzeit of Hindy's brother, Yisroel moshe ben Harav Yaakov and Chasya Miriam, last month.**

And as a welcome home to Matthew

and by Sarina Gross in honor of Ariella's 16th Birthday.

**It is also in honor of David Bibi's birthday (even though something came up at the last minute
and David will be away Friday and unable to return in time for Shabbat – He greatly appreciates the thought!**

**11:00 - 12:00 Orah's will be here with our Shabbat Morning Kids Program upstairs in the Rabbi's study.
Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more . . . And Leah Colish will be babysitting down in the playroom**

Children's Shabbat Afternoon Oneg, Age's 6 and up (Under age 6 is welcome with an adult) 6:00 - 7:00

We kindly request all parents to pick-up their children or supervise them once Mincha commences

**6:00 - Shabbat Afternoon Oneg with Rabbi Yosef and Leah; Treats, Stories, Basketball, Hula-hoop, Parsha
Quiz, Tefillot, Raffles and Fun! Supervised play during Seudat Shelishit.**

5:30: Ladies Torah Class at the Lemberger's 1 East Olive.

Minha: 7:00 PM –

Seudah Shelishi and a Class 7:30with Rabbi Aharon

Evening Service (Arbith): 8:30 PM - Shabbat Ends: 8:42PM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

**Selihot Sunday at 7:15 and Monday through Friday at 6:25 SHARP
Shaharit Sunday8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)
Daily Hebrew language class follows afterward in the Rabbi's Study**

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Daily 6:10 AM class – Honest Business Practices

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 7PM

Rabbi Yenay drives back and forth from Lakewood, 2 hours each way.

If you want to continue this class, please show him your support and be there at 7PM sharp.

Men and Women are invited.

Tuesday night at 8PM

At the home of Chantelle and David Bibi

1233 Beech Street in Atlantic Beach

We are fthree weeks away from the High Holidays

Please pay your outstanding bills

Its crucial at this time that we have your support

If you need help with your statement please speak with Hal or Ely

We would like to schedule an EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING for Sunday morning at 9AM - August 18th

**At that point we will review and discuss plans for the garden
as well as plans for the high Holidays and going forward into 5774**

The meeting scheduled for August 11th has been cancelled

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Editors Notes

There are so many Jewish screenwriters in Hollywood because so many stories, tales and legends find their origin in Judaism. They grew up with these stories and adapt them. It would be better if they adapted the writings of our Rabbis to teach rather than to simply entertain. All of us heard the story of Rip Van Winkle. How many of us know that the origins of this tale can be found in the Talmud. There we learn of the righteous miracle worker Choni HaMaagal. After recounting his special relationship with G-d, the Gemarah in Taanit tells that Choni was always troubled by the Verse which referred to Babylonian exile as a dream - how can one sleep for seventy years?

With that the tale begins. He once met a man planting a carob tree, and asked when it would bear fruit. When the man replied that it would take seventy years, Choni asked how he expected to benefit.

The man replied that his ancestors planted it for him, and he was planting it for his descendants. Choni fell asleep along the side of the road, and when he awoke, he saw a man harvesting the carobs. The man turned out to be the grandson of the original man, and Choni realized that he had slept for seventy years. Choni made his way to the Bet Midrash – the Yeshiva. Despite his being able to answer all their difficulties, nobody believed who he was. Lacking the ability to relate to this new generation, he was grieved and prayed that Heaven take his soul. Rava commented, Thus people say, "Either friends or death."

Rabbi Abittan z'sl, would explain that a rabbi and leader must have relevancy in his generation. He must be able to relate to those around him and they must be able to relate to him. His message too must always be relevant. We can't take the lessons taught to a five year old and expect those same lessons to be taught to adults. People today want to be challenged and want to think. They also want to be motivated spiritually.

Last Shabbat, I was the guest at a Synagogue where their rabbi very recently took a new position in another community. I mentioned how important it is to find someone who can relate to their unique community. A community with a very varied outlook and level of observance needs a very skilled person who can befriend and attract congregants.

At the same time I discussed with some at Seudah Shelishi the need for the Rabbi to be allowed to lead and for the most part be autonomous when it comes to religious communal issues. I recall hearing Rabbi Eli Mansour ask a question on a the positive command to appoint a king based on the verse we read this week. 17-14/15, When you come to the land ...and you say, "Asimah Alay Melech", "I will set a king over myself". And the Torah continues: – "Som Tasim Aleycha Melech" – "You shall set a king over you."

He asks, if we are commanded to appoint a king, then why is the prophet Shemuel so upset when the people ask him 8:5 – "Simah Lanu Melech – Place for us a King"?

And he gives a beautiful answer. The commandment relates to setting a king over me, but they are not willing to set a king over themselves, they really want a king whom they can control. This is what is upsetting to the prophet.

Today, many congregations want a Rabbi whom they can control. There is the joke about the new Rabbi who starts to prepare his sermon on Monday on family purity and the President tells him that family purity is a rough subject in this congregation as people don't want a rabbi to interfere in very private matters. So on Tuesday, he starts working on a sermon on Kashrut and the president tells him that Kashrut is a rough subject in this congregation because people here like to eat what they want to eat. So on Wednesday, he starts working on Shabbat observance, and the President tells him Shabbat observance is a rough subject in this congregation as after Synagogue people like to go out to play golf or see a ball game. Then on Thursday, the Rabbi starts working on a sermon about dedicating daily time to Daf Yomi Torah study, and the President tells him daily Torah study is a rough subject in this congregation as people don't really have the time and we don't want to make people feel guilty. On Friday, the president sees the Rabbi at his desk and the Rabbi is having a tough time coming up with a sermon. The president asks, "what's the problem"? The rabbi complains that he can't speak about family purity, he can't speak about Kashrut, he can't speak about Shabbat, he can't speak about Daf Yomi, and he has no idea what to speak about. The president looks at him confused. "Rabbi, we brought you here to speak about Judaism".

When Rabbi Abittan, z'sl was alive, at least while I served as his President, things were very simple. The Rabbi gave an order and we followed through. There was no ritual committee. There was nobody to give advice. When it came to halacha and by us when it came to pretty much anything, when the rabbi spoke we listened.

The Gemara at the end of Sotah tells us that in the era before Mashiach, "The face of the generation will be like the face of a dog"?

The eminent Rabbi Yisrael Salanter of blessed memory once explained this teaching as follows: A dog by nature runs ahead of its master. It may appear that the dog is leading the master. But then one notices that the dog is always turning around to see where his master is heading and that's the direction the dog takes. So the one who appears to lead is in reality following. This is the face of the dog. In our days, however, on the eve of the Redemption, leaders who are supposed to lead, don't! They take polls and then lead the people in the direction they presume the people want to go. While this may be the method of politicians, it should not be the method of our rabbis and leaders. The rabbi who simply tells his congregants what they want to hear is not doing the job a rabbi must do. The rabbi's role is to understand his people and understand where they are and where they need to be and then lead them there. Let us grant them that role and let us rise to new and greater heights together.

We may be the generation filled with politicians who have the face of the dog and who have mastered the illusion of leading while all they do is follow their pollsters. Let us not end up being the generation with dog faced rabbis too.

Let's take, "Rabbi who we can control" off the job description.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Paying it Forward

After undergoing major chest surgery at the age of 14 which required 13 liters of blood, James Harrison vowed to become a blood donor himself. True to his word, James has donated blood regularly for the past 56 years. Now approaching his one thousandth donation, James is the Australian record holder for the most blood donations. James' blood contains a life-saving antibody which prevents Rh(D) negative women developing Rh(D) antibodies during pregnancy, which can harm the unborn child. When he began donating, thousands of babies were dying each year of Rhesus disease, and thousands more

were being born with brain damage because of the condition. His multiple donations have contributed to more than two million doses of Rh(D) immunoglobulin. His selfless commitment to giving blood regularly has helped save the lives of almost two and a half million babies including his own grandchild. His blood has also led to the development of a vaccine for the disease called Anti-D. James has become affectionately known as the 'man with the golden arm' and his generosity is making a real difference to the lives of millions of Australians. (This was as of 2010 - As blood plasma, in contrast to blood, can be donated as often as every 2-3 weeks, he was able to reach his 1000th donation in May 2011. This results in an average of one donation every three weeks during 57 years. Commenting his then record number: I could say it's the only record that I hope is broken, because if they do, they have donated a thousand donations.) After reading this, what are you inspired to do? Let me know.

The Reward of Self Control

ED NOTE: I tried to reach Rabbi Meisels today to verify the story. It comes in the name of Rabbi Falk, posted in Emunah Daily. Amazing story which took place only a few years ago.

Rabbi Meisels, a renowned lecturer, was once invited to deliver a lecture in Melbourne, Australia at a Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes function. He was flying to Australia via Los Angeles, and while he was very pleased to deliver a speech, he was worried about the twenty-hour trek to the other side of the world. The travel agent found out that there was a Jew from Israel on his flight, and Rabbi Meisels was looking forward to meeting him and having a travel companion. The two men met in the airport in Los Angeles, and Rabbi Meisels learned that the man was flying to Australia in order to collect money to marry off his eleventh child. He had tried collecting in the United States, but due to the financial crisis he was unable to raise the funds he needed, and so somebody advised him to travel to Australia, where few people go to collect charity.

As the men passed through security, they were told to remove their shoes and put them through the conveyor belt, in accordance with standard security procedures. After they passed through the metal detectors, they went to retrieve their shoes. Rabbi Meisels found his shoes and put them on, but his new friend could not find his shoes. He looked all over, but could not find them. He started getting a bit agitated, but he was nevertheless able to stay calm, and he respectfully asked one of the security workers if they could find his shoes. They staff members

looked around, and they found a pair of shoes in a corner, but they were two sizes too small. "Apparently there was a mix up," they said, "and somebody mistakenly took your shoes." They said they could give him a \$100 voucher to purchase new shoes in Melbourne, but there was nothing else they could do. The man remained perfectly calm, said "Thank you," and continued toward the gate without shoes. He accepted the fact that he'd have to fly across the world barefoot, and would have no shoes until he got to Melbourne.

On the flight, there was an area on the plane where passengers could go and stretch. Rabbi Meisels was there with this man, and they noticed another man, a non-Jew, standing near them, who kept looking at the man's bare feet and then at his face. Finally, this non-Jew said to the man, "I want to tell you, I was right behind you in the airport when your shoes went missing. I must say, I've never in my life seen such refinement, such self-control. If that were me, I'd be shouting and screaming, 'Get me shoes! I don't care if you have to hold up the entire plane until you get me a new pair of shoes - I am not going to Australia barefoot!' But you just accepted the situation with a smile, I couldn't believe it."

The man, whose English was far from fluent, did not understand exactly what this passenger said to him, so the Rabbi translated for him. The passenger then asked Rabbi Meisels who this man was and why he was traveling to Melbourne, and the Rabbi explained that he was going to raise money for his daughter's wedding.

"What?" the man said. "That's not right. Such a refined person should go knocking on doors asking for money? He's far too aristocratic for that. How much does he need?"

The Rabbi replied that he needed \$25,000. Right there on the spot, the non-Jewish passenger wrote the man a check for €25,000, the equivalent of \$33,000. They couldn't believe it. When they arrived in Melbourne, they went to the bank to cash the check, and the entire amount was covered. The man thanked Hashem for His help, and took the next flight to Israel.

This was a beautiful example of a kiddush Hashem that brought in its wake an immediate salvation. G-d lends His assistance in the merit of our creating a kiddush Hashem.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st and 2nd Aliyot: Moshe details the most important characteristics of a Judge: the ability to remain objective and the strength to refuse bribery. The singular focus of the Shofet must be to carry out the

will of G-d as detailed in the Halacha. Nothing must deter him in carrying out his mission of justice.

Idoltrous practices must be eradicated and punished. Idol worship represents the greatest perversion of justice by replacing divine justice with human failings and desires.

The Sanhedrin is our direct link with divine intent, and as stated in Pasuk 17:11, we view the rulings and interpretations of the Supreme Court as G-dly directives.

Our Monarch must be selected for his unyielding commitment to G-d, Torah, and the people. This is why he must write his own Sefer Torah and carry it with him at all times. He must be first and foremost a Shofet, a Judge.

3rd and 4th Aliyot: Moshe again addressed the place of the tribe of Levi, reemphasizing the care and attention due to them by the rest of the nation. They are our teachers. Without their instruction we will neither understand or be able to properly apply justice.

5th Aliya: For justice to exist, it must be accepted as a divine ruling. Only G-d's justice can be trusted to take into account all variables and possibilities. Moshe instructed his nation regarding the true Navi - prophet and the false prophet. No other forms of divination can be used to ascertain G-d's justice, and all false prophets and methods of divination must be destroyed. The value of human life is determined by our system of justice, and Moshe reviewed the laws of the unintentional killing in contrast with the intentional murder.

6th, and 7th Aliyot: The end of Parshas Shoftim discusses both proper and false witnesses, as well as the Torah's approach to warfare. It may be that the judicial quality of a nation can be ultimately assessed by its behavior during war, more so than during times of peace.

The Parsha concludes with the unique mitzvah of the Eglah Arufa and the process through which the community takes responsibility for the unsolved murders. This ceremony, which reflects the priceless value of life, might be the most eloquent expression of G-d's judicial system.

Isaiah 51:12 -52:12 - G-d, speaking through Yishayuhu the Navi, contrasts the situation of Israel while in exile to the way things will be at the time of Her redemption. In many ways it continues the Parsha's theme of justice. "...Behold I took from you

the cup of weakness... and I will place it into the hand of those who cause you to wander..." (51:22-23)
Ultimately, Israel will be returned to the Land and our oppressors will be punished.

In the last section of the Haftorah (52:7-9) the Navi prophesies the coming of Eliyahu Hanavi who will herald the arrival of Mashiach and the rebuilding of Yeruysalayim. "How beautiful are the feet of the herald on the mountains announcing peace, heralding good tidings, announcing salvation..." Our soon to be announced redemption is the greatest consolation that G-d could offer his children.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"You shall be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d." (Debarim 18:13)

Rashi explains this verse to mean that we should accept what Hashem has in store for us wholeheartedly with perfect faith, and without trying to divine what will be in the future. We often hear stories from people who went to Israel and visited a "mekubal," and were informed of secrets of their lives. These people will tell you that these mekubalim are clearly privy to information that they could not have known through natural means, and they are convinced that they can also predict the future accurately. Why not avoid hardship, broken marriages, financial distress and the like by visiting one of these practitioners?

Rabbi Frand explains that there is only one reason: It's prohibited! According to Rashi and the Ramban, it's prohibited. They hold it's a misvah not to try to "outsmart" Hashem by trying to determine what will happen in the future. The Rambam holds the Torah is giving good advice, not an actual commandment. Besides all of this, our Torah leaders, Rav Schach one of them, have warned us that many of these "mekubalim" are fakers. One should not go to these practitioners for advice unless he is already known as a saddik and a great Torah scholar. Even if we follow the Rambam's approach and consider the verse good advice, our Sages teach that it can be dangerous

to rely on these soothsayers, even if they are honest.

Our Sages teach us that King Solomon knew the language of all wildlife. Someone once asked King Solomon to teach him the language of the birds. At first he refused, but the man pestered him until he finally relented. One day, after learning the language, he was walking in the field and heard one bird telling the other, "You see this fellow? His entire flock of cattle is going to die within the next couple of weeks." The man rushed home and sold his entire flock to the first man willing to buy it. Sure enough,

two weeks later the entire flock died, and he avoided a major disaster. Some time later he heard the birds saying that his house will burn down to the ground. The man took action and again sold his house on time.

The third time, he heard the birds saying, "This man is going to die next week." This time he didn't have a way to save himself, so he ran to King Solomon for help. The King said, "I told you that I didn't want to teach you the language of the birds! You see, a while back you had sinned, and Hashem had to deliver some sort of punishment as a message to you that you should do teshubah. He was going to punish you by killing your cattle. The financial setback would cause you to repent. But you 'outsmarted Him' and sold your cattle. The same thing happened with your house. Now the only option left is that Hashem will have you die as punishment for your sins."

This story might actually be true, or a parable, but the message is clear. We have to learn that when trouble comes our way, it is the best thing that could happen to us. We should accept it and try to interpret the message he is sending us with those hardships. Hashem doesn't send difficulties our way to make us suffer, but either as a lesson, an atonement, or to cause us to repent. With this advice we can spare ourselves much worse suffering that we might otherwise have to endure. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"You shall be simple with Hashem, your G-d" (Debarim 18:13)

After commanding us not to seek out the future using soothsayers and magicians, the Torah tells us to be simple in our faith with Hashem. The word ohin" means simple and also means perfect, to be whole and complete with G-d. Even though the meanings don't seem related, they are really along the same line. To be simple with Hashem means to put our faith only in Him and not let ourselves be consumed by what may be and all the "what ifs" of the future. Although we must plan and be prepared as much as is the norm, we must not be overanxious or use desperate means to figure out the future. By focusing on the "simple" trust that Hashem controls everything and He can do anything he wants, we turn to Him with complete faith, and this becomes a perfect faith.

Especially in these turbulent times, when events are rushing past us at dizzying speeds and we are tempted by those who claim to know what's ahead of us, let us remember that simple means perfect, and that by going back to our ancestors' ways of simple faith in Hashem, we will get closer and closer to perfection. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

People mature at different ages. Some youngsters act much older than their age, and then there are older folks who never seem to grow up. The way you behave is a function of your emotional development and sense of self.

But what about the aging of the body? How can we explain the differences in physical functioning among people as they grow older? While it is true that diet, exercise, and sleep habits, as well as vitamins and dietary supplements, can retard the aging process, the fact remains that whatever you do to keep fit is still subject to your personal metabolism and pace of aging.

There are many active and vibrant men and women, well on in years, who seem young to all who meet them. Their enthusiastic pursuit of new goals, ideals, and objectives recharges both body and mind and injects them with new doses of youthful eagerness which, in turn, work to supply energy to their aging bodies.

If you should suffer from lethargy or even the aches and pains that come with the later years of life, take a look in the mirror. Is it the body that is getting weak, or is it the mind that is submitting to a lack of spark? Decide to take on a new project and watch your vigor increase. This initiative will keep the wrinkles and the pains of old age at bay, and keep you feeling young and vibrant. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Gratitude Versus Entitlement

Parashat Shoftim begins with a discussion of the nation's judiciary, and in this context it reiterates the prohibition against taking bribes (16:19). The reason why a judge may not accept a bribe from a litigant is obvious. Judges must decide their cases with clear, strict objectivity. A judge who received a handsome sum of money from a litigant before the trial will obviously come into the courtroom with predisposed favoritism toward that litigant, and will be unable to try the case honestly and objectively.

The Talmud relates a number of stories that demonstrate how far the great Hachamim went to ensure a fair, balanced disposition in the courtroom. The Sage Shemuel was once crossing a narrow bridge, and a man extended his hand and helped the Rabbi make his way across. It turned out that this individual had come to ask Shemuel to settle a legal dispute. But Shemuel refused to try the case, as the

man had done him a favor which might, ever so slightly, cloud his objectivity.

The Talmud also tells that a man once did Amemor the favor of brushing a feather off his clothing. Amemor refused to preside over a court case involving this individual – since he had done him this “service” of removing a feather! Similarly, Mar Ukba refused to hear a case because one of the litigants had covered some spittle in the street as Mar Ukba was walking so that the Rabbi would not step into it. Once again, the Rabbi feared that he would be unable to judge with strict objectivity because a litigant had done him a small favor. Finally, Rabbi Yishmael refused to try a case involving his sharecropper, who worked his fields and brought him a percentage of the produce. Even though the sharecropper earned his livelihood from Rabbi Yishmael and brought him his own fruits, Rabbi Yishmael still feared he might be predisposed in the sharecropper's favor because of his service.

The obvious question arises, did the great Sages have such weak moral conviction that they would have been so easily led to subjectivity? Were they so easily flattered that they would show preference to somebody who had dusted a feather over their jacket?

The answer is that these Sages felt immensely grateful for even the smallest favors performed for them, and even for the service performed by their employees. We question their behavior in these incidents only because we do not sense the same level of appreciation and gratitude felt by these great Sadikim. We live in a society characterized by a sense of entitlement. People today always think they deserve more than they receive, that no matter what people do for them, they are actually entitled to even more. But the great Sages of Israel looked at things from the precisely opposite perspective. They genuinely appreciated even the small favors people did for them, and felt an enormous debt of gratitude for simple gestures like lending a hand at the bridge.

This is why the Rabbis refused to try cases involving individuals who had helped them, even by performing relatively small favors. They felt such a debt of gratitude for everything done for them, that they feared that this sense of indebtedness would cloud their objectivity. Their fear thus stemmed not from a lack of moral conviction, but rather from their overwhelming sense of gratitude.

The mindset of these Sages should serve as an example to all of us. We must not take for granted all that is done for us by our spouses, other family

members, employees, employers, partners, associates and friends. Rather than feeling selfishly entitled to all that we receive, we should instead feel grateful and appreciative, and never assume that we deserve all that we have.

Rabbi Wein

Prayer, in its most formal sense, comprises an important part of daily Jewish life and ritual. Daily morning, afternoon and evening services are the staple rhythm of activities in every synagogue and home throughout the Jewish world. There are many dimensions of prayer in Jewish tradition and thought. And perhaps no subject has been explained and scrutinized as closely in the writings of the great Jewish scholars of the ages as has been prayer.

Prayer in Judaism is at one and the same time composed of rigid formality and set halachic rules, and the necessity for personal emotion, devotion and intent. Reconciling these two apparently contradictory motives is and always has been a daunting task for the individual Jew who prays regularly.

On one hand it can become purely a matter of rote and habit, something that one does, so to speak, in a mental and emotional state of stupor and absentmindedness. On the other hand there are times when one experiences intense emotional feeling and this is especially true when one offers particular personal requests before one's Creator.

And the necessity for devotion and meaning in prayer is present at all times during prayer, even in the most formal and regular circumstances. So I think that we can all agree that achieving meaningful and spiritually satisfying prayer on a regular basis is a most challenging and taxing goal.

This being the case, in this current season when meaningful prayer occupies our minds and hearts we are often perplexed by the nature and results of prayer itself.

Basically, the idea of prayer in Jewish life is made up of two components. One is the concept of praise, wonder and awe that comprises our relationship with the Almighty. It is an acknowledgement of our faith in a universe created ex nihilo by an omniscient and omnipotent Supreme Being. Prayer in Judaism is a daily recommitment to the essential belief in a universal and active God.

The second element of prayer is our request from Heaven of earthly blessings and personal wishes.

Though even these prayers are formed in decided and formal language and terms, the requests are decidedly personal. There even exists latitude for more personal and individual formulations of wishes for health, family, prosperity and the like. There are also requests for the national salvation of Israel and for a hoped for betterment of the human condition generally, and for the betterment of all humankind.

Part of the sophistication and elegance involved in the formulation of traditional Jewish prayer over the millennia has been the ability to blend these two differing purposes into one almost seamless whole. Prayer was therefore meant to be a serious exercise in thought, life-analysis, and faith. It was also always meant to be emotional, meaningful, soulful and exalted. It never really was intended to be easy on the mind and the clock nor was it necessarily supposed to be entertaining or "cool." In order to achieve this precarious balance the rules of halacha were formulated to govern prayer. Deviating from these rules engenders a loss of prayer's essential balance and a forfeiture of its necessary holy aura.

But what are we to think when our prayers and requests seemingly go unanswered? It is painful in the extreme to the human psyche to be ignored or rebuffed. And yet we never have any guarantee that our particular prayers and requests will evoke a response from Heaven, which will be discernible to us. In fact all of us feel at certain moments of our lives that our prayers have gone unanswered.

There are those that say that "no" – being ignored and unanswered is also an answer. But that is really an answer that only again begs the question. It is obvious that we should not deal with prayer as an application to Heaven that must immediately be acted upon. The rhythm of Heaven is not that of our earth and prayers that seemingly went unanswered for centuries suddenly and unexpectedly receive response and fulfillment.

Thus prayer, though intended many times by the person praying to be seen as short-term and immediate, in reality is always long-term and can affect generations currently yet unborn. Prayer as a consequence becomes part of the inscrutable nature of all things governed by Heaven and Divine Will. It is our task and obligation to pray and request, to praise and to renew our faith in our Creator. Heaven will deal with our prayer in Its own perfect and beneficial judgment.

Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth
Testing Prophecy

In his enumeration of the various leadership roles within the nation that would take shape after his death, Moses mentions not only the priest/judge and king but also the prophet:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”

Moses would not be the last of the prophets. He would have successors. Historically this was so. From the days of Samuel to the Second Temple period, each generation gave rise to men – and sometimes women – who spoke God’s word with immense courage, unafraid to censure kings, criticize priests, or rebuke an entire generation for its lack of faith and moral integrity.

There was, however, an obvious question: How does one tell a true prophet from a false one? Unlike kings or priests, prophets did not derive authority from formal office. Their authority lay in their personality, their ability to give voice to the word of God, their self-evident inspiration. But precisely because a prophet has privileged access to the word others cannot hear, the visions others cannot see, the real possibility existed of false prophets – like those of Baal in the days of King Ahab. Charismatic authority is inherently destabilizing. What was there to prevent a fraudulent, or even a sincere but mistaken, figure, able to perform signs and wonders and move the people by the power of his words, from taking the nation in a wrong direction, misleading others and perhaps even himself?

There are several dimensions to this question. One in particular is touched on in our sedra, namely the prophet’s ability to foretell the future. This is how Moses puts it:

You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?” If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

On the face of it, the test is simple: if what the prophet predicts comes to pass, he is a true prophet; if not, not. Clearly, though, it was not that simple.

The classic case is the Book of Jonah. Jonah is commanded by God to warn the people of Nineveh that their wickedness is about to bring disaster on them. Jonah attempts to flee, but fails – the famous story of the sea, the storm, and the “great fish”. Eventually he goes to Nineveh and utters the words God has commanded him to say – “Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed” – the people repent and the city is spared. Jonah, however, is deeply dissatisfied:

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, “O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4: 1-3)

Jonah’s complaint can be understood in two ways. First, he was distressed that God had forgiven the people. They were, after all, wicked. They deserved to be punished. Why then did a mere change of heart release them from the punishment that was their due?

Second, he had been made to look a fool. He had told them that in forty days the city would be destroyed. It was not. God’s mercy made nonsense of his prediction.

Jonah is wrong to be displeased: that much is clear. God says, in the rhetorical question with which the book concludes: “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” Should I not be merciful? Should I not forgive? What then becomes of the criterion Moses lays down for distinguishing between a true and false prophet: “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken”? Jonah had proclaimed that the city would be destroyed in forty days. It wasn’t; yet the proclamation was true. He really did speak the word of God. How can this be so?

The answer is given in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah had been prophesying national disaster. The people had drifted from their religious vocation, and the result would be defeat and exile. It was a difficult and demoralizing message for people to hear. A false prophet arose, Hananiah son of Azzur, preaching the opposite. Babylon, Israel’s enemy, would soon be defeated. Within two years the crisis would be over. Jeremiah knew that it was not so, and that Hananiah was telling the people what they

wanted to hear, not what they needed to hear. He addressed the assembled people:

He said, "Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfil the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true."

Jeremiah makes a fundamental distinction between good news and bad. It is easy to prophesy disaster. If the prophecy comes true, then you have spoken the truth. If it does not, then you can say: God relented and forgave. A negative prophecy cannot be refuted – but a positive one can. If the good foreseen comes to pass, then the prophecy is true. If it does not, then you cannot say, 'God changed His mind' because God does not retract from a promise He has made of good, or peace, or return.

It is therefore only when the prophet offers a positive vision that he can be tested. That is why Jonah was wrong to believe he had failed when his negative prophecy – the destruction of Nineveh – failed to come true. This is how Maimonides puts it:

As to calamities predicted by a prophet, if, for example, he foretells the death of a certain individual or declares that in particular year there will be famine or war and so forth, the non-fulfilment of his forecast does not disprove his prophetic character. We are not to say, "See, he spoke and his prediction has not come to pass." For God is long-suffering and abounding in kindness and repents of evil. It may also be that those who were threatened repented and were therefore forgiven, as happened to the men of Nineveh. Possibly too, the execution of the sentence is only deferred, as in the case of Hezekiah. But if the prophet, in the name of God, assures good fortune, declaring that a particular event would come to pass, and the benefit promised has not been realized, he is unquestionably a false prophet, for no blessing decreed by the Almighty, even if promised conditionally, is ever revoked . . . Hence we learn that only when he predicts good fortune can the prophet be tested. (Yesodei ha-Torah 10: 4)

Fundamental conclusions follow from this. A prophet is not an oracle: a prophecy is not a prediction. Precisely because Judaism believes in free will, the human future can never be unfailingly predicted.

People are capable of change. God forgives. As we say in our prayers on the High Holy Days: "Prayer, penitence and charity avert the evil decree." There is no decree that cannot be revoked. A prophet does not foretell. He warns. A prophet does not speak to predict future catastrophe but rather to avert it. If a prediction comes true it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true it has failed.

The second consequence is no less far-reaching. The real test of prophecy is not bad news but good. Calamity, catastrophe, disaster prove nothing. Anyone can foretell these things without risking his reputation or authority. It is only by the realization of a positive vision that prophecy is put to the test. So it was with Israel's prophets. They were realists, not optimists. They warned of the dangers that lay ahead. But they were also, without exception, agents of hope. They could see beyond the catastrophe to the consolation. That is the test of a true prophet.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

Aspects of our Holy Shabbat The Source of Blessing A Sign of a covenant between Hashem & Us

1. Hashem created the world from nothing and is in full control.

Everything is in the world because He wishes it to be.

2. A double portion of Mann (food from Heaven) fell for Shabbat (Bitachon).

The 2 hallot that we have at every Shabbat meal to remind us that the Jew

who is loyal to Hashem's mitzvot will not lose out by keeping them.

The Mann is the demonstration of Bitachon, showing that Hashem is in control.

3. Shabbat is the time to give thanks to Hashem.

We sing on the Shabbat day, "Tov Lehodot laShem." It is Good to give thanks to Hashem.

4. "Zecher leyetziat Mitzrayim" "to remind us of the Exodus from Egypt"

Shabbat commemorates the creation of Am Yisrael.

"Beni uben Benei Yisrael ot hi le'olam" Shabbat is a sign of a covenant between Hashem and us.

Think: who are you? – a goy kadosh, a holy nation chosen by Hashem

5. "Be'Shabbat nitenah Torah le'Yisrael", The Torah was given on Shabbat.

Shabbat is the glorious opportunity to accomplish something in the knowledge of the great gift

Hashem gave us-The Torah.

6. Shabbat is "Me'en Olam Haba", A preparation and a picture of Olam Haba which will strengthen our

Eemunah.

As you sit at your Shabbat table enjoying the delicacies of Shabbat, think about Olam Haba.
7. Hashem rested on Shabbat, "Ki bo shabat vayinafash".

And He wants that your donkey and ox shall rest.
Hashem rested, and He wants us to do the same, so that we should emulate Him.

Shabbat teaches us that Hashem desires Kindliness.

8. Oneg Shabbat – "Anyone who causes joy to himself on Shabbat, he is going to get an estate in Olam Haba that has no bounds."

Shabbat is a day to enjoy in order to know how great is Hashem's kindness to us.

And so, we have to concentrate on enjoying Shabbat in every way.

9. "The words of the Hachamim are more beloved to Hashem than the wine of the Torah itself."

The Sages added a number of decrees to our shemirat Shabbat.

Keeping 'takanot' Hachamim shows real Yirat Shamayim by demonstrating that we keep the fences built around His laws.

!0. "Hashem blessed the Sabbath day"

The Jew has vacation with pay, one sixth of his life. Includes Shabbat & Holidays.

We can use this time to be with our families, talk to our children, associate with relatives

& friends, attend the synagogue for prayers and learning Torah and to hear the Rabbi speak.

11. To gain "Da'at". The most important thing in life is to gain True Knowledge.

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