

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYESHEB

DECEMBER 13, 2014

21 KISLEV 5775

DEDICATIONS: Le'lluy Nishmat Yosef ben Esther
Happy Birthday Allen Pilevsky – Abal 120 happy and healthy years

We want to thank all those involved in making our sisterhood dinner so successful

Candle lighting Friday evening 4:11 p.m. Mincha at 4:11

SHABBAT: Perasha class with Rabbi Aharon at 8:30 this week

Shaharit - Hashem Melech at 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:46AM
Kiddush this week is sponsored by Jerrie (Shlomo) Colish in memory of his mother Leah bat Hershel Avraham.
– Kiddush before 11:50 Hasot

Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one
Early Mincha after Kiddush - Amidah after 12:13

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30
Ages 0-5 - in the Playroom/ Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at the Bach 3:30 PM
Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 4:00

Return for Arbit at 5:30 and then following ARBIT
Saturday Night December 13th at 6:15 pm Did you know there are over 700,000 amateur radio operators in the United States and almost 3 million world-wide! Come learn the secrets of how to operate your own radio to communicate with others by transmitting voice, Morse code, digital text and pictures, even live video signals by radio from one ham "station" to another, on land and at sea, in the air, and in space. Children and adults of all ages are invited. Pizza and refreshments will be served. Presentation by Bob Kraus, facilitated by Rabbi Yosef

THERE IS NO Krav Maga SUNDAY because of meeting and Hanukah party

GENERAL SYNAGOGUE MEETING For all congregants
At the Synagogue – New Date - Sunday December 14th at 9:30 AM
Looking forward to 2015 – Talking about the future and transitions

SUNDAY – Sisterhood Chanukah Party
All invited 4-7 PM at the Synagogue

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE
Shaharit Sunday 8:00AM, Mon and Thurs at 6:55, Tues, Weds and Fri at 7:00

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE - Thursday Nights 8:30-9:30 Virtual* Class facilitated by Rabbi Yosef Colish.
Practical Laws of Shabbat for Sephardim

SAVE THE DATE!
Movie night will be on January 10th at Lido Synagogue.
We will be seeing BRURIAH, an Israeli movie about a modern Orthodox woman whose life and fate are intimately connected with the legendary Bruriah

A NOTE FROM DEBBY FISH

I love Long Beach! Unfortunately my return visit to the City by the Sea was for Rehabilitation at the Komanoff Center after sustaining a fractured femur. I am still amazed by the outpouring of support and caring shown by every part of the Long Beach Jewish community. Long Beach truly knows and understands what Bikkur Cholim means.

From my first days in Rehab I had visitors. Of course there were the wonderful "Pink Ladies." I can't remember a time when Estelle Wolf and Esther Press were not at Long Beach Hospital taking care of all the Jewish patients, making sure each one had grape juice, challah rolls and "candles" for Shabbos. Since Komanoff isn't kosher, I was showered with meals, not only for Shabbos, but all week too. Neither lunch nor dinner was a problem and I always had fresh fruit and other snacks. Amazingly, I always had something to read as people brought me books to keep me busy.

Most importantly, every visitor brought cheer and Chizuk. The other residents constantly commented on how nice my friends were; "she said "hello" and was so friendly" or "she asked how I feel and listened to my answer." I was lucky to be there on a very short term basis, but to the permanent residents, these interactions mean the world. Long Beach's Bikkur Cholim is indeed a Kiddush HaShem.

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

Follow us on twitter @BenaiAsher for a daily dose of Torah, Israel or something of interest

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100 – Mincha and Arbit – Give us 22 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

Editors Notes

Someone asked me why I was taking the time to get involved with the World Zionist Congress. A few weeks ago I wrote an article which appeared in a number of Jewish papers, was distributed by a number of organizations and which we posted in the newsletter.

In addition to that, let me tell you what happens if we don't become involved.

I received a copy of an email pressing members of the reform movement to vote. "If you care about the Reform Movement in Israel, if you support egalitarian prayer, if you believe in freedom of religion, the right

of Rabbis of all streams to conduct weddings, divorce, burials and conversion, here is your chance to make a difference."

The note continues: "The most important aspect of this election is money and influence."

They go on to stress that if they win the majority "they will be able to insure among other things \$20,000,000 to support The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, the World Union for Progressive Judaism and related organizations."

Furthermore they explain, "The influence will come from being able to determine appointments for key professional positions to carry out Reform Jewish values within the WZO. We will join with the Israeli political parties to influence Israeli society"

Controlling 200 out of 400 seats gives them this power and we see the influence they have and the changes they are making even when those changes run against the philosophy of the vast majority of Israeli society.

The rabbis understood and understand that our silence is a sin. Instead of letting our voice be heard And it takes so little to make a difference.

Consider this:

1. The Israeli Government is giving 1/2 billion NIS for Jewish education to strengthen world Jewry. 100's of millions of NIS will go to the US for this initiative.
2. From the WZO, which includes the Jewish Agency, Keren Kayemet and Keren Hayesod, the funds include 360 million US\$ plus 53 million US\$
3. The delegates elected into the Congress make the decisions and influence where the money will go. The party's with the most representation have more power to sway decisions and move money toward their party's interests and agenda's.
4. Ohavei Zion's agenda is to fund Torah education in America for the children in religious schools and especially for those families who cannot afford it.

At this point we are about 40 votes from making the party official. And we need those 40 votes entered this weekend. We have only until December 15th.

Each of you should follow the link below and register to vote for " Ohavei Zion ". The registration process is open to any Jewish US resident over 18. It only costs \$10 per person (\$5 if you're under 35), but again, this has the potential to get tens of millions of dollars redirected specifically for Jewish education.

Please visit: <https://admin.election-america.com/Candidates/?petition=10>.

You can register up to four people with the same credit card. Please close and reopen the window for each registration. If you have any questions or trouble with the sign in process, please contact Lana Eliyahu, our Executive Director at ana.eliyahu@gmail.com or call her to 917-213-4600

Your vote is crucial. We need 40 more votes this weekend. Please vote and forward this to friends and family to vote. Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

PS ... Vayeshev and shoes. They form an interesting combination to look into. We considered during our classes this week and I hoped to write about it, but I've got a plane to catch. If you're in Miami this weekend, ask me about it.

THE FESTIVAL OF HANUKKAH

By Rabbi Elie Abadie, M.D.

The miracle of Hanukkah occurred approximately 22 centuries ago. When the Greek-Hellenistic Empire ruled over Israel. Antiokhos the Governor, decreed that no Jew be allowed to practice the Mitzvot of the Torah. This decree meant that the Jews would not be able to keep Shabbat, eat kosher, circumcise their children, celebrate Pesah, Sukkot, Shabuot, Rosh Hashana Kippur, etc. Antiokhos wanted the total spiritual annihilation of the Jews.

The Hashmonaim, a family of Kohanim, served in the Temple in Jerusalem at that time. They were not able to perform the sacred duties required. The duty to light the "Eternal Light" – the Ner Tamid was one of these, since the oil used to light the Ner Tamid had to have the seal of the High Priest and could not be touched by strangers.

On the 25th day of Kislev 3591, the Hashmonaim with the help of the Almighty, overthrew the Greeks. They reconquered the Holy Temple and found enough "pure oil" to burn for less than one day. Miraculously though, it lasted for eight days, until the Kohanim were able to procure more "pure oil". The miracle of the oil and the successful military triumph over the Greek empire confirmed the everlasting pact that exists between G-D and the Children of Israel, and restored their freedom to practice anew the Torah and their sacred religion. They rededicated the Temple and renewed Jewish sovereignty over

the Land of Israel. Once again the spiritual and physical survival of the Jews was assured for eternity. Our sages recognized the importance of this miracle and declared the eight days of Hanukkah as "Days of Praise and Thanksgiving to the Almighty," and instituted that every Jewish household must celebrate Hanukkah by the lighting of the Hanukkah (or Menorah) for eight days, symbolizing the eight days during which the oil burned miraculously.

Selected Laws of Hanukkah

1. How do we celebrate Hanukkah?

Every year on the 25th day of Kislev, the eight days of Hanukkah begin. These days are to be celebrated with happiness and joy, with praise and thanksgiving to the Almighty. Therefore, one may not eulogize, fast or show any sign of mourning during these days, even if it is a memorial day. While there is no obligation to make feasts or a commemorative dinner, it is fitting to sing pizmonim and zemirot during the meals on these days.

Some homes are accustomed to eat all kinds of pastries such as mamul, gheraibe, karabij, sambusak, (borekas), sufganiot, (fried donuts), etc. One may not engage in any activity one half an hour before Hanukkah lighting time, such as eating a meal, studying, or any other activity that might distract one from lighting the Hanukkah on time. It is customary for women to refrain from doing housework during the first and last day of Hanukkah and especially during Rosh Hodesh. It is also customary for women to refrain from doing any work during the first half hour in which the Hanukkah is lit. Some say that even men should refrain from doing any work during that time, but one may be lenient for men when it is necessary. Hanukkah presents and gifts are not a Sephardic custom.

2. Who is obligated to light?

Men and women are obligated to light, but they may light for one another. It is the Sephardic custom that the father lights for the entire family. (In the absence of the father, the mother should take the responsibility upon herself to light.) Therefore, children even above the age of bar or bat mitzva should not light by themselves, although they may participate by lighting the additional candles of a given night (beyond the first candle). Children under five years of age may light only the "shamash" - the extra candle. Sephardic children in dormitories of high schools, colleges, universities or yeshivot, that are supported financially by their parents do not have to light their own Hanukkah, and they can rely on the yeshiva or the Ashkenazi students. Those wishing to go beyond the required halakha, may light but without the blessings.

3. Where do we place the Hanukkah?

The Hanukkah should be placed in open view of as many people as possible. If possible it should be placed on the left side of the door from without; if that is not possible, place it from within opposite the side where the mezzuzah is. If the door does not face the street where people walk, one may put it near the window. This also applies to people living in apartments above the first floor. However, for people living higher than the third floor - if the window is either not in the public view, or it is not possible to put it near the window, then the Hanukkah should be placed on the dinner table, where the family members will notice it. The Hanukkah must be placed at least one foot off, and no more than forty feet, above the floor.

All candles must be placed in a straight line, and should be at the same height, except the "shamash". Therefore Hanukkiot that are multi-leveled may not be used.

4. What kind of Hanukkah may be used?

An electric Hanukkah is not acceptable and cannot be used to fulfill the Mitzva of Hanukkah. If someone wishes to light an electric Hanukkah in addition to the regular Hanukkah, he may do so - but without the blessings.

Any type of oil, wax, or fat may be used to light the Hanukkah. Olive oil, however, is preferred. All Hanukkiot should be cleaned every night after usage. Hanukkiot made out of glass, metal, or wood may be used. Hanukkiot made out of clay should be avoided.

5. How, and how many candles do we light?

When facing the Hanukkah, one should place the candles beginning from the right side of the Hanukkah and start lighting from left to right. When adding a candle each night, it should be added to the left of the candle of the prior day. Recite the blessings and start lighting the new candle. The lighting must take place where the Hanukkah will remain; it is not to be moved once lit.

On the first night one candle is lit plus the "shamash" (the extra candle). On each successive night another candle is added until the eighth night when eight candles are lit, plus the "shamash" for a total of nine. It is the custom of some Syrian Jews, descendants of the Franco-Spanish Jews, to begin by lighting the first night with two candles plus the "shamash" - for a total of three candles, and on each successive night another candle is added until the eighth night when nine candles are lit plus the shamash for a total of ten. It is a Sephardic custom to light the candles with an extra candle and to light the "shamash" last. One should be careful not to light the "shamash" first.

6. When do we light?

The proper time to light is by nightfall, which is 15 minutes after sun-set, with the whole family gathered together. If by the time the whole family would be gathered is past the designated time to light, then the family should light with the blessings as soon as they can get together. The Hanukkah should contain enough oil, or wax to burn for 30 minutes after nightfall. On Friday evening, the Hanukkah should be lit before the Shabbat candles, thus the Hanukkah should burn at least for seventy minutes after the proper time for lighting. On a Saturday night the proper time to light is after Shabbat's end, even though it is already after nightfall. In the Synagogue, the Hanukkah is lit prior to Haddala. At home the Hanukkah should be lit after Haddala.

The Hanukkah should burn for at least thirty minutes after nightfall. Therefore, if the candles blew out by themselves before the required 30 minutes after nightfall, one is not required to rekindle them, however one may re-light them by using the "shamash" or an extra candle only (though not from one of the other Hanukkah candles), without saying the blessings.

Since it is forbidden to use the light emanating from the Hanukkah even to learn Torah, it is therefore customary to have the "shamash" candle to serve that purpose, should it be necessary. If for a compelling reason one was not able to light the Hanukkah on time, or if no one lit the Hanukkah for him, one may light the Hanukkah throughout the night with all the required blessings.

7. What are the blessings?

On the first night, before lighting the candles one should recite the following berachot in the order:

1. Barukh Ata....Asher Kideshanu Bemissvotav Vessivanu Lehadlik Ner Hanukkah. (note: do not recite "Shel Hanukkah")
2. Barukh Ata....She'asa Nissim La'abotenu Bayamim Hahem Bazeman Haze.
3. Barukh Ata... .Shehehiyanu Vekiyemanu Vehigianu Lazeman Haze.

On subsequent nights one should recite only the first two blessings. However, if someone forgot to recite the third blessing on the first night, he may recite it on the second, or any subsequent night. When someone has finished lighting the first candle, he may not recite the blessings any more for that night. After reciting the blessings and lighting the candles it is customary to recite "Hanerot Halalu" and "Mizmor Shir Hanukat Habayit L'David".

8. What do we pray on Hanukkah?

During the entire eight days of Hanukkah, one is obligated to recite the full Hallel with its blessings. "Yehi Shem" is recited in both Shahrit and Minha; Tahanun is omitted. The paragraph of "Al Hanissim" continuing with "Bime Matitya" is added during the Amida in the blessing of "Modim" and in the Birkat Hamazon in the blessing of "Nodeh". If Al Hanissim is omitted one does not go back.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: In the year 2216, Yakov was settled in Canaan. Yoseph was 17 years old and Yakov presented him with the multi-colored coat. Yoseph related his two dreams to his brothers.

2nd Aliya: The brothers conspired to kill Yoseph, but Reuven intervened. He suggested throwing Yoseph into a pit to buy time, during which he would have been able to save Yoseph.

3rd Aliya: During Reuven's absence, Yehudah suggested selling Yoseph into slavery. The brothers presented Yakov with contrived evidence of Yoseph's death, and he was inconsolable.

4th Aliya: The story of Yehudah and Tamar is related. In the end, their first son, Peretz, is the progenitor of Mashiach.

5th Aliya: Yoseph had been purchased by Potiphar and was quickly recognized for his managerial skills and integrity. He was appointed to run Potiphar's household.

6th Aliya: Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Yoseph, but Yoseph withstood temptation and fled his mistress's presence. He was thrown into the royal prison and was soon chosen by the warden to run the prison.

7th Aliya: Due to his managerial position, Yoseph came in contact with the former royal wine steward and baker. He successfully interpreted their dreams and the wine steward was re-appointed to his position. Yoseph asked the wine steward to intervene on his behalf with Pharaoh. In the year 2227, Yoseph is 28 years old.

In this week's Haftorah, Amos the Navi chastised the Bnai Yisroel [Children of Israel] for the perversion of justice manifest in their behavior toward the widowed, orphaned and the poor. Yoseph's sale for a few pieces of silver is referenced as a prime example of such injustice. Regardless of whatever rationalization the brother's may have used to justify their actions,

the money they accepted for the sale reduced their actions to nothing more than selfish and self-serving.

This same theme is repeated in the story of the 10 Martyrs. The Roman Governor accused the brothers of selling Yoseph for money. If their motives were in fact righteous, they should not have accepted any personal gain from their actions.

The Navi contrasted the injustices against the poor to the three most severe sins of: idolatry, adultery, and murder. Hashem [G-d] is willing to give a second chance when humankind fails due to personal failing; however, when humankind fails in the arena of social justice, there can not be a second chance. Judges are intended to do G-d's work of ministering justice, and the administration of justice should be a primary display of Hashem's manifest presence within society. When a judge perverts the power of his office he compromises much more than justice. He compromises G-d Himself.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"Reuben heard, and he rescued him from their hand." (Beresheet 37:21)

The brothers of Yosef made a decision. They sat in judgment and ruled that Yosef must be put to death. In their view Yosef was a usurper of power bent on excluding the brothers from their G-d-given right as leaders of the twelve tribes. Who should lead the fight if not Reuben, who by birthright deserved the monarchy? In fact, they stood by Reuben wanting to secure his rights for him once Yosef was gone.

However, the Midrash says: Reuben said, "I am the firstborn, and only I am to blame for this crime." It was Reuben himself who rescued his rival from the punishment that his brothers thought he deserved. Such sublime behavior is unprecedented.

It is instructive to observe the reason Reuben gave for what he did: "I am the firstborn, and only I am to blame for this crime." Reuben saw it as his duty to carry out the rescue and thereby transfer all of his own firstborn rights to Yosef. Why? Because he, Reuben, was the real firstborn! He regarded it as his duty to do what was right, even if it meant that his double portion and kingship would go to someone else.

The Oznayim Latorah says we have much to learn from Reuben. Anyone who occupies a position entailing both duty and privilege must never shirk his duty, even if he is deprived of those privileges. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“He entered the house to do his work” (Beresheet 39:11)

Rashi says that when Yosef went to do his work in the house of Potifar, he was actually contemplating being with Potifar’s wife, because she tried every means to seduce Yosef. However, at the last minute, Yosef conjured up a vision of his father Ya’akob and this prevented him from doing anything wrong.

The Midrash says that Potifar’s wife not only tried to physically seduce him, she brought him proof from astrology that they are destined to be united together. With such pressure being imposed on Yosef, how was he able to overcome this test, especially if she brought him conclusive evidence to her argument? The Rabbis say that when he conjured up the picture of Ya’akob, his father, Yosef was really trying to measure this deed according to the truth of his father Ya’akob. All of the proofs that she would gather cannot stand up to the pure truth with which he was trained in the house of Ya’akob.

This is a lesson for us all, even though we are not brought up by Ya’akob Abinu. There is a source of real truth inside every one of us, and whenever the evil inclination tempts us to do anything, we must measure it by the yardstick of the truth that is in us. The yaser hara brings evidence and arguments that he is right, but one who wants the truth can conjure up a vision of what is right and what is wrong. By digging inside of us, we will be doing the right thing, like Yosef Hasadik. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

**Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com**

How Many Bosses Do We Want

Parashat Vayesheb tells the story of Mechirat Yosef, the sale of Yosef into slavery by his brothers. Initially, the brothers planned to kill Yosef, but Reuben, the oldest brother, persuaded them to instead throw him into a pit and thus leave his fate in God’s hands, rather than kill him directly. Reuben’s intent was to later lift Yosef out of the pit and return him home safely, but instead of frontally opposing his brothers’ scheme, he chose to devise this scheme of convincing them to throw Yosef into the pit. (Ultimately, of course, Yosef was sold as a slave when Reuben was not present.)

The Midrash makes a perplexing comment regarding this episode. It says that if Reuben had known that the Torah would record this incident, then he would have proudly lifted Yosef on his shoulders and paraded him home in full view of the brothers. Rather than devising a covert plan to rescue his

brother, Reuben would have openly lifted Yosef and brought him home – had he only known that his heroism would be made public for posterity in the Torah.

At first glance, the Midrash seems to be saying that Reuben would have done a better job if he had known about the publicity he would receive. Is this possible? Can we imagine Reuben, one of the righteous sons of Yaakob, being obsessed with fame and public recognition?

Remarkably, the Midrash does not stop there, and instead goes on to make similar comments about two other legendary Sadikim. First, it speaks of Aharon, who went to greet his brother, Moshe, when Moshe arrived in Egypt at God’s behest to deliver Beneh Yisrael from bondage. The Torah (Shemot 4:27) tells that Aharon warmly bowed and kissed his brother to congratulate him on his appointment as the nation’s leader. The Midrash comments that Aharon would have done even more if he had known that this event would be recorded in the Torah. Rather than just greeting his brother, he would have made an elaborate procession with music and fanfare.

The third Biblical figure of whom the Midrash speaks in this context is Boaz, the wealthy landowner, who gave Rut – a destitute convert and newcomer – some food to eat. The Midrash writes that if Boaz had realized that this Misva was being recorded for posterity, he would have served Rut a full course meat meal.

In all three instances, the Midrash appears to accuse these great Sadikim of underachieving because they did not anticipate the publicity they would receive. How can we understand these baffling comments?

The common denominator between all three situations described by the Midrash is the concern of how other people would respond to the good deed in question. Reuben, of course, feared that he would meet with stern opposition from his brothers if he openly tried to rescue Yosef. In Aharon’s case, it was very uncertain how Beneh Yisrael would react to Moshe’s sudden arrival and announcement that he is the redeemer. Many people may have resented Moshe’s sudden rise to leadership after being away from Egypt for so long. Aharon’s decision to warmly embrace Moshe and celebrate his return to Egypt as national leader was not necessarily the popular move. And Boaz understandably had reason to hesitate before making special gestures to a young woman who suddenly arrived in Bet Lehem, which would likely trigger all kinds of rumors and speculation.

The Midrash seeks to alert us to the dangers of cynical peers who are all too eager to dissuade us from doing the right thing. These three Sadikim all did the right thing, but in the absence of pressures from their peers, they would have acted with more fervor and gusto, without any ambivalence. The threat of opposition, of whatever kind, resulted in a more subdued performance of the Misva. But if they had contemplated that these events were being recorded by God in the Scriptures, that they had received God's explicit and public "endorsement," they would have acted with more vigor and confidence.

This is an important reminder for those of us who occasionally feel self-conscious around peers who do not necessarily approve of or respect our Torah observance. It is natural to feel intimidated and subdued around people who look disdainfully at our Misva observance and are likely to make snide remarks. But we must remember that the Misva acts we perform have God's official endorsement. If God approves, does it really matter what the people around us think? Should we care that they poke fun at us if God Himself admires us for what we do?

A person who concerns himself only with how God thinks of him has only one "boss"; there is only one Being whose wishes he needs to satisfy. But those who fret about what the people around them think have dozens, or perhaps hundreds or even thousands, of "bosses." Such people have to answer to everyone; they bear the burden of trying to make everyone happy – a burden which nobody can bear without collapsing under the pressure at one point or another.

Let us, then, focus our attention on what God wants, and not on what everyone else wants. This perspective will give us the freedom to pursue our spiritual goals unencumbered by the pressure of our peers, and free from the wishes and demands of everyone around us, which oftentimes conflict with the wishes and demands of the Almighty.

Rabbi Wein LOOSE CHANGE

One of the most clichéd and oft-used words that mark election campaigns, such as the one we are now beginning to undergo here in Israel, is "change." One of the basic human drives is to achieve change for the better in one's personal life and in the national life of the country where one resides.

Barack Obama was elected president of the United States on the promise of change. Whether actual change has been accomplished under his leadership and whether that change is positive and beneficial to American society are issues that are currently being debated and yet to be decided. But, there is no question that the promise of change is a potent political and psychological weapon and is always exploited by those seeking office and power.

Yet, change is hard to come by, for the inertia of past events always weighs heavily upon the current drive for change. There is a basic feeling of dissatisfaction of the present situation that fuels our desire for change. We long for the good old days, even though they may not have really been so good.

We instinctively resort to nostalgic and often fanciful memories of the past. For some change means reverting to those imagined glory years. And at the same time, we dream great dreams about an idyllic future where all current problems will be solved in a satisfactory and equitable fashion.

This also drives our desire for change and eventually even justifies wickedness, slander, violence and lawlessness in an attempt to facilitate that hoped-for change. Both Jewish and general history are replete with examples of these types of behavior – all in the name of bringing about the desired positive change in society and in our personal lives as well.

Yet, King Solomon in Kohelet taught us that change is very difficult to obtain. He stated that "what was, is what will be," in that human nature is pretty much unchangeable and that complete change is really an ephemeral and almost unattainable goal.

The desire for change – any change at any cost – is a potent example of human arrogance and hubris. We are all convinced somehow that we can change the world and refashion it in our image and according to our values and beliefs. Again, history mocks us in this belief. The problems that face the world generally and the Jewish people particularly are the same ones that existed thousands of years ago.

Many of the proposals for change heard today are merely the recycled theories of the past dressed in new language and implemented by new technology. Change does occur but it is a process and processes take time, patience and tenacity.

The changes in Western society wrought by the ideas of the Enlightenment have taken almost five centuries to be fully absorbed in the Western world. The attempt to achieve instant change, which is what our

politicians always promise us, is futile simply because change requires time and deliberate patience.

Hasty and revolutionary change, in the main and in most historical events, has proven to be more destructive than beneficial. In societies where change is fostered from the bottom up rather than from the top down, the change that occurs lasts longer and is more positive. Forced change, whether by fiat or legislation, rarely is able to survive the test of time.

Over the last century, there are a number of prime examples of how forced change – immediate and radical – though initially successful, eventually collapsed because of the inability of changing the nature of human beings. The Soviet Union enforced a radical change on the people of Russia and most of Eastern Europe. For seventy-five years this new way of life ruled, enforced by a police state and very draconian methods. But atheism, the lack of private property, state control of thought and everything else, are all contrary to basic human nature. What resulted was that the Soviet system collapsed of its own weight, in a sudden and unexpected fashion, a quarter of a century ago.

After the First World War, Kemil Ataturk ruthlessly transformed Turkey from a Moslem caliphate into a Western, completely secular, modern country. This change, laudatory as it may have looked to Western eyes, has also collapsed in our time. Instead, we see that Turkey has reverted to an aggressively Moslem country with caliphate ambitions that it barely hides.

So, when we contemplate change in our society we should bear in mind that it is a process that takes time and deep public acceptance. Otherwise, every attempt to change, no matter how apparently positive and necessary it may appear, rarely will it be of lasting consequence or value. It must be deeply personal and societal in its origin for it to take hold. The old joke about "How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? One, but the bulb must want to be changed" is a true comment on personal and national life.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

This is a true story that took place in the 1970s. Rabbi Dr Nahum Rabinovitch, then Principal of Jews College, the rabbinic training seminary in London where I was a student and teacher, was approached by an organisation that had been given an unusual opportunity to engage in interfaith dialogue. A group of African bishops wanted to understand more about

Judaism. Would the Principal be willing to send his senior students to engage in such a dialogue, in a chateau in Switzerland?

To my surprise, he agreed. He told me that he was sceptical about Jewish-Christian dialogue in general because he believed that over the centuries the Church had been infected by an antisemitism that was very difficult to overcome. At that time, though, he felt that African Christians were different. They loved Tanakh and its stories. They were at least in principle open to understanding Judaism on its own terms. He did not add, though I knew it was in his mind since he was one of the world's greatest experts on Maimonides, that the great twelfth century sage held an unusual attitude to dialogue.

Maimonides believed that Islam was a genuinely monotheistic faith while Christianity in those days was not. Nonetheless, he held it was permitted to study Tanakh with Christians but not Muslims, since Christians believed that Tanakh (what they called the Old Testament), was the word of God while Muslims believed that Jews had falsified the text.[1]

So we went. It was an unusual group: the semikhah class of Jews College, together with the top class of the yeshiva in Montreux where the late Rabbi Yechiel Weinberg, author of Seridei Esh and one of the world's foremost halakhists, had taught. For three days the Jewish group davened and bentsched with special intensity. We learned Gemarra each day. For the rest of the time we had an unusual, even transformative, encounter with the African bishops, ending with a Hassidic-style tisch during which we shared with the Africans our songs and stories and they taught us theirs. At three in the morning we finished by dancing together. We knew we were different, we knew that there were deep divides between our respective faiths, but we had become friends. Perhaps that is all we should seek. Friends don't have to agree in order to stay friends. And friendships can sometimes help heal the world.

On the morning after our arrival, however, an event occurred that left a deep impression on me. The sponsoring body, a global Jewish organisation, was a secular one, and to keep within their frame of reference the group had to include at least one non-orthodox Jew, a woman studying for the rabbinate. We, the semikhah and yeshiva students, were davening the morning service in one of the lounges in the chateau when the Reform woman entered, wearing tallit and tefillin, and sat herself down in the middle of the group.

This is something the students had not encountered

before. What were they to do? There was no mechitzah. There was no way of separating themselves. How should they react to a woman wearing tallit and tefillin and praying in the midst of a group of men? They ran up to the Rav in a state of great agitation and asked what they should do. Without a moment's hesitation he quoted to them the saying of the sages: A person should be willing to throw himself into a furnace of fire rather than shame another person in public.[2] With that he ordered them back to their seats, and the prayers continued.

The moral of that moment never left me. The Rav, for the past 32 years head of the yeshiva in Maaleh Adumim, was and is one of the great halakhists of our time. He knew immediately how serious were the issues at stake: men and women praying together without a mechitzah between them, and the complex question about whether women may or may not wear a tallit and tefillin. The issue was anything but simple.

But he knew also that halakhah is a systematic way of turning the great ethical and spiritual truths into a tapestry of deeds, and that one must never lose the larger vision in an exclusive focus on the details. Had the students insisted that the woman pray elsewhere they would have put her to shame, the way Eli did when he saw Hannah praying and thought she was drunk.[3] Never, ever shame someone in public. That was the transcending imperative of the hour. That is the mark of a great-souled man. To have been his student for more than a decade I count as one of the great privileges of my life.

The reason I tell this story here is that it is one of the powerful and unexpected lessons of our parsha. Judah, the brother who proposed selling Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37: 26), had "gone down" to Canaan where he married a local Canaanite woman. The phrase "gone down" was rightly taken by the sages as full of meaning. [4] Just as Joseph had been brought down to Egypt (Gen. 39: 1) so Judah had been morally and spiritually brought down. Here was one of Jacob's sons, doing what the patriarchs insisted on not doing: marrying into the local population. It is a tale of sad decline.

He marries his firstborn son, Er, to a local woman, Tamar.[5] An obscure verse tells us that he sinned, and died. Judah then married his second son, Onan, to her, under a pre-Mosaic form of levirate marriage whereby a brother is bound to marry his sister-in-law if she has been widowed without children. Onan, reluctant to father a child that would be regarded as not his but his deceased brother's, practised a form of coitus interruptus that to this day carries his name. For this, he too died. Having lost two of his sons

Judah was reluctant to give his third, Shelah, to Tamar in marriage. The result was that she was left as a "living widow," bound to marry her brother-in-law whom Judah was withholding, but unable to marry anyone else.

After many years, seeing that her father-in-law (by this time a widower himself) was reluctant to marry her to Shelah, she decided on an audacious course of action. She removed her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil, and positioned herself at a point where Judah was likely to see her on his way to the sheep-shearing. Judah saw her, took her to be a prostitute, and engaged her services. As surety for the payment he had promised her, she insisted that he leave his seal, cord and staff. Judah duly returned the next day with the payment, but the woman was nowhere to be seen. He asked the locals the whereabouts of the temple prostitute (the text at this point uses the word kedeshah, "cult prostitute," rather than zonah, thus deepening Judah's offence), but no one had seen such a person in the locality. Puzzled, Judah returned home.

Three months later he heard that Tamar was pregnant. He leapt to the only conclusion he could draw, namely that she had had a physical relationship with another man while bound in law to his son Shelah. She had committed adultery, for which the punishment was death. Tamar was brought out to face her sentence. She came, holding the staff and seal that Judah instantly recognised as his own. She said, "I am pregnant by the person to whom these objects belong." Judah realised what had happened and said, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38: 26).

This moment is a turning-point in history. Judah is the first person in the Torah explicitly to admit he was wrong.[6] We do not realise it yet, but this seems to be the moment at which he acquired the depth of character necessary for him to become the first real baal teshuvah. We see this years later, when he – the man who proposed selling Joseph as a slave – becomes the man who is willing to spend the rest of his life in slavery so that his brother Benjamin can go free (Gen. 44: 33). I have argued elsewhere that it is from here that we learn the principle that a penitent stands higher than even a perfectly righteous individual.[7] Judah the penitent becomes the ancestor of Israel's kings while Joseph, the righteous, is only a viceroy, mishneh le-melekh, second to the king.

Thus far Judah. But the real hero of the story was Tamar. She had taken an immense risk by becoming pregnant. Indeed she was almost killed for it. She had done so for a noble reason: to ensure that the

name of her late husband was perpetuated. But she took no less care to avoid Judah being put to shame. Only he and she knew what had happened. Judah could acknowledge his error without loss of face. It was from this episode that the sages derived the rule articulated by Rabbi Rabinovitch that morning in Switzerland: Rather risk being thrown into a fiery furnace than shame someone else in public.

It is thus no coincidence that Tamar, a heroic non-Jewish woman, became the ancestor of David, Israel's greatest king. There are striking similarities between Tamar and the other heroic woman in David's ancestry, the Moabite woman we know as Ruth.

There is an ancient Jewish custom on Shabbat and festivals to cover the challot or matzah while holding the glass of wine over which Kiddush is being made. The reason is so as not to put the challah to shame while it is being, as it were, passed over in favour of the wine. There are some very religious Jews, sadly, who will go to great lengths to avoid shaming an inanimate loaf of bread but have no compunction in putting their fellow Jews to shame if they regard them as less religious than they are. That is what happens when we remember the halakhah but forget the underlying moral principle behind it.

Never put anyone to shame. That is what Tamar taught Judah and what a great rabbi of our time taught those who were privileged to be his students.

[1] Maimonides, Responsa, ed. Blau, no. 149.

[2] Berakhot 43b, Ketubot 67b.

[3] 1 Samuel 1: 13-17.

[4] Gen 38: 1. According to midrashic tradition (Midrash Aggadah, Pesikta Zutreta, Sechel Tov et al.), Judah was "sent down" or excommunicated by his brothers for advising them to sell Joseph, after the grief they saw their father suffer. See also Rashi ad loc.

[5] Targum Yonatan identifies her as the daughter of Noah's son Shem. Others identify her as a daughter of Abraham's contemporary Malkizedek. The truth is, though, that she appears in the narrative without lineage, a device often used by the Torah to emphasize that moral greatness can often be found among ordinary people. It has nothing to do with ancestry. See Alshikh ad loc.

[6] The text here is full of verbal allusions. Judah has "gone down" just as Joseph has been "brought down." Joseph is about to rise to political greatness. Judah will eventually rise to moral greatness. Tamar's deception of Judah is similar to Judah's deception of Jacob. Both involve clothes: Joseph's blood-stained coat, Tamar's veil. Both reach their climax with the words Haker na, "Please examine." Judah forces Jacob to believe a lie. Tamar forces Judah to recognise the truth.

[7] Berakhot 34b. Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation Genesis: The Book of Beginnings, 303-314.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And his master saw that Hashem was with him; and that all he did, Hashem caused to prosper in his hand" (39:3)

This that Joseph prospered was not merely a gift from Hashem, but it was bestowed upon Joseph because he correctly utilized every circumstance. Instead of becoming depressed and embittered by the un-dreamed of catastrophe, that a darling son of a wealthy father was suddenly snatched from his home and sold as a slave among foreigners, Joseph reacted with exemplary uprightness of character.

He had been brought up to understand that Hashem controlled and devised all circumstances, and therefore instead of falling into the degraded ways of a slave-boy he sought to make the best of his life at every step. He lived even now as a son of Jacob, with all the high aspirations that Isaac and Abraham had transmitted. He was faultlessly loyal to his new master, and everything that he did was performed with diligence and energy, in accordance with his father's ways (see 31:38) of loyal service to Laban. Because all that Joseph did was approved by Hashem, therefore "all that he did, Hashem caused to prosper in his hand."

But the verse does not state merely that Hashem caused everything to prosper in Joseph's hand, but it states that "his master saw that Hashem was with him; and (his master saw) that all that he did, Hashem caused to prosper." Joseph's success in everything was so phenomenal that even the Egyptian master recognized the hand of G-d. Joseph himself surely understood that his success was solely from G-d, despite Joseph's exceptional talents and his loyal devotion and diligence.

Pharaoh, too, said subsequently: "Could we find anyone such as this, that the spirit of G-d is in him?" (41:38). Joseph was very likeable and very capable. Yet his success in everything was so phenomenal that despite Joseph's talents it was clear that Hashem was prospering his efforts.

This is a model provided by Hashem by prospering the efforts of a conscientious man that:

A. Fears G-d (as in 39:9) & "It is G-d whom I fear" (42:18)

B. Possesses good character (as Joseph demonstrated by showing concern for the other prisoners in jail)

C. Must have Energy in order to accomplish (Joseph was a leader in all stages of his life)

Adapted from "The Beginning" By R' Miller ZT'L