

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE BO

JANUARY 19, 2013

8 SHEBAT 5773

DEDICATION: In Memory of my Rabbi. HaRav Asher Haham Ben HaRav Meir Haham Abittan, z'sl and in memory of my uncle Haim Ben Victoria Gindi HaKohen – 8 Shebat

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH SCHEDULE

Friday, January 11, Erev Shabbat
Candle Lighting - 4:38pm / Mincha - 4:40pm

Shabbat, January 12
Shacharit - 9:00am – Latest Shema is 8:57
Kiddush sponsored in memory of Rabbi Asher Abittan Z'SL
Mincha 12:15 – Amidah after 12:29
Shabbat Ends - 5:39pm - Return for Arbit at 6:00 and Birkat HaLevanah
Followed by Children's program with Pizza - And a class for adults

Daily Services - Shacharit
Sunday- 8:00am / Monday thru Friday - 7:00am SHARP

We are hoping that the Eruv will be up this Shabbat – we are awaiting confirmation. The Eruv work is being done by a dedicated group of volunteers. If you can help, please contact Rabbi Colish or Sam Shetrit.

The Bach is having a Siyum Mishnah in memory of Dr Wapniak This Shabbat afternoon.

Please join us, this Sunday morning, January 20th, 2013 for the inaugural lecture of a new community-wide monthly series.

“It's Up and It's Good! The Contemporary Eruv: Long Beach & Beyond”
and will be given by a leading expert in the field of Eruvin,
Rabbi Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer of Monsey, NY.

10 am bagel breakfast in honor of the dedicated volunteers working on the LB eruv, followed by the lecture -
YILB Social Hall / 120 Long Beach Blvd.

Class with Rabbi Yenay Monday night at 7PM -

Celebrate Tu B'Shevat in with the entire community at the YILB
Friday Night January 25th - Shabbat Dinner and Fruit Bar
Guest Speaker: Rabbi Eliyahu Yenay accompanied by the YILB Acapella Group.
\$20 p/p if reserved by Friday January 18th - (Price then goes up to \$25) Kids 4 and up \$12
Call Rivka Bohan 516-749-9099 rbohan@darchei.org - Sign up closes on Wednesday 1/23

We will have a Tu Bishvat Kiddush on Shabbat January 26th at the Sephardic Congregation – Special guest is Rabbi Eliyahu Yenay who teaches our weekly Monday night class
We will also have a Melave Malka with Rabbi Yenay sponsored by the Safaniev family

Our Sisterhood dinner this year will be held February 27th at Chosen Island
and our Guest of Honor will be---Lisa Gaon!!Reserve the date and invite your friends -
Remember this dinner is for men too!

On Saturday night, March 2, 2013, The Sephardic Congregation Of Long Beach will host a talk by Dr. Reeva Simon entitled "Jews and Islam: An Inconsistent Relationship. From the Golden Age to Modern Times." Dr. Simon is a former Associate Director of The Middle East Institute at Columbia University and professor of Middle East history at Columbia and Yeshiva Universities and the author of a number of books on the topic
Dr. Simon's talk will begin at 8pm, with a reception to follow. Suggested donation is \$10.

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100

Thanks for all your tefilot. Baruch Hashem Chantelle is home and is doing a bit better. Thanks for your emails and calls. Please keep Shulamit Bat Faygeh Libah in your prayers.

Editors Notes

On Wednesday I was flattered by UJA who asked me to give the Devar Torah prior to their executive board meeting for about 150 of their directors. UJA has been extremely helpful to us during this trying period and I really wanted to extend my appreciation.

My dad saw my notes and suggested I post them for this week's newsletter.

Thank You for the beautiful introduction and for inviting me to speak to you for a few moments this afternoon. My last name is Bibi. Sometimes people hear that Bibi will be speaking – Bibi they think - and they expect the prime minister, so I hope you're not disappointed that all you got was the Rabbi!

This week marks seven years since I took on the responsibilities of the pulpit. You see, I never imagined nor wanted to become a pulpit Rabbi ... Let me explain. This Shabbat marks the 7th Yahrzeit of my teacher, my mentor and dear friend of 17 years, Rabbi Asher Abittan z'sl.

Rabbi Abittan was the Rabbi of our congregation for 52 years when he suddenly passed away after services one Monday morning. The congregation was in shock – we were orphans without a father, the only spiritual leader the Synagogue had known was gone.

A few years prior to the Rabbi's passing, as I approached my 40th birthday, we decided that we should ratchet up our learning and to be sure that we did so, my study partners under the tutelage of Rabbi Abittan studied together for the Semicha or the Rabbinical ordination test. For me, it was simply to push myself. I had no intent on using the title and those who know me can attest to the fact that I remain uncomfortable with it still.

But G-d in strange ways prepares the cure before the malady and so the Rabbi pressed me into teaching and into speaking. So if I couldn't be the cure, I could

at least be the Band-Aid. And so I was asked me to at least temporarily step into his shoes – shoes which I found impossible to fill.

At the 30 day memorial I was approached by three gentlemen and I was told that I should be preparing to shut the place down. We would be lucky to get through the year considering the dwindling membership and support. They knew that we often didn't have a minyan during the week and we sat and waited most Shabbats and that was when the Rabbi was alive. Now what could I hope for? They reminded me that in Long Beach we say when people make money they move to the Five Towns and when they don't have enough to pay tuition they make aliyah. And that's what was happening to us.

I thought I owed it to the Rabbi to give it my best shot. With the tremendous support of The Rebbetzin and the Abittan boys, Shaya who made the minyan happen each day, Abie who was there for us, Meyer and Chaim who took it upon themselves to get semicha and take strong leadership roles, as well as the grandchildren, we made a commitment. And with their support I appealed to the congregation. I explained that none of us could take the role the rabbi played. When the parents pass away, the children can separate or they can come together. We as a community needed to make a decision. How would we honor his memory?

So we set aside the politics, the petty arguments, the differing views and came together – not as a congregation, but as a family. And to everyone's credit, we did more than survive; we increased participation, we had a minyan every day, we didn't need to wait on Shabbat, we added classes and programs. We felt as if the Rabbi's merit was shining down upon us and giving us the strength to forge ahead.

Facing tragedy is difficult. Two and a half months ago Sandy came washing up along our shores. Everyone was flooded and everyone lost cars. We went three weeks without power. Businesses crashed. And nobody would come through this without taking a tremendous monetary hit. You've seen the pictures. Let me telling you. In this case a picture does not tell 1000 words. You had to see it, walk through it, smell it, and feel it to really get an idea as to what we faced.

But we took the lesson we learned 7 years prior. If we, the communities of greater Long Beach, could come together not as synagogue groups but as a family, we too could survive the onslaught.

And we did. We set aside politics and religious differences. We set aside our personal and congregational needs. We became Am echad be lev echad, one nation with one heart. We joined forces, established a single list with a centralized control and a single fund where we all made our best efforts to raise capital and distribute based on need and not affiliation. When FEMA representatives came and said there were people Jewish and Gentile that they couldn't help but they hoped we could, we understood the concept of Kiddush Hashem.

We though, are required to step up, After all, this is our home.

I am here to thank you. On behalf of the entire extended Long Beach family, UJA we thank you.

We read these weeks in the Torah of Moses who is selected by G-d. Moses represents G-d. Moses leads us from Egypt. Moses takes us through the Sea into the desert. Moses, receives the commandments from G-d Himself. By what Merit does Moses become the prophet and leader that sets the bar for the future?

When we first meet him, he is a prince in Pharaoh's house. Yet when he sees his brothers suffering – he steps into the mud pit with them, he bends his shoulder and his back and with them he lifts his brother up. This concept of loving one's brother as one's self - is Moses.

You in UJA could have ignored us. Or you could have simply written a few checks. After all it wasn't your neighborhood, it wasn't your homes, and it wasn't your Synagogue.

But you did much more. You stepped into the flood zone, into the muck that invaded our homes. You helped to feed us and cloth us through Met Council and other agencies. You helped to clean out our houses and cried with us as our memories, our pictures, and our books were carted away. You went out and left your comfort zones and you, each of you begged for money on our behalf. You fought for us. You held our hands and reassured us that we were not alone. You allowed us to keep our dignity.

You didn't need to do that but you did. And today where we have close to 100 families still in desperate need, and with us running out of resources and people to turn to, we feel confident that UJA will remain there for us, giving us support, advice and helping with funding.

It was through Moses' empathy, through his love for his brothers and for the people's love for each other during those dark days in Egypt that brought us redemption. May each of you, who give of your time, money and effort, our Modern day Moses, be blessed with health, happiness, peace and prosperity for yourselves and your families.

And as Moses' efforts 3300 years ago brought us from our first exile, may G-d in the merit of all of our unified efforts today bring redemption speedily in our days, Amen!

I wrote the following a few years ago while in Aruba ... For those of you going on vacation this week and those already on some island, ski resort, beach or foreign city, it's a good reminder. SEE ALSO RABBI MANSOUR BELOW

This Shabbat commemorates the Yahrzeit of my Rabbi, Asher Chacham Abittan, z'sl. I wonder if its strange that years later, one feels the loss even more, if not emotionally than certainly intellectually. I had the honor of learning from and in many ways with the Rabbi for 17 years and I take great pleasure that through this newsletter which we have been distributing for more than 15 years to thousands and thousands of people each week, many of you have told me that without even meeting the rabbi, you've come to know him. There are certain gems that shouldn't be hidden away in small beach side towns. Even the greatest Rabbis of this and the past generation marveled at his knowledge, his wit, his sensitivity, his purity, his sense of humor and his ability to teach. As I continue to learn I lament over the fact that I had a treasure chest filled to the brim willing to give me anything and everything and I took perhaps one small stone. I take some solace that hardly a week goes by without me quoting Rabbi Abittan in a class, in a speech or in this newsletter giving the world a taste of who he was. We learn that it gives great pleasure to the soul when Torah is taught in his name. And we pray that the Rabbi's merits will stand for his family, his students and all of Klal Yisrael.

In the world of many Jewish Day schools, this is vacation week, I thought about some halachot and messages that Rabbi Abittan might have gleaned for us while we are sunning in Acapulco, Miami, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, or here in Aruba, or perhaps skiing in Colorado, Canada or even the French Alps. It applies to those who have stayed home, and those who travelled back to our home in eretz Yisrael as well.

At the beginning of this week's perasha, already having been struck with seven plagues the last of which was fire balls wrapped in hail, Pharaoh finally tells Moses to get out. But he prefaces this by asking, "Mi VaMi", who and who will go out. Moses responds with one of the most famous verses in the Torah and tells him we will go out with our children and our elders our sons and our daughters. Pharaoh offering to allow only the adults out, refuses.

This verse is perhaps the key to the success of the Jewish people representing the connection through the generations. Later in the portion we learn the law to tell your child. We are required to tell our children about the Exodus from mitzrayim and about our own personal exoduses. We are required to teach our children every day. And we often fulfill this in sending them to school where we assign the Rabbis and teachers with our responsibility to teach.

So this week as many of us have taken time to travel as families, it is incumbent upon us to remember to take advantage of this time together. I see here in Aruba parents and grandparents, children and grandchildren altogether.

This is a time for us to be with our children and talk to them. For grandparents to tell their grandchildren what life was like when they were children, and to teach them. Many of us are out of the houses for 12, 14, 16 hours a day during the year, now that we have our children with us, let us take advantage of the opportunity to be with them. These weeks we learn about the plagues, the exodus, the crossing of the sea and the giving of the Torah. Tell your kids what it means to be a Jew, tell them of Hashem's blessing and how we should be appreciative of everything we have.

I remember the Rabbi telling that in Morocco, four families shared an outhouse and they had no running water and comparing it to the miracle of a running sink, shower, bath and toilet in America even if a whole family shared a bathroom to today where we often have a bathroom for each child. We need to appreciate what we have, the miracle and gift of technology. I recall my great uncle Dave Bibi tell of his trips abroad by boat when the journey alone took weeks and we complain that the flight to Tel Aviv is delayed by an hour. To appreciate what we have, kids have to know what it was like in the stone ages when we had no laptops, cell phones or digital cameras and ipods.

My rabbi of blessed memory often taught us that the Jewish people are compared to an eben, a stone. The word eben is made up of two words the first two

letters spell ab, father the second two letters, ben or son. And the rabbi continued, if we take the letters individually we see an aleph, a bet and a nun, standing for ab – father, ben - son and neched - grandson. When we bind three generations, the rabbis teach us that it's like a rope with three bound strands which is very difficult to break.

The eben which we form through joining the father, the son and the grandson, becomes the eben over which King David said, Eben Ma-asu HaBonim, Hayetah LeRosh Pinah – in essence this stone becomes the foundation stone for the future Temple. So during all of this week we should take advantage of the opportunity. Believe me, every father has a lifetime of experience to tell their children of and every grandfather has a treasure chest of diamonds. Don't let them regret collecting only a small stone when so much more was there. Let us all fulfill this commandment of telling our children and connecting with our children and may we merit together, parents, children, grand children and great grandchildren to see this eben as the foundation stone for the third Temple speedily in our days. Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

From Morris Dweck, my daughter in law's father ... Thanks Morris for sharing, I really enjoyed this

Written by Regina Brett, 90 years old, of The Plain Dealer Newspaper, Cleveland, Ohio.

"To celebrate growing older, I once wrote the 45 lessons life taught me. It is the most requested column I've ever written. My odometer rolled over to 90 in August, so here is the column once more:

1. Life isn't fair, but it's still good.
2. When in doubt, just take the next small step..
3. Life is too short - enjoy it..
4. Your job won't take care of you when you are sick. Your friends and family will.
5. Pay off your credit cards every month.
6. You don't have to win every argument. Stay true to yourself.
- 7... Cry with someone. It's more healing than crying alone.
8. It's OK to get angry with God. He can take it.
- 9.. Save for retirement starting with your first paycheck.
10. When it comes to chocolate, resistance is futile.
- 11... Make peace with your past so it won't screw up the present.
12. It's OK to let your children see you cry.
13. Don't compare your life to others. You have no idea what their journey is all about.

14. If a relationship has to be a secret, you shouldn't be in it...
15. Everything can change in the blink of an eye But don't worry; God never blinks.
- 16... Take a deep breath. It calms the mind.
17. Get rid of anything that isn't useful. Clutter weighs you down in many ways.
18. Whatever doesn't kill you really does make you stronger.
19. It's never too late to be happy. But it's all up to you and no one else.
20. When it comes to going after what you love in life, don't take no for an answer.
21. Burn the candles, use the nice sheets, wear the fancy lingerie. Don't save it for a special occasion. Today is special.
22. Over prepare, then go with the flow.
- 23 Be eccentric now. Don't wait for old age to wear purple.
24. The most important sex organ is the brain.
25. No one is in charge of your happiness but you.
26. Frame every so-called disaster with these words 'In five years, will this matter?'
27. Always choose life.
28. Forgive but don't forget.
29. What other people think of you is none of your business.
30. Time heals almost everything. Give time time.
31. However good or bad a situation is, it will change.
32. Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does..
33. Believe in miracles.
34. God loves you because of who God is, not because of anything you did or didn't do.
35. Don't audit life. Show up and make the most of it now.
36. Growing old beats the alternative -- dying young.
37. Your children get only one childhood.
- 38.. All that truly matters in the end is that you loved.
39. Get outside every day. Miracles are waiting everywhere.
40. If we all threw our problems in a pile and saw everyone else's, we'd grab ours back.
41. Envy is a waste of time. Accept what you already have not what you need.
42. The best is yet to come...
43. No matter how you feel, get up, dress up and show up.
44. Yield.
45. Life isn't tied with a bow, but it's still a gift.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st & 2nd Aliyot: Moshe and Aharon forewarned Pharaoh about the Locust. His advisors begged Pharaoh to consider Moshe's request, and Pharaoh attempted to negotiate with Moshe and Aharon that

the children should stay behind. When his offer was refused, all negotiations broke down and Pharaoh chased Moshe and Aharon away. The Locust swallowed up Mitzrayim (Egypt), but Pharaoh still refused to send away the Jews.

3rd Aliya: Darkness enveloped Egypt for three days. Pharaoh told Moshe that he could take out his people, but he had to leave the cattle behind. Moshe refused and Pharaoh forewarned Moshe that he could not come to him again. In truth, the next time they saw each other would be after the Death of the First Born, when Pharaoh went to Moshe.

4th Aliya: Moshe forewarned the Egyptians about the Death of the First Born. In 12:2 Hashem (G-d) commanded Moshe and Aharon with the very first Mitzvah to be given to the Nation. The very first Korban Pesach was described along with the Mitzvos of Matzoh, Chametz, and Pesach.

5th Aliya: The Bnai Yisroel were commanded to mark the inside of their doors with the blood of the Korban Pesach.

6th Aliya: The plague of the Death of the First Born left Mitzrayim in mourning. Pharaoh and the Egyptians hurried the Jews out of Mitzrayim. Approximately 600,000 men besides women, children, and the elderly (3,000,000 total) as well as about 1,000,000 non-Jews (the Eruv Rav) left Mitzrayim during the Exodus. It was the year 2448, and the Pasuk says that the Jews had been in Mitzrayim for 430 years. (exactly 430 years from the Bris Bain Habisarim - The Covenant Between the Halves) The laws of the Korban Pesach were reviewed.

7th Aliya: The Parsha concludes with a review of the laws of Pesach as well as introducing the Mitzvos of Pehter Chamor - the commandment to exchange all first born, male donkeys for a sheep; Pidyon Haben - redeeming the first born male child; and the Mitzvah of Tefillin.

This week's Haftorah is from Yirmiyah 46:13. The rise of Nevuchadnetzar and Babylon to world dominance heralded the destruction of Mitzrayim (Egypt) eight centuries after the time of the Exodus. Mitzrayim had been a dominant power in the region for many centuries and saw the decline of Israel as an opportunity to gain even greater power. Israel, concerned about her own fate in the face of Babylon's onslaught, turned to Egypt for help. Yirmiyahu had already predicted in last week's Haftorah that Bavel would turn its fury and strength against Egypt, conquering her and dispersing her

inhabitants. This would force Israel to stand-alone and meet her destiny. Israel's only option for salvation would have to come from Hashem (G-d) and Hashem alone. In this week's Haftorah Yirmiyahu continues his prophecy of the destruction of Mitzrayim. This is the obvious connection to our Parsha in which the proud and arrogant Pharaoh is brought to his knees by the awesome hand of Hashem. So too, Bavel, acting as Hashem's agent, would punish Mitzrayim for her continued arrogance and pride.

The Bnai Yisroel (Jewish nation) would be directly impacted by Mitzrayim's destruction; however, they are reassured that Hashem will ultimately deliver them, so long as they keep their faith and trust in Hashem's promise.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"And there was a darkness of gloom throughout the land of Egypt for three days." (Shemot 10:22)

The ninth plague was darkness. Rashi says that there were evildoers who didn't want to leave Egypt and they died during the first three days of the plague of darkness. Who were these sinners? Why didn't they want to leave? The early commentators explain that the wealthy among the Jews managed to bribe the Egyptians and avoid labor in Egypt. It was only their poor brethren who were enslaved. Then, when the time for redemption came, those who were sinners and also wealthy, and therefore hadn't suffered at the hands of the Egyptians, did not merit to leave Egypt.

In the Holocaust the Germans did not differentiate between a Torah observant Jew and one who had strayed from the path. They sought to murder every Jew regardless of his affiliation or level of observance. This is an indication that when the ultimate redemption takes place, all Jews will merit to be redeemed. As there was no differentiation in suffering, so there will be no differentiation in redemption, may it be speedily in our days. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And the blood shall serve as a sign on the houses in which you are." (Shemot 12:13)

This verse refers to the smearing of the blood from the Korban Pesah on the doorway of each Jewish home. Rashi explains that this sign shall be for you and not for others. Hence we may derive that the blood was smeared on the inside of the doorway. An important lesson may be learned here. Often we attempt to help others in the fulfillment of Torah and

misvot, even at great sacrifice to ourselves. This may sometimes be at the expense of our own families. We are ready to sacrifice our time and energy for others, but are we finding time for our own personal study and self-development? The Torah enjoins us to establish in our homes Torah sessions for ourselves. We must be aware of our responsibilities to our own children, to guide and encourage them ourselves, not by proxy through tutors. We are obliged to do for ourselves and for our families that which we so readily do for others. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Our Top Priority

After being warned of the impending plague of Arbeh (locusts), Pharaoh enters into a dialogue with Moshe, expressing a willingness to allow Beneh Yisrael to leave Egypt. He asks Moshe, "Mi Va'mi Ha'holechim" – "Who are the ones going?" – and Moshe responds that he intends to bring with him the entire nation: "With our youth and our elders we will go...for we have a festival to G-d." Pharaoh flatly denies this demand. He tells Moshe that he is prepared to allow the older members of the nation to leave, but not the youth. At that point, the negotiations break down, and G-d unleashes the deadly plague of locusts against Egypt.

Pharaoh understood one of the basic truisms of Jewish survival – it's all about the youth, the younger generation. He was ready to allow the adults to leave and worship their G-d. He was not worried about them. What he insisted upon was that the youngsters remain in Egypt, exposed to the lures of Egyptian culture and society. The youth are impressionable, and Pharaoh did want them to come under the influence of the religious observance that Beneh Yisrael had planned to conduct upon leaving Egypt. He wanted the Israelite youth to remain in Egypt, under the strong influence of Egyptian culture, so they would harbor no feelings of loyalty to their religious traditions.

Moshe therefore firmly declared, "With our youth and our elders we will go." Significantly, he first mentioned the youth before the elderly, because the young generation was his priority. For the precise same reason that Pharaoh refused to allow the youth to go worship G-d, Moshe demanded that the youth go – and even made them the priority. From Moshe's perspective, if there would be room on the bus out of Egypt for either the youngsters or the older folks, the youngsters would be given the seats – because they,

more than the others, needed to be removed outside the influence of Egyptian society, and brought into the service of the Almighty.

This is a critical lesson for us, especially in contemporary society, where the influence and lure of anti-Torah culture, beliefs and behaviors is so strong and so pervasive. Now, perhaps more than ever before, we must prioritize our children's education. Certainly, we must take care of the adults and elderly, too. But Moshe's proclamation – "With our youth and our elders we will go" – must serve as our motto, as well. The youth's education comes before all else. Impressionable minds in today's society, when people walk around with the very worst that culture has to offer in their pockets, need protection. And we must make this protection our highest priority, just as it was for Moshe.

Tuition affordability is certainly a major challenge facing American Jewry. But let us ask ourselves: if, Heaven forbid, an observant couple had a child who was considering marrying a non-Jew, how much money would they be willing to spend to convince him or her to end the courtship? I imagine they would be prepared to pay whatever sum was needed, even if this meant mortgaging the house and pawning their valuables. When we look at it from this perspective, the price of tuition does not seem quite so daunting. This is the price we need to pay in today's society to protect our children and guide them to a life of Torah observance.

Baruch Hashem, our community is successful because it makes and has always made Torah education its highest priority. This is the model and example we must continue to follow, so that our children can successfully withstand the pressures of contemporary society and grow to be loyal and worthy heirs of our sacred tradition.

Rabbi Wein

The extraordinary devotion of the Torah to all of the intricate details of the celebration of Pesach and of its sacrifice strikes one as demanding explanation. After all, the Torah will command many mitzvot to the Jewish people in the course of the next books of the Torah, without necessarily going into particulars and details about their method of observance.

All of that, so to speak, was left to the Oral Law and to Moshe to fill in the exact details to fulfill the commandment. The Mishna and Talmud comprise sixty-three volumes of these details and explanations,

but somehow regarding Pesach and its mitzvot, the Torah itself provides this necessary information.

A simple understanding is that these laws and details were given to the Jewish people before they stood on Sinai and before the Oral Law was granted to Moshe - and through him to all of Israel. Therefore Moshe had to instruct the people in clear detail what was expected of them and how to properly observe the Pesach sacrifice and holiday.

The Torah faithfully records for us Moshe's instructions to the people – instructions which remain valid and operative in future times as well and not only for the first Pesach commemoration in Egypt. Though all of this is, in effect, correct technically, it still, to a certain extent, begs our original question of why Pesach instructions are so detailed while the commandments regarding the other holy days of the year are certainly less explicit and detailed.

The answer to this can be found in the nature of the holiday of Pesach itself. It is not an agricultural holiday as are Shavuot and Succot. Its uniqueness is not purely in being an historical commemorative day, a reminder of past events and occurrences, for both Shavuot and Succot are also days of memory and national recollection. The uniqueness of Pesach lies in its miraculous occurrence from which all of later Jewish practice and life emanates. You could say that Pesach is God's holiday, while Shavuot requires the acquiescence of Jews to accept the Torah at Sinai and Succot requires an act by the people in building and living in succot during their sojourn in the desert. Pesach is a Divine event, God imposing His will so to speak on Pharaoh and Egypt and upon the Jewish people as well.

For this reason, it was necessary for the Torah to clearly delineate and detail for the Jewish people what God expected, hence the complexity of the laws of Pesach as they appear in this week's parsha. Pesach is a top-down holiday while the other holidays are more of a two-way street type of commemoration.

By observing Pesach as commanded in every detail of the instruction manual the Jew submits Divine authority without question or logical demands. The laws of Pesach tested Jewish loyalty and discipline even before the Torah was given to them. It is therefore the leading holiday of the year, the one still mostly treasured and observed by the masses of Israel.

Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth
Freedom's Defense

And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt'.

It was the moment for which they had been waiting for more than two hundred years. The Israelites, slaves in Egypt, were about to go free. Ten plagues had struck the country. The people were the first to understand; Pharaoh was the last. G-d was on the side of freedom and human dignity. You cannot build a nation, however strong your police and army, by enslaving some for the benefit of others. History will turn against you, as it has against every tyranny known to mankind.

And now the time had arrived. The Israelites were on the brink of their release. Moses, their leader, gathered them together and prepared to address them. What would he speak about at this fateful juncture, the birth of a people? He could have spoken about many things. He might have talked about liberty, the breaking of their chains, and the end of slavery. He might have talked about the destination to which they were about to travel, the "land flowing with milk and honey". Or he might have chosen a more sombre theme: the journey that lay ahead, the dangers they would face: what Nelson Mandela called "the long walk to freedom". Any one of these would have been the speech of a great leader sensing an historic moment in the destiny of Israel.

Moses did none of these things. Instead he spoke about children, and the distant future, and the duty to pass on memory to generations yet unborn. Three times in this week's sedra he turns to the theme:

And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' you shall say . . . (Ex. 12:26-27) And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt' (Ex. 13:8) And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him. . . (Ex. 13:14) - About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators. That is what made Moses not just a great leader, but a unique one. What the Torah is teaching is that freedom is won, not on the battlefield, nor in the political arena, nor in the courts, national or international, but in the human imagination and will. To defend a country you need an army. But to defend a free society you need schools. You need families and an educational

system in which ideals are passed on from one generation to the next, and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. So Jews became the people whose passion was education, whose citadels were schools and whose heroes were teachers.

The result was that by the time the Second Temple was destroyed, Jews had constructed the world's first system of universal compulsory education, paid for by public funds:

Remember for good the man Joshua ben Gamla, because were it not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. At first a child was taught by his father, and as a result orphans were left uneducated. It was then resolved that teachers of children should be appointed in Jerusalem, and a father (who lived outside the city) would bring his child there and have him taught, but the orphan was still left without tuition. Then it was resolved to appoint teachers in each district, and boys of the age of sixteen and seventeen were placed under them; but when the teacher was angry with a pupil, he would rebel and leave. Finally Joshua ben Gamla came and instituted that teachers be appointed in every province and every city, and children from the age of six or seven were placed under their charge. (Baba Batra 21a)

By contrast, England did not institute universal compulsory education until 1870. The seriousness the sages attached to education can be measured by the following two passages:

If a city has made no provision for the education of the young, its inhabitants are placed under a ban, until teachers have been engaged. If they persistently neglect this duty, the city is excommunicated, for the world only survives by the merit of the breath of schoolchildren. (Maimonides, Hilkhos Talmud Torah 2:1)

Rabbi Judah the Prince sent R. Chiyya and R. Issi and R. Ami on a mission through the towns of Israel to establish teachers in every place. They came to a town where there were no teachers. They said to the inhabitants, "Bring us the defenders of the town." They brought them the military guard. The rabbis said, "These are not the protectors of the town but its destroyers." "Who then are the protectors?" asked the inhabitants. They answered, "The teachers." (Yerushalmi Hagigah 1:6)

No other faith has attached a higher value to study. None has given it a higher position in the scale of communal priorities. From the very outset Israel knew that freedom cannot be created by legislation, nor

can it be sustained by political structures alone. As the American justice Judge Learned Hand put it: "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it." That is the truth epitomized in a remarkable exegesis given by the sages. They based it on the following verse about the tablets Moses received at Sinai:

The tablets were the work of G-d; the writing was the writing of G-d, engraved on the tablets. (Ex. 32: 16)

They reinterpreted it as follows: Read not charut, engraved, but cherut, freedom, for there is none so free as one who occupies himself with the study of Torah. (Mishnah Avot 6:2)

What they meant was that if the law is engraved on the hearts of the people, it does not need to be enforced by police. True freedom – cherut – is the ability to control oneself without having to be controlled by others. Without accepting voluntarily a code of moral and ethical restraints, liberty becomes license and society itself a battleground of warring instincts and desires.

This idea, fateful in its implications, was first articulated by Moses in this week's sedra, in his words to the assembled Israelites. He was telling them that freedom is more than a moment of political triumph. It is a constant endeavour, throughout the ages, to teach those who come after us the battles our ancestors fought, and why, so that my freedom is never sacrificed to yours, or purchased at the cost of someone else's. That is why, to this day, on Passover we eat matzah, the unleavened bread of affliction, and taste maror, the bitter herbs of slavery, to remember the sharp taste of affliction and never be tempted to afflict others.

The oldest and most tragic phenomenon in history is that empires, which once bestrode the narrow world like a colossus, eventually decline and disappear. Freedom becomes individualism ("each doing what was right in his own eyes", Judges 21:25), individualism becomes chaos, chaos becomes the search for order, and the search for order becomes a new tyranny imposing its will by the use of force. What, thanks to Torah, Jews never forgot is that freedom is a never-ending effort of education in

which parents, teachers, homes and schools are all partners in the dialogue between the generations. Learning, talmud Torah, is the very foundation of Judaism, the guardian of our heritage and hope. That is why, when tradition conferred on Moses the greatest honour, it did not call him 'our hero', 'our prophet' or 'our king'. It called him, simply, Moshe Rabbenu, Moses our teacher. For it is in the arena of education that the battle for the good society is lost or won.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And I shall smite every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from man to beast" (12:12)

This was a demonstration of Israel's distinction as the first-born of Hashem (4:22). This principle of Israel's distinction is so important that it merited the destruction of a great number of men and beasts. The precept of sanctifying every first-born of men and beasts (13:2) is a demonstration of this principle. The election of Israel as G-d's people is the second most important principle in the entire Torah, inferior only to the fundamental teaching of Hashem as the Creator and the Master of the Universe.

Because of the vast greatness of this principle, the Plague of the First-born was the final Plague and also the Plague that caused Paro to set Israel free. The declaration "My first-born son is Israel" (4:22) opened the battle against Egypt, and the Plague of the First-born completed the liberation.

Because of this principle was the climax of the Redemption, it therefore becomes necessary to emphasize at all times, at least among ourselves, the supreme honor of being Hashem's chosen ones. Every symbol of this principle must be utilized by choosing Jewish names, Jewish pastimes, Jewish customs and celebrations, in addition to the proud practice of all the requirements of the Torah.

Even while in Exile, while being loyal citizens, we avoid contact with others and imitation of any of their ways. For the First-Born of Hashem must never forget that this principle was the final cause of the Exodus from Egypt. Because they did not alter their names or their language and refused to assimilate, they were thereby set apart by Hashem forever.