

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BESHALAH

Haftarah: Shoftim 5:1-31

January 30-31, 2015 11 SHEBAT 5775

Tu Bishvat will be celebrated on Wednesday, February 4.

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Joe R Bibi – 14 Shevat
And in memory of Marvin Azrak – 15 Shevat

Tuesday February 3rd – Please join us at the Areyat of our father Joe R. Bibi A'H at Ahi Ezer , 1885 Ocean Parkway and Avenue S, in Brooklyn – Mincha apx 5PM followed by Arbit and some divrei Torah at 5:30 followed by Tu Bishvat Berachot

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**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

You can make the difference!

The Jewish population is declining and that decline is no longer because of pogroms and holocausts. The decline is a consequence of intermarriage resulting in children who are either not Jewish or become completely indifferent to religion listing themselves as, "none of the above". This self-inflicted pogrom is diminishing us far more than enemy swords. And the single best tool we have to battle this daily loss is Jewish Education. Yet because of costs, this area too is under siege.

The Israeli government is acutely aware of this and has set aside 500 million shekels in funding. This money and other monies totaling hundreds of millions of dollars is distributed primarily at the direction of the World Jewish Congress. And that's a place where we have historically had no influence. The vast majority of funds are earmarked by the reform and conservative who control the votes because when it comes to voting we remain as we have been, apathetic. Sitting on the sidelines with no vote, no voice and no seat at the table is more than a shame, it's a sin.

We have been asking and will continue to ask for each and every one of you to get involved. Log on to www.wszo.org, register and cast a vote for World

Sephardic Zionist Organization – Ohavei Zion. We want you to press your organizations, synagogues, schools and rabbis to get involved and take a lead and to make every effort to get members to join and vote. Every single vote is crucial. We need each person to email all of their friends and neighbors and push them to vote. Bring up the subject at the table and get your kids involved.

Someone asked me this week why we felt it necessary to start a new organization with our own delegates. Why not just jump on the bandwagon of the Religious Zionists. My first answer is that the Religious Zionists have not been very successful. And although I can't be sure of why Hakham Ovadia z'sl initiated this effort four years ago, I must imagine that he felt that our unique communities must be represented. We have 63 diverse candidates from our communities. They include Sephardim and Ashkenazim, men and woman (about 30% are women), rabbis, elders and youth representing our future leaders (about 25% are under 30). The more we can vote in, the more control our communities will have over budgets for funding our schools in support of Jewish Education and Identity.

On a personal level I believe that we offer a unique perspective.

This week we read about the Jewish people leaving Egypt all together. All together they march into the sea. All together they witness the final demise of Egypt as the sea crashes in on their enemy. All together they sing the song at the sea. All together they march into the desert accompanied by the clouds of glory. And we will read next week how they arrive all together at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, one nation with one heart. What a beautiful picture!

Yet today's Orthodox world is far from a picture of togetherness. Instead of being inclusionary it is

The future of the Jewish people is in YOUR hands!

**Voting for the 37th World Zionist Congress Elections
has already begun across America.**

The Ohavei Zion party was established at the request of Rabbi Obadiah Yosef a"h so that the Traditional Sephardic community will have an influence on the direction of Jewish education within our communities and throughout the world.

YOUR IMPORTANT VOTE for Ohavei Zion will bring funding to our schools in support of Jewish Education and Identity, Zionism, and the support of Israel as the Jewish Homeland.

Vote for **Unity**
Vote for **Community**
Vote for **Tradition**

- ★ Promote spiritual & cultural Sephardic values and heritage
- ★ Provide funding for programs in support of Jewish Education
- ★ Instill a love of Torah values & the appreciation of Mitzvot
- ★ Pursue Jewish unity & respect for each other
- ★ Defend the rights of Jews anywhere in the world

Our list of delegates comprises Jews representing our various communities, with support of our Sages, Rabbis and Leaders.

OHAVEI ZION is a party by our people for our people. It is time we take *our* place at the table.



Join us and make your voice heard
The World Sephardic Zionist Organization - Ohavei Zion

VOTE NOW

Registration/Voting site: www.WSZO.org

E-mail: info@OhaveiZion.com
Website: www.OhaveiZion.com

US Chairman: Rabbi Elie Abadie
US Vice Chairman: Rabbi David Bibi



typically exclusionary. People don't feel comfortable in this Synagogue or that Synagogue. And within the Synagogue people only want to worship with those who are like minded and like spirited. Each Synagogue often feels like a "members only" private club. If you're not like me, than go pray with someone else.

We all know the story about the Jew found after being on a deserted island for thirty years. He gives his rescuers a tour of the village he assembled. This is my house, and this is my supply hut. This is the synagogue, and this is the coconut storage hut. This is the gym and this is the fish drying house. This is the synagogue and One of the rescuers stops him. I thought that was your Synagogue, why is there a second? Oh that's the one I pray in and this is the one I won't step foot in".

My friend Dr. Abie Abittan spoke of this idea of inclusionary and exclusionary last Shabbat as we commemorated the ninth yearzeit of his father, our Rabbi, Asher Abittan, z'sl. Our Sephardic Synagogue led by the Rabbi for 52 years is an image of diversity and inclusiveness. We pray together Sephardim and Ashkenazim – in fact the split is almost 50-50, we have observant people and not observant people. Many come on Shabbat with suit and tie, others without the tie and others without the jacket. Some even come with jeans and sandals as they might in Israel and everyone feels comfortable together.

Abie told a story of an eighth grade rebbe who came to pay his respects while that sat Shiva nine years ago. The Rebbe was in tears because he didn't have the chance to thank Rabbi Abittan. He told them of a boy who was in his 8th grade class in Yeshiva for the final year of elementary school. AT the time, the boy's parents went through a terrible divorce. The battle continued for years and as a result the boy left yeshiva and went to a public high school. Although the rebbe tried to keep in touch, the boy moved further and further away from his family, his friends and his religion, finally severing ties with everything but his bed at his mom's apartment. .

Four years later, the boy now 17 showed up at his father's home at 1AM on a Friday night. The boy was in torn jeans, a line of earrings pierced his ears and he had been drinking and doing drugs. He asked his dad if he could spend the night and the dad made it conditional on the boy joining him at synagogue in the morning. With little choice, the boy agreed.

The next morning still in his t shirt, torn jeans and adorned with his statement jewelry he arrived at the Sephardic Congregation. Rabbi Abittan stepped

down from his seat, grabbed a talet, a siddur and a kippah and made his way to the boy giving him a warm smile and handshake and welcoming him. He put his arm around him and walked him to a seat. And when the Torah came out, he gave the boy an aliyah to the Torah, finally giving him a long blessing at the end of the aliyah to the point where the boy shed a tear.

That evening the boy called his eighth grade rebbe and they reconnected. With the rebbe's help the boy cleaned up and was accepted to a school in Israel. At the Shiva the rebbe lamented that he had never told Rabbi Abittan that because of his smile and warmth and acceptance, this boy was now studying in his second year in Israel and got his life completely together. The boy had told the rebbe that when he became a pawn in the divorce, he lost his family and when he left Yeshiva for public school, he lost his friends who wanted nothing to do with him anymore. And in public school he was an outsider so his only friend was the street. It was Rabbi Abittan who in those few minutes raised him and showed him that he was wanted and loved.

Abie asked how many Synagogues would have given the boy an aliyah, how many Rabbis would have embraced the boy? In many places a security guard would have refused him entry.

Today the pious pray at sunrise. But when Rabbi Jacob Kassin Z'sl, our former chief rabbi, allowed an early minyan each Shabbat morning, it was primarily for those who wanted to pray and then go to work. Wasn't that sacrilegious people asked? But Rabbi Kassin knew that maintaining the connection, allowing people to remain a part and setting their mind to the fact that they might still be working but could look forward to the time when they wouldn't have to work, would insure children and grandchildren who would be connected. And he was right. Those same men who opened their stores on Saturday eventually became shomer shabbat. Their children are observant and grandchildren even more so. The attitude among Sephardim is sometimes called "not yet". It's an attitude that allows people to replace no with not yet. Does he always eat Kosher outside? Not yet! Does he observe Shabbat fully? Not yet! Does he learn Torah daily? Not yet!

The mind is there. The desire is there. The body must simply follow. And to make that happen we must encourage and include. And this attitude is spreading. So join us in battling exclusiveness and promoting inclusiveness. Join us in supporting Jewish education and directing the future of the Jewish people. Support our party. Join us in spreading this

attitude. It's a mitzvah, "Hakham David Yosef, son of Hakham Ovadia Yosef, a"n writes, "All those who assist in the success of Ohavei Zion in the upcoming elections where delegates will be chosen to represent us in a host of national institutions will be part of the strengthening of Jewish communities living their lives according to Torah and mitzvot based on Sephardic tradition."

Make sure that World Sephardic Zionist Organization – Ohavei Zion has a large delegation at the next Congress. Vote today. Get your friends and family to vote and spread the message. We are counting on you for 40,000 votes.

Please be in touch with us, visit our website www.OhaveiZion.com, email us at info@OhaveiZion.com and let us know who would be the ideal contact(s) in your synagogue for the placement of flyers, e-mail distribution of materials, and planning and organization of events. In addition, please point out who would be the most vocal and supportive advocates for the campaign in your community. Get your kids involved where they can register people in their synagogues and schools.

You Can Make a Difference! Every vote counts, and what is more important than our future and the future of Israel?

Each and every lover of Torah and mitzvot must join in this endeavor. It takes so little to do so. There are hundreds and hundreds of thousands of us. We can really make a difference. We simply need to register and vote.

If together we step into this sea, then together we will succeed with Hashem's help.

Big Bad Bibi

by Roger L Simon

(ED: I thought this was about me as a kid !)

Roger Lichtenberg Simon is an American novelist and screenwriter. He was formerly CEO of PJ Media. He is the author of ten novels, including the Moses Wine detective series, and six screenplays.

Fee fi fo fum. Big bad Bibi is coming to DC town — and Barack is VERY angry. Not only that, and possibly worse, Jeffrey Goldberg at The Atlantic may be equally as angry. The journalist insists Netanyahu making a speech to Congress at the speaker's invitation is a "disaster" or — in the words of my grandmother — "not good for the Jews." And Jeff should know. He's an important guy, I am told. He gets to talk... to Barack.

Goldberg accuses Netanyahu of electioneering (a rare thing indeed for a politician) and not showing the proper "RESPECT" for our president (cue Aretha), who always demonstrates so much respect for the Israeli prime minister.

Excuse me while I rend my clothes. Meanwhile, lost in Goldberg's posturing, and the funfkeying by such great State Department intellects as Jen Psaki, is the subject of Netanyahu's putative speech. What was it? Oh, yes... Iran. Now I remember. That country that has its hand in nearly every piece of Islamic mayhem from Buenos Aires to Sanaa.

Oh, wait. I made another mistake. I said Islamic mayhem. That's a no-no for Goldberg's hero. I meant, um, "workplace violence." Better? Good. The death of Alberto Nisman in Argentina was "workplace violence," no? He was at work, investigating the coverup of the terror bombing of that Buenos Aires Jewish center that killed 85 and wounded over 300 by Hezbollah or whoever it was. They're not Islamic, are they?

Anyway, not to worry. We have our best journalistic minds at work. Goldberg and others similar have assured us that Barack Obama has the best interests of Israel and obviously the West in mind. We shouldn't be concerned that Iran has been continuing to advance its technology and nuclear capabilities, even building ICBMs (what do they want with those — Israel's not that far away) while talks drone on and on and on. Obama will pull something out of the hat. He always has. Look at Libya. Oh, wait... That was just the jayvee team.

Scratch that and all those other countries from Nigeria to Pakistan and back. Obama has handled the war very well without naming it. As Goldberg et al will tell you, he doesn't need some rude foreign dignitary pontificating to him about what to do about Iran. Barack knew exactly what to do when all those Green demonstrators were marching for freedom in the streets of Tehran. Ignore them and negotiate with responsible leaders like Ahmadinejad. Oh, wait... I screwed that up again

I'm sorry. I should know better than to criticize my betters like Jeffrey Goldberg. It's not his fault Obama has no discernible policy after six plus years in office to deal with the Islamic terror war. The president probably doesn't want one. Give the guy a break.

And I feel for Goldberg, really I do. I'm sure he's embarrassed by Bibi. And Goldberg, of all things, would like to keep his access, like CNN with Saddam.

It's much easier to blame pushy Bibi then tell it like it is about Obama, Kerry and the rest of the mealy-mouthed crew that make Neville Chamberlain seem like Patton. But again not to worry. If Ayatollah Khamenei nixes a deal at the end, as most sentient beings assume he will, maybe Kerry can get James Taylor to serenade him.

And I'm sorry again to be so hostile to Goldberg and his "liberal" ilk, but I'm having echoes these days of 1938. Another Kristallnacht hasn't quite happened yet, but we've come mighty close. Time's up for being polite. Protocol-shmotocol. Benjamin Netanyahu isn't the problem. Barack Obama is.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: The Bnai Yisroel (Children of Israel - Jews) had left Mitzrayim (Egypt). The closest route to Eretz Yisroel (The Land of Israel) was along the Mediterranean coast up into Israel. However; this territory was occupied by the Philistines. The Bnai Yisroel were not ready for a battle, so Hashem (G-d) lead them toward the Sea of Reeds. Pharaoh was informed that The Bnai Yisroel appeared to be lost, and he strengthened his resolve and that of his people and pursued the Jews into the Desert.

2nd Aliya: The Egyptians caught up to the Jews as they were camped by the edge of the sea. (Imagine the thundering sound, and cloud of dust that 600 charging chariots must have made and you can begin to understand the pure terror that must have struck the hearts of the people.) Moshe reassured them that they only had to trust Hashem and stand silently as His awesome majesty wiped out the might of Mitzrayim.

3rd Aliya: Moshe was told to stretch out his staff over the sea. Hashem separated the Jews from the Egyptians with a cloud cover and caused an Easterly wind to blow the entire night. As the waters parted, the Bnai Yisroel entered between the towering walls of water and crossed to the other side. The Egyptians chased after them into the parted waters of the sea.

4th Aliya: Moshe stretched his arm back over the sea and the waters returned to their natural state, drowning the might and glory of Egypt's best. The Bnai Yisroel witnessed G-d's awesome display of justice and they believed in the reality of Hashem and in the appointment of Moshe as His most trusted servant. Moshe, and then Miriam, lead the Bnai Yisroel in a spontaneous song of exaltation and thanksgiving. The incident with the bitter waters at Marah is detailed.

5th Aliya: The Bnai Yisroel struggled with the realities of their experience, attempting to balance faith with practical concerns for survival. The concerns for food and water were overwhelming and Moshe promised them quail and Maana. These "miracles" were introduced to the Jews as evidence of Hashem's love, caring, honor and glory.

6th Aliya: The Bnai Yisroel were given strict instructions regarding the gathering and eating of the Maana. They were introduced to Shabbos, and an urn of Manna was saved for posterity.

7th Aliya: The nation traveled to Rephidim, and confronted Moshe over the issue of water. Moshe saw this as an unnecessary challenge to Hashem's caring and love. Hashem instructed Moshe to hit the rock and bring forth water. The final episode in the Parsha was Amalek's unprovoked attack on the newly independent nation. Yehoshua lead the attack against Amalek while Moshe, Aharon, and Chur (Miriam's son) stood atop the battle field with Moshe's arms stretched heavenward. Hashem commanded us to eradicate and never forget Amalek's evil.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"For I am Hashem your Healer." (Shemot 15:26)

In the Amidah we say the blessing, "He is the Healer of His nation, Israel." This seems difficult, because we see that healing is not exclusively found by the nation of Israel. It is found throughout mankind. Another question is that when we say the berachah of Asher Yasar, we end the berachah with the words, "the Healer of all flesh," and not with the words, "the Healer of Israel"?

Rabi Shimshon Pincus zt"l explains that the berachah in the Amidah that states that Hashem is the Healer of Israel is based on the pasuk in our perashah that says, "I am your Healer." However, we need to understand the pasuk. In what way is Hashem our Healer that differs from the rest of the world?

There are two forms of healing. One is that Hashem placed in the human body the ability to heal itself. The second form is when one goes to a physician to be healed, through medicines, surgery, etc. Therefore, the term that Hashem is the Healer of Israel is not referring to the first type, that human bodies have the ability to heal themselves, for that form was given by Hashem to all of mankind. When we say in Asher Yasar that Hashem heals all flesh, that's referring to the ability that Hashem gives to all bodies to heal themselves. The second type of healing, that one goes to a physician to get healed, that is our pasuk that Hashem is our "Doctor." We

are His “patients,” and that’s the meaning in the Amidah.

What is the difference between the two? The first form that Hashem gives to all mankind’s bodies to heal is dependent on that person’s performance in the past and the future. Is he a good person or not? However, when one goes to a doctor, the doctor doesn’t sit the patient down and ask if he is good or not. He tries to heal no matter who the patient is. So too with Hashem and the Jewish people. So it’s like a physician telling His patient, “I am your doctor” who heals no matter what. Who would trade off this special patient to doctor relationship? Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

One of the beautiful customs that we have is that of families getting together to celebrate Tu Bishbat. Some have plates and plates of all the different fruits and nuts representing all the berachot while other families have bags of these delicacies for the children. Besides showing appreciation to Hashem for all His bounty, what relevance does this holiday have to us?

The Rabbis tell us that on Tu Bishbat, the juices of the trees begin to flow again, getting ready for another season of producing leaves and fruits. It is a time that Hashem “remembers” the trees, deciding which one will flourish and which one will not, and indeed, the Sages tell us that one should pray for a nice Etrog on Tu Bishbat. The lesson for us is very heartening. If Hashem, Who runs the entire universe, can involve Himself with the smallest detail of which tree will grow to which size, is He not watching and guiding and protecting all His creations, especially His Chosen People? If we can appease Him regarding the welfare of plants and trees by making the right berachot on Tu Bishbat, surely we can pray to Him to bring about our salvation on a general and individual level. We need His protection all the time, especially for our people living in Israel, who are always the target of our enemies, may Hashem protect them! Let us continue our beautiful customs and learn the underlying lesson that it is Hashem who rules the world and to Him do we turn for everything. Tizku Leshanim Rabot!

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

ADRENALINE

When a cat feels threatened, it arches its back tensely in a position of self-defense. Similarly, a cobra will stretch its neck in a stiff, vertical position and hiss at an intruder. Dogs bark and show their teeth, and lions roar and swing their razor-sharp, powerful paws. Every creature has instinctive behavior for self-preservation,

The human being is equipped with a hormone called adrenaline, which automatically begins to flow into the bloodstream whenever an influx of extra energy and strength is required. In the human, this burst also energizes the brainwaves, enabling a person to think about escape more quickly and in a more focused way. The “fight or flight” response differs markedly from a person’s normal reactions to routine, non-stressful situations. It is only when needed that the adrenaline “juices” flow.

The Mesilat Yesharim says: “All matters of this world are tests to the individual.” How often people get caught up in the big picture and lose focus on the small details – and that is precisely where the testing is most difficult. In a crisis, most of us can consolidate our strength and rise to the occasion – even surpassing our normal achievement levels. It’s when we don’t even think we are being tested that the likelihood of failure looms large.

Every single millisecond of life that Hashem graciously grants us in this world is an opportunity to grow and succeed or, Hashem forbid, fail and regress. If we can focus on that one thought, every minute becomes a valuable “crisis” during which the spiritual juices might flow to overcome pitfalls. So, do not take any event or encounter lightly. Rise to the occasion and feel the spiritual adrenaline flowing. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

FAMILY PLANNING

The following true story occurred a few years ago in Antwerp. Reb Chaim and his wife sat down at their table after a long hard day.

“Baruch Hashem, we have been blessed so much, and I’m not complaining,” the wife announced, looking nervously at her husband. “It’s just that we now have twelve children, beli ayin hara, and there is no more room in the house, and we can’t really afford any more children. Although we’re coping, isn’t twelve enough?”

The husband lovingly sympathized with his wife and then began to speak about the importance of relying on Hashem. He then reassured her that He never gives anything to anyone that is impossible for them to handle.

“Since you are healthy and our only concern is a financial one,” he suggested, “I think that we should leave everything in Hashem’s hands, for if He blesses us with another child He will surely provide us the means to support that child, as He does with all of our children. Remember we’re not just having children for our sakes, we are building Hashem’s army,” Reb Chaim said to his wife.

The woman accepted her husband’s words and within a short period of time, she was delighted to find out that she was pregnant again.

On the day that the baby was born, in the same hospital, an exceptionally wealthy gentile died leaving no heirs or family. Years earlier, he had declared in his will that all of his money should be given to the largest family in Antwerp since he had never married and had no family to give the money to.

Now, there were several families in Antwerp with twelve children, but no family with thirteen children. Well, at least there was no family until the day that the gentile died, when there was one Jewish family who had officially become the largest family in the city, having just been blessed with their thirteenth child! (Short Vort)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR It's Hard Enough As It Is

Parashat Beshalah tells the story of Keri'at Yam Suf, the great miracle of the splitting of the sea. King David speaks about this miracle in Tehillim (114), where he writes, "Ha'yam Ra'a Va'yanos" – "The sea saw, and fled." Apparently, the sea "saw" something before it "fled" – meaning, before it consented to split into two bodies of water and let Beneh Yisrael pass through. The Midrash understood this Pasuk to mean that the sea split in the merit of Yosef, who "fled." As we read in Parashat Vayesheb (39:13), Yosef fled from the house of Potifar, where he worked as a slave, when Potifar's wife tried to seduce him. It was in this merit, the Midrash writes, that the sea split for Beneh Yisrael to save them from the pursuing Egyptian army.

This comment of the Midrash requires some explanation. Why was the particular aspect of Yosef "fleeing" so special, and deserving of such a great reward? Yosef withstood temptation as a teenage boy in a foreign country. This itself was truly heroic. What was so significant about the fact that he fled?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (1901-1978) explained that the Midrash here teaches a fundamental and critical rule about religious life: we are to run away from spiritual challenges. We should not be looking for "tests," to put ourselves in situations that arouse temptation or make religious observance difficult. A recovering addict does not keep a container of drugs on his kitchen table to prove to himself that he is capable of abstaining. Similarly, the Gemara in Baba Batra (57b) teaches that if a man has two paths he could follow to reach his destination, and deliberately chooses the path where women are present and not modestly dressed, he is considered a Rasha even if he closes his eyes. Voluntarily choosing situations of religious challenges is wrong – even if one successfully hurdles the challenge. Yosef's

greatness was not just in resisting temptation, but in running away from temptation. He refused to stay there for even an extra moment, lest the Yeser Ha'ra figure out a way to overcome him.

The rationale behind this rule is simple. Namely, we've got our hands full as it is. We already have plenty to deal with. Any conscientious religious Jew knows that observing Halacha can be challenging and demands great amounts of discipline and effort. The tests that God sends us are enough for us. We should not be in the business of subjecting ourselves to further tests.

But there is a deeper reason for this principle, as well. Anytime God subjects us to a test, we can rest assured that we have the wherewithal to succeed. This is a basic rule that we should all know: God does not send us a spiritual challenge that we cannot overcome. If He brought the situation upon us, we can and must assume, unquestioningly, that we are capable of passing the test. However, we have no such guarantee regarding tests that we bring upon ourselves. We might feel confident in our ability to withstand the temptation, but only God knows the outcome before the situation unfolds. There is thus no justification for voluntarily placing oneself in spiritually challenging situations. Indeed, we pray every day in our morning prayer service, "Al Tebi'enu Li'ydeh Nisayon" – that Hashem should not subject us to tests. Certainly, then, we should not be subjecting ourselves to tests.

We might draw an analogy to a driver who was speeding down the road and could not stop at the red light. He obviously cannot excuse himself from guilt by claiming that he was unable to stop. What was he doing driving dangerously in the first place? He had to anticipate traffic lights on the road. He should not be driving so fast to begin with.

Leading a Torah life is fraught with challenges, and we shouldn't be looking for more. We must be very careful in choosing the places we go and the kind of activities we engage in. If there are situations that could potentially compromise our religious standards, we should avoid them.

Keri'at Yam Suf was likely the greatest miracle that ever occurred – and the Midrash teaches that it happened in the merit of Yosef's escaping a situation of temptation. Let us follow his inspiring example and avoid all spiritually threatening situations, and in this merit, Be'ezrat Hashem, we, too, will experience great miracles and receive God's bountiful blessings, Amen.

Rabbi Wein
FORTUNE AND EQUALITY

One of the more popular and populist social and electoral issues here in Israel and in the rest of the Western world as well, is rectifying the seeming inequality of the distribution of wealth. The upper five percent of the population, in terms of wealth worldwide, control close to eighty percent of the wealth of the societies that they inhabit.

In order to correct this seemingly unfair imbalance, government programs are introduced and legislative laws are passed to redistribute wealth – taking from the wealthy by substantially increasing their tax burden and giving to the less wealthy in the form of government subsidies and welfare programs. This is, in effect, a glorified Robin Hood philosophy that has always proved popular and even heroic.

In those countries and societies where this utopian scheme was actually tried and enforced, the net result seems to have been that the wealthy became poor and the poor remained poor. The Soviet Union, which for seventy-five years destroyed the pre-existing wealthy class, only succeeded in creating a new class of bureaucrats and apparatchniks and an economy that bred universal poverty, social dysfunction and eventually collapsed under the weight of its own misguided policies.

Here in Israel, the socialist founders of the state also addressed the problem of income inequality with enormous taxation and controls over various forms of private enterprise. This was the legacy of the Marxist mindset that was part of the belief system of the Eastern European Zionist founders of the state.

Only over the last few decades has this situation changed, with many more Israelis prospering. Now more than ever before in the history of the country, there is a larger and growing wealthy class. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly a great gap between the wealthy and the less wealthy. And this gap is trumpeted, by all of the parties, as being an important electoral issue that needs determined correction and government action.

The Torah takes a more realistic and measured view of the human situation involved here. We are assured that there will always be a substantial number of people – if not even the vast majority of the population – that will be less wealthy than the rich people of the society. All human beings are created equal but they never are equal in talent, wealth, opportunity and accomplishment. That is simply a fact of human life.

The Talmud, in its usual pithy and accurate way, teaches us that success in raising children, achieving longevity of life and becoming wealthy in material terms are all dependent upon good fortune. Seemingly perfect parents and warm and loving households can also produce children that are rebellious and even monstrous.

One can rigorously follow the best of health, diet and exercise regimens and still not be guaranteed a long life. And one can work hard, be smart and intelligent, have great deal of knowledge and energy and still be a very poor wage earner. Apparently the Talmud takes for granted that income inequality will always be a part of human life. It encourages and demands that the wealthy constantly help the poor but it offers no magic bullet that will make everyone equally wealthy.

There exists an imaginary poverty line that is drawn by statisticians in every society. There will always be a substantial portion of the population that finds itself below that poverty line. The issue is how high that poverty line is drawn on the graph of wealth and income. There is no question that the poor in Israel today are much wealthier than the poor in Israel were a half-century ago. Yet we are constantly reminded of how many in Israel find themselves in the group that is below the poverty line.

I wish that there were no poor people in Israel or anywhere else in the world, but that is a hopeless wish. Those of us who find ourselves fortunate to have means and wealth are obligated to help our fellow citizens who need our help. But destroying the wealthy class, taxing them inordinately and attempting to redistribute wealth and income, only weakens the society and its economy.

We should not remain passive in the face of the economic and social troubles that confront so many of our neighbors here in Israel and throughout the world. It is interesting to note that people are more resistant to paying taxes to a government than they are to contributing towards charitable causes and helping other human beings.

As with everything in life there must be a balance between private wealth, government welfare, taxation policies and voluntary charitable behavior. Populist slogans rarely if ever contribute to achieving this most necessary balance. Lincoln famously once said: "The Lord must love the poor. He created so many of them". We should attempt to diminish the numbers of the poor but at the same time realize that certain facts in the human condition and in general society are not given to easy and popular theoretical solution

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Face of Evil

After 9/11, when the horror and trauma had subsided, Americans found themselves asking what had happened and why. Was it a disaster? A tragedy? A crime? An act of war? It did not seem to fit the pre-existing paradigms. And why had it happened? The question most often asked about Al Qaeda was, "Why do they hate us?"

In the wake of those events an American thinker Lee Harris wrote two books, *Civilization and its Enemies* and *The Suicide of Reason*[1] that were among the most thought-provoking responses of the decade. The reason for the questions and the failure to find answers, said Harris, was that we in the West had forgotten the concept of an enemy. Liberal democratic politics and market economics create a certain kind of society, a specific way of thinking and a characteristic type of personality. At their heart is the concept of the rational actor, the person who judges acts by their consequences and chooses the maximal option. He or she believes that for every problem there is a solution, for every conflict a resolution. The way to achieve it is to sit down, negotiate, and do on balance what is best for all.

In such a world there are no enemies, merely conflicts of interest. An enemy, says Harris, is simply "a friend we haven't done enough for yet." In the real world, however, not everyone is a liberal democrat. An enemy is "someone who is willing to die in order to kill you. And while it is true that the enemy always hates us for a reason, it is his reason, not ours." He sees a different world from ours, and in that world we are the enemy. Why do they hate us? Answers Harris: "They hate us because we are their enemy."

Whatever the rights and wrongs of Harris's specifics, the general point is true and profound. We can become mind-blind, thinking that the way we – our society, our culture, our civilization – see things is the only way, or at least that it is the way everyone would choose if given the chance. Only a complete failure to understand the history of ideas can explain this error, and it is a dangerous one. When Montezuma, ruler of the Aztecs, met Cortes, leader of the Spanish expedition in 1520, he assumed that he was meeting a civilized man from a civilized nation. That mistake cost him his life and within a year there was no Aztec civilization any more. Not everyone sees the world the way we do, and, as Richard Weaver once said: "The trouble with humanity is that it forgets to read the minutes of the last meeting."

This explains the significance of the unusual

command at the end of this week's parsha. The Israelites had escaped the seemingly inexorable danger of the chariots of the Egyptian army, the military high-tech of its day. Miraculously the sea divided, the Israelites crossed, the Egyptians, their chariot wheels caught in the mud, were unable either to advance or retreat and were caught by the returning tide.

The Israelites sang a song and finally seemed to be free, when something untoward and unexpected happened. They were attacked by a new enemy, the Amalekites, a nomadic group living in the desert. Moses instructed Joshua to lead the people in battle. They fought and won. But the Torah makes it clear that this was no ordinary battle:

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.' Moses built an altar and called it The Lord is my Banner. He said, 'The hand is on the Lord's throne. The Lord will be at war with Amalek for all generations.' (Ex. 17: 14-16)

This is a very strange statement, and it stands in marked contrast to the way the Torah speaks about the Egyptians. The Amalekites attacked Israel during the lifetime of Moses just once. The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites over an extended period, oppressing and enslaving them and starting a slow genocide by killing every male Israelite child. The whole thrust of the narrative would suggest that if any nation would become the symbol of evil, it would be Egypt.

But the opposite turns out to be true. In Deuteronomy the Torah states, "Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land" (Deut. 23: 8). Shortly thereafter, Moses repeats the command about the Amalekites, adding a significant detail:

Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God ... You shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! (Deut. 25: 17-19)

We are commanded not to hate Egypt, but never to forget Amalek. Why the difference? The simplest answer is to recall the rabbis' statement in *The Ethics of the Fathers*: "If love depends on a specific cause, when the cause ends, so does the love. If love does not depend on a specific cause, then it never ends." [2] The same applies to hate. When hate

depends on a specific cause, it ends once the cause disappears. Causeless, baseless hate lasts forever.

The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites because, in Pharaoh's words, "The Israelites are becoming too numerous and strong for us" (Ex. 1: 9). Their hate, in other words, came from fear. It was not irrational. The Egyptians had been attacked and conquered before by a foreign group known as the Hyksos, and the memory of that period was still acute and painful. The Amalekites, however, were not being threatened by the Israelites. They attacked a people who were "weary and worn out," specifically those who were "lagging behind." In short: the Egyptians feared the Israelites because they were strong. The Amalekites attacked the Israelites because they were weak.

In today's terminology, the Egyptians were rational actors, the Amalekites were not. With rational actors there can be negotiated peace. People engaged in conflict eventually realise that they are not only destroying their enemies: they are destroying themselves. That is what Pharaoh's advisers said to him after seven plagues: "Do you not yet realise that Egypt is ruined?" (Ex. 10: 7). There comes a point at which rational actors understand that the pursuit of self-interest has become self-destructive, and they learn to co-operate.

It is not so, however, with non-rational actors. Emil Fackenheim, one of the great post-Holocaust theologians, noted that towards the end of the Second World War the Germans diverted trains carrying supplies to their own army, in order to transport Jews to the extermination camps. So driven were they by hate that they were prepared to put their own victory at risk in order to carry out the systematic murder of the Jews of Europe. This was, he said, evil for evil's sake.[3]

The Amalekites function in Jewish memory as "the enemy" in Lee Harris's sense. Jewish law, however, specifies two completely different forms of action in relation to the Amalekites. First is the physical command to wage war against them. That is what Samuel told Saul to do, a command he failed fully to fulfil. Does this command still apply today?

The unequivocal answer given by Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch is No.[4] Maimonides ruled that the command to destroy the Amalekites only applied if they refused to make peace and accept the seven Noahide laws. He further stated that the command was no longer applicable since Sennacherib, the Assyrian, had transported and resettled the nations he conquered so that it was no longer possible to identify the ethnicity of any of the original nations

against whom the Israelites were commanded to fight. He also said, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, that the command only applied to people of specific biological descent. It is not to be applied in general to enemies or haters of the Jewish people. So the command to wage war against the Amalekites no longer applies.

However, there is a quite different command, to "remember" and "not forget" Amalek, which we fulfil annually by the reading the passage about the Amalekites command as it appears in Deuteronomy on the Shabbat before Purim, Shabbat Zakhor (the connection with Purim is that Haman the "Agagite" is assumed to be a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites). Here Amalek has become a symbol rather than a reality.

By dividing the response in this way, Judaism marks a clear distinction between an ancient enemy who no longer exists, and the evil that enemy embodied, which can break out again at any time in any place. It is easy at times of peace to forget the evil that lies just beneath the surface of the human heart. Never was this truer than in the past three centuries. The birth of Enlightenment, toleration, emancipation, liberalism and human rights persuaded many, Jews among them, that collective evil was as extinct as the Amalekites. Evil was then, not now. That age eventually begat nationalism, fascism, communism, two World Wars, some of the brutal tyrannies ever known, and the worst crime of man against man.

Today, the great danger is terror. Here the words of Princeton political philosopher Michael Walzer are particularly apt:

Wherever we see terrorism, we should look for tyranny and oppression ... The terrorists aim to rule, and murder is their method. They have their own internal police, death squads, disappearances. They begin by killing or intimidating those comrades who stand in their way, and they proceed to do the same, if they can, among the people they claim to represent. If terrorists are successful, they rule tyrannically, and their people bear, without consent, the costs of the terrorists' rule.[5]

Evil never dies, and like liberty it demands constant vigilance. We are commanded to remember, not for the sake of the past but for the sake of the future, and not for revenge but the opposite: a world free of revenge and other forms of violence.

Lee Harris began *Civilization and its Enemies* with the words, "The subject of this book is forgetfulness," and ends with a question: "Can the West overcome

the forgetfulness that is the nemesis of every successful civilization?" That is why are commanded to remember and never forget Amalek, not because the historic people still exists, but because a society of rational actors can sometimes believe that the world is full of rational actors with whom one can negotiate peace. It is not always so.

Rarely was a biblical message so relevant to the future of the West and of freedom itself. Peace is possible, implies Moses, even with an Egypt that enslaved and tried to destroy us. But peace is not possible with those who attack people they see as weak and who deny their own people the freedom for which they claim to be fighting. Freedom depends on our ability to remember and whenever necessary confront "the eternal gang of ruthless men," the face of Amalek throughout history.

[1] Lee Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies: The next Stage of History*. New York: Free Press, 2004. *The Suicide of Reason*, New York: Basic Books, 2008.

[2] Mishnah Avot 5: 16.

[3] Fackenheim, Emil L., and Michael L. Morgan. *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987, 126.

[4] Rabbi N L Rabinovitch, *Responsa Melomdei Milchamah*, *Maaleh Adumim*, Maaliyot, 1993, 22-25.

[5] Michael Walzer, *Arguing about War*, Yale University Press, 2004, 64-65.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

On the Seventh Day of Pesach we read from the Torah the Shirat Hayam, which tells of the stupendous miracle of the splitting of the Sea of Suf. We also read this portion each year in Perashat Beshalach, and we say it every day in our morning prayers. This repetition means that it is very important for us to understand and feel the many teachings of this open Miracle.

"And Hashem on that day saved Israel from the hand of Egypt". (14:30) The rescue of Israel from the power of Egypt was not completed until the day of the splitting of the Sea of Suf. From "that day" onward Egypt no longer interfered in the affairs of Israel. The remarkable fact that for the following 500 years nothing is mentioned of any intervention by Egypt in the affairs of Israel is a tremendous demonstration that testifies to the truth of the total devastation of Egypt by the Plagues and by the episode of the Sea.

"And Israel saw Egypt die on the shore of the Sea". (14:30) Not only did Hashem rescue Israel, but He also

granted them the exultation of seeing the destruction of their pursuers, while standing safely on the shore. When we see the downfall of the wicked, we gain more Awareness of Hashem's power and His kindness:

"Be elevated, O Judge of the world! Turn back recompense (revenge) upon the arrogant" (Tehillim 94:2).

"Then would sing Moshe and Bnei Yisrael". (15:1) Did the Jews rejoice at the destruction of the Egyptians?

Hashem does not rejoice at the destruction of any of His creatures, and it is stated that Hashem did not permit the angels to sing at the drowning of Paro's host (Megilah 10B).

But here we see that Moshe and the Bnei Yisrael sang, and even rejoiced in every detail of the destruction of

their enemy. We understand therefrom that men, unlike angels, must utilize such opportunities to gain more

Awareness of Hashem, and more Gratitude to Him. Angels cannot make any progress, but Moshe and Yisrael can gain understanding of Hashem and thereby improve themselves greatly.

And that is our function in this life, to improve ourselves.

Adapted

from "A NATION IS BORN" by Rabbi Miller ZT'L

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