

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VA'ERA

Haftarah: Yehezkel 28:25-29:21

Rosh Hodesh Shebat will be celebrated on Monday, January 11.

JANUARY 8-9, 2016 28 TEBET 5776

**DEDICATIONS: In memory of Jeffrey Matut -Yosef ben Malka A"H**

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to  
[ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com)  
 Newsletter archives now at [BenaiAsher.Org](http://BenaiAsher.Org)

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100 – Mincha– The most important tefilah of the day – Followed by Arbit - Give us 18 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!



Dave Bibi, A'H

## Editors Notes

### Zechot Avot In the Merit of Our Forefathers

As we completed last week's portion, Moses returns to G-d and is puzzled as to why his visit with Pharaoh did not result in the Children of Israel being able to leave Egypt and furthermore seemed to effect

a terrible consequence in Pharaoh demanding that the slaves supply their own straw in the brick making process. The Israelites are not very happy with Moses. As we begin this week's portion, G-d assures Moses. He tells Moses not to worry. Not only will the Israelites be released from bondage, they will be led to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And then in what seems to be the middle of the conversation, there is a break in the action and we are re- introduced to the families of Reuben and Shimon and finally Levi listing the grandfather and great uncles of Moses and Aaron, then the father, uncles and cousins, nephews and great nephews and finally Moses and Aaron themselves.

Mr. Rabbi Abittan once explained that it is crucial to remember that we are all human beings. None of us are gods or angels. All of us have human flaws which we must overcome. And because we are all in essence the same, any of us can achieve what a Moses or an Abraham or a David achieves. Perhaps as Rav Hirsch suggests, it's at the point where miracles begin when we must be reminded that Moses and Aaron are men. Rabbi Abittan went on to explain that we must never forget that much of whom we are lies in zechut avot, the merit of our forefathers. Whether we call it spiritual nature and spiritual genes or a spiritual nurture, we owe so much to those who came before us.

Today is the Yahrzeit of my great uncle Dave Bibi. Uncle Dave and I share the exact same name. We are both David Joseph Bibi. Twenty six year after he passed away people meeting me for the first time often ask if he was my grandfather. And I explain that my grandfather was Reuben, but I am named David after my maternal grandfather, David Gindi. When I was a child, I shared a special bond with Uncle Dave. He would often test me in my knowledge of Torah and would reward me generously. When I was older, he would talk to me about human nature, about business and about responsibility. During my twenties I spent a great deal of my time in Europe

and no matter when I went, Uncle Dave had been there before and many doors were opened in his honor. Still today, people remember his as a great man.

My father often spoke of his Uncle. He wrote about him as well. Some of the stories are published, others recorded and many just in his notes.

Uncle Dave was separated from his father and his older brother for the first nine years of his life. They were divided by two continents, an ocean and a world at war. My great-grandfather Joseph, who was living with my grandfather in San Francisco, must have been tormented that he could get neither word nor money to his two young sons, his wife and his daughter half way around the world. We know that David's older sister Shefika with two young children and a husband drafted into the Turkish army went out to support the family by selling eggs in the market. As she was fluent in several languages, she also worked with the embassies. Everyone loved her, but one day at the end of the war, she was murdered. No one is sure if it was an egg merchant who felt threatened or because of her work with the embassies. A very tough life became suddenly much tougher for young David.

When the family was finally reunited in New York in 1920, young David was able to get to know his father. But even that was short lived as Joseph passed away in 1927. And then two years later the depression hit, but nothing seemed to get Dave Bibi down. He was an eternal optimist. He was brilliant, always figuring out the solution to any problem and never giving up. He was a people person who cared deeply for all those around him.

My dad wrote that at the tender age of 21, in 1932, in the midst of the depression, Dave Bibi volunteered to raise money to renovate the Ahi Ezer Synagogue. The Synagogue began as a house on 64<sup>th</sup> Street and 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue purchased in the early 20s. Hacham Murad Maslaton was grateful at the attempt and when Dave succeeded, the Rabbi was ecstatic. By 1936, the main room of the synagogue was overcrowded and had to be extended. This meant more fundraising, a duty that by then Dave Bibi inherited. . In 1939, Dave, at the tender age of 29 became the third president of Ahi Ezer succeeding

Mr. Mousa Attieh. To be chosen for such a role at such a young age indicated the great esteem that his congregation had for him.

One of my favorite stories was hearing how the Bibi family got into the lighting business. The family was renowned around the world for many generations as master artisans who were virtual magicians with silver and other metals. In the 30's, Uncle Dave organized Bibi and Company with his older brother Reuben, blessed with a brilliant mind and magical hands as the head of production. His nephew Nouri ran the office, while Dave did the buying and selling.

In the late 30s Dave met with an antique dealer who had often used the family factory to refurbish pieces. The man had a candelabra. What was unusual was that it was electrified with crystal arms and glass prisms hanging down. The man explained that he used to buy these from Czechoslovakia, but that wasn't an option any more. The man left the piece with Dave who called in his brother to study it.

For Reuben, this was an intriguing challenge. For the next few days he walked around the city studying glassware. An ashtray here, some salt and pepper shakers, a cut glass dessert plate all mounted on a fabricated metal frame looked great. Next he had to arrange for the electrical components.

He knew a lamp dealer and asked if he had any items he was discarding. When shown an entire room in a warehouse, Reuben went through it and purchased it. One man's junk became the other's treasure. Reuben tinkered with the wires, the sockets, the switches, until he finally had a beautiful copy of the candelabra that the antique dealer brought to Uncle Dave.

"This is beautiful," the dealer, "can you make some more?"

Slowly, *Bibi and Co.* began specializing in candelabras that could be outfitted either for candles or electricity. Clients continued to show the brothers different styles and models and challenged them to interpret and produce their own versions. And Dave Bibi, master salesman as he was took these samples up and down the east coast.

What was so special about Dave was that as much time as he devoted to business, he devoted no less time and no less effort to charitable works almost

dividing his day between the two. And with all his efforts, one might think he absolved himself from giving. At the end of each month, he sat with his partners and reviewed the numbers and moved whatever he could into the charity fund. If they could only do ten percent, then it would be ten percent, but the goal was to donate as much as possible. And there was no community charity or project where he wasn't involved.

My Uncle Dave showed us one can be the president of the synagogue and the owner of a successful business, and still he should always run to greet a stranger, find him a seat, make him welcome, and invite him to your house. In business, he showed us that one could be traveling the world, with no other Jew around for miles, but wherever he was he knew he was the Jew who had to set the example, who had to stop and pray and who had to always do the right thing. And I can never figure out how he did it, but whoever needed a job was given one at Bibi.

As I noted above, Rabbi Abittan explained that we must never forget that much of whom we are lies in zechut avot, the merit of our forefathers. Whether we call it spiritual nature and spiritual genes or a spiritual nurture, we owe so much to those who came before us. I am sure that one could easily write a book on Dave Bibi's life and on the good that he did. I am proud and honored to be able to share his name.

Shabbat Shalom,  
David Bibi

**America's Year of Living Dangerously**  
**By BRET STEPHENS – The Wall Street Journal**

Two thousand sixteen will be the year of America living dangerously. Barack Obama will devote his last full year in office to shaping a liberal legacy, irrespective of real-world results. America's enemies will see his last year as an opportunity to take what they can, while they can. America's allies, or former allies, will do what they must. And then Hillary Clinton will likely become president. Whether the Republican Party chooses to remain intact remains to be seen. For aficionados of political delusion, it must have been fun to watch Mr. Obama rattle off his list of foreign-policy accomplishments at his year-end press conference last month. There was the Paris climate deal, the Iran nuclear deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, the opening to Cuba—"steady, persistent work," the president said, that was

"paying off for the American people in big, tangible ways."

Tangible means perceptible by touch. But the Paris climate accord is voluntary and unenforceable; the Pacific trade deal is unratified and unpopular, especially among Democrats; the opening to Cuba is "tangible" only if you enjoy taking your beach holiday in a dictatorship that, as my colleague Mary O'Grady has noted, made some 8,000 political arrests in 2015—that is, after it normalized relations with the U.S.

As for the nuclear agreement, it amounts, predictably, to another American hostage in the hands of Tehran. Iran conducted two ballistic-missile tests in the wake of the deal, both in violation of a legally binding U.N. Security Council resolution. When the administration murmured its intention to impose modest sanctions in response, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani warned that the sanctions would violate the deal and ordered his defense ministry to accelerate its missile program. "The White House on Wednesday morning sent a notification to Congress that the Treasury Department would announce at 10:30 a.m. new sanctions on nearly a dozen companies and individuals" linked to the Iranian missile program, the Journal's Jay Solomon reported last week. "The White House sent a second email to congressional offices at 11:12 a.m. stating the sanctions announcement had been 'delayed for a few hours.'"

As of this writing, the sanctions still haven't been imposed. Forty-two minutes sets a Guinness record in diplomatic self-abasement.

In the week of the sanctions capitulation the Iranian navy test-fired unguided rockets within 1,500 yards of the aircraft carrier USS Truman as it was transiting the Strait of Hormuz. Riyadh executed a radical Shiite cleric and put an end to John Kerry's fantasies of diplomatic settlement for Syria after it severed diplomatic ties with Tehran. China landed a plane on an artificial island built illegally in the South China Sea in an area claimed by Vietnam.

Each of these acts is an expression of contempt for Mr. Obama. Contempt is the father of lawlessness and the grandfather of violence. What happens when the next Iranian live-fire exercise lands a shell within 1,000 yards of a U.S. ship? Or 500?

Expect 2016 to be rich in such incidents and worse—the inevitable result of Mr. Obama's deliberate abandonment of Pax Americana as the organizing principle in international relations. Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other allies will freelance foreign policies in ways over which we have little say, even as we are embroiled in the consequences. Moscow, Beijing and Tehran will continue to take hammers to the soft plaster of U.S. resolve as they seek regional dominance. The nuclear deal will become a dead letter even as Mr. Obama insists on fulfilling our end

of the bargain. China will continue to build islands while buying us off in the paper currency of climate agreements and other liberal hobbyhorses. Russia will seek to test and humiliate NATO.

And there will be mass-casualty terror attacks on the scale of Paris. If you're reading this column on a major metropolitan commuter network, look up from your paper.

The U.S. has lived through dangerous years before—1968 and 1980 come to mind. Hindsight is often the great redeemer, but both years ended with the American people making sober political choices in the face of a deteriorating international position. Will that happen again in 2016? Not if either of the two current presidential front-runners wins the office. Not if we think that the central metrics of foreign policy are the size of our carbon footprint or the height of our wall with Mexico. Not if the bipartisan tilt toward economic protectionism and quasi-isolationism becomes the new national dogma. Not if we suppose that turning our back on the world's great convulsions (or bombing them till they glow) is the best way of escaping them.

In 1947 Democrat Harry Truman and Republican Arthur Vandenberg saved the Western world when they agreed that American prosperity at home depended on the security of our friends abroad. In 2016 we'll learn if that saving consensus still holds. Buckle up.

In his words, "One cannot say 'I am an Israeli in rights and a Palestinian in obligations.' Whoever wants to be Israeli should be an Israeli all the way, both in rights and in obligations, and the first and highest obligation is to obey the laws of the state."

### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading Va'era - Plagues 1-7

1- Hashem tells Moshe to go back and tell Benei Israel Hashem will save them and take them as a nation. They don't listen. Hashem tells Moshe to go to Paroah.

2- The parasha formally introduces Moshe and Aharon giving their lineage

3- Hashem tells Moshe what to expect. He will harden Paroah's heart and at first he will not listen. Hashem will then bring wonders and Mitsrayim will see Hashem's strength.

4- Moshe and Aharon go to Paroah. They bring a sign turning a stick into a snake but he does not listen. They return again bringing the macot of dam and then sefarde'ah.

5- Macat Sefardeah ends, Macat Kinim, The warnings for macat Arov

6- Macot Arov, Dever, and Shechin

7- Macat Barad

### EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

**"When your son asks you at a later time saying, 'What is this?'"**

The members of our synagogue suffered from two tragedies this past week. We lost two grandchildren, two precious neshamot. We as a congregation prayed for them for a long time, and we mourn their passing and we wish to console the grandparents, as well as the parents. I would like to dedicate my message this week to them with a beautiful message from Rabbi Shimon Schwab from next week's perashah. May this message be le'ilui nishmatam.

The Ba'al Hagadah tells us that the Tam, the simpleton asks, "What is this?" However, Rashi on this pasuk says that zeh tinok tipesh – this is a foolish son. One might ask, what is foolish about this question? Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch z"l answers with a parable to explain the pasuk in Tehillim, "Uchsil lo yabin et zot (91:78).

A person entered the cockpit of a plane and noticed the various instruments, levers, gauges, and flashing lights. He saw the wheels spinning and the dials rotating but comprehended not a single thing about any of the instruments, which determined the airplane's thrust, altitude, velocity, etc. Although the person knew nothing about aeronautics, seeing the maze of technology, his curiosity was piques. He pointed to one dial and asked the pilot, "What is this? Why does this particular dial turn from left to right, instead of from right to left?"

Were such a scenario to occur, the pilot would express incredulity, and view the questioner as a fool. How does a person who knows nothing about aeronautics zero in on one insignificant detail? Obviously the pilot will not be able to explain one detail of a plane's function to someone who knows nothing about its overall operation.

Similarly, David Hamelech says that a wise man who observes Hashem's mysterious conduct in this world realizes that he cannot understand Hashem's ways and that he had best remain silent. However, a kesil, a fool, lo yabin, will claim that he does not understand et zot, just this one thing. "Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer?" he asks, as if he understands everything else regarding Hashem's conduct in the world. Such a person is indeed a fool,

On the other hand, the Hacham, the wise son, who knows that he can't begin to fathom Hashem's ways, asks about the many obligations of the Torah, "What are all of these testimonies, laws and judgments?" (Debarim 6:20) He understands that the service of Pesah is only one aspect of the Torah, and he yearns to acquire a broader understanding of the entire Torah. This is in direct contrast to the son who

zeroes in on one particular detail of the Seder night and asks, "What is this?" This son is likened to that person who entered the pilot's cockpit with foolish questions.

The parents of these beautiful children have faith in Hashem's mercy, even when these righteous souls pass away at so young and tender an age. Our Sages tell us that the merit of emunah brought about the redemption from Egypt. May the merit of their emunah end our exile speedily in our days, Amen. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**The second plague to befall Egypt was the plague of frogs.** As the children's song goes, "Frogs here, frogs there, frogs were truly everywhere." The amazing thing about this plague was that at the outset, Hashem brought upon the Egyptians one huge frog. When they began hitting the frog in anger and frustration, it multiplied again and again, until they were everywhere. The Steipler Rebbe Z"l asks the obvious question; Why didn't they stop hitting it when they saw the results of their actions?

He answers with a very profound truth about human nature. When a person is angry and does something in his anger, although he sees that no good will come out of it, he can't help himself. His anger carries him further to do what he knows intellectually he will regret later on. How often do we get into an argument and begin saying things we know we will have to take back. At the time, we feel that we just "have to" do this regardless of the consequences. Later on we realize how foolish we were and wish it never happened.

We should realize that the majority of the time getting angry does more harm than good. Although the Rabbis tell us that there are certain times we are allowed to act angry if we are truly calm inside and there is good reason for it, nevertheless, experience has shown that this is difficult to rely upon. Next time we think about losing our temper, let's remember the big Egyptian Frog, and think about the consequences. This will help us find alternatives to solve our problems without losing our temper. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### Research and Development

When an innovative product hits the market, its selling price is usually way out of proportion to the bottom-line cost of the labor and materials necessary to make the unit. But within several years the same product, or even an improved version of the article, is sold for a fraction of the original price.

When Apple introduced the personal hard drive stereo system known as the iPod, the item cost many hundreds of dollars. Yet it could not compare in size, features, or overall quality to a product that

the same company has on the market today for a fraction of the original's cost.

What went into the first iPod that the consumer no longer has to pay for today?

"R&D" is the secret, expensive ingredient. Research and development is what cost the company a small fortune while designing the original format for the product.

When a corporation is doing well, it usually does not rest on its laurels. The successful firm, looking to improve, takes a portion of its profits each year and reinvests the dollars earned into the research and development of items that will improve the company's market share in the future. Past success is no reason to fall asleep at the wheel. Instead, it should prompt motivation to repeat good performance and even improve upon it.

The individual should learn from the corporation. A person should never rest on past accomplishments, but should invest a certain amount of time and money in the "R&D" of one's personal growth. Put time into reading. Attend classes that will help you grow. Spend money on tapes and books that will advance your progress towards personal profit.

When you are doing well, don't stop and indulge in self-congratulation. Take a minute and decide how you are going to invest in yourself. Specify the areas that need improvement, and "buy" the time and materials needed to fine-tune yourself to a higher level of performance in the super-competitive game of life.

This valuable minute spent planning your future growth will keep your top-priority product – you – current, marketable, and profitable in a fast changing world. (One minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

### RABBI ELI MANSOUR "Ani Hashem"

The story in Parashat Vaera begins after Moshe and Aharon's initial encounter with Pharaoh resulted in disaster. Pharaoh not only rejected their demand to release Beneh Yisrael from bondage, but enacted a new, inhumane measure, forcing the slaves to find their own straw for bricks, without diminishing from the daily quota of bricks. As we read in last week's Parasha, Moshe returned to God and protested, asking, "Why have You done evil to this nation? Why did You send me?" (5:22).

Parashat Vaera begins with God's response to Moshe, which the Torah records by using the divine Name of "Elokim" ("Va'yedaber Elokim El Moshe"), which generally refers to God's attribute of strict judgment. God here speaks harshly to Moshe,

criticizing him for his words of protest. He tells Moshe, "Ani Hashem" ("I am God") – using the divine Name of "Havaya," which signifies the divine attribute of mercy and kindness. God's message to Moshe is that everything He does is an act of loving kindness, even if it appears to us, with our limited vision, as a tragedy.

In the case of Beneh Yisrael's suffering, this is actually what enabled them to survive. The Zohar writes that during the period of Egyptian exile, Beneh Yisrael had sunken to the "forty-ninth level of impurity," to the lowest spiritual depths, on the brink of spiritual oblivion. It became necessary for God to hasten the redemption, even before the completion of the four hundred-year-period of slavery that had been decreed. He had no choice but to intensify the suffering so that the nation would endure four hundred years' worth of bondage within a shorter period. The increased hardship was an act of divine grace, intended to rescue Beneh Yisrael from complete spiritual ruin from which they could never recover. God therefore told Moshe, "Ani Hashem." Anything God does originates from "Hashem" – from His attribute of kindness and compassion, even if it appears cruel and harsh.

Imagine a person peering into a room through a keyhole, and he sees a knife severing a person's flesh. Assuming he is witnessing a violent crime, he immediately summons the police. The officer comes, opens the door, and sees... a doctor in a white robe standing over a sedated patient, skillfully performing life-saving surgery.

When looking at things with a very limited field of vision, as all human beings do, we see events that appear cruel. But if we had a full view of what was happening, we would see that these are really acts of kindness and grace.

Rav Haim of Volozhin (1749-1821) elaborated on the meaning of the divine Name of "Havaya" and its connection to the attribute of mercy. The Name literally means "existence" and refers to God's giving the universe existence at every moment. In our morning prayer service, we described the Almighty as "Mehadesh Be'tubo Be'chol Yom Tamid Ma'aseh Bereshit" – renewing creation constantly, at all times. At every fraction of a millisecond, God creates the universe anew. A consequence of this constant recreation, Rav Haim insightfully noted, is that there is no inherent connection between past, present and future. Existence as it is now is a different creation from that which existed just a moment ago, and

existence in the present will be replaced a moment from now. Everything is created anew at every moment.

This is God's response to Moshe. Even if a situation seems dreadful at the present, all of existence is recreated anew the next moment. There is no necessary connection between the way things are now and the way things will be a moment from now, and certainly a day or a month from now. We must therefore never feel discouraged by hard times, because there is no reason to assume they will last. Every second, God creates everything again. What exists now will not necessarily exist in a moment from now.

Furthermore, creation, by definition, is an act of kindness. God does not need a world, but He creates it so that He could dispense kindness. If God creates the world at every moment, then He is performing the ultimate act of kindness at every moment. Even if what we observe seems harsh, we must realize that existence itself is a living testament to God's boundless grace, compassion and goodness.

Moshe was not taken to task for petitioning God on behalf of Beneh Yisrael, but he was criticized for asking, "Why have You done evil to this nation?" Nothing God does is "evil." Everything He does, by definition, is good, regardless of how it appears to us. This is the belief we must carry with us at all times, especially during life's more difficult periods. At every moment, God is dispensing kindness, and even if we cannot see it now, at some point we will see how everything that the Almighty does is truly an act of grace.

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

**Will be distributed under a separate list  
If you want to receive this article every week,  
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

**Rabbi Wein  
THE NEWEST HOLOCAUST DENIERS**

I rarely if ever comment or disagree with pronouncements or public statements of other rabbis. These are people who are driven to publicity and even sensationalism and I never feel inclined to spoil their fun. However, every so often there comes along a rabbinic pronouncement so outrageous and damaging that even my reticent nature forces me to respond.

A rabbi is reported in public print and electronic media to have claimed that only one million Jews died in the Holocaust and that because of assimilation and intermarriage, the other approximately five million victims were not "real" Jews.

This claim is outrageous on numerous grounds – certainly in outlook but moreover in the sheer stupidity of not realizing the harm that such a statement by a rabbi can have in today's anti-Jewish and anti- Israeli world. The rate of Jewish intermarriage in pre-World War II in Eastern Europe was relatively small – probably less than five percent. Even amongst the Communist Jews in Russia, the intermarriage rate before the war was low and only grew substantially later as a result of the war itself.

Thus, the three million Polish Jews, the million Jews of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine were all Jewish even by any stretch of halachic exclusionary stringencies. The Jews of Slovakia, Hungary, Bohemia, and Romania were more assimilated but not in the main intermarried. One has to remember that intermarriage requires two to tango and in anti-Semitic pre-World War II Europe, the non-Jews were loath to marry Jews even if the Jews were unfortunately willing to do so.

So the overwhelming majority of people whom the Nazis considered Jewish were in fact, halachically and in every other way Jewish. And that number is far closer to six million than one million.

It has been well established in Jewish tradition that Jews who are killed simply because they are Jews are considered holy martyrs no matter what the level of their religious observance in their lifetime. All Jews killed in the Holocaust were killed simply because they were Jews. Their designation as holy martyrs cannot be taken away from them by current political correctness in certain sections of Orthodoxy.

The rule of: "A Jew who sins is nevertheless still considered a Jew," remains inviolate and in force even in today's fractured Jewish society. Assimilated Jews are still Jews as are Jews who somehow no longer affiliate themselves with Orthodoxy and traditional Jewish ideas and lifestyle.

Kamenev, Lenin's colleague and a leading Communist leader who was Jewish and an atheist, was purged by Stalin and subjected to a show trial. When being led away to be shot, he muttered to himself Shema Yisrael. All Jews, and especially rabbis, should be very reticent about terming other Jews, no matter what their level of observance may

be, as being out of the fold. This is especially true when the people being excluded were martyred simply because they were Jewish. Our motto should always be "A Jew is a Jew. A Jew is a Jew." For, so it is in Heaven and on earth.

And finally, how does one in the current climate of hatred against our people and state ally one's self with Abbas, David Irving, the mullahs of Iran and other assorted haters and liars in minimizing, if not even thereby denying the reality of the Holocaust?

Even if what the rabbi said had some truth to it, which it does not, why the publicity and the notoriety? Are there no opinions that somehow can remain bottled up within rabbinic minds and stomachs? Where is common sense and Jewish loyalty? The statement of one instead of six million is the classical man bites dog story that the media constantly hungers for.

Maybe the rabbi was naïve enough not to realize this, but we were long ago warned in Avot that "Wise men should be very careful with their words." Silence is truly golden and sensationalist opinions and statements can only cause harm to all concerned. I have received emails from different types of Jews in different parts of the world asking my opinion about this rabbi's comments about the Holocaust.

Apparently they think me to be some sort of expert on the matter, which I am not. However, their writing to me made me think that a response is truly necessary to this new and strange form of what can be termed rabbinic Holocaust denial. This article and my thoughts on this matter are the result. It is too damaging a matter to be left unanswered and unrefuted

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Spirits in a Material World**

The Torah sometimes says something of fundamental importance in what seems like a minor and incidental comment. There is a fine example of this near the beginning of today's parsha.

Last week, we read of how Moses was sent by God to lead the Israelites to freedom, and how his initial efforts met with failure. Not only did Pharaoh not agree to let the people go; he made the working conditions of the Israelites even worse. They had to make the same number of bricks as before but now they had to gather their own straw. The people complained to Pharaoh, then they complained to Moses, then Moses complained to God. "Why have you brought trouble to this people? Why did you send

me?"

At the beginning of this week's parsha God tells Moses that he will indeed bring the Israelites to freedom, and tells him to announce this to the people. Then we read this:

So Moses told this to the Israelites but they did not listen to him, because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh. (Ex. 6:9)

The italicised phrase seems simple enough. The people did not listen to Moses because he had brought them messages from God before and they had done nothing to improve their situation. They were busy trying to survive day by day. They had no time for utopian promises that seemed to have no grounding in reality. Moses had failed to deliver in the past. They had no reason to think he would do so in the future. So far, so straightforward.

But there is something more subtle going on beneath the surface. When Moses first met God at the burning bush, God told him to lead, and Moses kept refusing on the grounds that the people would not listen to him. He was not a man of words. He was slow of speech and tongue. He was a man of "uncircumcised lips". He lacked eloquence. He could not sway crowds. He was not an inspirational leader.

It turned out, though, that Moses was both right and wrong, right that they did not listen to him but wrong about why. It had nothing to do with his failures as a leader or a public speaker. In fact it had nothing to do with Moses at all. They did not listen "because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh." In other words: if you want to improve people's spiritual situation, first improve their physical situation. That is one of the most humanising aspects of Judaism.

Maimonides emphasises this in *The Guide for the Perplexed*.<sup>[1]</sup> The Torah, he says, has two aims: the well-being of the soul and well-being of the body. The well-being of the soul is something inward and spiritual, but the well-being of the body requires a strong society and economy, where there is the rule of law, division of labour and the promotion of trade. We have bodily well-being when all our physical needs are supplied, but none of us can do this on our own. We specialise and exchange. That is why we need a good, strong, just society.

Spiritual achievement, says Maimonides, is higher than material achievement, but we need to ensure the latter first, because "a person suffering from great hunger, thirst, heat or cold, cannot grasp an idea

even if it is communicated by others, much less can he arrive at it by his own reasoning." In other words, if we lack basic physical needs, there is no way we can reach spiritual heights. When people's spirits are broken by harsh labour they cannot listen to a Moses. If you want to improve people's spiritual situation, first improve their physical conditions.

This idea was given classic expression in modern times by two New York Jewish psychologists, Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) and Frederick Herzberg (1923-2000). Maslow was fascinated by the question of why many people never reached their full potential. He also believed – as, later, did Martin Seligman, creator of Positive Psychology – that psychology should focus not only on the cure of illness but also on the positive promotion of mental health. His most famous contribution to the study of the human mind was his "hierarchy of needs".

We are not a mere bundle of wants and desires. There is a clear order to our concerns. Maslow enumerated five levels. First are our physiological needs: for food and shelter, the basic requirements of survival. Next come safety needs: protection against harm done to us by others. Third is our need for love and belonging. Above that comes our desire for recognition and esteem, and higher still is self-actualisation: fulfilling our potential, becoming the person we feel we could and should be. In his later years Maslow added a yet higher stage: self-transcendence, rising beyond the self through altruism and spirituality.

Herzberg simplified this whole structure by distinguishing between physical and psychological factors. He called the first, Adam needs, and the second Abraham needs. Herzberg was particularly interested in what motivates people at work. What he realised in the late 1950s – an idea revived more recently by American-Israeli economist Dan Ariely – is that money, salary and financial rewards (stock options and the like), is not the only motivator. People do not necessarily work better, harder or more creatively, the more you pay them. Money works up to a certain level, but beyond that the real motivator is the challenge to grow, create, find meaning, and to invest your highest talents in a great cause. Money speaks to our Adam needs, but meaning speaks to our Abraham needs.

There is a truth here that Jews and Judaism have tended to note and live by more fully than many other civilisations and faiths. Most religions are cultures of acceptance. There is poverty, hunger and disease on earth because that is the way the world is; that is how God made it and wants it. Yes, we can find



happiness, nirvana or bliss, but to achieve it you must escape from the world, by meditation, or retreating to a monastery, or by drugs or trance, or by waiting patiently for the joy that awaits us in the world to come. Religion anaesthetises us to pain.

That isn't Judaism at all. When it comes to the poverty and pain of the world, ours is a religion of protest, not acceptance. God does not want people to be poor, hungry, sick, oppressed, uneducated, deprived of rights, or subject to abuse. He has made us His agents in this cause. He wants us to be His partners in the work of redemption. That is why so many Jews have become doctors fighting disease, lawyers fighting injustice or educators fighting ignorance. It is surely why they have produced so many pioneering (and Nobel Prize-winning) economists. As Michael Novak (citing Irving Kristol) writes:

Jewish thought has always felt comfortable with a certain well-ordered worldliness, whereas the Christian has always felt a pull to otherworldliness. Jewish thought has had a candid orientation toward private property, whereas Catholic thought – articulated from an early period chiefly among priests and monks – has persistently tried to direct the attention of its adherents beyond the activities and interests of this world to the next. As a result, tutored by the law and the prophets, ordinary Jews have long felt more at home in this world, while ordinary Catholics have regarded this world as a valley of temptation and as a distraction from their proper business, which is preparation for the world to come.[2]

God is to be found in this world, not just the next. But for us to climb to spiritual heights we must first have satisfied our material needs. Abraham was greater than Adam, but Adam came before Abraham. When the physical world is harsh, the human spirit is broken, and people cannot then hear the word of God, even when delivered by a Moses.

Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev said it well: "Don't worry about the state of someone else's soul and the needs of your body. Worry about the needs of someone else's body and the state of your own soul."

Alleviating poverty, curing disease, ensuring the rule of law and respect for human rights: these are spiritual tasks no less than prayer and Torah study. To be sure, the latter are higher, but the former are prior. People cannot hear God's message if their spirit is broken and their labour harsh.

[1] Book III, chapter 27.

[2] Michael Novak, *This Hemisphere of Liberty*, Washington DC, American Enterprise Institute, 1990, 64.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL  
"In order that you should know that I Hashem am  
in the midst of the world". 'Bekerev Haaretz'. (8:18)**

Here we learn the purpose of all of the miracles, not only in Egypt but throughout history. The open demonstrations of Hashem's presence come to teach that even when not openly visible, yet it is Hashem's presence that constantly fills the world and maintains the existence of the world and manages all the events of the world.

Just as these miracles were wondrous demonstrations of Hashem's deeds, so are all the "natural" processes and all the events and even all objects are demonstrations of Hashem's deeds. Every process or object or event is a wondrous miracle, and it is solely due to the blindness of habit that men fail to recognize the miracles that constantly fill the world around us.

Seeing is a miracle, hearing is a miracle, thinking is a miracle, eating and digesting are miracles, the birth of a child is a miracle, an enzyme is a miracle, DNA is a miracle, a chromosome is a miracle and an atom is a miracle.

Thus every miracle is intended for the purpose to demonstrate that "I HASHEM AM (ALWAYS) IN THE MIDST OF THE WORLD" and that every phenomenon should be studied to discern in it the miracles of Hashem's wisdom and power and kindness.

The Rav taught that the Ten Plagues were especially brought by Hashem for Israel to gain Yirat Samayim. As it states, "He is Hashem Our G-d, in all of the world are His judgments" (Tehillim). That all of the happenings in the world are only being brought by Hashem in His capacity of 'Hashem Our G-d'.

The Makot were ten vitamin pills of Emunah for our Jewish Nation in order for us to gain a sensory perception and a heightened Awareness of Hashem The G-d of Yisrael, the only One we can depend on.

Adapted from "A NATION IS BORN" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller

Parts of this newsletter are courtesy of Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Project Genesis, and refer to [learn@torah.org](mailto:learn@torah.org) and <http://www.torah.org/>. Both the authors and Project Genesis reserve certain rights. For full information on copyrights, send email to [copyrights@torah.org](mailto:copyrights@torah.org).